

# Psalms 63

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it is a wonderful moving psalm, isn't it? And if you want a text for my short little talk this lunchtime, it's verse 3.

! Your steadfast love is better than life. Your love is better than life. The psalms really are a cardiograph or an angiogram of where we're at spiritually.

I think it's a good test of where somebody and how somebody is doing as a Christian in are they feeling at home in the psalms?

It's a sign of spiritual health to enjoy the psalms in all their variety. There are some of us, aren't there, who are medical hypochondriacs, and we would gladly have a check-up every week if we could.

But that's not very healthy, is it, to do that. And similarly, it's not totally healthy to have a spiritual check-up too frequently. To constantly be looking inside breeds introspection and soul-scraping.

[ 1 : 10 ] And I went through a stage like that, as I'm sure many of you have been, and I was greatly helped when a preacher told me these words. He said, for every one look within, take ten looks at the Lord Jesus.

There is a place for introspection. But remember to keep one's eyes mainly on the Lord Jesus. Another danger that when we talk about experience and experiencing God, is that we're all different, aren't we?

We're all very different characters in this room this lunchtime. Emotionally, psychologically. And therefore, when we talk about experience, we do react in different ways, don't we?

Most of us fit in to the characters of Winnie the Pooh. So there will be some here who are like Eeyore, who are naturally gloomy. There will be others like Tigger, who are always bouncing. There are others out there that are like Owl, who are wise but impractical. There's Roo, who's got the mother complex. Kanga, who's always trying to help people.

[ 2 : 18 ] Piglet, who's naturally fearful. Others like Winnie the Pooh are lovable but rather thick. And if you don't see yourself as any of those, you're probably like Christopher Robin, a control freak.

Now, we're all different, aren't we? We are different as Christians. And we need to register that. Particularly when we talk about experience. The background to this psalm is there right on the side. It's not actually on your sheets. But it was written by David at a time when he was fleeing. He was away from the land. He was in the desert. In Judah, David is king.

He refers to that in verse 11. And he is in the wilderness, fleeing his son Absalom. Another of David's sons, Ammon, had raped Absalom's sister.

A terrific story. Absalom, the brother, takes the law into his own hands and he murders his brother Ammon. And as a result of that, Absalom flees. But eventually, through Joab's intervention, Absalom is allowed sort of home.

[ 3 : 28 ] He's allowed back to be near the palace. Not in the palace. He's not allowed to come to his father, King David. And Absalom, if you read the story, he begins to woo and seduce the people away from King David.

We read this phrase. Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel. And so there is Absalom. He stands at the gates of Jerusalem. And as people came along, he said to them, You know, when I am king, I'm going to scrap student fees.

And when I'm king, I'm going to raise pensions and lower the pension age. And I'll half your rent.

And I'll build Ealing Cinema. And Absalom captures the hearts of the people by empty promises.

David does the really brave thing and the self-sacrificing thing. He evacuates the city of Jerusalem. And he saves Jerusalem from being besieged and destroyed.

And David exposes himself to what had happened before. When he was a young man. David, the older king, becomes life on the run. And a return to the wilderness.

[ 4 : 41 ] Possibly even living again in caves. And that is the situation in which he writes this psalm. And this psalm really is a favourite for many.

Theodore Beezer, he was Calvin's successor in Geneva. And he says if he couldn't sleep at night, he would read this psalm. And John Chrysostom, the great preacher, read it daily.

I often find that when people are at the end of their lives. This is one of the psalms that people love for us to read them. Derek Kidner, the great Old Testament commentator, says.

There may be other songs that equal the outpouring of love and devotion. But few surpass it. And it is, isn't it? I don't know whether Leslie, whether you picked it up as Leslie read it.

It is one of the most beautiful and touching psalms in the Psalter. And so what I want to try and do is just in, really in about ten minutes, is to tackle this psalm with a spiritual health check. When it talks about my soul, you mustn't think of that as kind of separate from who you are.

[ 5 : 51 ] When the Bible talks about my soul, it's talking about all of you. Every area, every department of my life. And so three marks of a healthy soul. The first mark of a healthy soul is that a healthy soul thirsts for God.

Look at verse one. Oh God, you are my God and earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. It's really important that you realise that the seeker in the Bible is not the non-Christian.

It's not the non-Christian who is inquiring and kind of visiting. It's lovely when there are people like that. Maybe that's what you are. But the natural person, the natural position of men and women is to be running away from God.

We are not naturally seekers. And so you remember in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, they were hiding. And it was God who came looking, wasn't it? It was God who said, where are you?

The Lord Jesus Christ describes himself as the good shepherd who looks for the sheep. You never hear, do you, of sheep looking for their shepherd.

[ 7 : 04 ] Do you? You never hear that. They don't do that. But God comes looking for people. So in the Bible, the seeker is the believer. The believer who is wanting more of God's presence.

So, the famous psalm is Psalm 27. It's that one thing I will ask of you, Lord. This is what I seek, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

That is the first mark of a healthy soul. The healthy soul thirsts for God. Can you imagine an ancient Greek thirsting for their horrible god Zeus?

Or a Canaanite thirsting for Baal? Or a Hindu thirsting for a monkey god? I wanted to talk with David about this before the service, so I didn't get the chance.

But I don't think Muslims would ever use this language, would they, about Allah? My soul thirsts for Allah? They could never use that language.

[ 8 : 08 ] But the healthy Christian, he thirsts for the Lord God. C.S. Lewis, commenting on this aspect of the psalm, says this. He says, these poets knew far less lessons 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 in their best moments.

They long to live all their days in the temple, so that they may see the fair beauty of the Lord. They are longing to go up to Jerusalem, to appear before the presence of God, like a physical thirst from Jerusalem.

His presence flashes out in perfect beauty. And lacking that encounter with him, their souls are parched, like a waterless countryside. And therefore, say my soul, my soul, thirst for you.

It's important that you understand, it's not the groping of a stranger. It's the eagerness of a friend or a lover.

[ 9 : 16 ] It's like an engaged couple counting down the days until they're married. And they are deeply restless without him. And the cause of this thirst is in verse 3.

Because your steadfast love is better than life. So that's the first mark of a healthy soul. It's somebody who's hungry and thirsty for the Lord, who's longing to know more of him, who's longing to spend more time in his presence.

The second mark of a healthy soul is that the soul is satisfied. Satisfied. It's really interesting, it's that both these things are here.

Longing and being satisfied. Look at verse 5. My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food.

Verse 1. My soul thirsts for you. My soul thirsts. Verse 5. My soul will be satisfied. Sometimes unhelpful Christians ask us the wrong question.

[10:23] And sometimes preachers begin with the wrong question. They will say, are you satisfied with your Christian life? And the answer to that is always, always no, isn't it? Of course, I'm not satisfied with my Christian life.

And then very often you'll hear sermons, or talks, or read books, or watch them on the TV, where somebody will come up with some recipe to project me above the clouds so that I live all my life in permanent sunshine.

The better question is this. Am I satisfied with Jesus? And David is able to say, yes, yes, my soul is satisfied as with a great feast.

Verse 5. With the richest of foods. One of the blessings of being in London is the food that you can have.

I love it. And in our congregation, it's a really international congregation, you can go to people's houses and have these incredible feasts. You have a Brazilian and a Colombian couple that have just come back to the church.

[11:22] I remember going to their house for the first time and having to lie down in between courses. I'd eaten so much. You know what it's like, don't you? When you've had a real feast. And you throw your napkin down, or you loosen your belt.

And you have had everything you need, and you say, oh, that was terrific. You're very, very satisfied. That's the mark of a healthy soul. Verse 5. That's really in marked contrast with the world that we live in, isn't it?

The Rolling Stones, they sang, didn't they? I can't get no satisfaction. So for a whole generation, Simon and Garfield wrote this. From the moment of my birth to the instant of my death, there are patterns I must follow, just as I must breathe every breath.

Like a rat in a maze, the path before me lies, and the pattern never alters until the rat dies. No satisfaction. But the healthy soul, it can say, my soul is satisfied.

And God does not withhold himself from those who seek him. And finding him is very, very satisfying. Let me show you what I've seen this morning. Can you see that it refers to all the tenses?

[12:37] And so verse 2 says, I have looked. That's past tense, isn't it? I have seen you. I have looked upon you in the sanctuary.

So that makes me satisfied. Refers to the present, doesn't it? Verse 3. Your love is better than life. Verse 7.

For you have been my help. Verse 8. Your right hand upholds me. And it refers to the future, doesn't it? Verse 5.

My soul will be satisfied, as with the richest of foods. And so it applies to past and present and to future. And so it also affects every part of his anatomy.

Don't know where you notice that. Look at the body parts in the psalm. You've got his lips and his hands and his mouth and his memory. There's a book.

[13:38] It's one of the greatest books of the 20th century called Knowing God by Jim Packer. John Stott said in his review of that book that there were times when he had to stop reading and turn aside to worship.

And Packer opens with the story of a scholar. He's an intellectual and he was in university and he had a forfeit kind of advancement, academic advancement.

He clashed with the church dignitaries. Over the gospel of grace. And that intellectual said it doesn't matter because I've known God. And that is very satisfying and they haven't.

Ralph Davis, the great Old Testament commentator, speaks of a bedridden old lady he went to visit who was in great pain. Who was a widow. I don't think she had children.

She was on her own and she kept saying Jesus is very, very wonderful. He's been very, very good to me. And that is a soul that is satisfied and that results in praise.

[14:38] Did you notice that? Look at verse 3. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. In verse 4.

I will bless you as long as you live. And verse 5. My mouth will praise you with joyful lips. And in verse 7. And in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

And verse 11. Dead is the soul that has ceased to be amazed at the love of God seen at Calvary.

Dead is the soul that has ceased to be amazed at the love of God seen at Calvary. And so as we contemplate what happened when the Lord Jesus died we will be both satisfied and that will lead to praise.

There are two sides to praising aren't there? The first side of praise is telling the person concerned that they've done something good.

[15:47] The second part of praise is telling someone else about it. So let's say your boss calls you into the office this afternoon. And he says, you've done something in your work which is really, really good.

I'm so thrilled with it. That is really nice, isn't it? You leave the office having met with your boss. I'm really thrilled at that. He's praised you. But you come to work tomorrow and your friend says, I was in a meeting with our boss yesterday.

And his fellow bosses. And he said this about you. He said, you want to see what she's done? She's done terrific work. That he praised you in front of other people. Well that means even more, doesn't it?

When you hear about it. That somebody has praised you in the presence of others. That is even more than being praised directly. And so praise is not just telling the Lord God how wonderful he is. But it's telling others how great he is, isn't it? And so we go to other people and we say, how great is our God? Isn't that part of the reason why we gather and worship together on Sunday?

[16:52] To hear you with your feeble voice or your wonderful voice sing to me about how great our God is. God has been very, very good to me because I am totally satisfied with him.

So a healthy soul thirsts for God. A healthy soul is satisfied with God. And then you spot the third thing. It's in verse 3. It's in verse 8. A healthy soul clings to God.

My soul clings to you. My soul clings to you. What is the fundamental sin? The fundamental sin is UDI. It's thinking that I can go it alone.

Sin is thinking that I can enjoy God's gifts and God's world without him. And acting and living like I can get on with life as though God is irrelevant.

That is the fundamental sin. And the mark of a healthy soul is clinging to him. It's dependence.

[17:53] So you think of Jacob wrestling with God. And he says, I will not go unless you bless me. Or you think of Ruth grabbing hold of Naomi.

And saying, I'm going to cling to you. I'm going to go with you. I cannot do without you. Our saviour of the lost. At least Samuel was a well-known evangelist.

Some of you will have heard him. He sent John Samuel his arms minister at Duke Street, Richmond. And the Samuels come from a Jewish family originally. At least Samuel's dad was Jewish.

But he was beginning to get interested in Christian things. And he used to pray some of the Lord's Prayer. But he took sick. And he went to the doctor. And they couldn't find out what was wrong with him. And he got iller and iller.

And more feeble. And eventually, Lee Samuel's dad had to go to the hospital. They did various tests. But they couldn't find out what was wrong with him. And then one day, a Christian doctor was doing the rounds.

[18:59] And he came to Mr. Samuel's bed. And the doctor let it be known that he was a Christian. Mr. Samuel said, that's very interesting. Because I'm beginning to get very interested in Christian things.

And I say the Lord's Prayer. But I don't say, give us this day our daily bread. Because I know the hospital meals will come around. So there's no point in praying that. And the Christian doctor wisely said, ah, I wonder whether that's what the matter is.

You are not acknowledging your dependence upon him. And I suggest that from now on you pray, give us this day our daily bread. And from that moment, Lee Samuel's dad began to get better. He was acknowledging his dependence. What was he doing? Verse 8. He was beginning to cling. Maybe, isn't it, some of us know this.

It may be that sometimes God has to put us in the desert. So that we learn to cling to him. For most of us in West London, not for all of us, but for most of us, we have such a great life.

[20:11] And so many things are just provided for us, aren't we? Aren't they? I can never remember a time when I wondered, am I going to be able to have my next meal? That's never been part of my experience.

And so we assume, don't we, well, we can just go on without him. And it may well mean, it will mean that at some stage there has to be a time when we have to cling to him because there's no one else.

And so we need to register that here this afternoon we've all got very different temperaments. And we need to register that there's a big danger in too much introspection. But nevertheless, you've got this psalm, which is a wonderful health check to see whether I'm spiritually healthy.

A healthy soul thirsts for him as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. You can't wait to get up in the morning to meet with him.

Spend time with him. A healthy soul is satisfied, really satisfied. It's the thing that means most. The satisfaction that comes from knowing and loving the Lord Jesus.

[ 21 : 26 ] And a healthy soul clings to him, it won't let him go. It will not let him go. And so my hope is that Psalm 63 becomes one of your favourite psalms too. Let's pray.

Let's pray.