

Do Not Return Evil for Evil

Psalm 141

This psalm looks at how we are to respond when we are treated unjustly or unfairly. What do we do when we are wronged by others?

"Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all."
Romans 12:17 (ESV)

"Whatever may have been the immediate cause pressing David to pray in the manner he does in this Psalm, it is plain that his desire is through divine grace to check and bridle his spirit, under injuries of a causeless and unprovoked description, so as not to break out into retaliation and revenge, and return evil for evil." John Calvin

Suffering is part of maturing as God's children:

"Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him," Hebrews 5:8-9 (ESV)

Discipleship is learning obedience through suffering. It is not just learning principally what it means to obey but practically, it is learning to fostering an attitude, a habit, a life of obedience.

What wisdom can we glean from Psalm 141.

I. **Prayer: Learn to redirect your struggles (your words) from the horizontal to vertical. Psalm 141:1-2**

"O Lord, I call upon you; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to you! Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!"
Psalm 141:1-2 (ESV)

Question: Are you more concerned about getting quick resolution with your people problems than getting nearer to God?

Deep pain is a time for learning the power of devoted prayer and communion with Christ.

"Prayer [is] the quiet, persistent living of our life of desire and faith in the presence of our God." Andrew Murray, With Christ in the School of Prayer

"The knowledge of God's Father-love is the first and simplest—but also the last and highest—lesson in the school of prayer. It is in personal relationship to the living God and fellowship with Him that prayer begins." Andrew Murray

The highest urgency of our painful situations is to learn to take our troubles to God to resolve and to learn to rest in His love.

II. Pursue Personal Holiness: What is happening within you is of greater importance than what is happening to you. Psalm 141:3-4.

"Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies!" Psalm 141:3-4 (ESV)

Learn to fight against the temptations to sin within your own heart that surface because of difficulties with people.

- **Temptation #1 - Retaliation: "Set a guard over my mouth..."**

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." Matthew 7:1-5 (ESV)

"Our forgiving love toward men is the evidence of God's forgiving love in us. It is a necessary condition of the prayer of faith." Andrew Murray, With Christ in the School of Prayer

- **Temptation #2 – Capitulation: "Do not let my heart incline to any evil..."**

Consecration: When someone wrongs you can do two things wrong: you can retaliate or you can capitulate. Don't do either, consecrate yourself to God!

III. Consider Eternity: Don't think about instant "gratification" for you. Think about the eternal implications for everyone. Psalm 141:5-6

- **Stay Humble:** Let the occasions of false accusations be opportunities to become MORE responsive to those who speak into your life corrective words.

"Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it. Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds."

Consider Eternity: Think about how your words will sound on the judgment day rather than how your words will sound in their ears today.

"When their judges are thrown over the cliff, then they shall hear my words, for they are pleasant." Psalm 141:5-6 (ESV)

"Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." 1 Peter 2:11-12 (ESV)

IV. Take refuge... not revenge. Psalm 141:8-10

"But my eyes are toward you, O God, my Lord; in you I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless! Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me and from the snares of evildoers! Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by safely." Psalm 141:8-10 (ESV)

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

It is deeply painful to suffer personal injury from others. It is easy and tempting to take matters into our own hands. However, let us recall our Savior who did not retaliate but prayed "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Let us pray that we would grow nearer to Him and take refuge in Him so that though others meant it for evil, God will use it for our good!

Group Study Questions:

1. **When we are hurt or treated unfairly, our first instinct can be to focus on fixing the situation.** What might it look like to first bring our hurt to God in prayer? How could that change the way we respond?
2. David asks God to “set a guard” over his mouth. **Why do difficult relationships so often affect the words we speak?** What are some practical ways we can invite God to help us respond rather than react?
3. **Think about a time when you were wronged and God helped you respond differently than you naturally would have.** What did He teach you through that experience?
4. The sermon described two wrong responses to being hurt: **retaliation and capitulation.** What does each look like in everyday life? What might it look like to choose a third way—**consecrating ourselves to God?**
5. Psalm 141 reminds us that what is happening **within us** can be more important than what is happening **to us**. How can difficult people or circumstances reveal areas where God wants to grow us?
6. David says that a righteous person's correction can be a kindness. **How can we become more teachable when criticism or correction comes our way?** What helps us distinguish helpful correction from something we should simply entrust to God?
7. **How does remembering eternity change the way we handle conflict today?** What would it look like to think more about how our words and actions will honor God in the long run than about how they make us feel in the moment?
8. When we are wronged, we can be tempted to take matters into our own hands. **What does it practically mean to “take refuge” in God rather than seek revenge?** What might that look like in a difficult relationship you are facing?
9. Jesus responded to those who were hurting Him by praying, **“Father, forgive them.”** What does Jesus' response teach us about the kind of people God is forming us to become? Where might you need His grace to respond more like Him?
10. **Looking ahead to this week, what is one specific situation, relationship, or recurring temptation where you can practice the message of Psalm 141?** What would it look like to pray first, guard your words, pursue holiness, and take refuge in God?