

David: A Long Obedience in Worshiping God— Turning Lonely Hours into Worship Times Psalm 63

This morning as we listen to his voice in Psalm 63—David is an old man, all alone, staying in the Judean Wilderness (code for the Dead Sea area) one of the most desolate spots on earth, and on the run from his own son Absalom. That is the context that God uses to write for us one of the most powerful invitations to a life of worship.

Psalm 63 shows us how David chose to turn his lonely hours into times of worshiping God. Loneliness was as real then, as it is today.

We have come to the place in human history when people are lonely—yet surrounded by crowds. Life in the 21st century is very lonely for many people.

Though there are more humans than ever before alive and around us—many find less fellowship, companionship, and fulfillment each year. We move past, around and by, more and more people each day—but know fewer and fewer.

We often move faster—but not closer.

We often have more contact—but less touch.

We have more and more relationships—but less and less depth. And all of this leads to that aching hollow of the soul known as loneliness.

This common condition links Adam in the Garden before God made Eve, Ruth the widow, Job sitting in the ashes of misery, Elijah in the desert (I Kings 19), the Apostle Paul in prison (II Timothy 4), and Christ from Gethsemane to the Cross—for all were painfully alone.

DAVID WAS OFTEN ALONE

This morning in Psalm 63, we find David in that state that often characterized his life—and what he did when he was alone reflects what was deepest within him.

Long and lonely hours are often reflected from the record God has given us of David's

life. Even when surrounded by a nation, an army, and his own family—David often feels alone. Most of his Psalms come from that reference point. Think of David's greatest Psalms that we have walked through.

- Psalm 23: alone a shepherd boy;
- Psalm 9: alone facing Goliath;
- Psalm 132: alone in his home as a boy;
- Psalm 142: alone fleeing King Saul, and hiding in a cave;
- Psalm 34 & 56: alone as a prisoner at Gath;
- Psalm 101: alone on the Throne as he assumed the kingship of Israel;
- Psalm 31: alone on the battle field as he fled Absalom;
- Psalm 32 & 51: alone before God facing his own sinfulness.

Much of David's life was spend alone. But, we must also never confuse solitude with loneliness. Solitude is a chosen state to stimulate contemplation and meditation; but loneliness is an unwelcomed, unsought, and undesired visitor.

One doctor has written: "Acute loneliness seems to be the most painful kind of anxiety which a human being can suffer".¹

Not much has changed in 3,000 years, has it? One of the sociological phenomenons of the 21st century is that the more the population increases, and travel and communication explode, conveniences and comforts abound, and the increasing freedom and security of financial independence multiplies—loneliness floods our world.

About the time of the Civil War, a noted American writer and philosopher named Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), described cities as "places where people are lonely together."

THE LONELY PLANET

If Thoreau's observation was true in the past, it has become increasingly true in the present, and the prediction is that it will become alarmingly more so in the near future. We live on a very lonely planet.

- In 1950 there were only seven cities in the world with more than five million people. Only two of these were in the Third World.
- Today there are 34 cities with more than five million people, 22 of which are in the Third World.
- And by the middle of the 21st century, there will be nearly 100 cities with at least five million people, with 80 of these in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Most of the world's population will be living in cities and the slums and squatter settlements of Third World countries².

¹ Dr. Paul Brand & Philip Yancey, *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants*, (NY: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 164-165.

² Osbeck, Kenneth W., *Amazing Grace—366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications) 1997.

People are *alone* in high rise buildings that house tens of thousands; people are *alone* on transits systems that shuttles millions each day; people are *alone* in houses that are the size of castles as well as apartments that are the size of closets. Loneliness is no respecter of economics or status. Loneliness is not a stranger to more and more people around this city and across the world.

Charles Reich wrote in his impacting book a generation ago called ***The Greening of America***,

“Modern living has obliterated place, locality and neighborhood, and has given us the anonymous separatedness of our existence. The family, the most basic social system, has been ruthlessly stripped to its functional essentials.

Friendship has been coated over with a layer of impenetrable artificiality as men strive to live roles designed for them. Protocol, competition, hostility and fear have replaced the warmth of a circle of affection which might sustain man against a hostile environment. America has become one vast, terrifying anti-community.”³

So what are we to do the next time we see or feel the pangs of loneliness swirling around us? Think of the most described lonely person in God's Word--his name was David, his discoveries about the Lord in the midst of piercing loneliness are recorded as testimonies in the book of Psalms. Let's read one of the most powerful in Psalm 63.

Stand, read Psalm 63 and pray.

Loneliness is a spiritual opportunity; when God allows all of my normal companions to be out of my life—He can become closest to me. This means that loneliness can be a tool in God's hand, an opportunity for a right response by us His children. Don't let loneliness abuse you, use it to draw close to the Lord!

LONELINESS IS AS OLD AS MANKIND

Loneliness is as ancient as mankind, in fact the very first recorded words of God to Adam were on that very subject when he said in *Genesis 2: 18*

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

God solved that problem with Eve, and Adam was no longer alone. But soon after, sin arrived as Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Then came the sting of the most dreadful form of loneliness—alienation from God.

Because we are all fallen in Adam, we now experience loneliness in all of its many forms; none of them are good. Loneliness appears at times as that sense of emptiness,

³ Charles Reich, *The Greening of America: The Coming of a New Consciousness and the Rebirth of a Future* (NY: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 7.

like we have a vacuum inside of us. Other times it is a feeling of desolation or of unsatisfied longings. Probably the most acute form of loneliness is when we lose someone close to us through disagreement, distance or death.

But Jesus came as Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1). He wants to never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13). He promises to be with us always even to the end (Matthew 28). He meets us where we are in each of the lonely times life will bring.

Loss of a life partner is a deep void; moving away from cherished places also cuts deeply. The loss of the comfortable and familiar can leave gaps in our hearts and painful voids. And as we see all around us, everyone involved in a divorce—the marriage partners, friends, family, and children—all are touched with an aching void and begin down a pathway of loneliness.

Loneliness is a tool to glorify God, turn to him in trust and triumph, and to make some great discoveries about God. In every phase of life there is loneliness; and in every phase of life find out what Jesus says is true—*I am always with you!*

Are you feeling the loneliness of youth? Are you feeling the loneliness of life facing family conflict and danger? Are you feeling the loneliness of job loss, and family separation? Are you feeling the loneliness of moving to a new location that is very foreign to you? Are you feeling the loneliness of living and working with a tough crowd? Are you feeling the loneliness of unemployment and unsettled home life? Are you feeling the loneliness of betrayal by friends? Are you feeling the loneliness of being wronged in a business deal? Are you feeling the loneliness of the complete loss of his family, friends, and finances? Are you feeling the loneliness of temptation and failure? Are you feeling the loneliness of chastisement and restoration? Are you feeling the loneliness of old age? *Jesus says I am always with you!*

Loneliness—if you ever feel it, know that Jesus felt it.

If you ever suffer feeling friendless—know that Jesus is the friend who will stick closer than a brother.

If you ever feel forsaken—remember Jesus said that He would never leave you or forsake you.

If you feel alone—trust the One who said I am with you always, to the end! Like David shows us in Psalm 63.

DAVID SOUGHT GOD THROUGH HIS LONELINESS

Look with me at the first verse in Psalm 63. Alone in the bleak wilderness of Judea that we know as the Dead Sea region, David starts out by declaring he would pursue the Lord. “Seek” in Psalm 63 is an unusual verb that can be either rendered as ‘seek early’ [KJV/NKJV] or ‘seek earnestly’ [NIV/NASB].

Which ever way your Bible renders that word, the question remains—is that your heart? God shows us in the lives of everyone from Moses and Joshua, through David and right down to the life of Jesus—the immense benefit of a regular, early, daily seeking after God. Do you have a desire like that for Him? Most of us probably can't say that we always do. But as you sit and listen to God's Word, isn't that what we all want?

This attitude and desire for God is cultivated and part of spiritual disciplines. What ever we feed regularly grows. If we feed our body, it grows. If we feed our mind it grows, and if we feed our spirit with seeking after God times—we grow more and more to longingly seek Him. There is no better way to live a day for eternity than to start it with a personal, earnest seeking of God through His Word in personal Bible reading, study, meditation and devoted prayers.

David again uses every tense of life to describe his pursuit of the Lord. He says this has been my **past pursuit**:

*Psalm 63:2 So I **have looked** for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory.*

And even in the hot, empty, lifelessness of the bleak and hostile desert seeking God was his **present pursuit** even as he was being chased by Absalom (most likely the context of this Psalm):

*Psalm 63: v.1 O God, You **are** my God; Early will I seek You; My soul **thirsts** for You; My flesh **longs** for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. v.3 Because Your lovingkindness **is** better than life, My lips shall praise You. v. 6 When I **remember** You on my bed, I **meditate** on You in the night watches. v.8 My soul **follows** close behind You; Your right hand **upholds** me.*

Then as David always looks ahead, he declares that desiring God will always be his **future pursuit**:

*Psalm 63:1-11 v.1 O God, You are my God; Early **will I seek You**; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. v. 3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips **shall praise You**. v.4 Thus **I will bless You** while I live; **I will lift up** my hands in Your name. v.5 My soul **shall be** satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth **shall praise You** with joyful lips. v. 7 Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings **I will rejoice**. v.11 But **the king shall rejoice** in God; Everyone who swears by Him shall glory; But the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped.*

DAVID USES EVERY MEANS HE HAD TO PURSUE GOD

Even a quick glance at this Psalm in your English Bible shows an ancient Hebrew pattern; David uses seven different means to praise and worship God (seven as in an

complete set). Glance down and note with me each of them:

- First, David uses *his lips* to speak of God's love that is kind and true in v.3 "Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, **My lips** shall praise You".
- Second, he harnesses *his tongue* to bless the God he loves in v. 4a "Thus **I will bless You** while I live...".
- Third, he uses *his hands* to point to the God he seeks and loves in v.4b "...I will lift up **my hands** in Your name."
- Fourth, David uses *his will* to intentionally make a declaration of God worthiness in v.5a "**My soul** shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness...".
- Fifth, he again speaks with *his mouth* to lift praises to the God he loves v.5b "...And **my mouth** shall praise You with joyful lips."
- Sixth, David uses *his mind* to remember in v.6a "6 When **I remember** You on my bed...".
- Seventh, he uses *his intellect* to meditate upon God's character in v. 6b "...**I meditate** on You in the night watches.

David is saying I am using all the faculties that God gave me in seeking Him. Is that pursuit of God echoed in your heart this morning?

Since childhood we have been taught that we have far more capacity in our brains than we ever use. Most doctors say the average human barely uses 10% of their brain.

We are challenged by our culture to never stop learning to use a few extra percentage points through life; but in a vastly more strategic way, God is saying through David—***why not start employing more and more of your capacity to worship God?*** Regularly use your lips, your tongue, your hands, your will, your mouth, your mind, and your intellect *to the max* in seeking to offer worship to God.

ONLY GOD CAN SATISFY

One of the most fundamental truths from this Psalm is that God can satisfy us to the very core of our existence and being. That is David's 3,000 year old testimony. He was as human as anyone can get.

David reflects every virtue and every vice. He struggles with fear, depression and lust; yet he sings with abandon, worships with a passion, and meditates into the very Throne Room of God. We can each identify with his struggles—and we can each learn from his pursuit of God.

David is showing us the lifelong opportunity we can have of pursuing God. God is an exhaustless supply of new satisfaction; He is a well that never runs dry, a spring that always wells up with fresh and life giving waters. Every desire, even the deepest can be satisfied by Him. And as Augustine said those well remembered words 1600 years ago, "Our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."⁴

⁴ C.H. Spurgeon, The Treasury of David, vol. 2, Psalms 58-87 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), p. 65.

David says that he is *completely satisfied* **by God, with God, and in God**. David experienced what God has offered and promises—God can't hold Himself back from those who seek Him. God is always looking throughout the Earth for anyone who focuses their heart's desires upon Him. God said He is found by those who seek Him with all their heart. And David says—yes, that is what I have experienced.

Look at v.3 again. Note what David says: **Life is good; God is better!**

Psalm 63:3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.

Now there is something all of us can relate to and decide upon. David states that life is good. Now most of us would agree. In reality life is so good that people cling to it with a tenacity that surpasses all other desires. We will do anything to save our self from death humanly speaking. At gun point we will give up every dollar we have to not be killed. With cancer we will agree to the most painful surgical and procedures to try to stave off cancer's advance, to the point of amputation of parts of our body if that will give us hope of more days to live.

Satan's assessment with Job reminds us that this is always the case with us humans.

Job 2:4 So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.

So for almost every person on this planet, their life is their most precious and treasured possession. But this verse tells us that life is good, God made it wonderful; but God is better. Why? Because no matter how carefully we guard our life, it can be lost.

Our body wears out or gets ravaged by some disease or trauma—and it dies. Life as good as it is, ends. But God never will end; His love never fades away or gets traumatized or diseased. David says God is better because of His loving kindness—that is His faithful, steady, and unwavering love. That is the love of God He has covenanted to us. It is safe, sure, and reliable. God's love is inseparable from us who receive it.

Remember the great words of Paul? God has told us as clearly and forcefully as is possible in human language—nothing can remove His promised 'better than life' love!

Romans 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When we stop and think about it, like we are at this moment— isn't it hard to believe that we neglect and spend so little time cultivating something that is 'better than life'— and spend the majority of all our time pursuing, protecting, and seeking to prolong what is a distant second?

ENJOYING GOD

God offers endless satisfaction, completion on a supreme level for each of us to enjoy and enlarge on a daily basis. Maybe this morning we need to pause and like David with our lips, tongue, mouth, mind and will express how much we want to just enjoy the Lord Himself right now.

One way I do that, when struck by thoughts like these, is to break right out in song; whether I am in the study before my open Bible, or riding in the car listening to the Dramatized Bible on my iPod, or walking and meditating on memorized verses—I just right then grab for that reality of endless joy in His Presence. I often sing:

More Precious Than Silver

Words and Music by Lynn Deshazo
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Lord, You are more precious than silver.
Lord, You are more costly than gold.
Lord, You are more beautiful than diamonds,
And nothing I desire compares to You.

Lord, Your Love is higher than mountains.
Lord, Your Love is deeper than seas.
Lord, Your Love encompasses the nations,
And yet, You live right here inside of me!

Lord, You are more precious than silver.
Lord, You are more costly than gold.
Lord, You are more beautiful than diamonds,
And nothing I desire compares to You.
And nothing I desire compares to You.

Have you come to the place as we sang earlier that you regularly say, "...and nothing I desire compares with You..."?