

How to Respond When Life Treats You Unfairly

Several years ago the athletic director of a major university fired the football coach. Asked by a reporter if he was bitter, the coach replied, "Not at all, but I plan to buy a glass-bottomed car so I can watch the look on his face when I run over him."

How do you handle unfair treatment?

The person whom you taught job skills got promoted over you. The child you helped most is the most ungrateful. The husband you worked to put through school ran off with someone else. A friend with whom you shared your secrets and inner thoughts now uses them against you.

It's not fair

David knew what it was to get dumped on. He came to the rescue of members of his own tribe of Judah, in the region of Ziph, at the border town of Keilah. Philistines had looted the threshing floor—an attack not unlike robbing the safe of an uninsured small-town bank, emptying the resources of all families in the place. David came to the rescue. (See 1 Sam. 23:1-4.)

What thanks did he get?

The Ziphites traveled north to Saul at Gibeah and informed him, "Is not David hiding among us?" (See 1 Sam. 23:19-20.) David escaped the subsequent dragnet because, just as Saul's forces were about to nab him, they were needed immediately to counter a Philistine raid elsewhere. (See 1 Sam. 23:26-29.)

Not content with the first betrayal, the Ziphites later come to Saul a second time and tattle on David's whereabouts: "Is

not David hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which faces Jeshimon?" (1 Sam. 26:1.)

Saul again closes in. But while Saul naps, David and a top aide, Abishai, creep down and take the sleeping king's spear and water jug from near his head, sparing his life. When David confronted Saul from the top of the opposite hill, Saul blessed David and broke away from the hunt.

God, help me

David was delivered and never did take vengeance on the Ziphites for twice betraying his hiding place.

Why this background? Because without it, we do not understand Psalm 54. The quote in the preface to the psalm, "Is not David hiding among us?" exactly matches the Ziphites' words to Saul in their first betrayal. God granted David's prayer of Psalm 54, and then subsequently answered him yet a second time when he needed to pray again the very same words.

Like David, you may find yourself repeatedly in a position of physical, psychological or spiritual danger in which only God can help. Like David, you may cry out: "Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might. Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth" (vv. 1,2).

Many of our hurts in life arise from other people. Why are they so inconsiderate? Ungrateful? Why are they so ruthless and so lacking in the character of God (v. 3)?

Let's not exclusively focus, though, on who is against us—but, rather, who is for us. "Surely God is my help; the Lord is the one who sustains me" (v. 4).

From sublime trust in God, David turns to anger against those who so foully treated him: "Let evil recoil on those who slander me; in your faithfulness destroy them" (v. 5).

Anger is appropriate. It is God's built-in defense mechanism to rouse us from getting run over. Although forgiveness is important, it is difficult to get there unless we have first processed our feelings of anger. Like steam, anger needs to be vented lest it sour into wrath. (See Eph. 4:26.)

David places his anger in the safest place possible—God's hands. He leaves it with the Lord to deal with those who brought him anguish—their punishment is not his problem or duty. Nor is it yours.

He will keep me safe

At the close of this psalm, David vows that when God delivers him he will present a freewill offering (v. 6). In other words, he prays something familiar: "Lord, get me out of this jam, and I'll thank You. I'll serve You."

David expressed complete trust that the Lord would, indeed, pull him through: "For he has delivered me from all my troubles, and my eyes have looked in triumph on my foes" (v. 7). Do you have a similar confidence?

Have you consciously thought of what you will do when the Lord brings you out of your present crisis?

No, it will not bring you satisfaction to run over your "Ziphite" with a glass-bottomed car. What will fulfill you most is letting the Lord work out His purposes in your life, gaining maturity in handling difficulty, and patterning your responses after David's Son, Jesus, who overcame evil with good.

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