

David: How to Sleep When Fear Surrounds You

Psalm 3

As we open to Psalm 3 we can note some details that set this Psalm apart as a very special Psalm to learn from:

- First, this is the first of the Psalms, called a Psalm, note the superscript says: A Psalm, and no other Psalm before this one says that.
- Secondly, this is the first Psalm attributed to David in the Psalter, note it says: A Psalm of David. There are 72 others after this one ascribed to David, but this is the first.
- Third, this is the first time we see the term Selah used in a Psalm. After three occurrences in Psalm 3, Selah shows up 68 more times in 38 other Psalms. This term is a pause for emphasis and reflection upon what has just been stated.
- And finally, this is the first inspired setting to any Psalm. Note the rest of the title to Psalm 3 that says: "A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son". Here we find a message from God to each of us on how to deal with fear. David flees for his life, pursued by his own son. What a fearful and sad time in life. What a rich time to learn from the God who is able to help us in time of need.

The Biblical setting for this Psalm is II Samuel 15:30-32, if you want to cross reference your Bible so that you always remember this lesson, note that reference by this Psalm or check and see if your Bible has a marginal note citing II Samuel 15.

Now turn to that setting in II Samuel 15:30-32 with me.

³⁰ So David went up by the Ascent of the *Mount of Olives*, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who *were* with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they went up. ³¹ Then *someone* told David, saying, "Ahithophel *is* among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O LORD, I pray, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!"

³² Now it happened when David had come to the top *of the mountain*, where he worshiped God—there was Hushai the Archite coming to meet him with his robe torn and dust on his head.

Pray

Remember how we got to Psalm 3, and II Samuel 15. We are examining the consequences to David's sin with Bathsheba. This event is one, there were many.

- David finds out that after 5 years of relative calm that under the surface trouble has been brewing. Amnon's raping his half-sister Tamar led her full-brother Absalom to murderously plot against, and then kill Amnon, David's oldest son. (That is a summary of II Samuel 13).
- Absalom flees to his mother's hometown on the Sea of Galilee, hides out and stays away a total of 5 years and then is allowed to come home to Jerusalem where he deceitfully appears caring about others, and steals the hearts of Israel by being the King that people can approach and can pour out upon him, their troubles. (That is a summary of II Samuel 14).
- Then Absalom moves, striking out in treason as a usurper to David's Throne and gets key allies to go with him. David flees Jerusalem for his life, and that is where we find him now walking barefooted and weeping as he walks. (That is a summary of II Samuel 15).

Psalm 3 is actually part of a pair of Psalms that are so full of life applications for us today. Even though David is fully restored in his relationship with God, David still has to learn about facing, and dealing with the pain and fears that come with personal attacks and verbal abuse. These lessons are captured by God for us in the words of **Psalms 3 and 63**.

- **Psalm 3 A Psalm of David when he fled from Absalom his son.** This is our focus in this lesson.
- **Psalm 63 A Psalm of David when he was in the wilderness of Judah.** Because v. 11 calls David "king" which means that he is most likely running from Absalom, as the events in II Samuel 15-19 describe.

Now, back to the Psalm 3, where David is on the run for his life. Before we read this Psalm, feel the emotions of this moment in David's life.

Absalom is seeking to kill him. After making it out of Jerusalem and into a defensible position, David is allowed to rest. God is teaching David and us to this day, that we can:

WORSHIP GOD— EVEN THROUGH TEARS

Imagine with me the men surrounding David that was described earlier in the account of II Samuel 15. What was Joab, the commander-in-chief of all David's armies, doing during this time?

Joab was undoubtedly working feverishly in his preparation to protect David. Guards were posted, and troops were stationed. Concentric rings of defenses were planned and

prepared so that the 600 seasoned soldiers who marched out with David were arrayed to face any army or enemy that might attack on this very vulnerable night.

Joab, worried that a frontal assault by Absalom's army could overwhelm his perimeter, was tense as he came back to camp. He considered taking David deeper into the wilderness, or finding some other spot. With his head spinning with all these thoughts, he greeted David. But as we'll see instead of being rattled or despondent:

David was Experiencing God

For the first time in hours Joab got to see David all alone and sensed something was completely different about him. Gone were the red, swollen eyes of the morning. Back were the clear, bright eyes he remembered from so many years of fighting alongside this giant of a man.

Instead of anger, self-pity, or fear: David was calm, peaceful, and actually joyous as he began to tell Joab what the Lord had done in his heart. Incredulous Joab smiled, shook his head, and hurried off to check the defensive positions one more time.

When Joab returned, he was struck with an even more amazing sight.

David was kneeling on the ground in front of a rock, an animal skin unrolled on top of the rock in front of him, and with pen and ink in hand he was busily writing—just like Joab remembered from those days in the Cave of Adullam.

Those cave times were over a dozen¹ years earlier when David wrote Psalms 57 and 142; and just like then, Joab remembered David's peace in those days of fleeing from King Saul when David wrote Psalms 17, 54, 35-36, 53, 16, and 39. And now his King was at it again!

Once finished, David held up the scroll to the fading light of the evening sky. He read it over, quietly sang the words to a tune he'd just made up, rolled it up, tied a cord about it, and tucked it into his cloak.

David had just written another song, and it was Psalm 3. And then he turned, unrolled his sleeping bag, laid down, and was soon sound asleep.

In the very presence of his enemies, in the middle of the camp that could be over run at any moment—David slept. And Joab marveled again at this man after God's own heart.

Where we decide to turn in our most desperate moments, and how we face what we never wanted or dreamed of happening, reveals what is really on the inside of us.

And what came out of David at this excruciating time was a song that was so good God

¹ David served as King in Hebron 7 years and now 5 more years after Bathsheba had passed.

forever recorded it in heaven.

Because it pleased the Lord, this song was better than any of today's "top of the charts," "top of the billboard," or even a "gold" or "platinum." Here is the exact record of the worship flowing from David that day. Follow along as I read:

Psalm 3

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

- ¹ *LORD, how they have increased who trouble me!
Many are they who rise up against me.*
- ² *Many are they who say of me,
"There is no help for him in God." Selah*
- ³ *But You, O LORD, are a shield for me,
My glory and the One who lifts up my head.*
- ⁴ *I cried to the LORD with my voice,
And He heard me from His holy hill. Selah*
- ⁵ *I lay down and slept;
I awoke, for the LORD sustained me.*
- ⁶ *I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people
Who have set themselves against me all around.*
- ⁷ *Arise, O LORD;
Save me, O my God!
For You have struck all my enemies on the cheekbone;
You have broken the teeth of the ungodly.*
- ⁸ *Salvation belongs to the LORD.
Your blessing is upon Your people. Selah*

The setting of this Psalm is part of God's Word. The line about fleeing from Absalom was written down to emphasize that this is a lesson we all need to learn:

When Fear Stalks us: God Says Fear NOT

Psalm 3 is set in the context of battles. If you trace through the verses you will find the setting to be about seven different indications of warfare and battlefields:

1. Verse 1: David was facing "foes" (NIV); "adversaries" (NASB).
2. Verse 3: David needed a "shield" (NKJV).
3. Verse 6: David saw them deployed like an army—"set against me" (NASB/NKJV); "drawn up against me" (NIV).
4. Verse 7: David called them "enemies" (NKJV).
5. Verse 7: David cried "Arise, O LORD" and used the actual formula from Numbers

10:35 for entering battle.

6. Verse 8: David spoke of armies; the word "people" in this verse can also be used for an army (NKJV).
7. Verse 8: David sought victory implied by the word "deliverance" (NIV), and deliverance from the Lord is a war cry.

Psalms 3 divides up the message God gave through David by the use of the word "*Selah*" at the end of verses 2, 4, and 8.

"*Selah*" means "lift up" and is a musical term for crescendo. It means "Boom it out," "Crank it up," or "Punctuate that with emphasis." In other words, David was saying: "Hey, look at THIS!"

And so when you see the word "*Selah*," God wants you to stop and ask yourself: What do I think of that?

In verse two David said: *Many are they who say of me, "There is no help for him in God."* *Selah*—**Boom! Stop and consider this. What do you think of that?**

So David paused and thought about it and found a lifetime of definite proof God cared for him.

In verse four David said: *I cried to the LORD with my voice, and He heard me from His holy hill.* *Selah*—**Boom! Stop and consider this. What do you think of that?**

So David reflected upon his steadfast hope and confident faith that God had rescued him in the past and would continue to do so.

In verse eight David said: *Salvation belongs to the LORD.* *Selah*—**Boom! Stop and consider this. What do you think of that?**

So David reflected upon the truth that God alone can save us from all our deepest troubles.

These uses of "*Selah*" make three very clear divisions which are the message points of this psalm.

FIRST, LIKE DAVID— WE WILL ALL FACE BATTLEFIELDS

(Psalm 3:1-2)

Every one of us will face a variety of battles daily. Think about the workplace, which is largely cut-throat these days. As more and more people compete for fewer and fewer good jobs, with less and less job security, enduring personal attacks and abuse are the norm.

Competition prompts the ungodly use of weapons such as lying, slander, gossip,

misrepresentation, bribes, stealing, falsification, and blame shifting—all to gain personal advancement. How many enemies does it take to make your life miserable? Just one who is persistent.

Our battlefield may not be the workplace, it may be our home. Even though you and I will never face an army led by our son seeking to destroy us and take our throne, we may someday face personal attacks, slander, and abuse through the hatred of our children. They may betray what we stand for and even seek to undermine our family unity, or discredit and destroy us as parents.

Some of us may have to deal with personal attacks, slander, or abuse from a husband or wife who has turned against us with no warning, deserted us, and seeks to harm or torment us by breaking the lasting promise made in marriage.

Still others may face parents who turn against them, abandon them, or are slanderous and abusive against their very own children. Life is hard; sin is horrible; and people seem more than willing to harm others easily. So that is why David said: "***Selah—Stop, look around, and think about your battle!***"

SECOND, LIKE DAVID— WE WILL ALL MAKE CHOICES

(Psalm 3:3-4)

David was such a godly example because he turned his attention away from his problems and focused on God. Suddenly, everything would then be put into proper perspective. David did this by holding tightly to a truth about God.

For example, because God had been a shield in the past for David, he could truly say: ... *You, O LORD, **are** a shield for me* ... (Psalm 3:3). He told the Lord, "You *are* my glory, the One I want to please, the One worth living for, praising, and honoring!"

David addressed God by the name "LORD," which is "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." The significance is that this is the name for the covenant-keeping God. In other words, He is "the God who keeps His Word."

So David could say, "Lord, You who keep your Word, You who brings to pass the promises You have made, be the shield around me You have promised to be, and have always been."

This exposed the spiritual secret that kept David strong even through his darkest hours: he knew and trusted the Lord. This trust had stayed constant with him long before his rule as King.

So he reminded himself that the Lord could be trusted and counted upon as "*the One who lifts up my head*" (Psalm 3:3)—just as in the days when the Amalekites plundered David's home, stole his property, and took his family hostage in 1 Samuel 30:1-6. What did David do then? He ... ***strengthened himself in the LORD his God*** (1 Samuel

30:6).

When David was in so much grief he couldn't even look up, he felt the gentle hand of his loving Lord under his chin, lifting his head. Only the Lord can encourage us to the depth needed to heal a broken heart. Only He can lift our heads when they are cast down. David knew that, sought that, wanted that—and experienced that. So now in this saddest of hours he declared God as being the One who encouraged and strengthened him.

Sin always beats us down; God always lifts us up. Others may ignore us; God always answers us. In other words, David said, "*Selah*—**Stop and look at this. Let that truth settle down on your heart.**" For God always lifts, and God always answers.

So think about the Lord who can be trusted rather than looking at all the problems. Anxiety is meditating on problems, but peace is believing His promises. The latter is what David chose.

THIRD, LIKE DAVID— WE ALL NEED SLEEP

(Psalm 3:5-8)

At the end of one of the most grievous days of his life, David rested in the Lord: *I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustained me* (Psalm 3:5). Sleep is a gift from God to help prepare us to start over again tomorrow—refreshed and renewed. It is also a picture of how much we need God, and even more, how we receive His salvation. Sleep should decimate any pride we have in our own power or might, and humble us to think how weak and needy we really are.

Have you ever done a Theology of Sleep? I don't mean the comical answer in Bible College when you overslept and they ask you where you were. Remember the answer?

You would say I was at bedside Baptist, listening to Dr. Sheets from the Church of the Inner Springs. And then your professor would tell you that you need to learn the discipline of mind over mattress.

We need to think deeply about why God designed sleep.

Sleep is not an accident; God is the designer and promoter of sleep. As believers who look at life through the lens of God's Word, we need to see sleep as having the very signature of God written across it. When God designs something, it is very special and has specific purposes He wants us to know about:

- Sleep means—work must stop.
- Sleep means—a day must end.
- Sleep means—our strength has been depleted and must be renewed.
- Sleep means—our minds have become weary and must be refreshed.
- Sleep means—our bodies have gotten exhausted and must be restored.

- Sleep means—we have limitations that must be faced.
- Sleep means—we have a dependence that must be acknowledged.
- Sleep means—we must deny self-sufficiency, as Psalm 121 tells us.

One of the clearest reasons for sleep is to remind us of this truth:

God is God and we are not. We are helpless, limited, and dependent.

But that is not all. Sleep can also be one of the most beautiful reminders of what true saving faith looks like. In a few hours when it is your time to sleep, think of what you will do.

You will end activities, conversations, and even your consciousness of life around you as you lay the full weight of your body on an object that can hold you up (usually a bed).

Then as you lay down you must choose to completely trust that something else other than yourself will hold you up while you are no longer able to take care of yourself. That is pure faith.

So sleep is when we relax fully because we no longer need to take care of ourselves.

We are held up by something else, so we give in to sleep.

As one author so beautifully states: "... throughout the night as you sleep, Someone else is sustaining you. This is a picture of what it's like to belong to Christ."²

As you crawl into your bed tonight, pause to remember as you entrust your body to be held securely through the night—lift your heart in worship to God who holds your soul in the sweet comfort of lying secure in His arms.

Tell the Lord you are also resting your life in Him. Whisper that you completely need Him, trust in His care, and ask Him to get rid of any pride you may have built up throughout the day.

That is the supreme peace David felt as he laid down in the presence of his enemies and slept. So should we, humbly, and in complete dependence upon our Lord.

Makes me think of a song: Great is Thy Faithfulness # 43

² C.J. Mahaney, *Humility: True Greatness*, p. 85.