## Lesson 2 A Prayer of Longing for God Psalm 63

Praying The Psalms

Sometimes we feel separated from God. During these times, we may feel much like small children feel when they are separated from their parents—frightened, angry. And we may experience an intense longing for our parent to return.

Many things can create this sense of separation from God. It might come as a result of a loss or crisis in our lives which leaves us feeling forgotten or uncared for by God. It might come during a time of personal sin or failure when we struggle with fear that God might condemn or reject us. It might come as a result of being removed from our community of faith. Whatever the reason, a sense of separation from God can generate an intense longing for God.

Group Discussion Imagine, if you will, that we have two people doing what we will call "living sculptures."

- Image one—two people standing with their backs to each other and their arms folded across their chests.
- Image two—one person turns to face the other's back with their arms reaching out.
- Image three—the two are facing each other and they have their arms reaching out to each other.

What would it feel like to be each person in each image? What does it feel like to be separated? What does it feel like to be reconnected?

**Personal Reflection**. Think of a time when you felt especially close to God. What was the experience like for you?

This psalm helps us express our longing for God in times when we feel separated from Him. *Read* Psalm 63.

**Longing:** A strong desire for, or a yearning for.

**Synonyms** 

Appetite, craving, desire, drive, hankering, passion, thirst, urge, yearning.

## Discussion:

- 1. How does David's present experience of God differ from his past experience (vv. 1-2)?
- a. David is now on the run in the wilderness of Judah from his son Absalom (2 Samuel 15—18 NKJV). Previously he had been in the palace and near the sanctuary and had Praying The Psalms, Jaunita Ryan, Author; Life Guide Bible Studies; King James Open Bible, Thomas Nelson, Inc.

everything he needed. He also had the company of other worshipers. Now, he is in the wilderness and not only experiences needs for food, water, and protection, but he has a longing for God.

- b. Psalm 42:1-2 also gives a description of "thirsting" for God.
- 2. The psalmist describes his experience of longing for God in **verse 1** with the strong physical metaphor of being thirsty in a desert with no sign of water. How is this image an appropriate description of what it feels like to be separated from God?
  - a. This metaphor might be seen in several ways. It is a metaphor of dying. It is a metaphor of intense suffering and longing. And it is a metaphor of a person with a single-minded focus—there is only one thing in all the world that a thirsty person in a desert wants.
  - **b.** We need God in the same way that we need water. They are basic to life. When we see no sign of God anywhere, we experience deep suffering and intense longing, and we might fear that something might happen to us.
  - **c. Note:** Even though David writes in **Psalm 139** about not being able to flee the presence of God, we can still *feel* as if we are separated from God.
- **3.** In **verses 2 and 3** the psalmist describes how, in the past, he experienced God's presence. What did he experience of God?
  - **a.** The psalmist felt closest to God when he was in the sanctuary—in the place of worship, with a community of believers.
  - **b.** Does the community of believers play a role in helping you experience a closeness to God?
- **4. Verse 1** describes a soul that is thirsty, with no chance of finding water. In stark contrast, **verse 5** describes a soul that is satisfied with the richest of foods. In the Bible, marrow is the nourisher and strengthener of the bones. One of my Bibles defines marrow as the best, literally fat. It also defines fatness as abundance.

These pictures contrast the experiences of being separated from God and the experience of being close to God.

- **a.** What words or images would you use to describe times when you felt separated from God?
- **b.** What words or images would you use to describe times when you felt close to God?
- Because of his longing for connection with God, the psalmist says he will <u>seek</u> God, he will <u>remember</u> God, and he will <u>cling</u> to God. The first action he takes is to earnestly seek God (v. 1).
  - a. What does it mean to seek God?

- b. Turn to Isaiah 55:6-7; Psalm 27:4, 8, 105:4; Amos 5:4-8.
- c. To seek: to resort to, to go to, to go in search of, to look for, to try and discover, to aim at.
- **d.** To seek God involves both perspective (mental view or prospect) and behavior. Perspective might include a sense of awareness, of being on the lookout for, of being open to, or being motivative to find. Behaviors might include studying the Scripture, praying, or being with other believers.
- **6.** The second action he takes is "remembering." Where, when, how and in what way does the psalmist say he "remembers" God (vv. 6-7).
  - a. The "shadow of thy wings" speaks of a place of protection. (Psalm 17:8, 36:7, 57:1).
- 7. What value is there in remembering past experiences of God when we feel separated from him?
- 8. The third action he describes is "clinging." In verse 8 he describes how he clings to God and how God holds him. What is your response to the image of clinging to God?
  - a. Turn to **Deuteronomy 30:20**. Moses is about to go off the scene and has, if you will, given the people the commandments for the second time. In verse 19, he states that he has set before them life and death, blessings and cursing. He encourages them to choose life that they and their seed may live.
  - **b.** In verse 20 Moses mentions "that thou mayest:" 1) love the Lord, 2) obey His voice, 3) cleave unto Him, and 4) dwell in the land.
  - **c.** To *cling* means, to hold on tightly to, to adhere or stick firmly or closely to, to be hard to part or remove from, to remain persistently or stubbornly faithful to. One definition of cleave is to become strongly involved with or emotionally attached to.
  - **d.** Are you clinging to the Lord? Read **Romans 8:38-39**.
- 9. In the final phrases the psalmist responds in joy to the hope of once again experiencing God's presence. How has a sense of God's presence led to joy in your experience?
- **10.** As you think about the actions of seeking, remembering, and clinging to God, which of these most closely describes what would be most helpful to you at this time?

**Prayer:** Take some time to express your longing for God directly to God.

## **Now or Later**

Based on this study, make a list of specific actions you can take when you are feeling separated from God.

Homework: A Prayer of Trust. Read Psalm 62