



As I was preparing for today I thought about a challenging season in my life. I was 15 years old and came down with a very nasty flu; I was down for a week or so. About halfway through it all this very disturbing, loud, ringing started in both my ears. It's like when you go to a loud concert and you leave with that high pitched ringing, although mine wouldn't go away. After a few days I decided to see the doctor who I knew would prescribe me some medication to clear it up. After the exam he looks at me and says, "I'm sorry, there's nothing we can do. You have tinnitus of the ears, an inner ear condition, which cannot be operated on. You'll learn to live with it." Now understand, I was an indestructible teenager who overnight became a vulnerable, frightened, anxiety-ridden teenager who couldn't concentrate on conversations, TV, or music because the ringing was so severe and it was chronic, 24/7. It felt like I was given a life sentence in prison for a crime I didn't commit. The next day I noticed something wrong with my vision. Overnight, my eyesight went from 20/20 to blurry and I started seeing visual artifacts and anomalies. I got really scared and began to think I was losing my senses. This time specialists ran a series of tests and again, there was no treatment possible. They speculated the virus damaged my nervous system somehow and sent me out the door. I could only sleep a few hours a night, I'd wake up angry and discouraged but most of all I was afraid; I cried a lot. My struggles were increasing by the day. I didn't know the Lord but knew I needed a miracle. I was desperate for help, but I didn't know where to look.

We all have stories of struggle and can look back on them today with new perspective. But you know from experience that suffering can happen any moment, whether we deserve it or not. Some of you here today have just begun a season of great challenge and are searching for answers. So the question for us today is this, What do we do when struggles increase around us? Today's text will help us find an answer.

We're continuing our series called "Songs of Summer." Two weeks ago we looked at Psalm 1, which showed us that turning to God and obeying His word is the only way to a fruitful and happy life. Psalm 2 expanded that to a worldwide scale. Today in Psalm 3 we'll see what relying on God looks like in real life; when things seem to be at their worst.

First, some context. It's about 1,000 years before Christ. David is king of Israel; he's seen the nation grow and prosper. He made Jerusalem the capital city and built his palace there. No other

nation poses a threat and life seems to be good. But suddenly, the most dangerous enemy he's ever faced appears, threatening his rule and his life. What does he do when struggles increase all around?

**Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him" (verses 1–2)**

### David's Foes

I can relate to David because he's someone, like us, who seems to be an expert at having trouble find him and overwhelm him no matter what he does to avoid it. Plus, he's willing to voice his problems; he doesn't want to just internalize them. Can you relate?

David has "many foes," or hostile adversaries. Interestingly, these aren't foreign enemies; his troubles come from within. David had at least 20 children from 7 wives; probably more. One of his sons, Absalom, was an emerging leader, very handsome, but extremely self-centered. He kept an entourage of 50 guys who would run ahead of him as he travelled in his chariot. He used his remarkable charisma to charm people one by one, slowly stealing their loyalty away from David. He wanted to take the throne. When he had enough backers, he launched a rebellion, so sudden and fierce that David and his remaining followers barely escaped with their lives. After being on the run David takes a short rest before the final battle with Absalom's forces and he pours his heart out to God: "**Lord, how many are my foes!**"

Now, put yourself in David's shoes. You're not facing a lethal army but you are having some kind of spiritual or emotional struggle right now. How do you think David feels? Backed into a corner with escape? You know that feeling; you have a pre-occupying thought that rushes into your mind the moment you wake up and you can't see a way around it. How about betrayal? Someone you trust has hurt you and it's so hard to deal with. David is probably feeling guilty and regrets how he raised his son. Maybe you hurt someone, or you haven't lived up to someone's expectations for you, and that person can't let it go. David knows this is a real threat. Maybe you're struggling financially or your doctor just gave you tough news to handle. David is facing a massive, enemy force. You know it's not easy to share the Gospel; we face resistance to our message. Our culture and the world's system values self-reliance and hates the idea of submission and obedience to a sovereign God. There are many places where our

Christian brothers and sisters have to meet secretly or risk persecution and imprisonment. Those are just some of our many struggles.

These foes are saying something in verse 2. "It's hopeless! You can't save yourself and God can't save you either!" You've heard those voices! If we listen to them long enough we'll feel vulnerable, isolated, discouraged, and defeated.

Charles Spurgeon said, "It is the most bitter of all afflictions to be led to fear, that there is no help for us in God."

But guess what? David is modeling something critically important here; do you see it? The first thing we do when struggles increase is to honestly express our struggles to God. That's step one! It begins with crying out to God for help; voicing the tension you feel between God's promises for you and your present reality. That's why scholars call this a lament psalm; like David you're giving voice to your grief, you are causing God to remember you in your time of need.

If you haven't voiced your pain to God lately, or even prayed for that matter, it may be a bit awkward to start but you'll grow quickly. I have a two-year-old little firecracker named Jeremiah and he's been talking more for the last half-year or so. We're teaching him Spanish first and he started off with this all-purpose, go-to word for communicating most of his needs, "sha-stah." My wife is from Argentina where "sha-stah" means, "that's it" or "I'm finished," which he told us when he was done eating. But he added a variety of meanings on his own, such as "go away" "sit down" and "yes." He used this one word all the time and it drove me crazy! Last week, he was across the room and I looked at him and said, "I see you Jeremiah" and he smiled and ran to me as fast as he could and hugged me with a big smile and looking into my eyes he said, "I see Daddy."

It's like that as we learn to express ourselves to God in prayer. At first, it may seem like we only have one go-to phrase for Him: save me, help me. That's okay, that's real prayer from your heart, nothing to be embarrassed about! Keep talking to God and just like my son your prayer vocabulary will expand; and one day as you're praying you'll see God in a new way; listening to you, smiling, caring for you; you'll be able to say "I see you Daddy" and it will change you.

Our problem is that God is typically the last person we cry to. We'll do pity parties, complain to anyone who'll listen, or just stay angry over our circumstances. We're reluctant to bring our issues to God. Why? It's our pride. It's not easy to admit vulnerability; it humbles us to admit we are weak and in need of divine assistance. But that is exactly what we have to do as people of faith when struggles increase.

It's more than just talking at God or pure complaint; it's honestly admitting your troubles to your heavenly Father. Let me ask you: what burden do you need to admit? And what's holding you

back? Take that first step today and express your struggle to God in prayer. Don't miss the opportunity.

Now, something remarkable happens after you lament like this. You've now shifted your focus back to God and you're seeing Him clearly once again.

### **God Protects and Sustains**

**But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory,  
the One who lifts my head high. I call out to the  
Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain  
(verses 3–4)**

The next thing we do when struggles increase is we change our perspective of struggle by focusing on God. David isn't anxious anymore because he realizes his circumstances don't control him; rather his circumstances fit within God's larger plans for him.

In verse 3 he says God is his shield. A soldier like David would strap a shield to his left arm, which is only useful if it deflects all attacks and is proven reliable over the course of the battle. God is much bigger than a warrior's shield; He provides supernatural protection all around you. He's reliable; He will never fail you; you can trust Him.

David says God is his "glory," meaning only God is our source of honor. We can't put that burden on anyone else, not our bosses at work or even our spouses or our children. Only God affirms your true dignity and worth because you are created in His image and He loves you. You're worth the life of a Son to Him. He's your glory.

David says God is, "the One who lifts his head high." Criticism discourages us, conflict upsets us, and sin beats us down. But God always lifts us back up. We can expect that, even if we don't see it right away. Just wait for His timing, because in verse 3 He promises to lift you back up again. David is changing his perspective on struggle by focusing on God.

Pastor and theologian James Boice said when we pray, focusing on God, it's like "learning to play the violin with the virtuosos." A beginning violin student will buy concerto music and do his best to play along, squeaking and squealing all the while. As time passes, the student sounds more and more like a natural part of the orchestra until one day, he notices how his part is seamlessly swept up in the larger piece of the master composer.

It's like that with your prayers. At first, you're only noticing your own squeaky sounds, your prayers of struggle and need. But as you focus on God, your prayers change to statements of praise and confidence about who He is. You realize that God is the divine composer and your prayers get seamlessly swept up into His larger piece; the goal of which is simply to glorify Himself to everyone. And you realize your life is playing out just according

to His plan. You change your perspective of struggle by focusing on God.

In verse 4 David shows us another remarkable aspect of God. God answers prayer. He calls to God, and God responds. Even more amazing is the fact that God isn't random; He doesn't answer some of your prayers while ignoring others. God consistently answers prayer.

God responds from His "holy mountain," David says. That sounds odd to us but to the Israelites, God's glorious presence would appear over the ark, which was a sacred box that contained a copy of the Law of Moses, God's covenant with Israel. In David's time, the ark was kept in Jerusalem, also known as God's holy mountain. For God to answer from His mountain means that when you pray you can be assured He will answer according to the promises He's already made in His word.

You can't truly focus on God or know His promises unless you're reading the Bible. It's the only place where He's revealed these things. Don't risk making a caricature of God in your mind. Make time in your schedule and commit to regularly praying and studying God's word. Imagine what it would look like if you grew in your knowledge of and confidence in Him. Read and pray this psalm, as well as the others we're going through. Better yet, join a community and do that with others too. If you do, you'll discover an abundance of rich promises that God has already made to you. Here's just a few:

*"And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus."* Philippians 4:19

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."* Ephesians 1:3

*"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* 2 Corinthians 12:9

First, God will supply all your needs in this world. This includes material needs; not your wants, your needs. Second, you already have every spiritual blessing you will ever need in Jesus Christ; there's nothing more you can earn. Third, you have God's grace to make it through any struggle. Sometimes you don't need your struggles removed as much as you need God's grace to make it through them.

Please note: God is not obligated to do as we ask; He's sovereign. Sometimes He'll say "no," or "wait," or He'll do far more than we asked. No matter what, it will be the perfect response to our need because He's our shield, our glory, and He lifts us up. We change our perspective on struggle by focusing on God.

### **Our Confidence is in God**

**I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side (verses 5–6).**

Can you see what's happening? By articulating the tension in his soul David gains new insight about God and makes bold assertions about his future. Our confidence about the future is based not on our circumstances or our emotions, but on God's promises.

David talks about how he can sleep and wake up peacefully, without anxiety, even though grave danger is close. Isn't that a beautiful picture of someone so trusting in God that he can rest deeply? It's the confidence that grows with each new morning; waking up knowing that the events of your day are already in God's hands.

Remember story of the 12 spies? Moses led Israel to the edge of the land God promised them. He sent 12 spies into Canaan to scout out the people and the land. Ten of them were overwhelmed by what they saw and said, "We can't attack; they're giant people! We're like grasshoppers compared to them!" The other two, Caleb and Joshua, said, "We should go take the land, we certainly can do it!" What was the difference? Both groups saw the same thing, but ten looked at the giants and forgot about God; the other two kept their eyes on God, the real giant. Compared to Him, the giants they saw actually seemed quite small.

It's like that when we focus on how faithful God is to us. Our struggles, even thousands on every side as David says in verse 6, will seem more than manageable because our confidence about the future is based on God's promises, not on our circumstance or our emotion. God says in Jeremiah 29:11, *"I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* What a powerful promise!

### **From the Lord Comes Deliverance**

Finally, we come to the most fearless words of this psalm in verse 7 and 8.

**Arise, Lord! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.**

Can you see David's progression? He started off overwhelmed but poured out his struggles in prayer. Then he changed his perspective by focusing on God. Now David confidently makes his petition believing that God will go ahead of Him in the struggle against his foes.

In verse 7 David is quoting Moses. As the Israelites journeyed to the Promised Land, after resting they only moved ahead when the glorious presence of God, which appeared as a pillar of cloud that rested over the ark, would lift up and go ahead of them. At that time Moses would say in Numbers 10:35: *"Rise up, O Lord! And let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You."*

It was a battle cry knowing that the Lord is out in front, fighting your foes. That's also what David had in mind when he said, "strike my enemies on the jaw and break their teeth!" Our confidence, and David's, is that God will render our foes and our struggles unable to stop us from carrying out our calling as faithful disciples of Christ. That battle is already won. It doesn't mean God will give us an easy life, but rather a rich life of faith where we depend daily on His grace.

So what happened to David after he prayed this Psalm? You can get the details in 2 Samuel 15-19, but his army rallied and faced the enemy in an epic battle at the forest of Ephraim where 20,000 men were killed including Absalom, which broke David's heart. The rebellion was over. God proved Himself faithful.

So the question we originally asked was, What do we do when struggles increase?

Because God has secured our future, we keep hope during the struggles of today.

We all have our foes, our struggles, which tempt us to doubt God and even threaten us. But there are ultimate foes that none of us, even on our best day, can overcome—sin, death, and the power of Satan. Sin has separated us from God, eternal death is the consequence of our sin, and Satan is our ultimate enemy. We can't defeat these foes; they're beyond us! But, there's someone who already defeated them for us—Jesus Christ. That's good news!

We have the means to a restored relationship with God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. His life, crucifixion, and resurrection have already atoned for all our sins, already made us righteous in God's eyes, already forever broke the power of sin and the Devil, and overcome death. That's the Gospel!

You can only accept this offer of salvation through faith, as a gift; it has nothing to do with you earning favor with God or working really hard at being a dutiful, religious person. Faith goes beyond just the cognitive acceptance of the historical facts of Jesus' life,

beyond memorizing information and creeds. It implies an unyielding confidence that Jesus Christ, and nothing else, has fully atoned your sin on the cross.

If Jesus has already gone ahead of you and saved you from your greatest foes and given you salvation, why should you be so fearful of the lesser, smaller, struggles and cares of your life, no matter how scary looking they are? Like David, you should say confidently in verse 8, "***From the Lord comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people.***"

In the psalms, blessing conveys the idea of happiness. The final piece of this psalm is the truth that we carry happiness and joy because we are confident that God will listen to us, answer our prayer, protect us, and ultimately save us. Because God has secured our future, we keep hope during the struggles of today.

Circling back to my opening story; I was grieving for a good year before I thought, "at least I'm alive, I'll continue on and hope that things get better." Years later I met the Lord and He dealt with the fear and anger that consumed me for years. But the ringing and vision issues continued. So I prayed earnestly for healing, but nothing changed; in fact it's happening right now as I talk. But one day I was just talking to God about it and said, "God, why haven't you healed me yet?" And I didn't hear an audible voice but I sensed God was saying, "Lee, you are forgiven and free forever." I realized at that moment of struggle that what I need most in life every day is the hope of Jesus Christ. God uses this ongoing issue so that I'll rely on His grace to make it through each day, and so that I'll keep the hope in my heart that one day when I get to heaven, I'll be fully healed.

Life never goes according to your expectation, but because God has secured our future, we keep hope during the struggles of today.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

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