

Small Group Discussion and Prayer – Psalm 63

O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water.

(1)

Read the superscription: *A psalm of David, regarding a time when David was in the wilderness of Judah.* David must have been literally hungry and thirsty when he wrote this psalm in the desolate wilderness of Judea. But he saw in his body's longings a deeper meaning -- his hunger and thirst were signposts to his need for God. That brought a dignity to his cravings; he was more than his belly, he was made for God. Hungry and thirsty in the same wilderness, Jesus did the same thing with his bodily yearnings when he rebuked Satan: "It is written, 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Mt 4:4; Dt 8:3).

Here is a great way to pray: turn your longings and hungers toward God. You may pray that they be removed. But pray also that they become reminders and parables of your need for God. Pain and suffering, frustration and anxiety can become sacramental experiences if you let them lead you to their deeper meaning in God.

That's what the great British preacher W. E. Sangster did when he learned that he had an incurable disease that would lead to progressive, radical muscular atrophy. It started with an uneasiness in his throat and a dragging in his leg, but would eventually take away his voice, his ability to swallow, and finally his breath.

Sangster took his disease as a summons to go deeper spiritually, his radical loss a reminder of his more profound need of God. He begged God, "Let me stay in the struggle, Lord. I don't mind if I can no longer be a general, but give me a regiment to lead." He now had more time for prayer, so he prayed, and organized prayer cells all over England. He wrote articles and books. To those who pitied him, he said, "I'm only in the kindergarten of suffering." *Kindergarten*: the great loss was a time to learn of greater needs.

On Easter morning, just a few weeks before he died, he wrote his daughter: "It is terrible to wake up on Easter morning and have no voice to shout, 'He is risen!' – but it would be still more terrible to have a voice and not want to shout."

Worse things can happen to you than great hunger and thirst, or the loss of speech. The worst is to have no hunger or thirst and no sense of your need for God; to be able to speak, but have no desire to praise him.

- ***Your unfailing love is better than life itself.*** (3)

Think of your hungers and longings. Name each of them and add, filling in the blank, *I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. Your unfailing love is better than _____ itself; how I praise you!* (2,3)

Confess the things you have feasted on that don't satisfy – and can't satisfy your soul. Read Jeremiah 2:13 as a companion to this psalm:

"For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me— the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water

at all!"

- **while liars will be silenced.** (11)

Pray that God would indeed silence liars – all those voices in our culture that denigrate the Fountain and peddle pathetic little cracked cisterns.

Ask God to deepen and focus your hungers and longings on him as your true food and water. Pray to be like Jesus, who said, ""My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work" (John 4:34).