

Shall we open our Bibles to Psalms 61. I know we've been going through the Psalms forward, and since we did Psalm 64 last week, you'd expect to be on the other side of it, but being Memorial Day, I had a chance to talk with a couple of families who have lost kids in war. One of them was a police officer actually. There's no happy Memorial Day. But it is an important day, so I thought it would be all right with you if we just step back a little bit, three Psalms. It'll speak to that this morning. And then we will move on from here.

Psalms 61 is the 11th of 15 Psalms all in a row that David wrote as prayers. And we find David crying out to the Lord in various kind of calamities that he was facing, and God records for us his prayer, I think just for our sake, we can glimpse how did David pray? What was his confidence? How did it end up okay after he prayed? What did he know or what did he learn? And so there are lots of lessons to learn as David goes to find comfort around God's throne. And they're practical lessons. There's certainly no better way I think to learn than to put yourself right in the shoes of the people that wrote what God kept for us in His word, so that you can learn the lessons and apply them to your heart as well.

David had his share of glory certainly. Imagine if you were a young teenager and your brothers never treated you very well, and your job was washing the sheep, and then the prophet of the country comes to your house to ordain a new king, and he interviews all of your brothers and he keeps shaking his head. And then he looks out the door, because Dad said, "Well, we got one little runty kid outside. We don't even like to bring him in. He stinks like the sheep." "Well, bring him in here." And Samuel said, "He's the guy. He's going to be the next king of Israel." Imagine what that would do to your head as a little guy. But he took it in stride. A young man that walked with God.

As a young teenager, he was told even just as a young man -- he was brought to national acclaim because he took on a battle with a Philistine giant, Goliath, which everyone was

terrified of, and David by faith and a couple rocks in his hands took this guy out of battle. And the nation took notice. They began to write songs about David's exploits. Books about him were best sellers. Everybody loved David. He was popular. He'd brought victory and acclaim. He had a sense of purpose. He had a direction for his life.

And for the most part, his reign was extremely successful. Under him the nation prospered. The land borders were pushed out further than they had ever been. The people were as committed to the Lord as they had been for generations and spiritual things stronger than they had been in their life. And David found himself in many ways experiencing the blessings of God, but David also had his share of problems.

We have been talking on Sunday mornings because of the Psalms that we've been going through that while still in his late teens or so, David began to serve at the king's palace. Saul became jealous of his obvious popularity. He eventually would chase David out of town. David would spend seven and a half years running. Imagine running for your life from a man who had all of the resources at his disposal to take you out, to hunt you down. And David would write that he felt like a partridge on the hills of Israel. I mean, this wasn't a good time in David's life. It was problematic, and yet he was right where God wanted him to be.

As far as his home life, David had lots of marriage problems. The first woman he married was a woman named Michelle. Not exactly the most loving wife. Saul's daughter. And David returns -- you might remember that David tried to bring the ark back; right? The Philistines had taken it. But David hadn't followed the rules about the holiness of that place where God dwells, and he sent a couple of guys that didn't follow the rules. One of them tried to steady the ark; right? And it killed him. And David, Forget it, man. We're not going to bring it home at all. And he repented and he said, "We need God's presence in the city that He would put His name." So they went, and with great ceremony, trying to follow every rule of holiness and sinfulness, they slowly brought this ark back to Jerusalem where it belonged. And no one died and God blessed, and David couldn't have been happier. In fact, the people with him, they came into town dancing like crazy, and had the D.J. -- I'm pretty sure that's in the Bible -- going. They were ecstatic. I mean, they were singing the Lord is with us, again.

And so David that night when he came home was just on a

spiritual high. But his wife didn't think it was very funny at all. She had been watching him out the window. He had taken off his royal robes and danced around in his royal underwear, I guess. I don't know. But he was just happy. He's just, like, one of the guys. Everybody's just thrilled. And she wanted him to be more than one of the guys. You're dancing out there like a commoner. Look at you. And look at how you're behaving. And my, aren't you the sorriest representative of who's going to be king. And the Bible says David never touched her again; that the breach between them was permanent. And that was just the first wife.

Let me give you wives a clue, being a husband. We love to be needed. If you have a can that you can't open, or a jar, you got to bring it to us, because we feel great. "There you go, honey." Just act like you needed something like that. The worst thing in the world is when you can't open the can anymore. Then -- oh, my gosh. But we want our wives to think of us as the strongest and the most, protective. And we're thrilled to hear, "Honey, whatever you want to do, that's fine with me. You're so smart." Guys love that stuff. Even if you don't mean it, if you just say it, it's usually good enough for us. And for you guys, you should know that your wife just wants to be loved supremely. She wants to be the princess of your life that no one else can be. She doesn't care about power or strength, she just wants to be loved.

Well, David certainly didn't have that in his life. And he had lots of problems. Got married a lot, had lots of kids vying for power, wanting attention. When David sinned with Bathsheba, and we've gone over that too the last couple of months, sin entered into the home of his family. His children began to suffer like never before. His bad example kind of set the pace. One of his daughters, one of the sisters in the family, was accosted by a half-brother. David didn't do anything about it, because David had sinned kind of in the same manner. So one of the full brothers took and killed one of the half-brothers, and it caused alienation in the family.

When David's son Absalom led a rebellion against his father because of this whole sin deal, and took his best friend Ahithophel, a guy that he trusted as kind of his chief of staff in his rebellion, David had to flee the country as an old man. In his 70s, run from the palace, go live out in the desert, hoped he could survive, realizing there was an army of people coming with his son to kill him. The relationship had been strained for a year when Absalom killed his half-brother,

Amnon. David isolated him and said, "Leave the country. You're no longer allowed to live under my control." Years later when Absalom came back, they wouldn't speak. And things just got from bad to worse.

So when this coup took place, David eventually would win the battle, but his son Absalom would die. Wicked guy, hard heart. David went over him, his boy in the battlefield, and said to the Lord this: "I wish it had been me instead of you." Too late, too little. But it does appear like this Psalm, because of its context and the placement in the history here, is probably what David wrote as his son died in battle, having to watch as he has victory, but he has no victory at all. For him it's a victory that's very hollow. So David cries out to the Lord in great despair. The coup had been defeated. His son had died. David could return to Jerusalem. He would rule for several more years. He could come back from his forced exile. So he comes back with kind of a grief mixed with great joy, but he's hurting.

It is always the problems of David that cause him to go to his knees. I guess we have so many Psalms because he had so many problems. Maybe if he'd had less problems, it could have been a shorter book. But it is the prayers of a frail man facing life holding the hand of God every step of the way. And in his calamities, some of them just life, others of them self-induced, brought on himself, the lessons are all the same: If you're going to be a strong believer in the Lord, you're going to have to have a strong prayer life that can bring you comfort, not just that, you know, just pray, brother, like, ah, that's all I do is pray. But see that access to God as the place of finding great rest.

So David comes to the Lord. Eight verses. They're not very long, but they have a lot to say about David's commitment to and his understanding of the God that he prays to. Because I would suggest that your prayer life is only as valuable and helpful as your understanding of the God that you take your problems to. The less you know Him, the harder prayer's going to be. The more you know Him, then it will not only be easier, but more comforting your approach to God is going to be. And certainly, if you've lost a child to war, or a father or a mother, it is an overwhelming loss; that if God doesn't help you, there's no hope, there's no help. You're just left with bitterness and a sadness that cannot be overcome.

David finds himself in that position here. It says in verse

1, "Hear my cry, O God; and attend to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I." The word cry, Hebrew "rinnati." "Rinnati" is a word that means to scream at the top of your lungs. A ringing, piercing kind of scream. Mostly in terms of distress, sometimes in victory; but in its use, at least in the Bible, it is almost always tied to distress. And so put yourself in David's shoes. He's a 70-plus-year-old guy. His son has just tried to kill him. His son has ended up dead in the battlefield. He now gets to go home to continue his 35-year reign. He's got a few more years left, as an emotional man. He'd been removed from his home, alienated from the place that he had served with for generations, and now suffered in great loss.

David tells us in the historical books that he knew that Absalom had not acknowledged the grace of God in his life. It tore at the fiber of his being. It isn't something a parent would ever want for his children, to die without God. It overwhelmed him. Even in this victory, he left him in great distress, and so he -- he screams to the Lord. There's a difference between praying and praying like this, isn't there? We pray all the time, and we almost take it for granted and minimize it in our understanding. But if you have a tremendous need, you'll scream. That prayer will be the kind of prayer that drives you to your knees. Well, that's where David finds himself. In fact, he says to the Lord, "attend to my prayer." And the word "attend" literally means move to me to the front of the line, or it's my turn now. Don't listen to anyone else until you listen to me. My need is far greater than whatever it is that's knocking at Your door. Help me. Listen to me. Respond to me.

"From the end of the earth I cry to you." You know, sorrow is always difficult. It is far more difficult when you're in an unfamiliar place. I don't know if you've ever been on vacation and get sick and have to go to the hospital somewhere else. It's not as easy as being home. I'd rather be home. If I'm going to be sick, I'd rather be home. Something about my couch, my bathroom, my kitchen. Sorrow is always difficult, but look at where David is. He's in an unfamiliar place in an uncomfortable environment. I guess metaphorically, when you feel your needs have brought you to the ends of the earth, that's when you need to know that God is still there. I'm crying to You from as far out as I can go. I don't know how to do anything else but cry out. And it certainly should teach us that wherever you are and however far removed from God you are, He's still reachable. So David

prays, "From the end of the earth." To him, this is about as far away as he can get. I'm crying to You. It's that screaming word again. I'm overwhelmed. I need a better footing than I have.

People seem to have a very peculiar idea about praying, and sometimes I think it slows us down. I remember as a little kid my dad telling us when we prayed for supper that you had to fold your hands, close your eyes, and bow your head. "Or," he said, "God will not hear you." So I used to pray (indicating). You'd want Him to hear you. You wouldn't just close your eyes, you'd smash them together. I realize now he was lying to me. Just recently had that come up. But I suspect he was just doing that to get us to settle down; right? This was a good way for us to settle down, because we were kids. By the way, I'm glad that they didn't have A.D.D. diagnosed when I was a kid, because we all had it. It was called being kids. We didn't pay attention for two seconds. Prayer is not the position of your body; it's the position of your heart, or the condition of it. I remember at prayer times with my family peeking to see if my sister had followed the rules or not. Were her eyes closed? And I remember being more than willing to rat her out when she was looking around. "Dad, she's not praying like you told us." To which my father would say, "How do you know?" I tried this one time, I said, "I could hear her eyes opening." But that didn't work either.

David was far removed from a normal place of prayer. In fact, the whole environment was a hard place to pray. He was used to the presence of God. He was used to the tabernacle just down the street from the palace. He was used to being welcome and the doors being opened, the place that God had put His name.

When you go to Israel, all of the guys will tell you that when you pray in Jerusalem, your prayers are a local call. I think they're making that up too, but I'm not sure. From the ends of the earth, sometimes, when you're in great despair, you do feel like you're about as far away from that restful place as you have ever been. You lose the sense of God's presence, your awareness of His nearness. David is rocked by the death of his son. I'm way out here, Lord. Now listen to me. And he feels like he's only hearing echoes when he prays.

But yet we learn that God is reachable. And you should know that this morning, no matter what you're going through, God is reachable. I don't care how far you've run, or how far

you've fallen, or how far you've roamed, or how much distance you've placed between you and Him; whether circumstances now convince you that you're far removed. I tell you how you get back: Just turn around. One step. I don't know how much distance you've covered running away. Coming back's just one step. Because you're going to find Him running right after you and there when you need Him. The hard way is the way out. The way back is always available.

But David felt completely isolated from the end of the earth. He's screaming at the top of his lungs. He's demanding an audience. He wants to be moved up in the line. And he explains of himself, my heart is being overwhelmed. The word "'ataph" in Hebrew means to be feeble or to be failing or to be weak. When life is more than I can bear, God, help me.

We have the privilege and also the responsibility oftentimes to sit with people in the hospital while they're dying, and there's really a frustration that you usually find, a hopelessness amongst families that are going through that. You feel powerless. What can you do? How can you help? I mean, you can be there. That's good. You can bring comfort, you can share the truth, but you can't lift the burden. When you're alienated from your family, when you're going through financial hardships, when futures seem uncertain, when odds are overwhelmingly not in your favor, God wants you to know that He's still here. I talked to a lady a couple of weeks ago whose husband decided he wanted another wife after 38 years. I said, "How are you doing?" She said, "I feel all alone in a very big world." I guess David felt like that as well here. It can take your breath away. Overwhelmed.

Then do this, Lord, bring me or lead me to the rock that is higher than I. It should comfort you and I that there's a place that you can go and a person that you can turn to when you are out of ideas that still has ideas. I suspect that most of our faith is superficial in the sense that, if we know that there's a way out, if we got some ideas, if there's something on the horizon, we say, well, the Lord is good, and God showed me, and God's going to work this out, and God's good, and God's going before me, and I just see God's hand all over me. That's fine. Faith that is developing is the faith that has to confront the I don't know what to do, and I have no more answers, and I've run out of hope, and I got nowhere to turn, and no one can heal the hurt. Yet God is still there. He can offer refuge and strength to my position that is far beyond my weakness and frailty. He can take things up when I've hit the wall, when I've got nothing I can

do. I can go to the rock that is higher than I. Go stand on His shoulders. You'll see things a lot differently. And it'll give you some strength to stand and your feet, there'll be no more moving. There'll be strengthening.

David uses the word for the Lord 20 different times in the Psalm that He's the rock. Three times, in fact, in the next Psalm. In fact, look at verse 2 of the next Psalm, Psalm 62. It says, "He only is my rock and my salvation; he's my defense." And then he writes this: "I shall not be greatly moved." Four verses later, verse 6, "He only is my rock and my salvation and my defense." And then it says, "I shall not be moved." Not greatly moved, not moved at all. David had developed an understanding as he hid from Saul for many years in the Judean wilderness that God was a rock. Oh, He had brought the water out of the rock for the children of Israel, but in David's experience, if you go to Israel with us, one of the things you'll come back saying about Israel is it's full of rocks. I mean, there are rocks everywhere. More rocks than you want to see. And I'm sure that David over the years learned every nook and cranny and every hiding crevice. God had been David's rock; stable, unmovable, solid. But here's the deal: Dire consequence had driven David to his knees, and now he has to hang on to what he knows.

I have found over the years that the people that are the most pressed down in life are oftentimes the greatest prayer warriors because they've gotten the insight that you and I hope to avoid; that when we're all out of ideas, He's still there. We'd rather live in that place where we still have ideas in case He doesn't come through. My feet shall stand upon the rock. You can be above it all, standing on Him.

I went to lunch with Don McClure years ago and we were talking about growing up and families and our different experience, and he said to me without even blinking an eye, "I am responsible for the spiritual depth of my mother." And I said, "How is that?" He said, "When I was a kid, I had her praying night and day." I thought that was a pretty good observation, but he's right. Wayward children make for godly moms and dads.

Notice the rock is higher than you. Where you leave off, God begins. Pastor Chuck used to say to us young men, man's extremities are God's opportunities. When you run out of ideas, now you have to hang on by faith. So I can only do so much. I can only reach so high, push so hard, cry for so long. But wherever I leave off, He's higher than I. People

say sometimes, "Oh, Pastor, you don't know how this feels." And I'll say, "I don't, but He does." I don't. I don't want to experience everybody's worst moment. I'll learn from yours. I'll share with you what I've learned. But He's the only one that's been there for all of them.

He's higher than me, but notice what David says, "Lead me to the rock." The thing about coming to the Lord when you're out of gas and out of hope is that you won't actually go there. It's so crazy. We have to be led there. God has to bring us there. You would think people would run to church to be saved. They don't. They have to be led there. And so us. Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians said that they drank from the same rock, the spiritual rock, that followed them. The rock was Christ. But it said he led them to the rock. That's how you get there. That's how you arrive.

So there is a reason we have so many prayer meetings at church. They're not greatly attended, not by the numbers you hope to see there. But we pray every Saturday morning. We pray every Tuesday morning. We have people praying during the services today. We pray for our missionaries every month. It isn't just because that's what we should do. That's our only hope. Unless the Lord build the house, we're laboring in vain to build it.

You may be here this morning as a result of the prayers of others, or because you face overwhelming pressure that has isolated you and convinced you that no one knows how bad things have been. And they may not, but He does. So may the Lord lead you to Himself, the rock that is higher than you.

David says in verse 3, "You have been a shelter for me and a strong tower from my enemy." Those are written in the past tense. "I will abide in your tabernacle forever; and trust in the shadow of Your wings." That's written in the present tense. Because of my past experience with you, now in this new place of being overwhelmed, I have to climb the tower again. I found safety here before. You've never failed me. And certainly prayer should be greatly helped in your outlook when you remember what God has done in times past.

In fact, David says in verse 5, "But you, God, have heard my vows; and You have given me the heritage of those who fear Your name." David, even though he is going through it and suffering greatly, does not take it as somehow a mark from the Lord that he has been set aside by God. I've made a commitment to You. You've put me in Your family. My

relationship with You on that end stands firm. "You will prolong," verse 6, "the king's life, his years as many generations. He shall abide before God forever. Prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him!" Lord, give me mercy. That's not getting what I deserve. Give me the truth. That's knowing what I need to know. Relying on the future as he had relied upon God in the past.

He ends with this, verse 8, "So I will sing praises to Your name forever, that I might daily perform my vows." It's an interesting Psalm, because it starts with a guy screaming at the top of his lungs, pay attention to me. I can't handle this anymore. And it ends with eight verses later, hey, I'm going to sing worship songs. Quite a difference, isn't it, from beginning to end? In the middle You've been my shelter. Lead me to the rock higher than I.

There are many things in your life that will overwhelm your heart, but God is greater than them all. In fact, when Jesus was talking to His opponents, the Pharisees, Matthew 21, verse 44 maybe, He said this to them: "Whoever falls upon this Stone," speaking about Himself, "will be broken; but he upon whom this Stone falls will be ground to powder." You can come and just give Me your life. It'll cost you your life, but you'll have life given to you. But stand in opposition to God, stand away from here, try it without Him, and life will wipe you out if God doesn't in His judgment eventually anyway.

David would write, "You have brought me out of a horrible pit. You've set me on the miry clay. You've put my feet upon a rock. You've established my going. You put a new song in my mouth." I don't know what you're facing this morning. Maybe life is just good for you, and that's good. I think most of life is that way. But there are some horrendous days. It is good to know a God that knows the horrendous days. And to you that would hang on to Him, you want to go there. He's a rock that is higher than you. And I know you have no answers and you got no way out and it just feels like you're suffering under the consequences. He's not going to fail you now or ever. That's what prayer's all about: Hanging out with a God who can do anything. Even when you're falling apart, He's not.