

Prayer as Expression (19): Confusion

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[0 : 00] we've discovered, isn't like that at all. We think that for certain others it might be, certain others we envy, but even for them it never is. Life isn't a bed of roses for any of us.

In fact, sometimes it seems more like a bed of glass, a bed of broken glass. It certainly felt that way for King David in Psalm 13, because for him life had become somewhat confused and far from ideal.

How do you express yourself in prayer when your life has become confused? Well, there are perhaps few better ways than David here in Psalm 13.

It's another one of those wonderful examples of how, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Psalms become our prayer book as Christians.

As, in the reality of life, we begin to lose our bearings, we can pray our way through Psalm 13, knowing that we're in good company.

[1 : 10] There are two stages in this Psalm. Confusion, from verse 1 through 4. Confidence, in verses 5 and 6. I wonder if Jesus ever prayed this Psalm.

I'm sure he did. First of all, then, in verses 1 through 4, confusion, confusion. We would never dream of writing a hymn like Psalm 13 these days.

But then, that is to our considerable loss, because from bitter experience, I can guarantee there will be far more Christians in the confusion of verses 1 through 4 than we think.

These verses are a strange mix of toxicity, anger, sadness, and despair. The one thing they aren't is certain.

David feels like a cork bobbing on an ocean and being driven about by the winds of circumstance.

And now, we can't point to an exact time in his life when he wrote this Psalm, but again, that's okay.

[2 : 26] Because it means it can belong to us. It can be our Psalm for today, and it can be our prayer for today. David is confused.

Life has become, for him, a hall of mirrors. He can no longer tell what is real from what is unreal, what is true from what is false.

He's got a whole lot more questions than he does answers. And worst of all, when life has become so difficult for him, God seems far away.

But again, is this really how it is? Or is David just confused and can't tell what's real from what's unreal? It seems to me that from these first few verses, David is confused about two things.

God and himself. God and himself. He's confused about God. Psalm begins with some of the most famous words in the Psalter.

[3 : 34] How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? Yes, that's the way it felt for David.

Whatever the precise circumstance under which he wrote this Psalm, the most painful factor of all is that God seems so far away. Now remember, this is the same David who wrote the memorable words of Psalm 23, verse 4.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, thou art with me, thy rod and staff, they comfort me. But here in Psalm 13, verse 1, when he's going through this valley of the shadow of death, God seems to have hidden his face and forgotten all about him.

And you know, there's a lesson for us all here. It may be true that we feel God's presence most keenly in the darkest times of our lives.

But it may not always be true. Our testimony may not always be in the darkness he was with me.

[4 : 52] Rather, it might be in the darkness he seemed very far away from me. Does that mean that he has hidden his face and forgotten all about us?

Or is it just that's the way we feel? And that we're confused? Well, the truth is that for fair or for foul, we're confused about God himself.

We thought he would never forget us. We thought he was the friend who sticks closer than any brother. We heard the promise of Jesus, I will be with you always. And we too commit his word. But for the moment, he seems to have hidden his face from us. God has gone from being our father to seemingly standing by and letting our enemies get away with murder.

What kind of father is that? I don't think questions like this constitute necessarily a lack of faith. A crisis of faith, perhaps, but not a lack of it.

[6 : 00] Rather, they are honest questions looking for honest answers. I don't think, furthermore, they are sinful questions, nor even foolish questions.

Sometimes in prayer, that's how we need to express ourselves. And that's okay. Confused about God. But not only confused about God, confused about myself.

The psalmist is not just confused about God, but also about himself. In verse 2, he asks, How long must I wrestle with my thoughts, and every day have sorrow in my heart?

It's one thing to doubt others. It's an entirely other thing to doubt oneself. His enemies are coming in against him from every side. But it would seem to David that his greatest enemy is the enemy within himself.

He is constantly wrestling with his thoughts. He cannot be at peace with himself. Part of him says black, the other says white, and he can't work out what he truly is.

[7 : 09] And his heart is filled with sorrow. There's no joy here right now. There's no smiley faces sent as an emoji to a friend.

Just persistent, gnawing sorrow. Not only does he lack the intelligence to think through how to get out of this difficult situation, he's beginning also to lack the motivation.

He's letting himself down. And it hurts more than he can say. He wakes up, but he's confused. And he goes to bed, and he's confused.

In a world before professional psychologists, David is sailing close to the maelstrom of madness. And again, you know, it's okay to express ourselves in this way in prayer.

Do we not think that our heavenly father hears us, understands us, and sympathizes with us in our weakness? It is the only weakness he is able to sympathize with, a weakness of the body.

[8 : 24] Or can he also sympathize with a weakness of the mind? It's okay to pray this way. The title of the book says, It's okay not to be okay, especially in prayer.

Confusion, from verses 1 through 4. Secondly, confidence, from verses 5 through 6. Psalm 13 is a psalm of confidence. In many ways, this is one of the most remarkable of psalms.

At the same time, it scales the heights of confidence while plumbing the depths of confusion. That's very true to life for many of us.

But it can both be the worst of times and the best of times. Well, one thing's for sure. The measure of a man was revealed in how David dealt with the confusion in his life.

He had many questions. He was certain of little. But he trusted and he praised. He had faith and a song to sing to God.

[9 : 39] And it seems to me in this context, David was confident of two things. God and praise. God and praise.

Confident in God, first of all. Confident in God. It's difficult for us in our English translations to catch the contrast at the beginning of verse 5.

But I trust. The best translation might be, but as for me. It's almost like he's saying, you know, despite everything that's happening to me, I'm going to trust in God.

And that's what makes this psalm so remarkable. That despite his confusion in God and in himself, David's going to keep on trusting in the unfailing love and salvation of God.

He may well be clinging by his fingertips at this stage, but he's holding on nonetheless. And what's holding him is the covenant keeping, promise keeping character of God.

[10 : 54] That's what lies behind this word, unfailing love, in your Bible translation, or in Hebrew, chesed in verse 5. Not merely the affection of God for his people, but his infinite, eternal, and unchangeable determination to love them and to keep the promises of his covenant to them.

It's, as we might say, the gospel. It's not David's reputation that's as much at stake here as it is God's, God's ability to keep his promise.

And if there is one thing of which David is confident, it is God's integrity. But God will protect his own reputation by protecting his servant David.

So David is confident in the sovereignty and in the saving strength of God. If indeed, we were reading this passage in the original Hebrew Bible, we'd encounter a fascinating, but a very deliberate coincidence.

Namely, that the word, the Hebrew word for salvation in verse 5, is that from which we get the English word or the Aramaic word, Jesus.

[12:18] David says, my heart rejoices in Jesus. It's Jesus who, though we may still be confused, is our anchor and our strong refuge.

It's Jesus' knowledge of us. It's Jesus' grace for us. Jesus' love for us. Jesus' death for us. Jesus' resurrection for us.

Jesus' reign for us. It's Jesus' beginning, middle, and end. In our sorrow, we have a saviour. In our confusion, we have a Christ.

There is the confidence of every Christian who, even when he's lying on a bed of broken glass and is at war with himself, is trusting in God.

It requires effort, but still he trusts. That's our prayer for trust in trouble, for faith under fire, for confidence when confused, and all because of God's unfailing love, all because of Jesus.

[13:30] confidence. Confident in God, but then secondly, confident in praise. Praise. Verse six.

Is it really appropriate for David to be singing at this difficult time? I remember reading the autobiography of a freed slave, where he talks about the singing of the slaves in the American Deep South in the mid-19th century.

Many onlookers thought that these slaves were singing to express their happiness. happiness. But the autobiographer says, we sang not to express our happiness.

We sang to express our deep sorrow. Because for us, singing was the best thing to do. It was the most appropriate reaction to the difficult situations we faced.

And so David resolved to sing. He resolved not to be a slave to the confusion he was facing, nor to be cowed into silence by his enemies.

[14:41] He's going to open his mouth, and he's going to sing the praises of God. And it's not clear if he's going to be singing through tears, tears, or whether the act of singing itself will be therapeutic to him, but he is resolved to sing of God's grace and goodness to him.

Imagine the look on the faces of his enemies. Imagine how confused the Philippian jailer was when he heard Paul and Silas singing their hymns while their hands and feet were in chains.

You see, David's been punched, and he's been punched down but he's far from out. His trust in God is all the presenter he needs to lead him in worship.

Life's no bed of roses for him, but he's going to sing about God's unfailing love and salvation. You know, this psalm never tells us that David got out of this difficult situation he was facing, never tells us that his enemies stopped mocking him or he was no longer confused, but it does tell us that he was trusting and he was praising.

So often we think that we will only ever begin to praise and trust God when he has delivered us from our troubles.

[16:07] But as David has discovered, that the grace of God is so great and so sufficient that he can trust and praise in the troubles.

How then can I express my confusion to God in prayer? What better place than in Psalm 13 where we both have the therapy of words and the beauty of God and his salvation?

Did Jesus ever sing this psalm? Did he ever pray these words? I'm sure he did. I see no reason to doubt it, especially as he made his way up to Jerusalem, as he made his way into the Garden of Gethsemane and wept tears as great drops of blood onto the ground, especially as he gave himself up to death on our account.

So we close with these words. But as for me, despite all the confusing circumstances in my life, I will trust in your unfailing love.

Let's sing now a hymn of praise and confidence in God. God is a hymn of praise and confidence in God.