



Gregg Lamm

I began pastoring in Northwest Yearly Meeting in 1984, and since 2006 I've been the lead pastor-teacher at 2nd Street Community Church in Newberg, Oregon. This week's devotionals are excerpted from teaching I shared with the 2nd Street Flock in 2010. Manuscripts and MP3 audio files of these and other teachings can be accessed at www.2ndstreet.org.

My bride, Teresa, and I have been married 28 years and are the parents of three grown sons.

BIBLE READING: Psalm 61:1-8

David was a great man of God, a king of Israel, and an ancestor of Jesus Christ. But David's family situation—particularly the headstrong, cutthroat, competitive behavior of his children—caused him considerable and often ongoing trouble and grief.

Many Bible teachers believe David wrote this psalm after one of the most horrible examples of his family's destructive behavior, revealed in Amnon's lust over his younger half-sister, Tamar (2 Samuel 13). And after she consistently rejected his advances, he raped her. Of course, after the rape his "lust" for her immediately turned into loathing and contempt.

After David found out about Amnon's rape of Tamar he kept quiet; David didn't do anything about it, even though he was angry. But Tamar's brother, Absalom found out. And unlike his father, Absalom wasn't willing to look the other way and allow Amnon's crime to go unpunished. He patiently bided his time, and when the opportunity for justice (revenge?) came, Absalom had Amnon killed.

David failed to stand up to the giant of lust that reared its ugly head through his son Amnon; he didn't confront the giants of revenge and murder that showed up when Absalom took matters into his own hands. Eventually Absalom, too, was killed. And David grieved deeply the loss of his son.

David avoided *lovingkindness* and *truth* in his dealings with Absalom. But he used those words as he writes his psalm. As we move through these eight verses over the next few days, we'll focus on lovingkindness and truth as well.

SONG: Thy Loving Kindness (Is Better Than Life)

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, show me the giants in my life that I'd rather avoid. Help me to confront them through your strength, and in your truth.

—Gregg Lamm

BIBLE READING: Psalm 6:6; 61:1-4

The word *faint* (v. 2) is the Hebrew word *ataph*, and it means overwhelmed, to turn aside; to be feeble, be faint, grow weak, or be covered over with darkness. This place of discouragement isn't the kind of place we want to be when confronting and then doing battle with the pain in our lives.

All of us go through times in our lives when we're discouraged or even depressed. David talked about it this way: "I am weary with my sighing; every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears" (Psalm 6:6, NASB).

Moses became despondent while leading the nation of Israel. "I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me" (Numbers 11:14 NASB).

God used Elijah to perform great miracles, but when Elijah fled from Jezebel—after whipping the prophets of Baal—he became depressed and wanted to quit (1 Kings 19).

We, too, easily feel overwhelmed by our hurts, habits, and hang-ups: problems in our relationships, financial woes, loss and emptiness, physical illnesses or limitations, seasonal cycles of depression and discouragement.

David, feeling overwhelmed, cried out for God's presence: "Let me dwell in your tent forever; let me take refuge in the shelter of your wings" (Psalm 61:4 NASB). The wings David referred to might have been the wings of the cherubim angels on the Ark of the Covenant. The cherubim were seated over the mercy seat—the throne of grace—the place where God met with people (Exodus 25:20-22).

Are you feeling faint, feeble, or weak today? Join David at the mercy seat, under the shelter of God's wings.

SONG: Under His Wings

PRAYER SUGGESTION: O Lord, "let me dwell in your tent forever; let me take refuge in the shelter of your wings."

—Gregg Lamm

BIBLE READING: Psalm 61:5-6; 2 Samuel 7:12-17

(Scriptures in the following text are from NASB.)

“For you have heard my vows, O God” (v. 5). David had seen God answer his prayers before. He’d seen God work in his life. He’d seen God help him put to death the challenges that sought to undermine his faith, rob his joy, and kill his spirit.

“You will prolong the king’s life” (v. 6). David expected God to keep him alive, and that the challenges he faced—some of which he’d overthrown earlier in his life and some still ahead of him on the battlefield—would not ruin his life.

“He will abide before God forever” (v. 7). David might be talking about himself, and God preserving his life. Or, it might be that David is referring to eternal life. But David’s words might go even further than these two options. God had made some other promises to David about forever:

“I will raise up your descendant after you...” (2 Samuel 7:12).

“I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever...” (v. 13).

“I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me...” (v. 14).

“My lovingkindness shall not depart from him...” (v. 15).

“Your kingdom shall endure before Me forever...” (v. 16).

David had heard these promises, but then his own son, Absalom, tried to take him out and steal the throne. But Solomon, not Absalom, would prove to be the son of the prophecy. And eventually, Jesus Christ, the Son of David, would bring the prophecy to completion.

What “forever promises” has God made to you?

SONG: Forever (by Chris Tomlin)

PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Help us to trust in your unfailing love, O God. Your promises are forever.

—Gregg Lamm

BIBLE READING: Psalm 61:7

Prepare—*manah* in Hebrew—to appoint, prepare. This and the other Hebrew words here are written in the command form. Grammatically speaking, this phrase in Psalm 61 is the main request David makes of God. In Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase, *The Message*, it’s rendered this way: “Set [David’s] throne in the full light of God; [and God], post Steady Love and Good Faith as lookouts [over him].”

In other words, David is imploring God to be merciful (*checed*)—good, kind, faithful; and truthful (*emeth*)—faithful, reliable, stable. Mercy and truth (*lovingkindness*). These two words are paired more than 30 times in the Old Testament. Other examples of these words in Scripture:

Joshua and Caleb talk with Rahab before Israel conquers Jericho. “So the men said to her, ‘Our life for yours if you do not tell this business of ours; and it shall come about when the Lord gives us the land that we will deal *kindly* and *faithfully* with you’” (Joshua 2:14 NASB, emphasis mine).

Lovingkindness wasn’t a new concept for David. When fleeing Absalom, this is what David wished for his friend, Ittai: “Mercy and truth be with you” (2 Samuel 15:20 NASB).

But God’s ultimate demonstration of kindness and faithfulness, mercy and truth, are found in Jesus Christ: “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17 NASB).

There was no greater act of kindness and mercy, truth and faithfulness, than when Jesus laid down his life for us on the cross, paying the penalty for our sins with his own death.

SONG: Pass Me Not

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord Jesus Christ, in your mercy and truth you have conquered death on our behalf. How we praise you!

—Gregg Lamm

BIBLE READING: Psalm 61:7-8

When you and I ask God to appoint lovingkindness and truth over us, we'll not only have the discernment and the wisdom to identify the hurts, habits, and hang-ups we run into throughout life, we'll be moving in the direction of becoming equipped to overcome those exact same hurts, habits, and hang-ups with God's help.

David ends his psalm singing praise to God's name. So how do we get from feeling overwhelmed to praising God?

Bible commentator Matthew Henry writes, "Weeping must quicken praying, not deaden it." David was a man of prayer. Throughout the stages of his life, we see David's failures and successes, and we see him learning from both. But from the beginning to the end of his life, David matures and grows in this area of "enquiring of the Lord," asking God for direction, seeking God's face through prayer. In fact, the psalms themselves are mostly songs of prayer.

We see the same pattern in Jesus' life. All through the Gospels we read about his strong relationship of prayer with God the Father. "Before daybreak ... Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray" (Mark 1:35 NLT). Before choosing his disciples, "Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night" (Luke 6:12 NLT). "He walked away ... and knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine'" (Luke 22:41-42 NLT).

For David—and for Jesus—the answer was prayer. Prayer needs to be our first and best resort, not our last.

SONG: The Lord's Prayer

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Our Father, thank you for inviting us to pray. Thank you for hearing our prayers and healing our hurts.

—Gregg Lamm

BIBLE READING: Psalm 61; Colossians 3:1-10

I love Psalm 61. "... I call to You when my heart is faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I." (v. 2, NASB). David prayed. Pure and simple. And his relationship with God formed the basis for all his learning, growing, maturing, deepening, changing, and being transformed one choice at a time.

The help you and I need to move us through the tough circumstances of our lives and through fear and discouragement come from a rock and from a person who is higher than we. That help doesn't come from a frantic search for answers. Help comes from *above*. Always. Simply put, if we don't put our trust in the One who is greater than ourselves, we'll never accomplish anything greater than ourselves.

Read Colossians 3:1-10 again. Do you see how victory and change can only come from a growing life of healing discipleship with Jesus Christ? It won't ever come from any other place. Never.

Jonah found himself in the belly of a great fish—a consequence of running hard and fast away from God's will. Jonah's hang-up of disobedience wasn't defeated until he looked up to God and prayed (Jonah 2:1).

The great king Nebuchadnezzar got swallowed up by the habit of pride which led to madness—he started acting like a cow, living outside, even eating grass! But the craziness ended when he looked up and started praying (Daniel 4:34).

Don't let your heart be overwhelmed by the hurts, habits, and hang-ups you're facing. Don't give in to discouragement. Look up. Receive God's truth and mercy. Go to the rock that is higher than you are. His name is Jesus Christ.

SONG: The Solid Rock

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me remember that you always hear me. My hope and trust is in you.

—Gregg Lamm

BIBLE READING: John 10:14-16, 27-29

Throughout the Bible, when people came into relationship with God, God often changed their names. Abram became Abraham, Sarai became Sarah, Jacob became Israel, Simon became Peter, Saul became Paul. God changed their names to signify a change in each person's identity.

As a senior at George Fox College, I worked weekends at a local care home. Things have changed a lot in the past 30 years in terms of how people are treated in nursing homes, but back then—even though we tried to be sensitive—the patients often ended up being treated as “the person in room such and such...” instead of a person with a name.

Frances continuously antagonized the aides, nurses, the other patients. And we were at our wit's end trying to figure out how to get her to “play well with others.” Then one day I got to be in the right place at the right time, and was able to do the right thing. When Frances called her roommate a filthy name, instead of responding with frustration and condemnation, I simply spoke her name with compassion.

Evidently I said Frances's name in a way that indicated she mattered. At that moment I woke up to the fact that if I used her name more, Frances would respond in ways that led to grace and peace instead of frustration and chaos.

God knows your name, and God knows my name. Most of the time we don't quiet our lives long enough to hear him speak our name. He has messages for us—some contain words of encouragement and praise, and some contain words of correction and rebuke—but all of them will be spoken in love if we'll start listening.

SONG: I Will Change Your Name

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Slow me down, God. Give me a listening heart so that I can clearly hear your messages to me.

—Gregg Lamm



