

Going Deeper With God

Psalm 63

We are beginning a new sermon series today that will take us through most of the summer and there has been a unique journey that's led to the decision to do this series. It's a journey that started with many prayers for our church over the past several years – prayers for God's Spirit to move and for there to be spiritual revival in our hearts, church, and community. I believe it was those prayers that led to a conversation I had last fall with our Assistant District Superintendent, Doug Jerred. As we were talking about East Lincoln, he felt led to invite us to take an assessment that would clarify how our church is doing in comparison to the priorities Jesus had in his ministry and mission.

The elders believed it would be beneficial to take the assessment, so we had a group of people familiar with the church take the assessment in February and then met with Doug in March to go over the results and begin talking about steps we could take to align our culture and practices more with the priorities of Jesus. After that meeting we formed what we call a Vision Team and we've met a couple times to seek the Lord's direction. At our last meeting it seemed clear that the Lord was leading us as a team to first seek deeper intimacy with Christ and greater fullness of the Spirit and to invite the whole congregation to seek to go deeper as well. So that's what this sermon series is about... an invitation for us to go deeper and experience more.

This morning we're going to look at why we should do that and in the weeks after that we're going to look at ways God has given us to do that – habits to develop to seek greater intimacy with Christ so we can experience the wellspring of life that comes from that.

I want you to think about: How deep is your relationship with God? Do you have a close connection with Jesus every day? Are you experiencing the fullness of the Holy Spirit in your daily life? What does that even look like? I don't know what it was like in other generations, but the one we're in right now seems to make these things really difficult. And it's not because of opposition or persecution or because we lack resources or access to all that God has for us. I think it's mostly because of the competition for our time and attention. We have freedom, money, and opportunity and the ability to pursue all kinds

of time-consuming passions and interests. We also have ever-present technology designed to attract and keep our interest every waking moment and it's very addictive.

The majority of people in our culture end up living a lifestyle of busyness, distraction, entertainment, and pursuing interests. That's what's normal. But if we live like that – and I need you to hear this – if we live like most people are living, even if we aren't participating in things that are inherently wrong or evil – we kill our ability to experience a deep relationship with God, intimacy with Jesus, and the fullness of the Spirit. We simply replace that with other things that are interesting, enjoyable, and entertaining. And the result is spiritual dullness. If it was just a Christian here and there that was struggling with this it might not be a big concern, but I think it's widespread and leading churches and Christians to be unfruitful and unproductive in advancing Christ's kingdom in our world today.

We need a renewed hunger and thirst to go deeper with God. So this morning my hope is that we will see the surpassing worth of having an ever-deepening relationship with him that will compel us to seek him more fully, and develop the habits of spiritual intimacy we're going to talk about in the weeks to come.

Our primary text for today is Psalm 63 – a Psalm written by King David when he was either fleeing from Saul in his early years or from Absalom later on in life. In either case, he was hiding in the wilderness of Judah. He had run from his home and the things that were familiar and stable to him were no longer there, and he didn't know how things were going to end up. It was in that situation that he went out to meet with God and wrote this Psalm.

Read Psalm 63:1-11.

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;

my soul thirsts for you;

my flesh faints for you,

as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

²*So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,*

beholding your power and glory.

³*Because your steadfast love is better than life,*

my lips will praise you.

⁴ *So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.*

⁵ *My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,*

⁶ *when I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;*

⁷ *for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.*

⁸ *My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.*

⁹ *But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;*

¹⁰ *they shall be given over to the power of the sword;
they shall be a portion for jackals.*

¹¹ *But the king shall rejoice in God;
all who swear by him shall exult,
for the mouths of liars will be stopped.*

These are the words of a man who was in a desperate situation, and you can hear his desperation in verse 1: *“my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”* He’s describing how he felt deep inside by comparing it to the barren wilderness around him. He recognized that his soul was dry and weary and it was affecting every part of his being. He had a deep, inner longing that needed to be filled.

When I read his words, I think I know what he’s talking about and maybe you do too. I’ve had times in my life when I’ve felt a deep, inner longing and thirst. I remember feeling it first as a kid when I was out on a snowmobile ride by myself. I was in the countryside and for whatever reason I stopped and suddenly felt this sensation of being alone, empty and lost.

I felt it again in college at a time where I really had nowhere that felt like home. I had been travelling in a van for 4 months, doing concerts with a gospel quartet and that became my home. When the tour ended, I went back to my parents’ home for summer break and I felt a deep sense of emptiness and aloneness. That van had been home for so long that college wasn’t home anymore, and home didn’t feel like home. But the van and friends and tour

were gone and that experience was not coming back. And the gnawing emptiness inside me was really intense.

I remember feeling those things again at times as a young adult when I'd return from a fishing trip to the Boundary Waters or Canada. I felt it when I'd finish a busy season of life – maybe the end of the youth ministry year, or house project. My schedule would lighten up and I'd have down time when my mind wasn't occupied with busyness and again I felt lost, empty, disconnected.

In all those experiences I believe I was feeling what was going on in my soul – and at those times it was dry and weary and longing to be filled. Many of you may have felt it too. I think that's what David felt when he started writing this Psalm. His soul was longing to be filled.

And notice where he went to fill it... Verse 1 says: "*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you.*" Verse 2 says: "*So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.*" So when David felt that longing, he went to seek the Lord. There are different opinions about the sanctuary he's referring to, but I think he's talking about going outside on a starlit night, right there in the wilderness of Judah to seek the Lord and spend time with him. That was his sanctuary where he could behold the power and glory of God in the heavens above. He felt that yearning in his soul and he went to be with God.

I want you to note how different that is than what most people do, even Christians, to deal with that yearning in our souls. For me and for a lot of people, it's something we try to douse or run away from because it is not a great feeling and we don't know what to do with it and we want it to just go away. So we try to fill the void with all kinds of things – things that keep us busy and occupy our minds – friends, family, romance, work, sports, TV, hobbies. In today's world we quickly turn to our phones which provide a constant soul-numbing distraction. Sometimes those things don't work and people try to drown it out with alcohol, drugs, pornography. But you know where we need to go? To God...

When I was about 22 I felt the yearning most intensely and I desperately tried all the normal things to make it go away, things that had worked before, which for me was sports, friends, school, traveling, work. But God, in his mercy, didn't allow those things to work anymore. He was bringing me to a place where I would eventually realize and experience that the only way my soul would be truly filled and satisfied would be in deep relationship with him. He's the Creator of my soul, and that's how he created it to work.

I believe David knew that. So when he felt the yearning in his soul, he did what he had done many times before, he went to be with God and satisfy his soul in him. That's what this Psalm is about. After describing how he went to seek the Lord and spend time with him, he wrote about the effect it had. In verses 3-4 he says: "*Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. ⁴ So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.*"

When David earnestly sought the Lord, he experienced the overwhelming love of God. It was so wonderful and fulfilling David said it was "better than life." All the good things he had in life; all the blessings; the comforts and pleasures; all the experiences – the steadfast love of the Lord was better than all of it. And so his soul went from being dry and weary to overflowing with praise, worship, and devotion to God. Have you ever experienced that?

David wasn't going to settle for the lesser comforts and pleasures like so many do. C.S. Lewis wrote: "*We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.*"

Are you too easily pleased? Or do you want more? We need more. David experienced more and it moved him from being dry and weary to rejoicing and worship. And as he continued to write he expressed even more about how his relationship with God would affect his soul. He says in verses 5-8:

⁵ *My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food,
and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips,*

⁶ *when I remember you upon my bed,
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;*

⁷ *for you have been my help,
and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.*
⁸ *My soul clings to you;
your right hand upholds me.*

I was sitting in my office on Tuesday morning, studying these verses, when I was invited by the ladies Bible study to share in their potluck brunch. And I gladly took them up on their offer! Soon I was enjoying savory soup with parmesan cheese, mouth-watering egg bakes, pasta and fruit, and to top it all off I had a bowl of warm caramel apple bread pudding with sea salt caramel ice cream on top. My stomach was satisfied with fat and rich food and I had a contented smile on my face.

That's the idea David gives in verse 5 to describe what happened to his soul when he met with God. Verse 6 shows us that when he couldn't sleep at night he would spend time in prayer and worship, meditating on God, and when he did it was like his soul was having a feast. He was fully satisfied and his lips were filled with joyful praise. This wasn't a one-time thing for David; it was a habit in his life.

He had a deep, personal relationship with God and verses 7-8 express how that was the anchor for his soul. God was his help and like a young bird protected by its mother's wings, David was secure in God's presence. His soul was satisfied, secure, and overflowing with joy and he would cling to him.

God wants you and I to experience the same thing in our lives. That's the kind of relationship he wants to have with us. When sin entered the world, it severed that relationship. It separated us from God. But God has reconciled us to himself. When Jesus came and died on the cross he completely paid the penalty for our sin and removed the barrier between us and God. And all who turn to him in faith are reconciled to God. Our sins are forgiven and our relationship with our heavenly Father is restored.

If you are trusting in Jesus today, that has happened to you. And God wants to be near you. He wants you to find increasing joy and satisfaction in him as you live out your days here on earth and join him in his ongoing mission of advancing his kingdom. He doesn't want you to be distant, and empty, and

spiritually starving and thirsty. He wants you to seek him with all your heart so you experience more of him, deeper relationship, intimacy with Christ, and fullness of the Holy Spirit.

One of the verses that stuck out to me this week was Jeremiah 29:13 “When you seek me, you will find me, if you seek me with all your heart.”

So ask yourself – do you have a relationship with God like we saw in Psalm 63? If not, that’s what God wants for us. That’s what’s waiting for those who earnestly seek him. And in the upcoming weeks we are going to look at several practices God wants us to build into our lives in order to experience that. I’ve decided to use the book: [Spiritual Disciplines For The Christian Life](#) by Donald Whitney to give us the topics for each week, so if you want to go further in personal study and growth, I encourage you to get a copy. They’re about \$12 on Amazon.