



Much of the distress in my life was brought on by my selfish actions, but nothing could have prepared me for the distress of parenting. Becoming a parent should be a joyful experience, but for Charity and me it was the most painful experience of our lives. Just like any other couple we went to the hospital wide-eyed when Charity's contractions increased. Everything was going as planned until the nurse broke Charity's water and said: "uh oh." We were going to be first-time parents, but I'm smart enough to know those aren't words you want to hear in the delivery room! We quickly found out our precious baby Sophie had pooped too soon.

We were assured the doctors had it under control, but as Sophie was nearly out I noticed about six other nurses entering the room through the back door and I had an uneasy feeling. Right when she came out, they took her to a small area where they worked on her for about 20-30 minutes and like a flash of lightning I was heading down the hall to the NICU unit. The doctor assured me she would be there for only 2-3 hours, which turned into 2-3 days which turned into almost a week. Nothing prepared us for leaving the hospital empty-handed and leaving our daughter there.

Every three hours we committed to going to the hospital to feed Sophie. I watched how strong my wife was during those days and was in awe at the will of a mother. I didn't realize how deep the pain of my soul had gone until I drove through Starbucks on the way to see my daughter and the barista asked a normal question: "Good morning, how are you today?" The words brought tears to my eyes as I quickly lied and said "great." Sophie was finally released, but the encounter radically changed my reliance on God.

When you think back on your life what has shaped you most into the person you are today? When you think everything you've encountered, have those situations pulled you closer to God or driven a wedge in your relationship with Him? All of us are bound to face painful life situations, but our response to those today shapes our response to those in the future.

Open your Bible to Psalm 3. We're just a few weeks into our Songs of Summer series looking at the first nine Psalms. Many people have referred to the Psalms as the heart of the Bible, which makes sense given their location. The Psalms have also been referred to as God's prayer book and have been a place of refuge for hurting hearts for generations.

When I first saw the title of Psalm 3 I was kind of bummed I was preaching on the lamenting Psalm. The more I studied this Psalm the clearer it became this Psalm reflects the reality of our daily lives and the pain we feel as humans. David recorded the distress of his soul and his cries to God to help us learn how to trust in God during difficult times.

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)

How Many are My Foes

David clearly wants us to see how many are his foes; if he didn't he wouldn't use the word three times! We need to look back on David's life to see what caused him to flee from his son. Eleven years prior to David's flight from Jerusalem, a horrible situation actually started in 2 Samuel 13. Tamar, a daughter of David and sister of Absalom, was raped by her brother Amnon. Absalom consoled his sister but encouraged her to keep quiet about the matter and not tell anyone. For two years Absalom plotted how to get revenge on his brother and finally killed him at a banquet.

Absalom, knowing the distress he caused his father, fled to a foreign city where he lived for three years. While he was separated from his family, someone interceded and pleaded with king David to allow Absalom to return, and David finally consented. Absalom returned to Jerusalem but didn't see the face of his father for over two years! Finally they were reunited and for the next four years Absalom methodically devised another plan infinitely worse than his first plan of killing his brother. This devious plan would involve winning the hearts of the people, throwing a celebration in his name, and eventually naming himself king of Israel. Unfortunately the plan worked and because of David's poor parenting decisions, David was leaving Jerusalem while his son slept with his concubines.

During his flight, Israelites lined the street to see if the rumors of the king were true; hearts were heavy as David fled from his son. We don't know how many people were against David but we do know some of David's most trusted men stayed in the city with Absalom. No wonder David felt like everyone was against him! No wonder he wrote about so many people being against him. You may feel unable to relate to David's situation but if you call yourself a follower of Christ you have enemies seen and unseen. Don't believe me? How do you handle the words of Jesus

in Matthew 10:22 when he tells His disciples everyone will hate them on account of Him?

Let's quickly look at the end of verse two. In the NIV we see people were saying of David: "God will not deliver him." In our language it might be better understood as "God helps those who help themselves;" this would be a more literal translation. People were encouraging David to throw off his trust in the Lord and take the situation into his own hands, which sounds similar to what we hear on a daily basis. Have you ever heard someone say these things: "Don't trust in God, he doesn't care about you" or "Stop praying and start doing" or "What makes you think God will help you out?"

Given the area we live in we're constantly going to have foes because of our faith in Christ. You will regularly hear people telling you to take the situation into your hands and abandon your trust in the Lord. There is a take away for all of us here. If you're a follower of Christ, I want to invite you to trust God with one more area of your life this morning. This may be a small area for you to test God or a large area you know God has been asking for. This could be an internal trust or an external trust. It could be an issue of the heart or a problem at work. It might be trusting God more with your marriage or with your singleness. It could mean releasing your life plan to your plans for lunch.

God is a Shield

Trusting God in this area may be a scary request, but look at the language David uses to describe God in this Psalm.

**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)**

David knows God is a shield about him. The language David uses here is extremely descriptive. Think about a soldier entering into battle with a shield in one hand and a sword in the other. The shield would be in front of him to protect him as he strikes his enemy. The word David uses to describe God is a shield around him. No soldier would be able to engage his enemy with a shield completely around him, but as David encounters this battle he is confident God will protect him.

This isn't the only place we see the word *shield* in the Bible. Shield is found 104 times in the NIV and 22 of those occurrences are in the Psalms with most of them referring to God as a shield. There's a passage in the New Testament that helps Christ-followers understand the unseen foes we're bound to encounter and how to stand strong against them. When Paul writes to the church of Ephesus in Ephesians 6:10–20, we see a clear example of the unseen spiritual battle we encounter on a daily basis as Christ-followers. Paul uses clear examples as he encourages the

believers in Ephesus to daily put on the full armor of God; not half the armor of God. He describes how to put on the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. He makes sure their feet will be ready with the Gospel of peace and they will have the shield of faith in their hand. We can't forget about the helmet of salvation or the sword of the Spirit. All these accessories are essential for the unseen battle we face as followers of Christ.

Imagine going into battle with no shoes and the pain it would cause your feet stepping on the jagged rocks. Battle has changed since Paul wrote this but think about how naked you would feel without a breastplate covering your vital organs. It would be ridiculous to enter battle without a sword in your hand; your enemy would laugh when you approached him. Paul knew these to be true and wanted to make sure we know there is an unseen battle we must be prepared for. Pay close attention: Paul never mentions anything to cover the warriors' back. God wants us to stand strong and not turn and run away, exposing our back.

Think about the battle attire Paul gives us in Ephesians 6 and turn back to Psalm 3. For a shield to be of any use it must be present; can we all agree with that? Some people believe in a God who created the world but at one point became a hands off creator. Their belief is that God created the universe but eventually decided to no longer intervene in the created realm. This belief, which we call deism, started around the Enlightenment movement of the seventeenth century. Using David's writings in Psalm 3:3–4 I want to present to you a creator God who is actively involved in the lives of His people. A God who radically cares so much about His people, He is willing to be a present shield in the most difficult times of their lives. A God who you can call out to in the most distressful situations of your life and He will hear you.

Earlier this year I was preaching at a camp in Southern California. One of my best friends in the world, Conrad, picked me up at the airport and took me up to the camp. Within minutes of getting into the car, Conrad shared with me about his current work situation. In his 20's Conrad went to school to operate heavy machinery but eventually became bored. A few years ago Conrad went to school for fire safety and was looking to be a fireman, but the job market is extremely competitive. I could tell Conrad was getting discouraged, applying for fireman positions when he was up against 5,000 other applicants.

Conrad was working a weekend job on an ambulance and his relationship with God was growing cold from missing church. Randomly he applied to work at the train yard and ended up landing a job there. One night he was looking on the railroad website and happened to apply to be a train conductor. People told him he would never get the job, and guess what: he got the job! If Conrad had been fine with missing church and neglecting his relationship with God, he would have never landed his dream

job of driving a train! Just like God answered David in his distress, God answered Conrad's request.

I'm not advocating this is always the outcome for a heartfelt cry to God in a difficult situation; there are times God may not answer your request. What I would like to invite you to do is add another take-away to our list. This morning if you're feeling the pressure of your enemy, will you stop relying on your own strength and change your view of God? If you view God as being far off and uninterested in your life, take a lesson from David's playbook about the nature of God. David exemplifies the point that when we're in distress we can trust in God.

When in Distress I can Trust in God

Let's be honest, it's tough to trust God in every situation we face. It's easier to take the advice of verse 2 and attempt the worldly wisdom of "God helps those who help themselves." Thankfully we're not here to model our lives after those we encounter in the world around us. As your view of God changes, you will become more and more comfortable knowing you can place your trust in God. You will be comfortable with placing your trust in God in the easy times, the hard times, and the distressing times.

Looking Back to Move Forward

David was able to lean on his past experiences so he could boldly write about God the way he does in this Psalm.

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.**

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 (verses 5–8)

Have you ever thought about the trust it requires to fall asleep? David brings this point to our attention here in verse 5. David knows God sustains him and therefore, despite his circumstances, he can lay down and sleep. In a recent survey, put out by the center for disease control, almost one-third of Americans are sleep deprived. When we sleep we're telling God "I trust you." I trust you, Lord, to protect the very hairs on my head while I sleep. I trust you, God, to protect my family from harm while I sleep. I trust you, God, to protect my home while I'm sleeping. I trust you, God, to keep the created universe in order, the planets in place, the soil in place and water where it belongs because I'm going to bed. When we sleep, it's a confession we're not in control but are placing our trust in God.

We haven't stopped to look at the progression of this Psalm yet but remember how many foes David has? He knows God is a

shield around him and God hears his prayers. David has the confidence in God to lay his head down to sleep and in verse 6 he, once again, expresses how much he trusts God! David knows no matter how bad things are back in Jerusalem, no matter how many people are pursuing him, no matter what his son does, David doesn't have to fear. Where do you think David found such confidence in God?

If you were to read through 1st and 2nd Samuel you would see where David found such confidence in God. As a young boy David was able to identify one area where he could trust God more and that was his job. David was a shepherd boy and he would lead sheep through the fields of Israel. Scripture tells us every now and then a wild animal would stalk his sheep, but David didn't like them so he shot them with a cannon. Ok, he didn't really do that. If a bear or lion came to attack one of his sheep, David would kill the wild animal with his bare hands to protect his livelihood. When David stood up to protect his helpless sheep from a lion, God protected him and he found strength in God.

As David grew, he continued placing his trust in God. You know this story: one afternoon as David was taking supplies to his brothers on the battlefield, he noticed a large man dishonoring the name of his God. David didn't take too kindly to people speaking negatively about his God, so he ran down the valley and killed the man. David's trust in God didn't stop after that situation. Once he killed the man (his name was Goliath the giant), King Saul took notice and invited David to live in the palace as one of the king's attendants. Frequently Saul would be tormented and he liked to throw spears at David. Beside becoming more agile, David learned to trust God more with his life.

The story of David's trust in God doesn't stop there; he trusted God when Saul drove him from the kingdom God promised him. He trusted God when he hid in caves from his oppressor and had to rely on God for his daily bread while living in the desert. When we read this Psalm, it can be easy to forget how often David was in distress and chose to place his trust in God. This isn't the first time David fled from his enemy, and every time God protected him.

There is another take-away here we would regret skimming over. The last lesson we're going to take away from David is: The first step in crisis is to praise God. You may think: "Neal, this is a great idea but how do I praise God in crisis?" Good question. I've actually been reading *God's Prayer Book* and learning how to pray the Psalms so I can praise God when crisis happens. Let's be honest, we're better at complaining than praising. The first couple of verses of this Psalm gave us context to what was going on in David's life. If most of us were to finish the Psalm, we would have shared how difficult the journey was and every amenity of palace life we missed. Thankfully David wrote the Psalm because

the last six verses serve as a reminder of what a powerful God we have.

Compare Psalm 3:2 and 3:8 with me. In the second verse people were saying God would not deliver David. David ends our lesson about the distress of his soul with a rebuttal to that statement. David clearly reminds us where deliverance comes from. Deliverance comes solely from the Lord. This week when you have the opportunity to take matters into your own hands, you can confidently know deliverance comes from the Lord. This week when you have difficulty parenting you can confidently know deliverance comes from the Lord when your kids move out and go to college! This week when you face a crisis in a relationship, you know the first step is to praise God because deliverance comes from the Lord.

I want to go over our take-aways once more with you and then close with the idea "there is no help for mankind apart from God." We saw how many foes David had, but he chose to trust in God. This week will you identify one area where you can trust more in God? We saw how David focused on God as his shield when the distress of his soul was great. This week will you start to change your view of God and know Him as trustworthy? Finally we just looked at how the first step to take in any crisis is to praise God. In his trouble David ran to God, knowing there is no help for any of us apart from Him.

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

© 2013 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No. 1386-3FC