



THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

LOVE YOUR
ENEMIES: WALKING
AND WORSHIPING
THROUGH
INJUSTICE



DAN DUMAS

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WALKING AND
WORSHIPING
THROUGH INJUSTICE**



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INTRODUCTION

There was a man from the land of Uz. That man was the ultimate example of handling personal injustice in a biblical manner. It was a nightmare of a day. His character was strong. He loved and feared God. He was at the top of his career. Suffice it to say, life was good in Uz.

Then came a day when a cosmic conversation between the devil and God, in the heavenly courts of all places, put Job in the crosshairs. In just one day he lost his transportation business, clothing business, agricultural business, coffee vertical, and his ability to hire, feed, and care for his teams. Who would ever work for this titan again? The culture around his ag-business and other startups became hostile and was raided by Sabeen terrorists. It was no longer deemed “safe” to work for Job Enterprises. Job lost everything in just one day. Oh how the mighty had fallen.

His meteoric rise to success and sudden comprehensive downfall needs some explanation. Sometimes, we experience such calamity because we bring it on ourselves, through our own sinfulness, and/or bad decisionmaking. We are not perfect and prone to make a bad choice from time to time, and whom God loves, he disciplines (Heb. 12:7–8). Sometimes we experience hard gifts so that we will learn to care for and counsel others in their dark days. However, that was not the case for Job. Neither of these two explanations are accurate. Actually, he was doing everything right! Job 1:1 says his faith in God was stellar. He feared God and kept short sin accounts. His character was unimpeachable. He was a dutiful leader — a great dad and a world-class businessman with an extensive portfolio of businesses. Later in chapter one, God himself confirms all of this to be true also. God asks the devil: “Have you heard of my servant Job for there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil?” (Job 1:8). This is an example of trusting God

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in difficult times. Furthermore in 2:10, his beloved wife (our spouses know us best), also confirms his unblemished and stellar character. So this calamity was not brought on by his own doing or some sin he was hiding. This was not a trial of his own making. This was outside of his control, knowledge, and influence. Life was good in Uz until it was not. This helps explain why bad things happen to godly people. The causation for all of this is God. God knew Job could handle this injustice.

Job's first chapter records for us the challenge the devil gave to God. He asserted that Job only serves God because he blesses him and puts a spiritual hedge around him (1:10). Life is way too easy for Job, the devil contended. Who wouldn't pursue God with this massive hedge about him and constant blessings? God says, no way, you have misjudged Job's resilience and you may have a go at him to prove it. Except you can't touch his physical health. So Job becomes the target of a cosmic conversation, a real-life instance of spiritual warfare. What happens next is surprising and incredible.

The devil scampers out of the presence of God (a strange thought indeed that the filthy fallen devil is actually in the presence of God [Job 1:6]) and systematically destroys Job's reputation in the marketplace. As bad as that was, I'm pretty confident Job would rally, dig in, and think to himself, "we can rebuild." He did it once; he can do it again. That may be true of his business vertical, but what about his kids? What happens next is breathtaking. Job is living his best life and gets word from a family messenger that a freak tornado had destroyed his eldest son's home. All of his children were gathering and celebrating on that special day. The home cratered and collapsed under the tornado and killed all ten of his children. What a nightmare of a day that is recorded in Job chapter one.

Certainly Job would be asking the question "why?" His personal nightmare and unrelenting darkness would most likely give way to doubt, right? This is a comprehensive injustice in a godly man's life, requiring significant anger management. As you read all of Job chapter one you can't help but feel rage against the devil and his tactics. Job was totally unsuspecting and simply woke up that day thinking life was good in Uz. He was crushing it as a businessman, husband, and dad. This process of dealing with

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disappointment is something we can all learn from. Even when things seem wrong, we remember Romans 8:28.

Chapter one concludes with both sadness and worship. Job picked himself up off the ground (no doubt this horrific news had buckled him and dropped him to his knees), shaved his head as a memorial to his grief, and worshiped (1:20). How is worship possible at this very moment? He had walked with God so long that this was the only fitting and biblical response to comprehensive injustice. At the end of the day, the Scriptures state emphatically that “Job did not sin” (1:22; 2:10). Though it was an inexplicable day, his theology remained intact, sound, and vibrant. He even said, “The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21).

Do you see now why this is our ultimate example of walking and worshiping through deep, inexplicable, comprehensive personal injustice? Bad things happen to this godly man through no fault of his own. Job is heroic in his response, theology, and life skills to walk through this injustice. James, the half-brother of Jesus, in his letter in the New Testament said, “Have you heard of the endurance of Job?” (James 5:11). Earlier in his letter James told his audience to “Count it all joy when you go through various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (James 1:2). We must learn how to walk in and worship through personal injustice. Or in the words of the biblical authors, we must learn endurance within the context of personal injustices. Life is full of injustice. Are you ready for it? It’s not if it will happen to you but when.

Personal injustices are the hardest to navigate because we may never get clarity on why in this life. God’s sovereign hand may never give us an explanation, and people often go to the grave without understanding the real reason. Very few, from my experience, ever clean it up and return to the one they committed injustice against and confess what and how they did it. Like many others, I have many unresolved questions I’d like to ask when I get to heaven around the issue of injustice. As one author put it, God’s hard gifts sanctify us so that we might gain endurance. Paul in 2 Corinthians 1 states that God allows us to go through certain things so that we might be able to better minister to others through both our theology and life experiences.

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Regardless, we soldier on waiting for clarity in the future, either in this life or the next. We make our plans but God orders our steps. Or, in modern terms, we write our plans in pencil but God has a divine eraser and the prerogative to amend our plans for our good and his glory. This is part of trusting God in difficult times.

I confess that injustice has been one of the more difficult things to handle in my Christian journey and perhaps that is your experience as well. I am not a man of thin skin, and I have had many injustices happen — and I am not talking about minor offenses due to being an overly sensitive person. I wish that certain people would be honest and forthright, but in this Genesis 3 world it has been my experience that resolution is not always possible. Frankly, some people can never get past this one hurdle of sovereign secrecy and it ends up wreaking havoc in their souls, knocking them off spiritual kilter and disabling their spiritual lives. We must resist the urge to let the unknown destroy the life we know. More importantly, we have to trust the sovereign hand of God that first let it happen to us. Ground zero for injustice is a belief in a high view of God and confidence that he has hatched a plan that will be good for me and glorify him, a truth found in Romans 8 28.

Job's example is huge, but not the only one. The Scriptures are replete with examples of personal injustice. The book of Genesis is somewhat crowded as a record of injustice. Cain and Abel's dispute as siblings ends in Abel's final breath. Joseph in the Bible is sold into slavery and sent to Egypt by his own brothers (more on that later). Personal injustice is part of living in a Genesis 3 broken world, where sin corrupts and manifests itself in manifold injustices. You read the Scriptures and wonder how people endure, survive, and even thrive through their various ordeals. This is the very purpose of this field guide. Let me attempt to serve you in what follows so that you can navigate personal injustice in a healthy, God-honoring way.

Personal injustice has been my lot. For many leaders it simply comes with the territory. This is one of the reasons you hear the leadership phrase: "It's lonely at the top." Sabotage at the top, jealousy at the bottom, and dilution in the middle. The struggle is real. I have personally experienced it my entire life and ministry. By God's grace, I am not bitter, I refuse to quit,

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and I am not disillusioned. I know it may have been meant for evil, but God used it for my good. As a matter of record, it has made me a better leader with greater endurance and resolve. I even have pity on my adversaries as they have to deal with their sad choices and broken consciences. Dealing with such toxic people is a form of spiritual warfare.

My concern is that for many, personal injustices destroy their confidence in God, erode their faith, disorient their leadership, and leave them in a bad mental headspace. This field guide aims to give you a renewed vision for walking with and worshiping Jesus through personal injustice. Let's dive in with some necessary principles to navigate personal injustice in this life and to fight back the soul-shrivel that often accompanies personal injustice. I believe there are five key principles that will serve you in dealing with disappointment and forgiving others.

1

PEOPLE WILL LET YOU DOWN

One of life's great heartaches is the reality that people around you and even close to you can disappoint you. Our little family jokes back at me when something happens in our own home, the boys will say, "I am not mad, I am just disappointed with you." I guess I have said it enough that it is fair play to throw it back at me when I mess something up or sin against them as a dad.

Frankly, in most parts of our lives we experience severe disappointment. People let us down. People fade away. Our own family can disappoint us; corporate America can disappoint us; coworkers can disappoint us; the local church can disappoint us; and athletic teams can disappoint us. My point is simple: Life is full of personal injustice and brokenness. Living in community is messy. Yet, living in community is part of God's plan for us. Isolation is not a biblical concept and certainly not wise. From the beginning, God said it's not good for man to be alone. He provided Adam a help mate, Eve, who was equal in essence but different in function. One of my favorite verses is Proverbs 18:1, which states that it is foolish for us to try to go through this life alone. If we try, we "rage against all sound judgment." So we are meant to go together — to do life together — and within that togetherness there come many disappointments and injustices. Although there are no perfect relationships since we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, there are still many amazing imperfect ones. We have so much to learn from one another and the investment in one another is good, right, and beautiful. Albeit frustrating at times, we have to admit we are better together than apart.

So let's discuss the imperfect people God brings into our lives. It bears repeating that life is messy, especially when it comes to relationships, but

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I would exhort you to keep pressing into all the relationships God has brought into your life. Pursuing mentors and friends is necessary for your spiritual and life growth. Proverbs 27:6 states that “faithful are the wounds of friends.” Why? Because friends stab you in the front and not the back. I don’t know about you but I want to see the knife coming and know who is thrusting it in me. Furthermore, since having friends is necessary, that means it all starts with us being a good friend first (that was a bonus principle but true). If you want great friends you have to be a great friend. To have mentors you have to be willing to be mentored. Finding a good mentor is sometimes a challenge, and being a teachable mentee is also a challenge (see Dr. Beau Hughes’ field guide). Don’t ever give up and throw in the towel on pursuing friends and mentors. You will inhibit your spiritual growth if you are unwilling to take risks and cultivate life-long friends and mentors.

I remember working my way through the book of Philippians in the New Testament and finding myself a bit stunned as I read chapter one. The Apostle Paul is commenting on those around him who were taking advantage of his incarceration. Some were actually using his imprisonment to better themselves in Philippi. They were kicking him when he was down. They believed the worst and not the best about Paul. Perhaps they were reading the salacious headlines. They were throwing the warrior under the bus. So as I read this, I was convinced that the Apostle Paul was going to set the record straight, call them out, and let them have a tongue lashing. But that was not what I read. He actually said that for some people, his imprisonment gave them courage to speak more boldly for Christ. It actually made them stronger witnesses. However, for others, they proclaimed Christ out of envy and self-ambition. This was their attempt to add to the pain and hardship of his imprisonment, to take advantage of Paul’s plight. Paul responds: “What then?” How should he respond to these people letting him down? He then writes this leadership-shaping verse: “Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice” (Phil. 1:18). How can he say this? Their personal injustice is on such display that he calls them out. Oh friend, the gospel is not about us. It’s not about making us famous but making Jesus famous. It requires us to get low and stay low. In the spirit of John the Baptist: I must decrease and he must increase (John 3:30).

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Paul was so others-minded that he refused to make this issue about himself or his reputation. As he said in Colossians 3:1: We are to set our minds on things above and not on things that we can't change here. Had this been a case of doctrinal division and misunderstanding, Paul would have risen to the occasion and set the record straight. But it was not. This was a personal injustice pointed right at him. He stiffened his spine, swallowed his pride, and soldiered on. His view of the gospel kept him anchored in proper gospel motivation. The Spirit of God kept him walking in the Spirit (see Gal. 5:16–26). He knew full well that people would let him down. When I first read this, I felt a sense of injustice rise up in my heart. How could they treat the one guy who was sacrificing the most this way? It was said to me recently that, “the church is not safe for sinners.” What a sad statement. Have we become a hotel for saints and not a hospital for sinners? Jesus came for those who need a physician, not for the whole and healthy. Jesus came for the sick and brokenhearted, but sometimes his followers forget this.

I left that passage transformed and reminded that in this life there will be many hardships and disappointments, and many of those will happen within “friendships” — sometimes even those to whom you have given your time and energy to minister. Often, people care more about themselves than they do about others. They make a bad choice around selfpreservation and you end up getting thrown under the proverbial bus. The good news is that one day, God will right all the wrongs that even those so called “friends” did to you. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord (Rom. 12:19).

As I read further into the book of Philippians, I read this: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing” (2:14). That is gospel wisdom, and a strong command. Simple to read and hard to apply, right? Don't complain about things you can't change. People do what people do; “It is what it is.” Then I encountered these freeing statements: “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (2:19–21).

Timothy was an unparalleled companion for the Apostle Paul. It's hard to imagine that Paul was that thin on relationships. He could only think of one

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person, Timothy. We are fortunate to have one, or maybe two, lifetime friends who love us at all times (Prov. 17:17). “Foul weather” friends are the best and are rare to find. Paul was a traveling machine, knew everyone, was fantastically popular, had an amazing platform, and was a rockstar in the first century. He can only think of one guy who did not have selfish ambition in his heart? It is a reminder to all of us that friendships come and go. But consider yourself blessed and fortunate to have one or two lifetime friends. Or as Solomon said, “A friend that sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24).

The Apostle Paul remarked throughout his letters that certain people (he even named them) had left the faith, ship-wrecked their souls, and disappointed him. We all need relationships to be sanctified, but that comes with a cost. It can even be risky from time to time. There are no cheap friends. There are real friends and then there are deal friends. I hope you have a batch of real friends and you stay away from those that just want something and are mere takers and not givers. Even though people let you down, you are commanded to have mentors and friends to speak into your life. You are not called to live in isolation or off the grid. For the sake of the spread of the gospel and the good of others we keep striving. We all walk with a limp from a past broken friendship. We may walk a little slower, but we continue to walk anyway. How do we live like this? Let’s keep going and dig a little bit deeper.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. Who in your life has let you down in a major way? What steps might you need to take to forgive others?
2. Why is it helpful, as you encounter personal injustices, to expect that people will often let you down?

2

ESTEEMING OTHERS BETTER THAN OURSELVES

I do find it fascinating that we learn all these principles of managing relationships and hardships in a letter that is explicitly about joy and rejoicing. The words, “joy,” “rejoicing,” and “rejoice” are used thirty-two times in this short profound letter. Earthly friendship requires a truckload of effort and humility. As mentioned earlier, in order to get low we have to learn selfforgetfulness and self denial (Phil. 2:3). But that is not sufficient. The next phrase actually tells us we have to esteem others better than ourselves. I know it’s easier said than done. So yes, we need to play defense and slay our pride, but we also have to play offense and consider others better than ourselves. And not just those who love us and think like us. Notice in Philippians 2:4, it does not merely say to consider some people as more significant than ourselves, but simply, “count others more significant than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3). This is the foundation of pride vs humility. I believe this can only be accomplished when you know you’re the worst sinner in the room. I try to get up in the morning and make it my first thought that I am “the chief of sinners.” That is exactly what the Apostle Paul said: “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Tim. 1:15). How will you know if you have this proper attitude and mindset? When people treat you like a sinner, how do you respond? Do you say: “Yep, that’s me. You caught the tater”? Or do you move into defensiveness and denial?

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James 4:6 says that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. There are a lot of people who will resist you and your leadership, but there is one you don't want to actively resist, and that is God. When you adopt a biblical worldview you will also develop a proper view of yourself. You don't want to think too highly of yourself. Pride must exit. The ability to clothe yourself in humility is really, really important. As a matter of fact, Isaiah 66:2 states that the kind of person to whom God looks is "he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word." Part of this humility is some strong self awareness — that I really do really know the depth and breadth of my sinfulness. Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us that our hearts are desperately sick, who can know them? In essence, our hearts are unreliable, twisted, and even at times wicked. The heart plays tricks on our identity in Christ. We think we know our hearts, but we really don't. This truth is a bit stunning but vital.

Both injustice and heart distrust have a way of tearing down our pride and keeping us low. Are you able to esteem all others better than yourself and recognize how your hearts can play tricks on you? Even when others disappoint you, like Hymenaeus and Alexander let down Paul (1 Tim. 1:19–20). Paul said they shipwrecked their lives. People are messy. People fail miserably. People often do the things they don't want to do and don't do the very things they should do (see Paul's comment in Rom. 7:15). Some actively think they are shutting us down or causing us personal harm. Do you remember the life of Joseph in the Bible in Genesis chapters 37–50? His own brothers commit grievous harm against him. They strip his clothes, throw him in a pit, and sell him to foreigners. They meant it for evil, but God meant it for good (Gen. 50:20). It was in the sovereign plan of God that Joseph would experience massive personal injustice. God allowed all of it to preserve the nation of Israel through the decades and centuries, and to shape an entire nation. God even allows personal injustice to make us a vessel unto honor and not dishonor (2 Tim. 2:20–22).

Joseph is the archetype for conquering injustice. Everything he touched turned to gold until years later he arrived in key leadership. Genesis 39:23 states, after he was thrown in jail for offending Pharaoh's wife with his integrity, that "The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed." God used injustice to build Joseph's

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character. As a demonstration of that character, when a great famine hit the land and his brothers were desperate as they came begging to Pharaoh's court, Joseph questioned his brothers. They did not recognize him. Joseph missed them and the text says, "Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there" (Gen. 43:30). They showed Joseph no compassion, yet he showed them great compassion. This is a powerful lesson in forgiving others and what it means to love your enemies. What an example to us on how to handle injustice.

God can accomplish much through your own experiences of injustice, too. Joseph said on one occasion, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). This aligns perfectly with the truth of Romans 8:28. Joseph cared for his brothers and his father, Jacob, his whole life. He could have easily sought revenge, but he esteemed them better than himself. Spend some time reading Genesis 37–50 to dig a little deeper in how to handle severe personal injustice and the process of how to forgive someone.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. Read Philippians 2:1–11. What should motivate our humility? Why and how did Jesus treat others as more significant than himself?
2. How are you doing at esteeming others above yourself? Who in your life do you need to work on treating with more honor and dignity?

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3

**RESIST GETTING
ANGRY**

Is it possible that your first natural response to injustice is to get angry? Even to secretly spend your time thinking about how you can get even — to take matters into your own hands? Dealing with anger is a challenge, but this dark emotion can be controlled through proper anger management. I'm always amazed at how calm leaders can be at work, but then are tyrants in their homes. They know that if they fly off the handle at work they will face serious consequences. We often see people hurting those closest to them and treating those far from them with dignity because they fear losing their job. Instead, we should show deference and grace to the very people who will show up to your funeral out of love. We often find ourselves pleasing the wrong people. It's sad but true, right?

Anger destroys us from the inside out. Proverbs 19:11 states that good sense makes us slow to anger, and it is a glory to overlook an offense. James 1:19 also says that we should be slow to arrive at anger — to be long fused. Those who have a hasty temper exalt folly (see Prov. 14:29). You have to recognize that anger is omnivorous and destroys the one who possesses it. In order to resist getting angry, you have to sober yourself up from the intoxicating effects of anger. There are many Bible verses about anger that warn us of its cost. First, you have to preach to yourself that life is one big conveyer belt of disappointments. This is why we are to keep our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. The writer of Hebrews 12:3 says: "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." Nobody experienced more injustice than Jesus. He is God. He is perfect. He died for the anger and injustice of humanity, yet they hated him, and when given a choice to make it right, they cried out for the release of Barabbas and not Jesus. Ultimately it was the just who died for the unjust. Life is chalk-full of personal

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injustices. So keep your eyes on Jesus, kill your anger, and gain a biblical and healthy theological perspective.

Not only is life a conveyor belt of injustices, they come to us by God's sovereign hand. As John Piper once said, they are God's hard gifts, but still gifts indeed. Nothing comes to us that does not first pass through the hand of God. It's important to note the difference between a trial and a temptation. Temptations are from within us and are common to all of us (1 Cor. 10:13). Trials or tests are from outside of us, having first passed through God's sovereign hand. They are customized to us and for us, a part of trusting God in difficult times.

It can be hard to get our minds around it, so an example might serve us well at this point. The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 details that God gave him “a thorn in the flesh” — a messenger of Satan to torment him, and to keep him from exalting himself. This is a clear instance of spiritual warfare. Three times Paul begged God to remove it. It was debilitating for Paul. God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul finally relents and says, “I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). Now that is a game-changer verse, that the aged warrior could conclude with such deep theology to combat potential anger over injustice. If we fill our hearts with rich theology, including the principles found in Bible verses about forgiveness, there will be no room for injustice. We put aside anger by remembering how God uses injustice to shape our lives and equip us to better care for others. Leaders have to learn to be unoffendable. That is indeed a sign of spiritual maturity and likeness to Jesus. Can you say with James 1:2 that you count it all joy when you go through various trials because it will produce necessary endurance for the race of faith?

The believer is built for adversity. We are the only ones who can handle it, so why wouldn't he allow us to experience personal injustice? This world is not our home. While we're away, trials and tribulations accompany us on the journey. As believers, we need to refuse to get even and lean into the practice of Jesus who faithfully endured countless injustices. He taught us to turn the other cheek and love your enemies. If it happened to our Savior on the way to the cross to purchase our redemption, then you can count

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on it happening in our lives too. We are not exempt from injustice. There are no “get-out-of-injustice-free” cards for Christians. Be encouraged: no one is exempt.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. In what situations do you find yourself most angry? How do you handle that anger?
2. What from Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection gives you strength and hope to battle sins like anger?

4

GOD WILL NOT LET YOU DOWN

It's so easy to place our trust in something other than the right thing. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God" (Ps. 20:7). It is tempting to put our trust in other mortals — to put people on a pedestal. However, man, as previously stated, will let you down. God, on the other hand, will not. God started a work in you and he will see to its completion (Phil. 1:6). Furthermore he promised that all things will work together for our good and his glory (Romans 8 28). God alone is our refuge in a time of personal injustice. Psalm 91:2 states that Yahweh is "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

The writer of Hebrews gave us the principle that it's ok to glance from time-to-time at the saints, but we are to rivet our attention on Jesus (Heb. 12:1–2). If any person other than Jesus becomes the focus it will not be long before a major letdown comes. I am so grateful that God looks out for our best interest, is active in our sanctifying process, and possesses unrelenting and steadfast love towards us, as shown in many Bible verses about love. We don't have to spend our energy on the fear of man. As a matter of fact, the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon, said: "The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe (Prov. 29:25). We see this struggle throughout Scripture, such as the complex relationship between David and Saul, where trust in God had to override the fear of an earthly king.

We all know it to be true, but we fail to practice the discipline of singular love for God in that we love Jesus with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We are easily distracted from God's constant and corrective care in our lives. If we are not disciplined, we will get it wrong and seek to

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please man and not God. When we fail in this, we must also learn how to forgive yourself for our shortcomings and refocus our gaze on Christ. Thus, pleasing men will become an idol. This is a crucial aspect of trusting God in difficult times. John warns us “to keep ourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21). Our hearts are idol factories, and this is especially true when we experience injustice — when you know for sure you did not do something, or say something, or even think something wrong, yet people think you did. This is when you have to rely solely on God to protect your testimony and reputation.

It’s tempting to want to take up revenge, to set the record straight, and to fight back against personal injustice. Not only are we called to love your enemies in Romans 12:14, we are called to “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” Later in that same paragraph, Paul says,

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” (Rom. 12:17–19)

I am so thankful it does not depend upon me to be the avenger or protector. God is our protector, shield, and help (Ps. 33:20). I am reminded of Haman in the book of Esther who went and built gallows to hang Mordecai. His unjust hatred for Mordecai made him crazy to the point of wanting him erased. But instead God protects Mordecai and in 7:10 it states that “they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.” God sovereignly protects his people and makes right the wrong done. Sometimes that happens in this life, and sometimes in the next. Sometimes he uses unbelieving kings, sometimes he chooses to use us. I trust you are grateful for God’s sovereign oversight of your life. If God is for us, who can be against us? One plus God is a majority!

Discussion & Reflection:

1. What things (such as pleasure or physical strength or new experiences) are you tempted to turn to and place your trust in to get you through trials other than God?

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2. How does knowing that God will handle your personal injustices (either in this life or the next) change how you might respond to them?

5

PRAY FOR THOSE WHO COMMIT INJUSTICE

It is so easy to get bitter and vengeful. Again it is worth repeating: bitterness only destroys the one who holds onto it. Forgiving the offender(s) is the freedom you need and are looking for. You are the better person when you forgive. “Bless those who persecute you” (Rom. 12:14). Jesus said we are to love your enemies, not hate them. Then he says: “Pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). He then concludes his ten beatitudes with these radical statements, “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:11–12). Did you see that your reward will be great? Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:17 calls these injustices “light momentary afflictions.”

I have found it hard to despise people on my knees. The best antidote to fight off the effects of personal injustice is a solid prayer life. “Pray for your enemies,” says Jesus. Pray like crazy for others. Alongside a serious prayer life, we see in Matthew 18:21–35 that we are called to forgiving others when they sin against us in this manner. We are taught to forgive because we have been forgiven. Peter asked Jesus what the limits are to our forgiveness for injustices — even suggesting that maybe a maximum of up to seven times in a single day (he thought he was being generous). Jesus blew his mind when he said, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times” (Matt. 18:22). Then Jesus launched into a parable describing

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a man who had been forgiven a giant debt and then turned and held liable a worker with a much lesser debt. He even almost squeezed the life out of him. Read it for yourself, it's crazy (Matt. 18:23–35). Well, the conclusion of this parable is that if you have been forgiven for every sin — past, present, and future — then how in the world can you be unforgiving when someone commits a sin of personal injustice against you? That is contradictory to the very grace, mercy, and forgiveness of God you have experienced. This is part of learning how to forgive someone. Those of us who have been forgiven much need to learn to forgive much.

Back to prayer. We are called to pray about everything and for everyone that comes to mind (Phil. 4:6). It's hard to get mad when kneeling at the foot of the cross. I am reminded of the Evan Craft lyrics, “God, when I surrender I find all I need / Strength in every weakness in the name of Jesus / Oh, it's not a secret I fight on my knees.”¹ Prayer is the most underutilized asset we have as believers. The armor of God is mentioned in Ephesians 6:10–20, which concludes that as soldiers of Christ we are to be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (6:18). So fight personal injustice by going to the Father on your knees.

I recall during a particular season when I was fighting to disrupt the foster care system in Kentucky. I would pray all the way to the State Capitol building in Frankfort. I knew I was fighting against principalities and powers I could not see — not to mention the active resistance I could see. This is the reality of spiritual warfare. I spent my drive there in prayer and I spent my drive home often weeping. I circled my block to get composure to go into the house at night. It was a challenging time. How could people abuse kids in such horrific ways? Why won't the government move faster in getting these little ones in forever homes. It was dark, and it was hard to fight. I knew I had to fight on my knees. The devil knows that if he can wreck a young child's life, he can set them on a crash course of utter destruction. He attacked this population when they were young and damaged their souls, and the state is inept in helping these kids. I had to push back the darkness on my knees.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES: WALKING AND WORSHIPING THROUGH INJUSTICE

I plead with you: don't get bitter or vengeful; fight on your knees and respond like Jesus who, when he was reviled, didn't revile back. Prayer is one of the biggest weapons in our spiritual tool belt. I confess it is not typically the first thing that comes to mind, but it should be.

Don't let the devil get the victory in both micro and macro injustices. Be strong in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:1). Think biblically. Choose friends that are gospel-lifting and not gospel-loading for you, following the signs of a true friend. Remember: God is sovereign in all things. Pillow your head on the sovereignty of God. Recount that the rain falls on the just and the unjust. Refuse to get bitter. Pray like crazy. Get low and stay low. Forgive those who cause you pain. Keep walking with Jesus and worshiping God through personal injustice. Have pity on those who hurt you. God will wipe away our tears of sadness and make right all the wrongs in eternity.

And finally, remember that God knows you and understands (Ps. 139:17). Jesus is the perfect high priest, and you can run into the holy of holies and petition the Father through his Son, Jesus. Hebrews 4:15–16 gives us the necessary confidence to conquer our emotions and pain, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” This is essential when dealing with disappointment. When injustice ambushes you, I would encourage you to look up these passages in your Bible and get your eyes on all of them. In addition, read *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* by Mark Vroegop. When you discover the grace of lament it will inspire you to think deeply about God and forgive those who committed injustice against you.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. What role does prayer play in your daily routine? How do you do with prayer during times of suffering and trial?
2. Why is prayer the best response to personal injustice? What does it help?



END NOTES

1. Evan Craft, “Fight On My Knees,” released 2022, on *I Believe* (Live at Shepard Church), Universal Music Group.



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