

DEVOTION IN THE PSALMS

February 13, 2022 | *Trusting God When All Seems Lost*

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Why does the Bible contain laments?

Read Psalm 13.

Pray this lesson will help you learn how to lament well.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

We must trust in God's faithfulness even during times of lamentation.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Strengthen your faith now to prepare yourself to handle times that will be challenging to your faith.

MEDITATE

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1).

GETTING STARTED

+This section considers why this psalm ends in hope rather than remain in lament.

🗨️: *Why do schools and businesses conduct fire drills?*

Q: *In what areas of life do you “prepare for the worst and hope for the best”?*

Several years ago, the company I work for decided all employees should undergo active shooter training. At the time, I worked at a desk in the lobby of the building, and the trainer identified my post as a likely first contact position. He gave everyone who worked at that post detailed instructions on what to do should the situation ever arise so we would be protected as much as possible and could alert others to the threat. Everyone at the company was instructed on what to do in this scenario and how best to help law enforcement officers when they arrived on the scene. I pray I never have to put those instructions into action, but I am incredibly thankful to have been prepared for what to do if it happens.

In Psalm 13, the psalmist is faced with a situation he hoped never to encounter. His faith is being challenged, and it seemed as though God has abandoned him. But he is prepared. When adversity arose, he drew upon what he knew to be true about God, and his faith is strong enough to preserve him through the horrendous challenges he faces. His preparation did not keep the trial from coming, but he knew what to do when the situation arose.

Q: *How can you prepare yourself to face spiritual challenges?*

Q: *How can trials be opportunities to build your faith?*

APPLICATION POINT – Everyone endures trials in life. It does not matter if you are rich or poor, young or old, confident or self-conscious, saved or unsaved. Christians understand that the trials we face are also trials of faith. Will we persevere during times when it is difficult to maintain our faith in God? The best thing you can do is to strengthen your faith now so you are prepared when trials come. For faithful Christians, trials are times when they can build upon their faith, but it is impossible to build in difficult times if the foundation is missing. The inevitability of trials is one reason that practicing spiritual disciplines is important. When we seek consistent spiritual growth through following spiritual disciplines, we entrench the faith we need to draw closer to God during trials, as the psalmist does in Psalm 13.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+A German Old Testament scholar, Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890), compared Psalm 13 to throwing a rock into a pond. The waves are strongest at the epicenter, but they soon smooth out across the rest of the pond. We see doubt and lament in control at the beginning of Psalm 13, but as the psalm progresses, we see the psalmist’s demeanor smooth out as he reflects on God.

1. HAS GOD FORGOTTEN ME?
2. HOW CAN GOD RESCUE ME?
3. HOW IS GOD SO GOOD TO ME?

GOING DEEPER

+This section will move through each stanza of Psalm 13 and draw lessons we can learn from this lament.

1. HAS GOD FORGOTTEN ME?

PSALM 13:1-2

Q: How would you describe the psalmist’s mood in verses 1-2?

Q: How does he create this mood?

At the beginning of Psalm 13, we find the psalmist at the height of his despair. His words evoke almost a sense of panic. As with most psalms, the specifics of the situation are left for the reader to imagine, but what he does express is the feeling of being abandoned by God. The language found in verse 1 is challenging to understand theologically, but once Hebrew idioms are understood, they underline the sense of neglect the psalmist feels. He questions whether God has forgotten him, but if God is all-knowing (Psalm 147:5; 1 John 3:20), then his assertion is impossible. At another point in the Psalms, David, the author of this psalm, acknowledges that God knows everything about him before even he himself knows (Psalm 139:1–4). So the implied assertion that God has forgotten him

should not be understood literally. The same should be understood for the reference to God hiding His face. This is anthropomorphic language intended to communicate a point different from the literal meaning of the words. We need not be overly specific concerning the psalmist's precise meaning, but the general idea is that he feels God has withheld His help in the situation. Such abandonment in a time of need would lead any of us to feel the despair expressed by the psalmist in verse 1.

Q: *Is it appropriate for Christians to lament?*

Q: *How does the psalmist limit his lament when he addresses God?*

APPLICATION POINT – In Philippians 4:4–6, Paul states, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” Is Paul prohibiting Christians from expressing the kind of lament we see in Psalm 13? Probably not. Even Paul expressed feelings of deep-seated anguish at times (Romans 9:2). If this is the case, then how can Christians lament in a manner consistent with Philippians 4:4–6? We should follow the example set by Psalm 13. Although the psalmist feels deep despair, notice that he tempers his accusations by voicing them as questions. He does feel despair, but he is careful not to let his despair spiral out of control. This is something Christians must keep in mind when we are suffering through trials. It is good to acknowledge loss and hurt, but we must do it in a way that also acknowledges God's holiness and Jesus's reign over all things.

Q: *Who are the characters introduced in verses 1–2?*

Q: *What is the role of the enemy in this psalm?*

Although the nature of the psalmist's crisis is not obvious, the cast of characters he introduces is instructive. In verse 2, the psalmist introduces his enemy into the equation. We are not sure of the extent to which the enemy may have been involved in the origin of this situation, but his glee at the thought of the psalmist's suffering only makes things worse. The psalmist begins, however, by addressing God. He recognizes that his situation can ultimately be traced back to God, regardless of whether He was an active or passive participant. The enemy's role is always secondary.

Q: *How is the psalmist's order instructive for how we view our own trials and struggles?*

Q: *How does acknowledging God's providence limit the animosity we feel toward others, even when they are the direct cause of the struggles we face?*

APPLICATION POINT – As is obvious throughout the Psalms, trials leading to laments are an inevitable part of life. No matter how well you protect yourself, you will eventually have to deal with loss and suffering in some form. For most of us, struggles are a daily reality. Something somewhere is not going the way we would like. Our struggles can often be traced directly to a specific set of circumstances or a specific individual, such as the psalmist's enemy. For us to lament well, it is important to acknowledge God's providence over all of life, as the psalmist implicitly does. No matter how unforeseen to us, God is not taken by surprise by anything we struggle with. No matter how threatening the situation is, nothing is beyond His power to intervene. When we suffer trials that lead us to lamentation, we must first begin with God, as the psalmist does. We will only be able to process our lament when we fully appreciate our struggle in relationship to God and all His attributes. This provides the framework for how to lament well and how to sort out the various feelings we encounter during seasons of lament. Beginning with God also gives clarity to instances when our lament is caused by another person. If someone sins against you, that person has also sinned against God. The pain you feel is part of the greater pain God feels at the presence of sin in our world. The other person needs to be reconciled with you, but more importantly, he or she needs to be reconciled with God.

2. HOW CAN GOD RESCUE ME?

■ PSALM 13:3-4

Q: *What commonalities do you see between these verses and the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:24-26?*

Q: *How do the psalmist's requests counteract his words of despair in verse 1?*

Because the psalmist rightly orders his lament by beginning with God, he can then look to God when seeking a resolution to the challenge he faces. The psalmist has a threefold petition for God, which bears multiple

connections with the Aaronic blessing from Numbers 6:24–26. He pleads for God to consider or look upon him. For God to look upon an individual is a sign of His grace. He needs to know that God is still capable of showing him grace. His plea for an answer means he wants God to intervene in the situation for his favor and bring hope where there has only been despair. The request for God to light up his eyes means the psalmist is asking for God’s blessings again. Not only is he seeking a resolution to his suffering, he is also seeking a blessing from God.

❓: *Why do you hesitate to seek God’s help in every situation you face?*

❓: *How can we tangibly seek God’s help?*

APPLICATION POINT – Perhaps the most beautiful aspect of this psalm is that the author realizes the answer to his pain lies beyond himself. Pop-psychology would tell him to look within for the answers his soul is searching for. If he were to take his cues from Hollywood, he would shrug off God’s neglect and rise above it through sheer will power and self-determination to vanquish his enemy. But the psalmist does not have time for any of this nonsense, because he knows the solution to his plight must lie with God. There is no challenge you face, big or small, that you do not need God’s help with. What does this look like day to day? It certainly is not less than what we see from the psalmist. We need to be devoted to seeking God’s help through prayer on a regular basis. We also need to take advantage of the network of support found in our local church. From its inception, the church has been a community that cares for one another and carries one another’s burdens (Acts 2:42–47). God’s solution to your laments may be tied to the body of believers you worship with on a weekly basis. It is okay to look for help from your church when you are in the midst of lamentation.

❓: *What reason does the psalmist give for God to help him?*

❓: *How is the psalmist’s point similar to what is found in Exodus 32:12?*

After requesting God’s favor, the psalmist gives reasons God should act, highlighting the urgency of his situation. God must act quickly to save him and address his enemy’s injustice. At first glance, the psalmist’s reasoning seems self-centered, but considered in conjunction with God’s steadfast love (verse 5) and as part of a larger biblical theme, we can see that he is concerned for God’s name as much as his own preservation. The words “steadfast love” most commonly refer to God’s covenantal love for His people. God’s covenant includes promises that He will act on their behalf. If His covenantal people are suffering and He fails to act, God will be proven unfaithful to

His covenant. God's own glory is at stake.

The psalmist's appeal corresponds to Moses's appeals on behalf of the people of Israel in the desert. In Exodus 32, the people had committed idolatry by creating a golden calf and worshipping it. Moses was on Mt. Sinai at the time, and God threatened to consume the people and begin anew people with Moses. Moses intervened, however, and contended that if God did so, He would be jeopardizing His reputation in Egypt, the nation from whom God had just freed the Israelites from slavery. God agreed to relent from completely destroying the people because of His concern for His own great name. A similar situation occurs in Numbers 14:13–19.

🔍: *Why is God's concern for His own reputation important for us?*

🔍: *Is God's concern for His own reputation selfish?*

APPLICATION POINT – Some people may be tempted to think God's concern for His own reputation is self-centered. They are not completely wrong. The difference between God's self-centeredness and our self-centeredness is that we are not the center of the universe or the core truth of all reality. It is therefore wrong for us to act self-centeredly, and it would be wrong for God not to. God can have no higher priority than Himself and His own glory. If He did, He would be committing idolatry, and we know that is what God will never do.

God's commitment to His own reputation is not without consequence for us. It demands that certain qualities be true of Him that greatly benefit us. For example, since God is concerned for His own reputation, we can count on Him being consistent in character. God will not just arbitrarily decided to conduct Himself by a different set of rules from one day to the next or expect us to. We can also count on His justice, something very relevant for the psalmist on this occasion. We need never wonder whether God is concerned with injustice in the world. Finally, His concern for His own reputation on the earth demonstrates that He is invested in what happens in His creation. God is separate from creation, but He is not unconcerned with it or with us as His creatures.

2. HOW IS GOD SO GOOD TO ME?

📖 PSALM 13:5–6

Q: *What causes the change in mood in this psalm?*

Q: *How do verses 5–6 make it difficult to classify Psalm 13 as a lament?*

One of the most important points in Psalm 13 is made silently. Although made silently, it is not made discreetly. Verses 5–6 transition from the foreboding refrains of the first part of the psalm to a concluding refrain filled with joy and anticipation. What accounts for the psalmist's sudden change in disposition? His situation has not improved, at least as far as we are aware. The best explanation is the psalm itself. In verses 3–4, the psalmist offers a prayer to God. This prayer seems to have rejuvenated his mind and allowed him to transition from despair to hope.

Q: *During your devotional times, do you enjoy Scripture reading or prayer more?*

Q: *If we are familiar with the benefits of prayer, why do we still often struggle to pray?*

APPLICATION POINT: Today, many people question why we should bother with prayer. Most people would not voice this sentiment, but it is the only thing to infer from the widespread neglect of prayer among Christians. There are countless reasons we should practice prayer, and Psalm 13 offers another. Prayer helps to reinforce in our hearts what we know to be true in our minds. It can help pull us out of despair and hopelessness and remind us that God is concerned when we encounter struggles and trials. Prayer is a wonderful gift from God in times of abundance and in times of need. Make sure you are including adequate time for prayer during your devotional times. It is easy to become preoccupied with reading Scripture because it is easy to mark progress. Moving the ribbon in your Bible over a few pages or checking of a box on a reading plan gives you a sense of accomplishment. It is often more challenging to get this kind of reinforcement for prayer. You may want to begin your prayer times by making a list of things to pray about and cross them off as you move forward. This can help you gain that needed reinforcement during prayer.

Q: *Are the psalmist's actions in these verses proactive or reactive?*

Q: *Why is the psalmist so confident in God's salvation?*

Salvation, as generally in the Old Testament, refers to both physical and spiritual deliverance from danger. One could hardly guess that this psalm, which begins with a cry of despair, would end with a song of salvation. Although the psalmist has yet to see it, he trusts that God will bring him salvation. And he knows once he sees God's salvation, his heart will erupt in song. He will sing because God has dealt bountifully with him. The Hebrew word underlying "bountiful" is one of those for which no exact equivalent exists in English. The basic idea is complete or full giving. God's salvation will exceed what the psalmist can even anticipate. With a God this generous, no wonder the psalmist is on the verge of bursting forth in song even in a time of lamentation.

Q: *How can you train yourself to anticipate God's salvation in times of need?*

Q: *How could you incorporate song into your devotional times?*

APPLICATION POINT – When most people think of daily devotions, they typically think of reading Scripture, praying, and perhaps journaling. Some people may memorize Scripture as a part of their daily intake of God's Word. The Psalms should encourage us to consider adding times of song to our devotional times. Songs are an effective medium for learning theology and instilling biblical truths into our hearts. Furthermore, songs are the primary way we express our worship today. So, it is entirely appropriate for you to include a time of song in your devotional times. You don't need to do this on every occasion. Some of you, like me, could not carry a tune if it had handles. I have memorized the words of several hymns that have special meaning for me, such as "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing" and "Be Thou my Vision." Sometimes I merely recite the words of these great hymns during devotional times or even at other times during the day. In this way, my musical ineptitude does not keep me from worshipping God in song. If you live in a crowded house or dormitory, you may find others would appreciate it if you take this approach. Worshipping God in song may feel strange during your devotional times at first, but singing is something that has endured since the beginning of the Christian church.

NEXT STEPS

One of the best ways to prepare yourself to face challenges and trials in your faith is by journaling. When you write down your feelings and experiences, you can look back at them later when you need to be reminded of how God has worked in your life. If you struggle to find the time to regularly journal, consider making a list of five times you realize God has been faithful to you in the past. It does not have to be a detailed explanation, just a sentence or maybe even less. Keep it on your nightstand or desk and refer to it when you recognize your faith is being challenged. Add to it when you recognize God has been faithful to preserve you again.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

Father, help me lament well. I know struggles will come, and I do not want to deny what my heart feels. But I want to glorify you in my laments.

Lord Jesus, you also lamented as you hung on the cross for my sin. Thank you for the hope you have provided, even during lamentation.

God, thank you for being concerned for your own reputation. I could not get by apart from your consistency and your commitment to justice.

Father, thank you for your steadfast love. Your love makes even times of lamentation sweet.