

# How Long O Lord

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 03 February 2017

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[ 0 : 00 ] We're at Psalm 13 this evening. Pretty short Psalm compared to some of the ones we've done. I'll give you a moment to find it.

Psalm 13? Yeah, Psalm 13. Thank you.

I'll read it out loud for us. 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 enemy say, I have prevailed over him.

[ 1 : 16 ] 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. Amen.

Whenever we experience a setback in life, we hope, of course, that it's just a temporary setback. We'll get right back up. When we veer, of course, that we'll soon get right back on track.

But sometimes we experience suffering and disappointment that persists, right? That lingers. And we wait and we hope, wait and we hope and pray, but it doesn't lift.

And so then our changed circumstances, our suffering then becomes a new norm. And then we begin to kind of flounder and to lose hope. And that's the kind of suffering that the psalmist is experiencing here.

[ 2 : 19 ] He's crying out in desperation, verses 1 and 2. We don't know exactly what he was dealing with, but he talks about an enemy in the singular and foes in plural in verse 4.

So it may have been kind of an abstract enemy, like a sickness or maybe just facing death. Or it could be more concrete enemies like a military adversary or something.

But the fact that he uses words from singular enemy to plural foes seems to mean that he has a lot of different things in mind, just collectively things that are ailing him and making him suffer.

And the cry, how long, really kind of communicates the pent-up yearning and longing and years of waiting. It's not just that he's suffered for a few days now and he's crying, but he's been suffering for a long time and he's crying out to him, Lord, how much longer?

I can't endure much longer, God. So how long? How long? And it hurts especially more for him because of the uncertainty. He doesn't know how long it's going to be. He doesn't know when God's going to come to deliver.

[ 3 : 34 ] So he's just in the midst of it and he's crying out to him, how long? He doesn't see, I mean, when you're in a race and you see the finish line, you find new vigor in your muscles, right? Or you see the light at the end of the tunnel and you can strive to the end.

But for the psalmist, he doesn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. He doesn't see the finish line. So he's just crying, how long, God? And I think this, if you could think about maybe the lowest moments in your life, but I think of maybe people who have suffered for decades, maybe a single person who's been waiting for decades to get married, right?

Being, crying out for someone that they can spend life with. And maybe someone that's been going through chemotherapy for four or five years, right? And cancer keeps coming back stronger.

Or someone that, maybe a woman that's been trying to have a child but has been infertile, been miscarrying. And it's just, it's all of these people suffering and then crying out, how long?

That's the kind of cry that's here in the psalmist's longing. And he says, how long, Lord? So what about your promises, O God? Is this the green pasture that you promised me?

[ 4 : 46 ] Is this the, why have you turned your face from me? Where's the light of your countenance shining on me? And because of the suffering, and he sees there's two poles, right?

There's God whom he's crying out to and then the enemy that he's facing, the source of his troubles. And as he looks at those things, he feels, as the enemy is in ascendancy, he feels that he's been abandoned by God.

And so he cries, so will you forget me forever? In verse two, how long will you hide your face from me? He feels as though God's hiding from him.

And because of that, it's such a sad picture. He says, how long must I take counsel in my soul? So, you know, when you're suffering, you find, you look for counselors.

You seek advice. You try to seek solutions. And your mind's going off all the rest of the day. But the psalmist, he takes counsel in his soul. He's alone in his struggle and his suffering.

[ 5 : 43 ] And he has sorrow in his heart all the day. And all of the suffering is exacerbated by the fact that he feels that his God, his Lord, his confidant, his helper, his defender has abandoned him.

And because that's the main issue here, that he feels that he's been abandoned by God, he says to him in verse three, he prays, Consider and answer me, O Lord my God.

Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. So the word consider can be literally translated as, it's to look, it's to look at me. It's when my daughter, Ine, really wants my attention because she knows that sometimes I'm distracted.

She'll say, look at my face. Look at me. And then she'll tell me something that she really wants to tell me. So it's kind of like the psalmist feels that God's hidden his face from him. So he says, look at me, Lord.

Where are you? Why have you hidden from me? Look at me. And then answer me, O Lord. And because if he doesn't, he's going to sleep the sleep of death. He doesn't have light in his eyes.

[ 6 : 49 ] And this is connected to the covenant promise that God had given Israel. The covenant blessing that priests were supposed to pronounce upon Israel was in number six. It says, the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up his countenance on you and give you peace. So that was the promise that God would have his face turned toward us. He would shine on us. But that he feels that God's turned his face from him.

And because of that, he doesn't have light in his eyes, which is kind of a metaphorical way in Hebrew language of referring to really life. Strength in one's eyes was considered to be vigor and strength for life.

You see that in description of Moses at the end of his life. It says that he was not weak in his eyes, which just indicate that he was strong to the end of his life. And so he's grieving and he's dying.

And he's asking God, if you don't help me, I'm going to sleep the sleep of death. And so you can kind of picture light dimming around him. Everything's fading. And then as he's beginning to drown in the flood of grief and pain and sorrow, he puts a stop to this with a declaration of faith in verses 5 and 6.

[ 8 : 05 ] He says, Note the tenses in the verbs here.

That's really helpful, illuminating. Because it says, So the psalmist has already trusted in God's steadfast love.

And that's why he has the confidence that he's going to be able to sing and rejoice in God's salvation. Because he believes that God has already dealt bountifully with him.

And so faith in the present leads to hope for the future. But this leads us to ask a question, though, because psalmist had just been talking about how God hid his face from him.

Then how come all of a sudden he thinks God's dealt bountifully with him? And it's not that he's trying to lie to himself or play a mind trick on himself to convince himself that God's been good to him when he's actually been wicked toward him.

[ 9 : 16 ] But he's trusting in faith. His circumstances have not changed. He's still in the midst of his suffering. But his attitude has changed. His posture has changed.

And now he has decided to trust in God's steadfast love. That God, in the midst of all of the suffering that he's experiencing, loves him.

That his love has not changed toward him. And C.S. Lewis writes about this in his book, The Problem of Pain. He says, So courage helps more than knowledge.

People's sympathy helps more than courage. But the least tincture of the love of God helps more than all. Because we might not have knowledge.

We might not know why we're suffering. And we might be lonely in our suffering. We might have some people who are sympathizing with us. But even then, suffering tends to be isolating.

[ 10 : 26 ] We feel as though no one else truly understands. We might be just fed up with putting on a brave face and trying to face the suffering we're just done. We're at the end of our ropes and crying out, how long?

Yet in the midst of that, when we remember that God loves us. That his love is steadfast, as it says. That it's unchanging. That it's constant. That gives us hope. Because then, even the suffering, the evil, everything that we're enduring is coming from, ultimately, from the hands of a sovereign God.

The superintendents of a loving God who has our good in mind. Who has our interest in mind. And because of that, because when we remember that, that's steadfast love.

Then we can endure. Then we can persevere. Even the most severe suffering. It's in a way kind of like, you know, when we have someone that we really love and trust.

You know, they can tell us things about us that no one else would dare tell us about, right? And that's because we trust them. And we know that they love us. So we give them the benefit of the doubt. So even when they say something really harsh, you know, he loves me.

[ 11 : 32 ] So we give them the benefit of the doubt. As opposed to getting really defensive and being hurt when someone tells you that. When it's coming from someone that loves you, we trust them. So in the same way, when we experience suffering at the hands of God, our loving God, then we can endure while trusting in his steadfast love.

And for us as believers, we have an even greater assurance than the psalmist does, right? Because he sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die for us.

And in demonstrating in an ultimate way, in an unmistakable way, his faithful love, his steadfast love toward us. And that's what 2 Corinthians 4, 6 talks about.

It says, And if you're not suffering today, I hope that you remember that when you encounter your severe suffering.

And that you can use this to comfort others for suffering as well. So let's pray.