

READ John 11:33-35

This well known text of Scripture not only contains everyone's favorite memory verse, but it more importantly shows us the true humanity of Jesus as He Himself is overcome by emotion because of the circumstances that He finds Himself in with the death of His friend Lazarus and the pain being experienced by his remaining family and loved ones. There is the real possibility that we can feel incapable of truly being like Jesus because of His divine nature, but it is of the utmost importance that we remember His humanity and that it is a normal part of the human experience for us to be emotional and even to express those emotions by crying from time to time.

If ever there was a time when each of us might be forced to embrace that showing of emotion by crying...well we certainly would have to say that this qualifies as such a time. Our sense of normalcy has been completely turned on its head. The ease with which we made our way through life on a day to day basis has been completely changed. We used to not think twice about going to school, work, play, the grocery store, a restaurant, or worship, but now so many of those normal and benign activities have been disrupted or altered, and we have no clue when or even if they will ever get back to normal.

If I'm being honest...this is where I have often found myself during this pandemic crisis. I have found myself emotionally and spiritually drained from this entire situation. Teaching every single Sunday to a laptop screen is miserable! It completely lacks the invigorating interaction and energy that I gain from being able to look each of you in the eye and know that we're working through something of a spiritual nature together. That is torture not just for a public speaker but especially for an extrovert such as myself who craves the social interaction that had been enjoyed for the first 30 years of my life!

And I know that I am not the only one who has been negatively affected by the circumstances in which we currently find ourselves. I have watched a social media post from a sister who was at the end of her spiritual and emotional rope from being cut off from her regular interactions with her beloved brethren with whom she loved to encourage and be encouraged by. I have talked with a brother who was himself broken by all of this with some family issues piled on top. I have even been told of a young couple who have completely walked away from the faith during this crisis.

Friends, can you relate to any of this at all? I want to believe that everyone else is simply stronger than I am and you can deal with all of this without being negatively affected at all, but the evidence that I am observing from a wide range of places tells me that this whole crisis and everything that it entails not only has the potential but has in fact led people's spirits to being broken. Many a disciple of Jesus has shed many a tear during this whole ordeal, and it has left many of us struggling to find our balance when it seems as if chaos and heartache abound without anything slowing it down. I don't have a hard time believing that our Lord, if He were here with us, would shed a tear for our hurting hearts.

Yet, just as Jesus turned His eyes and the eyes of those gathered to God, so would we do well to turn our eyes, hearts, and ears to God and His Word to gain strength and relief in times when our tears might seem to be flowing without end. When I think of such a text where we are reminded that God's eyes are upon His people during their times of struggle, I think of a text such as the **56th Psalm**. I think specifically of **Psalm 56:8** where David is said to have written, *"You yourself have recorded by wanderings. Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in your book?"* The great king David was convinced that His God's eyes were continually upon Him even to the point that He caught David's tears as they flowed from his face during difficult moments in his life. Since we find ourselves in our own difficult time, let's read and consider this Psalm as a means of encouraging us as we continue to navigate our way through these emotionally and spiritually draining times.

(Psalm 56)

A. David's Troubles (Psalm 56:1,2,5,6)

1. The superscription for this particular Psalm identifies David as the author and the setting as being the time in David's life when he was fleeing from Saul in the land of the Philistines as can be found in **I Samuel 21:10-15**. However, to really gain the proper perspective on what David was going through, we would have to go back and trace his introduction into the Biblical narrative from back in **I Samuel 16** when Samuel anoints David as the next king of Israel.
 - a) Following his anointing, David is summoned to Saul's court where he soothes the king with his musical talents. This puts David in a position where he is made well aware of the tormentor of Israel, Goliath the great Philistine warrior.
 - b) David, with strength from God, conquers the mighty giant which immediately elevates him to hero status within Israel even to the point where the people speak of him being superior to king Saul himself. *"Saul has killed his thousands, but David his tens of thousands."*
 - c) Saul is enraged by David's new found fame and becomes extremely paranoid of David being a usurper, so the king begins a series of attempts on David's life. He throws a spear at him, tries to trap him by allowing him to marry his daughter Mychal, and orders his son Jonathan and his servants to kill David. Thankfully, David escapes each of these attempts by the grace of God and the help of Mychal and Jonathan, but he is still forced to flee.
 - d) He first flees to the priest Ahimelech at Nob who reluctantly helps him, but then he finds himself in the land of Gath (hometown of Goliath) where King Achish and his servants seek to take advantage of the opportunity that has fallen in their laps. David pretends to be crazy to the point that Achish and his servants let him move on to this next hiding place, and so on from there continues the story of David's running from Saul.
2. The point of this story that seems to connect so well with **Psalm 56** is the text of **I Samuel 21:12** where the text tells us that David was legitimately afraid in this situation as he found himself before the people of the great giant whom he had slain just a short time prior. The Psalmist expressly states that there were times when he had been afraid (**v.3**) and all of the circumstances during these dark days of David's life could certainly lead him to write about a man and his enemies trampling/crushing him, fighting against him, oppressing him all day long. Everywhere David turned, he was facing someone who wanted to do him harm. Certainly the thoughts of Saul towards David from **I Samuel** could be described in the way that we read in this Psalm, specifically **vv.5,6**. David was at a point in his life where he seems to have little to no peace, comfort, or ability to let his guard down. I don't know about you, but I can see even the great warrior David feeling as if he was at the end of his rope.

B. David's Faith (Psalm 56:3,4,10,11)

1. And yet, it is at this moment when all hope seems to be lost that we have these great statements and confessions of faith from David. **Verses 3, 4, 10, & 11** speak of David's great trust in God, and let's notice the progression of that faith as the Psalm moves forward

*"When I am afraid, I will trust in you.
In God, whose word I praise,
In God I trust: I will not be afraid.
What can mere mortals do to me?"*
(vv. 3,4)

*"In God, whose word I praise,
in the Lord, whose word I praise,
in God I trust; I will not be afraid.
What can mere humans do to me?"*
(vv. 10,11)

2. Notice how David first speaks of being afraid, yes, but that even when he felt this fear he still made the choice to praise and trust in the Lord, and that praise and trust of God actually led him to no longer being afraid in the moment in this situation because after all...what could *"mere mortals"* do to him if the God of heaven was for him? By the time we get to almost the end of this Psalm, David no longer mentions anything about actually being afraid. His praise and trust in God was continual and growing, and he again poses the question, *"What can mere humans do to me?"*
3. We might be sitting here thinking, *"Umm, David...they could kill you!"* Surely David was well aware of this fact, but he seems to not be overwhelmed by that possible reality when he considered the power and ability of the God that he served, praised, and trusted in. That to me is a sign of tremendous faith in God's word and promises, and it is that faith that led David to speak with such great confidence.

C. David's Confidence (Psalm 56:7-9,12,13)

1. David's words of confidence begin in **v.7** as he rhetorically asked whether or not his enemies would escape punishment for their sins against him. The answer would seem to be a resounding "no" since David then calls down God's righteous wrath to come down upon the nations who were standing against him. David had confidence that the impenitent evil doers would not escape God's divine judgment.
 2. This brings us to the verse that we began with in this text. **Verses 8 & 9** really seem to set the stage for the remaining verses where there is no hint of fear, anxiety, or uncertainty concerning what would come next in David's life. The shepherd was well aware that the Lord was well aware of him and every moment of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty that he experienced up to this point. He knew that God was so well aware that it was as if God has been there to catch his tears as they had fallen from his face. The all knowing book of God had every moment recorded because an all-knowing and all-loving God would not and could not allow for His people to suffer apart from His concern or knowledge. David's full confidence was in God knowing his plight and swiftly acting against his enemies. David's full confidence was in knowing that, *"God is for me."*
 3. The statements of confidence conclude in **verses 12 & 13** as David speaks to his determined commitment to God moving forward. Surely during such a time as this David made a lot of those *"God if you will...then I will..."* prayers and promises to God, and he is committed to making sure that he follows through. Why is he so committed? It surely was because he recognized just how much the Lord had done for him! He had rescued him from death, kept him from stumbling along the way, and even set him up on a high place to walk *"in the light of life."* God's grace was abundant in David's life, and the great king could not pass up an opportunity to speak of the goodness of His God in this 56th Psalm.
- A. The temptation in moments of darkness and loneliness is to believe that God is not aware of our struggles.**
1. The whole world was falling down around David. His mentor and beloved king was seeking to take his life. He was forced to flee because those he loved most were put in positions where they were supposed to betray him. He fled from one enemy and only found himself in the arms of another. Surely he did feel as if he was oppressed all day long without peace in sight.
 2. Can you relate to David at all at the moment? I know I sure can in some respects. I keep waiting for that legitimate piece of good news that tells us that a vaccine or reliable treatment is on the way that will allow for a light to be seen at the end of this tunnel...but I haven't heard it yet. This just leads to more and more thoughts of despair and thinking that this is

never going to end and we're never going to get back to anything that even remotely resembles the normalcy that we enjoyed before. I keep thinking about and imagining in my head when I'll be able to hug and embrace the very people who sit before me without having to worry about passing on this horrid sickness that has caused so many issues.

3. The isolation, fear, anxiety, and other negative feelings only seem to continue to remain without relief in sight, and this is the perfectly breeding ground for our adversary who is going here and there looking for someone to destroy to plant seeds of despair within our minds. He wants us to not see any end in sight. He wants for those thoughts to hinder us from joy, faith, and confidence in God. He wants us to think that God has forgotten all about us or simply doesn't care enough to intervene on our behalf. He wants our faiths to slowly crumble and decay.

B. However, David reminds us that God is keenly aware of our "wanderings" just as He was keenly aware of his own difficulties during his life.

1. The evil one wants for us to give up and give in, but David reminds us in this Psalm that God knows exactly where we have been and what we're currently going through. He has seen every single tear that has fallen from our eyes, and He has made note of every groaning prayer we have lifted up to Him. Even if no one else seems to be aware or seems to care about our pain...we must remember, as David did, that our God is for us!
2. To what extent is God for us? The answer would be all the way for us, and Paul seems to be working off of this same thought from this Psalm as he writes what he does in **Romans 8:31-39**. David very literally had a man who was against him and opposed to him, but that might not be the case for us. Instead, it could simply be what we have before us right now which is the desires of the evil one against us. He is waging spiritual war against us and he is seeking to claim victory over our souls as we struggle in this life. However, we must remember the words of David and Paul and never forget that our God is surely for us!

Main Point: *In our darkest and loneliest moment, we must always remember that our God sees us, cares for us, and will support and strengthen us to persevere through moments such as these.*

What does this mean practically? It practically means that when the entire world is in the pits of despair, fear, & worry...we stand out like a bright and shiny light on the hilltop that is calling the hopeless and despairing to God who gives life and healing. It means that while others are tiptoeing around fearing for their lives because of something they can't see, we walk around with confidence in the God who holds the power over everything seen and unseen. This doesn't mean that we behave foolishly or irresponsibly. We would do well, as people who are to love our neighbors as ourselves, to not be careless or reckless. However, this must not cause us to live life that is anything less than showing of our full confidence in the God who knows our struggles and holds our tears in His bottle.

When we feel ourselves afraid of the circumstances surrounding us, may we be like David and spend a bit more time praising God and being in His Word (which is full of so many encouraging promises) which will lead to greater trust in Him. What truly can men or even the evil one do to us if our God is truly for us? May we not be overcome, but may we overcome with the incredible strength that God longs to grant to us in every circumstance that we might face in this life.