



...Among All Nations, Beginning in Greater Washington DC

Let's do what we've done the last couple weeks. Let's read Psalm 13 out loud together

*How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
2 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?
3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,
4 lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.
5 But I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
6 I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

Before I say anything else, I want you to take a couple minutes on your own and do the first M in MAPS, like we did last week. Just meditate, which means for the next couple minutes ask, "What is this passage saying?" I'm trying to guide you in a way that shows how you can do the same thing tomorrow morning or afternoon or evening, when you're alone, with the next Psalm in our Bible reading. That's Psalm 20, for January 20th.

I want to invite everyone to do this, young or old, if you've been a member for decades or if this is your first time here. Even if you're not a Christian, observe what we just read. What is it saying? Circle words, underline phrases or write notes that might clue you in to the meaning of the Psalm.

By the way, if you've never heard the term "psalm," it's basically a biblical word for a song or a prayer that would be sung in praise to God. This Psalm, it says, was written by King David at some point in Israel's history. We don't know for sure if he was king when he wrote it. But look at what is David saying? Is there anything he repeats? Are there any words or phrases that stick out to you? What's the overall tone of the Psalm? Is it divided up in a certain way? What does it seem to be teaching us about God or about us?

Okay, that's more than enough to think about for the next few minutes. Write some notes, then I'll bring us back together.

~~~~~

All right, I hope that was nowhere near sufficient time. You might have wondered, “How do you spend all this time in the Word?” You can read it pretty quickly, but if we’re not speed reading—if we’re really stopping and looking and thinking—it’s going to take some time. Let’s start with the big picture. As you think about this, how would you say this Psalm as a whole is divided up? When you look at it, it starts with five questions in the first two verses. All these different questions seem to go together.

Then, when you get to verse three, you start to see some requests or commands. That continues from verse three to four. Then when you get to verse five, you see a major transition word—“but”—and that leads us into the rest of the Psalm. When you look at the big picture, it seems like three movements. Let’s do this. Let’s isolate each of those movements and think about them separately, then think about how they tie together.

We’ll start with the first one, verses one and two. Did you notice anything here that repeats? That was an easy one, right? “How long?” *“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?”* Four different times. This is significant. From the very beginning, David is questioning God. There are five question marks in the first two verses.

Now, we don’t know exactly what’s happening in David’s life at this point. But we do know that he’s feeling a lot of emotion here. If you haven’t already, write down some words that explain how David feels at this point. When the first words out of the shoot are “*How long, O Lord,*” I would say it’s pretty safe to assume he feels tired, maybe desperate. We’re trying to put ourselves in the shoes of the one who’s writing this. “*Will you forget me forever?*” He feels forgotten by God. “*How long will you hide your face from me?*” Not just forgotten but abandoned. He feels like God is against him and has deliberately hidden His face from him.

“*How long must I take counsel in my soul...*?” We’ll call that restless or anxious, tossing and turning. He can’t get this out of his mind. “*...[A]nd have sorrow in my heart...*?” He feels sad, maybe even depressed. And did you see: “*...all the day*”? Then earlier he said “forever.” It feels like there’s no light at the end of this tunnel. He feels hopeless—which is part of what depression is, right? “I’m in despair and I don’t see a way out.” Then, “*How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?*” He feels defeated by his enemy. In the end, I think it would be accurate to say he feels pretty much alone. “You’ve forgotten me, my enemy is prevailing over me—I feel alone.”

Let me pause here and ask do you ever feel like any of these things? This Psalm is so applicable to so many lives in this room right now. So many situations come to my mind that I know people are walking through in our church. This is real. I hope that right now you are encouraged by this Psalm in the Bible that is showing us that it’s okay to come to God with our questions. There is a place in relationship

with God for something that's called "lament" which is a biblical word that basically means being honest with God about struggles in our lives.

Psalms 13 is not alone. Did you know that over one-third of the Psalms in the Bible are laments like this? The Bible is showing us how to pour out our hearts to God with all our fears, frustrations, hurts and all our sorrows, in a way that will actually build our faith in the end.

Eric Saunders, our campus pastor at Arlington, and I were talking about this text. He pointed out how necessary it is for there to be space in our relationships with God for lament. Just think about it. This is the same David who wrote, three Psalms later, Psalm 16:11. This same David said to God, *"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."* One Psalm is full of joy, but another Psalm is saying, "I have no joy." Which is it? Eric says it's like David is your favorite musical artist. You pop in his album and the first track is, "God, where are You?" The second track is, "God, You're so close to me." Then the third track is, "God, I have no joy." The fourth track is, "God, You are fullness of joy."

When we come back to Psalm 13, we might think there's something wrong with David. But I would submit there's actually something right. David is expressing here the full range of emotions in a relationship with God. David's relationship with God had room for times when God feels distant, as well as times when God feels close. There's room in relationship with God for praise and thanksgiving—and there's room for lament. Some days there's more of one than the other. It's the fruit of wrestling with the reality of a good God in a world that is not always good.

"God, I thought marriage was good, but it's hard and I'm hurting. I thought singleness was good, but it's really challenging at times. I thought parenting was good, but I'm at the end of my rope and don't know what to do. I thought parents were good, but I don't always get along with mine. Or, I want to be a parent and I don't know why You're not providing a child. I don't understand why I have this pain that won't go away. I don't understand why I feel depressed or anxious or angry; I just can't seem to shake it. I know that death is real, but I didn't expect it to happen to my child, or my dad, or my mom, or my friend, so soon."

In the midst of it all, you wonder, "Where is God? And how long will this hurt last? Forever?" David is really asking the question here, because that's the way he genuinely feels. This is why Dr. King built a speech around wording from this Psalm at the end of that march from Selma. If you remember, the original march was to support voting rights for African-Americans just 50 years ago—in many people's lifetime today. The original march was scheduled for March 7, 1965 when peaceful, unarmed marchers were attacked with billy clubs and tear gas just a few blocks from where they started. It was an event that is now known as Bloody Sunday.

They tried again two days later, but they were barricaded by government state troopers. Finally, a couple of weeks later over 3,000 people set out from Selma, walked 12 hours a day, sleeping in fields at

night, until they reached the state capital in Montgomery, where they were joined by over 20,000 others.

Dr. King stood before them and here's what he said:

I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" Somebody is asking, "How long will prejudice blind the visions of men, darken their understanding and drive bright-eyed wisdom from her sacred throne?" Somebody is asking, "When will wounded justice, lying prostrate on the streets of Selma and Birmingham and communities all over the South, be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men?" Somebody is asking, "When will the radiant star of hope be plunged against the nocturnal bosom of this lonely night, plucked from weary souls with chains of fear and the manacles of death? How long will justice be crucified and truth bear it?"

How long? How long? How long? Although obvious strides have been made since that day, I'd say the question still remains in a country where everything from employment to education to household wealth to crime and the criminal justice system's undeniable disparities still exist. How long?

This leads us back to Psalm 13. These two words represent a real question with real wrestling amidst hurt in a fallen world. So let's see where they lead in verses three and four. Did you notice the requests? *"Consider and answer me..."* That's what he's asking the Lord, his 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."*

"Consider"—that's a pretty strong word, when you think about someone who feels forgotten or abandoned, like God has turned His face from you. It's like David is saying, "Look at me. Don't turn Your face from me. Look at me and answer me. Look, then do something. Respond please!"

*"O LORD..."* Did you notice that from last week? Yahweh, the covenant name for God. *"O LORD my God."* Look at me, God, because I am looking to You.

*"Light up my eyes..."* which we know is more than just figurative or symbolic or spiritual, because he says, *"lest I sleep the sleep of death..."* This is a life or death matter in David's life. He goes on to think about the prospect of ultimate defeat. *"Lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him,' lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken."* It's like David is looking at the future, and if God doesn't help, that future is really dark.

This is really critical here, not just for understanding the Psalm, but to us in our lives. Amidst all these emotions, what is David doing? He is looking to the LORD his God, which in and of itself is extremely significant. We are all tempted in our hurts to let those hurts lead us in so many other directions, to let them lead us toward frustration and anger with others. Maybe we try to numb our feelings and suppress our thoughts with anything from drinking to eating to endless entertainment to mindless hours on our phone or online, oftentimes in ways that lead to impurity and immorality. Instead what we need more than anything else is to look to the LORD our God.

I was so encouraged Friday night to see my brother Steve here after his son Jake died so unexpectedly and tragically a few months ago. He's here lifting his hands, seeking God and crying out to

God. I know that's not easy. Nothing is easy for Steve and Jen and Owen right now. Nothing. But that's all the more reason to look to the LORD our God and cry out honestly to Him, "Look at me. Help me. Light up my eyes. I need You to do this."

Yes, hold on to lament and don't let go of faith in the midst of it. Faith and lament go together. When your heart is filled with these emotions from verses one and two, hold on to faith (verses three and four).

You ask, "How can I hold on to faith?" Well, keep going and look at the last two verses. "*But...*" Here's where everything shifts. "*But I have trusted...*" Let's mark the verbs here: "*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.*"

So how do you get there amidst lament? How do you get to singing to the Lord? It starts with trust. We are to trust in what? In the steadfast love of God. David says, "I'm going to trust in Your love. I'm going to trust that You still love me." David knows this is the Lord we're talking about here. Throughout history, God's people have been through dark and difficult times, but the Lord has always, always, always proven His love.

It's like David pauses, realizes and remembers that the Lord "*...has dealt bountifully with me.*" What a word. God hasn't just dealt kindly, but bountifully with him. What a weapon we have in the fight for faith, to be able to look back and consider how, amidst all the hurts and all the pains, all the ways God have indeed been good to us, the ways God has indeed provided for us, in ways that lead you to rejoice in His salvation. This is the Lord Who saves. This is the Lord Who delivers. Now, think about this. When David writes the word "salvation," David doesn't even know all we know about God's salvation.

Listen closely here if you're not yet a Christian, because this is the big-picture story of the Bible. We're only about halfway through it here in Psalms. God created all of us to live in harmony with Him, but all of us have sinned against God. Every one of us has turned aside from God's ways to our own ways. That's why this world is not as it should be, because we have turned from God. Because of our sin against God, in His holiness we deserve His eternal judgment. But God has not left us alone in our state of fallenness, destined for judgment. God has come to us in the person of Jesus.

Do you want to know something really interesting? You wouldn't know this from reading the English, but this word "salvation" in the Hebrew is the same root word from which we get the Greek translation for the name Jesus. Do you know what "Jesus" means? Jesus means "The Lord saves."

Now, David didn't know that in Psalm 13. He didn't know all the details about Jesus. But the big-picture story of the Bible is that Jesus has come. He had no sin in Him, yet He chose to die on a cross to endure the judgment we deserve in our sin, then He rose from the dead in victory over sin. The Bible says anyone anywhere in this fallen world who turns from themselves and their sin, trusting in Jesus to save them from their sin, will be forgiven of all their sin and given eternal life with God.

Again, David didn't know all that in Psalm 13, but he knew enough to know that you can count on God's salvation in a fallen world. You can count on God's love. And the whole point of lament is to honestly come before God with your hurts, to cry out to Him and in your cries to remember that you are looking to the One Who has loved you, Who does love you, Who will love you and Who will ultimately save you and bring you to song as you trust in Him.

You say, "I don't know how to get there." This is faith. Faith is a fight to trust the love of God when everything in your soul is telling you to give up. The weapon you have to fight that fight of faith is the salvation of God. The weapon you have in the fight of faith is the presence of the God Who has paid the price to deliver you from sin and the promise of God that He will ultimately deliver you from suffering.

Before I bring this to a close, I want to pause for a few minutes and invite you to let this soak in. While reading the Bible alone, I would encourage you to make all kinds of notes, like we did the first time, then write down these four things: MAPS.

- **Meditate and Memorize.** Write down the point of the passage in one sentence. How would you summarize Psalm 13 in one sentence? Maybe circle one verse you might want to memorize.
- **Apply.** Write down at least one way you can apply this passage to your life. Think head, heart, hands. How does this passage transform the way you think, the way you desire, and the way you act? Try to be specific. Not just, "I want to trust God," but, "I want to trust God with this specific thing. I want to fight the fight of faith in this way, in this circumstance." Be specific.
- **Pray.** I want to encourage you to write down a prayer based on this passage. Think about the acronym **PRAY**. How does this passage lead you to **Praise, Repent, Ask and/or Yield**?
- **Share.** Write down one specific way you can share any of the above with someone else.

Let me invite you to take just a few minutes before we close. I'll bring us back together and bring all this to a head. Just like we did earlier, making notes, now based on what we've seen, let's do MAPS. Let's write it down. What does this passage mean? What is it saying? How does it apply? How does it lead me to pray? And, how can I share it with others? Start writing, then I'll bring us back together in a couple minutes.



All right. Feel free to continue writing if you need to. That's totally great. I hope this is a helpful picture. I'm not saying when you sit down for a Bible study it needs to look like this, but I hope that walking through this shows you how you can do this. It's you and God meeting together over His Word, making notes. If you answer just these four questions and if you meditate on God's Word day and night like that, you will experience life. It's a promise straight from God.

Let me bring this Psalm to a conclusion. I want to share with you how Dr. King ended his speech that day in Montgomery, Alabama. This is what he said:

I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long.

How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.

How long? Not long, because you shall reap what you sow.

How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.

How long? Not long, because:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored

He has loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword

His truth is marching on

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat

He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat

O be swift my soul to answer Him, be jubilant my feet

Our God is marching on

Glory, glory, hallelujah! God's truth is marching on

Don't miss it. The real power in Dr. King's speech is in the fact that he pointed to another King Who changes everything. This means I'm standing here looking out across a gathering with all kinds of people who, in different and deep ways, have struggled, are struggling and will struggle with the question how long? I want to encourage you today with a clear word from God Himself—"Not long." In the big picture, in the ultimate arc of the universe, not long at all.

How long? Not long, because we know that these present sufferings are not worth comparing with the future glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

How long? Not long, because justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).

How long? Not long, because Jesus has come and for our sake He felt forgotten, abandoned, full of sorrow. For our sake, He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46). For our sake, He took the judgment we deserve upon Himself. He died on a cross. He slept the sleep of death in a scene that sure looked like His enemies had prevailed over Him.

But how long did He stay dead? Not long. Three days later He rose from the grave! He ascended on high. Death has been defeated. So when you and I ask honestly, "How long, O Lord?" we can know the answer is, "Not long," because our Savior is alive, and He is coming back for us. And before long, there will be no more sorrow, no more sickness, no more pain. Before long, God Himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes and we will be with Him forever. So hold on to faith in the middle of the hurts, because we can know that because of God's love, it will not be long.

Will you bow your heads with me? First and foremost, I want to ask do you know Jesus as your salvation, as your Savior? Right now, where you are, are you trusting Jesus as the Lord of your life? If you have never put your faith in Jesus to bring you into relationship with God, or if you are far from Jesus right now, I want to give you an opportunity to put your faith in Him.

You can pray right now in your heart, before God, “Dear God, I am a sinner. I have turned from You. I am separated from You by my sin. But today I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sin. Today, I trust in Your steadfast love for me. Today, I rejoice in Your salvation. Forgive me of my sin and give me eternal life with You.” When you pray that, God promises to answer.

With our heads still bowed, if you just prayed that to God, I want to invite you to simply raise your hand before God, indicating, “Yes, I’m trusting in Jesus to save me from my sin and to be Lord of my life.”

God, I praise You for bringing people today to hear this good news, to be forgiven of their sin and be reconciled to You. I pray that You would give them courage to make that public today through baptism, and that others who have not been baptized yet would do that today. I pray that they would say, “Yes, Jesus is my Savior and my Lord.”

God, I pray especially for those who came in today asking, “How long?” They may not have put it that way, but that’s where their hearts are. Maybe they haven’t put it that way, but they’re struggling. God, I pray that You would help them trust in Your steadfast love.

Thank You for Your Word, for Your truth, that is indeed marching on, that we can trust in now and forever. Not one of us knows what’s coming this week or the rest of this year. I pray like in Psalm 13 that we may have faith in the midst of whatever comes. Help us trust in Your steadfast love and sing to You, for You have dealt bountifully with us. In Jesus’ name—in the name of the One Who saves—we pray. Amen.

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

All Scriptures are quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:** By David Platt. © David Platt. Website: [Radical.net](http://Radical.net)