

## Shattered by Betrayal: Using Psalm 35 to Help Survivors of Abuse Rebuild Trust

by Bruce Meyer<sup>1</sup>

Hope is essential for any person, but even more so for those who have experienced abuse—hope of restoration, hope of deliverance from confusion, guilt, shame, defilement, and such. The Scriptures are filled with hope, but an abuse survivor needs specific hope, “laser-guided” truth, that directly addresses the problems she faces, both the sin that came at her from the abuser and any sin that comes out of her heart in response to the abuse.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most common struggles for abuse survivors is broken trust with those who should be trustworthy, such as a parent, teacher, coach, sibling, and the like. The individual to whom the weak and helpless looks for care becomes a source of severe pain. In suffering abuse, whether physical, sexual, or verbal, it is the betrayal of trust that often makes the abuse so destructive in the life of the survivor, since her distrust wrongly spills over into other relationships. Tragically, the loss of trust often intrudes into the survivor’s perception of God. It is such betrayal that complicates the survivor’s ability to trust anyone, regardless of the person’s trustworthiness.

Many in Scripture suffered betrayal and its effects. David himself was betrayed by some of his closest companions. The counselor who is dealing with survivors of abuse can find in David’s life patterns that guide him through the growth process toward restoring trust, especially the trust in God that is so essential to the survivor.

Therefore, survivors of abuse will reestablish trust when they follow the biblical pattern of recognizing and expressing their thoughts and feelings of betrayal to God, trusting him for restoration. In that regard, the purpose of this article is threefold. It will show first how to openly express thoughts and feelings of betrayal to God and, second, how to use Psalm 35 as a counseling example for rebuilding trust.<sup>3</sup> Third, the article will demonstrate the Scripture’s all-sufficient character in providing care for those who have suffered trauma.

### *Setting of the Psalm*

This discussion of Psalm 35 begins with a brief orientation to its authorship, occasion, and genre. Establishing the authorship of the psalm is beyond the scope of this paper, but this writer accepts Davidic authorship based on the superscription, the parallel with struggles in David’s life, similarities

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<sup>2</sup> Although abuse is not limited to females, this paper will refer to the survivor in the feminine gender.

<sup>3</sup> See the appendix for a fresh translation of Psalm 35.

with Psalm 34 (e.g., the Angel of Yahweh in v. 7), and the prevalence of Davidic psalms in Book I of the psalter.<sup>4</sup>

Attempts by scholars to identify a specific historical setting of the psalm have proven inconclusive. Even general assertions attempting to determine the circumstances and conditions behind the psalm are equally varied. Scholars provide two possible settings for the psalm. One view is that David wrote the passage while Saul was pursuing him, because of the parallels between the language here and Psalm 34.<sup>5</sup> A second view assigns the occasion to Absalom's rebellion.<sup>6</sup> Either occasion fits the details of the psalm adequately. Other suggestions for an occasion range from a broken treaty<sup>7</sup> to a personal illness<sup>8</sup> to a temple lawsuit.<sup>9</sup> Given the disparity of these views and the diversity of images and language, it is best for the exegete to avoid dogmatically assigning a specific situation to the psalm. One should also be aware that on occasion the psalmist may have been deliberately vague so that the psalm would fit many occasions for his audience.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the occasion, the betrayal the psalmist experienced fits the betrayal of trust an abuse survivor suffers.

Psalm 35 is one of fifty-nine laments in the psalter. Containing three lament sections, the psalm also includes imprecations toward the psalmist's attackers. One author, however, captures the magnitude of the complaints the psalmist made when he states, "Psalm 35 is a particularly aggressive and defensive complaint of the individual."<sup>11</sup>

### *Analysis of the Psalm*

Because the psalmist weaves laments, petitions, and vows throughout the psalm, this article will approach the passage analytically rather than either a verse-by-verse approach or by strophe. An overview of the strophes, however, reveals that, although the psalmist's emotions are scattered throughout, he appears to address physical (vv. 1–10), personal (vv. 11–18), and verbal character attacks (vv. 19–28).<sup>12</sup> After the analysis, the psalm will be summarized synthetically to draw the three strophes together into a whole.

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<sup>4</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015), 61ff.

<sup>5</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *The Psalter*, in Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. F. B. Elland (1871; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) 5:266.

<sup>6</sup> H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 284.

<sup>7</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1983), 19:286–7.

<sup>8</sup> Craig C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study*, JSOTSupp 52 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 194–95.

<sup>9</sup> W. Graham Scroggie, *Psalms* (London: Pickering, 1948), 1:194.

<sup>10</sup> W. H. Bellinger, *Reading and Studying the Book of Psalms* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 45.

<sup>11</sup> Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 153.

<sup>12</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 490.

### Recognize the Protector (Address)

When looking for restoration from abuse, the survivor must look to God, since spiritual restoration always begins with him. Abuse can profoundly distort God's image in victims (cognitive, emotional, volitional), since the abuse cuts to the core of who that person is and often results in distorted views of God and others. David, when attacked, turned to God for assistance and relief (vv. 1, 22, 23–24). David's repeated use of the imperative verb in verses 1–4 with the vocative *Yahweh* as the subject and the jussives ("let" or "may") throughout the psalm reflect his need for God. Even when the psalmist felt as though God had delayed in helping him ("how long will you look on" in v. 17), he brought his requests of deliverance to God. Additionally, David realized the sufficiency of God to meet his needs ("who is just like you?" in v. 10). Thus, the counselee must recognize her need to come to God for comfort, deliverance, and restoration. If the counselee has little or no relationship with God, then the counselor should methodically point her in that direction via the gospel. This dynamic further means that the biblical counselor must reject those methods for restoration that are not in keeping with God's, including psychological or integrationist paradigms.<sup>13</sup>

Since the counselee often feels abandoned by all, even by God, she needs reassurance concerning God's nature. David focused on the nature of God through the use of his name and titles.<sup>14</sup> *Yahweh* (God's personal name emphasizing his self-existence, faithfulness, and eternity) occurs eight times in the psalm. The titles *Adonai* (emphasizing God's position as "master") and *Elohim* (emphasizing God's supreme power) occur two times each. The psalmist's use of various names for God, often in compound with one another, indicate his understanding of God's nature and his need to remember his nature in biblical trust. The counselor will need to remind the survivor repeatedly of God's presence and care. His teaching must be biblical and thorough, based on passages that assure and explain God's care for the individual. He may have the individual memorize and meditate on key passages that will help remind the counselee of the nature and love of God, starting with helpful truths here in Psalm 35. The counselee may find these verses as she embarks on her own search for assurances of deliverance by God through the Book of Psalms.

It is one matter for the survivor to understand the nature and abilities of God but another to believe God *can* and *will* act in relation to her. The survivor, therefore, must personally relate to God's nature and abilities. She will not learn to trust again if she does not begin to view herself as the object

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<sup>13</sup> Psychology's materialism largely ignores the spiritual side of man, whereas integrationism diminishes the sufficiency of the Scriptures while inflating the sufficiency of psychology. Trauma-informed counseling most apparently tilts in these directions. The popular book *The Body Keeps the Score* is one such example of the materialistic view of man. See Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2014). Critiques of Van der Kolk's hypothesis come from both secular and biblical counselors. For secular counterpoints see George Bonanno, *The End of Trauma: How the New Science of Resilience Is Changing How We Think About PTSD* (New York: Basic, 2021) or Michael Scheeringa, *The Body Does Not Keep the Score: How Popular Beliefs About Trauma Are Wrong*, 2nd ed. (independently published, 2024). For a biblical-counseling perspective, see Francine Tan, "A Critical Evaluation of Bessel Van der Kolk's *The Body Keeps the Score*," *The Journal of Biblical Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (2023), [https://acbcdigitalresources.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/resources/JBSC/Fall+2023/JBSC+Fall+2023\\_Tan.pdf](https://acbcdigitalresources.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/resources/JBSC/Fall+2023/JBSC+Fall+2023_Tan.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> For further discussion on the names and titles of God, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 47–51.

of God's concern and care. David uses the first-person personal pronoun repeatedly throughout the psalm when beseeching God to act for him (vv. 1–3, 22–24). David's use of God's personal name (*Yahweh*) shows that he viewed God in a personal way as one with whom he had a relationship. In addition, this psalm is an individual lament showing that David was anticipating God's help for him, not just for others—a common doubt in abuse cases. Through David's example, the counselor needs to remind the survivor often that God's care is available for her *personally*, demonstrating often how God is working in her to restore her. She especially needs these truths when loneliness and abandonment resurface or when discouragement overwhelms her.

### Recount the Abuse (Lament)

#### *Before the Abuse*

It is the close relationship the survivor had with the abuser prior to the abuse that incites the feelings of betrayal. One does not feel betrayed by an enemy but rather by a friend. The psalmist first describes his relationship with the words “friend” and “brother” (v. 14). Both the disjunctive *waw*<sup>15</sup> and the emphatic pronoun<sup>16</sup> in verse 13 contrast the kindness he showed in this relationship with the misery his attackers showed him. Previously, his relationship with his attackers was a part of his everyday life, as the phrase “I went about (daily life)” demonstrates (v. 14). It is this betrayal that the counselor needs to address with the survivor to help her in restoration. Unlike her attacker, the Lord is loving and trustworthy. The counselor will need to establish that not all her relationships have been abusive. She will need to correct her fear of intimacy if she is ever to trust again. This truth should be a source of hope for the counselee, to realize that she can have healthy relationships based on her growing relationship with the Lord. This fact should also help in showing the counselee that she did not deserve abuse.

Betrayal is further inflamed by the love and sacrifice the survivor displays for the abuser. David depicts his love through sacrificial activities. In verse 13 he lists fasting and prayer on behalf of his attackers. He connects his fasting with “humbled my soul” and with “mourning attire,” showing humility, sincerity, and love for his attackers. His intercessions on behalf of the abuser were persistent, as David explains in the words, “My prayer upon my bosom kept returning.” Some commentators understand this phrase to mean that his head kept returning to his chest (as in “bowing”) in prayer. Perhaps a better explanation is that the statement represents unanswered prayer rather than his “head” since the “prayer” functions as the subject of the clause.<sup>17</sup> The use of the frequentative imperfect adds emphasis to his sacrifice. Even when the prayer kept returning unanswered, David continued praying. In verse 14, David stresses mourning clothing, noting that he mourns as one mourns for a mother. Here, the counselor can show that genuine love and sacrifice were not what caused the abuse, nor were those acts of love improper. The problem rests in the abuser, not in the actions of the survivor.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 129.

<sup>16</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991) 5:290.

<sup>17</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 143.

Furthermore, the counselor can show the survivor that she can show healthy love again in her relationships through biblical restoration. As always, it is important to remind the counselee that such restoration is based upon the restoration found through Christ in salvation and daily sanctification.

Usual and customary acts of love were natural for the survivor before the abuse because the survivor trusted the abuser. Herein lies the destructive nature of the betrayal. In verse 15, David notes that “the attackers gathered together against me, and I did not know it.” VanGemeran notes that this clause may indicate either that the psalmist did not know his attackers or that because of the attack, he did not *recognize* them as his former friends.<sup>18</sup> The latter is the better explanation since David is still speaking of the friends of verse 14. The fact that he neither expected the attack nor expected it to come from these individuals indicates his trust in them. His reaction would be a natural response considering he viewed them as brothers and friends. He further states throughout the psalm that they attack him deceptively and without reason (v. 19).

This principle provides one of the goals in the counseling setting. The abuse survivor has difficulty trusting because in the past such vulnerability proved to be disastrous. Here, the counselor can show the survivor that others have had their trust violated and restored; they provide a pattern for her restoration also. With God’s help, her trust can be restored toward those who are trustworthy. Therefore, the counselor can show from this psalm the trust that David regained, having had that trust violated in the past. The problem is not her inability to trust but rather the false assumption that pain comes from trusting others. If the survivor will work toward dealing biblically with the pain of betrayal and abuse, the survivor can see the fear of trusting relationships diminish and trust restored, especially toward God.

### *The Abuse Itself*<sup>9</sup>

The counselor now must turn the attention of the survivor toward the abuse itself, since the survivor often has unbiblical beliefs about the abuse. Recounting abuse for the sake of recounting accomplishes nothing, but recalling for assessing biblically is profitable, as the survivor learns to think truthfully about her experience.<sup>20</sup> The survivor must begin to recount the abuse, to face the damage done at the hands of the abuser as she calls for God to restore her while moving toward forgiveness (Matt 18:15–34).<sup>21</sup> David teaches several principles about his abuse that are noteworthy.

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<sup>18</sup> VanGemeran, 289.

<sup>19</sup> The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors defines abuse as “the pattern of sinful, selfish mistreatment of another made in God’s image, whereby moral agency, freedom of conscience informed by God’s Word, and God-given human dignity is violated by harmful acts (physical, sexual, verbal) or schemes to perpetuate oppression and unbiblical control.” ACBC Whitepaper, “Framework and Key Guidelines for Handling Abuse Cases,” [https://abuse.biblicalcounseling.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Committed-to-Care-Framework-and-Guidelines-Download\\_Aug-30.pdf](https://abuse.biblicalcounseling.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Committed-to-Care-Framework-and-Guidelines-Download_Aug-30.pdf), accessed December 27, 2024.

<sup>20</sup> For more on this subject, see Steve Viars, *Putting Your Past in Its Place* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> In Jesus’ parable of the unforgiving servant, the king took an accounting of what his servants owed. Such an accounting is not vindictive (or rooted in bitterness), but rather important for offering forgiveness for those wrongs.

## Reasons for the Abuse

The abuser will take advantage of the powerlessness of the survivor. Beginning in verse 10, David uses descriptive terms to demonstrate his weakness. He uses the word עָנִי, translated “unfortunate,” twice in this verse. This word denotes that “socially he is defenseless and subject to oppression,” a strange assessment given David’s position as monarch.<sup>22</sup> David also employs the word אֶבְיֹֹן “needy”, which is used in Scripture of those who are unable to protect themselves within society either economically or socially.<sup>23</sup> He states that the attackers are stronger than he. In verse 15, David speaks of his “stumbling” (צָלַע). When the psalmist was weak, his attackers struck. The counselor should stress to the survivor that the perpetrator took advantage of her because she was available and vulnerable, not because she either encouraged or deserved the abuse.<sup>24</sup>

Because the survivor is weak, the abuser will selfishly take from her without regard for her welfare. Several verses describe such action by the attackers. In verse 10, David describes their attack as “robbing.” The imagery here shows this one can least afford to be robbed (“needy”). The word גָּזַל conveys a “tearing away by force” and includes the use of violence.<sup>25</sup>

In verse 12, the psalmist uses the word “evil” or “misery” (רָעָה) to indicate an experience that causes physical and emotional pain.<sup>26</sup> Here, David remarks that his friends repaid his good with evil, a high insult in Jewish culture (cf. Prov 17:13). Furthermore, the word “bereavement” (שָׂכַל) is so extreme that it is used for sorrow associated with the loss of a child in many contexts. Hamilton suggests the reading, “There is a desolation in my soul.”<sup>27</sup>

David further shows the selfishness of the attackers in the difficult reading of verse 16, either “like godless mocking ones (after) a cake” or “mockers at a feast.” Some scholars believe the word מְעֹג should be translated “to encircle” as mockers.<sup>28</sup> The JPS version translates the clause “with impious, mocking grimace” but notes the Hebrew expression is difficult.<sup>29</sup> HALOT provides little assistance with the word but notes an Arabic cognate meaning “someone who mocks a cripple.”<sup>30</sup> The imagery of “gnashing” fits either interpretation, since it is an expression of an angry attack against the victim (cf. Acts 7:54). Here, the counselor can remind the survivor that not only did she not deserve the abuse but also did nothing to *invite* the abuse. It was the selfish desires and hatred of the individual that drove the abuser to commit this act of aggression.

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<sup>22</sup> Leonard J. Coppes, “עָנִי,” *TWOT*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:682.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, “אֶבְיֹֹן,” *TWOT*, 1:5.

<sup>24</sup> Common among abuse survivors is the belief that she either deserved or invited the abuse. She may base this belief on the accusations of the abuser or others.

<sup>25</sup> Elmer B. Smick, “גָּזַל,” *TWOT*, 2:158.

<sup>26</sup> G. Herbert Livingston, “רָעָה,” *TWOT*, 2:856.

<sup>27</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “שָׂכַל,” *TWOT*, 2:923.

<sup>28</sup> Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms 1*, AB (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1965), 1:209.

<sup>29</sup> *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), in loc.

<sup>30</sup> Ludwig Koehler, et al., *HALOT*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 2:610.

Lest one should say that the abuser did not intend to harm the survivor, the psalmist shows the abuser deliberately chooses to abuse the individual. Verse 4 describes his attackers as ones “plotting evil” against the psalmist. The word for plotting (בִּשְׁחָ) means to invent or devise a plan against someone.<sup>31</sup> David describes the result of the enemies’ scheming in verse 7 in the verbs “have set up secretly” and “have dug.” These are actions of premeditation evidenced by the scheming involved, actions that parallel “grooming” in today’s vernacular. David further confirms premeditation when he notes that his attackers were “planning” deceitful words against him in verse 20 (same word as v. 4); therefore, one cannot excuse the attacker for his actions. He is responsible because of the deliberate choice he made to attack, use, and injure the survivor.

### Description of the Abuse

The abuse may take on different forms in the life of the survivor. David experienced both physical and verbal attacks. The physical attacks are evident beginning in verse 1. David uses the word “fighting” to describe the attacks against him. This word has a martial tone that paints the imagery of physical assault.<sup>32</sup> David continues the martial imagery in verses 2–3 with the addition of the “shields” and “spear.” He adds that his attackers are “pursuing” him. This word (רָדַף) appears most often in the context of making war (Joshua) and persecuting an enemy (Psalms). The word has a predatory tone, as one would find in the context of war.<sup>33</sup>

The actions of the attackers indicate the emotional injury to the psalmist. He mentions in verse 12 that he feels “bereavement to [his] soul.” The phrase explains the depth of emotional pain David feels, even to the remotest parts of his inner man. To be clear, however, the individual’s emotions reflect his thoughts and beliefs.

David also addresses verbal abuse in several ways. In verse 11 the “ruthless witnesses” kept “asking things which [he does] not know.” Craigie remarks that the “asking” has the tone of an interrogation, a demand, attempting to gain a confession from David of something that he had not done.<sup>34</sup> David speaks of the “mocking ones” in verse 16. In verse 20, the attackers are not “speaking peace,” and they are “planning deceitful words.” Verse 21 amplifies this thought when David recites how they “open wide their mouth against me” saying, “our eyes have seen it,” reciting false accusations about the psalmist.

Knowing these forms, the survivor can examine and confront these kinds of abuse in her own life. She may uncover either unbiblical or incorrect thinking from actions she had not previously recognized as abuse. Therefore, the survivor will gain insight from viewing how David dealt with these abusive actions in turning to the Lord for vindication and restoration.

As the initial act of abuse progresses into habitual acts, the hopelessness becomes more acute. The abuse, however, continues even when the damage becomes apparent in the life of the survivor without

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<sup>31</sup> Leon J. Wood, “בִּשְׁחָ,” *TWOT*, 1:330.

<sup>32</sup> VanGemeran, 287.

<sup>33</sup> William White, “רָדַף,” *TWOT*, 2:834.

<sup>34</sup> Craigie, 287.

regard for her welfare. David uses several present participles to indicate the continual abuse, such as “striving” and “fighting” (v. 1), “pursuing” (v. 3), “seeking my soul” and “plotting” (v. 4), “robbing” (v. 10), “gnashing” (v. 16), and “hating” (v. 19). Waltke explains that the active participle expresses action that is continual, “prolonged,” and unbroken (in contrast to the imperfect tense).<sup>35</sup>

David’s attackers knew the damage, as he explains in verse 15. When they “tore” him apart, they continued without ceasing (“do not keep still”). Later the attackers rejoice in the destruction of the psalmist when they exclaim, “Aha our soul’s desire . . . we have swallowed him up” (v. 25). The word *בָּלַע* “swallow” often conveys destruction throughout the OT.<sup>36</sup> The attackers’ “soul’s desire” points to the fact that they had achieved their goal in destroying the psalmist.<sup>37</sup>

Because of the duration of the abuse, the counselor will need to address the issue of time with the counselee. Since the survivor has suffered sustained acts of abuse, restoration may not happen quickly. The counselor and the survivor will need to display patience and seek persistent instruction from the Word. Here, the counselor will also find it helpful to remind the counselee that she has survived the acts of abuse, even though they were so destructive. Since she has survived the abuse, she can not only survive the recovery but can also grow spiritually through this time of testing (Jas 1:2–11). The psalm also indicates to the readers that God not only sees and condemns such treatment but also provides the needed care to restore such a person toward Christlike responses.

### The Response to the Abuse

When the abuse is exposed, the abuser often either blames the survivor for the abuse or diminishes and/or denies the abuse. This blame-shifting was the point of the ruthless witnesses that David mentions (v. 11). The interrogation, to which David did not know how to respond, was intended to show either that David was at fault or to divert the attention away from the attack.<sup>38</sup> Such was the intention in verse 20 (“planning deceitful words”). The false accusers attempted to slander the psalmist with false accusations. Likewise, the survivor must realize that the shroud of secrecy that started with abuse will be difficult to remove. The perpetrator will attempt to blame and shame her into retracting her claims, perhaps even manipulating others whom she thought were allies.

Furthermore, the survivor needs to look for allies who will also encourage her through her restoration and growth (Rom 12:14–21). The psalmist, though initially feeling abandoned, even by God (v. 17), realizes by the end of the psalm that there are those who are supportive of his protection and recovery (v. 27). David describes these genuine allies as ones “who desire the well-being of his servant.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Waltke, 613.

<sup>36</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, “*בָּלַע*,” *TWOT*, 1:112.

<sup>37</sup> Leupold, 291.

<sup>38</sup> Delitzsch, 271.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.



*After the Abuse*

## Reflections About Self

David includes laments about his own emotions from the betrayal in the psalm. From them, the survivor can relate not only to the nature of the abuse but also to how the abuse influences her thoughts and emotions. It is always important to remember that a person cannot change her emotions by herself, but by adjusting her theology, her emotions will eventually align with truth.<sup>40</sup> David addresses feelings of fear, sadness, anger, and betrayal throughout the psalm. Suffice it to say that David experiences the full range of these emotions in verses 4–6, 8, 12, 13–17, and 19–21. Here David recognizes truth about God that alleviates both his flawed thinking and his turbulent emotions.

One area of emotion David exhibits is utter hopelessness and entrapment. Survivors of abuse will suffer with the hopeless feeling of being trapped first by their attackers, then by the resulting circumstances and fears. David uses the images of hunting to define these feelings. In verse 7 he describes the traps set as a “net” (רֶשֶׁת) and a “pit” (שִׁחַת). Hunters used both devices for entrapping animals, but here the terms are metaphorical for trapping people covertly.<sup>41</sup> In verse 15 David mentions two times that the attackers “gathered together” against him. Between verses 15–17, he paints an image that is predatory in nature with the words “attackers,” “tore” (v. 15), “gnashing with teeth” (v. 16), and “lions” (v. 17). From these words, one envisions the attackers surrounding the psalmist, entrapping him for their attack.

Just as the psalmist finds comfort and relief through the expression of his thoughts, desires, and emotions, the abuse survivor can openly share the same with the counselor and ultimately with the Lord. When she does, she and the counselor will be able to deal with faulty feelings and underlying beliefs in a biblical way, learning to trust the Lord’s presence and care in her life again. She can find comfort through the Lord as she shares those feelings and thoughts with him. David’s focus on God’s nature and work is the antidote to the chronic fear, sadness, shame, anger, and betrayal that she may battle.

## Reflections About God

Of all the emotions and thoughts the survivor faces, one of the most troubling will be the feeling that God has abandoned her to her suffering. Survivors will believe and feel as though God was either inattentive or inactive toward their needs. David shares these thoughts and emotions as well. He expresses them once in a lament (framed as a question) and twice in a petition. In verse 17, he asks *Adonai*, “How long will you look on?” The statement questions God’s *seeming* indifference or passivity to the individual’s suffering.<sup>42</sup> Here the psalmist is lamenting not only the level of suffering in the event but also the duration.<sup>43</sup> David uses two statements to express these laments in verse 22. He

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<sup>40</sup> For more on sanctifying emotions, see Brian Borgman, *Feelings and Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> *HALOT*, s.v. “רֶשֶׁת” and “שִׁחַת.”

<sup>42</sup> J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms 1–50*, CBCNEB (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 164.

<sup>43</sup> Broyles, 100.

writes, “Do not keep silent” (חרש), an expression that refers to a person who is not hearing and, therefore, is unresponsive.<sup>44</sup> Here, David’s *perception* is that God is non-responsive to his suffering. Likewise, his perception about God being far from him moves him to request a change. While some may question the appropriateness of such a statement, the psalmist is open with God concerning his feelings and thoughts. In expressing what God already knows about the psalmist (cf. Ps 139:1–6), the psalmist can deal with his faulty beliefs and accompanying feelings God’s way in humble dependence and submission to truth.

The survivor of abuse needs to be equally honest with her feelings of abandonment. As she confesses these feelings, the counselor can remind her of the truth about God and can help her realize the extent and nature of the Lord’s involvement in both her protection and restoration.<sup>45</sup>

### Request Deliverance (Petition)

Having recognized the injury and pain the survivor has experienced, she must advance in her growth process. Without biblical renewal, she will likely remain in a state of emotional trauma as a victim. The survivor does not need to be controlled by the pain of the abuse but rather seek biblical change in her responses to her suffering and in her trust toward God and others. When David experienced betrayal, he brought the pain to God rather than ignoring or denying it. Of the twenty-eight verses in this psalm, fifteen contain petitions for God to act on his behalf. In these fifteen verses, David uses the imperative eight times and the jussive twenty-one times. Each of these volitional forms requests God to act in a way that would change the circumstances.

More importantly, included in these requests is a desire for God to produce change in David himself. For instance, in verse 3, the psalmist solicits comfort and assurance from God. In verse 24 he desires God to examine him according to his righteousness. The juxtaposition of praise with lament at the end of each strophe indicates further that David did not desire to remain in a condition of anger and bitterness but instead desired to express praise to God. Nowhere is this more evident than in verse 9, where David uses the future imperfect in expressing his determination to praise God. Leupold observes that the psalmist states his goal unconditionally.<sup>46</sup> One should not miss the contrast when David states in verse 12 that his soul was “bereaved,” while in verse 9, “my soul shall shout for joy,” and in verse 10 “all my bones shall [rejoice].” David is looking for profound change to occur not just in his circumstances, but even more in *himself*. Furthermore, David does not rejoice in the downfall of his enemies but in the deliverance that uniquely belongs to Yahweh (“who is like you”). This clause serves as the focal point of the entire psalm, demonstrating the incomparable nature of the God who truly delivers.

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<sup>44</sup> HALOT, s.v. “חרש.”

<sup>45</sup> The author often cites Romans 8:32 to remind the counselee that if God provides the most sacrificial gift for one’s greatest peril, he will certainly provide what she needs for the lesser concerns. Jesus’ active intercessory work for believers confirms his constant involvement in their restoration and growth (Heb 4:15).

<sup>46</sup> Leupold, 287.

As David finds hope in God alone, so the counselor should be consistent in reminding the survivor of the hope that rests in God's deliverance and restoration. She should not be content to be dominated by pain, or as some suggest, to simply put it out of her mind. The Psalms demonstrate that believers deal with skewed emotions and beliefs with potent and accurate theology in their relationship with God. In other words, the goal in the counseling setting should move from pain to praise through genuine restoration. Such a notion will sound insurmountable initially, but when the restoration begins, the counselee will experience relief through restoration for the first time.

The survivor should ask God for direct intervention. The opening verses of the psalm express this truth using imperative verbs. In verse 3 David uses the word קרא "come against" to appeal for an intentional confrontation between God and his attackers.<sup>47</sup> Again in verse 17, the psalmist asks God to "rescue my soul from their ruin," using the imperative verb. Later in verse 23, he requests that God would "stir up" and "be active" for justice. Here David was asking God to become actively involved in his plight.<sup>48</sup>

The counselor needs to point the survivor to God as the means of restoration, comfort, and justice. When the survivor asks God for such intervention, she will be expressing verbally the desires she has and demonstrating the trust she needs to rebuild. The counselor may direct her to write out her prayers of intervention so that she may later remind herself of what she has asked God to do and how God has answered according to his will. She needs to search the Scriptures for other examples of those who asked God for help and how he responded. The life of David when fleeing Saul could serve as an example of David's reliance upon God's intervention.

When asking God to intervene, the survivor should leave thoughts of vengeance with God. It is here that the exegete is confronted with the difficulty of imprecations. One only needs to peruse the commentaries to find diverging views on how to handle imprecatory prayers. Though the scope of this paper cannot include a thorough discussion, several principles help resolve this problem.

First, while some may view these prayers as unspiritual, David is, on the contrary, very concerned about God's righteousness.<sup>49</sup> This fact is evident in this psalm when David asks God to "judge according to [God's] righteousness" (v. 24) and states that his "tongue shall proclaim [God's] righteousness" (v. 28).<sup>50</sup>

Second, the psalmist is expressing his desire for God to deal with the attacker rather than executing vengeance himself. Bellinger correctly notes, "These psalms are prayers addressed to God, not curses. . . . Thus they leave any decision in the matter to God."<sup>51</sup> Fee adds that the imprecatory psalms "guide or channel our anger *to and through God* verbally, rather than to or at anyone else, verbally or

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<sup>47</sup> Leonard J. Coppes, "קרא," *TWOT*, 2:811.

<sup>48</sup> Paul R. Gilchrist, "קרא," *TWOT*, 1:398.

<sup>49</sup> J. Carl Laney, "A Fresh Look at the Imprecatory Psalms," *BSac* 138 (January-March 1981): 41.

<sup>50</sup> The author acknowledges theocratic concerns with David that do not match those of a NT believer. The point remains, however, that believers today should take their desires for justice to God (and to appropriate civil authorities) rather than seeking personal vengeance. Remarkably, David had the authority to take such actions as king and yet at times chose not to.

<sup>51</sup> W. H. Bellinger, *Reading and Studying the Book of Psalms* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1990), 54.

physically.”<sup>52</sup> David’s life is a prime example of this principle at work. As often as David expressed anger concerning his domestic enemies, he consistently refused to take matters into his own hands.<sup>53</sup> Bringing his desires to God reveals his proclivity to leave the problem with God and wait upon him to act out of his righteousness.

Third, the NT, despite its teaching on loving one’s enemies, also contains believers’ statements concerning judgment. For instance, Paul, perhaps acting through apostolic authority, petitions the Lord to repay Alexander the coppersmith according to his deeds (2 Tim 4:14). The martyred saints request God’s judgment upon their persecutors (Rev 6:9–10). Tribulation saints rejoice at the judgment of Babylon and the great harlot (Rev 19:1–3). There is no incompatibility between forgiveness and wanting God to display his righteous justice. Believers should not overlook sin, but justice must come from God and appropriate judicial authorities, rather than from individual believers.

In summary, Bellinger aptly explains the purpose of the imprecatory prayer this way: “The worshiper does not destroy the enemy, but in a liberating act of faith, places the matter with God.”<sup>54</sup> Likewise, the purpose for such prayers in the life of the abused is to turn the matter over to God in an act of faith, freeing the soul of the survivor from bitterness and hatred. When asking God to intervene, the survivor should leave desires of vengeance with God (Rom 12:19).

The most obvious imprecations in this psalm are found in verses 4–6. The first two requests relate to the attitude of the abuser. The psalmist desires to see them “shamed” (בוש) and “humiliated” (בלם). These two synonyms are often juxtaposed to stress the guilt associated with wrongdoing.<sup>55</sup> A third term employed in this verse is the word סוג, which means “made to draw back.” Wakely comments that in the Niphal stem the word is “often used of faithless conduct, of a treacherous desertion of one to whom a firm commitment had been made.”<sup>56</sup> This word also involves shame but is used more often in contexts that are hostile.<sup>57</sup> Even David’s desire to shame his attackers he left with God to impose.

The latter two requests deal more with protection of the survivor from the attacker. These two requests are parallel in their construction but contrasting in meaning. In both cases, David requests that the Angel of Yahweh become involved in this judgment. In verse 5, he asks that his attackers “become as chaff before the wind.” The Angel’s role, described in circumstantial clauses,<sup>58</sup> is to push them on, as if to prevent them from committing the offense again. The image here is one of removal and resulting protection.

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<sup>52</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 182.

<sup>53</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 294–95.

<sup>54</sup> Bellinger, 54.

<sup>55</sup> John N. Oswalt, “בוש,” *TWOT*, 1:98; idem, “בלם,” *ibid.*, 1:442–43.

<sup>56</sup> Robin Wakely, “סוג,” *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:230.

<sup>57</sup> R. D. Patterson, “סוג,” *TWOT*, 2:619.

<sup>58</sup> Delitzsch, 269.

On the other hand, verse 6 seems to be an image of helplessness or fear.<sup>59</sup> Here, the psalmist desires their way to be “dark” and “slippery” (קִלְקִלָּה), with the Angel of Yahweh pursuing them.<sup>60</sup> David wishes the attackers to feel the same helplessness he felt when attacked, as the Angel pursued them. David expresses in these verses some statements that seem rather harsh. He was, however, merely expressing emotions that God already knew he possessed. David reminds the reader that God knows all about the abuse (v. 22) and his resulting thoughts and emotions (v. 24).

These expressions lead to at least three reasons David gives for submitting these thoughts to God. First, God alone can meet the needs of the survivor (v. 10). Second, he alone knows the truth (v. 22). Third, he alone is righteous to judge correctly (v. 24). The psalmist, having realized that only God could deal righteously with his desires, describes those thoughts and emotions to God in hopeful expectation that God will respond.

As for the survivor, regardless of how shocking her thoughts may be, she needs to express them to God, not because God needs information but because the counselee needs to include God in her life. The depth of her grief requires open and frequent expression of her thoughts and emotions in a biblical way with a goal toward forgiveness of the perpetrator, should he repent, and biblical restoration for herself. The counselor can help by encouraging her that such desires are typical for survivors, even if unbiblical at times. As always, repentance and replacement are essential in her restoration (Eph 4:22–24). In encouraging such expression, she is rebuilding the trust she needs in God. She may find that keeping a journal of her thoughts and emotions will help her as well. As she adds to her journal, she will see the progress that she has made as she depends on God for restoration. Above all, she should not feel ashamed that she battles such responses. She should, however, view the thoughts as an indication of her deep spiritual needs that only the Scriptures and sanctification can address.

In expressing her thoughts and emotions to God, the survivor should desire appropriate response to the abuse. David, based upon God’s law, invokes the principle of *lex talionis* in requesting justice from God. Contrary to popular opinion, the “eye for eye” principle was not a primitive vindictive statute, but a principle based upon equity. Motyer remarks,

The basic principle of OT jurisprudence was absolute equity, enunciated in the striking and memorable form “an eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth.” This is often unthinkingly criticized as if it were a license for savagery, but reflection establishes that its intention was to secure as exact an equation as is humanly possible between crime and punishment.<sup>61</sup>

David uses this principle in his language. For instance, he asks God to “strive” with those who were striving with him and to “fight” with those who were fighting against him (v. 1). In verse 7 he describes the “pit” and “net” in which his attackers had attempted to capture him. David turns those

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<sup>59</sup> Kidner, 143.

<sup>60</sup> The Angel of Yahweh appears only here and in 34:7 in the Psalms. The reference may connect events here with the Angel’s protection during the Exodus.

<sup>61</sup> J. A. Motyer, “Civil Law and Justice in Bible Times,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 265–66.

devices upon his attackers in verse 8 in requesting that they be caught in their own mechanisms. In the same verse he requests that they fall into “ruin.” The word שׁוֹאָה “ruin” suggests “an irrecoverable state of devastation and destruction” that is characteristic of God’s judgment.<sup>62</sup> In fact, this word is the same as the modern Hebrew word used for the Holocaust.<sup>63</sup> One should not view such action as retaliation by the survivor but as just retribution by God for crimes committed by the aggressor.<sup>64</sup>

What kind of actions may be appropriate? David requests both physical and judicial action. The martial images (vv. 1–3) were discussed earlier, but these images do imply physical protection. The judicial images appear in the first and last strophes of the psalm. In verse 1, David uses the word רִיב “strive.” The AV translates this word as “plead,” reflecting the legal sense of the word. *HALOT* concurs with this sense, stating that the word is a “legal term” meaning “to dispute, to plead the case of.”<sup>65</sup> In verse 23 David requests that God become active “to [his] justice” and his “legal case.” The latter term is the same word David uses for “strive” in verse 1. The former term, מִשְׁפָּט, is the common word for justice or judgment referring to standard functions of government in providing justice for the oppressed.<sup>66</sup> The synonymous parallelism in this verse helps the exegete understand further the sense of the word “strive.”

The recent nature of the abuse will determine what is the appropriate action for one to take. Likewise, the actions depend upon who the survivor is. Certainly, if the survivor is a minor, counselors involved need to report to civil authorities to provide protection for the child and seek appropriate justice. For adult survivors of abuse, the actions may differ from those listed above. At the least, the abused needs to take appropriate biblical action. These actions include confrontation and forgiveness (Matt 18) of the abuser when possible and appropriate in a way that is safe for both the counselee and counselor. Furthermore, the counselor will need to remind the survivor that although God did not prevent the abuse, he certainly protected her through the abuse; she is a survivor.

Having called for God to act, the survivor herself should lay the blame where it belongs—with the abuser. This action involves exposure of the truth. David exemplifies this principle when he calls for God to shame the attackers (vv. 4, 26). Both verses use the same expressions to describe the psalmist’s request. He uses two Hebrew words in verse 4, while in verse 26 David adds a third. The added word, חִפּוּר “disgraced,” occurs fourteen times in parallel with בּוֹשׁ. Wood claims that the former word is an amplification of the latter and that the two words in concert carry the meaning of “disappointment because of unfulfilled expectations.”<sup>67</sup> The word for “ashamed” (חִפּוּר), according to Seebass, is used to identify a relationship that is based upon falsehood. He states,

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<sup>62</sup> Rick Brannan, ed., *Lexham Research Lexicon of the Hebrew Bible*, Lexham Research Lexicons (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), s.v. “שׁוֹאָה.”

<sup>63</sup> Goldingay, 493.

<sup>64</sup> Leupold, 287.

<sup>65</sup> *HALOT*, 3:1224.

<sup>66</sup> Robert D. Culver, “שְׁפָט,” *TWOT*, 2:948.

<sup>67</sup> Leon J. Wood, “חִפּוּר,” *TWOT*, 1:311.

Such a desire, then, is motivated not primarily by revenge, but by the fact that the falsehood with which the worshiper's enemies deal with him, and thus negatively the truth of God, shall be manifest in his enemies. . . . In any case, it seems to me that the interpretation that the worshiper here is demanding revenge is wrong. What he is requesting is a clear revelation of his God.<sup>68</sup>

The psalmist, therefore, is seeking for the truth to be revealed about the attacker's relationship with both him and God. David further desires this shame upon his abusers because they "magnify" themselves against the psalmist. David explains this in verse 26. Because of the attack, David's enemies viewed themselves as proudly victorious.<sup>69</sup> The psalmist desires that the attackers view their actions with shame rather than with pride. He states this in another way earlier in verse 19: "Do not let them rejoice over me." In verse 27 he states this same concept positively toward his allies. What David desires is that the truth would be known and, because of the truth, that his attackers would feel shame rather than pride. He even states that they should "put on shame" like one would wear a garment (v. 26).

The survivor of abuse cannot allow individuals to make excuses for either the abuse or the abuser. The truth must be revealed to those involved. This action should eventually include confronting the abuser with the hurt he has caused in some form when appropriate. Revealing the truth may, as needed, include reporting to civil authorities and warning others so that they are not injured in the same way. The counselee must be careful that throughout this process her motives are not to injure the perpetrator but to protect others. Furthermore, revealing the truth will help in identifying her allies.

Having assessed the damage through the truth, the survivor needs to work at rebuilding trust in God. She should work at viewing God's protection and deliverance as sufficient for her needs. The psalmist uses two images in verse 2 to portray God's sufficient protection. He speaks of God taking hold of both the "small shield" and the "large shield." Warriors used the small shield to deflect blows of the sword and the large shield as a protection for the whole body. Delitzsch notes that the "figure is idealized to show absolute protection."<sup>70</sup>

In verse 3 David calls for God to take the spear and cut off the way of the attackers. The word "javelin" has caused some problems for interpreters. Some have taken this weapon as the Scythian (or Persian) battleaxe (קֶטֶב), to maintain parallelism with the "spear." Since, however, the battleaxe was unknown in Hebrew usage, the variant reading of "cutting off the way" is preferred by some commentators.<sup>71</sup> Either way, the line stresses a realized protection that prompted the psalmist to request assurance in verse 3b. Of the word "salvation," Hartley writes, "One who experiences salvation does not need to be tormented by internal anxiety."<sup>72</sup> It was David's realization of God's ability to

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<sup>68</sup> Horst Seebass, "חֶפֶר," in *TDOT*, rev. ed., ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 2:59.

<sup>69</sup> Waltke, 440.

<sup>70</sup> Delitzsch, 268.

<sup>71</sup> See Leupold, 291; Delitzsch, 269; and Kidner, 142.

<sup>72</sup> John E. Hartley, "יִשְׁע," *TWOT*, 1:415.

protect that brought him comfort to deal with the aftermath of suffering. Wilson explains it well, saying,

In response to the psalmist's cry, Yahweh runs through the fray, spear and shield in hand, to defend the psalmist's life. As he does so, Yahweh's ringing voice is heard above the din of battle, shouting "I am your salvation!" This encourages the beleaguered psalmist to hang on until deliverance arrives.<sup>73</sup>

Therefore, not only should the survivor view God's protection as sufficient, but she should also seek personal reassurance of God's protection. Between verses 3 and 10, David changes his wording from a request to an affirmation of who God is. Seeking the personal assurance in verse 3 produced a change in David's view of God's protection.

The counselor should encourage the survivor to enumerate her physical, emotional, and spiritual needs to God. As she catalogs her desires, bringing them to God, she will see how God is meeting them. Taking note of both God's answers and the way he answers will reinforce the principle of God's protection in her mind and move her to realize God's care for her.

#### Acknowledge Dependence (Confession of Trust)

The survivor has now arrived at the crux of the matter. She has been betrayed and therefore has likely lost trust in others and in God, a trust she needs to regain. Since the survivor has begun to request God's help, she can acknowledge her trust in God, even if her thoughts at times conflict. Such acknowledgement should include daily repentance of both thoughts and feelings that deviate from trust in God's nature, presence, and care.

David requests assurance of God's deliverance in verse 3, indicating his desire for such assurance. By verse 10, David makes a startling confession. He states, "You are one who is rescuing the unfortunate." What prompted the change in David? Among other things we have already observed, in asking God for deliverance David begins to rely upon God for what he needs. That reliance helps him to regain trust in God (cf. vv. 17 and 22). He uses the active participle to show that this action was one he viewed as durative.<sup>74</sup> The psalmist begins this confession with a statement followed by a question: "All my bones shall say, 'Yahweh, who is just like you?'" The expression "bones" is synecdochical, a part used to express the whole. Kidner adds that this expression is emphatically declaring his personal trust in God.<sup>75</sup> The question is a "Hebraic way of confessing with deep conviction that there is no other than *Yahweh* who delivers."<sup>76</sup> David's feelings of abandonment are replaced with a confident trust that God is going to work on his behalf. Goldingay states it well:

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<sup>73</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1:579.

<sup>74</sup> Waltke, 613.

<sup>75</sup> Kidner, 143.

<sup>76</sup> VanGemeren, 288.



In a sense the psalm thus expresses less-cool faith than many others. Yet it also articulates a particularly consistent expectation that one will be given reason for thanksgiving and testimony, and makes a commitment to offering it. In its own way, Ps. 35 insists on looking in the face two sets of facts, like Ps. 22. It looks in the face the fact of vicious attack and serious danger, and it looks in the face the fact that Yhwh is a powerful and delivering God and surely will act to put down attackers.<sup>77</sup>

#### Anticipate Deliverance (Vow of Praise)

The confession of trust coupled with the vow of praise establishes the overall theme of trust. The confession is the overt statement of trust, while the praise is the evidence that the individual is anticipating God's response. Therefore, the survivor should anticipate deliverance in her praise (cf. Lam 3:21–24).

David expresses his vow of praise at the end of each strophe. The first vow (vv. 9–10) begins with the disjunctive *waw* contrasting the pain of his “soul” in verses 3, 4, and 7 (translated “life”) with the praise of his soul in verse 9.<sup>78</sup> The praise is the result of God's deliverance David requests in verse 8,<sup>79</sup> even before the deliverance has been accomplished.<sup>80</sup>

The counselor needs to assist the survivor, particularly in the early stages of recovery, in thanking the Lord for his care for her. She may not easily identify occasions that call for praise, even when they exist. The counselor may guide her in identifying areas in which to anticipate God's work of healing. Such activities will help instill hope in the survivor, realizing that God is going to restore her. As she progresses, the restoration she experiences should prompt a heart of praise and stimulate both the spiritual and emotional energy toward further spiritual progress and growth.

Not only should the survivor be involved in private praise, but she should also appropriately share her experience of deliverance with others. As painful as the abuse was, she now believes differently about God's grand purpose in her through that difficult trial. This action is especially evident in the psalmist's life in verse 18. David speaks of praising in the “great assembly” and among “a mighty group of people.” David so anticipates God's deliverance that he looks forward to leading the congregation of God's people in praise for his deliverance. Leupold writes, “David was always a man who thought carefully as to how his own experience might be made profitable for his people.”<sup>81</sup>

The survivor of abuse not only will help others in her testimony, but she will also benefit from the support of those individuals. David stresses this principle in verses 27–28. He begins his vow of praise with a petition concerning those who care for his well-being. He desires that they also would be able

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<sup>77</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 1: Psalms 1–41*, BCOTWP, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 504.

<sup>78</sup> Waltke, 129.

<sup>79</sup> VanGemeren, 287.

<sup>80</sup> Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox, 1965), 79–80.

<sup>81</sup> Leupold, 289.

to rejoice in God's deliverance in his life. Having the support of such individuals causes David to issue his vow in verse 28. Having seen the support of others, David desires to praise God also. Therefore, the abused individual will benefit by talking about her suffering and restoration; she will identify those who support her. She will benefit others who have experienced abuse. Her action, however, is not about seeking sympathy or glorifying herself but about exalting the Lord and his deliverance.

From these principles, one should understand the importance of daily confessing trust and praising God. Not only will the survivor be relying upon God to meet her needs, but she will also be dealing openly with her need of trusting God and anticipating what he will accomplish in her life in renewing her mind and attitudes. The counselor will need to re-emphasize repeatedly that, even though God did not prevent the abuse, he was aware of the abuse, limited the abuse, did not approve of the abuse, and desires the restoration and growth of the abuse survivor. The counselor needs to articulate clearly a biblical theology of suffering (perhaps Romans 8 or 1 Peter) to the survivor so that she may gain an understanding of why God allows and even ordains individuals to suffer. As the survivor works through these issues, she should be able to see progress toward trusting God (and others) and anticipating God's work in praise.

### *Synthesis of the Psalm*

There are three strophes in this psalm. The first and third strophes contain strong petitions (six statements each), laments (one and two statements respectively), and two vows of praise. The second strophe contains no petitions, strong lament (seven statements), and one vow of praise. From these facts, the counselor may glean some concluding principles that may apply in abuse situations.

The survivor's emotions will often move in cycles. This is most evident when one looks at the three cycles of lament through which David progresses. In each strophe, David issues a lament but ends in praise. Even in the middle strophe with the strongest of laments, David ends in praise. The survivor should be aware that because she has worked through the pain of her suffering, she may experience more bouts with sorrow and pain; but she can and should move back to trust and praise. With time and growth, these cycles will continue to diminish.

Survivors of abuse will experience emotions that vary in type and intensity. There is no set pattern to David's laments or petitions.<sup>82</sup> As one reads through the psalm, he will sense the greatest urgency concerning protection in the first strophe, while vindication becomes predominant in the second and third strophes. Therefore, the counselee should understand that her emotions will change from time to time; those changes do not indicate a regression but a normal progression towards restoration.

Furthermore, the survivor should understand that throughout her recovery, her prayers may include complaints about her pain, requests concerning her desires, and confession of trust coupled with praise, and yet be biblical prayers. David, both here and on other occasions, includes these elements in his prayers (see also Pss 69 and 109) and remains confident that God is hearing him. If David, a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22), can pray as openly as described in this psalm, so can others who have suffered abuse.

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<sup>82</sup> Westermann, 64.

*Conclusion*

The problem of the initial betrayal is only compounded by the continued distrust in relationships. If the survivor of abuse is ever to become a survivor who thrives, she must move beyond the abuse to a position of restored trust in God and others. As she submits to biblical principles, she can pick up the pieces and reassemble them into a life that brings glory to God and help to others. The counselee will become a survivor-thriver by recognizing the protector, recounting the abuse, requesting deliverance and comfort, acknowledging dependence upon God, and anticipating deliverance from him.

*Appendix: Translation of Psalm 35*

## First Strophe

- 1 Of David  
Strive, *Yahweh*, with those striving against me;  
Fight with those who are fighting against me.
- 2 Take hold of [the] small shield and [the] large shield,  
And rise up for my help!
- 3 And draw [the] spear and close up [the way]  
to come against those who are pursuing me.  
Say to my soul, "I [am] your salvation."
- 4 Let them be ashamed and be humiliated  
who are seeking my soul.  
Let them be made to draw back and be ashamed  
who are plotting evil against me.
- 5 Let them be as chaff before the wind,  
with the Angel of *Yahweh* pushing [them on].
- 6 Let their way be dark and slippery,  
with the Angel of *Yahweh* pursuing them.
- 7 Because without cause they have set up secretly for me a net,  
[because] without cause they have dug a pit for my life.
- 8 Let ruin come upon him without knowing,  
And let the net catch him which he set up secretly;  
Into ruin let him fall into it.
- 9 So my soul shall shout for joy in *Yahweh*;  
It shall rejoice in his deliverance.
- 10 All my bones shall say, "*Yahweh*, who is just like you?  
"You are one who is rescuing the unfortunate from the one [who is] stronger than he,  
"And the unfortunate and needy from the one who is robbing him."

## Second Strophe

- 11 Ruthless witnesses rise up;  
Things which I do not know they are asking.
- 12 They repay me misery instead of kindness,  
[causing] bereavement [*or* desolation] to my soul.
- 13 But as for me, when they were taken ill, my clothing [was] sackcloth.  
I humbled my soul with fasting and my prayer upon my bosom kept returning.
- 14 As a friend, as a brother to me,  
I went about [daily life] as in mourning for a mother;

- Dressing in mourning attire,  
I bowed down.
- 15 But in my stumbling they rejoiced and were gathered together;  
The attackers gathered together against me, and I did not know;  
They tore [me] apart and do not keep still.
- 16 Like godless mocking ones surrounding [*or* after a cake],  
They are ones gnashing upon me with their teeth.
- 17 *Adonai*, how long will you look on?  
Rescue my soul from their ruin,  
From lions my only [life].
- 18 I will praise you in the great assembly;  
I will praise you among a mighty [group of] people.

### Third Strophe

- 19 Do not let them rejoice over me,  
    who are my enemies deceptively,  
[Nor] let those who are hating me without cause wink [in maliciousness] their eye.
- 20 Because they are never speaking peace,  
And against those who live quietly in the land they are planning deceitful words.
- 21 Then they opened wide their mouth against me;  
they said, “Aha, aha, with our eyes we have seen [it]!”
- 22 You have seen it, *Yahweh*;  
Do not keep silent, *Adonai*;  
Do not be far from me.
- 23 Stir up and be active to my justice,  
My *Elohim* and my *Adonai*, to my legal case.
- 24 Judge me according to your righteousness,  
*Yahweh* my *Elohim*, and do not let them rejoice over me.
- 25 Do not let them say in their heart, “Aha our soul!”  
Do not let them say, “We have swallowed him up.”
- 26 Let them be ashamed and disgraced all together  
    who rejoice in my hurt;  
Let them put on shame and be humiliated,  
    the ones who exalt themselves against me.
- 27 Let them shout for joy and rejoice  
    who take pleasure in my righteousness;  
Let them say continually, “Let *Yahweh* be magnified,  
    the one who desires the well-being of his servant.”
- 28 And my tongue shall proclaim your righteousness,  
All the day your praise.