

# Facing Life's Challenges

*From the Psalms*

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**Bible Text:** Psalm 3:1-8

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Psalm number three. Hear God's Word.

O LORD, how my adversaries have increased!  
Many are rising up against me.  
Many are saying of my soul,  
"There is no deliverance for him in God." Selah.

But You, O LORD, are a shield about me,  
My glory, and the One who lifts my head.  
I was crying to the LORD with my voice,  
And He answered me from His holy mountain. Selah.  
I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me.  
I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people  
Who have set themselves against me round about.

Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God!  
For You have smitten all my enemies on the cheek;  
You have shattered the teeth of the wicked.  
Salvation belongs to the LORD;  
Your blessing be upon Your people! Selah.<sup>1</sup>

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you for the grace that you extend to us by means of this Word which you have been pleased to give to us. Thank you, also, for the means of prayer. We thank you that you utilize these means to bring about your ends. And we ask you to bless us and perfect your salvation in each one of our lives by these means, even this evening, as we are together. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

As you register your prayer requests each week and bring them before the congregation, there are several challenges that you hear, week by week. You hear of challenges in individual families with regard to employment, with regard to health concerns, with

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 3:1-8.

regard to family members not knowing the Lord. These represent the various challenges you have in this life.

And you freely bring these prayer requests before the Lord in the name of Jesus Christ. You lean upon Jesus Christ. You long to see the hand of God at work in your lives, in the lives of your family members, in the lives of other families in the congregation, and in the life of the congregation itself.

And there is a theme here, isn't there? If you lean upon Christ, if you lean upon Christ in life's challenges, you see God's hand at work. In fact, it is imperative that you lean upon Christ in life's challenges in order to see the hand of Christ at work.

Certainly this is what David is experiencing in the psalm which is before us as he cries out to God in a quite desperate family situation, a quite desperate family challenge. And as he does so, it is in retrospect that he sees the hand of God at work. And so this is the message for us from the psalm. Lean upon Christ in life's challenges to see his hand at work in your life. Lean upon Christ in life's challenges to see his hand at work in your life.

As you look at the psalm, the title of the psalm is in these words. "A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son."<sup>2</sup> This is actually part of the divine text and in the Hebrew text it is verse one. It is indeed part of the divine text and ought to be understood as such. It gives to us, in this case, the setting for the psalm, "When David fled from Absalom his son."

Absalom was the third son of David and, we read in the Scriptures that Absalom was of a very fine countenance. And he also had a sister who was quite beautiful, Tamar by name. And some of you will remember the story that Amnon, a half brother of both Tamar and Absalom, seduced Tamar. This aggravated Absalom not a little and he waited no less than two years to avenge his sister. And he plotted the death of Amnon.

Well, Amnon was one of David's sons. This murder angered David. And so Absalom fled from Jerusalem for a time. And when he was restored, David did not allow him to come into the king's house. He required Absalom to stay in his own house. Well, this grieved Absalom to no end. And we read in the Scriptures that Absalom spirited the people away from David.

If you turn to 2 Samuel 15, let's read just a few verses here of this history in 2 Samuel 15, beginning with verse two. Here we have this story of Absalom spiriting the people away from David. Verse two and following, in 2 Samuel 15,

Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way to the gate; and when any man had a suit to come to the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?" And he would say, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel." Then Absalom would say to

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 3:1.

him, "See, your claims are good and right, but no man listens to you on the part of the king." Moreover, Absalom would say, "Oh that one would appoint me judge in the land, then every man who has any suit or cause could come to me and I would give him justice." And when a man came near to prostrate himself before him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. In this manner Absalom dealt with all Israel who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole away the hearts of the men of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

Absalom was plotting against his father David. On a pretense, Absalom journeyed north to Hebron and 2 Samuel 15:10 indicates, "Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, 'As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.'" Then you can look at verses 13 and 14 in 2 Samuel 15 to see the result.

Then a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom." David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise and let us flee, for otherwise none of us will escape from Absalom. Go in haste, or he will overtake us quickly and bring down calamity on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword."<sup>4</sup>

You see, Absalom gathered a great number of men around him and declared himself to be king, replacing David. And so David fled from Jerusalem. It was in this circumstance, it seems, that David penned Psalm number three.

Look at verse 30 in 2 Samuel 15. "And David went up the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went, and his head was covered and he walked barefoot. Then all the people who were with him each covered his head and went up weeping as they went."<sup>5</sup>

It is of no small consequence that King David, also a type, a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ, went up the Mount of Olives weeping as he did so. It was only a short time later that another man, we read in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter, came out close to the Mount of Olives and began to curse David.

Look at verse five in chapter 16. "When King David came to Bahurim..."<sup>6</sup> This is a little place on the road to Jericho, just a stone's throw from the Mount of Olives.

Behold, there came out from there a man of the family of the house of Saul whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera; he came out cursing continually as he came. He threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David; and all the people and all the mighty men were at his right hand and at his left. Thus Shimei said when he cursed, "Get out, get out,

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<sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 15:2-6.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Samuel 15:13-14.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Samuel 15:30.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Samuel 16:5.

you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! The LORD has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. And behold, you are taken in your own evil, for you are a man of bloodshed!"<sup>7</sup>

And so it was that David fled Jerusalem.

Turn back, now, if you would, to Psalm number three. With this background, look at verses one and two.

O LORD, how my adversaries have increased!  
Many are rising up against me.  
Many are saying of my soul,  
"There is no deliverance for him in God."<sup>8</sup>

This was David's demeanor and thought as he left Jerusalem. Many, not only Absalom... And you remember when Absalom was killed how David wept. "O Absalom, my son, my son Absalom."<sup>9</sup> He loved Absalom and this son of his turned violently against him. And it was not only Absalom. But, as I say, Absalom gathered a great company around him. And so there were many, including this fellow Shimei who threw stones at David and cursed David as he left Jerusalem.

And they said of David, God will not deliver him. "There is no salvation for him in God."<sup>10</sup> Remember, David was a type of Christ and a person who foreshadowed Jesus Christ. We can therefore think of the Lord Jesus in this regard. When Jesus Christ was on the cross, men and women cried out, "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RECUE HIM *now*, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM."<sup>11</sup> Let's see if God will come down and save him. And they mocked our Lord. And so it was.

David understood his adversaries and our Lord understood his adversaries also. And isn't incumbent upon each of you to understand your adversaries, to know those who oppose you? They might even be of your own family.

I remember when I showed my parents the letter of acceptance I had to go to seminary. My father looked at me and said, "Are you going to give up a perfectly good career in the army for that?" And with some disdain he spoke to me with regard to my future.

Yes, there are adversaries. And they can be very personal. And we say, "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but names will never hurt me"? Ha! Such words do hurt when you receive the brunt of them.

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Samuel 16:5-8.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 3:1-2.

<sup>9</sup> See 2 Samuel 18:33.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm 3:2, NASB margin.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 27:43, Psalm 22:8.

Then notice not only the posture of the enemy, but at the end of the psalm, notice God's posture, God's stance. Look at verses seven and eight.

Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God! For  
You have smitten all my enemies on the cheek;  
You have shattered the teeth of the wicked.  
Salvation belongs to the LORD;  
Your blessing be upon Your people! Selah.<sup>12</sup>

Do you see it there? "Your blessing is upon Your people!"<sup>13</sup> Praise God this is the case. God's blessing amounts to—at least in part—God's Word being spoken upon people like you and me. God's blessing is God's good Word being spoken upon people like you and me. And what God speaks comes to pass. When God has a good Word to speak about you and me you can be sure that it will, indeed, come to pass.

This blessing also has to do with prayer, prayer in which we have already engaged, prayer concerning which we have spoken. I think of the Lord Jesus in prayer, that great high priestly prayer that is recorded for us in John 17. When he prays, it says, he prays not just for his disciples. Speaking to the Father he says, "I pray not only for these, but I pray for those who will believe through their word."<sup>14</sup>

Think about this for a moment. You are here this evening because of the words of the disciples transmitted to you through Scripture and transmitted to you through preaching and teaching of the Scriptures. You are here, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, having heard the words of the disciples, in answer to the prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are a recipient of this blessing. You are part of the answer to the prayer of the Savior recorded in John 17. What a blessing it is for us to understand that this is the case.

And you are, as verse eight says, a recipient of the salvation that belongs to the Lord.<sup>15</sup> He blesses his people, the people whom he called out from the foundation of the world to be his through his Son Jesus Christ. He blesses them with his salvation, with his blood bought salvation. And you are recipients of the salvation that belongs to the Lord. Praise God this is the case. God's stance with regard to you is to bless you. This is his stance.

And so David says in verse seven, "Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God!"<sup>16</sup> Based upon God's posture, David utters this prayer. And then he utters these striking words, "For You have smitten all my enemies on the cheek; You have shattered the teeth of the wicked."<sup>17</sup> These are very strong words. You get the picture of God reaching down from heaven and with the back of his hand smiting the cheek of each of his enemies. He breaks

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<sup>12</sup> Psalm 3:7-8.

<sup>13</sup> Psalm 3:8, NASB margin.

<sup>14</sup> See John 17:20.

<sup>15</sup> See Psalm 3:8.

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 3:7.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

their jaws and shatters their teeth. He stills every utterance that comes from their mouths so that they can no longer speak against God's people. And so David cries, "Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God!"<sup>18</sup> David is casting himself upon the Lord and trusting in him in the midst of his family challenge, this rather stark family situation in which his son has risen up against him to overthrow his kingdom.

And so David understands the posture of the Lord and entrusts himself to the Lord. Look with me at verses three and six in the psalm. Let's look at verse six, first of all. "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set themselves against me round about."<sup>19</sup> Knowing the posture of the enemy, knowing God's posture with regard to his people, now we get a picture of David's stance. "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people Who have set themselves against me round about."<sup>20</sup>

I don't know about you, but I know about me. I don't need ten thousand to come against me. One will be enough. I remember a situation in the dark days of a pastorate years ago. I met with the leaders of the congregation I was serving in the pastor's study to pray before morning worship. There was a controversy in the congregation. The men meeting with me were elected as elders. But they refused to take the prescribed vows to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith. I said to them, "Don't you realize that the devil is having his way in this situation?" And one of the men looked me square in the eye and said, "Denny, you are the chief emissary of the devil in this congregation."

You can imagine the icy frost that descended upon that little room. I was about to preach and had to do so in those circumstances. You can imagine going to an important meeting or teaching a Sabbath school class after receiving such an indictment. One enemy or adversary is sufficient.

Now look at verse three. "But You, O LORD, are a shield about me, My glory, and the One who lifts my head."<sup>21</sup> "You are my defense and glory, oh God. You are the one who lifts up my head." The picture is this. It is the picture of you as a parent tenderly taking your fearful child and cupping his chin in the palm of your hand and lifting up his head and saying, "Fear not, fear not. Your family is with you and you are in the hands of protection." And so your God reaches down and lifts up your heads to look on high where Christ is seated on the throne of the majesty to know that he is, as the Psalm says, a shield and defense about you.

And knowing this, what does David do? Look at verse four. "I was crying to the LORD with my voice, And He answered me from His holy mountain."<sup>22</sup> Now David, fleeing from Jerusalem and Absalom taking his throne, cries out to the Lord. He knew that God hears him in any place where he might be. He did not have to be in God's house which was upon that holy mountain in Jerusalem.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Psalm 3:6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Psalm 3:3.

<sup>22</sup> Psalm 3:4.

Zadok the priest brought the Ark of the Covenant out of Jerusalem. He was following David and fleeing with David's men and company. But David said to Zadok, "Take the ark back. Take the ark back into Jerusalem."<sup>23</sup>

David had some other ideas with regard to Zadok. He knew that Zadok would be his friend in the midst of his adversaries in Jerusalem. But David also knew that he did not need to have the symbol of God's presence with him when he had the real presence of God wherever he might be. "I was crying to the LORD with my voice, And He answered me from His holy mountain."<sup>24</sup>

Jesus Christ, in the Garden of Gethsemane, cried to the Lord who was in the holy mountain of the heavenly Jerusalem. Jesus Christ knew his Father in heaven heard every word he uttered. As it was with David, as it was with Jesus, so it is with you and me. Every Word that comes off your lips in prayer he hears and he answers. Oh, we might not always agree with the answer, but he does answer appropriately in accordance with each of our individual needs. So he answers.

And what does David then say in verse five? "I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me."<sup>25</sup> Knowing the posture and the stance of his adversaries, knowing the stance of God, his Father, David takes his stance in prayer before the Father, in the midst of his personal challenge, and then he took his rest. Is that not what the psalm says? "I lay down and slept."<sup>26</sup> And you can only do this, friends, when there is an implicit trust in what God will do. Then you can take your rest.

And what does the next line say? "I awoke."<sup>27</sup> Yes, "I awoke, for the LORD sustains me."<sup>28</sup> Have you experienced this? You have gone to prayer. Then you take your rest. In the morning when you are awake, and your head is clear, you realize, yes, I am here and all is well because the Lord has sustained me. In retrospect, as you look back, you realize the Lord sustained you. In life's challenges you lean on Christ and then you look back and realize God's sustaining grace. And it doesn't matter, in the end, what the situation in life might be. The Lord sustains you and me.

I am rather overcome by the stance of our present president, a man who has publicly made professions of faith in Christ. I don't agree with all of his theology. I don't agree with all of his positions and decisions. But here is a man who has been vilified and attacked week after week, month after month, and year after year by both his political opponents and the media. Yet he has maintained public stance of faithfulness—and I believe privately.

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<sup>23</sup> See 2 Samuel 15:25.

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 3:4.

<sup>25</sup> Psalm 3:5.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

I recently read an op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal* written by one of his staff members who said, in part, "I remember coming to the West Wing one morning before the daily 7:30 senior staff meeting and seeing Mr. Bush at his desk in the Oval Office, reading a daily devotional."<sup>29</sup>

I don't know how a man can stand with the pressures and challenges he has had without leaning on Christ. And it is no different with you and me.

And I suspect that this man, when he departs from office, will be able to look back and see the hand of God was at work. And so it will be with each one of you and so it will be with me. When you lean upon Christ in life's challenges, you will see the hand of God. It will come in retrospect. You will have to look back. And you will have to be patient.

This was one of the great virtues of David, his patience. And so it was with Jesus Christ, his patience. And so as you lean upon Christ in life's challenges, you too will have the opportunity to look back and see the hand of God. Whether you are a business owner or a truck driver, whether you are a lawyer or a teacher, whether you are a student or a housewife, your situation is the same as the man in the oval office. You must lean upon Christ in all of life's challenges to see God's hand at work in your life.

Let's pray together.

*Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you that we are challenged by it. And we pray, Lord, that by your grace we might lean upon Jesus Christ more and more and in life's challenges we might lean upon him more and more. And I thank you, Father, that if we heard the testimonies of men and women and young people here in this room this evening, we would hear testimonies of how individuals, one after another, have seen the hand of God at work in their lives. Thank you that this is the case.*

*Grant us grace and faith to lean in all of our challenges upon the Lord Jesus Christ and give us patience so that when we look back we will indeed be able to see your good hand has been at work in each one of our lives. Bless us to this end we do pray in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*

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<sup>29</sup> Jim Towey, "Why I'll Miss President Bush," *Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 2008, <<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122611181065310615.html>>, accessed December 8, 2008.