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.
- 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)


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”
  ■ 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).

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”
- 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”
- 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.

### 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.