

SOFT INTRO

Back at the end of June, Pastor Gerry asked me which Psalm I wanted to cover for our **Summer Through the Psalms Sermon Series**. And the Holy Spirit put in my heart right away, “**Psalm 13: How long, O LORD?**”

So Pastor Gerry gave me the go-ahead to start on that; I got to work **studying, praying, getting** my notes together...

...and about a **week-and-a-half** into working on my sermon notes, Pastor Gerry emailed me **his** sermon notes for last week’s message, ***How to Pray About Life’s Big Problems***, so that I could start putting the slides together for Sunday.

And as I’m working through PG’s notes, it was kind of like, “Huh... There must be some **Holy Ghost Telepathy** going on!”

Neither one of us planned this; we didn’t **communicate, collaborate,** or **copy** each other’s homework...but without realizing it, **we basically wrote two versions of the same sermon**. We covered some of the **same ground, same topics**, even a couple of the same supporting verses. And I told Pastor Gerry: “Hey, this happened... Do I need to preach on something else?” But he just said, “Don’t worry; just do what you were going to do.”

So if you **hear some similarities from last week**, it’s not **Deja vu**; you’re **not going crazy** from the heat or humidity; I just think the Holy Spirit wants to emphasize some things to our hearts this summer, amen?

SCRIPTURE

Let's go to **Psalm 13** together. It's only **6 verses long**, but **a thousand miles deep**...and here's what it says:

1 – How long, LORD? Will You forget me forever?

How long will You hide Your face from me?

**2 – How long will I store up anxious concerns within me,
agony in my mind every day?**

3 – Consider me and answer, LORD my God.

Restore brightness to my eyes;

otherwise I will sleep in death.

4 – My enemy will say,

“I have triumphed over him,”

and my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

5 – But I have trusted in Your faithful love;

My heart will rejoice in Your deliverance.

6 – I will sing to the LORD

Because He has treated me generously.

PRAYER + MAIN INTRO

What do you do when heaven is silent?

- What do you do...in the kind of crisis where it's **worst-case scenario, nowhere to turn, no earthly resource left...**
- And you know that **if God doesn't intervene**, life will get **real ugly real quick...**
- So you **come before the Throne**, you **lift up your voice**, you **cry out to heaven...**

But heaven is silent.

And it's not for a **lack of trying** on your part.

- You've **prayed**. You've **fasted**. You've **wept**.
- You've **read your Bible** and **quoted the promises of God over and over**.
- You've done **everything you know how** to do to get God's attention...

But no matter what you do...**heaven is silent.**

Time passes. Prayers intensify. So does the crisis.

And still, heaven is silent.

No closure...no answer...no sign of anything ever changing...

And as you hit the wall...that frightening moment where heaven's silence is deafening, all you can do is echo the words of David...

"How long, LORD?"

- How long...will I battle this **cancer** or **health condition**?
- How long...will my **marriage** or my **family** be in **conflict**?
- How long...will I be overcome by **depression**?
- How long...will my **prayers for change** go **unanswered**?
- How long...will You **stay silent**?

"How long, LORD?"

CONTEXT of PSALM 13

If you're wrestling with that question today, **you are not alone**. Because, as we just read a moment ago, **David** had to wrestle with that question too.

We don't know exactly **when** or **why** David wrote **Psalm 13**, but we **DO** know from the books of **1 & 2 Samuel** that David had **plenty of opportunity** to ask, "How long, LORD?"

- In **1 Samuel**, David was **anointed by God** to become the **next king**, only to be **hunted down** by the **current king**, Saul. **For at least seven years, David fled for his life...never at rest, constantly on**

the run, praying desperately that Saul wouldn't find him.

If YOU were running for YOUR life for 7 years...nowhere to call home, nowhere to feel safe...wouldn't you also be "storing up anxious concerns"? "How long, LORD?"

- Then in **2 Samuel**, as Pastor Gerry highlighted last week, David was hunted down **again**—this time by **his own son Absalom**, who was **trying to overthrow David and take the throne for himself**.

If your own child wanted you dead... and if **he had swayed some of your closest friends** and **allies** against you...wouldn't there be **"agony in YOUR mind every day"**? "How long, LORD?"

And from the raw emotion of that question... "How long, LORD?" ...**David introduces us to one of the most precious gifts God has provided to His people...** a gift called "**Lament**".

INTRODUCTION to LAMENT

As we learned a couple weeks ago, there are numerous styles of Psalms in our Bible; some are about **praise**, or about **victory**; some are even about **history**...but well over **half** of the Psalms are what scholars call "Psalms of **lament**."

Maybe you're wondering: What is "**lament**" anyway? We don't hear that word a lot in church today; what does it mean?

- Is “**lament**” just a sanitized term for “**complaining**”?
- Is “**lament**” the “spiritual way / the churchified way” of **shaking our fist at God** and **throwing a holy temper tantrum**?
- Or is it **MORE** than that?

When we study “lament” in the Psalms...what we discover...is that:

Lament is the healing surrender of our pain to God.

- **God knows**...that we live in a **fallen world**.
- **God knows**...that you and I face the **aftereffects** of **sin and death** every day.

And **in His mercy**, God has provided lament as a means to **fully express our sorrow** and **wholly encounter His presence** in a place of surrender.

Lament is the healing surrender of our pain to God.

How exactly does David “get there” in this Psalm? How can we “surrender our pain” in such a way as to find healing?

POINT 1 – BEING VULNERABLE BEFORE GOD

The first thing David teaches us is that we surrender our pain by BEING VULNERABLE before God.

David doesn't **hide his problems** behind a **superficial mask**. He's not afraid to talk about the **brutal reality** and **dangerous questions** that are **preoccupying his heart**, but he lays out all his vulnerabilities in **vv. 1 & 2**:

1 – How long, LORD? Will You forget me forever?

How long will You hide Your face from me?

**2 – How long will I store up anxious concerns within me,
agony in my mind every day?**

How long will my enemy dominate me?

In other words:

- God, I feel like You've **forgotten** me.
- Why are You **not talking** to me?
- How long will I have to **live like this**, God?
- And how long before You **do something** about it?

David shows us that Lament is not afraid to be vulnerable. And that's important!

Some of you might've grown up in a **family culture** or a **church culture** where **being vulnerable was taboo**...and you may have been taught to be **very stoic**, **very guarded** with your emotions.

- Big boys don't cry. Big girls don't cry.
- Don't ever open up about your **fears**, **sorrows**, or **secrets**
- **And ESPECIALLY don't bring any of that into church.**

Because if you're a Christian, you've got no business being sad...

You have **no reason** to feel **tired, depressed, or upset...**

- Because you're **more than a conqueror**
- You're **seated in heavenly places**
- You're **mighty in Christ**
- And if you say **ANYTHING** about how you're **REALLY** feeling...
- Remember that **death and life are in the power of the tongue...**
(don't even get me started on how badly that verse from Proverbs has been abused)... **death and life are in the power of the tongue...**
- And if you **say anything that's not life...**if you ever tell **anyone** that you're **sad** or **stressed** or **overwhelmed**, you're **speaking death**; you're **confessing negativity...**
- **So keep quiet! Soldier on! Chin up! Toughen up!**
- **This is the day the Lord has made; you had BETTER REJOICE and be glad in it!**

LISTEN: If you're struggling with that today...

... if you have been shamed into thinking that no child of God should ever be allowed to be vulnerable...then think about this...

- The same **David**...who says in **Psalm 34:1** that **"I will bless LORD at all times..."** (CSB)...

David also says in **Psalm 6:6-7a**, “I am weary from my groaning; with my tears I dampen my bed and drench my couch every night. My eyes are swollen from grief...” Anybody here ever gone through a night like that?

- **Not just David**, but **how about Paul?** The same **Paul**, who tells us that “**we are more than conquerors**” in **Romans 8:37**...

He also tells us in **2 Corinthians 1:8** about a time where he and Timothy were “...**completely overwhelmed—beyond our strength—so that we even despaired of life itself.**” **Come on, Paul!** Why aren't you being **more victorious?** Why are you “**confessing all that negativity?**” “**You can't talk about that in church, Paul!**” ... **he talked about it in the Bible!**

- And **not just David, not just Paul**, but even **Jesus**... who came to give **life to the full**, and to **set the captives free**...
Jesus was not afraid to be vulnerable.

John 11:35...Jesus wept at the **tomb** of **Lazarus**...

Luke 19:41...Jesus wept over the **sin of Jerusalem** and the **lostness of the Jewish people**...

- And His last night on earth, **overwhelmed** by what He was about to face on the cross, Jesus told His disciples in **Matthew 26:38**, “**I am deeply grieved to the point of death.**” Or, as another version says, “**My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.**”

- **REMEMBER: Jesus knew that God was in control**...He knew that God would use the cross for His glory...He knew how the story would pan out...and **even with that foreknowledge**...Jesus was still “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”

Don't ever fall for the lie that “a true Christian has no right to be sad” or vulnerable. God did not design our emotions to be **suppressed**, but to be **EXpressed**, and **to point us to Someone higher than ourselves**—a **faithful God** who **knows and understands ALL our feelings, even better than we do.**

And I would **encourage** you today:

- If you need to **come to this altar** at the end of the service
- If you need to **let your guard down** and **open up** with someone about what's **really going on** in your life
- **If you need to use up every tissue in these Kleenex boxes today**

That's not a bad thing! That's a good thing! Because vulnerability is a vital ingredient of lament; **it's that critical first step of healing surrender as we release our pain to God.**

Lament teaches us to surrender our pain by **being vulnerable before God**, but also by **being reverent toward God.**

POINT 2 – BEING REVERENT TOWARD GOD

Listen to this quote about lament:

“...a complaint is an **accusation** against God that **maligns** His character, but a lament is an **appeal** to God based on **confidence** in His character” (Packiam, 2020, April 3).

David applies that in **vv. 3-4 of Psalm 13:**

3 – Consider me and answer, LORD my God.

Restore brightness to my eyes;

otherwise, I will sleep in death.

4 – My enemy will say, “I have triumphed over him,”

and my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

Notice David’s reverence in these verses:

- Even as he **questions** God, **he does not ATTACK God...**
- “God, **I hate you!** You’re a **monster! How dare** You do this to me?!”
- David does not **resent God** or **profane Him...**

But even in his **questioning...he still honors God with reverence...why?**

Because David knows who God is!

- David knows that God ***isn't just "an" option***; God is the ***only*** option.
- No other ***rescue***...no other ***Savior*** can ***restore brightness to David's eyes*** and save him from ***sleeping in death***.

David is self-aware of the truth that Jesus taught us in **John 15:5**: "I am the vine, You are the branches...You can do nothing without Me." ***And from that awareness, David surrenders his pain to God by being reverent.***

We spoke a few moments ago about the importance of being vulnerable. But as ***dangerous as it is to NOT be vulnerable***, there is an ***OPPOSITE and EQUAL danger*** where ***vulnerability*** gets confused for ***vindictiveness***; and instead of ***reverencing God*** in our pain, we ***choose to resent Him*** instead.

I am ***very concerned*** by the ***sentiment in mainstream Christian culture*** which says, "You know, one of the best things you can do for your pain is just to cuss God out."

- "***Scream. Yell. Rage. Swear.*** Tell God what you ***really*** think of Him."
- "Don't be ***shy***; don't be ***polite***; don't ***hold anything back***, but ***give God both barrels*** and let Him have it."
- "Because ***God's big enough***; He's ***strong enough***; ***He can handle whatever you throw at Him.***"

And we have to be **so, SO careful** with that.

- **Hear my heart this morning:** There **are** moments where **it is necessary** to express pain on an extreme level. I've had to have those "ugly cries", and you have too.
- **But when someone says,** "Go ahead and cuss God out, because He's big enough to handle it..."
- **My response** to that is, "Of course, God is **big enough** to handle it...but **don't you think that should make you STOP and THINK TWICE** about **what you're saying** and to **Whom you're saying it?!**"

That lack of reverence is **exactly** what got the Israelites in trouble in

Numbers 14. Quick recap:

- **God rescued the Israelites** out of slavery in Egypt; He brought them to the **border of the Promised Land**, where they met some **giants** that blocked their progress.
- **BTW: The Israelites' sin was NOT that they felt vulnerable compared to the giants. Those giants were not insignificant; they were a very legitimate threat.**
- The Israelites' vulnerability was not the problem; **THE PROBLEM was that they EXPRESSED their vulnerability WITH RESENTMENT instead of REVERENCE.**
- "God, we hate You! We don't want You! You only brought us here to kill us! We wish we had never followed You! Your plan for us is terrible!"

And God's response was, "Alright...everybody 20 years and older **will die in the wilderness** and **never enter the Promised Land.**" **Their lack of reverence cut them off from the blessing God wanted to give them.**

The **worst part** of that story—which we don't hear a whole lot about—is that **after** the people have "**told God what they really think of Him**"

...and **after** Moses tells them **the consequences** for their lack of reverence...

...there **IS a moment** where the Israelites realize, "Oh no...God was **right...we were wrong...we didn't really mean what we said,** so let's rally the troops and give this thing a second try!"

But Moses says, "**It's too late!** You **chose resentment** instead of **reverence**...and now you have pay the cost of that."

This is why "reverence" in lament is so important: **You cannot surrender pain to God that is tied up in resentment!**

- If you are consumed with **hating God, blaming others, playing the victim,** and **RESENTING God instead of REVERING Him...**
- **Your resentment will cut you off from the victory and the healing that God wants to bring.**

That's why David tells us in **another Psalm, Psalm 51:17b:** "You will not despise a **broken** and **humbled** heart, God."

THAT'S reverence. THAT'S surrender.

As you **surrender your pain**, and as **you come before God** with vulnerability, **keep your heart humble**. **Let your lament and your surrender be marked by reverence**, so that God has total access to bring the healing that only He knows how to give.

Lament is the healing surrender of our pain to God. We surrender by **being vulnerable BEFORE God, being reverent TOWARD God**, and finally, we surrender by **being anchored IN God**.

POINT 3 – BEING ANCHORED IN GOD

Psalm 13:5-6:

**5 – But I have trusted in Your faithful love;
My heart will rejoice in Your deliverance.
6 – I will sing to the LORD
Because He has treated me generously.**

David gives us **3 Anchors of Healing Surrender** to consider here. And the first one is **Trust: Anchor yourself in God's faithfulness**.

SUBPOINT 1 – Trust: Anchor Yourself in God's Faithfulness

Notice how there's no "**happy ending**" for David in this Psalm.

There are other Psalms, like **Psalm 40**, where David says, “**Hey, the Lord answered me! God came through! He lifted me up, put my feet on a rock! I get to celebrate a happy ending today!**”

We don't get to see that in **Psalm 13**. There is no **definitive breakthrough**, or **answer**, or **closure**...but even without that, **David still trusts in God's faithful love.**

“Lord, even though it feels like You're hiding Your face from me, and even though I don't have answers right now, I believe that **Your love is faithful**, and **You are greater than the pain** that I'm experiencing in this moment.”

ILLUSTRATION: Joni Eareckson Tada

Some of you will know the story of a woman named **Joni Eareckson Tada**. 57 years ago, when Joni was a teenager, she was **paralyzed from the neck down** in a **fluke swimming accident**. When I was 23, I actually got to hear **Joni tell her story in person** at a conference in Nashville, TN, **and out of all the incredible wisdom** that Joni shared with us, there's **one thing she said** that has never left my heart. She said: “**God never promises us answers...but He always promises us Himself.**” **As an AG pastor, I wonder sometimes if we've lost sight of that.** We place so much emphasis on getting answers and getting them **NOW**.

“Lord, give us **healing!** Give us **victory!** Give us **miracles!** Give us **breakthrough!** **We tell God over and over how much we want breakthrough...**

...but what if God knows that the breakthrough WE WANT is not the breakthrough that WE NEED?

What if God is saying to us today, “I know you’re praying for answers...but more than giving you a breakthrough, what I really want to give you is Myself!

“I want to give you an encounter with My Spirit, and a moment of hearing My voice, that you won’t be able to access anywhere else.

“So that later on down the line, when another season of pain comes, you can look back at my faithfulness...and say, ‘The last time this kind of pain happened, God met me here!’

“ ‘And even when I didn’t have answers, and even when I didn’t know what would happen to me, I knew for a fact that I was anchored in the faithful love of the Lord!’ ”

Anchor yourself in God’s faithfulness. Trust in His faithful love today. **And that trust will lead you into healing surrender for your pain.**

SUBPOINT 2 – Rejoice: Anchor Yourself in God’s Salvation

First anchor is “trust”, second is **“rejoice: anchor yourself in God’s salvation.”**

David doesn't rejoice in his **own means of deliverance**, but in God's deliverance.

"God, I trust Your ability to save. You are **mighty**, You are **strong**, You have conquered **sin, death, hell** and the **grave**; and **if Your power can raise me from the deadness of my sins, then that same power is MORE THAN ENOUGH for this season that I find myself in.**"

Let me ask you a question today: **When was the last time that you reminded your pain of the wonder of the Gospel?**

- If you've been in a church **a long time**, one of the biggest dangers is that we forget the wonder of the Gospel... **and we treat the "good news" like it's "old news"**.

"Well, salvation is just **'beginner's material'** for new believers, and you don't really have to think about it after a while... You just have to go from 'glory to glory' and 'move on' to bigger and better, because the Gospel is just too basic and not as exciting."

LISTEN:

Don't EVER grow indifferent to the wonder of the Gospel.

- Don't ever treat Gospel as something you "graduate from", or something that happened to you back in 1972 at a camp meeting.

- But celebrate the reality that **you are saved, you are redeemed, you once were lost, but now you're found!**

Hold on tight to the wonder of the Gospel! May your heart never be stale, or indifferent, but ALWAYS REJOICING in God's salvation!

David embraces the anchors of trust...rejoicing...and finally, **singing**. **He calls us to SING...to anchor ourselves in God's goodness.**

SUBPOINT 3 – Sing: Anchor Yourself in God's Goodness

Look what David **doesn't** say.

- “I will sing to the LORD because I know that this will all get fixed tomorrow.”
- “I will sing to the LORD because this will all make sense next week.”

David doesn't worship so that God will DO. David worships because of what God has DONE.

“God, even though I see **real pain** in front of me, I also see **real goodness** from Your hand.

- “You give me **new mercies every morning**;
- “You **crown me with faithful love and compassion**;
- “You **lived, died, and rose again** so that I could be **restored** to You.
- “Because of Your goodness, Lord, I am **safe**...I am **secure**...

- “And I don’t say this **in denial** of my pain, I say this **through the surrender** of my pain...
- “I say it with **tested, tried, and unbroken confidence** in the unfailing goodness of God.

“And **even though the pain is real**, and **even though I don’t know how this current story will end...God, I choose to anchor myself in Your goodness. I surrender this pain to You**, with the **full assurance** that **Your healing** will come.”

CONCLUSION

Lament is the healing surrender of our pain to God.

Perhaps God is speaking to you about that today....

- God might be calling you to **surrender by being vulnerable**... to **open up** about the **pain**, the **secrets**, and **circumstances** that have weighed you down for too long.
- He might be calling you to **surrender by being reverent**...to **lay down** your **resentment** and **pick up reverence** so that He has **full access** to give you healing.
- And for ALL of us here, God is calling us to **surrender by being anchored**...to **trust** His faithfulness, **rejoice** in His salvation, and **sing** about His goodness.

If God is speaking to you about that, and if **you want to walk** in the **healing surrender of lament**, **I invite you to come receive that** at the altar today.

And if you feel that **you don't need to lament** today—if you've finally **had a victory**, or if you're **enjoying a season of rest** right now—**still come**, but **don't come for yourself**. **Come for someone else** to be **THEIR support** and **THEIR encourager** as they step into the healing surrender that lament offers us.

We're going to sing a final song to get us started... Again, if God is speaking to you today—either to **seek Him for yourself**, or to **seek Him on behalf of someone else**—don't **put that off**. Don't **stuff that down**.

Just come.

Just come to this altar and let's see what God does as we sing...

DISCLAIMER: This manuscript was written and preached by Jon Engler for the weekend of July 14, 2024 at EAG Church in Rocky Mount, NC. This manuscript is solely owned by EAG and has been published online for reflection and deeper study. The reproduction and/or distribution of this manuscript, either in part or in full, without the author's express written consent, is strictly forbidden.

SOURCES

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<https://www.ntwrightonline.org/five-things-to-know-about-lament/>