

Prayers

To God

Praise be to You, Lord God, for when we need Your love, You are there; when we claim Your forgiveness, You are there; when we call upon Your name, You are there; and when we cry to You for help, You are there. We praise You and thank You for the great mercy and love You show to us, and we commit ourselves to live forever according to Your will and pleasure. AMEN

For myself

Pray about your emotions. Each one of us feels good or bad from time to time, and sometimes it seems we cannot help our emotions. Ask the Lord to come into your heart and into your emotions, so that He can help you respond well to everything that happens to you.

For others

Weekly theme: The press

Pray for reporters who have the job of abstaining information to pass on to newspapers and TV. Pray especially for those who work in dangerous places so that we might know the truth about what happens in places of war, for example.

Meditation

When sorrowful, because everything fails to satisfy the soul;
Come to Christ, for His comfort and reassurance.

When troubled, because facing the truth is harder than life;
Come to Christ, and be set free from worldly fears.

When tempted, because the Evil One has found a foothold;
Come to Christ, who saves repentant the sinner.

When forgetful, because nothing stays in an occupied mind;
Come to Christ, the One who holds all things in His hands.

When stressed, because what was safe has grown insecure;
Come to Christ, for His love will soothe and pacify.

And thence remade, because the work of God will never fail;
Still, come to Christ, in whom all things are complete.

Bible Passage

Psalm 3

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

- ¹ 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

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

Selah

- ⁵ 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.
⁷ 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

Review

Psalm 3 is a wonderful psalm that gives us spiritual advice about how to deal with life's troubles. It is a simple psalm, but like so many others, it hides considerable spiritual and practical wisdom. Perhaps most importantly, it offers us some clues about how to trust God and live as His people.

The best way to appreciate this psalm is to begin with the brief sentence that comes just before it starts. This reads '*A psalm of David, when he fled from his son Absalom*'. These words are called a 'superscription', and psalm 3 is the first of the psalms to have this feature. It is important to realise that this superscription is a part of the original sacred text of Scripture, and it should not be confused with the various editorial headings given to the individual psalms, as found in most modern Bible translations. Superscriptions are not always found at the beginning of the psalms, but where they are, they can give us helpful and useful information about the writing of the psalm. Sometimes they give us clues about how they were used or the music they were sung to.

Here, the superscription of Psalm 3 recalls a dreadful incident in David's life when his reign was severely threatened. As an old man, David's sons squabbled over who would succeed him, and on one occasion, his son Absalom seized power and ousted King David. It was a terrible act of rebellion, and it had dire consequences (2 Sam 15, to the end). Eventually, King David recaptured Jerusalem, his capital, but it was at great personal cost, because the

son he once hoped would take his place, Absalom, was proved unworthy before the Lord and was killed in battle. With this in mind, the psalm is clearly about the victory of God's people over evil and also the personal cost of victory over evil.

The psalm captures David's sense of devastation, betrayal and deception, but it also conveys something more and it speaks of David's spiritual strength and insight. It begins with a description of the horror of betrayal (3:1-2), but it turns swiftly to the glory of God's presence (3:3-4). Remarkably, David is not consumed by such things, but his relationship with God is secure, and this brings peace (3:5,6). In that peace, David is able to pursue victory in the Lord's name, and praise God for his 'deliverance' (3:7,8).

However, the genius of the psalm is not that it describes David's experience. In common with so much Scripture, the words transcend the time and place of their authorship and the experience of their writing. This psalm has been written in a general manner, so although it obviously comes from David's experience, it can easily relate to the experience of anyone who reads it. For us today, the same Lord who helped David helps those of us who turn to Him in the midst of our battles.

If we read the psalm in this more general way, it can come to light for us. The first stanza now describes the way in which evil attacks the soul, firstly by creating panic within. It begins, '*O Lord ... how many rise up against me!*', and then illustrates the way that someone who feels attacked will sometimes listen to others who question faith, '*Many are saying ... God will not deliver him*' (3:1). All too often, when we recognise that we are under attack from some evil we can be confused, and it is hard to know where to go, but this is where our psalm guides us with a stroke of genius. The word 'selah' (3:2) is a pause, in which the reader waits for a moment before continuing with the psalm. How important it can be for us, when in the midst of trouble, to stand back, to pause and listen to the voice of God.

We can imagine David doing just this when in the midst of his personal difficulties, and it becoming important to include this in the psalm. The word 'selah' is hotly debated by scholars, and there are many other theories attached to its meaning. However, a number of them can be boiled down to the idea of a pause, and I recommend this to you as the best possible interpretation today.

After this pause, David makes the one move always open to a person of faith, which is to turn to God; he cries out '*but You are a shield around me, O Lord ...*' (3:3). This cry is pivotal, because it represents the soul's decision to turn away from evil to God, who is the source of all good. We, too, can use this psalm to do just this, and if we turn to God instead of becoming consumed by the attacks of evil, will take the necessary course of action to become 'overcomers' of evil, rather than people who are 'overcome' by it.

Then in the next verse, David prays to the Lord, as if worshipping Him in Jerusalem (3:4). Remember, according to the superscription, David had been thrown out of Jerusalem and longed to return, so this verse is for him, like the longing of the soul to be with the Lord. Again, by reading the psalm, we can be led to do just this, and find that in Christ, our problems have their solution. David then describes the peace that accompanies such a decision as like 'peaceful sleep' (3:5), and he declares that the Lord's protection has removed all his fear. Indeed, the size of the enemy no longer matters to him, he says, '*I will fear not the tens of thousands drawn up against me ...*' (3:6)! What a great treasure it is to be led from despair to a sense of peace and trust in God!

The last two verses are somewhat fierce, because they call on the Lord to defeat the evil foe. The phrases '*strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked ...*' (3:7) seem somewhat violent. However, this is poetic language that expresses God's ultimate defeat of all evil, and although we may not like the particular language used by David, we surely need to know that evil is overcome. Sometimes when this psalm is read in church, these last verses are left out because people do not like the words; what a tragedy!

This is a powerful psalm, which is of great help when dealing with the pain of rejection from loved ones; those who are closest to us can sometimes be the cause of great trials! Yet in the midst of such ordeals the best we can do for everyone is to seek the Lord's will and be centred on Him. It may be hard to see how everything will work out, but if we trust Him then we can have peace. We may need to do much work in order to sort things out, as David did when he had to recapture Jerusalem from Absalom, but if we keep close to Him, He will guide us through our problems even if we cannot see this.

Discipleship

Application

Dealing with problems that are close to 'home'

God's people often find it hardest to deal with problems that are close to 'home'. Indeed, the closer they are the more we like to hide them from others. It is as if people are afraid that if others know what they experience they fear they might be perceived as weak or troubled and in need of ministry. Some church leaders are prone to such troubles because they feel they must always keep up the brave face of ministry, which is always ready to help others and never accepting of personal help. Of course, this can lead to great distress, for no one can permanently deny personal need, and the Lord is always seeking to help us. Reading this psalm can be of great help because it reveals the open heart of David, who dealt with his personal difficulties whilst still in the public eye; and in the name of the Lord, he was victorious.

Overcoming personal troubles

I have always found it useful to ask for the Lord's protection, and I know that I live under the essential shield of God's love and care. Nevertheless, I have a serious physical condition that keeps me from normal work, and many people pray for me that I will be healed, indeed I pray for this myself, but as yet I am not healed! I believe that the Lord will overcome this trouble in my own life in His own good time, but in the meantime, the Lord uses this physical problem of mine for His purposes. I accept that, in order to deny Satan the chance to use my circumstances in any other way.

Ideas for what to do

- It is part of the discipline of the Christian life to take one's stance against the works of the enemy that compromise faith. Think about this, and about how the enemy can work to compromise your own faith. Pray to ask the Lord to help you stand firm against evil in whatever form it take.
- Pray for any in your family who are experiencing a troubled time at the moment, and ask the Lord to bless them spiritually, and practically, as appropriate.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Are you conscious of enemies who prevent you doing what you believe to be God's will in your own life, or your church? Who or what are they?

2. If you were to you 'cry aloud to the Lord' (3:4), would you be able to recognise God's voice, speaking in return?
3. In your group, discuss what this psalm says about how to deal with trouble and distress in personal life.

Final Prayer

Thank You, Heavenly Father, for the assurance that when we place our trust in You, all things become possible; our sins are forgiven, our lives are empowered and the Holy Spirit blesses us with His gifts. Your graciousness is far more than we could ask. AMEN
