

CITY LIFE CHURCH
Steadfastness: A call to dependence for wayward hearts
PSALM 63

In 2011, I was sitting inside a Barnes and Noble in Lubbock, Texas. As I walked through the store, I remember having an eerie feeling that the room seemed darker than usual by the large windows near the front of the bookstore. I looked out the window and all I could see was a brown cloud. This was different than a typical Lubbock brown, I could not even see the sky at this point. I could barely see 5 feet in front of the window and soon, I could not see 5 inches. The National Weather service alert then came on my phone and announced that we were in a Haboob.

For those unfamiliar with this weather pattern, it is probably for good reason as this is more of a natural occurrence in the Sahara and not the plains of West Texas, nor the Hill country. There was no visibility, desolate conditions outside, no driving, no awareness of what was happening.

David finds himself in this thick cloud of desperation. It distorts his view, it consumes his thoughts, he is restless and overcome with fear. Imagine what those Thai boys must have felt, trapped in that cave. Desperation dominates what we see, it consumes our thoughts, and it can deflate our joy. Desperation is present fear without future hope.

This morning we are going to see David's response to desperation. We are going to see how he recognizes desperation, see how he responds with his orientation, and then how he looks forth towards the promise of a greater hope.

Let's pray.

Desperation:

The beginning of this Psalm starts out informing us that David is writing while in the wilderness in Judah which is due south from Jerusalem. He is on the run from his son Absalom. His son at this point in history, in Samuel, is pursuing David to overthrow David's reign and murder his father. We find David in hiding, scared, lonely, and limited time left.

1 O, God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you.

Look at the starkness of this statement. He's appealing to the God of the Universe and the God that he knows well. The word for God here is Elohim. The God who creates, the overall King. Prior to revealing his personal name, YHWH, to Moses, the bible refers to God as simply God, the Creator God. God of the Universe. Now move a comma, you are my God. Why does he use the possessive, "my" God?. Elohim can also be translated as my strength, power, mighty one. This is a statement that God, the creator of the universe is David's strength and solace.

When I was in college, I was studying mass communications as a major. In the program, we had to pass a journalism entrance test that was a review of Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation. It sounds easy, but I was unable to pass after 3 attempts and ended up changing my major.. In my last attempt, I came to San Marcos for an all day testing session, and missed the passing score of 80 by two points. I felt panic wash over me as my mind was racing on how I would graduate, what I would tell my parents, and what I was going to do with my perfectly crafted plan after I graduated. I remember feeling overwhelmed and my girlfriend, now wife, grabbed my shoulders and looked at me in the eyes. She pulled my focus out of the freefall of disappointment and narrowed my focus to her. The situation had not changed but I

was reminded that my despair was not as perilous as I thought. I think David is having a realization in the cave that it is David and God. God has David's attention.

Earnestly I seek you...

Earnestly here has a literal component of seeking out early to diligently look for. This is David at the end of his rope, the walls closing in. David is saying that he knows the God over all and that he is known by him. With that in place, David starts to make the appeal, I need you. I need you to show up or this is game over. Humbly, sincerely, David is seeking God in desperation. He doesn't start with an ask for help out of the gate, he starts with an acknowledgment of who God is. Namely that God is God, creator over the universe and that God cares for David.

Let's pause here. We live in a culture that rewards self dependence, self advancement, and self sustainment. We decide what we want, we work hard to get those things, and with enough focus and determination, we earn those things. Dependency is weak. We don't want to be a burden. We want to be "strong," but are we? Think about when you are in a trial. What is your proclivity? God - I was doing all the right things. How did this happen? Where are you? Why didn't you come through on your part? When we are weak, when we struggle, we are quick to find fault with God, not with ourselves. So when we are strong, it's about us, and when we are weak, it's about us. David challenges the self-focused, self-absorbed perspective by immediately, earnestly, seeking God. Do you?

My Soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you; as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

As in a dry and weary land seems assumed as David is in the desert. David is making more than a factual statement of life in the desert, he is unpacking his dependence on God while in desperation.

Soul, comes from the word Nephesh. This word is often translated as Soul and we often carry the connotation of this ghostly figure of yourself that passes on when you die. The Hebrew understanding of this word is more like the living essence. It is what makes us alive. This is a statement on God's presence near his soul. David is pointing out the fact that God is the source of his life. Without God, there is no David. Not only in the sense that if God does not intervene Absalom will murder him; but there is an acknowledgement even more fundamental that God, the Creator of all things, sustains all things including David.

He continues my flesh faints for you. David is famished, panting for God in desperation. This statement of flesh fainting is about God's physical intervention in this situation. God is not simply presiding over the universe, He is active within our lives.

Orientation:

In verse two, David shifts his orientation

2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

3 Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.

4 So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands

I love the start of this with the word so. David is continuing the assumption, the realization of God's presence and his intervention in this moment. I will look to you. I will look through the storm to see God's presence. His orientation is no longer desperation with himself at the center, it is the sanctuary, the place where God dwelt in Israel. His earnest desire and comfort was God's presence. I have looked continues with the logic that David knows that God is God

over all. Secondly that God knows and sustains David. How does he know this? He's seen it, he knows where God has moved, remember the panting of his soul? He has experienced it. Where have you been made aware of his presence and seen him move? What are evidences of His grace for you, your family, and those in your community?

This Summer has been a wild ride to say the least. My grandmother passed away, my parents moved out of state, and I found myself unemployed after a round of layoffs. Each of these changes have lasting effects and I found myself without significant ties to the town that I grew up in, a further distance from my parents, and the fear of how I would provide for my family. In all of the change though, I can confidently tell you that the Lord's mercy was so evident. At my grandmother's funeral, I was reminded that it was her presence in raising me that I saw a daily model for faith and her faithfulness in bringing me to our local First Baptist Church. This brought strong men and women into my life that loved me and showed me the true God overall and his love for me in Jesus. It was a move with my parents that has reminded me the importance of being intentional in relationship. And thankfully in God's timing, I'm in a new role and another opportunity.

My ability to do the right things, try to out maneuver suffering, or to be honest avoid pain were not my solace. It was the Lord's presence and guidance that has carried me and our family through a season of change at every corner. Plain and simple, we are like David relying on God's very breath, provision, grace, and mercy to sustain us.

Perhaps this morning, you are familiar with common grace from the God who is over all. This is the grace and mechanism that we enjoy the things of God by nature of just living in his creation. We see a beautiful lake outside, we taste good food and coffee, we share laughs with a close friend. It doesn't take long or much effort to see the beauty around us.

David acknowledges God's common grace and takes it further by discussing revealed grace for those with a relationship with God. "I have looked upon you." I intimately know your goodness, not just of it. St. Augustine writes of this "God's love of us is good because God seeks and desires us for his own sake, because God knows that there is nothing better for us than himself."

Your steadfast love is better than life. What a statement! The word steadfast means resolutely or dutifully firm and unwavering. God's love for David, God's love for us through Jesus, upheld through His spirit is unwavering. Not less in trial and more in success. Steadfastness is not temporary, it does not fluctuate in intensity, it does not allude us until we get this right. This is God holding and keeping us.

This leads David to his response to all of these things in v.4.

4 - So I will bless you for the rest of my life and in your name I will raise my hands.

So - with all of this said, I will bless you. Bless here has the notion of acknowledgement from the soul that God is good. You could think of this in terms of resolution. I resolve that God is God, He is over all things, As a result I am under his sovereignty, his dominion, He is objectively good to all, and he is specifically kind. We see this beautifully explained in Psalm 139 v8-11: "If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me."

5-8 looks at the implications of a life lived in the awareness and trust of our dependence on God. Notice the transition, David's soul goes from fainting to full. On the cusp of death to delight. Notice David isn't looking for a morsel or taste of God, David is overwhelmed and savoring God's goodness and love for David.

The word for rich food takes on the idea of the choicest of meats. Let's use the choice meat of Austin, brisket. Now I realize everyone has a preference for their favorite Brisket in Austin. My favorite brisket is from Micklethwait Craft Meats off Rosewood. They are meticulous on how long the meat cooks for, what seasoning is added, when the seasoning is added, what sides are paired with the brisket, what cuts go best with each side. When executed well, we end up with the meat sweats. Peak brisket enjoyment.

I think David has this in mind when he uses the analogy of God's goodness to the satisfaction of rich foods. Our satisfaction is found when we know that God is good not just through joy and success, but we know that He is good also when we are in desperation. The richness of his goodness when tasted keeps us coming back for more and our affections see anything short of this richness as lacking.

As the summer is upon us and many of us are getting time to slow down and reflect; where do you find yourself turning to recharge? Where are you going to find rest? Do you find yourself constantly needing to check out for social scrolling and staying unsatisfied? Maybe it's that you work more hours in the hopes that your recognition will come and you will get the affirmation that you are craving. David points out that that true sustainment and satisfaction come from the same constant God through all times. Would you come and feast on what can truly satisfy?

One way to do this is to become more acquainted with God's presence, to enter the sanctuary so to speak. I just finished Reading the Bible Supernaturally by John Piper and it's an incredible call of savoring God's presence from His word. Do it with a fight club with the aim of beholding his power and his glory.

6-8 My mouth will praise you with joyful lips and mediation day and night.

David is saying that a life captivated by God is observing his presence and banking on his promises. David is consumed while he is awake, at rest, and even restless. Joyful here carries the connotation of a full, deep throated yell and praise brings the idea of murmured prayers. From breaking the backboard breaking hanging on the rim highs to lows where there are no words. Abiding confidence and assurance is lavishly given, fundamentally holding us, and resting on God's promises.

How do we live this life of resolve through all seasons of life?

David helps us see the promise of trusting in God.

V-7-8: for you have been my help,

and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

8 My soul clings to you;

your right hand upholds me.

In short, we do not shift our affections towards God. He first captures them and then we respond. We see this in a powerful phrase of in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. David is calling on the description of the Arc of the Covenant. This was the literal symbol of God's faithfulness to Israel throughout the Old Testament. On top of the arc was the mercy seat, the place where God would meet the priests who were sacrificing and interceding on behalf of Israel.

On either side of the mercy seat, there were two winged angelic creatures called Cherubim. David is packing a lot in this tiny phrase that His resolve through the seasons of life was under the wings of the mercy seat. David was able to have a relationship with God because of the sacrifices made and the blood on the wings themselves. The wings would have blood from the sacrifices from the priests made on behalf of the people, like David, for their sins. Malachi

even extends this analogy by describing the wings of these cherubims like the sun's rays for how wide these wings would shelter Israel and through Jesus all nations.

For us on this side of redemptive history, Jesus, is the fulfillment of David's hope in Psalm 63. He is the better David, the King who would not and will not fail. He would be the better sacrifice for all of humanity, by living a perfect and faithful life to be the spotless lamb, to bear the weight of all sin and shame on the cross, conquering the death that we all deserve before a righteous God, and in victory rising from the grave to secure our hope of life with God. We soar beneath his wings of mercy. You see in Jesus, our relationship with the God of David is possible not through our righteousness or our ability to make ourselves good enough or less needy.

A Promise:

V-9: But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;
10 they shall be given over to the power of the sword;
they shall be a portion for jackals.
11 But the king shall rejoice in God;
all who swear by him shall exult,
for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

It seems disconnected from the rest of the passage. Let's unpack. We see a promise that those pursuing David's life for the sake of murdering David would meet their end by the same sword. This is that they would be hunted and killed by others. This is a warning that those living their lives outside of God, running away from His goodness, and relying on their own power will not find ultimate life or rest. They are a portion for the jackals. The dust of the ground and separated from God. The hope in this passage though isn't focused on the destruction of his enemies.

Notice the promise, the King shall rejoice in God. God will have victory, his love will conquer, he will make all things new. For His glory and our good. David leaves us with a promise that those who rejoice in God and swear by him - or you could alternatively say live in the reality of who God is and what He has done - will find ultimate rest and life.

Response:

Trials and the seasons of life will show us how we respond to desperation and ultimately show our true loves, affections, and the hope that we are seeking. If we are trying to avoid our dependency, we will continue to lose hope when trials come and desperation sets in.. Our fixation will be on the pain of the trial and we'll have frailty without hope. A hope outside of God, a life of true independence, and self reliance is a lie and a path to death.

True hope, life, and assurance through all times, rests in a God who defeated sin for all and forever. This same God delights in us specifically and upholds us with his right hand. Would you run to Him with all of your might, in all of your brokenness and mess, and delight in the Father who is renewing all things even us.