God's Comforting Presence
Psalms 63:1-11
SS Lesson for 10/31/2010

Devotional Scripture: Ps 100:1-5

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The concept of the outline of the lesson came from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator. This week’s lesson examines **Comfort in God’s Presence**. The **study’s aim** is to learn that God’s presence will always be a source of comfort to sustain us. The **study’s application** is to apply this lesson when we are feeling alone and miserable by remembering that God’s presence can bring the joy back into our lives.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Sleeping Rough

“Sleeping rough” is an expression I first encountered while living briefly in England during the 1990s. It has a mildly romantic tinge, and I first equated it with the American expression “roughing it.” Americans might say they are roughing it if slightly inconvenienced. If I run out of coffee filters and substitute a paper towel, I am roughing it. If my water heater is out and I have a cold shower, that is certainly roughing it! But this is not what “sleeping rough” means. The English people use this euphemism for the urban homeless. I am writing this from my office in Los Angeles, a city dubbed the “homeless capital of the United States.” It is estimated that there are upwards of 100,000 people who are “sleeping rough” every night in Los Angeles County. The mild weather makes this somewhat tolerable, but there is nothing romantic or exotic about living on the streets without a home. Homelessness is a persistent issue that affects both large and small cities all over the world. Christians and churches may respond differently to the homeless in their community, but we are united in wishing that street people had decent housing and were not forced to “sleep rough.” Homelessness is not a new issue. Jesus and his disciples were often given the hospitality of staying as guests in homes as they traveled about, but it also seems that they slept rough at times (see Matthew 8:20). Jacob used a rock as his pillow while sleeping rough at Bethel (Genesis 28:11). When Moses fled from Egypt, he spent nights sleeping rough before he found refuge in the household of Jethro, the priest of Midian (Exodus 2:15). Before David ascended to the throne as king of Israel, he spent many months in the wilderness hiding from King Saul (see 1 Samuel 23:14). He had others with him, but there is no indication that they stayed in hotels or inns. They were most certainly sleeping rough. Those were tense times, periods of great hardship and distress. David’s early days as a shepherd had prepared him for this homeless life, for shepherds were expected to be with their flocks 24/7, often far from their homes. David was well acquainted with homelessness. Yet, out of these wilderness experiences came some of David’s greatest poetry, available to us in the Psalms. Today’s lesson comes from one of these, Psalm 63.

Lesson Background

The story of Israel’s first king is not a happy one. When the people clamored for a king in order to be “like all the other nations” (1 Samuel 8:20), it was a sad day in God’s eyes, for God saw this as a rejection (8:7). The first king, Saul, might have been a magnificent and militarily inspiring physical specimen, but he was a moral failure. His disobedience caused God to reject him (15:26) and terminate the right of his sons to succeed him on the throne. Instead, God directed the prophet Samuel to anoint David the shepherd boy as the future king (16:13). David eventually became a part of Saul’s household. He served as the king’s armor bearer (1 Samuel 16:21). He played the harp and sang for Saul to ease his troubled mind (16:23). David was even permitted to marry one of Saul’s daughters, Michal (18:20, 21). But at some point Saul perceived David as a threat to his throne and sought to kill him (19:10). This caused the future king to flee to the wilderness (23:14). Psalm 63 comes from this period in David’s life. (Some students think this refers to a different period of David’s life, when he fled from Absalom’s rebellion; see 2 Samuel 15:23, 28 and Psalm 3). The superscription of Psalm 63 tells us that it was written while David was “in the Desert of Judah,” which is a broad category. David apparently lived in various parts of this rugged hill country in central Israel. Some of these locations were more specifically called Ziph (1 Samuel 23:14) and Maon (23:25; 25:1). One of these locations that scholars can locate today is an oasis on the western shores of the Dead Sea called En Gedi (24:1). Here David and his men were safe because of their isolation, and they had
sufficient water and food. En Gedi is a likely location for the writing of Psalm 63. Those were difficult and
dangerous times for David—times that surely tried his faith. He must have questioned the anointing he had
received from Samuel. Would he ever be king? Would he die in the wilderness? Would he be betrayed by
one of his men? Would he be forced into a showdown with King Saul, perhaps even forced to slay the king
out of self-preservation? Would he ever have a normal, settled, secure life again? Perhaps David longed for
the days of shepherding, when at least he knew he was welcome in his father’s house and was loved by his
family. But David had become a fugitive, a homeless leader of a band of homeless men. Understanding
these circumstances causes us to marvel at the great faith expressed in the psalm.

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Relationships are important to us as humans. It is true that some people live like hermits, but that is not the
case with most. In fact, for a Christian, relationships are vital. And our first relationship is with God. David
begins this psalm with a recognition that God is his God. That may seem obvious, but it is important to
realize because it shows that he had a relationship with the Lord. David talked to God regularly. He prayed
often. That is part of what it means to have a relationship with God. What a privilege that we too can have
the same relationship with the Almighty! The word "early" can be translated "earnestly," or "diligently."
The word is translated that way in Proverbs 7:15 and 11:27. Seeking God early in the morning often does
show diligence, but the word does not require getting up early. God takes our relationship with Him
seriously. He seeks us diligently. He sought us out for salvation (cf. Rom. 5:8). We could not have salvation
if it were not for God's desire to save us. It makes sense that we should seek God earnestly. The phrases that
follow show just how David was seeking God earnestly. "My soul thirsteth"—that phrase is used a couple
of other times in the Bible, both in the book of Psalms: 42:2 and 143:6. The word "soul" is a way of
referring to the self. David was saying, "I thirst for You." The idea of thirst is one that we are familiar with,
though probably not to the extent that David was. The climate David lived in was prone to making a man
very thirsty. In fact, once when David was running from Saul, he expressed aloud how much he would like
some of the water from the well in Bethlehem (II Sam. 23:15). Water was an important commodity in the
ancient Near East, and the picture here of David thirsting for God reminds us of the intense desire we too
need to have for God. "My flesh longeth for thee" also tells us of the desire David had for God. By
mentioning his flesh, or body, he was showing how completely committed he was to wanting God. Every
part of his being was longing for God. He was crying out for God in every way imaginable. The final part of
the verse goes back to the idea of thirst: "in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." The image is of a
land that is parched and weary. There is nothing to satisfy. In our lives, there are many temptations that
surround us. The world tries to entice us with things that it says will satisfy, but nothing the world has will
ultimately satisfy our souls. Only God can satisfy. David knew that, and that is why he sought desperately
for Him. Satan also tries to convince us that the things he offers can bring satisfaction. When he tempted
Christ, Satan tried to use the kinds of things the Apostle John mentions in his first epistle (2:16). But Jesus
knew that those things are not God's will. Yes, only God can satisfy our desires. He and He alone can fulfill
our every need.

Major Theme Analysis

(SCRIPTURAL TEXT FROM THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION; CROSS-REFERENCES FROM THE NIV)

Seeking God's Presence (Ps 63:1-3)

1 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.
2 So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory.
3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.
Seeking in the soul (1)

Seeking in the soul because God bought it with a price (1 Cor 6:19-20)
19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

Seeking in the soul because God made it (Ps 100:3)
3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Seeking in the soul because it is the Lord's (Rom 14:8)
8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.

Seeking in the soul because Jesus redeemed it (Titus 2:14)
14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Seeking in the soul because God dwells in it (Rom 8:9-11)
9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Seeking in the sanctuary (2)

A sanctuary where the Holy Spirit lives (1 Cor 3:16)
16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

A sanctuary of the living God (2 Cor 6:16)
16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

A sanctuary that is God's spiritual building (1 Cor 3:9)
9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

A sanctuary that is eternal (2 Cor 5:1)
5 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

A sanctuary that has many rooms and is being prepared for believers (John 14:1-4)
14 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

A sanctuary whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:10)
10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.
Seeking God's lovingkindness (3)

A lovingkindness that is always before man's eyes (Ps 26:3)
3 for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth.

A lovingkindness that is magnified in His Word (Ps 138:2)
2 I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.

A lovingkindness that is prompted by love (Ps 89:28-33)
28 I will maintain my love to him forever, and my covenant with him will never fail. 29 I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure. 30 "If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, 31 if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, 32 I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; 33 but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness.

A lovingkindness that comes from serving God's purposes (Acts 13:34-37)
34 The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: "I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’ 35 So it is stated elsewhere: "You will not let your Holy One see decay.’ 36 ‘For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. 37 But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

A lovingkindness that endures forever (Ps 106:1)
106 Praise the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.

A lovingkindness that is shown through God's discipline (Prov 3:11-12)
11 My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, 12 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

A lovingkindness that comes from God being with us (Jer 30:11)
11 I am with you and will save you,’ declares the Lord. 'Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.'

Rejoicing in God's Presence (Ps 63:4-7)

4 Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.
5 My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.
6 When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches.
7 Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice.

Rejoicing in praise (4-5)

Rejoicing over God's righteousness (Ps 32:11)
11 Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!
Rejoicing over God being our strength (Hab 3:17-19)
17 Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, 18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. 19 The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

Rejoicing in the Lord (Phil 4:4-5)
4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Rejoicing with trembling and fear (Ps 2:11)
11 Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.

Rejoicing over God's trustworthiness (Ps 33:21)
21 In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.

Rejoicing before God (Ps 68:4-6)
4 Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds — his name is the Lord — and rejoice before him. 5 A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. 6 God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.

Rejoicing over the day God has made (Ps 118:24)
24 This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Rejoicing through meditation (6)

Meditation on God's works (Ps 77:12)
12 I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.

Meditation of the heart (Ps 19:14)
14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Meditation on God's unfailing love (Ps 48:9)
9 Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love.

Meditation on God's wonders (Ps 119:27)
27 Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders.

Rejoicing in God's help (7)

Help from God that dispels fear (Heb 13:6)
6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Help from God through prayer (Ps 5:2)
2 Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.
Help from God because He is the one who sustains (Ps 54:4)
4 Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me.

Help from God because He loves us (Ps 109:26)
26 Help me, O Lord my God; save me in accordance with your love.

Help from God because He takes our hand (Isa 41:13)
13 For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.

Protection in God’s Presence (Ps 63:8-11)
8 My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me.
9 But those who seek my life, to destroy it, Shall go into the lower parts of the earth.
10 They shall fall by the sword; They shall be a portion for jackals.
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.

Protection through being upheld by God (8)

God upholds those who fall (Ps 37:23-24)
23 If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; 24 though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.

God upholds from birth (Ps 71:6)
6 From birth I have relied on you; you brought me forth from my mother's womb. I will ever praise you.

God upholds through a willing spirit (Ps 51:12)
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

God upholds because He will never forsake His own (Ps 55:22)
22 Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.

God upholds because He promised to do so (Ps 119:116)
116 Sustain me according to your promise, and I will live; do not let my hopes be dashed.

God upholds because He always finishes what He starts (Phil 1:6)
6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Protection from enemies (9-10)

God protects us from perishing (Luke 21:18-19)
18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By standing firm you will gain life.

God protects us like a shield (Ps 84:11)
11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.
God protects us through His word (Prov 30:5)
5 “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

God protects us if we listen to Him (Prov 1:33)
33 but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm.”

God protects us if we trust in Him (Prov 29:25)
25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.

God protects from worldly enemies so that we may overcome the world (1 John 5:4)
4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

Protection through trusting God (11)

Trust God because God never forsakes those who seek Him (Ps 9:10)
10 Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

Trust God because He is our God (Ps 31:14-15)
14 But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." 15 My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.

Trust God so that God will make us righteous and just (Ps 37:5-6)
5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: 6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

Trust God so that we will not be afraid (Ps 56:4)
4 In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?

Trust God because no one else can save us (Ps 146:3-6)
3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. 5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, 6 the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them — the Lord, who remains faithful forever.

Trust God because He guides us in the straight ways (Prov 3:5-6)
5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

Trust God so that we can be overflowed with hope (Rom 15:13)
13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary
When do you recognize your relationship with God? How often? Do you praise him on Sunday, but not during the week? If your time of communion with your Creator is limited to once a week, what happens if
you miss a couple of weeks? Can you maintain a strong relationship if you neglect it for 7 or 14 or 21 days? What if you miss a couple of months, maybe during a sports season or due to a change in shifts at your job? The answer to this is obvious: any relationship withers if it is not cultivated. David understood this, even in his times of deepest distress. He languished as a fugitive in a remote wilderness hideout, far from his family and his old childhood stomping grounds. Whatever his family worship patterns had been as he grew up, they would have been difficult to maintain. There must have been days when he was confused, wondering why Samuel would have promised him the throne of Israel only to have King Saul seek his death. But today’s psalm shows us that David did not despair of his strong, sustaining relationship with the Lord. A mature, growing relationship with God will not be confined to Sunday. It will spill over into the other days. It can begin as we seek time alone with the Lord every morning and/or evening. We do not need a carefully planned program with people designated to pray and read Scripture. There is nothing wrong with these things, but worshiping “only on Sunday” is not enough. As our relationship grows deeper, we will begin to understand what David learned: that God’s “love is better than life.” We will begin to acknowledge that our souls have a deep, unquenchable thirst for God and that we need to experience his presence to sustain us.

Concluding Thoughts from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Some of the psalms have historical superscriptions that indicate a time element. According to the superscription of this psalm, David was in the wilderness of Judah when he wrote it. There are two possible occasions for this writing. It might have been when he was running from Saul, or it might have been when he fled from Jerusalem and his son Absalom. The second incident is the more likely of the two, because in verse 11 David referred to himself as "the king," which he was not when Saul was pursuing him. The incident regarding Absalom is recorded in II Samuel 15 through 18. Absalom had rebelled against the king (15:7-12). In this psalm we read the reflections of a desperate man. Just as a person stranded in a lifeboat on the ocean eventually longs for nothing but water, so David was longing for God's help. The person in the lifeboat does not worry about business, think about the upcoming football game, or wish for a television set. He wants just one thing: rescue. We have all been in situations where we need comfort and assurance in our lives. We have felt lonely and without anyone to talk to. Our lesson this week assures us that when we seek God, we will find Him, and He will be totally sufficient to sustain us in our time of need. It is tough to be the one who is always left out and ignored. We all want to be accepted. We go through times that are hard, and there are no easy answers. We have to make some difficult decisions, but we see no viable alternatives. We want to talk to someone and share our feelings, but there is no one around we can trust who will accept us as we are and truly understand us. It is at times like these that we can turn to the ever-present comfort of the presence of our God to sustain us in our lives.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Daily fellowship with the Lord should be our constant desire and priority (Ps. 63:1-2)
2. Contemplating God's steadfast love, or "lovingkindness," will give us a proper perspective on life (vs. 3-4)
3. True satisfaction comes only from fellowship with God and dwelling on Him (vs. 5-6)
4. We are to cling to the Lord at all times, knowing He will sustain us always (vs. 7-8)
5. Though we are treated unjustly, with God ultimate justice is assured (vs. 9-10)
6. We can rejoice that we share in God's victory (vs. 11)

Heart of the Lesson from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

God is omnipresent, always present everywhere. So why do not all human beings acknowledge Him? Why are they not interested in being around Him or His people? Perhaps it is because they do not own Him as their God. They may think of Him as an austere, forbidding, judgmental God whom they would really rather not think about at all. The idea of His being present fills them with guilt and fear, not comfort. Conversely, those who trust Him own Him as their God, whose presence brings them great comfort and security.
Seek God (Ps. 63:1-4)
Without God your life will be as barren as a desert. You will have no sense of seeing His powerful and glorious hand at work in the world. With Him as your God, you can hunger and thirst after Him. You can come to see Him in your daily life just as you may sometimes be very aware of Him while in church. The psalmist says “early” (Ps. 63:1), perhaps indicating a first priority of interest. You can make being aware of God and praising Him your first priority. You can still work, play, and live normally while longing after and praising God. But your deepest interest, the thing you most hunger for, is knowing Him. He has done and is doing wonderful things for you. He is the most wonderful Person in the universe. So why not?

Be satisfied in God (Ps. 63:5-6)
You do not need special experiences to know His presence or to be in a blessed state. You can simply praise Him, meditate on Him, and rest under His detailed care. When He is your first priority, you can invest every nook and cranny of your day in seeking Him. Even when you wake up in the middle of the night, you can remember Him and take great joy in His presence with you. You will be constantly learning more of Him. Your mind and your spirit will be satisfied and yet hungering for more of His presence.

Find intimacy in God (Ps. 63:7-8)
You may remember that God created man to fellowship with Him. Probably the worst consequence of man's fall into sin was the alienation and loss of that close fellowship. Now you can be restored to fellowship with Him through faith in Christ. There is great reward in seeking Him, as the entire psalm indicates. You will come to see and understand His involvement in your life, guiding and blessing you. You will find great comfort and security in all that He brings your way. You will then want to follow Him as closely as possible because He is sustaining you. There is wonderful assurance and comfort in our pursuit of God, hungering and yet satisfied.

Rejoice in God (Ps. 63:9-11)
You may have already discovered that there are people in the world who do not like you. They may hope for calamity to reach you or hope for your destruction in some way or other. They may resent your attention to the Lord and your convictions that make your behavior different from theirs. Remember that God has a plan for them too. He will manage their circumstances in this life and in the next. You do not have to be directly involved in correcting them or in proving or justifying your walk with Him. You can continue to be happy that you know Him. You can have sweet fellowship with those who also follow Him. Those who criticize you or lie about you will be corrected by the same Lord who blesses you.