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## God's Love is Better than Life

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# God's Love Is Better Than Life

JEANNIE AND MIKE CAGLE

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What an incredible task—to reflect on a self-selected passage of scripture and its relationship to our life of ministry. How can we possibly cull out one passage when so many from God's precious word have spoken to us throughout our journey; when so many have provided "eureka" moments in our relationship with God and his people?

Especially daunting is the task when it requires the agreement of our twenty-nine-year marriage—when she says "tomato" and he says "to-mah-to," when he loves Gregorian chants and she loves Casting Crowns. Of course some passages seemed immediately obvious: Psalm 86.14 "Ruthless men surround me and want to slay me" but not **all** members of our church family feel that way, so it wasn't a complete fit. Perhaps Galatians 6.9 would work, since it is a reminder to "not become weary in well doing." A frequently quoted memory verse for us both, it does come in handy from time to time. Still, we weren't quite satisfied that it was our favorite text for ministry.

However, we did quickly agree on one thing—both music and poetry speak deeply to our souls. When all around us is hectic, frustrating, and trite, the words of a song and the sound of music can quickly bring tears and comfort to us both, as those words and music speak to our deepest longings for God. We often listen separately to the new Zoe CD and come back with the same phase or song that elevated itself above the others. God uses the incredible gift of creativity in others to communicate himself to us. It's as if we both feel that music is our "secret language" between ourselves and God.

In this context, it is obvious why we easily agreed on a psalm from one of God's most expressive servants, David. Both of us yearn to be known as servants "after God's own heart." The sixty-third Psalm is special to us, among many. As we reflect on our calling, God has used David's words in this psalm to encourage, discipline, and challenge us. How could David have known our feelings when we weren't yet born? Yet, in this psalm, written so long ago, we are reminded of our Father's constant provision and care, and his desire to communicate intimately with each of his creatures, especially us.

## **FOCUSING UPON GOD**

O God, you are my God,  
Earnestly I seek you,  
My soul thirsts for you,  
My body longs for you,  
In a dry and weary land  
Where there is no water (Ps 63.1)

David clearly establishes that his desire is focused on God and him alone. "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you . . ." Our desire is to do just the same. One of the greatest challenges for us in ministry has been pleasing God and him alone. We've had many times when the audible voices of men and women and their desires distracted us to the extent that we haven't listened to the voice of God. Recently we've expe-

rienced conflict in our church body over doctrinal differences—the same struggles every group of believers has endured at one time or another. Our discouragement grew daily as the conflict increased. The hardest part of all was the anger and accusations of brothers and sisters who felt strongly that they were defending “truth” instead of personal opinion. God made himself known to one of us on a Sunday when he said clearly, “It’s about me, not about them,” and then the focus sharpened. His voice became more distinct as the other voices faded into the background.

This undivided focus on God has taken on meaning, even in our relationship with each other. The beauty of co-ministry has been the support of the other when we feel our devotion to God failing. It seems one of us is up when the other is down. But even then, we have to fight the temptation to lean on each other before we lean on God. We believe God intends our marriage to be a source of support in our love for him, but never is it meant to be a replacement.

The focus upon God in this psalm represents a search that is motivated by desire and longing. Thus the psalmist describes seeking for God as a thirst. Those we’ve had the privilege to encourage in the Lord can quickly identify with the feeling of being in a desert, of desperately thirsting for their souls to be hydrated. We also find ourselves in that place, longing for God’s complete presence. Therefore, David’s description of complete satisfaction for the thirsting soul is a source of comfort and a beacon of hope for us, as it has been for those to whom we have ministered through the years.

### **BEHOLDING GOD’S GLORY**

I have seen you in the sanctuary  
And beheld your power and your glory.  
Because your love is better than life,  
My lips will glorify you (Ps 63.2-3).

We’ve truly seen God in his sanctuary and beheld his power and glory. We’ve witnessed conflict resolved with church leaders when we saw no possible solution; we’ve seen marriages mended that seemed hopeless; we’ve seen lives steeped in sin become restored with God’s love and grace. Once we truly saw the power of God at work in our lives and the lives of others we couldn’t imagine life without him. Early in our ministry, we went through a period we refer to as “the black hole.” To say things were not good would be an understatement. We got out of ministry for a couple of years, and during that time we both struggled in our relationship with God. One of us struggled to believe God is anything more than an authoritarian dictator, and the other struggled to trust that God will keep his promises to the faithful. Both of us had faulty theology: a wrong concept of God and who he is. Both of us were in a two-year faith crisis; each arriving at the same conclusion—“your love is better than life.” Would we say we enjoyed that time of struggle? No way! Would we say we would go through it again? You bet! A clearer perspective of God, a deeper understanding of who he is and what he is about is always worth the trip, no matter how painful the experience may be.

### **RECEIVING SOUL SATISFACTION FROM GOD**

I will praise you as long as I live,  
And in your name I will lift up my hands.  
My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods;  
With singing lips my mouth will praise you (Ps 63.4-5).

Our life with God has shown us over and over again how true it is that soul satisfaction comes from God and him only. Because of the ups and downs of working with people we’ve finally figured out that peace with God transcends external struggles, and that we are able to deal with the externals when we are communing with God. It is more than just regular Bible study and prayer, it is feeling God in the daily rhythm of



our lives: walking with him as a matter of relationship and not habit. One indicator of this relationship, this presence of God in our daily walk, is described in the following verses:

On my bed I remember you,  
I think of you through the watches of the night.  
Because you are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.  
My soul clings to you,  
Your right hand upholds me (Ps 63.6-8).

Do you hear what David is saying? He is describing an obsession. He is thinking about God all the time. All of us know what it's like to be lying in bed, dwelling on a particular thought or concern. We also know that there is such a small distinction between true meditation and worry. David describes such closeness to God that he is consumed with thinking about him. He meditates on him all the time. We'd love to say we are totally consumed by God, but that would be an exaggeration. God has instilled in us a desire to be totally consumed by him so that we are energized by his Spirit, but we've yet to realize that reality in its fullness.

### SEEKING THE HEART OF GOD

We've both experienced a transition over the last couple of years. It has become our desire to truly dwell on God and all that he is, even as we lie in our bed. When did we make the switch from our earlier ideas of ministry as leadership and organization with God as our co-pilot, to a realization that ministry is truly seeking the heart of God as directed by the Spirit? We can't exactly say when, but we can certainly proclaim why. When it became clear that we are helpless without him and totally dependent on the upholding of his hand, our ministry was energized through no power of our own.

What a proclamation of trust to "sing" when you are shadowed by God's wing, knowing he will protect you! Actually, we are in the middle of a faith crisis as we write this—we are in a place where we are not sure about the future of our professional ministry. Yet we believe we truly can sing as we count on his promise to protect us, particularly from the evil one. Our walk hasn't always been easy but it has always been good. Truly, LORD, your love is better than life!

Jeannie and Mike Cagle have served Churches of Christ for several years and are currently engaged in a church planting in Marietta, Georgia.

