

## Praising God in the Wilderness Psalms 63:1-11

**“A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.”** That’s the heading for this psalm given in my Bible. Yours may be similar.

Why was he there?

Was he on a picnic?

Was it a camping trip?

Was he trying to earn a boy scout badge for wilderness survival?

Did he take a wrong turn somewhere and get lost?

The context doesn’t suggest that any of those reasons are plausible when it talks about those who are seeking his life.

Although it’s unclear from the psalm, scholars believe that this is the time when David fled Jerusalem due to the threat by his son Absalom. It’s recorded for us in **II Samuel 15**, which really begins back in **chapter 11** and his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, her husband. From that point the family begins to implode. His son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar who is then vindicated by her brother Absalom who kills his half-brother, Amnon. He is then on the run for a period of time in self-exile until David is challenged by General Joab to let his son return, but David doesn’t see him for two years. So Absalom, still feeling like an exile, even in the capital city, begins to plot against the king by stealing the hearts of the people so that one day when he believes he has enough support, he springs his conspiracy to annihilate any potential heirs to the throne and seizes the crown by being appointed king. When David hears about the plot that has been hatched, his initial reaction is to run for the hills, to get out of Dodge as the saying goes. That all takes place in **II Samuel 15**. David encouraged all his followers to leave Jerusalem as quickly as possible.

The best writers of daytime soap operas couldn’t make this stuff up.

David is on the run. He’s out in the desert somewhere away from Jerusalem, away from the Ark, away from the security of his home. But in spite of his peril and predicament, in spite of the barrenness of his surroundings, he does not feel alone and neither does

he feel like his soul is barren. He finds plenty of opportunity to seek God and to praise God.

In this psalm, David confesses to a deep longing for God even though he is threatened by his enemies. I would be hard pressed to say that I would respond in the same way. **How about you?** Yet, that should be our response. **When life throws you lemons, can you make lemonade? When you’re in the pit, can you still give praise? When you feel rejected, can you still rejoice?**

I find three important lessons from David that are revealed in this passage. They are lessons about God that are worth remembering, lessons about God that should compel us to continue to trust Him when we face trials and troubles of all sorts.

Let’s begin by looking at the first one found in **vs 1-2**.

### I. WE STILL HAVE A GOD WORTH SEEKING IN OUR TRIALS – vv. 1-2

You may know people who have abandoned God when things didn’t go the way they thought they should after asking God for help.

They may have thought that God had left them.

Maybe you have faced hardships where you considered doing that yourself, especially when you looked around and saw that those who had no relationship with God seemed like everything was going just fine for them.

**That’s where my uncle was on a bitterly cold day in upstate New York hitch hiking as a teen to who knows where. He prayed that God would send a car to pick him up, but when none came, he concluded that he couldn’t depend on God and so decided right then and there that he could only depend on himself.**

Or maybe you were once there having made the decision that you weren’t sure God could be trusted so you walked away from your faith, but you found that life was even harder without Him, that God really is an ever-present help in time of trouble.

Maybe you can identify with the words of Asaph in **Psalm 73:2 “As for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold.”**

Take time to read through **Psalm 73** and see if you can't identify with Asaph. He came to an important realization about God even when what he was seeing didn't make sense to him. Notice what he said.

### **Psalm 73:23-26**

In the margin of my study Bible, I have four words written next to **verse 26**.

Despair

Durability

Dependability

Duration

They are words we need to remember when we face the overwhelming trials and troubles of life. When circumstances seem too much to bear, it is easy to lose hope, to feel like we can't go on much longer, that our heart may fail. That is the time to remember, as Asaph did and as David did, that God is the strength of our heart. There is both durability in the strength of God because His strength will never run out and there is dependability because He is always there as an ever-present help in time of trouble. We can depend on Him because He never fails because of His great faithfulness (**Lamentations 3:22-23**).

**And what is the duration of His durability and dependability?** It is forever.

I think what Asaph discovered is what David had learned earlier, something we see in the opening verses of our text and something we would also do well to remember. Asaph said in **verse 23** that there was nothing he desired but God, which expresses both our will and our emotions.

**Why is God still worth seeking after?** It's something we have talked about before but worth repeating. We see it in **verse 1**. David knew that God is personal.

#### **A. David Knew That God Is Personal – v. 1a**

From day 6 of creation it is very evident that God is personal. His interaction with Adam is highlighted in their dialogue and then even after their sin, God spoke of a way in which a personal relationship that had been severed by sin could be restored through a coming redeemer, not that they would have to wait for His arrival to reinstate that personal relationship, but that through the symbolism of a sacrifice, they could have that broken relationship restored.

God has always sought to have a relationship with us, not just here and now, but for eternity. Jesus spoke to the disciples in **John 14** about an eternal residence with Him for those who believe in Him.

The very first question of the Westminster confession attests to a personal God who wants us to know Him and enjoy Him forever.

David understood that the God he is addressing is personal. He said the same in **Psalm 23** which attests to the very personal, knowable nature of God when he wrote **“the Lord is MY shepherd”** (Emphasis added). David understood that His God was not one made of sticks and stones that cannot see or speak or hear. His God was one who heard his cries for help, saw him in his mother's womb, and spoke to him of promises to come.

God wants us to know Him and so experience the fullness of His attributes of love, forgiveness, mercy, grace, compassion, faithfulness, patience and so on. We find out that He is personal as we read and obey His Word and experience for ourselves His work in our lives or witness His work in others.

I would not ask a stranger or an acquaintance to write a biography about me because they know little or nothing about me. But I could ask Robyn because she knows me having spent more time with me than anyone else.

God is personal in that He has given us all things to enjoy.

God is personal in that He has revealed Himself through His Word and through His Son, Jesus.

God is personal in that He has written on our hearts a yearning to know Him.

God is personal in that He made it possible through the atoning sacrifice of His Son on the cross for us to have a relationship with Him through faith in that finished work of Christ on our behalf.

God is personal in that He paid the debt for sin that we couldn't in any way pay and neither can we ever pay back.

God is personal in that He forgives us our sin. How much more personal can it get when He has said **“I have loved you with an everlasting love.”** (**Jer. 31:3**)

**Have you found God to be personal?** If not, it may be that you haven't spent enough time with Him or you may be looking in the wrong places or you may have the wrong expectations of what that means. David knew that God is personal. Second, because David knew that God is personal, he also knew that God is worth pursuing.

## **B. David Knew That God Is Worth Pursuing – v. 1b**

To seek God earnestly has several meanings. It can mean wholeheartedly. It can mean above everything else. It can mean intense desire. It can mean unreserved loyalty or unbridled commitment or unashamed devotion, according to one author.

Jeremiah writes that **“the Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him.” (Lamentations 3:25)**

We have addressed before this idea of what it means to seek God. John Piper says it means to seek His presence, to want to know Him more. That's what it means in **Psalm 105:4** when it says to seek His face continually. It is the idea of setting our heart and mind on God, something Robert spoke about in last week's message – having the mind of Christ.

I have said this before, but it bears repeating, that when Uncle Johnnie, who founded Camp Barakel began to lose his vision to the point where he could no longer read his Bible he was asked what he did for his quiet time. He said that he just sat and thought about it. That is seeking the Lord. That is seeking the Lord with your whole heart and mind. That is seeking His presence.

**I Chronicles 22:19 “Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the Lord your God.”**

**Jeremiah 29:13-14 “You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord.”**

Seeking the Lord is a matter of choice, something we must decide to do and do it consistently and continually, not casually.

Along with it being a matter of choice, there are also obstacles that can get in the way of pursuing God. They may not necessarily be bad things in and of themselves, but they can be things that keep us from pursuing God as we should. They can be obstacles to knowing God.

We need to avoid activities that can dull our spiritual desire, things that pull us away from spending time each day with Him in His Word and prayer. We may think that it's okay to skip our time with God today by saying we'll just catch up tomorrow.

When I had COVID and went to the hospital for an infusion, I never expected or planned to stay for four days so I didn't have my Bible. After the second day, I asked the nurse if she could get one for me. I could have just as easily said I was too sick and tired to read or that I'll be getting out of the hospital soon. Instead, I needed that time with God.

Sin can be an obstacle.

Work can be an obstacle.

Relationships can be an obstacle. I know of many people who dated or ended up marrying someone who wasn't a Christian that caused their heart for God to be cooled.

Isaiah says **“Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.” (Is. 55:6)**

If you find yourself in that situation, ask God to open the eyes of your heart. Seek Him with all your heart and He will be found by you. He is both personal and worth pursuing. David sought God with the core of his being likening it to a person who is looking for water in a desert.

Matthew Henry says: **“The true believer is convinced, that nothing in this sinful world can satisfy the wants and desires of his immortal soul; he expects his happiness from God, as his portion. When faith and hope are most in exercise, the world appears a weary desert, and the believer longs for the joys of heaven, of which he has some foretastes in the ordinances of God upon earth.”** God is worth pursuing.

David then says that God is worth seeking because He is always present.

### C. David Knew That God Is Always Present – v. 2

If we know that God is personal and that God will be found if we seek Him, we must believe then, that He is always present.

To 'see' means to enjoy. It's not just seeing with the eyes, but enjoying the benefits of His presence, to experience His protection, provision, and peace. In his fervent pursuit of seeking God, he had come to enjoy the presence of God as is evident in his praise of God. Seeing God in the sanctuary refers to the Ark of the Covenant, which was the representation of God's presence to His people. When the Ark was carried before the nation whether they were trudging through the wilderness or marching out to battle, it was a reminder to the people that God was with them.

David saw the divine power and glory of God at work, and it stirred his heart to long for God even more. Even in the wilderness, David remembered the power and majesty of God when he was in the tabernacle.

When we are in our own personal wilderness whatever that may look like, remember the power and glory of God that you have seen before. We don't need to be in an assembly such as this to witness the work of God. We don't need to be in an assembly to know the presence of God.

In our wilderness, He is present.

In our wilderness, He is working.

In our wilderness, we can see His glory.

Be encouraged that God is near the broken hearted, that He is an ever-present help in trouble, that He will never leave or forsake you, that there is nothing to fear because He is with you. He is always present and for that, He is worth seeking.

We still have a God worth seeking in our trials. Moving on, we find in **verses 3-4** that we still have a God worth singing about in our trials.

### II. WE STILL HAVE A GOD WORTH SINGING ABOUT IN OUR TRIALS – vv. 3-4

I don't know if you have ever had one of those days where you wake up and even before your feet hit the floor, you just know it's going to be one of those days. I don't know why it is, but it seems like Robyn

never has one of those days, even when she has to get up at 2 a.m. to go in to work knowing she'll be there a good 17 hours and then to do it the next day.

If Robyn had a theme song for each day it would be the opening song in the musical Oklahoma.

*Oh, what a beautiful Mornin'*

*Oh, what a beautiful day.*

*I've got a beautiful feelin'*

*Everything's goin' my way.*

Now it's not that she never has a bad day, but she really looks for the lemonade in the lemons. Me on the other hand, like I said, I woke up one day this last week not feeling very good about the day ahead and to be honest, I couldn't tell you why. I guess I was hooked on a feeling, high on believing, and it wasn't because you're in love with me. I could tell an Eeyore attitude was starting my day. But every day with devotions I sing a song in the hymnbook or if I don't know it, I read the lyrics. On the way to church, I sang with the radio. Later that morning, I had prayer with a prayer partner and after that my mood changed for the better even though the circumstances had not.

*Yes, on through life's long path,  
still chanting as ye go;  
from youth to age, by night and day,  
in gladness and in woe.*

*Rejoice, rejoice,  
rejoice, give thanks and sing.*

David was in the wilderness, yet he could sing and praise God. Whatever our wilderness may be, we can do the same. **What did he sing about, what can we praise God for? In verse 3**, we learn that we are to praise God for His love.

### A. We Are To Praise God For His Love – v. 3

Sing this with me:

*Thy lovingkindness is better than life*

*Thy lovingkindness is better than life*

*My lips shall praise thee, thus still I bless thee*

*I will lift up my hands unto thy name*

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**You didn't know you were quoting Scripture, did you?**



Let me mention again that God loves you with an everlasting love. If you ever doubt that, if you ever find yourself in the doldrums, if you ever find yourself in the wilderness, dust off **Psalm 136** and read through it a few times. At the end of each verse, it says **“His love endures forever.”**

That means it will never end, it will never run out, it will never change.

**Are we convinced of that truth?**

We believe it when everything is right as rain, when everything is hunky-dory.

We believe it when everything is coming up roses.

But do we believe it in a time of heartache and loss?

Do we believe it when the bottom falls out and we've lost our job, had a major illness or huge car expense and we don't know how it will be paid for?

Do we believe it when we face trials and troubles?

Did Abraham believe it when he took Isaac, the son of promise, up on that mountain at God's direction in order to sacrifice him as a test of faith?

Did Joseph believe it after being sold into slavery, falsely accused, and then thrown into prison?

Did Moses believe it when he stood before Pharaoh for the 10<sup>th</sup> time after 9 times of being rejected?

Did Daniel believe it when the bars of the lion cage clanged shut?

Did those three Hebrews believe it when they cranked up the thermostat on the fiery furnace and then were tossed inside?

Did Hezekiah believe it when Sennacherib and the whole Assyrian army threatened to destroy Jerusalem?

Did the apostles believe it as one by one they were all martyred?

Did Martin Luther, John Hus, Dietrich Bonhoffer, Jim Elliot and so many more believe in the love of God when they suffered for their faith?

I believe they did without question. **The question is, do we? Do we believe God loves us?**

Paul tells us we need to look no further than the cross when God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (**Romans 5:8**).

Jesus said that God loved the world so much He gave His Son to take our place so that by believing we wouldn't perish in our sin. The word 'gave' indicates that it was a freewill gift not based on any

merit of our own. We didn't earn it, and we don't deserve it, but God did it out of His great love for us.

God's love endures forever, and that is something worth singing about. Give Him praise today that He loves you with a pure and prevailing love, and especially remember that when in the wilderness.

David goes on to say that we are to praise God throughout our life.

## **B. We Are To Praise God Throughout Our Life**

### **– v. 4a**

Nothing you do will alter God's love for you, but that doesn't mean we should do things to test whether that in fact is true.

*My Mom had a very loving nature and in her 30 years at Camp as the cook, she worked with a lot of characters. She would say that most were a joy to work with, but there was one teen who tried her at every turn and all week Mom showed this teen the love of God. At the end of the week the girl apologized and said she acted the way she did because she didn't believe someone could be that loving and wanted to see if everything others said about her was true.*

David found that God in His consistent love for him deserved his ongoing commitment of praise. I found out, as David had, that praising God gives vitality to our spiritual life. It gladdens the heart and brightens the day. Praise is the natural expression of a heart that thinks about God, that obeys God, that lives for God.

Walvoord and Zuck write: **“Praise is evidence God is at work...Praise is essential for one's spiritual life.”**

It comes spontaneously and should be natural for the person who earnestly seeks God and sees His divine power and glory at work. Praise is something that should never be hidden or kept quiet.

Our time of praise through singing isn't just to fill an hour. As you well know, I have plenty to say. Our time of singing is set aside for each of us to express our praise to God through whom all blessings flow.

David adds one more thing about singing praise to God. We are to praise God with lifted hearts.

### C. We Are To Praise God With Lifted Hearts – v. 4b

Anyone can sing words out of a hymnal or on a screen, but they can be as hollow and dead as a tree I saw blown over from last week's storm. **Are you singing from heart of gratitude? Are you singing from your heart out in your wilderness?**

David says to lift up your hands. It's an outward expression of an inward attitude. I mentioned a few weeks ago, that lifting hands was a way of exalting God, glorifying Him, putting Him first in your life, loving Him with your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

If you feel like lifting your hands in worship, go ahead, but make sure it's the heart that is lifted first. David says it's okay. We can pretend at worship and no one will ever know except the Lord. So make sure your heart is right with the Lord.

We visited a church last week, which was a very expressive church and there was a guy I'm guessing well into his 80's or early 90's and he was raising his hands singing his praise to the Lord. You could see his joy.

David says it's in God's name that he lifted his hands. We still have a God worth singing about in our trials.

There is one more lesson I want us to see from this passage. It's in **verses 5-11**.

### III. WE STILL HAVE A GOD WHO SATISFIES IN OUR TRIALS – vv. 5-11

First, God satisfies us with His provision for us.

#### A. God Satisfies Us With His Provision For Us – vv. 5-8

In **verses 5-6** God delights our heart.

##### 1. God delights our heart – vv. 5-6

The NIV says our soul is satisfied as with the richest of foods.

The KJV says our soul is satisfied with marrow and fatness.

Marrow is what gives bones strength and nourishment. It provides health to the bones.

David says that when we praise God, even in the wilderness, it's nourishment to our soul, it strengthens our spiritual nature. Even when he couldn't sleep, he thought about God and remembered His goodness and it satisfied him. God delights our heart.

David also said that part of God's provision is that He defends us with His help.

#### 2. God defends us with His help – vv. 7-8

We see that theme throughout Scripture – God helping those who are in trouble. Because David knew God to be his help even in the wilderness, he chose to cling to God. The word 'cling' means to hold fast and not let go. It's the idea God conveyed about marriage in **Genesis 2:24** that you are not to let go of your spouse. We cling to God when we spend time with Him in prayer and study and praise. We are to hold on tight to Him in our wilderness.

Alexander MacLaren writes: **"It suggests adhesion. The more we have of God, the more we long for Him, and the more we possess Him."** And then He concludes with this important thought: **"We can have as much of God as we want...when we have God, we have enough."** God satisfies us with His provision.

In **verses 9-10** God satisfies us with His protection of us.

#### B. God Satisfies Us With His Protection Of Us – vv. 9-10

He may not take us out of our wilderness, but He will be with us in it and here David realizes that in time God will vindicate him by bringing judgment on those who are after him.

The last thing I mention is that God satisfies us with His praise through us.

#### C. God Satisfies Us With His Praise Through Us – v. 11

David said that God was his God, and it resulted in the praise of God. Even out in the wilderness, David knew his relationship with God was strong and it brought praise.

What are you going through right now, what kind of wilderness are you in where you feel the barrenness around you, where you need to remember that God satisfies with His provision, His protection? Can you give Him your praise?

The lyrics of Saint Francis of Assisi are fitting for us to close with. (Hymn # 63, stanza 4)

And all ye men of tender heart,  
Forgiving others, take your part,  
O sing ye! Alleluia!  
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,  
Praise God and on Him cast your care;  
O praise Him, O praise Him!  
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

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