

Lesson Eight: Rest on the Rock

Focal Text: Psalm 62

Background: Matthew 11:28-30; Rev. 14:13; Isaiah 26:4

Main Idea: Only God provides true rest.

Question to Explore: How do I rest in God?

Quick Read: God is the Rock that shelters believers where they can find true rest in the middle of a crisis.

Introduction

It is not healthy to be around constant noise. Prolonged periods of noise not only cause early onset hearing loss, but they also prevent individuals from “hearing” other things. They have difficulty collecting their thoughts. They are unable to be creative, and they lose their sense of imagination and wonder. They lack the ability to think through ideas and learn from their experiences.

Noise does not even need to originate from sound. For instance, when people travel to different countries, they often lose their sense of orientation. It is easy to get confused due to a difference in sensory perception or a change of language and culture. International travelers often feel the need to isolate themselves from their new environment for a few hours simply to reorient themselves to what they know and understand. So it is with the soul; the noise of life can drown out the still small voice of God.

Even within their native country, “city-dwellers” often need to head to the “country” to find solace, and some who cannot find a quiet place at home will pay money for the privilege to enter a “quiet room.” Urban “country parks” are a great lure to escape the noise of everyday life, for they allow people to draw back into a world without various shades of noise.

It is in the stillness, the “quiet place,” that many learn to listen to God. Although God is always present, individuals can push Him to the side through the “noise” of their everyday lives. Psalm 62 focuses on finding a stillness that once again can provide mental creativity and spiritual listening. Those who can find such a stillness are able to draw back to God.

Commentary

Psalm 62 is a beautiful psalm that calls readers to a stillness of soul and a calmness of spirit. It is a simple and straightforward poem, but it is not easy to categorize. Although there are elements of lament within its lines (vv. 3-4), the psalm does not have the full idea of a lament. There are hints of thanksgiving within the psalm as well, but it does not overall fit the category. “Wisdom” seems to be the closest category, but there are only traces of it as well. The psalm, therefore, is *sui generis* (without genre).

The writer uses the adverb *’ak* (“surely,” “indeed”) throughout the psalm. In the six times it is used, four of the usages pertain to God, one usage pertains to the writer’s enemies, and one usage is a philosophical phrase about humanity. With these usages, the psalmist provided certainty to his viewpoints, for they pertained to the chaotic moment he found himself in.

Although the psalm can be divided in several different ways, a natural way to divide the psalm is to use the term *selah* (found in verses 4 and 8) as the natural break in the poem. If *selah* provided a mental pause in the psalm,¹ these natural divisions would allow readers to think and meditate upon the material that the psalmist had stated. Assuming that *selah* is used this way, the psalm divides into three sections: Stillness in the midst of chaos (vv. 1-4), stillness that can be trusted (vv. 5-8), and stillness that brings reality to light (vv. 9-12).²

Within the body of the psalm, verse 8 could be the key to the entire psalm. Since the writer firmly believed that God was his deliverer, glory, rock, and refuge, the psalmist then directed his attention to his audience.³ If the poet could indeed trust God in the midst of his own chaos, anyone could do the same.

The superscription⁴ to the psalm has two items that have been used many times. “To the Choirmaster” probably indicated the one who would put this psalm to music.⁵ “Of David” indicates either the author or the receiver of the psalm.⁶ Unique to the psalm is the phrase, “Upon Jeduthun.” This name is only used twice elsewhere (Psalm 39:1 and 77:1); however, the preposition is not always the same. Jeduthun was one of the Levitical singers that David had in his court (1 Chron. 16:1). While the phrase may simply refer to him, it might also refer to the style of music or of a group of singers used as a chorus.⁷

Stillness in the midst of Chaos (62:1-4)

Instead of beginning as a hymn of praise to God, the psalm opens with a word of silence: “Truly my soul finds rest in God.” The term “rest” (*dumiyah*) refers to more of a “quietness,” “stillness,” or “waiting.”⁸ The reason the writer has found this stillness is through the fact that his salvation came from God. He is assured that God is his rock (*sur*), his salvation (*yoshua*), and his fortress (*mishgab*). Consequently, he “will never be shaken” (v. 2).

It is this calmness that the psalmist longed for, because in his present life he found no such peace. Instead, his outside life was filled with chaos and confusion. Going into little detail, he spoke briefly about his enemies: “How long will you assault me?” (v. 3). While this phrase “how long” (*ad ana*) is normally addressed to God, here it is addressed to his assailants.⁹ These unknown individuals wanted to attack him,¹⁰ verbally and physically, when he was at his lowest and weakest (“this leaning wall, this tottering fence”). The verse, then, describes a person who is not doing well, and whose enemies have decided to “kick him while he was down.”

It is in verse four that the psalmist uses *'ak* in a different way. Here, he spoke that his enemies planned to topple him. From whatever high place he found himself,¹¹ they planned to take him down. They would do so in two ways. First, they would “take delight in lies,” and they planned to destroy him verbally. Second, they would be duplicitous in their actions; they would bless with their mouths, but they then would curse with their hearts. Such egregious behavior from a group of thugs was too much for the writer to take. This is a great place to pause the poem, which may be why the term *selah* ends the verse.

The writer is downtrodden. On the one hand, he is certain that God is with him. He had found shelter in God, for God was both his rock and his salvation. On the other hand, these enemies were nearby. At the very least, they verbally attacked him, smeared him with lies, and spoke behind his back. At the very most, they plotted a physical attack to overtake him and finish him off.

Stillness That Learns to Trust (62:5-8)

Although the psalmist felt the reality of their threats, in his heart he knew that God’s reality was greater. In verses 5-6, the writer went back to his earlier points: his stillness in God and the qualities of God (rock, salvation, and fortress) that caused him to be still. These two verses employ much the same language as verses 1-2, but with three exceptions. First, he called his soul to “be silent”; this is now an affirmation that he stated in verse one. Second, the writer used “hope” instead of “salvation.” Again, this now moves him into action what was only a principle in verse one. Third, he stated, “I will not be shaken.” In verse six, the word *rabah* (“much”) is not used as it had been in verse two. The wording is therefore much clearer than when first stated.¹²

The difference between verses 5-6 and verses 1-2 appears to be a faith placed into action. Verse one is a principle that the psalmist had believed in, and that he trusted to be true. In verse 5, however, the differences show that the psalmist’s faith was at work. He acted on what he believed. He actively asked God to be his rock, salvation, and fortress, which allowed him to stand firm in his faith. What he believed to be true in verses 1-2 had become reality in verses 5-6. These enemies, regardless of their power, were no match for the strength of Almighty God.

The writer knew that God's strength was greater than his own weakness, but he also realized that God's strength was greater than his enemies' supposed strength. This allowed him to stand tall and stand firm.

After repeating his statements, he added to them. He knew that his deliverance could only come from God. God was his "strong rock" and his refuge.¹³ Consequently, he called upon others to trust Him to do the same: "Trust him at all times, you people" (v. 8). It is because God was their refuge that they could pour their heart out to Him and always trust Him.

God was the rock, salvation, fortress, and hope of this psalmist. While he believed those words before things became tough in his life, he also found greater truth in them when things went badly. Because he knew that all this hope and assurance came from God and no one else, he called on his readers to trust as well. This opportunity for refuge was vital, and it was worth the time for his readers to think and meditate upon. Thus, the writer provided a second *selah* to the poem.

Stillness that brought Reality to Light (62:9-12)

After focusing his words upon his own situation, both inwardly in his relationship with God, and outwardly in his relationship to his attackers, the psalmist focused upon humanity at large. In many respects, this material is the most wisdom-based of the psalm, for it contains a proverb (v. 9), an admonition (v. 10), and a numerical saying (vv. 12-13). Rather than being specific in detail, the poet generally stated the obvious about humanity.

First, the poet spoke of humanity's frailty: "Surely the lowborn are but a breath, the highborn are but a lie" (v. 9). The word "breath" (*hebel*) is the same word that the writer of Ecclesiastes used to describe everything in life. The word can have several meanings, among them are "frail," "futile," "brief," and "deceitful." Regardless of which meaning is understood, the term refers to how weak and finite humanity is. This is a stark contrast to the God that the psalmist served. If placed on the scales (lit., a "balance"), humanity would certainly display their weakness and frailty. Whether thought as a group or the accomplishments that they have achieved, they were only a "breath."

Second, the writer spoke of humanity's desires. Whether treasures were taken by extortion or through theft, or through any kind of acquisition, there was no reason to be attracted to them. These items, while found to be in high regard, would eventually fade into nothing.

Once he spoke about the common ideas against humanity, he then spoke of the difference between humanity and God (v. 11). Using the "graduated number" (x, x+1) formula, commonly found in wisdom literature,¹⁴ the psalmist spoke of two things that he believed with all his heart. First, he knew that power belonged to God. God's strength (*'az*, "power"), is greater than any human could ever achieve. With that strength, God also possessed love. Throughout the book of Psalms as well as the Bible itself, the Lord possesses both strength and love. They are not

opposed to one another; in fact, they work together. God's love is strong. In His strength, God is love.

The second item he believed is that "you reward everyone according to what they have done" (v. 12). The word translated "rewarded" (*teshalem*) means "make whole." The person is made complete by how he lived his life. These two statements were not to be taken separately, but they were to be understood together. By realizing that God's strong love was what enabled someone to be made whole by what they had done, this was a context to how humanity lives. Frail humanity trusts in things that would not last, and those things would eventually be gone. God, however, would reward those who trust in Him, who realize that God's love is strong and that He is a "strong rock" and unmovable in His salvation.

Throughout the psalm, all these words of assurance became a source of strength to the writer and to his readers. Whatever difficulties he had received from his enemies in his life, they were no match for the love and care that the Almighty God would give him. However, it would have been easy for him to forget all of this if not for his willingness to calm himself down, and to set his mind and heart on the things of God. By creating calm, he would be able to have rest.

Conclusion

Noise is everywhere, and it is inevitable. If people are not careful, they can be easily sucked into the noise of the world without any possibility of a respite. "Inside noise" (personal fears) or "outside noise" (bullies or worse) can threaten to take the peace right out of life. However, there is a solution.

The solution is to find rest in God. To find rest in God, however, one must learn how to do it. Believers must recognize that God is their salvation, their rock, and their fortress. When they do, they are assured that they will not be moved from it.

But what happens when life situations cloud their beliefs? How can one remember the things of God at such chaotic moments? Psalm 62 teaches them that the best way is to, once again, calm down and remember what they have learned. Consequently, those principles that were previously learned will be remembered and will ring resoundingly in their lives.

When the world grows loud, this psalm invites believers to retreat into the silence where God alone is their Rock. Perhaps that is the reason why the adverb "surely" (*'ak*) is used so often. In the heat of the moment, the psalmist ran to what he believed and what he knew to be true. Time and again, it had been a source of strength to him. It would again be so. Surely it was so then, and it is so now. Calm can reduce anxiety and allow many opportunities to praise the Lord.

1. The term *selah* (“to lift up”) is a pausal phrase whose meaning has been lost to antiquity. It is found 71 times in 39 psalms, often at places within a psalm where one might contemplate what has been said. Popularly, then, the term means “to pause” or “to meditate.” See Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, A Continental Commentary, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 27–29.

2. See Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973), 220–22; Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 456; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, Word Biblical Commentary 20 (Waco, TX: Word, 1990), 119.

3. Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 877, believes verses 7–8 are the central section of the psalm which holds the key to the entire poem.

4. As is often the case with psalms throughout the collection, verse one of Hebrew Psalm 62 is the same as the superscription in the English versions. Consequently, the Hebrew version has 13 verses. For the sake of simplicity, this study will follow the NIV numbering of the verses.

5. Kraus, 29–30.

6. That David was the author of the psalm is up to debate. Although the phrase *lēdāwid* could mean “of David” (as in authorship), it need not mean this. The preposition before the name could mean “of,” “from,” “to,” “about,” or “for,” to name a few possibilities. However, Kraus, 22–23, was convinced that the phrase meant authorship (*lamed auctoris*).

7. See Kraus, 30; Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 3, *The Writings* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 152.

8. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 189.

9. John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 2, *Psalms 42–89* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 246.

10. Because the term is used only here in the Bible, it is hard to discern whether the attack is verbal or physical. Alter, 152, suggests “demolish,” while others suggest “assault.” See also Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51–100*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 110.

11. The term often refers to a loftiness of dignity instead of height.

12. Kidner, 222.

13. Tate, 118, notes that this verse creates a chiasm, which helps drive home the psalmist's point:

On God—A
 My salvation and glory—B
 My mighty rock-refuge—B'
In God—A'

For further information on chiasm, please refer to Lesson One of this GC2 Press Commentary on Psalms.

14. For some examples, see Proverbs 6:16; 30:15, 18, 29. The “graduated number” is also found in Amos 1–2 (“For three sins of . . . and for four . . .”).