

“A Lament for Advent”  
Psalm 13 | Rev. Stephen Johnson  
Trinity Presbyterian Church | December 7, 2025

Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 13 (p. 453) – as I mentioned earlier, Pastor Chris made the call yesterday afternoon that he was too sick and his voice was too gone to teach and preach today, and so instead of being in Luke 1 and hearing the song of Zechariah, we’ll turn to a different song, a song that we normally don’t associate with Christmas. It doesn’t give us the warm Christmasy feels, but I do believe that it is a song that many Christians may find very helpful to pray this time of year or any time of year for that matter. You see, just because it is the Christmas season doesn’t mean that we are full of Christmas joy and peace. Perhaps this Christmas you feel more distant from God than you ever have before, and all the bright lights and decorations and songs are just a constant reminder that your heart isn’t responding to the joy of Christmas like it used to. If that is you today, or if that might be you in the future, or if you have a dear friend who is experiencing this, then turn your ear now to this song, a Psalm of David, a lament psalm.

**13 TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID.**

- 1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?**
- 2 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?**
- 3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;  
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,**
- 4 lest my enemy say, “I have prevailed over him,”  
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.**
- 5 But I have trusted in your steadfast love;  
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.**
- 6 I will sing to the LORD,  
because he has dealt bountifully with me.**

Let’s pray.

A few years ago Dr. Russell Moore wrote a book on adoption titled “Adopted for Life.” In it he shares the story of how he adopted his two boys from Russia. Let me read his story:

The creepiest sound I have ever heard was nothing at all. My wife, Maria, and I stood in the hallway of an orphanage somewhere in the former Soviet Union, on the first of two trips required for our petition to adopt. Orphanage staff led us down a hallway to greet the two 1-year-olds we hoped would become our sons. The horror wasn't the squalor and the stench, although we at times stifled the urge to vomit and weep. The horror was the quiet of it all. The place was more silent than a funeral home by night.

I stopped and pulled on Maria's elbow. "Why is it so quiet? The place is filled with babies." Both of us compared the stillness with the buzz and punctuated squeals that came from our church nursery back home. Here, if we listened carefully enough, we could hear babies rocking themselves back and forth, the crib slats gently bumping against the walls. These children did not cry, because infants eventually learn to stop crying if no one ever responds to their calls for food, for comfort, for love. No one ever responded to these children. So they stopped.

The silence continued as we entered the boys' room. Little Sergei (now Timothy) smiled at us, dancing up and down while holding the side of his crib. Little Maxim (now Benjamin) stood straight at attention, regal and czar-like. But neither boy made a sound. We read them books filled with words they couldn't understand, about saying goodnight to the moon and cows jumping over the same. But there were no cries, no squeals, no groans. Every day we left at the appointed time in the same way we had entered: in silence.

On the last day of the trip, Maria and I arrived at the moment we had dreaded since the minute we received our adoption referral. We had to tell the boys goodbye, as by law we had to return to the United States and wait for the legal paperwork to be completed before returning to pick them up for good. After hugging and kissing them, we walked out into the quiet hallway as Maria shook with tears.

And that's when we heard the scream.

Little Maxim fell back in his crib and let out a guttural yell. It seemed he knew, maybe for the first time, that he would be heard. On some primal level, he knew he had a father and mother now. I will never forget how the hairs on my arms stood up as I heard the yell. I was struck, maybe for the first time, by the force of the Abba cry passages in the New Testament, ones I had memorized in Vacation Bible School. And I was surprised by how little I had gotten it until now. . . <sup>1</sup>.

This story has helped me be thankful when I hear my children crying. Yes, when our children cry it means something is wrong, but it also means that something is *very right*. Our children feel loved and know they will be heard. The Christian life is a lot like this. We are God's children, and so when things go wrong, we cry out to Him, as Romans 8:15 says, **"you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father!"**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/when-russell-moore-truly-understood-abba-father-for-the-very-first-time/>

It is good to cry out to God. But what happens when you cry out to God and He doesn't seem to respond? We read and sang about God's comfort in Isaiah 40, but what happens when you cry out for his comfort and he's silent toward you? There are seasons in a Christian's life when you feel like God has forsaken you, like God is silent toward you and opposed to you. Isaiah 45:15 says, **"Truly, you are a God who hides himself."** Why does God hide himself from us? Does that sound odd to you? Or even make you afraid? This experience, as odd and as terrifying as it sounds, is a normal, Christian experience. Psalm 13 reassures us of that. One of my former pastors and mentors Kevin Carr said this in one of his sermons, "The doctrine of God's hiddenness is not a doctrine of God's absence." He is always involved in the lives of His children.

So how is that true when all the evidence seems to indicate the contrary? Psalm 13 and many other Psalms and passages throughout Scripture assure us that experiencing the hiddenness of God, or the silence of God, is a normal, Christian experience. If you're in a dark season today, if you feel like God has forgotten you, that your prayers are not being heard or responded to, then I pray that Psalm 13 can be *your* prayer this advent season and help guide your heart, verse by verse, to respond rightly to God in your suffering. If you're not in a dark season, I want to give you instruction to help prepare you for those times or to help prepare you to help someone else walk through that dark season.

The main point from Psalm 13 is this: *When we experience the silence of God, let us not be silent, faithless, and despairing, but let us instead*

- 1) *cry out to God,*
- 2) *pray for the mercy of God,*
- 3) *trust in the love of God,*
- 4) *and rejoice in the salvation of God.*

## **I. Cry Out to God**

The first way we are to respond to God when we experience his silence is to "Cry out to God" from verses 1 and 2. Look with me. **"<sup>1</sup>How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" <sup>2</sup>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?"** Our psalm begins with groans for relief. **"How long, O LORD?"** Again

and again we cry out “how long?” How long will you forget us, God? How long will you hide your face?

Have you felt this before? I have. Many faithful Christians have. God feels so distant and you pray and pray but nothing changes. You read your Bible and nothing changes. You sing songs at church and nothing changes. You have fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ and nothing changes. You are hit with trial after trial and you find yourself spiraling down and down with no help from heaven. Your soul is not at rest day or night. You just want to sleep, to check out, to escape. You want to get away from all your problems but they are always on your mind. After weeks and months and even years of this you begin to feel like you’re not saved, because nothing adds up. If you were saved, why would prayer be so difficult? Would things change after you prayed if you were truly saved? If you were saved, wouldn’t you get something from reading the Bible? If you were saved, wouldn’t you enjoy singing worship songs? If you were saved, wouldn’t you be overcoming sin and have power in your life to do great things for God and not be such a burden on others? It doesn’t add up.

When this happens, you become preoccupied with yourself and your standing before God. Verse 2 says, “**How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?**” Here we see the progression of what happens after long seasons of darkness. After going Godward in prayer, and feeling rejected or ignored, we begin to go *inward*. From Godward to inward. When God doesn’t answer we often retreat to introspection to try to solve what’s wrong with us. But that doesn’t help. We cannot counsel ourselves. We need help from outside of us, from God himself.

Experiencing the silence of God can be perplexing and seem contradictory to what God says in His word. It makes sense why God would take away things and even people from us, but why would He remove *Himself* from us? It makes sense that God would take away good things that are becoming idols to us, but why would God take away fellowship with Himself? Isn’t God’s ultimate goal to have us worship Him and commune with Him? We’re told to pray for God’s kingdom to come and his will to be done, and what’s more in line with His will than that I abide with Him and pray to Him and He responds to me and applies His word to me and directs me? God where are you?! What’s so wrong with me that you won’t answer! Why have you forgotten me?

When someone starts speaking this way, that they feel distant from God and it disturbs them and they are sorrowful and concerned about it... that's a *good* sign. It's a *good* sign. When someone talks like that, they sound a lot like the Psalms. The same Holy Spirit who is in you is the same Spirit who was in the psalmists who wrote the lament Psalms. When someone groans like Psalm 13 or 22 or 42, you can know that that is a response you'd expect from someone who has the Holy Spirit within them. It would be more concerning if they didn't cry out to God at all, like the babies in the Russian orphanage without any parents to comfort them.

And so pray the Psalms to God in the midst of dark seasons. Scripture is God's words to us. Prayer is our words to God. The Psalms, then, are the poetic union of both Scripture and prayer, of God's words to us and our words to God. God in His sovereign wisdom ordains that we go through suffering and times of feeling distant from Him. And at the same time, God, in His mercy, has not left us alone, but has given us the Psalms as words to help us pour out our hearts to Him in whatever trial we may face. When we don't know what to pray to God, when we're without words, isn't it so loving of our Father to give us His own words to pray back to Him? There are 150 Psalms and if at least 65 of them are lament Psalms, then perhaps we need an increased diet of lament in our private and corporate worship. It's okay to lament during advent. It's good. It may ready your heart for Christ's coming perhaps in ways that joyful songs don't.

So why does God hide himself from us at times? What good purposes does God have for us when he does this? The Westminster Confession of Faith gives a helpful summary of the Bible's answer to this. It says that God's providence toward us often includes dark seasons. Chapter 5 paragraph 5 from the Modern Version says this, "The most wise, righteous, and gracious God often leaves his own children, for a time, to manifold temptations and to the corruption of their own hearts." And then our confession tells us what God's good purposes are for doing this. It says this,

"He does this (1) to chastise them for their past sins, (2) to humble them by making them aware of the hidden strength of the corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, and then (3) to raise them to a closer, more constant dependence upon himself for their support, to make them more watchful against all future occasions for sinning, and to fulfill various other just and holy purposes."

This excellent statement brings out some of God's purposes for providentially hiding himself from you. He's humbling you, perhaps disciplining you, showing you the depth of your sinfulness, and making you more prayerful, more watchful, more dependent on Him. As you cry for God to hear you, know that He has already heard you and is answering you in ways that you might not have been asking for or listening for.

## II. **Pray for the Mercy of God**

The second way we are to respond to God when we experience his silence is to "Pray for the Mercy of God." Psalm 13:3-4, **"<sup>3</sup> Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, <sup>4</sup> lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him,' lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken."** We see the psalmist shift from groaning and complaining to asking God to respond to him. It is okay to groan and complain to God, but we mustn't stay there. We need to ask for help. Remember, God hasn't forgotten you! Isaiah 49:14-15, which Pastor Chris just preached on a few weeks ago, gives such reassuring words, **"But Zion said, 'The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.' 'Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands;'"** You are God's child, beloved, how could He forget you? He has in a sense engraved your name on his hands! So pray to God with confidence that he will consider you and answer you.

Here's a comforting quote from Charles Spurgeon, "You may fear that the LORD has passed you by, but it is not so: He who counts the stars, and calls them by their names, is in no danger of forgetting His own children. He knows your case as thoroughly as if you were the only creature He ever made, or the only saint He ever loved. Approach Him and be at peace." When we ask God to consider and answer us, we can ask him with confidence, because we are His children and He loves us.

And so ask and wait. Ask and wait. The last verse of Psalm 27 leaves us with this note resounding in our ears, **"Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!"** How long did Elizabeth and Zechariah have to pray and wait for a child? Perhaps they had felt at times like they were praying at a wall, and maybe they even stopped praying for a child at some point. But God was still at work. He hadn't forgotten them or his loving plan. Pray and wait.

### III. Trust in the Steadfast Love of God

The third way we are to respond to God when we experience his silence is to “Trust in the Steadfast Love of God.” We see this from the first line of Psalm 13:5, “**5 But I have trusted in your steadfast love;**” Here we find ballast for our tossing and anxious souls. Through this Psalm, God moves us from groaning and complaining to praying and trusting and then even rejoicing. There is no indication in this verse that David’s situation all of a sudden improved and now He’s hopeful and optimistic. No, our situation may not change, but our heart can. It changes, oftentimes very slowly, ebbing back and forth, from anxiety and despair and anger to trust and patience and childlike humility toward God. When we experience the silence of God, we are to reflect on God’s steadfast love for us and then trust in that love. Trust that He loves you *now*. Trust that He will love you tomorrow, even if your enemies do not go away. The first thing to help us see the steadfast love of God toward us is to know that God’s love is defined by Him and not by us. We may think God would be loving if he would remove our enemies from us, if He takes away our trials. But God defines His love differently and we need to look for *His* definition of love, otherwise we will be looking for something that may never come.

Turn with me to Genesis 39, the story of Joseph. Joseph is sold to slavery by his brothers and then is bought by Potiphar. His wife tries to seduce him and when Joseph runs away, she lies saying that he was trying to take advantage of her. Look now at Genesis 39 verses 19-21, “**19 As soon as his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, “This is the way your servant treated me,” his anger was kindled. 20 And Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king’s prisoners were confined, and he was there in prison. 21 But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.**” Amazing. The LORD showed Joseph steadfast love while he was *in* prison. Joseph wanted out of prison, but God’s love toward him wasn’t to take him out, at least not yet. Instead, God’s love was expressed in the form of favor in the eyes of the prison guard. So in your dark season, look for God’s love toward you in the details of how God daily sustains you. Don’t just wait for the dark season to pass, look at how He is loving you today in specific, ordinary ways.

God’s steadfast love toward us today in our dark season has *deep, deep roots*. Gospel roots. Roots that we should never forget. Roots that remind us that God’s love isn’t

temporary, it is steadfast, it's ancient. So when did God's love for us begin? Ephesians 1:4-5 says, **"he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,"** So when did God's love for us begin? It began before the foundation of the world. He predestined us *in love*. His choosing of us was not a cold act of sovereign will, but of love, and not a general love for a group of people, but a particular love for you, for me. He lovingly created a plan to adopt us as sons and Christ agreed to be the sacrifice on the cross to make that happen. This love for you was further expressed and promised in the covenants of the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Covenant in Christ.

When you are in the darkest day of your life, remember the darkest day in all of history, the day that Christ expressed and demonstrated His love for you when He died for you on the cross. **"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends"** (John 15:13). This is a love you can trust in. You can put your faith in God's faithfulness. If Christ died for you and united you to Himself, will He not be with you and guide you and love you forever, no matter how dark the valley gets? What can separate us from the love of Christ? Nothing!

#### **IV. Rejoice in the Salvation of God**

Finally, the fourth piece of counsel for when we experience the silence of God is to "Rejoice in the Salvation of God." Read Psalm 13:5-6. **"<sup>5</sup> But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. <sup>6</sup> I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me."** The Psalmist trusts in the love of God and from that stable, fertile soil of faith, joy begins to grow. Look at the tenses of these words. **"I have trusted in your steadfast love," "He has dealt bountifully with me"** these are verbs in the past tense. We are to meditate on God's past grace toward us. He has dealt bountifully with us in innumerable ways, benefits that were all purchased for us with the death of Christ and applied to us by the Holy Spirit. Because of this, we have something to sing about, even if our dark season doesn't lift.

This Psalm ends with rejoicing, but know that not every saint in a dark season is there yet. It's a journey. And rejoicing might look different than you expected and still be intermixed with tears or a lack of any feeling at all. So dear saint, wherever you are in this



Psalm, let this Psalm guide you. Let it guide your prayer. If you are not praying at all to God, cry out to Him in faith as a child. If you are groaning and complaining to God, know that He hears you and pray for His mercy to help you in your specific circumstance. And if you are fixated in the current moment and feel insecure in God's love, remember God's ancient and steadfast love for you, ultimately expressed in Christ's death for you and daily communicated to you through His providence and provision. And finally, if you are meditating on God's steadfast love for you in Christ, respond with rejoicing, even if the feelings aren't all there, even if you don't have all the answers, even if God still seems to be silent toward you, declare His greatness, sing of how He has dealt bountifully with you in Christ.

If you are experiencing the silence of God today, know and remember that Jesus Christ experienced the silence of God on the cross when he cried out, "**My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?**" Jesus experienced the silence of God so that you wouldn't have to forever.

Let's pray.