

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Native Prayer, No. 2*

**It's Beautiful**

August 28, 2022

**Psalm 62:1-12** (NIV, ©1984)

*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 never be shaken.*

*How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down – this leaning wall, this tottering fence? They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place; they take delight in lies. With their mouths they bless, but in their hearts they curse.*

*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. Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.*

*Lowborn men are but a breath, the 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.*

*One thing God has spoken, two things I have heard; that you, O God, are strong and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what he has done.*

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Take a Bible, if you would, and turn back to that passage in Psalm 62.

It was probably ten years ago that Doug Newton spoke here for our spring revival services. I honestly don't remember much of what he said, but I do remember this: he asked us, "How many of you, deep in your hearts, know that your prayer life is not what it ought to be?"

He didn't ask for public response—just for us to respond to ourselves.

Then he said, "Okay, then what is your plan to make that happen, because it's just not going to happen on its own. What change are you going to make?"

I mention that because, ultimately, that is the practical implication of any study of prayer.

We can do a sermon series on prayer, we can study it, observe it, and we can learn about it until we're absolute experts on it. But what good is that unless we apply what we've learned so that it does us some good?

At prayer meeting this past Wednesday, Dave Coulliette said it this way: "How do you make something a part of 'the very fabric of your life?'"

Every indication is that King David had done this. He made prayer—conversation with God—part of the very fabric of his life.

We're told that Psalm 62 is one of David's psalms, and I can easily believe that's true just by a quick reading of it.

"*God is my rock,*" it says, "*my fortress, my salvation...*"

Where does that image come from? I would think that it comes from all of David's running and hiding from his then boss, King Saul, in the caves of En Gedi. That's the imagery that David knew: the safety of the hills where God had met him and kept him when Saul was hunting him like an animal.

Years had passed since those days, and David had now arrived at his destiny: He is now the King of Israel.

But, you see, even now some person or group of persons—presumably some of his own allies—is trying to "*topple him from his lofty place,*" according to verse 4.

We're not told the details.

All we know is that David describes himself as a "*leaning wall or a tottering fence or hedge*" ready to break—ready to fall down under the pressure that's building up behind him.

In other words, he feels he's on the edge of collapse.

Have you ever been there? Do you know what it's like to be a tottering fence?

Nearly 20 years ago, I enclosed our back yard with a picket fence to keep our boys in the yard and out of the street that runs by our house.

When I was digging the post holes for that fence, I learned something about my back yard: I learned that there's not much dirt on top of the rock back there. Consequently, some of those posts aren't in the ground very deeply, because there's solid rock not too far down.

And that's why when the weather gets really dry and hot, a number of my fence posts get loose; the dirt that the posts are set in loses its moisture and shrinks.

And when the posts get loose, that part of the fence gets loose—sometimes so loose that I think that all it would take is just a little pressure from the wind—or from the kids—to bring it down.

That's a tottering fence.

That's such a descriptive word, isn't it?

"Tottering"? You can see it in your mind: shaky, unstable, liable to fall.

That's how David felt.

Have you ever felt that way?

I'll tell you this: anyone who has ever taken on any real responsibility has felt as David felt.

You don't have to be king or the president of a company or anything like that. If you're a parent or if you're responsible for the welfare of someone besides yourself, you've known, at one time or another, how a tottering fence feels.

You're going along OK, you're getting things done, you're paying the bills, and then you find out your kid

needs braces. Four grand [\$4,000] for straight teeth. Man, where's that money come from?

Suddenly, you feel a little more pressure behind the fence.

How about when the company you've been with for years tells you, out of the blue, that your job is being eliminated?

A little more pressure behind the fence.

You've worked hard and you've saved toward your retirement. You have plans, but you go to your doctor with this nagging pain, and your doctor says a word you were not expecting.

The pressure behind the fence is rising. You can feel it.

What do you do when the fence totters?

You know, reading the Psalms shows us that David was very honest with himself, which is the first thing wise persons ought to do when their fences totter. We need to get honest with ourselves.

David was a remarkable person and truly an extraordinary king. Most people in authority in David's day would never have dreamed of letting anyone know that they were frightened or unsure or struggling in any way.

Back then—just like now, really—there was a conventional wisdom in leadership that said, "Put on a confident front no matter what you're feeling inside. Don't admit to anyone that you're struggling."

Now, yes, there are times for confident fronts.

Sometimes, for the survival of the whole group, the leader has to appear confident on the outside, even if he or she isn't all that confident on the inside.

At 8:30 in the evening, on September 11, 2001, President Bush, a relatively new president, sat at his desk and spoke words of comfort and assurance to our country—to the whole free world, really. His countenance was one of strength and poise, and the country needed that. We needed to see that.

But we all *know* that in his heart, he was hurt, he was shaken, and he was wondering, "Man, what's really going to happen here? What do I do?"

We know that because he has admitted it over these following years.

When the fence totters, like David, we have to be honest with ourselves.

You know, I've lived in Wilmore for going on 25 years now, and I wouldn't choose to live anywhere else. This is a great town in which to live and work and raise a family.

But the culture of Wilmore is not one that easily encourages people to be honest with themselves or others about their fears or pressures—about their own tottering fences.

Of course, it's not just in Wilmore. Our whole American culture makes individualism and self-reliance almost holy—so that even admitting we are struggling is seen as weak.

But, you know, the spiritual dimension of Wilmore and of the Church in general can add another level of deterrence to self-honesty.

There is this pride thing in some Christ-followers that keeps them from being honest about their struggles, because they feel that if other people really knew what they were struggling with, then they would be looked down upon for not having it all together.

So, people can tend to put on a confident front here, all the while burying their tottering deep inside.

That is damaging enough, but it leads to something even worse, because, over time, that confident front begins to be a part of who they are.

They lose touch with what's really happening in here, and they refuse to even admit to *themselves* that there's struggle or hurt in their lives.

They're no longer truly honest with themselves, and so they wind up in this ridiculous and dangerous cycle of keeping up appearances.

Now, I'm not saying that everybody gets caught in this, but there are a lot who do. And I think it's quite repulsive to God, actually, when we're not humble enough to admit to ourselves, let alone to someone else, that we need help or that we're not perfect or that we're on the edge for one reason or another.

I mean— isn't that really the definition of pride?

You don't see that in King David. He was just so beautifully honest. That's part of the reason God says he's a man after His own heart—the vanity of keeping up appearances simply had no place in his life.

It's interesting that this honesty, which may have been the very characteristic about David that God *loved* the most—was also the characteristic that David's wife, *Michael*, *despised* the most.

She liked being Mrs. King David, you know, and she wanted him to maintain a certain level of sophistication and dignity.

You remember when the Ark was being brought back to Jerusalem—David was so happy and full of praise that he danced before the Lord in just a linen sheath.

Scripture tells us that, because of that, his wife despised David in her heart. She accused him of humiliating himself—and of course, humiliating her.

Do you remember what He told her? He said, "*I'll become even more undignified than this, and I'll be humiliated in my own eyes, but by others, I'll be held in honor*" (2 Sam 6:21-22, paraphrase).

David was honest with himself in good times and in hard times—when the fence was sturdy and when it tottered.

And because of that self-honesty, David could then be honest with God.

You see, we can never truly be honest with God until we're honest with ourselves. Until we're willing to admit our own strengths, weaknesses, prides and prejudices, we'll never really be able to be honest with God—to have an honest conversation with God—like David.

Not just here, but all through his Psalms, David admitted when he was hurt, when he was tired, when he was confused, when he'd been slandered, when he was afraid, and when he felt rejected by his friends.

Over and over again, David, the King, admits that he doesn't know exactly what to do.

**But**, David always knew to whom to turn. David always turned to God.

In this Psalm 62, David says in three different ways how God is the answer to his problems—how God is his savior.

The first time, in verses 1 and 2, it's just a flat statement. He declares: *"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 never be shaken."*

That's the first time: just a plain statement of fact.

The second time, starting in verse 5, the way David says it is almost as if he has to talk his own soul, his heart, into believing what his head knows to be true.

You see, he's so broken—he's so on the edge—that he has to say to his heart, *"Heart, find rest in God alone!"*

It's not just a declaration, it's a command to himself, to his conscience.

And then finally in verse 8, David comes to a place where he can give a word of testimony and instruction to others. He says, *"Trust in God at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge."*

*"Don't bother trusting in yourselves, in other people, in your position or in your possessions when times are hard. Only God can save. Only in God will we find true refuge."*

David's counsel to us, then, is that we need to pray.

*"Pour out your heart to God,"* he says, *"because He is our refuge. Pour out your heart to God – as I do – as I've learned to do."*

Someone once said, "We only *really believe* what we *act* upon. Everything else is just religious talk."

We might *say* that we believe—we trust in God, but if we don't act on that trust, we're just talking, usually for the sake of how we appear to other people.

Prayer—spending time talking to, and listening to, God is acting on our trust. Prayer puts trust into action.

The Psalms are evidence of David's acting on his trust.

David was honest with himself, and David was honest with God.

And that allowed David to have totally open conversation with God.

David truly prayed.

Do we?

Do we, do you, really pray?

Are you honest with yourself, as David was?

Can you look yourself in the eye and say, "This is where I'm succeeding, this is where I'm failing, this is where I'm hurting, this is where, maybe, I'm causing hurt in others?" Are you honest with yourself?

And then, can you open yourself up—and pour yourself out—to God? Can you talk to Him and listen to Him talk to you about those very things?

There's a freedom—and a real beauty—in honest conversation, you know?

Whether the topic is easy or difficult, when two people know that they're bound in a relationship of love, they can talk honestly and openly—without fear of retribution or judgment or evil consequence.

In verse 11 there, we see that David knew he was in a relationship of love with God. *"...two things I have I heard:"* he says, *"that you, O God, are strong and that you, O Lord, are loving."*

It's when we doubt the love of another that communication gets guarded, isn't it? That's when we start keeping things inside.

But if we know we're loved, we can say just about anything and hear just about anything.

Do you *know* that God loves you?

You never have to doubt it or question it. He loves us, and He wants so badly for us to come to Him just as a child comes to a parent. He wants us to come and talk with Him about our deepest needs and joys and hurts.

The truth is, we weren't made to carry all that stuff inside us, and particularly the *hurts* of life. We weren't supposed to have any in the first place, remember? We were made for a good world, not for a world of sin.

That's why God stands ready to help us—it's part of His redeeming work and grace.

God says to us, "I love you so much that I sacrificed my Son to save you. So would you let me help you walk through this world of hurts?"

God can see the tottering fence within us. He knows when our wall is leaning, and, if we will be honest with ourselves and then honest with Him, He will be to us what He was to David.

He'll be our strength and shield and refuge and rock and fortress and salvation.

That's the promise of God to every one of us.

Will you believe Him?

Do you trust Him?

Do you trust Him enough to act, to take the next step toward Him in prayer?

What is God asking of you today?

To be honest with yourself?

To be honest with Him?

I don't know exactly what He's asking of you, but whatever it is, do as He asks. Take that step toward Him this morning. Put your trust into action through prayer right here—right now.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we want to ask you for three things here in closing:

Help us to be honest with ourselves;

Help us to be honest with you;

Show us what we need to do to put our belief into action and to begin a more focused, more intentional, more involved life of prayer.

Closing Song: *Tis So Sweet*, vs 1, 3, 4

Benediction:

Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote, "Belief by itself is the *map* of the land of God's care for us. To *pray* is to actually travel through the country."<sup>1</sup>

It's a beautiful thing to put trust into action. It changes the way we think and the way we live.

An old British woman who had stood the bombings of World War Two with amazing fortitude was asked the secret of her calm in the midst of such danger.

She said, "Well, every night I said my prayers and I remembered how the preacher told us God is always watching over us—so I went to sleep. I figured there's no need for both me and God to stay awake!"

That is putting trust into action, and that is what leads us to deeper lives of prayer.

Hey, let's not be satisfied with just belief—let's not be satisfied with just seeing the map. Let's begin actually travelling through the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Fosdick, Harry E. *The meaning of prayer*.