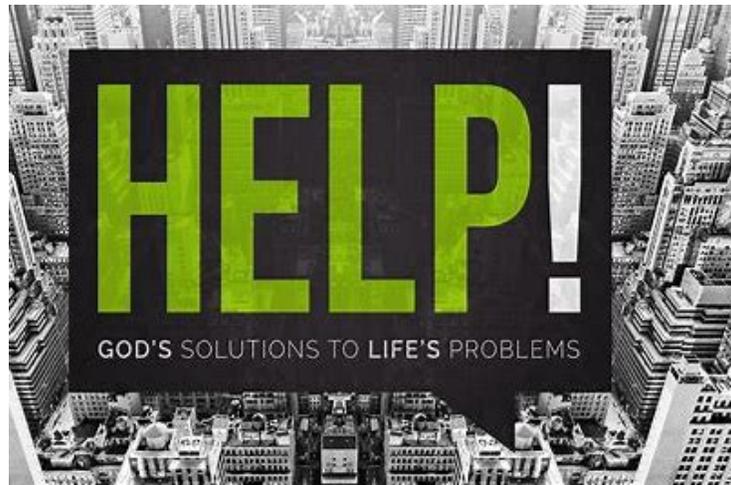


“Where Are You, God?” Psalm 61

Help #2

Weekend of June 8-9, 2019



Two great cultural icons died last year: Kate Spade and celebrity chef Anthony Bourdain. As I read about their deaths I was taken aback by a statistic that revealed that since 1999 suicide rates are up 30% across the nation. The reasons behind why they took their lives we will perhaps never know, but it reminded me of just how desperate, lonely, and utterly helpless so many people feel.

I would imagine that perhaps for many of us there have been times in our lives where we've really felt as if we were in a dry and weary land and then we look at our circumstances all we can really do is cry out “Where are you God?”

God, where are you...my family's falling apart?

God, where are you...I've lost my job and I don't know how to make ends meet?

God, where are you...my child is dying of cancer?

God, where are you...my marriage is in shambles?

God, where are you...I'm just so lonely?

God, where are you...I'm stuck in habitual sin?

God, where are you...in the midst of my suicidal thoughts?”

Some of you are asking that question right now and in the midst of deep suffering, pain, and hardship. These are honest questions and I believe the Bible speaks to them.

In Psalm 61 David finds himself in the midst of a traumatic experience of his own, so as we look at how David responds I pray that we would be both comforted and challenged.

Before we read the psalm together I think it's important for us to understand the context of David's prayer. Although not explicit, I believe the backdrop for this psalm can be found in 2 Samuel 13-15, so let me hit the highlights:

- David is reigning as king over Israel.
- He has many wives (which doesn't make it right) and subsequently many children.
- One of his sons Absalom has a beautiful sister by the name of Tamar Amnon, one of David's other sons from another wife, becomes infatuated with Tama and sexually

assaults her (and although David is grieved he does nothing) As one can imagine this infuriates Absalom (Tamar's brother) who eventually kills Amnon for the wicked sin committed against his sister.

- Absalom flees from David for years until David finally allows him back in Jerusalem. At that point however, Absalom's heart has turned against his father.
- As a result of this Absalom begins turning the hearts of the people against David which results in David fleeing Jerusalem into the wilderness as Absalom seeks to destroy him.
- David is at the end of himself and his heart is faint. It's in the midst of this pain that David pens Psalm 61.

Look at these words...

Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; 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, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! Selah

For you, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name. Prolong the life of the king; may his years endure to all generations! May he be enthroned forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him! So, will I ever sing praises to your name, as I perform my vows day after day. Psalm 61:1-8

As we study this psalm I want to help us answer the question: "What do I do when I don't know where God is?"

It's a question that we all need to be ready to answer and wrestle with. For some of us we're in that kind of season right now...for others of us we will be in that kind of season later (I Peter 4 -Do not be surprised by the fiery trial that comes upon you). But for all of us, there is someone in our lives that feels this way now, so we need to know the answer deep down in our bones.

I think there are four things you find in the life of David that helps him navigate this season of life. Here is the first one...

David's Transparency Before God

"Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer; from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint." Psalm 61:1-2a

Sit in David's pain! He has a daughter who had been violated by his own son. He has a son who was murdered at the hands of another son. That same son has turned the people against him and is seeking to kill him. For some of you David's pain isn't hard to imagine at all because right now you're experiencing something very similar. Abuse, murder, betrayal are not just ideas for you. They are pieces of your story.

Never worry about wearing your emotions on your sleeves. There are times when the most appropriate response when we just don't know where God is, is to genuinely cry out to God...to not hold back...to convey to Him the desperation we really feel.

I realize that this goes against the very grain of our culture where we value self-determination over dependency and toughness over tears. But that's where real intimacy

and real strength begins...when we start being transparent and acknowledging the truth of where we really are.

Charles Spurgeon says about this idea... **“When my heart is overwhelmed: —when the huge waves of trouble wash over me, and I am completely submerged, not only as to my head, but also my heart. It is hard to pray when the very heart is drowning, yet gracious men plead best at such times. Faith’s greatest triumphs are achieved in her heaviest trials.”**

So, in the midst of those heavy, heavy trials be transparent and cry out to God! There is a second idea...

David’s Vulnerability With God

“Lead me to the rock that is higher than I...” Psalm 61:2b

It’s not just that David is crying out, he’s humbly coming before God and acknowledging his need. His heart is faint, he’s at the end of the earth and he’s begging God to “lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

It’s not hard to picture this at all...David fleeing Jerusalem into the rocky Judean wilderness...frantically begging for the down stretched hand of God to pull him up to safety. The ‘rock’ is a metaphor for safety...protection...salvation...it’s a metaphor for God.

We all inherently look somewhere for a ‘rock’ that will protect us, keep us safe, give us significance. We know we need something immovable, unchanging, reliable. But what we naturally look to isn’t anything like that.

I want you to be real honest for a moment and ask yourself “What is my rock?” Maybe it would be...Money, but in an instant, that can be taken away. Is it family? But, honestly who can guarantee that family will turn out how we want. Success, but what we’ve worked our whole lives for is suddenly taken and given to someone else. We need a ROCK, but what in this life can actually stand that kind of pressure?

Money, sex, power, fame, family...none will hold up under the pressure. They crumble and crack. We like our counterfeit gods because we can control them. We like to be in control of our money, our family, our successes. But that kind of God is never strong enough to save us and will always let us down.

David is asking for this both literally and figuratively. To be on a “high rock” is to be in a place of safety and strength. It’s the ancient world equivalent of having a security system on your house. If you have the “high rock,” you don’t have to be vigilant and paranoid. You can rest in peace.

But David needs God to lead him there because he can’t get there on his own...it’s higher than him. He’s humbly begging for help in which we see his vulnerability with God.

Vulnerability is the doorway to experiencing the sufficiency of Christ. It’s through vulnerability, and our admission of need, that we can truly begin to say that “His strength is made perfect in our weakness.”

Redemption, healing, and comfort come when your ‘desperation’ moves you to ‘dependence’ on God. Here’s a third one...

David’s Confidence In God

“...for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.” Psalm 61:3

I want us to see is that David derives His confidence from remembering God’s faithfulness to him. There is little doubt that when David says that God has been his refuge...has been his strong tower that he is reflecting back on all the ways God has worked in his life. Faithfulness when he was a shepherd, when he was before Goliath, when Saul sought to kill him.

I don’t know about you but when the heat is really turned up in my life I’m prone to become focused on my pain and forget all that God’s done. It’s so easy to forget...

Paul David Trip said... “I’m so prone to forget God, forget his grace, forget my identity as his child, forget that he supplies all that I need, forget his unstoppable sovereign plan, and forget his eternal kingdom. When I forget God, I tend to put myself in his position and make my life all about me: my will, my feeling, my plan, my wants, and my needs.”

It’s good for my soul to remember what He’s done in my life...Listen, when you don’t know where God is, then turn around...look back all the way to the cross...and remember all He has done that will give you confidence for what He will do. Here is the last idea...

David’s Hope

**“Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings!”
Psalm 61:4**

The word ‘dwell’ (or abide) here means: ‘to be a house guest’ ‘Tent’ is a reference to where the ark of the covenant resided both while Israel wandered through the wilderness and the tent that was erected for the same purpose in Jerusalem before Solomon built the temple.

But the imagery plays out further. He goes on to say, **“Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings! For you have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.”**

Again, I believe David was thinking again here of the ark. On top of the ark (covering) was called the Mercy Seat and on top of the Mercy Seat were two cherubim who had outspread that covered the Mercy Seat.

We read in Exodus 25:22 that the mercy seat is where God promised to meet with the people of Israel. This was made possible because one day a year, on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the High Priest (and only him) would shed the innocent blood of a Lamb for the sins of Israel and sprinkle it on the Mercy Seat.

David is saying, “It’s right here, where you say you will meet with your people that I want to be a houseguest forever!” Do you see what David wants? He wants to be with God. Far too often I fear that we desire God more for what he can do for us in essence treating Him like our butler. The blessing is not what the Father can do for you the blessing is the Father. That’s what David wants.

Since David understood that only the High Priest was allowed where the ark rested, David had hope in the coming Messiah who would be the true Lamb that would satisfy the wrath of God toward all who will call on His name through faith and repentance...forever allowing him to abide in his presence forever!

In Psalm 51, as David is confessing his sins before God, there is one thing that David asked God not to do, and that was to cast him away from his presence. It was the one thing that David couldn't bear.

And that's the one thing that God didn't do. You see, like David, there was a time in Jesus' life when he too was forced outside the city by people who had turned against Him and were trying to kill Him. There outside the city, Jesus too cried out for deliverance, "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" Silence.

Then God the Father poured out upon His Son every bit of the judgement we were deserving of and Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath. Jesus was abandoned by His Father...so you would never be. He was abandoned by His Father so that when you feel abandoned, you'll know that you aren't actually alone, that Jesus sits there with you, weeping with you, mourning with you, wrestling with you in prayer.

And he has gone ahead of you, showing you the end of the hard road of hope. You see, he went into death before us, but in His resurrection, we saw where that road really leads. So, when we are in the midst of death and destruction, if we cling to him, our resurrection will be as sure as his.

Your circumstance may not change in this life...but you can be sure that the promise for every believer is resurrection and God ensures us that all things evil will be undone as He establishes a new heaven and a new earth...and we reign with Him forever.

That's why David could write in **Psalm 23**:

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me...your rod and your staff they comfort me...surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

That's why David could write in **Psalm 16:10-11**...

"For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol or let your holy one see corruption. You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures evermore."

All of this so that through whatever storm you're facing He says to you, "I will never leave you or forsake you."