

**Series:** Pray20

**Sermon 2:** Praying to God our Father pt 2

**Text:** Psalm 13 – Unanswered Prayer

**Pre-sermon: Serve Week Announcement (coming out of video)**

Serve week is coming up March 23-28. We believe the church should be a blessing to its community. God has put his church in the world to proclaim his love, but also to demonstrate his love. So as a church we send God's people to all people. There are wonderful ministries here in Charlotte who give their 24/7 to doing just that. Loving our city. And because God has raised up such great ministries, we as Mercy Church think the best thing we can do is partner with these ministries to help them go further faster. That's part of what your Christmas Missions Offering did. Giving to that helped these ministries tremendously. But, we also want to give our time to serving with these ministries. SO, serve week is our orientation week to these ministries. We ask you to set aside a few hours and go serve with one, or more if you want, of these ministries we partner with and learn what they do. The goal is to encourage them and to help you find a fit for long-term ministry here in the community.

We have 300 slots across about 8 ministries and 4 schools. And every partner we are serving with has a Mercy Member already either on staff or very involved with the ministry. They know us, they are ready for us. Let's crush this week ok. Go sign up on our website.

Ok with that said, I want to transition over to our last sermon in the Pray20 series. This series has really been awesome for me and I've heard the same from many of you. The simple idea was to call Mercy to Pray for 20 minutes every day. And if we will give ourselves to that practice, we can unlock a closeness to God we were made for. We are going to close the series out talking about an elephant that's been hanging around in the room. I wanted to spend a lot of time talking about the richness of drawing close to the father. About how prayer is this incredible access to God...because I wanted us to have a foundation for dealing with the harder side of prayer. The elephant in the prayer room is...how do you deal with unanswered prayer?

**Intro<sup>1</sup>**

I recently prayed for a couple who was struggling with infertility. They got pregnant, everybody was excited...and then lost the baby in miscarriage. What do you do with that? Prayer seemingly answered and then...taken away.

I've prayed with single friends for God to bring along a spouse and it's a good and right prayer and yet...years go by and still no spouse...what do you do with that?

I know a couple who has prayed for years for a wayward son and yet the son just keeps self-destructing. Faithful believers, good parents...right prayers...no answer. What do you do with that?

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<sup>1</sup> This structure for the intro was used by John Mark Comer in his [sermon on unanswered prayer](#) at Bridgetown Church.

And compound that with scriptures like

13 Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. -- John 14:13-14 (CSB)

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you -- John 15:7 (CSB)

16 You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. -- John 15:16 (CSB)

23 "In that day you will not ask me anything. Truly I tell you, anything you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. 24 Until now you have asked for nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete. -- John 16:23-24 (CSB)

Not once or twice, but 5 times in this little section Jesus says if you ask anything in my name I will give it to you. Just ask! And the rest of the new testament seems to give us a kind of similar expectancy. ASK in my name and you will RECEIVE. Really?

What about my friend's baby? Was that not in your name? What about my friend who is faithfully serving you and asking for a spouse...is that not in your name? What about these parents who love you and love their son?

You feel the tension there? We are in a series on prayer and this is our final week. We've been talking about the wonders and goodness of prayer. We've seen the personal closeness to God prayer offers us. The power it unlocks in and through us. And yet there is this reality that life often confronts us with:

### What do we do when some prayers seem to go unanswered?

This is the elephant in the prayer room? Why are some prayers answered and others aren't? And how do we live in the middle of that? That's what I want to talk about today. I want to equip you to walk in that place where your prayers seem to go unanswered. And things are hard. We'll call that place the spiritual desert. And all of us will go there at some point. James 1 says "whenever" trials come. Not "if ever." And we all know that to be true. And I want to show you how that desert can actually become a place you experience the richness of God in a way you cannot otherwise.

We are going to be in Psalm 13. This is a Psalm of David. And it's a Psalm of Lament. A lament is basically an expression of grief. It's **An admission that everything is NOT ok and you are NOT ok and you need God but can't see God.** That's a lament. It's an acceptance of a painful reality and putting it honestly before God. It's like a funeral dirge. we are going walk through it and see what to do in the desert. And maybe you need these words RIGHT NOW, maybe a friend does. But they are here. I'll show you some elements of lamenting as we go through it. Warning this thing starts low...gets lower...and then finishes high. So you should feel pretty bummed about 4

verses in and yet walk out of here rejoicing in God. That's my hope.

1 How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

2 How long will I store up anxious concerns within me, agony in my mind every day?

How long will my enemy dominate me?

How Long? Four times in two verses. How Long, Lord? That's the hardest part with being in a spiritual desert. You don't know when you are going to get out. And maybe you start to wonder if you are ever going to get out. You hear despair here. This isn't a prayer of repentance. David isn't saying 'Oh well I imagine this is my fault somehow that I'm here.' In verse 1 No David puts this on God.

Will **you** forget me...forever? God, it feels like you've abandoned me! I've served you Lord, I've done my level best to follow your commands. And this is what I get? Are you just going to forget me...forever? How much longer? This is agony that is a combination of confusion and hurt.

And not only do my circumstances feel like you've forgotten me...how long will **you** hide your face from me? The face of God represents the blessing of God. That's why the past two weeks we've closed our service reading numbers 6.24-26 over you...

24 "May the Lord bless you and protect you; 25 may the Lord make his face shine on you

and be gracious to you; 26 may the Lord look with favor on you and give you peace." ' -- Numbers 6:24-26

We read it over you because the face of God turned toward you represents the presence of God and the blessing of God. And David is saying...God not only is my situation bad, it feels like you've gone quiet. And I don't know why. And it's killing me.

He feels like he's suffering alone. And suffering alone multiplies the anguish of the soul. Verse 2 he says How Long will **I**. How long will I suffer anxiety as I try to control something out of my control? How long will I agonize in my mind? Can any of you relate yet?

How long will my enemy dominate me? This temptation, this grief, this despair, this anger, this sickness, this conflict, how long will it last? How long God!? When God seems silent, when it seems like prayers are unanswered...it feels defeating. Nothing quite like it.

3 Consider me and answer, Lord my God.

Restore brightness to my eyes; otherwise, I will sleep in death.

He's not done asking. That's part of what makes a lament so important. One of the big things in being able to survive in a spiritual desert is understanding **you can pray when you don't feel like it**. The reason you don't feel like it is because you are tired (v1) from nothing changing when you do pray. And the lie we often believe is...prayer doesn't work. So I'm done. But

the Psalms are filled with prayers for exactly these moments. Because God is still father in the desert.

Do you know that 2/3 of the Psalms are Laments? There's a reason there are so many of these! God knew we would go through spiritual deserts where it seems to us like he isn't listening. So he made a way for us to deal with that feeling. Lamenting is a lost practice in much of the American church. But it's THE kind of prayer that helps us survive the desert. Because there is hope built in.

David's laments have a pattern to them. He cries How long, How long, how long....BUT. there is a turn. That's gonna be verses 5-6 for us. But that's not what happens for a lot of american Christians. Historically, the global church is accustomed to expressing lament. To walking with God in the desert. **We** are not. So instead of How Long...BUT and then turning to praise. So many people say HOW LONG HOW LONG...Ok I'm out. I haven't heard... so I'm out. Just recently heard two now fairly well known guys who used to be Christians share about what they called their journey away from Christianity. And I wouldn't presume to boil down their whole story to one point but I did notice a thread throughout that they said they prayed...and no answer came. So they left the faith and are no longer Christians. And maybe you wouldn't go that far...but many Christians kind of settle into a spiritual fog.

We've lost the practice of being able to say I'm not ok, this situation is not ok, God I can't see you in this...and yet I trust you.

The absence of lament in the liturgy of the American church results in the loss of memory. We forget the necessity of lamenting over suffering and pain. We forget the reality of suffering and pain." - Soong Chang Rah

Go back to verse 3 and look at the imagery there. Consider me. The word here is 'look.' Turn your face back to me God. Look on me again. Renew my weary soul Restore brightness to my eyes. Your physical suffering messes with you spiritually & your spiritual suffering messes with you physically. Matthew 6.22 Jesus says the eyes are the lamp to the body. Basically your eyes tell the story. If your eyes are full of life, so are you. If they are weak, so are you.

And he's saying LORD...BRING BACK LIFE to me! Because Otherwise, I will sleep in death. That's the death of the soul. That's hopelessness. That's where he goes without God. He's talking about despair here and how it gives way to depression. He's talking about hitting the worn out bottom. And he adds one more thing.

4 My enemy will say, "I have triumphed over him," and my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

David almost always includes a reference to the victory his enemies will win and the way they will flaunt their power in God's face if they do. He ties his salvation to God's reputation. And he is right to do so. Because God's glory really is what is at stake. And we have a very real enemy, the father of lies, who scripture tells us wants us to fail. Wants us to be shaken. And this same David says in Psalm 62

I am at rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.  
2 He alone is my rock and my salvation, my stronghold; I will never be shaken. -- Psalms 62:1-2

So God if I am shaken, your reputation is shaken. And you and I need to realize there is very much a spiritual battle being waged in the desert. Where the enemy who is much smarter than you is trying to destroy your soul. And you and I need to cry out to God and say GOD...I have given you my life...and if the enemy wins against me, he wins against you. SO FOR YOUR namesake...not for my pride but for your glory...pick me up here. Carry me here. PRAISE GOD that his reputation is linked to our salvation. Not linked to our suffering...God's people suffer. But linked to our salvation.

By the way right here I want to remind you here that this isn't just an echo of your story that Jesus is going to come along and fix. Before it was your story, it was actually Jesus' story.

See Hebrews tells us we have a great high priest who is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses because he has been tempted just as we have been. He was ONE WITH THE FATHER. Far closer to the father than you or I could ever be. But when he went up on the cross what did he cry out?  
33 When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lemá ' 'sabachtháni? " ' which is translated, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"  
-- Mark 15:33-34

See you and I feel abandoned by God...but the truth is...Jesus WAS abandoned. For one moment in time he hung where no one else has at any point in space and time since. Completely cut off from the father so he could endure all that our sin deserved. So when you cry out WHY GOD? Jesus isn't over there shaking his head at you disappointed that you won't just trust God.

He's WITH YOU. HE's saying YES I KNOW THAT FEELING. IN fact, I made sure to know it at a really deep level SO THAT you don't ever have to go where I went. Some of us want so desperately for God to get us out of the desert. And God is trying to say HEY...what you need to learn right now is that I AM WITH YOU IN THE DESERT!!!

- Sometimes God says no to our requests because he wants to use that feeling of need to draw us into a deeper relationship with himself. If he answered everything immediately we would just have an ATM relationship with God.
- He wants us to have a child-father relationship with him. And sometimes he uses this desert to draw us closer to himself. Because what is BEST for us, is the presence of the Lord himself. That is the most secure, life giving thing God can give us. That's why in Luke 11 Jesus says how will he who loves us like a father not graciously give us the Holy Spirit? Nothing is better than God with us! And maybe he's withholding his answers to give us the space to be satisfied with his presence.

You WILL go through the desert Isaiah 43.2 says, but I will be with you. When you pass through the waters they Will not overwhelm you, when you walk through the fire you will not be burned because I am WITH YOU. Which leads us to the turn of the Psalm.

5 But I have trusted in your faithful love; my heart will rejoice in your deliverance.

6 I will sing to the Lord because he has treated me generously. -- Psalms 13:1-6 (CSB)

The great hope of all Christians. There is a past tense and a future tense bound up together in these verses. I **have trusted** in your faithful love. That is what I did. And it is what I continue to do. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the certainty of things unseen. I have chosen to trust in God's faithful love. And that love I have trusted in is the gospel. **And the circumstances of the desert do not change the certainty of the gospel.**

When I am in the desert I have promise that I can cling to because of Christ. A promise that not only I cling to, but there is a person who is clinging to me! His name is Jesus and he says you don't have to get up here. NO. I've got you. I've won the battle for you! YOU SHARE IN MY VICTORY.

13 And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. 14 He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to

us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him. -- Colossians 2:13-15 (CSB)

Brothers and sisters in the desert, Christ loves us. Christ has suffered like us and in greater ways than us. Christ has forgiven us. Christ has redeemed us. Christ has defeated the enemies that threaten us. Christ has brought us home and made us sons & daughters. The victory is ours church. Trust in the certain, not in the circumstance.

7 Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; 9 we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed. 10 We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus's sake, so that Jesus's life may also be displayed in our mortal flesh. -- 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 (CSB)

Maybe, hasn't delivered from some internal struggle or temptation because his plan is to use the struggle to put on display something about the life of Christ in your mortal flesh!

- John Newton: why hasn't God delivered me from my temptations? Taught me humility. "I realize now that pride is the most important thing to be delivered from." And the humility of Christ shown through his life.

- **Spouse walking through abandonment:** He is there with you. He is with you in the desert. And he's extending his life to you. His presence to you. And using you to show the world Christ experienced betrayal so that GOD would always be with us.
- **Teenager with same-sex attraction:** He may want you to use you as a demonstration to everyone that you will hold onto God's word even when everything in you is going the opposite way. And that your identity in Christ is GREATER, more life giving, more worthy of your heart...that's Christ being displayed through you. That's victory!

Charles Spurgeon famously said he has learned to kiss the wave that threw him back on the rock of ages. Do you see Christ is with you? Do you see that this suffering is real. But it is not going to destroy you. And this light and momentary affliction is not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us. Victory is ours.

When you see that you will join David in verse 6. You will sing to the Lord because he has treated you generously.

Isn't that a strange sight? A guy or girl walking through the desert. Tattered clothes from a tattered past. And here they are singing. Not in a deranged way...But in solemn hope. In a way that allows tears to flow...that expects tears to flow...but those tears carry a truth with them...

3 Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will

be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. -- Revelation 21:3-4

This is the church. Not one person walking alone. But a whole group of people from every tribe tongue and nation. Strangers and Aliens here in this world bound together because our hope is in another world to come. We were never meant to be comfortable here. We were destined to suffer...and in Christ we are able to suffer well. And so we go forward. Singing one song of salvation to the world. That's why he says I will sing.

It's not just therapeutic. It's evangelistic. Sometimes God uses his people most powerfully when they openly trust him when nothing seems to be going right. When they say like Shadrach My God can deliver me...but even if he doesn't...I will trust him anyway. Because to absent from the body is to be present with Christ. AND NOTHING...NOTHING can separate me from that. And the world wants that. WE CAN'T KEEP THIS TO OURSELVES. THAT ONE FAR FROM GOD BUT CLOSE TO YOU – DON'T WAIT UNTIL YOU ARE OUT OF THE DESERT TO TALK ABOUT GOD WITH THEM. SING ABOUT THE LORD IN THE DESERT!

Some of you tonight want that confidence. You need to hear the certainty of the gospel.

PRAY20 is a call to pray to the one who has come for you, died for you, resurrected in victory for you, reconciled you to God, adopted you into his family, and is coming back for you.