



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Summer Playlist

How To Handle the Evil We Encounter

David Wood | August 2, 2020



In my home, there's something we like to do around our dinner

table called "Highs and Lows." This is a way for us to go around and share what happened during our day—the highs and the lows. When we get to the point where we're going to share our highs for the day, we may share something like a great project we finished around the house. It could be a fun family bike ride we were able to take, or it could be seeing a friend around town or at the store. Then we take time to listen to each other as we also share a low, something that maybe wasn't as happy but was more of a disappointment. It could be something like one of my kids getting in trouble for not listening. It could be a time when things didn't go as planned, so we were disappointed. It could be something like missing a friend from summer camp or school. Whatever it is, it's helpful to talk through both the highs and the lows.

As we look around us, as we go day to day and week to week, there are so many things we have to be thankful for. There are so many things around us that are big blessings. We praise God for His gift of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. We thank God for the blessing of a church family, brothers and sisters in Christ who we can come together and build God's Kingdom together. We can enjoy one another's fellowship and encourage each other. Of course there are lots of other good and perfect gifts that come down from God above. There are so many things to be thankful for in our lives.

However, there are some things we come across in life that really don't fit in that "high" category. There are some things in our lives that are really difficult. There are times when we encounter evil in our world. What do we do when we come across effects of sin? Or things we don't know what to do with? For example, how should we handle the injustices that happen around the globe each day?

I came across a story this last week of a young girl who faced an unimaginable circumstance. There was a teacher visiting this 14-year-old girl's home on an island in the Caribbean to follow up on the girl's schoolwork while she was in quarantine. That's when the teacher learned from the mother that the girl was no longer in the home—because she was now married. This was a real big surprise to the teacher. She reached out to the principal of the school who happened to be a pastor of a local church. This pastor had been trained by the International Justice Commission to watch for signs of injustice. So they started to investigate and what they found was sad. This 14-year-old not only was married, but she came under the control of the 58-year-old man she married. She had been forced into an enslavement situation through this marital union on the island there in the south Caribbean.

So a few weeks ago, around 11 p.m. on June 25, the officials broke into the house and found a flagrant crime of aggression. They rescued the teenager and arrested the 58-year-old man. That's a heartbreaking story and unfortunately it's not an isolated incident. In Latin America alone, millions of girls under the age of 18 are forced into child marriage.

That's just one example of evil in our world. Our hearts break with God's heart over the abortions that happen every day, killing untold numbers of babies. Our hearts break with those who experience different forms of discrimination or racism. Our hearts desire justice when we hear of refugees who have to flee their homes and countries just to stay alive. Our hearts desire justice when we see people who are in power in places like school systems, politics, even in churches, whose leaders abuse those positions of power.

What do we do with that? What do we do when we encounter evil or injustice in our world? Do we ignore it? Do we hope someone else will deal with it? Do we just shut our eyes and pretend like we never heard about it, because we don't know what to do? Are we throwing up our arms in hopelessness?

In the face of these hard things, I do have some good news. The Bible is not silent about these matters. The Bible does not pretend these injustices are not happening. For centuries God's people have seen these evils in our world and have been able to respond to them.

As we continue in our series through the book of Psalms today, we're going to take a look at a shepherd named David who responded to a form of evil that was taking place in his world. In Psalm 12, we'll find three responses to that evil and see that it also applies to the evil we're encountering in our world today.

1. When we encounter evil, we need to speak honestly to God about it.

This last weekend I had a great opportunity to spend some extra time with my kids. We were able to go out for some food, which we then took to a local park. We walked around Jericho Lake, a beautiful spot here in Aurora. After that, we went home and turned on a superhero movie, one of the Marvel movies.

My daughters were enjoying the movie, until we got close to the end. At that point, they became a little unsure about this movie. You see, it began to look like the villain would win at the end of the movie. Ironman would be defeated and all the things he was fighting for would be demolished. Piper told me her honest feelings about what she was seeing. Her words were not very positive at that point: "Why are we watching this movie? This is the worst movie ever made. The bad guy is going to win." Of course, the movie wasn't over yet, but in that moment, she was convinced that evil would triumph.

I think the same is sometimes true for us. Sometimes we see things going on around us that are not right. That should not be happening in our world. We see things that are not just; things that go against the character of God. What should our conversation with God be like in these times? What should our prayer life look like when we see things in the world that are not right?

Let's look at Psalm 12:

¹ To the choirmaster: according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.

Save, O LORD, for the godly one is gone;
for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.

² Everyone utters lies to his neighbor;
with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

This is the injustice David saw. This passage was written by David, who became the king of Israel after being a shepherd boy when he was growing up. We're not exactly sure when David wrote this Psalm. It may have been when he was trying to stay alive because King Saul was trying to kill him. Saul had lied about David to manipulate the leaders, then in return, the people were lying to Saul. The whole thing was a big mess. Or David could have written this during his son Absalom's rebellion. Absalom had seduced Israel with his lies and staged a military coup that was marked by things like espionage, betrayal and misdirection. Whatever the reason, David was really struggling to cope with what was going on.

Psalm 12 is a "lament Psalm." When we speak honestly to God about the things that are not going well in our lives, we call that a lament. I'm reading a book right now called Weep With Me by Mark Vroegop who writes:

A lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust. Laments are more than merely the expression of sorrow. The goal of a lament is to recommit one's self to hoping in God and believing His promises. It is a godly response to pain, suffering and injustice.

I love that. Let me repeat the beginning of that. "A lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust." David calls out to God, turning to the Lord. This is a prayer in which he shares his honest perspective on the situation.

As usual in these lament Psalms, the psalmist describes the situation. In this situation, the particular kind of lies that are going on are lies of flattery—lies of insincere speech or a double heart which manipulate others for the sake of gain. In such an environment, the godly and the faithful become so rare that it seems as if they have disappeared, either because they have been suppressed or because they've been seduced into lying themselves.

As David shares his hardship with God, he prays in faith. How do we know David is praying in faith and not just in despair without trusting God? Here is how we know. The very first word out of his mouth is, "Save." He's asking God to save him because he knows God can. David is asking God to be the solution for his trouble.

This Hebrew word later was used for the name Joshua, or Yeshua—or as we say in English, Jesus: "the Lord saves." In Matthew 1:21, right at the beginning of the New Testament, an angel tells Joseph, "*You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*"

I don't think that's what David was thinking about when he said the word "save." He wasn't thinking, "Hey, this is going to be the name for the Messiah Who will come someday." Even as David cried out for salvation from God, God had a plan already in motion to send the Savior of the world named Jesus— "the Lord saves."

So what does it look like for us to apply this point? What does it look like for us to speak honestly to God about the evil we encounter? When we hear about the estimated 20-40 million young people caught in modern day slavery or trafficking, we can take that before the Lord and say, "This is wrong. I hate that this is happening, God!"

When we hear about politicians on any side of the aisle caught in bribery schemes, we can lament, bringing that before the Lord and saying, "God, I hate to see these abuses of power." When we hear examples of police brutality, or people committing injustice or crime or attacking law enforcement people, we bring these before the Lord and say, "This is not right."

2. When we encounter evil, we need to ask God to intervene.

I'm thankful for this biblical example of David speaking out honestly in this prayer to God. David does not stop there. The first biblical response to evil is to speak honestly to God about that evil. The second response to evil is to ask God to intervene.

Pastor Tony Evans tells a story of being trapped in an elevator with a group of people. The elevator stopped and the buttons wouldn't work. The people began to panic. They started to bang on the walls and screamed, "Help! Help! Can somebody hear us? Will you save us? We're stuck in this elevator." He said people started to go crazy, getting claustrophobic, not knowing what was going to happen or how long they would be stuck in there.

Tony then walked over, flipped open a latch, pulled out a phone and waited for a voice on the other end of the line. Sure enough, someone picked up and said, "Hello. Is everything okay?" Tony Evans said, "Hey, we're stuck here in this elevator between these two floors. Would you please come help us?" The person said, "Yes, we'll be right there." Help came and freed them from their hostage situation. The people in that elevator forgot they had a direct line to the security department that could help them out.

Many times we forget the same thing. We forget, because we get into a hard situation and get so overwhelmed. We bang on the proverbial walls and start screaming out, "Help! Help! Is anyone there to help me?" We forget that we can take it straight to the Lord.

I've had my own experiences of wondering, "How am I going to deal with this?" I remember times going on a prayer walk around the lake here in Aurora, saying, "Lord, what am I going to do in this situation?" Then I realized that I was asking the wrong question. My prayer then turned into, "Lord, You are in control, so I can trust You to take care of this. Would You please intervene in this area?"

In our passage today, David picks up the proverbial emergency phone and asks God to intervene. Let's continue reading at verse three:

³ May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,
the tongue that makes great boasts,
⁴ those who say, "With our tongue we will prevail,
our lips are with us; who is master over us?"

What does David mean here by cutting off lips, cutting off tongues? It sounds like a pretty grotesque scene. The parallelisms here between verses three and four suggest this is a figure of speech called a synecdoche, where parts of the body refer to the whole person.

We've all heard the example of a ship captain saying, "All hands on deck." Does he expect to see a bunch of fingers and thumbs? No, he wants to see the sailors come onto the deck to help out with whatever is going on. In the same way, David is speaking of lips and tongues, referring to people who are flatterers and boasters. When we think about the consequences David is asking about—cutting these people off from God's people or putting them to death—it may seem like a really harsh prayer, until we realize the impact of false words, flattery and bribery. Liars and boasters can do far more damage when they do things like pervert the gospel. Those who listen to false teachers may lose their eternal souls if they die with an incorrect understanding of the gospel.

When Jude, the second to the last book of the Bible, warns us that false teachers will creep into the church, he describes them with almost these very same words from Psalm 12. Jude 1:16 says, *“They are loud-mouthed boasters, showing favoritism to gain advantage.”* These teachers are not only going to condemn themselves, but they drag others into the fires of hell along with them. So when we consider the damage deceivers can do with the tongue, David’s harsh words make more sense. The stakes are so high that the punishment must fit the crime.

Here’s the thing. We can’t just apply these standards of justice to others without looking at ourselves. We can’t just think, “Oh, there’s evil going on out there; it’s those other people who are doing bad things.” We need to recognize the times when we are at fault. God does not want to see those things happening in our lives either. We need Him to deal with us to bring us closer to Him and sanctify us by the power of His Holy Spirit. According to James, our tongue is a restless evil that makes great boasts. We have to remember that God will not only righteously judge those out there, but also us in here. He will look at us and hold us to a high standard as His children.

David wants God to deal righteously with those who are dishing out flattery, boasting and pride. What does it look like for us to ask God to intervene in these matters? As I mentioned earlier, we can bring our struggles before the Lord and ask God to take care of these things. When we see injustice in the world, we should bring that before God.

We should also recognize when we need God to work in our own hearts. We need God to intervene in our lives, but thankfully, through the work of Jesus Christ, God made a way for us not to be cut off from Himself or His people, not to deserve death any longer as a consequence of our sins.

This is the good news—the gospel—that through faith in Jesus and repentance from our sin, God creates in us a clean heart that no longer deserves the judgment we deserve. Let’s praise God for this salvation. Let’s praise God that He is able to save us from our own wrongdoing and also ask God to deal with the wrongs in our world.

3. When we encounter evil, we need to trust God to define and carry out pure justice.

The first biblical response when we encounter evil is to speak honestly to God about that evil. The second response we can have is to ask God to intervene. The third biblical response to evil is to trust God to define and carry out His pure justice.

A few days ago I was with my family and we were having a great time. The cousins were running around, playing with toys and doing some make believe. Then I noticed something very interesting. Calvin, my two-year-old son, was playing with one of his cousins. I’m not sure if it was on purpose or accidental, but she bumped into Calvin or she pushed him. I’m not sure which. I was really interested to see how Calvin would respond. I’ve told him before, “You can come to me. I will help you.” Without fail, he turned around, his eyes locked on mine, then with total sincerity and earnestness he said to me, “She pushed me. She pushed me.” He knew in that moment that I was the authority in the room. I was the one there who could make this right, who could take care of what had gone wrong. He was thinking, “I know my father will deal with this.”

That’s the same way we should be with our Heavenly Father. We can turn to God, the perfect and holy Judge of all things, and trust that His definition of justice is the right one. We can trust that He will not let evil occur without addressing it. That’s what David says in this Psalm. We can in a sense lock eyes with God. With all sincerity and all earnestness, we can trust that He knows and cares about the injustice.

Let’s take a look at verses five through eight:

⁵ “Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan,
I will now arise,” says the LORD;
“I will place him in the safety for which he longs.”

⁶ The words of the LORD are pure words,
like silver refined in a furnace on the ground,
purified seven times.

⁷ You, O LORD, will keep them;
you will guard us from this generation forever.

⁸ On every side the wicked prowl,
as vileness is exalted among the children of man.

In verse five, the poor and the needy are mentioned. This is a familiar group of people. The Israelites would have known of this group and true Israelites would not have oppressed them. They would have cared for them, just as we see in Deuteronomy 15 and 24. To oppress people arouses God to action; He will not hold back His righteous response. His ways are above our ways, so nothing escapes the focus of His eyes. In His timing, in His holy plan and purpose, God will judge those who oppress the needy and the poor.

At times, God provides a part of that justice here and now. We're thankful for that. We should ask for that, just as David does. Sometimes God invites us to be a part of the justice and mercy that is carried out here on earth. Isaiah 1:17 says this, *"Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."* God gives us opportunity to be advocates for those who are needy and poor. Micah 6:8 also speaks about this: *"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*

We see this also in the New Testament when Jesus calls us to mirror His heart for justice. Matthew 23:23 says, *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."* When God opens doors for us to take a stand for the vulnerable, we should take that stand and walk through them.

Other evil will be dealt with in the final judgment. Psalm 12:8 leaves us with the hard reality that sin will continue to plague our world until the return of Christ. Although for a time, the wicked are sometimes exalted in this fallen world, God's covenantal protection of His people will last from generation to generation. So even when you or I as believers feel overwhelmed by evil, when we're disheartened or disillusioned or tired, this Psalm will lead us to the only One Who can save.

In the meantime, Christ's promise of justice from Revelation 22:12 provides hope for the future return of Christ: *"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done."* God means what He says. His words are completely true. This Psalm closes with the assurance that God will protect His faithful followers, even in the face of evil.

So where do we go from here? The Bible tells us that David's response to the hardships he was facing was to turn in faith to God. It's not a comfortable or an easy response to the things going on in our world—to see them, recognize them and acknowledge them to the Lord, bringing them before Him. This lament is a response that turns to God in honesty and trust. When we see hard things in the world, let's take this to heart. The next time we encounter evil in our world, take that first step. Speak honestly to God about the evil. He wants to hear our struggle. He wants to hear our pain. Second, ask God to intervene. He cares more than we can imagine. Third, trust God to define and carry out pure justice.

The God Who poured our punishment on to His own Son so that He could forgive us of our sin—so that Jesus could be the One Who died in our place—stands forever as a holy, pure and righteous God for all eternity. Just as I said earlier, when God opens the door for us to care for the vulnerable in our world, we should walk through that door.

In the story I told you at the beginning about the teacher and the pastor who was also a principal, they were ready to walk through that door and stand for the vulnerable. They took that step and God used them in a powerful way to change that girl's life forever. We can do the same. When we encounter evil by turning to God and trusting Him with everything.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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