

Why You're in a Spiritual Desert

One morning several years ago when I was thanking God for the delight of His presence, I heard a voice say, "If you seek Me for the way you feel in My presence, it is no different from any other soul-realm passion." I had never thought about my relationship with Him in those terms before. God was saying that if I pursue Him simply for the pleasurable experience I have when He makes Himself known to me, then my enjoyment of Him is dictated by my feelings.

After this encounter I experienced a season of dryness—called a "dark night of the soul" by 16th century mystic John of the Cross—during which it seemed as if God was not there. This season was especially difficult because for years prior to it I had walked in an almost continual awareness of His presence. Now, suddenly, I sensed nothing.

During my "dark night" I realized that on our path to spiritual maturity, we don't go from mountaintop to mountaintop. We have to walk through valleys as well. Even after we have arrived in our "promised land" we may experience spiritually dry times.

David confirmed this truth in Psalm 63, in which he expressed the thirst he had for God in the midst of a "dry and weary land" (v. 1). He wrote the psalm in the desert of Judah—a dry region in the promised land! David had experienced God intensely before (see v. 2) but found himself for a season in a place "where there [was] no water" (v. 1).

There are different reasons for dryness. Once during David's reign, there was a drought in Israel (see 2 Sam. 21:1). God told David that the drought had been brought on by Israel's sin. When David dealt with the sin, the rains came.

But sin isn't the only reason we enter dry seasons. God may be working in us to prepare us for a greater release. We are like trees in winter that appear to be dormant—even dead—while their roots are growing and preparing for greater fruitfulness. During these seasons we are learning to walk by faith rather than by sight or feeling.

Whatever the reason, a dry season can be a difficult period. So how do we respond?

God's Word tells us that He "will never leave [us] nor forsake [us]" (Josh. 1:5). This means that whether we sense His presence or not, He is there. We must determine to believe Him and walk by faith.

When I am faced with dryness, I read the promises God has given of His nearness to me. They remind me that His love for me is not diminished even though He seems far away.

Ultimately, the key to breaking through is prayer. There is nothing that will dispel the dryness more quickly than significant time alone in your prayer closet.

Don't despair! God has not abandoned you, and in His time, He will bring you out of the desert and lead you again "beside springs of water" (Is. 49:10).