

The Psalmist's Faith
Versus
The Arrogance of His Foes
Psalm 3

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Psalm 3 is a psalm of encouragement and faith. **As we begin to read the psalms, we discover that these writings picture the moral welfare of humanity in all of its struggles.** We are ever conscious of the gulf that separates reality from the ultimate goal of peace from troubles. As Christians, we long to be free from troubles and just experience peace in our lives. Yet, in these poetic disclosures, the Holy Spirit makes clear to the reader the greatness of the gulf that separates the wish from its fulfillment. There is a constant battle between the flesh and the spirit. In spite of the battles with troubles, we can still say that God's grace is sufficient. The Book of Psalms serves as a mirror in which we see the motions of our own souls. These in-depth writings reveal pregnant statements about our devotion and trust to God in spite of the negative statements and actions of the unrighteous. As we reflect upon Psalm 3, we can almost hear the strings of the harp as David wrote about his trust in God. David expresses his confidence in the Lord in spite of Absalom's desire to kill him and to take over the kingdom (2 Samuel 15-18).

Whenever we read the Old Testament, we should always bear in mind that the things written long ago were also written for our learning. Paul in his Epistle to the Christians in Rome writes: "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). **As we reflect upon Psalm 3, we learn from David that God is still in charge, regardless as to the external circumstances that he experienced in his own life.** Hopefully, a study of David's innermost thoughts about his struggles will give hope to us who, too, are suffering trials and tribulations. Paul, toward the end of his ministry, writes to Timothy to encourage him to read and to study the Old Testament writings: "All Scripture is God-breathed

and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).¹

CHRISTIANS USE OF PSALM 3 THROUGH THE CENTURIES

Christians down through the centuries have relied upon Psalm 3 to sustain them in the time of fearsome dangers. The nation of England, in 1588, cited this psalm when Philip II of Spain launched 130 ships against them. The Armada set sail to invade England and bring it back under Catholicism by dethroning Elizabeth I of England (1538-1603). The English nation expressed their fears of the impending invasion with a citation from Psalm 3:1: “LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many *are* they that rise up against me” (I am citing from the KJV, even though this translation did not appear until 1611).² They, too, found Psalm 3 of comfort as they faced the imminent dangers from 130 ships loaded with 30,000 soldiers.

Also, in the sixteenth century, the Huguenots, a name given to the French Protestants of France, suffered for their faith. On August 24, 1572, thousands were massacred in Paris and elsewhere in France. Between 1562 and 1598, eight wars were fought between French Roman Catholics and Protestants. **Louis XIV persecuted the Huguenots mercilessly, and on October 18, 1685 revoked the Edict of Nantes (‘nan(t)s,1598), an edict that had previously granted them complete religious freedom.** As a result of this persecution, thousands of Huguenots fled to England, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the English colonies in North America, including Massachusetts, New York, and South Carolina.³

According to the research of Rowland Prothero (1851-1937), the psalms were bound up in the history of French Protestantism. The psalms were identified with the everyday life of the Huguenots. Children were taught to memorize the psalms. The psalms were sung at their meals. Just as the Spanish Armada displayed on a banner a verse of one of the psalms, so the Huguenots chanted Psalm 3:1—“LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! many *are* they that rise up against me—as they threw off the advances of their enemies.”⁴

In the nineteenth century, when the worst of the Indian Mutiny was over (1857), there were many Christians who did not understand “the mysterious workings of the Divine purpose,”⁵ which included Dr. Duff, who wrote from Calcutta in May 1857 about his reliance upon the promises of the psalms. This terrible mutiny caused him to reflect more and more upon the psalms in order to give him security and peace of mind from the dangers that surrounded him. He cited these verses (5-7) from Psalm 3:

¹See Dallas Burdette (b. 1934), “Relevance of the Old Testament,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL.: Xulon Press, 2009), 1-25, for an in-depth study of the Old Testament in the life of every believer.

²See Rowland E. Prothero, *The Psalms in Human Life* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1903), 157.

³See “Huguenots,” Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2003. © 1993-2002 Microsoft Corporation

⁴See Rowland E. Prothero, *The Psalms in Human Life*, 170.

⁵Ibid., 322.

I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me. ⁶I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set *themselves* against me round about. ⁷Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies *upon* the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.⁶

DAVID AND HIS RELIANCE UPON GOD

As we read Psalm 3, we gather that David is in flight from his son Absalom, which story is related in great detail in 2 Samuel 15-18. The two psalms leading up to Psalm 3 are foundational to the Book of Psalms. **Psalm 1** stresses the importance of God's Law. **Psalm 2** stresses the ultimate triumph of the Messiah in spite of the apparent setbacks to His reign by His enemies. This psalm (**Psalm 3**) sets the prelude, as it were, to demonstrate that various circumstances that often come into our lives in which we must put our trust in God, even though we may not understand troubles in our own lives. **We frequently become discouraged when faced with catastrophe and do not put our trust in God.**

Habakkuk (609 BC), a prophet of God, had to deal with trust in his own life. Habakkuk was perplexed that wickedness, strife, and oppression were rampant in Judah but God seemingly did nothing (Habakkuk 1:13). He also questioned God about His proposal in taking care of the problem through the Babylonians. This kind of action on the part of God was too much for this prophet. Ultimately the prophet could only say, "The righteous will **live by his faith**" (2:4). This, too, is the attitude that all Christians must accept—trust in God who brings salvation. David's psalm should bring attention to the fact that all God's children share trials and sorrows in every age. This psalm divides itself into four strophes ('strō-(.)fē)⁷: (1) Grievance [Psalm 3:1-2], (2) Faith [3:3-4]. (3) Certainty [3: 5-6], and (4) Prayer [3:7-8].

The Psalmist's Grievance

O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! ² Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him." *Selah*^a (3:1-2)

Faith in the Lord's Support

But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift^b up my head. ⁴ To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. *Selah* (3:3-4)

Certainty of the Lord's Protection

I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. ⁶ I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side. (3:5-6)

Prayer to the Lord

⁶Ibid., 322, 323.

⁷Strophes: A rhythmic system composed of two or more lines repeated as a unit.

a A word of uncertain meaning, occurring frequently in the Psalms; possibly a musical term

b Or *LORD*, | *my Glorious One, who lifts*

Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O 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. *Selah* (3:7-8)

ANALYSIS OF PSALM 3: FOUR STROPHES

1. The Psalmist's Grievance

O LORD, how **many** are my foes! How **many** rise up against me! ²Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him." *Selah* ^a

Just a casual reading of Psalm 3 reveals that this psalm was composed to encourage faith and to help us to rely upon God for support, even though we may not understand why things happen. **The two preceding psalms disclose that we are not immune from struggle or opposition in our daily walk with God.** In Psalm 34, for instance, David again stresses that the one who belongs to God may have numerous difficulties: "A righteous man may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all" (Psalm 34:19). Paul, too, while languishing in prison, writes to Timothy about his confidence and trust in God in spite of his incarceration and impending death:

Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. ¹⁵You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. ¹⁶At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷**But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength,** so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸**The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.** To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:14-18)

In Paul's circumstances, it appears that Paul is saying that God will "rescue me" from evil and will take me safely to His heavenly abode. We may be delivered from imminent dangers from evil people, but others may not be delivered from suffering from the hands of evil men and women (see Hebrews 11:32-40). **We observe in David's psalm a threefold repetition of the word *many* (רב (*răb*), "great, many, abundant").** In this first verse of Psalm 3, David recounts his enemies: "O LORD, how **many** are my foes! How **many** rise up against me!" This conspiracy on the part of his son Absalom was not a small conspiracy. It was a conspiracy that had swelled into numerous wicked individuals who were seeking David's death and overthrow. David had become an outcast from his own city Jerusalem, which is called the city of David. Even though his son Absalom sought the death of his father David, nevertheless, David's heart still went out to his son. David was in a very precarious situation. This was a terrible time for David. David fled the city a broken-hearted man. **The author of Second Samuel writes:**

a A word of uncertain meaning, occurring frequently in the Psalms; possibly a musical term

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. (2 Samuel 15:30)

David's departure was not just about himself, but also about the citizens of Jerusalem. Again the author of Second Samuel writes:

A messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the men 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 upon us and put the city to the sword." (15:13-14)

David wrote this psalm to give courage to others like himself. This psalm was to be sung with instruments. The second verse of Psalm 3 is a heart-wrenching verse that pierces the soul: "Many are saying of me, 'God will not deliver him' *Selah.*"^a Since David had sinned grievously with Bathsheba, a sin that he prayed that God would forgive (Psalm 51), many were saying, "God will not deliver him." Earlier the author of Second Samuel reports the words of Nathan about David's actions:

This is what the LORD says: "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight."¹² You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel." (2 Samuel 2:11-12)

Do we, too, think in our hearts, "God will not deliver us"? The KJV renders Psalm 3:2: "Many *there be* which say of my soul, *there is* no help for him in God. *Selah.*" God had forgiven David and would deliver him (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51). Just as David suffered the consequences of his sins, nevertheless God forgave him. **Today, we, as Christians, may still suffer the consequences of our many sins, but God still forgives.** If we repent of our sins, we can say that there is help in God. What were they saying? They were saying in essence that there is no one to wash away his sin? There is no one to clothe him with righteousness. This psalm does let us know that there is salvation in God.

In the present day, we can also find comfort in knowing that "in Christ," there is One who cleanses us from our sins. There is One who can present us faultless before the throne of God. This One is none other than Jesus the Messiah. **Without Christ there is no hope of forgiveness.** The unrepentant sinner has **no Calvary, no blood, and no throne of grace.** Paul expresses our utter helplessness "without Christ" this way:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. (Ephesians 2:11-12)

a A word of uncertain meaning, occurring frequently in the Book of Psalms; possibly a musical term.

Are we without hope and without God? Are we serving the One “Who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and **who forms the spirit of man within him**” (Zechariah 12:1)? If we are not “in Christ,” we are “separate from Christ.” Why are we not serving the One who formed our spirits within us? Do we not fear God? **One of the most notorious deists of the seventeenth century was Voltaire** (1694-1778), the renowned French writer and political philosopher and one of the leaders of the Enlightenment who did not fear God. At the age of eighty-four, he made a trip to Paris, which was too much for him at his advanced age. As a result of this weakened condition caused by the trip, he died on May 30 of 1778. His anticlerical and skeptical writings had earned him much hatred from the Church.

During his lifetime, he surrounded himself with people who, as a whole, had reverence for nothing, except wit, pleasure, and literature.⁸ Wallace Fowlie writes: “Voltaire decries supernaturalism and denounces religion and the power of the clergy, although he makes evident his own belief in the existence of God.”⁹ **When he realized he was dying, he sent for a priest and sought reconciliation with Rome, but this action was not reconciliation with God.** His infidel friends crowded his chambers in order to prevent him from recanting his writings, but he cursed them and turned them out. **He prepared a written recantation and signed it before witnesses.** But this act did not avail anything from the Church. For two months, he cried out, “I must die—**abandoned of God and of men.**” As the end came, his spiritual condition was so frightful that his unbelieving friends would not even approach his bed. His nurse declared, “**Not for all the wealth of Europe would I ever see another infidel die.**” Some say, “There was no help for him in God! Selah.”¹⁰ God knows the hearts of men and women. The church may have rejected, but did God? Did God listen to his plea for mercy? He listened to the thief on the Cross. God is the forgiver, not us. One cannot ultimately face death and not realize the fear of facing judgment without God’s way of Atonement, namely, Jesus.

When we reject the One who forms the spirit of man within himself, there is no help from God, unless we repent. **There is help** for one who is not in Christ. Whatever our lifestyle may have been, we can say with confidence: “But now **in Christ Jesus** you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13). This psalm gives hope to the down-and-out. For David, the enemies could say, “God will not deliver him.” But the psalmist still expresses his faith in God’s support: “But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift^b up my head. ⁴To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. *Selah.*” (Psalm 3:3-4)

⁸See John Phillips, *Exploring the Psalms: Volume One Psalms 1-88* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), 32. **John Phillips** (1927–2010) served as assistant director of the Moody Correspondence School as well as director of the Emmaus Correspondence School, one of the world’s largest Bible correspondence ministries. He also taught at the Moody Evening School and on the Moody Broadcasting radio network.

⁹Wallace Fowlie, “Voltaire,” *Microsoft ®Encarta ®Encyclopedia 2003* © 1993-2002 Microsoft Corporation.

¹⁰I am indebted for this information from John Phillips, *Exploring the Psalms*, 32.

^b Or LORD, | my Glorious One, who lifts

2. Faith in the Lord's Support

But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift^b up my head. ⁴ To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. *Selah* (3:3-4)

David, in spite of negative statements by his foes, cried out, “But you are a shield around me, O LORD.” **The psalmist employs a metaphor (“shield”) to convey his dependence upon God—a common metaphor for protection.** He is saying that God can protect him. He is declaring that God is the One who protects me from the evil intent of Absalom and his host. Whenever we focus too much attention on our troubles, the problems seem almost impossible to overcome. On the other hand, when we reflect upon God, we are able to look more realistically at our problems. Whatever our problems are, we can reduce the magnitude of the so-called insurmountable obstacles by relying upon God. An excellent example is found in the reaction of the twelve spies who Moses sent into the land of Canaan to survey the possibility of their odds against the people (Numbers 13:16-25).

Ten of the spies returned with a tale of horror: “We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are” (13:31). In their description of the enemies in the land, they concluded their remarks with the following words of fright: “We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (13:33). They failed to give notice to what God said to Moses earlier: “Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites” (13:2). Ten of the representatives from the twelve tribes failed to rely upon God as their shield. Yet, two of the other representatives—**Joshua and Caleb**—cautioned the people about not putting their trust in God: “Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up” (14:9). Ten of the leaders looked upon the Israelites as grasshoppers, but Joshua and Caleb look upon the Canaanites as grasshoppers. These two spies kept their eyes upon God.

As believers in Christ’s Atonement, we, too, need to emulate Joshua and Caleb in their trust in the providence of God. When David turned his attention from his son Absalom to God, he also discovered that his enemies were manageable. When trials and tribulations come our way, we need to keep our eyes focused on the One who is greater than anything Satan can throw at us. Even in Paul’s final hours, he did not reflect upon the strength of the enemy, but he placed his trust in God for deliverance:

At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. ¹⁸ **The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.** To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:16-18)

Did the Lord deliver him? Yes! God delivered Paul by taking him home to glory. For Paul, God was still in charge. Even though he suffered much in his life, he still had such trust in God that he could write:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,^a who^b have been called according to his purpose.²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?** ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”^c ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ **For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^d neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** (Romans 8:28-39)

David’s assurance, like Paul’s, was based upon God’s Word, not his circumstances or his feelings. Christianity is not based on how we feel, but rather it is based on what God has promised “in” and “through” His Son Jesus. David knew that he had sinned dangerously before God, but, at the same time, he knew that God’s mercy was outstandingly great. David prayed for forgiveness. Soon after, David writes about his remorse and God’s amnesty with reference to his sin with Bathsheba:

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. (Psalm 51:10-12)

As a result of God’s faithfulness, David could write: “But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift^b up my head” (3:3). Sin may beat us down, but God always lifts us up. We need not fear the world when we have a prayer-hearing God. Psalm 3 is as relevant today as it was at the time David penned this marvelous psalm of trust in God. We, as Christians, encounter hostilities from others; as individuals, we run into opposition from family members; as disciples of Jesus, we come upon troubles from our neighbors; as persons of faith, we suffer harassment from employers or employees; as folk with Christian experience we often suffer religious persecution from other Christians.

Yet, in spite of all the travesties that we experience as believers, we can still find comfort in our belief that God is still our shield. An attack against God’s children is an assault against God Himself. This psalm is designed to give hope to us who face overwhelming resistance from others. In the words of James L. Mays, Professor of Hebrew and the Old

a Some manuscripts *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God*

b Or *works together with those who love him to bring about what is good—with those who*

c Psalm 44:22

d Or *nor heavenly rulers*

b Or *LORD, | my Glorious One, who lifts*

Testament, “The psalm is composed to encourage faith and to give it language.”¹¹ David speaks of God’s divine intervention and safeguard. The psalmist believes, as Paul later wrote, that no amount of opposition could separate him from God’s protection.

Are we wondering how God could put up with us who are like David? If so, has it ever occurred to us as to how God could put up with persons like us? We should bow in humble gratitude that God forgives. Not only did God put up with a sinner like David, but He also forgives anyone who comes to Him in repentance. Pay attention once more to David as he cries out: “To the LORD I cry aloud, and he answers me from his holy hill. *Selah*” (3:5). The word *Selah* (סֶלָה, *sě·lā(h)*) appears seventy-four times in the Old Testament, almost exclusively in the psalms. The term appears to signify a “musical interlude.”

Three-fourths of the occurrences of this word in the psalms are associated with the choir director. The psalms were set to music to be played by orchestra and sung by a great choir to praise God and to bring comfort to the people of God. **David employs this musical term three different times in this short psalm.** The first occurrence is found following verse two and the next occurrence is used following verse four. Is David saying that we should stop, look, and listen to the words of this psalm? Every time we read this musical term, do we, as the people of God, should stop, look, and listen to the message with a keen ear?

Before proceeding to the next two verses, we should reflect upon the instructions that we gather from verses 3 and 4. **We cannot help but observe David’s rise above the contemplation of his enemies to that of the encircling shield of the LORD.** We can do one of two things in the face of danger or trials. We can focus upon our troubles or we can focus upon the Christ who comforts. As troubles encompass us, we can look up to God rather than sink into despair. Even though we may feel loneliness or helplessness in our everyday walk with God, nevertheless, we can still say with the psalmist: “But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift^b up my head” (3:3). Or, in the words of Job (ca. 2000 BC), we can say: “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away” (Job 1:21).

3. Certainty of the Lord’s Protection

I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. ⁶I will not fear the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side. (3:5-6)

Even in the face of disappointment and treachery from his son, David could still say, “I lie down and sleep.” He knew that everything was in God’s hands. Do we feel that way about our trials and tribulations? The psalmist went to sleep with absolute trust in God. He did not fear the thousands drawn up against him. He said in essence, I have had a good night’s sleep, and I am not afraid of today’s problems. If God does not interfere to rescue us from impending trouble or danger, do we still trust God? Paul in writing to the Philippians explains: “**Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**” (Philippians

¹¹James L. Mays, *Psalms in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 53.

^b Or *LORD*, | *my Glorious One, who lifts*

1:27). In spite of hardships, Paul wanted the Philippians to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for **it is God who works in you** to will and to act according to his good pleasure” (2:12-13).

Did Paul know hunger? Did Paul know what it meant to be in need of the basic necessities of life? It is in this vein that Paul gives a glimpse into his own walk with God to the Philippians. He unfolds the story of his own spiritual journey and trust in God in spite of want or plenty:

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ **I can do everything through him who gives me strength.** (4:12-13)

How did Paul cope with troubles? He says, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Whatever Christ has in store for us, we can do because of the power He supplies. As Christians, we are not immune from problems. **Paul, in a brief autobiography of his life, writes about his sufferings:**

What anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. ²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ **Five times** I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ **Three times** I was beaten with rods, **once** I was stoned, **three times** I was **shipwrecked**, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. **I have been in danger** from **rivers**, in danger from **bandits**, in danger from my **own countrymen**, in danger from **Gentiles**; in danger in the **city**, in danger in the **country**, in danger at **sea**; and in danger from **false brothers**. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? ³⁰ If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. ³¹ The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not lying. ³² In Damascus the governor under King Aretas [ār’ē-tās] had the city of the Damascenes guarded in order to arrest me. ³³ But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the wall and slipped through his hands. (2 Corinthians 11:21-33)

As we reflect upon Paul’s trials and tribulations, do we find strength to serve God in spite of difficulties in our own lives? Can we pray as David did in his psalm? Listen once more to the words of David as he faces his enemies: “I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. ⁶ **I will not fear** the tens of thousands drawn up against me on every side” (Psalm 3:5-6). This psalm gives faith and courage to the downtrodden. Can you say, “I will not fear”?

4. Prayer to the Lord

Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O 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. *Selah* (3:7-8)

As David faced the battle with his son Absalom, he still knew what the outcome would be. Whatever our plight in life is, hopefully, this psalm will assist us in making a connection between ourselves and David's dependence upon God. **In this psalm, we witness the language of passion, betrayal, and humiliation expressed through prayer.** In spite of the conflict, David still trusted in God completely. **Can we pray this prayer of David as our own prayer?** This prayer of David is reminiscent of Psalm 2:12b: "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." Can we declare this beatitude with zeal? Do we take refuge in Him? When we put our trust in God, we find comfort in prayer. **Prayer to God is confidence in the faithfulness of God.** Prayer is reliance upon God. Prayer is trust in God. As we reflect upon prayer, we are also conscious that prayer is the soul's habitual craving and regular desire for spiritual food. Prayer is the whole of our thoughts and actions.

Do we pray without ceasing? What does it mean to pray without ceasing? **To pray without ceasing, so it seems to me, is to have a heart and soul that is constantly bent on God.** We can also say that prayer is faith in action. P. T. Forsyth correctly says, "To be religious is to pray, to be irreligious is to be incapable of prayer."¹² In our prayers, we must always pray that God's will be done, not ours (Matthew 6:5-15). Prayer is turning our will toward God. For us **not** to pray is unspiritual. The object of prayer is to bring us closer, as it were, to God. Prayer demonstrates our dependence upon God, not ourselves. The trials and tribulations of life usually bring us closer to God. Distress and conflict are often the means whereby God draws us nearer to Himself.

When we are worshippers of God, there is an engagement of ourselves to God through commitment to His cause. Even though prayer is an excellent way to begin the day, still we must live the day with dedication and loyalty to God. In our prayers, we are lost, as it were, in the love, praise, and wonder of God's love for lost humanity. Does prayer lift us up to Him, the initiator of our salvation? We do not approach God as beggars, but as children. **Prayer is not to inform God, but rather prayer is to express our dependence upon God, the giver of grace.** Do not parents like to be told what they already know? Yes, prayer is faith in action. Olive Wyon captures the very essence of prayer when she writes: "It is man's response to God's revelation of himself."¹³ Again, she pens: "A world without prayer is fundamentally a world without meaning."¹⁴

¹²P. T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer* (London: Independent Press, 1960), 46. **P. T. Forsyth** (1848-1921) was born in Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Scotland. He was educated at the University of Aberdeen and the University of Göttingen. He was an ordained Congregational minister, and he served in various churches before accepting the post as principal of Hackney College, London. He was also a member of the theological faculty of London University. In 1905, he was elected chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales. He was also Scottish theologian and Scottish Congregationalist divine. **Forsyth's prolific works continue to be reprinted today, and his ideas are largely thought to have anticipated, and mirrored, the neo-orthodox movement of Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Emil Brunner (1889-1966).**

¹³**Olive Wyon** (1881-1966), *Prayer* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 16. She was a British author and translator of books of the Christian faith.

¹⁴Olive Wyon, *The School of Prayer* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1952), 23.

CONCLUSION

David knew that his deliverance could only come from God: “From the LORD comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people. *Selah*” (3:8). **David understood that salvation is from the Lord. We, too, should realize that salvation is from the Lord.** Even though David spoke of physical deliverance from his enemies, we today can speak of our deliverance from God’s wrath (Romans 5), from the dominion of sin (Romans 6), from the curse of the Law (Romans 7), and from condemnation (Romans 8).¹⁵ All of this is possible “in” and “through” Jesus Christ. Paul expresses salvation this way: “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). Once more, Paul exclaims:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. (2 Corinthians 5:17-19)

The good news of Psalm 3 is that God helps those who cannot help themselves. James L. Mays declares:

The psalm is composed to encourage faith and to give it language. . . . It recites the doctrine that ‘salvation belongs to the LORD’ to remind the distressed that no trouble is beyond help and no human hostility can limit God’s help. In all these ways the psalm encourages and supports faith and invites the distressed to pray, the ultimate act of faith in the face of the assault on the soul.¹⁶

J. Clinton McCann, Evangelical Professor of Biblical Interpretation, also cuts away all underbrush as he seeks to set forth the necessity of prayer in our walk with God:

Prayer is both the language and the life-style of persons who know that their lives, their futures, and the destiny of the world depend on God (3:8; see 1:1-2; 2:12). To pray subverts the prevailing worldly wisdom that God helps those who help themselves. Therefore, to pray in our kind of world is a revolutionary act, but it is one that may yield indirectly the same practical consequence for us as it did for the psalmist—a good night’s sleep (vv. 4.5).¹⁷

¹⁵For a detailed study of Romans, see Dallas Burdette, “Overview of Romans,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 249-281.

¹⁶James L. Mays, *Psalms in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1984), 53. **James Luther Mays** is Cyrus M. McCormick Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Old Testament Interpretation at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. He was the general editor of the best-selling *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* series, and is author of many books, including *Psalms in the Interpretation series* and *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms*.

¹⁷J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *The Book of Psalms in The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, Vol., 4 (Leander E. Kack, Sr. Editor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 695. Clinton’s research and writing have focused on the Psalms. A noted biblical scholar, he served as chair of the Psalms Section for the Society of Biblical Literature for 10 years. His publications on the Psalms include: *The Shape and Shaping of*

What does Psalm 3 mean to us? Is God our shield? Do we trust God in spite of troubles in our lives? Do we pray as David prayed? Have we placed our trust in Jesus? Remember, Psalm 3 pictures the moral welfare of humanity in all of its struggles. This psalm should give courage to all of us in our daily walk with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. **How do we cope with our problems?** As we reflect upon our trials and tribulations, do we find strength to serve God in spite of all the difficulties in our lives?

the Psalter (1993); A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah (1993); the Psalms commentary in The New Interpreter's Bible (Vol. IV; 1996); Preaching the Psalms (2001); and annotations on the Psalms in The Access Bible, The Learning Bible, and The Westminster Discipleship Study Bible. His most recent book is Judges (2002) in the Interpretation commentary series.