

Anitta Tilly  
Preaching the Psalms  
DML 970.NA: Dr. David Emanuel

### Psalm 3: Steps to Freedom from an Offense

“Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” This could not be further from the truth. Our words carry authority. With our words we can bless or we can curse. From my experience words can be more painful than sticks and stones. Words land in our soul and often crush our identity, significance; our view of self, our worth and value.

A few years ago, I started leading a my very first adult small group in the church I worked at. Until then I was only involved in kids ministry. At that point I had worked super hard on my true identity versus identity found in performance, and anxiety relating to public speaking. But after the first class one of the participants came to me and said, “you were nervous.” And then she touched my hair and said, “you really need highlights.” This may seem like no big deal to you but those words landed in an insecure spot in my soul and I felt a bit offended. Often times kids hear things like, “you’ll never amount to anything” or “you’re so stupid, you’re the worst kid.” These words can hurt and influence a child’s future view of self and view of who God is, especially if those words came from the father. These words can land on the very being, the soul of that child.

Because of sin we all face offense. Words can be used to hurt others. Proverbs 18 says, “The tongue has the power of life and death.” Until we get to heaven, we will offend others. We all say things we regret. And when people say bad things about us we internalize the words, feel shame and anger. And words like “you were nervous” made me even more anxious, those words reinforced my false view of my value and significance, my false identity. Instead of dealing with the offense, we keep adding them to the secret place in my soul.

I will never forget how now almost 35 years ago I completely unintentionally offended a friend. We were both pregnant. She was due about 6 weeks before me, expecting her third child and I was pregnant with my first. I was feeling really sick and therefore lost weight in the first months. One day I asked her, “how much weight have you gained?” WRONG QUESTION! My friend got so offended by this because in her mind I was telling her that she was fat.

Sometimes there's a direct offense and sometimes it's unintentional. But because of sin we all will face offenses.

Today we will be looking at Psalm 3. Psalm 3 is considered an individual lament. More of the Psalms belong to the category of lament than in any other category. Laments typically include a complaint that the foe, the enemy, is too strong and the psalmist is too weak and God may seem absent. In Psalm 3 the complaint relates to spoken words and actions where the enemy is rising up against the psalmist, David.

**Read Psalm 3.**

O Lord, how *many* are my foes!  
*Many* are rising against me;

2  
*many* are saying of my soul,  
 "There is no salvation for him in God." **Selah**

3  
 But you, O Lord, are a shield about me,  
 my glory, and the lifter of my head.

4  
 I cried aloud to the Lord,  
 and he answered me from his holy hill. **Selah**

5  
 I lay down and slept;  
 I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.

6  
 I will not be afraid of many thousands of people  
 who have set themselves against me all around.

7  
 Arise, O Lord!  
Save me, O my God!  
 For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;  
 you break the teeth of the wicked.

8  
Salvation belongs to the Lord;  
 your blessing be on your people! **Selah**

Before we dive into the three steps found in Psalm 3 to experience freedom from an offense, I want to share more about the category of lament Psalms because in most churches we rarely practice this form of praise. Lament **IS** a form of praise. We as Christians typically think of praise as telling God how

awesome life is and how grateful we are for the amazing things happening all around us. When someone offends us with their words or actions, we may pray about it, but do we truly have such a relationship with God that we can be honest with him. Lament is about trusting our greatest pain, fear and shame in God's hands and telling Him to act on our behalf. It is a proof of a relationship. Lament is birthed out of desperation, pain, abandonment. This is precisely what Jesus experienced on the cross when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" Lament is a prayer directed at God which gives him an opportunity to act.

The theme of Psalm 3 is found in the quatrain making the first and second verses. Our ESV translation says,

O Lord, how **many** are my foes!  
**Many** are rising against me;  
**many** are saying of my soul,  
 "There is no salvation for him in God." Selah

The literal translation of soul is throat. Throat is a term used to express our ability to worship God with our breath and words. At the very core of being, David was a worshipper. Worshipping and giving God the glory with our voice was God's plan for humanity in creation. This Psalm is about the enemy trying to silence David's worship. The rest of the Psalm is about the steps how God silenced the enemy because David did the right thing and didn't take offense. David's physical protection was completely tied to his spiritual attentiveness.

How can we experience freedom from an offense? Our human reaction is to either isolate with shame the offense ushered in us, or shame the person who offended us by bad mouthing them, and letting them have it. Both of these have no room for forgiveness and letting the person off the hook. We want justice and we want them to pay for consequences. Neither one of these human reactions bring freedom to our soul from the offense, or better yet, help us with the future offenses. Because of sin we will continue to experience offenses.

When Jesus was on the cross, people were deliberately mocking Him, insulting Him with their words and actions. On top of the reality of the people, He felt abandoned by God. But instead of taking offense, He said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

God's best for us in situations when we have been offended by words, is to use our words to bless those who curse us. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." (Luke 6:27,28)

Our words have power. Our words can either bless or curse. Blessing our offender frees us from the responsibility of being the judge. When I am offended by someone's words, especially if they land in my very soul, my human reaction is to either retreat to isolation because of shame, or to defend, shame, and even curse them back. But God's way is different. I need to bless those who curse me. And when I do that I give all responsibility of the consequences to God. It is then up to God how he will silence my foe.

A few years ago I was incredibly hurt by someone's words. This person's words completely crushed my view of self, my identity and my soul. For one year I pretty much cried every day. And I remember thinking that I would not want my worst enemy to go through this. It was an incredibly difficult time in my life because the words spoken over me brought so much shame, they crushed my sense of worth, value and significance. Eventually by guidance of a mentor, I was able to forgive the person and began to pray blessings over them, their family, children and ministry. It's just about seven years from the day I knew I had forgiven this person and today I consider that whole experience the best God would have ever trusted me with. Today I believe God allowed it to happen. He trusted that in the face of the offense I would do the right thing. Today I am blessed with that experience, it changed me and I wouldn't want to give one day away.

In Psalm 3 we find three steps to experiencing freedom from an offense. In this journey to freedom from an offense blessing those who curse us, starts with embracing the reality. The first step is to embrace the reality.

### **(1) Embrace the Reality**

David Benner, a Canadian psychologist, author and wisdom teacher, writes this in his book, *Gift of Being Yourself*, "Reality must be embraced before it can be changed." This book is about identity and it is precisely our identity, our soul that takes the hit of the offense. "Reality must be embraced before it can be changed." Until we see the honest, real situation, we cannot do anything about it.

In verses 1, 2 and 3 we find two realities. We find the metaphysical reality where David finds himself in, the reality he lives, sees and experiences. On the other hand David knows the possibilities of the unseen, God's reality. "Reality must be embraced before it can be changed." This was David's reality. Psalm 3, verses 1 and 2. Pay attention to the pronouns: I, my, me. Very personal. It is not a war between two nations but a personal offense to try to defeat David.

O Lord, how many are **my** foes!  
 Many are rising against me;  
 many are *saying* of my soul,  
 "There is no salvation for him in God."

This was David's reality but he did not only see the reality of his own situation, he also knew the reality of who God is. In between these 2 realities we find a magical word BUT. This is my current reality BUT GOD!

But you, O Lord, are a **shield** about **me**,  
**my** glory, and the lifter of **my** head.

The word BUT separates the hopeless reality from freedom and deliverance that is possible because of God. This word BUT takes David and the reader from a despair to trust and letting go the human response.

David knew intimately who God was, he knew and understood His character. In this Psalm we find a word "selah." We do not quite know what it means but I think of it as a pause, a period of reflection. Here the psalmist is reflecting on his reality followed by contrasting reality of God.

David knew God's reality. He knew that the Lord was his shield. David was a military man and uses military language in this Psalm. The Hebrew word for shield refers to a deliverer. He knew who God was and he knew how God acts because he had an intimate relationship with Him. God was his shield, the one who would keep him safe and the one to deliver him from the hands of the enemy.

Secondly, God was his glory. What I love about the Old Testament use of this word glory is that it can be described as the manifest presence of God. Here David is saying that the manifest presence of God was going to be with him. When we express God's glory, it is always something visible that others will recognize in our behavior.

David let God fight his battle. When we get hurt in the battle field, our tendency is to focus on our pain. We look down. Sometimes it's our shame that keeps our head down. But here David acknowledges that you oh LORD are the lifter of my head. In other words, I don't need to focus on my current reality.

A few years ago my husband and I found ourselves in a situation where we had not been able to pay our mortgage for many years and one day all of it was due. Now instead of just paying something each month, we had to come up with the whole amount. There was no way for us to come up with all that money. Our house was for foreclosure. It did not feel good when our neighbors knew about it now that it was public information. Around that time I was taking a class in which I was asked to write a lament. I had never in my life told God my negative feelings. As a good Christian girl I was not allowed to share my disappointments to God and definitely not disappointments at God. I started working on this assignment, looking at my reality, the reality of our impossible situation. I wrote it all down with honesty I had never experienced. Then I reminded God of His character and His reality. "God, you say you are my provider." There I had two realities. Both of these realities were 100% true. "Reality must be embraced before it can be changed." Embrace the reality.

In Psalm 3 we find three steps to experiencing freedom from an offense. First step is to embrace the reality. And the second step is to take the first step which in the context of Psalm 3 is to cry out to the Lord. We cannot pray boldly until we have embraced the two realities. It is only then that we can take the first step, act, and approach God.

## **(2) Take the first step: ACT!**

Verse 4 continues,

**I** *cried aloud* to the Lord,  
and he answered **me** from his holy hill.

David cried out to the Lord, and the Lord answered him from His holy hill. When the enemy was cursing David's soul with their words and voice, David used his words and voice as he cried out-loud to the Lord.

One of the most interesting stories in the Bible is when the Israelis had finally been freed from the slavery in Egypt and were on their journey to freedom in the promised land. God had told them where to go and there they were camping by the Red Sea. As soon as they had settled, they saw Pharaoh's army approaching. This reality completely freaked out the Israelites. At the point of fear they did not keep

God's reality and His promise in their mind. So, they complained to Moses. Because of the intimate relationship and trust Moses had with God, he told the Israelites God's reality with confidence. "Do not be afraid. The LORD will fight for you." The next step in this journey to freedom is one of the most interesting responses of God recorded in the Bible. God says to Moses (Ex 14:15), "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on." TAKE THE FIRST STEP, ACT!

God did not intervene in David's life until he cried aloud to the LORD. So often we expect God to act but we fail to act according to God's reality and promises. The first step the Israelites needed to do was to start moving towards the Red Sea and when spoken words were meant to curse David, he needed to use his voice to cry aloud to the LORD. God cannot do a miracle in your life until you, with your actions, show God that you have embraced God's reality. Get moving.

This second step, which is to take the first step and act, has a cause and effect about it as the Psalm 3 continues to develop by contrast. Let's see what happens in Psalm 3 after David cries aloud to the LORD followed by reflection marked by the second "Selah."

I lay down and slept;  
I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.  
I will not be afraid of many thousands of people  
who have set themselves against me all around.

There was peace. Anxiety and fear had lifted. The second step to experience freedom from offense is to take the first step, act!

When my husband I were in the situation where our house was for foreclosure, I spent many nights with thoughts of hopelessness. It was after I boldly brought my request to God that I had peace.

### **(3) Be Bold! And give God an opportunity to ACT**

The third and final step to experience freedom from offense is to Be Bold! And give God an opportunity to ACT. Present your request to God. In this step the psalmist moves from his reality to God's reality with boldness.

Verse 7,

Arise, O Lord!  
**Save** me, O my **God!**

The petition “ARISE!” is the urging that the LORD should leave the temple, His holy hill and enter into the fray of trouble on behalf of David. WOW! Talk about being BOLD! Here David is telling the God of the universe to leave His dwelling place and come and help him. David’s reality was “many are rising against me.” Now he commands the Lord to do the same, to ACT, “arise!” David was told, “there is no salvation for him in God but now David was bold to say, “save me oh God!”

In this third step we find David giving commands to God. You might remember from your school years that these verbal forms are called imperatives. Imagine the boldness David had to command God to act, to arise and leave His holy hill.

God knows our trouble, our pain, the danger we’re in, He knows the state of our soul. The sign of an intimate, real relationship between me and God is when I finally realize my state of being and boldly come to the throne room of God and ask Him to ACT. God is always aware of our situation but he wants us to be aware of our state as well.

When I wrote my lament a few years ago, I didn’t know what to expect. Miraculously we were able to pay the remaining mortgage and didn’t need to sell our house. But even if this did not happen, I would have known that God is my provider. I learned a valuable lesson about lament. That experience made God more real to me. It made my relationship with God intimate. For the first time I presented my real situation to God who loves it when his children seek for this kind of intimacy with him where we are free to be brutally honest with Him and go to Him with our request. Lament is a proof of a relationship.

This last step, be bold: present your request to God, gives God an opportunity to act. Be Bold! Present your request to God.

Because of sin we all face offenses. How can we experience freedom from an offense? God’s best for us in situations we’ve been offended by words is to use our words to bless the offender. Embrace the reality, take the first step, act and be bold by presenting your request to God.

You might be wondering, How did God silence David’s enemy in Psalm 3? Let’s read the second part of verse 7.

For you strike all my enemies on the **cheek**;  
you break the **teeth** of the wicked.

Striking the cheek is a picture of disarming the enemy and the ability to speak. God took their ability to speak, to use their voice away. I don't think I would speak with confidence or authority with a broken jaw and no teeth.

Psalm 3 develops by contrast. It began with a curse and it ends with a blessing, a beautiful benediction, "Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing be upon Your people." Because of sin, we experience offense. We are so used to feeling offended and maybe there are so many offenses in your soul that you don't even recognize them. They have become such a normal part of your being and identity. As we close this time together, I feel that the first step even before embracing the 2 realities for you is to pray the prayer David prayed in Psalm 139:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.

Ask the Holy Spirit to point out the offenses that you have shoved in the secret place of your soul. In the coming weeks, start unpacking them, bringing them to light one by one and watch your life change from bondage of the offense to freedom. "Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing be upon Your people."

**Prayer:**

God, you are our shield, our deliverer. In this moment I lift up my brothers and sisters in this room. We come before you, our Heavenly Father and ask that your Holy Spirit will search our hearts and bring to our attention any offenses that we are holding onto. God your will is that we embrace the reality, that we identify those offenses. But we need the help of the Holy Spirit because some of these offenses have been tucked away so long. Show us, we trust you.

I am going to give you a minute for the Holy Spirit to speak to you.

If the Holy Spirit brought a memory in your mind, hold your left hand in a fist as if you were holding onto that reality. Jesus, I ask in this moment that you will speak to each one of us: what is your reality is in this situation that I am holding in my left hand?

**(Take a moment)**

When God shows you His reality, take your right hand and hold it in a fist as if you were holding onto God's truth and reality.

God, here are my 2 realities. As my first action, I release these realities to you Jesus. Open your hands.

God I pray that you will guide each one of us in the coming days as we let go of these offenses. We trust you.

“Salvation belongs to the LORD; Your blessing be upon Your people.”