

When Hope Despairs

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[0:00] If you have your Bibles, please open up to Psalm 13 this morning. Psalm 13 is where we'll be. Like Jim said, my name is Josh.

I'm here with most of my family here, my wife and four children. You'll not remember their names, so I won't try to tell them to you this morning. But after the service, please say hello to all of them. It's a joy to be able to minister as a family. And I'm thankful that we can come up here together and not just by myself. Like Jim said, it is a blessing and it's a privilege to be able to help churches in the area, churches that are like-minded.

Any opportunity that I have to serve churches like this, it's such a blessing. It's a joy. And so I just want to extend my thankfulness and gratitude to you all for letting me come and minister to you. And my hope and prayer is that the Word of God does minister to you this morning. So Psalm 13. Follow along with me in your copy of God's Word this morning.

[1:08] To the choir master, a psalm of David. 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 enemies 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. I have entitled this message, When Hope Despairs. In the many, many long years of training for the ministry, one of God's kindnesses that we have experienced as a family is to be part of churches really all over the area.

[2:25] We've been part of churches in Prescott area, Prescott Valley. We've had the opportunity to be part of churches down in the valley. In Michigan, where I went to seminary, we were able to be part of many churches there.

And it's just, it was a blessing to me and my family as we have grown and just been ministered to by people and as we've ministered to others as well. We've seen many similarities in a lot of these churches.

But one similarity, I think, that stands out above them all is that God's people suffer. It seems like there is no exception.

Every church we have been part of, there have been God's people, there have been Christians who have been suffering, whether it's from their own sinful choices, suffering from someone else's sinful choices, whether it's chronic pain or debilitating illness, difficulties at work, difficulties just in personal relationship.

The list goes on and on in ways that they have suffered. And as we've ministered to these Christians, it seems like there has been a repeated theme among these suffering Christians.

[3:40] It hasn't been everybody. But there have been some people where it wasn't explicitly stated, but if you could listen, you could discern this gnawing sense that God wasn't there to help them when they needed God most.

These people were trying to articulate this idea that they thought, God should be there when I'm suffering, right? And yet, it felt like my prayers didn't go past the ceiling.

It felt like when they needed God most, God was not there. So, how do you navigate this sense?

Whether you are walking through trials with somebody or yourself, you are going through trials.

How do you navigate this sense of God has abandoned you? Whether it's physical pain or financial difficulty or relational problems, strife, depression, what do you do when the waves of pain are

crashing over you again and again and again?

And you call out to God only to be met with a deafening silence. This morning, we are going to look at Psalm 13 and hopes to answer that question.

[4:58] Now, a little setting for this psalm before we jump in. There's not much. We don't know the situation surrounding David's life when he pens Psalm 13, but we do know that whatever he is facing is extremely difficult.

It is very significant. And in response to the circumstances that he finds himself in, he writes a psalm that is categorized as an individual lament psalm.

This is how theologians kind of describe Psalm 13 and others. It's an individual lament psalm. Now, there have been theologians who have given really helpful definitions, but I've been helped by one pastor.

He defines lament as a prayer in pain that leads to trust. This is what we see in Psalm 13. This is a prayer in pain that leads to trust.

So as we walk through Psalm 13, we're going to try to answer this simple question. What do we do when we feel abandoned by God? And as we do, we're going to see three responses.

[6:07] So that's the outline for this morning if you're taking notes. Three responses for when you feel abandoned by God. And the first is this. Bring your complaint to God.

Bring your complaint to God. We see that in the first two verses. Now, before I get into these first two verses, when I tell you that you should complain to God, there should be flags that are going up all over this room.

Because you know your Bibles. You know that in the Old Testament, when God's people complained to Him, it didn't work out well. They were punished. They were destroyed.

They were killed. And I'm telling you, you should complain to God. There should be pause here. So there is definitely a sinful complaining that we see in the Old Testament, some in the New Testament.

But there is a sinful complaining which I am not advocating for. So let me tell you what I'm hoping you don't do. Let me describe what a sinful complaining is.

[7:14] A sinful complaining is the venting of self-centered rage at God when life doesn't go as we thought it would or we aren't getting what we thought we deserved from God.

In other words, sinful complaining is anger with God or impugning His character. And that can only be done, listen, when I remove God from being king and I put myself in that position.

When I put myself as judge and king and I say, God, you got it wrong. This is what I should be experiencing. How could you let that happen? That is sinful complaining.

That is not what I'm telling you to do this morning. So what am I advocating for? What do I mean when I tell you, you should complain to God? Well, this is what a biblical complaint is.

A biblical complaint is addressing anything that is out of step with what we know to be true about God or anything that is out of step with the promises in His Word. So I want you to imagine life as a highway and on each side of this road, this highway, we have guardrails.

[8:21] One guardrail is God's character and the other guardrail is the promises that we read in His Word. And so what I'm saying is anything that is out of step with who God is and what He promises to be or do in His Word, those are things that you should complain to God about.

We know life is hard. It is broken and tainted by sin. So when things spill over those guardrails, then we go to God in a biblical complaint because a biblical complaint is centered on who God is and what He said He will do.

God is the standard. That is what I understand everything to measure up against. So when things are out of step, I can go to God with those and say, Lord, I do not understand.

And that's what we see David doing here. He brings four complaints before God and you'll notice each complaint begins with this repeated phrase. In the original languages, it's until when, translated here in the ESV, how long.

And it's repeated four times. You'll remember in Isaiah 6 when Isaiah has this wonderful image of God and he sees these angels flying and he hears one yell, holy, holy, holy.

[9:36] This repetition in Hebrew literature serves to intensify whatever it is that they're saying and David uses that same method here. He repeats how long and what it does is serve, what it does is intensifies David's complaints.

And this first complaint here is found in verse one. He says, how long, oh Lord, will you forget me forever? This isn't David saying, Lord, why are you forgetting me?

Or Lord, you have forgotten about me. David takes that as a truth and he says, how long are you going to forget about me?

This first complaint really is centered on a charge of neglect. God, you're not paying attention to me. I know who you are, but you are not, you're not listening to me.

You are completely forgetting about me. But he goes on in verse one. How long will you hide your face from me? This second complaint really does increase the accusation David is loving against God.

[10:44] It's going beyond neglect because every time God shows his face on someone in the Bible, it's always a sign of blessing. Listen to Numbers chapter six, verses 22 through 26.

God is commanding Moses to speak to Aaron and he's telling him, bless the people. So listen to Numbers chapter six, verses 22. The Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to Aaron and his sons saying, thus you shall bless the people of Israel.

You shall say to them, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

This is the blessing the people of Israel were supposed to receive from Aaron. So if it's true that God shining his face on a people is a sign of blessing, then the opposite is also true.

God hiding his face is equal to a curse or an alienation. I want you to listen to Deuteronomy chapter 32, verse 19. In the context here, the children of Israel are about to go into the promised land.

[11:52] And Moses is prophetically talking about what will happen. He's talking about the sin that the children of Israel will commit against God. This is what he says. The Lord saw it and spurned them because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters.

And he said, this is the curse, I will hide my face from them. I will see what their end will be for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness.

So understand what David is saying here. He's moving beyond this charge of God being neglectful to saying God is actively abandoning him.

And it's in the midst of trials when things are actually going wrong. But David brings a third complaint in verse 2. He says, how long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

And I think this really does speak to the abandonment David feels. It's as if he is saying, God, how long will you make me suffer alone? This phrase, take counsel in my soul, it really shows that David is turning inward deep down in who he is as a person.

[13:09] He's trying to make sense of what God is doing, why God is not there. And this turning inward doesn't help him. And instead, it really compounds this pain that he feels.

This is, I think, primarily emotional in this verse. It's sorrow or grief felt deep in his inner man. And he goes on.

He gives another complaint. He says, how long shall my enemies be exalted over me? He says, how long, Lord, will you allow my enemies to be victorious? How long will you allow people to oppose not only you, but to oppose your servant?

His enemies are currently triumphing over David, and this is presenting a very real physical danger. But listen, it seems like there's a deeper problem that David is trying to communicate to us.

Deeper than the physical crisis that is coming is what seems to be almost a crisis of faith. Why do I say that? Well, just a few psalms earlier, the entire psalter opens with Psalm 1.

[14:26] And what does Psalm 1 tell us? Well, the righteous person is going to be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, and everything he does is going to prosper. He's going to flourish.

He's going to be blessed by God. But the wicked aren't like that, are they? They're like chaff that the wind blows away. David knows this psalm. He's written this psalm.

However, I think that is part of the problem David is experiencing. He knows, well, the righteous should be blessed by God, right? And the wicked should be kind of cursed or opposed.

But who is feeling that curse in this psalm, in Psalm 13? Who is feeling that? Well, it's David. David is the one saying, God, why have you abandoned me? Why does it feel like you are cursing me because you're not looking at me?

I think that is really compounding what David is feeling. Now, it's important to note in this psalm there is absolutely no mention of sin.

[15 : 27] There is no mention of anything for David to repent of. There is nothing that David can look to to make sense of why God has abandoned him.

His main complaint is centered on God and really these external trials serve as a catalyst to bring up what David's real problem is.

It's that these pleas, these complaints that David is bringing form this resounding question, how long, O Lord, will you abandon me? Now, while we aren't likely to have enemies who are chasing us, wanting to take our lives, we will face situations that are out of step with what we know to be true about God and what we see God promised in his word.

And in those times, we may feel as though God has abandoned us, that God is indifferent. But when we look at David's complaints in these just few verses, just two verses, I think we see a few things that we can learn from.

First, I think, when we see David speak like this to God, we can see that we can honestly speak to God about what we feel as well. I want you to listen to Puritan Thomas Brooks.

[16 : 46] He's speaking in the context of lament. And this is what he says. Certainly, the very soul of prayer lies in the pouring out of a man's soul before the Lord.

Though it be but sighs, groans, and tears, one sigh and one groan from a broken heart is better pleasing to God than all human eloquence.

we can honestly take our pain and frustration to God. But I think as we look at these complaints, we see something else. We see that we can utilize the gift of complaint in a biblical sense, in a biblical sense, in order to begin the process of reaffirming our trust in God.

As we'll see at the end of this psalm, David ends with reaffirming his trust, with a resolve to praise God. But this is the path to get there. You don't wake up resolving to praise God or praising God when things are falling apart around you.

There's a process to get there. And lament, beginning with complaint, that's the beginning of the process. Listen to one author's take on lament.

[17 : 59] He says this, Lament is how you live between the poles of a hard life and trusting in God's sovereignty. Lament is how we bring our sorrow to God.

Without lament, we won't know how to process our pain. Silence, bitterness, and even anger dominate our spiritual lives instead. So there is a very real benefit here for us to lament.

But here's, I think, the last thing I want to touch on as far as David's complaints here. And I want to say this as clearly as I can. A deep sense of despair and grief is not out of step with a mature faith. Okay, let me say that one more time. A deep sense of despair or grief is not out of step with a mature faith. These words are written by a man who is described as a man after God's own heart. These words were inspired by the Holy Spirit. So that means they're sanctioned by God and we can use these words and we can complain like David does because he was spiritually mature and he is complaining like this.

[19 : 13] But the problem is for some reason we feel like we can't do this, right? We feel like when we come here on Sunday well everything is supposed to be good, right?

I'm supposed to smile and be happy because Paul says rejoice always. And again, I'll say it, let's rejoice. So these emotions, they're bad and I should just push them away, right?

But that couldn't be farther from the truth. I think we misunderstand fundamentally the purpose of pain like this.

And speaking about these emotions, Alistair Groves in his book *Untangling Emotions*, this is what he says. He says, Christians often see negative emotions, the ones we would describe as feeling bad, as a sign of spiritual failure.

Furthermore, every dark feeling also carries with it a sense of spiritual guilt and failure and shame about having that dark feeling. As a result, negative emotions are to be squashed and repented of immediately rather than explored and should be expressed only when carefully monitored and controlled.

[20 : 26] You see, the Psalms, I think, really do explode that false notion. I think the Psalm calls us to come to God even though we might not be refined and even though we might be hurting.

The Psalms call us to come to God because grief and despair are not always emotions that are out of step with a mature faith. So this is where we see David begin in this Psalm.

We see him begin with complaint but David doesn't stay there and neither can we. When we feel this way like we're abandoned by God, first we must bring our honest complaints before God but

David provides a second response and this is the second point of our outline this morning, a response to when we feel abandoned by God and that is asking God to act. What do you do when you feel abandoned by God? Number two, ask, God to act. This is in verses three and four. Now David is going to make three petitions in the forms of imperatives. What does that mean? It's as though David is requesting so strongly that it comes across as a command. It's as if David is commanding God to act.

[21:42] Look at verse three. He says, consider and answer me O Lord my God. Notice that phrase, O Lord my God. He begins his request with acknowledging who God is.

He's using here the covenantal name of God. It's as though David is getting hold of God and pointing him back to the covenant that he has made with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and David is saying because I am a recipient, I'm in the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the covenant that you've made with them, you've made with me.

It's as though David is reminding God of who he is. But here's his first command, request that David makes of God. He says, consider me. Consider me.

Here the idea is look. David is asking God to give him attention. He's asking God to act in response to the pain he feels. It's as though God's face has been turned from David so the first thing David asks is for God to look at him.

Look at me. Return your favor to me. But he also asks God to answer him. In verse 3, consider and answer me.

[22:56] Again, he's saying God I want you to look at me and then I want to hear you. I want you to answer me. Please end this abandonment. And then in verse 3 he asks for this third request.

He says, light up my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death. Now, this is a very common Hebrew idiom. All this means is David is saying I am at death's doorstep.

I am being crushed under the weight of what I feel and if you don't save me I will die. Light up my eyes means give me life. Rescue me.

Save me. Save me or else I'm going to die. Save me or else my enemies will say I've prevailed. I've won. We've done it. We finally supplanted that person lest my foes rejoice.

Not only will they say we've done it but they're going to throw a party. They're going to rejoice because they think they will have overcome not only me but also you because I am your anointed one.

[24:04] Now, maybe you've gone through what we're reading here or maybe you've walked through something terrible with someone else. Let me ask you what do your prayers or someone else's prayers look like when they feel abandoned by God?

What is it that you ask God to do on your behalf? Or maybe a more pointed question would be do you pray to God and ask him to act on your behalf?

You see, our temptation will be to get to doubt God's goodness when things are falling apart around us. It'll be to think God doesn't love me.

It'll be to think that maybe God is indifferent. But listen, your circumstances are the poorest indicators of God's faithfulness. The things going on around you, those are the absolute worst things that you can look to to judge whether or not God is faithful.

Because God works all things together for our good in his glory but they often don't happen the way we want them to and they often don't happen in the time we want them to be done.

[25:15] When you feel this temptation to doubt God's goodness and turn inwards, you must rehearse truths of God to your soul. You need to remind yourself that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Romans 8.35 Remind yourself that he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Romans 8.32 Remind yourself that though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. And listen, because this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

2 Corinthians 4.17 When you feel that temptation to turn inward or it feels like God has abandoned you, rehearse these truths to yourself and allow your faith to take the form of a prayer.

Allow your faith to take the form of a request and ask God to act on your behalf. And this brings us to the last response when we feel abandoned by God and really this is the culmination of Psalm 13 and it's the culmination of lament psalms or just lament.

[26:37] When we're honest and we bring our complaint before God and we ask him to act on our behalf, we end by renewing our trust in God. And that's the final point for this morning's outline.

Renew your trust in God. And we see that in verses 5-6. Renewing our trust in God involves three kind of related and overlapping ways.

Look at verse 5. Look at what David says. But I have trusted in your steadfast love. The first thing we must do is reaffirm our trust in God's goodness. Now, it's hard to catch in the English translations that we have but in verse 5, David has done something very interesting here.

He's changed the word order in the Hebrew. Now, there's a way for a Hebrew writer to say, but I have trusted. David doesn't do, doesn't use this normal construction.

He has, he has a conjunction and then a pronoun. Now, what that does is serve to kind of catch our attention. It's meant for us to say, whoa, okay. It's as if David is saying, things are terrible.

[27:48] It feels like God has abandoned me. I need God to rescue me or else I'm gonna die. but I, even I, I have trusted in your steadfast love.

He's using specific language here even to indicate this is a past action. He says, but I have trusted. I've already done it. And David is simply reminding himself of what he has done.

And notice what he trusts in. But I have trusted in your steadfast love. This trust in God's unfailing love. This word here is a very important Hebrew word.

It's called chesed. It's a very important word but it's also a very difficult word to translate because it encapsulates the ideas. It combines the ideas of love and generosity and enduring commitment.

This word describes an act of promise keeping loyalty that is motivated by deep personal care. This is love that is undeserved.

[28:52] It's love that is unmerited. And listen, it's a love that is not dependent on your worthiness to receive it. This love is bestowed on an undeserving people based on nothing more than the love and character of God.

David looks back and reminds himself of God's unfailing love that he has received in the past. And the reality is here that every Christian has a record of God's unfailing steadfast love.

If you feel abandoned by God, look back at all of the ways that you have been a recipient of God's love. Now remember, you and I didn't deserve, we don't deserve anything except for God's wrath, God's punishment.

And yet, because of his character, because of his love, he sends his perfect son to die on a cross for you and for me, making atonement for our sins, making reconciliation between a holy God and a rebellious people.

This is the beauty of the gospel. Now, we shouldn't think of the gospel in terms of maybe strict orthodoxy or maybe a question on a test that we must get right.

[30:09] It's true, we need to be correct and clear on the gospel. But the gospel goes so much farther than a correct answer. The gospel is the ultimate expression of God's loving kindness.

And we must let that truth, the reality of that, seep deep into our souls so that when we feel abandoned by God, all we need to do is look back on the cross.

Look back to the cross and know that God loves us and he is for us. So we reaffirm our trust in God's goodness in verse 5. But David also shows us something else.

He says that we should rejoice in God's salvation. This is in the second part of verse 5. My heart shall rejoice in, my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

Again, David here shows, again, really interesting language here. David is not saying, my heart is currently rejoicing in God for he is good.

[31:12] That's not what David says. David is saying, my heart is resolved to one day rejoice in God's salvation. This is him saying that his heart, the innermost part of his being, will one day rejoice because he knows not when or how God will save him or reconcile the situation but he knows that God will eventually fix or rescue him in what he is facing.

Now you may not know how your trials will be resolved but you can be sure that God will always rescue his people. And even if the trials are intensified by a sense of abandonment by God, we can have joy knowing that God again providentially works everything, even bad things for our good.

And I think that the clearest example here again is the gospel. It's the cross. Imagine you and I were there on the night Jesus was betrayed. He is our Lord and we see Judas come.

We see him get arrested. We see him beaten. We see him tried in this court and ultimately murdered. You and I would be hanging our heads in defeat because we would think what

happened?

How in the world can this turn out to be anything other than a tragedy? And yet we know this side of the cross it was working together for good.

[32:43] It was all part of God's plan and even the cross the horrendous nature of the cross was for God's glory and our good. So if God is able to do something like that with the cross surely surely the pain and the grief that you feel can be used by God in a glorious way.

So we reaffirm our trust in God's goodness. We resolve to rejoice in God's salvation and then lastly in verse 6 we hope in future future vindication.

Look at verse 6. David says I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. He is not saying I am currently singing to the Lord.

He says I will sing to the Lord. Here we see the culmination of every lament psalm. This is David's hopeful expectation of singing praise to God when God inevitably acts.

The knowledge that deliverance was sure produced an anticipation of future joy directed at God. David resolves to praise God. Now I think it's obvious but it's worth noting the situation for David did not change.

[34:00] It still seemed like his enemies were triumphant over him. I'm sure it still felt like God wasn't very close to him. I'm sure it didn't seem like the loneliness disappeared but that's what David's situation is.

It really didn't change all that much at the end of the psalm. And listen your situation the trial that you may be facing right now that might not change either.

It is possible that this life will be full of trials it will be full of despair but God will vindicate you.

God will one day vindicate every single one of us whether in this life or in the life to come when we see him face to face. Every injustice that you have faced will be made right.

Every wrong will be corrected. Everything done in secret will be brought to life and God will right every wrong. Any pain or grief we feel that will be taken away when God wipes away every single tear from our eyes.

[35:17] And this is why we can hope in future vindication like David does. We must resolve to hope in God not just once but over and over and over.

You see we renew our trust in God we get here by walking through lament this process of lament like in Psalm 13. So how does this look practically?

Well we can offer a prayer of lament and we can do that by taking a psalm and making it our own just praying the Bible back to God that is always a good thing to do or we can model or we can mimic what David models here in Psalm 13 by turning to God in prayer complaining to God offering a biblical complaint asking God to act and then renewing our trust in God.

So let me show you what this could look like. First we turn to God in prayer. It could sound something like this God I know you're good but this is hard.

I turn to you with a heart that is struggling and then we offer a biblical complaint. It could sound like this I'm completely overwhelmed Lord I don't feel like I can make it another day the pain I feel in my body the stress I feel for my own doubts are too much why do you make me feel alone why do you make me feel like the rock that is beaten by the waves of these trials and then we ask God to act Lord help me help me stand strong in the face of this pain conquer the lies of the enemy that plagued my mind and grant me the ability to trust you and then we renew our trust but God I know you're good I know you're protecting me and helping me through the gospel of Christ I know that you have never failed me you have blessed me with mercies that are new every morning you're you're given you're given me every reason reason to trust you I'm going to walk by faith today in the ability in your ability to help me this is something simple this is what lament could look like so we began our message by asking simply how we navigate the sense of abandonment when we feel God is absent and I think this psalm really does provide a beautifully simple answer to that question when trouble comes and God seems distant when we can't make sense of what's going on the psalm does provide a dominant message and that is embrace the good gift of lament that's how we respond when God feels distant or when we feel as though he's abandoned us embrace the good gift of lament utilize the language of lament by turning to God offering a biblical complaint asking God to act and renewing our trust in him because when despair when hope despairs despair will always turn to hope if we are in

[38:24] Christ so I wanted to end this morning really by reading just a stanza from a current or contemporary song that was it's a lament psalm and it captures really the heart of psalm 13 and

then other lament psalms in the psalter it's called Lord from sorrows deep I call let me read you what the song says Lord Lord from sorrows deep I call when my hope is shaken torn and ruined from the fall hear my desperation for so long I've pled and prayed God come to my rescue even so the thorn remains but still my heart will praise you should my life be torn from me every worldly pleasure when all I possess is grief God be then my treasure be my vision in the night be my hope and refuge till my faith is turned to sight

Lord my heart will praise you it's my hope for you all that that this would be the cry of our hearts this morning so let's pray father we are so thankful that we serve a God who is gracious who knows our frame remembers that we are but dust who knows that we suffer in this life but who also knows what that suffering is like because we have a high priest who knows our pain and father we are so thankful that you you don't tell us in the midst of these trials to just man up to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get through the trial instead you make a way for us to process the pain and the grief that we feel in a way that ultimately glorifies you and renews our trust in you and father I pray for these people here this morning I pray that you would help them that you would minister to them this morning and drive that point deep into their hearts and their minds that we serve a good God morning I pray they would turn to you in biblical lament thereby renewing their trust in you father we praise you for all that you'll do in Christ's name amen