

Summer Psalms

*Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night. (Psalm 1:1-2 ESV)*

How To Be Quiet In Times Of Trouble

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Psalm 3

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Introduction:

Good morning! If you have been tracking with us, then you are likely expecting to turn in your Bible to Acts 2, verse 14. However, we are going to take a brief break from our series. Instead, we are going to spend the rest of our summer in the Psalms. To that end, would you please turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 3.

Songs don't exist in a vacuum. They are birthed out of experience, and when we understand that experience, it often brings a greater clarity to the depth of the lyrics. Take the song that we just sang, for example. "It Is Well With My Soul" is a powerful song in and of itself. But when you hear the story *behind* the song, the lyrics come to life in a whole new way.

Horatio G. Spafford was a devout Christian and a successful lawyer who lived in Chicago. He had a beautiful family – a wife, a son, and four daughters. He possessed great wealth which he invested in local real-estate. He had it all.

But then, tragically, Horatio's only son died. While the family was still immersed in grief, a fire broke out near the shoreline of Lake Michigan and all of his real estate was consumed overnight.

Horatio and his wife decided that the family needed to get away for a season to grieve. Their friend, D.L. Moody, was ministering in Great Britain, and they had been invited to join him. They accepted. However, as they prepared to leave, some unexpected business obligated Horatio to stay

in Chicago for an extra few days. He sent Mrs. Spafford along with their four daughters to go ahead without him.

But tragedy struck again. The ship bearing the Spafford family collided with an English vessel and sank within a matter of minutes. A rescue team rushed to the scene. Days later, Horatio received a message from Wales. It was from his wife, and it said: “Saved alone”. Their four daughters had perished at sea.

Reeling from unimaginable loss, Horatio boarded a ship to join his wife. As he sailed past the sight where his daughters had drowned, he wrote through tears the hymn that we just sang.¹ Listen again to that first verse:

When peace like a river attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say
It is well, it is well with my soul²

Context matters.

In the same vein, Psalm 3 is powerful in and of itself, yet it loses some of its force if we divorce it from its context. In the superscription above verse 1, we catch a glimpse into the backstory of this Psalm. It says:

A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

David wrote this song while his beloved son was chasing him down to kill him. If you skim past that detail, then you won't hear this song as you ought to.

The details of this backstory are captured in 2 Samuel 15. Because of David's sin, there was a history of hurt and disfunction in the royal household. Absalom had been planning to overthrow his father ever since David failed to discipline his son Amnon for raping Tamar. We don't have

¹ Details as represented in <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-it-is-well-with-my-soul>. Accessed July 19, 2022.

² Horatio Spafford, Phillip Bliss, *It Is Well With My Soul*, 1876.

time to wade into that story today but suffice it to say that Absalom had a legitimate grievance against his father.

David was no innocent sufferer. He was a sinner. And Absalom appointed himself to be the one who would make his father pay. He took it upon himself to remove his father from the throne. He lurked behind the scenes turning the hearts of the people against his father. And his plan worked. In 2 Samuel 15:13, we're told:

And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom." ¹⁴ Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. (2 Samuel 15:13-14a ESV)

In a humiliating display, King David turned tail and fled from his own capitol. His beloved son marched victoriously into the city to the shouts and the applause of the men and women that David had given his life to serve and protect. The covenant community had turned against the promised king. Unsurprisingly, this betrayal devastated David. We read in verse 30:

But David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went, barefoot and with his head covered. And all the people who were with him covered their heads, and they went up, weeping as they went. (2 Samuel 15:30 ESV)

It was there, driven out of his kingdom by his own son, that David wrote the words of this Psalm.

How does a person pray when their world has been turned upside down? How does a person pray when their closest loved ones have dealt them their deepest wounds? How does a person pray in times of trouble?

Far too many of us find that our prayers are dictated – for better or for worse – by our circumstances. Far too many of us don't know how to pray from the depths, so we hide from God. We've never learned the discipline of praying through tears. We feel angry, we feel betrayed, we feel frightened, and we're not entirely sure if we're allowed to express those feelings to God.

Lord, teach us to pray!

Teach us to pray when the sun is shining, but also, teach us to pray when the enemy is at the gate. Teach us to pray when those closest to us have betrayed us, and when all we can see is failure and defeat. This Psalm was written for our instruction. This is a Psalm for times of trouble. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

O Lord, how many are my foes!
Many are rising against me;
² many are saying of my soul,
"There is no salvation for him in God." *Selah*
³ But you, O Lord, are a shield about me,
my glory, and the lifter of my head.
⁴ I cried aloud to the Lord,
and he answered me from his holy hill. *Selah*
⁵ I lay down and slept;
I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.
⁶ I will not be afraid of many thousands of people
who have set themselves against me all around.
⁷ Arise, O Lord!
Save me, O my God!
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.
⁸ Salvation belongs to the Lord;
your blessing be on your people! *Selah* (Psalm 3:1-8 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 3 is a Psalm of lament, but it is also a song of great confidence. David is surrounded! And yet, he knows that he is secure. Verse 5 is an absolutely beautiful verse, and those of us with anxious hearts would be well served if we committed it to memory! Here we find David, driven from his throne, surrounded by his enemies, and betrayed by his own son. And yet, David says:

⁵ I lay down and slept;
I woke again, for the Lord sustained me. (Psalm 3:5 ESV)

How does he do that? How does he sleep when anyone else would be tossing and turning?

This Psalm answers that question for us. So, let's lean in close and listen intently to this song where we will learn how to be quiet in times of trouble.

How To Be Quiet In Times Of Trouble

First. In times of trouble:

1. Take it to the Lord in prayer

That's what we find in verses 1-2. David writes:

O Lord, how many are my foes!
Many are rising against me;
² many are saying of my soul,
“There is no salvation for him in God.” *Selah* (Psalm 3:1-2 ESV)

David doesn't tiptoe around his problems, and neither should we.

He's bold. He's specific. And he doesn't hold back. As Alec Motyer observes:

David is too practical to say 'forget your problems'... No, don't try to forget them, but rather face and describe them - as these psalms do.³

Is your marriage on the brink of collapse? Do you feel like an imposter in your job? Are you angry about the way that your life has turned out? Are you frightened about the future of your children? Whatever your trouble is, you don't need to hide it. You don't need to pretend that it's nothing. And you don't need to try to handle it on your own! As one commentator notes:

Too often plans come before prayers.⁴

Before you take it to the drawing room, take it to the Lord!

Can I tell you something? He is far better equipped to handle it than you are!

And can I tell you something else? He WANTS to bear that burden for you! Peter wrote:

³ Alec Motyer, *Psalms by the Day* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 24.

⁴ Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Psalms – Song of Songs)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 5, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 76.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ **casting all your anxieties on him**, because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7 ESV)

David wrote Psalm 3 a thousand years before Peter wrote these words, and yet David had already mastered this. In our Psalm this morning, David is casting his anxiety on the Lord because he knows that the Lord cares for him! In humility, we must do the same! We need to acknowledge that we can't solve our deepest problems without God – and we don't have to! He loves us! O that we would believe this!

I had the privilege of teaching Psalm 23 to the kids at Camp Redeemer this week, and I was so thankful for the opportunity to explain to them that the Lord is our shepherd! He leads us! He feeds us! He protects us! He is with us by still waters. He's with us in the valley of the shadow of death. He prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies! I had the blessed privilege of letting those kids know that they are not alone!

And I count it an equally great privilege to be able to share that same news with you this morning.

Do you have troubles? Do you feel isolated? Hear me today – hear God's word today – you don't need to handle those all by yourself. Lay them down at His feet! Every last one of them! Be specific. Be thorough. Take them to the Lord. That's the first lesson we learn in this song.

Second, if you want to learn how to be quiet in times of trouble then you need to:

2. Remember who your God is

David had many flaws, but one thing that no one can deny is that David knew the might and the authority of his God! The same man who volunteered to fight Goliath found himself surrounded by an army that was made up of those who used to be his friends. Yet, he faced his new foe with the same confidence that led him to go toe-to-toe with a giant. Look with me at verses 3-4:

³ But you, O Lord, are a shield about me,
my glory, and the lifter of my head.

⁴ I cried aloud to the Lord,
and he answered me from his holy hill. *Selah* (Psalm 3:3-4 ESV)

David has just been chased out of the city. He is hiding from his own son. An attack is imminent. It will be nothing short of a miracle if David survives this next wave!

But he knows who his God is! He remembers where his help comes from. Therefore, his prayer is marked by a decided confidence.

As he prays, he declares that God is his shield. Yet, unlike ordinary shields which only provide defence on one front, God is a shield that simultaneously defends David on every side. No arrow will get through unless God allows it. David doesn't need to fight and grasp for his glory. GOD is his glory! He doesn't need to stress over his position. God is the lifter of his head! As commentator Willem VanGemeren notes here:

The confidence of the king was not in his knowledge of the future, nor in the might of his forces, but in God who had installed him as king.⁵

What has David to fear? What can mere mortals do to him? If God is for him, who can stand against him? David is able to be quiet in the midst of his troubles because David knows that his help comes from a big and glorious God!

A.W. Tozer was right when he wrote:

What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.⁶

What comes into your mind when you think about God? Is He a God who cares? Or is He sitting back with disinterest?

Does He have authority? Is He sovereign over all things? Can you declare with the Apostle Paul:

⁵ Willem A. VanGemeren, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Psalms – Song of Songs)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebelin, vol. 5, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 76.

⁶ A.W. Tozer as quoted by R. Albert Mohler Jr. *The Apostle's Creed - Discovering Authentic Christianity in an Age of Counterfeits* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2019), 3.

And we know that for those who love God **all things work together for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28 ESV)

Listen: The God of the Bible is a BIG and GLORIOUS God! He is an in-control God! He is a nothing-slips-by-me God! THIS is the God that David prayed to! One of my favorite quotes of all time states:

Anxiety is a heart confessing that Christ is not Lord.⁷

We will never be quiet in times of trouble unless we remember who our God is.

But we can't stop there. There is one final lesson that we must learn, and it is the most important lesson in this Psalm. If you would be quiet in times of trouble, then you need to:

3. Trust in the plans and promises of God

This right here is the most important piece. Everything else that we've said thus far is inapplicable and void of comfort apart from the promises of God. Taking our troubles to the Lord in prayer is only helpful if the Lord promises to act! Remembering who our God is only brings us comfort if we know that God is on our side!

In this Psalm, David clearly believes that God WILL answer his prayer and David clearly believes that God IS for him.

But when we stand back and look at the larger story, it's hard to understand how David could possess such a deep assurance. What right did he have to expect God's blessing on his life? Where did his confidence come from?

It certainly wasn't a confidence in his own righteousness. As I mentioned off the top, David was not a blameless man – not by any stretch of the imagination. That's the whole reason why

⁷ Scott K. Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics – Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 204.

Absalom had mounted this mutiny! David was a negligent father! David was a hypocrite! David was a murderer!

David was a sinner.

And yet, God had made a promise to David.

David, in this Psalm, is showing that he believes that the promise of God is stronger than anything! It's stronger than Absalom. It's stronger than many thousands of enemies. And the promise of God is even stronger than our sin.

Do you believe that this morning? The promise of God is stronger than your sin.

If you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ, then God has made a promise to you, Christian. Romans 10:9 says:

if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, **you will be saved.** (Romans 10:9 ESV)

Do you believe that?

If Jesus is the Lord of your life then you will be saved! You know how this story ends! If you have confessed your sin, and if you believe that Jesus has paid for your sin on the cross – if you believe that he lived for you, died for you, rose for you, and now sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for you – then you will be **SAVED!**

Now, the Devil is going to play the part of Absalom. He's going to try to convince you that your sin has negated the promise. He's going to wave all your faults and failures in your face to try to deceive you into despair. He's the accuser. And he is good at what he does. Sinclair Ferguson notes:

He knows he cannot destroy the salvation of God's people; but he is bent, indeed hell-bent - as he was in Eden - on destroying our peace, liberty, and joy in God.⁸

The devil is good at what he does.

But God is the promise keeper, and He is BETTER at what He does! God has declared that:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1 ESV)

The promises of God are STRONGER than your sin!

The blood of Jesus Christ is STRONGER than your sin!

The comfort of the Holy Spirit is STRONGER than your sin!

And so, even as you find yourself in times of trouble – the kinds of trouble that ought to leave you buried in fear and anxiety – you can take them to the Lord! You can remember who your God is!

And as you trust in His plans and promises, you can declare along with David:

⁵ I lay down and slept;

I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.

⁶ I will not be afraid of many thousands of people
who have set themselves against me all around.

⁷ Arise, O Lord!

Save me, O my God!

For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;

you break the teeth of the wicked.

⁸ Salvation belongs to the Lord;

your blessing be on your people! *Selah* (Psalm 3:5-8 ESV)

You can sleep, because salvation belongs to the Lord – and that salvation is yours in Christ.

You can overcome your fear even in the face of many thousands of enemies, because salvation belongs to the Lord – and that salvation is yours in Christ.

⁸ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 133.

God has broken the teeth of the accuser! The only weapon he can wield against us is our sin, but God has taken that weapon from him. Colossians 2:14-15 says:

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:14b-15 ESV)

Our adversary has been disarmed! He's a toothless enemy! He's all bark and no bite! All he can do is lie to you!

And the lie that he is going to whisper in your ear is that the promise of God is no match for your sin.

But don't believe him for a second.

John Newton – the former slave trader who repented and went on to write the hymn “Amazing Grace” – when he was nearing the end of his life, said:

My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior⁹

In times of trouble – when your circumstances feel as if they will overwhelm you – take it to the Lord. Remember who your God is. Trust in His plans and promises. And then, like David, lay down and go to sleep.

This is the confidence that we have in Christ. This is a prayer that we can pray in times of trouble. And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray together.

⁹ McMinn, Mark R.. Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling: An Integrative Paradigm (Christian Association for Psychological Studies Books) (p. 31). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.