



### **WHEN RELATIONSHIPS TURN SOUR**

Disclaimer: this could be a risky sermon! But as I look back on almost 20 years of church leadership, I'm convinced that there must have been a whole bunch of Bible college lectures I was missing for. Lectures like:

- How to hold a church community together in spite of 3 different opinions on just about any subject.
- How to have the I-don't-want-to-say-this-but-I-have-to conversations without looking like the bad guy.
- How to juggle pastoral issues, wannabe prophets and technical glitches – all in the same morning!
- How to lead a church in the midst of a pandemic (and set up a cyber ministry in the space of a week).
- And this: how to deal with the impact of relationships you *thought* were friendships – but weren't.

We've all been there, haven't we? Because everyone has a *Take A Bow* song about a relationship that went wrong.

For some it will be a marriage.

For some it will be a friendship.

For some it will be a workplace.

For some it will be a church (and yes, pastors can get it wrong too).

So, what do we do when a relationship turns sour? How do we continue to honour and glorify God when our natural inclination is to say something we shouldn't, very loudly? How do we turn *this* negative into a positive?

### **Psalm 41**

While we can't be 100% certain of the context, we know King David had a fair number of friends who morphed into enemies: Saul; Absalom; and in this instance, most likely Ahitophel, his ex-adviser. Regardless, the big question here is: what do you do when a relationship turns sour?

There are 4 principles in this psalm:

**1) Be A Faithful Person** (vs1-3). David appears to be mentoring himself and saying, "Don't lose sight of what matters to God, David." Because it can be easy to become bitter or cynical or to compromise your values when you feel betrayed. It can also be easy to make everything 'all about you', and forget there are people going through worse than this. So as best as possible, keep your perspective, keep doing the right thing, and keep showing kindness – even to your enemies. To quote Proverbs 25: "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink." Be the person God has called you to be – regardless of what others are doing.

**2) Be A Truthful Person** (vs4-6). If you think you may have contributed to this situation, or mishandled it, do what David does here: take a good hard look at yourself, and make reparations if necessary. Sometimes we can feel betrayed because someone has told us something we needed to hear but didn't want to (and sometimes the situation *itself* is telling us something!). "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses," Proverbs 27 says. On saying that, if you haven't done anything wrong don't feel the sacrificial need to be a punchbag, or a doormat, or a scapegoat. Just because someone says something is true, doesn't mean it is.

**3) Be A Prayerful Person** (vs7-9). When you're feeling abandoned do what David does: seek out the One who's got your back and will never stab you in it – and offload. All the anger and heartache and sense of betrayal. Again, as it says in Proverbs 18, "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." And He knows how it feels to be betrayed and abandoned, more than anyone does (more about that in a minute). But He's also able to help you forgive in a way that might seem impossible at the moment. Not forget, necessarily (forgiving and forgetting are not the same thing). But He can help you forgive.

**4) Be A Hopeful Person** (vs10-12). I.e. "Give me victory, Lord." Fact is: some relationships will go wrong, some spouses will forget their vows, some friends will be no better than enemies, and some bosses will disregard the loyalty of their workers. If a relationship reaches a point where it is damaging for you to stick around, go. There are other relationships to be had. As Proverbs 13 says, "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm." I'm not saying give up on a marriage, friendship or job

just because things are a little tricky right now, or you don't feel the same as you once did. But equally, don't let a damaged past define your future.

### **The Ultimate Betrayal**

So, in the midst of a difficult time politically, relationally and emotionally, David reaches out to God. And in the process, he turns a negative into a positive.

Now like so much of what we read in the Psalms, there's an historical context here, but an even greater fulfilment. Partly because human interactions are rarely as unique as we like to think they are, but mostly because King David's life was a picture of a greater King of Israel to come. And that King of Israel had to be betrayed by a close friend of His own. Which is why part of this psalm (vs9) gets quoted by Jesus (John 13:18):

*"I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfil the scripture: 'He who shares My bread has lifted up his heel against Me.'"*

Yes, Jesus was born to be abandoned, to be betrayed. In fact, He knew it was going to happen, all the way along. He chose His friends, His followers, knowing that they would run away and leave Him when He needed them most. Knowing that one of them would actually betray Him for the price of a slave (Jesus even sat Judas next to Him at the Passover meal – an honoured place - and gave Him 2 opportunities to change his mind).

You see, in Jesus, God Himself allowed His face to be kissed by a traitor. And on the cross, He went through Hell in our place - alone.

Abandoned so that you will never have to be.

And betrayed so that every traitor could be forgiven.

Now I am almost 100% certain there are people here today that this is going to be relevant to. 2 groups:

- People who know what it is to be a traitor.
- People who know what it is to be betrayed.

At the foot of the cross - the ultimate symbol of betrayal and abandonment – we can find forgiveness, and the strength to forgive. So, as we share communion together, let's bring our hurts, suffered and inflicted, to Him.

And ask Him to make us that bigger, better person.