

A prayer for relief from malicious talkers

Psalm 5

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I was really looking forward to this show. But a few minutes into it, I walked out. We were on a cruise to Alaska a few years ago with my extended family. On these cruise ships they have a theater for live shows. The first 2 shows were musicals. Our kids were 14, 10 and 6 at the time. They kind of liked the shows. But then the cruise director announced that there would be a ventriloquist at the next evening's show. He would bring his friend Matilda who was actually a puppet. A ventriloquist speaks for the puppet disguising his or her voice to make it seem like the person and puppet are talking.

So all day, I promoted this evening show especially to the younger kids. "Tonight, there's going to be a puppet." We got to the show early and sat 2 rows from the front. We were set for an evening of fun and laughs. The male ventriloquist came out with his female puppet, Matilda. Everyone anticipated a half hour of laughs. He started his act. A couple of his early jokes were funny. But then he had the puppet tell jokes that were on the edge racially. The puppet impersonated people in a way that mocked ethnic groups. I thought that was inappropriate especially for a ship staffed with a multi ethnic crew. All of our family sat paralyzed wondering if this could get worse.

It did. The jokes turned crude. Here I am with my kids in the second row from the front. They didn't get some of the crude jokes but they heard the rest of the audience laughing a lot. It got worse and I had a decision to make. We're at the front after all. If we get up to leave, hundreds of people will see us. But could I just sit there passively approving of what this actor said? Finally, it was enough. Despite the fact that everyone in the theater would see us, we got up and took the kids out. It was a little intimidating for about 30 seconds. But it was a great relief for the rest of the evening. I didn't want them to hear any more of those words or have to explain the jokes to them.

Words have great power. They can build up and spur forward. Or they can tear down and paralyze. Words can encourage and help someone keep going. Or they can discourage and divert you from your dreams. Words can direct a conversation towards glorifying God or gossiping about your friend. Words can stay with us for days; months; decades.

- Yes, go for it. That's a dumb idea.
- I really appreciate your efforts in fitness. Boy, are you ever fat.
- Here let's try this together. Give me what I want or I'll beat you up.

Sadly, it seems that destructive words have much more power than constructive ones. I remember hearing about a study that said for every negative comment a person receives, they need 7 positive comments to counter the negative. Sometimes, we're our own worst enemy. Someone else did a study on what we say to ourselves. It determined that for most people 80% of their self-talk is negative. Only those with big egos talked positively to themselves and usually with an over-inflated view. Many of you have been damaged by someone's spoken, written or texted word. Some efforts are made to combat these practices especially in the area of bullying.

Yet our culture shows little or no concern for speech. Our political process thrives on lies, personal attacks and half-truths. Most movies contain numerous curses, profanity and use of the Lord's name in vain. We might not even notice it because we've gotten so used to it. Or we say "the language is not too bad in that movie or game" which means it's bad but not too bad.

Before we know it, we can get sucked in ourselves. We've been hurt by words, so we hurt others with our words. We're surrounded by coarse language so we start using it. Then we might defend the words we use because they're a lot tamer than what other people say. Or people may never swear but they still use their tongues to destroy others. Lying, gossip, slander and threats can all be done without profanity. It's sophisticated sinning. But it's still sin.

So the questions we face today are these: How do you move forward when facing malicious talkers? How do we guard against destructive talk coming out of us?

The next Psalm in our study raises this issue of malicious or mean talkers. We've been focusing on learning to pray through the Psalms. We've seen them raise ordinary issues for us. Psalm 3 talked about enemies. Psalm 4 talked about preparing for sleep. Psalm 5 is a prayer about these harsh talkers. In fact, it's a song. Can you imagine singing about the malicious talkers in life? Yet that's how practical the Psalms became for personal and corporate worship. So as we go through Psalm 5, we will be looking at how the Psalmist appeals to the Lord for help while facing malicious talkers. Then we will consider how we can guard against becoming such talkers ourselves.

TO THE CHOIRMASTER: FOR THE FLUTES. A PSALM OF DAVID. (ESV)

5 Give ear to my words, O LORD;
consider my groaning.

² Give attention to the sound of my cry,
my King and my God,

for to you do I pray.

³ O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.

⁴ For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil may not dwell with you.

⁵ The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.

⁶ You destroy those who speak lies;
the LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

⁷ But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house.

I will bow down toward your holy temple
in the fear of you.

⁸ Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.

⁹ For there is no truth in their mouth;
their inmost self is destruction;
their throat is an open grave;
they flatter with their tongue.

¹⁰ Make them bear their guilt, O God;
let them fall by their own counsels;
because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out,
for they have rebelled against you.

¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you rejoice;
let them ever sing for joy,
and spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may exult in you.

¹² For you bless the righteous, O LORD;
you cover him with favor as with a shield.

How do you move forward when facing malicious talkers?

Call upon the Lord to listen. (1-3) The Psalm begins with a desperate cry to the Lord. “Give ear to my words O Lord, consider my groaning, sighing, meditation.” David appeals for the Lord to take note of his words and inner murmurings. These are the silent words never spoken out loud but spoken in his heart. When someone else’s words trouble us, it affects our self-talk. We may not even know what we’re thinking but there is a murmuring or something going on in inside of us. David invites the Lord to discern those internal words.

Yet even though his opening words are demanding – Listen! Give attention to my cry! – He recognizes the Lord’s authority over him. Give attention to my cry, *My King and My God*. David, The King of Israel, recognizes the supreme King over the universe and over him. Remember Psalm 2 where the great King anoints His Son ruler over all the kings of the earth? David recognizes that he appeals to this great King.

But he needs the King’s help. So he looks for the King’s answer to come. Verse 3 gives us a picture of a watchmen waiting for the arrival of a messenger with crucial news. “O Lord, in the morning, you hear my voice. In the morning, I prepare a sacrifice for you and watch.” Remember, in those days they didn’t have wifi, email, phones or a postal system. They sent people who ran and rode to deliver messages. So to prepare to receive a message, a king posted watchmen to keep their eyes out for messengers or danger. Like a watchmen who scans the horizon with eagle eyes, David keenly watches and waits for the Lord’s help.

But in the next verses, the focus changes from the Lord to the mean talkers. Yet David doesn’t just talk about them. He remembers that they don’t enjoy close fellowship with the Lord. **Remember that the Lord does not tolerate wickedness, evil or those who have power through arrogance or boasting. (4-6).** When someone asserts to control us with their spoken or written words or their mean texts, we might conclude “they’ve got all the power. God is on their side.” We might believe that He can be bought just like some official can be bought by organized crime; or someone close to us can be influenced by our enemy. Maybe a bully at school has a teacher on their side that refuses to believe that our child has been bullied.

But David reminds himself that the wicked do not enjoy fellowship with God. In fact, God opposes them. Notice how God’s emotional response escalates in verses 4-6. He does not delight in wickedness. He hates evildoers. He detests the bloodthirsty and deceitful person. But not only do God’s emotions escalate. His actions escalate. In verse 4 - Evil doer may not dwell in my presence. I will provide no sanctuary for you. In verse 5 - You may not stand in my presence – meaning they cannot stay standing - they cannot stand before him. In verse 6, he destroys those who speak lies.

Psalms commentator Peter Craigie writes, “The psalmist, who opened by preparing to enter God’s presence now describes people who cannot enter God’s presence. God’s hatred of all forms of evil and wickedness prevents people who live like that from entering his presence. God is not merely a God of power with whom powerful (but evil) people

can hope to stand as guests and companions. God's nature as good and righteous specifies the character required of human beings who desire to dwell with him.

Those who can't dwell with him - These include boasters, arrogant people who are supremely confident in their own strength or those who worship other gods. Evildoers and liars are also excluded. The bloodthirsty may be murderers or people who take advantage of weak and innocent through lies and deceit. They see weakness and they smell blood like a lion seeking the wounded animal in a herd. These are cut off from God's presence and subject to His wrath because they live in direct contradiction to Him. David reminds himself and other worshippers of this reality as he considers facing them. We need to remember when facing malicious talkers that we don't face them alone. The Lord is with us.

But he cannot just consider things. He wants to move forward. So the next verses answer the question "how do we move forward when facing malicious talkers?"

Approach the Lord with an appreciation that recognizes His grace and steadfast love in your life. (7) Verse 7 – But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter your house. I will bow down toward your holy temple in the fear of you." Unlike those who cannot enter the Lord's presence in verses 4-6, David can. "But I WILL enter your house." Yet it's not because he's so great or so worthy. It's because of the abundance of the Lord's steadfast love. Only God's grace and goodness allowed David to enter His presence. After all, David committed almost every one of those sins in verses 4-6 in the incident with Bath Sheba. He saw her and wanted her. So he was arrogant. When learning that she was pregnant, he tried to trick her husband into sleeping with her to cover up the real father of the baby. So he was a deceiver. When that didn't work, he became bloodthirsty. He had her husband killed. Yet David repented and admitted his sin. He could enter the Lord's presence because of the Lord's mercy. David threw himself at the feet of God who responded to this repentance with an abundance of steadfast love – the love that remains committed even when one falls.

In this humble and appreciative approach, we come to the heart of the Psalm – the way to move forward when facing malicious talk. **Ask for the Lord's leadership and path straightening work. (8)** Verse 8 – "Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me." David does not want to let these talkers paralyze him. He needs to move forward. But he will not do it without the Lord.

He appeals to the Lord to lead in His righteousness. He needs the Lord to lead him in a right, God honoring way. This is very important when we consider responding to someone who has spoken, texted or written something malicious about us. When that happens, it is very tempting for us to sin and to strike back angrily. We may want to take vengeance and in so doing go too far. So we, who have been sinned against, end up sinning in response. David needs the Lord's strength to help him move forward without sinning himself.

Part of this involves the Lord making the way straight before David. In ancient times, when kings travelled, they faced great security risks just like leaders do in the world today. One risk involved going on a curved path because you can't see what's around the next corner. If they blindly travelled on crooked paths, they were more vulnerable. Powerful kings sent construction crews ahead of them on their journey. These crews would literally straighten the path or build new ones that bypassed dangerous corners. This image of making paths straight shows up in other places. The most famous one is in Isaiah 40:3 – A voice cries, in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” This text was applied to John the Baptist when he announced Jesus' coming. He prepared a straight path to hearts that would receive Jesus' message.

But here, the Lord prepares the path for our moving forward. It's like David is saying, “As I go forward to face my enemies, I don't know all the traps set up for me. But the Lord does. So I need to depend on Him to go before me and make the paths straight.”

So let's try this with difficult words that have been directed your way. Maybe you have received harsh or negative words from someone in your past or presently - your spouse, family, coworkers, a board, your boss or some financial institution. Or maybe you replay a negative message in your head that was drilled into you to the point that you believe it and live it.

Or we all have to deal with the malicious talk of our enemy. The devil does not want us to move forward in our Christian lives. So he uses smooth seductive words that lead us to temptation. Then the second we accept temptation, he condemns us and accuses us.

So we face malicious talk from others or ourselves or the enemy. But instead of just listening to this talk and letting ourselves be paralyzed by it, we go forward with the Lord's leadership and path straightening. So we ask “Lord lead me in Your righteousness. Show me Your way. Give me courage to go forward despite what they say. May your

truth penetrate to lies I believe. Give me wisdom to discern when someone else's talk is not right. Give me strength to challenge my own malicious self-talk.

And we move forward in His strength instead of allowing words to paralyze us. Now, it's far easier to talk about this compared to actually doing it. But we have someone who has gone before us on the path through malicious talkers and knows how to get through. Jesus.

Think about the amount of opposition He faced. Think of the malicious talk He dealt with from the religious leaders and high priests. Think of the discouragement from His own brothers who thought He lost His mind. Think of the disciples who didn't understand, questioned and even stood in His way. Think of the subtle temptations from the devil. Think of His own struggles in Gethsemane pleading if there was any other way. Think about the malicious talk He endured during His trials, beatings, scourging, on the way to the cross and on the cross. But He made it to the other side for the joy and salvation of millions.

Hebrews 12:2-3 – Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and is seated at the right hand of God. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint hearted.

Jesus is the expert on walking the road forward through malicious talkers, and He never sinned doing it. Ask Him to lead you in His right ways and make straight your path.

But what about those malicious talkers? It's not fair or right! That's correct. So **Trust in the Lord's just response to them. (9-10)** David appeals to the Lord for justice. Verse 9 - "For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue. "No truth in their mouth." Have you ever met someone where you wondered if anything they said was true? Their inmost self is destruction. There are people like that. They think about ways to destroy others. To the depths of their being, they seek destruction. Their throat is an open grave. It could refer to the stench. So out of their throats when they speak comes stench or bad smelling words. It could refer to defilement. Touching a grave defiled an individual in ancient Israel. When they speak they defile others. They flatter with their tongues. Flattery involves speaking supposedly kind words with the purpose of getting something from a person. This Psalm assumes we live in a menacing, malevolent world headed by Satan.

Yet David trusts the Lord to rise up and deal with these talkers. Verse 10 – Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of the abundance of their transgressions, cast them out, for they have rebelled against you.” This reminds us of Psalm 3 where David calls on the Lord to strike his enemies on the cheek and break the teeth of the wicked. One of the primary ways we can contribute to justice in this world is on our knees appealing for the Lord to act.

So in dealing with malicious talkers, we trust in the Lord’s just response towards them. David concludes with a prayer and praise.

Pray for the Lord’s protection and covering from mean talkers and mean talking. (11-12) Ask the Lord to cover you from the damage done by malicious talkers and to protect you from maliciously talking yourself. Verses 11 and 12 of Psalm 5. *But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy.* No matter what is going on in life, we have reason to rejoice because we can find refuge in the Lord. We enjoy His protection.

Here David appeals to the Lord to spread His protection over the people like a mother bird spreads her wings over her little ones. But not only does the Lord protect, he covers with favor as with a shield. “With favor” has two sides to it – will and pleasure. It is God’s good will and pleasure to reach out to His children in mercy and compassion.

So we appeal to the Lord to protect us from malicious talkers and to cover us with His favor. But we also need to appeal to Him to protect our words from malice. Craigie writes “the prayer is not only for protection *from* wicked persons, but also for protection from becoming *like them*. Those who use their tongues to exult in God, cannot also use them to boast and flatter.

Our speech reveals our walk with God. Joni Eareckson writes, “If we fail in the little things, if we ignore our tempers, our tongues, the slip of little white lies; if we ignore the Spirit’s whispers, telling us to do this or not to do that, if we despise the small things, we shall fail little by little.

Corrupt, coarse, destructive, profane speech is no small thing.

The Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 5:9 in Romans 3. That chapter contains the all encompassing charge against everyone for their sinfulness. Paul points to speech as one of his primary proofs that all humans have sin in their heart Romans 3: 13 “Their throat is an open grave (Psalm 5) – they use their tongues to deceive (Psalm 5). The venom of snakes is on their lips – their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” All of these speech patterns indicate the darkness in

people's hearts. Yet there is hope for Romans 3:23 and 24 say "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God but all who believe are justified by his grace as a gift."

If you think it's no big deal to hang around with people who speak defiling and destructive words or to be careless with your own speech, let Scripture speak.

- Colossians 3:8 – But now you must put them all away: anger; wrath; malice; slander and obscene talk from your mouth.
- Ephesians 4:29 – Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.
- Ephesians 5:4 – Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.
- Matthew 12:34-37 – How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.

So on the construction site; board room; parent's meeting or social; gathering of friends; in your texting; posts and emails where you think you're being clever by using abbreviations for profanity – JUST SAY NO! Don't let the enemy and the culture convince you that this is normal. Fight the good fight here. Don't casually accept this culture's way of speaking. It dishonors God and is a barometer on how far many have strayed from holiness!

So pray and ask for the Lord's protection from malicious talkers and from malicious talk out of your own mouth.

How will you respond to these truths today?

Some of you here need to **Receive for the first time the Lord's grace and begin to walk under His leadership and path straightening.** For anyone to be able to enter the Lord's house and be in close fellowship with Him, the Lord had to show an abundance of steadfast love. And ultimately, Jesus did this on the cross. People can only experience fellowship with God through Christ.

So through His blood, we are able to draw near to God. Because of His death, we can call upon a God who favors us because He looks at us as forgiven on account of Christ. Because of His resurrection, we can receive the Lord's

protection, leadership and path straightening work. Because of Christ's blood we have been moved from verses 4-6 and over to verse 7-8. Will you turn to Christ today and begin this journey of life led by Him? Christian will you turn to the Lord's leadership when facing malicious talkers? Will you call for His protection to keep you from becoming one?

- May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord. Ps. 19:14