

Turning Life's *Desert* Into *Dessert*: Or  
How To Avoid The Game of Trivial Pursuit  
Psalm 63

Our English word for worship comes from an old English word that literally means “worth-ship.” It speaks of more than posture or the outward acts we might associate with worship. It reflects what we *value*, what we consider most *precious*. That definition expands the definition of worship considerably. And if it is a valid definition, it helps us understand how *life* itself becomes a never-ending act of worship.

God made us to place ultimate value on Him. And that is how Adam and Eve functioned—until the day the Serpent slithered into the Garden of Eden and helped to distort man's values.

**Illustration:** I once heard about a prankster who broke into an expensive department store (like Sak's Fifth Avenue) and vandalized the store in a very subtle way. He didn't damage the merchandise. He didn't take a can of spray paint go throughout the store painting graffiti. All he did was rearrange the price tags on all the merchandise. So when customers came in the next day, they found underwear and socks that cost hundreds of dollars and expensive suits and fur coats for \$25.00!!

That is exactly what Satan did in the Garden. He changed all the price tags. He caused man to *devalue* the Creator and to transfer ultimate value to the Creation. Ever since Adam and Eve made this decision, worship has been turned upside down. **Read Romans 1:21-24:**

*21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.*

Notice that immorality and sexual impurity *begins* with the *devaluing* of God. It is not the cause of God's judgment, but rather is in itself a form of divine judgment! Why? Because you always become like the object of your own worship. In worshipping animals, they began to behave like animals.

Well how did God respond to man's fateful choice? In Genesis 3, He embarked on a policy of spiritual “*deflation*”. *He devalued the created order. How did He do that? Listen to Paul in Romans 8:20: For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it....*” He devalued the created order by turning paradise into a desert. Specifically by putting *pain* into family life and *thorns and thistles* into the workplace. That pretty much covers the world of our domain, doesn't it? But He didn't do this impulsively because He wanted to get even with us for our sin—but rather to cause us to value *Him* once again and make *Him* the treasure of our heart.

This is what salvation is designed to accomplish in our lives: *to return our distorted value system to a right estimation of what is precious*—of what really matters. Salvation is not about merely escaping God’s judgment. It’s about regaining an accurate understanding of the infinite value of our Creator/Redeemer God. With that in mind, I want you to turn to a psalm that shows us how to value the Living God—even in (or should I say especially in) the middle of the desert of a sin-cursed world.

Read Psalm 63.

This psalm—like no other psalm exposes for us the heart of a man who was known as “the man after God’s own heart.” As Derek Kidner noted in his commentary on the Psalms: “There may be other psalms that equal this outpouring of devotion; few if any surpass it.” In it, David shows us how to take the great truths about God and use them to “turn life’s *desert* into *dessert*.”

As we look at this psalm, we see that David is on the run *from an enemy (as was often the case)*. But not as a young man facing the jealousy of a sitting King named Saul. This time, *he* is the King fleeing his own palace because of an angry, estranged son named Absalom. At an age when he would have most desired the glory and relative comforts of a royal palace, David is forced to seek seclusion in the hot, arid, Judean desert. No fine dining. Only scrubby brush. No lofty throne. Just hot sand beneath his feet and between his toes. No admiring crowds. Only the sounds of silence occasionally interrupted by the piercing cries of hungry but patient buzzards. No bed of ease or comfort. Only the bare floor of a Judean cave. It is a place of Desolation. Of loneliness.

**Question:** How do you think David must have felt? How can *you* deal with the harshness of living in a sin-cursed world? You can try to change the climate. And that can seem to work for awhile if you are fortunate enough to have the means to do it. But we’re only a hurricane or a terrorist attack or a stock market crash away from the desert.

Or you can focus on the One who is in control of the climate. That is what David shows us how to do that in this psalm. There are at least four important truths from this text that I want you to consider this morning:

I. You were created with *powerful* desires (1).

We are creatures of desire. We were made to passionately pursue life. Look at the expressions David uses in verse 1. Desire or lust has it sometimes translated is not necessarily bad. In fact, here the words are used in an obviously good sense:

A. To seek intensely—“*earnestly I seek you*”

Two possible meanings of this term. KJV translates it, “seek early.” The idea being the first thing you do when you get out of bed. The NIV translates it “seek earnestly.” But the ideas are actually pretty close—

because that which is most *important* will be that which you seek *first*. You and I were made to be seekers of something *outside ourselves*.

B. To thirst intensely—“my soul *thirsts* for you”

This phrase is easy enough to imagine. David is in the desert on a hot, dry day. He is weak and worn out due to a lack of water. This isn't just a simple case of *dry mouth*. This is a deep down thirst that is screaming for satisfaction—or eventually death will ensue. This is the sort of thirst that leads to desperate acts—like men fighting over a canteen or people desperately digging in the sand, vainly hoping to find anything they can to quench their insane thirst. David, of course, uses this as a metaphor for the thirst of his own heart. You and I were made to thirst *for something greater than this life*.

C. To crave intensely —“my body *longs* for you”

Ever crave something so badly that you actually experience a sensation in your body? Like a craving for a T-bone steak. Or Haagen-Daz ice cream. Or fresh-picked Michigan strawberries. And it doesn't even have to be for food. The world is constantly manipulating our cravings for all kinds of things: cars, clothes, electronics, sex—you name it.

(Illustration: Man at Tiger's game who won a new Chevy Cobalt with shiny magnesium wheels).

Why do you think they are able to manipulate our desires so well? Because they understand that an essential part of our humanity is our capacity to “*want!*” That capacity was put there by God. *He* made us to desire.

But what was His purpose in giving us this capacity to crave or desire something outside ourselves?

II. Your desires were meant to find their ultimate satisfaction in God.

A. In His person (1) “You are my God.”

This is the most incredible phrase in any language! Charles Spurgeon once asked: “Can *angels* say more?” This phrase is really the heart of the psalm—for it reflects a conviction that goes all the way back to the covenant promise that God made with Israel through Moses: “I will be your God” (Exodus 6:7). Centuries later, Jesus told the Sadducees that this God is *forever* the God of His people. Today, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you can say no less than Moses or David: “You are *my* God.”

Now this might not mean all that much to you when you are living in your present comforts—artificially insulated from the desert. But when God in

His mercy takes you to the desert, you begin to see just how precious this phrase is. You begin to see that all the things you delight in and look forward to are mere imposters.

Let's do a little comparing. How many of you can get excited about that new car? A new house? A trip to a far away, exotic place? A new toy—like a jet ski or a computer or a new Home Theatre system. Or maybe tickets to a Red Wing's game? But what are those things to you when you are in the desert? When the doctor tells you that you have six months to live? When your spouse walks out on you? Or your kids break your heart. Or what do you do when all those pleasures disappear?

But if you have Christ—you can say: **You** are my God. You are my Rock that provides streams in the desert. You are my fortress against which no enemy can defeat me—not even the most formidable foe of all—death! God, You are *life* to me. All these other things were never meant to be more than tokens of your love to me—Fruit trees to be admired in your garden—but never meant to take your place. You alone can ultimately satisfy me. *You* are what I *need*. *You* are what I was made to enjoy.

**Illustration:** As most of you know, I am watching my Dad die. Only God knows the outcome of his cancer and the timing of it all. Frankly I never thought that such a day would come. I grew up watching him work hard to provide well for his family. And we enjoyed some things together. We could get really geeked when Kentucky basketball was on TV—especially when they beat IU and Bobby Knight. But now when we talk, we don't have much time for that anymore. What we talk about are the promises of God that have taken on so much more meaning. Basketball is still fun—but not all that pertinent when you are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. But God has never been more precious to him—because grace can turn the desert... into dessert.

**Application:** Can you say that tonight? If so, you have something that the wealthiest man in the world would spend every penny of his fortune to have on his death-bed! But sometimes, it takes the desert to see what you have—or need! This personal God that we can call “*our* God” has so much more to satisfy our parched souls. Look at verse 2. You were made to be satisfied ...

- B. In His power and glory (2) “I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory...”

David recalls happier days when He saw God manifest Himself in the tabernacle.

In OT times, God revealed Himself to His people in the form of the *shekinah* glory cloud. Once He delivered the Israelites from Egypt, He gave them special instructions through Moses on Mt. Sinai for a tent of meeting or tabernacle where He would come and meet with His people on a limited basis. I say *limited* because they as sinful people could not bear the fullness of His holy presence. It would have literally *consumed* them.

And so He condescended to dwell in the tabernacle, specifically in the rear compartment of the tabernacle called the Holy of Holies. And He manifested Himself in a gold-embossed wooden box referred to as the Ark of the Covenant. It was always reassuring to the people of God to have God's *Shekinah* glory dwelling among them. And it was equally devastating when God allowed the Ark to be captured by the Philistines due to the disobedience of Israel and her leaders. That day marked one of the lowest points in Israel's history when she was epitomized by the name given to a grandchild of the HP born that day—*Ichabod*—the glory has departed.

But what a day it was when the glory returned. When God's *Shekinah* **Glory** came back and the ark was returned to Jerusalem. David literally danced with ecstasy before the Lord. Whether David had that memorable day in mind—or the many times that the Lord acted faithfully in His behalf—like when David killed Goliath or defeated his various enemies, we don't know for sure. What we know is that David *knew* God. And He knew Him not only in Jerusalem in the Tabernacle—but he knew Him especially in the solitude of the Judean wilderness.

David's view of God had expanded to the point that *no matter where he went, he was never beyond the presence nor the power of God*. Later he would write in Psalm 139:

*7 Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;  
if I make my bed in the depths, you are  
there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
if I settle on the far side of the sea,  
10 even there your hand will guide me,  
your right hand will hold me fast.*

**Application:** Do you ever think about God's presence? That is an incredibly important truth for the believer. No matter where you are and what you are doing, God is present. I believe this is one of the major components of the fear of the Lord. The continual awareness of His presence. (Example with Joel and Karissa: Would you be doing anything different if Jesus was here right now?) It keeps us from sin. But it also

gives us assurance and confidence. It brought David great peace and comfort in the desert—and it *will* for you.

But that is not all that brought David satisfaction. He especially found satisfaction...

C. In His covenant love (3)

*Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.*

How many things can you think of that are better than life itself? What is so great that to lose it would be worse than forfeiting your very life? This is something that few of us understand. This is a phrase that seems to set David and perhaps the martyrs of Church History apart from the rest. So what is it? God's love. The Hebrew word is hard to nail down. It is the word, *Hesed*, which is translated either lovingkindness or covenant love—depending on the translation. James Boice says that “*it stresses the faithful continuance of God's love.*” Human love is so fluctuating. It fluctuates with circumstances. And because of our own experience with this, we know the vulnerable feeling we have when we sin against God and let him down. Our consciences can rain down accusations upon us. We hurt. We despair. But God's love is not like a weather vane. It isn't spun around by the winds of our sinful or godly decisions. In fact, nothing can separate us from this love as Paul reminds us in Romans 8:38-39:

*38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*No wonder David said: “...your love is better than life....”*

But that is not all. You were made to be satisfied not only with God's person, His presence, and His love, but also...

D. In His help (7)

*Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.*

David uses the figure of a desert dweller—the eagle and her eaglets. The nest was a place of refuge. But even there eaglets were vulnerable to other birds of prey. A nest where the mother eagle was away, hunting might invite the intrusion of falcon or hawk. So an eaglet never felt safer than when it saw the shadow of its mother's wings overhead. As David is in the wilderness, listening for the unwelcome sounds of approaching hoof-beats, he meditates on past deliverances. He not only is secure in God's protection, He is able to rejoice in it! He is so excited that He cannot keep it to Himself. That is the ultimate mark of satisfaction with God—when

you cannot help but tell others about it. Which brings us to the third point....

### III. Your actions reveal what you truly desire.

Your worship is not necessarily measured by what you do on Sunday morning—though that may be a good starting point. True worship is measured by your actions during the week. True worship is revealed not when the bright lights of a service are turned up and the choir is singing and the orchestra is playing and we are aware of our brothers and sisters and visitors watching. True worship is the unsolicited words and actions that flow from your heart. If you don't think so—ask yourself the following questions—all based on David's words here in Psa. 63:

- A. About what do you “brag” most? Whose “praises” do you sing? (3b-4a)
- B. For what do you *long* most? What are your deepest cravings? What gives you the greatest satisfaction when you obtain it—and the greatest anguish when you don't? What five things would you hate the most to lose or give up for the rest of your life? (5)
- C. What occupies your thoughts—when nothing else has to? Toward what do your thoughts drift in times of rest and relaxation? (6)
- D. To what do you cling in times of adversity? (8)
- E. Where is your hope when you face opposition from the world? (9-11)

So here is the bottom line...

### IV. Make God the object of your desires (1)

- A. Pursue a relationship with Him: “You are *my* God.”

How? Turn your knowledge *about* God into the knowledge *of* God by meditating on...

- 1. **His perfections.** One thing I have noticed in Scripture—and that is how God reveals himself through names. Not just *any* name. But the particular name that best fits the need of the situation in which we find ourselves. Abraham and Sarah who are well past child-bearing years? El-Shaddai; Abraham and Isaac—Jehovah-Jireh; My Dad—“The God who raises the dead!” (Read II Cor. 1:8-9).
  - 2. **His promises.** “All things work together for good...” “If any of you lack wisdom, ask God...” “All power is given me in heaven and in earth...”
  - 3. **His providences** (His ways—usually behind the scenes) where he fulfills His promises).
- B. Make your relationship with Him your *first* priority. (Proverbs 8:17—Wisdom personified is speaking—“*those who seek me will find me*”).

### **Conclusion:**

How can we have such a hope? How can we know that God is always with us in the desert, ever fulfilling His promises as we seek Him—even in the most difficult situations as He did with David? Because God has already demonstrated His unfailing covenant-love to us through Jesus Christ. Romans 8:32: “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” God is in the desert. But it is there that He wants to take away all the stuff that entangles our desires and distracts us from His person and His promises so that He can set a banquet before us!