

When trouble comes, do you turn to or turn away?**Psalm 38**

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Sometimes life brings us bad days. Sometimes many troubles converge. Some of you may even have had a bad day this past week. But would your bad day compare to that experienced by a couple in Sweetwater, Texas?

They had a lot of potted plants that they kept outdoors for most of the year. But this day during a cold spell, the wife brought the plants indoors to protect them from frost. It turned out that a little green garden grass snake was in one of the plants and when it had warmed up, it slithered out. The wife saw it go under the couch. She let out a very loud scream.

Her husband, ran out into the living room, to see what the problem was. She told him there was a snake under the couch. He got down on the floor on his hands and knees to look for it.

About that time, the family dog came in from outside and stuck his cold nose on the husband's leg. He thought the snake had bitten him and fainted. His wife thought he had had a heart attack, so she called an ambulance. The attendants arrived, rushed in and loaded him onto a stretcher. They started to carry him out.

Just then, the snake came out from under the sofa. One of the ambulance attendants saw it and dropped his end of the stretcher. The husband fell off and fractured his leg. So he had to go to the hospital – and they took him away in the ambulance.

The wife would come to the hospital soon. But she still had the problem of the snake in the house. So she called on a neighbor and the man of the house came over. He volunteered to capture the snake. Armed with a rolled up newspaper he began poking under the couch.

Soon, he decided it was gone and told the woman so. For some reason she believed him so she sat down to rest for a moment relieved. But in relaxing, her hand slipped down between the cushions where she felt the snake wiggling around. She screamed and fainted. The snake rushed back under the sofa. The neighbor saw her laying there passed out. So he tried to use CPR to revive her, mouth to mouth. .

About this time, the neighbor's wife, who had just returned from shopping at the grocery store couldn't find her husband at home. So she went over to the house with the snake inside. She entered just as her husband was giving the woman CPR. Seeing her husband's mouth on the woman's mouth, she slammed his head with a bag of groceries

containing canned goods. This knocked him out and cut his scalp to the point where it needed stitches. Another ambulance was called.

But before the ambulance arrived, the original woman awoke from her faint and saw her neighbor bending over the husband she had just knocked out. The original woman assumed he had been bitten by the snake. She went into the kitchen, brought back a small bottle of whiskey, and began pouring it down the man's throat before the neighbor woman could explain what had happened.

Well, the police had been alerted to the fact that two ambulance calls had been made from the same house within an hour. So they came to check out the scene, again before the second ambulance arrived. They saw the unconscious man with the smell of whiskey on his breath and assumed a drunken fight had occurred. They were about to arrest them all but the two women explained how it had all happened because of a little green snake. The second ambulance finally arrived taking the neighbor and his wife to the hospital.

Just then the little snake crawled out again from under the sofa. One of the policeman had a snake phobia. So he drew his gun. After all, this was Texas. He fired at the snake, missed it, but hit the leg of an end table that was on the side of the couch. The table fell over and the lamp shattered. As the bulb broke, it started a fire in the drapes.

The other policeman tried to beat out the flames and fell through the window on top of the family dog. The dog, startled, jumped up and raced out onto the street, where an oncoming car swerved to avoid it and smashed into the police cruiser. It too started to burn. Meanwhile, the burning drapes had spread to the walls and the entire house began to burn.

Neighbors called the fire truck. With the report of multiple fires, the arriving firemen panicked and began raising the ladder as they were halfway down the street. The rising ladder tore out some overhead wires this put out the electricity and disconnected the telephones in a ten-square city block area.

Time passed. Both men were discharged from the hospital, the house was re-stored, the police acquired a new car and all was right again in their world. They never did catch that green snake. All of these incredible events happened because of one little green snake on one bad day. Sometimes troubles come together in our lives. And when that happens in your life, how do you respond? **When troubles multiply, do you move towards or away from God?** Some people faced trouble and turned away from God for years. Things happen that shake us to our core. We wonder

where God is or how He could allow such a thing to happen. In some ways it's natural for us to pull back from one we look to as our protector when bad stuff happens. We can immediately conclude that He's failed or He's let us down in some way. But is turning away from God the best choice when those times come?

Today, we get to look at someone who faced this. He was in all sorts of trouble. Like often happens, one trouble led to another which led to another. How would he respond? To find out, we're going to look at Psalm 38. This Psalm is a relative unknown compared to the shepherds Psalm 23 or the confession Psalm 51 or even last week's O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth from Psalm 8. Yet this Psalm will reveal some beautiful jewels if we will just give a few moments of reflection. With these jewels, we will then approach the Lord's table whether we have troubles today or we're pretty well trouble free.

A PSALM OF DAVID, FOR THE MEMORIAL OFFERING.

38 O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,

nor discipline me in your wrath!

2 For your arrows have sunk into me,
and your hand has come down on me.

3 There is no soundness in my flesh
because of your indignation;

there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.

4 For my iniquities have gone over my head;
like a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.

5 My wounds stink and fester
because of my foolishness,

6 I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;
all the day I go about mourning.

7 For my sides are filled with burning,
and there is no soundness in my flesh.

8 I am feeble and crushed;
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

9 O Lord, all my longing is before you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.

10 My heart throbs; my strength fails me,
and the light of my eyes—it also has gone from me.

11 My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague,
and my nearest kin stand far off.

¹²Those who seek my life lay their snares;
those who seek my hurt speak of ruin
and meditate treachery all day long.

¹³But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear,
like a mute man who does not open his mouth.

¹⁴I have become like a man who does not hear,
and in whose mouth are no rebukes.

¹⁵But for you, O LORD, do I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.

¹⁶For I said, "Only let them not rejoice over me,
who boast against me when my foot slips!"

¹⁷For I am ready to fall,
and my pain is ever before me.

¹⁸I confess my iniquity;
I am sorry for my sin.

¹⁹But my foes are vigorous, they are mighty,
and many are those who hate me wrongfully.

²⁰Those who render me evil for good
accuse me because I follow after good.

²¹Do not forsake me, O LORD!
O my God, be not far from me!

²²Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

David is in trouble. I see about at least 4 different sources of his trouble.

Source #1 – David sinned. Notice how many times David mentions his sin. Verse 3 – There is no health in my body because of my sin. Verse 4 – For my iniquities have gone over my head. Verse 5 – My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness. Verse 18 – I confess my iniquity; I am sorry for my sin. David has become acutely aware of his own sin. He does not deny it or try to sugar coat it. He made foolish choices and now admits his guilt. Now he faces the consequences. But intertwined through all the admission of sin and confession of it is his second source of trouble.

Source #2 – David is physically sick. Sickness brings trouble in its own way. David is really sick. Some commentators state this is the most extensive description of physical illness in the Bible. Some even wonder if a person in this state could actually have composed such a prayer. After all, look at everything wrong with him. There is no soundness in his flesh – so his whole body aches or hurts. There is no health in his bones. So not only does he experience muscle pain but some sort of skeletal ache. He has some sort of open sores that smell and fester. His sides

or back or stomach is filled with searing pain. Maybe he had ulcers. His heart pounds. He feels no strength. He feels like he's one step away from death.

But perhaps more troubling is that David links his sin with his illness. He believes he is sick because of his sin. In verse 1, he believes he is under God's anger and wrath. In 2 he believes God has struck him down like a skilled archer. In verse 3, David makes his belief clear – "There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones because of my sin." Verse 5 – My wounds stink and fester because of my foolishness.

That's a little bit of a puzzle. Getting sick because of sin? Does God send colds, coughs and cancer our way to punish us? Well, in one sense, sickness certainly is a result of sin – the First Adam's sin. Sickness was one of the consequences of the fall. It came into this world and reminds us of the fallenness of man and the curse of death which still threatens us all. It's a lot muddier to conclusively prove a specific illness is connected to a specific sin. Yet this belief that sickness was somehow tied to one's personal sin was common. If you've heard about or read the book of Job, you know Job's three friends believed that. They tried to convince Job that his intense suffering had to be because of his sin. Yet Job protested his innocence and in the end the Lord vindicated him. But this persisted into the New Testament. In John 9, people observe a blind man. Then they ask Jesus the question – "Who sinned; this man or his parents that he should be afflicted like this?" Jesus answered – "Neither. He was made this way so that God would be glorified."

There are a very few examples of person sin somehow being tied to illness – Miriam gets struck with leprosy for opposing Moses. Gehazi, Elisha's servant is struck with leprosy for greed. Jesus even says to a healed lame man "stop sinning or something worse may happen to you." But overall, it seems we have very limited knowledge as to whether an illness is linked to some personal sin. Unless we receive some very clear direction from the Lord about this, it's better not to conclude that. I asked the Wednesday evening prayer for their thoughts on this.

*One wrote this: In general, sickness is the result of the Fall. i.e. Christians suffer from the same acute and chronic illnesses, accidents, congenital problems and inherited tendencies. **Some** sickness is the result of other people's sin. i.e. drunk drivers, criminals, etc, but also **Parents**: Exodus20:5,6 (Sexually transmitted diseases will cause death or blindness in offspring.) In my limited experience, rarely will a specific sin cause God to use corrective discipline in a God fearing person.*

Unfortunately it is doubly hard to pray when one is really sick, that's why we need help from the brothers. Our hearing is impaired and our mouth full of groaning. V. 13 14. Even our own judgment can't be trusted in this awful situation.

So unless we receive some very clear direction from God about this, it's probably not much value to spend a lot of time concluding we're sick because we sinned. We don't know for certain if he suffers because of his sin. When you're struck as low and hard as he was, it might seem very reasonable to conclude that this suffering must be related to some terrible thing done. But we can't be sure. We can be sure that David experienced physical illness.

Source #3 – On top of that, people close to him deserted him. Verse 11- My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off. I don't know what it is about us humans. Most of us can deal with normalcy. But when it comes to something abnormal, uncomfortable and unusual, we can just drift away from those going through these things. Most of the time I think it's because we don't know what to say. We fear that we'll say something wrong or make things worse. But it really makes things worse when we just don't show up. People going through great trials and troubles need others to walk with them not run from them. Yet it's hard to get near someone who's in pain and doesn't feel like socializing with a smile or who is somewhat irritable because of their agony. Yet part of our calling is to stand near; go there and get close.

Source #4 – His enemies seek to take advantage of his weakness. Verse 12 – “Those who seek my life lay their snares; those who seek my hurt speak of ruin and meditate on treachery all day long. Here are the enemies again. David fears that they will take advantage of his weakened state. He's convinced they will somehow make things worse.

So David faces a bunch of trouble – guilt and consequences of his own sin; severe physical illness; abandonment by those closest to him; threats by his enemies while he's weak. What will he do? Will he turn away from God or turn to Him?

Verse 15 provides us with the answer – “But for you, O Lord, do I wait. It is you, O Lord my God who will answer.” David again turns to the Lord in his troubles. Despite others leaving him, David still finds hope in the Lord's presence comfort. He again seeks relief from the one who has proved Himself faithful so many times before. When a whole pile of things go wrong – don't shut off the Lord. Keep praying. Keep expressing yourself to Him. If there's one thing I want you to learn from this summer series it's this. When things go wrong - keep going to God. Keep connecting

with Him. Keep expressing yourself to Him. When things are going well cultivate a deeper/stronger connection to Him. Put down deep roots of faith into Him so when the storm comes your faith will remain connected to the rock. God chose to include these prayers in His book to us. He values them. He provided them so we could continue with Him even when life is difficult. So please don't think that you have to have everything correct to pray properly; or have all the right words; He wants to hear from us.

Yet I love the reality of this Psalm. It doesn't end in verse 15. Though he's prayed in faith, he falls back into some struggle. He fears his enemies overthrow. He is ready to fall and in pain. He fears the strength of his foes. And he remembers those he tried to help now responding with evil. So he ends with one last cry for the Lord to deliver him in haste. With David in trouble but at least connected to the One who would not desert him.

Sometimes different causes and types of suffering roll into one dreadful experience. But we can use these times to draw near to the Lord – when you're laid up on a sick bed, there's not much else to do but pray. You can turn that into productive time by praying and drawing near to the Lord. When others face multiple troubles, we must fight against the impulse to draw back from those who suffer something unpleasant. Many of you do well in this; you come out of the woodwork; you come along side. You offer the ministry of presence.

But what about those times when we have great difficulty coming to God? We may be so weak and so worn out that we have little or no strength to even pray. In those times, we need to recall how God reached out to us through Jesus when we were in an even more desperate state. In fact, there are hints towards the way God would reach out to us in this Psalm.

Bruce Waltke points out the similarities and differences between David and Jesus in this psalm. Both suffer God's holy wrath against sin. But David suffered for his own. Jesus endured God's wrath as he took upon himself our sins.

David's relentless description of his sufferings match the relentless afflictions of Christ on Good Friday. Both David and Jesus' closest friends respond by deserting them, leaving them without aid and standing far off at a distance. Both have enemies who try to trap them verbally. Both do not speak to defend themselves in a court. Their enemies lodge false accusations against them in hopes of toppling and discrediting them. Both enter the realm of death – David

partially but Christ fully. Both ask for God not to abandon them as they confront immanent death. Yet in the midst of their suffering, both retain faith in God.

Jesus endured the suffering we deserved so that we might have salvation, eternal life now and hope. Now, no matter troubles we face and no matter how many there are, we can still experience close fellowship with the God of our comfort and hope. God is present and willing to hear our prayers and respond to them no matter what we face.

Sufferings; trials; difficulties are hard enough. But they can be harder to go through alone – without others; without God. Yet God has not left us alone. He receives our prayers amidst our confusion. He dealt with the greatest trouble we'd ever face through the cross.

And so now, I want to invite you to bring your troubles to the Lord. And then meet him at His table.