

Small Group Guide: The Praying Life -- Psalm 52

Overview

This week's sermon explored Psalm 52 and the backstory found in 1 Samuel 21-22, examining betrayal through the lives of David and Doeg the Edomite. Pastor Jay walked through what he called a "blueprint for betrayal" -- the self-preservation instinct, bending the truth, and ignoring the conscience -- while pointing toward a God who forgives and restores even those who have both been betrayed and done the betraying.

Key Takeaways

- Betrayal is a universal human experience. No one gets through life without being betrayed, and few get through life without betraying someone else.
 - The self-preservation instinct is natural, but when it overrides our trust in God it can lead us to compromise our integrity and harm others.
 - A lie does not have to be an outright falsehood. Lies of omission -- withholding the truth -- carry real consequences and are just as morally serious.
 - When we are in positions of power or influence, our dishonesty rarely hurts only ourselves. It tends to ripple outward and wound many people.
 - David, even as a deeply flawed person and a betrayer himself, modeled honest and raw prayer. He brought everything before God -- his anger, his guilt, his grief -- and recommitted himself to trusting in God's unfailing love.
 - The God who forgave and restored David is the same God who forgives and restores us. Through faith in Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit who convicts us and empowers us to live differently.
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Opening Question

Take a few minutes to get comfortable with one another before diving into the deeper content.

- Have you ever played "Two Truths and a Lie"? What is the most convincing lie you have ever told in that game -- or heard someone else tell? (play the game together if you'd like)
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Discussion Questions

On Betrayal and the Self-Preservation Instinct

1. Pastor Jay said, "It is impossible to get through life without being betrayed." Do you agree with that statement? What is your gut reaction to it?
2. Think about a time when your self-preservation instinct kicked in -- not necessarily in a dramatic situation, but in an everyday moment. How did it shape the choices you made? Looking back, do you think it served you well or led you astray?
3. David's self-preservation instinct caused him to flee from Saul, which is understandable. But it also caused him to lie to the priest Ahimelek, which had devastating consequences for many people. Where do you think the line is between healthy self-protection and self-preservation that compromises our integrity?

On Bending the Truth

4. Pastor Jay described a "lie of omission" -- staying silent when you know the truth, and having your silence interpreted as agreement. Have you ever been in a situation like that? What made it hard to speak up? What happened as a result of your silence?
5. David told outright lies to Ahimelek, and Doeg withheld key information from Saul. Both forms of dishonesty contributed to a terrible outcome. In your own experience, which do you find harder to recognize and resist -- direct dishonesty or dishonesty by omission? Why?
6. Psalm 52 describes the tongue as something that "plots destruction" and is "like a sharpened razor." How have you seen words -- or the absence of words -- cause real damage in a relationship, a workplace, a family, or a community?

On the Conscience and the Holy Spirit

7. Pastor Jay noted that even with the Holy Spirit upon him, David still ignored his conscience. What do you think makes it possible for someone who genuinely loves God to override their conscience in a moment of pressure or fear?
8. As followers of Jesus, we are told that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin. What does that conviction actually feel like for you in practice? How do you distinguish between healthy conviction and unhealthy guilt or shame?
9. David recognized his own guilt quickly after the consequences unfolded. He said, "I am responsible for the death of your whole family." There is something both painful and admirable about that level of accountability. How do you tend to respond when you realize you have caused harm -- even unintentionally -- through your choices?

On Forgiveness and Restoration

10. Pastor Jay pointed out that David, despite being a betrayer himself, is still described in Scripture as “a man after God's own heart”. What does that tell you about how God measures a person's character and worth?
11. David ends Psalm 52 by declaring his trust in God's unfailing love and his commitment to praise. Have you ever experienced a moment where, after confessing something heavy, you found yourself genuinely able to worship? What was that like?
12. Jesus himself was betrayed by nearly everyone around him -- family, friends, religious leaders, and government -- and went to the cross anyway. How does the reality of Jesus's own experience of betrayal change the way you think about bringing your own betrayals, both as victim and as offender, to him in prayer?

Practical Applications

Choose one or two of the following to reflect on personally or discuss as a group.

- **Honest Inventory:** Take some quiet time this week to ask the Holy Spirit to surface any relationships where you have withheld truth, stayed silent when you should have spoken, or acted out of self-preservation in a way that harmed someone else. Write down what comes to mind.
- **Confession and Repair:** If someone came to mind during the sermon or this discussion whom you have wronged -- through a lie, an omission, or a silence -- consider what a first step toward honesty or repair might look like. It does not have to be a dramatic conversation. Sometimes it starts with a prayer or a simple acknowledgment.
- **Praying Like David:** David did not filter his prayers. He brought his anger, his guilt, and his grief directly to God. This week, try writing out a raw and honest prayer about a situation where you feel betrayed or where you know you have done the betraying. Do not edit yourself. Bring the whole thing to God.
- **Speak Up:** Identify one area of your life -- at work, at home, in a friendship -- where you have been staying quiet when you know the truth needs to be spoken. Ask God for the courage to say the thing that needs to be said, and ask a trusted person in this group to pray for you and hold you accountable.
- **Truth and Reconciliation:** In light of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation referenced in the sermon, consider how the themes of betrayal, silence, and the need for honest reckoning apply to the broader story of this nation. How might your faith community engage more honestly and actively with that history?

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by praying in the spirit of Psalm 52. You may use the prayer Pastor Jay prayed at the close of the sermon as a guide, or pray freely together. Ask God to search your hearts, reveal what needs to be confessed, bring healing to places of betrayal, and restore trust where it has been broken -- between people, and between each person and God.