

“How Long? Never!”**Psalm 13:1-6**

It is with unapologetic admission that I was caught up in the “Where’s Waldo?” fad of the late 1980’s. Yes, I scanned each page looking for the elusive character in the striped shirt and stocking cap. At one of the Red Cross donation sites they had pages from the book attached to the ceiling so you could occupy your time trying to find Waldo. I looked forward to that almost as much as I did the snacks they served after my donation.

People have spent a lot of time wondering where Waldo is on a page.

In **Psalm 13**, David is wondering where God is. He seems to be MIA – missing in action. David wonders about His absence or why He appears to be derelict in His duties.

Maybe you’ve been wondering yourself why God seems absent or distant. Neither the heading nor the text itself provide us with any indication regarding the occasion that prompted David to write this Psalm. Some scholars suggest that it was written while he was fleeing from Saul. Whatever trouble he was facing was significant enough to wonder where God was in his pain and anguish.

Maybe you’ve felt the same way and asked the same questions. Four times he asks ‘how long.’ Maybe you’re wondering that today because of something you are going through right now. Just maybe there will be a day yet to come in which you will have those same thoughts. Maybe you know someone who is asking where God is. Does He see me in my pain? If so, this psalm is for you and them. In **verses 1-2** David is perplexed about God’s absence. In **verses 3-4** he petitions God for an answer. But in **verses 5-6** he praises God Almighty.

With your Bibles opened to **Psalm 13**, let’s take a look at this text which moves us from fear to faith, from concern to confidence. Note with me David’s perplexity about God’s absence.

I. DAVID’S PERPLEXITY ABOUT GOD’S ABSENCE – vv. 1-2

Whatever the psalmist was going through, he was lamenting the anguish he was experiencing. The tone of his words indicates that he couldn’t take much more, that he was on the verge of despair, perhaps even thinking about giving in and giving up. His ability to endure or keep going was spent.

My college cross-country coach set a standard if we wanted to qualify to run nationals. We had to break 28 minutes for the 5 mile run. Every meet I was close but never quite broke that mark. He gave me one more shot to break the barrier that had eluded me all season. On my last attempt I qualified. I was excited that I could go but the two weeks leading up to nationals were some of the toughest training I along with two other runners endured. One particular practice we had to run 16 quarter mile repeats. We ran a quarter mile, checked our pulse and after a minute of rest ran the next quarter and so on. We ran them in four sets. The catch was each set was faster than the previous set. If you missed that time, you had to run it again. There were a few times I’d cross the line gasping for breath only to have to get ready and run the next quarter after our minute rest was up. There were times my energy was spent and I wondered if I could make the next quarter.

In **verse 1** we see David’s despair about God’s seeming absence from him.

A. David’s Despair About God’s Seeming Absence From Him – v. 1

That word ‘**forget**’ can also mean to ignore. David wants to know how long God will keep His head turned in the opposite direction paying no attention to his plight. **How long will God keep His ears covered? Is God just going to ignore him?**

This isn’t the only time David felt that way.

Psalm 27:9 “Do not hide Your face from me, do not turn Your servant away in anger.”

Psalm 30:6-7 “When I felt secure, I said, ‘I will never be shaken.’ O Lord, when You favored me, You made my mountain stand firm; but when You hid Your face, I was dismayed.”

Psalm 44:23-24 “Awake, O Lord! Why do You sleep? Rouse Yourself! Do not reject us forever.

Why do You hide Your face and forget our misery and oppression?”

Psalm 69:17 “Do not hide Your face from Your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble.”

Psalm 88:14 “Why, O Lord, do You reject me and hide Your face from me?”

Psalm 102:2 “Do not hide Your face from me when I am in distress. Turn Your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly.”

Psalm 143:7 “Answer me quickly, O Lord, my spirit fails. Do not hide Your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit.”

If we were honest, that could be us. We’ve all been there. We’ve all felt like God has dropped the ball and left us on our own, too busy or too unconcerned to care about our plight.

The Message puts it in a way that we can all identify with: **“I’ve carried this ton of trouble, lived with a stomach full of pain.”**

David was all tied up in knots both because of what he was going through right then, but also thinking that God wasn’t around. We have all been put in a situation where we have felt alone and abandoned by God. We cry out to Him for help and hope, and He seems silent.

I think that’s how Job must have felt at times as he endured days on end of anguish at the loss of his 10 children along with all his flocks and herds. Notice his anguish in **Job 3:1-26**.

Job had no way of knowing if there was an end in sight to his misery. For all he knew, this was the new normal for him. Up to that point, his life had been one of relative ease. Everything was coming up roses for him. Then one day he woke up not knowing that his biggest test was about to strip all that away. His soul was in despair. He even wondered why he had ever been born if the end of his days were going to be nothing but misery. One day life was an endless buffet of dessert delicacies and the next it was a garbage dump of moldy scraps. **Where’s God? Does He see? Does He care?**

Isaiah records that the Israelites felt the same way. **Isaiah 40:27 “Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?’”**

One of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament felt the same way. **I Kings 19:1-5a, 9-14**

Elijah had a rousing victory over the prophets of Baal, yet one threat by Queen Jezebel sent him running for his life, wondering why God seemed to have abandoned him in his hour of need.

When we feel alone and abandoned, we can become fearful, and that fear can lead to despair and anxiety. David felt alone, and wrestled with abandonment. It felt like a life-or-death situation. It felt overwhelming, like he couldn’t hold on much longer and he cried out “where are you God?”

Now, lest we become too hard on David, because we have all been there as well, we need to understand that asking the question “how long” is a familiar one in Scripture. And it’s a perfectly good question to ask, if your heart is right with God. Gerald Wilson writes: **“God is not offended by honest questions.”**

Remember that in **Revelation 6:10**, it was a question those who had been martyred asked the Lord. How long would it be before their murderers were brought to justice? So, if you believe that you are in a right relationship with God, ask the question. But then wait patiently for an answer, don’t keep pressing. Remember all the promises in Scripture that remind us God is with us and will never leave or forsake us.

Someone made a good point when he wrote **“don’t deny your feelings, but don’t let them rule you.”**

David kept knocking on heaven’s door that sounded like one big echo. To him, it seemed like no one was home. He kept dialing the number but only got a dial tone or a busy signal.

Maybe you feel like God has withdrawn from you. Looking back at your past, you may feel unworthy because of something you did in your past. You may think that what you did disqualifies you from God wanting anything to do with you and so you feel alone that God has left you. How untrue that is.

Some people who wonder if God has abandoned them during a time of crisis have come to the erroneous conclusion that God must not exist and they're left on their own to navigate their crisis.

And let's keep in mind that honest questions can quickly and easily progress into a complaining heart that leads to bitterness, resentment, and anger toward God who has repeatedly told us to take courage and not be anxious because He is with us. And yet here we are discouraged and worried because it seems that God hasn't kept His promise.

I don't hear Steve March talk much about reading Shakespeare or Keats or Browning. He isn't prone to quote much poetry. But he has mentioned that his favorite poem is Footprints. It was written in 1936 by Mary Stevenson at the age of 14.

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.

Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky.

In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand.

Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was only one set of footprints.

This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints.

So I said to the Lord,
"You promised me Lord,
that if I followed you,
you would walk with me always.
But I have noticed that during
the most trying periods of my life
there have only been one
set of footprints in the sand.
Why, when I needed you most,
you have not been there for me?"

The Lord replied,
"The times when you have
seen only one set of footprints,
is when I carried you."

What a great reminder that when we are tempted to be like David, filled with despair about God's seeming absence as we go through a trial, especially

one that just seems to never end, that God is the one carrying us. We may seem alone, but we are not.

But it wasn't just about God's seeming absence that left David in despair, he was also in despair over the enemies' scathing amusement over him.

B. David's Despair About the Enemies' Scathing Amusement Over Him – v. 2

In other words, David had trusted God to deliver him, but felt his cries to God weren't being heard, and so his enemies were laughing at him.

No one likes to be laughed at, especially when you're going through a tough time. It only adds insult to injury. It can feel like the whole world is looking at you and laughing. It can get to the point where you don't want to go out in public for fear people will whisper "there goes that dreamer who thinks God's going to help him. What a pie in the sky idea. Even if there is a God, God doesn't even care about him."

The Message reads "**Long enough my arrogant enemies have looked down their noses at me.**"

Perhaps that's how Jesus felt at His crucifixion, wondering out loud why God had forsaken Him. Given the taunting of the crowds, we can imagine that some must have heard His cry "**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?**" They may have mocked Him and responded with something like "God has forsaken you because you are guilty of sin and cursed for being hanged on a tree. You don't deserve God's help."

It's one thing to feel abandoned by God and another thing to feel the sting of words by those who throw it in your face. We can even feel like evil is winning. Mocking laughter can increase the pain of feeling forsaken.

Matthew Henry notes that "**It is a common temptation when trouble lasts long, to think it will last always; despondency then turns into despair; and those that have long been without joy begin, at last, to be without hope.**"

Is that how you feel when your trouble seems to linger, and God's answer seems long in coming?

Remember that it's okay to ask how long as long as we're not asking with resentment or bitterness or anger. But where we see a sense of hopelessness in **vs. 1-2, vs. 3-4** reveal some hope that David felt as we take a look at his petition to God for an answer.

II. DAVID'S PETITION TO GOD FOR AN ANSWER – vv. 3-4

I see two things about his petition.

In **verse 3** we see *his petition for God's deliverance of him*.

In **verse 4** we see *his petition from the enemy delighting over him*.

For David to ask God to consider and answer is like asking God to relieve him of his circumstances. That he wants God to **"give light to his eyes"** means he wants God to restore him.

In **Psalm 23** as the writer looks at God as his shepherd, he understands the care he is given and how the shepherd has his best interest at heart. The care given by the shepherd restores his soul. He is revived and his spirit refreshed and rested.

Psalm 19:7 "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul."

Jeremiah 31:25 "I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint."

Exodus 33:14 "The Lord replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'"

Matthew 11:28 "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

The psalmist wants his spirits to be refreshed, his soul to be at rest and he knows that what he needs can only come from the Lord. Maybe you need your soul to be refreshed, but you can't get past the how long. Remember that question Israel asked of God back in **Isaiah 40:27? "Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?'"**

Listen to God's response to their question and be refreshed in our times of despair.

Isaiah 40:28-31

John Phillips writes **"Man's extremity is God's opportunity. When we are at our wit's end, without resources, at a loss for a way, perplexed and desperate – that is usually when we begin to see God work. But before He does anything about our situation, He wants to do something about ourselves, and that is where we begin to hedge. We want God to deal with our complications; He wants to develop our character. We want Him to change our circumstances; He wants to change our character."**

Shortly after their deliverance from bondage, God wanted to teach the Israelites to completely trust Him. God had Moses lead them to a place where they were completely blocked in. The Red Sea was in front of them, and the Egyptian army was behind them. They began to despair because there was no way out of that impossible situation. Moses told them to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. God took a seemingly impossible situation and showed them how important it is to trust Him.

Now, God may not always deliver you from your trials and troubles, but He will be with you in your storms. When you get to heaven, just ask Daniel what it was like to spend the night in the lions' den, or ask Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, what it was like to walk around in a fiery furnace. But then also ask those who were martyred for their faith what it was like to know they were about to die yet be at peace knowing that God hadn't abandoned them even when facing the fire or the noose.

As we learned from last week, the names of God David uses here refer to Him as a covenant God, a God who never alters His promises. So when He says He will never leave you or forsake you, you can be assured, guaranteed that His promise is just as valid today as it was yesterday and will be tomorrow. He is Jehovah, the covenant, promise keeping God. He is Elohim, the Almighty God whose hand is not too short to save. Trust Him without fear.

David is seeking God's presence in trouble that will result in some action on God's part to deliver him. David wanted to understand how long God would turn away from him because his inward struggle had brought daily sorrow. He's honest with God by

telling Him that he isn't certain how much longer he could hold off the taunting of the enemy.

It is in those moments that we ask God to give light to our eyes. It's a way of saying **"Let the eye of my faith be clear, that I may see my God in the dark."**

As the father who came to Jesus asking Him to heal his son stricken by an evil spirit, let our response be the same: **"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."** (Mark 9:24) Our prayer for faith could be in the chorus we sing:

Open the eyes of my heart Lord
Open the eyes of my heart
I want to see you
I want to see you

David began his psalm in despair, and he ended in delight. He has moved from fear to faith, from sorrow to song. In **verses 5-6** we see David's praise of God Almighty.

III. DAVID'S PRAISE OF GOD ALMIGHTY – vv. 5-6

When we are in the middle of a trial, it can be difficult to wait on God. But remember, God is never in a hurry. He has some reason for our need to wait.

Psalm 40:1-4a "I waited patiently for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord. Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust."

Psalm 27:14 "Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

Psalm 25:3 "Indeed, none who wait for You shall be put to shame."

In **verse 5**, we see David's praise about God's benevolence.

A. David's Praise About God's Benevolence – v. 5

When we consider how he started the psalm asking

how long God would forget him, how long God would hide His face from him, to **verse 5** David responds in confident trust.

Will God hide His face forever? Never!

Will my heart continue to be sorrowful? Never!

Will my enemies continue to gloat over me? Never!

David trusted in God's unfailing, unchanging, unending love. **Lamentations 3:22-23** reminds us that God's benevolent love is great so that our hardships don't consume us because of His mercy and great faithfulness. And in that mercy which God has for him, David gives God praise. He has moved from feeling powerless to giving praise, from feelings of abandonment to feelings of adoration.

When we are in despair over wondering if God has possibly forgotten us, remember the words of David when he wrote **"My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me. Let Your face shine on Your servant; save me in Your unfailing love."** (Psalm 31:15-16)

From the Message we read **"I've thrown myself headlong into your arms – I'm celebrating your rescue."**

Do you have confident trust that all you're going through right now is in God's hands? "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not in your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

I have told you before how much my Mom loved music. Sometimes she would just sit down and play a few hymns. At other times she would hum or sing some song. Among her collection of sheet music, was an old ballad, a sailor song from 1897 titled "Asleep in the Deep."

Stormy the night and the waves roll high,
Bravely the ship doth ride,
Hark! while the lighthouse bell's solemn cry
Rings o'er the sullen tide.

There on the deck see two lovers stand,
Heart to heart beating, and hand to hand;
Tho' death be near, she knows no fear
While at her side is the one ever dear.

Never forget that God won't let go of your hand.
 Never forget that God has etched your name in the palm of His hand. You are forever secure in His grip.
 Never forget that He is right there by your side. You are too dear to Him to ever let you go.

Warren Wiersbe writes that **“God’s people live on promises, and those promises are as unchanging as the character of God...relying on God leads to rejoicing in God.”**

Hope in God’s unfailing love.
 Sing because of His salvation.
 He is committed to His covenant love with you.
 Spurgeon wrote **“Sorrows remembered present joy.”**
 While Matthew Henry responds by noting that **“God’s mercy is the support of [David’s] faith.”**
Romans 15:13 “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

I Peter 1:8-9 “Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your soul.”

Can we count it all joy when we fall into all kinds of trials knowing that our faith develops perseverance which, when we allow the trials to do their work, matures us? **(James 1:2-4)**

Can we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that it produces perseverance, character and hope which does not disappoint knowing that God has poured out His love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit?
(Romans 5:3-5)

How often am I like the disciples, who feared the storm even though Jesus was with them in the boat?
 Can I praise Him in the storm, or do I let the faith I’m standing in disappear?

When our circumstances want to drive us to despair, can I be like David and come to the conclusion that I can trust in God’s unfailing love and let my heart sing His praise?

David has one final thought from **verse 6**.
 He praises God about His bountifulness.

B. David’s Praise About God’s Bountifulness – v. 6

The Message: **“I’m singing at the top of my lungs, I’m so full of answered prayers.”**

David reminds himself of the goodness of God. His circumstances hadn’t changed, but God had changed David’s perspective. David took his eyes off his big problems and put them on a big God. David didn’t look at the size of Goliath, David looked at the size of his God. When we do that, our heart will be filled with praise, because we know that victory belongs to the Lord. He is with us even in the shadow of death.

Gerald Wilson writes that **“God is still God despite our inability to fully comprehend our suffering.”**

Too many people who feel that God has abandoned them turn around and abandon God. Whatever was happening to David had not driven David from God as his refuge and stronghold. It’s a lesson for us to cling to faith and have confidence in God. As I remind you from time to time *“God’s silence does not mean His absence.”* Keep this in mind the next time you are filled with despair and wonder if God has forgotten you. This comes from the pen of Charles Spurgeon: **“A hidden face is no sign of a forgetful heart.”**

Isaiah 49:14 “But Zion said, ‘the Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.’ ‘Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has born? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands; your walls are ever before Me.’”

In those times of desperation let us **“sing to the Lord, for He has been good to us.”**

In a song written by Gary Paxton, he reminds us that God **“was there all the time.”**

How long will God forget us? Never!