

**The Gathering Church**  
**Dan's message 6/07/26**  
**Chasing Smoke, Finding Water - Week 8**  
*A sermon inspired by themes from Kent Denlinger's book*  
*"Living Thirsty"*

Groaning is Hoping  
Hoping is Thirsting  
Thirst after Righteousness  
In this Hope  
We are Saved  
Now I See  
Sustained in Hope

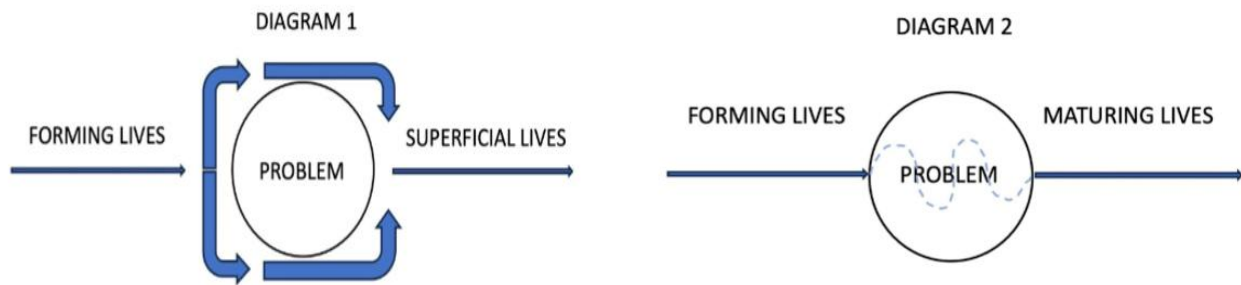
**I John 3:1-4** "How great a love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And such we are! . . . Beloved, we are God's children now, and it has **not yet** appeared what we shall be. But we know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. **3** And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

There are 3 biblical realities in this passage and one suggestion for walking it out. Did you hear it?

- **We are God's Children Now.** If we have accepted the grace and mercy released to use through the cross of Jesus Christ, repented of our sins, and surrendered our hearts and lives over to Christ, we are His. And there is nothing the gates of Hell can do to take that away from us.
- **We are Not Yet all that we will Be.** This is our current state of affairs. As much as we know we are God's children, we must learn how to live hungry and thirsty for all that God wants to do in this life through the temptations and trials: through the victories and defeats; through the sorrows and joys; through the sufferings of this world that groans inwardly awaiting the return of Christ.
- **We will Be Like Him.** One day when we see Christ, we will be changed into his likeness. It's a future reality not yet realized in our present state. We must wait but we will be like Him one day: Fully transformed.
- **Fix Your Hope on Him.** To remain pure in this life as I await his return I must choose to not put my hope in anything this world has to offer me. Enjoy it, live it, take pleasure in it, but be careful not to place my hope in it. My hunger and thirst can easily shift from what I am made for to trying to squeeze out of this world the experiences that were never meant to fill me. I am challenged by scripture in this passage to remain thirsty and place my hope in the future, not today. That is how I remain pure.

**I am going to come back to this passage....** But this book (Living Thirsty -Denlinger) has been encouraging us all along to consider a different approach to managing the outcomes of our life here on earth.

As we journey through the "not yet" of life and face problems, if we are not careful, we manage our problems by avoidance. We numb our pain or problem with a plethora of worldly numbing distractions found on any media device we have (phone, TV, computer) or at any supermarket or retail outlet.



Kent uses two diagrams to show us two approaches to dealing with the problems we encounter. When we choose diagram 2 we are forced to deal with the problems and wrestle with what we are hungry and thirst for. But as we do that instead of trying to skirt around life's problems; pretending they are not there, we choose instead to be honest with what is happening inside of us. We take the time to consider the impact of what is happening through conversations with a good friends or time alone with God. And as we take the time necessary to go through instead of around, God does a maturing work in us. He begins to transform us.

All of us have ways we have developed over time to skirt around life's problems, and these paths are rutted out deeply in our lives and are easy to take.

On many levels this is what makes this book a difficult read; especially when we try to apply it to our lives. When we take the time to consider what we are thirsty for, we are forcing ourselves to ponder the things in our lives that are not going well. We are thinking about our trials and tribulations. **And the truth is:** We don't naturally want to deal with it?

We are like horses in this way. Horses are known to be what is called flight animals. At the sight of danger, suffering and trials, it wants to run the other way. They can be awful skittish and do crazy things to get away from the threat of danger.

And we instinctively want to do the same thing in our lives. We want the easier road. So, we skirt around trials and pretend like they are not there.

This subject matter of thirst makes us consider a counter-intuitive way of living. Which is staying thirsty in this life.

I hope our church will be a church that will help people journey through what is truly going on in their hearts and lives no matter how hard that might be and how much time that might take. It is hard work but it is a good work.

Kent makes a statement in the final chapters that makes you stop and read it twice and wonder is that a true statement? He says, ***"Our thirst for God sustains us more than the experience of God."***

*If you had to choose from two paths to walk: **Path A:** the path of experiencing God's presence -or- **Path B:** the path of being thirsty. **Which one would you choose?***

**Kent says Path B will sustain us longer than Path A. Why would he say that?**

Kind of sounds like something from our upside-down kingdom series;

*Matthew 5:6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."*

The bible does not say blessed are the righteous (the ones who have it all together) but instead blessed are those that thirst for righteousness. For in the longing and thirst after God, they will have the motivation to continue down the road.

Philip Yancy in his book, "Disappointment with God," shares that every time God shows up and does something miraculous with the People of God in the Old and New Testament it did little to produce lasting faith.

Experiences of God do not always equate to stronger faith. **It's the longing and thirst for something more, that equates to a stronger faith.**

Whether it was getting water from a Rock, manna from Heaven, being led by a pillar of fire by night or cloud by day, the children of God's experienced God's miraculous provision in their lives but it didn't take long for them to step back into rebellion and walk unfaithfully after other experiences.

And before you think this was only an Old Testament problem, it was not much different in the New Testament.

When we come to the rebuke of the seven churches in the Book of Revelation, we find congregations walking away from incredible Pentecostal experienced growth. These churches began with signs and wonders and now in they are getting a prophetic rebuking in the book of Revelation.

The church in Ephesus had left its first love. The church at Pergamum and Thyatira had compromised with the culture around them. Sardis had a reputation for being alive but was spiritually dead. Laodicea had become lukewarm, convinced it was rich and in need of nothing, while Jesus declared that it was actually poor, blind, and needy.

I wonder how God would rebuke the current church in America. Our desire to reproduce experience never sustains.

***"Our thirst for God sustains us more than the experience of God."***

We are not much different than the early church people. We experience God's provision, he comes through for us, and it does not take long for us to start doing life on our own without Him, pretending that the things of the earth will satisfy me.

What would it look like to be okay with living thirsty and trusting God more than trying to make my life work, and looking and living for the next experience with God to fill me up?

**Could we believe this road of *thirst will lead us to deeper intimacy with God?***

[(KENT) It is a two-pronged path. When we come to God with our thirst, God often, not only does not satiate our thirsts, He instead **intensifies it**. Why would that be so?

Could it be God's heart is not to make things easier for us but to purify us and transform us into His image. He is committed to rooting out everything in each of us that keeps us from being more like Him.

This leads us this morning to the **Story of Job** (this is a story about pain and suffering that God allowed for a purpose Job could not see)

Quick introduction to the story: Job was known as a one of the most righteous men on earth at the time and the story starts with a Cosmic interchange between God and the Evil one, where God gives permission to the Devil to sift Job knowing that there is nothing the enemy could do to him that would make him turn from God.

Job loses his children, his health and his wealth and the support of those that were closest to Him. Job becomes a desperately thirsty man.

**Can you identify with what Job was most thirsty for?**

**What would you thirst for most, if that happened to you? (Answers)**

I would be thirsty to want to know "Why" God wouldn't protect my life and legacy? And what have I done to deserve this?

In his thirst for an answer, Job gets demanding with his words wanting to defend his ways before the Lord. Job was a righteous man. His three friends are quiet at first and then start telling Him he must have done something wrong to deserve all this. They tell him to repent, to figure out what he did wrong and get it right so life will return to how it was before.

Job has nothing to repent of. And God says to his friends, they are wrong about Job, Job's sin did not cause the suffering.

Kent says, "We could simply stop there, but the story would leave us wanting. Why then did Job suffer?" And as importantly, "why did Job say these words at the end of the story?":

***"My ears have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."*** Job 42:5-6

We must ask the question here, if Job did not do anything wrong what is he repenting of? Job's sin was not the cause of his suffering."

Kent points to what happens in Job is he is thirsty for answers. God intensified the pain in Job's life to make him thirsty for things he had never been thirsty for before. **In Job's thirst we find a a demanding spirit.**

Listen to his words: **Job 23:3-4 "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, That I might come to His seat! 4 "I would present my case before Him And fill my mouth with arguments."**

He even goes so far as to tell the Lord to put his charge against him **in writing** so he can defend himself.

Job 31:35. (“Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense—let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser **put his indictment in writing.**”

These circumstances feel unjust, cruel and pointless. **Have you been there before?**

The Lord does answer Job, in a storm, in a whirlwind scripture says.

*“Will the one who contends with the almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!” Job 40:2*

Something is brought to the surface in this situation that Job did not see in himself. As the thirst intensified, a sense of entitlement rose up in Job; He believed God should respond to us like we would expect and when this does not happen; he felt justified to demand answers from God.

I felt a little of this mystery when I was watching my son waste away on a ventilator at the age of 18. “Why? What good is going to come of this? This all seems pointless. What did we do to deserve this. We have been serving you faithfully and this is what we get?”

### **Story of Watching Loved Ones in Pain**

If you have ever watched a loved one in long extended pain, it is horrible. I was talking with a co-teacher friend of mine who knew something of what it was like to watch loved ones in pain, and she was currently watching her son in pain from cancer and chemo treatments. And as we were sharing in the hallway, I said that there was nothing more painful than watching the ones you love be in pain and being unable to do anything about it.

She said **“God doesn’t seem to be bothered by it as much as we are.”** And that statement stuck with me.

From our vantage point, God’s perceived unwillingness to intervene and his perceived willingness to let the unimaginable happen makes no sense in our brain.

And yet His ways are beyond our ways. He is love, He is mercy, He is grace, He is just, He is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, He can’t be otherwise and yet we don’t get it and have to just release ourselves and let go of the why’s and trust Him. **Job never got the answers to the questions of the suffering that took place in his life, but what he received was more of God than he had seen before. His faith matured. His hope was built on something more.**

**Job’s thirst combined with God’s presence in the whirlwind sustained and matured him.**

Job’s final words after this encounter with the Lord. Job 42:5-6 *“My ears have heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.”*

**(Kent)** “the point of the story is that living thirsty has the potential to **unearth in us** things we might not otherwise detect.”

We all live entitled lives. We demand things go as we think they should. (And when they do not, we raise our fist at God; we are not much different than Job)

This “unearthing of our real thirsts” can serve to refine our thirst, helping us see what we are truly wanting. We are hungry for God. To be complete and whole before Him.

**(Kent Qoute).** “Living thirsty awakens us to what the Bible calls our **true hope**. It requires waiting, which is another theme the writers of the Scriptures invite us toward over and over. We are so quick to go after the things of this world that we never realize how hungry and thirsty we are for God and for home.”

I think that is why in I John 3 the apostle tells us that those who “**3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**” When our true hope is unearthed and we see it and want it; everything else diminishes in importance. I am not as enticed by the stuff of life, thinking that somehow it will fill me up. I am aware of a deeper hope and that is to see God and to know Him as He really is. Job got to see that, and it satisfied him.

**Golf game analogy.** Some days I get on the Course, and my swing is working and other days I get on the gold course and I can’t find it. But I know myself enough that I have hope that another good day is around the bend and I am not going to throw away my golf clubs because I had one bad round. I live thirsty to continue to play the game because it is hard and requires work. But that is good. The thirst to get better sustains me. If I was playing like Tiger Woods at his best, I would have no reason to thirst.

In **Romans 8:18, Paul says** “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. **19** For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. *(Creation itself thirsts)*

**20** For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope **21** that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. **22** We know that the whole creation has been **groaning** as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. **23** Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, **groan inwardly** as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this **hope we were saved**. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? **25** But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

This hope is written into the DNA of creation and into man. When we rest in this hope,, it gives us the strength to live now, thirsty; it sustains more than the perceived need to experience more of God.

**28** And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. **29** For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to **become conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

God’s greatest good in our groaning and in our waiting isn’t to relieve it. Job, if he were here today, would testify; but God’s greatest good is to conform, transform and grow us into the image of His Son.

Our thirst for God, if understood under this context, can sustain us in hope if we hold on to what God is up to in the thirst.

As I close this Sermon I want to bring us back to the I John passage.

### **We are, Not Yet, But Shall Be.**

When we give our lives to God and confess our faith in Jesus Christ, when we fully surrender ourselves to him, we become Children of God. We effectively start the journey as a Christian of placing our Hope in him. Of letting go of the things of this world to fill us up.

We ask him to make us hopeful and thirsty for what he is up to in this world and in eternity.

**We accept our Not Yet statues in hope. We live thirsty, willingly remaining thirsty as he does the “good work” of transforming us into His image.**

This will be a painful process as it was for Job... it will not seem good all the time; in fact, most of the time you might ask questions like Job and receive God’s understanding of Goodness in your life.

Your challenge, if you choose to accept it, is to remain hopeful in the not yet, believing that the work of transformation will result in your perfection; in wholeness; in who God created you to be.

Can we believe that is where all creation is headed, and when we choose to stay on this path of going through the problems and the pain and not skirting around life in less painful ways, it will be God’s best for us, it will be Him “working all things together for good.”

God will conform us through any means necessary until we stand before him face to face and are changed into His likeness.

I kind of wish this was a “Beam me up Scotty” kind of process and transformation. But its not, and for most of us it is going to be a long journey where we continually bring our thirsts before the Lord and ask him where we are trying get ahead of his plans for relieving that thirst.

But it will be a good journey. Let's remain thirsty as a church, trust what God is doing in this process, and believe in hope that one day it will turn out as He he said it would.

*One additional note to the story of Job that Kent doesn't bring out: **we often see the trials and tribulation from one vantage point: OURS. And ours is limited.** God was doing something in the cosmic realm through Job's life, reminding the devil that he doesn't have control and will be defeated. Job life was on display not only in a human sense but in a cosmic sense bringing Glory to His creator. Our stories have repercussions beyond our own lives. We serve a big God and His purposes will be revealed one day, and I think we will stand in awe as to why and how things happened the way they did.*

*May we live in Hope as a church and stay thirsty as we await Christ's return!*