

How long, O LORD!

Psalm 13

In this Psalm David calls on God from the brink of death and despair, and yet finishes his song full of faith. His prayer consists of petitions, statements of faith, and arguments for why God should do what he asks.

Summary of the Text

This psalm divides into three sections: a complaint (vv. 1-2), a prayer (vv. 3-4), and a statement of faith (vv. 5-6). The complaint is about God, himself, and his enemies, expressed by four how longs: how long will God forget him and how long will He hide His face from him (v. 1); how long will he take counsel in his own soul with daily sorrow in his heart (v. 2); and how long will his enemy be exalted (v. 2). The second part of the psalm calls on Yahweh his God to consider and hear, to enlighten his eyes lest two consequences follow: his eyes close in sleep of death (v. 3), and his enemies announce their victory and rejoice in his defeat (v. 4). In the third section David states his trust in God's mercy in the past and his plan to rejoice in His salvation (v. 5). He will sing to the Lord because He has dealt bountifully with him (v. 6).

Righteous Complaints

When was the last time you asked God how long He would allow something to continue? It's easy to pray like God doesn't really care about you, answer prayers, or indeed exist, so we need the psalms to sort us out. David asks specifically because he knows God can and will act. This is what biblical faith looks like and we should live in such a way that we are driven to call on God to do something about the mess we see all around us. Each part of this psalm expresses righteous emotions and desires. David is not being a whiner at the beginning, insolent in the middle, and then finally repentant at the end. He is faithful throughout. He wants not just to know *about* God's grace and favor, but to experience it. He knows the Lord can't actually forget him, but the point is that He isn't answering his prayers (v. 1). So David is sick of being sad every day and beat by his enemies (v. 2). There's a false piety that tries to be holier than Scripture, really, holier than God. For evangelicals it can be shock to even have enemies because we think the second greatest commandment is to be nice everyone. We are told to minister to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19), and in this psalm we learn how to complain faithfully to God and not sinfully to ourselves or others. Sinful complaints express dissatisfaction, pain, uneasiness, censure, resentment, or grief in a way that displeases God, in a way that isn't part of any solution. Godly complaints tell God what needs to change and why, going to the one who can and will do something about it. But you need to ask. Faith asks, complains, and trusts God; unbelief just grumbles because we like to whine and remain victims instead of fighting for victory. We don't worship a tame God who can be bought, bribed, or controlled. He won't always answer the way we ask, which is good because we are often wrong, but He will hear and answer.

Faithful Arguments

We don't know the particular occasion for this psalm, but we know David was no faker. He argues for God to preserve him. He calls out "O Yahweh, my God", recognizing the position and power of the one who can shine the light on his eyes that will otherwise close in death. The argument, slightly expanded, goes like this: You, my covenant God, are my life-giver; I don't want to die; therefore, give preserve my life lest I sleep in death (cf. Ps. 6:5). In addition, as a result of my death, my enemy will exalt and rejoice over me. David uses God's own works and character as arguments for why He should answer his prayer. He's not

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his own God, Yahweh is. Is this really the place in the story where David's character should make his final appearance? God hates the violent and proud; why would He let them have their way and strut over David's downfall? These are real consequences that will follow if God allows him to die. If this conversation between David and God feels unnecessary or like it contradicts His sovereignty, then you think like a hyper-Calvinist instead of a Calvinist. God is completely sovereign, knowing the end from the beginning, and He ordains the means that result in the ends. We are Christians and not Stoics, called to pray and live fervent for glory of God. Paul commands you to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13). You should pray and sing because it works. The Lord uses your desires, your prayers, your arguments with Him to shape history, to change the lives of people who will live forever, including your own. God doesn't need us in the absolute sense to do anything, but He has chosen to govern the world this way, to bring us into covenant friendship like Abraham, and covenant sonship through Jesus, to hear us when we cry as His beloved people.

A Plan to Win

David bolsters his confidence in the Lord, what He will do for Him and through him. There were many troubles, sins, and failures in his past. What do these matter when God's grace triumphed over them all? "But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation" (v. 5). He stands on the mountain summit of God's past faithfulness to view the horizon of victory in the future. If David were to say these exact words while trusting in himself—his plans, his cunning, his power—it would be presumptuous and fall to the ground. But trusting in God to do according to His promises, His faithfulness, and for His glory, it's as good as done. This is what we call faith, and it's a faith that *sings*. David plans to sing because the Lord has dealt bountifully with Him, and this has a dual application. He will sing right now because it's a fact that God has already dealt with him this way. But he's also vowing to sing again because the Lord do it again. We look to the cross of Jesus, His death and resurrection, and God's goodness to us through Him throughout our lives stand in joy in the present. And like Jesus before the cross, we look to the Father to sustain, deliver, bless, and ultimately resurrect us. We can rejoice when trials come knowing they make us patient, and patience brings maturity as God pours out the wisdom we ask for (Jms. 1:2-4). How long, O Lord?