

Thirsty Soul in the shade of God's wings.
Psalm 63

Its been a very hot week ---image of the Psalm with thirst, dry land...sits well. We know again how refreshing it is to put feet in a lake, or the cold ocean...a drink of ice water...shade, and best of all a good rain, like the one we had Friday, Thank God.

As Atlantic Canadians we are not used to that kind of heat, and the experience brings us close to the experience of the desert people of the Bible, who described the experience of God in terms of water, shade and thirst quenched.

How intensely one can long for water one only knows when deprived of it,

how intensely one longs to place once feet in a stream one can only know when all around one is asphalt or dry earth and scorching sun.

Psalmist is expressing a deep longing for God..is it true then also that to express such an intense longing for God one must suffer God -deprivation...?

It would seem so.

The prayer of psalm 63 is attributed to King David, in one of those moments in his life when every bit of life green is shrivelled up. A broken heart over his son, prince Absalom ,who had conspired against the father to get the throne for himself, and an exhausted body as he fled through the Judean desert to territory still loyal to him. Thus comes the strong longing; for connection, for love, for safety; for God.

The difficult things in our life are hard to endure. They can press on the chest like an asthma attack and you can't find space to breathe. In the midst of them it can feel like you set out on a long walk and you underestimated the heat and the distance and with each step you become more dizzy and closer to heatstroke.

Those difficult situations can dry up our faith - or intensify our longing for God - or both, back and forth..

Do you thirst for God?

I do...especially when times are incredibly hard. My heart is with the boys of the Thai football team trapped in a cave and their longing for sunshine, freedom, safety, a good meal and love....

My heart is with the rescue teams from all over the world who are coming together to get these boys out. With them I thirst for rescue...is that not a thirst for God?

My heart is with the children trapped in cages like detention centres in the US and their parents who must be besides themselves with worry whether and when they will be reunited with their children. I long for a change of heart in this harsh and fanatic government- is this not also a longing for God ?

I remember my own longing for healing when I lay trapped in a dark room during the concussion.

I also longed for God in this situation, and longed for spiritual strength and prayer. How it helped, when someone prayed with me.

I longed to be able to go to worship - the prayer, communal singing and scripture would have fed my soul. How similar a situation like this to David's feelings then and those of all who have prayed that psalm with fervour since....

In the tough places of our lives we long for the situation to change, and the difficulties to end. Then, we feel we could sing to the Lord, we would be grateful, we believe.....Because you are my help,

I sing in the shadow of your wings

But, Is that all?

What if the situation does not change for the better? How can there still be comfort in God?

In my experience and in the experience of many, it is precisely here that many words of scripture help in times of deep distress. Even if help is not at hand, words like the ones of this Psalm express our longing and satisfy our longing at the same time because we sense the truth in them, the strength of Hope, the breath of life while we struggle with death.

David, or whoever wrote this Psalm, and the countless women and men who have prayed it since, are expressing love for God in the midst of their difficulty: They remember:

I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.

Even :

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

4 I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.

God's love is sufficient, is all we have in some situations. It is rock solid when everything else around us swims away.

In a situation of despair, have you ever imagined in faith a positive outcome, like the psalmist?

5 "I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you. "

In today's; secular environment many criticize us for using prayers like these, suggesting that we only fool ourselves in looking to God when the only help we can expect is from other people.

But to me, God is in the rescue workers who are trying so hard to get that team out of the cave, and in the one who sacrificed his life to bring supplies to the boys. Expecting help from people and from God is not exclusive!

Neuroscientists say now that every human's brain creates its own reality. When we keep absorbing anxiety and messages of hatred we teach our brain that life is dangerous and our sense of reality becomes one where we are constantly on the defense.

When we pray prayers of trust we teach our brain to trust, and be hopeful and our sense of reality will be transformed for the better.

Modern pop psychology talks a lot about |positive thinking.

Perhaps you do not often think of the Old Testament as of a spiritual source of positive thinking? Yet, the 150 Psalms are full of psychologically healthy prayers. Here is an example of how the Older Testament ,which is often decried, is full of the same Hope that we see embodied in Jesus in the Newer One.

onto pastor Heyn Soo Lin was released last year from a 2 year imprisonment in North Korean labour camp. Here is some of his testimony as given to a national newsnetwork:

Lim said he experienced "overwhelming loneliness" during his time in detention. In the statement, released before he started speaking at the church, he talked about the "difficult moments" he suffered.

"From the first day of my detainment to the day I was released, I ate 2,757 meals in isolation by myself. It was difficult to see when and how the entire ordeal would end," Lim said.

Lim said the hard physical forced labour also took a toll on his body and the first time he went to hospital it was for two months. To keep himself busy, he said he read more than 100 books on North Korea, read the Bible in English and Korean five times, memorized more than 700 Bible verses, and worshipped alone on 130 Sundays.

"While I was labouring, I prayed without ceasing," he said. He said his moments of "discouragement, resentment and grumbling" turned into "courage, joy and thanksgiving."

This was before his release- during his imprisonment.

I do not recommend that you attempt to read the bible 5 times or learn 700 verses by heart, (unless you are imprisoned) but I do want you to remember how important it is for us to become friends and familiar with that biblical poetry that can perhaps save your sanity....

That witness of faith of our forebearers has carried them through crisis after crisis and would carry us....Its no magical recipe....but

The poetry of the Psalm Prayers expresses our need for God – and the beauty is that as we pray them we may feel the grace that God *does indeed* hold us ...The thirsty soul remembers God and trusts God's promises...and our soul thirst is quenched (at least in part) in the act of praise.

Whoever wrote this Psalm in personal difficulty did what poet Rainer Maria Rilke says a poet does:

In' his poem "Oh Say Poet" ...

Oh say, poet, what you do?

I praise.

But what about the deadly and monstrous?

How do you keep going, how do you take it all in?

I praise.

Ahh what a response to the deadly and monstrous. To defeat it with beauty, trust and hope. The praise of God, of life, is like shade for the thirsty soul.

Listen to this version of Psalm 63, written by

Silvia Purdy with the intention of it being suitable for children...

O God, my God, my friend,

I am looking for you, I need to find you!

I need you like I get desperate for a drink on a boiling hot day.

I need you when I am hiding

from people who are trying to hurt me.

Save me from lies, rescue me from danger!

I have seen you sometimes out of the corner of my eye -
you are light and kindness and glory.

I have felt you sometimes in church as love fills the air,
it's great to sing and praise and celebrate!

All my life I will love you,

O God, my God, my friend.

And now you are here, you found me!

You lead me to a party, all my friends waiting for me,
plenty to drink and eat, a feast of my favourite food -

I am full of joy!

And when it is time for bed
I snuggle up with you, like you were soft as soft,
gentle wings over me through the night.

And tomorrow, and every day, I will hold on to you
and you will hold on to me,
O God, my God, my friend.

Or: as it is played by....You Tube Music Video
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sf3-jZPqMA> In the shadow of your
wings Ephrem Feeley
5 min

Find your bible at home and place a dried flower, a sticker or a bookmark in
the page where Pslam 63 is. And, as you become familiar with this psalm
may your thirsty soul rest in the shade of God's wings.

Elisabeth B. Jennings, July 8, 2018