

Psalm 13 • How long, O Lord?

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Psalm, chapter 13. It says: 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.*”
(ESV)

I have taught through this Psalm several times and I continue to find it such an amazing communication from David to the Lord on several different levels. But you will notice that it begins with the voice of desperation.

David begins this Psalm by saying, *“How long, O LORD?”* He is talking about how difficult his situation is. Then we get to the end of the Psalm, and he ends with a voice of praise, so what exactly is going on here?

The first couple of verses, you will notice, ask no fewer than 5 questions. And 6, if you count them a little bit differently, but they do a really good job of showing or revealing to us David's heart condition as he begins to pray here. He says, *“How long, O, LORD? Will you forget me forever?”* David feels forgotten by the Lord.

Now, here is a question we always have to ask ourselves: Was David forgotten by the Lord? No, he was not forgotten by the Lord. But did he feel forgotten by the Lord? Yeah, he did, and David wasn't afraid to communicate that to the Lord. This is the way I feel. He isn't necessarily saying that this is the situation. But he feels forgotten, and he feels like the Lord has hidden His face.

David furthermore feels like it has been going on forever, which elicits that question, *“How long?”* How long is this going to keep going? Now, we need to introduce the idea— and we are certainly not introducing it— but we need to go

back and review the idea that God does not forget His children. God cannot forget His children. He said so. Let me show you Isaiah, Chapter 49, on the screen. Goes like that. He says:

Isaiah 49:15 (NIV)

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you.

Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? (And then he goes on to say,) Though she may forget (in other words, in some extreme and extraordinary circumstances, although she may forget, yet, he says), I will not forget you.

Here is a promise from the Lord. God said to His people: It is the most unnatural thing in the world for a mother to forget her child. Now, we have seen things in the news where it can happen, so He even admits, though she may, though it is possible in an extreme and extraordinary situation for a mother to forget her children, He says, still, *“I will not forget you.”*

Next, he asks— look at verse 2 in your Bible: *“How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart?”* Now that is another interesting question. I don't think it is probably something you and I use. I don't think you probably use the phrase, *“take counsel in my soul.”* I don't, and I am assuming that you don't either.

Let's figure out what this means. What does it mean to take counsel in your soul? First of all, we realize that the soul is the seat of emotions and intellect. To take counsel is to receive advice. So what David is asking is, how long must I basically receive advice from my emotions and my own limited understanding?

Now, to be honest with you, there are a good many Christians who take advice from their emotions and their own intellect pretty much all the time. And so they know nothing different. But David was so unaccustomed to this sort of thing, he considered it unbearable to be constantly advised about my situation by my emotions. Boy, there is probably no more miserable experience in life than to be left alone with the voice of my emotions when I am going through a hard time. There are probably very few more miserable circumstances than when I'm sitting and counseling myself through my own intellect.

Because why? My intellect is incredibly short-sighted. It just doesn't have the ability to see from the perspective of God. And so what I'm doing is, I'm doing exactly what the Bible tells me not to do. I am leaning upon my own

understanding. I am told not to do that. I am told instead to trust in the Lord with all of my heart. (Proverbs 3:5)

David is finding himself in a situation where he is leaning on his own understanding. He is receiving counsel from his own intellect and his own emotions. And you know as well as I do, when we are in a tough spot and our emotions are ruling the roost, as it were, and calling the shots, we are going to be in a world of depression.

And we are going to constantly be telling ourselves about the worst case scenario. We never make it good for ourselves; we always make it the worst it can be. Interesting, isn't it, our human nature being what it is? And David says that this brings him sorrow. He says, "*How long?*" Let's read the verse again.

"²How long must I take counsel in my soul (in other words, receive advice from my emotions and intellect), and have sorrow in my heart all the day? (And then his last question is,) How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" The NIV reads, "*How long will my enemy triumph over me?"* David is feeling beaten down by the enemy, and he is crying out. He is asking God when his situation might change, when the deliverance of the Lord is going to happen.

Then in verses 3 and 4, David lays out his prayer request to God. He says in verse 3, "*Consider and answer me, O LORD, my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.*" And so here David expresses to God the seriousness of the matter, one in which he fears death might even result if the Lord doesn't intervene.

And this is one of those things where David is not giving God an ultimatum. He is simply explaining how desperate he feels. Lord, if You don't help me, I don't think I'm going to make it. And I don't know if you have ever been there where you have spoken those kinds of honest and sincere words to the Lord. I don't think I'm going to make it without You. But God is not afraid to hear those words from His children. David was a man after His own heart, and he just laid it out.

He laid it out to the Lord exactly the way he felt, and he said if you don't help me, I may die— or even worse. In verse 4, look what he goes on to say. And you might think, well, what's worse than dying? In David's mind, he says, "*Lest my enemies say, 'I have prevailed over him,' lest my foes rejoice, because I am shaken.*"

David's awareness of his circumstances, and how they might reflect on the Lord, was a big concern to him. He never wanted to see the Lord's goodness called into question because of his life. It's one thing when people call God's goodness into question because of other things. But David never wanted his life to be something that was used by detractors to speak ill of the grace and the protection of the Lord.

And so David cried out to God along those lines. Lord, I don't want this. I don't want my enemy to be able to gloat and say, we prevailed, and the Lord wasn't able to save David. I really wish more Christians today were concerned about how the Lord might be viewed by unbelievers because of their lives and the battles that they fight.

I wish more believers were concerned, because I believe it is the heart of the Lord for God's people to be concerned about that very thing. When the nation of Israel was going through the wilderness, and they turned their backs on the Lord so incredibly, God came to Moses and told him (Exodus 32), I'm going to wipe them out. I'm going to wipe them out, and I'll start over again with your seed, and we'll start a new nation.

Do you remember what Moses did? He pled with God and he said, What are the enemies of the Lord going to say? After that amazing deliverance that You performed in Egypt, bringing Your nation— all 2.5 million of them, give or take— out of Egypt in this incredible display of sovereign glory and divine power only to come out in the wilderness and kill them and slaughter them? What are people going to say? You know what they're going to say? They're going to say, You weren't strong enough. They were going to say, Your glory wasn't sufficient enough, and this is all going to reflect badly on You.

That is what Moses said, and I'm paraphrasing and putting it into a little more modern language, but if you read the words of Moses, that is the essence, that is the gist of how he argued with the Lord. And the Lord responded, and He said, I've heard your prayer, and you're concerned for my glory.

There were other times that people were concerned for the glory of God, and it was considered to be a powerful thing. And as I said before, I wish more Christians today were concerned. In other words, when they look at my life, do people find reason to scoff? Or do they find reason to say, Wow, your God is real. Your God must be real. Look what He has done in your life.

Now, keeping in mind how David started this psalm— and you saw how desperate it was— *“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?”* Check out

these last couple of verses, “*But I have trusted....*” Notice that is past tense as David begins to speak now here toward the end of this very short psalm. He says, “⁵ *But I have trusted in your steadfast love.*”

And it is as if David is saying, I have trusted You in the past, and there is no reason for me to stop trusting You now. “*I have trusted in your steadfast love; (so what is his conclusion?) my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.*” Now, the word salvation means deliverance, and David is expressing his determination to rejoice in the Lord even in the midst of his challenging circumstances.

He's saying, I'm choosing. I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart will rejoice in your deliverance.

But this is the man that said, How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? Look at this turnaround. “My heart will rejoice.” I want to show you what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. Philippians chapter 4, verse 4.

Philippians 4:4 (ESV)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

Now I want you to notice, it doesn't say there, Rejoice in your circumstances, does it? Because sometimes, frankly, we can't. Sometimes our circumstances are very challenging, and I'm just not really feeling like rejoicing in the midst of my circumstances, or for my circumstances, I should say. But there is always reason to rejoice in the Lord. “*Rejoice in the Lord always,*” Paul wrote.

Can I share a neat quote that I found for you on this basic subject? Look at this:

Christian joy is independent of our immediate circumstances. If it were dependent on our surroundings, then, indeed, it would be as uncertain as an unprotected candle burning on a gusty night. One moment the candle burns clear and steady, the next moment the blaze leaps to the very edge of the wick, and affords little or no light. But Christian joy has no relationship to the [ever changing disposition of] life, and therefore it is not the victim of the passing day. – Jowett

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Great quote. Very pretty words. Very difficult to live. Very difficult to live. But here is what you and I need to realize. If my inability to rejoice is so profound that I begin to give in to discouragement and depression and so forth, and so on, then I have just proved to you that I pretty much have my eyes on my situation—my circumstances—exclusively.

But if my eyes are on the Lord, there is always reason to rejoice. And that is what we are told: Rejoice in the Lord. And then David's final statement here, he says, *"I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me."*

Now the word bountifully means generously, or as the NIV simply puts it, He *"has been good to me."* But notice, David says, *"I will sing to the Lord."* And I find those words very important with the emphasis on the word "will," because I don't think he felt like singing to the Lord. I'll be honest with you. In fact, David doesn't say here, I feel like singing to the Lord. This is a man who just a few verses before is saying, *"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?"*

And so now when he begins to speak of singing to the Lord— given our understanding of his opening statements— I think it is fair to say that David didn't feel like singing to the Lord, but he chose to sing to the Lord because, as he said, *"He has dealt (generously or) bountifully with me."* And so David is looking back on his past, and he is saying, God has been faithful.

That doesn't mean there haven't been rough spots, but God brought me through. The Lord saw me through. Here I am. I'm not a mess somewhere. I'm sitting here. I'm hearing about the Word of the Lord. I'm walking with God. Look, God has brought me through these situations.

He has been faithful to me. He says here, I will sing to the Lord, for He has dealt generously with me. Now, it is very possible that you could be one of those individuals who does not feel like God has been generous to you. Sue and I were chatting about that just recently, about people who feel very strongly that the Lord has dealt them a very difficult hand.

Their focus on that hand is so pronounced that they have begun to engage bitterness and self-pity, which is a deep well, let me just say. Very deep well.

And maybe that is something that you, or someone that have experienced that difficulty to the point where you could say, I'm not really sure I could say with David, *"I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me."*

That's just not the word I think of when I think of how God has dealt with me. I just don't think of bountiful. Or generous. May I just say to you, if you have accepted Jesus Christ and His death on the cross, and as a result you have received Him as your Savior and what comes with that, which is total forgiveness of your sins, you have received the Holy Spirit and the promise of life everlasting, I need you to know something. The Lord has been very generous with you.

Regardless of what has happened or not happened in your life, the Lord has been very generous. The Lord has given you what you don't deserve. And I believe it is possible for each one of us to say, *"I will sing to the Lord for He has dealt bountifully with me."* And that is why.

But I want you to see again here, David's declaration or choice: I will sing to the Lord. Oh, those are such powerful words. It would be one thing if he started off this psalm saying, Lord, you've answered all my prayers. You've given me everything I've asked for. I'm living in the lap of luxury. Green fields and abundant this, and my family's all in great shape, and everybody loves each other, and there's just no problems. I will sing to the Lord for He has dealt bountifully with me. We could all relate to that at least. We could at least relate to that.

But for somebody to come from this perspective and this level of desperation and difficulty and then to end with, *"I will sing to the Lord,"* that one catches us off guard. And it reminds us just how easily we are— No, let me say this— how easily our determination to praise the Lord can slip away from us because of the circumstances of our life. Lord, I just don't feel like praising You. As if I'm withholding praise from Him, that'll show Him just how upset I really am with what He did or didn't do in my life. I'll just withhold praise. That's what I'll do.

As if it's going to affect Him. You guys realize if every single human being on earth ceased to praise the Lord or believe in God or pray to Him today, it would not change Him, or His circumstances, one iota. This idea that somehow God needs us is completely erroneous. Our God is 100-percent self-sufficient.

We need Him. We praise Him because He is worthy of praise. We praise Him because He is good, and because He is generous. And He has dealt bountifully with us. And I think that is an important thing to remember, when the music

comes on here or anywhere else, and you are together with other people in the Lord, and we begin to worship God. Where is our attention; where is our participation in that? Where are my emotions at a time like that?

Are my emotions ruling to the point where I say, Well— hands in my pocket— I'm just not feeling it. Just not feeling it. God, I know you understand. I'm just not feeling it here today, so I'm just going to stand here. I'll look at the screen. Look at the lyrics. Yeah. Okay. Cool. All right. Putting in my time.

Or how about: I will sing to the Lord. I don't feel like singing. I don't feel like praising. I don't feel like offering up a word of thanksgiving. But here is the question: Who is in charge of my life, and what is in charge of my life? And is it my emotions alone, or am I going to be led by the Spirit? To a lot of believers, this whole idea of being led by the Spirit is a foreign concept, because we have so long been led by our emotions.

Like we even read in the previous psalm, we have been counseled by our soul so long that the idea of being counseled and led by the Spirit is a completely foreign concept. We have to learn to say, No, to our emotions. Our emotions are a wonderful, glorious gift from God, but they were never meant to control our lives.

Yet we live in a culture that is constantly telling us to live by our emotions. If it feels good, do it. Or as the old song refrain, It can't be wrong if it feels so right. We grew up on this. For years. And we are hearing it in movies and TV shows and reading it in magazines and people talking to us, and the constancy of that preaching has just seeped into our very pores, and it has become a part of us, and we have to confess it.

We just have to confess it. Lord, I am captive to my feelings. I am a slave to my emotions. And when my emotions are down, I don't praise you because I don't feel like it. And when my emotions are up, oh, then I'll give you all kinds of praise because I feel good now. And I'm happy now. But, this idea of saying, no, I will not be governed by my emotions, is something that we need to get through our hearts.

It is Psalms like Psalm 13 that just smack us right in the face with this reminder. Yes, with your emotions cry out to the Lord just like David did: "*How long O LORD? Will you forget me forever?*" How long must I wrestle with these thoughts that come from my emotions and my intellect? How long am I going to be filled with sorrow because of these things? Fine, pour out your heart to the

Lord. But then when you get to the end of your prayer– and I'm preaching to myself just as much as you– let's bring it back to what is right.

I will rejoice in God, who is my salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for He has been good to me. He has blessed me, and so forth. Ah, such important reminders.