

What Do You Do When You Feel Like God Forgot?

Psalm 13

By Billy Dempsey

Let me get you to either turn over to the back side of your evening bulletin or open your copy of the scriptures to Psalm 13. That will be the text that we'll use this evening. And before we begin to read it, let's go again to the Lord in prayer.

Father, thank you that you know us and you know that we are made of dust. Thank you that you know our limitations as we try to understand your ways and understand the timing of your actions. Thank you for your patience with us. And, thank you for, in this portion of your Word, teaching us how to wait for you. Bless our attention to your Word. Open our hearts. Help us be teachable. Help us not be distracted. Make our hearts and our minds soft like Play-Doh in your hands to mold us after the image of Christ. Hear us as we make our prayer in his name, Amen.

From Psalm 13, let's read God's Word together:

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

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?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,

lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

But I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

All men are like grass and all their glory like the flower of the field. The grass

withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever.

How Long, O Lord?

We've all had occasion to wait for God. And, you know what? We're not done waiting for God. We're not done waiting for God and at times we will feel that God really has forgotten. What do we do when we feel like God has forgotten us or our loved one? What do we do when we feel like God has forgotten our pleas? We don't know what situation David faced here in the writing of Psalm 13. My guess is, and if you're familiar with the life of David you'll agree—David had more than one occasion to recite or to call out the “how longs” of Psalm 13. They could've been placed at any number of times in David's life. This psalm could be finding itself in any number of times in our prayers. What do we do when we feel like God has forgotten?

I think there are three things that David shows us about a response that we as God's people make in times like this. We find David questioning in the first couple of verses. We find David calling in verses 3 and 4. And, we find David concluding in verses 5 and 6. Let's talk about those three categories of response first of all.

1. David Questioning

We find him questioning. All those “how longs” of the first two verses. Four times the question is asked, “How long?” It's an intense anguish of heart that that question reveals. It's a deep desire for God's deliverance. It reveals a feeling that this trial has already lasted too long. Our ability to hang on is put to the test when a short term experience becomes a long-term pattern. We can handle a short-term experience we feel like. This is a bump in the road. But, sometimes a short-term bump in the road becomes a long-term pattern and we begin to wonder, “What is God doing? And why isn't God answering my prayers? Why isn't God helping me?”

David shows us the patience of God with our questions. Four times, “How long?” Spurgeon says that it's almost as you read the “how longs” it almost begins to sounds like a “howling.” Don't you feel like that sometimes? That you're no longer asking, “How long?” but you're literally howling for God's mercy, howling for God's grace, howling for his answer, howling for him to move. David, perhaps, felt like howling for God to do something. Seems like that the “how long” questions really kind of put the issue of God's delay almost in four different shapes. First of all, it would maybe be described as “how God's delay seems to be.” The first question, “How long, O Lord?” And, “O Lord” there, God's covenant name, dates David is trading on God's covenant promises. “Yahweh, how long, Yahweh? How long, Yahweh? Will you forget me forever? It seems as though God has forgotten me.” That's what David is saying. “It seems as though whatever my trouble is God has totally forgotten me and gone and busied himself

with other projects and other people and other needs and other events. And here I am pleading and waiting. God has forgotten.” You ever feel that way? You ever feel like you see God answering the prayers of friends and loved ones and other people and strangers and you want to say, “Wait a minute, I’ve been praying longer than they have! I’ve been in crisis longer than they have! My problems are worse than theirs! My family needs more than their’s does! Will you forget me?” That’s how it seems, doesn’t it? That’s how it seems to us; God has forgotten.

There’s a certain despair behind that. And that’s when we kind of need to tell ourselves the truth. Isaiah 49 is a great passage to have ready to hand to remind ourselves that it appears that God has forgotten, but here’s God’s attitude. Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me. The Lord has forgotten me.” And God’s response, verse 15, “Can a woman forget her nursing child that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb even these may forget yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands. Your walls are continually before me. Your builders make haste. Your destroyers...” Well, we won’t go there. Let me stop at the end of verse 16: “Your walls are continually before me.” We have to remind ourselves as David will have to remind himself it seems as though God has forgotten but he hasn’t. He’s always remembering. He’s delaying. He’s holding back, but he’s not forgetting.

God’s Delay: The Wait Itself

Another shape that the how long question gives to God’s delay may be would be God’s delay as it is. “How long,” verse 1, “will you hide your face from me?” That really is the reality it seems. That’s the biblical language we’ve seen in our study of the Aaronic blessing, “the Lord bless you and keep you,” that two times there the blessing of God is tied to his face. We’ve talked about that, that one of those references would be the face of God as his favor. The other reference, “may the Lord lift his countenance upon you,” God’s attentiveness, his attention. Both those parts of Aaron’s blessing or the blessing that God gave to Aaron to give to the people, God really giving the blessing of himself. His favor and his attentiveness and as God delays in David’s life, as God delays in your life and my life, it seems that both those things are gone. We don’t have, we don’t enjoy God’s favor. If we enjoyed God’s favor, surely he would help. God is withholding his favor in this area or in another area. We don’t have God’s attention. What we do, Psalm 121 tells us that “he that watches over Israel neither slumbers or sleeps”; he’s always watching, but he’s not extending to us the benefits of his attentiveness it seems to us. We’re lacking the benefit of his attentiveness. He’s watching. He knows what’s going on. The truth is, the big picture truth, is he’s doing great work as we wait. But, what it seems to be to us is God is withholding his attentiveness from us. He’s not answering our prayer. He’s not moving in response to our pleas. We’re waiting. We’re waiting. We’re waiting. We’d say we’re drying up. We’re about to blow away. How long will you hide your face from me?

God's Delay: Affecting Ourselves

Another shape that the “how long” question gives this notion of God’s delay—God’s delay as it affects ourselves within. Listen to what he says in verse 2: “How long shall I take counsel in my soul having sorrow in my heart all the day?” What does David do when God delays? What do you do when God delays? I know what I do! I get real busy on plan B. God is plan A. Okay, God is not coming through. I’ve got to pull together a plan B. What’s it going to be? How’s it going to work? What’s it going to look like? If God’s not going to help, by jimminies, I’m going to help myself. David shows us a perfect example. Go back and read 1 Samuel 27. We’ve been talking about this in our Tuesday Morning Bible study, our *Truth at Dawn* Bible study. David looking at the continued pursuit of Saul. Telling himself one day, “Saul is going to get me. The law of averages is going to run out for me. I’m not going to be able to stay a step ahead of him forever. I’m going to go hang out with the Philistines and Saul won’t pursue me there. David devises a plan. He takes council within himself. He devises a plan for his own rescue and it turns out to be a disaster because he’s not there long before he’s being pressed into the service of the King of Gath to fight the Israelites on his behalf. David’s plan was a way that seemed right to him, but the end, thereof, was the way of death. As you and I take counsel in our souls, we look for a plan B. God is delayed. God is stopping. God is waiting. God is inattentive. I put together a plan B as a way that seems right to me. But the end, thereof, is death. God will achieve my deliverance. I don’t have to deliver myself. I have to wait for him. I have to wait. Even though I wait with question. Even though I wait with grief. Even though I wait with yearning. Even though I wait and my eyes wear out looking for his relief and my voice grows hoarse crying, “How long, how long?” Better the wait than my plan B because my plan B will bring me sorrow all the day.

God's Delay: An Opportunity for our Foes

And finally, the “how long” question gives a shape to the delay of God in the answer of our prayers because it gives opportunity to our foes. Look at what David says: “How long will my enemy be exalted over me?” We watch, we watch. David watches as God delay creates opportunity for the exaltation of his enemies. As God delays in our case, don’t we see our enemies take opportunity to take advantage? Our ultimate enemy, the devil, who wanders around like a roaring lion looking for whom he may devour has us in his eyes as he sees God delay: “This one is tired of waiting. He’s easy pickin’s. And I can have him!” We watch as the enemy of our souls exalts himself and seems to be exalted over us and we say, “How long, Lord? How long until you answer me? How long until you move? How long until you respond? I watch my enemy gain ground in the situation that I’m so concerned about, in the life of the loved one, in my own heart I watch the enemy gain ground. I watch the enemy victorious. How long?” Those are good questions. And they’re in the scripture exactly for our benefit that we wait for God with questions.

We wait for God crying out how long. We wait for God yearning for his response and yearning to see his strong right arm. We wait for God not cynically, not questioningly. “We’ll see if he’ll move.” He will move! We wait for his time. David is waiting for his time. But, waiting longingly. Longingly. Not as a disinterested spectator. Not as a cynical bystander. Longingly. He’s engaged with God as he’s waiting for him. He’s engaged with God pouring out his soul, pouring out his impatience, pouring out his desire. You and I don’t need to wait and be disengaged. We wait and be fully engaged. Fully engaged. Engaged with God face to face almost, as it were. “God, how long? Father, how long?”

2. David Calling

His questioning becomes a call. He doesn’t just question. His question becomes a call. A call that’s pointed. I want you to notice how pointed verses 3 and 4 are. You can’t get really any more pointed than David is right here. Listen to what he says right here. He says, “Consider me. Consider and answer me, O Lord, my God. Light up my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemies say, ‘I have prevailed over him.’ Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. What’s he asking for when he says, “Consider and answer”? That Hebrew word embraces every interpretation from a glance to almost microscopic attention. What David is asking for is “show regard to me.” “Show regard to me. Pay attention to me. Pay attention. Hear my plea.” He’s asking God: “Look at me! Look at my need.” It’s pointed. It’s driven. “Answer me.” He’s not asking for information. He’s saying, “Show me regard. Do for me. Do for me.” He cannot do for himself. His plan B won’t work. He’s utterly dependent on Yahweh, on Yahweh. “O Lord, my God.” He’s utterly dependent. He’s embracing his covenant God, “*Yahweh Eloheanu*.” “You’re my God. I don’t have any other. There’s no one else I go to. There’s nowhere else I have. Consider. Show me regard. Pay attention to my cries and do for me. No one else can.” That’s what he’s asking for. That’s what he’s understanding.

A Resolve to Trust in God’s Power

He’s asking and, particularly, look at this business of “enlighten my eyes” or, as the ESV says, “Light up my eyes.” He’s asking—Spurgeon translates it this way, “Let the eye of faith be clear that I might see you.” Wow! Isn’t that what we need at the time of God’s delay? Isn’t that what we need at the time that he hangs back and seems not to move and, we would even say, seems not to care? As David says “seems to forget.” It’s the eye of faith. “Enlighten us. Give us eyes to see you and your work at these times.” Isn’t it, by the time that we’ve had several experience like this with God, haven’t we learned that as we look into the rearview mirror or look over our shoulders, that in the time of delay, in the time of waiting, in the time that didn’t seem like it would ever pass before God would really move and finally brought final disposition to the issues at hand—didn’t we

find that he was doing heart work? Didn't we find that he was doing something that was beyond our sight at the moment? And as we find him moving we find a reality. WE find ourselves convinced in new and fresh ways how much we need him, how worthy he is of our praise and our love and our adoration. Isn't he more dear to us as he concludes the work we've longed for him to do? See, that's what we're praying for. We're praying, "Light up our eyes. Let us see you. If we don't see you, it'll be as though we die. If we don't see you, we will sleep the sleep of death. We need you. I need you. And if I don't see you, if my eyes don't see you, if the eye of faith doesn't grasp you, doesn't behold you, doesn't see some evidence of your movement, I will sleep the sleep of death. I will die." We need him that badly and that's what David is saying. "I need you that badly." And that becomes his plea.

Asking for Present Deliverance

Also, as he calls out to God—also this business of the enemy comes into play. Look at verse 4: "My enemy saying, 'I have overcome him.' My adversaries rejoice when I am shaken." Who are David's enemies? David's enemies are the same as your enemies and my enemies. David's enemies are God's enemies because David fights the Lord's battles. In this great combat that this Psalm is describing there are enemies at work and they are God's enemies. They're our enemies. Which means, then, that the honor and the glory of God are at stake in our deliverance. The honor and the glory of God is at stake in David's deliverance. As Moses was entreating God not to destroy his people in the wilderness at the foot of Mount Sinai following their idolatry of the golden calf, that's exactly what Moses said: "Your enemies will make sport of you. Your enemies will ridicule you." You see, that's what David is saying here: "Your enemies, my enemies rejoice if you don't deliver me. Deliver me." So that's a pointed plea. He's not even saying, "Deliver me now." But he is saying this is what's at stake. Your enemies hate you and because I belong to you they hate me. Paul reminds us that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces in the heavenly places. Those enemies hate God and they hate us. And they pray for deliverance so that our adversaries, God's adversaries, won't have the opportunity to rejoice. The honor, the glory of God are tied to our deliverance and our salvation.

3. David Concluding

One more point, then we're done. I think verses 5 and 6 reveal a step in faith that we need to give careful attention. We need to give careful thought to what David is doing right here. Let me read these verses again. "But, I have trusted in your steadfast love." That's translated in other versions as "your loving-kindness." That is the Hebrew word *hesed*. That is the covenant, faithful, promise-keeping love with which God holds his people in the palm of his hand. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. "I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully

with me.” You know what David is doing there? He is concluding and I don’t mean he’s wrapping up. He is drawing a conclusion. He has believed God even in his questioning. He’s believing God because he’s going to God with his question, “How long?” He’s believing God because he’s going to God with his question, “How long?” He’s calling God because he believes God will answer him. And, here, he’s concluding. He’s drawing a conclusion that God will one more time hear him, respond to him in his own time. Why? Because “he has dealt bountifully with me.” You know what David is doing? He’s mining. He’s mining the truth of God that he knows and he’s mining his experience with God and the faithfulness with which God has dealt with him in the past. And he’s concluding, “I don’t know the time. I don’t know the manner. I don’t know the way or the place, but God will move.”

Trusting for Future Goodness

See, that’s the missing piece many times in our exercise of faith. At some point, we have to see the evidence of God’s truth in his word. We have to see the evidence of God’s faithful action in our past. And, we have to draw the conclusion, “God will move and I will wait. I will pray. I will call out ‘how long.’ I will ask him regularly, ‘Consider and answer me, O Lord my God.’ But, I will believe. I will quiet my soul and I will believe because he has promised and he has done exactly that.” I think that’s the closing. That’s the closing. That’s the closing of the gap.

I just, last week, went hiking with Ken Seawright. And Ken Seawright didn’t tell me he was going to do this, but we got to a certain point on the Appalachian Trail and we were at a concrete kind of post at the junction of trails and it showed mileage in different directions with way too much mileage in the way we had to go. Way too much. And he pulled off his pack and he said, “Take my picture.” And I thought, “Okay. And then you can take my picture.” So I took his picture. And, he said, “You know why you did that? Because this spot marks my 1000th mile hiking the Appalachian Trail.” And so we had a little moment there. We had a little bit of a celebration. And it became a moment of prayer in which Ken reflected on the past and the goodness and faithfulness of God in all those thousand miles and thanked him for the favors he’d already experienced, and looked to the future and asked God for more. That’s exactly what David is doing here. He’s reflecting on the goodness and faithfulness and bounty of God in the past. And, looking at this particular situation and saying, “God, I know that your steadfast love will meet me here in this need.” He’s concluding that God will be as good as his promises and his faithful action in the past. May it be so as we wait for God to do all his holy will. Let me pray for us.

Father, thank you for waiting and what we learn of you in waiting. Thank you for your patience with our pleas and your patience with our fears and your patience with our asking, “How long?” Thank you even for sanctifying that question and using it as a tool to draw us to yourself. Would you help us our father as we wait?

Would you help us call and call to you pointedly and regularly. Would you help us conclude, quieting our hearts, remembering your faithfulness in the past and remembering the promises of your word, trusting you to deal bountifully with us in your covenant faithfulness. Hear us as we make our prayer in Jesus' name, Amen.

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