

# A Prayer for the Betrayed

Psalm 55

Psalm 55 is a story. It doesn't look like a story. We aren't told of a specific time or place or event – all the normal things we see in a story. But it is a story, nonetheless. It's the story of a wounded heart. The contours of this psalm are formed by the twisting and turning of David's inner torment. He is in great pain and these words are the furrows ploughed by his grief.

Notice the words David uses to express what he is feeling in **verses 4-5**:

*My heart is in anguish within me;  
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.  
Fear and trembling come upon me,  
and horror overwhelms me.*

"Anguish, terror, fear, trembling, horror." David multiplies synonyms in an attempt to describe something that evades description. How do you describe a chainsaw to the soul?

The obvious question is, what happened? What could possibly be the cause of such anguish? The answer, in Psalm 55, is betrayal. Someone, a close friend, betrayed him.

## I. An Overwhelmed Man

There are other things that are hounding him. In **verses 9-11** David speaks of those the "violence and strife" he sees in the city of Jerusalem.

*Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues;  
for I see violence and strife in the city.  
Day and night they go around it  
on its walls, and iniquity and trouble are within it;  
ruin is in its midst; oppression and fraud  
do not depart from its marketplace.*

As the king, these things are deeply troubling to him. David loves this city. He loves the people of God and has been anointed king by God to establish righteousness, peace, and justice in the land. The violence in the city is a personal affront to him and an indictment regarding his rule. It would be bad enough if violence and strife, iniquity and trouble, were happening on the outskirts of Israel, out along the borders of Palestine. But "ruin is in its midst." Oppression and fraud are happening in the markets of Jerusalem – right under David's nose and before his eyes. This is normal life in the big city, but David hates it, has lost all patience for it, and wants God to make it stop!

*Psalm 55:9 Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues.*

This is a reference to the tower of Babel (Genesis 11). The nations gathered to oppose God, but God destroyed their ambitions by confusing their languages – so the whole enterprise came to a screeching halt. David is praying, *Lord, do that. Destroy their ambitions; confound and confuse them. Do whatever it takes to make them stop.*

In **verse 15**, the request becomes more urgent:

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

David is surely thinking of the rebellion of Korah in Moses' day. We read about it in Numbers 16. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled against the leadership of Moses, and God judged them by opening the earth beneath them so that they went down to Sheol alive. The raw nerves of David's heart have made the normal wickedness of the city just too much. He can't do this anymore. *Lord, just deal with them.*

But the violence and strife in the city are not what fills him with fear, trembling, and horror. These things aren't the "problem." They are normal aggravations that have become overwhelming because of the deeper heartache.

Don't you find that to be the case? When you have some particular heartache, you have less ability to deal with normal irritations. When a loved one is dying, a broken dryer or bad traffic can drive you to tears. When your marriage is strained, the normal frustrations of parenting become overwhelming. But these things aren't "the problem." The problem is a broken heart.

David points to the true issue, the true crisis of his soul in **verses 12-13**:

*For it is not an enemy who taunts me—  
then I could bear it;  
it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—  
then I could hide from him.  
But it is you, a man, my equal,  
my companion, my familiar friend.*

That's the heartache.

## II. A Brokenhearted Man

There is a pain in being taunted by your enemies. But it's a "bearable" pain. David says, "Then I could bear it." If an enemy taunts you – well, that's what enemies do. It fits the category of enemies.

There is a pain of an adversary who deals with insolence, disrespect, and even malevolence. That's what adversaries do. But David says, "I would have an answer, a solution, a coping mechanism for that. I would just avoid them."

But what do you do when it is not an enemy who taunts you but an equal, a companion, a close and familiar friend? How do you hide from the devastation of knowing that a loved one has set out to destroy you?

Betrayal brings its own trauma. There is actually a thing called "Betrayal Trauma." Here is one writer's description of her experience when she found out that her husband was cheating on her:

"Every betrayed partner is dealt two blows at once when they discover their spouse's sexual behavior. Blow number one is the gut punch of betrayal; a breathtaking breach in trust that changes your relationship in permanent ways. Blow number two is the shocking realization that your partner has been extravagantly and expertly lying and manipulating reality in order to cover up their behaviors. These blows smash into your heart and in an instant plunge you into a whole new world...When I experienced this, the person who I depended on and was deeply connected to went from being a source of support and companionship to being a source of pain, fear, and deep uncertainty."<sup>1</sup>

That's exactly what David is experiencing. In **verse 14** you can sense David trying to make sense of what has happened. How could this have happened?

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

This friend was someone with whom David "took sweet counsel" – and gave it. They were sharing their lives, their hopes, their fears – and their faith. "Within God's house we walked in the throng." They shared the most intimate and important part of their lives together. And then the betrayal came. We read in **verses 20-21**:

*My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant.  
His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://partnerhope.com/2016/11/understanding-betrayal-trauma/>

That's betrayal. And that's the trauma. A solemn covenant was violated. Words were used as weapons. The betrayer took advantage of his trust and used smooth words to hide the sword. And it is devastating.

"Here's the thing about Betrayal Trauma. It makes you feel like you are losing your mind. It puts you on an emotional rack and pulls you in opposite directions until you are begging for mercy or you break and ricochet over to one of the extremes just to find some relief."<sup>2</sup>

And that's why David groans out loud in **verses 6-8**:

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

He's begging for relief. He's desperate for shelter, some place away from the heartache. Some place where he can find rest for his decimated soul. And a lodge in the wilderness sounds like heaven.

Ever been tempted to run away? I was talking with someone recently who said, "I got out of work the other day and thought, *What if I just pointed this car north and kept driving?* Drive past your exit, just keep going as far as the roads will go and find rest there. It sounded good to him. Doesn't it sound good to you?

Now, of course, David was the king. If he wanted a lodge in the wilderness, all he had to do was order it. But he doesn't. Why not? Because there is no actual help there. All the memories and anguish of the wound would follow him there. The cure for a broken heart is not the absence of someone, but the presence of Someone. The only refuge which actually shelters us from the raging wind is the refuge found in God alone. And that's where David goes in **verses 16-17**:

*But I call to God, and the LORD will save me.  
Evening and morning and at noon  
I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.*

### III. The Believing Man

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God. A place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.

David calls on God, Elohim. The living, omnipotent maker of heaven and Earth. And "the LORD" will save me. "LORD" is the covenant name, the name God has given for his children to use.

Boys and girls, you have a special privilege when it comes to your parents. You are allowed to call them a special name. Other boys and girls have to call you parents Mr. and Mrs., but you get to say "dad" and "mom." And those names include all the special privileges of being their child. You get to hug them for no reason. You get to ask them for help with your math, and for band-aids and college tuition. Only you get to ask them for those things – because you are their child.

And that's exactly the truth behind the name "LORD." It's the name God gives to those who belong to him by faith. David has absolute confidence – "he hears my voice" – because "he" is David's Father in heaven.

And David invites us to do the same, for the same reason in **verse 22**:

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

There really is a place we can go, a place of shelter from the raging wind. In a world where people will fail us and wound us, the Lord will be faithful. You can cast your burden on the Lord. He will sustain and he will never permit the righteous to be moved.

The word "burden" is an interesting word. It does not simply mean "the hard things that weigh you down." It means "your appointed lot." It means that David is recognizing that in his betrayal was a divine purpose and calling. This didn't just happen to him; it was appointed to him. And in that appointment, there is purpose and even peace. We can take our appointed trials to the Lord. They aren't there by accident.

The word "sustain" is also important. It doesn't mean "remove." It means to lovingly, daily, provide everything that is needed on our pilgrim journey to assure that we arrive safely home.

**Neh. 9:21** *Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.*

The Lord may not remove the ache, but he will shelter, guard, and keep you.

"He will ever keep thy soul.  
What would harm, He will control.  
In the home and by the way,  
He will keep thee day by day."

Now, the promise at the end of verse 22 might sound precarious: "He will never let the righteous be moved." Does that promise include you? Does your sin mean that you are left alone in the raging wind of your trial?

Here's a thought for you – what if you are the betrayer? Is there a shelter for you? One of the amazing things about Psalm 55 is how David's words describe David's own behavior. Do you remember the story of David and Bathsheba? It's really a story of David and Uriah, his close friend and faithful soldier. They used to take sweet counsel together and walk together in the house of God. But then one of them violated their sacred covenant of brotherhood. David did. And David spoke smooth words to his betrayed friend: "Why don't you come home and spend a little time with your wife? Come and enjoy her intimacy." And when Uriah declined out of a sense of honor and what he owed to his men out on the battlefield, David completed the betrayal by having him placed on the front line and killed. David was not only a man betrayed; he was a betrayer.

And the fact is, this is true for all of us. Our betrayals may look differently than that of others, but we've all used words to manipulate those we love. We have all violated sacred covenants of family and friendship – with gossip, slander, disobedience, anger, and lust. We've grievously sinned against the very people we are most obligated to protect. Yes, we are victims of the sins of others – but we not innocent victims. And that reality brings us to the gospel.

There was only one innocent victim, and that was our Lord Jesus. It strikes me that one of the Holy Spirit's primary purposes for inspiring these words may well have been not our comfort but Christ's. Imagine Jesus reading this Psalm. Don't you think these words would have been on his mind in the torment of betrayal? Think of the betrayal Jesus experienced in his own life. His own family members mocked him. His "pastors," the religious leaders, scorned him and accused him of being demon-possessed. One of his 12 disciples betrayed him to his enemies with a kiss. Another one denied he ever knew him to a little girl. They all abandoned him. And all this on the way to the cross where he would suffer and die to atone for their betrayal.

In **Luke 22** we are told of the anguish, terror, trembling, and horror of Jesus as he faced the cross. *“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done”* (v. 42). Jesus was casting his burden on the Lord. And the Lord sustained him. Do you remember that?

**Luke 22:43** *And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.*

The Father didn't remove the cross, but provided the necessary grace and strength in Christ's hour of greatest need so that he was able to endure the cross, suffering all the guilt of our betrayals so that we could be robed in the righteousness of his faithfulness.

And that's the beauty of the gospel. By faith in Jesus Christ there is a shelter for both the betrayed and the betrayers. In other words, a place for us. A place for sinners. But sinners who are no longer defined either by grief or guilt, but by his grace. You see, in Christ we aren't defined by the wounds we have suffered or the wounds we have caused, but by the wounds Jesus bore for us. By faith in him and by being united to him, we are the protected, sheltered, righteous saints of God. And we shall never be moved. Jesus died to make it so.