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## SEEKING AFTER GOD

Psalm 63

by

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Lesson 14: Psalms

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If you had to pick a single word to describe our society, perhaps the most accurate word would be "pressure." We live in a day marked by pressure in almost every area of life. At five years old we are thrust into school where there is pressure to perform and to compete for grades. We join athletic teams where there is more pressure to excel. We face the pressure of getting into college and once we're there, of making it through. Then there is the pressure of getting a good job and, once we get it, of doing well enough to keep it and be promoted.

There are family pressures: finding the right mate and building a solid marriage in a culture where divorce is easy and accepted. There are the pressures of raising godly children in our pagan society. World problems, economic problems, personal problems, and the problems of friends and loved ones all press upon us.

In the midst of such pressures, there is one thing that will determine the course of your life: your priorities. Everyone has a set of priorities. If your priorities are not clearly defined, you will be swept downstream in life by various pressures, the seeming victim of your circumstances. But if your priorities are clear, then you can respond to your pressures by making choices in line with your priorities, and thereby give direction to your life.

Thus it is crucial that you have the right priorities. Your priorities determine how you spend your time, with whom you spend your time, and how you make decisions. Your priorities keep you from being battered around by the waves of pressure and help you to steer a clear course toward the proper destination. Priorities--godly priorities--are crucial!

King David was a man who knew what it meant to live under pressure. As the king of Israel, he knew the pressures of leadership. The higher and more responsible the position of leadership, the

greater are the pressures. And David knew the pressure of problems. During his reign, his son, Absalom, led a rebellion against him. David and his loyal followers had to flee for their lives. During that time David spent a short while in the northeastern portion of the wilderness of Judah before he crossed over the Jordan river. In that barren land, fleeing for his life from his own son, feeling disgraced and rejected, with an uncertain future, David penned Psalm 63.

It is one of the most well-loved psalms. John Chrysostom (347-407) wrote "that it was decreed and ordained by the primitive [church] fathers, that no day should pass without the public singing of this Psalm." He also observed that "the spirit and soul of the whole Book of Psalms is contracted into this Psalm" (*The Book of Psalms*, J. J. Stewart Perowne, [Zondervan], p. 486). In fact, the ancient church had the practice of beginning the singing of the Psalms at each Sunday service with Psalm 63, called "the morning hymn" (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, Keil & Delitzsch, [Eerdmans], p. 212).

The psalm shows us the priority of this man of God under pressure. If you or I were under the kinds of pressure David faced at this point in his life, I doubt if we would be writing songs. If we did, the song would probably contain a lot of urgent requests: "Help, God! Get me out of here!" David did write a song like that (Psalm 3). But it is interesting (as Perowne observes, p. 487) that Psalm 63 contains no petition. David expresses longing for God's presence, praise, joy, fellowship with God, confidence in God's salvation. But there is not one word of asking for temporal or even spiritual blessings. The psalm shows us that David's priority was to seek the Lord. Like him,

Seeking after God should be our most important priority.

No matter what pressures come into your life, you will be able to handle them properly if you maintain this one priority above all else: Earnestly seek after God! I want to answer from Psalm 63 three questions about seeking after God:

1. What does it mean to seek after God?

2. What characterizes the person who seeks after God?
3. How does a person seek after God?
1. What does it mean to seek after God?

Psalm 63 allows us to peer into the heart of this man after God's own heart. It is an emotional psalm, coming out of the depths of David's life, and it would be an injustice to pick the psalm apart while missing the feeling that it conveys. But while keeping the depth of feeling in mind, it is helpful to separate out three strands of what it means to seek after God:

- A. To seek after God means to have an intimate personal relationship with God (63:1).

"O God, You are *my* God." David knew God in an intimate, personal way. There is a vast difference between knowing about a person and actually knowing that person. You can learn a lot about President Clinton. You can read news articles and books on his life. You can learn all about his personality, his personal habits, and his family life. But it is still not the same as knowing the man personally.

To know the President personally would require an introduction or occasion to meet, and then spending hours with him over a long period of time in many situations. As the relationship developed you would begin to discover more and more about the man, not from an academic standpoint, but as a close friend.

That's how it must be with God, if you want to seek Him. There must have been a time when you met Him personally through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent" (John 17:3, NIV). Your introduction comes when you acknowledge your sin to God and receive the free gift of eternal life and forgiveness of sins which He offers you through Christ's death.

And then you must develop your relationship through spending time with your new Friend through the weeks and months and years in a variety of situations. "Seeking after God" means that you are seeking to develop an intimate relationship with the God whom you have met personally through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

- B. To seek after God means always to desire more of Him (63:1).

David said, "Earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for You; my body longs for You..." Didn't David have the Lord? Yes, because he calls Him "my God." But he wanted more. He wanted to go deeper. He was satisfied (63:5) but he wasn't satisfied. He knew that there was more and his whole being craved it as a thirsty man craves for water.

The word translated "seek earnestly" is related etymologically to the word for "dawn," and thus some translations have "seek early." But most commentators agree that the word means earnestly, ardently, or diligently. It was used of wild donkeys looking eagerly for food. The point is, to seek after God means to go after God with an intense desire.

A young man ran after Socrates, calling, "Socrates, Socrates, can I be your disciple?" Socrates ignored him and walked out into the water. The man followed him and repeated the question. Socrates turned and without a word grabbed the young man and dunked him under the water and held him down until he knew that he couldn't take it any longer. The man came up gasping for air. Socrates replied, "When you desire the truth as much as you seek air, you can be my disciple." How much do you desire to know God?

A. W. Tozer, in his devotional classic, *The Pursuit of God* ([Christian Publications], pp. 17, 15), wrote, "Compla-

gency is a deadly foe of all spiritual growth.... Come near to the holy men and women of the past and you will soon feel the heat of their desire after God. They mourned for Him, they prayed and wrestled and sought for Him day and night, in season and out, and when they had found Him, the finding was all the sweeter for the long seeking."

To seek after God means that there is always more, because God is an infinite person. If you figure that you've reached a level of maturity in your Christian life where you can put it in neutral and coast, you're in trouble! David had walked with God for years, but he thirsted for more.

- C. To seek after God means to pursue God alone to fill the vacuum in your life.

Many of us remember the day President Nixon resigned over the Watergate scandal. One day he was the leader of the most powerful nation on earth. The next day, he flew off into oblivion and disgrace. Even if we thought he deserved what happened to him, we could still identify with the emptiness, the shame, the wave of depression which must have enveloped Mr. Nixon.

David was there. He has fled from the throne. He left his possessions and his wives behind him. His own son whom he loved deeply was attempting to kill him. And yet in all of this, David wasn't seeking for any of those things to fill the vacuum in his life, but rather for God alone. "I seek You"; "I thirst for You"; "I yearn for You"; "Your love is better than life." What amazing statements!

The fact is, it is so easy to fill your life with things other than God. They may be good things, but they are not God, and God alone can fill the void. For example, many people fill their lives with people. They surround themselves with family and friends and give God a slice

of the pie on Sunday. But He isn't the center, people are. People are good, and God has given us the blessing of human relationships. But we should not try to fill the vacuum in our lives with people, but with God.

Others try to fill their lives with possessions or with a good position in their job. Again, those things have their place, but they are not meant to fill the vacuum in your life. God alone can do that. To seek Him means to pursue Him alone to fill that God-shaped vacuum in your life.

Thus seeking after God means to have an intimate personal relationship with Him; always to desire more of Him; and, to pursue God alone to fill the vacuum in your life.

## 2. What characterizes the person who seeks after God?

I only want to touch lightly on this question so that I can concentrate on the third question. But I want you to see that a person who seeks after God is not a religious mystic who is out of touch with reality. Putting God in the center of your life gives you balance and perspective in the crises of life. Notice, briefly four things which characterize the person who seeks the Lord:

### A. Inner satisfaction (63:5).

Never complacent, but satisfied. David's soul was at rest. Even in the middle of a calamity such as this rebellion, which would push many to the brink of a nervous breakdown, David had inner peace and calm. Just as you feel physically after eating a delicious prime rib dinner, so David felt spiritually after feasting on the Lord.

### B. Inner joy (63:3-5, 7, 11).

David had a joy not based on circumstances. His whole world was falling apart, but he had the Lord and His

loyal love, and so he could sing and rejoice in God. You can't explain that apart from God!

C. Inner stability and strength in crisis (63:7-8).

God was David's help. David hid under God's wing as a baby chick hides for protection under the mother hen's wing. God's powerful hand upheld and sustained David. He didn't fall apart at the seams because he had the inner resource of God's strength.

D. Inner perspective and balance (63:9-11).

David wasn't consumed with thoughts of getting even. As he considered his circumstances, he realized that God is just; God would judge fairly. The wicked would not prevail in the long run. Thus David could commit the situation to the Lord and act with the right perspective and balance: He would make it his business to rejoice in God, and let God deal with his enemies and vindicate him. He knew his calling ("king," 63:11) and that God would not fail to accomplish all that concerned him (Ps. 57:2).

The point is, the person who seeks after God will be a person of strength and stability, a person with inner resources to meet every crisis in life. Now for the crucial question:

3. How does a person seek after God?

I'm assuming that you already know God personally through Christ. As I already mentioned, you begin a relationship with God when you realize that you have sinned against a holy God and when you flee for refuge to the provision God has made for your sin, the cross of Christ. No one seeks for God unless God first seeks after them (John 6:44). Thus no one can boast; we have only received God's undeserved gift. But once you've received it, how do you go on seeking after God? Three things:

- A. You seek God by putting love for God at the center of your relationship with Him.

God's loyal love (63:3) was better to David than life itself. Therefore, David says, "My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me" (63:8). What a beautiful balance! David clings to God, but underneath it all, God's powerful hand is under David.

The Hebrew word translated "clings" points to loyalty related to affection. It's the same word used in Genesis 2:24, where it says that a man will "cleave" to his wife. It is used to describe Shechem's feelings of infatuation which led him to get involved sexually with Jacob's daughter, Dinah (Gen. 34:3). It describes Solomon's "holding fast" in love to many foreign women (1 Kings 11:2; see also, 2 Sam. 20:2; Ruth 1:14). The idea is loyalty related to strong feelings of affection.

Your relationship with the Lord is comparable to a marriage relationship. Marriage is a relationship where intense feelings of passion and a lifelong commitment are intertwined. When a couple falls in love, there are strong feelings, and there is nothing wrong with that. But a marriage cannot be built on feelings alone, but on commitment. The commitment carries you through the hard times when the feelings may fade. Sometimes you have to work at the romance (which sounds contradictory, but it's not). But if there are never any feelings of love, your marriage is in trouble.

Seeking after God means keeping your passion for God alive. Christianity is not just a matter of the head, but of the heart. As you think on what God has done for you in Christ, it ought to move you emotionally. As you reflect on His great love and faithfulness toward you over the years, in spite of your failures, you ought to feel love for Him.

In your marriage, keeping your passion alive means saying no to some things in order to say yes to your wife. Your job, outside interests, time with other friends, even your involvement at church--these are all good things in their place. But they shouldn't come before your marriage. In the same way, nothing, not even your marriage and family, should come before your love relationship with God. That leads to the second thing:

- B. You seek God by spending consistent time alone with Him.

David was under intense pressure as he fled from Absalom. He had to think about how all of his loyal followers who fled with him were going to get food and water in this barren wilderness. He had to be thinking constantly about their safety. And yet he did not neglect earnestly seeking God in this trying situation (63:1-2, 6, 8). David made it a priority to spend time alone with God.

We all make time to do what we really want to do. Exhibit A: A young man in college who is working and carrying a full load. His schedule seems packed. Then he meets the woman of his dreams. Suddenly he finds time to spend with her! It's not a duty, it's a delight! He will cut corners elsewhere if he has to, but he will not miss his time with this beautiful creature.

If you're in love with God, you'll make time to spend with Him. This includes time in His Word, renewing your mind so that you can please Him. It includes time in prayer, bringing your needs and others' needs before Him. It includes time in praise and worship, expressing your love for Him.

- C. You seek God by integrating Him into every area of your life.

God isn't just a spoke in the wheel; He's the hub. God permeates every area of your life. He's at the center of

every decision you make. He's the Lord of every relationship you have. You manage your money by considering what His Word says about it. There is no area of your life, be it your business, your family, your education, or whatever, where God is not an integral part. There is no division between sacred and secular; all of life is related to God.

Here is David, his kingdom in disarray, running for his life, seeking to protect his men. It would be understandable if God was temporarily squeezed out of the picture. But David is "following hard after God," as the old King James Version puts verse 8. God was at the center of David's present and his future. No area was off limits to God.

### Conclusion

How is it with you and God? Perhaps you say, "I'm actively involved in serving Him!" That's fine, but that's not what I'm asking. You can be in full time ministry and lose sight of seeking God Himself. I once heard the godly pastor and author, Alan Redpath, speak. He told how he faced a time in his life when the opportunities for ministry were the greatest he had ever seen. God seemed to be blessing his preaching. It was the kind of thing every pastor prays and longs for.

And then, right in the middle of it, Redpath was laid up with a stroke. As he laid in his hospital bed, he asked, "Lord, why? Why now, when the opportunities to serve You are so great?" I'll never forget what he said next. He said that the Lord quietly impressed upon him, "Alan, you've gotten your work ahead of your worship."

Review your past week or month and ask yourself, "Did my schedule reflect that seeking God was my number one priority?" You say, "Well, that's my priority, but I've been under a lot of pressure!" Pressure is what reveals our true priorities. When the pressure is on, everything but the essential gets put on hold. The Holy Spirit is telling us through David, "Seeking God is essential!" If it's not essential for you, you've got to join David, the man after

God's heart, in making it so.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can we make time alone with God a priority and yet avoid a legalistic approach to it?
2. How can a Christian who has lost the passion for God regain it?
3. How does a person who lacks self-discipline go about getting it?

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