

Series: Psalms: Cries From the Heart
Sermon: *The Cry of Longing*
Scripture: Psalm 63
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Introduction: What would it look like if your world fell apart? Or should I ask, what did it look like when your world fell apart? Have you lost all you count dear, including your job, your standing in the community, even your family? Have you ever had family members turn against you in destructive and vengeful ways? Did you check to see if your name tag read *Job*? David, the author of Psalm 63, was a victim of these exact circumstances. You may be amazed at the cries of his heart.

When you face a crisis is your tendency to trust or distrust God? Do unforeseen emergencies cause your desire for God to increase or to be weakened? David turned to God in his crisis, and found his desire for God was intensified, his delight in God's love was deepened, and his dependency upon God was strengthened. Turn with me to our text, Psalm 63, and listen to the cry of longing from David's heart.

David's desire for God, vs. 1-2

¹ O God, you are my God,
 earnestly I seek you;
 my soul thirsts for you,
 my body longs for you,
 in a dry and weary land
 where there is no water.

² I (thus, formerly) have seen you in the sanctuary
 and beheld your power and your glory.

How was David's desire for God intensified in this crisis? First,

A desire born out of relationship – "O God, you are my God." David begins his psalm with a statement that defines his relationship to the God he addresses. It goes without saying the God whom David addresses is the God of Creation, the maker of heaven and earth, the God who has revealed himself in these last days through his Son, Jesus Christ. In David's life, God had no competitors; no one else vied for David's worship and devotion, for David's obedience and service. In this first statement David is saying, "You are my ruler, my rightful owner, my redeemer." That David and God have a special relationship is seen by the predominance of personal pronouns in this psalm. Nine of the eleven verses in the English Bible use the pronouns *I* and *You*. Do you have a personal relationship with God, in which you can say "O God, you are my God," and know, bottom line, that He is all you need? Before we look further into the Psalm, we should look at the circumstances that spawned it. David's desire for God was

A desire heightened by circumstances – In a nutshell, King David, after almost 40 years on the throne, had been forced to leave Jerusalem as a result of his son's coup of the kingdom. We are told in 2 Samuel 15 that Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel, and he proclaimed himself king. David said, "Come, we must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom."

Psalm 3, also written on this occasion, has this superscription:

A PSALM OF DAVID. WHEN HE FLED FROM HIS SON ABSALOM.

¹ O LORD, how many are my foes!
 How many rise up against me!

- 2 Many are saying of me,
 “God will not deliver him.”
- 3 But you are a shield around me, O LORD;
 you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.
- 4 To the LORD I cry aloud,
 and he answers me from his holy hill.
- 5 I lie down and sleep;
 I wake again, because the LORD sustains me.
- 6 I will not fear the tens of thousands
 drawn up against me on every side.
- 7 Arise, O LORD!
 Deliver me, O my God!
 Strike all my enemies on the jaw;
 break the teeth of the wicked.
- 8 From the LORD comes deliverance.
 May your blessing be on your people.

David did not flee to the edge of town and stop; he traveled some 20 miles and descended some 4,000 feet in elevation. As David left Jerusalem the inhabitants of the countryside wept aloud. The Ark of the Covenant was brought too, but David had it sent back, with these words: “Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But, if he says, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.” (2 Samuel 15:25, 26)

Was David afraid in these circumstances? Who wouldn’t be afraid? David was not a stranger to fear. Fear intensified David’s desire for God. He says “Earnestly I seek you.” This could also be understood to mean “early” I seek you. In another Psalm David said, “When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” (Psalm 56:3,4) David’s first awareness as he arose in the morning was his need of God. In the midst of circumstances that are out of control, is your first thought of God? Another factor in David’s desire for God had to do with his surroundings.

A desire sharpened by surroundings – In his flight from Jerusalem he headed for the wilderness of Judah. You can see by these photos that this was an arid, desert-like area. Physical thirst was to be expected. David expressed his desire for God in terms that would fit a person who found himself in a desert setting with no water. David wanted God with everything he had, his soul longed for him, his body thirsted for him.

A well-known OT commentator said, “In a region where he is surrounded by sun-burnt aridity, and a nature that bears only one uniform ash-colored tint, which casts its un-refreshing image into his inward part, which is itself in much the same parched condition, his soul thirsts, his flesh languishes, wearied and in want of water, for God, the living One, the Fountain of life.” (Keil) We read of a similar thirst for God in Psalms 42:1,2 “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” One writer expressed his longing for God’s house in these words from Psalm 84:1,2 “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.” And from David’s own lips, in Psalm 143:6, “I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.”

David thirsted for God. Have you ever thirsted for God, really thirsted for him? Some would say it is part of being a follower of Jesus. "Holy desire, exercised in longings, hungerings, and thirstings after God and holiness, is often mentioned in Scripture as an important part of true religion." (Jonathan Edwards)

God created each of us with a thirst, something that keeps us unsatisfied in our natural condition. In one way or another, everyone wants more than they have now. The difference between people is the *kind* of thirsty longing in their soul.

There is the thirst of the empty soul. The natural man, the unconverted person, has an empty soul. Without God, she is looking everywhere for that which will fill her emptiness. Augustine said to God, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

We who know Christ realize that only He can satisfy a thirsty heart. Jesus said, "Who ever drinks of the water that *I shall give him will never thirst*" (John 4:14).

There is the thirst of the Dry Soul. We, as Christians, can experience the thirst of a dry soul. Our soul will become dry when we drink too much from other springs, fountains of the world, which after drinking only leave us thirstier. Another reason can be due to feeling like the Lord has withdrawn from us, leaving us alone and abandoned. Of course, this is only our perception, since he promises he will "never leave us or forsake us." David felt like this in Psalm 143:6, 7 "I spread out my hands to you; my soul longs for you like a thirsty land. Answer me speedily, O Lord; my spirit fails! Do not hide your face from me." A third reason we may feel our soul is dry is when are suffering from prolonged mental or physical fatigue.

Regardless of the reason, when our soul is dry, we need only cry out to the one who promises to give us "water that quenches spiritual thirst." When we find ourselves in this condition, only time with God himself will satisfy our need for the living water. Later, in this message, I will share some ways I draw near to God.

Finally, *there is the thirst of the Satisfied Soul.* In contrast to the dry soul, the satisfied soul thirsts for God precisely because he has "tasted and seen that the Lord is good"; and the taste is so wonderfully satisfying he craves more. Paul, the apostle, was soul-satisfied with Jesus, yet he expressed his deep thirst for him, "that I may know him." This was the goal of Paul's life.

Thomas Shepard, founder of Harvard University and an influential New England minister, explained the cycle of satisfaction and thirst this way: "There is in true grace an infinite circle: a man by thirsting receives, and receiving thirsts for more." It is true that there is no lack of satisfaction in knowing Christ, but neither has God designed us so that one experience with Christ removes all future desire for Him. Rather, just the opposite is true; it only increases our desire for him. On my sabbatical last summer God satisfied my thirst, but I also continue to experience increasing thirst for him.

Here's how Jonathan Edwards described the relationship between the spiritual good enjoyed in fellowship with Christ and the thirst for more that it produces: "Spiritual good is of a satisfying nature; and for that very reason, the soul that tastes, and knows its nature, will thirst after it, and a fullness of it, that it may be satisfied. And the more he experiences, and the more he knows this excellent, unparalleled, exquisite, and satisfying sweetness, the more earnestly he will hunger and thirst for more." Jonathan Edwards

King David knew the thirst of a satisfied soul. In Jerusalem he made it a habit to enter the sanctuary and behold God's power and glory, and now in the wilderness this memory increased his desire for God.

A desire increased by memory. “I (thus, formerly) have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.”

He waited expectantly for God. He waited to behold his power and his glory in the wilderness of Judah.

David had been displaced, but he knew his God was just as able to reveal himself in the wilderness as he was in the sanctuary. David was ready for the early show, and he was on the front row. There in the desert, with no choir, no worship leader, no instruments, no sacrifices, David worshiped God with fullest expression of body and soul. The ache of the wilderness gave David an increased appetite and a renewed commitment for God. Was David’s desire for naught? Did it fall upon deaf ears? How did God satisfy David’s desire, his cry of longing? God showed up, in keeping with his character, and fed him with a soul-satisfying meal from heaven. What about you? Has God met you in your times of crisis and increased your desire for him? Or are you still waiting?

The second thing God did for David was to give him great delight in his love.

David’s delight in God’s Love vs. 3-8

- ³ Because your love (loving-kindness) is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.
- ⁴ I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.
- ⁵ My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.
- ⁶ On my bed I remember you;
I think of you through the watches of the night.
- ⁷ Because you are my help,
I sing in the shadow of your wings.
- ⁸ My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.

God’s loving-kindness was David’s highest good. It was better than natural life, the greatest of all life’s blessings. This Hebrew word translated love is found over 200 times in the Bible, rendered mercy, loving-kindness, favor, faithfulness, goodness. It emphasizes the steadfast nature of God’s love and loyalty to his covenant with Israel. Jeremiah spoke of this aspect of God’s love when he said, “Because of the Lord’s great love (loving-kindness) we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness.” Lam. 3:22, 23. Do you value God’s love and faithfulness to you? Have you told him lately?

God’s loving-kindness was the reason for David’s worship. In the morning, during the day, and through the night, David worshiped and praised his God. His lips spoke of God’s goodness, and with his lips he sang praises. His hands were lifted in prayer and tribute to his merciful God. I am intrigued with verse 6. On his bed David remembered God, maybe reflecting on the things God had done in the past. Rather than being preoccupied at night by the tumultuous state of his kingdom, or the rebellious actions of his son, David’s mind was on his God. In another psalm David said, “I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me.” (16:7) What type of bed do you imagine David had in the wilderness? Probably a mattress of hard, sun-baked ground with a stone for a pillow.

That could be another reason why he was awake during night, rather than in a dreamless sleep. What do you do when you cannot sleep at night? David listened to his heart, as God counseled him.

Often times, if I am lying awake in bed I am working out a solution to a problem, or being anxious about an upcoming event. Do I ask God for counsel, instruction, and insight? Is it only David whom God counsels at night?

David was not alone in his habit of meditating upon God at night. Another Psalmist said, “By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me – a prayer to the God of my life.” (42:8) And, “In the night I remember your name, O Lord”; “At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws.” (119:55, 62) Isaiah said, “My souls yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you.” (26:9)

For my mind to go to God in the nighttime, it must be accustomed to going to God during the day. Do you have a habit of spending time with God in his Word at least 5 times a week? If you don't, it is not likely that your mind will go to God when you cannot sleep at night. Do you spend time meditating on a verse of scripture during the day, one you studied in the morning? If not, it is doubtful that you will find yourself meditating on God's word in the waking moments of the night. Unless God's love is better than life to you, it is not very likely that your first thoughts will be of God when you cannot sleep.

God's loving-kindness nourished and refreshed David. What food did David have to eat there? On the evening of his departure from Jerusalem he was met by Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth, with a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs, and a skin of wine. The king asked Ziba, “Why have you brought these?” Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is to refresh those who become exhausted in the desert.” (2 Samuel 16:1-3) It seems that some foods taste better in certain surroundings more than in others. But I can't think of a surrounding where bread, raisins, figs, and wine would 'hit the spot'. But then, I have not visited the wilderness of Judah. Maybe anything would taste good there.

I recall fishing in southwestern Kansas, not too far from Medicine Lodge, with TD Carlisle, one of our senior saints who is now with the Lord. Our lunch, which he provided, consisted of a fried egg and bologna sandwich with a can of Ensure. You would think that in such a place that would taste good. Well, think again. Maybe you had to be 88 years old.

How thoroughly did God satisfy David's soul? “As with the richest of foods.” Literally this says, “My soul will be satisfied as with fat and fatness.” Remember who is speaking here, and for a moment forget his present surroundings. Recall his title - King of Israel; his home - a palace; his table – spread with the finest food available to the most powerful man in the Middle East. David knew rich foods.

Thinking about God's ability to satisfy his every need brought a sense of fullness, contentment into David's life. Like when you push your chair away from a wonderful meal of all your favorite foods.

On our vacation to the South East this summer we had the wonderful experience of eating at Mrs. Wilkes' Boarding House, in Savannah, GA. After a 45 minute wait we were shown to a table for ten already set with plates and silverware, sweet tea, and with 22 different bowls and platters of southern-style food, including fried chicken, mashed potatoes, cornbread, squash, black-eyed peas, and several things I had never seen before. And yes, we had more than enough to eat. Do you ever feel satisfied like that after spending 30 minutes with the Lord? David did.

God's loving-kindness also provided David with safety and support. “Because (God) was his help he sang in the shadow of his wings, his soul clung to God, and God's right hand upheld him.” I love the word pictures here which speak of the protection God gives those whom he loves. The first one, being in

the *shadow of his wings*, is that of a mother hen and her chicks. The safety provided by a shadow is a common figure in scripture, occurring four times in Psalms, and six times in other OT books. Sometimes God is the shadow, or He is the rock or tree that provides shade, or his hand makes the shadow in which his loved ones hide. The meaning is clear; we are safe in God's care. How safe did David feel? In Psalm 3, he said, "I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side." (vs. 5, 6) Here he says "I sing in the shadow of your wings."

In the expression, "My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me," we have a picture of a protective parent and his or her child. David, speaking for his soul, said it clings to God. David has already confessed to "seeking," "thirsting," and "longing" for God. To "cling to" God means 'to follow wholeheartedly, to be in hot pursuit of, and, to press on after'. Quoting from *The Message*, "I hold on to you for dear life." This speaks of a very earnest desire and a serious, vigorous endeavor to stay close to God. David clings, hold's on for dear life, and God upholds him with his right hand. Brian Morgan says it this way. "That wondrous love seizes him and slips beneath him: his bones, his flesh, enmeshed now as if one with God's loving-kindness."

Between David and God there existed a reciprocal relationship of active love: he depended on God, followed hard after him; and on the other side God's right hand held him fast, not letting him go, not abandoning him to his foes.

Example: This summer we visited a water park with our grandchildren. After much coaxing I convinced some of them to go with me down the highest slide. On the first ride they sat on my lap, and clung on to my neck for dear life.

I believe this is what God invites us to do when the ride we are on is scary. Can you feel yourself doing this, hanging on while sensing God's hand under you? It is what God wants us to do. God told Isaiah, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10

Finally, in this time of crisis, and in response to David's cry, God deepened David's dependence upon himself.

David's dependence on God

- ⁹ They who seek my life will be destroyed;
They will go down to the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁰ They will be given over to the sword
And become food for jackals.
- ¹¹ But the king will rejoice in God;
All who swear by God's name will praise him,
while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

One benefit for David was:

David's dependence on God gave him a clear vision of his enemies' end. On what basis did David pen these words? How did he know the future end of his enemies? David's knowledge of the future was based upon God's character and how God has consistently acted in the past. When the final chapter of history has been written, everyone, the righteous and the unrighteous, will stand before the Judge of all the Earth

and receive what is coming to them. The apostle Paul says in Romans 2:5, 6 “But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’”

In God’s justice those who have tried to destroy him will be destroyed instead. The wicked men that were seeking his life will descend into the deepest parts of the earth, a term that describes the grave or eternal ruin.

David was also given insight into the "methods" of God's justice in that God will use their own ways against them: they who came after David with the sword, will be devoured by the sword (a metaphor for certain death). Even their final memory will be desecrated, for they will be left as prey for the jackals. This next quote is quite graphic, but relates well to the text. Othman Keel writes: "In death nothing was worse than to lie exposed on the field--a prey to animals--or in a strange land. So long as the bones are intact, even a dead man retains a minimal existence...the bodies of those fallen, slaughtered and executed were often left to lie as food for jackals, raven, and other scavengers. The dead were thus deprived of the last vestiges of their existence."

The Message captures it well, “Those who are out to get me are marked for doom, marked for death, bound for hell. They'll die violent deaths; jackals will tear them limb from limb.”

Because David was dependent upon God in his crisis,

God also gave him a clear vision of his own end. He was as confident of the final state of his enemies as he was of his own. "They **will** be destroyed, **will** go down, **will** be given over.... But *the king will* rejoice in God." This is a clear statement that David is convinced of his restoration to his royal position. He calls himself *the king* because he knew himself to be so in the divine purpose and designation of God.

We can as Christians also be confident about our future destiny. We can affirm what the beloved disciple John said while in exile on the Isle of Patmos, “To him who loves us, and released us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Rev. 1:5, 6

What can we learn from Psalm 63?

We can welcome times of crisis, days in the wasteland, no matter what brings them about, because God will hear our “cry of longing” and:

Intensify our desire for Himself. I promised you some suggestions for thirsting after God. These are things I find helpful in developing a true thirst for God.

- ◆ Meditate on Scripture – Don’t just read it. George Muller said, “The simple reading of the Word of God can become information that only passes through our minds just as water passes through a pipe.” I spend 25-50% of my Bible intake time meditating on a verse, phrase, or word from my reading. I write it down, think about it, ask questions about it, and ask God to remind me of it through the day.
- ◆ Pray through Scripture – after I have read and meditated on a passage of scripture, I pray it back to God in the form of a personalized prayer of worship, confession, petition,

intercession, affirmation, or thanksgiving. I find this especially meaningful as I read in the Psalms, since many of them are prayers.

- ◆ Read Christian writers who have a thirst for God (ancient and current)– read the works of A.W. Tozer, Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, Thomas Watson, Charles Spurgeon, or the many writings of John Piper.

God will Delight us with His love – show us how he nourishes, strengthens and carries us in faithful, never-ending love. Looking back on these times we will declare “because of the Lord’s great love, we were not consumed.”

God will deepen our dependency upon Him – and allow us to place the unknown future in his capable and wise care.

This prayer by Tozer expresses my desire. After you have read it, I invite you to join me in praying it aloud.

“O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need for further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still.” A.W. Tozer