



How to Read a Psalm
Week 2 Study Guide (9/27/2020)

Psalm 61

NRSV

- ¹ Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer.
² 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;
³ for you are my refuge,
a strong tower against the enemy.
⁴ Let me abide in your tent forever,
find refuge under the shelter of your wings.
⁵ For you, O God, have heard my vows;
you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name.
- ⁶ Prolong the life of the king;
may his years endure to all generations!
⁷ May he be enthroned for ever before God;
appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch over him!
- ⁸ So I will always sing praises to your name,
as I pay my vows day after day.

The Message

- ¹⁻² God, listen to me shout,
bend an ear to my prayer.
When I'm far from anywhere,
down to my last gasp,
I call out, "Guide me
up High Rock Mountain!"
- ³⁻⁵ You've always given me breathing room,
a place to get away from it all,
A lifetime pass to your safe-house,
an open invitation as your guest.
You've always taken me seriously, God,
made me welcome among those who know and love you.
- ⁶⁻⁸ Let the days of the king add up
to years and years of good rule.
Set his throne in the full light of God;
post Steady Love and Good Faith as lookouts,
And I'll be the poet who sings your glory—
and live what I sing every day.

1. Read aloud both versions of Psalm 61 found above. What words or phrases get your attention?
2. This week, we're talking about how to read a Psalm. Here is some guidance about reading Psalms as we begin our series:
 - a. As Steve suggested in week one, read a Psalm a day. Start with Psalm 1 and months from now when you get to Psalm 150, go back to Psalm 1 and begin again. This is the best way for the language of God we find in the Psalms to become our own. We need to hear his words in order to learn them. This is how we develop "soul memory."
 - b. As we did above, read the Psalm aloud. Much of Scripture was spoken before it was written. That was certainly true of the Psalms which were first used in worship long before they were placed in the middle of our Bibles. In addition to seeing the words with your eyes, allow your ears to hear them.
 - c. Pay attention to what is going on in the Psalm. In Psalm 61, the Psalmist is crying out to God. The author is facing some sort of challenge. In this Psalm, the challenge is not specifically identified but the plea is real. Notice, too, the cry for God is rooted in a confidence in God. God is the "rock that is higher than I." This combination of *plea* and *confidence* is common in the Psalms.
 - d. The Psalms are often referred to as poetry. The Psalmist's use of metaphor is one of the reasons why the Psalms have been beloved by God's people for thousands of years. When you read a Psalm, note the metaphors that are used. In Psalm 61, how does the "rock" metaphor enrich the Psalm? How does it speak to you? Whatever Psalm you read, notice the metaphors!
 - e. Is there a line of the Psalm to remember through this very day? Is there a line you might pray for someone this moment? For example, in Psalm 61:2, we read: "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Perhaps that is a line for you to pray for yourself today. Pray it often in the hours ahead. Or, perhaps you know someone for whom you can pray this line. This is yet another way the language of God in the Psalms becomes our own.
 - f. Like we did above, read a Psalm in two different translations. Compare the words and phrases. Often having two translations of the same Psalm side-by-side opens up the richness of the Psalm before you.
 - g. Choose two to three of the above pieces of guidance and put them into practice this week. Which of them will you explore?

Going Deeper

In the opening pages of his wonderful book on the Psalms, N.T. Wright shares these wise words:

"...for me to think about the Psalms is like thinking about breathing. I breathe all the time but seldom stop to think about it or about what might happen if I tried to stop. In the same way, I have sung, said, and read the Psalms all of my life, from early churchgoing days in the Anglican tradition through glorious years in the English Cathedral tradition, and with my own daily reading of them as a constant backdrop—or should I say backbone—for everything else.

From *The Case for the Psalms*, p.13.