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Series: Summer in the Psalms
Message: When God Seems Far Away

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Psalm 13

Musician and author Michael Card in a book entitled *A Sacred Sorrow* said all true songs of worship are born in the wilderness of suffering. Four centuries before Michael Card wrote that, a similar poet and songwriter by the name of William Cooper wrote a hymn entitled “God Moves in Mysterious Ways”. You may be familiar with that song. “God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform. He plants his footsteps in the seas and rides upon the storm. Deep in unfathomable minds of never-failing skill, he treasures up his bright designs and works his sovereign will. You fearful saints, fresh courage take the clouds you so much dread, are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.” If it is true that all songs of worship are born in seasons of suffering, then the author of the majority of the psalms that we’ve been studying knows something about that. So many of the psalms of David are the back story of suffering and hard things that were going on in his life. that’s certainly the case in the psalm we turn to this morning. I invite you to turn in your Bibles to the 13th Psalm. In this 13th Psalm, we want to see that trusting in God is how we are to live the Christian life. that is the calling upon us whatever the circumstances might be. That’s the call of God in my life to walk by faith, to walk and trust. Lament and learning to lament is really the means that God uses by his grace to help us keep trusting in those times.

Let’s look together again at the background of this 13th Psalm and I want to make a number of observations. The first of which is to say this is a lament psalm. When we started in the Psalms back in June and we talked about the different kinds of psalms that there are, we’ve looked at a praise psalm. We looked at a thanksgiving psalm. We looked at a penitential psalm. We looked at a wisdom psalm. We looked at a psalm that is messianic and prophetic in nature. We have all of these varieties of psalms. I thought before we wrapped up our summer we should step into one of the laments and that’s what this 13th Psalm is. The 13th Psalm is one of lament.

What you find throughout the lament psalms is an intensity that you don't find in many of the other psalms. You find an intensity. You find the intensity that comes out of a sense almost of desperation and maybe even at times depression as the psalmist speaks of things that are going on in his life. A lament by definition is the largest group of psalms that we have in the Bible. The lament psalms constitute the largest group within the category of psalms. There are at least 42 psalms that are identified just as lament psalms. Then there are 16 psalms that have elements of lament within them. When you put that number together, you realize that well over a third of all the psalms are psalms of lament which is rather striking, isn't it?

What do you think that tells us? In the Psalter, the handbook of Jewish worship, God in his wisdom and sovereignty determined to give to us over a third of the psalms that reflect this sense of lament. Then you add to that the book of Job. The book of Job has long sections in which Job is pouring out his heart to God in lament. We have a whole bunch of laments in a book called Lamentations. When you step back and you ask why would that be? What does that tell us? What is God communicating to us by giving us such a significant section within the psalms that deal with the hard things of life and walking through those hard things? I think first of all it would have to tell us that we live in a fallen world. We live in a fallen world. We live in a broken world. We live in a world of pain. We live in a world of hardship. We all walk through those times as we make this journey of faith.

I think the second thing it says is lament and faith are not incompatible. You don't leave your faith when you lament. Lament and faith are very compatible. That's the whole point of the Holy Spirit giving us the heart of David in these intense times of suffering in his life. the Bible certainly invites us often to be honest and open, to understand that these things are a part of life. the Bible doesn't call on us to pretend so that every time somebody asks us how we are doing, it is not required of us as we walk by faith to say it's all great when it really isn't. It's okay at times to say it's really not that good. If you're asking people that question and you have any sense of commitment to hearing their answer, that may give you an opportunity to minister. If you're asking just to pass the time, then you're probably not even going to hear when they say not that

good. But the Bible doesn't call on us to pretend. It tells us to step into these times of lament just as we do other times.

Then I think that as you study these psalms, you see that there's always progression. There is a progression from that point of struggle to growing in their trust, to growing in their faith. There's always progression in every lament. You go from the painful points of difficulty to ending in praise. I think that's very important for us to see and we'll see that again this morning.

Thirdly, psalms of lament are both individual and they're corporate. There are 29 psalms of lament that are individual. That is to say that the pronouns are all singular. It's one person, often David, pouring out his heart to God. But there are another 13 of them that are corporate where it is a collective group of people that are lamenting together over some of the hardships that are going on within life. you have both of those together.

Then finally the specific time and circumstance of this 13th Psalm is not known to us. We don't know what specifically David had in mind when he cries out to God in this lament. I wonder if that's not even to our benefit that we don't know. It is almost like the Spirit of God says I'm not going to tell you exactly what the circumstance is in David's life because David's experience more readily becomes our experience. David's heartache becomes our heartache. David's cry to God becomes our cry to God. I think there might be merit for us in that regard.

Let's look at this matter of the forgetting God. The forgetting God. In every one of the laments, there is a very discernible progression that goes on within the lament and usually there are five elements. We're just going to step through these five elements together as we look at this 13th Psalm this morning. The first one is God is addressed. At the beginning of lament, God is addressed. Look at the beginning of verse 1 of chapter 13: "How long, O Lord?" We'll stop right there. How long, O Lord? The very first thing you notice is that David is calling out to the God of covenant. Yes, not just the God of Covenant Community Church but the God of covenant that he's calling out to. Again, look in your English translation and you see that the word Lord is all in caps. You know that when you see that, it's the word for Jehovah, the word for Yahweh. It is the covenant keeping God that David is addressing. So very instructive that he begins that

way. He calls out at the beginning of this lament to the God of Abraham, to the God of Isaac, to the God of Jacob. To the God who reveals himself as we saw way back at the beginning to Moses in Exodus and said I am who I am. That's who he is calling out to here. So instructive that he turns to the Lord who signifies that he is a God in relationship with his people. It was Martin Luther who said, "Our hope despairs and our despair yet hopes." That's what David is doing here.

But he's not just calling out to a God who he has a relationship with. I want you to see secondly that he is a man with questions. He is a man with lots of questions. "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?" five different questions in verses 1 and 2. I think it's fair to say that the Bible invites us to ask questions. It ought to be true within our family, within our marriage, within the context of parenting, within the life of our church that people feel comfortable and welcome to ask questions. That's how we learn. You certainly see that in the opening verses of this lament. Five different questions that we'll look at that David lifts up.

At times, God asked his people questions. The very first question that God asked is in Genesis 3 and it is to Adam and Eve. Where are you guys? Unfortunately, it's worthy to note that the first question in the Bible was Satan saying to Eve: Did God really say that? Did God really mean that? You can't really believe and trust God on that, can you? the first question that God asked to Adam and Eve is where are you. He is reaching out to them. At times, God is the one who is asking us questions. Sometimes God is answering our questions. You remember in the book of Job, the other book that we mentioned of lament, Job is firing off all kinds of questions to God. What does God do? You'll remember God fires back at Job a whole series of questions, In fact, 77 questions God asks of Job. Job asked God questions in the middle of his lament and God says those are good questions, Job, but what about these? Here are 77 for you to consider that I'm asking of you. you see that all the way through. Oftentimes we're asking questions of ourselves as we go through different experiences. It probably is a good thing to be asking questions, and it probably signifies that maybe something isn't as it should be when we stop asking questions. When we stop asking

questions, maybe we've reached such a point of uncertainty and apathy and despair that we're not even asking them anymore. I think David gives to us a good encouragement here in this matter of coming to God and asking God the things that are on his heart.

We move to the second part of lament and that is the lament itself. A lament is offered in verses 1 and 2. We've already read these verses but let's just see them again to set the tone. "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?" you read those opening verses and you realize that this sounds a lot like a long struggle. It sounds like a long struggle is going on in David's experience. Four times he says how long. How long? Lord, how long is this going to go on? You read those words slowly. You hear them out loud. You can feel the pain. You can sense the confusion that David is dealing with.

That phrase how long is repeated 22 times in the Psalms. It is not unique to Psalm 13. Other places, other writers of the psalms are calling out and asking God a very similar question. It is not unlike the cry of a husband or wife who is calling out to God and saying God, how long before my spouse shows any interest in spiritual things? How long before you open their eyes to even understanding the gospel? Some of you are praying that on behalf of your spouse. You've been praying that for a long time. Others of you are praying for a spouse who has come to understand the gospel but is not walking with God and your cry is God, how long? How long before my husband steps up, God, and begins to really take seriously the spiritual realities of our home? how long before my wife wants to walk with me in spiritual things? That cry is a common one. It's a common cry of parents. How long, God, before our wayward son or daughter comes home? you have to think that in the prodigal son story, that father was lifting up that prayer every day. It was what drove him to go out and look down the road to see if God was answering that prayer. But you know that every day throughout that day he was calling out to God: How long, Lord? How long before my child comes back? You might be in the midst of some health issue. You might have something going on at work that doesn't seem to go away and it never ends. There could be other relational things

that are happening. We all have things that at times cause us to cry out how long. Maybe you are struggling with even a sense of depression, a cloud hanging over your life. You're crying to God how long before this is lifted. That is David here. RW Moberly says, "The experience of anguish and puzzlement in the life of faith is not a sign of deficient faith, something to be outgrown or put behind one, but it is intrinsic to the very nature of faith. The reality is that the righteous suffer in various ways and God does not always give us what we ask for in prayer when we want it."

The second thing you see is David is experiencing a sense of abandonment. There is a sense of abandonment here. Would you forget me forever? Seriously? Will you forget me forever? To be forgotten for a day, a week, a month, a year – that would be hard. That would be unthinkable. David's cry, his sense of despair as such that he is saying are you going to forget me forever? I didn't check with Bonnie on this but I think over the course of our child raising when our children were younger, we forgot one or more of them at church on more than one occasion, only to go home in thinking they had gone with somebody else. And somebody would call asking us if we had left so-and so behind. There is always an initial trauma I suppose for everybody. But to be forgotten? That's a hard thing, isn't it?

David takes it to the ultimate when he says have you forgotten me forever. Not just for a little bit. Not just for a moment in time. David is clearly when he expresses that speaking from his feelings. A little bit later on in Psalm 139 he is going to speak from truth and say, "O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all of my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether." That is the truth that needs to be affirmed in our heart, but sometimes our emotions speak for us and they say Lord, is it possible that you're going to forget me forever? Of course, God had not forgotten David. God could no more forget David than he could deny his own character. Yet that's where David is in his sense right now.

The third part of this lament is the lack of blessing. A lack of blessing. How long, Lord, are you going to hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul? Am I going to sorrow all day? How long, Lord, will the enemy exult over me?

When I read that initial statement of David, I couldn't help but think of the wonderful Aaronic blessing in Numbers where we read: "The Lord bless you and keep you. the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." But it's that idea. The Lord bless you and keep you. the Lord make his face to shine upon you.

We all know from personal experience, and maybe somebody is experiencing it this morning, but we all know what it's like when somebody is so upset with us that they don't even want to look at us. They don't even want to make eye contact with us. There's something that's come between us, whether it's real or perceived, we think they don't even want to look us. That is always a hurtful thing. That's what David is saying. God, it's like you don't even want to look at me. You don't want to even put your face towards mine. It's easy at this point again to see David generating all these statements from the feelings and emotions that he is struggling with.

Then we move in verses 3 and 4 to the third part of lament and this is the petition. This is the part where he is going to cry out to God in prayer. Look at verses 3 and 4: "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." Hardship and pain and depression will push you towards someone or something. They'll push you towards something or someone. The pain that needs to be numbed drives people to something, to someone, oftentimes to addictive behaviors. We obviously live in a land where addiction to various things is overwhelming in people's lives. Why is that? Well, very often it is to numb the pain of their experiences, of the hardships that they're dealing with, the struggles. David here thankfully is driven towards someone. He in fact is driven towards God in prayer.

I want you to see that from the heart of David there are three prayers that he lifts up. The first one is God, look on me. That's the word "consider". That is the same idea as the verses that I read in Numbers, the idea that God would look on us with favor. There is a break in the logic here, isn't there? If this whole thing is about the forgetting God, how interesting is it that David is now praying to the God he thinks has forgotten him.

So here is David and he's praying to God. Why pray? This is the confession of the heart of David in trust. He is stepping out in faith believing that this God, who he on the one hand thinks has forgotten him, in reality hasn't forgotten him at all. It is almost like the interchange between Jesus and the disciples when Jesus spoke hard things. Remember a whole bunch of his disciples/followers left him. Jesus said to the ones who remained, are you guys going to leave me too? Remember Peter comes back and says Lord, who would we go to? You alone have words of eternal life. We're not going anywhere. That in a sense is what David is stepping towards at this point. He is acknowledging and calling out to God. God, look on me. Consider me. His heart cry is directed towards the Lord.

The second thing is answer me. This is a reoccurring theme in the laments. A call that God would answer. God, answer me in my prayer and answer me...now. That's what we want. Answer me and answer me now. God doesn't always work that way, does He? In fact, you could probably say God seldom works that way. Bruce Waltke gives us some insight when he says, "God is sovereign in dispensing of his grace. Moreover, it would not be for our spiritual profit if God were always to reward us immediately. If he always rewarded us immediately, it would destroy us spiritually. We would use God. He would be to us like a genie in Aladdin's lamp. We would not worship him for who he is but simply for our own self-gratification. Instead of our being his servants, he would become our servant. We would use God, and so he delays answer to our prayers so that we are not destroyed by confounding morality, and true faith grows." Isn't that right? David's heart cry is God, answer me. We know we want him to answer at that moment, but God often works differently.

The last part of verse 3 and verse 4. David's prayer is restore me. Look at what he says. "...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." You can look into somebody's eyes. You can look at somebody's eyes and often see how they're feeling. Bonnie might say to me, you don't look very good. I say why. Your eyes. You look like something might be wrong. We look and we see physically just by seeing somebody's eyes. I think it's both. I think for David's acknowledgment physically he needs the touch of God, as is often the case when we're going through difficult times and in even times

of depression. Physically, we need a touch of God. But it's also obviously spiritual. It's both of them. He wants God to enlighten his eyes both I think physically and spiritually. He needs a touch of God. He's worn down. He's worn down physically. He is worn down spiritually. The fact that David is praying here for enlightenment, for his eyes to be restored suggests that the problem from the beginning is not a forgetting God, but the problem is rather David's inability to see God as He is. David is asking God that he could see him again as the way he is to see him. We need our eyes focused, refocused on the character of God.

Then you go from that lament which is really the petition part and then you move in to the fourth part which is the declaration of trust. There is a declaration of trust. Note the very first part of verse 5: "But I have trusted in your steadfast love." What do you note right at the very beginning? You note the strong contrast. The very first word in verse 5. But. Here is the change. It is an adversative and is introducing us to a change in mood as David is seeing things in a different way. It is emphatic right at the beginning of the verse. There is an intentional shift from the cause of his pain, from the cause of his circumstance to trusting in the God who is. Understand that the only explanation for where David is in verse 5 is God has answered the prayer of verses 3 and 4. His eyes have been enlightened. God has given him a clearer vision, a better understanding of his circumstance. His circumstance may not even have changed at this point. most likely not, but David with these enlightened eyes is able to view God for who he is beyond the circumstance.

What does he see about this God? What he sees is the loyal love of God. "But I have trusted in your steadfast love." That is one of the great words of the Old Testament. It's the theme word of all of Psalm 13. It is the Hebrew word *hesed*. It is one of the great words of the Old Testament. It speaks of the loyal love of God. When David began this psalm and he cried out how long, O Lord, he was crying to Jehovah God. He was crying out to God with whom Israel had this unique relationship, that you and I have this unique relationship. Now he is relying on this loyal love, this covenantal love that God has established with his people. This unchanging, unfailing, never-ending love. David says he has made a decision to trust in God. His circumstance hasn't changed but his ability to see God has changed. Trusting God is how we are to live the Christian

life. We come to understand the gospel by faith. We step into the truth of the gospel and we believe it by faith. Colossians 2:6. As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him. We come by faith. We come by believing that what God has said about us and about himself is true. That's what he's saying to us here in this psalm. You've got to continue to step into that trust. You've got to continue to believe this God who is describing himself as a God of loyal love. Whether you feel like it or not, whether it seems like it or not, His love for you is unchanging. His love for you is unwavering. His love for you is unending. You may not feel it this morning, but David is saying God, enlighten my eyes where I can step into and believe and trust that that is in fact true. That's the whole point of the loyal love of God.

Now notice this ends with a song of praise. Let's read all of verse 5. "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." What an amazing thing here. Every lament in the psalms ends in praise. Every one of the psalms ends in praise that are psalms of lament. At first, it is a look forward. He started with tears at the beginning of the psalm and he ends it with singing. He does so because he's looking forward. It is very similar to what Cooper wrote when he said, "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour. The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his work in vain. God is his own interpreter and he will make it plain." So he looks forward to what he believes God is going to do.

Then he looks back. The end of that 6th verse: "because he has dealt bountifully with me." That's the statement of David looking back and seeing what God has done in his life. He is looking back at the faithfulness of God. Past tense. The certainty of what David has already realized. He turns not to the quality of his faith. He is not basing this on his feelings or his emotions, but he is looking at the object of his faith. It is the God of loyal love. It is the God who is trustworthy that he is counting on. He says God, you have dealt with me bountifully, which is to say you have dealt with me in fullness, wholeness, completely. My friends, trusting in God is how it is that we're called to live

the Christian life. that is God's call upon our life. Learning to lament helps us to step into that experience and to walk with God by faith through that.

What do we take away? God's love for you. my friends, this morning, whatever your life circumstance might be, God's love for you is unchanging. Look outward. Look upward. Read your Bible and pray. Even if you don't feel like it, read your Bible and pray. Then lift your voice in praise. It's not a cliché to say to someone who is walking through the hard things of life to read your Bible and pray. Go to the psalms. Go to the lament psalms. Join David in that journey in which you just walk with God through that, declaring both the heart ache of your soul but your determination to trust him, calling out for him to do what only he can do. Listen. Zephaniah chapter 3 and verse 16: "On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: 'Fear not, O Zion; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love. He will exalt over you with loud singing.'" What if in the journey of lament as you lift your voice in praise to God, what if you listen quietly and you hear this gracious, loving, loyal God singing over you? He's done that for us in the person of his Son Jesus.

He has made that possible because of what Jesus did for every one of us in his death on the cross. He brought to us salvation that we could never realize or achieve on our own. God requires that we be 100% perfect. That pretty much takes all of us out. There is no equation by which we can earn our salvation because all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. There is only one way and that's the way that Jesus provided. Through his death on the cross, He paid the penalty for sin and made it possible for us by faith and trust in what he did to receive the gift of grace. This gift is not of works but the gift of grace. We invite you to accept that this morning.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you that in the word you have given to us you've shown to us all of the different aspects of this journey in this broken and fallen world. Lord, thank you that you do not call us to pretend. You do not call us to act like everything is always just okay, but you walk with us through the hard things, the hard times as well as the good. We are so grateful for the encouragement of your word. We are so thankful for the witness of your Spirit to carry us through those times. Lord, I know in this room and those who are listening, there are those that are walking through

difficult circumstances. I pray the encouragement of your word and encouragement of your Spirit will lift them to consider that you are a God who is loyal in your love, that you are singing over them even now as they walk through hard things. Thank you for Jesus. Father, I pray that you would open the heart of someone to believe and trust in Jesus alone this morning for the salvation that only you can give. We ask that in Jesus's name, amen.