

DEEP CALLS TO DEEP: SUMMER IN THE PSALMS

A Prayer of Tears

Psalms 13

June 14, 2026

Last week we began a summer series on the Psalms. Both poetry and instruction for living, Psalms are prayers offered by the people of God expressing grief, doubt, anger, or despair; needs brought before God in honest and raw ways, held up by the deep faith of the people.

We began at the beginning with Psalm 1, "*Two Roads Diverge*," showing us two choices for the way we live our lives: as trees planted by the water or as chaff blown about by the wind.

Today we look at Psalm 13, a prayer of lament—a prayer with honest words that bring human suffering to God *and* ask God hard questions about why suffering happens and what it is for.

We all know the pain that life can bring, and we all wonder, "Why?" The Psalms of lament give us all permission to bring every emotion, all of ourselves, before God and to not hide from one another. The Psalms teach us how to pray.

In Psalm 13, something is terribly wrong in the life of the speaker *and in the speaker's life with God*.

God is absent and silent. Where is God? Why the silence?

Simply put, they are miserable, they think their enemies are winning, and it is God's fault! Helpless, they cry out in despair.

In verse 1, listen for the despair:

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain...*

And then abruptly in verse 5 we hear:

*But I trusted in your steadfast love;
My heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the lord...*

How did we go from "***How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? Will I have sorrow in my heart all day long?***" in the first verse to ***the psalmist singing to the Lord, trusting in God's steadfast love and delivered from his enemies in the last verse?***

Why the shift?

We begin with pain and end with trust in God. Hold these questions as we turn to Psalm 13, a prayer of lament. Listen for God's word to us.

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
And have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and answer me, O Lord, my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
And my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
And my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.
But I 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.*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

"Life is hard!" I found myself muttering as I walked into church last week. I tend to be pretty resilient and upbeat, but the last couple of weeks have been rough, and I found myself talking to myself a lot—especially in my car. There had just been too much. Or there was too much.

First, there was Jan. She and I were planning her husband's funeral. "He was suddenly gone just when we were beginning to live," she said. "He had finally retired. One week we were playing golf, and two weeks later he was gone. I can hardly believe it" *How long, O Lord?*

And then there was a son who had found the courage to reconcile with his father. He and his dad began to work together in business. They learned new things about one another and formed a friendship. Life seemed brighter, and then a heart attack took him.

How long, O Lord?

And then there was the adult children, clearly wanting control and afraid of their father's anger and grief as he aged, demanding that he sell his home and move to an assisted living facility.

And then there was the courage of a friend whom I love and admire very much. Her husband and best friend is fighting a relentless cancer. It won't give up. They lie in bed, watching Netflix together, eating all the junk they want. They make it a point to love their children, grandchildren, and friends, and do their best to enjoy the gift of life each day—and yet it is breathtaking to witness the pain as they face this outrage together. *How long, O Lord?*

And then there was a divorced woman grieving the death of a life she thought she would have.

And then there was my son's car—he was hit, and the car is totaled. (He is fine, thank God.)

And last of all, a shopping cart, rolling down the hill at supermarket smashed into my new car. The same day, a rock hit my windshield as I am driving on I-465. You know those cracks you get? They are already beginning to spread. *How long, O Lord?*

We all have these weeks.

And I know they are not the same thing: Scratches and windshields can be fixed. My son is OK and can buy a new car.

BUT divorce, suffering, and fighting cancer, grief from the loss of a husband, wife, partner, parent, or child—these knock us down and call for a prayer of lament.

But it is often the last little thing that does us in; we throw up our hands. **Life is hard!** *How long, O Lord?*

We brace ourselves when the big struggles—job losses, bankruptcy, diagnoses, deaths—hit. But it is usually the small struggles, the dents in the car, that get us.

Even so, when those words, "LIFE IS HARD," came out of my mouth, they surprised me.

The ironic thing is that they are not foreign words to me—let me explain. I grew up hearing my mother say, "Karen Leigh, life at its best is hard." As a child, I thought that was a sad thing to say, and I didn't really understand what she meant. But my mother was a Southern mother; she told you the way it was—along with her big hair, beautiful makeup, and big smile. She held a deep faith and loved to sing the hymns in her trained soprano voice—much to me and my brother's dismay.

She was a resilient, talented woman, and although life could be hard, she made it good and even magical for my brothers and me, with her flair of making every day special—lighting candles, the yummy smells from her delicious Southern cooking, yeast donuts shared with my grandparents when they dropped by with a box from the bakery on Kentucky Ave.

How did she do it? I think it was from the lament she practiced.

Our kitchen table was a place of much conversation—friends laughing or crying, so much talking. As kids, we thought the coffee and fellowship hour at St. Paul's Episcopal Church would never end. There were no donuts, but we would drink the pink sherbert punch until our bellies hurt and the church ladies shooed us away.

She shouldered the difficulties of life with long talks with Father Web and later at AA meetings she and I my dad attended after he stopped drinking. As children, we grew up playing and running through the church while the adults drank coffee, talked, and listened to stories of hope and recovery. **What did all this have in common?**

My mom was cared for. She was healed in a way—through friendship, particularly through the act of being heard. I think her friends experienced it as well. This is the key in the church and our coffee and donut time, *and you know this*; this is the key in AA—being heard. Nothing is fixed, **but** you are heard. My mom was cared for and heard.

And because of this, she was able to get up almost every day and chose how to live with joy and to make

life special; to do the next right thing; to not pretend. She gave voice to her feelings. My mom was heard.

That is what I want to tell you today. My friends, God hears us.

In Scripture, God hears Israel. God listens to his people, and the people bring it all to him.

In the Psalms specifically, we see laments to God rooted in personal or community distress: job loss, broken dreams, sickness, disappointment, unjust treatment by others, and grief. Sometimes the prayers of lament question God's presence altogether. (Kathleen D. Billman, Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry, Lament in the Bible*, 29.)

To cry out to God is to trust God. If we trust someone, we will bare our souls.

It is as simple as that. So as the Israelites praised and offered sacrifices to God in the temple, they also brought their real complaints and their pain.

In the book of Exodus, we see God's mystery and sovereignty revealed as Moses requests to see God's face and God replies, "You shall see my back, but my face you shall not see."

Israel stays faithful to its covenant with Yahweh in the wilderness and in all life's unpredictability. The people of Israel know that God is faithful; they trust God's steadfast love. And yet, in the reality of their life together, they know injustice and undeserved suffering, and they cry out, "How long, O Lord?" And they know that they are heard.

Jesus continues the practice of lament. In his life and ministry on earth, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem because the people of Jerusalem did not recognize the way to peace. He weeps over his friend Lazarus when he is told that Lazarus is dead. And of course, Jesus' loudest cry of lament is from the cross. In his hour of suffering and despair, Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus was not alone on the cross. God was present.

Friends, we are not alone. God shows up for us when we pray. God hears us.

Just as God showed up for my mom—in her friends, through the church, in AA meetings.

God shows up in Scripture. God shows us the most important thing: the people raise their voices are heard, and they can go on.

And it is the same with Psalm 13. **The psalmist is heard**, restored, and healed.

Now we see how the psalmist could go from lament in verse one:

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?*

To rejoicing in verse nine:

*My heart shall rejoice in your salvation.
I will sing to the lord,
Because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

The psalmist was heard, restored, and healed. Friends, when we pray the Psalms, the promise is that God shows up for us. As we bring our lament to God, we can be healed and go on.

The Psalms are not only words that were written long ago. In a strange way, they are being written right now as we bring our lament to God.

The Hebrew Bible scholar James Kugel says, "When someone reads the words of a psalm as an act of worship, he or she takes over, in a sense, the psalm's authorship. It may have been written by an ancient Levite, but at the moment we begin to recite it, the words become our own. We are speaking on our own behalf to God. We are now the author." (*How to Read the Bible: A Guide to Scripture, Then and Now*, 472.)

When we say the Psalms, when we pray the Psalms, they become ours.

In a moment, I am going to ask that you close your eyes and pray Psalm 13 with me. The Psalms were originally read and said responsively—the people would repeat the leader's words. So as I read each line and you repeat it, think of those words—feel those words—as your own.

Let us join the generations who have offered themselves
to God in prayer. God hears us still.

Let us pray:

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
And have sorrow in my heart all day long?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and answer me, O Lord, my God!
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
And my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
And my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.
But I 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.*