

Praying the Psalms

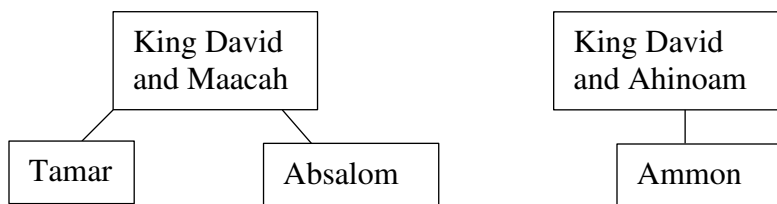


June 27, 2023

Praying the Psalm against Trouble – Psalm 3

A psalm of David. When he fled from his son Absalom.

This is the first psalm with a title, and it refers to a specific time in David's life when he was in deep trouble. David had many wives and many children.



Absalom plotted to endear himself to the people of Israel so that he could replace his father as King.

2 Samuel 15: 10-15, 17, 22-23, 30

Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.'" ¹¹ Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. ¹² While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing.

¹³ A messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom." ¹⁴ Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, "Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword." ¹⁵ The king's officials answered him, "Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses."

¹⁷ So the king set out, with all the people following him, and they halted at the edge of the city.

²² David said to Ittai, "Go ahead, march on." So Ittai the Gittite marched on with all his men and the families that were with him. ²³ The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness.

³⁰ But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up.



David had reigned for decades as one of the most powerful monarchs in the world. Remember, he was chosen by God over all his older brothers. He was honored above all others. His military victories were legendary. He was famously wealthy, lived in splendor with his many wives and servants.

But his begetting sin—his addiction—took a terrible toll on David and his family. What could be more traumatic, more humiliating for David than this? Everything he had spent his life working for was unraveling before his eyes.

From this humiliating event near the end of his life David writes **Psalm 3**:

Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! ²Many are saying of me “God will not deliver him.” ³But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. ⁴I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain. I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. ⁶I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side. ⁷Arise, Lord! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. ⁸From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.

What do you do when life falls apart? Have you ever gone through a traumatic experience where it seemed like life was over? This is a Psalm to pray at those times.

David doesn't hesitate to seek God in the midst of these terrible circumstances because after all these years, David knows God and he is still a man after God's own heart.

1. David pours out his trouble to the Lord.

Verses 1 and 2: *Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me “God will not deliver him.”*

Yahweh which we translate as “Lord” means “Sovereign Lord,” which is the personal covenant name of God. It is a personal address—the kind you use when you know someone and have a close relationship. David is acknowledging that God is in control.

When you pray *Lord*, are you declaring that you believe God is Sovereign? If you don't believe that God is in control of everything, of the universe, of you and your life, then you are praying with a hope but not with faith.

David begins by telling God that he has many foes. It's more than he can handle.

This is unique for David in that it is very personal. His own son is against him, trying to kill him. Those he trusted are now against him. This is the kind of hurt that digs in deeper than most.

And then, to make it even worse, those who are rising up against him are mocking his faith: “Many are saying of me “God will not deliver him.”

C. H. Spurgeon wrote: “Doubtless, David felt this infernal suggestion to be staggering to his faith. . . It is the most bitter of all afflictions to be led to fear that there is no help for us in God.”

It recalls what Jesus endured on the cross. His enemies taunted him:

Matthew 27:43: “He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

And even worse, Jesus felt forsaken by the Father as he cried:

Matthew 27:46: *About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”).*

2. David declares who God is and how God answers prayer.

Verse 3: *But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high.*

Notice how quickly David shifts from a focus on his frightening circumstances to a focus on who God is. This is such an important principle for us to remember when we're enduring hurt. David "calls out" to the Lord. Another version says, "I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill."

Spurgeon wrote: "Surely, silent prayers are heard. Yes, but good men often find that, even in secret, they pray better aloud than they do when they utter no vocal sound."

Do you find that to be true in your prayer life?

Crying out to God is an act of desperation. Crying out to God is admitting you have come to the end of self and now you're placing hope in God alone.

Psalm 18:6: *In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.*

I encourage you to take this seriously—to literally cry aloud—with a loud voice!

- The Lord is a shield around us.

David makes this prayer about who God is not because God needs to know it, but because David needs to remember who God is.

Seeing the Lord as a shield was often done in those days because wars were common and the armor worn during war was well known and understood.

Genesis 15:1: *After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."*

Psalm 18:30: *As for God, his way is perfect: The Lord's word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him.*

Psalm 28:7: *The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.*

For us today a Roman shield doesn't have the same impact as it would have then, but we're aware of the spiritual armor given to us in **Ephesians 6:14-17:**

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Don't forget that the enemy is working to defeat you through whatever issue you're facing. Remember what Joseph said to his brothers, who had tried to kill him:

Genesis 50:20: *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.*

Notice in Psalm 3 that David personalizes this shield; the Lord is a shield around David. Do you have that kind of personal faith that says, "I know the Lord is my shield and he surrounds me"?



Imagine being surrounded by a shield! In Psalm 5 David said "you surround the righteous with your favor as with a shield."

If you have people rising up against you, they are powerless against this shield that God provides for you.

- The Lord is our glory.

What does it mean to say that the Lord is your glory?

In this Psalm David says, quite simply, God is his glory. Have you ever said that to God? It means you have no glory of your own, but God's glory is around you.

- The Lord lifts your head high.

"To lift up the head" is a Hebrew expression for restoring someone who is cast down.

Psalm 42:5 (NKJV): *Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance.*

Do you know where this expression "cast down" comes from? It actually is another term used with sheep.

Is your soul ever "cast down"? When you're facing some hurt and you feel like you cannot recover, ask your Good Shepherd to set you back on your feet, to lift your head high!

Psalm 27:5 – 6: *For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock. ⁶Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the Lord.*

Pray for the Lord to restore your joy.

Nehemiah 8:10b: *Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

You need joy in the midst of your grieving. The Lord wants you to be joyful. He wants to lift your head high, over the problem, over the circumstances, with your eyes on him.

3. The Lord is a prayer-answering God.

Verse 4: *I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain.*

Spurgeon said, "We need not fear a frowning world while we rejoice in a prayer-hearing God." As David was fleeing from Absalom, the people were trying to bring the ark with them:

2 Samuel 15:24-26: Zadok was there, too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city.²⁵ Then the king said to Zadok, "Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. ²⁶But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him."

David's heart was humbled before God. This terrible event had brought him to a place of humility. No longer is being king the thing; he says if the Lord finds favor in him, he will bring him back; if not, let him do to me whatever seems good, David says.

Have you ever found yourself in such a place that you could not even utter prayers? Words just didn't come out.

Romans 8:26: *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*

Just ask the Holy Spirit to pray for you in wordless groans, and God will hear and know. And there are times when we need to hear someone else pray for us.

James 5:16: *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

Is there someone in your life that you could ask to pray for you? If not, ask God to help you find one.

4. The Lord gives his peace.

Verses 5-6: *I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.*

David cried out to God in prayer, then he went to bed and slept through the night.

Acts 12:7: *Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.*

David awoke safe and sound, because the Lord sustained him.

Philippians 4:6 – 7: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

David is able to sleep and awake in peace because he has learned to trust a trustworthy God. David wills not to fear. It is a choice he makes, not necessarily an emotion he feels.

Romans 8:31: *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

5. We depend completely on God for deliverance.

Verses 7 – 8: *Arise, Lord! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. ⁸From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.*

David could have said "Amen" after verse 6. Wasn't that the end of it?

Fear has a way of creeping back into your mind, doesn't it? So, what do you do? You cry out again. It's an ongoing battle that you are in.

Ephesians 6:12: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

David pictures his enemies as ravenous beasts baring their teeth, ready to devour him.

1 Peter 5:8: *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

David asks God to break their teeth, which would render them powerless. How do you pray against those who are attacking you, who are intent on doing you harm? Is it wrong for us to pray in that same way?

David's final exclamation, "Salvation belongs to the Lord," shows that David acknowledges that any victory would come from God alone. David's final request, "Your blessing be upon Your people," shows that David was not praying selfishly. He saw it in terms of God's blessing his people.

Conclusion

David turned this horrible experience of betrayal, emotional pain, and nearly being killed into a song of praise. When life falls apart, you can experience God's peace by laying hold of him in believing prayer. When he answers, he gets the glory, you get the joy, and God's people get the blessing.

Philippians 4:6: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*

Have you thanked the Lord for this opportunity to learn to trust him more?

Praying Psalm 3:

Pour out your trouble to the Lord.

Verses 1 and 2: Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me “God will not deliver him.”

Declare who God is.

Verse 3: But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high.

Affirm that the Lord is a prayer-answering God.

Verse 4: I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain.

Declare that the Lord gives his peace.

Verses 5-6: I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.

Confess you depend completely on God for deliverance.

Verses 7 – 8: Arise, Lord! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. ⁸ From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.