

Psalms 143:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah.

Analysis

I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Selah. This verse employs vivid physical imagery to express spiritual longing—stretched hands and parched land both communicating desperate need for God. The gestures and metaphors convey intensity of desire that words alone cannot fully express.

"I stretch forth my hands unto thee" (פְּרַשְׁתִּי יְדֵי אֶלְيָהוּ/parastti yaday eleikha) describes physical posture of prayer. Paras means to spread out, extend, stretch forth. Ancient Israelite prayer posture typically involved standing with hands raised and extended toward heaven or toward the temple. This wasn't merely cultural custom but physical expression of spiritual reaching, supplication, openness to receive. The extended hands symbolize both empty neediness and reaching faith.

1 Kings 8:22 describes Solomon at temple dedication: "Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven." Exodus 9:29 records Moses: "I will spread abroad my hands unto the LORD." Lamentations 2:19 commands: "Lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children." Extended hands toward God expressed dependence, petition, and worship.

"My soul thirsteth after thee" (נֶפֶשִׁי לְבָקָרֶץ-עִמָּפָה/nafshi lekha ke'eretz-ayefah) employs thirst metaphor to convey spiritual desire. Nefesh (soul) represents the

whole person—life, being, innermost self. Ayef means thirsty, weary, faint, exhausted. David's soul experiences thirst comparable to parched land—desperate, life-threatening need for water/God.

"As a thirsty land" (כִּי אֶרֶץ עִזָּה/ke'eretz-ayefah) makes the comparison explicit. Eretz means land, earth, ground. The simile pictures cracked, parched ground during drought—earth crying out for rain, desperate for water that means life versus death. In semi-arid Palestine where agriculture depended on seasonal rains, drought was catastrophic threat. Dry, cracked ground vividly illustrated desperate need. Similarly, David's soul thirsts for God with life-or-death urgency.

"Selah" (הַלְּךָ/selah) appears here, this musical/liturgical notation probably indicating pause for reflection or instrumental interlude. It invites readers to stop and meditate on what was just expressed—the intensity of spiritual thirst, the physicality of desperate prayer, the comparison to parched land. Selah creates space to feel the weight of longing just described.

Historical Context

The thirst metaphor appears frequently in Psalms to express spiritual longing. Psalm 42:1-2 declares: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God." Psalm 63:1, written when David was in the wilderness of Judah: "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

For people living in semi-arid Palestine, thirst and drought were existential threats, not mere inconveniences. Water scarcity meant the difference between life and death for individuals, flocks, and crops. The dry season lasted roughly April through October with virtually no rain. Springs and wells became precious resources. Drought years brought famine, economic collapse, population displacement. Against this background, thirst metaphors carried weight modern readers in water-abundant regions may miss.

Jesus used thirst imagery in John 7:37: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me,

and drink." He told the Samaritan woman: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Revelation 21:6 promises: "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

The physical posture of stretched hands in prayer reflects embodied spirituality—faith isn't merely mental but involves the whole person, including body. While contemporary Western Christianity often emphasizes internal, mental faith, biblical faith engages body, emotions, and physical expressions. Kneeling, prostration, raised hands, dancing—all appear in Scripture as appropriate physical expressions of spiritual reality.

Augustine wrote: "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee." This captures the psalm's theology—humans have God-shaped thirst that nothing else satisfies. Attempting to quench spiritual thirst with created things is like drinking seawater—it intensifies rather than satisfies thirst. Only God ultimately satisfies human longing.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does physical posture in prayer (stretched hands, kneeling, etc.) relate to internal spiritual attitudes?
2. What does it mean practically to 'thirst' for God, and how is this different from merely wanting things from God?

3. How might contemporary abundance of physical comforts and entertainment dull our sense of spiritual thirst for God?
4. What practices or circumstances have intensified your spiritual thirst for God, making you desperate for His presence?
5. How does recognizing that only God can satisfy soul-thirst change what we seek and how we pursue satisfaction?

Interlinear Text

פָּרָץ	נִפְשֵׁר	נִפְשֵׁר	כָּאָרֶץ
I stretch forth	my hands	H413	unto thee my soul
H6566	H3027		land
עִיטָה	לְבָ	סָלָה:	
thirsteth after thee as a thirsty	H0	Selah	H776
H5889		H5542	H776

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 63:1 (Parallel theme): O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;

Job 11:13 (Parallel theme): If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him;

Psalms 84:2 (Parallel theme): My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.

Psalms 88:9 (Parallel theme): Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee.

Psalms 44:20 (Parallel theme): If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god;

Isaiah 35:7 (Parallel theme): And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

John 7:37 (Parallel theme): In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.

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