

# CAST YOUR BURDENS ON THE LORD

## **Psalm 55:1-23**

**Key verse: 55:22, “Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.”**

Have you heard the expression, “Ask me if I care?” It means, “I don’t want to know your problems, because I can’t help you with your problems. I have enough problems of my own to deal with. So don’t cast your burdens on me.” What do you do with your problems and burdens? Some people just try to escape and forget about them. They run away. Others try to face their problems with their own strength and fight them. But what happens if you fight the wrong battle, or if you don’t have enough strength or skill or experience to fight?

We want to get some insight through Psalm 55 on how to fight the good fight against trouble, wickedness and injustice. Psalm 55 is the cry of a person in deep trouble and distress. It is the prayer of a person overwhelmed by the evil around them, even the anguish of hatred and deceit from a close friend. Are you facing a battle or burden right now in your life? Probably you are. And if you are not now, you will soon. Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble...” Then how are you fighting your battle? Are you training in the martial arts to take your opponent down? Are you practicing running to run away as fast as you possibly can from a problem with someone? Are you taking pilot lessons to fly to a far off place? This is what the psalmist felt like doing. But his faith in God led him to a better solution. Let’s learn from this psalm and grow in wisdom and prayer.

The subtitle of Psalm 55 says it was written by David. In fact, David wrote half of the 150 psalms in the Bible. They are poems, prayers and songs to the LORD his God. Have you ever written a poem, prayer or song to God? Dylan Burke shared his beautiful poem with us in his recent conference message. In our church, we often write testimonies or reflections on God’s word. Perhaps include a poem, thoughtful prayer or song to God some time. It can be a beautiful expression of love to God.

The story of David’s life is found in the Bible, beginning in 1 Samuel chapter 16 through 2 Samuel and to 1 Kings chapter 2. David lived an adventurous but challenging life. Please read it if you haven’t (as your homework), or you could read it again as a refresher (it’s 42 chapters). 1 Chronicles Ch.11-29 retells and fills in more details of David’s life and what he did for God’s people.

As I said, David lived an adventurous but challenging life. Let me review a few key events of his life briefly, which might have inspired this psalm. His claim to fame was his defeat of the giant Goliath with a sling and a stone. But then trouble started. King Saul was jealous of David and tried to kill David on several occasions, even chasing David with the king’s army into the mountains. David had two opportunities to kill Saul, but he did not, since David feared God and honored Saul as the king of Israel. Eventually, Saul died in battle and David became king. Then David got into serious moral trouble: he committed adultery with a married woman and then

arranged her husband's death in battle. David was rebuked by the prophet Nathan. David confessed his sin and wrote a penitent psalm, Psalm 55. He said, "Have mercy on me, O God... blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!" (Ps 55:1-2) God forgave David's sin, but there were many bad consequences in his family: David's son Amnon violated his half sister Tamar. In revenge, Tamar's full brother Absalom planned the death of Amnon, his half brother. Then Absalom was banished by his father David. Absalom bore a grudge against his father king David and conspired to take the throne from his father. As David fled Jerusalem, his trusted adviser Ahithophel betrayed David and joined Absalom. So both David's own son and his trusted adviser sought to destroy David. These are some of the heart-breaking stories in David's life. One of these stories could be the background for this psalm.

The psalm begins with these words:

"Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy!  
2 Attend to me, and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and I moan,  
3 because of the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked.  
For they drop trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me.  
4 My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me.  
5 Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.

David was in deep trouble and distress. He mentions "the noise of the enemy," "the oppression of the wicked," "trouble upon me," "a grudge against me," "anguish," "terrors of death" and "fear and trembling upon me", and, "horror overwhelms me." Clearly, people hated David and wanted to kill him. So he did what any child of God should do: he cried out to God in prayer for mercy and help.

When you are faced with trouble, what do you do? Psychologists speak of "fight or flight" mode. This means, people often choose one of two options when they are in trouble: they fight or take flight. David was an experienced fighter. He could fight back. After all, he defeated the giant Goliath with faith in God and one sling of a stone. But David chose not to fight in this instance. Remember, he could've killed Saul. One of his soldiers even had the chance and suggested it to David. But David refused. Shimei cursed David as David left Jerusalem to escape from Absalom's conspiracy. Again, a soldier offered to kill Shimei, who was cursing and humiliating David. But David cast himself upon the mercy of God, saying, "Let him curse... It may be that the LORD will look on the wrong done to me, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing today" (2Sa 16:11-12). David cast himself upon God for mercy. Isn't it beautiful?

In the psalm, David wishes he could fly away. David didn't fight, so he imagined flight. See verses 6-8:

6 And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest;  
7 yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness;  
8 I would hurry to find a shelter from the raging wind and tempest."

Did you ever run away from a problem? When my son was in high school, his cell phone was taken by a hoodlum. I wanted to report this to the school or police. But I was afraid harm would come to me or my son. So I did nothing. Regret and fear lingered, and shame, even to this day.

When I was in junior high school, a bully stole my friend's pencil and used it to play pencil fighting. I said to the bully who was bigger and stronger than I, "Why don't you give his pencil back?" He said, "Cause I don't want to!" Later that bully saw me in the hallway and knocked off my hat. From that day, I struggled with fear and anger. I imagined him pulling a knife on me and then I imagined I would run across the street from the school to the police station. It never happened. Fight or flight.

Let me tell one more story. I was inviting college students to Bible study. One yelled at me after I asked him. He said, "I don't believe you people!" I didn't know whether to get angry (fight) or get out of there (flight). So I gulped and said, "What?" He said, "Why do you think you have to go around cramming your religion down people's throats!" Again I gulped. And I said, "I politely invited you to Bible study. You could politely decline if you are not interested." He said, "What makes you think you have to do this anyway?" I smiled and said, "The love of God." Then he cursed and turned and walked away. I didn't run. I didn't get angry. I stood my ground. And I said to myself, "Thank you, Jesus. That wasn't me." I need the fullness of the Holy Spirit to do that every time.

Ok, one more personal story. I've told this one before. I was driving out of the church parking lot. Another car was zooming down the street and honked long and loudly at me. Immediately I pulled over my car and rolled down my window. He also stopped and rolled down his window. I wanted to rebuke him. But instead I said, "My bad, sorry!" Do you know what he said? "Oh, it's ok, It's cool." Fight or flight is not Jesus' way. Of course, these are lightweight examples compared to what David faced.

The psalm continues:

9 Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues; for I see violence and strife in the city.

10 Day and night they go around it on its walls, and iniquity and trouble are within it;

11 ruin is in its midst; oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace.

12 For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it;

it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—then I could hide from him.

13 But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.

14 We used to take sweet counsel together; within God's house we walked in the throng.

15 Let death steal over them; let them go down to Sheol alive; for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart.

David prays that their evil schemes would be halted and they would perish. As Christians, Jesus taught us an even better way to pray: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:43-45a). Jesus not only taught this; he practiced what he preached. While he was dying on the cross,

Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34).  
Jesus prayed for his killers.

David shared his honest feelings to God. He was God's friend. Trusted friends share freely and openly. What pained David so much was that the trouble was coming from a companion and familiar friend, rather than an enemy. It was a frenemy (sometimes friend, sometimes enemy). He describes later this type of person who can't be trusted, in verses 19-21:

19 God will give ear and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old, because they do not change and do not fear God.

20 My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant.

21 His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.

People who fear God and show they are willing to change can be trusted. People who don't think they need to change have a distorted view of themselves. They don't like to listen to others, since they think they know better than everyone else. They are too proud. And as the Bible says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Let me say it again, quoting the Apostle Peter: "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (1Peter 5:5).

Let me go back to verses 16-18. This is David's resolve and confidence:

16 But I call to God, and the LORD will save me.

17 Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.

18 He redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me.

In the morning, during the day and at night, he calls to God in prayer. He knows the LORD will save him. He knows God hears his voice. And he knows that God redeems his soul in safety from the battle he is waging.

And we come to the conclusion of his psalm of prayer:

22 Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.

23 But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in you.

God is just. God will uphold the cause of those who are right with God. God delights in upholding righteousness. And God will punish wickedness. This is why we must repent of all wickedness and pursue righteousness. Listen to Apostle Paul teaching his disciple Timothy:

“But as for you, O man of God, flee these [evil, ungodly] things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called...” (1Timothy 6:11-12a)

Again, listen to Paul: “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels” (2Timothy 2:22-23).

David pleaded to God against his enemies. As Christians, our real enemies are sin and the devil. These are what we must fight. Paul wrote, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

David declares in today’s key verse: “Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you...” Are you burdened or troubled or weary or heavy hearted? Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you.” Apostle Peter borrowed this Bible verse. He wrote, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1Peter 5:6-7).

Listen to this hymn, “Tell It to Jesus” (#635):

“Are you weary, are you heavy hearted? Tell it to Jesus; tell it to Jesus. Are you grieving over joys departed? Tell it to Jesus alone. Tell it to Jesus; tell it to Jesus. He is a Friend that’s well known! You’ve no other such a friend or brother. Tell it to Jesus alone.”

Jesus gave this great promise to the weary and burdened: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). May we come to Jesus with our burdens, cares and anxieties, and trust in him. He will sustain us. He will give us rest.