

## Devotional for March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021

By Brian Coles

The Peanuts cartoon created by Charles Schulz is familiar to most of us. In one cartoon panel Charlie Brown and Lucy are engaged in conversation.

Lucy's back is turned, her arms folded across her chest, and a look of disgust appears on her face. Charlie is pleading, as usual, for her to be tolerant and understanding.

With outstretched arms he says: "Lucy, you must be loving. This world really needs love. You have to let yourself love to make this world a better place in which to live!"

Lucy whirls around and screams [as Charlie does his famous back flip]: "Look, blockhead – the *world* I love. It's *people* I can't stand!"

We smile, not because this is an unrealistic cartoon, but because it is so very true. There are no problems like people problems, are there?

You can have a job that demands long hours and requires great effort; you can have financial difficulties, physical pain, a tight schedule, and long journeys to drive,

but these things are not the cause of our major battles. It's people, as Lucy said.

The psalm we're looking at today talks about living with people problems. It gives some very practical advice on how to respond to people problems.

The superscription is helpful for understanding the context of what follows.

The words that appear before the 1<sup>st</sup> verse in our bibles, and are the 1<sup>st</sup> verse in the Hebrew bible, are part of the original text.

In this 54<sup>th</sup> Psalm the superscription reads: *For the director of music. To be accompanied by stringed instruments.*

*A maskil of David. Written when the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, "Is not David hiding among us?"*

From this superscription we learn that David wrote this song. We also learn that it is a Maskil. Maskil means, “to give instruction or insight.”

All Maskil songs are designed to give “instruction or insight.” In this case, it’s giving instruction or insight on how to deal with people problems.

The historical setting appears here at the beginning – an event recorded in 1 Sam. 23. David is being hunted by King Saul.

His life is in danger. So, he tries to find a place of safety at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph [pronounced ‘Zeeph’].

This is Ziphite territory, and so far as he can tell, it’s a place where he can rest and sleep for a while.

But no rest is possible. The Ziphites turn against him and report his whereabouts to Saul. The chase was on again!

Just picture David. He is dirty, sweaty, hungry, thirsty, exhausted and no doubt discouraged. He has been attacked and let down by people.

He expresses himself in the lyrics of this song, Psalm 54.

<sup>1</sup> *Save me, O God, by your name;  
vindicate me by your might.*

<sup>2</sup> *Hear my prayer, O God;  
listen to the words of my mouth.*

In the Hebrew Bible, vs. 1&2 begin differently than our English version. Literally, they read: *O God, save me...! O God, hear my pray...!*

The rearrangement of the word order in the Hebrew language places greater emphasis on God. The emphasis is strengthened by the repetition of his name, “*O God... O God!*”

David gives us a perfect example of what to do when we find ourselves facing people problems. Pray first! Don't wait! Ask for his strength.

The Gnu [pronounced **new**] is an animal, which has a curious habit when being hunted or cornered.

It kneels on its forelegs and remains completely silent, as if in prayer. David was a human Gnu and so we should be!

David requests deliverance and vindication based on two things – God's name and God's power. V.1, *"Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might [or power]."*

God's presence and power are two things we cannot do without when enduring people-related problems.

In v.3 David specifies his problem. *"Arrogant foes are attacking me; ruthless people are trying to kill me - people without regard for God."*

Arrogant foes refers to the Ziphites. Ruthless people refers to Saul and his soldiers.

It may be that you, like David, are being spied upon or are falsely accused. It's a frightening thing to be falsely accused,

especially when the accusation against you is from one whom you once trusted as your friend!

Like Judas, who turned against Jesus, one who was your friend may have now turned against you.

If so, you have One who fully understands your experiences, who sympathizes with your feelings.

As the Hebrew writes says, in 4.14ff, *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*

<sup>15</sup> *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.*

<sup>16</sup> *Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

David states, in v.3 of Ps. 54, that the people out to get him were *“people without regard for God.”*

In other words, God was not in their thinking. Their suspicions were not prompted by the Lord, which brings up a very practical point.

When people turn against you, and you are in the right, it is somewhat like being kicked by a mule; it’s best to consider the source! You were kicked by a creature whose nature it is to kick.

So, when you’re wrongly treated, consider the source. They are people without regard for God.

V.3 concludes with “Selah,” that musical insignia meaning, “pause – think about this.” Think through these verses by making them personal to you.

I heard a little poem many years ago that sounds amusing but isn’t so funny when we experience it.

“To dwell above with saints we love, Oh, that will be glory! But to dwell below with saints we know, Well... that’s another story!”

Let me urge you to review the 54<sup>th</sup> psalm frequently until its words becomes second nature to you.

When we find ourselves facing people problems, pray first! Don't wait! Ask for his strength.

God's presence and power are two things we cannot do without when enduring people-related problems.

And let's declare war on those ugly habits we can cultivate against others – negative feelings, unforgiveness, resentment, grudges, jealousy, hatred, retaliation, gossip, criticism, and suspicion.

Leave this well-worn road and take the route of love. It is the answer to most people problems – a sincere, Spirit-empowered, undeserved love.