



BRUTALLY HONEST

**Discovering a God You Can Trust
With Your Deepest Wounds and Darkest Desires**

A contemporary parable based on Psalm 109

PAUL CONEFF AND LINDSEY GENDKE

Brutally Honest:
Discovering a God You Can Trust
With Your Deepest Wounds and Darkest
Desires

A Contemporary Parable Based on Psalm 109

By Paul Coneff and Lindsey Gendke

Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. (Matt. 13:34, NIV)

**O Lord my God, I cried out to You, And You healed me.
(Psalm 30:2)**

**He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
(Psalm 147:3)**

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Disclaimer: Everyone struggles with feelings of anger, frustration, fear, grief, etc. While the information, Scriptures, and prayers in this book are intended to address those feelings in the context of discipleship, they are *not* intended to be a substitute for any treatment by medical or mental health professionals.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to our “Abba” Father. Many see Him as the “bad cop” who is against us, while Jesus is the “good cop” who is for us.

My prayer is that we will discover the freedom to:

- Trust in God’s faithfulness to **us** when we have been deceived, betrayed, rejected, abused, controlled etc. (*which is the opposite of trusting someone who has violated our trust*)
- Trust that our Father’s heart is big enough, compassionate enough and strong enough to see, hear, and heal our deepest wounds *behind* our darkest desires in a **process** of healing and freedom (*which is the opposite of offering a quick-fix approach that will not work*)
- Trust that His **process** of seeing us, hearing us, and walking with us in *daily, on-going* conversations will lead to deeper healing and freedom in our own hearts – and sharing His heart of compassion with others

STRAIGHT 2 THE HEART'S TRAINING MINISTRY IS DESIGNED FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

This book shares Straight 2 the Heart's prayer and discipleship process through a combination of Scriptural study and fictional characters in the story. It is *not* a training manual. Training opportunities and other resources are offered through our ministry website, www.hiddenhalf.org.

Professional counseling needs to be offered by someone with professional training. Professional counseling is also different from the discipleship process shared in this book.

Straight 2 the Heart's discipleship process has been specifically designed to be used in the church environment by non-professionals, even as many professionals are using our resources with their clients.

We have intentionally designed the discipleship process to create safety for the person receiving prayer. This includes preventing church members from sharing "solutions/judgments" such as "you just need to have more faith," "just believe," "just try harder," "if you were really surrendered . . ." etc. (Please count the number of "Christian clichés" in this skit showing how the person "listening" fails to hear the heart of the person sharing her pain and loss: [Youtube] God Never Said That: Promo 2 - LifeChurch.tv)

Instead we emphasize the power of listening to and honoring the person's story first and foremost. Next we offer to pray with the person at God's throne of grace to receive the faith, strength, hope, and victory that Jesus has already gained for them through His suffering, death, and resurrection.

It is also important to understand that we are not offering "quick fixes" (*or diagnosing problems, offering unsolicited advice, or making judgments*), because we understand that the journey of healing and freedom in Christ is an ongoing process. That said, the power of connecting our stories of suffering with Jesus' story of suffering in prayer and discipleship definitely offers real anchor points of hope and change in the journey of healing and freedom (Col. 2:6-7; 1 Cor. 15:31; Gal. 2:20).

* This is a book sharing scriptures and stories with examples of praying Jesus' story into a person's story. We keep praying and discipling the person so he or she can move into ministry, with a testimony, in their community as they experience the *whole* gospel for the *whole* person so it can go to the *whole* world.

* **And again, this book is not a training manual.** Training is a “hands-on” experience where a mentor trains you to pray with someone multiple times. And then you move from the role of facilitating prayer for someone to being trained to mentor someone else to pray with others.

Just as Jesus spent quality time *with* His disciples in person (3.5 years + 40 days after His resurrection + having them pray for 10 days), this kind of “hands-on” training cannot take place through a book or manual.

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Authors' Note

Twenty-five years ago, a professor in my master's program, Dr. Calvin Thomsen, commented on a paper I wrote about Psalm 109. He said, "This is a fresh look at Psalm 109... you should consider developing it into a book." While it is probably too late to get extra credit in his class, I have finally followed through on his suggestion with my cowriter Lindsey Gendke, a quarter of a century later.

It is written in the form of a fictional story with characters we have created to help us see:

1. How we can move from *knowing* Bible truth intellectually to *applying* Bible truth personally.
2. How we often struggle to be honest with ourselves, with God, and with others.
3. How we can receive healing and freedom in Christ as we learn to trust God with our deepest wounds and darkest thoughts—wounds and thoughts He already knows about.

So while the truths from God's Word are real, the characters are not real, they are fictional, and they do not represent any individuals. All of our own stories are unique in many ways, even as the themes may overlap with those in this book, or the stories of other real individuals.

We have also condensed key lessons about the process of prayer and discipleship into this story so you can "see" what it looks like—even as discipleship is a process that takes place over time in the context of Christ-centered, caring relationships.

Our prayer is that you will:

1. Let the truths of God's Word and HIS-story speak into your own story.
2. Connect your story with Jesus' story in a way that moves you into ministry, with a testimony, in your community.

FOREWORD

I first learned of Paul Coneff in 1990 when he began using music from a production I'd worked on to help heal survivors of sexual abuse. From the beginning it was clear to me that he had a heart for sharing the love and compassion of Jesus Christ with people suffering from deep pain and trauma wounds.

But it was not until we sat down for dinner one evening when he was visiting Nashville that I fully understood his unique way of presenting the suffering of Christ that is consistently supported by the events recorded in scripture.

When he explained to me that Jesus had been broken in every way that we are broken I was finally able to see the hidden half of the Gospel that you will learn about in these pages.

In speaking with Lindsey Gendke I've discovered her heart for helping people find connections and share their stories, moving past clichés to the deeper truths that God has for all of us. This kind of honesty, which may be uncomfortable at first, is the necessary work of healing our hurts.

The title of this book completely captures the spirit of Psalm 109. It is a Psalm where David is brutally honest, speaking out of a place of deep pain. Only a God big enough to deal with this kind of honesty is big enough to worship. That's the God you will meet in these pages.

It is a rare calling to walk with others in their pain. Coneff and Gendke do that here, offering guidance and support for the healing journey. Along the way you'll find new ways to think about prayer, and a deeper understanding of forgiveness. In the process you'll discover the path to a healthier relationship with our marvelous Creator God and to healthier relationships with others.

As you read may you find the hope of Christ and be set free to walk in the light of His love.

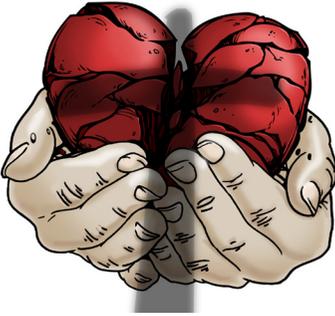
—Steve Siler, May 2019

Steve is the President of *"Music For the Soul"* and the author of *The Praise and Worship Devotional and Music for the Soul, Healing for the Heart: Lessons from a Life in Song*.

Chapter 1

What Makes You Angry?

Sondra's Story



“What makes you angry?” The question reached the kitchen table where Sondra slumped, head in hands, poring over newly arrived divorce papers. Her two girls, four-year-old Autumn and six-year-old Alice, sprawled on the rug below her, coloring. The two girls were miniature versions of their mother: wavy auburn hair, green eyes, and dimples when they smiled. But none of them smiled much these days.

“C’mon, everyone. What makes you angry?” The question came again from the living room, muted by the kitchen’s closed double doors, from Gary, a tall, slender guy who was leading the Bible study.

Lost in her thoughts, Sondra didn’t heed the question, but let it hang in the air. She had let her parents know, clearly, that she would not be joining them for the Bible study tonight. For two weeks, she had been hiding out in their home, and she wasn’t yet ready to be seen.

Gary’s slate blue eyes scanned the small group before him. Tim and Elizabeth, the middle-aged parents of Sondra, sat on the couch opposite him. Jeff and Sheila, a couple in their early forties, sat on two folding chairs to his left. And Zach and Caitlyn, the pastor of their church and his wife, sat on a loveseat on his right. Gary waited for a response from the group.

On the other side of the door Sondra paused from her papers and raised her eyebrows. *Really?* Was she hearing this right? Was God toying with her?

“Did we all come to this meeting today with happy hearts and perfect lives? Anybody blow up at a family member while trying to get here today? Anyone see something on the news that makes your blood boil? Anyone got coworkers that tick you off?”

The group members chuckled, but no one said a thing.

What makes me angry? Ha. Where do I begin? Sondra blinked back tears. *How about being here today, for one. How about living with my parents again for the first time since I was twenty-one? How about being suddenly single and broke?*

At thirty-one, with a bachelor’s degree, two beautiful daughters, and a beautiful face herself, Sondra was supposed to be in the prime of her life. For

the six years of her marriage, she'd had to regularly flash her wedding ring to fend off men. But now, the one man who should have stood by her was gone. Cory had left a couple months ago, saying he just couldn't commit to one woman for the rest of his life.

Sondra shook her head, dark curls brushing her shoulders, as if to clear her thoughts.

"Talk to me, guys," Gary tried again. "I know we're Christians who aren't supposed to 'get angry,' but you can be honest." Gary paused, but still, no one spoke.

"Okay, let's try coming at it from a different angle. I was attending a conference for pastors and I jokingly asked the registrar if there were any presentations on how to strangle church members and not go to prison. Without blinking an eye, she said, 'No, but if there is one, please let me know, I definitely want to attend.'"

Gary laughed, as did everyone else.

"So, I know we have anger in the church. Now, let me ask again: What really makes you angry?"

"My wife taking too long to get ready!" a male voice offered.

"My husband not asking directions when we get lost!" a female voice added.

Laughter erupted.

Despite herself, Sondra rose from her chair and tiptoed to the double doors. Those two voices sounded familiar. She peered through the crack, trying to glimpse the owners of the voices.

She caught their profiles immediately, and she drew in her breath and pulled away from the door. It was Zach and Caitlyn! High school sweethearts. Her friends from academy. She hadn't talked to them in about a dozen years, since high school graduation. *Great. Fun reunion that'll be, comparing life stories.* Sondra hoped to delay that reunion for as long as possible.

"What else makes you angry?" Gary asked.

"Dishonest politicians," Tim offered.

"As if there are any honest ones!" a deep and commanding voice responded.

Sondra leaned forward once again to look, this time, on the other side of the room. The voice belonged to a man around age forty with sandy blond hair and laughing eyes. Sondra squinted. Was that Jeff? It had to be. Sitting beside him was Sheila, his wife. Sondra had served punch at their wedding when she was fifteen. But how Jeff had changed!

Sondra remembered Jeff being slightly overweight and very ordinary during her teens, when she'd attended church with her parents. Now, years

since last seeing him, he'd shed the excess weight and sculpted his muscles.

He'd traded slumped posture for strong, broad shoulders. He looked like someone she would have dated during her college days. She found it hard to look away, and didn't realize that she had actually pushed the door open a crack and was staring, one-eyed, at Jeff.

"That's good, guys," Gary chuckled. "Taxes, politicians. No argument there." He paused. "Anything else make you angry?" His voice softened. "How about things hitting a little closer to home? Do we have any problems in our church, in our families, that we like to pretend aren't there?" At these words, Sondra gazed to the middle of the room, where Gary sat straight across from her in a folding chair. Tall and slender, with thinning blond hair but a full smile, he looked to be about her dad's age.

"Child abuse."

"Racism."

"Sexism."

"Someone who cheats on his wife and leaves his family struggling to survive financially." Those words came from Tim, her father, whose back was to Sondra and who didn't know she was listening.

At this last answer, Sondra startled, bumping the door with a small thud.

She gulped and whirled back, the swinging door folding her into the safety of the kitchen, but not before Gary's eyes met hers.

"Those are great responses," Gary said. "All of those can make us angry inside and lead to bitterness." He shifted in his chair, considering the woman behind the door. Tim and Elizabeth had shared just a little about their daughter's pending divorce, and how they hoped she would eventually join their Bible study. *Lord, please speak to her tonight, he prayed silently. Please let her hear this message and begin to feel some hope.*

Roots of Anger

Gary looked away from the door and gazed at Tim and Elizabeth, who sat directly in front of him. "Did you realize that anger is a secondary emotion?" he continued. "We feel angry because we feel threatened somehow, or we've lost control, or because we've been hurt. There is a root there, and it goes deeper than anger."

He paused, and Sondra did too. She stood frozen, too scared to peek through the crack again, but unable to step away.

"Let me ask you a question. Why would we choose to use anger to protect ourselves? How does anger make anything better? How does it make us *feel* better?"

In the silence that followed the question, Sondra slipped to the table and grabbed a kitchen chair. She set it down gingerly near the double doors and sat facing her girls.

Alice looked up with delight. “Mommy, are you watching us?” She wasn’t used to her mother’s full attention these days.

“Shhh, yes, I’m watching,” Sondra whispered, leaning forward, arms on thighs. “I’m watching you color those pretty pictures. Can you draw me a picture of a unicorn? And Autumn, can you draw me a picture of a princess and her castle?” She hoped that unicorns and princesses would divert her girls long enough for her to listen to what Gary had to say.

When no one answered him, Gary said, “Let me rephrase the question. What’s *good* about anger? Is there a good kind of anger and a bad kind of anger? Is there a type of anger that can actually, *legitimately*, protect us?”

“Sure, like when an adult realizes a child is being abused and takes action to stop it.” That came from Zach.

“Great answer. There are times when anger is helpful; it activates a response where action needs to be taken, and it leads to a positive outcome. But what about other types of anger? Can we be so angry that it infects our lives, and the lives of others, until we destroy relationships with others, with ourselves, and even with God?”

Sondra clenched her jaw. It was like he was talking directly to her.

“How do we know the difference between good and bad anger? And how do we heal from the bad kind?” Gary got quiet, as if he had all the time in the world, as if there really were an answer to his question.

Sondra snorted. She leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms over her chest. Was this man, Gary, suggesting that it was even *possible* to get over the betrayal she’d suffered, and the anger she faced as a result? *Just try*, she mentally dared Gary. *Just try to tell me to get over my anger.*

“Over the next few weeks, we’re going to look at how Scripture addresses anger in a real way. But tonight, I want to lay some groundwork for our topic, to show how the Bible is relevant to where we are right now, no matter whether we struggle with anger, fear, panic, worry, anxiety, addiction, you name it.”

Chapter 2

The Hidden Half of the Gospel

Jesus' Story

"I'm bored, Mommy." Autumn looked up from her coloring book.

Sondra sighed for the millionth time in the past two weeks. "Here." She fumbled her iPhone out of her pocket. "You can play your princess game on Mommy's phone."

In the past, she would have tried harder to entertain her daughters. But since Cory's crushing announcement, she could hardly muster energy to keep everyone clothed and fed. While she resented having to stay at her parents' house, she was grateful for their support. She knew she was letting her girls down, sleeping late, hiding under three showers a day, pretending to look for work while surfing on the Internet—but with her mom at home with the girls, she could afford to check out a little. She just couldn't deal with the full responsibilities of being a mother right now.

With Autumn thoroughly engaged on the phone, Sondra crumpled again into the hard back of the kitchen chair to continue listening to Gary.

A Gospel for Those Who Have Been Sinned Against?

"Typically, we hear that the gospel of Jesus is three things:

1. He died
2. He rose from the dead
3. He gave us forgiveness of our sins.

"And that's great and completely true...*as far as it goes*. But what does that gospel offer us when we are living with pain and lies from abuse? From betrayal or rejection by a spouse? How can that gospel heal us from addictions we just can't break? How does that gospel help us when we keep blowing up in anger, no matter how hard we try not to? How does that gospel help us forgive people, like our parents, or a spouse, who have caused us pain and suffering?

"In other words, how does the gospel that Jesus died to forgive my sins help me when I was the one *sinned against*? How does a gospel of forgiveness for my sins help me when I am hurting?"

Sondra stared blankly at her hands. No one in the living room spoke.

"Don't know how the traditional gospel helps in those situations? I didn't know either. And it frustrated me when church members or my pastor told me to 'lay it down at the cross.'

“It frustrated me to hear about the ‘new life’ that Christians were supposed to get when they accepted Christ. Did Christ’s promise of new life only apply to certain things in life? Did it mean we could be free of drinking, for instance, but we couldn’t be free from anger? Did Christ come to offer us partial freedom, or did He come to give us full freedom?”

Sondra knew the answer to that. Her parents had quoted her the verses just recently. “Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger...forgiving each other as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:31–32). Those words echoed in her mind, and they made her even angrier. Just how was she supposed to put off those emotions that came as naturally as breathing?

“Jesus came to offer us *total* freedom and restoration. And He did it by including more in the gospel than we usually talk about.”

The Hidden Half of the Gospel

In the living room, Gary leaned in, locking eyes around the group. “There is a ‘Hidden Half’ of the gospel that is clearly supported in the Bible, but often overlooked by Christians.”

Tim cocked his head. “What do you mean by the ‘Hidden Half’ of the gospel?”

“In a nutshell, it’s the suffering of Jesus,” Gary responded, “and what that suffering means for our suffering.”

“Okay, Tim said. “I’m interested. Tell me more. What does the suffering of Jesus mean for our suffering?”

Sondra’s ears perked up. *Good question.*

“Well, perhaps the best way to say it is to use Jesus’ own words. Jesus said, over and over again, as did His disciples and other Bible writers, that He came to *suffer*, die, and rise from the dead for our sins. He didn’t just die for our sins, but He also died for our suffering.¹ Hebrews tells us He suffered ‘in every way’ we suffer so He could be our merciful and faithful high priest and offer us help in our time of need. That right there is the basic pillar of Straight 2 the Heart: Jesus suffered so He can understand us, relate to us, and heal us, when we are suffering.”

“Okay,” said Tim. “That sounds good.”

Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted. (Heb. 2:18, NIV)

¹ See these Scriptures for more on the suffering of Jesus: Luke 9:22; 22:15; 24:24–27, 44–46; Acts 3:18, 24; 17:2–3; 26:22–23; Heb. 2:9–10, 17–18; 4:14–16; 5:7–9; 13:12; 1 Pet. 1:11; 2:21, 23; 3:18; 4:1, 13

“Hold on,” Elizabeth jumped in. “I’m intrigued, Gary. So, to add to Tim’s question, why is your ministry called Straight 2 the Heart?”

Straight 2 the Heart Discipleship Ministry

“Basically,” Gary answered, “everything we do at Straight 2 the Heart is meant to get to the heart of the matter, so to speak. It’s meant to address issues that we are struggling with *right now*—sensitive issues that, sometimes, our churches don’t know how to address in light of the cross. We talk about ‘laying our burdens at the cross,’ but what does that really look like in the nitty gritty details?”

“Well, our goal in all that we do is to connect two hearts at the cross—the heart of our ‘Wounded Healer’ with the heart of His wounded son or daughter—in a way that is Biblical, personal, and practical. With discipleship groups that pray together and support one another, we can:

- a. Move from information about the gospel
- b. To application of the gospel
- c. So that it leads to transformation in our lives.”

Tim nodded. “Sounds good.”

“Now,” Gary clarified, “Our Bible study here tonight is setting up the *information* piece about Jesus’ suffering...and as we progress in our study on anger, I will encourage you to *apply* the information in your own lives through some ‘homework.’ But ideally, when I work with churches, doing a Bible study or a series of talks, people will benefit the *most* from these teachings if they go on to form small groups.”

“Which I’m hoping to do in our own church, after this Bible study...” Zach said, smiling. “But we’ll talk about that later. Go on, Gary. You were saying Jesus suffered to help us with whatever sensitive issues we are dealing with...”

“Yes, that’s right. Our prayer and discipleship groups are a place where it’s safe to bring our deepest wounds and darkest desires—because that’s what Jesus wants us to do. He suffered in the most severe ways so He could help us with anything we are going through, whether it’s anger, depression, relational issues, or anything at all.”

A God Who Understands

“I’m going to list off some experiences, and I want you to tell me: Who are these words describing?”

Abandoned	Mocked
Betrayed	Beaten
Abused	Bruised
Tempted	Unjustly treated
Rejected	Unfairly accused

“Okay, that’s the list. So, who are these words describing?”

At the exact same moment, Tim said “us,” and Elizabeth said “Jesus.”

Gary nodded. “It’s all there in the Bible, in all four gospels, but also in Isaiah 53, a chapter that predicted Christ’s suffering. Isaiah 53 is the one chapter from the Old Testament that is quoted more often than any other in the New Testament. That reminds me.”

Gary pointed to his Bible and looked around the group.

“If you get a chance, please read Isaiah 53 before our next meeting. This is a prophecy about what Christ went through for us, and I want you to be thinking about it.”

Isaiah 53 stands as the second-most quoted Old Testament chapter in the New Testament authors—second only to Psalm 110. However, if New Testament allusions are included, Isaiah 53 far outdistances every other Old Testament passage.²

He put down his Bible and looked again at the group. “We are abandoned, Jesus was too. We get betrayed, Jesus was too. We are abused. Jesus was abused. We are mocked and beaten, and so was Jesus. We are tempted to numb our pain, and tempted to get angry with our abusers, and so was Jesus.”

² Jonathan Lunde, *Following Jesus, The Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenantal Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010), p. 70.



Gary paused again. "Do you think *this* Jesus who suffered can understand us? Do you think He has something to offer us in the midst of our pain and temptations? Pastor Zach knows what I'm talking about."

Gary looked at Zach, who nodded.

"Zach was at the men's retreat three summers ago where I helped present the principles of Straight 2 the Heart's prayer and discipleship ministry. He has a pretty awesome testimony of how the Suffering Messiah changed his life. Pastor, why don't you jump in here?"

Really? Sondra thought. The Zach she had known ten years ago was problem-free. He came from a good family, as far as she knew, he had a clean record in high school, and he found a great Christian woman in Caitlyn. After high school, the two had headed off to a Christian college to do bigger and better Christian things. After college, they were married and became partners in ministry. *They did things the right way*, she thought. *Unlike me.*

How she regretted even dating Cory now. Cory, the good-looking older guy with a Mustang. Cool, non-Christian Cory, who had noticed Sondra waiting tables at the local diner and left a single red rose and a phone number along with his tip.

Now, ten years and two kids later, she was here, hiding, single and ashamed behind her parents' double doors. She felt shut out not just from the society of her old friends, but shut out from God. And so angry! At Cory. At God. At herself.

My life has been such a mistake! I was so stupid! Sondra thought now, head in hands.

She was brought back to the present by Zach's voice.

"Well, I know it might be hard to believe, because you have all known me as your happy, easy-going pastor for the last two years, but I used to be a very angry person. Caitlyn can tell you."

Sondra's ears perked up. When Caitlyn said nothing, Sondra took a chance, stood slowly, and again peered out the doors.

Caitlyn was staring at Zach, eyebrows raised. "You didn't tell me you'd be sharing about this," she said under her breath. "You really want me to tell them?"

Zach held Caitlyn's gaze for a moment, but Sondra couldn't see his face. Then he turned abruptly to the group. "I shouldn't have put Caitlyn on the spot. Let me just suffice it to say that I grew up in a tough home with lots of anger and abuse—I know you guys didn't know that either—and I carried that anger, plus some other baggage, into our marriage. I was able to cover it up from Caitlyn while we were dating, but once we tied the knot, it started to come out, and it was ugly.

"Are you okay with me sharing this?" Zach had turned again to his wife.

The look on her face was hard to decipher. Was she scared, or relieved? Sondra held her breath.

"I'm fine," Caitlyn said quietly, sincerely. "I just didn't know you wanted to share all of this."

"Not all of it." Zack turned back to the group. "That would be too much for our first night. I guess I could sum it up by saying that, after Caitlyn and I left for Seminary in our mid-twenties, while I was completing my studies, we got to the brink of divorce. I was making choices and behaving in a way that no woman should have to put up with."

He looked tenderly at Caitlyn. She was sitting up straight now and gripping his hand, a show of support. Her features had softened, a brave smile warming her face.

"I'm so fortunate that God intervened. After that summer men's retreat with Gary, Straight 2 the Heart's discipleship ministry came to campus, allowing me to hear the message a second time. By then I was ready to reach out and ask for help. The professor prayed with me and another friend of mine, and discipled us on a weekly basis so we could continue praying together on our own. I started to identify with Jesus, how He was tempted to protect Himself with anger and tempted to numb His pain, and I was able to let Him deal with, and heal, my heart. Caitlyn started to see the changes about halfway through the prayer sessions, until she said I was a completely different person."

“Straight 2 the Heart saved our marriage,” Caitlyn agreed, turning to the others.

“Well, *Jesus* ultimately saved our marriage,” Zach said. “But Straight 2 the Heart led me back to Jesus in a way that finally, *really* made a difference in my life. Before that, I was sincerely seeking to be a Christian, getting my pastor’s training. I was hoping that studying the Bible and preaching and teaching it would somehow sink in and fix the horrible person I was. But it wasn’t working. Nothing worked, until I prayed with Straight 2 the Heart.” Zach paused. “Right, Caitlyn?”

“Right.” She beamed at him, and the image of the two of them filled Sondra with both wonder and bitterness. She wondered at what her friends had just shared. What was the full story? How had Zach covered up such an apparently sinful life? And what did he mean that Jesus could actually, *really* make a difference? The picture of their happy marriage reminded her of the life she had wanted for Cory and herself. A picture that was now shattered.

“Well, time is getting away from us,” Zach spoke up. “Anybody interested in finding out more about what Gary and I have shared?”

Heads nodded. Sondra backed away from the door, tiptoeing around crayons, forgetting her chair.

Zach continued. “You’re in luck. As you know, Gary has offered to run a Bible study group for three weeks on anger so we can see for ourselves how God’s Word speaks into our daily struggles in a way that relates to us. And we are grateful for you and Elizabeth offering to host it in your home.”

Sondra’s head swung back to the closed doors. *Seriously? Three more weeks?* Her parents hadn’t told her this Bible study would be ongoing. She’d thought it was a one-time thing.

She pictured the entire church filing into parents’ living room, watching her life unravel piece by piece.

Pastor Zach continued to talk about meeting details. Meanwhile, Sondra heard coats shuffling and Bibles closing. Things were wrapping up.

Must get out of here, Sondra thought, shooing her girls out of the kitchen. She knew she would have to face Zach and Caitlyn at some point, but not today. She just didn’t know how she would talk to them without crying. A sweeping glance caught her divorce papers, and she snatched them from the table. “Let’s go,” she urged Autumn and Alice. “I’ve got fruit snacks in our room for you.”

A few minutes later, the guests had left and Elizabeth headed for the kitchen.

Thud. One of the doors met with an unexpected bump, and Elizabeth's head barely escaped as it swung back her way.

"Oof!" Elizabeth uttered, her shoulder taking the blow.

"Are you okay?" Tim called from across the living room. He was putting folding chairs back in the closet.

Gingerly, Elizabeth slid the opposite door open and craned her neck into the kitchen. That's when she saw the abandoned chair by the door and crayons on the floor.

"Tim, come look at this!"

In a moment, she felt her husband's warm breath on her neck.

He whistled. "Looks like the scene of a drive-by Bible study."

"Yeah," Elizabeth mused, wide-eyed.

"So." Tim turned to his wife. "Do you think Gary's talk got to her?"

"It must've." Elizabeth nodded. "As Gary was talking tonight, I couldn't stop thinking about her. I think this could really help her."

"I know," Tim added. "And I was thinking of forcing her to come next week by reminding her that we're providing room, board, and child care."

"You wouldn't!" Elizabeth guffawed.

"Oh, I would." Tim nodded solemnly.

"Tim! She's not twelve!"

Tim coughed and said under his breath, "Acts like it sometimes."

Elizabeth didn't argue.

"But..." Tim continued, "I think what we have here is evidence that I don't have to force her to do anything. God is already working on her." He picked up the chair and walked it back to the table. "You just watch." He set the chair back where it belonged as Elizabeth stooped to gather crayons. "She'll be here next week."

"I hope you're right." Elizabeth crossed the kitchen and turned on the faucet to do her nightly dishes. Under her breath she prayed, *God, thanks for getting my little girl to Bible study tonight. Please bring her back next week.*

Your Turn: Read Isaiah 53

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.

3 He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces He was despised, and we held Him in low esteem.

4 Surely He took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered Him punished by God, stricken by Him, and afflicted.

5 But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open his mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away. Yet who of His generation protested? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people He was punished.

9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death, though He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush Him and cause Him to suffer, and though the Lord makes His Life an offering for sin, He will see his offspring and prolong His days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in His hand.

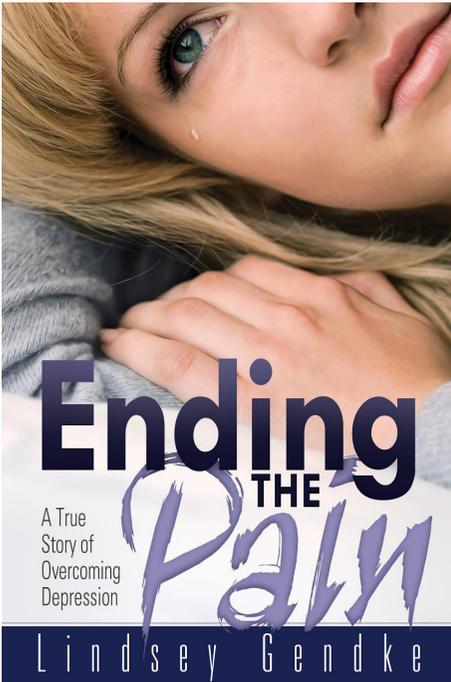
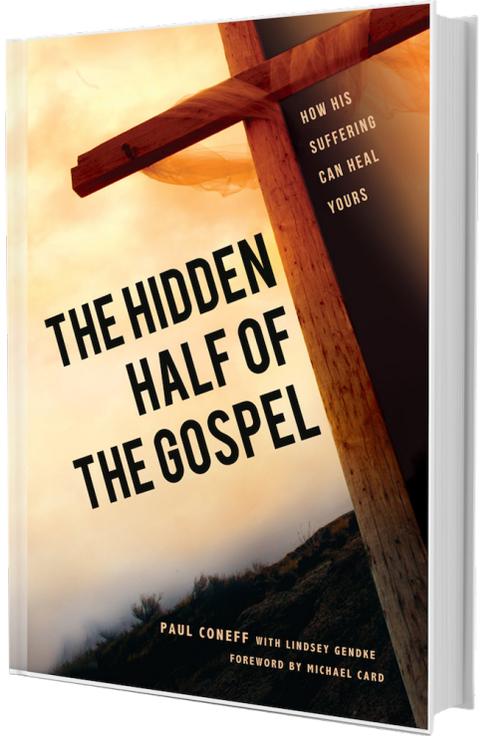
11 After He has suffered, He will see the light of life and be satisfied; by His knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give Him a portion among the great, and He will divide the spoils with the strong, because He poured out His life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (NIV)

For Further Study

Read *The Hidden Half of the Gospel: How His Suffering Can Heal Yours* by Paul Coneff and Lindsey Gendke. This book, based on the principles of Straight 2 the Heart ministry, tells the story of how Jesus suffered to identify with *us* in our suffering.

Walk with Jesus through Gethsemane to Calvary along with a group of real individuals who found Jesus to be a “very present help” in the midst of their own suffering and went on to share his love and grace with others. Stories include recovery from depression, abandonment, betrayal, shame and guilt, physical and sexual abuse, pornography and cocaine addictions, and rejection.

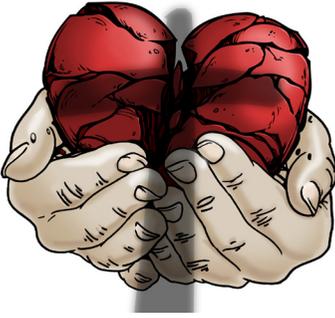


You can also read author Lindsey Gendke’s story of moving from despair to hope in her memoir, *Ending the Pain: A True Story of Overcoming Depression*. Read how God not only saved Lindsey from suicide, but also answered the deepest desires of her heart and moved her into a ministry offering living hope to others.

Chapter 3

God's Timing

Sondra's Story



One week later on Monday night Elizabeth sat on the couch, in the same place she had sat last week, and Sondra was nowhere to be seen. Jeff and Sheila had just arrived and were taking their places on the folding chairs to her right. Tim was showing Zach in.

Elizabeth checked her watch again. Sixty-four. They were supposed to start at seven.

“Hey everyone!” Zach announced, slipping off his winter coat. “Caitlyn texted me from work to say some friend needed a favor... or something like that—but she said she’ll join us as soon as she can.”

Elizabeth leaned over to Tim, who had just plopped down beside her. “Are you sure you haven’t heard from Sondra all day?” she hissed.

Tim raised his eyebrows, unfazed. “Nope. Last I heard was same as you heard. She left this morning to ‘job hunt.’” He placed air quotes around “job hunt.”

Elizabeth crumpled back into the couch. She had invited her daughter to this Bible study last week and reminded her again this morning, but both times Sondra had just shrugged and said nothing. She hadn’t said much about anything all week, in fact, sleeping in late every day and letting Elizabeth get the girls off to school. It was only after her parents left for work that Sondra appeared. And on the days Elizabeth didn’t work her nurse’s shift, Sondra ditched the house as soon as she could. Sondra clearly didn’t feel like talking, and for once in their relationship, Elizabeth wasn’t forcing her. She had learned that pushing Sondra didn’t work.

Since Cory had picked up the girls three nights ago, Tim and Elizabeth had seen and heard from Sondra even less. She *said* she was job hunting today, but with Sondra staying out until midnight the last three nights, Elizabeth knew that wasn’t *all* she was doing.

“Should we get started?” Tim asked the group, and Elizabeth’s head swung to glare at her husband. Did he have to act so nonchalant about this? Right then a tap sounded at the door.

“That’ll be Caitlyn,” Zach said, rising for the door.

“Here, let me.” Jeff, sitting closest to the entrance, rose and opened the door with one fluid movement.

“Hey Cait...” Jeff did a double take. “You’re not Caitlyn!”

Everyone craned their necks to see who it was.

“Sondra!” Elizabeth breathed. Framed in the doorway was her little girl, rosy-cheeked, windblown, and beautiful as ever in a fitted black coat, felt gloves, and designer boots. She looked dressed for a night out, but instead, here she was, at Bible study.

“You made it.” Elizabeth squeezed Tim’s hand. He glanced at her as if to say, “See? Told you so.”

“Sorry I’m late,” Sondra mumbled, suddenly self-conscious. She half-turned and motioned beyond the door. “Come in, quick, and warm up.”

Next it was Caitlyn bustling through the doorway, then a last gust of frigid February air before Jeff pulled the door closed. In the confusion of coats and scarves and gloves coming off, Jeff was able to drink in the dark-haired beauty before him virtually unnoticed. It was a vision that would have caught any adult male’s eye, but especially the eye of someone who remembered her as an awkward teenager.

“Wow Sondra, long time no see!” he said.

“I know.” Sondra blushed and looked down.

“Yes, it’s great to see you,” his wife, Sheila, added.

Everyone knew Sondra had been staying at her parents’ home for the last few weeks, but until now, no one had mentioned her name in the large group.

“Were you able to help your friend?” Zach asked Caitlyn, as she sat down next to him.

“Well, yes...” she grinned, and then turned to motion to Sondra, who blushed. “Sondra here needed a ride.”

“Oh?” Elizabeth’s eyes drifted to her daughter.

“My car broke down.” Sondra shrugged, annoyed by her mother’s apparent curiosity.

“Oh no!”

“Yeah, I guess it was God’s timing,” Caitlyn said to Elizabeth.

By now, everyone else was looking on, so she turned to address the group. “I had just sent a friend request to Sondra on Facebook. I said I was going to your house,” she motioned to Elizabeth, “and Sondra accepted my request and told me she was sitting at the library without a ride.”

“Really?” Elizabeth could hardly contain her pleasure.

Sondra looked away to hide her rolling eyes. She did not add that Bible study had not been her intended destination that night. In reality, she had

intended to finish her job hunting and then go out drinking, as she had done the past few nights...but then her car hadn't started. She didn't tell her mother, and she hadn't told Caitlyn, about the pang of conviction she'd felt at the engine's choked rumble, and finally her angry prayer, zinged at God like a rock:

God, are You kidding me? Really? Now? Are You trying to tell me something? God, You better give me something here, some sign that You're still up there and You care!

She'd marched back into the library then, reopened her laptop, and logged into Facebook. And there was Caitlyn's friend request. Waiting for her answer.

"What timing," Elizabeth marveled.

"Yeah," Sondra wilted, unable to disagree. The timing was pretty hard to ignore. And then Gary's Bible study on anger. It seemed pretty clear that God wanted her here, that He wanted to help her somehow.

Okay, God, she prayed inwardly. You did a pretty good job getting my attention tonight. I don't know what You want from me next, but I guess I'll keep my eyes open.

Right beside her, Elizabeth was saying her own prayer: *God, thank You! You used a broken-down car to drive my girl to Bible study tonight! Your timing is perfect!*

Out loud she said to her daughter, "So is your car still at the library?"

"Oh shoot! Yes!" Sondra's head snapped up. "That reminds me. I've got a job interview for tomorrow morning at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School. But we're supposed to get some freezing rain tomorrow. I doubt if I can get my car towed and fixed before then."

Sheila had been listening from across the room and now she stepped closer to join the conversation.

"Sorry, did you say you have an interview at Ben Franklin?"

"Yeah, that's right."

"Well Jeff does his rounds over in that part of town in the mornings. He's usually just driving around at that time, right, Jeff?"

"Huh?" Jeff looked up from a conversation with Gary.

"I was just saying you do rounds over in the west side of town in the mornings. Sondra needs a ride tomorrow morning to Ben Franklin. I'll be stuck at work, but I thought maybe you could take her." She looked expectantly at Jeff.

"Oh!" Jeff's eyes lit with understanding. "Sure!" he turned to Sondra. "You just let me know what time you need me to pick you up, and I'll make sure you get a police escort to your job." He grinned at the damsel in distress

in front of him, enjoying the thought of his new rescue mission.

“But there might be bad weather...” Sondra said.

“No problem,” Jeff shrugged. “Even if it’s freezing rain, that’s no problem; police officers don’t get days off for bad weather!”

Sondra exhaled gratefully. “Thank you, Jeff. That would help me out so much.”

“And thanks for the ride here, Caitlyn,” she said, turning to her old, yet new friend. “I guess things are working out, in some ways,” she said softly, more to herself than anyone else.

Chapter 4

The Angriest Prayer in the Bible: Part 1

A Study on Psalm 109:1-16



“Well, please carry on,” Sondra gestured to the group. “I know you probably already started.” Without making eye contact with Elizabeth, she sat beside her mother on the couch, Zach and Caitlyn on her left.

“Actually, we were just about to start,” Gary assured her, “so your timing was perfect. Nice to meet you, Sondra, by the

way! I’m Gary.” Gary leaned over the coffee table between them and extended his hand.

“Nice to meet you too,” Sondra replied, shaking his hand.

“Hear that?” Tim whispered in Elizabeth’s ear. “God’s timing is perfect!”

“Zach, why don’t you begin with a word of prayer?” Gary asked.

“Sure.”

Everyone bowed their heads as Zach prayed: “God, Thank You for bringing us all here safely. We give this time together to You. As we read Your Word, help it to speak to the different challenges we face in our lives, and draw our hearts closer to Your heart. Amen.”

“Thanks, Zach.” Gary looked at the group. “Let’s jump right into our topic of anger with a Psalm that is known as the most hostile of all the Psalms. It is Psalm 109, and it is so *angry*, so hostile, that it was the only Psalm never used in Jewish worship.” Gary raised his eyebrows and grinned a little. “Are you ready to see what an angry King David sounds like?”

The group nodded and murmured affirmatives.

“Okay then.” Gary opened the worn Bible on his lap. “Let’s tackle Psalm 109, verses 1 through 16, tonight.”

Elizabeth pulled an extra Bible from the coffee table and slipped it into Sondra’s hands, grateful it was going to be used tonight.

“I want us to take turns reading a couple verses out loud. I’ll start by reading verses 1 through 5,” Gary said.

Do not keep silent, O God of my praise!

2 For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful have opened against me; They have spoken against me with a lying tongue.

3 They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause.

4 In return for my love they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer.

5 Thus they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love.

(Psalm 109:1–5)

Why Is David Angry?

Gary put down his Bible and looked up. “Why is David asking God not to be silent?”

Jeff studied the verse for a moment before speaking. “Well, clearly David is under attack. It says wicked people are lying and talking smack about him and...” he rechecked the verses. “They are fighting against him, undermining his leadership. And David wants revenge!”

Sondra kept her eyes fixed on her Bible, as if rereading the verses. In reality, the words swam before her. *What must everyone think of me?* she couldn't help wondering.

“Right, good,” Gary said. “Anything else there? Any indication as to who is doing this to David?”

“Well,” Sheila said, “David says he loves them.”

“Yes, good. So, if David loves these people, are they his friends, or are they his foes? And what difference does it make?”

Now Zach spoke. “If David loves them, that must mean they are friends. It means he has some history with them. He must have some good memories with them, but now, apparently, something has drastically changed. They've turned against him.”

“They've betrayed him,” Caitlyn added.

“Good, guys,” Gary said. “Obviously, it always hurts when someone attacks us. But what hurts more: being betrayed by an enemy, or by someone close to us?”

“Someone close to us,” almost everyone said. But Gary noticed that Sondra kept silent.

“Yes,” said Gary. “David's been betrayed by a friend. Unfortunately, betrayal is often a painful part of leadership. Dan Allender, in his powerful book on leadership, *Leading With A Limp* (p. 31), puts it like this: ‘If you lead, you will eventually serve with Judas or Peter . . . It is like looking at ten people who serve on a committee with you and wondering, Who will

take my words and soak them in kerosene and attempt to burn down my reputation?”

Zach nodded with knowing. “I can relate to that. I’m a young pastor, but already I’ve learned that I can’t make everyone happy. Dealing with disgruntled church members, and their hurtful words, is a real concern for pastors. I can feel some of David’s pain, there.”

“Yes,” Gary said. “So we can start to understand why David is really angry.”

Gary shifted in his seat. “Now, here’s a transition: he says he is giving himself over to prayer in verse 4.” He paused briefly to let that sink in. “Is turning to God to pray a good response?”

Tim nodded. “The best!”

“That really shows maturity,” Elizabeth added. “Most people in that situation would not pray as a first response.”

“No kidding,” Jeff chortled. “I know I wouldn’t!”

“You’re right,” Gary said. “Jeff, would you read the next verse, please, and everyone take turns reading two verses after that. Also, as we read through verses 6–16, let’s ask ourselves one simple question: Would we want David praying for us?”

Key Question: Would We Want David Praying for Us?

Jeff took a moment to find his place in his Bible and then read in a strong voice:

6 Set a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand
(Psalm 109:6)

Sheila picked up where her husband left off:

7 When he is judged, let him be found guilty, and let his prayer become
sin.

8 Let his days be few, and let another take his office.
(Psalm 109:7–8)

Tim read the next two verses, and as Tim read, Gary looked around to see the response. Most were staring intently at their Bibles, but Jeff soon started to chuckle.

9 Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.

10 Let his children continually be vagabonds, and beg; Let them seek their bread also from their desolate places.

(Psalm 109:9–10)

“Wow.” Tim finished his verses and turned to look at his wife and daughter. “He doesn’t stop! He goes after the whole family! Gary, I already know I don’t want David praying for me...well, maybe if the wife makes me mad!

“Care to continue?” he nudged Elizabeth.

She frowned at her husband. “Watch it, buddy. The wife may be a widow, but the man here is dead!” Then Elizabeth looked down calmly and continued.

11 Let the creditor seize all that he has, and let strangers plunder his labor.

12 Let there be none to extend mercy to him, Nor let there be any to favor his fatherless children. (Psalm 109:11–12)

Elizabeth shook her head and turned to Sondra, who picked up in a surprisingly strong voice:

13 Let his posterity (future family members) be cut off and in the generation following let their name be blotted Out.

14 Let the iniquity/sin of his fathers be remembered before the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out.

(Psalm 109:13–14)

Finally, Zach and Caitlyn read the last two verses.

15 Let them be continually before the Lord, That He may cut off the memory of them before the earth;

16 Because he did not remember to show mercy, But persecuted the poor and needy man, That he might even slay the broken in heart. (Psalm 109:15–16)

Gary let a space of silence fill the room after those final words.

Zach had been through the Bible study before and waited with Gary in amusement for a collective reaction. Jeff and Tim were chuckling. Sheila’s eyebrows arched in confusion. Caitlyn and Elizabeth looked at Gary expectantly. And Sondra, finally, for the first time, looked up and caught his gaze. Her eyes, once aimless and cloudy, now stared deep and fierce.

Gary held her gaze for just a moment before he blinked and said, “Okay, so what does everyone think? Remember, this is David, who was known to

be a ‘man after God’s own heart.’ What are some words to describe how he’s feeling here?”

“He’s really ticked off!” Jeff said. “Or can I use a more colorful word?” Sheila gave him a hard elbow. “Jeff!” she hissed. “No, you cannot!”

“Well, it’s true,” Sondra piped up, with no humor whatsoever. “I can think of some colorful words that describe David’s feelings as well.”

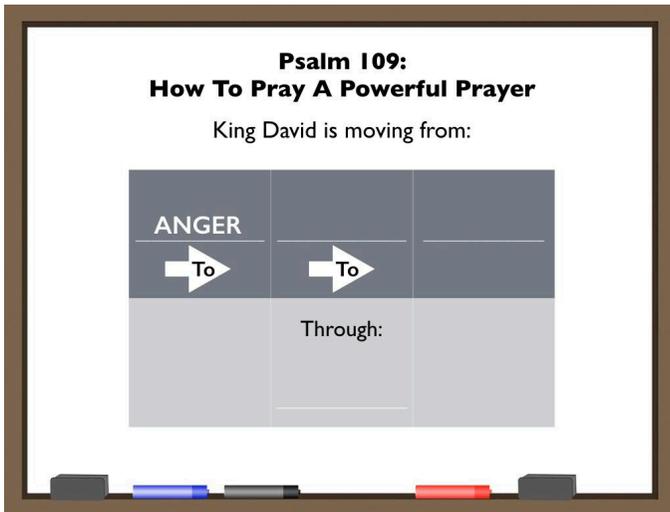
“He is definitely upset,” Zach agreed, with an encouraging smile.

“He wants revenge—in a big way. David wants this man, his wife, and his whole family to suffer as much as possible...in *every way possible!*”

Gary’s eyes twinkled at the lively discussion. “Are there any other words that come to mind?” he asked.

“Maybe ‘raging’ or ‘livid,’” said Tim. “David is raging mad.”

“Definitely right, to all those descriptions.” Gary rose and approached a whiteboard he had set up near his chair. “Let’s write down ‘anger’ here, just to sum things up, knowing that *rage, revenge, hate, and the desire to see someone else suffer* are all very much a part of it. What else do you notice? What are some specific ways David is handling his anger? Even when he’s ‘in prayer?’”



David’s Form of “Anger Management”

Sheila glanced around the group and, when no one spoke, said, “His words here are just terrible. I can hardly believe they’re in the Bible! There’s no way to justify this level of hostility to another person.”

“I see your point, Sheila,” Elizabeth said. “It’s kind of scary how hateful he sounds in this chapter. It says he wants his enemy’s wife to be a widow, and their children to be fatherless.” She glared at Tim. Tim put up his hands in mock defense.

Caitlyn piped up. “It also says he wants the widow and children to live in poverty, having their home destroyed and all they own taken away. He wants them to be reduced to begging—and for no one to give them any pity or kindness.”

Gary nodded. “Good. Good discussion, guys. And if all that were not enough, David wants entire generations of this man’s family, from *before* and after, to be completely cut off and forgotten by the world. You can’t get much more thorough than that!” Gary sat back down before asking, “Thoughts, anyone?”

Zach leaned forward. “My first thought is *how ironic* David’s words are. Just think of it: he’s complaining to God because this man *didn’t have mercy on him*...and yet, David is asking God *not to have any mercy on the man!*”

“That’s true, Zach,” Tim jumped in. “In a way, David has become just as vengeful as his enemy.”

Gary nodded. “Interesting, isn’t it? Can you see how anger blinds us?”

“Definitely,” Elizabeth mused.

“Any other thoughts or comments?” Gary asked.

“What does he mean by having generations cut off?” Sondra asked. “Especially the generations that came before this man?”

“Good question. Let’s look back at verses 13–15 again. Phrases like, ‘Let his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation,’ ‘May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord,’ ‘cut off the memory of them from the earth,’ and so on.

“In Hebrew culture, his words all mean variations of the same thing. David is asking God to make sure this family is lost forever, in every possible way. He wants God never to forgive them, never save them, and never redeem them. And he wants all human record of them to be erased, so that they have no worldly connections and no heritage or history to be remembered.”

“Wow,” Sondra said.

“Yeah.” Gary smiled wryly. “Basically, David wants the other guy—and his whole family— to suffer, so that he knows what kind of pain David is in.”

There was an awkward silence after that, so Gary continued: “It creates an interesting dynamic when we’ve suffered, but then want to inflict suffering. Actually, Dan Allender put it really well in his book *The Healing Path*.” Gary looked down at his notes and read the following quote:

We want relief from our pain. We want someone to care [for us] and comfort us, but we also want justice, vengeance. The dark desire to make our betrayer pay places us in the *strange position of being both victim and abuser*. (Dan Allender, *The Healing Path*, p. 64, emphasis added)

Sondra looked down at her hands. *I know how that feels*. Images of slashing Cory's tires or setting fire to his house flitted through her mind. She would never say it here, but her desire for revenge was about as potent as King David's.

Summary of Psalm 109:1–16

Gary cleared his throat. "Let's go back over some of the verses we've discussed tonight. Jeff, why don't you summarize verses 2 and 3 for us? Then Sheila, if you could do the same for verses 4 and 5, and Tim, verse 8, from what we read today? As you summarize, I'll write down your responses so we can review what we've learned about the man, about David's prayer for the man, and where Jesus can identify with David in this painful experience."

Jeff looked down at his Bible. "From verses 2 and 3, we see that this man and others made false accusations against David. They've lied about him for no reason."

"Thanks, Jeff," Gary said, writing down "false accusations, lying" on the board. "Sheila? What do your verses say?"

"These men were friends of David's, but then they turned on him, returning evil for good and hatred for friendship. And they want to take advantage of some situation where he is broken hearted, so they slay him or kill him."

Gary nodded solemnly. "In other words, betrayal at many different levels—from people David trusted." Sondra winced as Gary wrote "betrayal" on the board. "Alright, Tim. You're next. What does verse 8 tell us about this man?"

"Well, we know David definitely wants this guy to die. It also sounds like he has some sort of official leadership position."

"Good." Gary wrote "leader/official position" on the board. (see summary in column 1 on the next page)

What we know about this man and his family:	What David wants God to do to this man: (and family)	What Jesus has gone through to identify with David and us:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wicked, deceitful 2. Making false accusations and lying 3. Betrayal/hatred from someone David trusts and loves 4. Leader/official position with no mercy – seeking to slay/kill David when he is broken hearted 		

“And yes, David does want to see this man die because of all he’s done.” Gary paused from writing to address the group.

“Actually, it’s interesting to note that Psalm 109:8 is a fulfillment of prophecy, and is quoted in Acts 1:20, as part of Jesus suffering to identify with us. Just thought I’d throw that in.”

For it is written in the book of Psalms: “Let his dwelling place be desolate, and no one live in it;” and, “Let another take His office.” (Acts 1:20)

“Can we look at the verses again? What else does David want God to do to the man and his family?” Gary paused as the group reread the verses and called out answers. He wrote down the following in the second column: *(see summary in column 2 on the next page)*

What we know about this man and his family:	What David wants God to do to this man: (and family)	What Jesus has gone through to identify with David and us:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wicked, deceitful 2. Making false accusations and lying 3. Betrayal/hatred from someone David trusts and loves 4. Leader/official position with no mercy – seeking to slay/kill David when he is broken hearted 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Judge him in court 2. Make his prayer sin 3. Man dies–his family become beggars 4. Have no mercy for him or his family–with all the generations before and after him being lost forever 	

“As we look at this list, can we all agree that David’s words and desires here are not good? That it’s not good to essentially tell God that He should grab a few of the lightning bolts He has lying around and use this man and his wife and children for target practice?”

That brought out a few smiles and laughs.

“Right,” said Zach. “Not good at all. I think I’ll pass on having David pray for me, at least when he’s angry at me.”

“So, what are we to make of David’s words here?” Gary prodded.

“Well, it’s hard to know,” Sheila said. “Like I said earlier, it’s hard to justify David’s words, no matter what the other guy did. I mean, does God want us to pray this way when we’re angry?” She looked genuinely perplexed.

Does God Want Me to Respond Like David When I Am Angry?

The group mulled it over for a moment, and then Jeff said, “Could this be an example of the Old Testament ‘eye-for-an-eye’ theology of wanting justice? I agree that David’s words are kind of sociopathic, but it sounds like he has some really good reasons to ask for revenge. So...I don’t know...maybe this is telling us that sometimes it’s okay to *pray* for justice?”

“Hmm, there is definitely an element of Old Testament theology in this psalm,” Gary mused. He turned to the rest of the group. “It’s true, many people operated on that ‘eye-for-an-eye’ mentality back then. But the man

is *lying* about David. Is that the same as generations before and after being lost and cut off from salvation? No. It is way beyond an 'eye-for-an-eye' principle. But it raises the main question you guys have been driving at: If David's harsh prayer is inspired by the Holy Spirit and it was okay for *him* to respond this way *to God back then*, how should *we* respond when we are wronged and *we* want revenge?"

Jeff grinned and shrugged. "I suppose wielding my police badge and pointing my gun isn't the answer you're looking for?"

Gary smiled at the joke, as did others, but he kept quiet...as did everyone else.

Finally, Sondra sighed and said, "I really don't know. It feels natural to want to hurt someone back." After a long pause, she added, "But in my head, I know that's wrong. David's words seem wrong to me, especially since they're in a prayer!"

"David's words are not what most Christians would expect to read in Scripture," Gary agreed. "Let's go back to the point we all agreed on: David's words are not good. So let's look at it another way: what is good about David's anger?"