

# Praising God in the Wilderness

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Date: 29 May 2022

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[ 0 : 00 ] We extend a very warm welcome to you all this morning and those of you who are joining us online as well, welcome to you as well. There are a number of things on the information sheet today that I want to mention. I'm not going to go through them all by any means, there's quite a number of them. There is tea served after the service this morning and that'll be in the hall and everybody's welcome to that, visitors included. If you're a visitor we welcome you and you're welcome to stay for tea, coffee with us as well after the service. The service this evening will be conducted by Mr Scott McLeod. Deacons Court is due to meet tomorrow evening, that'll be in the upper hall in person and that's at 7pm and then on Wednesday after a time of worship we'll have the annual meeting of the congregation and for the annual meeting the statement including the trustees report and financial statement for last year 2021 that will be presented. There is a copy of the statement available today if you want to take one with you in advance. These are available here and also in the seminary. Now at the close of the annual meeting a presentation will be made to

Mr Mortimer McPhail who you remember resigned as treasurer, retired I suppose would be a good word, after more than 19 years of dedicated service. So it'd be great to have a good attendance for the annual meeting but also for that particular presentation as well. And then after that the Kirk Session will meet immediately after that in the upper hall and will be pleased to meet with anyone who wishes to profess their faith and take communion for the first time. And as you know the communion is due next Lord's Day morning at 11am, that'll be here in the church and as was intimated over the last few weeks the procedure will be the same as we had at the last most recent communion. So we'll just go by the same way of carrying out the communion for this time and then for the future we'll assess just how to go ahead.

This is just still part of the recovery from the times of COVID restrictions and spacing and so on which we're no longer required to keep but there will be a space in between each pew that's used for the communion table. And ahead of the communion there'll be services on Saturday evening, a service on Saturday evening and a communion early morning prayer meeting and you can see these intimated there on the 4th and 5th on Saturday and Sunday. And please get in touch with Alistair MacLeod if you are going to join any of these by Zoom. The LDOS annual rally takes place this coming Friday at 7.30, that'll be in the town hall and it'll also include the launching of a new book produced by the branch called Remember the Sabbath Day. And finally there's a book available today called Our Faithful Queen and it's a very well produced and colorful book. It's a very very nice book. It's intended for giving out to people and we're suggesting that if you can take a copy you can please just give it out to those that you may know in the neighborhood or your friends that aren't able to come to church or are able to come to church but don't. In any case use your own initiative but it is for handing out so there's no charge for it. So it's available today for that purpose. It's a book of prayers that the Queen over the years has used. She was given a book of readings and prayers in advance of her coronation all these years ago and she has used that and made statements of her own faith which are included in the book as well. So it's a very useful book to actually give out especially to any that you know would benefit from it. Well these are the only intimations I need to mention. Let's worship

God now. We're singing firstly today from Psalm 30. Psalm number 30 and that's in the Scottish Psalter page 239 the tune is St. Minver verses 1 to 5. And we're reverting back to four singings which we used to have for our services in any case. So again today we're back to having four singings, four items of praise.

Lord I will thee extol for thou hast lifted me on high and over me thou to rejoice made'st not mine enemy. O thou who art the Lord my God I in distress to thee with loud cries lifted up my voice thou hast healed me. And so on down to verse 5 we'll stand to sing. Lord I will thee extol.

[ 4 : 46 ] Lord I will thee extol for thou hast lifted me on high and over me thou to rejoice made'st not mine enemy.

O thou who art the Lord my God I in distress to thee with loud cries lifted up my voice and love hast healed me.

O Lord my soul that hast healed me. O Lord my soul that hast sought out and rescued from the grave.

O Jesus that hastened me inessential tales to thee with luke myself than my rage of our deliverance Would he have gått and completed up with time before his gehad each other? God to die, have life against me save.

O ye that at this holy one, sing grace unto the Lord, and give unto them that praying his holiness record.

[ 6 : 55 ] For God of whom and thus his wrath life in this favor lies.

We being made whole at night and truth and born the joy in our eyes.

Amen. We're now going to call upon the Lord in prayer. Let's join together in prayer. O Lord, our gracious God, we thank you for the many assurances that we have given as we come together to worship you.

We give thanks especially for the assurance that you make us welcome in your presence through the provision you have made for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. We come together today, O Lord, and come to approach you, conscious that he is the way, the truth, and the life, conscious that he is that new and living way which you have opened up into your presence, that we might be able to approach you and find acceptance and a place in your presence and your approval.

We thank you, O Lord, for all that that contains for us today and for the ground that it gives us to be assured of God's own welcome. We pray for faith, O Lord, to come before you, believing that you are God, that you are a rewarder of those who diligently seek you.

[ 8 : 34 ] We thank you today for the faith that you create in the hearts of your people, for the way in which by your Holy Spirit you give us to believe in you, to trust in you, to entrust ourselves to you.

We thank you, Lord, that that faith brings so much into our possession, and yet we do not trust in our faith itself, but in the one who is foundational to it, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and Christ himself as our Savior.

We bless you, Lord, today that we find ourselves addressing you in his name, confident that you have provided all that we need in him through his work on earth, through his continuing intercession in heaven.

Lord, we thank you today for this place of worship. We thank you for this occasion of worship. We thank you for all that you provide for us as means by which we worship you.

We give thanks for your word, and we give thanks for the way that you call us to praise your name through singing your praise. We thank thee for the access we have to you in prayer.

[ 9:42 ] We pray, O Lord, that our access to you in prayer may constantly be in use by us. you call upon us in your word to pray to you continually.

And Lord, although we know we cannot be every second of every day engaged meaningfully in prayer, yet we give thanks for every occasion that we can, and for the way that even as we go about our vocation and work and places in the world, we can address you in prayer and seek your help and give you praise.

we give thanks, O Lord, for all that you have been to us over these past years, especially in this time of COVID pandemic. And Lord, help us, we pray, to continue to give thanks to you for the way that you have watched over us and kept us, for the way that you have continued to guide us and teach us by your word, for the way that you have continued to provide for us in the gospel, the services of worship that we gladly engage in.

And Lord, we ask that this may constantly be in our mind to give thanks to you and to remind ourselves of how easily things can change in your providence, how much we are dependent upon you, how we cannot steer our own course through life successfully.

And if we try to do so, Lord, you make it clear to us that our life is in your hands. We pray today that as we gather in your presence, these realities may indeed be true for each one of us.

[ 11:16 ] We ask for everybody gathered here today and for all who are joining us online. Lord, may your blessing rest upon us. May your Holy Spirit be active in our experience.

May your word be applied to our hearts with power. May we find, O Lord, today that we take it with us and its teaching into all that lies ahead of us, even in this week itself.

We thank you for the blessings that we enjoy in the gospel, the way that you continue to provide for us individually and as a congregation and in our homes and families.

Lord, we pray that your blessing will be extended to us even more as we seek an increase in our own commitment to you and our love for you.

We pray, Lord, that you would continue to fuel our lives by your grace and by the strength of your power. Enable us to proceed and persevere onwards in that life of faith.

[ 12:17 ] Help us, we pray today, to resist all inclinations away from you, every temptation from whatever source, O Lord, that seeks to draw our minds and our lives away from the life that is in you, from the fountain of life that we know is with yourself.

Lord, we ask that you would enable us day by day to continue to persevere in that way of trusting in you and serving you. Bless again, we pray, our children, our young people.

We thank you today for them as they gather in creche and in tweenies and Sunday school. And for those of them, Lord, who are now approaching adulthood, who gather from time to time in Bible class, in youth fellowship, in other ways of joining together and hearing about the things of God.

O Lord, as they are taught and as they learn these things, grant to them that they may be firmly entrenched and established in your ways so that they may continue, Lord, to in their lives engage with you and continue in the teaching they received to follow it through in their practice in our adult life.

Remember, too, today, Lord, those who have gone away from you, those who have strayed away from following you faithfully, those for whom this time of COVID pandemic and restrictions and all of the things associated with that have been so difficult and so challenging, and whose love has grown cold and who today are not found in a place of worship.

[ 13:52 ] Gracious Lord, be merciful to them, whether belonging to this congregation or others. We know how devastating this time has been for some. We know how some have lost their relish, how some have even turned away from following you altogether.

O Lord, our God, be pleased, we pray, to bless them, to recover them, to reach out to them, O Lord, and take them back and graciously work in our midst, in our communities, to bring others who may have never before thought about you, but whose minds have been upon these eternal issues during this providence.

Grant that you would bless that to them. We pray for those who lead us in our nation, and as we lament, O Lord, the evidences we find of departure from your values and your ways and your laws amongst them, we pray for them, for you have called us to do this.

We pray for our governments in Scotland and in Westminster, in Ireland and Wales. We pray, O Lord, as a nation, that we may be more and more bound together in your truth, and not in the ways of human beings, however much they may appeal to our own nature.

Grant, Lord, that your blessing, therefore, will be with our First Minister, our government, our Prime Minister and his government. And, Lord, grant at this time that we may see more and more of your own people coming to raise their voice against the departures morally and spiritually that we find so sadly marking our nation and our leaders at this time.

[15:28] Remember our Queen. Be with our Lord in her old age. Be with her as she finds her at this time of her life, her movement to be restricted and her ability to go from place to place to be less than it used to be.

We thank you for the declarations of her faith that she has made and that she continues to make, and for the guidance that that has given to her family. And we pray that you would bless her, O Lord, at this time as she comes to celebrate this Jubilee.

We be thankful, O Lord, for her leadership over the nation over these many years and for the ways in which she has withstood so many tests. And we pray that you would continue, Lord, to uphold her and to continue to maintain her in her own faith and attachment to you.

And now we pray that you would remember us here as we continue in your presence. Bless to us your word and help us to sing your praises joyfully. And we pray all of these things, seeking pardon and cleansing of all our sin.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's sing further now to God's praise from Psalm 61. Psalm 61, again, it's in the Scottish Psalter version.

[16:42] Page 293. And verses 1 to 4. O God, give ear unto my cry, unto my prayer attend.

From the utmost corner of the land, my cry to thee I'll send. We'll sing to the tune Salzburg, verses 1 to 4. O God, give ear unto my cry.

Amen. Amen. O God, give ear unto my cry, unto my prayer attend.

From the utmost corner of the land, my cry to thee I'll send.

What time my heart is overwhelmed, and in perplexity, where thou be lead unto the rock, the fire is the night.

[18:13] For thou hast for my enmity, a shelter by thy power, and for defence against my foes, the vast, he laves strong tower.

within thy cover, within thy cover, none will die, forever will abide.

And I'll cover all thy wings, with God that lets me hide.

Now as we return to God's Word, we're reading two passages this morning. First of these is in 2 Samuel, chapter 15. And then we're also going to read from the book of Psalms, and Psalm 63.

So firstly, it's in 2 Samuel, chapter 15, reading verses 13 to 23. 2 Samuel 15, verse 13.

[20:03] This is after David had fled, after the rebellion of Absalom, the coup that Absalom had led.

So we read at verse 13, a messenger came to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom. Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom.

Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly, and bring down ruin on us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword. And the king's servants said to the king, Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides.

So the king went out, and all his house sold after him, and the king left ten concubines to keep the house. And the king went out, and all the people after him, and they halted at the last house.

And all his servants passed by him, and all the Carithites, and all the Pelithites, and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king.

[ 21 : 08 ] Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us?

Since I go, I know not where. Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. But Ittai answered the king, As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be.

And David said to Ittai, Go then, pass on. So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men, and all the little ones who were with him. And all the land wept aloud as the people passed by, and the king crossed the brook Kidron, and all the people passed on towards the wilderness.

And we turn now to the book of Psalms, and Psalm 63. Psalm 63.

Psalm that's entitled, Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. Psalm 63. O God, you are my God.

[ 22 : 29 ] Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you. My flesh faints for you as in a dry and weary land, where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live. In your name I will lift up my hands. My soul shall be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.

When I remember you upon my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night. For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.

My soul clings to you. Your right hand upholds me. But those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth. They shall be given over to the power of the sword.

They shall be a portion for jackals. But the king shall rejoice in God. All who swear by him shall exult. For the mouths of liars will be stopped.

[ 23 : 39 ] And once again we pray for God to bless these passages of his word to us today. Now before we turn to look at Psalm 63 this morning, let's sing once again.

We're singing in Psalm 62, and this time from the Sing Psalms version. You'll find that on page 79. Psalm 62, page 79.

The tune is Heron Gate. And we'll sing verses 1 to 8. My soul finds rest in God alone. From him comes my salvation sure.

My safety, fortress, sheltering rock. In him alone I am secure. How long will you assault a man? Do you all seek to lay him low, this leaning wall, this tottering fence, and bring about his overthrow?

They plan his fall from his high place. They take delight in spreading lies. With false and flattering mouths they bless. But in their hearts curse and despise.

[ 24 : 40 ] And so on, down to verse 8. My soul finds rest in God alone. From him comes my salvation sure.

My safety, fortress, sheltering rock. In him alone I am secure. In him alone I am secure. I long will you are going to do. From him alone I am secure.

From him comes my salvation sure. The 50 fortress, sheltering rock, in heaven alone I am secure.

How long will you, a softer man, do you all seek to live in love?

This leaning wall, this tottering fence, and may now act this overthrew.

[ 25 : 59 ] They plan this hope from this high list, they take the light in setting lights, with false and flattering mouths they bless, but in their hearts, first and desies.

Find rest, my soul, in God alone, and there my hope is ever true.

My safety fortress, sheltering rock, in heaven alone I am secure.

My honour and salvation rest, on God my love and my default.

O people, trust in him always, to him alone for a true heart.

[ 27 : 49 ] Well, for a short time this morning, will you please turn with me to Psalm 63 in the Book of Psalms. I'm going to look at some of the contents of this psalm as we go through it fairly quickly, but looking at some of the main points.

A psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah. There are times when the worst experiences we may have to go through in this life bring out the very best in people.

Of course, the opposite is also true. When the worst experiences or conditions will sometimes bring out the worst in people as well.

Sometimes even the best conditions can bring out the worst in people. But not so here. Because here is David in very difficult circumstances in the wilderness.

And what he brings out before us in this psalm is really a confession of his faith in God. A confession that is just full of beauty and emotion and power and confidence in God.

[ 29 : 01 ] And the setting for it, as we find in the title, is when he was in the wilderness of Judah. We're not sure that it was exactly at the same time as he was fleeing from Absalom, but it certainly fits the context.

And when you look at verse 11 there, the king shall rejoice in God and what it says. It appears that that is a very likely context for this psalm to have been written in relation to David's experiences in the wilderness when he had to flee for a time from Absalom.

When Absalom had gathered support from many of the people and risen up against David and forced him to leave the city as king. And here in this great confession of faith, we have something that is so very important and relevant to ourselves.

In our wilderness experiences, David is obviously literally in the wilderness, but God's people have always taken this psalm to be emblematic or symptomatic or a picture for them, an image for them, of the difficulties that they go through in this life that can actually be described as wilderness, can be described as going through difficult times such as you go through physically when you go through, as he says here, a dry and weary land where there is no water.

And that has been the experience of people over the past couple of years, especially during the more serious lockdown and the aftermath of that with the COVID restrictions that were then put in place.

[ 30 : 38 ] And some people, of course, are still finding it very difficult to recover from that, to build up their lives again from that. And maybe you yourself and myself are amongst that number as well.

But whatever wilderness experience you may have or have had, or you may be going through even at this time, and if you're online as well and part of your difficulty is that you have not yet managed to make your way back to the gathered worship of God, then I hope this psalm itself will say something to you, to reassure you, to encourage you, to bring you this measure of praise to God that will draw you to be with God's people as we are here today together in this place of worship.

I'm going to divide the psalm into three. It really divides itself into three. Verses one to four, first of all, we'll take that as David's desire after God.

And then in verses five to eight, we'll call that David's delight in God. And then the final few verses, eight, nine to 11, David's defense by God.

So there's David's desire, there's David's delight, and there's David's defense. And as we go through these, I hope we'll see how they are relevant to our own circumstances in life, because that's really what the Bible is for.

[ 32 : 03 ] It's not for us just to study this as a piece of history, as a piece of biography or autobiography on the part of David. It's here as God's word, relevant for our circumstances too.

And in David's desire after God, you first of all see his longing and his confession at the very beginning. Oh God, you are my God.

And that's really what runs right through the whole of the psalm. It's central to all of the rest of the psalm and what's stated there. You are my God. Earnestly, I seek, who is confessing immediately.

Despite his circumstances, he has not lost sight of who his God is. He has not lost sight of the fact that this God is still his God, and that he wants to be known as one of God's people.

That's so important. It's so crucial. In all the circumstances of life, that we keep our minds on the fact that God, this God, this God of the Bible is our God.

[ 33 : 06 ] And that when our circumstances change, and especially when they become difficult and challenging, nothing has changed from God's point of view. Nothing has changed in his plan for us.

It's always been planned this way. And the difficulties and the trials and the challenges, whether they be spiritual or mental or whatever trauma they might be, and there are many of them, and we've all experienced some of them to one degree or another.

For the people of God, they can still say and want to be able to reaffirm, O God, you are my God. I don't want any other God but you.

And you see, the longing that David has is really put in terms of the longing of a friend for his friend. It's a longing on David's part for God as his best friend.

God is no mere acquaintance for David. He's not some figure that he's just come to acknowledge in a formal fashion as part of his religion. He is his dear friend.

[ 34 : 13 ] He is his Lord. He is his God. He is creator. He is his savior. This is what he is longing after, that he would have more again of God. And especially, I think, he's obviously looking at the times when he was in the sanctuary, when he was able to go to the temple in verse 2 there, and his longing is that that would return, that he would be back again with God's people, worshiping him in the sanctuary that was built for that purpose.

And he's eager for this God and eager as soon as can possibly be. And the word earnestly there is an interesting word. The older translations have, Early will I seek you.

And probably it's best taking it rather than earnestly, although earnestly is built into that. If you're actually coming early in the morning to seek the Lord, then obviously there's an earnestness about that as well.

But the earliness of it is important. For example, it fits verse 6 there, When I remember you upon my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night.

David's not confining his seeking after God, his communion with God to the daytime, or to the hours during the day when that may be easier to fit in. He is saying in the watches of the night, I meditate upon you.

[ 35 : 35 ] Every spare moment he has. And here he is in the wilderness. You might think he needs all the time he can get for his sleep. And he does. But he still wants to have communion with God. And that's the secret here.

Really in many ways a key to the expression of faith that he brings out in the psalm. And that's a reminder to ourselves that if you take this as early will I seek you, as well as earnestly, it's a reminder to ourselves how important it is not to let your troubles keep you away from God.

Not to let your troubles become an argument against seeking God earnestly. Not to let the difficulties, the challenges, the wilderness periods of life actually put a distance between you and your God.

It should be for you and for me the other way about. Let your troubles take you to God, as it were. Let the troubles of your life be a means of drawing near to God.

Of seeking God's face like David is here, even in the wilderness. This is what he's saying. You are my God earnestly. Early I am seeking you. My soul thirsts for you.

[ 36 : 48 ] My flesh longs for you. And there's such an intensity in that, which I find a huge challenge to myself. I'm sure you say the same. When he says here, my soul thirsts for you.

My flesh faints for you. He's really talking about his whole being, being taken up with this. Everything that's there in him, in his soul, even his very flesh, his very physical frame, is affected by this desire for God, this longing to go back into fellowship with his friend in the sanctuary where he once used to be.

And there's a very interesting thing here where he says in verse 2, So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary. And what he's really saying by that is that the thirst that he now has for God, the intensity that he expresses by, my flesh faints for you as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary. In other words, David is saying, I don't want my wilderness longing after you to be any less intense than it was when I was in the sanctuary when I had the freedom to be there as king.

You know, and that raises for yourself and myself a question and indeed a challenge for us today again. Are we here today gathered with longing hearts?

[ 38 : 12 ] Are we gathered here with thirsty souls? Are we gathered here in a way that really longs to meet with God?

Have we come just to praise him outwardly, to sing some of the psalms that we've been singing, to hear his word expounded, to hear it read, to follow through in the reading, to follow the prayers, the prayer of the pulpit, and your own prayers as well?

Surely this is your desire. Surely this is my desire. Surely this is something that you had before you came into this building today, that there was a measure. I'm not saying it's going to be the intensity of David's, because I can't follow that myself many other times that I come to church.

Sadly. But here is a man who is so intent in his eagerness and his longing for God that he can say even in the wilderness, Lord, as I've looked upon you in the sanctuary, as I did long after you there, so I'm longing after you now.

You see, that says so much about our difficulties, our trials, our periods of wilderness. They are for us to deal with God, to have communion with God, to seek God, to yearn after God, as what David is doing here.

[ 39 : 39 ] When I was in the study this morning, just going over the notes for the service today, I looked out the window of the study, and there in the little tree growing up, or the big trees as well, outside the study in the garden, are all these fledgling sparrows, just newly out of the nest, and the energy with which they appeal to the parent birds, come and feed me.

Give me something to feed me. Give me my breakfast. And the parent birds flitting back and forth with the worms or flies, whatever it was, constantly flitting in response to the cry of the fledgling, the little baby sparrow.

And I looked out the window and I thought, I just wish I would go to church myself today with the desire, with the longing, with the hunger of that little sparrow that is so eager and so longing for a crumb, for a fly, for a worm from its parent's mouth, that I could find myself in the pulpit today, preaching the gospel, and yet in my heart yearning after God with that hunger, something of what David has here.

As I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and your glory, so my soul thirsts after you. Friends, we have souls, despite what you see and hear out in the world there, that we're just creatures without any spiritual dimension of this kind.

We have souls for a purpose. And one of the great purposes for you having a soul and my having a soul is that you will long after God, that you will love communion with God, that you will use the teaching of the Bible in your times of wilderness, in your times of challenge, in your times of trial, in your times of difficulty to bring you to God to thirst after Him.

[ 41 : 38 ] God has designed us in His creation of us. He has designed us for communion with Himself. He has designed us to be even in our times of wilderness and difficulty to yearn after Him, to seek after Him.

You know, there's a sense in which even the expression that we sometimes have of confessing an absence of this longing in the presence of God.

That itself is an expression of longing because you want it to be different. You want it to be more than it is. You want an increased hunger for God. And so we come today seeking that God will bless this word of David all of these years ago to us and that whatever it is today is a trial to you.

Make it an occasion for meeting with God. Make it an occasion for longing after God. Make it an occasion for drawing the strength of God into your life in these circumstances.

Samuel Rutherford, a famous Scottish theologian of long ago, had very many short but powerful statements and sayings.

[ 43 : 01 ] One of them was this, we live so far from the well yet complain but dryly of our dryness. We live so far from the well and yet complain but dryly of our dryness.

We're conscious at times that we're not as near to God as we should be and yet our complaint about that is rather dry, he says, compared to what it should be, compared to the longing of David in this psalm.

We live so far from the well. That's of our own choosing at times. We lose our relish. We decrease in our hunger. Our love does grow cold.

Yet we complain but dryly of our dryness. Today, let it be for me and for you an occasion of drawing near the well, shortening the distance if we're at a distance from the well that God is and coming to be there with him to draw our water of life from him.

David's desire after God and David is not belittling anything when he says your loving kindness is better than last, your steadfast love is better than life so because of that my lips will praise you so I will bless you as long as I live in your name I will lift up my hands.

[ 44:27 ] Now you can understand the steadfast love we've come across these words many times. God's steadfast love is not just his love his eternal love for his people but his love in covenant with them.

He has bonded himself to his people and his people to him and the love that we experience from God as we're bonded to him by faith and by love on our own part as created by him well that's something he says here is better than life.

Now he's not he's not belittling or minimizing the benefits of life. The many good things we have in life we appreciate we thank God for we don't belittle them but they cannot compare with his steadfast love.

They can't compare with his loving kindness. As you know I love the songs of Ellie Holcomb and in one of these songs she speaks really to God in the song and it's entitled You Love Me Best.

Most of you some of you will probably know it. My mother she holds me when I'm weak she consoles me my troubles weigh on her mind my tears fall down from her eyes but you you loved me better.

[ 45:49 ] My father beside me holds out his arm to guide me his wisdom waits in silence he speaks and I grow quiet but you you loved me better.

And there may come a day when all other loves have gone away when darkness hems me in you'll be right where you have always been closer than the heart within my chest because you loved me best.

the ring around my finger to have and hold forever it circles round like years that we've walked through joys and tears but you you have loved me better.

And there is no better love and the loving kindness the steadfast love of God and in the wilderness oh how David appreciates the steadfast love God has for him.

David's desire after God and his delight in God secondly from verse 5 to 8 more briefly you can see here how he has great satisfaction in God and how he is saying to himself this is how it's going to continue as far as possible my soul will be satisfied with fat and rich food could translate that as a present as well my soul is satisfied with fat and rich food my mouth praises you with joyful lips but if you take it as his own reference to the future as far as he sees it then this is what he's saying this is his intention this is his aim this is the purpose of his life my soul will be satisfied with fat and rich food when I remember you upon my bed and meditate you on you in the watches of the night how could he say this sort of thing in the wilderness that his soul will be satisfied with rich and fat food how could he say my mouth will praise you with joyful lips well the secret to it is really in verse 6 it's his communion with God that has led to this conviction to this purpose to this determination to continue to be satisfied in God you see the wilderness sharpens our wakefulness doesn't it sometimes you and I need something like that something of a challenge to come into our lot just to remind us of who God is and what he's like and especially if we have gone astray somewhat just to bring us back to a right perspective and balance and to go on again following the Lord it has produced for David this satisfaction this intensity of praise and he also speaks about safety for you have been my help he's reflecting upon what God has been to him up to that moment you have been my help and in the shadow of your wings

[ 48:49 ] I will sing for joy my soul clings to you your right hand upholds me what he's saying is this is how I've always found you Lord and you're not going to change now even though I'm in the wilderness you are still this same God and it's interesting he says there in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy you have been my help it may be that that's the imagery of the mother bird protecting its little chicks but I think it's probably more better to take it as a reference to David's experience in the sanctuary in the temple where the the cherubim with their wings outstretched represented or part of what represented the presence of God above the mercy seat where the cherubim were located and in Psalm 61 you have something very much like that he says let me dwell in your tent forever let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings it's more obvious there I think he's saying let me dwell in your tent in your sanctuary forever let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings in other words whatever you take it David is certainly looking to the protection of God that has been his privilege up to now and what he's saying is that's not that's not going to change this is where my safety is in the shadow of your wings and in God's own right hand upholding him you see how wonderfully the two things go together we have a responsibility ourselves to bring ourselves to be in the presence of God to worship him to communicate with him to pray to him but our ultimate confidence is not in that itself

David's ultimate confidence is in God's own right hand upholding him similar to Psalm 73 you recall where he says in Psalm 73 after not David but Asaph this time but very similar words Asaph is making a confession of how near he came to sliding away altogether but he came back to the sanctuary of God when he went in there he was brought to see how foolish he was in his thinking he was thinking the world was better off because it didn't have the troubles that he as a believer had but he went into the sanctuary then realized how foolish he was brutish and ignorant like a beast before you then he said nevertheless I'm continually with you you hold me by my you hold my right hand you guide me with your counsel and afterwards you will receive me to glory it is you see his confidence there is the foundation in which David stands confidently the grasp that God has of him yes he's thankful for the grasp that he has of God in his faith and in his love and in his hope and all of these things are important to him but it's God's own right hand that he looks to particularly my soul clings to you these words really mean my soul follows hard after you is the AV translation it means to pursue something earnestly and it fits in with the seeking of God by David it's a pursuit it's a seeking after it's following hard after you it's like someone running a race clinging holding on but especially conscious of his need to be held by God isn't that where your own confidence where your own security is today you're thankful for faith you're thankful for the way in which

God has brought himself into your life in such a way that has convinced you of your need to hold on to him to trust in him but you don't go to eternity fully persuaded that that's all you need for your safety that's got something else beneath it something else bigger than that God himself and God's own grasp and God's own hold of your life so here's David's delight in God his satisfaction and his safety and especially in the way God still holds him where he is and then there's David's defense I'll be very brief with this David's defense verses 9 to 11 David's defense by God having seen his delight in God and his desire after God look at what he's saying here in verses 9 to 11 but those who seek to destroy my life shall go down into the depths of the earth they shall be given over to the power of the sword there shall be a portion for jackals but the king shall rejoice in God all who swear by him shall exult swear allegiance that is I think for the mouths of liars will be stopped a couple of things there you'll see first of all how God's commitment to his people means that he is committed against their enemies

God's steadfast love for his people is not going to be something that regards them in any kind of loose or indifferent way as they face enemies as they face challenges from their enemies whatever enemy that might be God is committed to their protection God is committed to looking after his own people his steadfast love ensures that and the solemn thing is that those who challenge the people of God those who challenge God himself will end up he says here they shall be given over to the depths of the earth they shall die they shall come under God's judgment and his justice and the king he says shall rejoice in God whatever happens to my enemies David is saying because God is my God oh Lord oh God you are my God and because that is still the case the king shall rejoice in God you see what he's saying

I'm in the wilderness I've had to flee from Jerusalem my son Absalom has risen up against me he's gathered support that has forced me away from the throne for this period and as we read in 2 Samuel he wasn't really sure where he was going to end up he just kept going into the wilderness along with those who were in support but he's still the king he is still convinced that he is God's appointed king the king shall rejoice in God as you know often in the Old Testament the kingship of the kings of the Old Testament the good kings especially are types of Christ they are representations of Jesus for us and many of the Psalms so brilliantly so brilliantly portray the kingship of Jesus as you read through what they say about the kings of the times whether it's David or Solomon whoever and it doesn't matter how many millions of people today will reject Jesus how many people out there will be convinced that there is no God how many people will actually say and throw in our teeth the gospel that we seek to maintain not just in the preaching of it but in your testifying to it in your lives however many times people will turn and say well why are you actually trusting in someone who's dead why are you trusting in a God whose existence you cannot prove it's just simply like all other religions people will say they're at the end of the day they're fine if you want to follow that but they're not actually useful and they're not truth is that going to change things as far as

[ 56 : 56 ] God is concerned supposing you're the only believer left in the world and you're surrounded by people who say it's foolish to trust in God a God that you cannot see and have never proved in your heart and in my heart the Lord is still king and he will always continue to be the king it doesn't matter how many people deny it that's not going to change the truth people can try as hard as they like to disprove the existence of God and that'll go on to the end of the world but the truth remains the truth and God remains God and the king the Jesus who is king shall rejoice shall continue to be who he is and shall do all he has promised to do for his people all who swear by him shall exult they shall be exalted in rejoicing is what it means and if that was true of David here prophesying of the future for himself and for his followers how much more is it true of Jesus and his people whatever the world may say and it doesn't we're not saying that doesn't matter it's our duty to try present the gospel and the truth to them but ultimately it doesn't matter because the king still lives and the king is going to return and the king's followers and the king's people all who swear by him all who are in allegiance to him they shall exult they shall have everlasting rejoicing nothing and no one's going to spoil that or make that untrue as we read in the song of Solomon where you find the longings of this lady after her beloved in chapter 1 and verse 4 we can finish with this it is her desire here is the bride this woman confessing her love for her beloved in which you find an image of our own love for the Lord he says draw me and we will run after you let us run the king has brought me into his chambers we will exult and rejoice in you we will extol your love more than wine rightly do they love you take these words home with you rightly do they love you and nobody can take that conviction out of your heart today because it's based on

God's truth in Jesus Christ Lord our God we pray that today you'd bless to us this portion of your word help us we pray like David long ago help us to trust in you with the trust that he spoke of and the desire that he could confess and Lord we pray that you would intensify our desire our longing after you we pray that in these days in which we live when so few yearn after you in the world in which we live with that desire that is true to your word gracious Lord we pray that that will be true of ourselves help us to delight in you help us to be thankful for your own sheltering of your people for your protection of them and for the way that your truth will endure how many challenges it may have to face we don't know Lord we know that your truth will continue on through into eternity help us to prize it to commend it to the world in which we live to rejoice in it ourselves hear us now we pray for Jesus sake

Amen we're going to praise God now in conclusion in Psalm 36 Psalm number 36 in the Sing Psalms version you'll find that on page 44 the tune is Bays of Harris singing verses 5 to 9 your steadfast love is great O Lord it reaches heaven high your faithfulness is wonderful extending to the sky and so on through to verse 9 your steadfast love is great O Lord your steadfast love is great O Lord it reaches heaven high your faithfulness is wonderful and extending to the sky your righteous vessels bear me laid like mountains high on sea your justice depths like ocean depths of man and peace you keep high precious is your steadfast love what confidence is a blessed prince o high and love thine shelter in the shadow of your wings they feast within your hearts and day from streams of pure delight for men you are the source of light in your light peace in light if you allow me please to get to the main door

I'll greet you on the way out now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore Amen