

Hurting

As a young man, he had been anointed as the future king of Israel. He had risen to prominence as soothing musician, court favourite and armour-bearer to the king. He had become the people's hero of the campaign against the Philistines, close friends with the crown prince and son-in-law to the king.

But then it all started to go wrong. David found out that King Saul, far from favouring him, was afraid and jealous of him and was trying to kill him. David's world looked set to fall apart. The events are recorded in **1 Samuel 19-24**, but we can look into David's heart in poems that he wrote at the time, pouring himself out before the LORD.

Psalm 59 was written when he knew that Saul had sent a hit squad to kill him as soon as he stepped outside his house the next morning (**1 Samuel 19:11** onwards). What does he say to the LORD? Yes, he asks the LORD to save him and to scatter those who are lying in wait for him, asking the LORD to deal with them, but he also says, *"But as for me, I shall sing of your strength; yes, I shall joyfully sing of your loving kindness in the morning, for you have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress."* (**Psalm 59:16**)

After he escaped, David fled further away to a neighbouring kingdom and wrote **Psalm 34** - hardly the sort of poem we should expect from a political refugee! Please take the time to read the whole psalm, but here are some extracts:

"I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth . . . I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to him and were radiant, and their faces will never be ashamed . . . the LORD is near to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all . . . the LORD redeems the soul of his servants, and none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned. "

These reactions are pretty impressive, but the most staggering comes when he and his fellow-dissidents are hiding in the cave of Adullam (**1 Samuel 22 & 24**). David's companions are all either in debt to someone or else embittered against them (**22:2**), and they are quick to urge him to grab the opportunity to kill Saul when he so easily could have done (**1 Samuel 24**). He proves to Saul that he does not seek to hurt him, despite all Saul's efforts to kill him (**24:9**).

But just look at **Psalm 57!** He knows that he is in danger, that destruction threatens, but he hides his soul in the LORD just as plainly as he hides himself in the cave. He seems more concerned about having to spend his time with 'those who breathe forth fire' than about his own physical safety or vindication. *"My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises!"*

We might say that David had every right to feel hurt. **Very** hurt! It would be difficult to blame him for any of the things that had happened to him - he seems to have been at the mercy of people and circumstances which had all conspired against him. There is no doubt that the dramatic changes in circumstances will have been painful to him, especially the changes in people's attitudes to him. He went from national hero to hunted outlaw, almost overnight.

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How do we respond or react to hurtful events? We might like to think that we respond like David, but sadly it is not always the case.

Often the first response is to try to apportion blame - whose fault is it? "I did my very best, but the other people . . ." If you can convince yourself that it is someone else's fault, you may feel better about it. It even allows you to feel quite justified in declaring your innocence and their guilt. You may feel that they owe you an apology, although it is most unlikely that they know anything about it. The friendship cools off, resentment sets in and the relationship is poisoned. If you talk about it with others, the poison spreads.

Or perhaps you see that you have been largely to blame yourself. "If only I hadn't done that - I really am a fool. Why do I always make such a mess of things? I hate myself." You may not use those words, but you grind yourself down and start to feel sorry for yourself. You lose confidence and start expecting to fail at everything. Then you stop trying, because failure is so certain! Christians may sometimes think that this is really humility - far from it! It can be the threshold of depression.

If you are not inclined to blame yourself, and you cannot stick the blame on anyone else, then it must be God's fault! You would probably never admit it to your Christian friends, nor even to your nearest and dearest, but you start to believe that God has let you down, that he has not dealt fairly with you. Once again, the relationship is soured and begins to fail.

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The common factor in all these cases is that the person who has been hurt ends up with more problems. Their relationships suffer, their own self-esteem disappears and very often bitterness and resentment set in. We may describe their condition by saying, "They are hurting."

Two questions, then:

- 1) What can you do if you are 'hurting' like this?
- 2) How can you avoid 'hurting' in future?

As we have seen, right at the heart of feeling hurt like this is the sense of 'it's not fair', being owed something (an apology, perhaps), self-pity and a refusal to forgive other people, God or yourself. Holding onto hurt locks you into unforgiveness and negativity. You may want to get out of it, but perhaps the cost seems too high.

Forgiveness is at the heart of healing from this hurt. You will need to release the other person, yourself or God himself from the 'debt' which you feel is owed. Maybe extending forgiveness seems too high a price to pay. "Why should it always be me that has to give ground? I am the one who has been hurt, after all!"

That is the way it works, says Jesus. *"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."* (**Matthew 6:14-15**)

Often the hardest person to forgive is yourself, especially if you are not sure of God's forgiveness to you, but this is where the Gospel is really good news. Jesus has broken the 'vicious circle' of sin and condemnation by paying off our debts by his blood. This not only deals with our standing before God but also answers the accusations of our conscience.

". . . the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the Truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (**1 John 1:7-9**)

"How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (**Hebrews 9:14**)

When we have received the forgiveness which God offers through the blood of Jesus, it is much easier to forgive those who have done us wrong, but we may not find it very easy, even so. Jesus' parable in **Matthew 18:23-35** helps us to get things in perspective and is a warning alongside the passage we have already seen in **Matthew 6**.

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If, by the grace of God, we have now been able to put past hurts behind us and forgive those responsible, are we going to be able to deal with any more that come our way in the future? How can we avoid becoming embittered and resentful?

Self-pity, resentment, bitterness and holding onto hurt are all wrong, but how can we avoid them when something hurtful happens to us? Perhaps we

think it was easy for David in his problems. After all, he was one of God's 'special people', wasn't he? 'A man after God's own heart' - what hope do you and I have?

We need to see the difference between 'sins', the things we have done wrong and for which we need forgiveness, and 'sin', the bias in our natural state to do things wrong.

If we come to God and say, "Father, I have failed you. Please forgive me through the blood of Jesus", he is more than ready to do so, and to wipe our record completely clean. Wonderful! But if we say to him, "Father, I fail you. Please forgive me through the blood of Jesus", he says, "No. I have provided forgiveness for what you have done. I have made different provision for the way you are."

Just as God's remedy for sins is the blood of Jesus, so his remedy for the sinful nature is the death of Jesus. If we are in Christ, God tells us that our old life actually died when Jesus died! It is over, finished, gone! In its place is the new life of the Holy Spirit, ours because of Jesus' resurrection! (**Romans 6:1-11, 2 Corinthians 5:14-17, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:3** . . . and many more!)

So we can say to him, "Father, thank you for forgiving me, through the blood of Jesus, for the things I have done wrong. Thank you also that, through his death and resurrection, you have done away with my old life and given me a new one, joined to him. Thank you that the life of the Holy Spirit in me produces the fruit of the Spirit. By your grace, I am dead to self-pity, resentment and bitterness and alive to your love, joy, peace and all the other fruit of the Spirit."

What a wonderful end to all our struggling to succeed! When we first see that our old life is dead, it is a marvellous revelation - freedom at last! Then we need to learn to put it into practice, and what better time than when we are faced with temptation? Confronted by hurtful events, for example, we can stand in the fact that in Christ we are dead to self-pity, resentment and bitterness, and (by the grace of God) refuse to be drawn into them.

"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. " (Colossians 3:12-13)

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