

Our God and our Father, we bless
you this evening for your mercies to us that are new every morning. Because of your
compassions,

O God, that fail not, we are not consumed. We bless you, O
Lord, that though we go through many tribulations to enter the
kingdom of heaven, you do not willingly afflict the children
of men, your people, O God. You send trials, but always for
our good and for your glory. So this evening, Fathers, we
come to yet another psalm in which the psalmist finds himself
up to his neck in trouble and entirely divest of a sense of
your presence. We pray, Lord, for your people
this evening, some of whom are experiencing this sense of abandonment
right now, and others of us will experience it soon. We pray,
Father, you'll arm us for the fight and grant us faith and
a light to brighten the darkness of our experience in the sure
and certain hope that Because you abandoned your only begotten
Son, you will never abandon your adopted ones. We offer these
prayers, O God, trusting your Son, who always lives to make
intercession for us. Therefore, he is able to save
to the uttermost those who come to God through him. Amen. Please take your seats.

And if

you would, turn with me in your copy of the Word of God to Psalm
number 13. And again, please listen carefully,
this is the word of God. Take heed how you hear. To the choir master, a psalm
of David. How long, oh 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. 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. The grass withers and
the flower falls off, but the word of God endures forever. May he add his blessing
to his

reading and his preaching this evening. Well, people have a nasty habit
of putting preachers on a pedestal. It's kind of hard not to because
we stand up here six feet above contradiction. You tend to assume
that we're much better than the rest of you. We're not. You tend
to assume that our hearts are much more naturally spiritual
than the rest of you. They're not. And you tend to
assume that our communion with God, particularly our prayer
life, is more glorious than the rest of you, and I'm here to
assure you it is not. You think sometimes that when
we pray, heaven opens, the angel Gabriel or perhaps Michael appear
in the study, and what is thy bidding, and it's just a sense,
and that's often not the case. I often feel, again, sorry, cockroach

illustration, but I often feel like a cockroach on my back trying to get right way up. when I'm praying, and I rather suspect you feel that way as well. And it's kind of important to know that, and I'm often asked, like, for example, by our interns, how much of that do you share from the pulpit? And there's a balance. It's a bit like Goldilocks's porridge. You can have too hot, too cold, and just right. And you can share too much from the pulpit, and then you can share not enough, and then you can get it just right. And it can be difficult, but it's important. Because I want you to know that I have the same nature and the same struggles and I have the same propensity to commit appalling sins that are magnified much more than yours by my office as a pastor. Let not many of you become teachers, for you will receive a stricter judgment. I'm not totally sure what that means. But Mark Twain says, it's not those passages of the Bible that are obtuse, that I struggle with. It's the one that are very clear, that terrify me. And that verse haunts me, I have to say, even though I know I'm justified in Christ Jesus, my sins are forgiven. Yet James wants me to know that on the last day, while I will face no danger of damnation, but I will have a searching and probing examination of my thoughts, words, and deeds at a deeper level than the rest of the congregation. So how much do you share? It can be difficult. Sometimes there's a necessity to sharing. I remember one time back in Greensboro, it was around Christmas time, and I went to the front door. I forget why, but I went to the front door and I discovered an anonymous parcel. of Christmas goodies had been left at the door. That was not unusual. What was unusual was the gifter did not ring the doorbell when they arrived at the door, and I wondered why. I pondered that for a while, and the answer wasn't too hard to divine. Shortly before that, 30 minutes or so before that, I remember my dog Baxter, who's the fount of a thousand seminal illustrations, had been unusually stupid, and stubborn. Now, stupidity in a dog is not unusual, and we can cope with that. And stubbornness in a dog is also not unusual, and you can cope with that when those two faults come alone. But when they come together at the same time, it can frustrate the patience of the best of us. And I remember telling Baxter in no uncertain terms he was to desist from this behavior, and it was never to happen again. But I used it in a tone of voice that I'd have rather kept private between me, master, and dog, Baxter. And I suddenly thought, oh, no. I had visions of this kind lady coming to the door with her parcel and hearing me yell at my dog, and then taking the card out of the parcel and leaving the parcel at the back door, front door, and then beating a history retreat. And it was rather embarrassing. And so later on, not long after that, actually, I had an opportunity in a sermon to use that as an illustration. I can't remember what I was illustrating, but

it was a good one. And it kind of let the congregation know that I'm a sinner, And if this particular woman was there as well, it also let her know that I knew and that this behavior was not acceptable. I hope it wasn't normal and that I'd repented of it. All that to say, right, it can be good for you as a congregation to know that we pastors are sinners and that we too have struggles. And the Holy Spirit seems to think that's an important thing as well because you could imagine the Holy Spirit or an enlightened editor as he read through the Psalms thinking, no, We can't put in Psalm 51, that's too embarrassing. We've got to hide David's problems. And Psalm 32, no, that one's got to go too. And Psalm 13, we can't have the Psalm singer of Israel feeling abandoned. Got to take that one out too. And you'd be left with a Psalter that was kind of all Psalm 150. You know, praise the Lord. Or Psalm 145, I will extol you, O God, my King. I will bless you forever and ever. Every day I will bless you. I will praise your name forever and ever, for great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and so forth and so on. And if that's all you had in the Psalter, you might be left thinking that David and the sons of Asaph and the rest of them lived in a higher spiritual plane than the rest of us. And that's not the case. And there are stacks, in fact, well more than a third of the Psalms are Psalms of lament in which the psalmist feels himself profoundly distressed and worse, abandoned by God. And that should encourage you because If God has given you such songs in the Psalter, he expects you to use them, and more than that, he expects you to need them. So when you feel abandoned by God, and you will sooner or later, there are Psalms like Psalm 13 and Psalm 22 that let you know that this is not abnormal, that other Christians have passed this way before David, one of them. and that while these feelings come and while they may last a jolly long time, they will not last forever and you're not alone in your suffering. Others have walked this way before you. I think that's an encouragement, at least it is to me. Now, Psalm 13 is about faith, the grace of faith, the battle of faith. And faith is very much like the Flashlight on the back of your cell phones. It is much more useful in the darkness than the noonday sun. And that's the lesson of our psalm this evening. What can we learn about faith in the psalm? And there are three lessons I want to draw from this psalm for you. First of all, notice the distress faith experiences. And you see it there, especially in the first two verses. 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? David feels forgotten by God, forsaken by God, cut off from the friendly presence of God and from the smiling face of God. And worse, he feels he's

been left to his own defenses. He's been left to think through his troubles in the lonely, abandoned, cold, dark echo chamber of his own heart. And to make matters worse, while David is dying, his enemies are on the rise. They seem to be winning, and David is the proverbial loser. Notice the three dimensions of David's sorrow. First of all, Godward, inward, and outward. Godward, he's no sense of God's smiling face. How long will you forget me, forever? How long will you hide your face from me? No sense of God's smiling face. Then inward, no sense of God's guiding hand. How long must I take counsel in my soul and of sorrow in my heart all the day? He's alone, no counsel. In Psalm 16, David says, I will bless the Lord who has counseled me. Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night. Where am I? I have set the Lord always before me. Because he's at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. That's Psalm 16. But David's experience is not all Psalm 16. Psalm 16, he's blessing God for that sense of counsel. He's sitting on the battlements maybe of Jerusalem on night watch, thinking, walking about, thinking, pondering some decision he has to make. And he's blessing God for counseling him. But he's also aware, as he's thinking through the problem, his own mind, as he's thinking through God's Word and the problem he faces, the principles of God's Word, the problems of his life, he finds his mind being drawn by the unseen hand of God in the right direction. Well, that's then, but this is now. In Psalm 13, David feels none of that. He's alone, by himself, abandoned, cut off. no sense of God's smiling face, no sense of God's guiding hand, and then his outward problems, he has no sense of God's saving power. How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Derek Kidner, ever a good commentator on the Psalms, says the third element is enemy's ascendancy would be dismaying at more than one level, not only as a personal humiliation. I mean, there's nothing worse than your enemies being exalted over you, rejoicing at your downfall. It's pretty bad, right? Not only as a personal level though, but as a threat to his kingship and to his faith. in God's justice. David isn't a private person. He's the king of Israel. And as he's abandoned, the people are abandoned. And that's bad in more than one way, right? But notice the order of this three-dimensional sorrow. He laments a distant God and a distressed heart before he gets down to his defiant enemies. And I think there's a reason to that order. The absence of God is the worst trial a Christian has to endure, much worse than the presence even of enemies. And you'll see this again and again in the psalmist. The psalmist's top priority is not less of the enemy, not less trouble, not less difficulty.

He wants more of God. And if your heart can echo with that, it's a sign of a lively soul and a good hope, that your priorities are straight, and you know more light than you might feel in the darkness of your current trial. So first of all, then, the distress faith experiences. Secondly, the delay faith endures. To make matters worse, David isn't just lost in the darkness, but this darkness is going on and on and on and on. And he wonders, is it ever going to stop? Four times he says, how long, oh 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 of sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Plummer, in his study in the Psalms, says, the psalmist's darkness was enlightened by no ray of divine favor. His misery had no lucid intervals, and this went on and on. and seemed as if to go on forever and a day. Yet, even though every circumstance in his life, every dread in his heart proclaims God's absence, David is still searching for this God. He's still calling out to this God. He's still praying. He's still seeking God. He turns to the God who seems to have abandoned him. He asks God, do you see, let me just turn on Do Not Disturb, thank you. He asks God to take careful stock of his pain. He can't feel God, but that's not to say God can't hear him. And he prays to, even though he can't hear God listening, he seems by faith to know that God is. Consider means take a long, careful look at my situation. Consider and answer me, O Lord, my God. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him, lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. He's saying, Lord, look at my pain. And his instinct seems to be that the heart of God is moved by his pain. That God can't look at him and see him suffering and feel nothing. That God is moved as he looks at him. The instinct of faith. He's reasoning with God here. He asks God to give his eyes the light of hope. Lest he sink into the darkness of death. It's like that old song, I'm so sorrowful I could die. Lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him. Lest my fools rejoice because I am shaken. Lord, can you look down at the state of affairs and say nothing and feel nothing and do nothing? My enemies, which by implication are your enemies, are about to rejoice, and here I am languishing in misery. Does that not bother you, O God? He's reasoning with God. There's both emotion in his prayer and reason, and the two go together like water and wet. Ralph Davis calls this the instinct of faith to search for the God who seems to have abandoned him. When God plays hide and seek, play along, look for him, search for him. It's like when your children hide from you, dads. They don't mean you to go, great,

I've got a few hours to watch the Ryder Cup in peace. We just leave them hiding. No, you go looking for them. It's part of the game. But when God hides from you, he means for you to search for him. He's testing your heart to see how badly do you want him. But deep down in his heart, do you see, by this instinct of faith, David seems to know that his fears are not as true as they feel. There's a world of theology in that statement. Our fears, Christian, when we're trusting Christ, our fears are never as real as they feel. Things are never as bad as they seem. Just because God is hiding doesn't mean God is forgotten. Spurgeon. in his Treasury of David, which is a fantastic commentary. He says, we have been wont to call this the How Long Psalm. In fact, I almost called it the Howling Psalm, from the incessant repetition of the cry, how long, how long, how long? A week, Spurgeon says, within prison walls is longer than a month at liberty, but a hidden face is no sign of a forgetful God. Isn't that wonderful? A hidden face is no sign of a forgetful God. No to the cry of faith, oh Lord, my God. He's abandoned, but he can still say that, oh Lord, my God. And when you can say that, boys and girls, he's my God, he's your God, you can say a very great deal indeed. My God. Is it not a very glorious fact, says Spurgeon, that our interest in our God is not destroyed by our trials and our sorrows? We may lose our girds, but not our God. The title deed of heaven is not written in the sand, but in eternal brass. Remember, there was a time in my life when I felt entirely, I was in ministry, and I felt entirely abandoned by God. I was at a low, low, low point. And I was walking along the beach at Myrtle Beach, totally downcast. And I was looking down at the ground, couldn't even look up, and I suddenly stumbled across this huge heart that someone had written into the beach. And the middle of it says, What God's plan has brought you to, his hand will carry you through, right? It was like one of those tacky signs you find sometime on a marquee outside churches, but it came with the power of God to my heart. There I was walking along this beach, and for some reason, some Christian had scribed into the sand in letters as big as day, what God's plan has brought you to, his hand will carry you through. And it was as if God himself had reached down and touched me. Our feelings are never as bad as they seem. And what's more, think about it. What does your doctrine of inspiration tell you about this, Sam? The very moment David is lamenting the absence of the Spirit's presence, the Spirit of inspiration is filling him and giving him the words to write this psalm down. God is never as far away as he feels. The Christian is always more full of God than he is feeling in his heart. Remember that. when God seems to have abandoned you and seems to have forsaken you. The distress faith experiences,

the delay faith endures, and then lastly, the anchor faith embraces. Verse five, but, David says, 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." Again, David comes back to the word chesed, which is a very wonderful little Hebrew word, H-E-S-E-D, and we struggled to translate it. Tyndale put it into loving kindness. He took two glorious words, loving and kind, and he welded them together. loving kindness, the ESV captures the idea of steadfast love. That's a wonderful kind of catch-all, but it carries the mind, as we said before, of God's stubborn, single-minded, steadfast commitment to do you good. That's his people. It's like that scene at the end of Marcus Luttrell's book, Lone Survivor. It's a marvelous book about that awful time in Afghanistan when he and his four-man team of Navy SEALs were ambushed. Do you remember? They were discovered by a shepherd boy and his grandfather. And they debated what to do. Do we tie them up that the wolves would come and eat them and so forth and so on? And they go back and forth. Do they kill them or do they let them go? And they debated and let them go. And then the two of them predictably ran down to the Afghan village where the Taliban were. And all hell broke loose on the mountain. And they and a rescue team of Navy SEALs were killed. And at the end of the day, Marcus Luttrell was left alone, crawling away. He was blown up by an RPG that blew him over on a scarpment of rock. He landed on a ledge, rolled in under an overhang and was hidden. He was almost mortally wounded and he crawled for several days. If you've read the book, it's an amazing story of determination. Grievously injured, at the point of death, and he describes this moment where he arrives at a stream, a mountain stream. His mouth is full of dust and blood. He hasn't drunk in several days. He's at the point of death almost, and he puts his head into the stream, this ice-cold mountain stream, and he sucks the water in, and he feels the invigorating presence of refreshment. And then he lifts his head up, And he sees three or four Afghan males with AK-47s pointed at him. And he thinks they're the Taliban and they're deciding whether to shoot me or not. And actually they weren't. They were Afghan Pashtun tribesmen who were deciding whether to show him help or not. And it was a pretty important thing. Because in that culture, And all cultures find their roots back to Noah, of course, and the flood, and the idea of covenant is deeply wedded into the cultural memory of human beings of every nation, tribe, and tongue. And in the Pashtun tribesmen, that cultural memory finds its ethos in a term, Pashtunwali. I'm probably mispronouncing that. I apologize. But what it means is once you show help to a person, Be he your friend or your foe, you're on the hook for that man or that woman. And you are to defend

him as a town. Once a member of a town shows aid to another human being, be they friend or foe, every man in that town is on the hook to defend that guest to the last man. And they decide to show him Pashtun Valley. And they bring him to the town. And they nurse him, and they heal his wounds, of course. And it doesn't take the Taliban long to find out he's there. And you remember, if you've read the book or seen the movie, there's a scene whenever the Taliban come down with all of their guns. And they say, basically, it's in the book more than the movie, bring him out. We're going to kill him. And this Afghan father walks out and goes, you can kill him if you want, but before you do, you have to kill all of us first. And there's a tense standoff, and the Taliban eventually turn and walk off. And that's, in a nutshell, what chesed means. That when Yahweh extends chesed love to you, the whole Godhead are on the hook. that they will defend you to the last man, whatever price they must pay, whatever need of redemption you might have, they will pay the price. They will rescue you, body and soul, and they will keep you safe. It's like that time in the end

of the Book of Flags of Our Fathers when Doc Bradley, who won the Medal of Honor in Iwo Jima, he was a medic, a corpsman in the Marines. And one of the other Marines, they were fighting before Mount Suribachi, which was this huge mountain that had been hollowed out by the Japanese and turned into machine gun nests and howitzer positions and mortar positions. And the Marines had to take Mount Suribachi. And if you've seen the Marine memorial of the five men lifting the American flag, On top of Mount Suribachi, it's a great symbol of American military might and American victory. But before they raised that flag, they had to win the battle. And it was a hellish thing. There was bullets flying in all directions. And Doc Bradley saw a Marine. He didn't even know him, but he was a Marine, was cut down by machine gun fire. And Doc, the medic, had to run out into essentially no man's land. And there were machine gun bullets coming from all sides, mortar rounds landing. He ran to the man, realized he needed a plasma infusion. took his rifle, shoved it into the grind, set up the plasma, and then cradled the man. He put his back to the machine gun bullets. So if anyone else got shot, it would be Doc Bradley and not the man. And he waited for that plasma to drain into him, and then he drags him back to safety into the trenches. And he did it because he was a Marine, and that man was a Marine, and there was an esprit de corps between the two of them. And that's a picture of Chesed, God the Son coming down, sent by God the Father, helped by God the Spirit to stand between you and the merciless, withering fire and fury of the wrath of God. And he cradles you in his arms and he puts his back to the bullets of God's just wrath that we deserved but he received. and he was abandoned. He felt

the full fury of Psalm 13 in verse 1 and verse 2. How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? And in a sense on the cross, The infinite person of God the Son felt the full fury of infinite, eternal, unchangeable wrath. And because of the dignity of his person, he was able to experience the full weight of eternal hell in those hours of darkness upon the cross. And he did that because of chesed, because his father had extended chesed to you, and because he had extended chesed to you. And he would pay any price, face any problem, experience any abandonment so that you would not have to. And so, you can see Jesus, the lad, singing Psalm 13, and again, readying himself for the appalling cost of our redemption. This is what their redemption will cost. What they sometimes experience in feeling, my son, you will experience in reality. You'll be abandoned. You'll face the fury of the wrath of God without a sense of the kindly, loving, supporting, undergirding presence of God. And so Christian, this evening, you can lay hold of that too. When you feel abandoned, when you feel forsaken, When you feel that you've sinned yourself beyond the hope of mercy, you lay hold of chesed. It's a glorious golden chain wrapped around the aorta of your heavenly father. And when you pull it, he feels it. It's a promise to you, you will never be forsaken. You might feel it, but you'll never be it. And so David rises up. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. And then in verse six, in a climactic moment of faith, now remember, he's not felt the bounty of God yet in reality, but he feels it with certainty. so certain he can speak about it in the prophetic perfect as if it had happened, though it is yet to happen. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. There's no sense in the psalm, that bounty is David's now an experience, but by faith it's his in reality. It's Psalm 11, verse 1. Now, faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. You can't see them with your eyes, but you can see them by faith. The substance of things hoped for. You can't feel them with your hands. Oh, but you can wrap your arms around them by faith. They're yours. And it's never the strength of our faith, but the object of our faith. David puts his faith in the chesed love of God. It's like, if the Almighty will forbid me for likening him to a dog, it's like owning a Doberman. They call Dobermans Velcro dogs. They never leave your side. Remember when I was thinking of buying my Doberman some years ago, Armani was his name, but it was a wonderful dog. But one of the websites I looked up said, if you own a Doberman, abandon the hope of ever using the restroom by yourself again. No matter how hard you close the door, he'll go in and he'll nose that door open and come in and sit on your feet. But if you have Yahweh as your God, abandon the hope of ever being forsaken again. He might leave you for a while, but he'll not leave you forever. Before

long, his blessed hand will push open the door, and he'll come in and wrap us round about and underneath with his everlasting arms, and we will know the joy of singing to the Lord, for he has dealt bountifully with me. Aren't you glad? that the Holy Spirit hasn't hidden the dark times of David's life from us. He's given us songs to sing in the darkness. Wasn't it Wesley or Cooper, I forget, who says, sometimes a light surprises the Christian when he sings. It is the Lord who rises with healing upon his wings. Let's pray together. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for this beautiful Psalm. that speaks to us of our experience, but more it speaks to us of our Savior's experience, who endured this psalm to the nth degree, so that while we might have it for a moment, a light and momentary sorrow, we'll not have it forever. He had the lake of fire upon the cross. that we might have the crystal clear, refreshing streams of the water of life that flow from the throne of God forever and ever. We pray this evening, O God, for your people gathered here, and perhaps there are some here who feel abandoned. Every circumstance in their life proclaims that God has forgotten them, that God has forsaken them. Grant, oh God, that you'd give them the grace by faith to reach up to that scarlet thread hanging in the window of your hesed love. You'll never abandon the men, the women, the boys, and girls you have pledged to love with an everlasting love. You will not ever stop loving us. because you never began to love us. You've always loved us from before the foundation of the world in Christ Jesus. Give us faith, oh God, to believe that. Grant us the experience to know that, oh Lord. And we can bear any trouble. We can face any foe. We can carry any burden if we just feel and know by faith that the God of heaven is our father His Son is our elder brother and Redeemer, and His Holy Spirit is the one called alongside us to help us and to keep us kept in the betwixt and between as we live now, waiting for Christ to come and make all things new. In His name we pray, amen.