

All right. Well, it certainly is a privilege to be able to stand in for Pastor Jack tonight and continue to pray. Unfortunately you're only going to get half the study because, you know, it's (Pastor Gerard holds up his arm to demonstrate the difference between his height and Pastor Jack's height) (Laughing) So go ahead and turn in your Bibles to Psalm 63.

You know, when we come together as a church, we are obedient to the Lord, are we not? In the book of Hebrews, it says "do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together....." (Hebrews 10:25). We literally are commanded, as God's people, to continue in this thing that's called the church - the body of Christ - to come together. And when we come together, there are certain components that should happen. One we just experienced - a time of worship and praise to the Lord. The other is what we're about to do now - study God's Word together. But there's another component that I think sometimes we might take a bit for granted; and that's the component of fellowship - of us coming together as brothers and sisters of Christ and being able to bear each other's burdens, to share with one another how things are going in our lives. And you know, we kind of toss that word around a lot, don't we? Fellowship. "We're having fellowship." And it even kind of gets tagged on as a part of a title. It's the men's fellowship, it's the women's fellowship, we'll have a worship fellowship. Let's get together for a fellowship. But what does that really mean, for us to come together that way? Well, the word "fellowship," in the Greek, is the word "*koinonia*," which means to commune together. It's where we get our word communicate, that shared understanding of one person speaking to another. But it also means to have joint participation in something, to have, in a sense, that intimacy because you have those things in common.

I love the culture of the biblical times, even the Old Testament but certainly through the New, because their fellowship almost always involved food. Now that's not why I love it, although it would be a good reason. But what they felt in those days is that if you shared a meal with someone, then you literally are becoming part of one another. That's why it's so significant when you see in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, people inviting someone into their home and giving of their food. Remember when Abraham saw the three visitors come down the road? (Genesis 18) And they stopped there, and the first thing he said was, "Please, stop

and rest. Let me bring some bread for you to be nourished, and we'll kill one of the lambs or a bullock. We'll prepare a meal for you." That wasn't just to feed a stranger. That was to say, "Come into my home, and be part of who I am." That was a big deal.

So I don't think we should ever take fellowship for granted. And what I want to talk about tonight - here in Psalm 63 - is really where fellowship needs to begin: and that is our fellowship with God. Because we can't have fellowship with one another unless it starts with that relationship we have with Him. And why do we have sweet fellowship with God? Because God, in every way, satisfies us. Doesn't He? I mean, if you think about it, He brings that satisfaction into our lives. Because, really, if we're dissatisfied in a relationship, would you think it'd be easy to have fellowship with that person? It'd be kind of strained, wouldn't it? It would be like, "Hello." "Oh, yes, hi." "How are things going?" "Oh, they're fine." "And, please, can I now move on to the next conversation?" You need that place of satisfaction.

Well, as we'll read here David, who wrote this psalm, found his satisfaction in God. And we all can and do and will. I mean, I feel sorry for Mick Jagger. He's been saying it all along, right? "I can't get no....." (satisfaction) Oh, thank you. I was just wondering, am I the only one? (Laughing) As long as he's done that song, he's never given himself an answer, has he? Well, there is one, and we find it right here in front of us. So Psalm 63.

Now to give you a little bit of background, and that's what makes this psalm kind of amazing, is David is going to write about the sweet fellowship - the joy that he can have in fellowship with God. But what's going on here is David, at this point, is really literally running for his life; not from Saul, like in the early days. He's running from his own son because Absalom, his son, has taken the throne. And the background to that was a big mess because one of David's other sons fell in love with one of his half-sisters and wanted to have her and ended up raping her. Well, that was Absalom's blood sister, and he, in turn, killed Amnon. And then that was a big mess, and Absalom goes away for a while, is called back to the city. Absalom starts now kind of wooing the people and drawing them to his own heart, and they start thinking, "You know, Absalom's here for us. David's just kind of always in the palace. He seems to be too busy." And then at one point Absalom kind of goes away for a while, but what he's doing is he's gathering an army. And when word comes that he's coming back, rather than stand and fight his own son, David

decides he's going to flee. And he takes the rest of his family and kind of a handful of supporters, and they literally flee. They run for their lives, away from the palace, away from Jerusalem. And he goes into the Judean desert. There's where he is kind of taking his refuge. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 comes to mind. "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." I know, as we'll read in this psalm, David still has confidence in God. But everything around him was suddenly coming to a crashing halt.

So this is the setting that David is now in, and this is where he now puts pen to paper while he's there out in the wilderness and writes this psalm. Let's look at verse 1 together. "O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water." The first thing that David's going to do is he's going to set his priorities - if he's going to come to this place of, "Look, I need this fellowship with God, I don't want to lose sight of the fact that the LORD is with me, even though I've been driven out of my own city and away from my own kingdom, I know that God is still here with me." So he sets his priorities straight, and really, that very first statement, "O God, You are" what? "my God," David realized that this was personal, that his relationship with God was a personal relationship. Even though he longed to be back in God's house, he knew it was all about God Himself, not the place. It's wonderful when we gather here together as a church, but if we think this is the only place where we can and will meet God, that's a very sad commentary. Because we'll go very, very hungry the rest of the week. But the fact that we realize that God is with us and God is everywhere, and we can check in with Him every moment and any moment of the day, that's what gives us that peace, that's what gives us that confidence because of our fellowship with Him. And David realized that. As a matter of fact, when he was fleeing (it says there in 2 Samuel 15), the priest, Zadok, and one of the Levites, Abiathar, had grabbed the ark of the covenant and took that with them thinking, "David probably will be comforted by having this symbol of God's presence with him." Do you know what David does when he sees it? He says, "No. You take that back quickly. That belongs back there in the tabernacle. Because, for one thing, I trust that God will have me back there at some point. And for another," in a sense, what he was saying is, "I don't need that object to be here with my LORD. God's right here with me."

"O God, You are my God; early will I seek You." I love that. I hope that's your habit - that you seek God early. Because guess what brothers and sisters? If you

don't, unfortunately that gives the devil all kinds of chances to get to you first. Every single morning, when we wake up - even before our feet hit the floor - you're going to do one thing or the other. You're going to feed the flesh, or you're going to feed the spirit. And what a great way to start your day before you even roll over or fall out, whichever it is that you do in the morning, to just take a moment and say, "Lord, here we go into this day together. Will You please walk with me?" To start early, to start that very first conscious kind of moment that you take in the day. Feed your spirit. Ah, your flesh'll get plenty. Don't worry. Keep that fed.

Notice that David had this hunger for God that wasn't just emotional or spiritual. He literally looked at it as physical - in the rest of this verse, "My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. My soul thirsts for you." I love that imagery! Have you ever been thirsty? Every one of us here has been, right? Sometimes extreme, sometimes not so much. But when you're thirsty, that literally obsesses you, doesn't it? I mean, that's all you can think of. Yeah, you can have a conversation with someone or maybe get your work done, but in the back of your mind, all you're thinking is, "Man, I just need to get something to drink." That's what David's talking about here. That's the way his soul was feeling. He was so thirsty for God.

It's kind of like little Johnny who had stayed up a little past his bedtime. But now it's time for bed, so Dad puts him to bed. And not five minutes later, down the hall you hear, "Daaad." "What?" "I'm thirsty. Can I have a drink?" "No. You had plenty of chance. It's time for bed. Lights out." Silence for about five minutes. "Daaad." "What?" "I'm thirsty. Can I get a drink, please?" "No. And if you ask again, I'll come in there and spank you." "Daaad?" "What?" "When you come in and spank me, can you please bring me a drink of water?" (Laughing) That kid's thirsty!

"My soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land." I'm sure that David looked around in this Judean wilderness, this arid place, not a living thing anywhere (we've been in the Judean wilderness - it's barren, it's dry), and he just saw there's nothing here, there's no nourishment. And he thought back to the beautiful gardens in the palace and the green of Jerusalem and the city where God puts His name. And he says, "There's nothing here for me, not whatsoever." You know, it's what the world should be to us. It should just appear to us as a barren place because, indeed, that's what it is.

Well, in the next four verses, verses 2-5, David is now going to, in a sense, tell us how God satisfies his soul. He longs for Him so much. Now here is how God satisfies his soul so that he can have that fellowship with the LORD, but he takes it from the past, the present and the future. First, in verse 2, the past. "So I have looked" (all past tense) "for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory." Notice David's thinking to the past - those days really not that far removed - when he was there in the palace, when he was there right by the tabernacle. The Temple hadn't been built yet. But he could go just anytime he wanted to, to go worship God. He had looked, and it was that past satisfaction that he had with God. And it just drove him to so long for it again.

Well then in verse 3 he talks about the present. "Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You." Verse 4, "Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name." See, those are all present tense. He's talking about what he's doing right now. Remember, David's running for his life. This would be a time when you'd be all kind of downcast and bummed out, right? "Oh, LORD, woe is me. My very own son is trying to kill me and throw me off the throne." But instead, he's saying, "Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You," and that "I'm going to indeed bless You while I live and lift up my hands to Your name." I love that imagery there. I love the pictures that he's painting for us. You know, life is very precious to all of us, isn't it? I know that, as Christians, we look forward to that day when this life will be over, and we'll be catapulted into the next; when we'll shed this corruptible and take on incorruptible; when mortality will be done and immortality will be our reality. And yet, we have an instinctive drive to live, don't we? When our life is threatened or that, especially, of our loved ones, we don't think. There's that knee-jerk reaction to sustain life, absolutely there is, for every one of us. If you're in the water, and you're going down, you're not just going to say, "Well, I'm just going to take in a big gulp of water and get it over with." No. You're going to fight every stroke of the way to stay above where there's breathable air. Right? I mean, if someone approaches you in a dark alley somewhere (not that you should be in a dark alley) and says, "Give me your money or your life," I think we'll give him the money. Right? For our lives? Absolutely!

Kind of unlike those two guys that did get mugged, and the robber said, "Give me your wallets," and they both pulled their wallets out. And just before they did, the one guy pulled a bill out of his wallet and looked at his friend and handed it to him and said, "Here's the twenty I owe you." (Laughing) Got that taken care of at

least. Or that poor snail who was trying to cross the street and got mugged by two turtles. The police finally came and tried to get a statement from the snail, and, "Did you get a good look at the assailant? What did they look like?" And the snail said, "I really can't tell you. It all happened so fast." (Laughing) I apologize ahead of time. When you put the "short" pulpit up, this is what you get. (Laughing and clapping) Oh, don't.....dooooon't.

Let's see if we can reel this back in. In Job 2:4, here's what Satan said. "He answered the LORD and said, 'Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.' " So even the enemy knows life is precious. But what is David saying in verse 3 here? "As precious as my life is, Your lovingkindness is better. I'd rather have that. Your lovingkindness is better to me than my own life." That word "lovingkindness" there is the word "**chesed**." It's a Hebrew word, "**chesed**," which means goodness, kindness, faithfulness. It's that covenant love that God has with us, that faithful continuance of God's love. It never varies. It never shifts, whatsoever. Isn't that amazing, as Christians, that we have confidence in that? That no matter what happens, no matter what we do, God's love does not change. And why does He love us? I don't know. You answer that. I have no idea. No. He loves us because He loves us! He loves us because He's chosen to love us, and we can't do anything to make Him love us more or to have Him love us less. His love is that unconditional. I think Paul put it great, there in Romans 8:38-39, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Everything that we can put our hands on or think about will never ever separate us from God's love.

And even going further (in verse 4) about the present praise and fellowship that David wants to have, this satisfaction that God brings, "Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name." "While I live." God brings that satisfaction to us in our present day - with every breath that we take. Do you guys think that God just breathed into Adam's nostrils and then just kind of left the rest to chance? No! He continually breathes into every human being that He has created. Or a good way to look at it - as I put before - when we inhale, God is exhaling. (Pastor Gerard exhales) That was a "God breath" right there. You know why? Because the moment God decides I don't take that breath, I don't take that breath. He gives us our very life, and, "Thus I will bless You while I live." "While I'm here on this earth," David is saying. "Yes, I'm looking forward to being with

You in heaven, LORD. But while I'm here on this earth, I will continue to bless You and praise You for who You are." And I love the lifting of hands. We do that in this church. You're free to do that. And I really appreciate being able to do that because it means so many different things. We praise the Lord by lifting our hands. We bring supplication, "Oh, Lord!" It's like we're asking, "Please fill us. Answer our prayers." But we're also showing God that we have nothing to offer in and of ourselves, do we? "Lord, this hand here is empty. I can't offer anything more. My only hope is that You would fill, that You would fill this hand. Fill me, fill my life. Bring me to that place, Lord, of fullness in You." And the lifting up of hands - it's that symbol. David lived for God by working for Him, by serving Him, by having that relationship with Him that overflowed into him being king of Israel. It was that give-and-take that he had.

So, the past - satisfaction in the past - verse 2; satisfaction in the present - verses 3 and 4. But also satisfaction in the future, verse 5, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips." "Shall be," notice, "shall praise." It's all future - that, "No matter what's going on right now," is what David's saying, "I'm still going to praise Him." Right? What did Job say? "Though He slay me, yet will I praise Him" (Job 13:15). "If God decides this is the end of my life, the last thing He's going to hear off of my lips is praise to Him." And David is saying that, too. "That time is going to come when I'll be back there." And what a beautiful natural combination of satisfaction from God in song. "My soul shall be satisfied. My mouth shall praise with joyful lips. Having that satisfaction of, notice, "marrow and fatness." Now that's something we may not relate to because we think, okay, marrow - that's a little gross - and fatness - my doctor told me, "Stay away from that stuff!" But in David's day, that was the portion of the kings; that was the delicacy. That was the kind of thing that not everybody was privy to, and now David - that's how he'd looking at it. That's the kind of satisfaction that God is giving, so that it's with "marrow and fatness." Or in our day and age, if you were here earlier, taco salad. (What was served at the church dinner before tonight's message). I don't know about you, but I'm going to be full for probably a day or two. That was an amazing meal. That kind of satisfaction that you feel after you've had that great meal - where all you really want to do (as I do right now) is just sit down somewhere and just nod off. Oh, that was so good. That's what David is saying. That's how he's comparing it. That's the kind of satisfaction he's looking forward to yet in the future; because David trusted God that God would not only satisfy his soul but would sustain him physically. "Give us this day our daily bread," Jesus taught us to pray (Matthew

6:11). Everything we need for today comes from the Father's hand. "Every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father above, from the Father of lights, in whom there is no variation, no shadow of turning" (James 1:17). He is faithful, and He will be. And we can praise Him with joyful lips, that soul that is so welled-up with goodness and satisfaction. It goes beyond simple praise of joy. You know, when you have joy in your life, what is the result? You tend to re-joyce, right? That's not like regurgitate, that's like rejoice! That's like joy upon joy upon joy. And if you can't help but shout it from the rooftops, then maybe you ought to examine how much joy you actually have. And we talk about joy quite a bit, don't we? "You need to have joy, brother. Walk in the joy of the Lord!" Well what is that, really? Because I've heard it said it's not anything to do with happiness because happiness depends on something to happen. But joy goes far beyond it. Do you know the way I look at it for me? For me, joy is the absolute solid assurance that I'm God's child. That's joyful. That brings so much peace and calm to my heart - in the middle of these kinds of circumstances. "Oh, Lord, my mouth shall praise You with joy!" And look at the different ways that David praises God. Verse 2, with the eyes, "So shall I look for You in the sanctuary." Verse 3, with the lips, "My lips shall praise You." Verse 4, with the hands, "I will lift up my hands to Your name." Verse 5, with the mouth, "My mouth shall praise You." In just these four verses, David's involving pretty much his whole body. "I just want to be one massive praise to God because He so satisfies, and because He does, I can have joyful fellowship with Him."

Well, we've looked at God's part of fellowship. What about ours? Well, that comes up in verse 6. "When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me." See, there's our part - our having fellowship with the Lord and with one another. But where does it start for David? It starts with him remembering. Right? It starts with him going to that place of meditating. And when does he do it? "I remember you on my bed." I love that. You know, we talked about starting early in the morning, verse 1. Now David is taking us to the end of the day. What a great way to stop the day, to end the day. As you're there at night, drifting off to sleep, to meditate on and to remember what God has done. Or another way you could put it is literally rehearsing our history with Him. Have you ever done that? Have you ever just laid there, as you're getting ready to sleep, and just think through all of the things that God has done with you and for you? Maybe even starting back at your own conversion, that time when you first fell in love with Him, that time when

you realized that He was forgiving your sins, that you had the hope of heaven, that you have eternity promised to your life. And all of a sudden everything just became new, and you got into God's Word - maybe for the first time. For me it was different because I was raised on God's Word, but it was all a mental exercise for me. And at age 27, when I finally surrendered to the Lord and everything just opened up for me, now I got into His Word, and I could see stuff that I never realized before; that it was relational, that God was literally talking to me through the pages, through the written Word on these pages. His Holy Spirit was quickening that to my heart. It just blew my mind! I couldn't get enough. I had my Bible out at work at lunch and every break I had and literally read through the whole thing in probably about a month. I just couldn't get enough. And it was just coming alive to me in every way. Well now, as I lay down at night, what a blessing to be able to rehearse that history, just to go over it again and again. "When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches."

That word "meditate," there, is to ruminate. That's what a cow does when they chew the cud. Now this might be a little gross, but it's a great analogy. You know when a cow grabs that grass or straw or whatever off the field, she swallows it whole. It just all goes in to one stomach chamber. Then when she's done, all of that intake, she goes off somewhere calm and brings that stuff back up from that one stomach and just begins to chew it over and over. It's called ruminating. And they're literally pressing all of the nutrients out of that grass, and I think that actually passes, maybe, once and again over and over. And that's - when we say "meditate" on God's Word - what we're talking about, just chewing on it over and over to press all of the nourishment out of it that we possibly can. "When I meditate on You in the night watches," through the night.

When we go to sleep at night, there's something interesting that happens. Our conscious brain shifts all of our involuntary muscles over to our subconscious brain - because otherwise we'd stop breathing, and our heart wouldn't tick anymore. So we have to have brain function, but our consciousness needs to shut down so we can sleep. And if you have ever experienced this, you know this happens. Have you ever been drifting off to sleep and all of a sudden you get the jerk? Boom! You know what that is? That's the conscious brain trying to give everything over to the subconscious brain, but the subconscious brain isn't quite ready to take it yet, and the conscious side of the brain panics and grabs everything back real quick; and that's why you jerk. Well, the same thing happens with the thoughts that are in your mind. The conscious thoughts you have get transferred over to your

subconscious thoughts. That's why dreams are always kind of weird because your subconscious isn't linear; it usually isn't logical. And dreams - that's why you can fly in dreams and have conversations with plants and animals and things like (well maybe those are my dreams) (Laughing). So here's what I'm saying. If we're going to sleep meditating on the things of God, and we allow those things to get transferred over, guess what happens when we wake up in the morning? They gently get put right back. Have you ever gone to sleep with a song in your head? It's usually one you don't want to have there, and you wake up in the morning, and that dumb thing is still there? Well that's because it's just been passed back and forth. What a great way to end the day - by literally taking God's Word and the truths of what He has done into the night with you and wake up fresh in the morning with all of those things still there.

Verse 7, "Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice." You see, God helps and covers us, and it doesn't cause us to fret. Rather we rejoice. Again, being so filled with joy. That word "rejoicing" is giving a ringing cry in joy, a ringing cry. I like that. Hey!!!! God loves me! We, as His people, can rejoice. And then I love that picture of being safe there "in the shadow of Your wings." That's what causes the rejoicing. That little chick, that little fledgling bird that just so huddles in the warmth, comfort and security, that rests beneath its mother's wing. You know, when I was young we used to go to Holland almost every other summer. We're all Dutch. My mom just was always homesick, and so, when we were out of school (from usually the entire summer) - back to Holland to visit family. Well, me and my brother got a little bored of hanging out with the old people (of course, I'm one of them now - that's kind of interesting) (Laughing), so we would go to my uncle's farm, and we'd hang out there. And he raised turkeys and allowed them just to free range on his farm. It was an open farm, and they free range there. And they would lay eggs, they would lay fertilized eggs, and we would collect those. They'd get crated and shipped off to England, where they'd be incubated. And they're real into turkey in England, so they would raise the turkeys there and eat them. So we would go out, and my brother and I knew where a lot of the nests were. We went every day, so usually in a nest you'd find one or maybe two eggs. But sometimes these turkeys would go out a little further and be able to kind of keep that nest hidden for a while; and then it was like a jackpot for us because you'd get there, and that turkey would go off the nest, and there'd be eight or twelve eggs there. Oh, that's a bucketful right there. That was great. But we always knew when we approached that nest and a turkey was sitting on it, if any of those eggs had hatched, because she would

not get up. She'd fight you, and they're mean. Turkeys can be mean. I know from firsthand experience. So then we would know, and then we'd go tell uncle, and "Yeah, it looks like one or two of them hatched," and then he'd go over and take care of it, grab the rest of the eggs. But there was that instinctual protection that that turkey hen had for her little ones, and they were just so safe and snuggled there underneath. It's a great place for us to be - in the shadow of God's wings.

And then I love verse 8, "My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me." See, that's our part - to follow close. There's another way you can translate that - is to follow hard after. I think about Ruth when she was there with Naomi, and they were at the border of Israel, and they had already left Moab behind, and it was time now. Naomi was saying, "You girls go back. I have nothing to offer you in Israel." And Orpah, the other daughter-in-law, said, "Yes, I'll go back home to family." But Ruth couldn't bear to be away from her. And this is what Ruth says in chapter 1 verses 14 and 16, "Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And Ruth said: 'Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.' " See, Ruth was going to follow hard after Naomi. She wanted to stay right there with her. And that's what David is talking about. That's our part - not only to remember God as we're going to sleep, to meditate on Him in the night watches, to acknowledge that because of His help for us we want to stay nestled under the shadow of His wings, but also to follow hard after Him.

You know, my son, when he was little, had the habit of doing that. When we'd be going somewhere, he wasand there's an appropriate distance to follow, even for a kid, a pace back or so. But, no. He was right there. He just wanted to be close to dad. And one time, unfortunately, we were at the beach, and I had my arms full; I had a beach chair under one arm and a cooler in the other and carrying towels and everything bulked around, and I'm waddling down in the sand. You know, you already don't have good footing. And my wife, who's behind us, called me, and I turned around, and he was right there. And I took that beach chair and just (Pastor Gerard turns and looks back) - bang! And I looked behind, and I knew from the look on the lady's face who was sitting on the towel - she did one of these (grimace, gritted teeth) (Laughing) - and then I looked down at my son, and you know how kids, a lot of times when they get traumatized they don't cry right away? He was in that in-between state where it hadn't quite sunk in yet. But the look on

his face was, "Why on earth did you do that to me?! I was following hard after you." "But that's the problem, son. You were right there behind me, and I just whapped you with the chair." And of course then it sunk in, and he started wailing. He had this big goose egg on his head, and that was it for the rest of the day. But what a great lesson for both of us - to follow hard after; because, as the leader, I needed to be aware that he was right there, and, as the follower, he should have found every bit of security by being right there behind dad, right there with him in every way.

And then he finishes this little section by saying, "Your right hand upholds me." The right hand is almost always a picture of strength and power, but it's also a picture of favor - favor from the Lord. God's right hand came down to uphold David, and David lived for God by walking with Him, by following close and hard after Him. You know, kind of like those times I remember when I was little, and I was a little guy (well, I know I still am), and around crowds and stuff, it'd be real easy for me to just get swallowed up. So I'd stay close to dad, and he would take my hand and just hang on to me. But there were times when even that was not enough, and he always knew just the right moment when I was starting to panic. When you can't see anything but butts (Laughing), it gets scary. And he always knew when to not hold my hand but take me and put me up on his shoulders and carry me the rest of the way. Now all of a sudden, I was above everything. It was perfect. "Your right hand upholds me."

Well then we have verses 9 and 10. It's kind of, all of a sudden, a quick shift. Look at what it says. "But those who seek my life, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. They shall fall by the sword; they shall be a portion for jackals." Basically what David's saying here is, "Hey, life goes on. Life goes on." You might think that these verses don't fit; they kind of take away from the beautiful picture of praise that we've been presented up to this point. But here's what those verses are intended to do - they're intended to remind us that the world is real, and no matter how close we get to God, no matter how hard we follow after Him, there's still going to be that element out there that wants to destroy, that seeks to destroy our lives. We don't live in never-never land where we don't have to grow up. Life is real. The world is real. And we must be satisfied with God's love right here and now, in the midst of all of the world's disappointments and frustrations and dangers. Yet will I praise Him. "Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You." "Your '*chesed*' that You give to me, Lord, that lovingkindness, that's going to sustain me; even though the world around

me is falling apart and threatening to take me." And David was confident that his enemy, verse 9, would, in the end, go to Sheol, go to the lower parts of the earth. But in verse 10, he really is, in a sense, kind of proclaiming a curse because he anticipated that a battle would, indeed, happen; that they would fall by the sword, that they would be a portion for jackals. He was standing on God's promises. Isaiah 59:19, "So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him." And also Romans 8:31 (we already read something from there). But earlier on Paul said, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" And David proclaims this curse, "They shall be a portion for jackals." He's talking about his countrymen here because those are the ones that are coming after him in reality. Because the worst fate that you could possibly conceive of, as a Hebrew, was that when you died your body would remain unburied, somehow, and a prey to scavenger beasts and birds. That was the worst thing you could possibly imagine. And if you remember, later from this point, during the time of the kings and the kingdom of Israel, Ahab and Jezebel - it was prophesied about their deaths that that's exactly what would happen. As a matter of fact, 1 Kings 21:23, "And concerning Jezebel the LORD also spoke, saying, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.'" That was an incredible fate to have to face. But David realized that that was indeed - when we have satisfaction in God, when our fellowship with Him is sweet, and we realize all that He has done for us, then no matter what the world throws at us, we can be absolutely satisfied and at peace.

And that's why he concludes here with verse 11, "But the king shall rejoice in God; everyone who swears by Him shall glory; but the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped." No matter what the world threw at him, no matter what David was experiencing - remember he's getting this adversity from his own flesh and blood, his own son is coming after him, and yet he's able to say, "But the king shall rejoice in God." "Throw at me what you will. It's not going to change anything." I mean, the smear campaign in Jerusalem against David was pretty intense. But David understood. He understood their fate, and he knew that he, like that little chick, was right under the shadow of that wing, God Almighty.

Praise in the mouth of God's people. It's evidence of Him working on our behalf. It's evidence of our relationship with Him. It's really hard to praise someone you don't respect or that you don't feel has done anything for you. Well, God doesn't need to do anything for us. All He has to do is love us and accept us. That should

be praise enough. Then He goes beyond that, and He works in our lives every day moment by moment. And if that isn't the sweetest fellowship on earth, I don't know what is. Then we can take that fellowship that we have with God and give it to one another. I would encourage you guys - first of all, come early to church. No, really. Come early to church because then you can sit and talk with some of the folks here. You can have fellowship before church even starts. I'll tell you what a blessing is for me is sometimes to sit (because we pray in this back room back here before we come out), and sometimes the fellowship is so loud out here that we literally can hear it in the back. And that blesses my heart to no end. I sit there and just think, "Wow, God's people are ministering to each other." To me, it's the same as the sound that comes off a playground that kids are playing in. You know that feeling, that sound when you hear kids just playing? That's like, "Oh, that is so cool!" And hearing the fellowship of brothers and sisters. So, when we come together, take advantage. Fellowship with one another. And, yeah, catch up with each other. Have small talk. Talk about the things that are happening in your life. But take some time as well, and say, "How are you doing with the Lord? How is your walk? How are things going with you and Jesus? Let me tell you what God did in my life today." And share those testimonies, and build each other up. Take advantage of the fellowship, the "*koinonia*," that we have the opportunity to have with one another. Because, as David concludes, "But the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped," dishonest lives will not find sweet fellowship, not with God or with each other. So be sincere. Be open and vulnerable with one another. And love on each other. Have great, sweet fellowship together.

Let's pray.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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