

Psalms and Proverbs 23

Laurel Ann Porro

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Several weeks ago, my Sunday school class as asked to write down our biggest fear in life. Several shared their fears of losing jobs, children, (singles class), health, financial independence and others, but my greatest fear is that that I will not hear, the words, “Well done” when all the days ordained for me have reached their end. Even though I’ve been teaching here at Eastside for many years, I worry that teachers are accountable to high standards, because the reality is that my walk with the Lord has its share of ups and downs. In this world, my faith is not sight, and my feelings and circumstances are not a reliable gauge, so I must trust and obey and rely on two other realities: study of the Word and relationships with other people.

The Word, fortunately is unchanging and dependable, but relationships not. However, they can be an indicator of how we are doing; a barometer to tell us about the pressures we are up against in our walk of faith. People are always giving us feedback both valuable and trivial, and most of it can be tested according to Scripture to determine its usefulness. That’s what today’s lesson is all about: using the relationships that God has given to us as a measuring device for developing a more complete understanding of what God desires for His people. If you are like me and want to hear, “Well done”, it will be because we invested time and effort into developing relationships that reflect the Lord and glorify Him in all we say and do.

Relationships are our greatest source of joy in this world, as well as our greatest source of stress. The Scriptures we looked at in Psalms and Proverbs certainly show us both the positive and negative aspects of living with friends and enemies.

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How do your relationships reflect the Lord to others? I'm sure that it depends on which relationships we are talking about. It was Jesus' purpose to reflect God in ALL His relationships.

Slide : John 14:9 He told His disciples, Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father. Jesus was fully human, so how did he reveal the Father? He did so by completely trusting the Father's love and His goodness without regard for how that love may have appeared to others. Jesus' lowly birth, the flight to Egypt to escape Herod's murderous threats, the temptation in the wilderness, the cross may not have looked like the outpouring love of a Father, but those circumstances were intentionally planned, and prophesied to reflect the Father's heart to the world. So too were His relationships with others planned and recorded in Scripture to reflect the love of the Father. Think about Jesus' parents and family, His disciples, the people to whom He ministered, and His enemies. All of Jesus' relationships were opportunities for us to learn how to love and how to forgive.

Slide: in three ways:

Now is His physical absence, He has given us the Holy Spirit to help continue His work. You and I, as ambassadors of Christ have the responsibility to revealing Christ to the world in all of our relationships: by forgiving others especially our enemies, by dealing with conflict, and by reaching out to love others. If those with whom I have on-going relationships are not drawn to Christ through me, they may miss their only chance to know Him. As I ponder the many people and relationships that the Lord has brought into my life, I realize that I have

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squandered many opportunities to reflect the Lord in a positive and loving way.

So, I must take these words that I share with you today to heart so that my greatest fear does not become reality. So I'm checking my barometer today and invite you to check yours too. Let's start with the hardest one: our enemies.

Slide Psalm 109

Let's first look at Psalm 109. Psalm 109 is in the category of "imprecation" psalms which are so-called because they include the psalmists' prayers for divine punishments on his enemies. The key to understanding why these prayers would be included in the Psalms, (and recall that 109 was sung), is that David, as a man of prayer, answered to a higher calling than revenge against his enemies. And so must we. David did not pray out of malice and vindictiveness, but out an intolerance of sin and a desire to see wickedness rectified. Look at these "harsh" statements, in verses 6-12: let him be found guilty, may no one take pity on his children, may his descendants be cut off. This is not a desire for personal revenge; rather it an angry cry that the justice of God shall prevail even though David has been treated unjustly. The desire for holiness that God gave to David motivated him to pray for divine retribution so that people who were genuinely evil would be defeated. David, knew as we all do, that if evil were never punished, there would be no end to calamity in our society.

But I am a man or woman of prayer. I answer to a higher calling. David, fully trusting God to be just and righteous could pray and then leave the consequences to God.

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Vengeance is mine, says the Lord. He is the only one who has the wisdom adequate to handle this kind of a problem where one has been unfairly been attacked and maligned by one who had been a friend. In David's case, it was most likely King Saul to whom he had pledged his loyalty, although some commentators have suggested that it was Nabal, a wealthy landowner whose flocks David's men had protected.

In verse 8 we read, "may his days be few, may another take his place of leadership." Quoted by Peter in the first chapter of Acts, this verse was used to justify replacing Judas in the lineup of the apostles after Jesus' and Judas's deaths.

Have you struggled with the rejection or betrayal of someone who once loved you? Someone into whom you had poured a great deal of time, emotional, physical and financial energy? Then consider yourself close to the heart of Jesus who had done the same. Even Jesus struggled with the rejection of one who was close to Him. He knew how it must have felt to time and time again to have reached out to Judas only to have him reject and turn away. Jesus washed the feet of His enemy in the upper room, gave him opportunities to repent by offering him a piece of bread and then saying, 'what you must do, do quickly,' letting Judas know that He was fully aware of the betrayal.

Why did Jesus offer Judas so many chances? Because He loved His enemies, asked His Father to forgive them, and allowed them to experience the natural consequences of their evil deeds without Him orchestrating the results or seeking to injure them despite His own hurt.

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Think for a minute about the power of forgiving someone who has hurt you.

Before Jesus, only God had the power to forgive sins, but forgiveness is one power that Jesus gave to His disciples shortly after His resurrection

Slide: John 21:23 John chapter 21 relates how Jesus showed up to visit the disciples while they were behind closed doors, breathed on them and said, If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you retain any sins.....hold them bound, do not forgive them, they are not forgiven. That power to forgive sins has been passed onto to and we must trust God enough to obey Him when we read His reminder in Luke 6:37 to forgive and we will be forgiven. Now, forgiving someone does not mean giving them a "get out of jail free" card, nor does forgiveness force us to establish a positive relationship with the forgiv-ee. Recall that Jesus forgave the瘫痪 (paralytic) lowered down through the roof on his mat, but we never heard that a relationship followed that event. Jesus forgave those who crucified Him, but that did not bring them into their grateful knees. Forgiveness does not require that you forget the wrong done to you, or even that you trust that person again. Indeed, the forgiven one may still be untrustworthy, but by forgiving our enemy, we build an opportunity for reconciliation, and that may *sometimes* restore trust. You are a man or woman of prayer, and so therefore, forgiveness means that you give up your right to hurt the person who has wronged you, and you allow God to take control of the situation. Because He is a God of love, He does not act apart from love in administering His justice to all guilty parties. All we have to do is trust and obey His command to forgive and to love our enemies. **Slide Psalm 109**

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As long as our enemies are still on this earth, they are potential saints. By praying for them and treating them with kindness, we not only heap guilt on them, as we saw in Proverbs 25:22, but we keep ourselves from the trap of repaying evil for evil. We leave the door of reconciliation open for them to come to Christ if they recognize the error of their ways sometime in the future. Enemies are a true test of our Christian character and a reliable gauge of our relationship with the Lord. When we take a serious look at how we deal with those who have hurt us and measure our barometer next to the One who never gave up reaching out to His enemies, we will surely realize that most of us have some work to do.

And that work takes some effort as we saw in Proverbs 17 and 27 along with several related texts. These verses are a treasure trove of advice about getting along with both friends and others who are more difficult. Did you each pick out your favorites as you discussed them today?

Proverbs 17:6 reminded us that parents are the pride of their children. Now that's a switch! Are you children and your grandchildren proud of YOU? If you were to overhear your kids talking about you, would their words reflect that they are proud of what you do, how you have handled your career, life, relationships, your Christian walk? People these days often have parents or grandparents who have compromised their own moral values, been inconsistent spiritual models, and have lived unhealthy lifestyles that now cause problems for their families.

Are you the type of parent that your son or daughter would be proud to ask a friend to care for if you were not able to care for yourself? Jesus' mother was!

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Jesus was so confident that Mary would bring joy to the household of His friend that He asked John to care for her for the rest of her life even as He was dying on the cross. Surely Mary was the pride of her son, Jesus.

Proverbs 17: 15 and 26 both remind us that letting the guilty off the hook, and then punishing good people are both equally abhorrent to God. In our culture today, we are seeing more and more of this as the health care debate reaches its climax. Medical personal will be forced to perform abortions to obtain license to practice, turning the righteous into lawbreakers. It is difficult to watch our judicial system side with political correct thinking and punish Godly people, but we can expect more of this as the God's word becomes increasingly irrelevant to our culture and the end times draw closer.

Several verses in Proverbs 27 remind us of the important roles that friends have in our lives. In verse 1 we read that we should not drop hints about the good things we have done, but rather let others figure out for themselves.

Solomon is practical as well as humorous in 27:14 where it says, if a man loudly blesses his neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.

The Message version says that if you call out 'rise and shine" in the morning, it will sound more like a curse than a blessing. If the people you live with like to get a slow start in the morning, go easy on them and don't push your cheerful self on them until they have had their coffee!

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In verse 28:18 we are reminded to watch the back of our boss at work, because when he or she does well, we also do well, and are honored. Leadership is a very difficult and often lonely position and most leaders don't have much back up.

When we honor our bosses, even if they are not always wise, we are honoring God who has placed them in authority over us, either as role models, or as examples to learn from their mistakes.

At the end of Proverbs 27, we read the section from verses 23-27 we could paraphrase in this way: Take the time invest in financially and emotionally in relationships with those who are worth your time and effort. The harvest of that investment will be a rich reward when I need it the most.

It is tempting to try to avoid conflict, avoid commitment, avoid being rejected by going it alone, but there is no such thing as solitary Christianity. When we are born again, we are born into the fellowship of community. It's supposed to be a place of full acceptance, of loving equality, of family security, the reality is that Christians, like any other group of people, are not perfect. They don't stop sinning the moment they begin believing in Christ. They don't suddenly become the exciting conversationalists, sensitive listeners, caring companions, and glowing inspirations that we think we need. But we are all in the process of growing as believers and growing up together into a Christian community based on our relationship to Jesus, trusting His Word, following His example, and obeying His teachings. Because of our relationship to Jesus Christ, we will one day experience perfect unity in heaven where all those 'sticky' relationships we have tried to avoid here on earth will be permanent.

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Which brings us to Psalm 133 where I want to conclude today: How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity! One of the shorter Psalms of Ascents, this is a song of David, the most famous song writer of Israel. In 2 Samuel 5, we read of how the northern tribes came to David and said to him, "We are your own flesh and blood. We want to follow the Lord under your leading." With that united commitment, David then went with his army, and God gave him Jerusalem. He claimed it as the capital seat of leadership of the nation of Israel. Then he brought the ark of the covenant up into Jerusalem, and finally all the tribes could worship together. Surely it must have given God great joy to see all the tribes gathered together, worshipping Him in unity. I recall that my Dad used to say that one of his greatest pleasures was watching his six kids as adults play and have fun together whenever we gathered for family reunions. I think God gave my father a piece of His own heart when he gave my Dad that pleasure.

That unity within the Body of believers is based on the love and relationship which exists within the holy Trinity. If God were only one God and one person, we would experience God much differently than we do as Christians. The God Allah is one God and he is a god of power; a personal relationship with such a God cannot exist, because its nature is authoritative. On the other hand, our God exists not in authority over us, but in a relationship where God looks out for our best interests out of love. That love is possible only because it already exists within God himself in three persons. The mystery of that unity is what draws us relate to others as reflections of God's love.

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David uses the metaphor of anointing oil to describe the pleasure the Lord receives when brethren are unified in their efforts to please Him. In the Old Testament, starting with Aaron in Exodus, priests, kings and prophets were anointed with olive oil mixed with precious spices indicating that they were gifted and called by God for their task. Anointing oil, poured out so lavishly that it flowed down the head and beard of the anointed, was a tangible sign of the Holy Spirit's presence in the heart and mind of the individual. This anointing of a leader, a king or a priest prefigures Christ Himself, for the word Messiah means anointed one. The extravagance is compared to the heavy dew which covers the land of Israel each morning in a land which has little rain.

Slide: John 17:23 Jesus' high priestly prayer in John chapter 17 included these words: "May they (the disciples) be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me. " Now in its greatest sense, this unity will not happen until Christ returns, and we come together as one nation, as one church, and as one people at the resurrection where we finally **are** truly one with God, as His family, as the bride of Christ. And in that unity, we will experience the blessing of eternal life forevermore.

So we see that unity of the goal of all our relationships and unity with the Father was one of Jesus's goals while He was here on earth. If all of our relationships reflected unity, then we would indeed reflect the love of God as it was originally intended before the Creation in the persons of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. If we work to accomplish that, then we would not have to fear not hearing the words, "Well done." **Video: Psalm 133**