

# RETURN TO JOY

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## The Victim of Lying Lips Returns to Joy - Psalm 120

By Peter Eng



### The Victim of Lying Lips Returns to Joy (Psalm 120, NASB)

<sup>1</sup> *In my trouble I cried to the LORD,  
And He answered me.*

<sup>2</sup> *Deliver my soul, O LORD, from lying lips,  
From a deceitful tongue.*

It is really hard to be joyful when we are victims of “lying lips” and “a deceitful tongue.” The Psalmist is a child of God and he is suffering from this injury. Through this pain, he finds his way back to God and returns to the joy of the Lord.

The lie is a powerful tool. If a person lies convincingly enough, we often accept his words without even verifying them. We are just too lazy to check the facts, and we swallow the lie; hook, line and sinker.

No one likes to be the victim of gossip. At the same time, we love to listen to gossip; and forget that when we listen to gossip, we have created a victim through our passive gossip. If we do not listen, the other person has no audience and the victim is less of a victim. If we listen, we encourage the rumor mongering.

There are some who lie about others because they are simply liars. The great puzzle comes when ordinarily good people tell lies about others. That is difficult to comprehend. But it happens. They lie about you and hurt you deeply even when they do not appear to hate you. Why then do they lie? They lie because they love themselves more. And there are lots of people who love themselves (or somebody else) more than you.

Liars rarely show remorse. And if you confront them, they do not admit the truth. This is because the liar’s self-interest is more compelling than the pain you are suffering. For instance, someone sells you an item and lies about the item. He is not doing it to harm you. He is doing it to make a bigger profit. When you confront him, there is no reason for him to now turn around and tell you the truth (if he can avoid it). His original goal of unjust profit has not changed, and he now wants to avoid the punishment for that unjust profit. Instead of admission to the lie, you must expect a cover-up.

It was not too long ago that a milk supplier in China lied about its contents. The melamine they put in the

milk sickened thousands and killed babies. When they did this evil, it was not to harm people; they just wanted to make a bigger profit. But their lying actions resulted in terrible consequences for their victims.

When we see this applied to our life, we are conscious that lies told, not necessarily out of malice, but out of self-interest, can hurt us no less than those told in malice.

A co-worker can lie about you so he can get ahead. He can even justify it as self-preservation. Whatever the motivation, the harm is done. The arrow is loosed from the bow and finds its mark. The harm on the innocent can be devastating, and sometimes there is nothing you can do about the lie.

On 15 July 2008, Cindy Anthony called 9-1-1 to report that her grand-daughter Caylee had not been seen for 31 days, and that her daughter's car smelled as though something dead had been in there. Cindy had been asking her daughter Casey about Caylee, and Casey had been telling stories about why Caylee had not been seen. Finally, Casey admitted to her mother that she had not seen her daughter Caylee for weeks. That was when Cindy called 9-1-1.

As the investigation unfolded, it became apparent to everyone that Casey was a compulsive liar. The defense was vigorous, but it could not change the fact that Casey had told one lie after another. Given that situation, we might think that she would be convicted. The jury returned a "not guilty" verdict for murder, but recognized her lies and found her guilty of lying to the police. She was released on 17 July 2011, not guilty of murder, but placed on probation. On 23 August midnight 2012, she served her probation and now walks free.

There is no reason why Casey would want to harm Zenaida. What Casey wanted to do was to pin the blame of her missing daughter on someone else. She

found her victim in Zenaida. Casey told police that her two year old Caylee was placed in the care of her nanny, someone known as "Zanny the Nanny." Casey supplied basic information to the police identifying her as Zenaida Fernandez-Gonzales. Both women had visited an apartment building at the same time, and Zenaida had filled in her information on a card. Apparently, Casey used that information to mislead the police so as to deflect blame from herself.

Investigations showed that Casey was lying about Zenaida. She was trying to deflect blame for the missing child. Zenaida had no connection with Casey or Caylee other than the chance meeting. The investigators concluded there was no basis to think Zenaida had kidnapped and killed Caylee.

But when the allegations became public, Zenaida suffered grievously. Casey is shown to have lied repeatedly, but it did not matter with some people. Zenaida became the victim of Casey's lie.



In 2012, Zenaida filed a defamation suit against Casey. As of now, the lawsuit is in progress. We do not know if the American justice system will assign guilt correctly this time. But there is little doubt that Zenaida suffered terribly from Casey's accusations. Zenaida lost her job, lost her home, and her daughters were tormented in school.

To this day, some foolish people choose to believe the vivacious Casey against Zenaida, a plain looking Hispanic woman. Some choose neutrality under the false notion that it is the wisest thing to do. Neutrality is wrong when sides have to be taken. A two year old is dead, and somebody did it. It was not Zenaida, so there is no reason to pretend neutrality when it is clear she suffered from Casey's lies.



Zenaida continues to suffer when she brought the defamation suit. Some argue Zenaida has not really suffered because she made many public appearances to protest her innocence. Surely, they think, a victim will be languishing in some corner and not fight back. "Her fighting back shows she is not a victim," they say. That is, again, faulty reasoning. If she did not respond, would they not say it proves she is guilty?

The doormat mentality is not fundamentally Christian. When a Christian accepts wrongs done against him, it is to come out triumphant. When we allow ourselves to be trampled, it is not a virtue, but a lack of courage.

In addition to Casey deflecting blame on Zenaida as the nanny who kidnapped her daughter, Casey's defense was that Caylee drowned accidentally and Casey's bizarre cover-up was on account of her troubled childhood. Casey's defense would not even

suggest Zenaida killed Caylee. So why do some people still think Zenaida is responsible? Go figure!

To explain her bizarre behavior in covering the supposedly accidental drowning of Caylee, Casey's defense accused Casey's father of sexual abuse. Her father stood by silently as his own daughter laid these charges on him. He would not refute her because her lies gave her a better chance of winning her case. Despite Casey's record of lying, some will believe her accusations against her father. He will forever live with his daughter accusing him of sexual abuse. He is another victim of her self-interest.

The Psalmist is the victim of lying lips. Even though he is innocent of the charges brought against him, he suffers as a powerless victim. There is no doubt he is in deep trouble. His opening words are "*In my trouble I cried to the LORD.*"

There are two general possible Christian responses to lying lips. One is to assert truth because God is truth and injustice is an affront to God's character, and the other is to stay silent and ask God for deliverance, and perhaps quote the example of Christ. This psalm is not a treatise on how to respond under all situations. But it guides our hearts in a situation when we are victims of lies.

When all joy is fled from his life, the Psalmist points his own heart back to God and back to joy.

It is a sad reality that "myth is more potent than history" (Robert Fulghum). Once a rumor is released, a chain reaction is set in motion. It does not matter that the salacious rumor is myth, but it is more potent than the truth that tries to emerge. It will do as much damage as it wants, and there will be no shortage of mean people who believe or repeat a rumor, sometimes for no other reason than to appear they are in the know.

The Psalmist has no effective recourse to correct the lies said about him. So he brings his complaint to God. When we have the means to expose lies, we ought to do so. But when we are powerless to confront evil, we have the assurance that God will be our defense.

Injustice is contrary to God's holy character. When we pray for deliverance from the lying lips and the deceitful tongue, we can be confident it is a prayer he hears. So the Psalmist says, "And he answered me." We do not have the impression there was immediate deliverance, but we certainly see the immediate answer.

Spurgeon rightly points out, "It is of little use to appeal to our fellows on the matter of slander, for the more we stir in it the more it spreads; it is of no avail to appeal to the honour of the slanderers, for they have none, and the most piteous demands for justice will only increase their malignity and encourage them to fresh insult. As well plead with panthers and wolves as with black hearted traducers."

When God answers our prayer for deliverance against lying lips and a deceitful tongue, we are not to think it means he sends his angels to expose evil, strike the liar dead, and carry us on their shoulders in a victory parade. But he does answer our cry without delay. He speaks peace to us who go to him. He stills our troubled minds and tends to our wounded hearts.

Sometimes, God sends someone who believes us. Sometimes a person stands up for you and blunts the attacks. And painful though it may be, sometimes God shows us our friends through the pain of being a victim. Through these and other means, God answers our cry for help. We just cry out "Deliver my soul O LORD."

The word "soul" simply means "person" in most of the Psalms. It is not a cry to deliver the soul and let the body rot. This is a poetic way of saying, "Deliver me O LORD."

The cry is to "the LORD." (When we see all caps for "LORD," it means the original Hebrew name for God Y-hw-h / Yahweh is used). This is a reminder that God is the covenant keeping God. He is faithful. He is the God who is able to deliver.

Perhaps this song was written in exile in Babylon. Perhaps the Psalmist was referring to the Babylonians as those with lying lips. Perhaps the lying lips were other Jews who lived with him in Babylon, or among the returnees to Israel, or even those who were living in the land of Israel. We do not know. What we do know is that they were powerful. They out-manuevered the Psalmist; out-talked him; out-funded him; and they had the ears of the audience.

Are there times in your life when joy has fled because evil rumors flood your life? Regardless of who the liars are, and how influential they may be, God hears your cry and sees your plight.

When you are maligned, your hearts suffer a terrible wound. Even when you have means and mandate to refute evil, there is still pain. But that pain and anger is multiplied when you have no recourse. The first thing you ought to do when you are maligned is to ask God to deliver you and to return you to joy.

There is a tendency for all of us to forget God until we are truly desperate. We use human resources and human methods to respond to the lying lips and the deceitful tongue. There is no virtue in living with lies, but there is also no spiritual growth when we handle lies merely with the arm of flesh. That is what many Christians do, and we come to God only as a last resort.

The first line of the song tells us that the Psalmist is in trouble, and the immediate response to that trouble is, *"I cried to the Lord."*

<sup>3</sup> *What shall be given to you,  
and what more shall be done to you,  
You deceitful tongue?*

The Psalmist addresses the "deceitful tongue" as though it were a person. "What shall be given to you, and what more shall be done to you" is a Hebrew style that conveys a statement and follows it with an intensification. That is, "What punishment shall be given to you, and what more can be added to that punishment?" As much as the lies and rumors cause harm long after they are spoken, may the punishment befit the offense. That is, may God punish the liar and add to that punishment.

<sup>4</sup> *Sharp arrows of the warrior,  
With the burning coals of the broom tree.*

Two different images of justice are used. Let that justice be like "sharp arrows of the warrior." As much as the rumormongers have shot at, and pierced him, the Psalmist asks God to recompense the same to the evil doers.

The next image is that of burning charcoal. When others tell lies about us, it causes us to burn in frustration and anger. The broom tree is used for making a good hot-burning charcoal. So the Psalmist asks God to punish these liars so they suffer the burning as coal from the broom tree.

This is a prayer for justice; a plea to God that the ones who liar will suffer for the lie and will continue to suffer for it as long as the lie has a life. It is a cry for justice to be satisfied.

<sup>5</sup> *Woe is me, for I sojourn in Meshech,  
For I dwell among the tents of Kedar!*

Meshech is a place northeast of Israel (exact location uncertain), and Kedar is to the southwest. The song writer cannot live in both places at the same time. It is clear that this is figurative speech. While we know only the approximate geographic location of Meshech, we know its moral location. The people from Meshech lived in a distant land and did not know the LORD ([Isa 66:19](#), NASB); they were slave traders ([Ezek 27:13](#)); they were connected to death ([Ezek 32:18, 26](#)); and they were connected to Gog and Magog as enemies of God ([Ezek 38:2-3, 39:1](#)).

The location of Kedar is more certain. It is the ancient name for a tribe that lived in Arabia, descendants of Kedar, second son of Ishmael ([Gen 25:13](#)). However, we do not know the moral issues in Kedar except that the song writer calls it a woe to live there.

Simply put, the writer is in a bad spot. He is living among people who do not value truth. Instead, they support lying lips and the deceitful tongue. This is a very important point we must not miss. The writer is speaking as one who has no means to set right the lies told about him. It is even possible that he is not talking about living among the Gentiles, but among fellow Jews. Yet the way he is treated makes him feel as though he is living in Meshech and in Kedar.

The verse can also have the sense of "Woe to me, whether I sojourn near Meshech, / or dwell near the tents of Kedar" (Dahood). In this case, the Psalmist is saying that even if he were to move to remote Meshech or to remote Kedar, the poisonous lies said about him will follow him there.

This interpretation is very plausible. It flows well with the lament by the Psalmist. He is weeping over the reality that even though he tried to ignore the lies and tried not to respond in kind to these rumor mongers, they just will not leave him in peace.

This is even truer today. We live in a global village. Myth is so powerful it will travel oceans at the speed of an electronic byte to overtake us and wait for us at our destination. There is no escaping the lie. This problem has become so severe that people are making a business out of protecting reputation on the web. Yet, it is not an easy battle to fight. Laws and defamation lawsuits can only do so much. They may gag some people, but no method has yet been found to compel everyone to speak the truth.

*<sup>6</sup>Too long has my soul had its dwelling  
With those who hate peace.  
<sup>7</sup>I am for peace, but when I speak,  
They are for war.*

The Psalmist comes forward now as someone who is a lover of peace, and who speaks peace, but his enemies want war. How did the Psalmist get to the point when he is for peace despite his ongoing suffering?

This is what Jesus taught, saying, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matt 5:9).

Some recoil at this psalm because it seems to call for justice and does not seem to fit with the call for us to love our enemies.

There are paradoxes in the Bible because there are paradoxes in life.

The inspired Word of God is rarely a treatise of one thing or another. It is given to us to address our spiritual needs. When we are maligned, we have a natural need for justice. There is nothing unspiritual about wanting justice because God is just. Our innate desire for justice is a reflection of God's image in us.

But how can we ask for justice and at the same time, do good to those who abuse us? ([Matt 5:44](#); [Luke](#)

[6:27-28](#)). It is this paradox that seems irreconcilable to some. But this paradox is true in life application.

In sports medicine, cold and hot compresses are often used. This seems like a paradox. Why would you use a cold compress only to follow-up with a hot compress? You do it because the cold compress reduces swelling, and after the swelling is reduced, you use hot compress to stimulate circulation.

The human spirit is like the human body. We need both the cold and the hot compress. We need to have the liberty to call on God to pursue justice on our behalf because we have no means to do so. We must be allowed to cry out for justice. This prayer for justice is our victim-voice speaking to God. But what we observe is that this helpless victim did not choose the path of vengeance. He leaves the injustice with God.

It is a cry that says, "Lord, I am powerless to pursue justice, now I leave it with you." This is the release we need so we can move to the next step: to love our enemies and do good to those who abuse us.

When Jesus teaches us to love our enemies, he is asking us to fulfill the law of God. The law starts with:

*"Vengeance is Mine, and retribution,  
In due time their foot will slip;  
For the day of their calamity is near,  
And the impending things are hastening upon them"*  
(Deut. 32:35)

Our need for justice has to be satisfied. When we have the means to assert justice, we need to do so. But all too often, we do not have the means to demand justice in our imperfect world. So God tells us he is interested in our justice, and we can lodge a complaint with him and leave it with him. He will take up our cause.

Jesus then tells his disciples they must not stop there. There is one more thing the true child of God would do. He would love his enemies.

Some people walk through the need for justice quickly, and some walk through that path slowly. But it is a path we need to take before we can emerge on the other side.

Paul explains to us, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath *of God*, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Rom 12:19).

When we look at Jesus on the cross and the injustice he suffered for us, we find our motivation to forgive; and to love; and when our enemy is hungry, to feed him; and when our enemy is naked, to clothe him.

In Jesus Christ, we see the payment for justice satisfied and the love of God enabling us to let go of hurt done against us.

Therein lies our paradox, but therein lies our redemption. When our wounds are fresh and hurting, we call out to God for justice. When God comes to us in grace and heals our broken spirit, we learn to return good for evil.

There are Christians who have so thoroughly understood the surpassing grace of Christ on the cross that they find it easy to forgive. Others take the long road. In either case, we lay the injustice at God's feet, and then arise and do good to those who abuse us. That is when joy returns.

How can the child of God find joy in the midst of pain? How can the child of God find rest when there are those who spread lies about him?

There is no answer in this world. The answer is in the LORD himself. The peace and the justice the Psalmist longs for is one that can be found only when he

comes into the presence of the good, faithful, and covenant-keeping God. To return to joy, we need to return to God and place the injustices at his feet.

We who see the love of God poured out to us in Christ on the cross can never say we suffer greater injustice than Jesus. There is no grievance that we cannot place at the cross. There is no injustice so great that we cannot return to joy.



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