



## Rest for the Weary Soul

SERIES: Songs for the Hungry Heart

This morning we are going to begin a 4-week series in the book of Psalms. Like many of you, the Psalms have been a tremendous source of instruction and comfort for me throughout my spiritual journey. In the Psalms, I believe more than any other book of the Bible, we learn what it means to be intimately related to God, we learn how to pray, and to grieve, we discover how to speak openly and passionately with God about our circumstances, confessing to him our weaknesses, and our need. So these poems of reflection and worship and instruction have been a treasure for generations of those who want to draw closer to God.

As we turn to the Psalms today I want to talk about something that touches each and every one of our lives. And I find it's becoming more and more difficult for us to grasp. In this frenzied, multitasking, accelerated life that we live there is a question that sits just below the surface for most of us and we want desperately to know: How can I find rest in the pressures of life? How do I keep from falling apart under the cumulative stress that surrounds me? How can I move beyond just coping with the chaos to discovering true rest, contentment and security for my weary soul?

About 12 years ago there was a season when life felt like an absolute pressure cooker. I was working full time at a job that drove me crazy. I was finding it difficult to get up and face what was ahead each day. I was in my second year as a full time Seminary student and I had just signed on as a part time (20 hour per week) ministry intern overseeing two separate segments of a large singles ministry. If you add all of that up you can guess that there wasn't really enough hours in the day for all that was on my plate. Of course, add to that all of the issues you face when your son is nine and your daughter is just entering adolescence, and the struggles of family life and marriage, and I was pressed to the wall.

And one morning, I don't even remember where I was heading, I rolled right through a stop sign. I did one of those "California Stops" with a policeman on the other side. And it particularly irritated me since my wife is the one with the reputation of having the lead foot in the family, and here I was getting a ticket. I felt like saying, "Officer, if you knew what my wife was doing right now you wouldn't be wasting your time with this." But he politely gave me my ticket and I was sentenced to traffic school. I'll never forget as we went around the room this one woman trying to explain why she was going 50 miles per hour in a 25 mile per hour zone. She said, "Well, you see, I've got three kids and I'm constantly on the go, running from one sports event to the other, picking up snacks, taking them to band practice, my life is constantly on fast forward." Sounds familiar? But when the teacher pressed her a little why she was in such a hurry this time, she thought a minute and said, "I guess there really wasn't anything. My life is in such a rush I'm in a hurry even when I don't have to be." And when she said that you could almost hear the whole room breathe a collective sigh of empathy. Because we knew that feeling. We knew what it was like to be so unglued inside that you're just carried along by the frantic pace

of things, anxious and hurried, even when you can't remember why.

And maybe that's exactly how you came to church this morning. Frazzled and frenzied, feeling like you may just explode under the pressure of all you're carrying. But for some of you it's more than just the pace of life. In fact, you would love for things to normalize, to return to busy. But you're battling an illness that has taken all of your energies. Or you're struggling in a marriage that has hit the wall and all the pieces have shattered and the family feels like it's being ripped apart. Or it's the job, with all the cutbacks you've needed to work longer hours, you're working harder and feeling less and less satisfied. Or the finances, or maybe it's the pain of your own history that keeps you feeling anxious and fearful, uncertain of the future. How can I find rest in the pressures of life?

We're going to look at Psalm 62 and this morning I believe that the Lord wants to do more than give us five or six handy tips on stress management. He wants to restore us with His presence, and renew with us an invitation to rest in Him, an invitation that was spoken through His Son who said, **"Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest ..."** Rest for the Weary Soul. If you have your Bibles open you'll see that there is a musical marking that appears after verse 4 and verse 8 and it's the word *Selah*. Its root meaning is "to lift up" and some believe it was a time for an instrumental interlude. Others believe it indicated a time where a worship leader would invite the congregation pause, a time to meditate, and a time to lift up their hearts to the Lord. This morning we're going to begin with a *Selah* moment; a time to quietly pause before the Lord and bring to Him the things that are most pressing on our hearts today. Because He wants to minister to us this morning right at the place where we are struggling the most today.

### I. As We Turn to God Alone

Psalm 62 begins with this bold declaration, **"My soul finds rest in God alone."**

King David, it would appear, wrote this poem at a time when he was in the pressure cooker. When (as we will see) the assault of his enemies was unrelenting, the future of the Kingdom looked bleak, the daily stresses he faced were unimaginable. And yet in the midst of this chaos, instability and danger, he describes an interior that is quiet and at peace.

There is a small but very significant Hebrew word that appears here and runs throughout this Psalm that gives us our first insight into how we can find this resting place. It is the word that is translated here "alone." My soul finds rest in God alone. To emphasize this idea the word is actually placed at the beginning, in an emphatic position. We might translate it this way: "Only in God does my soul find rest." Only as it turns towards God does my soul finally find its resting place. And that's the fundamental starting point for us as well. How will you find rest for your weary soul, to truly be calmed and quieted in

the midst of all that you are facing today? Well, it's "only" as you turn towards God.

So David continues: **"My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will not be greatly shaken."**

David has discovered that God is the only one who saves, one who rescues us in those times when life is unbearable. He's our rock and fortress, that place of security and safety where the enemy in the Hebrew context can no longer assault me. I'm safe beyond the grasp of those who wish to do me harm. In verse 7 he adds, **"He is my mighty rock and my refuge."**

When I was growing up I built a fort on the side of our house. It was crudely put together with old tarps and pieces of scrap lumber. It smelled like mildew and was damp and dark most of the time. But it was my refuge, my stronghold, my safe haven. The place I could run to when the chaos of my own world felt out of control. When I felt fearful or anxious I could run to my refuge in the storm. And no matter what was swirling around me I could cuddle up in the safety of that place. David says that's what God is like. He's my fort, my safe place, my refuge.

"Only as it turns towards God does my soul find rest." But do you know what that implies? It means that David has given up on the idea of finding rest anywhere else. He's discovered that this rest isn't found in his military power, his wisdom, his political maneuverings. He's given up on all other avenues of achieving rest. He's let go of the controls. You see, rest in God alone requires a surrender, a giving up on all of our illusions that rest can be found apart from Him. For some of you this morning that's the scariest thought you could possibly face. Henri Nouwen writes: "The movement from illusion to dependence is hard to make since it leads us from false certainties to true uncertainties, from an easy support system to a risky surrender, and from many (supposed) "safe" gods to the God whose love has no limits." Maybe this morning you're still determined to find satisfaction, fullness, and contentment somewhere else. You're on a quest to make life work the way you expect it to. So let me say to you this morning the rest you so desperately desire is only found in the safe and tender arms of a good and loving God. Perhaps God is addressing you at that place and it's simply time for you to let go and ease into His arms. Only as we turn to Him do we truly find the quiet and calm of a rested soul.

## II. As We Remain in the Pressure

There is another aspect of this word "rest" that is helpful for us this morning. The Hebrew word can be literally translated "to wait silently." In fact, if you are following with the New American Standard this morning you would have read, **"My soul waits in silence for God only."** David is silent because he is stilled and quieted, and he is waiting upon God as his life remains firmly rooted in the struggles and pressures he is facing. He continues to seek God's answer, trusting in His time and in His outcome. It's true that sometimes we need a break, don't we. Sometimes we need to get away from it all, to veg out, to take a siesta from the pressures of life. Vacations are great. But we will never discover true rest unless we learn to wait upon God in the midst of all life's pressures and disappointments.

The name Harry Houdini is almost synonymous with

the art of magic. He was particularly known for his breathtaking escape stunts, where he would extricate himself from straight jackets, handcuffs and chains while being suspended by a rope from a crane. But there are many of us who have also refined the art of escaping. In fact, we have managed our lives through elaborate patterns of avoidance, hyper-business, addictions to drugs, alcohol, hoping to find rest at the bottom of a bottle, or on the pages of a glossy magazine or porn-site, or you escape by getting lost in sexual and romantic fantasy, the accumulation of things, the lure of greater and greater success, or we hop from one relationship to the next, moving on when the road ahead gets rough, or we busy ourselves with religion.

A few years ago there was a slogan for a popular anti-inflammatory drug that said you should take this pill "When You Haven't Got Time for the Pain." Folks, we must never expect to find this kind of rest unless we learn to wait silently upon God. You've got to have time for the pain. David's life is a clear example of this. It was filled with years of discouragement, loneliness and betrayal. And the Psalms reveal that his inner life was marked by pain, grief, a deep sense of abandonment, and isolation. But as He waits silently upon the Lord, David's heart finds its resting place.

So in verses 3 and 4 David describes the pressure and pain that surround him as He waits upon God. **"How long will you assail a man, that you may murder him, all of you, like a leaning wall, like a tottering fence? They have counseled only to thrust him down from his high position; They delight in falsehood; They bless with their mouth, But inwardly they curse."**

Many find in these words a parallel to a time called "The Great Rebellion." A time when King David was recalled. It didn't start here in California! Of course, the problem was that he wasn't an elected official. He was God's anointed King over the house of Israel. But through the deception of his son, David had lost the popularity contest among his own people. Absalom turned the hearts of the people against King David and David was forced to flee into the wilderness with his head hung in dishonor and his heart broken in discouragement. And so he describes himself as a leaning wall and a tottering fence.

Do you feel like that this morning; just about ready to fall over from the slightest little breeze? That's how David felt. He was weak and vulnerable, having no resources or strength left in himself. Isn't it interesting that it's from this posture of weakness and vulnerability that David arrives at this place of rest, a place of security and safety. We find rest as we turn towards God alone; and as we learn to wait upon Him, facing our reality, trusting Him in the midst of the pressures and disappointments of life.

## III. As We Engage Our Hearts

But this rest is not a passive acceptance of our miserable lot in life. Sometimes we think that if we truly rest we'll become like Winnie the Pooh's friend Eore, this sort of "woe is me" character who mournfully accepts the gloom that surrounds him. God's rest is not mournful acceptance of things as they are. But it's characterized by an active stirring up of our own hearts. And so we read in verse 5 and 6, **"Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will not be shaken, my salvation and my honor depend on God; He is my mighty rock, my refuge."**

So here, the confident statement of verse 1, **"My soul finds rest in God alone"** now becomes the exhortation of verse 5, **"Find rest, O my soul, in God alone."** So David talks to his own heart. And he engages his soul with a holy exhortation to find rest in God again. Isn't that great! It's so much like you and I. Because one day his rest is a settled conviction; a steady state of being. But the

next day he's lost his grip. Praise and confidence have given way to confusion and doubt. So we find him talking to himself, telling his heart to once again silently wait upon God. It reminds me of another incident in David's life when he was running from Saul and he had collected a scruffy band of rejects like himself and they camped in a town called Ziklag. But when the men were away the town was burned to the ground by a band of Amelikites, and their wives and children were taken captive. David's own men turned on David and they were just getting ready to stone him when the text says this: **"And David strengthened himself in the Lord his God."**

I think David tells us how he did it here in verses 5 & 6. He speaks to his soul. And he reminds himself of God's steadiness, repeating to himself the truths about God that have kept him safely standing on the rock and sheltered in the refuge. He strengthens himself in the Lord by telling his own heart that God alone is His rescuer, His hope, His fortress, His mighty rock, and His safe refuge.

When Paul tells the Philippians how to manage fear and anxiety. He first tells them to pray and receive God's peace that transcends all understanding. Then he says this, **"Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - Let your mind dwell on these things."** In other words, saturate yourselves in the goodness and beauty of God.

Maybe this morning your soul needs a good talking to. Not a scolding but a gracious reminder of God's goodness, saturating your heart in Him, to pour into your soul the goodness and beauty and the wonder of God's immense love for you even when you feel like a leaning wall and a tottering fence.

But there is another aspect of this activity of rest that we find in verse 8. Where David turns from his own condition and speaks out with passion to us and to our situation and he says: **"Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge!"**

You see, our troubled hearts find rest when we honestly pour them out before the Lord. This is the language of lament. And that is why this Psalm is classified as a lament Psalm. Where the psalmist comes with great trouble and turmoil inside and he pours out his heart to the Lord in the midst of his distress. In fact, the Hebrew word for "pouring out" that is used here describes the complete pouring out of a liquid with no reserve. It's like getting the very last drop out of the ketchup bottle. As a young man I never learned the language of lament. I was never taught how to grieve. And I was never able to give words or expression or even tears to the reality of my own heart. So I went from hurt to confusion, from disappointment to discouragement, from failure to self defeat, all the time wearing a sort of a confident smirk on my face, masking the agitation and restlessness I felt inside. If we are to ever find rest it will only be as we take up the language of lament. As we learn to pour out our hearts, every last drop, before the Lord.

#### **IV. As We Turn from False Supports**

And then there's one final barrier to rest that we find in verses 9 and 10. And this so often the wall that many of us can't seem to get over. Because as much as we may desperately desire rest we simply will not give up our faulty foundations, misguided supports. And David tells us that we can never expect to find this rest as long as we're looking to people or things to satisfy us. **"Lowborn men are but a breath, and highborn are but a lie. If weighed on a balance they are nothing; together they are only a breath. Do not trust in extortion or take pride**

**in stolen goods. Though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them."**

There is a wonderful line in the opening chapter of the Gospel of John where John describes his own experience of having encountered Jesus, the living Word made flesh. And he says this: **"And we beheld his glory, glory of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth."** That can only be said of Jesus Himself. He was full of grace and truth. The rest of us are deeply flawed and conflicted, marred by sin, and held captive by our own self interest. And that's David's point here. No matter their social status, whether they are born rich or poor, altogether people are just like a breathe of wind. They really are. And the point is this: If my expectation is that people can bring rest to my weary heart, then I'm setting myself up to be hugely disappointed. Why? Because only as it turns to God does my soul find rest! And when we sort that out; that people simply will not meet the deepest need of my heart, then I'm freed up to finally lean into God who alone is our mighty rock, our refuge and place of rest.

I am hopelessly in love with a woman that I met almost 30 years ago. I am head over heels in love with my bride. We've been in the empty nest stage now for a few years and I'm more crazy about her than I was on our wedding day. But here's a word for you husbands and wives this morning. As soon as I get confused in my heart and begin to think that she is the answer to my troubled heart, that somehow she is responsible to bring rest to my weary soul, things quickly begin to fall apart. Because I've placed an expectation upon her that she was never intended to carry. So for you husbands and wives, and to those of you who are single longing for that special someone, the word to us is this: my soul finds rest in God alone. And when we are rested there in Him we are freed up to love from that place of security and safety and strength.

Next he turns to the faulty foundation of material wealth. First he says, don't trust in ill gotten gain, riches that are achieved through extortion, stealing, unethically taking advantage of others. This would seem obvious to most of us. But it's of the increase of riches that he says "do not set your heart on them." I love what Proverbs 23:4&5 says about this the shaky foundation of material wealth. **"Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle."**

Of course the recent history of our own Silicon Valley is filled with story after story of how true this ancient proverb really is, where millions and millions of dollars have just flown off to the sky like an eagle. You think we would have learned the lesson as a people. But of course the Lottery ads keep the lie alive: Inciting us, telling us that maybe, just maybe, you or I could be the next one to have our dreams come true.

Do not set your heart on material wealth, for when you think you need it most; it may simply fly away.

#### **VI. Final Affirmations**

And finally we come to the passionate summing up of all that David has discovered. It's almost as if someone has asked David, what is there about that God that makes you so sure He's the answer? Why do you put your confidence in Him alone? Shouldn't you keep your options open?

Here's what he says: **“One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God are strong, and You O Lord are loving.”**

When my mother was tired of my persistent questions she used to say: “If I've told you once I've told you a thousand times.” Meaning, that this is not new information, this is a truth that should have stuck in your head by now. And that's what David says in this numerical proverb: If God has said it once he's said it a thousand times.

**“You O God are strong. Power belongs to You. You are able.”** As Paul says in Ephesians 3:20, God **“is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.”**

Here is our confidence. God is able to rescue us, to deliver us in our time of greatest need. He is powerful enough to secure us from the enemy, to be a fortress and refuge in the wildest of storms.

But we would never draw near to the power of God unless it was also coupled with His abounding faithful love. Power without Love is frightening. And Love without power will never lay the foundations of hope. But together, power and love, that's something, that's someone, we can truly rest in. David uses a word for love that is translated at least 13 different ways but it has at its core the idea of God's passionate and loyal love for us, especially as we turn towards Him in our need. Then he closes with a verse that may surprise us.

He says, **“Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.”** I think David is claiming this as yet another reason to rest in God. And as he remains in the midst of battle with his enemies all around, David takes great comfort in knowing that God will be faithful to vindicate the cause of all those who run to Him as their fortress and shelter, turning to Him in their vulnerability and need.

What is it that presses hard upon your heart this morning? Maybe you're someone who is unglued inside, jostled around by the frenzy for so long that you've forgotten what true rest is like. Or maybe you're like the leaning wall today, a fence that's just about ready to collapse. Perhaps there is some grief to spend before the Lord today. Or some loss to express. Or it could be that this morning as you've been sitting here you've realized that God is closing off your escape routes and asking you to face the real world as you learn to wait on Him in a new whole way.

And so this morning we're going to have our worship be our conclusion. And in the moments remaining we're going to continue to bring our hearts before the Lord. He is inviting us to be strengthened in Himself today: So he encourages us with these words: **“Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge!”**

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