

Psalms: God's Worship & Prayer Guide

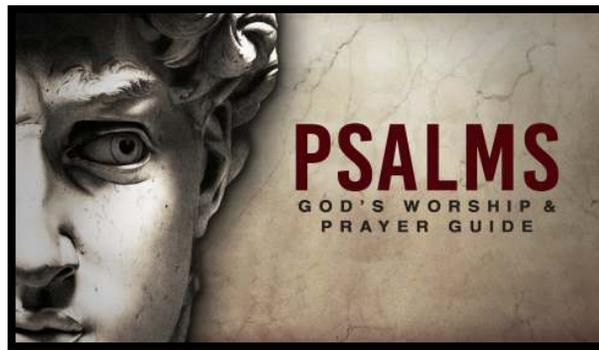
Battling Backstabbers

Psalm 55

Written By

©Dr. Marty Baker

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I mentioned the old hit *Backstabbers* last week by the O'Jays, and only a handful of people remember this song and this tune. It's worth recalling the lyrics since many of us have faced, are facing, or will face those people who oppose you for your Christian walk, thinking, and stance.

What they do . . .
 All the time they want to take your place
 The back stabbers (back stabbers)
 (They smilin' in your face)
 All the time, they want to take your place
 The back stabbers (back stabbers)
 All you fellas who have someone and you really care, yeah, yeah
 Then it's all of you fellas who better beware, yeah, yeah

Granted, the song is about your good "friends" working hard to steal your woman from you, but you get the idea.

Applied to Christian life and living, Backstabbers are of a different sort. They want to do a variety of things: silence your moral voice (say, in the classroom at a liberal university), make you look foolish so people won't look up to you, subvert your position (whatever it is) so they can either assume power or pass it over to those who hold their twisted ideology, discredit you, prove

that you were wrong about a given issue . . . even though you are not, and so on and so forth. In this respect, Backstabbers are similar to Dragons. They both have godless, ruthless ulterior motives where you are concerned. They are different from Dragons insofar as they typically lie low and appear to be your best friend. They earn your trust, create greater memories with you, are there for you at tough, critical times, and, then, BAM, they nail you in a hurtful, painful fashion.

Ever run into anyone like this? I have, unfortunately, many times. So did David. In Psalm 55 he tells us how to navigate the rough seas with a person like this. It's a lengthy passage, so in order to cover it in one study, I will make principalized comments on the larger collective units of David's teaching.

How Should You Deal with A Backstabber? (Psalm 55)

Yes, when someone close to you inflicts great personal harm on you, typically for no wrong you committed (the Backstabbers *are* just evil and they love doing evil things . . . think of Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane when he betrayed Jesus with a fateful kiss), how should you react apart from being stunned, demoralized, angry, and/or depressed? By following David's emotional and thoughtful analysis in this powerful poetic piece, we will gain much needed insight for our lives.

Give God Your Request (Psalm 55:1-2)

Note how David lays his true feelings out before God while he experienced an overwhelming personal and private crisis:

To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A Contemplation of David. >
Give ear to my prayer, O God, and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. ²
Attend to me, and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily,

Knowing that others in his kingdom understood what it is like to be laid low by a Backstabber, and desiring to equip future Israelite God-followers with how to respond, in a godly fashion, to this type of person, David wrote these lyrics and then put them to music for Israel to sing while in worship. What a thoughtful, caring king.

Here, David, is so overwrought and undone by the wickedness launched against him, constantly and deceptively, his inner man is as restless as the churning sea, he is so overwhelmed by the activity of evil people he audibly moans . . . and groans. Can you identify? I can. You watch the wicked drape themselves in robes of righteousness, you listen to them smile as they use words like tolerance and love, while working to subvert you and all that is holy, just, and good, and it appears they get away with their deceptive tactics constantly. No wonder this type of activity leads to moaning and groaning by the saint.

It also leads the saint to get to a point where he gets real honest with God. That's what David does here. He's saying in our vernacular, "God, I do pray about these things, but I just don't know if you hear me because I don't see anything changing in this dilemma with the devious. So, please, listen to me and then act quickly." Walk with God for any length of time and you'll understand these words cognitively and emotionally. Of course, you know God is omniscient; hence, there is no way He could not hear your prayer. But in tough times it does, at times, feel like heaven is brass and your prayers just aren't getting through.

So, what do you do? Pull back? No. Stop praying? No. As God breaks you down in the silence, you learn much about Him and about yourself. Concerning Him, you'll readily learn He is quiet because He is typically and sovereignly working in a million details within the context of numerous lives in order to actually answer your prayer at the right time. Concerning yourself, you'll discover the importance of patience where God's plans for your life are concerned, and your need to trust your good Father no matter what. You'll also learn it is quite acceptable to get real with Him, to let Him know what you are thinking and feeling. Communicating with Him at this level is most cathartic.

But there is more to learn as David shares from his hurt heart:

Give God Your Reasons (Psalm 55:3-4)

Yes, don't stand before God's throne in the middle of a battle with bad people and not give Him, the Judge of all judges, evidence to consider. Drill down into the details. Build your case. David did this as you can see:

³ Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked; For they bring down trouble upon me, and in wrath they hate me. ⁴ My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me.

The enemy here is more akin to the Dragon of Psalm 52. He attacks the godly Christian in more of a frontal fashion. His "voice" is really just a figure of speech denoting the insulting, threatening, volatile words of the perpetrator. Later in the psalm, the voice is equated with drawn swords. This figure of speech serves to denote how their words slice and dice you. Of course, the words can denote how they use profanity to put you down or put you in your "place," or they can speak of the vile, tenuous arguments they employ to accomplish the same dastardly godless goals.

A few years ago I had the pleasure of meeting Cal Thomas, a great national commentator and an even greater Christian man, seeking to live courageously for God in a carnal, wicked day. At that private encounter he gave me a copy of his book *What Works*. Each chapter, as you can guess, talks about what we should start doing personally and publically to rebuild and strengthen our tattered, twisted nation. Part 3 deals specifically with the fact *We Can Solve Our Problems*. In this section, he discusses three things which work to this end, and one thing which doesn't: *writing outright hate mail to those who speak truth to the culture*. The venomous emails he has received over the years designed to muzzle him are, well, so bad I can't really share them in a sermon. Suffice it to say, some bad actors use bad arguments wedded to rudderless rhetoric in emails to attempt to vaporize the careers of Christians like Cal who'd dare speak up and out about sin, along with moral and spiritual truth.

Sub-par, erroneous, and logically vacuous ideologies, which pose as the epitome of truth, have a penchant, as David expresses and Cal understands, to oppress the godly with the hope of silencing them. Yes, they do, in fact, bring trouble down on you when you show the fallacy of their thinking, point out their hypocrisy, clearly reveal how their argument does not logically follow, and so forth. For instance, the next time you are talking about a hot button cultural issue, be what it may, just factually and respectfully disagree, and then step back and see how intolerant the tolerant become.

And as David points out, their sinister speech eventually leads to oppression. In Cal's case they write the stations hosting him in order to get him fired. In an academic setting the professors

let you know up front you had better kowtow to liberal, progressing thinking and forgo any idea of sharing analysis in papers which might oppose the tenants of this thinking. At a local grocery store in Little Rock, Arkansas last year, the company made a new policy requiring employees to wear aprons depicting a rainbow heart emblem so as to endorse LGBTQ values. When two young (and brave) Christian women said they wouldn't follow suit, they were both summarily fired. See the oppression? It's all around you if you are paying attention and living a godly life, and it is, sadly, I believe, only going to get more pervasive and powerful.

David shared these data points with God. Vile verbiage led to oppression, and oppression led to him fear for his life. After all, is this not the logical conclusion? If a godless ideology, be what it may, can effectively oppress godly voices which disagree, then what is keeping the godless from moving from re-education of those they can't stand (but who stand for truth) to simply removing them altogether? Read Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* (1973), which details how the Soviet Union placed its iron grip on its people from 1918 to 1956, and you will see how this all works. As Alexander had good reason to fear for his life as a dissident who dared speak up about the corruption of his country, David had stood in those shoes long before the Nobel Peace prize recipient. Sadly, our country is quickly headed in this same dangerous, disgusting direction, all while its adherents are convinced they are guiding us all towards utopia.

Dystopia, as in David's day, was the real destination.

When you are up against an ever-increasing sinful people bent on codifying their n as if it decadent dystopia as holy, and when they come after you to sideline you when you are vocal, will you be the first to run to the throne of God and tell Him exactly what you are facing? Laying out the details shows Him you are thinking deeply about your predicament. Doing this will also serve to give you much to praise about when, not if, God moves to definitively deal with the person or persons arrayed against you.

Get Really Real (Psalm 55:5-8)

In these emotionally charged verses, David, the King, and a skilled warrior and military leader, who had faced his share of troubles on Israel's battlefields, is completely transparent about how he felt when his greatest enemies were his own people, who worked overtime to thwart his every leadership move:

⁵ Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me.

"Fearfulness" is internal, while "trembling" is the outer representation. Imagine, a tough, seasoned, combat-scarred man like David fearing and trembling when he came home from work at night. Can you relate? Perhaps you are paying a price as a lone godly legal worker at the Justice Department. Perhaps you are pro-choice worker who takes plenty of heat for standing up for the rights of the unborn. Perhaps you are a godly wife married to a godless husband who opposes your Christianity at every turn. Perhaps you are a godly couple who were wrongly attacked by "mature" Christians at your former church who pushed a godless, heretical agenda. You know the drill as you have stood in the gap for God, but it hasn't been easy and it is finally getting to you, causing you to fear and tremble at the mayhem and confusion of it all.

So how do you tend to think? If you're honest, you can get to the hopeless place David arrived at in the crisis:

⁶ So I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. ⁷ Indeed, I would wander far off, *and* remain in the wilderness. Selah ⁸ I would hasten my escape from the windy storm *and* tempest."

What a great figure of speech. Who wouldn't like some wings when the hate mail is cluttering your in-box, when your wicked boss with a vendetta against you keeps you off-balance with where he sends you and how often he sends you, when your first company commander out of West Point, Annapolis, the Air Force Academy, or the Coast Guard Academy is a real piece of wickedness at work, and he specializes in stepping all over your Christian beliefs. Who wouldn't want to have some wings to just fly you out of the situation to safety and peaceful, easy living? I've been there more times than I can recall, and I know our modern day verbiage of David's simile.

- If I could, I'd get out of dangerous Dodge in a second.
- If I could, I'd pack up and leave today.
- If I had another job to go to, I'd go in a red hot second.
- I am within retirement age even though I'm still relatively young. So, I'll just throw in the towel, accept an early retirement and leave this mess for someone else to fix.

You know, it is one thing to have these real, raw feelings, and quite another to act on them. Since God is sovereign over all things, be they evil or good, your current Backstabber scenario is, indeed, part of God's plan for His chiseling away all the unwanted character traits from your life so you can be the man/woman He wants you to be. To fly away right now would remove you from His perfect plan for your maximum impact on your facet of this old wicked world. So, my counsel is to stay put, drop the wings, and dig those claws deep into a branch and hold on. Jeremiah did it in his day, and so, too, did your Lord.

In the meantime, it is quite spiritually cathartic to get down into the details of how you really feel with God. Lay it all out on the table, and don't fear His judgment. On the contrary, look for Him come bring peace and healing to your inner man as you come clean. And if you are a strong, staunch military man who's struggling with emotions you don't know how to control, don't worry. Feelings of fear and bodily shakes can, and do, arise from real spiritual warfare. This is quite natural for we are, at the end of the day, only made of flesh, blood, and bones. Conversely, if you are a believer, you do have the Spirit who stands ready to empower you to remain at your post instead of flying off into a remote location so you can get out of the action.

David continues to teach us:

Get On with Your Request (Psalm 55:9)

Before we consider David's request in verses 9 and 15, we must, I think, first look hard at what these evil countrymen are doing.

⁹ Destroy, O Lord, *and* divide their tongues, for I have seen violence and strife in the city. ¹⁰ Day and night they go around it on its walls; iniquity and trouble *are* also in the midst of it. ¹¹ Destruction *is* in its midst; oppression and deceit do not depart from its streets.

The picture David paints here is of countrymen walking around the protective walls of the city all the time so they can look down from this vantage point to better see situations they can exploit for evil. Perhaps they see a godly, moral man they don't like talking to some judges in the gate of the city. Ah, they can't have that. They can't have him getting a ruling in his favor for that would undermine their evil schemes. Perhaps they see a shop owner building a new addition onto his shop, and they realize he must be turning a good profit. They take this as a sign for a shakedown of this moral, hardworking man. If these people were politicians, I'm sure they used their lofty position in the country pass new tax laws in order to further fleece the person(s) they wanted to dominate and control. Point is, these people *live for* perversion, diversion, deceit, and decadence.

Skipping down to verse 19, David describes these pernicious people in more detail:

¹⁹ God will hear, and afflict them, even He who abides from of old. Selah Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God. ²⁰ He has put forth his hands against those who were at peace with him; he has broken his covenant. ²¹ *The words* of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war *was* in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they *were* drawn swords.

Their problem is they do not want to, nor will they ever change morally or spiritually. They are like the people of Romans 1 who God gives up to their sin so they can be judged by the ramifications of said sin. If they are a politician David encountered, and they have been in office for thirty or forty years, he has seen them in action all too often. Given an opportunity they will lie, steal, deceive, deflect and do whatever is necessary to stay in power so they can line their pockets. And they always do it with the nicest, kindest, most caring speech you have ever heard, but that is all a front to their wild, wicked ways. They are true Backstabbers and their theme song could have easily been written by the O'Jays:

What they do . . .
All the time they want to take your place
The back stabbers (back stabbers)
(They smilin' in your face)
All the time, they want to take your place

It's tragic people exist like this, but they do, and they will until Jesus returns.

If you are dealing with one (or more of them), how should you pray for them? Good question. Listen to David's words:

⁹ Destroy, O Lord, *and* divide their tongues, . . .

Hold it right there. If you divide a person's tongue they can't speak, correct? The word can also be a flashback to the Tower of Babel where God judged man's unthrottled quest for political and spiritual power by confusing his tongue, viz., language, by giving him new dialects. When man could no longer speak to everyone with one language, that stopped man's strategy to be his own god in control of his own life. David's request is of the same order: God shut down their speaking. Make it to where their twisted ideologies, false thinking, unfounded argument, false proofs, and so forth just sound like a bunch of gibberish. Yes, God, confound them when they speak!

David's second request is harsher.

¹⁵ Let death seize them; Let them go down alive into hell, for wickedness is in their dwellings *and* among them.

He is so fed up with the gross, unchecked godlessness directed at him and others, he asks God to just remove them from the planet. He seeks divine, not human judgment. God has done this in the past, from David's perspective. The names of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram who, by means of insurrection, opposed the leadership of Moses, God's chosen leader, *were removed* by God in a localized earthquake (28-33), but this type of divine discipline was the exception, not the rule. It did not stop David in his frustration from asking if God could/would take those out who live only for hurting others and furthering their crime portfolios.

How does this apply today? I think we are simply *praying privately* for the day when Christ does return and definitively deal with evil and evildoers (Matt. 24; 2 Thess. 1:8; Rev. 19). In the meantime, I think we are better suited to follow Christ's *life example* as showcased in His first sermon:

⁴⁴ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (Matt. 5).

These are tough words for trying times, but they are the way God's saints should live when dealing with Backstabbers. Pray for them so they can be hopefully saved, do not return evil for evil, and while you are living this way you can pray for the day when Jesus returns and sets the record straight.

Get To The Raw Issue (Psalm 55:12-14)

In the next three verses, David pivots to an unexpected direction. Read on and you'll see what I mean:

¹² For *it* is not an enemy *who* reproaches me; Then I could bear *it*. Nor *is it* one *who* hates me who has exalted *himself* against me; Then I could hide from him. ¹³ But *it* was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. ¹⁴ We took sweet counsel together, *and* walked to the house of God in the throng.

There are two kinds of Backstabbers. The ones David just described were his countrymen and women who turned against their own people and leader for the sake of power, money, and control. They, who should have been on the walls of the city defending it, used their vantage points to promote and push evil among their fellowmen. How tragic. How timely. Do we not see this as well? Is it not alarming? Is it not shocking? Indeed.

But here David opens up about the really hurtful Backstabber. He worked closely with this man. They were intimate friends and had their share of intimate conversations. When they hit hard, complex situations in life they took counsel together behind closed doors. They even walked with thousands of others into the Lord's presence for worship on many days of Sabbath.

David never saw this friend's betrayal and desertion coming. That the man in question would go to the side of his opposition in order to hurt him NEVER crossed his mind. They were buddies who were tight and they trusted each other with everything. However, at a critical time in David's life, his close confidant abandoned him with the sole purpose of doing maximum damage to his life. Could it have been Ahitophel, his key political counselor who defected to work with Absalom, David's son, in order to advise him how to overthrow in former boss and "friend" (1 Sam. 13-19)? Quite possibly.

Ever met someone like this? Again, I have, and I, like David, never saw them coming until it was too late. As a young pastor I developed a good relationship with a "godly" businessman who started attending our church plant. From our authentic conversation about life, I knew his wife had just recently come out of the New Age movement. She was at our church because she liked the teaching and wanted to grow. I was all for that.

One breakfast changed everything, and not for the better. While we ate he asked me a question, "Pastor Marty, can my wife become the new women's leader?" When I told him that would not be a good idea because of her recent exposure to New Age thinking, my reply didn't go over well.

Not long thereafter he raised a stink about my pastoral observation, and they both eventually made an appointment to talk with me. Since we were friends, I thought, "What can a meeting hurt to clear the air?"

During the meeting they shared their thinking and feelings, and I (calmly) shared mine. I thought things went rather well, but that was not the case.

They left the meeting and immediately started telling all kinds of people I had yelled at them the whole time they were attempting to state their position. That was a lie, of course. I don't yell at sheep, or even goats or wolves for that matter.

What had been a great relationship was vaporized by their false story about what happened in that private conversation. And the damage they did to the ministry was hard to watch, especially since we had such a small number to begin with. I'll never forget the pain of that lost friendship. You never do, do you?

When this happens to you, when your good friend becomes, all of a sudden, your evil foe, what should you do? Confront them in love. Pray for them. Tell people what really happened. Learn from the encounter what you might need to change. Make it a point to forgive them of their misdeeds(s). Finally, make sure you spread this whole mess out before God so he knows you know what's wrong and needs fixing. So don't clam up with God. Get it all out before Him, even if it is painful to talk about. And above all else, don't let the sad, sordid situation cause you to pull away from others. On the contrary, step out in faith, looking for new friends who will love and stick by you closer than a brother.

In the closing verses, David gives us some additional insight as to how we should function when wronged. I'll summarize his wise words this way:

Get On The Road (Psalms 55:16-18, 22-23)

What road is that? It's the one marked, "The Road To Righteousness." What do you do while you are on this wonderful, refreshing road? I'll let David tell you:

¹⁶ As for me, I will call upon God, and the LORD shall save me. ¹⁷ Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice. ¹⁸ He

has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle *that was* against me, for there were many against me . . . ²² Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved. ²³ But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in You (Ps. 55).

Let's break down David's counsel:

- One, pray like you've never prayed before and God will, in due time, hear and act in your behalf. Are you praying or playin'?
- Two, quit carrying the grief associated with the Backstabber around like a heavy pack. Offload it onto the strong back of the Lord Almighty. Do this and He will free your spirit and put much needed joy into your life.
- Three, trust that God will in time deal with the godless in an ominous, definitive fashion. So, stop trying to solve the whole mess by your power, which is highly limited, and start trusting Him to solve it in His way.

Right now I have a hunch some of you might just be carrying a heavy pack. It's full of rocks of shattered relationships you've been toting around for too long. I think I hear the Spirit of God saying to you, "Here, pull that pack off and give it to me, and, then, you trust me to do right with the Backstabbers in your life."

