

Pastor Steven J. Cole
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Seeking God in the Psalms
Psalm 63

Pressure is one of the inescapable facts of modern life. As students you face the pressure of getting the many assignments done well and on time. You face the pressure of working so that you can meet financial pressures. The busy schedule puts pressure on your family relationships, especially if you're married with children. You face the pressure of deciding what you're going to do, where you'll work and live after you finish school.

In the midst of such pressures, there is one thing that will determine the course of your life: your priorities. We all have priorities, although some of you may not be able to articulate yours clearly. If you do not clearly define your priorities and keep them in front of you in the midst of the pressures, you will be swept downstream by the rush of everything around you. You will not end up where you probably would want to go if you sat down and thought about it in a calm moment.

I want to talk about what ought to be your most important priority: Seeking after God. If you get this priority in place and work to keep it there, everything else in life will take its proper place. If you neglect it, even though it may seem that things are going well, you will end up far from where you ought to be. As Jesus put it, "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things [personal needs, provisions] will be added to you" (Matt. 6:33).

While all Scripture is profitable for spiritual growth, and you ought to be reading through the whole Bible, I want to encourage you especially to be seeking God through the Psalms. The Book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible. It is the Old Testament book most frequently quoted in the New Testament. Don't forget that it is a hymn book, meant to be sung from the heart. God loves to hear His people singing His praises.

The Psalms come out of the trenches of the battle of life. Invariably, the psalmist is in some overwhelming situation, taxed beyond his ability to cope. In his predicament, he cries out to God and comes to know God more intimately as he trusts Him in this crisis.

So the Psalms reveal much to us about the nature of God—His mercy, His loyal love, His faithfulness, His readiness to help in our time of need, His righteous judgment on sin. And the Psalms reveal much about our own nature—fallen in sin, always in need of God, tossed about by many overwhelming emotions.

I want to take you briefly to a Psalm written by King David when he was under tremendous pressure. His own son, Absalom, had led a rebellion against David. The king and his followers were forced to flee for their lives. During that time, David spent a short while in the barren wilderness of Judah. While there, he penned Psalm 63. The very fact that he wrote it then is significant. If I were fleeing for my life, faced with the kinds of pressure that David faced at that moment, writing psalms wouldn't be real high on my priority list! Or, if I did write a song, the theme of it would be, "Get me out of here, Lord!" But Psalm 63 contains no petition. Instead, it's an affirmation of David's priority under pressure. It teaches us ...

Seeking after God should be our most important priority.

I want to deal with two questions from this Psalm: (1) *What does it mean* to seek after God? (2) *How do I* seek after God?

What does it mean to seek after God?

Three things:

1. To seek after God means to have an intimate personal relationship with God.

"O God, You are *my* God" (63:1). David knew God in an intimate, personal way. Obviously this was not the first time David had sought after God. Years before, when he was a teenage shepherd, David had written that beloved song, "The Lord is *my* shepherd" (Ps. 23:1). He had entered into a personal relationship with God as a young man, and he had developed that relationship over the years. So here, in a time of crisis, David didn't pray, "O God, whoever You may be, if You're out there, help me!" He personally knew the God whom he now sought in this crisis.

There is a vast difference between knowing about a person and actually knowing that person. You can learn a lot about the President by reading news articles and books on his life. But that is quite different than knowing the President as a close personal friend. To

know him or anyone else personally, there must be an initial introduction, followed by many different occasions of spending time together. As a friendship and trust develops, there is an increasing disclosure of each friend to the other.

A lot of people know about God. Perhaps you were raised in the church and you know many things about God. But knowing God personally is different than knowing about Him. 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). He also said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV). To know the one true God, who is holy in all His ways, you must trust in Jesus Christ as your sin bearer and receive the free gift of eternal life He offers. That's the introduction or starting point.

And then, as with any other relationship, you must develop your friendship with God by spending time with Him through the months and years that follow. Sin hinders a relationship with God, and so to grow closer to Him, you must openly confess all sin and grow in obedience. Jesus promised, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him" (John 14:21). To seek after God means to have this kind of growing personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ, where He discloses more of Himself to you as you grow in obedience to Him.

2. To seek after God means always to desire more of Him.

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 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, "Complacency 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 think that you've reached the place in your Christian life where you can coast, you're in trouble! David had walked with God for years, but he thirsted for more.

3. To seek after God means to pursue God alone as that which satisfies your soul.

When you're in a jam like David was, the tendency is to try to use God like Aladdin's genie to get you out of the crisis. When it's over, you put Him back on the shelf and get on with your life. Or, you use things or people to fill the void in your life. In either case, God is in the background. He isn't central. Things or people or work or hobbies are.

Put yourself in David's place. 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 trying to use God to get all his things back. He was seeking God alone. "I seek You"; "I thirst for You"; "I yearn for You"; "Your love is better than life." What amazing statements!

It's a constant battle, because we're all prone to drift into the place where God has a slice of our lives, but He isn't central. We go

to church on Sunday. We profess to be Christians. But we're really living for something other than God. To seek Him means to pursue Him alone to meet the needs of your soul.

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 satisfy your soul.

How does a person seek after God?

I'm assuming here that you already know God personally through Christ. No one seeks for God unless God first seeks after them (Rom. 3:11; John 6:44). His sovereign grace initiates the process. But once you've received His grace, how do you go on seeking after God? Three things:

1. 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" has the nuance of loyalty related to affection. It's used in Genesis 2:24, where it says that a man will "cleave" to his wife. It is used of Ruth clinging to her mother-in-law, Naomi, rather than leaving her (Ruth 1:14; see also, Gen. 34:3; 2 Sam. 20:2; 1 Kings 11:2). 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:

2. 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 wonderful creature.

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

3. 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 the Lord of every decision you make; the Lord of every relationship you have. There is no area of your life--business, family, money, 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 King James Version puts verse 8. God was at the center of David's life.

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 lay 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 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.