

# Psalms 50

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[ 0 : 00 ] I wonder how similar is the God in your thoughts, the God in your minds to the God who is in the universe. Is the picture that you paint of him in your mind realistic?

In this psalm God challenges our caricature of him. God says here actually that more often than not when people paint a picture of me in their minds it's merely a self-portrait.

The line that I think sums this up is in verse 21 there. God says to his listeners, you thought that I was one like yourself.

He speaks to his own people in the beginning of this psalm and he says to them as well, you know what your problem is? That your picture of me is far too much like a picture of you.

I want to focus on the middle section in verse 7 to 15 this afternoon. Because there there is a particular feature of God's character that has been repainted by his people.

[ 1 : 14 ] Just drop your eye down to verse 12. If I were hungry, I wouldn't tell you. The world and its fullness are mine.

He says to his people in a slightly sarcastic manner there, contrary to how you see me, I am not a needy God.

I am not a needy God. That's our first point. The Apostle Paul in his famous sermon in Acts 17, he's in Athens and he speaks to people who are involved in heavy religious activity.

And he sees that the people are worshipping and offering sacrifices and doing all kinds of religious stuff. Because of a perceived need in the mythical gods around them.

So they make idols and worship them. But he says to them, doesn't he, the true God who is in heaven is not served by human hands as though he needed anything.

[ 2 : 25 ] Since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. Paul centuries later echoes these verses where God speaks in a vivid way to a people who are into lots of religious activity, aren't they?

Note how much effort is going into the sacrifices and offerings at the time, verse 8. Your burnt offerings are continually before me. And that's not the reason why God is rebuking them.

That is a good thing. But he rebukes them because they think that God needs them. God's people can so easily repaint him, can't they?

In trying to bridge the gap between God, who is up there, and man down here. And dealing with guilt. Our response is often to turn to ritual and to false religion, isn't it?

To try and pay God off. To try and give him something. To twist his arm. But quite brutally, he's saying to his people here, I don't need you.

[ 3 : 37 ] I don't need you or anything you can give me. As if I would. Verse 10. And I own the cattle on a thousand hills, don't I?

Anything you give me was mine in the first place. But our whole conception of God, so often, is that he is a needy God.

And in some ways, we human beings can fill a gap in God. That God has a man-shaped hole. That we can fill him and bless him in a way that he cannot in himself.

But in the beginning, there he was, God. All alone. Before he made the world. Before he created the universe. And he thought to himself, I'm so lonely.

I'm so lonely. I need someone to love. I'll create a world. And little people in it. And that story would be convenient for us, wouldn't it?

[ 4 : 48 ] We'd love that so that we could have some kind of leverage on God. That we could persuade him to do things our way. If he needed us in some way and our gifts, we could blackmail him, couldn't we?

And use him. But we know that's not how the Bible paints God. The Bible starts, firstly, with God. And then human beings come second.

And he is utterly complete and content and fulfilled before any of us appear. He is one God in three persons.

The Trinity. So important. And in those three persons, in that one God, there is perfect love and community and satisfaction.

God is love. The Bible says, doesn't it? And he doesn't need you or me or any of his creation to show that. Or to be that.

[ 5 : 48 ] It's one of the reasons why, from what I understand, Allah is different to the God of the Bible. And Allah is deficient.

Because there is no Trinity in Allah. And so to be love, he needs another to express who he is. To be the object of his true love. In order to be what he is, love, he needs creation. He needs us. But not so with the one triune God.

He speaks to us on a very human level, doesn't he, in verse 12. Even if I did have needs, even if I was hungry, it wouldn't be your concern. I wouldn't tell you, little ants.

It's quite a thought, isn't it? Just think about this. If everyone became an atheist today, like that, how would that affect God?

[ 6 : 51 ] It's quite a deep question, isn't it? I want to say that he would care deeply about that. Ezekiel tells us that God doesn't delight in the death of the wicked.

And he rejoices when one sinner repents and comes to him. But if we all became atheists today, in one sense, we've got to say, actually, God wouldn't bat an eyelid.

God is not changed or affected in himself by what we do or what we don't do. Or what we give him or what we don't. To believe in him adds nothing to him.

To doubt him doesn't take anything away. Just think of it like this. If I close my eyes as I walk out the town hall later on to the sun, does that mean that the sun stops shining?

Of course not. If I couldn't see the stars at night, does that take away from their glory in any way? Of course not.

[ 7 : 59 ] Jesus tells us that God has life in himself in John's Gospel. He is what he is in himself. Without regard to anything or anyone else.

He needs no support. He needs no charity. He needs no sympathy. But as somebody once said, probably the hardest thought of all of our natural egotism to entertain is that God does not need our help.

Maybe we picture the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is a profound thing, isn't it? As we consider these things, that God himself should need anything.

That in fact he should hunger. As he says that he doesn't hear. Because he takes on a human nature. And the exception of the incarnation proves the rule.

That it's a total paradigm shift. Where God would have needs. Where he would have the need for the ministry of the angels that he had created.

[ 9 : 05 ] Or a drink of water. Or a sleep. But the mistake that we often make is to let Christ's humanity fill our entire portrait of who he is.

Remember this Jesus Christ is veiled in flesh the Godhead see, isn't he? And according to his divinity, Christ wants for nothing.

Jesus Christ, your God, does not need anything from you. He doesn't need your vote. He doesn't need your encouragement. He doesn't need your money.

We are not here Tuesday by Tuesday to drum up support for Jesus Christ. He doesn't need it. For the world and its fullness are mine, he says.

Verse 12. I am no needy God. He says to his people. But secondly, he says, you are a needy people.

[ 10 : 11 ] You are a needy people. That word needy has lots of connotations, doesn't it? He or she are a needy person. It's got a negative ring to it.

We don't like to talk about our needs or feel like we're needy people. But having needs as human beings is not always a flaw and it's not always a sign of sinfulness.

It's actually how you were made. It's actually one of the things that makes you human. Having needs is one of the things that makes you different from God.

God doesn't need anyone or anything. Or there would be a deficiency in him, wouldn't there? And we don't worship a deficient God. A God who lacks something.

No. But while God has life in himself, human beings, all creatures, from a microbe to the greatest person who ever lived, has needs.

[11:10] Churchill got tired. Nelson, I'm sure, even had a cold. The Queen passes wind.

We've all been needy, haven't we? Even before sin came into the world, in the creation account, God creates man and woman and supplies their needs for food and for rest.

For each other in relationship. We don't have life in ourself. We are dependent creatures, dependent on the things that he lists here.

Cattle and food and the things that the earth produces. There is a craze, isn't there, in living a self-sufficient life in the country.

Maybe grow your own virgin and keep your own animals and generate your own electricity. And there's a sense of independence in that. But really, if you think about it, it's not true self-sufficiency, is it?

[12:13] You've still got to eat. You've got to drink. You can never actually get rid of your needs. It is part of being human. And he says in this psalm, See the way that God sees it.

It's upside down from how we see it, isn't it? There's no man-shaped hole in God that we would rescue him or we would rescue his church.

But that he would rescue us. And supply our needs and give us life. We can try and sort of mitigate our needs and drink more caffeine and take some paracetamol, can't we?

But we can't deny them altogether. And we can't deny our ultimate need for God's deliverance and for his life. Paul goes on in that sermon in Acts 17.

In him, in God, we live and move and have our being. And we spin the plates of life, don't we? We try and do it all. We don't ask God.

[13:34] We don't rest in him. We don't confess to him. We don't admit our need. And we say to God, God, I'm fine. I don't need you.

Actually, you need me, God. And you're lucky to have me. And false religion, and even right religion here, is used in a wrong way.

The great way of twisting that, isn't it? When we serve God in different ways. He delights that we serve him. And that we give him gifts.

But not because he needs them. Nothing God receives as a gift to him hasn't already been given from him. And the pattern with everyone that he touches in scripture is that God acts first to supply a need.

And then we praise him for it, not the other way around. It's a good thing to look for as you read the Bible. Look for that pattern. God never acts out of necessity of any deficiency in himself.

[14:41] Only out of grace and kindness. What does God say to his people? Moses, you're such a gifted man. Abraham, I could do with your leadership qualities.

Abraham, I need you. You are so godly and wise and faithful. Peter, I need you to get heavy handed with my enemies.

Be my bodyguard. Matthew, I need you as my accountant to get cash flow sorted. What could he say to you? He doesn't say any of those things, does he?

Abraham, I will be God to you and your children. Peter, on this rock, I will build my church.

Matthew, follow me. Moses, I am who I am. Totally sufficient in myself. With or without you.

[15:42] But it's true. That whilst God doesn't need us, he does seek us, doesn't he? And he loves his people. And he does use us. But his love and work in us is not for what we can supply to him.

Which actually is quite liberating, isn't it? Because if he did need something from me, the question is, what if I haven't got what he needs? And then I'm in big trouble.

When we do give him things and serve him, there is a certain way we should do it, isn't there?

Verse 14 he says, offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

That verse could say, make thanksgiving your sacrifice to God. Call upon him. Do you know what I think he's saying here?

The best way of giving to God is to receive from him. It's kind of upside down, isn't it?

[16:41] The best way of giving to God is to receive from him. What delights him most is when we receive with thanksgiving his deliverance through Jesus Christ.

And we trust him and we thank him. And we live our lives in response. It was Father's Day a few weeks ago, wasn't it? We don't really do Father's Day in our house. It's kind of a tradition that we just ignore it.

But imagine the house where Father's Day does happen. And the mum says, doesn't she, to the kids, it's Father's Day coming up and you should buy Dad a present.

And so the boy or the girl buys Dad a shaving kit or whatever. And they pay for that with their pocket money. But the dad knows that when he gets the shaving kit, that the gift was paid for with the pocket money that he had given to the child anyway.

But that doesn't take away the pleasure from it, does it? From that moment. That is okay. His need isn't the point. Giving there is about relationship. And about thanksgiving.

[17:55] And about love. We say about some people, I say this about my father-in-law, what can you buy a person who has everything? What can you give a God who has everything?

Christina Rossetti writes in that famous Christmas carol, What can I give him? What can I give him? Poor as I am. If I were a shepherd, I'd bring a lamb. If I were a wise man, I'd do my part.

Yet what can I give him? Give him my heart. He is no needy God. And we need him.

We need him with every fibre of our being. Of our entire humanity. And it delights him when we admit that. I just want to close in the last couple of minutes just with a few implications of what we've heard.

Because when we get this wrong, it leads us into some wrong thinking. It leads us into, doesn't it, a lack of prayer. I'm okay God.

[19:02] It's easy to do that in our self-serving world. But we need him for all that he supplies. And on the flip side of that, it leads us well to a lack of thanks, doesn't it?

When we forget that all good things that we have come from him. Waitrose merely are the middlemen, aren't they? It leads to a lack of humility when we won't receive help or ask from it. For it from God or others. We say, I'm fine. And we quickly find ourselves exhausted when we overextend our resources. But more positively, I think, it's actually very liberating to know that God does not need.

Even that he doesn't need us. Because that means that God cannot be blackmailed by any human being. He cannot be bargained with.

And that is very, very good for us. I was at Hanwell Carnival the other week. And at these things, they always typically raise the prices of food, don't they?

[20:10] A burger costs five pounds or whatever. But you're hungry. And you're there. And you're trapped in the fair. The kids won't let you get out. And the need is used to lever you into paying more.

And need makes you vulnerable to the attacks of the food vans. Our needs shape us, don't they? And our needs weaken us in the face of temptation.

But God is not like that. He cannot be coerced. There's no stick big enough or carrot big enough to get him to change how he does things. There's no kryptonite to get at his Achilles heel to bend him to human will.

To steer him off his righteous and good ways. No human being possesses anything God needs, thankfully. No one has that kind of leverage with God.

There's no divine blackmail. He does all that he does. Unshaken by what we do or what we don't do. And so you cannot bribe God this afternoon into loving you by simply ramping up outward religious activity.

[21:22] If that is what you're trying to do, he says to you, I won't accept a bull from your house. You should, he says, offer a gift of thanksgiving.

And our mistakes don't stop him from seeking and loving his people either. He still calls himself in this psalm, verse 7, your God, I am your God.

And so serve him, love him, give to him your life. Not because he needs it, but because you need him and he delights in you as you admit that.

Because the best way to give to God is actually to receive from him and to trust in him. Let's pray. Father in heaven, forgive us for trying to recreate you in our image.

And for thinking that you were one like us. And we praise you, triune God, who is absolutely sufficient and complete and perfect in yourself.

[ 22 : 30 ] Thank you that nobody can coax you into their plans. Not even the most powerful beings that you have created, not even the devil can do that.

Because you have everything you need. And so we glory and rest in your self-sufficiency. And we look to you for life and deliverance.

Amen. Amen.