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Prayer During and After the Trial; Psalm 61  
GPBC  
11.22.20

Introduction – To pray is to speak to God. To bear our souls, unload our burdens, confess our sins, seek His grace and mercy, plead on the behalf of others. When we pray we leave behind the mundane matters of this world and this life and we press into eternal matters, spiritual matters, urgent matters, matters that lie beyond us but not beyond God.

That’s why we pray. In this life we are often faced with matters that lie far beyond our resources and capacity, but never do we encounter matters that lie beyond God’s will and God’s grace.

Here in Psalm 61 David is an example to us of praying in two very different circumstances. In the first half of the psalm, David is in the trial. In the second half of the psalm, David is on the other side of the trial. Both instances require prayer, necessitate prayer – all of life, by the way, requires prayer.

The specific trial here is when David was exiled from Jerusalem by his own son Absalom. If you recall our previous studies of the psalms, this occasion must have been the most gut-wrenching, heart-breaking, faith-testing experience that David lived through. Of all the psalms penned by David, this trial brought forth from his heart and his pen a large number of his psalms. He lost his home, his throne, his city, but more than all, he lost his son. One from his own household was his greatest enemy. David knew what it was like to walk through a trial. We know what it is like to walk through trials. But David learned how to pray in the trial. And the psalms that he leaves for us, like Psalm 61, teach us how to pray in the middle of life’s greatest trials as well.

- I. How to Pray in the Grip of Trials (vv1-4)
  - a. Vv1-2a – Learn to be honest with God in the trial. David says, “I’m crying to You, O God. I feel as far away from You as I’ve ever been. My heart is faint.” I feel the distance. My faith is weak. I’m losing hope. I’m not just in a trial, I’m in a mess.

- i. We can be entirely honest with God. Express your feelings. Speak of your thoughts and struggles of faith. Admit your doubt and frustration and anger and confusion.
  - ii. God already knows where you are and what you feel, we might as well confess it to Him. If you're barely hanging on, tell Him. If you can't understand why, tell Him.
  - iii. The first step of prayer in the trial is an honest confession to God of where we are in the trial. Rather than bottling up the doubt and anger and fear, pour it out. You may find yourself admitting and saying things to God you never thought you'd say, you certainly wouldn't want anyone else hearing.
  - iv. But don't avoid God from pride or depression. Go to God in prayer. Prayer has been given to us by God as our means of life! Spurgeon writes, "There is an end to a man when he makes an end of prayer." Prayer keeps us going, keeps us believing, keeps us clinging.
- b. V2b – Reach up for the hand that is already reaching down. Reach up to God through prayer and find in Him exactly what you need. Trials have a way of bringing us to God and God to us, and prayer is the pathway where we meet.
  - i. Reach up and look up – He is the Rock that is higher. We get bogged down in the trial. We get spiritually weighed down in the trial.
  - ii. But in the trial, we have a sure and steady God that is above us and above our trial.
- c. V3 - Remember God's faithfulness. Spurgeon also writes, "Experience is the nurse of faith." Recall God's faithfulness to you. Trials are occasion to engage our spiritual memory, to time travel back through our spiritual journey, to bring up those forgotten victories, those answered prayers that have collected dust through the years, those lifechanging moments when God spoke and moved and saved and encouraged you.
  - i. He's always been our refuge and our strong tower. He hasn't changed. We've changed. Our circumstances have changed. But God is the same. Who He has been yesterday is who He is today.

- ii. If God has brought you this far, He does not intend to lose you in this trial.
    - d. V4 – Look to the future. The God who has brought you through is the God who will bring you through.
      - i. For He is not only the same yesterday and today but also forever. Look not only beyond the trial, but look even further.
      - ii. God intends to bring you to His house, to His tent, to His home forever.
      - iii. Trials tend to give us temporary vision. We can only see what is right in front of us. What is right here, right now. When you reach up in prayer and you reach back in prayer, don't forget to reach forward in prayer – all the way forward in prayer – all the way to God's eternal home. We need our vision corrected. We need the spectacles of eternity to see that God is going to bring us home.
      - iv. Trials tend to give us short-term memory. We can only remember what has just happened and tend to forget what has been promised.
    - e. You see my friends, prayer works in our hearts and souls to open our vision and expand our memory above and beyond life to life everlasting. Prayer helps us see beyond today. Prayer helps us grip those precious promises for tomorrow.
    - f. In the trial, we reach up to God, we reach back to God's faithfulness, and we reach forward to cling to God's promises.
    - g. Now the "Selah" at the end of v4 means there's a break in the psalm. The course of direction changes. David is no longer in the trial in v5. In fact, scholars believe these last four verses were written as David was on his way back to Jerusalem, back to the throne. From expelled to exaltation. Now the trial is over. How does David pray now?
- II. How to Pray When Freed From the Grip of Trials (vv5-8)
- a. V5 – David acknowledges that God's faithfulness in the past has proven itself again in the present.
    - i. God has heard and God has given.
  - b. Vv6-7 – David requests for God to continue to bless him in this life with his eyes on the blessings of eternity. You can hear how David's prayer intertwines the now and the forever.

- i. When God brings us out of the trial, when He delivers us again, don't take our eyes off eternity. Don't lose our eternal perspective when life calms back down.
  - ii. Only by living for heaven will we know how to live on earth!
  - iii. David is not just going to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is a temporary stop on the way to an eternal city. So while he journeys, he needs the steadfast love and faithfulness of God to keep him on the way as he makes his way to what John Bunyan calls in his classic Pilgrim's Progress, the Celestial City.
  - iv. Just like trials tend to blind our vision of glory, so do times of ease. We begin to settle into this life, to this world, as if this is our home.
  - v. So prayer after the trial is similar to prayer in the trial in that it helps us not lose sight of forever. Keep heaven in view, and it will change your life here and it will change your prayers here.
- c. V8 – David commits himself to everlasting praise and day by day living.
- i. And here it is again – he's got his feet in both worlds. He's in heaven and he's on the earth. I'm going to sing your praise forever – but while I'm still here on this earth, I'm going to live for you!
  - ii. The end of v7 is what causes v8.
  - iii. The steadfast love and faithfulness of God causes us to sing His praise – here in this life as He sustains us and keeps us - and one day on the shores of glory we will sing His praise from the top of our lungs. If we think He is steadfast and faithful to us now, what will we think when we step through the gates of glory?
  - iv. But not only does God's graces to us bring forth our praise, they also bring forth our service and works of faith. God is daily about His promises, let us be daily about our vows. He has committed to us, let us commit to Him. Determine to be in His Word and in prayer every day. Determine to share Him with others. Determine to serve one another. Determine to cast off sin. He keeps us, let us hold fast to Him.

Conclusion – Prayer during the trial is meant to sustain us through the trial. Prayer after the trial is meant to lift us closer to God. What David prayed for in v2 is where he finds himself in v8.