

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study guide is to facilitate the study of Psalm 63 as a supplement to the sermon. It is based on my (Michael's) study and meditation on the psalm. This handout can be used for personal study or community group conversation. (I hope you join a group!)

PSALM 63:1-11 ESV

1 A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. 2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. 3 Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. 4 So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands. 5 My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, 6 when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; 7 for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. 8 My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. 9 But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; 10 they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals. 11 But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

STRUCTURE ¹

- I. God, my desire (1-2)
 - a. David thirsts for God in a spiritual desert (1)
 - b. David pursues God by remembering a spiritual oasis (2)
- II. God, my delight (3-8)
 - a. David will bless God for His *better-than-life* love (3-4)
 - b. David will feast on God through constant meditation (5-6)
 - c. David will celebrate God for His faithful protection (7)
 - d. TURNING POINT: David's reciprocal relationship with God (8)
- III. God, my defense (9-11)
 - a. God will honor David by judging his enemies (9-10)
 - b. God will honor David by vindicating his kingship (11)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

The superscription of Psalm 63 informs us that David "was in the wilderness of Judah" while writing this song. Paired with verse 11 (see comments), this suggests that David probably wrote this after his son Absalom usurped the throne. The wilderness background provides imagery for the opening verse, where David portrays himself as a tired desert traveler, thirsting for God as for water. The Psalm moves in sequence from *desire* for God (vv. 1-2) to *delight* in God (vv. 3-8) to *defense* from God (vv. 9-11).

Every journey begins with desire; our journey with God is no different. We cannot grow with God if we don't first crave him. The appetite of the saints marks us: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst..." (Matt. 5). David's thirst drives the first step of his journey toward God: remembrance. Rather than permitting his mind to drift like a rotted log downriver, David intentionally calls to mind—as Psalmists so often do—past encounters with God. Thirst meets pursuit, and the journey begins. This is the focus of the first two verses.

In verses 3-8, the theme shifts from *desire* for God to *delight* in Him. Six times, David confidently asserts what he "will" do: he "will praise" (v. 3b), he "will bless" (v. 4a), he "will lift" his hands (v. 4b), he "will be satisfied..." (v. 5a), he "will praise" (v. 5b), he "will sing" (v. 7). With these prophetic proclamations, David models the sort of faith that crawls from desert to oasis and from starvation to banquet. Not only do we remember God's former goodness (vv. 2, 7), but we do so in faith, stirring our hearts to believe that "the one who seeks finds" (Matt. 7:8). In this way, David realizes, he need not postpone delight until he returns to the "sanctuary" (Ps. 63:2). Instead, he can feast on God now through remembrance and meditation.

¹ Roman numeral headings adapted from Kidner.

Verse 8 forms a turning point in the Psalm. If “I will” characterizes the second stanza, then “God will” defines the final one. David smooths the transition from “I will” to “God will” in verse 8 by depicting his relationship with God—like any healthy friendship—as reciprocal. David “will” do his part by clinging to God; God “will” do (and has done) His part by upholding David. David’s clinging to God is observed in vv. 1-7, while God’s upholding appears in vv. 9-11. Verse 8 provides the hinge by summarizing our mutual responsibilities within the covenant relationship.

Following the transition of verse 8, we learn what “God will” do. He will defend David against his enemies (9-11). He will do this not only because David is in the right and his enemies in the wrong but also because David reigns as Israel’s “king” (11). For the first time in the song, David references his royal status. As monarch, David represents God before the people (see comments below), and God is not about to let His earthly counterpart succumb to godless pagans. Furthermore, God made a covenant with David: *“Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”* (2 Sam. 7:11-14). God promises to build David’s house rather than permitting enemies to tear it down. Fulfillment of this covenant takes special shape when God “will raise up your offspring after you”—a reference to Christ’s resurrection—to “establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” This future king, Jesus, would enjoy special status as the Son of God.²

As believers in Christ, we read this Psalm in light of King Jesus, the eternally begotten Son of God. Jesus came as a human being who thirsted after God like his father David (63:1-2). Despite the distance He sometimes felt (Matt. 27:46; Jhn. 19:28), Jesus nevertheless delighted in God, just like David did (63:3-8). For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross (Heb. 12:2), and today He reigns as the Son of God and Son of David, fulfilling God’s covenant to David (63:9-11). Jesus preliminarily defeated our enemies and vindicated the righteous in His first advent. However, He consummates His saving work upon His return. Jesus reigns right now, but He returns to reign *without contest*.

The mention of “king” tempts us to label this a royal psalm, but only one verse mentions his kingship. Others have described this as a lament, but surprisingly, Psalm 63 contains no single petition (request for help). The song seems to defy our normal categories for Israel’s Psalter. Perhaps we should content ourselves with the general label: the king’s meditation.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

—David penned this while in the wilderness of Judah, which can only describe one of two times: when he fled from Saul, or when he fled from Absalom. Later in the Psalm, David refers to himself as king, making the latter setting probable.

—“O God, you are my God”:

- God’s people must be able to verbalize both expressions—“O God” and “my God.” The first implies deep emotion, which we bring before Him. It reflects a pouring out of the heart, which is proper for the people of God. Our prayer life should not just be a stinky laundry list of needs but a heart cracked open like Mary’s jar at the feet of our Savior.
- The second expression, “my God”, provides the ground for the first. We pour our hearts out before God because God belongs to us—and us to Him—by covenant. Oh, to possess the One who possesses all things! He belongs to us, not like property, but like a Lover bound by promises. “my God” reflects the heart-cry of an intimate partner.
- This reminds me of the Song of Songs, where personal pronouns fill the lovers’ songs. There are too many to count, but here’s a sampling from the first two chapters.
 - 1:9: *“I compare you, **my love**, to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots.”*
 - 1:13-16: *“**My beloved** is to me a sachet of myrrh that lies between my breasts. **My beloved** is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Engedi. [He] Behold, you are beautiful, **my love**; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves. [She] Behold, you are beautiful, **my beloved**, truly delightful.”*
 - 2:2 *“As a lily among brambles, so is **my love** among the young women. [She] As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is **my beloved** among the young men.”*

² As was common in the ancient near east, all kings in Israel were labeled “son of God.” But Jesus possessed this title from eternity past.

- 2:8-10: *"The voice of **my beloved**! Behold, he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. **My beloved** is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, there he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, looking through the lattice. **My beloved** speaks and says to me: 'Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.'"*
 - 2:13-14: *"Arise, **my love, my beautiful one**, and come away. **O my dove**, in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."*
 - 2:16: *"**My beloved is mine, and I am his**; he grazes among the lilies."*
 - I only cite these because the Psalmist wants us to feel the flash flood of affection he has for God, which resembles the song of lovers quoted above. Interestingly, the Shulamite's affection progresses from 2:16 ("My beloved is mine, and I am his") to 6:3 ("I am my beloved's, and he is mine"). In 2:16, she emphasizes her own possession of her lover by stating it first ("My beloved is mine..."). Love begins this way. We feel overwhelmed with OUR experience of the other person. As the song progresses, so does their love. She ends by reversing the order. "I am my beloved's" comes first. The more we grow in love—either as human partners or in partnership with the Divine—the more our heart rests securely in belonging to the other. So it is in Psalm 63, where "my soul clings to you" is balanced by the emphatic, "you uphold me with your right hand" (v. 8). The Psalmist moves from possessing love for God to feeling possessed by love from God.
 - Kidner: "The longing of these verses is not the groping of a stranger feeling his way towards God, but the eagerness of a friend, almost of a lover, to be in touch with the one he holds dear. The simplicity and boldness of 'Thou art my God' is the secret of all that follows, since this relationship is the heart of the covenant, from the patriarchs to the present day (Gn. 17:8c; Heb. 8:10c)."
- "earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you":
- "earnestly":
 - When we pour our affectionate yet broken hearts out before God, we do so not casually but earnestly.
 - The NKJV translates "earnestly" as "early"—"early I seek thee."
 - Kidner: "There is no compelling reason to abandon the familiar translation, 'early will I seek thee,' which is based on the derivation of 'seek' from the word for 'dawn', suggesting an eagerness which chimes in with the thought of 130:6 and the language of 57:8."
 - [Psa 130:6 ESV] "my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning."
 - [Psa 57:8 ESV] "Awake, my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn!"
 - While we should not be legalistic about which time of day we seek God, it is true to the Psalms and the life of our Lord (cf. Mk. 1:35) that earnest seeking starts early. I have found this to be true in my experience.
 - "seek... thirsts... faints":
 - "earnestly I seek you" is actually a single Hebrew word (*sahar*). See comments above on "earnestly" for detail.
 - "thirsts": God is water to our soul. Like water hydrates the body, enabling it to survive and thrive, our inward being survives and thrives on God alone. Without Him, our spiritual life withers like a rootless desert plant. The Psalmist feels like that plant, which explains why he cries out for a drink—for God.
 - "faints": if "thirst" speaks of a craving, "faint" conveys weariness. Just as God designed our bodies to thirst for that which enables us to survive and thrive—water—He designed us to thirst after Him. He alone satisfies our thirst and sustains us when we feel faint.
 - I am reminded of a quote by C.S. Lewis: *"The Christian says, 'Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or to be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the*

something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that country and to help others to do the same."

- "I... soul... flesh":
 - The Psalmist ("I") breaks down his constitution into "soul" and "flesh". However, he does not intend this as the exhaustive definition of our makeup. Christians have argued for centuries over anthropology ("do we consist of body, soul, and spirit? Or just body and soul? Or body and spirit? What about mind, will, and heart?"). These questions matter, but the Psalmist only intends to speak poetically. The device he employs is a "merism," which combines two contrasting parts to speak of the whole (i.e., "near and far" means everywhere; "day and night" means constantly). In this case, "soul" and "flesh" depicts the entirety of "I". In other words, the Psalmist is saying, "My total being is in agreement: I am desperate for God!"
 - Other Psalms that use "soul" and "flesh" (or "heart" and "flesh") as a merism for one's total being include Pss. 16:2; 73:26; 84:2.
 - One takeaway of this merism is that thirst for God affects us more than spiritually. It affects us physically, emotionally, and mentally. Western culture too easily divides the parts for classification without considering their interrelationship. If my spiritual life suffers, my whole life does—and vice versa.

—"as in a dry and weary land where there is no water": this simile deepens our understanding of the Psalmist's thirsty soul and faint flesh. Considering that David penned this song from a wilderness, the imagery required little creativity to dream up. David's spiritual desperation matched his physical surroundings. So often, this is the case. We feel distant from God when He feels absent in our circumstances. This is our cue to respond like David in Psalm 63. Instead of accepting our spiritual and physical "desert" as a long-term reality, we cast ourselves on "God, my God," spilling out our desperation before Him, trusting Him for breakthrough.

—Should we be desperate for God always? Or will we sometimes feel perfectly satisfied?

- Those who consistently pursue God will naturally experience sharp desperation for God in certain seasons and rich satisfaction in others. We observe both in this Psalm (see contrast between 63:1 and 63:5-7).
- At the same time, we should never lose our desperation for God. Until we see God's face, we are always "away from the Lord." See 2 Cor. 5:1-9: *"For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. **We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.** Yes, we are of good courage, and we would **rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.** So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him."*
- Paul's point is that we long for a new bodily home—our resurrection body—so we can see God's face and not die (cf. Ex. 33:20: "no man can see Me and live"). Until we depart from this world, we are "away from the Lord." Therefore, we should always be desperate for more of Him.
- Thomas Aquinas says this about the beatific vision, which describes the moment we see God's face: *"Man is not perfectly happy, so long as something remains for him to desire and seek."* Until we see God's face, we should feel desperate to see God's face.
- But what about those seasons when we feel God's special nearness, such as in Ps. 63:5-7? Even then, we must recognize this as a minuscule foretaste of the glory to come.
- In short, we must always endeavor to feel simultaneously content and desperate. David follows hard after God (63:2) and finds satisfaction (63:5), but he's still away from the "sanctuary" (63:2) and "away from the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:6).

2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

—"So": the Psalmist is no sluggard. "The desire of the sluggard kills him, for his hands refuse to labor" (Pr. 21:25). God designed desire to drive us. "A worker's appetite works for him; his mouth urges him on" (16:26).

The "So" of Ps. 63:2 explains the actions that follow. The Psalmist's thirst (v. 1) drives the following action (v. 2).

—"I have looked upon you in the sanctuary":

- Feeling distant from God, David remembers times when God encountered him. Acts of remembrance stir our faith. Psalmists employ the tactic often. David will again in v. 6.
- Combining this thought with "so" at the beginning of the verse, David acts upon his thirst for God by intentionally remembering his experiences with God.
- What experiences with God can you intentionally recall? What answers to prayer and divine encounters would stir up your faith? We all need a spiritual scrapbook of events we remember often. Too often, like Israel, we forget (cf. Ps. 106:13: "But they soon forgot his works"). Do you have spiritual amnesia? Or do you have a spiritual scrapbook?
- "in the sanctuary":
 - Since David is in the wilderness, he is away from the sanctuary.
 - David knew of God's omnipresence (Ps. 139:7-10), but he also knew that God manifested His presence in the temple. He longed for those experiences again.
 - As new covenant believers, the "sanctuary" is not a building but God's people, gathered. Corporately, we are His temple (Eph. 2; 1 Pet. 2). We should therefore expect to encounter God and remember experiences we had with Him—through Word and Sacrament, worship and prayer—ordinary means of grace.

—"beholding your power and glory": how did David see God's power and glory in the sanctuary? Since David's thirst is for "God, my God," he seems to recall revelations of God's "power and glory" that he experienced in the sanctuary (cf. 27:4). He remembers encountering God.

3 Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. 4 So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.

—"Because your steadfast love is better than life":

- After recalling past divine encounters, David finds faith to cling to God's steadfast love.
- God's steadfast love—His covenant devotion—is better than all life has to offer: all power (David had a lot), all wealth (David had a lot), all pleasure (David had a lot), and all fame (David had a lot). To have all these things but not experience God's covenant love is to have nothing. They will perish with us. To have none of these things but possess God's love is to have everything. God will never leave us.
- What would it look like to live as if this were true? What if we cared little about losses of power, wealth, pleasure, or fame? Or sudden gains of the same? Would anyone observe our lives and conclude, "Knowing God is more important to him/her than anything"?
 - I am reminded of Ps. 73:25-26: *"Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."*
 - I am reminded of Ps. 84:10-11: *"For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly."*
 - I am reminded of Acts 20:24: *"But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."*
 - I am reminded of Phil. 3:7-8: *"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ."*

—"better than life... as long as I live":

- The quality of God's steadfast love determines the quantity of years He is worthy of praise—"as long as I live."
- Some things are worth praising for a moment—a good movie. Some are worth praising for a season—a wise decision. But God is worth praising for our whole lifetime because God's love is better than life.

- For that matter, we who believe live forever, and God will continue to earn our praise with successive revelations of His grace “in the coming ages” (Eph. 2:7). He is worth all the worship we could ever give, and more, forever.
- “my lips will praise you... I will bless you... I will lift up my hands”:
- In the context of a worship song, “my lips will praise you” is about singing, which is accompanied by the lifting of hands, as in 1 Tim. 2:8.
 - God’s love makes all of us singers. We can’t experience His love without singing about it.
 - Imagine a world without songs. We would struggle to emote. Music is the language of the heart. When we feel deep love for God, it’s not enough to say it; we must sing it. Songs amp up our praise. They take it to another level. They make it heavenly.
 - The Psalmist promises to praise God with his lips, life, and hands. When he says, “I will bless you,” he does not tell us how. While we expect it to include music, we should not limit it there. God’s love is better than life, so David will praise Him with his whole life.
 - Why is lifting our hands significant? For many years, Christians rarely did so. The charismatic movement re-introduced hand-raising to public worship. But why is this a charismatic thing? In truth, it’s a Bible thing. Here are some verses about it:
 - “To you, O LORD, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my **hands** toward your most holy sanctuary” (Psalm 28:1).
 - “Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my **hands** to you” (Psalm 88:9).
 - “I will lift up my **hands** toward your commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes” (Psalm 119:48).
 - “Lift up your **hands** to the holy place and bless the LORD!” (Psalm 134:2).
 - “O LORD, I call upon you; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to you! Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my **hands** as the evening sacrifice!” (Psalm 141:1-2).
 - “I stretch out my **hands** to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land” (Psalm 143:6).
 - “Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his **hands**. Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the court, and he stood on it. Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven” (2 Chronicles 6:12-13).
 - “And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and fell upon my knees and spread out my **hands** to the LORD my God” (Ezra 9:5).
 - “And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, ‘Amen, Amen,’ lifting up their **hands**. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground” (Nehemiah 8:6).
 - “Let us lift up our hearts and **hands** to God in heaven” (Lamentations 3:41).
 - These passages reveal hand-raising as a way of expressing desperation (Ps. 28:1; 141:2; 143:6; Ez. 9:5), allegiance (88:9), surrender (119:48; Neh. 8:6), adoration (134:2; Lam. 3:41), and dedication (2 Chron. 6:12).
 - As Christians, we affirm the goodness of human bodies because God created them and evaluated them to be good (Gen. 1:31) and because of resurrection (cf. Phil. 3:21). We are not just brains or spirits. We are human beings. God is worthy not only of our entire life but of our whole being.
- “in your name”: God’s name equates to more than the letters that spell G-O-D. His name is His reputation and character. It can be a synonym for God Himself.

5 My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips, 6 when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; 7 for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

—After studying many of the Psalms, one thing that strikes me is the faith they express. So many of these famous prayers declare what “will” happen when God answers. Too often when I pray, I plead with God desperately for something I don’t expect to be answered. After a while, my desperation turns to resignation and routine. I think a healthy prayer life will meditate more on the answers to our prayers than the situation we feel stuck in. Healthy prayers will contain many “Then you will” and “then I will” statements like we see here.

—“with joyful lips”: Ross says this literally reads, “lips of a ringing cry.” David’s lips will ring like the long vibration of a bell that’s been struck. The Psalmist foresees the reverberating power of passion and gratitude emanating from his heart.

—“satisfied as with fat and rich food”:

- The perfect inverse of the opening scene, where his throat felt parched, David imagines a feast of delicacies. There is no satisfaction like soul satisfaction.
- The image of “fat and rich food” differs from “bread,” which would have symbolized how God sustains and nourishes us. “fat” suggests meat, so the metaphor includes sustenance and nourishment. But “rich food” includes desserts. God sustains and nourishes us like a Thanksgiving meal; He also satisfies us like an after-dinner treat.

—“when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night”:

- David has not yet experienced soul-relief from his bitter estate. Still, he doesn’t envision having to wait until the wilderness season is over or until he’s back in the sanctuary.
- David expects to receive inner sustenance, nourishment, and satisfaction even before his trial ends. We can have our thirst and hunger satisfied amid our pain.
- To experience it, however, we must “remember” God upon our bed and “meditate on” Him in the “watches of the night.”
- We have already addressed the importance of remembering God. Here, David marries it to “meditate” (*haga*).
 - Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT): “*The basic meaning of haga and its cognates is a low sound, characteristic of the moaning of a dove (Isa. 38:14; 59:11) or the growling of a lion over its prey (Isa. 31:4)... The Psalmist speaks of meditating upon God (63:6) and His works (77:12; 143:5).*”
 - The meditation seems to be a low, verbal muttering of divine truths. This would explain why God told Joshua to never let Scripture “depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night...” (Josh. 1:8).
 - We should therefore picture David lying awake at night, stemming his mental drift by intentionally remembering past experiences of God, muttering to himself about them and the truths they represent. This would take place over a long period—“the watches of the night” (each night comprised of three watches for Jews before the captivity). Having lost his kingdom to a rebellious son and on the run for his life, David meditates on God’s goodness for hours and hours.
- Ross: “[The Psalmist] longed to see the power and glory of God displayed in the sanctuary once again. Since he found it impossible to do this under the circumstances, he began to commune with God through meditation. He found satisfaction and cause for great praise in the contemplation of the loyal love of the LORD, which to him was better than life itself. The meditation satisfied his spiritual needs just as a banquet would satisfy his physical needs.”
- Kidner: “If the wilderness of verse 1 sharpened his appetite for God, his wakefulness through the watches of the night (an expression which stresses the slow progress of the hours) enlisted time and thought for the same Lord. Both kinds of hardship yielded ‘streams in the desert’ and ‘honey from the rock.’” In other words, both the hardship and the restlessness created by it served to intensify David’s pursuit of God.

—“for you have been my help”:

- Not only does David intentionally remember his encounters with God—the “power and glory” of verse 2—but also God’s goodness in the form of deliverances, interventions, and answered prayers. God has been his help.
- If you’re in a situation where you need help, you do well to remember past times when God helped you. For me, it helps to write them down as I meditate. Otherwise, my mind drifts too easily.
- I have also found it helpful to model my weeks after Genesis 1. After each day, God reviews His work to say, “It is good,” and then on the seventh day, He concludes, “It is very good.” At the end of each week, I call to mind each good thing God did, write it down, and thank Him for it. But I don’t just do this once a week. Around the dinner table on most evenings, my family shares one thing we are grateful for, and then we thank God for it. (We also share one thing we are stressed about so we can pray about it.) As human beings made in the image of God, we are not just creatures who live. We can evaluate. We can discern. We reflect. The deeper life requires us to do these often.

—"in the shadow of your wings": God does not have wings. This poetic imagery teaches us about God by comparing Him to a bird. To create a shadow, we picture a large bird—an eagle or a hawk. Like these creatures soar through the sky, God dwells high above, impervious to dangers below. Since we rest in the shadow of His wings, we too are impervious. The metaphor speaks of God's perfect protection. No danger "down below" can touch Him—or us.

8 My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

—David does his part, and God does His. David clings to God; God upholds David.

—David's "soul" clings to God. This does not mean that his mind and body ignore God. This is a figurative device called synecdoche, which means "part for the whole." David's whole being clings to God, but by mentioning just the "soul," he emphasizes the inward battle.

—He does not just lightly grasp but clings, as if his life is on the line. It is. Whenever we face danger from the outside, we win it from the inside—by clinging to God.

—"right hand": the hand of strength and honor. David knows that God strengthens him as he clings to God. He also knows that God will honor him.

—The verse finishes with God's strength holding David, not David's strength holding God. Our friendship with Him, like every friendship, should be reciprocal. However, no matter how much we give ourselves to God, He always outdoes us. God performs the heavy lifting.

—Ross: "The prepositional phrase 'to you' is literally 'after you'; his soul follows hard after God—he follows God but sticks with Him."

—Tozer (commenting on this verse): "The impulse to pursue God originates with God, but the outworking of that impulse is our following hard after Him. All the time we are pursuing Him we are already in His hand: 'Thy right hand upholdeth me.' In this divine 'upholding' and human 'following' there is no contradiction. All is of God, for as von Hugel teaches, 'God is always previous.'"

—More Tozer (from his chapter, *Following Hard After God*, in his classic book, *The Pursuit of God*): "The moment the Spirit has quickened us to life in regeneration, our whole being senses its kinship to God and leaps up in joyous recognition. That is the heavenly birth without which we cannot see the kingdom of God. It is, however, not an end but an inception, for now begins the glorious pursuit, the heart's happy exploration of the infinite riches of the Godhead. That is where we begin, I say, but where we stop no man has yet discovered, for there is in the awful and mysterious depths of the Triune God neither limit nor end."

—Tozer again: "To have found God and still to pursue Him is the soul's paradox of love, scorned indeed by the too easily satisfied religionist, but justified in happy experience by the children of the burning heart."

—Tozer again: "When religion has said its last word, there is little that we need other than God Himself. The evil habit of seeking 'God-and' effectively prevents us from finding God in full revelation. In the 'and' lies our great woe. If we omit the 'and' we shall soon find God, and in Him we shall find that for which we have all our lives been secretly wanting."

9 But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth; 10 they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals.

—Now the song shifts toward enemies, as the Psalms often do. David often faced adversaries. We encounter them less frequently, but God has revealed more clearly the "enemy behind the enemy," whom David barely knew about. As Paul says later, "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 6:12).

—Practically, I find it helpful to pray the psalms about "enemies" against my spiritual enemies—the devil and his angels.

—David does not pronounce a curse over his enemies, but he does prophesy concerning them.

—"they shall go down into the depths of the earth... they shall be given over to the power of the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals."

- David's prophecy concerning his enemies is three-fold.
- The first one could mean that his enemies will go into the grave or that they will enter the realm of departed spirits—Sheol. Either way, his enemies will perish.
- The second prophecy also speaks of death, but in a unique way. "given over" is a Hebrew word, "nagar", which means "to pour out." Alan Ross renders it, "they [each of them] will be poured out [to the hands of the sword]." The TWOT says, "Perhaps Ps. 63:10 connotes 'pouring over' the blade of the sword: i.e. the ungodly are to die." Either way, it's another way of saying his enemies will perish—violently.
- The last prophecy means that his enemies will be scoured over by scavengers, having received an improper burial due to combat.

- In summary, David's enemies will perish violently as just retribution for their violence towards David. A New Testament equivalent might be 2 Tim. 4:14: "Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds."

11 But the king shall rejoice in God; all who swear by him shall exult, for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

—"But": in contrast to these enemies, who will die, David foresees a different fate for the king and his people.

—"the king":

- This comes out of nowhere. David has been praying in a personal way, but suddenly he concludes by referring to himself in the third-person and by his royal title. Why?
- In the ancient near east, and more importantly in Israel, the king represented God before the people. This is why the king was called a "son of God." By referring to himself as "the king" David affirmed that he, not Absalom, represented God on the earth. Surely, God in heaven would not allow His earthly ambassador to "go down to the depths of the earth" or have his blood "poured out" over the blade of a sword. No, the king and his citizens would rejoice because God would back His counterpart on the earth.
- As new covenant believers, we should read this verse as foreshadowing our greater Son of David and Son of God, King Jesus, who reigns over heaven and earth (cf. Matt. 28:18).

—"shall rejoice in God... shall exult":

- Those associated with the king will not perish but rather celebrate joyously, as victorious armies do.
- This victory foreshadows Christ's. In His first advent, Jesus defeated sin, death, satan, and human adversaries, but only preliminarily. He consummates His victory upon His return. See last week's study guide and sermon.

—"all who swear by him": this refers to the citizens of the king.

- In ancient times, this was Israel under king David.
- In modern times, it is the church under the Son of David, Jesus. We "swear by him" in that we pledge our allegiance to Jesus. No earthly king has our allegiance like the King of heaven. As the apostles say in Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men."

—"for the mouths of liars will be stopped": God opens the mouths of the righteous so they might sing and shout for joy (63:5); God shuts the mouths of the wicked, so they perish under condemnation. This happened for David's enemies. At the end of the age, it will happen to ours. When this occurs, God will open our mouths to sing and shout for joy that never ends.