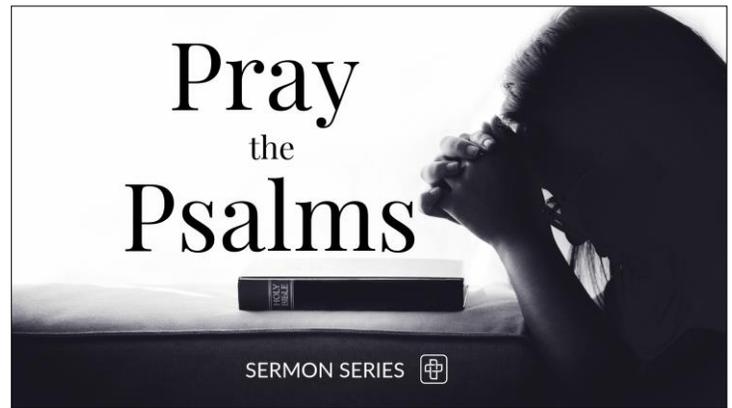




## Praying Through Betrayal

### Psalm 55

Joe Jones July 14, 2019



We're in a series on the book of Psalms and this morning we'll be looking at Psalm 55, addressing the challenging topic of betrayal. We'll descend into this tough topic, but I think we'll come out on the other side light-hearted because we're casting our burdens on the Lord.

Let's pray together.

Lord, as we look at Psalm 55, I pray that You would strengthen us to see the beauty and worth of Jesus as it shines forth from this Psalm. We need Your help for that, so we pray for it, in Jesus' name. Amen.

There are some sufferings in this life we have to go through that are especially intense and painful. They include losing someone we love to death—a spouse, parent, child or friend. Another category is physical or emotional abuse, or perhaps violent persecution at the hands of those opposed to the message of Jesus that many of our brothers and sisters around the world are facing even today.

One form of suffering we might not immediately put into this category, but which very well could belong there, is the suffering we experience when we face certain kinds of betrayal. When I say "betrayal," I'm not talking about the everyday tension and conflict that always comes with building relationships. The Bible calls us to bear with one another in those conflicts and forgive one another.

The betrayal I'm talking about, and which Psalm 55 gets at, is a more serious and definitive violation of a person's trust. Relationships are always built on promises and trust. Sometimes those promises are publicly stated in formal settings, like wedding vows. Many times the promises are implied but not spoken. The friendship between two friends can't flourish if one of them is always selling the other out or telling the other's secrets. Betrayal can take many different forms, such as:

- A spouse is unfaithful in marriage. So painful.
- A child walks away from the faith or rebels and shames his parents. That's a kind of betrayal. So painful.

- A close friend lies about you, ruins your reputation and turns to befriend someone else in your place. Painful betrayal.
- A pastor breaks the commitment he made to care, be a guide and example of humility, faithfulness and purity in your life. Betrayal. So painful.

What makes betrayal so hard is that it's not an enemy or even a stranger who has turned his or her back against you. It's someone you love, to whom you've entrusted yourself. It's someone you respected and cared about. It's someone you were or are in relationship with who has turned against you. The higher the hopes for what that relationship could be, and the deeper the dreams you shared with that person, the more concrete the commitment to one another—the more bitter the pain and lasting the effects are of that betrayal.

What are some of those effects? I believe there are two primary negative effects. One is that you can be desensitized to betrayal, thereby becoming prone to commit betrayal against others. On the other hand, you can become hyper-sensitive to betrayal, thus you have a hard time forming deep and lasting relationships. It becomes hard to trust people, especially those you feel you need the most. Another response might be to become very controlling in your close relationships, wanting to guarantee that betrayal never happens to you again. You know by experience how painful it is, so you try to control those relationship to guarantee you'll never feel that pain again. We shouldn't pretend we can just get over this experience quickly and easily and painlessly. Rather, we need to realize this kind of suffering often leaves lasting wounds, wounds that change us.

I experienced this kind of betrayal at a previous church where I served out of state. I trusted and entrusted myself to a man who seriously let me down, belittled me and betrayed my trust. It was a kind of suffering that was harder to go through and harder to recover from than I would have expected before I went into it.

Actually, when Pastor David asked me to preach on Psalm 55 and I read this Psalm, it helped me so much. We'll get to that in a minute, but it connected so deeply and powerfully with my experience of betrayal, that's why I commend it to you now.

The questions we who have experienced betrayal might ask include these:

- Will I ever be the same again?
- Has this person left an indelible negative mark on my life?
- Will I walk with a limp for the rest of my life because of how this person treated me?
- And on a deeper level, what does God have to do with all of this?
- Is He aloof and uncaring?
- Did He watch all that happened with indifference?

The resounding answer to these questions is no! The Bible says God is not aloof and uncaring. God actually is near and at work, even in the midst of your experience of betrayal. He's there and He's going to use the pain and wounds for your good. God's heart toward you, even right now the morning, is a heart of love and He will sustain you. You who have been betrayed, cast your burden on the Lord today. You who carry any kind of sorrow or anxiety, or whatever your burden is that weighs you down, cast your burden on the Lord today.

To you who have not been betrayed...yet...I want to offer Psalm 55 as a huge means of grace for when you do. This Psalm may very well rescue you. It will help, encourage and empower you in the face of betrayal. So let's look at it together. I'm not going to be able to do justice to all the power and help that's here, but I'm going to do my best. Psalm 55 is a wonderful Psalm.

David was the second king of the nation of Israel who wrote a poem or psalm about betrayal—Psalm 55. He writes about his personal experience of betrayal and how he responded to it. I want to take a little time to quickly walk through the entire Psalm, then at the end I want to leave a little time to pray an extended prayer through Psalm 55. This is a little bit different, but we're going to pray our way through Psalm 55 at the very end. So here we go. Strap on your seatbelts—we're going to move fast, looking at five questions and answers as we work through this Psalm.

### **Question #1 – What does David want? He wants God to answer his prayers.**

Look at verses one and two:

*<sup>1</sup>Give ear to my prayer, O God,  
and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy!  
<sup>2</sup>Attend to me, and answer me.*

David is requesting that God will hear his request. He's praying that God will hear his prayers. He's asking God to listen, notice, care, be attentive, act and respond. What we need to realize is sometimes we are distant from God and can't break through to Him in prayer because there's some barrier we've created, some sin in our lives that we're unwilling to release to God. It's like a wall between us and God that we can't get through. We need to release that sin or that thing we're holding on to. This Psalms tell us at various places that sometimes God chooses to hide Himself in order to call us further into trust.

If you're having a hard time today when you pray, if it feels like God is distant, don't conclude that God's purposes for your life have ceased to be loving. Even when your soul feels dry and it feels like your prayers are ineffective, God is still on His throne and is still pursuing you for your good. He's working even through that difficulty to draw you into greater trust.

Several years back I worked in student and family ministry at Grace Church of DuPage. Grace Church has a bunch of property, and there's a path behind one of the ponds on the property. I used to go back there, pacing and praying before youth group on Wednesday evenings. Some of those times of pacing and praying were really hard. It felt as though I was having a difficult time enjoying God's presence and getting through to Him. I would plead with Him, but it would feel as though there was a blockage and a wall there. Sometimes it wasn't like that, so instead there was lots of joy and intimacy. But sometimes it was difficult and challenging.

This is where David is at here. He's praying and pleading with God, "Please hear me. God, please don't hide from me. Please hear, answer, help, care and respond." We should follow his example of praying that way.

### **Question #2 – Why is David praying? Because he's in deep pain.**

What does David want? He wants God to answer his prayers. Why is David praying? Because he's in deep pain. Look at the second part of Psalm 55:2 through verse eight:

*I am restless in my complaint and I moan,  
3 because of the noise of the enemy,  
because of the oppression of the wicked.  
For they drop trouble upon me,  
and in anger they bear a grudge against me.  
4 My heart is in anguish within me;  
the terrors of death have fallen upon me.  
5 Fear and trembling come upon me,  
and horror overwhelms me.  
6 And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove!  
I would fly away and be at rest;  
7 yes, I would wander far away;  
I would lodge in the wilderness; Selah  
8 I would hurry to find a shelter  
from the raging wind and tempest."*

God often uses pain to get our attention. Listen to this quote from C.S. Lewis, which will be familiar to many of you: "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. It is His megaphone to arouse a deaf world."

You can't ignore pain. If you are in the midst of pain right now, God is actually shouting to you. What He's shouting to you is this: "Come to Me. Come to Me."

You see, in our pleasures, in our joyful times, in those easy times, God whispers to us. But the way He usually wakes us up is through pain. So let the pain in your life lead you to God in prayer, not away from God in self-dependence. Often our knee-jerk reaction when we're facing pain and suffering is, "How do I figure this out? How do I get through this? What can I do to get myself out of this bind or this pain I'm in?" But all the time, in our pain, God is shouting to us, "Come to Me. Come to Me. Do not try to figure this out on your own."

The Psalms are so helpful to us because, as Psalm 55 shows us, pain and suffering are normal in the Christian life. Don't think it's wrong or weird if you're a Christian and you're emotionally feeling hardship and restlessness. Look at the words David uses to describe his inner life in these verses. Just scan through and look at the words he uses: Restless. Anguish. Terror. Fear. Trembling. Horror. These are strong words of emotion he's experiencing.

Look at verse five. He talks about these strong emotions as coming upon him and overwhelming him. It's like he can't do anything about it they're just there to a significant degree. You see, nowhere does the Bible expect us to be stoic or walk through the sufferings of life without honest acknowledgement and expression of our inner turmoil. It also does not expect us to plan to stay there. Yet it matters how we move from our anguish and confusion to confidence and relief.

The problem David is facing here is a problem with people. See it there in verse three? It's the noise of the enemy. One option David has is to take his relief into his own hands and just get away. "I'm going to the mountains, live alone and get away from all these hard people who are causing all these problems in my life." Sometimes that sounds pretty good. Let's move to the Montana mountains and enjoy life there away from all the hardship, pain and troubles of this life. Wouldn't that be easier? Wouldn't that be simpler?

We should beware of the temptation to withdraw from people because people are hard and cause hardship. What a temptation it is, even in subtle ways, to back away a little bit and not dive into the real issues and messiness of people's lives. It's messy in there, isn't it? When you get into my life, you're going to realize I am messed up in a lot of ways. And I'm going to realize that about you, too. There are going to be difficulties there.

Because of the potential for hurt in relationships, we should be aware of the temptation to say, "Relationships are hard, so I'm just going to shy away and have my own nice safe life alone." The Bible tells us not to do that, so what should we do instead? There are many healthy ways to move from turmoil to joy internally. The one this Psalm gives is prayer. God invites us to pray our

way from despair to trust. Prayer is so central to the Christian life. The Bible is calling us into this joyful life of moving from confusion to confidence through prayer.

### **Question #3 – Why is David in deep pain? Because of betrayal.**

So what Does David want? He wants God to answer his prayers. Why is David praying? Because he's in deep pain. Why is David in deep pain? He's in deep pain because of betrayal. Look again at Psalm 55, starting with verse nine:

<sup>9</sup> *Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues;  
for I see violence and strife in the city.*  
<sup>10</sup> *Day and night they go around it  
on its walls,  
and iniquity and trouble are within it;*  
<sup>11</sup> *ruin is in its midst;  
oppression and fraud  
do not depart from its marketplace.*  
<sup>12</sup> *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.*  
<sup>13</sup> *But it is you, a man, my equal,  
my companion, my familiar friend.*  
<sup>14</sup> *We used to take sweet counsel together;  
within God's house we walked in the throng.*  
<sup>15</sup> *Let death steal over them;  
let them go down to Sheol alive;  
for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart.*

Skip down to verse 20:

<sup>20</sup> *My companion stretched out his hand against his friends;  
he violated his covenant.*  
<sup>21</sup> *His speech was smooth as butter,  
yet war was in his heart;  
his words were softer than oil,  
yet they were drawn swords.*

There are two parts to this section. First, David identifies people doing all sorts of wrong inside the city of Jerusalem(verse nine). He isn't talking about enemies out there, like the Philistine armies coming to attack him. He talks about them in other Psalms, but not here. He's talking about people who live in God's place, who dwell in the holy city of Jerusalem. He's talking about God's chosen people, fellow Israelites, but they're not acting like God's people at all, really.

There's a category of people who look so nice on the outside. Outwardly they identify as the people of God, but inwardly they're unrenewed by God's Spirit. There's a type of person who says, "Yes, I belong to God," but as this Psalm describes, they actually love violence, strife, making trouble, oppression, fraud, injustice, deceit and corruption. They look good on the outside, but that's what's really inside them. There are people in the church—maybe even in this church—who say, "I believe in God," but they live as if He doesn't exist. We need to know that biblically, there is this category of person.

Now look at verse 12 to see what David does next. He zooms in on one person who fits this category, a person who looks and sounds very spiritual and godly, but who inwardly is full of willingness to use people for his own gain. Just scan through the verses here, starting in verse 12, and notice the coming together of these two elements. There's this person who appears to be a righteous man, committed to God, but underneath the surface there's all sorts of betrayal, turning away from God, even turning against his own friends.

So test yourself now to see if you're in this category. Put the spotlight on yourself—not on the person sitting next to you. Are you someone who is around God and His people? You might even like going to church and being around God's people, but deep down you're actually antagonistic toward God and even ready to betray those who would follow Him.

I don't know all of your stories, but many of you sitting in this room this morning have—along with David—experienced horrific forms of betrayal. It may be worse than what I've experienced, but I have a sense of that pain and I am so sorry. It is deeply and uniquely painful. People you thought were friends and companions, who were close to you, have turned their back on you. It's not right; it's unjust and it ought not to be this way. David understands.

At this point, I want to gently turn the tables on us by asking could it be that we have committed more betrayal than we would like to admit? Could it be that we're both the receivers and the dispensers of betrayal, both toward God and toward those who trust us?

Take David as a test case. Think about David's life. From this Psalm we know he experienced this terrible betrayal that was so painful for him. Yet he would commit a betrayal against a friend of historic proportions. Remember Uriah? Remember what David did to Uriah? I mean, that is serious stuff. Uriah was a companion of David's. David stole Uriah's wife, deceived Uriah, then put him to death. I mean, that is serious, deep betrayal.

We must not hold this out at arm's length. We, like David, have often been disloyal and unfaithful on emotional, spiritual, mental and physical levels as spouses, children, parents, friends, neighbors, coworkers, bosses and as employees. We must admit that we've broken promises.

We've betrayed trust. We've belittled and shamed even those closest to us for our own gain—haven't we? I have. How sad. How wrong. How unjust. How regrettable these situations are.

There was one and only one, Who was fully loyal to those closest to Him, at any cost and without fail. Yet He experienced the most bitter betrayal in all of history. You can almost hear Jesus rehearsing Psalm 55—can't you? He awaited the kiss of betrayal from Judas, one of His closest friends.

Just put yourself back there. Imagine the scene. The dark of night. Jesus has been praying in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas approaches. He walks up to his friend and Lord Jesus, to come close one last time, to kiss Him one last time and to hand Him over to be killed—for some cash. Consider Jesus. He's so beautiful, so pure, so good. Just consider Jesus, in the echoes of this Psalm, in that moment of betrayal by Judas. "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, Judas, a man, My equal, My companion, My familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together. Within God's house we walked among God's people. You stretched out your hand against Me, your dearest Friend. You violated our covenant bond. Your speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in your heart. Your words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords."

We too have been like Judas in that Garden, willing to abandon Christ at the drop of a hat and make friends with the world—right? Aren't we more like him than we'd like to admit? Yet Jesus endured betrayal and much more for us. He went to the cross so He could make this unbreakable, betrayal-crushing promise to us: "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5-6). That's the promise of the Bible and Jesus—the living Christ Who is alive to us—makes that promise to you today. "I'll never leave you, even though all who are around you betray you." Jesus says, "I will never leave you or betray you."

As we trust this promise, we're learning to be loyal to God, loyal to His Son Jesus and loyal to one another. Right now, as a church, let's commit to this. Let's commit to loyalty because of what Jesus has done for us. As children of God—loyal. As spouses—loyal. As children to parents—loyal. As parents to children—loyal. As friends—loyal. As neighbors in our neighborhoods—loyal. As coworkers, bosses and employees—loyal.

You may be here this morning and you're realizing, "I actually don't have that relationship of loyalty and trust with God. I've never trusted in Jesus in that way and entered into that relationship." Why not trust Him now? Now is a good time to place your trust in Jesus and receive that promise from Him that He will never leave you or forsake you for all eternity. If you're one of those people who says, "Yeah, I've been coming to church, yet deep down I don't really know God; I've been living in rebellion against Him and have been stiff-arming Him all my life," now He calls

you to enter into this relationship of loyalty and trust, a relationship where God says to you, “I’ll never leave you or forsake you.” Enter that relationship today.

**Question #4 – How does David respond to all this? With confidence that God will save him.**

What does David want? David wants God to answer his prayers. Why is David praying? Because he’s in deep pain. Why is David in deep pain? Because of betrayal. How does David respond to all this? He’s confident that God will save him.

Let’s look at Psalm 55 again, starting at verse 16:

*<sup>16</sup> But I call to God,  
and the LORD will save me.  
<sup>17</sup> Evening and morning and at noon  
I utter my complaint and moan,  
and he hears my voice.  
<sup>18</sup> He redeems my soul in safety  
from the battle that I wage,  
for many are arrayed against me.  
<sup>19</sup> God will give ear and humble them,  
he who is enthroned from of old, Selah  
because they do not change  
and do not fear God.*

Then skip down to verse 23:

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

David started this Psalm in verses one and two by asking God to hear him. Now he’s at the point where he’s confident that God will hear him. God does care. God does answer. God is attentive. God will destroy those whose hearts are set on betrayal with no repentance.

You might be thinking, “Man, those are some hard verses. David is asking for the complete destruction of his enemies. How do I process that as a Christian?” Well, a pastor named Paul Carter wrote a great article for The Gospel Coalition in which he addresses the question: how do we deal with David’s prayers for the destruction of enemies and their death? Paul Carter writes this:

The Bible tells us not to waste time in our short lives pursuing personal grievances. It tells us to forgive and to love and to show

mercy and to invite all people into covenant relationship with God through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But it does not tell us to be indifferent toward matters of justice. Far from it. It promises that at the end there will be judgment. No one will get away with anything. God will keep track and all sin will be dealt with—in the body of Christ on the cross or in the body of those who refuse repentance. To pray what is promised is in no sense sub-Christian. Thanks be to God.

David here prays in that way and he prays with confidence that God will answer him. Let's do the same.

### **Question #5 – How should we respond to this? By casting our burdens on the Lord.**

What does David want? David wants God to answer his prayers. Why is David praying? Because he's in deep pain. Why is David in deep pain? Because of betrayal. How does David respond to all this? He's confident that God will save him. And finally, how should we respond to all this? We should cast our burdens on the Lord.

Look at verse 22:

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

It's as though David is saying, "Okay, I've shared my burdens with you. Now, it's your turn." What are your burdens? You, this morning. Again, not the person sitting next to you. Not the person of whom you're thinking, "Ah, this would be a great sermon for that person to hear." You. You. I wish I could go to each of the seats and say your name: "\_\_\_\_\_, cast your burden on the Lord. \_\_\_\_\_, cast your burden on the Lord. \_\_\_\_\_, cast your burden on the Lord." Whatever it is, big or small.

It doesn't have to be a burden of betrayal, but what weighs on your heart this morning? What gives you anxiety? What keeps you up at night? What are those hopes you have that are unfulfilled? What temptations do you battle day in and day out? What sorrows do you carry? What loss do you fear? You, cast that burden on the Lord. That's what this Psalm beautifully invites us to do. And why not? Why should we carry our burdens on our own weak shoulders when we have a God Who in Psalm 55 says, "Give that burden to Me; cast that burden on Me"? How long has it been since you've sat down and had a good chunk of time to just lay it all out there, saying, "Lord, here's what's going on in my life"?

Here are some real concrete applications. What if in the next several weeks or months you planned a time, an extended period of time to sit down and think through your whole life? As you're thinking—maybe journaling—you're praying through your work, home, marriage, parenting, studies, leisure, work for the Kingdom, involvement in your neighborhood, sin struggles, sufferings, losses and all that stuff that's buried way down, down deep. You bring it all out to the Lord, not to inform Him—He already knows—but to invite Him into all of that and to ask for His powerful help.

Wouldn't that be healthy? Wouldn't you come out of that joyful and floating through life rather than weighed down through life? This is what God calls us to. There's one command in Psalm 55: cast your burden on the Lord.

Okay, let's pray. You can have your eyes open, have your Bible open, following along as I'm going to be praying through Psalm 55. It's going to be a little bit longer than usual as we pray through this together now.

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Father, hear our prayers now. Don't be deaf to what we say or silent when we ask. Please listen now. Receive our requests now. Attend to us and answer us. We face so many trials without and within, enemies both demonic and human from without; anguish, discouragement and restlessness within. We're weak—we acknowledge that.

Many people don't want us as Christians to flourish or the Kingdom of Christ to advance. There's so much opposition in our dangerous world, Lord. Sometimes the opposition causes our hearts to melt in fear or be struck with horror. We don't want to just escape and try to get away from it all and hole up where life is safe from all threats, where we don't have to interact with people. We want to be engaged, fully present and invested in the lives of those we love—both fellow believers and unbelievers You've placed in our lives. So Lord, please protect us from the temptation to just get away from everyone and hide.

Instead, help us, like David, to pray our way into security, confidence, trust and deep joy, even in the midst of an insecure and pain-filled world. That's what we're doing now, O God. We're praying our way into You. We're praying our way into Your safety, into the shelter that is You.

So we pray, almighty God, for the absolute destruction and downfall of those who seek to harm Your church and Your purposes for the world and for Your elect. We pray that their plans would be thwarted. We pray that they would meet with Your severe justice. For those wolves within the church who are hurting your people and who are hungry for money and power, cause their sins to be found out. Set them in slippery places. Let Your great name not be mocked. Don't

let us harm ourselves by taking justice into our own hands. Don't let us take vengeance on those who have betrayed us. Give us the faith to leave it all to You.

We also pray for peace for those who have been victims of betrayal. We pray for repentance and joy for those who have been perpetrators of betrayal. Lord, if we're honest, that's all of us. So help us not to be the type of person who at one moment has spiritual closeness with someone we love, then in the next moment turns our backs on them. Help us to be truly loyal. Empower us not to speak smooth words that seem so kind on the outside when we bear grudges inside and would rejoice at our friend's downfall. Cause us to be Christians through and through, not hypocrites, not false, not half-hearted, not merely externally religious. Lord, You know I need Your help.

We thank You that Jesus our Savior willingly walked through the most bitter betrayal because of His unendingly deep heart of compassion for us. We thank You that because of Him, You will never, ever, ever betray us. We rest in that reality now.

So Father in heaven, with confidence we stand before You. We're confident that You will vindicate the righteous and condemn the guilty. We're confident that we will be vindicated by You, because You condemned Your innocent Son for us, the guilty. We're confident that You'll fully and finally mete out justice for all people on the day Your Son returns to earth. We're confident that we'll stand before Your Son Jesus, unmoved and with great joy on that day.

In the meantime, help us cast our burdens on You. Strengthen us to cast our burdens on You, whatever they are. As sinners and sufferers, we cast our burdens on You. We cast our burdens on You now, the God Who will never leave us or forsake us. And we pray in the powerful name of Jesus. Amen.

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