

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

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Psalm 63 — Distress and Desire in the Desert

1.0 Introducing Psalm 63

- David spent a good deal of time in the Judean wilderness.
 - ✓ Fleeing from Saul: 1 Samuel 23:14, 24; 24:1; 25:1.
 - ✓ Fleeing from Absalom: 2 Samuel 15:28.
- Although his situation has afflicted David with distress, exhaustion, and thirst, his greatest concern is his sense of distance from God.
- Theme: God's steadfast, loyal love is "better than life" (v. 3).

2.0 Reading Psalm 63 (NAU)

63:1 A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.

O God, You are my God;
I shall seek You earnestly;
My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You,
In a dry and weary land where there is no water.

63:2 Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary,
To see Your power and Your glory.

63:3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,
My lips will praise You.

63:4 So I will bless You as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands in Your name.

63:5 **My soul is satisfied** as with marrow and fatness,
And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips.

63:6 When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the night watches,

63:7 For You have been my help,
And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy.

- 63:8** My soul clings to You;
Your right hand upholds me.
- 63:9** But those who seek **my life** to destroy it,
Will go into the depths of the earth.
- 63:10** They will be delivered over to the power of the sword;
They will be a prey for foxes.
- 63:11** 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.
- For the choir director.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 63

3.1 Outline

- I. The Craving Soul (vv. 1-4)
- II. The Contented Soul (vv. 5-7)
- III. The Clinging Soul (vv. 8-11)

Or,

- I. God My Desire (vv. 1-4)
- II. God My Delight (vv. 5-7)
- III. God My Defence (vv. 8-11)



— Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 224-26.

3.2 Notes

- **v. 1** “seek You earnestly”
 - This verb is found in Psalms only here and at 78:34.
 - ✓ The meaning involves a reflective search for God for the purpose of wisdom in one’s own life.
 - In some translations (e.g., NKJV, “Early will I seek You”) give the idea of rising early in the morning.
 - ✓ The ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) translates the verb as “I rise early in the morning.”
 - ✓ The Early Church began the singing of Psalms with the reciting of Psalm 63.
 - ✓ David may be using a play on words in order to contrast with his nighttime reflections (v. 6).
- **v. 1** “My soul thirsts for You”
 - See Psalm 42:1-2.
 - Compare John 7:37; Revelation 22:17.
- **v. 1** “My soul . . . my flesh”

- This is a merism that refers to the total being of David. Equivalent of the English idiom “body and soul.”
- **v. 2** “I have seen You”
 - David could be referring to visions of the divine Presence in the sanctuary (see Psalm 27:4).
 - God’s glory and power were revealed in the sanctuary and the ark of the covenant (Psalms 78:60-61; 96:6; 132:8).
 - See 2 Samuel 15:25.
- **v. 4** “lift up my hands”
 - “Verbs of praise dominate these verses . . . The psalmist’s praise is no hidden or silent prayer but a public display that involves spoken testimony, physical gestures (‘lift the hands’), and joyous singing (‘my singing lips’).” — Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 891.
 - See Psalm 28:2 and 1 Timothy 2:8.
- **v. 5** “satisfied as with marrow and fatness”
 - David contrasts the condition of his soul with what it had been before he had begun prayer and contemplation (v. 1).
 - “The phrase is idiomatic and a metaphor for the joy, greatness, and beneficence associated with the love of the Lord (cf. 36:8).” — Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 5:427.
- **v. 6** “the night watches”
 - Guards stood night duty that was changed every four hours (Exodus 14:24; Judges 7:19; 1 Samuel 11:11; Lamentations 2:19).
 - See Psalm 119:148.
- **v. 7** “in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy”
 - See Psalm 61:4.
- **v. 8** “My soul clings to You”
 - See Deuteronomy 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Joshua 23:8.
 - In Genesis 2:25 the same verb is used to describe the close relationship of husband and wife.
- **v. 9** “into the depths of the earth”
 - Compare Psalms 9:17; 55:15; Isaiah 5:14; Ezekiel 32:18, 24-27.
 - This depicts the opposite of the preceding verse.
- **v. 10** “a prey for foxes”
 - Literally, “a portion for jackals.”



- A proper burial will be denied to the wicked—their bodies will be left exposed to carrion-eating jackals.
- **v. 11** “But the king”
 - If David was fleeing from Absalom, he would be praying for himself.
 - ✓ See 2 Samuel 15:25 and compare with verse 2 of this psalm.
 - ✓ Compare Psalm 61:6.

4.0 Singing Psalm 63

Step by Step

O God, You are my God
And I will ever praise You!
O God, You are my God
And I will ever praise You!



I will seek You in the morning,
And I will learn to walk in Your ways.
And step by step You'll lead me,
And I will follow You all of my days.

5.0 Praying Psalm 63

- I desire You—I want to know You better, O God. [v. 1]
- Lord, teach me to sing in the desert. [v. 1]
- Thank You, Lord, for Your unchanging love. [v. 3]
- Father, I rejoice in Your protection. [v. 7]
- Help me to cling to You all the days of my life. [v. 8]



6.0 Applying Psalm 63

- We truly live only when we live for God.
- God's unchanging, faithful love is better than life itself.
- Concentrating on God's faithfulness reduces stress, produces praise.