

Trusting God Through Deep Despair

Psalm 13

Sunday, June 1st, 2025

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Scripture

Psalm 13

[1] How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

[2] How long must I take counsel in my soul

and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

[3] Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;

light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,

[4] lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,”

lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

[5] But I have trusted in your steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

[6] I will sing to the LORD,

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Let's Pray

Introduction

As I was preparing Psalm 13 for today's sermon, one of the things that it caused me to do was to look back at everything that I've been through in my life. One of the things that I realized is the fact that my life has been fairly easy. As most of you know, I had heart surgery at age 9, but beyond that, I've lived a fairly pain-free midwestern life.

I graduated from high school, went to college, met my wife, got a couple of degrees, got hired after graduation, had a few kids, and I am now fortunate enough to do what I love.

I have lived a fairly blessed and easy life. But that also means that for most of my life, I hadn't experienced a lot of hardship, and I wasn't prepared to deal with the deep sadness, anxiety, and despair that comes when real tragedy strikes.

So when tragedy and hardship came, instead of bringing my grief, sadness, and anxiety to God, I simply tried to hide from it, which in turn had very negative effects on my life and my well-being.

This is where Psalm 13 has been a real help to me, and I believe it will be helpful for each one of us this morning.

This Psalm is considered a Lament psalm. Its author, David, is dealing with some very hard circumstances that have put him in a deep pit of despair.

And he is about to get very real about his feelings toward God and what he believes he needs from God. Now, for some of us, David's extreme reaction will seem a bit overblown, or we might begin to feel like he isn't trusting God.

But I want to make a case this morning that David's realness toward God is not only the right reaction, but it comes out of his deep faith in God's unfailing love.

And my hope is that this will be very instructive for us as we walk through either our current hardships or the ones to come.

That we will leave here believing that God loves us with an unending love, even in the darkest valley, and that we can come to him with our deepest hurts and our greatest needs, **because he promises that he hears us and will answer us.**

So let's start by looking at David's despair.

Cry out to God with deep despair.

Psalm 13:1-2

[1] How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

[2] How long must I take counsel in my soul

and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Illustration

The year was 2017, but I remember the call like it was yesterday. It was 3:00 in the morning and I was woken up by a phone call from my sister. So I picked up the phone, and through a tearful and shaky tone, I heard her say, Ry, I've got some bad news, dad is dead.

I have to say, there are times in your life when you are semi-prepared for the loss of a family member, and there are others where it hits you like a brick. I knew that for a long time, my dad wasn't in the best of health, but in no way was I ready to hear that news.

Now, for a lot of people, there would be an emotional response after hearing news like that. But, instead of having a flood of emotions, I went numb. And for the next few weeks, I operated like an emotionless machine as my brother, sister, and I worked through my dad's funeral and settled his affairs.

I knew it wasn't the right approach to handling my grief, but I assumed, once everything was over, that I would come to grips with the grief of that loss. But I didn't. I just stuffed it down, remained emotionless, and went back to work.

Then, about three months after his death, I woke up in the middle of the night, right around 3:00 am, as I endured one of the worst panic attacks of my life.

Now, I am sharing this story with you because I can imagine that I'm not alone in this kind of response. It's easy to believe that faithful Christians should be able to endure hardships and tragedies with a smile because God is on our side.

Or that it's good and right to get through it without an emotional response because somehow that proves our faith.

But the beauty of this "Lament" psalm and others like it is that it shows us what a real and faith-filled response to hardships looks like. **And it begins, not by hiding our emotions, but by truly bringing our hurt and our despair to God.**

Text

As we look at these first two verses, one of the first things to notice is the repeated phrase **"how long?"**

Now, unfortunately, we don't know exactly what David was going through, but this repeated phrase lets us know that he's been experiencing it for a while, and that it has brought with it a deep sense of **confusion, hurt, angst, and despair.**

Confusion and hurt are abounding for David because, from his perspective, God has forgotten about him and has hidden his face from him.

Now, to understand what that means, we need to understand that when scripture talks about God's face turning toward someone, it's a sign of blessing and favor. We can see this in the blessing of Numbers 6:24-25:

[24] The LORD bless you and keep you;

[25] the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

[26] the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

So for David, when he is asking God how long he will forget or hide his face, he is really saying, **"how long will you continue to take your favor and blessing away from me?"**

But there's more. Because he not only feels like God has left him, but he is seeing his **enemy (whoever that is)** exalted over him. It's as if God left David and then went to show favor to those who want to destroy him.

So it's safe to say that he feels utterly rejected and alone. Which is causing him to "take counsel" or "to struggle" within the very depths of his soul, as his heart is full of sorrow and anxiety.

Have you had moments like that? Where you felt like God left you? Can you relate to his deep struggle and sorrow?

If you can't, I want to point out a couple of things you might be thinking as we try to make sense of his deep despair.

One, you might be assuming that David's despair must be a result of his sin. However, we don't know that, so we shouldn't make that our default assumption. If we do, we will make the same mistake as Job's friends, who believed that his hardships were the result of sin.

But often that isn't the case.

Two, we might be thinking, **“David was a man who knew God deeply and intimately; shouldn't he know that God is with him even when it feels like he is absent?”**

Now, there will be a point where we eventually see a very real expression of David's trust in God. **However, we also need to realize that it is his deep faith in God that allows him to cry out in this way.**

Because David believes that God already knows his deepest hurts, and that God wants him to bring all of those hurts and burdens to him.

Psalm 139:1–2

[1] O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

***[2] You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.***

Psalm 55:22a

***[22] Cast your burden on the LORD,
and he will sustain you;***

Application

When I look back at how I responded to my dad's death in 2017, one of the things that has become clear to me is that I felt like I had to hold it all together. **I wasn't believing that I could truly cast all of my cares upon Jesus.**

So instead of crying out to him in trust, and instead of bringing my deep hurt, despair, and anxiety, I tried to push it down. I tried to forget about it and I tried to get through it believing that I could get over it on my own, instead of turning to Christ.

I was living with an unbelief in my heart that led to my first of many panic attacks instead of turning to the one and only one who says that he knows me and will sustain me.

So I want to encourage you in your distress and despair to get honest with God. Bring your hurt, confusion, and angst to him. Because he already knows what is going on, you can't hide it from him. And whether you realize it or not, he wants you to come and cast your cares upon him.

Because if we can't be honest and real with God, we will probably never get to the place where we're willing to seek his help as we walk through the deep waters of our hurt and despair.

This brings us to our second point for this morning.

Pray to God with a hope-filled expectation.

Psalm 13:3-4

***[3] Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,
[4] lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.***

Text

One of the things that I love about how this Psalm is written is the fact that there is a space between verses 2 and 3. Now, this may not seem like a big deal to most people, but the reason these spaces exist in the Psalms is to let us know that one thought is ending and another is beginning.

Now, we don't know how much time David took between writing verses 1-2 and 3-4, but we do know there eventually was a moment where David had to go from utter despair to prayer.

Where he went from telling God how he was feeling in his hurt to asking God to move in his circumstances.

Mini-Application

This is a really important transition for us to notice and to apply to our lives. When we are going through hard circumstances, it's really easy for us to stay in a place where we wallow in our despair, but never get to a place where we genuinely cry out to God for help.

Text

But David doesn't do this. Instead, he boldly comes to God and is very direct in his request. He says in verse 3: ***"Consider and answer me, O Lord, My God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death..."***

Here's the essence of what he's saying, *"I know it feels like you have turned away from me God, but I need you to bless me and answer me. I need your favor to return to me. That you would restore me spiritually and physically, because if you don't, I'm going to fade away and die."*

Now, in some ways, this seems really demanding of David, and it almost feels a little fatalistic, doesn't it?

Most of us would never think of saying to God, **“You need to answer me this way or else.”**

Instead, we would say something like, *“God, I ask that you would answer me, if it’s according to your will, but you can do whatever you like.”* Which is true. God will answer us according to his will, and he will do whatever he pleases.

But a lot of times, when we pray this way, we are hedging our bets so that we’re not disappointed if he doesn’t answer in the way we expect.

We are like the father in Mark 9 who wants Jesus to heal his son of a demon, but then says to him, *“If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”* To which Jesus emphatically replies, *“If I can!”*

It’s clear that this man was hedging his bets like we do. He wasn’t actually sure if Jesus, the Messiah who is fully God and fully man, could actually heal his son. So Jesus calls him out, and the man replies, *“I believe, help my unbelief.”*

But David didn’t hedge his bets. He went directly to God and boldly brought his requests.

And he was able to do this because he knew that he belonged to God and that God was for him, which is why he says, ***“O LORD, my God.”***

But he also came with such conviction and boldness because he was putting his hope in what he knew to be true about God. Look with me at the following verses, all of which are attributed to David:

Psalm 34:17

**[17] When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears
and delivers them out of all their troubles.**

Psalm 92:12-13

**[12] *The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.***

**[13] *They are planted in the house of the LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our God.***

Psalm 5:4-5

**[4] For you are not a God who delights in wickedness;
evil may not dwell with you.**

**[5] The boastful shall not stand before your eyes;
you hate all evildoers.**

David knew that God hears his people and delivers them out of their troubles, that he wants them to flourish, and that he doesn't delight in wickedness.

Therefore, he was able to bring his prayers with the hope-filled expectation that God would answer them, because David knows that he will always act in accordance with his character and his Word.

Application

Now, I wish I could say that the move from despair to prayer was an instantaneous one for me, but it wasn't. In fact, after my dad died, I struggled with various forms of anxiety for about 2-3 years until I finally made a concerted effort to get help.

For me, this involved spending a ton of time in prayer over this issue while also seeing a professional who could help me through some of the underlying issues of unbelief and fear that I was dealing with.

And the answer to what I was dealing with came down to two fundamental questions.

Do I believe that God is who he says he is? Do I believe that he is for me?

If you're dealing with really hard issues in your life and you are struggling to bring them to God, then there is a good chance that you are wrestling with one or both of these questions.

You are either struggling to believe that God is the faithful, loving, and powerful God that he says he is, or you are unsure if he will be faithful, loving, and powerful in your life.

Of course, we could read the first 4 verses and assume that David was struggling with these questions. And if we had a crystal ball and could see his inner thoughts at the time, maybe that would be true.

But I actually think that he was pretty clear about his answers to these questions, which is why he could bring both his despair and his prayers to God.

That he was the gracious and mighty God of the universe, and that he would hear and answer David in his time of need, not because he deserved it, **but because God loved him with a steadfast and unfailing love.**

Which brings us to our last point.

Trust in God's unfailing love.

Psalm 13:5-6

***[5] But I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.***

***[6] I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.***

Text

As we look at these final two verses, we need to recognize the fact that David, for much of his life, was someone who had experienced the blessing and favor of God. This is what he's getting at in verse 6 when he says, *"because he has dealt bountifully with me."*

David has experienced the goodness and the faithfulness of God in his life, and it is part of the reason why he now believes that God will bless him again.

Mini-application

This is true for all of us. As God's children, we each have a list of experiences and circumstances that we can point to where we have seen God be faithful to us.

And like David, scripture calls us to remember those things because they help us to trust that God will be faithful in the future.

Look with me at Psalm 77:11-15:

***[11] I will remember the deeds of the LORD;
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.***

***[12] I will ponder all your work,
and meditate on your mighty deeds.***

***[13] Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is great like our God?***

***[14] You are the God who works wonders;
you have made known your might among the peoples.***

***[15] You with your arm redeemed your people,
the children of Jacob and Joseph.***

The psalmist Asaph is remembering and meditating on God's past deeds, which gives him the confidence that God will be faithful and will redeem his people in the future.

Therefore, in times of trouble, we should look to God's past faithfulness as a way to help us trust him in our present circumstances.

Text

But even though scripture calls us to remember God's past faithfulness, that's not the main place that David is putting his trust. Because looking to the past can be helpful, but it can't give us, with any certainty, the assurance that God will help us in the present.

We can assume that he will. But the past, by itself, gives us no guarantee that God will act in the same way. Because we know that God works differently in different circumstances and situations.

So, how can we be certain that he will answer us and be faithful to us now like he was in the past?

For David, this certainty was found in God's steadfast and unfailing love.

This is the kind of love that is referred to as God's *hesed* or covenantal love. It's a love that God has for us as his people, apart from anything that we have done or will ever do.

This is the kind of love that Moses wrote about in Deuteronomy 7:7-8 when God told the Israelites why he chose them to be his people. As it says:

[7] It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, [8] but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

God in his goodness and mercy, redeemed the Israelites from slavery. But he didn't do it because they deserved it. Instead, he freely chose to love them, even though they were a small and weak people, and in so doing, he was fulfilling an oath that he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This is the steadfast and covenantal love that David is putting his hope in, and it gives him the confidence that God is going to work on his behalf even in his dire and desperate circumstances.

And it is this same covenantal love that God poured upon us through Christ. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2:4-7:

[4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Application

The reason that we are here this morning, to worship our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is because he has chosen to love us and to rescue us, despite us.

We didn't do anything to earn his love, and we have done nothing to earn the salvation and new life that he has freely bestowed upon us.

Which means that God is working on our behalf every single moment of every single day, not because we are doing anything to deserve his help, but rather, in love, he sent Christ to die for us, even when we were dead in our sins.

So you can bring your deepest despair, you can cry out to him in prayer, and like David, you can be confident that he hears you and will answer. **Because he has freely and fully chosen to love you and to make you his own forever.**

Now, does this mean that you're going to leave here this morning, and miraculously, your struggle to trust God in your hardships will be gone? No.

I wish I could stand up here and tell you that my struggle at times with worry and anxiety was completely over. But it isn't. I'm just being honest about that.

But what I can tell you, and what I try to remind myself of every single day, is that no matter what you're going through, no matter how strong or weak your faith feels, no matter how absent or present God feels, and no matter how much or how little you struggle.

God loves you and sent Christ to die for you and to redeem you. Therefore, he will always care for you, he will always hear you, and, **even when you can't see it**, he will always answer you as he works for your good.

Because, as scripture tells us, his steadfast and unfailing love will endure forever.

Let's pray.