

When My Heart is Overwhelmed **Psalm 61:1-4**

INTRO:

What do we do when we find ourselves in a difficult place? Do we ruminate on our problems and seek to find a solution in our own resources? David, King of Israel, was no stranger to difficult situations. He had many enemies. He also faced very difficult times in his life. Two such times stand out in our memory. First, he spent a long time running from King Saul after Saul had become obsessed with killing him. Second, there was the awful time when he fled Jerusalem before his rebellious son Absalom. In those difficult times, David wrote some of the most touching and helpful **Psalms** that we find in the book of **Psalms**.

One such **Psalm** is the one that is before us today. Many scholars speculate that David wrote this Psalm while on the run from Absalom. Perhaps it was in the time between his victory over Absalom's forces and when the leaders of Israel came to bring back the king. Whatever the setting, we find David teaching us again how to respond when our hearts are overwhelmed. Our study will fall into two divisions.

I. Seeking God (v. 1-2)

II. Finding Him (v. 3-4)

I. Seeking God (v. 1-2)

Psalm 61:title–2 ***“To the Chief Musician. On A Stringed Instrument. A Psalm of David. Hear my cry, O God; Attend to my prayer. From the end of the earth I will cry to You, When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”***

A. Whatever the setting of this **Psalm** is, we have all at one time or another been where David is when he cries out to God in **verse 1**.

“Hear my cry, O God; attend to my prayer.”

1. The fact that David is anxious over something in his life is betrayed by the vigorous language he uses. The Hebrew word for **“cry”** means **“to cry out.”** It can be a shout of joy, but clearly in this context it is a cry of concern from the depths of his heart.

2. In the parallelism of the Hebrew poem, David repeats his thought with a plea for God to hear his prayer. I know some preachers and teachers condemn folks for pleading with God to hear their prayers, yet I can't help pointing out that many

times in the **Psalms** pleading is exactly what the Psalmist does. Let me just cite three examples.

Psalm 17:1 *“Hear a just cause, O Lord, attend to my cry; Give ear to my prayer which is not from deceitful lips.”*

Psalm 39:12 *“Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears.”*

Psalm 71:1-2 *“In You, O Lord, I put my trust; Let me never be put to shame. Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape; incline Your ear to me, and save me.”*

B. Here we find David practicing what the Apostle Paul prescribed in **Philippians 4:6-7**. *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”*

1. In his anxiety here, David immediately fled into the presence of the living God through prayer. He cried out to the Lord.

2. I am thankful that God understands the language of the heart and He understands our tears. One of my favorite **Psalms** is **Psalm 56**, another Psalm of David. In **Psalm 56** David again called out to God in a difficult situation and he said:

vs.8-9 *“You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book? When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me.”*

C. Having pleaded with God to hear his prayer David now unburdened his heart to the Lord.

v.2 *“From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”*

1. We need to remember when David wrote this the worship of the Living God was tied to a geographic location. The Ark of the Covenant was in Jerusalem. That was the place on planet earth where God dwelt in the midst of His people. David, at this moment in time, was nowhere near Jerusalem, and he felt keenly the distance from the Tabernacle of God. This is why he wrote, that from the end of the earth He will cry unto God.

2. Although David was not in geographical proximity to the Tabernacle, he learned he could call upon God anywhere. The LORD was not a localized deity. He is the God of heaven and earth. David himself reminds us in the **139th Psalm**,

vs.7-10 *“Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in sheol behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.”*

3. While we do not know the details of David’s distress, we do know the manifestation. Here is what David felt at the moment he wrote this Psalm, *“my heart is overwhelmed.”* The Hebrew word can mean *“to faint”*, but it is also used to describe something being enveloped. Trouble and sorrow enveloped him. He felt as if his heart was swallowed up in these things.

4. Thus far we see the prayer part of Paul’s prescription in **Philippians 4:6** and 7. David poured out his heart before God, laying his feelings before God.

D. The last phrase of **verse 2** is the supplication part of the prescription.

“Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

1. Some see this reference to the rock as an allusion to God Himself. If this is the idea here, David wants the LORD to bring him into a closer relationship with Himself. God would be the high rock of protection.

2. Others understand this rock as the major obstacle that David has left to overcome and thus David is saying that without God’s help, he cannot scale this rock which is higher than he is able to climb.

3. I don’t know we can definitively say which of these positions is the correct one. Either way, David is laying out his need before the Lord.

II. Finding Him (v. 3-4)

Psalm 61:3–4 *“For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. Selah .”*

A. The first part of this Psalm is about seeking God. When we come to **verses 3** and **4**, David senses that God has indeed heard his prayer and will answer him.

B. I drew a parallel earlier with **Philippians 4:6** and **7**. If we continue on in that parallel a little longer, **verse 3** would be the *“thanksgiving”* section.

“For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy.”

1. Many see the thanksgiving in **Philippians 4** as being thankful for what God is going to do. I submit that we are to be thankful for what God has already done. When we begin to rehearse what God has done, we are encouraged and our spirits are lifted as we anticipate another deliverance from this same God.

2. David does this here. He remembers how in the past God has been a shelter for him. How God has protected him and delivered him before.

Proverbs 18:10 *“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.”*

The wise person learns this truth in a very practical way. The name of the LORD is His attributes and His character. If we know God, we will know how He will never let us down.

3. David knew this well.

Psalms 18:1-2 *“I will love You, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.”*

I call this a reality check. When David reminds himself of Who God is and what God has done for him already, he cannot help but have his spirit renewed within him.

C. We cannot miss the tone of confidence in **verse 4**.

“I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. Selah.”

David sought the LORD and He was found by him.

1. Right away some commentators call a time out. Hey, David was not a Levite. He could not enter the Tabernacle. What does he mean that he will remain in God's Tabernacle forever? The word is tent. David is probably saying that he will dwell in God's dwelling place with Him forever. This is a very similar statement to that which he made in **Psalms 23:6**

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

David is assured he will be spending eternity with God.

2. It is not just David's future which is in God's hands. His present is equally secure. *“I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.”* This image is very common in the **Psalms**. It comes from the barnyard. When the rain comes and shelter is

not found the chicks find protection under the shelter of the hen's feathers. Two places this is used in the Psalms and in one Gospel.

Psalm 36:7 *“How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.”*

Luke 13:34-35 *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; and assuredly, I say to you, you shall not see Me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’”*

So, here are lessons for us when our hearts are overwhelmed with in us. We must first seek the Lord in prayer and lay our burden before Him. Then we must ask for that which we sense we need. After this we must discipline ourselves to remember and thank God for all that He has already done.

Hymn #348 *Hiding In Thee*