

Psalms: The Language of Prayer Part One

Speaker: Tim Mackie

[EMSB theme fades in]

Hey everybody, I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, "Exploring My Strange Bible." I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last twenty years' worth of lectures and sermons, where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible, and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you, too. I also helped start this thing called BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at bibleproject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[EMSB theme fades out]

All right, well, this is going to be the first of a four-part series on the podcast. These are four teachings that I did a number of years ago, when I was a pastor at Door of Hope, on the book of Psalms. We took a whole summer and explored the book of Psalms as a church community, learning how to see, in these poems and prayers, a language that can teach us how to pray and how to talk to God.

I remember when I was a brand-new follower of Jesus, and I quickly fell in love with the book of Psalms. I just never read much poetry before, period. And just these poems and prayers—they were so intense, with people's emotions and anger and gratefulness towards God—the full range of emotions.

I remember taking my first class on the book of Psalms when I was doing my degree in biblical studies, and I was introduced to the significant role of the Psalms in Jewish history and culture. And how, for thousands of years now, observant Jews grow up memorizing most of the poems in the book of Psalms. And literally, they learn from these poems the language of prayer by which they talk to God. I still remember realizing for the first time that, [at] multiple points in Jesus's own life and teaching, he used the language of the Psalms to express his own thoughts. And he models for us what it means to use the Psalms as the language of our own prayers.

I also remember another significant influence. The first pastor that I ever heard explore and teach the book of Psalms in this way was through—actually, a recording—a podcast. It was actually CDs back then—of sermons by Timothy Keller, a pastor in New York. And he took this seriously and tried to teach his congregation how to pray the language of the Psalms in our own prayers. And so his teachings on the Psalms have made a big impact on me.

So there you go. I *love* the book of Psalms. I think it's absolutely incredible. And these four teachings represent, really, the first teachings I ever did on the book of Psalms and how to guide people, not just into understanding them, but how to adopt these poems into our own language of prayer. They teach us how to pray.

So this first teaching is based on Psalm 3. It's about learning how to pray when we're in the midst of great fear and anxiety in our lives, and how Psalm 3 can help us learn how to do that. So there you go. Hope this is helpful. Let's dive in.

[Musical Break (3:34—3:40)]

One of the things that we're going to focus on, and that we talk about in the little introductory page, is that the Psalms, as they teach us the language of prayer, they give “pride of place” to our emotions—the importance of our emotions—in our prayer life. And what's interesting is: I think many of us—we grew up—if you did or didn't grow up around Christianity, or church, or whatever, it doesn't really matter—most of us grew up in one of two kinds of settings, when it comes to our emotions, based on our temperament, or our family of origins, or whatever.

Some of us grew up around settings where what you do with your emotions is “stuff” them. That's what you do—right?—you just deny that they're even there. And so if there's a tense moment at home, or with other people, what you do is *not* talk openly about it, or release those emotions that are stirring. You just stuff it deep down—you deny it—yeah? And you just are quiet. You leave the situation or whatever. Some of us were raised, and we respond to our emotions in that way.

The flip side of that, of course—so that would be, like, an example of: that was, kind of, my family and what I grew up in. The flip side would be like the family my wife grew up in. And so in her house, like, the dinner table was like where the volume's at “eleven.” And that's just, kind of, the way they—and so, it's just like everything's “out there,” and if something tense comes up, if there's conflict, volume goes up and then—but they're hugging and crying afterward, and loving on each other. And that's just how they, just, dealt with it, and moved right towards it.

But often in those settings, in those types of temperaments and families, it's about giving *full vent* to your emotions so that you end up—your emotions end up in the driver's seat—and you end up saying and doing things that you have to say you're sorry for later [Tim laughs], right? And so there you go. Those are the two spectrums, two ends of the spectrum. Most of us have, kind of, grown up or been around—have temperaments on one or two of the ends of those.

The Psalms do neither—the Psalms do neither. The Psalms teach us, kind of, a “middle way” about expressing our emotions. The Psalms teach us to give “pride of place” to our emotions in our prayer lives. But they teach us neither to deny and “stuff” our emotions, but neither to let them overtake us in ways that we lose control. The Psalms teach us to *pray through* our emotions, in the presence of God.

And this is about a reflective, intentional processing before God—about understanding the source of my emotions, about sorting through them: the cause and effect, how they relate to my view of God, myself, and other people—and you just pour out the whole mess in God's presence. That's prayer. That's biblical prayer.

And so what we're going to see tonight: we're going to, in different weeks, highlight different prayers that are generated out of different, very different emotional experiences. There's *every* type of experience and prayer you can imagine in this collection of 150 prayers and songs.

And so tonight, what we're going to explore in Psalm 3—you may have already, kind of, picked it up—is: what does it mean to pray through our fears. To pray through our fears and our anxieties—not “stuff” them and deny them. But yet, not let them take us over. But to pray through them in the presence of God, and to process our fears before him.

Fear is one of those feelings. Some of our good fear is actually one of the most primal, like, primary human emotions. And you can see just—I mean, it didn't probably take very long for any of you to pick up—this is a Psalm of David, generated out of a life experience that he had—we'll talk about that more. And it's very clear that he's terrified.

The first thing he does in the prayer is draw attention to all the things that he's totally freaked out about. There's a whole bunch of people, and they want to kill him. That's a pretty decent reason for being afraid. And there's something about fear—it's the most primary human emotion, not just because it comes up in circumstances where we're out of control or in danger. It's actually, I think, one of the first emotions we experience as human beings, period.

So I realized—I'm not sure if I've said this—I don't think I've said this in this setting or not—so some of you know this and some of you don't. But somewhere, in the next four weeks, I'm going to disappear off the map for about a week and a half or so. And that's

because a *human* is going to emerge out of my wife, somewhere in the next [Tim laughs]—like, a new human that’s going to . . .

So I have no categories for this. I’ve been through it once, and I still really don’t have categories for what happened, and what’s going to happen again. [Tim laughs] It was just so crazy. You’re like, “This is how it works? This is crazy. So crazy.” So anyway—so somewhere in the next month here, our second son is going to come into the world, and we’re super excited to meet him.

But I’ve been doing a lot of reflecting, just, of course, as we’re preparing. And you know, she’s over, now, eight months pregnant. So this is the point where you can fully make out, like, the elbow and the foot, you know—pressing through the belly, and this kind of thing. And you’re just, like: that’s like an alien, or something [Tim laughs]—it’s a little crazy.

But so I’ve just been reflecting on what is—what’s it like for him right now? He’s fully there, you know—cause once he’s on the outside, he’s aware and so on. So that’s all going on inside too. He’s a little human being who’s aware of his surroundings right now. And what are those surroundings like?

So obviously it’s very, very close, you know, and tied in. It’s very warm. He’s surrounded by these very soft walls—right?—of the womb. And it’s like bath water. It’s very comfortable. It’s dark. He can sleep whenever he wants, or whatever. He always seems to wake up and jump around about 10 p.m. every day—not sure what that—that doesn’t bode well for us [Tim laughs] anyway, for sleeping. And he has this constant supply of food, just pumped right into his belly.

And you’re just going, “Man, that’s a *setup* right there” [Tim laughs]—you know what I’m saying? Who can imagine anything better, actually? You know, it’s just going to go downhill for him—and it is going to go downhill for him. Because somewhere in the next month—I don’t know when—I’m going to disappear. And that’s because his little world starts collapsing, right?

The walls that were soft and blocked all the noise are going to get very tight around him, start to squeeze him—probably very, very uncomfortable. *Why is this happening?* He’s going to be pushed out, very slowly, over a long period of time. But then in the space of just a little while, he’s going to, very quickly, come out into this world.

And just imagine, like, what’s happening there—you know what I’m saying? *Light*—like there’s going to, you know—there’s going to have to, his throat’s going to have to be cleared, and he’s going to fill his lungs with very, what will seem like, a very cold, strange substance that we call “air,” or whatever.

So maybe he's seen his own hands, but now there's going to be these huge, big hands handling him, and so—you know what I'm saying? And what's his first response going to be? *Cry*. And is this his cry of, like, reflective, [With a serious tone] "What is happening to me right now?" [Tim laughs] You know what I'm saying? No, it's a primal cry of fear—of fear.

The first emotion that every single one of us experiences in our first life experience is a cry of fear. The unknown: *What's happening? Am I safe? I don't like this. Danger. Weird stuff's happening to me. I'm not in control.* It's the very first emotion that we experience. And I suppose, depending on how your life has gone, it could be the last emotion that you experience before your life ends, and dotted in between, of course, pretty much all the way.

And so this is primary. If I'm a follower of Jesus, and if a part of following and knowing him is cultivating a personal connection to him and learning the language of prayer, we *have* to learn how to pray through our fears. Not deny them and "stuff" them, because they'll destroy you, but not give rein to them and just let them take over your life, because that will destroy you in a different way. We have to learn how to face them and pray through them.

And that's precisely what David is doing in Psalm 3. So what David—what we're going to do is we're going to look through this story, both the story and then how David processes through this experience. And this is a model of prayer for us, a model of processing our fears.

So let's, kind of—look at Psalm 3 with me, real quick. Just one thing to clarify. So likely in your Bible, you have a heading that says: Psalm 3, or 4, or 10, or 47, or something. And so that's a heading in your Bible to let you know the number. Some of you might have a little summary that says, like, "A prayer of praise," or "thanksgiving," or something like that. And if that's *not* in italics, most likely that's not an original part of the poem. That's a heading that the Bible translators have put there for you to help you get the gist of the psalm pretty quickly.

But then you're going to get this information that says, like here, "A psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom." That *is* an original part of the poem and of the psalm. And so you're going to find this many different times. There's about seventy prayers connected to David in the 150 in here. And of those, about two dozen, there's little notes about stories—the story where this prayer emerged out of.

And so it really will pay off, as you're going through the ninety days, to create some time to stop when you see that, and to find the cross-reference or whatever, and go read that story in David's life, in the books of Samuel, first or second. Because what that does is

that illuminates so much of the background of why David would say the things that he's saying here. And that's what we're going to see here today.

And so we're told this is a psalm of David "when he fled from his son." Essentially what happened is—this was, kind of, during the ending of David's career—and his son essentially formed a resistance army and staged a coup—a successful coup—against his father.

And so this whole story—it's in Second Samuel, chapter 15 and following—this whole story takes place—of how David has to flee his own house, the city he established as the capital, and he's running into the hills with a few hundred people. And we're told he has an army of 12,000 foot soldiers chasing him through the foothills. And you're just like, "That's a bad day. That's a really, really bad day."

And you can just imagine the fear and the unknown that he's experiencing—which is clearly how he begins the poem. He prays through his fear by first identifying the source of his fear. Again, we're going to see this as a model for prayer. The first thing he does is bring his fear to God's attention, and the source of his fear.

And what does he say? Right at the beginning here, he says, "Lord"—and remember when you see "Lord" in all capital letters, that means the divine, personal name of God in Hebrew. It means "Yahweh." So he says, "Yahweh, how *many* are my foes? How *many* rise up against me? *Many* are saying of me, 'God will not deliver him'"—or some of your translations have, "There's no salvation for him in God."

Now just look at the repeated words here. What's freaking him out the most right now? What does he say three times over? How *many* people there are—there's 12,000 soldiers on his heels, right? He's clearly—he's identifying the source of his fear. It's kind of—again, this is the model for prayer. We're watching him as an example. He identifies the source: *What is wrong with me? Where's my fear coming from? Oh—12,000 people who want to kill me.* Yeah, so that's a pretty good reason to be afraid. There's a very clear, physical, identifiable source of fear, right? His life is in danger: *many, many, many . . .*

But there's two levels, or two—because fear is two-sided here. Right? It's a clear physical threat: *12,000 soldiers*. But there's another layer to it, and it's in their propaganda. It's in the propaganda that Absalom and this army is spreading about David. And what are his enemies saying? They're saying, "God's through with David." In other words, what they are saying is not that they don't believe in God. The enemies are not saying they don't think God delivers people in general. What they're saying is "God is through with David." There is no more favor, or salvation, for David left in God anymore.

And this is a *very* different kind of attack. This is not a physical attack on his life. This is an attack on David's identity, and on David's sense of his very self and significance and his status. And so you have to—again, this is going to happen over and over again. It will really pay to just go back and read through the life of David as you go through and read the book of Psalms.

So you have to remember: where did David come from? How did he arrive as a king [who] could even have such status that he had to be run out of town and rejected, and so on? And so some of you may remember the story. It's one of the more well-known stories in the Bible. He was a no-name shepherd boy. That's what he was—yeah? Kind of, the "runt of the litter."

And one of the most important prophets of Israel shows up at his dad's house and is like, "You know, Yahweh's told me that one of the great kings of Israel is going to emerge out of your house." And David's dad, Jesse, is like, "Oh yeah—I know, I know. It's the firstborn." It says, "he was ruddy"—his first son was "ruddy." You know what I'm saying? Who says that anymore? *Ruddy, ruddy*. Which just means he was well-built and really attractive.

And what is God's response to the well-built, attractive son? "Yeah, sorry, not so much that guy." And so he goes all through the sons of Jesse, and so he's like, "Is there not any more?" And they're like, "Well, I have this little *runt*. He's, like, out in the field watching the sheep." And he's like, "Yeah, that guy"—right?—"yeah, that guy."

And so that's the story of David, right? Just out of sheer grace and generosity, God elevated him to the most—the highest status in the land, right? And he's a "golden boy" in the first part of his career. God protects him from Saul and blesses him. He comes into the kingship—everything's going great. Everything's great. And there's this key moment, this turning moment, in the life of David where you can see in his heart, he begins to take all of these gifts that God has given him—his status, the big family that he has—and something turns in his heart.

He begins to take them for granted. And he sees those gifts as something, now, that he can use towards his self-advantage, instead of using them as a chance to serve the people that he's over. And so this takes the form of him seeing a woman that he wants. He forces himself on her. He gets her pregnant, and then he conspires to kill her husband, which he does successfully.

And from that moment in the David story, his whole world just falls apart. His family falls apart, his kingdom falls apart, his life falls apart. And so what Absalom and the enemies are capitalizing on here—the propaganda they're spreading—is that God is through with David. He *was* God's chosen king, but not anymore. *Look at him now. He's fleeing. Look at this exalted king—he's fleeing for his life from his own son into the woods.*

And so what's being threatened here is not his life—although that is happening too. It's his identity: *who is David now, if he's not a successful king and father? And he's none of those things anymore.* See, that's what they're calling into question. And I just want to camp out here because I think this is really—he begins praying through his fear by identifying the *source* of his fears. And there's a very clear source: there's people chasing him who want to kill him. But then there's this thing: all of a sudden, his very sense of his own value and identity and status is in danger, and wrapped up here.

And there's two layers of this, and I want to camp out on this, because I think this is really an important process of praying through our fears. One of the, I think, most significant, kind of, steps forward in psychology—the study of psychology, in the twentieth century—was in the study of fear, and learning that human fear is actually a really, a really complex experience, and there are different sources and kinds of human fear, and so on.

And the most common one, the kind of distinction and language to talk about fear was—actually, it was given to us by a guy whose name is Rollo, which is just awesome in and of itself, that his name's Rollo, right? But his name's Rollo May—you guys heard of Rollo May before? If you took anything about psychology at school or anything, you will have learned about Rollo May.

[Tim refers to visual] First of all, you'll notice that he—1967 was his book—look at him, you know what I'm saying? He's just— isn't he the part, yeah?—of like, the “1960s psychologist”? He's missing a beard, but that's—they usually wore turtlenecks. Anyhow, so this is Rollo May. He is responsible for the concept and the word of “anxiety,” that's just such a household word for us now, in ways of talking. But he was the one who pioneered research on “anxiety,” and that it's different from other types of fear.

And he had a whole bunch of ideas that, I think, were not helpful, but he had a couple that I think were really important and were helpful. And it's this: he said, “Fear is an instinctive response to a very clear and present danger.” So fear is about: when there's an identifiable source of danger or threat, and it's an instinct that turns on all your adrenal glands—right?—and floods your body with adrenaline, so that you get this burst of energy, this burst of clarity to respond and save your life.

So whatever—drunk driver. You're walking on Division, a drunk driver swerves onto the curb, headed right for you. Your glands are going to flood your body with adrenaline, and you're Superman, or Superwoman, right?—whatever, you know these stories, right? And so all of a sudden, there's this incredible burst of strength—you're able to grab someone and jump out of the way, or leap really far. These things—this is a very common story—so what happens with *fear*? And so Rollo May said this is a positive, constructive emotion because it saves your life when you're in danger.

But he said there's kinds of—different types of fear. The most common and complex one is what he called “anxiety.” And his definition of “anxiety” was both, in contrast to fear—fear is temporary. It's a flood of intensity, and energy and so on. Anxiety is very vague and diffuse. It's a feeling of dread, and of weakness, and fragility. It has no clear identifiable source. It's just this feeling—and what he interpreted essentially as “a dread of death,” and of how death ultimately, in his worldview, renders all of your life and relationships and accomplishments totally meaningless.

And not only that, he said: anxiety is about the wear and tear of what he called “1,000 little deaths” that we all die every year, and just the disappointments and failures and hardships that hit our life, and shatter our dreams.

And so he said, what's at stake with anxiety is not our physical well-being. It's our very sense of who we are—our identity—the idea that I'm a meaningful person, and my story has meaning. All of that gets called into question through this perpetual, ongoing, just sense of weakness and fragility. It's what he called “anxiety.”

And so, if fear is like a lightning storm that comes through and flashes, and so on, and then it's gone, anxiety is like the “June gloom” that we're headed into here, in Portland. [Tim laughs] You know? So like the three to four weeks of just perpetual gray drizzle of fifty-four degrees. And it just never seems to go away. And it's like, where—is there any one cloud in the sky? No, it's just: the whole thing's gray. You know? This is anxiety.

And I think this is a helpful kind of category for what David is getting at here. He has a clear, identifiable threat: “12,000 people want to kill me.” But the propaganda of his enemies is eating away at his very sense of himself. His status as king, his status as father—it's all falling apart now—and who is he? What meaning does his life have if he's not king? That's the whole way that his story took shape—who is he if he's not a king, if God has now abandoned him? It causes fear and anxiety—and when fear and anxiety collide, it can destroy a human being.

And so how does he pray through that—his very insightful identification of his fear. And so how does he pray through it in God's presence? He does it in the next few verses, and it's brilliant, and it's very powerful.

Look at verse 3. He says, “But you, Yahweh, you are a shield around me. You are my glory. You are the one who lifts my head high. I call out to Yahweh, and he answers me from his holy mountain.” You can see the tone shifted, right here. Something really profound just took place inside of this very fearful, anxious man.

And it has to do, first of all: you see, he moves his attention from his circumstances onto God and onto God's character. It's part of how he processes through: identify the source, but then he turns his, just, attention, laser-like, on his God. And he speaks of

God in these images here. And this is one of the challenging things about the Psalms is: they're full of metaphors and images. And we, kind of, just read them, and they sound like Bible-like images or whatever, and we move on.

And so—*no*. You've got to stop. This is poetry. You've got to read it slowly. And remember Psalm 1: it's about meditating, day and night, on the meaning. Why would David choose these three metaphors to describe God in *this* scenario right here? So let's look at them a little more closely.

Look what he says. He says, first of all, he says, "Yahweh, you are a shield. You're a shield around me." Now just stop and think about that for a second. If you—we typically think of an image of a shield, and we think "protection." A shield keeps bad things from happening to you. So, okay, yeah—what he's saying here is: you are going to protect me and rescue me out of this so that bad things won't happen to me.

But if you just stop and think about that—this is way, way more going on here. And just think about—I've never actually had to use a shield for anything. But if you intentionally strap on a shield as you begin your day, what is your assumption about how your day is going to go—you know what I'm saying? Is your assumption, "This shield is going to prevent horrible things from happening to me?" No, it's not why you put on a shield. Why do you put on a shield? Because you assume "horrible things are going to happen to me," right?

[Tim laughs] Or you're on your way to Mount Tabor—[Tim laughs] you know what I'm talking about? With the wooden staves and swords, and they're up there—[Tim laughs]. It was just, like, two weeks ago, I was walking up there, and they're, like, they're wearing capes, and there's this whole castle-and-knight scene, and so on, anyway. [Tim laughs] Great—they were filming each other. Anyway, I love those guys.

So, okay, so either: you're on the way to Mount Tabor—sorry, that was silly. I'm trying to deflect from the seriousness of it. This is actually, this is very—this is really profound. Why do you strap on a shield? A shield doesn't prevent bad things from happening to you. You put on a shield because you *know* bad things are coming. What a shield does is protect the most vital part of who you are from being totally annihilated *when* the bad things happen. Do you see the difference here?

So a shield—and look, it's especially—the shield he's describing—it's *around* him. So it's clearly—it's not describing a little "circle," here, for sword dueling, or something. He's talking about a big, massive thing that covers him. And so—what?—he assumes that things may get better; they're likely going to get a lot worse. He does, after all, have 12,000 people chasing after him, right?

So he assumes it's going to get worse, but yet he can sit and, in the same breath, say, "but you are a shield about me." In other words, Yahweh is not going to *prevent* bad things from happening, but Yahweh is going to be right there, *so close* to him, protecting the most *vital* part of who he is from being swept away in this horrible onslaught. So—and you're going to see here—he reckons with the fact that he could die. But yet he can still say, "Yahweh is my shield."

And so what this speaks to, as we pray through our fears, as we identify the source of our fears, I think for many of us—and this is true for me too—when hardship hits your life, or there's a season of confusion or tragedy, one of our basic assumptions that we go to is: this is a sign that God's abandoned me. This is a sign that God's no longer present with me.

And so you have to, as you pray through that, you have to dig underneath that and say, "Okay, what's my assumption there?" My assumption there is that God's role in my life is to keep bad things from happening to me, because if he really was good and he really was powerful, he would never let anything bad happen to me, so that I'm always content and happy.

And you're welcome to believe in that God. I would just urge you to not connect that God to anything to do with the Bible. Right? So really, and I actually, I would say, let's just make this quick and easy: just become an agnostic—or an atheist. So just, make the whole transition of "not being disappointed by God" much quicker. Because that God doesn't exist. And that's not the promise of this God. The promise is that when life in this broken world—broken by human sin, by the sin of other, more mysterious, dark powers that are at work—when horrible things happen, God's right there.

What he's saying is, essentially: this season of tragedy might be the closest that he's ever felt God's presence before. This tragedy might be what draws him closer to God than he's ever been before. And that's part of the paradox of suffering in the Scriptures. And the God of the Bible sometimes rescues his people out of very difficult situations, but sometimes he doesn't. Sometimes that's precisely the tool he's using to shape the hearts, and the minds, and the character of the people he loves so dearly.

And so this is very powerful, what he says. He begins here: "Whatever happens, Yahweh is a shield protecting the most vital part of who I am. I could die, but Yahweh is still my shield." And so what does it mean? What is the most important part of who he am—who he am? [Tim laughs]—who he is, that needs protecting? And that's the next two metaphors here. This is very powerful.

He says, "You are my shield; You are my glory." Just stop and think about that: "You are my glory." Why? First of all, what does that mean, and why would he need to say that? What does it mean to say something like that, as you pray through your fears? Now,

part of it has to do with the word “glory,” [it] might kind of trip some of us up. Because again, this is another kind of religious, “Bible-ese” kind of word that none of us really know what it means anymore.

And so this is a very important concept. It comes up all over the Bible. And of course, I’m going to teach you the Hebrew word, because that’s how I do things. So you see the word there [Tim refers to visual]—it’s *kavod*. Why don’t you say it with me: *kavod*, *kavod*. Here’s what’s interesting. *Kavod*: its most literal meaning is something that’s “heavy.” It’s heavy. In the book of Judges, there’s a king of Moab called Eglon, and he’s a horribly overweight man, and he’s called *kavod*, right? It’s *heavy*. It’s *heavy*.

But that image of “heaviness” gets used as an image, or a metaphor, for something that’s *significant* or *important* or *weighty*. So we say this in English: we say, “Oh, that’s so *heavy*. I’m feeling so *heavy*.” Or, “That’s a really *weighty* matter.” Do I grasp “the *gravity* of the situation”—we use this in English too. If something is “heavy,” it’s *kavod*. It’s important. It’s of status and significance.

And so to say that God has “glory,” or to “glorify God,” or “give him glory” means to—all of us—get together, and we say out loud: “God is the most significant, important thing that there is to know, and be aware of.” So it means “to glorify God.”

But humans can have glory too. David had *kavod* near the end of his life. We’re told—this is from First Chronicles—we’re told, “David, the son of Jesse, he was king over all Israel.” He gets restored to his role as king after this. “He ruled over Israel forty years. He died at a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth, and *kavod*.” *Kavod*.

So *kavod* is about your status. It’s about whatever it is in your status and position that gives you significance and importance. And so for David, obviously, from the rags-to-riches story, what defines him as who he was—his whole story was about the poor, no-name shepherd boy becoming this great king.

But see, now all of a sudden, he doesn’t have that *kavod* anymore, right? Any illusion that he was a successful father of a large family—yeah, that’s been shattered, you know what I’m saying? So Absalom actually murdered one of his other sons for raping his sister. I mean, his family’s completely fallen apart. He’s not a good father. He’s a successful nation-builder—well, yeah, not anymore. He’s a powerful king—yeah, clearly not anymore. At least he has his moral integrity as part of his status and honor—not anymore.

And so why would David have to come, at this low point in his life, and say in a new way, “You, Yahweh, you are my *kavod*—you were the thing that gives me significance, identity, and meaning, and purpose in life”? And it’s, clearly, he has to say this because something else has been his *kavod*—and you can just see it in the story of his life: his wealth, his power, his status, and significance. He was his own *kavod*—his role as king

and father. And he squandered it. He ran it—he tried to milk it for everything it was . . . and it leads up to a wrecked life that did not give him the *kavod* that he was made to experience, as a creature made in God’s image.

And so praying through his fears, he realizes that he has misplaced his *kavod*. He’s misplaced his *glory*. And because all of his “eggs” were in the “basket” of being the king, all of a sudden, once his kingship is called into question, he crumbles. Anxiety and fear—because who is he if he’s not a king?

And so as he recognizes God’s going to protect his vital—the most important thing about him—in the midst of this. And he says it strips—that hardship—strips the rest of his life away, and all he has left is to say, “Yahweh, you are the only thing that’s important and significant about me. The fact that your attention is towards me, your care is on me, that’s all I need to give me meaning and significance.” It’s a very powerful confession.

And so essentially what’s happened, you can see his anxiety is like a cloud of smoke that’s just a symptom of a fire burning. And that fire is his misplaced *kavod*. And so he prays through it, and he has to identify that misstep that he took, and restore God to be in the place of glory in his life. And it’s connected to what he says next here, “You’re my glory. You’re the one who lifts my head,” which means the same thing as it does in English, when we say “hold your head high.” It means: to be confident.

And so essentially he’s saying, “I don’t have any reason to be confident in myself anymore. So, I took what God gave me, and I ruined it and made horrible decisions.” And so he directs his attention away from himself: “*You* are what gives me significance and identity. You are the one through whom I can hold my head high, even though, by everything around me, it looks like I’m an utter failure. And everyone knows it, and everyone’s saying that I’m an utter failure. You are my glory. You hold my head high.”

And so as you process through—how could he even know something like that? So we might—again, your life’s in shambles around you—we might see that as a sign of God’s lack of favor, or that he’s angry at you, or something. And yes, David is working out the consequences of his stupid decisions, but he’s really confident that God is with him and *for* him in that moment. How can he know that?

Look at what he says next, verse 4. He says, “I called out to Yahweh. He answered me from his holy mountain.” I mean, he’s just, “I’m praying to you, and I know that you’re answering me.” I mean, he’s just super-confident. And you just go, “How can—he’s running for his life, first of all, and he’s totally, morally compromised. Failed father and king—how can he be so confident that Yahweh is answering him?”

It has nothing to do with him. It has to do with where Yahweh is answering from, and where’s that? He says, “his holy mountain,” or some of your translations might have “his

holy hill.” Do some of you have that—“holy hill”? What’s he talking about? Yeah, this is kind of strange. This is one of those things: “the holy hill; the mountain of Zion” comes up all over the book of Psalms.

He’s referring to the city of Jerusalem. And specifically, just a city that he built as Israel’s capital. And on the highest hill, in the city of Jerusalem, David set up what? He set up the very dwelling place of God: the tabernacle, where the big temple was later built.

And so essentially what he’s saying here is, he’s saying: “I’m out here in the woods—failure. You are my glory. You’re the one who gives me confidence. I’m praying to you, and I know that you answer me because you’re answering me from the temple, from the very hotspot of your presence in Jerusalem.”

Now, what is it that happens on a regular basis—this is all, kind of, background to the poem that you’ve got to bring out to get the significance of what he’s saying—what is it that happens in the temple, or in the courtyards of the temple, on a daily basis, weekly basis, monthly, yearly basis, that it would allow a very sinful, selfish man to look towards God, but know that he’s been forgiven and shown grace? What’s happening in the temple that can give him that confidence?

So that’s where the sacrifices were offered. That’s where animals were offered, as a substitute for people’s sins. So the animal dies in the place of the sinner, or the wrongdoer. The animal “bears the guilt” instead of the perpetrator. In essence, the death of that substitute “covers over” the failure and the sin of the one who’s praying and looking towards God, at the temple.

And so that’s precisely—what could possibly give a man like David—who’s squandered everything God gave him—right?—and has made horrible decisions—give him confidence that God is *for* him, that God would even stoop to be wanting to be his glory, yet once more. And he says, “because you’re answering me from the temple”—he’s looking towards the substitute that’s covered over his sin, that gives him confidence that Yahweh is for him and has forgiven him.

Don’t you wish this 3,000-year-old prayer—don’t you wish it was relevant—relevant to modern people, [Tim laughs] you know what I’m saying? Right? So we’re standing on the other side of the cross as we read this poem. David’s praying this prayer, looking towards Jerusalem—looking towards the substitute—and he sees that Yahweh will answer him and be gracious to him because of what happens in the temple.

You and I, on this side of the cross, this is something you’re going to have to do as you read through the Psalms. There’s a lot of language about “prayer” and “temple” and “sacrifice,” and you’ve got to, kind of, reframe it from this angle that we’re reading from. Because our conviction is that Jesus was the ultimate substitute, and that his life and

death and resurrection on our behalf covered over our sins as Jesus absorbed into himself what we deserve.

And in his resurrection, he both provides a covering and a source of new life and grace for those who would turn towards him, this other son of David, who was executed by the Romans near that holy hill. And so this allows us to pray through this prayer as followers of Jesus, but to go on exactly the same journey—which allows him to do what? Verse 5: he can finally get a good night's sleep.

He's identified the source of his anxiety, of his fear. He's aligned his priorities again. He's looked to the substitute who's done for him what he couldn't do for himself, and now he knows he rests in God's mercy and grace. So he says, "I lie down and sleep. I wake up again because it's Yahweh sustaining me." He's not going to engineer his future. He's not going to make how he feels about God or himself dependent on his plans turning out. It's just, you know—it's in Yahweh's hands.

And so look what he can say in verse 6. He says, "You know, even though tens of thousands might assail me on every side, I will not be afraid." And we read that, and we think, [With disbelief in his voice] "Honestly? Really?" You know what I mean [Tim laughs]—"10,000 people surrounding you; spear through your chest—you're not afraid?" But there you go. I mean, we're reading his prayer.

Apparently he's reached a place that many other—like the apostle Paul—is able to reach, who lived a very difficult, horrible life precisely *because* of his commitment to Jesus. And every ounce of that hardship and suffering, he could see as yet one more act of God's grace to make him *more* dependent on Jesus. And he died for it—he died for that commitment—who knows what went through his mind in that last moment. But David apparently is of the conviction that even if a spear goes through his chest and he doesn't wake up tomorrow morning, he's not afraid anymore, because he knows that Yahweh is his glory. That Yahweh's commitment to him—his love for him—is stronger than death.

And so it puts him in this place of perpetual peace—which doesn't cancel out his emotions. Look at verse 7. He says, "Arise, Yahweh. Deliver me, my God. Strike all my enemies on the jaw. Break the teeth of the wicked." And some of us are kind of like, [In a mocking tone] "Now, David" [Tim laughs]—you know?—"we mustn't speak like that about our enemies." Some of us are kind of bothered by this. You're going to come across this all over in the Psalms, where there's a clear enemy, and we're praying for justice to happen on our enemies.

And so what would you have him do? Would you rather he "stuff" his emotions and just totally deny the fact that there's *real* injustice that's taking place? Would you rather him just totally give "full vent" to it, like he did on one occasion in his life—and this is the

story of Nabal and Abigail. He's so ticked off that somebody dishonors him, he's like, "I'll have his head." It's this really—he's this violent, vengeful man. He could go that route. Which route should he take?

He takes neither. He prays through it. And don't be so *prude*, you know what I mean? Like, his emotions are raw. There are some things in this world worth being angry about—can I get an "amen"? Seriously. And so what are you supposed to do with that? Just act like it's not there? No, you *pray* through it. And so as a profound act of faith, he commits his enemies over to God's justice, and he asks God to take care of them.

And it bears itself out in the story. David didn't lift one finger to defeat Absalom. Absalom had an obsession with his long hair—he was a very vain man, we're told. He wanted to make a statue—he made a statue—of himself and his long hair. And so while he's actually in the middle of the battle, his hair gets caught in a tree—right?—and leaves him vulnerable for a second for somebody to throw a spear through his chest, right? So through this crazy series of events, Absalom meets his own doom. David didn't lift a finger.

And so, I mean, you could actually argue that it's David giving, just, "full vent," not letting it control him, but just venting and processing his emotions before God, which actually allowed him to cope with his anger and just hand it right over to God.

And that's what's happening in these prayers. God can take your anger—you know what I'm saying? You don't have to be afraid of it. But don't let it take you over—but you don't need to stuff it. You pray through it—which leads him, verse 8, to say this: "If deliverance is going to come from anywhere, it's not from me. It's from Yahweh. From Yahweh comes deliverance. May your blessing be on your people." Dude, doesn't this prayer rock? This is so powerful. This is so profound.

So I mean, this is going to land in so many different ways with us. But as we, kind of, move into our time of singing, and of prayer, and of quietness, as we recognize Jesus's presence here, I would just encourage you to think through: what would it look like for you to take this same journey?

How many of you have a very clear, identifiable source of fear in your life right now? It's a person. It's a situation. And what would it look like for you to identify that—to really dig to the root of what's freaking you out, and what you're so afraid of—and actually come through this experience of turning to God's character, turning those circumstances over to God, turning that enemy over to God to find peace?

How many of us know that gray cloud that's over our lives—right? And it's that sense of, like, "Where is my life going? What's happening? Nothing's working. Who am I? What am I about?" It's anxiety, that sense of dread. And some of us might need to do some

real soul-searching, because it could be that *that* anxiety and fear come from misplaced glory.

So none of us is the tribal chieftain of a small nation-state in the Middle East, okay? [Tim laughs] So obviously we don't have that problem to deal with. But we find our glory—which just means “status” and “significance”—we find it in all kinds of silly places, if we just had eyes to see.

We're trying to get our meaning and significance out of whatever it is—it's that relationship. You think that relationship is going to give you what you're looking for in life—finally make you validated and important. If I could just get that “step” in, kind of, my job search, or career. And other very, much more superficial things—about, we're trying to attain a certain “look,” or a certain edgy, ironic tone in all of your jokes, or whatever—you know what I mean?

Like it's just, we build our sense of who we are on the silliest things—and on the most meaningful, good things, too. And there will come a day, whether it's something like David's—as traumatic and horrible as David's—or whether it's simply our deathbed, where every person you built your sense of worth on won't be there. Or it may be the 1,000 “little deaths” that Rollo May spoke about—of disappointment and hardship—and see those as opportunities to *re-place* your glory in the *right* location. And some of us might need to pray that prayer tonight.

And so wherever Psalm 3 meets you—whether we need to confess about “misplaced glory,” we need to find hope that Yahweh might not prevent bad things from happening to me, but he will protect the most vital, important part of me from being annihilated in the storm—wherever you're at, Psalm 3 can say it to all of us, in all our different life circumstances. So let me close in a word of prayer, and let's just ask Jesus to speak to us in the time that we have left.

[EMSB theme fades in]

Well, there you go. That was Psalm 3—short, but so profound and powerful. You guys, thanks for listening to “Exploring My Strange Bible” podcast. We'll continue on in exploring the Psalms and the language of prayer in future episodes. So, thanks for listening.

[EMSB theme fades out]