

## **Breathe: 2. Finding Stability**

**Psalm 61**

**July 16, 2017**

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Tomorrow marks the half way mark for summer of 2017. It's the fiftieth day of our one hundred days of summer. In Minnesota, summer days are fleeting! Let's face it, there are certain things we can only do between late May and early September. So if you're like me, in the cold, dark days of winter, you start making your summer wish list: trips to the cabin, zoo camp, baseball games, concerts in the park, Valley Fair, Vacation Bible school, sleep overs, lemonade stands. It's a great time to hone a new skill like rock climbing or paddle boarding. So much fun to be had, so little time.

And if we're not careful, even the fun stuff can overwhelm us. I remember especially feeling this way when our kids were younger. There were so many fun, interesting things to do in the summer but they all lasted just a week or maybe a few days so we were constantly looking at our schedule for the upcoming week, figuring out who needed to be where when and then connecting the dots for transportation, meals, equipment, supplies and details. Maybe you don't know this about me, my family does, but I am a very structured person. I'm in my happy place when there's a plan. So every Sunday night, we sat down with a blank piece of paper and created the structure for the upcoming week working around Jerry's and my work schedules and the kids' activities. To be honest, by the end of summer, I was glad that school was starting again so that there was some normalcy and predictability to our lives. I felt like I needed a vacation from my vacation! It wasn't so much the busyness of our schedule as it was the necessity to rebuild the infrastructure each week that was exhausting.

We are in the second week of our series called "Breathe-Letting God Restore Your Life." Last week, Pastor Steve started off this series by talking about the importance of breathing, creating that space in our schedules, in minds and hearts and allowing time just to be still, so to hear God's voice in our lives. Do you remember the memory verse from last week?

Psalm 46:10. "Be still and know that I am God."

Did you do the exercise?

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

How did you do this week at creating that space this week? Were you able to schedule time to be still? To breath?

If you tried but struggled, it might be because of that thing that too often drives our life called fear. So many times we don't even start things because of fear. Fear can actually paralyze us. This morning I want to look at ways in which we can face our fear and find our stability by resting in God's faithfulness. But how do we do that? By anchoring our lives, not to things of this world, but to a sure foundation, the faithfulness of God; by attaching our lifelines to the one true Rock.

Have you ever attached your rope to a person or an object before? Maybe you attached it to a person? But when you lost your job or your family member was faced a serious medical problem, that person, for one reason or another, disappointed you. Or maybe you put your trust and self-worth in your job and your entire career you worked diligently and faithfully with hopes and dreams of sitting in the head chair. But when time came and the boss retired, you were passed over. Recently there was an article published that shared some of Steve Job's last thoughts about life. You all know Steve Jobs, the founder and CEO of Apple, and arguably one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's most wealthy and powerful individuals, until he passed away at the age of 56 from pancreatic cancer. In his final days, when reflecting on his life, it is said that he said, *"At this moment, lying on the sick bed and recalling my whole life, I realize that all the recognition and wealth that I took so much pride in, have paled and become meaningless in the face of impending death."*

Now hear these words from the New Testament, 1 John 2:17, "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever." "Whoever does the will of God lives forever." That's a foundation that I'd like to build my life on.

But when we lose sight of God, our focus gets blurred, we lose our anchor and we spend all of our time trying to recover from our falls and regain our balance. Worrying can't change our situation; it's actually a vicious cycle that only amplifies our stress. In times of desperation, even those who profess to have no faith can find themselves crying out to God for help.

Author, Anne Lamott, suggests that there are just two kinds of prayers that are essential to Christian living. Both are very short. "Help" and "Thank you". Perhaps you found yourself praying one of these prayers this past week. I know I've spent a lot of time praying the HELP prayer this week as I prepared for this message today and as I do each time I preach. There is nothing more humbling and important than the responsibility of sharing God's word and I don't take that responsibility lightly. In fact, if I don't pay attention, wrap the entire process in prayer, I can very easily allow fear to paralyze me.

And do you know who else is really good at praying the "HELP" prayers? The psalmists: the authors of the book of Psalms. The psalmists are experts at praying the "help" prayers. Help me. Look at me. Hear my cries. Me, me, me. Their prayers often begin centered on themselves. They are filled with angst, anger and despair and the result is honest, open and bold cries for help. But they emerge in a different place from where their prayer starts. We can see the psalmist's view of the situation, and of God, actually shifts in the course of their praying. They begin with petitions and complaints addressed to God and move to praise and thanksgiving. Theologian, Ellen Davis in her book, *Getting Involved with God*, says this, "It's a remarkable assumption when you think about it, that the God who made the heavens and the earth should care that I am hurting."

So if we spend time reading the Psalms, allowing time to **breathe** through them, they can comfort us. When we cry honest cries for help, fully exposing our thoughts and emotions to God, we begin to open ourselves up to God and clear the way for our fears to be released. Then, with our fears in check, we can focus, slow down and spend time in authentic prayer and worship. God wants us to live a life free from fear but if we don't address our fears, if we ignore them and hope they will go away, we allow fear to run rampant, just under the surface-and we're in danger of collapsing. It's kind of like this.

Before moving our family to Minnesota in 1997, Jerry and I made not one, but two house hunting trips. On our first trip, we came equipped with big hopes and dreams for our new home in Minnesota. But the trip was completely unsuccessful and we returned to Texas empty handed and very discouraged. The housing market in Texas is very different than the Minnesota housing market. So on our second trip, with a more realistic view of what was available and what we could afford, we found a house in Burnsville that fit our needs. The couple that was selling it had separated years earlier and the wife was raising the four teenage children in the house by herself and she was completely overwhelmed by life. Life had punched her in the gut and the house looked like it. But it was in a good neighborhood and a good school district and it had enough space for our family. We decided that this was a house that we could work with and we bought it. Once we moved in, we got to work prioritizing our repair list. We knew from the increasing size of the water stain on the kitchen ceiling that our upstairs' master shower had a leak. And upon closer investigation, we discovered some loose tiles on the back wall of the shower. And as we gently pushed on those tiles, they gave way, as did the ones next to them, and the ones next to them and, well, you get the picture. We called in a professional and we were told that we had a big problem.

Let me pause here for a second and say that at first glance, this bathroom was not the obvious place to start with our renovations. The other upstairs bathroom was entirely blue. Everything was blue, the counter tops, the sink, the tub and surrounding tiles. Even the toilet was blue! Some 1960 designer really loved blue! So when we first looked at the house, that bathroom seemed like the obvious place to start. But in fact, once the walls and the floor came out of the master bath and the sub floor was exposed and we could see that it resembled the texture of a saltine cracker. It had obviously suffered years of water damage. It was only when we until we got everything stripped completely away, down to the studs, that we had a foundation on which we could begin to rebuild. This was the right place to start.

So it is with building our faith. Only when we get below the surface and uncover and directly address our fears, can we begin to build our lives on the one sure foundation that is God. So how do we do that? Let's look again at the Psalms. The psalmists over and over again in their cries for help, use the metaphor of God as their Rock, their sure foundation.

- Psalm 18:2: The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.
- Psalm 42:9: I will say to God my rock, "Why have You forgotten me?"
- Psalm 31:2: Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue, be to me a rock of strength.
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And today's memory verse, Psalm 61 is a cry for security, assurance and stability. "Hear my cry, O God. I call as my heart grows faint, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I."

When rock climbing, is there a better place to anchor your rope than the rock at the top of the mountain? Or when the floods of life are rising, is there a better place to stand than on the highest rock? God wants to be that Rock for us, so to live in his peace, give our fears to him and trust in his goodness and faithfulness. With the image of anchoring ourselves to the rock, listen to what Jesus says in his Sermon on the Mount. The sermon

begins with Jesus teaching about the importance of praying, forgiving others, not judging others, and loving others. These are his guidelines for Christian living. And he closes his sermon with this well-known parable.

Matthew 7:24-27

*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."*

If we want something to last, it has to be built on a strong foundation. We all know that. It's not a complicated concept. Good foundations are critical when you are building something as important as, let's say, a building.

Our son, Mark, is a civil engineer in the city of San Francisco. Three years ago he relocated there to oversee the redevelopment of Candlestick/Hunters Point Shipyard, the area in the southeast corner of the city that had formerly been the site of Candlestick Stadium and the US Navy Shipyard. It is now in the process of being turned back over to the city for urban development. The first steps of the project was to take down the iconic Candlestick Park, the former home of the SF Giants and 49ers. Demolition took six months and then the ground underneath the stadium needed to settle so that the next structures to be built on that location would have a firm foundation. Firm foundations are especially important in earthquake-ridden California. And so, for the next 9 months, the ground sat untouched. Nothing was being done to start the new building. At least, that is what it looked like to the untrained eye. The engineers were utilizing a technique called "surcharging" where the weight of the dirt is used, along with some strategically placed drains and water, to compress and stabilize the dirt below it. It's a simple concept but one that takes time and one that is very important to building a stable foundation. Never cheat on a building's foundation.

Good foundations are also important in a marriage. If you want your marriage to last, don't cheat on the foundation. When couples get married these days, it is recommended that they attend 12 hours of pre-marital counseling. In fact, the State of MN thinks it so important that they give a sizeable discount to the cost of a marriage license if you complete the pre-marital counseling. The foundation of a healthy marriage puts into practice Jesus' guidelines for Christian living:

- loving the way Jesus wants us to love each other
- forgiving each other the way Jesus forgives us and
- serving each other the way in which Jesus served
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The foundation of a marriage - invisible to the public eye - the way we actually treat and care for each other when we're behind closed doors, is what matters. You simply cannot have a great marriage without a solid foundation. It would be foolish to scrimp or cheat on the foundation, whether it's for a building or a marriage or our faith. If you place your trust in Jesus, the Rock, you've got a foundation that will last a lifetime and withstand the storms of life.

In his book *Simplify, 10 Practices to Unclutter Your Soul*, Pastor Bill Hybels from Willow Creek Community Church, in the suburbs of Chicago, offers these steps for addressing your fears.

1. Positive self-talk. When you're scared or find your self in a stressful situation, firmly speak truth-filled words to focus your vision and let your panic subside. Then envision God taking you by the hand and walking with you.
2. Scripture: Scripture is filled with words of truth that help us overcome our fears. Having a few verses committed to memory can allow our mind to immediately go to those in a moment of panic. Beginning last week, and continuing each Sunday throughout this message series, we'll give you a card as you leave the sanctuary with a short memory verse on it. Last week's was "Be still and know that I am God." Today's verse is: "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; for you are my refuge and my strength." I think if you can take the time to memorize them, you'll find them comforting.
3. Prayer: When you pray, tell God exactly what you want. Keep it simple and pray boldly, with great expectation that God will answer your prayers. And regardless of the outcome of your circumstances know that God is with you always.

Now, are we expected to be perfect in our efforts? Of course not. But the person who hears Jesus' teachings and attempts to do them is the wise person. Wisdom comes in the doing, in the repeated attempts to live a Christ-like life. And when our faith gets shaky and we remember the cries of the psalmists and all that God has done in the past for others, and for us, we reestablish our foundation on God, our Rock, so that our house will stand, no matter what storms beat against it.

### **Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of July 16, 2017**

**Weekly Prayer:** Here I am, God! My week has been filled with so many emotions; joy and excitement, sorrow and despair. Sometimes I find myself filled with energy, others times I am filled with weariness. Sometimes I am filled with love for you and at other times, I wonder where you are and feel far from you. I lay myself before you and with all the honesty I can muster, I give to you all that I am. Create in me a clean heart. Fill me with your Spirit so I can be made holy to serve you wholly. Amen.

### **Monday, July 17**

#### **Scripture: Psalm 21**

The king rejoices in your strength, LORD.  
How great is his joy in the victories you give!  
You have granted him his heart's desire  
and have not withheld the request of his lips.  
You came to greet him with rich blessings  
and placed a crown of pure gold on his head.  
He asked you for life, and you gave it to him—  
length of days, forever and ever.  
Through the victories you gave, his glory is great;  
you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty.  
Surely you have granted him unending blessings  
and made him glad with the joy of your presence.  
For the king trusts in the LORD;

through the unfailing love of the Most High  
he will not be shaken.  
Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies;  
your right hand will seize your foes.  
When you appear for battle,  
you will burn them up as in a blazing furnace.  
The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath,  
and his fire will consume them.  
You will destroy their descendants from the earth,  
their posterity from mankind.  
Though they plot evil against you  
and devise wicked schemes, they cannot succeed.  
You will make them turn their backs  
when you aim at them with drawn bow.  
Be exalted in your strength, LORD;  
we will sing and praise your might.

**Observation:** This is a prayer of thankfulness and praise for the Lord's faithfulness - for all of the gifts, the "desires of my heart" that have been received from God.

**Application:** Ask yourself, "How has God answered my prayers, the desires of my heart?" Then pause, right now, and thank God for answered prayers. By doing this, you are authentically giving your praise to God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank you for the gift of this scripture message today. Thank you for answering my prayers and for the gifts that you give to me each and every day. Amen.

## Tuesday, July 18

### Scripture: Psalm 61

Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe.

**Observation:** In this opening appeal the psalmist desires rescue. From what, we do not know. "From the ends of the earth" implies that the author is distant from God in a spiritual sense. Author Leslie Brant says it like this, "Listen to me, O God. Listen to what I have to say. From the bowels of this fractured world, I cry out my fears and my longings."

**Application:** We can cry out to God in anger and despair. God hears our cries even when we feel far from God and in our moments of complete despair and hopelessness. It is only when we put our trust and hope in God, that we find a sure and lasting foundation for our lives.

**Prayer:** I confess, O God, that sometimes I get so wrapped up in my despair and grief that I forget to pray to you as I should. Quiet and center my mind today. Help me focus my attention completely on you, for you are my rescuer, the strong tower on which I choose to anchor my life. Amen.

## **Wednesday, July 19**

### **Scripture: Psalm 9:1-2**

I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart;  
I will tell of all your wonderful deeds.  
I will be glad and rejoice in you;  
I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.

**Observation:** Our praise expresses our appreciation and understanding of God's gifts. It is how we say "thank you" for each aspect of God's divine nature. When we give our praise to God it helps us expand our awareness of the vastness of God.

**Application:** Before your feet touch the floor each morning, think of at least one thing for which you are thankful and then, right there and then, express your gratitude to God.

**Prayer:** O Lord, I give thanks for your great deeds. I want my life to reflect the good news of your saving grace. Please help me to start each day with a word of thanks to you on my lips. Amen.

## **Thursday, July 20**

### **Scripture: Psalm 31**

In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;  
let me never be put to shame;  
deliver me in your righteousness.  
Turn your ear to me,  
come quickly to my rescue;  
be my rock of refuge,  
a strong fortress to save me.  
Since you are my rock and my fortress,  
for the sake of your name lead and guide me.  
Keep me free from the trap that is set for me,  
for you are my refuge.  
\*Into your hands I commit my spirit;  
deliver me, LORD, my faithful God.  
I hate those who cling to worthless idols;  
as for me, I trust in the LORD.  
I will be glad and rejoice in your love,  
for you saw my affliction  
and knew the anguish of my soul.  
You have not given me into the hands of the enemy  
but have set my feet in a spacious place.  
Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;  
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,  
my soul and body with grief.  
My life is consumed by anguish  
and my years by groaning;  
my strength fails because of my affliction,  
and my bones grow weak.  
Because of all my enemies,  
I am the utter contempt of my neighbors

and an object of dread to my closest friends—  
those who see me on the street flee from me.  
I am forgotten as though I were dead;  
I have become like broken pottery.  
For I hear many whispering,  
“Terror on every side!”  
They conspire against me  
and plot to take my life.  
\*But I trust in you, LORD;  
I say, “You are my God.”  
My times are in your hands;  
deliver me from the hands of my enemies,  
from those who pursue me.  
Let your face shine on your servant;  
save me in your unfailing love.  
Let me not be put to shame, LORD,  
for I have cried out to you;  
but let the wicked be put to shame  
and be silent in the realm of the dead.  
Let their lying lips be silenced,  
for with pride and contempt  
they speak arrogantly against the righteous.  
How abundant are the good things  
that you have stored up for those who fear you,  
that you bestow in the sight of all,  
on those who take refuge in you.  
In the shelter of your presence you hide them  
from all human intrigues;  
you keep them safe in your dwelling  
from accusing tongues.  
Praise be to the LORD,  
for he showed me the wonders of his love  
when I was in a city under siege.  
In my alarm I said,  
“I am cut off from your sight!”  
Yet you heard my cry for mercy  
when I called to you for help.  
Love the LORD, all his faithful people!  
The LORD preserves those who are true to him,  
but the proud he pays back in full.  
Be strong and take heart,  
all you who hope in the LORD.

**Observation:** This is a prayer that moves us from petition to praise. Focus on verses 5 and 14, “Into your hands I commend my spirit...I trust in You, O Lord; I say, You are my God.” These are the same words that Jesus prayed as he was dying on the cross. And Stephen repeated these words when he was being stoned to death (Acts 7:59).

**Application:** If Jesus showed his absolute dependence on God at his darkest hour, shouldn't we also entrust and commit ourselves completely to God? When we are able

to live this way our life is marked with a steadfast hope that is able to take a long view on life and rely on God in the face of persecution and suffering.

**Prayer:** Even when I feel hopeless and helpless, put a new and right spirit within me, O God. Give me courage to be strong and take heart in all that you are doing in my life. Into your hands, I give my whole self, for you are my God. Amen.

### Friday, July 21

#### **Scripture: Psalm 56**

Be merciful to me, my God,  
for my enemies are in hot pursuit;  
all day long they press their attack.  
My adversaries pursue me all day long;  
in their pride many are attacking me.  
When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.  
In God, whose word I praise—  
in God I trust and am not afraid.  
What can mere mortals do to me?  
All day long they twist my words;  
all their schemes are for my ruin.  
They conspire, they lurk,  
they watch my steps,  
hoping to take my life.  
Because of their wickedness do not let them escape;  
in your anger, God, bring the nations down.  
Record my misery;  
list my tears on your scroll—  
are they not in your record?  
Then my enemies will turn back  
when I call for help.  
\*By this I will know that God is for me.  
In God, whose word I praise,  
in the LORD, whose word I praise—  
in God I trust and am not afraid.  
What can man do to me?  
I am under vows to you, my God;  
I will present my thank offerings to you.  
For you have delivered me from death  
and my feet from stumbling,  
that I may walk before God  
in the light of life.

**Observation:** This is a psalm about trusting in God's care even in the midst of our fear. When life seems dark, one true light still shines bright. The Apostle Paul stated it this way in Romans 8:31, "When God is for us, who can be against us?"

**Application:** Focus verse 9-10, "by this I will know that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise — in God I trust and am not afraid. What can another person do to me?" Do you ever feel like you're not good enough for God? Then this verse is especially for you. When you waiver between fear and faith, when you

feel discouraged and you are sure that no one understands, remember that God cares!

**Prayer:** God, you know the difficulties that I face each day. Remind me that you are always near me, that you are a shield around me. I will put my whole trust in you and will not fear. Amen.

## Saturday, July 22

### Scripture: Psalm 84

How lovely is your dwelling place,  
LORD Almighty!  
My soul yearns, even faints,  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and my flesh cry out  
for the living God.  
Even the sparrow has found a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may have her young—  
a place near your altar,  
LORD Almighty, my King and my God.  
Blessed are those who dwell in your house;  
they are ever praising you.  
Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.  
As they pass through the Valley of Baka,  
they make it a place of springs;  
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.  
They go from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God in Zion.  
Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty;  
listen to me, God of Jacob.  
Look on our shield, O God;  
look with favor on your anointed one.  
Better is one day in your courts  
than a thousand elsewhere;  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.  
For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
the LORD bestows favor and honor;  
no good thing does he withhold  
from those whose walk is blameless.  
LORD Almighty,  
blessed is the one who trusts in you.

**Observation:** Do you ever long to get away from the hustle and bustle of the world and meet God in a holy place? The truth is, you can meet God anywhere, anytime. God's living presence is our greatest joy. It helps us to grow in strength and grace.

**Application:** The grace of God allows us to trust God's goodness and power. Only divine love is strong enough to transform the un-loveliest of us into companions of our living Lord. God's grace enables our cynical spirits to see life with new eyes, the eyes of

a child. When we begin to see with new faith, we can accept God's power to heal, redeem, and transform each of us personally as well as all of us together.

**Prayer:** As I remember your faithfulness, I trust that you have my best interests in mind. By your grace, teach me to trust you more. I give you permission to enter my life – all of it. I am not asking for a light touch or a redecoration. I am asking for a complete overhaul of desires, appetite, priorities, time and activities. I abandon myself willingly into your hands. Amen.