

Psalm 60 “When We Experience Victory”**1

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Series: “Learning from the Psalms: How to Put God at the Center of Life”

Main Idea: Psalm 60 is a teaching psalm, and it teaches us how to respond when we experience victory. It gives us two important lessons about victory.

- I. David teaches us to see God in our losses (1-3).
 - A. When David saw defeat, he looked up.
 1. Is there sin in my life?
 2. Am I taking God for granted?
 - B. When David saw defeat, he asked God for help.
- II. David teaches us to see God as the giver of victory (4-12).
 - A. Victory is linked to the fear of God (4).
 1. We do not fight for victory.
 2. We fight from victory.
 - B. Victory is linked to the love of God (5).
 1. Discipline isn't the absence of love.
 2. Discipline is a vital expression of love.
 - C. Victory is linked to the word of God (6-8).
 1. God made promises in the past.
 2. God can be trusted because He always keeps His Word.
 - D. Victory is linked to the presence of God (9-10).
 1. If God isn't with us, then all we have is our own strength.
 2. If God isn't with us, there is no hope.
 - E. Victory is linked to the help of God (11-12).
 1. We'll never know God's power unless we face situations that reveal our weakness.
 2. We'll never know God's sufficiency unless we face situations that reveal our inadequacies.
 3. We'll never know God's wisdom unless we face situations that reveal our ignorance.
 4. We'll never know God's greatness unless we face situations that reveal our smallness.

The Bottom Line: There is victory in Christ!

This is a significant Sunday. Due to COVID-19, we haven't gathered together for two months. We stopped meeting on March 22, and haven't met for nine Sundays. But today, May 24, we're beginning to reassemble for corporate worship. That's cause for celebration! And for asking a question.

What's the God-honoring way to respond to victory? Since this is also Memorial Day weekend, in which we're remembering past battles and those who gave their lives for our freedom, this is a doubly important question. How do we put God at the center of life when we face battles, and He grants victory? He gives us the answer in Psalm 60.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 60

Some folks do well in hard times, spiritually speaking, I mean. When times are tough they turn to God, they seek God's help, they trust God. God is real to them.

But something happens when the hardships cease. A shift occurs. It's gradual, almost unnoticeable. What the hard times could not do, the absence of hard times accomplishes. The person starts to coast. Oh, he still believes in God, prays to God, reads God's Word, and serves God. But something's missing now. He's not *desperate* for God any longer.

It's so ironic. We know the enemy can kill us so our guard is up for him. But success can destroy us, too. In the parable of the four soils, Jesus warned about this when He had this to say about the third type of soil, the thorny soil, in Matthew 13:22, “The one who

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier treatment of this psalm, see the Psalms of David series and the message preached in 2007.

received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.” What tripped this person up? The *stuff of this life* and particularly *the deceitfulness of wealth*. In the hard times we *look up*, but in the good times we tend to drop our heads and fix our gaze on our surroundings.

Which of us can say we’ve never coasted spiritually? What I’m describing is a propensity we all battle. When we’re really sick we go to the hospital, but who goes to the hospital when they’re feeling well? That’s kind of how we view the Lord, I fear. When we’re not feeling so well, we run to church to get a dose of God, but... You get the idea.

David faced the same challenge ten centuries BC. In recent weeks we’ve pondered several psalms he wrote when King Saul was hunting him down to kill him, and in each of those psalms David ran to God and put his full trust in God. But what did David do *after* he became king? Once he took the throne he had power and authority. As king he had an army to fight his battles. He didn’t live in caves any longer, but in a palace. How did he respond to adversity *then*? We find the answer in Psalm 60.

Psalm 60 is the first psalm with a historical heading that David wrote after he became king. Psalm 60 actually has the longest introductory title in the Psalms—seven lines in the NIV Bible! In the Hebrew Bible the title actually comprises verses 1-2 (thus the psalm has 14 total verses). Notice the superscription...

For the director of music – Although David wrote this psalm, it eventually ended up in the hands of Israel’s minister of music so he could teach it to the rest of God’s people. It was sung...

To the tune of “The Lily of the Covenant” – We obviously don’t know how that tune sounded, but Asaph used the same tune in Psalm 80 and the Sons of Korah used the tune “Lilies” in Psalm 45. Psalm 60 is...

A miktam of David – apparently some sort of literary or musical notation that we’ve seen in several psalms (for instance, Psalms 56, 57, 58, & 59). But out of all the psalms only Psalm 60 includes the designation...

For teaching – Songs can be wonderful teaching tools. Kidner states, “By this term...we are reminded that the psalm, with its heartfelt plea from man and its resounding word from God, is no museum-piece but a forceful message to every generation.”² Yes, we can learn from Psalm 60! Notice when David wrote it...

When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

That’s interesting. The title talks about *victory*, but as we’ll soon see the psalm itself is about a *terrible defeat* (see verse 1). How can that be? Let’s take a closer look at the backdrop to Psalm 60.

We find the setting in 2 Samuel (and 1 Chronicles). After Saul was killed in battle, David became king of Israel (2 Sam. 2-5). After he became king David moved the ark of God up to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6) and proposed making a permanent structure for it, a temple, a ‘house’ for God (2 Sam 7:2). But God said *no* to David and told David his son would build that temple (2 Sam. 7:13), and then gave David a prophecy that the Messiah would be his descendant.

² D. Kidner, pp. 215-6.

Rather than letting him build the temple, God had other plans for David, namely dealing with hostile nations that were a threat to David's dynasty and Israel's future. And that's exactly what we read in the following chapters of 2 Samuel. David is fighting Israel's enemies (2 Sam. 8-10; also in 1 Chr. 18:1ff.). What the account of 2 Samuel (and 1 Chronicles) doesn't make clear is that the road to victory was no cake walk.

Apparently, the Philistines, Israel's arch-enemy, entered into an alliance with Moab, Aram, Ammon, Edom, and Amalek. In other words, the countries to Israel's west, east, and north all attacked Israel at once. As any military strategist knows, it's tough for any nation to defend itself when attacked on multiple fronts.³

From the details we're given in Psalm 60, we can surmise that David and Israel's main army were fighting up north near the Euphrates River against Aram Naharaim (the Arameans of NW Mesopotamia) and Aram Zobah (the Arameans of central Syria), when an army from Edom attacked Israel in the south. A war on two fronts! David sent his army chief of staff, Joab, to ward off the Edomites who had, as this psalm suggests, done substantial initial damage to Israel. Things didn't look good for the home team.

Psalm 60 tells us what happened next. King David prayed, but he did more than pray. He recruited the nation to pray and even gave them the prayer to use. *Psalm 60*. Psalm 60 is a communal lament. VanGemeren observes, "This psalm is a community lament in which the people pray for God's success after an apparent defeat."⁴

As it turned out, Joab defeated the Edomites in the south. Then, after finishing his conquest up north, David joined Joab and completed the mop-up work.⁵

Let that sink in. Even in David's victories, there were defeats along the way. That's the way the Christian life works. It's an uphill battle, three steps forward, two steps back, three steps forward, four steps back, three steps forward, one step back, and so on. The result is progress, but the process is often tedious!

Psalm 60 shows us an important part of this process is *prayer*. It's a teaching psalm, and it teaches us two important lessons.

I. David teaches us to see God in our losses (1-3).

"You have rejected us, O God, and burst forth upon us; you have been angry—now restore us! You have shaken the land and torn it open; mend its fractures, for it is quaking. You have shown your people desperate times; you have given us wine that makes us stagger."

David uses two powerful images to communicate how devastating the initial losses inflicted by the Edomites were. First, he likens it to an *earthquake* in verse 2. I saw firsthand the effect an earthquake had on southern Thailand. The tsunami it produced completely demolished entire villages, leaving only rubble behind. "You have shaken the land," David says to God.

His second image is *drunkenness* at the end of verse 2, "You have given us wine that makes us stagger." As James Boice observes, "We might say that the attack by the Edomites left the people reeling from the blow."⁶

³ I'm indebted to Eric Lane's explanation on p. 269.

⁴ VanGemeren, p. 414.

⁵ Derek Kidner observes, "Three men, David, Abishai, and (here) Joab are credited with the slaughter in the Valley of Salt, a fact which may reflect the chain of command or, as 1 Kings 11:15f. suggests, different outbreaks of fighting." D. Kidner, p. 215.

It was bad that the Edomites destroyed Israelite towns, yes, but there was something worse. David says this happened because God was angry with His people. He uses seven verbs to show that God initiated this: “*You* have rejected us,” he says. “*You* have been angry...*You* have shaken the land...*You...You...You.*” Apparently, as happened years before with Achan, there was sin in the camp. This doesn’t mean God was angry with every Israelite—verse 4 indicates some feared Him and were obeying Him. But some weren’t, and their lack of obedience, says David, was causing the entire nation to experience God’s displeasure at the hands of the Edomites.

When David saw defeat he responded in two ways.

A. When David saw defeat, he looked up. He saw God in the losses. Granted God used *means* but David nonetheless God was at work. God had redeemed Israel by His grace, and now He was disciplining wayward Israel, also as a demonstration of His grace.

Where do you turn when life gets tough? We need to *look up*, to see what’s happening from God’s perspective and ask ourselves two questions.

1. *Is there sin in my life?* Have I disobeyed any of His commands? And here’s a question that gets to the heart of a very specific sin that we’re prone to commit when life is good.

2. *Am I taking God for granted?* Charles Spurgeon offers this important insight, “To be cast off by God is the worst calamity that can befall a man or a people; but the worst form of it is when the person is not aware of it and is indifferent to it.”⁷

God is so passionate about His glory that He takes action when those He has permitted to see His glory take Him for granted. Sometimes He takes drastic action on a national scale as in David’s day. So David *looked up*. In addition...

B. When David saw defeat, he asked God for help. Tucked away in the midst of his prayer David inserts two requests in verses 1-2, “You have rejected us, O God, and burst forth upon us; you have been angry—*now restore us!* You have shaken the land and torn it open; *mend its fractures*, for it is quaking.”

Restore us! Mend our land! Please, Lord, help us! This is David’s plea.

So here’s the first lesson we learn in this victory song. We need to see God *in our losses*. Nothing just ‘happens,’ including our losses. Including COVID-19.

We’ve lost time together. We’ve lost experiences we were anticipating. We’ve lost money. Perhaps we’ve lost health, or loved ones. So have billions of people worldwide. But here’s what we learn from Psalm 60. By God’s gracious enabling we *see God* in our losses. We *seek God* in our losses, and take steps to put our total trust in Him.

II. David teaches us to see God as the giver of victory (4-12).

The rest of the psalm teaches us about victory. Notice how the psalm ends in verse 12, “With God we will gain *the victory*; and he will trample down our enemies.” Now how did David transition from “You have rejected us, O God” in verse 1 to “With God we will gain the victory” in verse 12? We see the answer in the verses in between.

According to David, victory is linked to God in five ways.

A. Victory is linked to the fear of God (4). “But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow. *Selah.*”

⁶ James Boice, p. 497.

⁷ Charles Spurgeon, p. 27.

But—notice the contrast here. David says God’s victory belongs to *those who fear Him*. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” David’s son wrote in Proverbs 9:10. People who *fear* God are people who respect Him, reverence Him, honor Him, and take Him seriously in their lives 24/7.

And what does God do for those who fear Him? David says, “You have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow.” The Hebrew word for ‘banner’ (*nes*) refers to a piece of cloth on the end of a pole, a flag.

I think of a scene from a Civil War movie I saw where soldiers are trying to take a fort on a hill. The man carrying the flag took a bullet and went down, so one of his comrades picked up the flag in his place and kept it flying high. The flag must not fall.

What does God do for those who fear Him? He has raised a flag, a banner, a rallying point for them. He is the One who grants victory, He and none other.

1. *We do not fight for victory.*

2. *We fight from victory.* That’s why Paul can say in Romans 8:37, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us,” even though he would eventually be decapitated by a Roman sword. Christ has already won the victory. His death on the cross paid sin’s penalty and His triumphant resurrection put the dagger in the heart of death for His people. Victory isn’t something we must *attain*. It must be *received*. As Paul announces in 1 Corinthians 15:57, “But thanks be to God! He *gives us the victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

If you are in Christ, then victory is yours. You don’t fight *for* it, but *from* it.

B. Victory is linked to the love of God (5). “Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you love may be delivered.”⁸

David offers a very specific plea: *save us...help us...* What gives him the audacity to ask God Almighty for such favor? This does. The undeserved place he and the rest of God’s people hold in God’s heart. How does David see himself? We are “those you love,” he says to God.

This is an amazing reality to consider. Many centuries ago, God Almighty chose to love a tiny, unimpressive nation in the Middle East. Not because she deserved that status but because He graciously willed to love her. He loved Israel. Why? Because it was His good plan to bless this undeserving nation in order to show His love for all the peoples of the world. How? By, through Israel, sending into the world the Savior.

“But God,” says Romans 5:8, “demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

How does God show His children that He loves them? So many parents think they show their children they love them by giving them everything they want. Yet Psalm 60 says God demonstrated His love by chastening His children for their disobedience. Then, having captured their attention, He restored them.

1. *Discipline isn’t the absence of love.*

2. *Discipline is a vital expression of love.* Parents, when we see sinful behavior in our children, let’s not miss the opportunity to model God’s love for them by showing them that sin has consequences, must be dealt with, and once it is, there’s beautiful restoration. That’s what God does with His children. Victory is linked to the fear of God, next, to the love of God.

⁸ Psalm 108:6-13 are virtually identical to Psalm 60:5-12.

C. Victory is linked to the word of God (6-8). “God has spoken from his sanctuary...” Stop there for a moment. David says, “God has spoken.” He doesn’t tell us *how* God spoke, but he does indicate *where*. God has spoken *from His sanctuary*.⁹ Perhaps He spoke through a priest in the tabernacle that David had recently moved to Jerusalem (using the Urim and Thummim on the ephod). Or maybe He spoke through a prophet who brought the message to David. Regardless how He spoke, He spoke! And David took His word to heart. In fact, he wrote down what God said.

Verses 6-8, “In triumph I will parcel out Shechem and measure off the Valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter. Moab is my washbasin, upon Edom I toss my sandal; over Philistia I shout in triumph.”

Note the points of geography that God mentioned, places He said He would conquer as easily as we move pieces in a chess game. *I will parcel out...*

Shechem and *Succoth*, one on one side of the Jordan River and the other on the other side, were the first parts of the promised land occupied by Jacob when he came home after his years with Laban. *Gilead* was part of Israel’s promised land on the east side of the Jordan River, the tribe of *Manasseh* straddled the river, and *Ephraim* and *Judah* were the main tribes on the west side of the Jordan. Or to look at it another way, God picked the two major tribes, Ephraim which represents what later became known as the northern kingdom; and Judah, which became the southern kingdom.

Specifically, He calls Ephraim His ‘helmet,’ symbolic of force, and Judah His ‘scepter,’ symbolic of dominion and governance.¹⁰ That’s significant, for God gave the scepter to Judah, that’s David’s tribe, thus establishing the Davidic dynasty. David was God’s chosen ruler. Ultimately, the Son of David, Jesus the Messiah, was God’s choice for King of kings.

In verses 6-7 God mentions geographical locations *within* Israel. In verse 8 He mentions three locations *outside* Israel, the very countries that were attacking Israel: *Moab*, *Edom*, and *Philistia*. And note the common denominator between the places inside Israel and the countries outside of Israel. Note God’s repeated use of “**my**” and “**mine**.”

God is making something else crystal clear. The land is *mine*. It’s not your land, Philistines, nor yours Edom, nor is it really yours, Israel. It is *mine*, God states emphatically. Granted, He allows tenants to occupy and enjoy His land, but it remains *His* land. And He does with it what He wants to do.

What do we learn about God from this? Two insights...

1. *God made promises in the past.* “God has spoken,” David said. The speech of God is what gave courage to David for the battles facing him. He paid attention to God’s speech, he pondered carefully what God said and what it meant for his life. In this case, God’s promises about the land gave David great hope in the midst of great challenges.

2. *God can be trusted because He always keeps His Word.* Always.

Ponder what this teaches us about faith. Faith is not a blind leap in the dark. It’s not foolish, groundless optimism. It’s also more than just *positive thinking*. Faith is believing what God says and acting on it. David believed God’s Word, sent Joab to fight the Edomites, and then later joined Joab trusting that God would turn the tide. God promised victory, so David fought to get that victory. Again, we do not fight *for* victory, but *from* victory.

⁹ Literally, ‘in his holiness’ (as rendered by the KJV, NKJV, and ESV; the NRSV says ‘in his sanctuary.’

¹⁰ VanGemeren, p. 416.

Victory is linked to the fear of God, the love of God, and to *the Word of God*. This is why studying the Bible is so important, which is why we emphasize teaching at WBC.

D. Victory is linked to the presence of God (9-10). God's speech ends in verse 8. David begins speaking again in verse 9 by asking two questions followed by his own answer in the form of a question in verse 10, "Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? Is it not you, O God, you who have rejected us and no longer go out with our armies?"

Granted, God had given His Word that Judah was His scepter, which meant He was giving the land to Judah, which meant there would be ultimate victory in the battle. But God didn't say it would be easy. And it wasn't. Here David talks about what he's facing. He refers to a 'fortified city' apparently in Edom. Who will bring me to that city and give me victory over it? That's David's question. Lane comments, "Edom had a strong *fortified* city called Petra, built into the rock and seemingly impregnable."¹¹

James Boice describes the scene: "I have had the privilege of visiting Petra twice. It is approached through a narrow cut in the limestone cliffs that winds inward for about two miles and is called a *siq*. The cliffs rise upward for thousands of feet on both sides, and in places the passage is so narrow that no more than two horses can pass abreast. A handful of brave men could defend this *siq* against an army. But even if the passage could be breached, the defenders could retreat into the mountains surrounding the hidden inner valley and defend themselves from there. Only God could give a victory over a fortress like that, and David knew it."¹²

All of us face challenges in life. Your challenge may not be a Petra but it may feel like it. The question is, where are you looking for your strength? Know this.

1. *If God isn't with us, then all we have is our own strength.* Or we could say...

2. *If God isn't with us, there is no hope.* That thought petrified David. Listen again to him in verse 10, "Is it not you, O God, you who have rejected us and no longer go out with our armies?" David knew that Israel has just lost some battles because God wasn't going with Israel's armies into those battles. David learned that victory is linked not only to the fear of God, the love of God, and the Word of God, but also to the *presence of God*.

My friend, this is serious. We were created to live in relationship with our Maker. Without God we merely *exist*. We coast. We slide. Eventually we fall and perish.

God is so good that He allows us to fall on our faces in defeat at times so that in our pain we'll stop and look up. We can't make it without Him. He knows that. He wants *us* to know that.

At that point David laid before God a very specific petition in verses 11-12, "Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless. With God we will gain the victory, and he will trample down our enemies." Here's the fifth key to victory...

E. Victory is linked to the help of God (11-12). "Give us aid," David says. Notice that David isn't shirking his responsibilities. He's asking for God's *aid*, but he still plans to send Joab to fight the battle, and he himself will finish the battle up north and then join Joab against the Edomites. But David knows that at the end of the day, he can strategize well, motivate the troops well, and even fight well, *but* only God can give the victory.

¹¹ Lane, p. 271.

¹² James Boice, p. 499.

And so he calls out to God, “We need Your help! Man’s help is vain, O God, but with Your help we will defeat the enemies that are attacking us.”

Did you catch how this psalm ends, on a note of confidence? “With God we *will* gain the victory, and He *will* trample down our enemies.”

Now answer this. Could God prevent His people from facing obstacles? Could He have prevented the Edomites from attacking Israel? Sure. And sometimes, in our lives, He does. He protects us by preventing the enemy’s attack. But not always. Sometimes He allows us to be attacked, even to suffer setbacks. Why?

Remember something we saw in the heading. This is a *teaching* psalm. What have we learned? Allow me to summarize with four very basic lessons.

1. *We’ll never know God’s power unless we face situations that reveal our weakness.*

Perhaps you’re in such a situation now and you are feeling *very weak*. Think of it this way. You are now in the perfect position to experience God’s power!

This is true for our country right now. We’re facing a situation that reveals our weakness. William Plumer’s instruction is helpful, “Let good men commit their country to God. David’s country was perhaps reduced to a lower point of depression than it is easy for us to conceive, and he carried the case to God, vv. 1, 2. Let us do the same. There is hope of peace when we look to the God of peace.”¹³

2. *We’ll never know God’s sufficiency unless we face situations that reveal our inadequacies.*

The fact is, we are inadequate. Jesus said, “Without my you can do nothing.” He said that because He knows the truth about us.

Jesus didn’t die on the cross for strong, self-sufficient people. He died for *sinners*, broken, weak, helpless, needy sinners. He died to take care of the sinner’s problem, for the wages of sin is death.

He conquered the grave to take care of the sinner’s problem. He defeated the sinner’s foe. And now He gives the sinner His power—the very power by which He came out of that tomb.

But which sinner benefits from the work Jesus did? This one. The sinner who admits he or she needs it.

So feeling inadequate is a good thing. You can’t be saved without it. My friend, if you will admit your sinfulness and repent of it, and call upon Jesus who alone is strong and believe in Jesus, He will save you. And then He will give you the power you need to live the kind of life you were meant to live, putting off sin, putting on righteousness, all to God’s glory.

3. *We’ll never know God’s wisdom unless we face situations that reveal our ignorance.*

David had no idea what to do. How do you defend a country on multiple fronts? Perhaps you’re facing challenges on multiple fronts right now. Once again, that means you are in the perfect place to experience God’s wisdom. “Where do I look?” you ask. To Him, and specifically, to His Word. His victory is linked to His Word.

4. *We’ll never know God’s greatness unless we face situations that reveal our smallness.*

¹³ William Plumer, *Psalms*, p. 617.

Beloved, we are *small*. One look into the star-filled sky at night is all it takes to remind me of my smallness. I am but one out of seven billion people on planet earth. And there's one God. He alone is great. My smallness and His greatness, what a combination!

Back in the 1800's a 37 year old mother by the name of Annie Hawks was busy with her household tasks. In her own words, here's what happened: "Suddenly, I became so filled with the sense of nearness to the Master that, wondering how one could live without Him, either in joy or pain, these words...were ushered into my mind, the thought at once taking full possession of me."

After writing those words down, Hawks gave them to her pastor, Robert Lowry, who put those words to music and added a refrain. The hymn was first published at the National Baptist Sunday School Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, in November 1872. Some years later, after the death of her husband, Hawks wrote: "I did not understand at first why this hymn had touched the great throbbing heart of humanity. It was not until long after, when the shadow fell over my way, the shadow of a great loss, that I understood something of the comforting power in the words which I had been permitted to give out to others in my hour of sweet serenity and peace."¹⁴

Here's what she wrote...

I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord;
No tender voice like Thine can peace afford.

I need Thee every hour, stay Thou nearby;
Temptations lose their power when Thou art nigh.

I need Thee every hour, in joy or pain;
Come quickly and abide, or life is in vain.

I need Thee every hour; teach me Thy will;
And Thy rich promises in me fulfill.

I need Thee every hour, most Holy One;
O make me Thine indeed, Thou blessed Son.

Refrain

*I need Thee, O I need Thee;
Every hour I need Thee;
O bless me now, my Savior,
I come to Thee.*

Perhaps we've been coasting through life because times were good. Perhaps we're crumbling because the waves are high. In either case, we need to express our need for Jesus! Come to Him! The help of man is worthless but with Him we will gain the victory. This is the bottom line. *There is victory in Christ!*

¹⁴ Taken from *The Cyber Hymnal*, <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/i/n/inneedteh.htm>