

Psalm 52 “When You’ve Been Betrayed” [**](#)

Main Idea: We can learn from David in Psalm 52 how to honor God when we’ve been betrayed and burnt by problem people. There are three movements in this psalm.

The Setting: 1 Samuel 21-22

1. David is running from Saul.
2. David is ratted on by Doeg.
3. David feels responsible for the murder of 85 priests.

I. David describes the problem person (1-4).

- A. He has a tongue problem (1-2).
 1. He loves himself.
 2. He uses people.
 3. He ignores God.
- B. He has a heart problem (3).
 1. He loves himself.
 2. He uses people.
 3. He ignores God.

II. David describes the fate of the problem person (5-7).

- A. He affirms what God will do to him (5).
- B. He affirms what the righteous will do to him (6-7).

III. David describes himself (8-9).

- A. He resolves to live above his circumstances (8a).
- B. He focuses on God, not the problem person (8b-9).
 1. He thinks about God’s house.
 2. He thinks about God’s character.
 3. He thinks about God’s accomplishments.
 4. He thinks about God’s promises.
 5. He thinks about God’s people.

Make It Personal: Am I like an olive tree?

1. Trust in His love.
2. Hope in His name.
3. Praise Him for His deeds, no matter what.

A lot of people choose Bible names for their children, which is understandable since many of the characters in the Bible provide wonderful models for us. But there's one biblical name I have never heard a parent use, and for good reason. The name is Doeg.

To put it simply, Doeg was a troublemaker, a grievous thorn in David's side. David wrote a song about this man and how he dealt with him, Psalm 52, the psalm we'll be investigating this morning.

As we begin notice the introductory words in the superscription of Psalm 52.

For the director of music. We've been learning in our series on the psalms of David that God wants His people to *put Him at the gravitational center of their lives*. One of the primary ways we can do that is through singing. That's why God gave Israel the book of Psalms. And that's why David gave this Holy Spirit-inspired psalm to Israel's director of music, so that the rest of God's people could use it in their lives.

A maskil of David. This term appears in the heading of about twelve of the psalms. We're not sure what it means. It's possibly some sort of musical term. In place of the term *maschil*, the NKJV calls this "a contemplation of David."

When Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him: "David has gone to the house of Ahimelech." There's the background of this psalm. It involves four people: Doeg, Saul, David, and Ahimelech. To find out the details of the event that prompted this song, we must turn to 1 Samuel 21-22.

The Setting: 1 Samuel 21-22

As we scan the account we'll notice David experiencing three painful events.

1. *David is running from Saul.* The reason he's running is because God chose him to be Israel's next king but Saul isn't interested in leaving the throne. He's already attempted to murder David at least three times, but God protected his chosen one.

David went to Nob (21:1) where the priest Ahimelech lived and served. He claimed to be on a secret mission authorized by King Saul and asked the priest for bread and a sword, saying he needed these supplies for the mission. Ahimelech complied, and David fled the country ending up in Philistine country.

So David was an outcast, away from his family and fleeing for his life, hungry, and without a weapon to defend himself. And just when it seemed like things couldn't get worse, they did.

2. *David is ratted on by Doeg.* 1 Samuel 21:7 tells us, "Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd."

Doeg was an Edomite by nationality, a herdsman by trade, and a self-seeking troublemaker by choice. He took it all in when he saw Ahimelech provide David with consecrated bread and the sword of Goliath. That knowledge was the trump card for which Doeg was waiting.

In 1 Samuel 22, we are told that Doeg committed two great atrocities. First, he informed on David to King Saul, and incriminated the priest Ahimelech. Second, when paranoid Saul gave the order to kill Ahimelech and none of his troops would obey, Doeg did not hesitate to move up the executive ladder. He took a sword and killed not only Ahimelech, but 85 priests of Yahweh, as well as the women, children, and even the animals of Nob (22:18-19).

For nothing other than personal gain, Doeg did the devil's bidding. He sold his soul for a chance to move up in the world.

One man escaped the slaughter, Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech (22:20). He fled to David and told him the terrible

news which of course devastated David. 1 Samuel 22:22 records, “Then David said to Abiathar: ‘That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your father’s whole family.’”

So not only is David running from Saul, and not only has he been ratted on by Doeg, but what’s worse...

3. *David feels responsible for the murder of 85 priests.* A whole village was annihilated because of his well meaning actions. Sure Doeg pulled the trigger, but his well-intentioned actions put the gun in Doeg’s hand.

Charles Spurgeon observed, “Doeg is gone, but other dogs bark at the Lord’s people.”^[1] The fact is, there are a lot of Doegs around in our day. They could care less about doing what is right, only what is expedient. The Doegs of the world operate by one guiding question, “What will help ME get ahead in life?” To a Doeg, everything and everyone else is expendable. Principle doesn't matter. Ethics doesn't matter. Integrity doesn't matter. Only one agenda matters—his own. The tools of the Doegs of the world are cleverness, craftiness, and self-seeking ambition.

Yes, Doeg is long gone, but troublemakers like Doeg still abound and afflict the people of God. We see them in politics, in professional athletics, on Wall Street, and even behind pulpits in America . We work next to them at our jobs and may even have them in our families.

What should be our attitude towards people like Doeg, people who try to take advantage of us and could care less about anything or anyone but themselves? How does God want us to deal with troublemakers? We find the answer to these relevant questions in Psalm 52. In Psalm 52 David teaches us how to honor God when we’ve been betrayed and burnt by problem people. There are three movements in this psalm.

I. David describes the problem person (1-4).

“Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God? Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. *Selah* You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!”^[2]

According to David, Doeg had two basic problems.

A. He has a tongue problem (1-2). Verse 1—He *boasts* of evil. He *boasts* all day long. Verse 2—With his razor-sharp *tongue* he plots destruction.

It's interesting to note the question with which David begins this psalm, “Doeg, why do you boast?” Think about it. What reason did Doeg have to boast? What had he done? He had slaughtered a band of defenseless priests! He ought to have been ashamed of his cowardice instead of boasting.^[3] It was not bravery that moved him to action—it was greed, self-love, self-promotion—it was a heart filled with twisted values.

I remind you that in the world's eyes, Doeg did move ahead because of his wicked conduct. He was promoted to a chief place near the king. But what a price he paid!

When I think of a boaster I think of a loud-mouth, obnoxious braggart, but that probably wasn’t the case with Doeg. As Derek Kidner comments, “The word *boast* does not necessarily imply outward show: the real point is the man’s self-satisfaction. He thinks himself clever...”^[4]

In fact, Doeg used his words as venomous weapons. Oh the destructive power of a few poisonous words! James Boice illustrates the point. “In England during World War II a war poster designed to warn against the unwitting disclosure of troop movements or other military secrets was displayed all over the country. It contained the words ‘Loose talk costs lives.’ That is true spiritually as well.”^[5]

You may never murder 85 people with a sword, but you and I can cut people to pieces with our tongues, if we’re

not careful. James 3:6 states, “The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

But a person with a sharp tongue has a more fundamental problem. Like Doeg...

B. He has a heart problem (3). Notice verse 3 again, “You *love* evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. You *love* every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!”

The tongue problem is rooted in the heart. What’s going on in Doeg’s heart? It’s not just that he *boasts* of evil. He *loves* evil. It’s not just that he practices deceit, but that he *loves* it. And it’s not just that he *says* harmful words, but that he *loves* every such word. Jesus said in Matthew 15:19, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

So in the first movement of the psalm, David affirms three things about Doeg that are true of most, if not all problem people in our lives.

1. *He loves himself.* He’s a boaster.

2. *He uses people.* There seems to be a gap of time between when Doeg saw David at Nob and when he reported David to Saul. For instance, after David left Nob he went to Gath in Philistine territory (according to 1 Sam. 21:10), and then to the cave in Adullam where his father’s family and four hundred other men in trouble with the law joined him (1 Sam. 22:1-2). Doeg didn’t tell Saul about spotting David until *after* those events (22:6).

Why did Doeg wait? Boice suggests, “He knew he had a piece of valuable information and kept it to himself until it would best serve his interests to divulge it.”^[6]

That’s the way a troublemaker works. He loves himself and uses people for selfish ends. But worst of all...

3. *He ignores God.* That’s not to say that Doeg wasn’t religious. Everybody in Israel was religious. But true religion shows up in the way we live, just like the *lack of* true religion shows up in the way we live. Doeg didn’t love God. He loved evil. And Doeg didn’t love the truth. He loved falsehood. He flip-flopped good and evil, truth and lies.

Does this flip-flopping happen today? All the time. A few years ago at the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, CNN interviewed one of the leaders of the abortion rights movement. The woman's speech went something like, “We are concerned for the constitutional rights of women, and do not want to see some minority group that uses such actions as doing violence at abortion clinics turn back the progress we've made since 1973.” We hear it all the time. What is evil (namely the murder of unborn children) is promoted as being good (i.e. a woman's right), and what is good (namely, the attempts of people to prevent the murder of unborn persons) is portrayed as being evil (those who oppose abortion are viewed as being opposed to what is really good for society).

In the first movement David describes the problem person. In the second...

II. David describes the fate of the problem person (5-7).

He describes Doeg’s fate from two perspectives...

A. He affirms what God will do to him (5). “Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. *Selah.*”

Notice David’s confidence. *Surely*, he says. *Surely God will*, and then lists four powerfully descriptive verbs: *bring you down...snatch you up...tear you from...uproot you.*

David pictures Doeg as an uprooted tree, mighty one moment, torn up by the storm and lying dead the next. *That’s*

what God will do to you, David affirms.

And then David inserts the word *selah*. *Selah* appears 71 times in the Psalms (and three times in Habakkuk). Marvin Tate explains, “The exact meaning is unsure, but it almost certainly indicated a pause in the reading of the text... The question of what the pause was for is much more difficult.”^[7] Tate suggests some possible reasons for the pause: to bow in prayer, or to recite a liturgical saying such as, “forever,” or “Yahweh is good,” or to shout “Hallelujah” or some other expression. A refrain may have been sung or chanted, perhaps the previous verse was repeated. It’s possible that the *selah*-pause was flexible, used in different ways in different psalms.^[8]

After affirming what God will do to Doeg, David next looks at Doeg’s fate from a horizontal perspective...

B. He affirms what the righteous will do to him (6-7). “The righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at him, saying, “Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!”

God is sovereign over people like Doeg. The Doegs of the world are like dogs on a leash. They can only go so far, then God yanks their chain.

All things work together for good for those who love God (Rom. 8:28). All things? Yes. Here we see one of the good outcomes of the actions of Doeg. David says God uses Doeg to teach His people a lesson. *The righteous will see*, he says, *and fear*. The righteous are God’s people, those who have entered in a relationship with Him by faith and consequently love righteousness. By the time God is done with Doeg, the righteous will *see* and *fear* and even *laugh* at Doeg and say this, “Here’s the fate of the man who didn’t put his trust in God but rather trusted in himself and his own resources.”

God could eliminate the Doegs of the world and one day He will. But one of the reasons he allows them is to teach us that there are only two ways to live. You can live for God and if you do He will be your stronghold, *or* you can live for yourself and if you do you will have to depend on your own resources. That’s a vital lesson, at times a very painful lesson to learn, to discover that God is enough for His people.

Is God enough when things happen you don’t understand? Is He enough when problem people attack you and seem to get away with it? David says yes, not a flippant yes, but a tear-stained, heartfelt *yes*.

When I think of what David experienced as the result of Doeg’s actions, I can’t help but think of another godly man whose well-intentioned actions resulted in the loss of life. Sunday, October 19, 1856 was one of the most difficult days in the life of Pastor Charles Spurgeon—he never really recovered from it. It was supposed to be a great day, the day he preached at the newly built Royal Surrey Gardens Music Hall in London . Ten to twelve thousand eager worshippers squeezed into the Hall when the doors opened at 6:00 p.m. Another ten thousand milled about outside unable to get in. The entire area looked like a surging sea of faces.^[9]

Right in the middle of the service someone yelled, “Fire! Fire! Fire! The galleries are giving way! The place is falling! The place is falling!” People panicked and ran for the doors, trampling on each other, crushing each other. The banisters of one of the stairs gave way and many were trampled over. As some exited the building, some on the outside struggled to get in. Tragically, seven people died and twenty-eight were taken to the hospital seriously injured.

To make matters worse, Spurgeon’s critics blasted him, particularly the press. The next morning, October 20, *Daily Telegraph* reported: “This man, in his own opinion, is a righteous Christian; but in ours, nothing more than a ranting charlatan...”^[10]

The loss of innocent life and the brutal slander that followed sent Spurgeon into depression which the preacher battled throughout his life. In Spurgeon’s first book, *The Saint and His Saviour*, he described his agony:

I refused to be comforted; tears were my meat by day, and dreams my terror by night. I felt as I had never felt before. ‘My thoughts were all a case of knives,’ cutting my heart in pieces, until a kind of stupor of grief ministered a mournful medicine to me. I could have truly said, ‘I am not mad, but surely I have had enough to

madden me, if I should indulge in meditation on it.”^[11]

That event could have destroyed Spurgeon, but it didn't. He went on to become one of the most effective, God-used preachers since the apostle Paul. Thousands came to know Christ through his sermons and books. How did Spurgeon overcome his despair? The same way David did. And it's the same way we can. We find the answer in the third movement...

III. David describes himself (8-9).

“But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints.”

Note how David describes himself. “But I am *like an olive tree* flourishing in the house of God.” Maybe there actually was an olive tree at Nob, a tree that David now pictures in his mind. Remember, Nob was where Ahimelech served in the tabernacle, the house of God. And where Doeg saw Ahimelech help David. It's that tree that now encourages David.

“I'm like that tree,” he says. The olive is an evergreen that may bear fruit for centuries (usually in alternate years).^[12] It is a sturdy tree, and even if the main trunk dies, shoots grow up to prolong its existence (see Ps 128:3). It grows well in the Mediterranean climate, needing some seven months of sunshine and heat. As Tate observes, “However, since some frost helps productivity, the central highlands of Palestine (especially on lower slopes and valleys) were very fruitful. The olive was used in various ways: as food and as a source of fat in cooking, for hygienic and medicinal purposes (such as for soap and for ointments; cf. Isa 1:6), for cosmetic uses (cf. Eccl 9:7-8), for lamp oil, and for liturgical uses.”

Don't miss the contrast. The troublemaker Doeg trusts in himself, does evil, lines his pockets with unjust gain at the expense of others, but in the end what happens? The Lord uproots him like a tree, and destroys him. On the other hand, the God-fearing, righteous person is like an olive tree that flourishes and in the test of time brings forth lasting fruit. We must acknowledge what we are (see Psalm 1; John 15).

Do you see what David is doing? He's engaging in two vital activities.

A. He resolves to live above his circumstances (8a). *But I*, he says. Doeg is still out there, *but I*. The pain is still there, *but I*. I'm still on the run from Saul, *but I*. My circumstances are the same, *but I am like an olive tree*.

David's situation hadn't changed, but *David had changed*. He's making a choice to *live above* his circumstances. You say, “How did he do that? I feel like my circumstances and particularly, the problem people in my life, control me. How do you live above them?” The answer is linked to David's second activity.

B. He focuses on God, not the problem person (8b-9). Jesus said, “As a man thinks, so is he.” Take a close look at what occupied David's thinking in verses 8-9, five subjects, all related to God.

1. He thinks about God's house. “But I am like an olive tree, flourishing *in the house of God*.” For David, God's house referred to the tabernacle. His son, Solomon, would replace the tabernacle with a building called the temple, which the Bible also refers to as God's *house*.

For Israel, God's house represented hope for sinners. It's where sacrifices were made for sins. It's where a holy God would listen to His people (so much so that Jesus referred to the temple as a “house of prayer” in Matt. 21:13). It's where instruction of the Word was given. It's where you went to get your perspective restored (remember Asaph in Psalm 73:17? And King Hezekiah in Isaiah 37:1, 14?). It's where the Levites sang songs of praise to God and where God's people learned to sing ‘take home theology.’ That's what happened in Israel's house of God.

Where's God's house today? Jesus talked about His Father's "house" in John 14:2 and indicated He left the world to prepare a heavenly home for His people. But what about now? Where is God's house today? The following texts tell us:

1 Corinthians 3:16 "Don't you know that you yourselves are *God's temple* and that God's Spirit lives in you?"

The church is God's house, not the church building but the people. Is everyone who comes to a church building part of that house? No...

Hebrews 3:6 "But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast."

Who's the head of God's house? Jesus Christ is. And what must we do to become part of this house? *Hold to the hope of which we boast*. In other words, we must place our continuing hope in Jesus Christ. He must be our confidence, our source of hope, not our good deeds, but His. To enter God's house we must *come to Him*, as the next text says...

1 Peter 2:4-5 "As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a *spiritual house* to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

The world rejected Jesus and put Him on a cross. But that cross and the One who hung there is God's provision for sinners like you and me. He is precious to God, and must be to us if we are to be made acceptable to God. And what happens once God picks us up and places us as a stone in this living building? Paul tells us in...

Ephesians 2:19-22 "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of *God's household*, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

What did David think about that helped him live above his circumstances? *But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God*. Do you want to be an overcomer? Then think about God's house. Make sure you're part of it. And then cherish it!

2. *He thinks about God's character*. Verse 8—"I trust in God's *unfailing love*." The Hebrew word is *hesed*, God's covenant faithfulness and mercy. We don't achieve God's favor by earning it. It's a gift we must receive. God didn't accept me because I deserved it. He loved me when I was unlovely, a sinner, and His love is unfailing.

There's another aspect of God's character that captures David's attention, in verse 9—"In your name I will hope for your name is *good*." God is good, all the time. He's good when He sends things into my life that I like...and when He sends things that perplex me.

3. *He thinks about God's accomplishments*. "I will praise you forever *for what you have done*," David sings. What has God done? How about *created the universe*, for starters! And *rescued us from our sins*! If He did *that*, can we not trust Him for everything else?

4. *He thinks about God's promises*. God, through Samuel, gave David a promise in 1 Samuel 16:12, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one." God said David would be Israel's next king. God means what he says. Not Doeg, nor Saul, nor anybody else can prevent the fulfillment of God's promises to David. Nor to *you*, child of God.

"I will never leave you," God says in Hebrews 13:5. That's His promise to you.

"When you are tempted, He will provide a way out so you can endure." That, too, is His promise to you (1 Cor. 10:13).

“In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path (Prov. 3:5-6).”

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find (Matt. 7:7).”

“Call upon the name of the Lord, and you will be saved (Rom. 10:13).” Those are God’s promises, my friend, and God never lies. So focus on God’s promises rather than the problem person.

5. *He thinks about God’s people.* Notice David’s final words, “I will praise you in the presence of your saints.” That’s quite remarkable. A man just slaughtered an entire village and the king who ordered it is mobilizing the army of an entire nation to kill David. Yet David is singing. He’s affirming what he *knows*. Not, I *hope* I will, but I *will*! Right now I’m running for my life, but the time will come when I will once again be with God’s people—I will be their king, in fact—and when I am in their presence, I will praise You!

Make It Personal: Am I like an olive tree?

If you’d like to be, do what David did. Make three decisions right now.

1. *Trust in His love.* “I trust in God’s unfailing love (8).” To be like an olive tree, you must, like David, trust in God’s love. And...

2. *Hope in His name.* “In your name I will hope for your name is good (9).” His name is Jesus which means, “The Lord saves.” To be saved from your sin you must put your hope in the verity of His name. To be saved from the turmoil of your circumstances, you must likewise put your hope in His name.

3. *Praise Him for His deeds, no matter what.* “I will praise your name forever for what you have done,” David says in verse 9, and then repeats himself, “I will praise you.” Don’t wait for your circumstances to change. You change! Start praising Him *now*, and keep praising Him no matter what. He is worthy!

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, p. 426.

[2] Eric Lane suggests the enemy here isn’t Doeg but Saul because David refers to him as “mighty man” (Hebrew *gibbor*), and Doeg was only Saul’s head shepherd and not a “mighty man.”

[3] Spurgeon, p. 426.

[4] Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, pp. 194-5.

[5] James Boice, *Psalms, Vol. 2*, p. 441.

[6] James Boice, *Psalms, Vol. 2*, p. 440.

[7] Marvin Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, p. 33.

[8] Tate, p. 33.

[9] Taken from *The Reformed Reader*, <http://www.reformedreader.org/spurgeon/mhrsg.htm>

[10] Taken from *The Reformed Reader*, <http://www.reformedreader.org/spurgeon/mhrsg.htm>

[11] Taken from *The Reformed Reader*, <http://www.reformedreader.org/spurgeon/mhrsg.htm>

[12] See Tate, p. 38.