

My Soul Thirsts for You

Psalm 63

Rev Dr Jos M. Strengholt

I guess you know Murphy's Law. And if you do not know the law, you know the reality. Murphy's Law says: "If anything can go wrong, it will go wrong."

Is that not what we often experience in daily life? Troubles seem to pop up all the time.

The Psalm we have read together speaks of King David in times of troubles. It is amazing how a prayer of 3000 years ago, can still speak to us and be meaningful for us.

King David was in deep troubles. He had to escape from his own son, Absalom, who had staged a coupe d'etat against him. He had to escape to the desert, east of Jerusalem, to not be murdered.

Our circumstances are very different. But if we try to enter into the mind, the heart, the feelings, of King David, we learn how God can also help us in times when Murphy's Law strikes us again.

1. Staring into the abyss

Sometimes we are at our wits, surrounded by so much trouble, and sometimes more than one thing at the same time. It may feel as if we are taken by the throat.

As if, in the words of the Psalm, we are in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

What are the threats you are confronted with?

King David was persecuted by his own son, and was hiding in the wilderness. He had been a successful king, with a fine family - and now he had lost his house, his work, his access to the tabernacle, he had lost his family.

That is devastating.

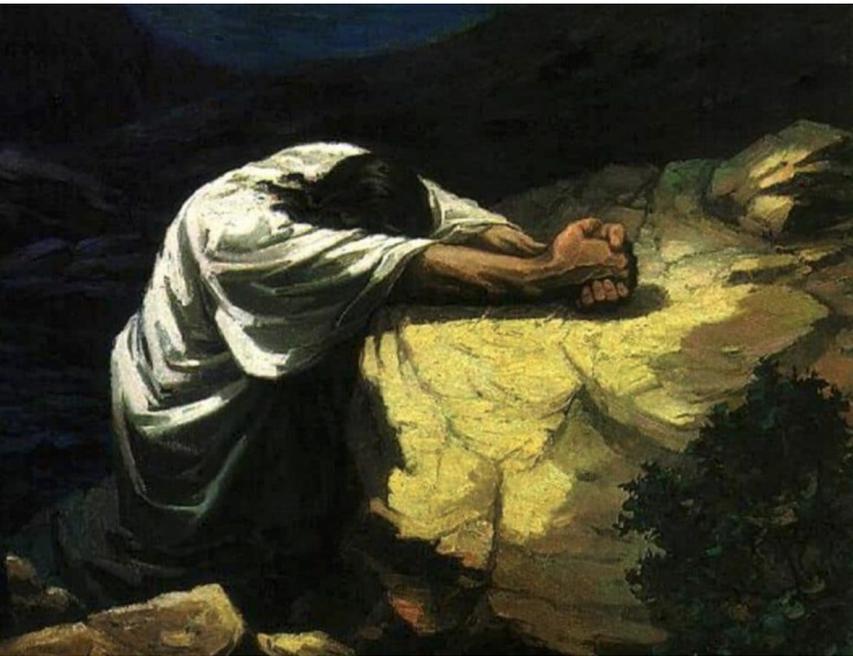
These beautiful prayers of David can be a bit deceiving; they are so full of trust in God, they are so uplifting, and if we are not careful, we would think that to struggle with our problems is a sign of unbelief. Or that we are not spiritual enough or so.



Think of King David, escaping in haste from his house, from Jerusalem, escaping into the desert. How many days, weeks, did he feel depressed? He wondered. 'where is God?' He asked himself, maybe, what he had done wrong.

Did I not raise my son Absalom well? Why did I not see this come? What is wrong with me? Why does God not help me, and bless me?

It is very normal to go through periods of darkness in our heart and our mind. Only people with very shallow brains and with a very shallow heart can avoid this, I think.



Like David, our Lord Jesus Christ was in the desert. For 40 days and nights actually.

Especially those times when our circumstances are not great, it is tempting to become so focused on our problems, to hold them so close to our eyes, that we lose track of all other things - and that we lose sight of the presence of God, our Father.

Jesus' biggest temptation came very shortly before he was crucified, the night before, in the Garden of Gethsemane.

That garden was green, full of trees, truly beautiful. But for Jesus it was his driest desert. He begged God to save him from the most awful things that were to unfold in the hours that were ahead of him.

Hematidrosis. That is the medical name for sweating blood. I looked it up. Blood usually oozes from the forehead and other skin surfaces. This can occur under conditions of extreme physical or emotional stress.

Because of his circumstances Jesus was extremely stressed. And this tells you, that if you are very stressed out by your problems, that's okay. It is not sinful and it does not show a lack of faith in God.

But the question is, what to do in such times. If you go through a time of agony, follow the example of David and of Jesus. They did not forget God, but they turned to God.

2. Staring at God

David reminded himself that God had been his help in the past. "You have been my help". When you are really pressed down, it helps to force yourself to think of better days, and how you in those days experienced the presence of God. His help. His support.

And when David was in anguish, even fearing for his life, he expressed to God: “Your steadfast love is better than life.”

In fact, Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, had the same conviction. ‘My Father, whatever happens to me, I do not like it. But I want your will to be done.’ And Jesus knew that in the end, the love of God would be stronger even than death.

Now that is a certainty that does not come easily. It is the result of experiencing the love and presence of God when you are in better days. The good days train us to be prepared for the darker days.

That is why it is so important that we feed ourselves, day in day out, with the knowledge and love of God. And that we train ourselves to remember the many good things that happened to us.

Yes, sure, you may go through tough times. But do you remember the better days? The days of blessings? God was there, and he is with you now, even if all seems dark.

For Jesus, all seemed dark. But in the midst of darkness, when he was sweating blood, he focussed on God. “My Father”, he said to God. People had left him. But God was still there.

And David, he was left by the people he loved, persecuted by his own child. In the midst of this agony, he remembered God, “My God”. Not some sort of power far away. “My God.”

And if you are in such need, and you know that God is your Father, what to do?

Like David, seek him. Thirst for him. Look for him. Cling to him. Do not let go of him. This is an active attitude of prayer and meditation.

In the midst of his desert of problems, David could not sleep, but in his sleepless nights, he would think of God. I need to train myself better in this. I often sleep bad. Not because of worries, but it just happens. Maybe part of the ageing process.

But instead of being busy with my pillow, putting the douvee better, where to put my arm, what time is it, better to think of God. I think that will work better also than counting sheep.

In those quiet desert-like times, meditate on God, on a bible verse, on who he is for you. Your loving Father! Your good shepherd!

Jesus often tried to find quiet space around himself, in nature, by withdrawing to a quiet are, and in the nights, for being with his Father. If he needed it, need it more.

Quiet space with God is good.

But when we are in trouble, when you feel down and out, you may consider, that when Jesus was in problems, he actually asked his disciples to pray with him.

He needed the prayers of his people. As you need the prayers of others when you are not well. Some people by nature, and I am one of them, have a tendency to always keep the turmoil inside and the people away. But that is not always good.

Jesus needed his friends. He asked them a few times to pray with him when in that garden of tears.

And David, yes, he was alone in the desert. So he prayed to God more or less alone, on his bed. But what did he remember? He reminds himself of how he knew God “in the sanctuary.”

It was in the tabernacle that he knew God; there he had learned to know him. Not as a loner, but in the community. And in that community of fellow Christians, that is where we learn to know God and where we find strength.

The idea that it is enough to have a Bible, or that you can know God best in nature, I understand the feeling. Many of us are quite individualistic.

But the truth is, the idea to have a personal Bible is very modern. The first 1500 years of Christianity, people could not have their personal bible, because printing had not been invented. Our fellow Christians in the early church had no bibles.

And the idea that we meet God in nature is great - but when Bible speaks of the summit of nature it points to human beings. You want to meet God in nature? Be with your brothers and sisters in church!



I am not saying to not read your bible, ofcourse not. That is extremely healthy to do. And by all means, enjoy God in a forest or while staring at your guppies in your aquarium. But here, in our small community of believers, here we help each other to know God together and to cope with our hard times.

We need each other.

3. Rejoicing

That memory of meeting with God in the house of God, with all the other believers, gave David the strength to cope with his hardship when alone in the desert.

Just as Jesus needed his disciples around him, even in his loneliest moment.

And what is so wonderful is that in his prayer, David is so joyful. In the midst of his problems - not after they are all solved, he is still in the desert! - in the midst of that, he says that his mouth “will praise you with joyful lips”.

And he trusts that God will protect him as a chicken who takes her chicks under her wings, so “in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.”

David was convinced that God would solve his problems. In his prayer to God he says that “those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth.”

Thereby David expressed his faith that all things would be well again. That he would be reinstated in Jerusalem, with his enemies defeated.

Just as Jesus, even in his agony, even on the cross, knew he would rise from the dead.

The early Church has always seen Psalm 63 as a prayer of David, sure, but even more as a prayer of the great son of David, Jesus himself, who with this prayer instructs his church how to pray. He is our example.

And as the early church believed it was actually Jesus praying in this psalm, they decided it had to be sung every morning as part of morning prayer. Let us seek God early, even before the day begins.

And Jesus is not just our example by his prayers. He is also our redeemer. He, through his suffering and by holding onto God, even in his darkest hour, was able to offer us redemption. That is our ultimate hope.

Conclusion

If in the midst of hardship, we fear, we lack joy, that's normal. But then Jesus teaches us - be mindful and remember your better days. Remember God, how he was with you in the past. And pray to God, with the community of Christians. With the church.

In the church, we learn to know God; in the church we are reminded of God's unrelenting goodness and love for us; in the church we are reminded of the hope we have. That is where people help you and encourage you.

So do not give up, but meet with God's people faithfully. And lift your hands to God, to seek for his help. And if we teach ourselves to do this day by day, we will also be able to seek God and to find him in darker days.

+ Amen.