

When God Seems Far Away

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We love the Psalms in part because they give voice to our distress in times of weakness. Many of the Psalms do that and Psalm 61 is certainly in that same genre. Let's read it together, or I'll read it as you listen along might be a better and more accurate way to say it. Psalm 61. The inscription reads, "For the choir director; on a stringed instrument. A Psalm of David." Perhaps a Psalm to be sung as opposed to simply read in its original day. In verse 1,

1 Hear my cry, O God; Give heed to my prayer. 2 From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. 3 For You have been a refuge for me, A tower of strength against the enemy. 4 Let me dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. Selah. 5 For You have heard my vows, O God; You have given me the inheritance of those who fear Your name. 6 You will prolong the king's life; His years will be as many generations. 7 He will abide before God forever; Appoint lovingkindness and truth that they may preserve him. 8 So I will sing praise to Your name forever, That I may pay my vows day by day.

Well, here in Psalm 61, David finds hope in God and in his enduring promises and there is no historical setting that is given for this Psalm. Many commentators believe that perhaps David wrote it when he was fleeing from his son Absalom during that time of distress in his life. Whatever the setting is, the key for understanding this Psalm is that David was feeling alone and alienated. He felt as though God was far away and so as we come to Psalm 61, we can ask ourselves, "Well, what do we do when God seems far away?" There are times like that in the lives of believers. It's not a universal experience but certainly those who have been dislocated by job transfers or new situations in education or the death of a loved one, things like that leave you without your comfortable sense of support, the things that are familiar that have always informed and given you a sense of direction as you followed God. Well, what about when those times are taken away, when those things are no longer present? David was in that situation as he wrote Psalm 61 and we're going to see how he responded to it here this evening together.

We'll start out with his call for help, point 1 if you're taking notes: David's call for help, and he opens with a call to God to answer his prayers. Look at verse 1 with me. He says,

1 Hear my cry, O God [and then as though it were an echo]; Give heed to my prayer.

So he calls on God at the opening of the Psalm to say, "God, hear me. I need your attention. I need you to listen to what I have to say here." And as you go on in the Psalm, you find that he is seeking divine protection in a time of weakness.

Look at verse 2, he says,

2 From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

There in verse 2 you get a sense of what the condition of his heart is and maybe a sense also of what his circumstances were. Somehow either literally or simply metaphorically, it may be a combination of both, David, it seems as though he was separated from Jerusalem and separated from the established place of worship and so he's perhaps in a foreign land leading a military battle or something like that. It's as though he was far away from that which he loved and treasured the most, "I'm calling to you from the ends of the earth," he says and he says that "my heart is faint."

So David is weary and he is at the point of despair as he opens this prayer and you get a sense that he feels distant from God and yet even when God seems far away, David knew that he could call on him. And that's one of the sweetest things to take from this Psalm right from the beginning, is that when you have that sense of distance, you're alone, maybe you've been transferred, you're away from family, you're away from your church, you're away from your fellow believers or maybe you're a new believer and your family won't have you anymore, well, what then? In a human horizontal level, you're all alone. Well, how sweet is it to see David calling to God with a sense of confidence that God will hear his prayer in that time of distress.

So he says there in verse 2, look at the end of it with me, he says, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." And here is one of the hardest things for us to kind of grasp and to embrace, I believe. We all love the sense of being self-sufficient. We like to be independent. We like to have a sense that, you know, we kind of have things under control. But life isn't always like that, is it? And David was in a situation where the things that he wanted and the things that he needed were outside of his control. He wasn't able to make it happen on his own and so he asks God, he says, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I," the rock being a place of refuge, a place of safety. Picture a cliff that is high above a valley where enemy forces are and you are up on this cliff and you're protected by the physical distance and the place of safety is there. David says, "I can't get there on my own. What I need, God, I am not able to provide on my own." So with humility and with a sense of dependence, he comes to God and he says, "God, take me and lead me to a rock that is higher than I am. Where I need to go is too far away for me to reach. What would comfort my soul is beyond my circumstances to accomplish."

And beloved, one of the keys to true spiritual growth, I believe, is coming to recognize what David is presupposing here and that is that you cannot always control your circumstances. You're not always in a position to be able to change that which would make things more comfortable for you. You cannot be the instrument of your own deliverance. You cannot be the source of your own safety. You're too weak, you're too vulnerable, you're too impotent to do that. And beloved, let's just kind of step back here for a moment and stop for a moment and realize that isn't it true that when you truly came to Christ, weren't all of those principles in play at the moment of your conversion? Isn't conversion simply a statement, "God, I realize that I am in a place of danger and alienation from you. I am under judgment. I am a guilty sinner before a holy God." And isn't the principle that is at work in conversion, isn't it a statement, "God, you must deliver me because I cannot deliver myself. God, I need you to show mercy to me that I cannot earn with the works of my own hands"? This principle of helplessness and dependence is woven into the very beginning of the Christian life. It's at the heart of conversion, that, "God, I have to come to you as a beggar. I come to you as a sinner separated from you and unable to save myself." No one is a Christian who doesn't know something about appealing to God in that desperate humility and dependence that he would have mercy on you because you know that you can't do anything to save yourself.

Well, what you see in Psalm 61 is just a carryover that the things that animate that initial moment of conversion is the same thing that animates us later in spiritual life when we find ourselves weak and separated and isolated and you come back, it brings you back not to be saved again but it brings you back to that start position of dependence that says, "God, I need your help and I am relying on you because I cannot do anything with the power of my own hands." You need help that is beyond yourself. You need God to lead you. And those who would advance in spiritual life, those who would grow in their sanctification, are those who will embrace that principle in humility rather than resist it in pride and say, "I don't want to confess my weakness." Well, then, don't be surprised if God doesn't humble you further until you do. The point is for us to recognize our dependence on God and to live in a trusting sense of committal to him. And yes, it humbles you but it promotes your spiritual growth. What you find in Psalm 61 is David, as we will see, is David growing ever closer in increasing degrees of intimacy as he appeals to God. Well, beloved, in a sense you kind of have to make a choice about what you want and what you will embrace in life. And when the humble circumstances come and you are not the tower of strength that you once thought you were but that others thought you were and you are humbled and you are reduced, then embrace that and enter into the spirit of Psalm 61 because that is what will promote your spiritual growth. No one grows spiritually who has a sense of self-sufficiency that is animating their life. So we have to put that pride aside.

Well, as you continue in this Psalm, ultimately what you're going to see is that what David ultimately has in mind for what his rock is, it's God himself. God himself is the rock that he wants him to lead David to. He's saying, "God, lead me to yourself," as we'll see in verses 3 and 4 as David appeals and states the basis for why he is praying and his expectation for God's answer. Look at verses 3 and 4 with me. "Lead me to the rock that

is higher than I. For," and he goes on and he explains the basis of his prayer here in verses 3 and 4. He says,

3 For You have been a refuge for me, A tower of strength against the enemy. 4 Let me dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings.

Several different things that are going on in these two verses that are all very sweet and very enriching for our spiritual lives for our hearts to feed on. First of all, David is saying as he says, "God, lead me to the rock that is higher than I," as he states that as his prayer, "here I am faint, distant, you seem so far away. God, lead me to the rock that is higher than I," and then he says, "For," and he goes and he unfolds the basis of his prayer. Well, first of all, he says, "God, you've been like this to me in the past. You have been a refuge to me in the past and therefore based on the reality that you have already dealt with me in this manner in the past, I have a confident expectation as I pray that you will do that again in the future. God, I'm just asking you to do what you've already done for me in the past. I'm not asking for anything new. Of course you will answer this prayer. Of course I prevail upon you to do that which you have already shown yourself willing to do." Well, that's wonderful, isn't it? Doesn't that strengthen your sense of approaching God in prayer? Can't you step back in your own spiritual life and realize there have been times where God has strengthened you and helped you when there was no way that you could help yourself? Isn't that true? Isn't that true when you have had loved ones on the brink of death and said, "God, help my loved one," and God answered and now you find yourself in a position of blessing once again. Isn't that a sweet place to be? Well, as you grow and multiply those experiences over the course of your life, they become the grounds upon which you say, "God, help me again. Do what you did in the past. Do it for me again." And there is that growing sense of intimacy and trust that comes and starts to break the isolation when God seems far away and you say, "No, I remember. I've been in this position before and God helped me then. He'll help me again."

David is reasoning with God in that sense and he uses four metaphors in these two verses and these are very interesting to look at and to watch. Look at these four metaphors, these word pictures of what he is asking for from God. He says in verse 3, "You have been a refuge for me." In the second half of verse 3, "A tower of strength." A refuge, a tower. Verse 4 he says, "Let me dwell in Your tent forever." At the end of verse 4, "Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings." Look at these metaphors because they are really key to the core of the Psalm here. Refuge. Tower of strength. A tent. And wings. And what each of these pictures is doing is they are showing confidence in his God. They are showing, they are picturing the way he is viewing the protective hand of God on his life. They are pictures to explain a greater principle, an invisible principle of what he wants God to be like to him.

And watch this: with each of these metaphors, they become increasingly personal along the way. This is one of the highlights of Psalm 61, at least in my judgment. These metaphors are increasingly personal. Think about it. Refuge being like a high rock, a high rugged rock where you are safe from the enemy but you're still kind of out and exposed,

but at least you're safe. You go on to the next metaphor, the tower of strength. That was the place of protection in a fortress on the city wall. So you are within the walls, you're within the protection of the city now, closer than you were on the refuge, on the high rock, closer and more intimate with perhaps the people of God there. But it goes more. From there he goes to the tent, perhaps even referring to the very tabernacle in the wilderness where the presence of God was made known before the temple was built. So from the rock to the fortress to the tent, and then to the most intimate place of all. Look at the end of verse 4 here. He says, "Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings," picturing the protective presence that young birds take under their caring mother where they are close and where the mother is safe and there is that warmth and intimacy right under the wings of mother herself. Well, David is saying, "God, where I ultimately want to be, I want to be in that place of close intimate fellowship with you where there is nothing between you and me, where there is no separation, where, as it were, I am right on your chest," even as the disciple John leaned his head onto the chest of Jesus at the Last Supper. That close intimacy. So from a high rock to a city tower to a tent of dwelling to the most intimate place, David is saying, "God, what I want you to do, I want you to lead me right next to yourself. You seem far away right now. God, I want you to step by step by step bring me into that place of intimacy that we once enjoyed in the past." And he says, "That's what I'm after here." It's not so much protection from the enemy that is visible here in Psalm 61, but it's that earnest desire for the intimate fellowship with his God.

So, beloved, let's step back and just be a little bit personal here this evening. Does God seem far away to you as you sit here tonight? Did you come in estranged with a sense of so many problems that are just weighing down upon me, so many different things that I'm thinking about and God seems like he's a million miles away? Well, how sweet to see in Scripture itself a God-inspired word through the pen of David telling you this is the way back to intimacy. And rather than trying to fix all of your problems that are weighing down on your mind, set those aside and just say, "God, I can't fix this. I am not able to solve the problems that I face and here I am in my weakness. I pray that you would take me and that you would lead me right into the center core of fellowship with you," and to realize that in Psalm 61, you see the evidence that God delights to answer that prayer. And so, beloved, in those times, stir yourself up to faith. Don't collapse in your weakness. Don't melt under the weight or under the heat, you would kind of collapse under the weight of something, you would melt under the heat of your trials. I'm trying to keep my own metaphors straight here. Don't just melt there, stir yourself up and say, "God, lead me. Help me. I trust in you. I need you to lead me ever closer to you because I don't want to stay in this place where you seem so far away."

Now, he ends this first section of four verses with the word "Selah," a word that's designed to have a stop and pause and meditate on it; to recognize that this is what God is like, that God receives prayers of tender bruised hearts and responds to them with positive, loving, gracious answers. That's who God is and we're supposed to stop and reflect on that, that God is not a God who chastises us for the sense of distance, he's not a God who repudiates the prayers because we are weak. It is precisely on the basis of our weakness that he receives us. It is precisely when the patient says, "I am sick," that the

doctor comes to heal. Jesus said, "Those that are well don't need a physician. I have come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." This is the whole principle on which God receives us. He told Paul, he said, "My strength is perfected in your weakness." And Paul said, "Then I am content to be weak if only the power of God would be perfected in me in my weakness." So it turns all of our normal human thinking on its head, that when we are weak, then we are strong. And it is when we are weak that we call out to God in a way that he is pleased to answer. That's an encouragement for us to come to and an encouragement to trust him.

Now, as you move on into the second half of the Psalm you find a call of confidence. A call of confidence now. Having prayed this way saying, "God, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Lead me all of the way into progressive steps of close intimacy with you," now what you find in the second half of the Psalm is David's confidence that God will indeed honor his prayer and his commitment.

Look at verse 5, he says, "For," because. "God, I'm confident that you will let me take refuge in the shelter of your wings because,

5 You have heard my vows, O God; You have given me the inheritance of those who fear Your name.

And what you find here is that David's confidence was rooted in God's promises. God had made a covenant with David back in 2 Samuel 7 to give David life and to give David an enduring kingdom, a dynasty that would flow through his descendants and that there would be men to sit on his throne.

Look over at 2 Samuel with me for a moment, 2 Samuel 7, one of the truly key chapters in all of the Bible. 2 Samuel 7, you'll find in verse 16, we won't go through all that we could say about this chapter, just a representative text from this chapter in verse 16. God is speaking to David and says, "Your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." And David goes on, David responds in verse 18 and is says, "David the king went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, 'Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? And yet this was insignificant in Your eyes, O Lord GOD, for You have spoken also of the house of Your servant concerning the distant future.'" David realized that these promises and this covenant that God made with him in 2 Samuel 7 was not simply about David but it was about his descendants and this would extend long into the future. This was to be an enduring covenant and it's that promise that is the basis of David's appeal as we turn back to Psalm 61.

Psalm 61, go back to verse 5 with me. He says, "You have heard my vows, O God; You have given me the inheritance of those who fear Your name." He says, "God, you have made promises to me. You have made promises to the nation, Israel. You have promised us a land and you have promised us a blessing and you have promised spiritual prosperity in this land when we are faithful to you." And it is that promise that is the basis of David's appeal.

Here's the key, here's the key for you and me as we are processing how we apply this to our lives. Notice that he says, "God, you have given this to me." He is appealing to God based on things that God has done and things that God has said and he says, "God, I know that you have heard my vows. You know of my commitment to serve and follow you." Well, what he is saying here is, "God, I'm not appealing to my own merit. I'm appealing to what you have done. I'm appealing to what you have given. You have given us this inheritance. You have given us that in order to bless us and you have given that to me." So he's not appealing to any sense of self-righteousness as he prays this way. His confidence isn't rooted in anything in himself as though he somehow deserved God's protection, rather he is confident – watch this – he is confident that God will align David's life and David's circumstances so that they will ultimately be consistent with the promises that he has made in the past.

Now, how do you take that and think through that and apply it in your own thinking? And it's so easy to fall into self-pity and self-justification, isn't it? That, "God, I don't deserve this and why me and why am I suffering this way?" Which embedded and implied in statements like this is that, "I'm good enough that I shouldn't be suffering like that." That's a wrong way for us to think. It's a wrong way for us to respond to God and it's not the basis on which we approach him. Rather, rather – oh, this is so important, it is so important for you to come back and to premise your appeals to God and your prayers to God based on what he has promised and what he has said about himself and the mercy that he has shown to you in Christ, and the premise that in that rather than simply saying, "God, get me out of this trouble because I don't like it," so that your mind is thinking and your words are rehearsing promises of God.

For example, turn to Romans 8. When God seems far away, well, let your mind go to Romans 8 and speak truth to yourself. Rehearse Scripture to yourself and rebuke your weak and unbelieving heart with Scripture and your heart will respond to the word of God. The Apostle Paul said in verse 38 of Romans 8, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." So you reason like this, you pray like this, you think like this, what I'm about to say, "God, you sent Christ to save me and you have, in fact, saved me, and that means that you have saved me forever, and the love of Christ is eternal, the love of Christ is permanent. It has to be that way because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. The way that you have blessed me in the past, O God, is the way that you will bless me in the future. And not based on any merit of my own but based on what you have done for me in Christ, O God, there is nothing that could possibly separate me from you. And so, God, I pray that in this time of weakness, in this time where you seem far away, I pray that you would gather me up and lead me back into the state of mind where my mind rests in the internal security that belongs to the believer in Christ. God, keep me there. Strengthen my heart that I might live and believe in light of what you've actually done for me." That is the way that we respond when God seems distant. You go back to the word. You go back to the promises. You go back to what God has actually accomplished for you in Christ and you return to

first principles and say, "I'm going to reevaluate everything. I'm going to turn my attention back to these first things that are true about Christians and let my heart rest in those and trust God and ask God to bring me back into the spiritual reality of these things," which is much different than saying, "I don't like this. I don't want to be here. I don't deserve this." We don't reason that way as believers. We go straight to the promises of God and reason from them and let those shape the way that we think and respond.

Well, with those things in mind, go back to Psalm 61 now and David in verse 6 switches to the third person as he continues to pray. Remember that as a king he had a representative capacity for the nation. It wasn't simply about David as an individual, David as an individual man, but as the king, the well-being of the nation was tied up in his own well-being as well because of that representative capacity he has. So he prays in the third person from that perspective and he says in verse 6, making statements of confidence, he says,

6 You will prolong the king's life; His years will be as many generations. 7
He will abide before God forever;

You hear the echoes of the Davidic covenant there, don't you?

7 He will abide before God forever; Appoint lovingkindness and truth that
they may preserve him.

Now, there are two aspects to David's prayer here. In the immediate situation, he is expressing confidence that God will preserve his own life as the king of Israel but what you want to see and what we need to see and draw out of this is that David is looking further than his own well-being. He is looking further than his own deliverance. He is expressing confidence that God will preserve his line, preserve his dynasty for many generations. This is no superficial prayer that says, "God, get me out of my immediate problem." David has in mind the fact that God had promised a dynasty to come through and come from his loins that would endure forever. Ultimately, then, David's prayer here in verses 6 and 7 are answered in no one less than the Lord Jesus Christ because Christ is the one who will abide before God forever. Christ is the one who is the ultimate David. Christ is the one who will dwell and sit on the throne of David in his millennial kingdom. So David is expressing confidence not only for the immediate situation but for the long-distance future as he prays here and he is praying that God would preserve that dynasty that would ultimately culminate in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So David says there at the end of verse 7, look at it with me, "Appoint lovingkindness and truth that they may preserve him." David is certain now. Notice how he has gone from a call, a cry for help, to statements of confidence now. He is sure that God will do this because God is a God of loyal love and truth and he has made promises and he will keep them.

Now beloved, that is what frames your entire approach to life as a Christian. This frames everything else. This is the first principle that determines the way that you process

everything about life. You think this way: "Christ has come to save me. He accomplished my redemption on the cross. I now belong to him. The Holy Spirit dwells within me and the Holy Spirit is the guarantee of future things yet to come. The guarantee, the down payment that assures us that there is more to come. Therefore," you say, "therefore," you reason with yourself, "because these things are true, then therefore I cannot possibly be meeting my end in these present circumstances. No matter how stark, no matter how desperate, no matter how hopeless it appears from a human perspective, that's not the perspective that governs my heart. That is not the perspective that governs the way I interpret what happens to me." You step back from the circumstances, you remember the things revealed to us in God's precious word about your salvation and you say, "That is what determines my ultimate future and what determines my ultimate future is not the next doctor's report, it's not what happens in the midst of this very serious and heavy trial. No, there is something transcendent that is at work in my life and that is what I draw my confidence from. It's not that the circumstances will necessarily change but that I am in the hand of Christ and no one can pluck me out of his hand." And that is why we are confident even when God seems far away, even when the circumstances are difficult.

You see, as Christians we are in a blessed position that would be the envy of non-Christians if they only understood it. We are not at the mercy of our circumstances like they are. Our happiness, our security, our well-being, is not rooted in what happens around us. It's rooted in things that are eternal and unchanging. It's rooted in a God who loves us and has given himself up for us. It's rooted in the certainty of his promises that he will finish what he has begun in us.

So that leaves us in a blessed position of peace that David expresses in verse 8. With renewed faith, David pledges his future obedience and worship. He says in verse 8, "So," from this position of confidence,

8 So I will sing praise to Your name forever, That I may pay my vows day by day.

The vows show that David was praying with a conscious commitment to obedience. The praise shows that David's prayers were not rooted in selfishness. He desired deliverance – watch this – he desired deliverance so that he could serve God according to God's desires; that David would have the desire of his heart by being able to praise and to serve God with the life that God had given him.

Adversity, the adversity of this time in his life did not kill David. It was not the end of him. Rather it brought forth a greater sense of perspective on the love for God, a deeper awareness of his promises and a renewed commitment to trust him. And do you know what, beloved? Your present adversity, by the grace of God, is not going to kill you either. It's not going to be the end of you. Nothing is going to be the end of you when you belong to Christ. Nothing is going to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, your Lord. Nothing is going to somehow put you in a position where your soul is lost and all that you held precious will somehow slip through your fingers in the end. That is just not the way that God deals with us. That is not the way God deals with you.

God deals with you in perfect faithfulness. God deals with you in a selfless generosity that was shown at the cross. God deals with you in a perfect faithfulness and though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, in the language of David elsewhere in Psalm 23, you say to yourself, "I fear no evil, for you are with me." That is the confidence that we have as those who belong to this great God.

Now, with those things said, let me just give you four quick takeaways from Psalm 61 to apply to your own heart and life and they will just kind of be an echo of things that I've already said. But sometimes, you know, the truth of the matter is the longer that I preach, the simpler I want things to be, the simpler I try to be, the more direct and clear I try to be because sometimes it's just the simplest things that we need to hear to strengthen us and to help us. Well, these things are very simple but perhaps the very point at which we often fail.

The first takeaway: in times of weakness, call on God. Call on him. "God, hear my prayer. Hear my cry, O God, give heed to my prayer." And especially – oh, beloved – remember this Psalm in particular, remember Psalm 61 when the means of support that you have always relied on are suddenly taken away from you: a new job, entering into college, moving away into a new city, an extended illness where your strength is gone, the death of a spouse, the death of a child, the sickness of a child that you can't fix. In all of those things, beloved, come back to Psalm 61 and in the midst of what seems to be a crisis and the circumstances are spinning out of control, go back to Psalm 61 and call on God and say, "God, I am calling to you. It's like I'm at the ends of the earth, it seems so far away and I am alone and my heart is fainting here. My heart is weak here, O God. God, in light of that, in light of what you've done in Psalm 61, in light of what you've done in Christ, God, please come and take my hand and lead me closer to yourself. All of my human friends, all of my human loved ones may be gone but, God, you're not. You're still here and therefore I rest my hope in you." And beloved, even in those times of isolation, you can turn to God in confidence that he will respond to you with his love, wisdom and power and that he won't abandon you in perpetuity to the present isolation that you're feeling. This is a wonderful truth to lay hold of.

Secondly, as you call on God, remember his promises. Remember his promises. In weakness, say, "Okay, I'm feeling weak here. What am I going to do? I'm going to call on God is what I'm going to do." And as you call on God, you say, "I'm going to remember his promises. I'm going to remember what he said to me." David prayed with confidence as he remembered the promises of God to him, as he remembered the past times that God had delivered him. Well then, you do the same thing as you're praying in the midst of your weakness. You say, "No, I remember Philippians 1:6. God said that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Well, do you know what that means, then? I know that I belong to Christ. That means that he's going to perfect me over the long-term even though today is a bad day. Even though this period of life is very difficult, God is at work perfecting me and accomplishing the fullness of the reason for which he saved me and therefore I am not alone. Therefore this isn't the end of me."

So you remember promises like that and, beloved, in those times of weakness, your dependence and your vulnerability is real but you do not need to panic, in fact you should not panic; you should not let yourself panic because your God reigns. Your God has offered his Son on the cross to save your soul. Your God has promised to bring you safe into heaven in the end. There is no need for panic here. And one of the ways that you manifest spiritual growth, spiritual maturity, one of the surest ways that you can be an effective witness for Christ is to be calm in a crisis that would make others collapse.

Thirdly, as you call on God: renew your commitment to faithfulness. That's what David did. David said in verse 8, "I'll pay my vows day by day." He not only was asking for help, he committed himself to obedience. So you are mindful of so many things. You say, "I am weak therefore I'm going to call on my God. And I'm not going to call on him in ignorance, I'm going to inform my prayers by the promises that he has given to me. And as I think about the goodness of God in my life, what I'm going to do is I'm going to let this time of isolation strengthen my commitment to be faithful to my God rather than letting it become a source of disobedience or distrust. Not me," you say to yourself, "I'm going to become all the more committed to faithfulness in this time of isolation." And beloved, a willing and trusting heart like that is positioned for God's future blessing.

Then finally, tonight if you're not a Christian, Psalm 61 applies to you too in the simplest of ways. You see, I keep coming back to these simple things. I just come back to the simplest of things. If you're not a Christian, you need to become one but you can't do it in your own strength and what Psalm 61 teaches you is this: it teaches you to pray, "God, I know I am not saved. I know I am still a sinner separated from you. God, I just pray that you would take me and lead me to Christ. By the power of your Holy Spirit, lead me to him. God, as I open your word, I pray that you would lead me to the Scriptures that would awaken my dead heart and open and illumine my darkened mind so that I could understand and come to Christ. God, do that for me." Seek the rock that is higher than you are. Don't be content to live in your sin. Don't be content to live in the obvious depravity of your own heart. Let Psalm 61 awaken you to the sense that says, "God, I need out of here and I can't do it on my own. I'm lost. I can't find my way, O God, lead me to the rock that is higher than I am. O God, lead me to the rock who is Jesus Christ." And as you do that, God will be faithful to you. God will answer that prayer. Why? Because that's the kind of God that he is.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we love to be on top of the world and on top of our circumstances but so often life is not like that. People, circumstances, health don't cooperate with our desire to be on the top of the hill, the king of the hill, and we find ourselves weak and desperate and unable to deliver ourselves, the circumstances have spun out of control in a way that we cannot fix. It's unsettling, Lord, for us when those things happen and it's that way for many in the room tonight. Father, we know each other, we know these things about each other, and so in simple dependence after an exposition of your word, Father, which shows us that you are more willing to help us than we are to ask, Lord, we pray that you would take our weak and weary hands and lead us to the rock that is higher than I, lead

us to the rock that is higher than we are, lead us indeed, O God, to yourself. Let the difficult earthly circumstances be the classroom in which you teach us to find our complete satisfaction in Christ alone. And Father, bring us, as it were, to the very intimacy of your side, under the very wings of God, as it were, knowing that you care for us and that your provision and protection for us is absolutely perfect and that in a supernatural way that goes contrary to outward circumstances, Father, we would be at peace in the midst of the storm. I pray that for each one here, Father, I pray that for those who are listening over the live stream or hearing these things later on. Father, when our bodies fail us, when relationships fall short of what we had hoped, Father, when our own spiritual commitments prove to be inadequate, Father, in those times of weakness and distance, so it would seem, hear our cry and lead us to the rock that is higher than I. Let us flee to our refuge, our Lord Jesus Christ, Father, where we will always find a loving reception, a faithful ear, the help for which we need and eternal perspective that will guide us as we go forward. Bless each one now as we close and commit these things to you in the name of Christ. Amen.

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