

# Sacred Songs, Life Lessons

## Difficult People

### Psalm 54

June 2, 2024

HDBC

*My generation grew up with the cartoons of Charles Schultz.* Charlie Brown, Linus, Lucy and the rest. In one cartoon Lucy is having a conversation with Charlie Brown. She is clearly agitated. She has her back turned and arms folded and a look of disgust on her face. Charlie is pleading with her for tolerance and understanding. He says:

*Lucy, you must be loving. This world really needs love. You have to let yourself love to make this world a better place in which to live.*

*She whirls around and screams (as Charlie does his famous backflip):*

*Look, blockhead, the world I love. It's the people I can't stand!*

We grin not because it is outlandish but because it is very real. We've all felt that way at times. There are not problems quite like people-problems. The problems that most pastors and ministers deal with are not doctrinal, or administrative, or moral. They are people problems. The same is true of teachers, bankers, craftsmen, administrators, entrepreneurs. One of the greatest sources of joy in this life is people. But it can also be one of the greatest sources of frustration, discouragement, and tension.

David wrote a song about difficult people. It's song number 54 in the Bible's songbook. He wrote from personal experience. Time and time again David had to defend himself from those who wanted to kill him. At other times the threat was not to his life but to his reputation. Still at other times the actions and words of others were enough to rob him of his peace.

**Let's take a moment to look at the information before verse one.**

These little snippets of information are designed to give us background information and context to help us understand the meaning of the song. So, what do we learn from this superscription?

**David wrote this song.** He wrote many, but not all Psalms.

**It was a Maskil.** It means *instruction* or *insight*. Teaching song.

**Written for public worship with the use of stringed instruments.**

**Based on a real life experience in David's life.** 1 Samuel 23:14-26

Once more David was being hunted by King Saul. His hiding place was bleak and rugged. His life was in danger and he tried to find a safe place. Once more it backfired. He tried to hide among the Ziphites. He hoped it would be a place of neutrality where he could rest and remain safe. That was not to be. The people there turned him into Saul. Once more David had to run for his life.

He found himself in a place called *the wilderness of Maon* where he was surrounded by Ziphite warriors and soldiers of Saul. I imagine that he was dirty, tired, thirsty, hungry and exhausted. Maybe he found a quite hiding place where he sat down and began to express his feelings in poetic form. Those words ultimately formed the song we know of as Psalm 54. I see four elements in this song. **But first, let's read it together.**

### 1. The Prayer (1-2)

Notice the verbs in this prayer. Verbs are so important. That speak of movement, action, response. There are four. David asked God to . . .

#### **Save**

When the enemy is closing in and the escape routes have disappeared the simple prayer is to be saved, to be rescued from the immediate threat. There is something interesting that we don't see in our English Bibles. In a Hebrew sentence it is normal for the verb to appear first. That's what we see in the English, **save**. But that is not what is found in the Hebrew Bible. There, we find that the sentence begins with **O, God**.

David did something very unusual. He changed the normal word order from what would have been regular Hebrew grammar. Why would he put **O, God** first? For emphasis. The focal point is not on the verb, being saved, but on the one whom he trusted for salvation, God. This is reinforced by the repetition of the name of God. David understood that there was only one sure source of His salvation. And so, he called to God, above all other potential sources of help.

**His immediate need was to be saved** (rescued from the danger). But he also asked God to do three other things.

**Vindicate** – to show to be right. Used of going through entire court proceedings and to be declared not guilty in a criminal case or to be right in a civil case. David was not at fault for what was happening.

**Hear** and **Give ear** – David wants God to turn His ear toward David. This was a request for God's full attention.

**David** calls to mind two of the great things about God, in praying. His name and His power. God had no less than twelve names or designations in the O.T. Each one highlights a facet of His character, nature or way of relating to us. And God is all powerful, omnipotent. In other words, as David was praying, he was remembering who God was (His name), and what God could do (anything). He was personal and limitless. He could and would come through for David.

When you find that others are against you, or that you are simply having trouble with **difficult people**, let me encourage you to **pray first**.

Dear God, So far today, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped. I haven't lost my temper. I haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish or over indulgent. I'm very thankful for that. But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed; and from then on, I'm going to need a lot more help. Amen

## 2. The Enemies (3)

David then describes his enemies as strangers and violent men who have not set God before them.

**Strangers** – Certainly refers to the Ziphites. The word means *to scatter, disperse*. It was used in the O.T. of investigating a matter, or searching out or tracing something, like spies might do. The Ziphites had become spies for Saul. They had dispersed through the land, looking for David. What made it worse is that David went to them thinking he could trust them. He thought they would at least be neutral.

**Violent men** – They were out for blood. Like sharks circling their prey in the water, or a pack of Hyenas nipping at a wounded animal, moving in for the kill.

**Have not set God before them** – They had no thought of God and therefore felt no accountability to God. They were carnal, fleshly, selfish. There was not thought of right and wrong or of consequences.

Maybe you have experienced a similar thing. People spying on you, looking for you to make a mistake. You've been investigated by those who hoped to bring you down. This often comes with false accusations.

## 3. The Helper (4-5)

David then focuses on his helper. He describes God in two ways, then offers two things God will do. First, note the way he describes God.

**Helper** – This word means *to furnish relief*. We might think more of a defender than simply a helper. And notice the possessive pronoun, **my**. God is a personal defender. He stepped in specifically for David and He does so for us.

**Sustainer** – To support with unflinching firmness. I love that David brings these two pictures together. A helper will pick you up from the

ground. A sustainer will keep you upright. A defender will step in and prevent your enemies from hurting you. A sustainer will keep you safe by staying beside you to prevent future attacks. God is both!

David then reveals what God would do. Once more, note the verbs.

**Recompense** – To turn back, to return. The idea is of giving someone what they deserve. Turning their own actions back toward them. Those who have harmed you will experience the same kind of harm that they have caused.

Racquetball – eye injury. I hit it but it came back and hit me.

God would turn the evil of David's enemies back on themselves. Scene in *The Hunt for Red October* where Russian sub fires a torpedo at the good guys. Missed. But the guided torpedo came back around and struck their own submarine, instead. That's the idea.

**Destroy** – to ruin, do away with, **silence**. Boy that last one is serious. God would not simply repulse the enemy, but would take them out. This may seem extreme. We might want to soften it. Let me warn you to never do that. God says what He means and has justification for what He plans to do. In fact the word, **destroy** = **exterminate**. Keep in mind that God is the one doing the exterminating, not David.

When we are under attack, it is easy for us to not only defend ourselves, which is legitimate, but also to counter-attack and seek vengeance. The Bible clearly warns us against this. Romans 12:17-19.

*Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*

#### 4. The Promise (6-7)

The song closes with a promise of what David would do. Because of the faithful work of God on his behalf notice what David promises.

***Willingly sacrifice, Give thanks –***

David has been through a painful, scary situation. Yet, he makes a commitment to worshipping God. You've taken a major step in dealing with difficult people in your life when you can thank God for the experience and for what He has done for you, and to make a commitment to deepen your commitment to worship God.

**Note the phrase, *for it is good*.** What is the it? I think David is reflecting on the experience itself. It was good that I went through this so that I might see God work. And God did work! I want you to see something. Turn to 1 Samuel 23:26-29 and see what God did.

*Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain; and David was hurrying to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them. <sup>27</sup> But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land." <sup>28</sup> So Saul returned from pursuing David and went to meet the Philistines; therefore they called that place <sup>l</sup>at the Rock of Escape. <sup>29</sup> David went up from there and stayed in the strongholds of Engedi.*

God not only defended David, but He actually caused his enemies to leave the scene. That's what David meant when he wrote, *For He has delivered me from all trouble*. I love that. But note one more thing.

***And my eye has looked with satisfaction upon my enemies.***

Because of David's protection, David could look upon His enemies with no fear, no concern, and with no lingering animosity. Saul was not David's enemy. What I mean is this. David respected Saul and honored him as the king. It was Saul who had chosen to make David his enemy.

David could look at Saul not as an enemy. David had not sin in his heart toward David. He could keep his head up and look Saul eye-to-eye. When you keep your heart pure in the face of enemy attacks and let God fight your battles, you too can keep your head up and look your enemies in the eye. You can only do that with a pure heart.

So, this is a song about difficult people. It's easy for us to think of the difficult people who have hurt us. But let's be brutally honest. Some of us at times have been the **difficult people** for others. We are all flawed, sinful and at times selfish and hurtful. So, before we lift up our heads too high and become proud of our own handling of the difficult people in our lives, let's humbly admit that we all have a ways to go. We can all do better, on the receiving end of attacks and certainly on the giving side of attacks.

To use Charles Swindoll's words, ***let's declare war on those ugly habits we cultivate against others – negative feelings, unforgiveness, resentment, competitiveness, grudges, jealousy, revenge, hatred, retaliation, gossip, criticism and suspicion. Let's leave this rugged, well-worn road forever.*** The better route is the road of love. Not the worldly kind of love, but the Spirit-empowered, sincere, unconditional, persistent love. **Amy Carmichael reminds us of this in her small but powerful book, *If*.**

*If I belittle those whom I am called to serve, talk of their weak points in contrast perhaps with what I think of as my strong points; if I adopt a superior attitude, forgetting . . . then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I take offense easily, if I am content to continue in a cool unfriendliness, though friendship be possible, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*

*If I feel bitterly towards those who condemn me, as it seems to me, unjustly, forgetting that if they knew me as I know myself they would condemn me much more, then I know nothing of Calvary love.*