

Tell 'Em That God's Gonna Cut 'Em Down ...

That They May Cry Out for Mercy

Psalm 52:1 *To the choirmaster. A Maskil of David, when Doeg, the Edomite, came and told Saul, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech."*
Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day.

² Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit.

³ You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking what is right. Selah

⁴ You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue.

⁵ But God will break you down forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah

⁶ The righteous shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying,

⁷ "See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!"

⁸ But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.

⁹ I will thank you forever, because you have done it. I will wait for your name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly."

Psalm 53:1 *To the choirmaster: according to Mahalath. A Maskil of David.*

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good.

² God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

³ They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

⁴ Have those who work evil no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God?

⁵ There they are, in great terror, where there is no terror! For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you; you put them to shame, for God has rejected them.

⁶ Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad."

Psalm 54:1 To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David, when the Ziphites went and told Saul, "Is not David hiding among us?"

O God, save me by your name, and vindicate me by your might.

² O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth.

³ For strangers have risen against me; ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves. Selah

⁴ Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life.

⁵ He will return the evil to my enemies; in your faithfulness put an end to them.

⁶ With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good.

⁷ For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies."

Psalm 55:1 To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A Maskil of David.

Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy!

² Attend to me, and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and I moan,
³ because of the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they drop trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me.
⁴ My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me.
⁵ Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.
⁶ And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest;
⁷ yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; Selah
⁸ I would hurry to find a shelter from the raging wind and tempest."
⁹ Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues; for I see violence and strife in the city.
¹⁰ Day and night they go around it on its walls, and iniquity and trouble are within it;
¹¹ ruin is in its midst; oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace.
¹² For it is not an enemy who taunts me-- then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me-- then I could hide from him.
¹³ But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend.
¹⁴ We used to take sweet counsel together; within God's house we walked in the throng.
¹⁵ Let death steal over them; let them go down to Sheol alive; for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart.
¹⁶ But I call to God, and the LORD will save me.
¹⁷ Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice.
¹⁸ He redeems my soul in safety from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me.
¹⁹ God will give ear and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old, Selah because they do not change and do not fear God.
²⁰ My companion stretched out his hand against his friends; he violated his covenant.

²¹ His speech was smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords.

²² Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.

²³ But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in you."

Psalm 52-55

Repeat

GROWING UP THERE WAS THIS MAN named Phill. Phill was in my dad's youth group back in the '60s. My dad's name is Pete. Then I came along. From my earliest days, even though my name is Doug, every time Phill saw me, he would call me Re-Pete. You've heard the riddle:

Pete and Repete went down to a lake.

Pete jumped in. Who was left?

Repete.

Pete and Repete went down to a lake.

Pete jumped in. Who was left?

Repete.

Pete and Repete went down to a lake...

One day I got tired of it. So I asked him what he named his oldest son. “Phill,” he told me. “*Re-Phill?*” And he never called me Repete again.

Calvin is well-known for his teaching of **divine accommodation**. This is a sort of “repeat.” It is the idea that God sometimes accommodates his message so that we can understand it. Calvin often spoke about it in relation to using figures of speech to help explain the divine essence. “The Anthropomorphites also, who dreamed of a corporeal God, because mouth, ears, eyes, hands, and feet, are often ascribed to him in Scripture, are easily refuted. For who is so devoid of intellect as not to understand that God, in so speaking, lisps with us as nurses are wont to do with little children?” (*Institutes* 1.13.1). I think of accommodation in another sense. This is how often he repeats the same thing to us. When you “lisp” to a baby, you say the same syllable over and over again.

The law is repetitious. Sometimes, as in the case with the Ten Commandments, we get almost the exact same list repeated. Certainly, we get the idea of what law is, how it functions, what its purpose in our lives is over and over. **The Gospel is the same way**. From Genesis 3 on through to the

end of Revelation, we get the Gospel announced, prophesied, typed, declared, embodied, fulfilled, taught, and repeated over and over. In some ways, the whole Bible is nothing but a commentary on Genesis 1-3 that is telling the same story time and again.

The Psalms in their own way follow this pattern too. That can make it difficult to know how to preach when you have already covered much of the subject matter, and done it more than once. Being poetry, they repeat themselves sometimes in **parallelism** of thoughts in the same verse, sometimes in **refrains** a few verses apart, sometimes in ideas that are collected into **units** of Psalms that are placed together, and sometimes on a very few occasions, entire **songs are reproduced** in the Psalter. We've seen some of each of these things in our look at the first 50 songs.

Psalm 53 provides a great illustration of this principle as it is with the exception of a single verse, a virtual **replica of Psalm 14**:

| Psalm 14 | Psalm 53 |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <i>"To the choirmaster. Of David.</i> | <i>"To the choirmaster: according to Mahalath. A Maskil of David.</i> |

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.

² The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

⁴ Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD?

⁵ There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous.

⁶ You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge.

⁷ Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad."

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good.

² God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

³ They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

⁴ Have those who work evil no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon God?

⁵ There they are, in great terror, where there is no terror! For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you; you put them to shame, for God has rejected them.

⁶ Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad."

Why would God do this? Why would he want the same song put into the same Psalter twice?

Maybe it had a [different tune](#)? Our own hymnal does this. For example, Psalm 23 is placed together four times in a row with four different tunes.¹ But these two Psalms are very far apart, making them unlike this example. Besides, we have no suggestion of what the tunes would have been in the Psalms. Maybe it is like Psalm 23 in a different way in our Psalter.

Not only does Psalm 23 occur with the same words four times in a row, it appears in two other very different parts of the Hymnal with fairly [different language](#).² This gives you three different poetic takes in English on Psalm 23 in one hymn book, making for a very different experience as you sing each song, not only musically but lyrically. This is probably getting closer at the reason.

Probably closer still is coming to understand that our hymnal (like all hymnals) is not just a hodge-podge of randomly collected songs. Instead, it lays the songs out in a kind of [theological order](#). They are mini-systematic theologies put to music. The placement of a song corresponds to its theological heading. For example, in the

¹ *Trinity Hymnal: Baptist Edition*, #77 (first, second, third, and fourth tunes).

² *Trinity Hymnal: Baptist Edition*, #77, #141, #663.

case of the three different placements of Psalm 23, you find the first under the section “*The Glory of God: His Faithfulness*,” the second in the section on “*Jesus Christ: His Love and Grace*,” and the third is the first song in a section called “*Hymans for Informal Occasions*.” In other words, the placement of the song conveys something different to you as you sing it, even though it is based off the same different song.

This is exactly what we find going on with Psalms 14 and 53. They repeat to show us the same basic theological teaching. But **their placement** gives us a **different emphasis**. This is a good lesson for how God’s Word can always be new to us, as we come to a passage one day and see one thing and then another day noticing something very different. And thus, God’s word is new every morning, a never-ending supply of fresh water for parched and thirsty souls to drink. Even when it repeats itself.

Context, Context

When we looked at Psalm 14, we did so **in the context of 14-16**. We saw that Psalm 15 seemed to **ask a question**.

Psalm 14 seemed to **pose a problem** that Psalm 15 asked as a question. Psalm 16 seemed to **solve the question and the problem**. Psalm 14 raises the problem of human depravity. Sin. Psalm 15 asks the vital question in light of it, if people are wicked, who can stand on God's holy hill? Psalm 16 answers that though God requires perfection to stand here, there is one who was perfect according to the Law, and he has provided a way through his death and resurrection whereby those who are sinful can be made right and thus stand on the holy hill. **So the context of Psalm 14 points to our need for Christ and shows us what God has done that we can be saved.**

One more thing is worth remembering about the context of Psalm 14. Just two Psalms in the other direction there is a song that while having no mentioned historical occasion, nonetheless many think David had the story of **Doeg the Edomite**, one of king Saul's enlisted herdsmen, behind it. In that song, David sings much of flattering, lying, deceitful lips that bring devastation in their wake. This is exactly what Doeg did when he treated David one way, and then turned against him to Saul and eventually ended up murdering 85 priests of God (**1Sa 21:7-22:18**). In this way,

the general psalm of human depravity that is Psalm 14 was set up by a very specific instance of evil committed by Doeg and Saul against the LORD and his anointed.

Technically, in our study of the Psalms we are in Psalm 52 rather than 53. The remarkable thing about Psalm 52 is that it begins, “*To the choirmaster [or For the End]. A Maskil of David, when Doeg, the Edomite, came and told Saul, “David has come to the house of Ahimelech”*” (Ps 52:1). This is the only known Psalm about Doeg. But as we have just remembered, Psalm 12 may very well have him in mind as well. Thus, both of them come just prior to the repeated Psalm 14/53. This is no accident. Everything about the placement of the Psalms is deliberate, and dare I say, inspired by God.

Psalm 12 and 52 have much in common. One begins with the faithful **vanishing** (Psalm 12:1), the other with God’s steadfast love **enduring** (Psalm 52:1). Both then take three verses to talk about the wicked and their lying, flattering, destructive, weapon-like, devouring **tongues** (12:2-4; 52:2-4). In the wake, Psalm 12 has the psalmist **arise** (12:5), while Psalm 52 has God breaking the wicked **down** (52:5). Psalm 52 clearly inspired the old folk song variously called “**Run On**” or “**God’s Gonna’ Cut You Down**”

(covered by the likes of Elvis and Johnny Cash, Johnny did it better):

*Go tell that long tongue liar,
Go and tell that midnight rider,
Tell the rambler, the gambler, the back biter,
Tell 'em that God's gonna cut 'em down.*

That's a very short and memorable way of explaining **Psalm 52:2-5**. But if read in context, this is not an end to itself (nor is it in the song). That would be truly dreadful.

The parallels continue right on through to the end of the songs. In Psalm 12, the **words of the LORD** come as a response (**12:6-7**). In Psalm 52 it is **the words of the righteous** (**52:6**). The Psalmist then speaks to the LORD's words in the one (**12:7**), and to the righteous' situation in the other (**52:8**). Psalm 12 ends with vileness being exalted **among the children of men** (**12:8**), while 52 ends with the godly waiting for the good Name of God **in the presence of the godly** (**52:9**).

| Psalm 12 | Psalm 52 |
|---|---|
| <p>"Save, O LORD, for the godly one is gone; for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.</p> <p>² Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.</p> <p>³ May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts,</p> <p>⁴ those who say, "With our tongue we will prevail, our lips are with us; who is master over us?"</p> <p>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."</p> <p>⁶ The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.</p> <p>⁷ You, O LORD, will keep them; you will guard us from this generation forever.</p> <p>⁸ On every side the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among the children of man."</p> | <p>"Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day.</p> <p>² Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit.</p> <p>³ You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking what is right. Selah</p> <p>⁴ You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue.</p> <p>⁵ But God will break you down forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah</p> <p>⁶ The righteous shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying,</p> <p>⁷ "See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!"</p> <p>⁸ But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever.</p> <p>⁹ I will thank you forever, because you have done it. I will wait for your name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly."</p> |

So we have it that two songs, written because of the sociopaths named Doeg and Saul, set up the repeated songs that depict total depravity in its universal horror. But the context in which Psalm 53 is different, mostly because of [what comes after it](#).

Some may think it crazy to try and preach four Psalms together. But doing this (especially when three are so short, one has similar themes to a previous song, while another is identical to a previous song) can help us understand the repetition, the baby-talk of Scripture, so that we might grasp the same ideas but in a different sense than we did the first time. And this can be tremendously helpful to our Christian lives, for not only do we easily forget what we have learned, when we learn the same thing in multiple ways it becomes easier to remember! And this is a means of grace for those who will hear and heed the word of God.

Whereas the context of 14-16 had that problem/question/answer movement of the songs, Psalms 52-55, as a different part of the hymnal if you will, are personal reflections upon [terrible events](#). When you think about the evil in the world you must ponder long and hard on it. Many people think about evil. The problem of evil is

one of the great problems in all the world. But many people think wrongly about it. You are not to seek easy answers. You are not to avoid answers. You must wrestle with the question, but you absolutely must come away with God's answer.

The grouping is clearly intentional. **All four are** songs of David. All four are songs “to the choirmaster” or “For the End.” **All four are** grouped together as “maskils,” a word that teaches us wisdom.³ And in fact, they have much in common with **Proverbs 1-2** and **30:1-14**.⁴

Two of them are very specific in terms of why he wrote them. We've seen that Psalm 52 has the evil of Doeg and Saul in mind. Psalm 54 was written, “**When the Ziphites went and told Saul, ‘Is not David hiding among us?’**” (**Psalm 54:1**). Like Doeg and Saul, the Ziphites—who were a people living in the hill country of Judah—used their tongues to commit treason against David, telling Saul of his hiding place and offering to assist in his capture, even though the LORD had anointed him through Samuel (**1Sa**

³ On the relationship of these songs in context see Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 794.

⁴ Phil J. Botha, “Ps 53 in Canonical Perspective,” *OTE* 26/3 (2013): 587 [583-606]. <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/ote/v26n3/04.pdf>

23:19ff). (And we should remember that this was all started with Psalm 51 and the David and Bathsheba song that talk about personal sin and repentance). Both songs are about treachery. Psalm 53 is in the middle. Like Psalm 14, it has no explicit occasion. And yet, it's beginning of the "fool" recalls the name **Nabal** (*nabal* = fool in Hebrew), and the unrelenting mocking of David that this rich scoundrel gave to David (1Sam 25:1ff). Psalm 55 seems to be an individual response to the basic message these others songs. It is his reflection on this repeated theme.

This, then, is how Psalm 53 teaches us something different. The focus is still on human evil. But rather than asking how an evil person may stand on God's hill, finding the answer in Christ Jesus, **something else is also necessary**. It is not incompatible with the first idea, but complementary to it. God must provide the way of overcoming evil. But humans must also respond properly to it and to him.

Human Depravity, Especially the Tongue

Psalm 52 and 53 each begin by singling out **a kind of person**. The former calls him a "**mighty man**" (*gibbor*; Ps

52:1). The first time this word is used in the Bible it describes the Nephilim (Gen 6:4). They are the *gibborim*, the “mighty men” of old. The next time it is used it describes the wicked Nimrod (Gen 10:8), who was very probably a giant. The word, therefore, does not have a positive origin. By the days of Moses, these people were so wicked that God cut them off from all the lands in which they were living. In fact, much of the moral and civil law of Israel is a direct response to the evil of these *gibborim*. Later, the word will be used of Joshua’s armies and David’s mighty men. The true mighty man in God’s eye is the one who is small in his own eyes, is humble, and loves to obey the LORD. Thus, Psalm 52:1 says, “Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day.”

Psalm 53 brings up “the fool.” “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good” (Ps 53:1). The fool and the mighty man have a couple of things in common in these songs. The mighty man is a worker of deceit (52:4) who prefers evil to good (52:5), while the fool also does nothing good (53:2, 4). Second, the mighty man uses words that devour (52:6), while the fool “eats up”

God's people (53:5). There is a contrast as well. The fool is foolish because he does not understand (53:3) and does not know (53:5). But the mighty man "boasts" in his evil (52:3) as he trusts in his riches (52:9).

The tongue is a major focus of these psalms. The tongue plots destruction, is like a sharp razor, and full of deceit (Ps 52:2, 4). It lies (53:3), it speaks words that devour (4). The language in both songs is metaphorically that of cannibalism, the eating of another human being. People find this practice (practiced among the giants by the way) detestable. Alfred Packer, the Donner Party, those who survived the plane crash in the movie *Alive* (based on true events), even if it is done out of self-preservation the thought is so repulsive that it makes everyone disgusted. None of us would ever become cannibals!

And yet, the psalm describes the way that we speak to others in these very terms. We may not destroy them physically, but we eat them alive spiritually. We eat their souls with the horrible things that we say to each other. When we yell. When we lie. When we deceive. When we flatter. When we complain. On and on it goes. In Psalm 12 these things come from flattering lips (12:3). Here, it is a plot

(52:2). It is a love (3-4). And it comes out through the tongue. Is it any wonder that James spends so much time on the tongue? And yet how little time do we actually spend trying to master it, even though we are told of the horrors that come out of our own mouths here?

But, you say, I'm not a fool, I'm not the mighty man. But **Psalm 53:2-3** tells us, “**God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.**” This is exactly what Psalm 14 said, and it bears repeating. Why? Because our tendency is to deny it. Amazingly, these very words show up yet again in Romans 3 (we saw how part of Psalm 51 ended up there too), when the Apostle is explaining how apart from Christ, these things describe **every single person on earth**. Hence, the two songs describe **universal depravity**; no one is immune. Romans even gets more specific in its depravity, talking about how men's tongues, lips, throats, and mouths are open graves and full of poison. Just like the Psalms.

I'm not sure these things can be repeated enough by God or to ourselves. For the moment we start to think—even as

Christians—that we are immune, this is the very moment we fail to realize that we do them. Hence, James again. James wrote to Christians! There are really very few doctrines that I hold with absolute conviction that bring fire from my belly. The Person and work of Christ, the Trinity, God’s electing love and grace, and human depravity because of our absolutely dark and ugly hearts. I feel these things so strongly because I know them to be true and/or necessary in my own life. And I know them to be true from God’s word. And I know that when people start for even the shortest moment to think that one of them isn’t true and/or necessary for them, it’s all over. You must be brought to your senses as you consider yourselves in light of the Word from these two Psalms. Look at what you do to other people. Then look at what happens to those who do such things in these Psalms.

Judgment is Coming

“But God will break you down forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. Selah” (Psalm 52:5). Pause indeed! This is

the God of the Bible, the whole Bible: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He does not tolerate our evil, our wickedness, our lying, our deception, our hiding of our sins (**Psalm 50-51**). And he will break you and cut you down forever in them. And he commands his people to sing about this! This is in a song, just like the folk-song we brought up earlier. But this is in all of these songs.

Again Psalm 53. What of those who do not call upon God, who eat up his people as they eat bread? “**There they are, in great terror, where there is no terror! For God scatters the bones of him who encamps against you; you put them to shame, for God has rejected them**” (**Ps 53:5**).

Again in Psalm 54: “**He will return the evil to my enemies; in your faithfulness put an end to them**” (**54:5**).

Again in Psalm 55, “**Destroy, O Lord, divide their tongues ... Let death steal over them; let them go down to Sheol alive ... You, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction**” (**9, 15a, 23a**). And why? Not because they are people. Not because they are not-elect. **Because they are wicked.**

They are “**men of blood and treachery**” (**23b**). Their speech is “**smooth as butter, yet war was in his heart; his**

words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords” (21). The tongue again! How many souls have been destroyed by those whose speech goes on like butter, but when they eat it, it turns out to be poison? They “stretch out their hand against friends” and they “violate their covenants” (20).

“For I see violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go around it on its walls, and iniquity and trouble are within it; ruin is in its midst; oppression and fraud do not depart from its marketplace. For it is not an enemy who taunts me—then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me—then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. [This is very close to what Jesus tells his friend Judas, as it finds its ultimate expression of treachery].⁵ We used to take sweet counsel together; within God’s house we walked in the throng” (Ps 55:9-14). You see? This comes from those who are called God’s people, who spend time in worship, around the company of the believers, who have been shown much common mercy and grace.

⁵ Psalm 41:9; cf. John 13:18. See Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 486.

The hard thing here is that these Psalms really are describing the *unregenerate* heart. But this one does it through people who are outwardly religious, morally pure and upright, “Christians,” worshipers of God. This becomes a much more powerful rebuke to us than just leveling out the atheistic fool or the *gibborim*, because everyone here fits this category. But is everyone here born-again? I can’t know with certainty and neither can you ... about everyone else. I hope and pray that you are. But I can tell **you that you can know about yourself**. How?

The Proper Response to Human Evil

By whether or not you ever fall into the categories of those who speak in such ways, of those who do such things to others? No. **You must not measure yourself by the Law**. You will always be found wanting. Rather, it is **by how you respond to the wrath of God**, to the kind of God presented here.

Does it completely offend you that God would be like this? Do you find yourself getting angry at this “**God of the Old Testament?**” Many do. In my opinion, if this is you,

then you have simply never met him. And he is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. He is the God of the NT too.

But it is also by how you respond to yourself. Do you recognize your propensity towards any and all of these things? Do you see that even as true believers, we Christians sin and act in vile ways? The first thing to do is admit it! Admit it about yourself, because you do hurt others. You do. Every one of you. And me too.

The second thing is to desire greatly that this not be true of you. Christians do not want to be like this, though we often can be. The way you do this is *not first* by trying to obey the law. That necessarily comes later though. First, it is by making God your refuge, fleeing to him for mercy. “The righteous shall see and fear” (52:6).⁶ “See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!” (7). “I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever” (8). Faith first. Then thankfulness, “I will thank

⁶ The end of this verse is interesting. “... and shall laugh at him [i.e. the mighty man of evil].” But he is not laughing in a hypocritical way. No, he is laughing at the man’s own stupidity and the end to which he brings upon himself. It is a laughter that at one recognizes God’s right and sovereignty to judge, but takes no desire in the death of the wicked.

you forever, because you have done it ... I am like a green olive tree in the house of God” (9, 8), Then patience, “I will wait for your Name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly” (9). It does not come all at once. So we wait for the Name. The Name that is above every name. All of this is the “salvation ... that would come out of Zion!” (53:6).

But it is repeated again in the last two psalms. “O God, save me by your Name, and vindicate me by your Might” (54:1). The Name again. He is the Might of God, powerful to save. How will he do it? As you pray. “O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth” (2). As you pray, you admit in it that “God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life” (4). He keeps you from falling. You don’t, for you are wicked. This is grace. Then thanks comes again. “With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your Name, O LORD, for it is good” (6). “For he has delivered me from every trouble” (7). Notice here that it is not “you” (i.e. the LORD), but “he,” that is the Name. This is the Father and the Son together in an OT verse.

Finally, Psalm 55. Again, prayer, “Give ear to my prayer, O God” (55:1). It is a prayer for mercy. “Hide not

yourself from my plea for mercy!” Only sinners need mercy. It is a restless prayer, one that comes from moaning (2). Now it is the sins of others against him (3ff). He knows real evil and his only solution is to go to God in prayer. He calls upon God to bring them to a swift end, even though he used to be his friend and companion and fellow worshiper.

But though he betray, the Psalmist will “call to God, and the LORD will save me” (16). “Evening and morning and at noon” the cry will go out (17). And God will redeem his soul in safety from the battle that he wages (18). God will give ear and hear his prayer (19). He will cast his burden on the LORD, and the LORD will sustain him” (22).

If the first go around we learned how a person can stand on God’s holy hill though they be evil, and we saw that it was because of the work of Christ Jesus who overcame the curse of sin and died for it on the tree; this time around we learn about the proper response to evil—others and our own—and how it is only in coming to a realization of who God is as rightful judge over our own sin, and then only turning to him for mercy that we ever have a hope of salvation.

You will continue to sin once you leave this place. But you do not have to love it. You can strive and fight against it. And you can do this from the power that comes from knowing God's grace and mercy in spite of it for Christ's sake. It is grace, the Gospel that is the power to overcome sin. Why? Because you can't help but want to forgive and do well when you know just how much God has forgiven you. Realize how your tongue hurts other people, how it eats them alive like Grendel in the cave in *Beowulf*. Realize the depths of the mercy of God to forgive you of this. Then weep over your sin and beg God to relieve you from its power. In Christ, the penalty of sin is removed fully. By the Holy Spirit, he will daily help you be free of its power over you. He will do it. And he does it by the very things he tells you to do in response to them in the Psalms. Not by "trying harder," but by becoming humble in the face of them. This is how he puts sin to death in you.

So "cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved. But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in you" (Ps 55:22-23). These are the last

words of our songs today. Let us repeat them once and again and again.

Dear God, make it so.