

Finishing the Day Well

Psalm 63

Today we conclude a three-week series from the Psalms, noticing the emphasis on seeking God “all day long.” Instead of seeking and experiencing God infrequently or superficially, the psalmists advocate an ongoing, substantive experience of God through the Scriptures and prayer. Two weeks ago we discussed Psalm 1 and the practice of delighting in the Law of the Lord and meditating on it “day and night” – all day long. Last week we considered Psalm 5, a “morning psalm” in which David expressed his commitment to seeking God in the morning: “In the morning, O Lord, You will hear my voice; In the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch.”

Today we are going to consider Psalm 63 and the habit of meditating upon Scripture/ God at night. This psalm is a case study in “ending the day well.” We aren’t going to find “rules” or “laws” for meditating at night; David provides an example or pattern that we are free to imitate. And we are going to notice how his practice fits into the larger context of seeking God all day long.

A Case Study in Night-time Meditation: Psalm 63

The heading of this psalm is: “A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.” Since David spent extended periods of time in the wilderness on at least two different occasions, we can’t be exactly sure which wilderness experience prompted this psalm. This psalm was either written while David was in the wilderness hiding from King Saul who had been rejected by God (1 Samuel 23) or while he was hiding from his son Absalom (2 Samuel 15). In both cases, he was literally running for his life. He begins with an expression of desire/delight for God.

1 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.

You can probably think of a time when you’re parched – maybe even a bit dehydrated. When you’re that thirsty, nothing else matters much and nothing else will satisfy you except a drink of water. David had that type of longing/yearning for God Himself, and so he sought after God like a thirsty person “in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

I love how David addressed God: “O God, You are my God.” There’s nothing arrogant or possessive in addressing God in this way; he was simply taking God at His word when He promised Abraham’s descendants, “I will be your God” (see Genesis 17:7). David was affirming that he welcomed God having this role in his life. He lived as a person who belonged to God.

In verses 2 through 5 David rehearses how he had “seen” God and experienced His covenant love.

2 Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary,
To see Your power and Your glory.
3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life,
My lips will praise You.
4 So I will bless You as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands in Your name.
5 My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness,
And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips.

David had obviously spent a great amount of time dwelling upon the attributes of God that he had experienced. You get the distinct impression that these attributes of God (such as His power, glory, and lovingkindness) were more than just theological concepts for him. He had experienced them firsthand and had internalized their significance for his life. That's the fruit of meditation – growling over the attributes of God like a lion growling over its prey. Because he had experienced so much satisfaction in God, David expresses a commitment to “bless” God, lift up his hands in God's name, and offer praises with joyful lips. In light of his experience of God, David makes a bold commitment to worship.

Such deep, substantive contemplation of God will form the reservoir for David's night-time meditations. He will draw upon this reservoir when he is alone with God at night. The same thing can be true for us. Experiencing God throughout the day provides the raw material for night-time meditation.

In verse 6 David mentions his habit of meditating at night (at bedtime):

6 When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the night watches,
7 For You have been my help,
And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy.
8 My soul clings to You;
Your right hand upholds me.

In the context of Psalm 1 and the psalms as a whole, this is an example of how David delighted in the law of the Lord and meditated “day and night.” Here he mentions that he “remembers” God on his bed and meditates on God “in the night watches.” In Hebrew culture, the night was divided into three four-hour “watches” or periods of time. When David speaks of meditating on God “in the night watches” he is saying that he ponders God's attributes when he is awake during the night. We aren't given details of what David was experiencing, but it's likely that David and his men were in the wilderness because Saul or Absalom wanted to kill them. If you were in that situation, what thoughts would dominate your thinking? Revenge, the unfairness of life, thoughts of giving up? David intentionally set his mind upon God and His protection.

Of course nobody was **making** David meditate on God during the night watches; it wasn't a law that he had to be careful to observe. Rather, he was internally motivated to dwell upon God because he had found God so satisfying and because he was

convinced that his help would come from God. He had a reservoir of experiences and convictions from which to draw. That's what David makes clear in verse 7. He meditated in the night watches . . . "For You have been my help." He didn't forget how good God had been to him that day; his meditation flowed from his experience of God throughout the day. He savored the conviction that God's lovingkindness had been better to him than life.

Psalm 119:148 expresses a similar thought, making clear that such night meditation wasn't a duty but a delight:

148 My eyes anticipate the night watches,
That I may meditate on Your word.

The psalmist looked forward to the peace and quiet of the night watches so that he might focus his attention more fully upon God and His word. Waking up in the middle of the night can be frustrating. If you're like me, you begin thinking about how tired and unproductive you're going to be the next day. But David gives us another option, doesn't he? He experienced rich fellowship with God throughout the night. Again, this night-time meditation fits into the overall pattern of "meditating day and night" on God's word. Instead of frustration, we can remember that seeking God day and night helps us have lives that are stable, fruitful, and satisfying, like the tree planted by streams of water.

In Psalm 16 we get further insight into what happened in David's mind and heart during the night:

7 I will bless the LORD who has counseled me;
Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night.
8 I have set the LORD continually before me;
Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

What David describes in verse 7 would never have happened without the habit David describes in verse 8. David said, "I have set the Lord continually before me." David was in the habit of placing God front and center in his life; this is another way of saying that he meditated "all day long." Because David continually placed the Lord front and center during the day, he found, "Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night." Since his mind was saturated with thoughts of God, it had the capacity to instruct him in the night – telling him whatever he needed to hear. If he was especially discouraged, his mind might instruct him (as the "sons of Korah" in Psalm 42 and 43), "Why are you downcast O my soul? Hope in God, the help of my countenance!"

I think we can all see the value of having minds that can instruct us in the night (or at any other time). Sometimes our minds are a great liability in experiencing God; an untamed, undisciplined mind can lead us away from confidence in God. If your mind is a liability (due to angry, obsessive, anxious, or fearful thoughts), you either have to drown out your thoughts (busyness, alcohol, fantasy, etc.) or renew your mind through the Word and prayer.

When renewed through the Word and prayer (seeking God all day long), our minds can be our greatest asset in experiencing God. That can and should be the case since in the new covenant God has promised to write His law on our hearts. If we allow “the word of Christ to richly dwell within us” we’ll have a reservoir of wisdom that our minds can utilize at the proper time.

Let’s read the last three verses of Psalm 63. I won’t make much comment on these verses other than to say that David is contrasting his own life with those who seek to destroy him. Whereas David clings to God and experiences His protection, those who seek to destroy him (whether Saul or Absalom) will themselves be destroyed:

9 But those who seek my life to destroy it,
Will go into the depths of the earth.
10 They will be delivered over to the power of the sword;
They will be a prey for foxes.
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.

This stark contrast between David and his enemies reflects the two types of people described in Psalm 1. Those who delight in the law of the Lord and meditate “day and night” will be like trees planted by streams of water that yield their fruit in season and whose leaves do not wither; those who mock God and His ways will be like chaff which the wind drives away.

Habits that can help us finish the day well:

Let’s think about the prospect of adopting David’s habit of meditating “in the night watches” or “in bed.” The following ideas/suggestions flow from what we’ve seen in the psalms.

Meditating on Scripture. You can think of this as a bedtime snack if that would help. Generally speaking, you don’t spend an hour preparing a bedtime snack; you just grab something quick that sounds good at the time; you open the fridge and grab a few grapes or whatever. Sometimes we need to go to the Scriptures that way as well. Maybe we need less of an “all or nothing” attitude (“Either I’m spending an undistracted hour of focused time in the Word or I’m not doing anything. . .”). Sometimes two or three minutes of reading/meditation can be very nourishing – especially if the meaning of the passage you’re reading is apparent.

Again, this isn’t a “have to”; we’re not piling on more obligations. Rather, we’re seeking to experiencing a God whose lovingkindness is better than life, more satisfying than anything else.

The past couple of months I’ve spent as much time in 1 Corinthians 4 as in any other passage. Paul had his critics in Corinth who questioned his authority and his motives. In essence they were judging him. Paul writes that “it is a very small thing that I may be examined/judged by you, or by any human court” (v. 3). “In fact,” Paul writes, “I do not

even examine myself,” (v. 4). Then he writes that having a clean conscience doesn’t mean that he’s innocent; his conscience wasn’t infallible. He concludes that “the one who examines me is the Lord.” This doesn’t mean we ignore what others think or what our own consciences tell us. Rather it means that we care most about what God thinks about us - something that will be fully known only at the return of Christ.

The truths in this passage have come back to me many times lately, especially at night. I can tend to obsess about what others think about me. I don’t have to dwell on what I think **others** think about me or on what **I** think about me; we might both be wrong! This passage pushes me to think about what God might think about me. I try to have a clean conscience, but ultimately I am at the mercy of God (who is **incredibly** merciful). I commend taking a few minutes at the end of the day to think about a specific Scripture.

Remembering God. In 63:6 David mentioned that he “remembered God” when he was lying on his bed. Specifically he remembered how God had “been his help.” Luke 17 records that Jesus healed 10 men with leprosy but that only one turned back to thank Him and worship. The implication is that we should take time to notice and thank Jesus for what He has done for us.

One simple exercise is simply to think back over your day and consider how you’ve experienced God that day. You could do this **tonight** actually. Before bed or in bed, think back over the day and ponder, “In what ways have I experienced God today?” Maybe you’ll remember something that’s been said here today; maybe you’ll remember a conversation that you found helpful; maybe God disciplined you in some way. Realize that God is with you and that He is continually at work in your life. Like David, remember Him at night.

Casting all our anxieties upon God. This is from 1 Peter 5:7 which says, “casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.” I find that this is especially important at night. During the day we often stay busy enough to keep our fears and anxieties at bay. But at night they often catch up with us. When you’re lying in bed at night – or when you wake up in the middle of the night – sometimes issues come to mind that make you anxious and that you cannot ignore:

- A conversation you’ve had during the day that wasn’t particularly pleasant. Sometimes I replay a conversation in my mind, imagining that I’d said something different or better.
- An unresolved conflict/issue.
- Guilt over some sin you’ve committed – either in thought or deed. We can run from guilt only so long; it often catches up with us at night.
- Sometimes I find myself thinking about all of the things I have to do the next day; anxiety over tomorrow threatens my sleep and rest.

When such thoughts flood our minds, that’s what we should pray about; that’s the context for crying out, “God, you are my God. . . . You are my help and my Rock. . . You provide everything I need.” You cast your anxiety upon Him over and over, because He cares for you. Many times God will give a type of peace that we cannot even comprehend (Philippians 4).

Praying “Search me, O God, and know my heart. . .” (Psalm 139:23-24) Consider the last two verses of Psalm 139.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me and know my anxious thoughts;
24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
And lead me in the everlasting way.

David wasn't implying that God didn't know what was happening within his heart. If you read the first 22 verses, you'll see that David understood that God already knew him comprehensively. God knew him in his mother's womb; God knew every thought in his mind and every word on his tongue; there was no place where David could hide from God. This is an invitation for God to reveal the contents of his heart and mind to **him**. This was an invitation for God to expose anything in his life that was hurtful or sinful, and then to lead him down a better path.

This prayer is an expression of humility. We are acknowledging that our God knows our hearts and mind better than we do. We are so often deceived about our own heart. In humility we turn to our heavenly Father and ask Him to show us what we don't know about ourselves.

This prayer is also an expression of faith. We wouldn't pray this prayer if we didn't believe that God knows us exhaustively and has the capacity to reveal to us what we need to know. This knowledge can come through meditating on Scripture, through a conversation with a wise, trusted friend, or in a number of other ways.

We take a risk when we pray this type of prayer; God may show us ugly things about ourselves that are painful to see. But the risk is worth it because God is a Father who disciplines us in love so that we might share His holiness (Hebrews 12).

Conclusion. Let me close with this thought: Ending the day well is both a cause and effect. On the one hand, pondering God and His goodness at the end of the day is the **effect** of thinking on God all day long. On the other hand, dwelling on God at the end of the day can **cause** us to experience God more fully the following day; it can be a stimulus for meditation when you get up the next day.