

Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide

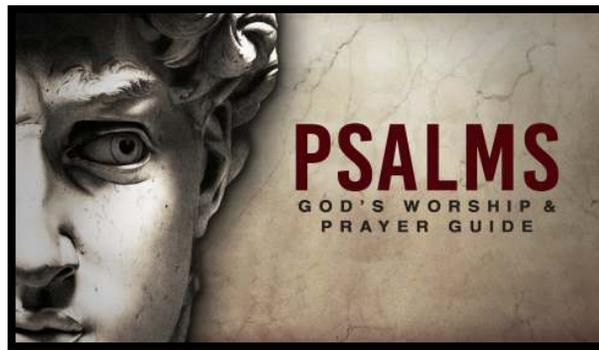
Dealing With A Dragon

Psalm 52

Written By

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During my fourth, and last, year at Dallas Theological Seminary in 1985, our Hebrew professor arbitrarily assigned us psalms to exegete and preach. No one wanted a rather obscure, somewhat unrelatable section. Obviously, as a student and future preacher, each man wanted a passage he could really preach with personal power and conviction. As the prof moved from row to row giving each student his pericope, I sat stunned when he handed me (by divine providence I see now as I look back) Psalm 52, which details David's battle with a troublemaker named Doeg.

Immediately, I scanned the passage and then thought to myself, "I'm twenty-six years old and I don't have any Doeg's in my life, which means I don't know what I'm am going to preach about." I walked out of the class quite anxious. I knew I could readily exegete the Hebrew of the text, telling you the meaning of the various participles, the etymological meaning of pivotal words, and the import of key conjunctions. What I feared was attempting to relate all of this to a life principle I had never really dealt with before: troublemakers.

And, then, I became a pastor. Don't get me wrong, I love my job, especially as I preach this sermon on my birthday. However, once you step into the shoes of a local church shepherd, you, by definition, are called to deal with all kinds of sheep, goats, and, yes, wolves (Matt. 7:15) . . . who are, by the way, most destructive when they are of the spiritual, religiously high-minded sort.

I will never forget the first time I ran into a modern version of Doeg.

At thirty-one, I couldn't have been more thrilled, passionate, and excited to be at a church plant with nineteen members and about thirty or so in worship on a Sunday (in a local elementary school). When we attracted an older, godly couple with apparent gifts and means, we saw the

hand of God at work. Ah, what we didn't see was the Devil at work. I ran into him as he energized the speech of this professional and quite powerful local businessman.

We met at a local Carl's Juniors for burgers. I looked at the meeting as a mentoring situation, whereby the older saint would impact the younger saint. I found out he didn't hold this optimistic view.

During the lunch, he looked across the table and said, "Well, I just wanted to let you know, Pastor, that my wife and I will be moving shortly out of state. So, we won't be able to be around to help you grow this church plant. Yet, before I leave, I do want to leave you with one observation from my years of being in church in watching pastors."

I eagerly awaited his "sagacious" advice.

"Marty, it is quite clear to me that you are not going to make it. You don't have the gifts and abilities to make it. I just wanted to leave you with my observation from years of experience being in churches."

Who was this guy? His name should have been Doeg. He didn't go around *building up* churches and leaders. No, he went around from church to church *blowing up* churches and leaders. Sadly, I have run into Doeg the dragon too many times to count over the last thirty-five years of shepherding, and my encounters with them have taught me much about myself, as God has used them to shape and hone my soul and character, and I've learned how to identify and deal with them more effectively so the church is safe and secure.

Time is a funny thing, isn't it? At twenty-six, I worried I couldn't preach one sermon on Psalm 52, while now at sixty-three it could easily be a thirty-part series. And to think, my pastoral and spiritual journey down this rough, but righteous road, all started with a prof "arbitrarily" handing me this particular Psalm from a tough time in David's young life as a future leader.

Perhaps you are really listening right now because you, too, have Doeg the dragon in your life right now. He (or she . . . I've met . . . let's call her . . . Donna the dragon, too) is dismantling your life, making you miserable, destroying your joy, and causing you many a sleepless nights staring at the proverbial ceiling. What should you do? How should you respond? What is the world is going on? Psalm 52 contains all of the counsel from God's good hand you need to know, and that counsel all starts with an expositional question arising from the inspired text:

How Should You Deal with A Dragon? (Psalm 52)

Fortunately, and thankfully, David gives us rock solid, trustworthy, and proven counsel from his life, so let us learn from his experience. The simple structure of this passage alerts us to two clear and concise concepts we can employ when dealing with dragons. And, no, these two concepts, or divinely ordered life principles, are not the be-all, end-all of how to square off with a troublemaker, but they are a good starting point.

Give The Dragon Some Warning (Psalm 52:1-5)

David develops this practical spiritual pointer by first acquainting us with his Carl's Juniors experience.

¹ To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation of David when Doeg the Edomite went and told Saul, and said to him, "David has gone to the house of Ahimelech." Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God *endures* continually.

I find this all so educational. The header in the English text, as I have said before, is really verse one of the Hebrew text. This is why the NKJ version, as others, weds it with the English of verse one. David's lessons from the dragon, Doeg, were so instructional in his life he wrote a psalm/song about it and made it part of Israel's hymnal. Why did he do this? Being a pragmatist, the king knew we'd all face our fair share of evil emissaries devoted to effacing our lives, all while they elevated theirs.

With the opening words, David puts the entire Psalm in its historical context. He had numerous encounters with this wicked man; however, the incident with David, Ahimelech, the priest, and Doeg served as the zenith of the troublemaker's activity in the king's mind. To understand, therefore, David's analysis in Psalm 52, one must first understand what David alludes to in verse one. Insight is gained from studying 1 Samuel 21 and 22. Since our time is limited, permit me to summarize.

David's victory over Goliath, followed by the masses singing his praises (Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands, 1 Sam. 18:7), moved King Saul to blind jealousy and rage against David (1 Sam. 18:8). Shortly thereafter young David played beautiful music on a harp in Saul's presence. Overcome with jealousy and anger, the carnal king hurled a sharp spear at David in order to kill him. Being nimble, David escaped, but this evil episode served as the beginning of Saul's inexorable desire to remove his young competition.

Over the next few years, David ran from the King's unfounded wrath, hiding wherever he could. Over the years, God also used the dragon-like nature of the King to strip him of all personal supports so he could eventually become the leader God desired. You might need to read that again. This time let it sink in. God, in his wise providence, does not waste the dragon's activity in your life, but he uses it to burn out the dross (viz., your sin), while also removing supports you rely on for help and empowerment. Why does He do this? So you will learn to lean on Him. Check out how He worked in David's life to get his attention:

- *First, God removed the support of a powerful position.* David went quickly from being Israel's premier warrior to being, well, a dog on the run.
- *Second, God removed the support of (carnal) wife.* To marry Saul's daughter, Saul had David kill two hundred Philistines as a dowry (1 Sam. 18). I'm sure he hoped the Philistines would take him out. When David came out the victor, Saul's evil plan fell apart, but that didn't stop him. After his wife, Michal, warned him of her father's desire to kill him, the fugitive fled, again, and she lied to her father, saying she had to let David leave because he had threatened to kill her. Their relationship was never the same again (1 Sam. 19:11ff).

Fleeing from his home, David wound up with a friend. His name? Ahimelech, priest of Israel's temporary sanctuary located in Nob, a small city resting on the eastern slopes of Mount Scopus, just north of the Mount of Olives and opposite Mount Zion, where David's son, Solomon, would one day build the glorious temple (1 Sam. 21:1). Unfortunately, David lied to the priest when he

told him that he and his men were on a mission of the king (1 Sam. 21:2). Sad how we lie when we don't need to. I'm sure David did so in order to save some face.

After this, he made a bold request, "Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found" (1 Sam. 21:3). Translated, he and his man were hungry and needed food to function. The only food the priest had on hand was the table of showbread, which was dedicated first to God and then to the priests. Realizing, as Jesus pointed out years later, that God is more concerned about caring for His people than He is about religious items (Matt. 12:1-8; Luke 6:1-5), the priest gave the soldiers the holy bread (1 Sam. 21:6).

At that point is when we read these interesting parenthetical words:

⁷ Now a certain man of the servants of Saul *was* there that day, detained before the LORD. And his name *was* Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who *belonged* to Saul. (1 Sam. 21).

Interesting. While David and his rag-tag Special Ops team absorbed the food, Doeg, the Edomite (Israel's ancient enemy), happened to see the whole event and he absorbed it so he could use it against Israel's most famous warrior. How did he, the unscrupulous, unethical man, use this tasty historical morsel? He told Saul:

⁸ All of you have conspired against me, and *there* is no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse; and *there* is not one of you who is sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as *it is* this day. ⁹ Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul, and said, "I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. ¹⁰ "And he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine" (1 Sam. 22).

That intel motivated Saul to call Ahimelech to account for his insurrectionist activities. After the priest boldly confessed (1 Sam. 22:14-15) as he stood there with an entourage of eighty-five priests, Saul's anger exploded with a command for the guards to murder him and all of the priests ((1 Sam. 22:17). The guards refused, but Doeg didn't.

But the servants of the king would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the LORD. ¹⁸ And the king said to Doeg, "You turn and kill the priests!" So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck the priests, and killed on that day eighty-five men who wore a linen ephod. ¹⁹ Also Nob, the city of the priests, he struck with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and nursing infants, oxen and donkeys and sheep-- with the edge of the sword (1 Sam. 22).

Doeg went further than King Saul commanded him when he traveled to Nob and wiped out *everyone* associated with the priesthood, including their animals. That's why I call him a dragon. He, like all dragons, doesn't care who he hurts so long as he takes you, the godly person, down. Further, like THE Dragon seeks to silence godly people, his smaller dragons follow suit by any means possible: a lawsuit, a vile Twitter feed, a hostile posting on Facebook, a mean-spirited statement on Yelp, a false accusation (David's is a traitor), a juicy tid-bit of information colored

for carnal results, and so on and so forth. Whatever works to silence the saint. That's the work of a dragon. Have you met him, or her, yet? You will as you attempt to walk with and serve God.

How should you respond? Before we answer that query, let's stop and remember what we've learned thus far. God will use troublemakers in your life to remove crutches you lean on so your character is shaped and honed so you are humbled and fitted to do what God wants you to do. Now, back to the question at hand. Verses one through five give us the coveted counsel:

¹ To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation of David when Doeg the Edomite went and told Saul, and said to him, David has gone to the house of Ahimelech. Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually.

Instead of being quiet and taking it, David tells us that when you get the opportunity, and you will, you, out of love and concern for the troublemakers' soul, must warn them of the spiritual consequences of their vile, vicious, and vindictive behavior.

David starts this warning with a question followed by a statement:

Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually.

Evil people enjoy doing evil things to others who represent all that which is holy, true, and moral, and when they are really evil they openly boast about their pernicious, problematic prowess. You know a man, or a country is spiraling spiritually downward when they call evil, light, and light evil and then are verbally cocky about their exploits (Isa. 5 is a case study in this regard). After listening to this bad man bellow, David sarcastically (and emphatically asks, which is denoted by the question, *mah*, coming at the head of the clause) states:

מַה־תִּתְהַלֵּל בְּרָעָה הַגִּבּוֹר (Ps. 52:1)

Sarcasm falls heavily on the name David gives Doeg: mighty man, or warrior (*gibbor*). Doeg is not mighty man, for all he did was kill unarmed and innocent priests, men, women, children, babies, and animals. This kind of ruthless activity comes from the life of a coward who is a legend in his own small mind.

David turns gives the troublemaker his first dose concerning the problem with his sinful activity and sinful self-assessment.

The goodness of God endures continually.

By leaving out the main verb, *endures*, in this clause (which is called ellipsis), and by placing the noun "goodness," *hesed* (חֶסֶד) in the first position, David doubles down on the power of this biblical truth. What the dragon forgets, because he is so self-absorbed, and so full-of-himself regarding how he dispenses with people he doesn't like, is that God's loyal love for His children is never-ending. And since this is true it means He will never abandon His people, but will, in due time, come to their aid . . . either in the here and now or in the hereafter, theologically speaking, of course.

I think a few choice biblical texts will drive this concept home to your heart:

²⁴ but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD (Jer. 9).

Jeremiah, who endured his fair share of Doegs in his tough spiritual times as the nation faced implosion and captivity, reminds us that the wisest thing a man can do is know the living God. When this occurs, that man quickly finds out the living, eternal God “exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth” in real time, as it were.

The Hebrew participle for “exercising,” (עֲשֶׂה תִּסְדָּד) can be grammatically classified as either a *durative* or *iterative* us. If the former, it underscores how God constantly works in behalf of his battered, persecuted people to make sure they see and sense His unabated love for them. If the latter, the participle denotes that God will step in occasionally, as he did in David’s life, to cause you to know He hasn’t forsaken you, and at times He will deal with your Doeg in a profound way so you can see his justice and righteousness in action. Did not Elijah finally hear from God as he hid in a cave from the wrath of Jezebel (1 Kings 19)? Did not Stephen, the first Church martyr, not see the Lord high and lifted up when the jealous, angry Jews stoned him (Acts 7)? Did not Paul get a clear view of heaven when Satan buffeted him with a physical malady (2 Cor. 12)?

As a young pastor, I had a rich, powerful man oppose my leadership, attempting to seize leadership for himself. For several years he, like Doeg, dogged me, passing around information not based in truth so as to elevate himself by casting me in a negative light. He didn’t listen to sermons for what God might be telling him, but for what content he might seize upon to tear into me in order to minimize my leadership. One day he dropped by the church office to tell me, “Pastor, I just want to let you know your sermons really anger me and my wife.” I guess they did for as I worked through the danger of gossip as played out in ancient Israel’s opposition to Moses in the wilderness, it must have hit home. Yet, nothing caused this man to stop and take a fair appraisal of his spiritual walk. His persistent and pugnacious activities wore me down, causing me to question God’s loyal-love and justice.

All of that changed with a phone call from the man’s Executive Secretary.

“Pastor, I’m so and so secretary, and I just wanted to call to say thank you.”

“For what?” I asked, since I didn’t even know the lady.

“Thanks for what I’ve learned about God as I’ve typed your sermons to give my boss a hard copy of them. As I’ve sat at my desk and typed from the Dictaphone, I’ve learned what it means to know Christ and how to follow him. So thanks for your impact on my life.”

When I hung up, God’s loyal-love and justice just poured all over my parched, tired heart. Isn’t God good? Sometimes He permits the troublemaker to do a proverbial number on you so that when you are at your lowest ebb is when He moves most profoundly and providentially. I have traveled many pastoral years on that divine morsel of encouragement gleaned from that one, never-to-be-repeated phone call. Ah, how perfect is the timing and wisdom of God Almighty. Since He is concerned about every bird He has created, it is true His eye is upon us at all times. And because He loves us, He always stands ready to step into your crutchless life and speak in the most profound, jaw-dropping fashion.

This is what Doeg the dragon unfortunately forgets. Arrogance and hubris so blinds him, he fails to understand that God *always stands* with His saints He loves, and He will move in due time to defend them while He takes care of the troublemaker. Bound up in this opening truth of

verse one is a positive emphasis for God's children, wedded to a stern word of warning to the Doegs of this wicked, wild world.

Are you Doeg? If so, realize your lifestyle of pulling others down to pull yourself up is not going to end well. Your sinister skill of trashing Christians, moral folks, and God-fearing people so you can be feared and extolled by other cocky, carnal people like yourself, will one day be your undoing. I know this is true because I know the God David speaks about in verse one, and I've seen Him in action. His ways are quite impressive and ominous.

So what do you need to do? Repent and confess your sin and bow before the feet of the Savior who loved you enough to die for your sins so you might find forgiveness, eternal life in His glorious presence, and a new life full of lasting peace and joy (for a change).

Are you the object of Doeg the dragon? If so, be encouraged. Why? God has not only given you the first part of what you need to know about dealing with this "dude," but He IS with you, and since this is true, you are going to be all right. Just perhaps you need to sing a song to Him who watches you:

Verse 1

Why should I feel discouraged
 Why should the shadows come
 Why should my heart feel lonely
 And long for heaven and home
 When Jesus is my portion
 A constant friend is He
 His eye is on the sparrow
 And I know He watches over me
 His eye is on the sparrow
 And I know He watches me

Chorus

I sing because I'm happy
 I sing because I'm free
 His eye is on the sparrow
 And I know He watches me (He watches me)

Verse 2

Let not your heart be troubled, His tender words I hear
 And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubt and fear.
 Tho' by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see:
 His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.
 His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.

Chorus

I sing because I'm happy
 I sing because I'm free

His eye is on the sparrow
And I know He watches me (He watches me)

