

PSALM 63 – LOVE BETTER THAN LIFE

The title of this psalm is, **A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.** Most commentators believe it to belong either to David's wilderness years before he came to the throne of Israel, or to his brief exile from the throne in the rebellion of Absalom. The wilderness years when hunted by King Saul are preferred, but not held with absolute certainty.

Charles Spurgeon added a note of interest: "Chrysostom tells us that among the primitive Christians it was decreed and ordained that no day should pass without the public singing of this psalm."

A. Praise from the wilderness.

1. (1-2) David's thirst for God.

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.

So I have looked for You in the sanctuary,

To see Your power and Your glory.

a. **O God, You are my God:** This may seem like senseless repetition, a tautology. It is not; David declared to *Elohim* that He was David's *El*, David's God in the most fundamental sense. In a day when pagans thought there were many gods and each nation had their own gods, David sweeps such ideas aside and proclaimed his allegiance to *Elohim*.

i. "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 ([Genesis 17:8c](#); [Hebrews 8:10c](#))." (Kidner)

b. **Early will I seek You:** Appreciating God as God, it is entirely reasonable to **seek** Him, and to seek Him as a priority of the day. The thirst of David's soul demanded to be satisfied **early** in the day.

i. "What first lays hold of the heart in the morning is likely to occupy the place all the day. First impressions are the most durable, because there is not a multitude of ideas to drive them out, or prevent them from being deeply fixed in the moral feeling." (Clarke)

ii. "The word 'early' has not only the sense of early in the morning, but that of eagerness, immediateness. He who truly longs for God longs for him now." (Spurgeon)

iii. **My flesh longs for You:** "*Longeth; or, languisheth, or pineth away.* The desire of my soul after thee is so vehement and insatiable, that my very body feels the effects of it, as it commonly doth of all great passions." (Poole)

iv. “Most people do not even know that it is God their souls truly desire. They are seeking satisfaction in other things.” (Boice)

c. **So I have looked for You in the sanctuary:** David sought God at the tabernacle as earnestly as a thirsty man looks for water **in a dry and thirsty land**. The Wilderness of Judah is largely desert, so this was a picture of longing that came easily to David’s mind.

i. “There was no desert in his heart, though there was a desert around him.” (Spurgeon)

ii. **In a dry and thirsty land:** “Learn from this, and do not say, ‘I will get into communion with God when I feel better,’ but long for communion now. It is one of the temptations of the devil to tell you not to pray when you do not feel like praying. Pray twice as much then.” (Spurgeon)

d. **To see Your power and Your glory:** David sought God at the tabernacle to connect in some way with God’s **power** and **glory**. Significantly, David was *not* at the tabernacle when he sang this song; he was in the Wilderness of Judah. Yet he knew that’s God’s **sanctuary** was not only a place, but also a spiritual concept that could be entered by faith no matter where a person was.

i. “Our misery is that we thirst so little for these sublime things, and so much for the mocking trifles of time and sense.” (Spurgeon)

2. (3-6) The greatness of God’s love stirs praise.

Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,

My lips shall praise You.

Thus I will bless You while I live;

I will lift up my hands in Your name.

My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness,

And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.

When I remember You on my bed,

I meditate on You in the *night* watches.

a. **Because Your lovingkindness is better than life:** This is the reason why David was so motivated to pursue God. The **lovingkindness** (*hesed*) of God was **better**, more meaningful to David, than **life** itself. This means that David both knew and experienced something of God’s **lovingkindness** that many believers today do not know and experience.

· People regard life as natural; David regarded God’s great love as natural.

· People enjoy life; David enjoyed God’s great love.

· People value life; David valued God’s great love.

· People will sacrifice to live; David would sacrifice for God’s great love.

· People want to give life to others; David wanted to give God’s great love.

· People despair without the sense of life; David despaired without the sense of God's great love.

i. Life and literature are filled with people who loved someone or something more than their own life, and it could be said of them that they held love **better than life**. Yet that *is not* what David sang of here. David meant that the *love of God to him* was more precious than his own life.

ii. "Now you know at what a high rate men value their lives; they will bleed, sweat, vomit, purge, part with an estate, yea, with a limb, yea, limbs, to preserve their lives.... Now, though life be so dear and precious to a man, yet a deserted soul prizes the returnings of divine favour upon him above life, yea, above many lives." (Brooks, cited in Spurgeon)

iii. "To dwell with God is better than life at its best; life at ease, in a palace, in health, in honour, in wealth, in pleasure; yea, a thousand lives are not equal to the eternal life which abides in Jehovah's smile." (Spurgeon)

iv. "He knew a pearl of far greater price, namely, the 'loving-kindness' of Jehovah, on which is suspended not only the life which now is, but that which is to come." (Horne)

v. **Better than life**: "Many men have been weary of their lives, as is evident in Scripture and history; but no man was ever yet found that was weary of the love and favour of God." (Brooks, cited in Spurgeon)

b. **My lips shall praise You**: In light of David's experience of God's great love, he determined to vocally praise God. David thought that he would be ungrateful and rude to not praise and thank the God who loved him so greatly.

i. "If we have nothing to say about God's goodness, the probable cause is our want of experience of it." (Maclaren)

ii. "May I ask a question of every professed Christian? Have you spoken with God this morning? Do you allow a day to pass without converse with God? Can it be right for us to treat the Lord with mute indifference?" (Spurgeon)

iii. [Psalm 63](#) speaks of praise and devotion given to God in gratitude, out of a rich sense of being blessed. Spurgeon noted that we should not limit our thanks and praise to such seasons: "Even when our heart is rather desiring than enjoying we should still continue to magnify the Most High, for his love is truly precious; even if we do not personally, for the time being, happen to be rejoicing in it. We ought not to make our praises of God to depend upon our own personal and present reception of benefits; this would be mere selfishness: even publicans and sinners have a good word for those whose hands are enriching them with gifts; it is the true believer only who will bless the Lord when he takes away his gifts or hides his face." (Spurgeon)

c. **Thus I will bless You:** David did not mean this in the sense that a greater person bestows a blessing on a lesser. David meant this in the sense that it blessed and honored God when His creatures praised Him and thanked Him appropriately.

d. **I will lift up my hands in Your name:** The lifting of the hands was not only the common posture of prayer among the ancient Hebrews, it was especially appropriate for praise. It displayed the anticipation of gratefully receiving from God, and the sense of surrender to Him.

e. **My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness:** David spoke of a satisfaction that too few people know, even among believers. He spoke of the deep satisfaction that comes in a surrendered seeking of God, of receiving His great love, of praising God without reservation.

i. "There is in the love of God a richness, a sumptuousness, a fulness of soul-filling joy, comparable to the richest food with which the body can be nourished." (Spurgeon)

f. **When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches:** David thought that there were not enough hours in the day to think upon God's greatness and goodness. Therefore he also used the **night watches** to **meditate** upon God.

i. **Night watches:** "An expression which stresses the slow progress of the hours." (Kidner)

ii. "Solitude and stillness render the 'night watches' a fit season for meditation on the so often experienced mercies of God; which, when thus called to remembrance, become a delicious repast to the spirit, filling it with all joy, and peace, and consolation." (Horne)

B. Thankful confidence in God.

1. (7-8) Thanks for help already given.

Because You have been my help,

Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.

My soul follows close behind You;

Your right hand upholds me.

a. **Because You have been my help:** Many of David's psalms are simple cries for help. Since this psalm was composed from the Wilderness of Judah, there was certainly help David could ask for. Yet, [Psalm 63](#) has no cry for help but gives thanks and praise for God's faithfulness in many times when God had **been my help** for David.

b. **Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice:** The idea of the shelter of **shadow** of God's wings is repeated many times in the psalms. Sometimes it has the idea of *protection*, as a mother bird shelters her young chicks. Other times it has the idea of *presence*, as in the wings of the cherubim that surround the throne of God. Here the idea of *presence* seems to best fit the context.

c. **My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me:** This speaks of the partnership and connection the believer experiences with God. David's **soul** was close to God, following Him as one followed a Master or Teacher. God responded with care and strength for David, upholding him with His mighty **right hand** (the hand of skill and strength).

- i. **My soul follows close:** “Press toward the mark. Let there be no needless space between the Master and thee.” (Meyer)
- ii. The connection expressed by **my soul follows close** is truly close. The words translated **follows close** have the sense of joining or gluing together, as in [Genesis 2:24](#).
- iii. “The primary sense of [the Hebrew word is] to glue together; from thence it signifies figuratively *to associate*, to adhere to, to be united with; and particularly to be firmly united with strong affection.” (Chandler, cited in Spurgeon)

2. (9-10) Trust despite the trouble.

**But those *who seek my life, to destroy it,*
Shall go into the lower parts of the earth.
They shall fall by the sword;
They shall be a portion for jackals.**

- a. **But those who seek my life, to destroy it:** David’s deep communion with God did not take away his problems. There were still those who wanted to kill him. According to its title, [Psalm 63](#) was written from *the Wilderness of Judah* and David was in the wilderness hiding from a conspiracy to kill him.
- b. **They shall fall by the sword:** David trusted God to deal with his enemies, especially with King Saul. In God’s time and in God’s way, David’s enemies did **fall by the sword**, which has the sense of being killed in battle.
 - i. “He knows that the ‘steadfast love’ of God which he praised in verse 3, is strong with justice (*cf.* 62:12).” (Kidner)
 - ii. **A portion for jackals:** “If the body of a human being were to be left on the ground, the *jackals* would certainly leave but little traces of it; and in the olden times of warfare, they must have held high revelry in the battle-fields after the armies had retired. It is to this propensity of the *jackal* that David refers – himself a man of war, who had fought on many a battle-field, and must have seen the carcasses of the slain mangled by these nocturnal prowlers.” (Wood, cited in Spurgeon)
 - iii. “*Jackals* make sense here, rather than the ‘foxes’ of some older translations (one Hebrew word serves for both). They are the final scavengers, consuming the remains of the kill rejected by the larger beasts.” (Kidner)

3. (11) The king’s confidence.

**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.**

- a. **But the king shall rejoice in God:** David was not yet on Israel’s throne and that promise still waited many years for fulfillment. Yet it was a promise of God (first expressed in [1 Samuel 16](#)), so by faith David could dare to think of himself as **the king**, and in that daring faith **rejoice in God**.

i. *"The king; I, who am already anointed king, and who shall be actually king, when these mine enemies are fallen by the sword. He speaks of himself in the third person, either out of modesty or out of prudence."* (Poole)

b. **Everyone who swears by Him shall glory; but the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped:** The sense of **swears by Him** is to trust in God and place one's confident love in Him; men normally take oaths upon what they hold dear. The contrast to trusting God is to **speak lies**; we resort to lies when we don't trust God. One of these paths has a future of **glory** and the other path will **be stopped**.

i. "Two things are necessary for such triumph as this. These are indicated in the opening words of the psalm. First, there must be the consciousness of personal relationship, 'O God, Thou art my God'; and, second, there must be earnest seeking after God: 'Early will I seek Thee.' Relationship must be established. Fellowship must be cultivated." (Morgan)