

When Friends Become Enemies

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[0 : 00] Well, hello, welcome back to the Providence podcast.

My name is Chris Oswald, senior pastor at Providence Community Church. I'm recording this on Friday, February 9th, 2024.

And I just want to mark this down because my sense is that we'll forget. What glorious, amazing weather we've had. It's 65 today. It was like 68 yesterday.

Beautiful, beautiful weather all in the very first week of February. Man, I just want to mark this in memorial and thank God for what has been a really much needed, you know, a much needed reunion with the sun.

All right. Well, Friendship Week is drawing to a conclusion with this particular podcast. And today I want to talk about the what I guess I could say is the the dark side of friendship.

[1 : 10] And, you know, here's where I'm where I would stand. The likelihood of you experiencing genuine betrayal of a friend.

It's real. It's real. I hope you never experienced that. But on the other hand, you know, I want you to have a lot of friends.

I hope that you will be a friendship farmer and be friendly to as many people as possible. And it is entirely possible that in increasing the number of friends you have, you just sort of increase the odds that at some point you'll be betrayed.

I'm not quite sure how to prepare you for that, but I do want to tell you about a couple of Psalms. Let's start there. I'm going to read a couple of Psalms to you here. And the first one is in Psalm 55. Man, I'm so excited today. I found, I bought this, this journal Bible, but it's just the Psalms.

[2 : 22] It's about as thick as a normal Bible, but it's just the Psalms. See, I used to be a total Psalm guy. Like that was my daily reading. Five Psalms a day, every single day.

I'd read the whole book of Psalms every month. And I did this over and over and over again for months and months and months and multiple years. And I just trusted that, you know, you know me.

I'm an unconventional guy in some respects. And I just trusted that in reading the Psalms repeatedly, God would meet me there. And that, you know, I already kind of knew enough of the Bible.

Might have been kind of arrogant. But anyway, so I love the Psalms. And there were Psalms that I would read in sunnier days, you know, nicer days, like circumstantially.

And I would read them and I would just kind of think, well, I don't, you know, I don't even, I don't have any way to relate to this. And Psalm 55 is one of those Psalms.

[3 : 31] Let me read it to you now. Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy.

Attend to me and answer me. I am restless in my complaint and I moan. Because of the noise of the enemy. Because of the oppression of the wicked.

For they drop trouble upon me. And in anger they bear a grudge against me. So I would read that years ago. I remember this period of time when I was, you know, kind of in peak Psalm mode.

I would sit out in the parking lot of this company that I worked for while I was helping to plan a church. Worked for this insurance company. And I would read the Psalms every morning.

And I would remember, you know, I'd have this feeling where I'd get to a particular Psalm and just, like I said, I just couldn't identify. This was one of those. And I only later realized that there's a club of, I call it, you know, you can call it the Psalm 55 club.

[4 : 40] There's a club of people who lived in that Psalm. I think we've all been in the Psalm 51 club. I wonder if you know that Psalm 51 was really integral to the Jews in the Babylonian exile.

It was really their prayer. But, you know, I think we've all been in the Psalm 51 club, which is primarily when you have abandoned God. When you have betrayed God. But I don't know how many people have been in the Psalm 55 club. The Psalm 55 club isn't for people who have lost a friend. It isn't for people that, you know, has had a friend neglect them or withdraw or, you know, life gets busy and they lose track of each other. The Psalm 55 club is someone who was formerly a friend who now hasn't simply left, but is, has gone from a friend to an enemy. Give ear, verse one, give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy. Attend to me and answer me.

[5 : 55] I am restless in my complaint and I moan. He's just absolutely miserable. Because of the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they drop trouble upon me and in anger they bear a grudge against me.

My heart is in anguish within me. The terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me. And horror overwhelms me. And I say, oh, that I had wings like a dove. I would fly away and be at rest. Yes, I would wander far away. I would lodge in the wilderness.

I would hurry to find a shelter from the raging wind and tempest. He just desperately wants to get out of this situation. And I gave away the, you know, the kind of plot twist in this psalm. You know, you know now, because I told you, that the person who is pursuing him and who is making his life miserable was his friend.

[7 : 01] But of course, if you were just reading this psalm for the first time, it wouldn't appear that way. It just looked like somebody's being terrible to poor David. He continues in verse 9.

Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues. For I see violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go around. They go around it on its walls. And iniquity and trouble are within it.

Ruin is in its midst. Oppression and fraud. Do not depart from its marketplace. So not only is the friend now waging war against him, but it's working.

People are buying the story that the friend is selling. And verse 12. For it is not an enemy who taunts me.

Then I could bear it. It is not an adversary who deals insolently with me. Then I could hide from him. But it is you. A man. My equal.

[8 : 04] My companion. My familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together. Within God's house. Within God's house.

We walked in the throng. So that's the plot twist. I gave it away. But that's the plot twist. This persecution is happening from someone who was once a friend.

And David's just miserable. He's just absolutely a tortured soul. And he calls out to the Lord. And he's moaning.

And he's restless. And so on and so forth. Well, I think that to begin with, we might think, man, that seems so extraordinary. Does that really happen in real life?

And like I said, there are people in the Psalm 55 club. But why? And what's going on? Well, I would just say this. And there's lots of possible explanations, I suppose.

[9 : 04] But I will just say this. That when the Bible goes to explain that particular dynamic, in terms of teaching, it will give us a pretty clear direction.

Jesus says, don't think that I came to bring peace, but I brought a sword. And he says that husbands will turn against wives or fathers will turn against sons and so on and so forth.

He also says elsewhere that there's a time coming when people will be terrible to you thinking that they're offering service to God.

And so that would be some of the theological explanation I see for this phenomenon. And again, I really hope you never experience this. But as I said to begin with, the more friends you make, the more possible this becomes.

And I dare say that the more those friendships are centered around the Lord, the more possible this sort of thing can become.

[10 : 18] Certainly, certainly, Satan takes great joy in dividing a friendship that celebrates the glory of God, for instance. So David's in this utterly difficult situation.

Now, if you ever get in this situation, I'll tell you what to do what I did, one of the things that I've done. Read A Tale of Three Kings by Gene Edwards.

A Tale of Three Kings by Gene Edwards. It's not really my kind of book, traditionally. He takes some exegetical liberties and so on and so forth.

But I know a little bit about why that book was written and the history and so forth. And I think he does a good job accomplishing his intentions. And he essentially writes a loose sort of narrative kind of flowing idea of how David handled being betrayed.

How David handled honoring and giving good service to Saul only for Saul to try to kill him. And how David handled later in life having his son Absalom turn on him and also try to kill him.

[11 : 38] And the main thrust of that book is that David simply doesn't want to live in a world where God doesn't defend him. And so David, more or less, is not utterly foolish, but more or less drops his hands and just waits for the Lord to deliver him.

He's not going to engage in a fight one-on-one with this other person. He's going to either let the Lord deliver him from this fiery furnace or not.

A big theme in that book is David doesn't want to be king if God doesn't want him to be king. He doesn't defend his title, his position, even his life.

He's like, I don't want to live if God doesn't want me to live. And so we see David struggling through, back to Psalm 55, we see David struggling through this idea that his friend has not only abandoned him, but is really seeking destruction for him.

And it isn't as if David is simply, you know, morally indifferent to this. But what he does is what we see him do in other stories. We see him call out to the Lord and ask the Lord to be his vindicator.

[13 : 00] He says back again in verse 12, we go back a bit. For it is not an enemy who taunts me, then I could bear it. It is not an adversary who deals insolently with me, then I could hide from him.

But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together within God's house as we walked in the throng. Let death steal over them.

Let them go down to shoal alive. For evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart. He's not morally indifferent. He's really calling for the Lord to intervene and to intervene violently on his behalf.

He is ready, in spite of his past affection, he is ready for the Lord to eliminate this threat. And that's what he's asking God to do.

He's not going to do it, but he's going to ask God to do it. Verse 16. But I call to God and the Lord will save me evening and morning and at noon.

[14 : 06] I utter my complaint and moan and he hears my voice. He redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I wage. For many are arrayed against me.

God will give ear and humble them. God will give ear and humble them. For he who is enthroned from old, because they do not change and do not fear God.

My companion stretched out his hand against his friend. He violated his covenant. His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.

Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you. He will never permit the righteous to be moved. But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction.

Men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days, but I will trust in you. So, if this happens to you, don't fight for yourself.

[15 : 21] And trust the Lord and tell the Lord your heart and let him, let him and trust that he will take care of you.

So, that's just kind of all the advice that flows out of this psalm. But I think structurally, like the whole psalm in just general, the fact that it exists. Here's my number one piece of advice. I mean, all that stuff I just said is really important, but number one maybe would be find someone else in the Psalm 55 club.

It's a small club. Find someone else in that club. You need to, if at all possible, and I'm not sure David had that, by the way. I mean, he had Christ, who is the ultimate member of the Psalm 55 club.

But I would tell you, as someone in that club, if you ever go through this, the best thing you can do is to find someone else who has gone through it.

And it may be one of those rare exceptions to my general rule, and that's not seek out friends that are living through the exact thing as you. There are some exceptions to that, and one of them would be, it really can be useful, especially if it's your first time in the Psalm 55 club, to find someone to

walk you around.

[16:42] So, that's one of the, you know, friendship destruction psalms. Let's see. I think there's another one that I wanted to look at. Yeah, Psalm 41. Psalm 41. Psalm 41.

Psalm 41. To the choir master, a psalm of David. Blessed is the one who considers the poor. In the day of trouble, the Lord delivers him.

The Lord protects him and keeps him alive. He is called blessed in the land. You do not give him up to the will of his enemies. The Lord sustains him on his sickbed.

In his illness, you restore him to full health. As for me, I said, O Lord, be gracious to me. Heal me, for I have sinned against you. My enemies say of me in malice, when will he die and his name perish?

And when he comes to see me, he utters empty words. While his heart gathers iniquity, when he goes out, he tells it abroad. All who hate me whisper together about me.

[17:52] They imagine the worst for me. The thing that's so compelling about this psalm to me is that David is under no illusion about his own sinfulness.

And it really feels as if he sees his own sin playing some role in this. This is verse 4 again. As for me, I said, O Lord, be gracious to me.

Heal me, for I have sinned against you. My enemies say of me in malice, when will he die and his name perish? And when one comes to see me, he utters empty words while his heart gathers iniquity.

When he goes out, he tells it abroad. He tells it abroad. All who hate me whisper together about me. They imagine the worst for me. You know, one of the things that's really good to understand is that the devil is an accuser of the brethren.

And he loves it when you sin because he gets to use that in many other ways.

[19:08] And sure enough, we do indeed sin. It's one of the great joys to walk with people full of grace. And so David's got some sense in which his sin is actually connected to these attacks.

And so the first thing he does is he deals with the sin. He's going to have to deal with the people. That's going to take a longer time. But at first, he's got to deal with his sin. He's got to ask God to forgive him. He's got to ask the Lord to deliver him from his iniquity.

And really, then it's a process of asking the Lord to deliver him in some respect from some of the consequences of his iniquity. It's like, you know, I've sinned.

Some people are using that sin against me. Lord, help me with that, too. But most of all, help me with the sin. Verse 8. They say, A deadly thing is poured out on him.

He will not rise again from where he lies. Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me. But you, O Lord, be gracious to me and raise me up that I may repay them.

[20:14] By this I know that you delight in me. Oh, back up. Back, back up. But you, O Lord, be gracious to me and raise me up that I may repay them. In my opinion, and, you know, I'm not prone to tend, I don't tend to be pacifistic in my understanding of the Bible.

But in my opinion, what he says, raise me up that I may repay them. His resurrection is the repayment.

They hate him that much. So if he just comes back, that will be vengeance aplenty. Verse 11. By this I know that you delight in me.

My enemy will not shout in triumph over me. But you have upheld me because of my integrity and set me in your presence forever. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.

Amen. That last piece. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, the God of him who struggles with God. The God of Israel is from everlasting to everlasting.

[21:22] What is God doing? You know, you may have caused some problem. Your friends may have caused pain.

What is God doing in all this when he allows even a friend who you used to take sweet counsel together with to raise his hand against you? What is God doing in that?

Well, he really is teaching you that there's only one person who is entirely faithful, and that's the Lord.

He's really teaching you that he wants you to have friends. He wants you to pursue friendships, but they will never be a substitute for his faithful, kind hand.

And hey, all you young married people that listen to this podcast, do me a favor as your pastor. Would you remember that now? Would you like soak that in now? Your spouse is not God. [22 : 25] Because there's going to be a time when you're going to be like, my spouse isn't God, and I'm frustrated, and my faith is shaken, and so on and so forth.

God wants you to know that people will fail you, even if they're not mean about it. They will fail you. So this idea that sort of what is God doing behind when friends disappoint us, when they let us down, or even worse, when they turn on us, what is God doing?

He is teaching your soul, the deep part of your soul that can only get touched when you're suffering. He's teaching the deep down parts of you, that he is faithful, and he alone is perfectly faithful.

Well, there's one last thing I wanted to leave you with, and it comes from Hebrews 6. Suppose you are in a period of time where maybe a friend has turned against you, or maybe a friend's just really not reciprocating.

I felt led to share this verse as well, Hebrews 6.10. For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints as you still do.

[23 : 43] Well, have a wonderful weekend, my friends. Seems like it's going to get a little chilly out there this weekend, and of course, now we're all used to the warmth. So bundle up.

But at the same time, it'll be sunny out, and that'll be nice. And I look forward to seeing many of you in the Lord's Day here just a couple days from now. God bless. Be well. Be well. Be well. Be well. Be well.