



ENCOUNTERING GOD THROUGH THE PSALMS

STUDY 2: PSALM 13 – GOD IS FAITHFUL TO HIS COVENANT

Start the study by reading the psalm aloud and asking the group for their immediate response to the psalm. What caught their attention? What was their overall impression?

Laments are the most common form in the psalms making up a third of all the psalms and were part of Jewish worship and would have been sung by Jesus and his disciples in the synagogue and the temple. Laments contain words of complaint, question, sorrow, anger and frustration as well as praise.

As we go through this psalm, written by David, we will consider what it teaches us about his relationship with God and how that can relate to us. We do not know the specific situation that brought about this lament except that it was causing him distress and that he felt God was absent. However, not knowing the exact situation, means that we can more easily apply David's words to our own whatever that might be.

DISCUSS

'How long, LORD?' (Psalm 13:1 NIV). When you read 'LORD' in capitals in the Bible it is there to replace the covenant name, Yahweh, that God revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:13,14. The Jews neither speak nor write this name as it is seen as too holy. In using the substitute 'LORD' David was crying out not to an impersonal 'god' or universe but to the One with whom he had an intimate relationship based on being in covenant relationship with God.

How do you address God in prayer? Do you pray 'Father' as Jesus taught his disciples to (Matthew 6:9) or 'Jesus' (John 14:14) or do you simply pray 'God'? What is the significance of praying 'Father' or 'Jesus' for understanding our relationship with God?

DIGGING DEEPER

'How long?' This question is repeated four times in the first two verses. What does David complain about to God in these verses?

The language of lament refuses to live in denial but insists on facing the reality of the situation. God, who is Truth, can only meet us when we come to Him with the truth. How truthful and real are you in your prayers?

Read Romans 4:19-21. Abraham faced the facts and believed. We can be honest about what is going on and still express our trust in God.

'How long will you hide your face from me? (Psalm 13:1 NIV) Have you experienced the silence of God when he appears to be silent and/or absent? How did you respond? Notice that David does not stop praying even though he feels that God has abandoned him. What can we learn from David?

DISCUSS

'Look on me and answer, LORD my God.' (Psalm 13:3 NIV). This is where David gets specific with God about what he needs from Him.



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How good are you at coming to him with your needs? Are there things that you think you should not bother God with?

DIGGING DEEPER

You may have noticed a clear move from despair to thanksgiving between verses 4 and 5. David has been crying out for help and asking God how long he must keep suffering but then in verse 5 everything is different. Something has happened. Some commentators describe this as the 'silent verse' which is not found in the psalm but which contains God's response to David's prayer. David has accused God of being absent but now he is convinced that he has been heard and, because God has heard, he has confidence that He will act. God is a God who hears us.

What has been a 'silent verse' for you in a difficult season when you were crying out to God for help? How did it come to you? (e.g. in your daily Bible reading, a sermon, a prophecy, in your private prayer)

How did that 'silent verse' affect the way you looked at your situation?

DISCUSS

'But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise for he has been good to me' (Psalm 13:5,6 NIV) The Hebrew word 'hesed' that is translated 'love' literally means 'covenant loving kindness' and David expresses his confidence in that. Notice that he moves into the past tense because, believing that God has heard him, he has certainty that he will act.

'Hope is the ability to hear the music of the future

Faith is the courage to dance to it today.' Ruben Alves

Can you share a time when have you needed to have the courage to praise God in advance?

DIGGING DEEPER

*'Lament is not our final prayer. It is a prayer in the meantime. Most of the lament psalms end with a 'vow to praise' – a promise to return thanksgiving to God for his deliverance. Because Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, we know that sorrow is not how the story ends. The song may be in a minor motif now, but one day it will resolve in a major chord. When every tear is wiped away, when death is swallowed up in victory, when heaven and earth are made new and joined as one, when the saints rise in glorious bodies...then we will sing at last a great, 'Hallelujah!'*¹ N T Wright

Read Revelation 21:1-4. This is when the Not Yet of the kingdom finally becomes NOW! How can the language of the lament help us in our prayer life? What can we learn from the journey of David's psalm in terms of our own prayers?

Write down one "How long Lord" that you would like for God to answer. Next to it, write one praise to God "in advance", praising Him for who He is. Share with the group if you are comfortable.

PRAY TOGETHER

¹ <https://www.ntwighonline.org/five-things-to-know-about-lament/>