

♪ Worship Notes ♪

Volume 3, Number 2 ♪ February 2008

THEME: Thirsting for God

Better than Life

(Psalm 63)

It's been said that a crisis shows what a man is really made of. If that's true, David's situation when he wrote Psalm 63 certainly qualifies. Our Bibles call this a "Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah," and most likely this refers to the time later in his life when his son Absalom rebelled against him, and David had to flee for his life to the desert. There he sees his bare and parched surroundings as an illustration to him of a life without God; and his heart cries out with longing for God and for the joy of His presence. That's what David is made of; that's what this crisis brings out in him; and that's why David was "a man after God's own heart."

In worldly terms, David has lost it all: his family, his throne, his reputation, his security. He's on the run, far from the tabernacle and the palace; in the dry, barren, dusty desert where he can take no creature comforts for granted. Yet, as Spurgeon put it, "There was no desert in his heart, though there was a desert around him." Perowne writes about Psalm 63: "It is remarkable that in this Psalm . . . there is no petition. There is gladness, there is praise, there is the most exalted communion with God, there is longing for His presence as the highest of all blessings; but there is *not one* word of asking for temporal, or *even* for *spiritual* good." David gives us this beautiful expression of

There was
no desert in
David's
heart,
though there
was a desert
around him

a man thoroughly saturated with love and longing for God.

David says in effect: it's not water I need, not the comfort of my palace, not even the refuge of the tabernacle. *I need God!!*

DAVID'S GOD

God Most High. David cries out to God in verse 1. "O God," he says, calling him by His title of majesty and greatness, *God Most High* (Hebrew *Elohim*). David knows Him to be a God of holiness, power, and glory. That's what he had experienced in the tabernacle: in verse 2, "thus" indicates that he had thirsted and yearned for God before, and he had satisfied that need by meeting with God in the tabernacle. "Thus," (that is, "in the same way," "with the same kind of longing,") "I saw You in the sanctuary" (literally, "in the holy place"). He had recognized the *holiness* of God, that God as Creator was totally separate from His creation and must be approached with reverence and with a sacrificially cleansed life; he had recognized the *power* of God, the Almighty One; and he had bowed before the *glory* of God, whom he worshipped in the splendor of His majesty.

This was the God David called on: the one true God, the God of Israel, the great and glorious God, God Most High.

God Most Near. But he called on him in another way too in verse 1: "O God, *my God*" (Hebrew *Eli*). Not only was God high and exalted above the heavens, He was also *David's God* (cf. Psalm 23: "the Lord is *my* shepherd"). He was Most High, but also *Most Near*. Even before the incarnation God had come near and committed Himself in covenant to a special people he had

called forth, the nation of Israel. And David, as the rightful king of that nation, understood that, and understood that God was *his God* and that he could call upon Him. Kidner says that “the simplicity and boldness of ‘You are my God’ is the secret of all that follows.”

David could not only call upon God in His holiness, power, and glory, but also on the basis of a personal relationship with his God, who is characterized by *lovingkindness*.

God’s *Hesed*. In verse 3 David exclaims, “YOUR LOVINGKINDNESS IS BETTER THAN LIFE.” That, we might say, was the motto of David’s entire life, the energizing principle of his existence. “Lovingkindness” is that very special Old Testament word *hesed*, which speaks of affection but also of *faithfulness*. It’s a covenant word meaning “loyal love”—God’s love expressed in a commitment to the good and the well-being of His people. *That* kind of lovingkindness overshadows David’s circumstances, draws his mind and heart to the Giver of that love, and evokes expressions of adoration.

God’s lovingkindness is “*better than life*,” David says. David is in the desert, where thirst, even survival, are crucial issues: he could easily be focused only on his physical needs. He is also on the run because of his tragic family situation: he could easily focus on a desire to be vindicated and restored to power. Yet he focuses on GOD, desires to be in His presence, yearns to drink deeply of His fullness. He *sees that* as better than the meeting of his basic needs or his desire for comfort; as better than meeting his need for success and usefulness and self-fulfillment; as better than life itself!

We give so much attention to improving the quality, and extending the duration, of our life. *How much attention do we give to resting in Him, searching for Him (as David did in v.1), enjoying his presence, feasting at His table, drinking deeply from the fountain of His grace and lovingkindness?*

The Lord’s “lovingkindness is better than life”: David could say that during pleasant times (as in Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall

not want. . . . Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”). And he could say it during the hardest of times—even when on the run for his life.

DAVID’S WORSHIP.

An appetite for God. Knowing and savoring and cherishing the Lord and His lovingkindness: that’s worship. And that’s what David inevitably turns to—that’s his deepest desire and deepest need.

He doesn’t seek to perform a *religious activity* or a *good work* or a *ceremonial duty*—he was in the desert and there was no way he could fulfill *ANY* of the external requirements of the Old Covenant system: he had no access to the tabernacle. But he understood a truth which transcended the physical and spatial limitations of the Old Testament system: that God, *His God*, was just as accessible and present as He was through the sacrificial system; He was just as powerful and glorious as David had seen Him to be in the Holy Place. David understood that the Lord’s lovingkindness endures forever and *in all places*. He seeks God, thirsts for Him, yearns for Him, seeks his satisfaction in Him and Him

alone. He looks to God, who is so high, and holy, and powerful, and glorious; and he’s driven to his knees in worship. He tastes of the faithful, tender lovingkindness of the Lord (which is new every morning), and finds rest and satisfaction in that.

And so we see the flower of David’s worship bloom and flourish in the desert. He comes to God, as Eric Alexander has put it, “not to fulfill a duty, but to *satisfy an appetite*”—a thirsting and yearning which he sees illustrated in the kind of longing which characterizes the person who finds himself in the desert. He compares his longing to physical thirst. Spurgeon put it this way:

“Thirst is an insatiable longing after that which is one of the most essential supports of life; there is no reasoning with it, no forgetting it, no despising it, no overcoming it by stoical indifference. Thirst will be heard; the whole

David
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man must yield to its power: even thus is it with that divine desire which the grace of God creates in regenerate men: only God Himself can satisfy the soul really aroused by the Holy Spirit.”

Indeed, David exclaims, “My soul thirsts for *You*, my flesh yearns for *You*, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” Soul and flesh: the entirety of David’s being cries out for God. That’s the way David was about God: He wanted God, and nothing else would do. He longs and thirsts and yearns for God and for the joy of fellowship with Him. He is not alone among the Psalmists in this; in Psalm 42 we read:

*As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for You, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God;
When shall I come and appear before God?*

A response of praise. Along with this kind of appetite for God, David’s worship is characterized by joyful responses of praise. He praises God with His voice (vv. 3,4,5,7), with his hands (v. 4), but most fundamentally with his heart: a *satis-*

fied heart (v. 5), a *reflective* heart (v. 6), a *confident* heart (v. 7).

David finds comfort and assurance “in the shadow of Your wings.” He finds security and the peace which comes from knowing that “You are MY God” and that “Your lovingkindness is better than life.”

And with that, as one writer has put it, “David’s heart has become a temple of praise.” There is no desert in his heart. Far from the palace, far from the tabernacle, David has found in his heart the true place of worship and communion with God. The soul of David drinks deeply in the desert; his yearning flesh sings and shouts with joy to His God; his heart bursts with the glorious truth that the lovingkindness of the Lord is better than life.

Better than life. O that we might learn to thirst like David; and drink like David; and worship like David!

Thirst for God and be quenched. Yearn for Him and be satisfied. Feast on Him and find fullness of joy. Because *HIS LOVINGKINDNESS IS BETTER THAN LIFE.*

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HYMNS & SONGS BASED ON PSALM 63

O God, Thou art my God alone;
Early to Thee my soul shall cry;
A pilgrim in a land unknown,
A thirsty land whose springs are dry.

O that it were as it hath been!
When, praying in the holy place,
Thy power and glory I have seen,
And marked the footsteps of Thy grace.

Yet, through this rough and thorny maze,
I follow hard on Thee, my God;
Thy hand, unseen, upholds my ways;
I safely tread where Thou hast trod.

Thee, in the watches of the night,
When I remember on my bed;
Thy presence makes the darkness light,
Thy guardian wings are round my head.

Better than life itself Thy love,
Dearer than all beside to me;
For whom have I in Heaven above,
Or what on earth, compared to Thee?

Praise with my heart, my mind, my voice,
For all Thy mercy I will give;
My soul shall still in God rejoice;
My tongue shall bless Thee while I live.
(James Montgomery, 1822; *Trinity Hymnal* [1961] #556)

Early, my God, without delay,
I haste to seek thy face;
My thirsty spirit faints away
Without thy cheering grace.

So pilgrims on the scorching sand,
Beneath a burning sky,
Long for a cooling stream at hand,
And they must drink or die.

I've seen thy glory and thy power
Through all thy temple shine;
My God, repeat that heav'nly hour,
That vision so divine.

Not all the blessings of a feast
Can please my soul so well,
As when thy richer grace I taste,
And in thy presence dwell.

Not life itself, with all her joys,
Can my best passions move,
Or raise so high my cheerful voice,
As thy forgiving love.

Thus till my last expiring day
I'll bless my God and King;
Thus will I lift my hands to pray,
And tune my lips to sing.
(Isaac Watts)

~ ~ ~ ~

Thy lovingkindness is better than life,
Thy lovingkindness is better than life.
My lips shall praise Thee, thus will I bless Thee:
I will lift up my hands unto Thy name.

I lift my hands, Lord, unto Thy name,
I lift my hands, Lord, unto Thy name.
My lips shall praise Thee, thus will I bless Thee:
I will lift up my hands unto Thy name.
(Hugh Mitchell; © 1956 Singspiration Music;
The Celebration Hymnal #706)

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God is my great desire,
his face I seek the first;
To him my heart and soul aspire,
For him I thirst.

As one in desert lands,
whose very flesh is flame,
In burning love I lift my hands
and bless his name.

God is my true delight,
my richest feast his praise,
Through silent watches of the night,
through all my days.

To him my spirit clings,
on him my soul is cast;
Beneath the shadow of His wings
he holds me fast.

God is my strong defense
in every evil hour;
In him I face with confidence
the tempter's power.

I trust his mercy sure
with truth and triumph crowned:
My hope and joy forevermore
in Him are found.

(Timothy Dudley-Smith; © 1984 Hope
Publ. Co.; *The Worshiping Church #336*)

~ ~ ~ ~

Thy lovingkindness, O my Lord,
Can more than life itself afford,
My hands to thee I'll raise;
Long as I live, my best employ,
My soul's delight, my heartfelt-joy,
Shall be thy name to praise.

Beneath the shadow of thy wings,
My joyful soul exulting sings,
Rejoicing in my God:
Thy own right hand shall guide my way,
To follow thee to endless day,
To view thy blest abode.

Glorious on high Messiah reigns,
Exalted o'er the heavenly plains:
His enemies shall fall:
His saints, who served with holy fear,
With him in glory shall appear,
And crown him Lord of all.
(*Kemble's Psalms and Hymns*, 1853)

My God, permit my tongue
This joy, to call thee mine;
And let my early cries prevail
To taste thy love divine.

My thirsty, fainting soul
Thy mercy doth implore;
Not travellers in desert lands
Can pant for water more.

Within thy churches, Lord,
I long to find my place;
Thy power and glory to behold,
And feel thy quick'ning grace.

For life without thy love
No relish can afford;
No joy can be compared to this,
To serve and please the Lord.

To thee I'll lift my hands,
And praise thee while I live;
Not the rich dainties of a feast
Such food or pleasure give.

In wakeful hours at night
I call my God to mind;
I think how wise thy counsels are,
And all thy dealings kind.

Since thou hast been my help,
To thee my spirit flies,
And on thy watchful providence
My cheerful hope relies.

The shadow of thy wings
My soul in safety keeps;
I follow where my Father leads,
And he supports my steps.
(Isaac Watts)

~ ~ ~ ~

O God eternal, you are my God!
for you I long in body and soul;
As in a dry and waterless land
I search, I thirst, I faint for you.

On holy ground your glory I saw;
your steadfast love is better than life;
I'll bless your name as long as I live
And lift my hands to you in prayer.

You feed my soul as if with a feast—
I sing your praise with jubilant lips;
Upon my bed I call you to mind
and meditate on you at night.

For you have been the help of my life;
You take and keep me under your wing;
I cling to you, and find your support;
O god my joy, you are my God!
(Christopher Idle; © 1973 Hope Publ.
Co.; *Trinity Hymnal* #663)

~ ~ ~ ~

O God, you are my God;
I seek you eagerly;
My soul and body thirst for you
in barren lands and dry.

Therefore I gazed on you
within your holy place,
that I might look upon your power,
the glory of your face.

Your love is more than life;
my lips shall give you praise;
I lift my hands up in your Name
and bless you all my days.

My soul is well content,
my mouth shall give you praise
when I remember you at night
and ponder all your ways.

Your wings have sheltered me,
my helper in the past;
my soul, Lord, clings to you alone,
your right hand holds me fast.
(© 1986 Christopher L. Webber; *Presbyterian Hymnal* #198)

~ ~ ~ ~

Fill my cup, Lord—I lift up, Lord!
Come and quench this thirsting of my soul;
Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more—
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole!
(© 1959 Richard Blanchard, © 1964 Sacred
Songs)

SCRIPTURES ON SPIRITUAL THIRST

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and appear before God?
(Psalm 42:1-2)

I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all that you have done;
I ponder the work of your hands.
I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.
Ps 143:5-6

“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;
and he who has no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.”
(Isaiah 55:1-3a)

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”
(Matthew 5:6)

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,
but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.
The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”
(John 4:13-14)

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out,
“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has
said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”
Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive,
for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.
(John 7:37-39)

And he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.
To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.
(Revelation 21:6)

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.”
And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.
(Revelation 22:17)

QUOTABLES

Thirsting for God

“I want to stress what I think that we (or at least I) need more [than instruction about sacrifice]: the joy and delight in God which meet us in the Psalms. . . . These poets knew far less reason than we for loving God. They did not know that He offered them eternal joy; still less that He would die to win it for them. Yet they express a longing for Him, for His mere presence, which comes only to the best Christians or to Christians in their best moments. They long to live all their days in the Temple so that they may constantly see ‘the fair beauty of the Lord’ (Psalm 27:4). Their longing to go up to Jerusalem and ‘appear before the presence of God’ is like a physical thirst (42). From Jerusalem His presence flashes out ‘in perfect beauty’ (50:2). Lacking that encounter with Him, their souls are parched like a waterless countryside (63:1). They crave to be ‘satisfied with the pleasures’ of His house (65:4). Only there can they be at ease, like a bird in the nest (84:1-3). One day of those ‘pleasures’ is better than a lifetime spent elsewhere (84:11-12).

“I have rather—though the expression may seem harsh to some—call this the ‘appetite for God’ than the ‘love of God’. . . . It has all the cheerful spontaneity of a natural, even a physical, desire.”

(C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 50-51)

“It is a mark of spiritual barrenness in the church when people come to worship to fulfill a duty rather than to satisfy an appetite.”

(Eric Alexander, “Thirsting for God,” sermon on Psalm 63)

“There is a French proverb, ‘The appetite grows with eating.’ □ The God-given way by which we come to feast on God in all the glories of His character □ is His inscripturated Word. And as you feed on it more and more, I tell you, your appetite □ will grow. And as you drink deeply of the wells of salvation, you will find yourself saying, ‘I hunger’ and ‘I thirst’—‘Jesu, my manna be.’”

(Eric Alexander, “Thirsting for God,” sermon on Psalm 63)

□

“And so the final and most important exhortation to us from the life and work of Jonathan Edwards is this: in all our life and all our study and all our ministry let us seek to glorify God by being satisfied in him above all things. Let us press on to know in the depth of our being that ‘the steadfast love of the Lord is better than life’ (Ps. 63:3). And so let us find the God-exalting freedom from this world that will make us the most radical, sacrificial servants of good on earth that men may see our good works and join us in glorifying God by enjoying him forever.

“We can expect a lot more delight than we are probably experiencing at the moment. How much can we expect? We can expect (1) enough delight to be happier and more content than the happiest non-Christian, (2) enough delight in God to make thoughts of God and of the life to come pleasant and welcome to us, (3) enough delight to lift us beyond our weariness and depression and make our Christian walk pleasing to us, (4) enough delight to take away our appetite for sinful pleasures, (5) enough delight to make every expression of God’s mercy and love to us sweet and satisfying, (6) enough delight to make suffering more bearable and even enjoyable at times, and (7) enough delight to make the thought of death less terrible.” □

(“A Vision for Worship: Richard Baxter’s Directions for Delighting in God” in Mark Shaw, *100 Great Ideas from Church History*, 101)

□

“Worship does not satisfy our hunger for God; it whets our appetite. Our need for God is not taken care of by engaging in worship; it deepens. It overflows the hour and permeates the week.”

(Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 56)

“The heart and soul of saving faith is the spiritual apprehension of the glory of God in Jesus Christ, and the embracing of all that God is for us in Christ to the satisfaction of the thirst of our souls.” (John Piper, “Preaching as Worship”)

“God thirsts to be thirsted after.”
(Augustine)

“You have called, You have cried out, and You have pierced my deafness.
You have radiated forth, and have shined out brightly, and You have dispelled my blindness.

□ You have sent forth Your fragrance, and I have breathed it in, and I long for You.

□ I have tasted You, and I hunger and thirst for You.

□ You have touched me, and I ardently desire Your peace.

□ (Augustine, *Confessions*)

“The role of God’s Word is to feed faith’s appetite for God.”

(John Piper, *Future Grace*, 335)

“Faith in future grace produces love not only by what it pushes out of the heart, but also by the strong desires it brings to the heart. Faith has an insatiable appetite for experiencing as much of God’s grace as possible. Therefore, faith presses toward the river where God’s grace flows most freely, namely, the river of love.”

(John Piper, *Future Grace*, 283)

“Faith is not just believing facts about God. It is not just intellectual assent. Faith is the quenching of the soul’s thirst at the fountain of God.” □

(John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, 247)

“When faith has the upper hand in my heart I am satisfied with Christ and his promises. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “He who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). When my

thirst for joy and meaning and passion are satisfied by the presence and promises of Christ, the power of sin is broken. We do not yield to the offer of sandwich meat when we can smell the steak sizzling on the grill.

“We need to see first and foremost that God is God—that he is perfect and complete in himself, that he is overflowingly happy in the eternal fellowship of the Trinity, and that he does not need us to complete his fullness and is not deficient without us. Rather we are deficient without him; the all-sufficient glory of God, freely given in fellowship through his sacrificed Son, is the stream of living water that we have thirsted for all our lives.”

(John Piper, *Future Grace*, 335)

□□

“What you do in public worship, do it with all your might. Shake off that slothful, indifferent, lukewarm temper, which is so odious to God. . . . Think it not enough to present your bodies before the Lord. . . . The worship of the body is but the carcass of worship; it is soul worship that is the soul of worship. Those that draw near with their lips only shall find God far enough from them’ not only lips, and mouth, and tongue, but mind, and heart, and affections; not only knee, and hand, and eye, but heart, and conscience, and memory, must be pressed to attend upon God in public worship. David says, not only ‘my flesh longs for Thee,’ but ‘my soul thirsts for Thee. Then will the Lord draw near, when our whole man waits on Him; then will the Lord be found, when we seek Him with our whole heart.”

(Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*, 90)

□

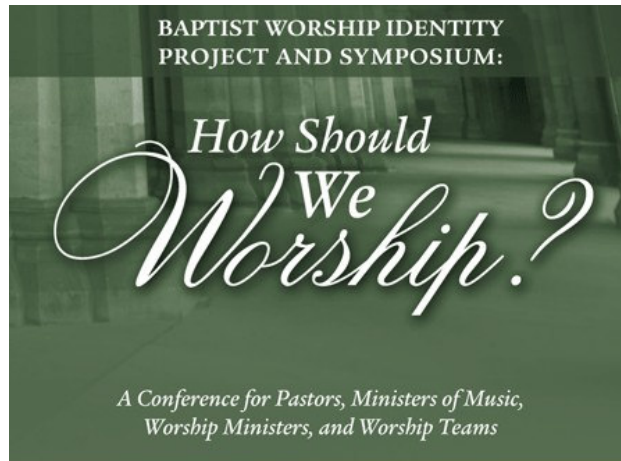
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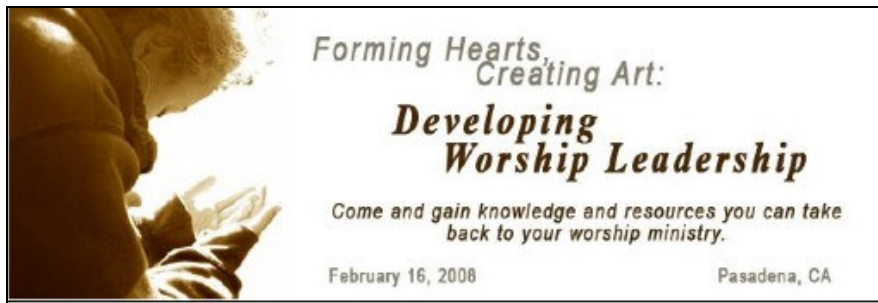
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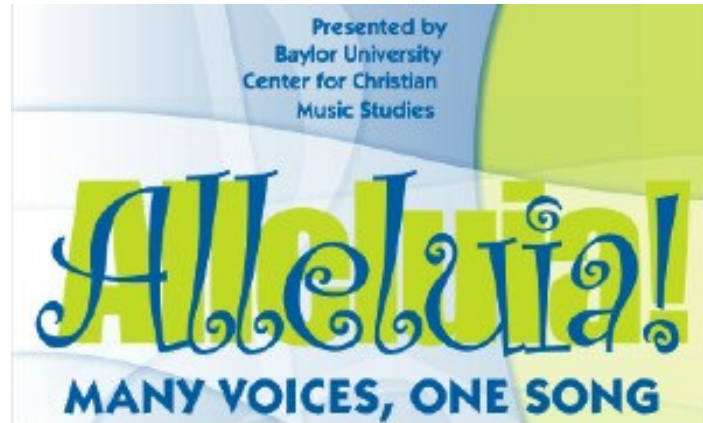
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