

Small Group Guide: The Praying Life -- Psalm 59

Overview

This week's sermon explored the contrast between King Saul's destructive jealousy and King David's life-giving prayer, using 1 Samuel 18-19 and Psalm 59 as the foundation. The central question we are wrestling with is this: when we feel attacked, trapped, or caught in cycles of rumination, will we turn inward like Saul or turn to God like David?

Key Takeaways

1. Counterfactual thinking can become dangerous rumination. Replaying conflicts in our minds is a natural human tendency, but when it becomes repetitive and inward-focused, it can spiral into anxiety, bitterness, and destructive behaviour.
2. Jealousy has the power to destroy three things. In Saul's life, unchecked jealousy eroded his rational decision-making, his relationships, and ultimately his reputation. The same pattern plays out in our lives today.
3. Jealousy is rooted in deep insecurity. When we feel jealous of someone, it is rarely truly about them. It reveals what we believe we are lacking and where we feel most threatened.
4. Prayer breaks the cycle. David experienced the same intense emotions as Saul -- fear, anger, a desire for vindication -- but he brought all of it honestly to God. This is what kept him from sinking to his enemy's level.
5. The cage can become a fortress. When David was trapped in his house with assassins outside, his circumstances did not change. But his prayer transformed how he experienced those circumstances. Dependence on God turned his cage into a fortress.

6. God is the judge, not us. A key move in David's prayer is handing the situation over to God: "You do it." This act of surrender freed David to act with wisdom and integrity rather than retaliation.

Discussion Questions

Opening (Choose one to get the conversation started)

- The sermon opened by describing the experience of replaying an argument in your head and imagining all the things you should have said. Have you experienced this? What does it feel like?
 - When you hear the word "jealousy," what comes to mind? Is it a word you would use to describe yourself, or does it feel uncomfortable to claim?
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Going Deeper

1. The sermon described counterfactual thinking as a normal human tendency that can become harmful rumination. Where is the line between healthy processing of a conflict and unhealthy rumination? How do you know when you have crossed it?
2. In 1 Samuel 18, Saul hears the crowd praising David and immediately thinks, "What more can he get but the kingdom?" His jealousy distorted a moment of celebration into a personal threat. Have you ever experienced jealousy distorting your perception of someone or a situation? What did that look like?
3. The sermon identified three things jealousy destroyed in Saul's life: rational decision-making, relationships, and reputation. Which of these do you think is most commonly damaged by jealousy in your own experience or in the relationships around you? Why?
4. The sermon made the observation that jealousy is really about our own deep insecurities -- the feeling that we are not enough, or that something we desperately want is being taken by someone else. Does that ring true for you? Is it difficult to admit that jealousy is more about us than about the other person?

5. Psalm 59 is raw, honest, and at times quite harsh. David calls his enemies “dogs”, asks God to consume them in wrath, and does not hold back. What does it tell us about prayer that God preserved words like these in Scripture? How does this change the way you think about what you are allowed to bring to God?
6. The sermon contrasted Saul and David this way: there is no evidence that Saul was processing his pain with God, while David was working it out through prayer. What is the difference between venting to a friend about someone who has hurt you and bringing that same honesty to God in prayer? Why does the destination of our venting matter?
7. David's repeated refrain in Psalm 59 is, "You, God, are my fortress, my God on whom I can rely." The sermon suggested this may have become a kind of mantra prayer David returned to again and again in the middle of danger. Is there a short prayer or a Scripture passage that has functioned that way for you in a difficult season? What was it?
8. The sermon described a powerful shift: "Our cage becomes a fortress." The circumstances did not change for David, but his relationship with God transformed how he experienced them. Have you ever had an experience where prayer did not change your situation but changed you within it? What happened?
9. Pastor Milissa said that when we hand our enemies over to God as judge, it frees us to act with wisdom, protect our relationships, and preserve our reputation. Is this easy or difficult for you to do? What makes it hard to let God be the judge?
10. Toward the end of the sermon, the congregation was invited to confess jealousy and retaliatory thinking as sin, receive forgiveness, and begin the process of forgiving their enemies. Where are you in that process right now? Is there someone you need to hand over to God?

Practical Applications

This week, try one or more of the following:

1. Name the rumination. The next time you catch yourself replaying a conflict or imagining a confrontation, pause and name what is happening. Say out loud or

write down: "I am ruminating. This is counterfactual thinking." Simply naming it can interrupt the loop and create space for a different response.

2. Pray the Psalm. Read Psalm 59 slowly and use it as a template for your own prayer. Fill in the specifics of your situation. Name the people, name the feelings, name what you are afraid of. Do not edit yourself. Bring the honest version to God.

3. Identify the insecurity beneath the jealousy. If you are currently experiencing jealousy toward someone, take time this week to write down what you believe that person has that you want. Then ask yourself: what does this reveal about what I believe I am lacking? Bring that specific insecurity to God in prayer and ask him to be your fortress in that exact place.

4. Practice the handover prayer. For any person who has hurt you, attacked you, or whom you have been holding in resentment, try praying this simple prayer: "Jesus, I hand _____ over to you. You be the judge. I trust you to deal with this. Set me free." You may need to pray it more than once. That is okay.

5. Memorize a fortress verse. Choose a short verse or phrase from Psalm 59 to carry with you this week -- something you can return to when the rumination starts. The sermon suggested this line as a starting point: "You are my strength. I sing praises to you. You, God, are my fortress, my God on whom I can rely."

Closing Prayer

Close your group time by praying together, using the structure of Psalm 59 as a guide. Invite group members who feel comfortable to pray out loud, naming something they are bringing to God -- a conflict, a jealousy, a fear, a person they need to hand over. End with the refrain from the psalm together: "You, God, are my fortress, my God on whom I can rely."