

Priority under pressure

Scripture: Psalm 63

David was a man who knew what it meant to live under pressure. As the king of Israel, he knew the pressures of leadership. The higher and more responsible the leadership position, the greater are the pressures. And David knew the pressure of problems. During his reign, his son, Absalom, led a rebellion against him. David and his loyal followers had to flee for their lives. During that time David spent a short while in the northeastern portion of the wilderness of Judah before he crossed over the Jordan River. In that barren land, fleeing for his life from his own son, feeling disgraced and rejected, with an uncertain future, David penned Psalm 63.

Psalm 63 shows us the priority of this man of God under pressure. If you or I were under the kinds of pressure David faced at this point in his life, I doubt if we would be writing songs. If we did, the song would probably contain a lot of urgent requests: "Help, God! Get me out of here!" David did write a song like that (Psalm 3). But it is interesting that Psalm 63 contains no petition. David expresses longing for God's presence, praise, joy, fellowship with God, confidence in God's salvation. But there is not one word of asking for temporal or even spiritual blessings. Derek Kidner nicely outlines it as "God my desire" (1-4); "God my delight" (5-8); and, "God my defense" (9-11). The psalm shows us that David's priority was to seek the Lord.

Seeking after God should be our most important priority.

No matter what pressures come into your life, you will be able to handle them properly if you maintain this one priority above all else: Earnestly seek after God!

1. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SEEK AFTER GOD?

Psalm 63 allows us to peer into the heart of this man after God's own heart. It's an emotional psalm, coming out of the depths of David's life, and it would be an injustice to pick the psalm apart while missing the feeling that it conveys. But while keeping the depth of feeling in mind, it is helpful to separate out three strands of what it means to seek after God:

A. TO SEEK AFTER GOD MEANS TO HAVE AN INTIMATE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (63:1).

"O God, You are my God." David knew God in an intimate, personal way. There is a vast difference between knowing about a person and actually knowing that person. You can learn a lot about President. You can read news articles and books on his life. You can learn all about his personality, his personal habits, and his family life. But it is still not the same as knowing him personally.

To know the President personally would require an introduction or occasion to meet, and then spending hours with him over a long period of time in many situations. As the relationship developed you would

begin to discover more and more about the man, not from an academic standpoint, but as a close friend.

That's how it must be with God, if you want to seek Him. There must have been a time when you met Him personally through Jesus Christ. Jesus said (John 17:3), "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent." Your introduction to God comes when you turn from your sin to God and trust in Jesus Christ and His death on your behalf. He gives you eternal life as His free gift.

And then you must develop your relationship by spending time with your new Friend through the weeks and months and years in a variety of situations. "Seeking after God" means that you are seeking to develop an intimate relationship with the God whom you have met personally through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. TO SEEK AFTER GOD MEANS ALWAYS TO DESIRE MORE OF HIM (63:1).

David said, "I shall seek you earnestly; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh yearns 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 in the desert craves for water.

The word translated "seek earnestly" is related etymologically 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."

To seek after God means that there is always more, because God is an infinite person. If you figure that you've reached a level of maturity in your Christian life where you can put it in neutral and coast, you're in trouble! David had walked with God for years, but he thirsted for more.

C. TO SEEK AFTER GOD MEANS TO PURSUE GOD ALONE TO FILL THE VACUUM IN YOUR LIFE.

David has fled from the throne. He left his possessions and his wives behind him. His own son whom he loved was attempting to kill him. And yet in all of this, David wasn't seeking for any of those things to fill the vacuum in his life. He wasn't praying, "O God, give me my wives back. Give me my palace back. Give me my kingdom back." But rather, he prayed, "I shall seek You"; "my soul thirsts for You"; "my flesh yearns for You"; "Your love is better than life." What amazing statements!

The fact is, it's easy to fill your life with things other than God. They may be good things, but they are not God, and God alone can satisfy your soul. For example, many people fill their lives with family and friends. On Sunday, they usually give God an hour, but He isn't the center of their lives; people are. People are good, and human relationships are a blessing from God. But we should not try to fill the vacuum in our lives with people, but with God.

Others try to fill their lives with possessions or with a successful and satisfying career. Again, those things have their place, but they are not meant to satisfy your soul. God alone can do that. To seek Him means to pursue Him alone to fill that God-shaped vacuum in your life.

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 fill the vacuum in your life.

2. WHAT DOES THE PERSON LOOK LIKE WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD?

A. THE PERSON WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD HAS INNER SATISFACTION (63:5).

"My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness...." He is never complacent, but satisfied. David's soul was at rest. Even in the middle of a calamity such as this rebellion, which would push many to fall apart emotionally, David had inner peace and calm. Just as you feel physically after eating a delicious prime rib dinner, so David felt spiritually after feasting on the Lord. He was satisfied in God.

B. THE PERSON WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD HAS INNER JOY (63:5, 7, 11).

"My mouth offers praises with joyful lips" (63:5b). "In the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy" (63:7b). "But the king will rejoice in God... (63:11). David had a joy not based on circumstances. His whole world was falling apart, but he had the Lord and His loyal love, and so he could sing and rejoice in God. You can't explain that apart from God!

C. THE PERSON WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD HAS INNER STABILITY AND STRENGTH IN CRISIS (63:7-8).

"For You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me." God was David's help. David hid under God's wing as a baby chick hides for protection under the mother hen's wing. God's powerful hand upheld and sustained David. He stayed steady in the storm because he had the inner resource of God's strength.

D. THE PERSON WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD HAS INNER PERSPECTIVE AND BALANCE (63:9-11).

"But those who seek my life to destroy it, will go into the depths of the earth. They will be delivered over to the power of the sword; they will be a prey for jackals [lit.]. But the king will rejoice in God; everyone who swears by Him will glory, for the mouths of those who speak lies will be stopped."

David wasn't consumed with thoughts of getting even. As he considered his circumstances, he realized that God is just; God would judge fairly. The wicked would not prevail in the long run. Thus David could commit the situation to the Lord and act with the right perspective and balance: He would make it his

business to rejoice in God, and let God deal with his enemies and vindicate him. He knew his calling (“king,” 63:11) and that God would not fail to accomplish all that concerned him (Ps. 57:2).

The point is, the person who seeks after God will be a person of strength and stability, a person with inner resources to meet every crisis in life.

3. HOW DOES A PERSON SEEK AFTER GOD?

A. YOU SEEK GOD BY PUTTING LOVE FOR GOD AT THE CENTER OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM.

God’s lovingkindness (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” points to loyalty related to affection. It’s the same word used in Genesis 2:24, where it says that a man will “cleave” to his wife. It is used to describe Ruth clinging to her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:14). She didn’t want to part from her (see also, 1 Kings 11:2; Gen. 34:3; 2 Sam. 20:2). 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, and even your church involvement—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 life, should come before your love relationship with God.

B. 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. There is a determination here: “I shall seek you earnestly” (63:1b). “My lips will praise You” (63:3b). “So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name” (63:4). “My soul clings to You” (63:8a). David made it a priority to spend time alone with God.

We all make time to do what we really want to do. For example: A young man in college who is working and carrying a full load of classes. 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 beautiful creature.

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

C. 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 isn't just a slice of life, who rounds out your other pursuits. Rather, God permeates every area of your life. He's at the center of every decision you make. He's the Lord of every relationship you have. You manage your money by considering what His Word says about it. There is no area of your life, be it your business, your family, your 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 were temporarily squeezed out of the picture. But David is "following hard after God," as the old King James Version puts verse 8. God was at the center of David's present and his future. No area was off limits to God.