



My Strong Tower

Psalms #3 | Oct 22, 2023 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

Opening

As we start today's sermon, I'm going to need a volunteer... [\[Select an adult\]](#)



With me I have five printed faces:

I need you to place them in order from least powerful to most powerful (however you want to define that). You have 30 seconds on the clock. Are you ready?

- *Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson – former pro wrestler, actor, and influential figure*
- *Billy Graham – former preacher, speaker to millions, and minister to presidents*
- *Vladimir Putin – former KGB agent and current leader of Russia*
- *TJ Watt – defensive star player for the Pittsburgh Steelers*
- *Rosa Parks – civil rights icon who refused to give up her bus seat*

On your mark...get set...go!

→ **Why did you rank them the way you did?**

The reasons for your answers are very revealing and help us think about types of **power**.

(Give volunteer a round of applause as they find their seat)

What is Real Power?

_____ chose to rank them according to _____.

But there are other, valid ways to answer the question. You could view **power** as...



- **Physical Power.** Strength and power are often related to sheer force on a physical level. A man with bulging biceps is more powerful than a scrawny weakling. Muscular strength or mechanical strength, such as the horsepower of an engine, allows us to achieve practical objectives.

- **Example:** *I must be able to lift a child in order to get him in the tub; my car has to have enough horsepower to drive up a hill; a mixer needs enough power to knead dough.*



- **Emotional Power.** Sometimes power is associated with our emotions. We have strong feelings, or we have the willpower to act despite the feelings we encounter. It's different than being stoic (unemotional). Instead, emotional power harnesses the feelings to help us accomplish meaningful objectives.
 - **Example:** Consider the strength needed by family members when they experience the sudden, unexpected death of a loved one. One moment their family is intact, the next it is ripped apart. In the face of grief and horror, they muster the emotional strength to take care of everyday life – children, work, homes, bills, etc.



- **Intellectual Power.** The strength of the mind comes when it is faced with a challenge. A strong mind is powerful enough to wrestle with deep issues, to evaluate and analyze complex problems, and to come up with answers. It can handle and evaluate different perspectives. We use the terminology when dealing with computers (the processing power of a CPU) and with people (e.g. intellectual lightweight, mentally tough).

- **Example:** A powerful mind can juggle a number of different tasks, whether formulas in a spreadsheet or managing the inventory in the home pantry. Memory and analysis provide powerful tools to keep our world in order.



- **Volitional Power.** A combination of both emotional power and intellectual power is our volitional power. In simple terms, it describes whether we have the will to continue doing what we want to do in the face of outside pressure.
 - **Example:** Experiments have been done to test human conformity. Solomon Asch and Stanley Milgram performed experiments, now famous in psychological studies, that demonstrated how quickly people conform to peer pressure – such as describing the length of a line as shortest or longest while staged opposition claims the opposite.

We could look at others area – **political** power, **economic** power, **electrical** power (*TJ Watt would definitely win that one, lol*) – but you get the idea. Each type of strength and power is important!

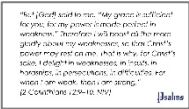
But they all have limits!

Even the strongest bodybuilder could never lift the building in which we sit. Not even the most intelligent person can think through every possible outcome of a move in chess. The most emotionally stable people can still be rocked by a series of tragic events. While we proudly strive for and boast in our toughness and power, we are surprisingly fragile.

The apostle Paul brings this weakness up in his second letter to the Corinthian church. In chapters 11 and 12, Paul challenges some church members who had been boasting about Paul's theological rivals as if they were better ministers than Paul. In challenging them, Paul

utilizes a worldly argument to make his point. He claims superiority and strength in several areas. He points out situations that might lead him to boast because they give him some type of *power* – his status as an apostle, his heritage, his work, his physical resilience, and more.

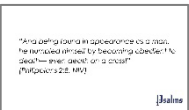
But in all these powerful identities, Paul knows a deeper truth:



“But [God] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9–10, NIV)

All of us who might have a worldly reason to boast about power are weak, Paul says. But the paradox is that this *weakness* opens the door for *God’s power* to work through us!

When we consider strength, there is no comparison. God is supreme. With his eternal and infinite qualities, nothing is outside the realm of possibility for God (i.e. He is omnipotent!). He is not weak; He is powerful...even when He chooses to humble himself for a particular purpose.



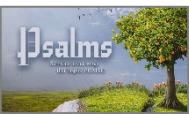
Example: Look at the cross to better understand this reality:

“And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:8, NIV)

The greatest moment of weakness on the cross becomes the most powerful spiritual moment in history where Jesus defeats the power of sin and death!

God allows His strength to work through weak vessels to show that He is the only source of power we truly have. And THAT is something for which we can praise Him!

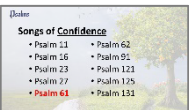
Songs of Confidence



In our current sermon series on the book of Psalms, we want to help you see the *range* of Psalms, help you learn to *read* them well, and help you *cultivate a brain/heart* that thinks like them!

In last week’s sermon, we looked at songs that *express praise and adoration* to God. The Book of Psalms, we said, is filled with songs that praise God through different circumstances and emotions. The songs we examined last week all praise God for who He is...expressing a desire to know Him and be in His presence.

Today, I want to branch out and move from songs of *praise* to the related “songs of *confidence*.”



Songs of confidence are songs that explicitly discuss God’s strength and power. The author expresses trust in God’s ability to keep him safe. While this sentiment is *echoed* in many

other psalms, it is found as a *dominant theme* in the songs of confidence.¹ Some examples include:

Psalms 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 91, 121, 125, and 131

In these songs, you'll find declarations of *confidence* in God's protection:

"Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay." (Psalm 16:9–10, NIV)

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4, NIV)

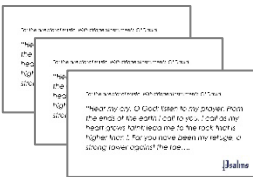
"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."" (Psalm 91:1–2, ESV)

"As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore." (Psalm 125:2, ESV)

These songs are brimming with confidence as they describe a God who is strong and powerful, whose strength provides hope for us in our weakness. They share a combination of adoration mixed with respect, love mixed with godly fear, humility mixed with trust.

Let's dig a little deeper into one example to understand what is happening in a song of confidence: let's examine Psalm 61. If you have your Bible this morning (and I hope you do!), please turn there and follow along.

An Example: Psalm 61:1-8 (NIV)



For the director of music. With stringed instruments. Of David.

- | | |
|---------|---|
| PS 61:1 | Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer. |
| PS 61:2 | 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. |
| PS 61:3 | For you have been my refuge,
a strong tower against the foe. |
| PS 61:4 | I long to dwell in your tent forever
and take refuge in the shelter of your wings.
<i>Selah</i> |
| PS 61:5 | For you have heard my vows, O God;
you have given me the heritage of those who fear your
name. |

¹ cf. Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 223

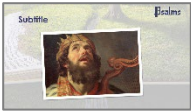
PS 61:6 Increase the days of the king's life,
his years for many generations.

PS 61:7 May he be enthroned in God's presence forever;
appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him.

PS 61:8 Then will I ever sing praise to your name
and fulfill my vows day after day.

Amen? Amen. Let me point out a few important features of this song.

Subtitle



Like many songs in this book, Psalm 61 begins with a *subtitle* that gives information about the song's background and performance. Subtitles in the Psalms might share the author's name and/or situation, the context in which the song should be sung, or musical instructions for musicians.

Here we learn that the author of this song is David – Israel's second (and arguably greatest) king. As ruler of the nation, he was in a position to be envied. He commanded armies and directed the nation. Yet in this psalm we find him looking to someone other than himself for strength. The psalm's cry for protection -- its elevation of God -- would be more understandable coming from a person in a position of weakness...but from a king it is striking!

Poetic Style



The first thing that stands out in the text itself is David's poetic style and use of parallel ideas. Each verse pairs two related ideas to communicate the author's point.

Ex: **Hear** my cry, O God // **listen** to my prayer (verse 1)

Parallelism is the major feature of Hebrew poetry and its way of rhyming ideas. I'll talk more about it another time, but the reason I point this out here is that David makes good use of parallelism throughout the entire song...*except* for one line that stands alone – a line that is related but separate. The third line of verse 2 is not matched; it has no parallel statement. Whenever Hebrew writers isolate a line like that, it is meant to draw attention.

"Lead me to the rock that is higher than I" is not rhymed, drawing attention to David's message of dependence and faith in God. It is a focal point of this song – dependence on a God who is strong when I am weak!

Metaphors of Protection



"The rock that is higher than I" is a *metaphor* that communicates God's protection. It is one of many in this song. David uses several analogies to communicate God's power. God is a...

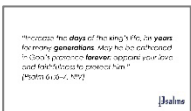
- **“Rock”** (v. 2). He is solid, strong, not easily crushed.
- **“Strong tower”** (v. 3). God is a powerful place of refuge. In a culture with no airborne military presence, a high tower could be seen as a position of strength and defense. (“I have the high ground!”)
- **“Tent”** (v. 4). David asks to “dwell in your tent.” While that might not sound like a position of power for anyone who has camped out during a thunderstorm, the reference here is to the Tabernacle (the precursor to the temple). Dwelling in a tent in the Middle East puts you under the host’s protection; dwelling in God’s tent/tabernacle puts you under His protection. So, the tent is safe!
- **“Shelter of your wings”** (v. 4). The metaphor recalls a protective mother bird watching over her offspring. Those who attack face her wrath! The chicks don’t have to worry about anything while mom is protecting them.

Other psalms use additional metaphors – ex: The Lord is my “shepherd” in Psalm 23 – but they all speak to the strength of God and the dependence of the author on that strength.

Prayer of Protection



Along with the metaphors of protection, this psalm of confidence includes a prayer or protection for the king – a natural subject for the king to write about! He presents himself as a king who has pursued God, and then he asks for *continuity* of the kingship...not only in his own life but also for the future.



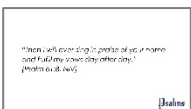
“Increase the days of the king’s life, his years for many generations. May he be enthroned in God’s presence forever; appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him.” (Psalm 61:6–7, NIV)

Did you catch how the trust in God escalates?

The length of time grows each time David mentions a period of time:

“days...years...generations...forever!”

David is expressing trust in God’s promises. In 2 Samuel 7:13 God promised to give David a descendent on the throne *forever*. That promise would ultimately be fulfilled by Jesus (a descendent of David) who literally embodies David’s plea for enthronement in God’s presence forever. But David’s purpose is not just a statement to extend his own power. It is a plea so David can keep the praise going! Why does he want protection? So...



“Then I will ever sing in praise of your name and fulfill my vows day after day.” (Psalm 61:8, NIV)

David wants his praise to go on...and on...and on...

Many things are praiseworthy in the present, but they don’t always continue.

- Your haircut from high school might have been impressive...but now it is cringeworthy.
- Your car was a sweet ride when you bought it...but now it is a rusty wreck.
- Your speed and agility were legendary...but now your body protests at every step.

Almost everything deteriorates. Yet God's name deserves praise now and forevermore! And David wants to be around to deliver it!

Summary

David has confidence in God. He trusts Him completely! He trusts Him continually – now and forever more. His praises aren't just for the present; they are for the future!

This is the message of Psalm 61. And this is the message of the songs of confidence. When God's trustworthiness, authority, power, and strength are presented in songs such as these, we are encouraged to respond appropriately. And one appropriate response is to submit to Him in humility.

Trusting God in the Real World



Self vs. God

Remember what Paul said in the passage from 2 Corinthians earlier?

“That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10, NIV)

The psalms of confidence remind us that we need to have an honest view of *self vs God*. While we are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), we are not God! We are flawed, weak, and imperfect. As such, there is no room for boasting or for elevating our own plans above His. Honest evaluation will help us see who we truly are – weak humans in need of God's grace.

Think about some of the things in life you can't change:

- You can dye your hair, but you can't stop it from growing gray.
- You can seek medical treatment, but you can't prevent your eyes from needing glasses.
- You can buy an umbrella, but you can't stop the rain.
- You can monitor a volcano, but you can't prevent an eruption.

Those examples remind us that you and I have very little control over the world we inhabit. But if our God gives the word? The world must obey! He speaks it into existence! He sustains every created thing!

You and I can't change things...but God can!

- He can make the lame walk.
- He can make the blind see.
- He can cause the rain to dry up or the desert to blossom.
- He can part the seas and stop the sun.
- He can raise the dead!!!

We cannot boast in ourselves, but an honest evaluation of Who God Is shows that his perfect and infinite qualities are not only *praiseworthy* but that they are also *trustworthy*.

And trust requires real-world *application*.

Trusting God



How much do you trust God? How confident are you in his protection? When faced with real-world doubt, can you trust God enough to submit to His plans?

Let's play a game of "what if..."

- What if God allowed you to receive a huge inheritance? Would you trust Him?
- What if God gave you the inheritance, but asked you to give it all away? Would you trust Him?
- What if God asked you to put yourself in harm's way for another person? Would you trust Him?
- What if God asked you to face ridicule and torment for His sake? Would you trust Him?

(Hard to answer – we know the "right" answer, but it's harder to know the "accurate" answer. I HOPE we trust Him, but would we?!)

If anyone had time to doubt, it was David. The song's author had years of practical experience waiting for God. David was chosen and anointed as the next king of Israel...but it didn't happen right away. David had to wait. He had to wait while facing Israel's enemies on the battlefield (including a literal giant!). He had to wait while the current king jealously tried to kill him. He had to wait while on the run, living in caves and hiding behind enemy lines. He spent years waiting on God's timing rather than take matters into his own hands.

David was in a situation where trust was difficult, and yet He retained unshakable confidence in God's protection!

David demonstrates trust, and his example isn't isolated. There's an entire chapter in the New Testament book of Hebrews that lists examples of men and women who exhibited trust like that. Hebrews 11 tells us of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Rahab, and more. They were tested, yet despite the difficulties, they trusted God! Even when they didn't see the positive results of their faith, they had confidence in Him.

Why?!?!?

It's because they had more confidence in God than their situation! They knew Him and His character and His power and they concluded that His way was *better*. Regardless of whether

the situation was good or bad, trusting and submitting to God meant that they were more confident in Him than in themselves.

We must do the same. We must ascribe power and honor to God instead of ourselves.

The action of doing so is a *choice*, not a feeling. We don't wait for the feeling of confidence; instead, we just *decide* to follow God. We look at His past faithfulness and see a God who has earned that confidence (this is why Bible study is so important – it gives us the reasons to have informed confidence rather than just blind trust). We remind ourselves of His promises and determine to choose His ways above our own. Strengthened by His Holy Spirit, we determine where He is moving, and we follow without hesitation; we are humbly obedient!

Our confidence can be *even stronger* than David's because we have Jesus! We can have more trust because we know the promises that God has given us through Jesus:

“For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.” (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10, NIV)

This is our hope! This is our confidence! Not in ourselves, but in the promises of God through Jesus!



Closing

Do you have confidence in Him? Do you trust Him regardless of the situation? Do you trust His Word above your own will? Do you seek His protection against the spiritual forces that fight for your soul?

You can...and you should!

Keep the songs of confidence on your lips and in your mind, and you can practice the kind of humility and submission that is needed to demonstrate trust in God. When you face your own difficult situations, you can be reminded why God is our trustworthy rock, our strong tower, and our shelter. You can find refuge in Him and have assurance that He has gained the victory...maybe not obviously displayed in your current situation, but one day made crystal clear...through Jesus!

This appreciation for God makes it impossible to boast in our own strength. When we proclaim HIS worth, our situations become more bearable because we know nothing is outside of His control!

This is the gift of the songs of confidence.

Allow them to steer your praise and to help you trust your powerful, protective God!

Invitation

Do you trust Him? Do you need confidence to trust Him in your situation? I want the songs of confidence to help you, but I also want the church to help you. If there are challenges beyond your own power, we want to pray for you! During the song of invitation, we invite you to come forward and write down your requests so we can pray for them when our song is over. If you'd rather not come forward, you can always write it on your Connection Card (in your bulletin) so our staff can pray for you.

Share with us as we stand and sing!

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

What is Real Power? (2 Corinthians 12:9–10, Philippians 2:8)

Songs of Confidence

Psalms 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 91, 121, 125, and 131

An Example: Psalm 61:1-8 (NIV)

Subtitle

Poetic Style

Metaphors of Protection

Prayer of Protection

Trusting God in the Real World

Self vs. God (2 Corinthians 12:10)

Trusting God (1 Thessalonians 5:9–10)

Sermon Discussion ?s

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- What is a setting that makes you nervous? (Ex: roller coaster, public speaking). Who do you want with you in that situation? Who helps you feel more confident? Why?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Which type of strength or power do you consider to be most important: physical, emotional, intellectual, or volitional? Why?
- Would you rather describe yourself according to your strengths or your weaknesses? How does 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 challenge or support your answer?
- Why should you rely more on the Holy Spirit's empowerment than on your own strength? Are there practical steps you can take to lean more on Him than yourself?
- Share a time when you had to rely on God's strength in a situation. How did you feel before, during, and after? Have you relied on Him more frequently since then?
- What are some of the metaphors used to describe God's strength and power in Psalm 61? If you had to come up with a modern metaphor of power, what would you compare God to? How would your metaphor communicate confidence in Him?
- Read Psalm 61:8. Why does David want God to continue protecting Him? When you ask for God's protection, is it for your glory or for His glory? Explain your answer.
- How does confidence in God enable us to have greater submission?
- Does confidence and trust in God mean that we won't face bad situations? What would you tell someone if they asked why you still trusted God through the bad?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Praise God for being your refuge and protection during difficult times. Ask Him to shelter you and protect you. Ask the same for your church and church leadership!