

# Stewardship of Suffering

*The Grace of Stewardship*

By Rob Green

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Psalm 13

**Preached On:** Sunday, November 8, 2015

## **Faith Church**

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:** <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

**Online Sermons:** <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

My name is Rob Green and I normally have the responsibility of teaching the young couple ABF during this time, however, Pastor Viars asked if I would handle the preaching responsibilities this morning so it's great to study the word with you and I'm certainly looking forward to our study together. This is the second week of our Stewardship Month and each year we invest one month out of the year in order to think particularly about how we can be a good steward of various aspects of our lives, everything from our health to our abilities, to our experiences and then everything in between. And today we're going to be discussing the issue of stewardship of suffering and the testimony that went right along with that. The stewardship of suffering, that's not exactly the most common thing that people think about when they think stewardship. They think about money. They think about time. They think about their talents. They think about their gifts and abilities. But I think it's fair to say that the word of God has an awful lot to say about suffering as well and as we think about Stewardship Month, whether we're talking about money or we're talking about time or we're talking about talents or we're talking about suffering, there are four principles that our church has really encouraged all of us to memorize for the purpose of helping us be a good steward with all that God has given us. And if these are not committed to your memory, I would encourage you over this month to do that so they are ready for recall at a moment's notice.

Number 1 is that God owns everything and you own nothing. That God owns everything and you own nothing. The second one is that God has entrusted you with everything you have and so therefore you just simply are a steward of whatever God has allowed into your life, whatever he has given you. You are simply a steward that is going to give an account for that at some point. You can either increase or diminish what God has given you and his desire is that you increase it, that you be a good steward. Do you remember the parable of the talents? That those who were given five were expected to earn more. The one who was given two is expected to earn more. And the one who was given one was called a wicked slave because he didn't do anything with it. So God expects us to increase whatever he has entrusted to us and some day we'll give an account for our stewardship and it could be today.

Now, with those four thoughts in mind, I want us to take that idea and apply it specifically to the issue of trials and suffering. The stewardship of trials and suffering and I believe a message like this has the potential to apply to several different groups in several different ways. One of the ways that I've been praying is that those of you who are experiencing suffering right now, you are under hardship, you are experiencing trials and suffering in various ways that today would be a source of encouragement for you. That as you study the word, you would be encouraged and you would know how to respond to the suffering and the trials that you are experiencing.

It's also my hope that it will equip us, all of us, or at least contribute to equipping us to minister to people who are suffering. Even if we're not suffering at this point in time, it simply allows us to minister to those who are.

Then I think a third category is that God would use his word to help us to be ready for suffering should the Lord call us to that at some point in the future. In other words, I may not be suffering today, but that suffering may come in the future and I need to be prepared for that and equipped for that based on the word of God. In fact, because this is such a sensitive subject for many, I'd like to just pray and ask the Lord for his help in this matter.

*Lord, thank you for your word and thank you that you call us to be stewards and thank you that you call us to be stewards not simply of the normal things, but even of trials and suffering. So, Lord, I'm asking that your word would minister particularly to those who are suffering this morning, that today would be a source of encouragement and help for them, that it would equip those of us who aren't suffering right now to be prepared for suffering should you call us to that in the future and then, Lord, that it would help to equip us to be ready to talk to those who are suffering. So we're asking, Lord, for your help because we understand that this cannot be accomplished without your work in our lives. In Christ's name. Amen.*

Well, the question I had to answer this week as I prepared was, "Where in the world should I go in order to address this particular issue with our church family? Where could we spend time that would result in comfort and hope to those who are suffering and at the same time would be theologically robust enough to help those of us who aren't suffering to be prepared for it?" Therefore, with that in mind, I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 13. That is on page 397 of the front section of the Bible that's in the chair in front of you.

As you're getting there, I'd like to explain two reasons why I ultimately landed in the book of Psalms. The first one is that ministering in the Psalms is what Spirit filled people do. Ministering in the Psalms is what Spirit filled people do. Ephesians 5:18 says this, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." And we know someone is filled with the Spirit because there are certain things that then result and that is "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." You see the words "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs," are actually three words that were used in the Greek translation of the

Old Testament to describe the book of Psalms and so many people would argue that Ephesians 5:19 here speaking of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs are not talking about the various categories of songs but are actually referring to the book of Psalms. The passage ends by "giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ."

The companion to Ephesians 5:18 is Colossians 3:16 where it says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with," here it is again, "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." In both passages, we find the result of someone who is Spirit filled or the result of someone who is letting the word of Christ richly dwell in them is that they share with one another the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. That is, we shouldn't be surprised because, after all, the book of Psalms was designed to teach and to instruct and to be spoken to one another.

A second reason why ultimately he chose to land here is because the Psalms are hurting people writing to hurting people and because they're hurting people writing to hurting people, they speak incredibly well to the sufferings of people. We never argue that one person has to experience every single aspect of another person in order to minister to them, however, I think we would all recognize that if we have experienced something similar, then our advice tends to be a little bit easier to swallow. That's one of the reasons why we have a cancer support group. It doesn't meet very often but it does meet on occasion because sometimes it's helpful to hear from one person who is either going through it right now or has gone through it and encouraging one another in the midst of it. That's why we have a few ladies in our church that are willing to meet with other ladies who have experienced or who have recently experienced a miscarriage. Why? Because some ladies are helped by talking with someone else who has been there and has experienced God's grace in the midst of that trial. The point of these ministries is that helping people speak very well to hurting people and that's exactly what the Psalms do. They don't replace the body of Christ. They don't replace ABFs. They don't replace church family nights. They supplement and hurting people providing help to hurting people, that's exactly what the Psalm does.

Now, I'd like to read Psalm 13. It says, first of all,

1 For the choir director. A Psalm of David. How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? 2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? 3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, 4 And my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," And my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken. 5 But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. 6 I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.

I would like to organize our time around the way the Psalm is organized and that is there are three aspects of this Psalm that help us understand how to respond as a good steward to trials and suffering. The first one is simply this: to express honestly your struggle to the Lord. Most editions of the Bible include a little editorial note. Mine says this: prayer for help in trouble. Yours probably says something similar. That is simply a person's, an editor's view of what the content of Psalm 13 is about. However, the line right below it, which I did read, "For the choir director. A Psalm of David," that is actually verse 1 of the Hebrew Bible. That is inspired Scripture and there are a couple of reasons why that is really important. It was written to be sung. It was written for the choir director. Can you imagine if the worship team had opened up our service this morning with, "How long, O LORD? Will You forget us forever?" We wouldn't be very encouraged by that, would we? But here's one of the reasons why it is: this way in Psalm 13, because the Psalms, which was the hymnbook for Old Testament Israel, one of the things that they did is they acknowledged the challenges of life and so there are some Psalms that start off like services normally start of, that is, with praise and adoration for our great God describing how wonderful everything is and then sometimes there are Psalms like this that describe really how challenging life is; how hard life is; how difficult life is. So the congregation is raising up their voice, singing together and to one another, "How long O LORD? Will You forget me forever?"

It was designed to be sung because in this little Psalm is a wealth of theological information that helps someone deal with the sufferings that they are experiencing. In fact, if we just begin to unpack it, sometimes it feels like God has abandoned you. That's what David says. He says, "How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?" and that little phrase "A Psalm of David" tells us that David is the one who wrote it and the most famous statement about David in the Bible is that David is a man after God's own heart. So here is a man after God's own heart expressing to the Lord, "Lord, why is it that you have forgotten me? How long is it going to be before you remember me?" One writer actually argued that it's only because David and the Lord were so close that he would issue a complaint of this magnitude. It wasn't because he was angry at God, it was because he was close to God and he was expressing his feelings and thoughts to God of, "Here's what it seems like, Lord. This is how our relationship seems to be going right now."

Someone else also wrote and I think rightly so, that the language of the text encourages us to believe that David was experiencing prolonged hardship. He writes, "How long?" four times. He uses the term "forever" almost implying as if there has been a period of time in which the Lord seems to have forgotten him and now he's just simply asking, "Lord, how long is it going to take? Is it going to be forever or is this going to end?" I think that is incredibly significant because David is not just simply talking about a bad day. He's confessing about a prolonged period of difficulty and challenges and for whatever reason, he believes that the God of heaven and earth has not chosen to act on his behalf at this point. I think many of us can relate to that, huh?

When we have a bad day, we don't really think about this but when suffering takes its time in its torment and takes its toll upon us, then we begin to fade in our resolve. Do you

know that was true of Job? When Job initially gets the word of all of the calamity that is taking place around him, servant after servant after servant kept coming up to Job and saying, "Hey, I alone am left. This was destroyed and this was destroyed and this happened and this happened and I alone am left." Job is absolutely resolved in his commitment to the Lord, but by the end of Job, he's not quite so strong anymore. Now he begins to question God, not because he had a bad day, but because he was having a lot of bad days in a row. I think that's a concept that many of us can relate to again because when we experience a day of prolonged suffering where it just doesn't seem to end, then we're asking God, "How long is it going to take?"

It reminds me of those who struggle with cancer. They're being treated in the best way that we know how, but often that means they lose their hair. It often means that they don't feel like eating because, quite frankly, everything tastes bad. They're constantly tired and just about the time they start to feel well, what happens? It's time for another treatment and, you know, the first time and the second time, you kind of endure it. The third time and the fourth time it's like, "I'm going to be tortured today." It's a hardship and it can feel like, "Oh Lord, how long is this going to last?"

I think about the family that is torn apart by the sinful rebellion of one person regardless of who it is: father, husband, wife, mom, child. The home is supposed to be a place of safety and comfort and security and instead it's anything but that and there seems to be no way to escape. Well, friends, if this is you, I want to encourage you to cry out like David did. In fact, David goes a step further. He not only says, "Lord, how long? Will You forget me forever?" but he actually says, "How long will You hide Your face from me?" It's almost as if God is playing this cosmic game of hide-n-seek. It's one of those where your older siblings played with you, you know? They really didn't want you around and so what they did is they said, "Hey, tell you what, let's play hide-n-seek and here's what you do, you count to 100 and then you come find us," and they went to the mall. So what you're doing is you're looking everywhere. You're trying to find them and you can't find them. Finally you're going to your mom in tears and you're like, "Mom, where is John?" And she's like, "Honey, he left two hours ago."

That's the description that David is giving, "Lord, how long am I going to seek after you? I keep searching and I keep searching and it seems like every time I find your hiding spot you move. Lord, how long is it going to be like this?" Let that language sink in. Forgotten. Abandoned. Lonely. Forsaken. And if you're experiencing that kind of trial and suffering, I want to encourage you to cry out to the Lord just like David did.

He goes on and he's going to describe sometimes the fact that it seems as if God will not answer your request for advice. In verse 2 he says this, "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day?" In this, I think you need to understand the David story in order to really understand what he's saying so you start in 1 Samuel 15 and you read to 2 Kings 1 and you get the story of David and there is time and time and time again when David goes to the Lord and says, "Lord, what do you want me to do? How do you want me to respond?" And God either through direct communication or through a messenger, gives David an answer. He says, "David, I want you to do this," and

that's exactly what David does and here he is describing a time in which he says, "Lord, what do you want me to do? What do you want me to do?" and there is no response. He says, "Lord, how often? How long is it going to be before you begin to speak in my life again? How long is it going to be before you begin to show me the direction that I'm supposed to go?" From David's perspective, he's just receiving advice from himself.

Then he goes on, "How long will my enemy be exalted over me?" He takes it a step further and he's like, "Lord, how long do my enemies get to be wicked and enjoy it? Where is the justice? Where is the righteousness? Lord, it seems as if you have forsaken justice and righteousness and goodness and you have traded them in and you exchanged them for abandonment and evil and wickedness. I don't understand." Friends, can I encourage you that's the song that the nation of Israel was singing to the Lord and to each other and God actually put it in the Bible. If he didn't want it in the Bible, he could have not included it. God was not embarrassed by the words of David and if we're going to experience and steward our suffering well, then there are going to be times in which we're just crying out to the Lord, "Lord, how long? How long is this going to endure? Lord, why does it seem like those who are wicked prosper and I'm trying to be righteous and yet I'm suffering? Lord, how long is it going to be?"

Well, that's not the only aspect of stewarding suffering in Psalm 13 because in verse 3 he begins to turn. There is an important turning point in verse 3 and that's that David chooses to pursue the Lord despite how he feels. He chooses to pursue the Lord. You see, instead of saying that because it feels like the Lord has abandoned him that he is going to pursue other things, instead, David, a man after God's own heart, turns and pursues the Lord. It reminds me of Jacob when he's wrestling the angel. Do you remember what the angel does? Dislocates his hip. Can you imagine the excruciating pain in which Jacob feels at that point and yet what does Jacob do? He hangs on and he says to that angel, "I will not let you go unless you bless me. Fine, bring more calamity on me, I don't care but I'm not leaving until you bless me."

I think that's what David is doing here with the Lord. He's saying, "Lord, here's what it feels like: it feels like you have forgotten me. It feels like you've abandoned me. It feels like you're letting my enemies win. But I'm not going to let go. I'm not going to pursue other things. I am going to continue to run after you." He pursues the Lord, first of all, by asking him to respond to his suffering. I love the second part of this. He says, "Consider and answer me, O LORD my God." I asked the worship team if they would lead us in the song "Forever Reign" for a couple of reasons. Number 1 is because the chorus says this, "I'm running to your arms. I'm running to your arms." The idea is to pursue the Lord. Then it says, the little tag, "My heart will sing no other name," what's the name? "Jesus. My heart will sing no other name." I'm not going to find somewhere else to go because it seems as if God has forsaken me or abandoned me, instead, I'm going to hold on tight.

That was the message of the Psalm and when hurting people run, where do they run to? Some of them try to pretend as if their hurt doesn't really exist and so they pursue pleasures of various kinds. Some of them slip into self-hating mode where they deserve misery and so, therefore, they're just miserable people and that's exactly what they

deserve because that's their lot in life. Some argue that their discouragements in life are really just a physical problem that's going to be solved through some form of treatment of medication so this discouraged, abandoned person finds their joy and satisfaction in drugs or alcohol or the party scene or abusive relationships or self-harm or work. What David realizes is that those cheap substitutes will never supply the need. Not over the long term. They might make things better for a few hours; they might make things better for a short period of time, but prolonged suffering will not be answered by any of those cheap substitutes. So he goes back to the Lord and he says, "Lord, please answer me."

For those of us this side of the cross, we have the privilege of thinking about our annual theme verse this year. What do we get to do? Hebrews 4 says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." In other words, what this passage reminded us of is the Lord was saying, "Hey look, when you need mercy and you need grace, come and pursue it from me and here's the answer I'm going to give, the answer is yes because I want to give it to you already. I'm a God of grace. I'm a God of mercy. I'm a God of compassion and so I want you to come and pursue me because the answer is yes when you ask."

David specifically asks the Lord for three things in verse 3 and 4. He says, first of all, "Consider, Lord, consider. Take careful thought of my experiences and my circumstances. Pay attention to me. Understand what I'm going through, Lord. Be thoughtful about my trials and my suffering." Then he says, "Answer me, Lord. Lord, please answer my questions. How long is this suffering going to last? How long am I going to continue to feel like you don't care? Lord, please answer my questions." Then he says, "Enlighten my eyes. Consider and answer and enlighten my eyes." What he's asking there is that God would be moved by compassion to do something about his suffering. He says, "Lord, I'm appealing to you, not on my own merits, I'm appealing to you on your merits. I'm asking you as a result of your character to come and rescue me from this suffering."

So, friends, if you're in suffering right now, can I encourage you? Can I encourage you to pursue the Lord like David is pursuing? Can I encourage you to seek the Lord out in prayer and using David's request as a model that God would take careful thought of you? That God would provide answers to your deepest questions? That he would be moved to help you because you understand that there is only one way to be rescued and that is God is the one who has to rescue you?

Now, this passage doesn't say it but I want to encourage you two additional ways to pursue the Lord and we heard them in the testimony that Ashley gave. The first one is to be as involved in the local church as possible. When she receives the call that says, "Hey, your biopsy came back cancerous," the question she was asked is, "Where do you want to go? Home?" and what was her answer? "No, I don't want to go home. I want to go to

Wednesday night Kids of Faith because I want to serve and I want to be with my friends. I want to give blessing and I want to experience the blessing that comes with being part of a church family. I want to get both sides. I want to give and I want to receive and I know that the church is the place for that." Friends, I want to encourage you: if you're suffering right now, that is the thing to do. That was the right response.

Just a week ago, I never had this happen before, but I found out that three men in one of my ABFs, I teach a class at 8 called the sunrise class and then I teach young couples normally right now at 9:30, and three men lost their jobs in one week. In the midst of that, what happened was I just saw the body come together because there were calls and texts and messages of all sorts expressing, "Hey, we're going to pray for you. Hey, is there anything we can do for you? And oh, by the way, here are a few job opportunities that I happen to know about." And one of those individuals who lost his job on Wednesday had a job on Sunday in part because of the outreach that was given by the church family. That's exactly how it's supposed to function and when we stop participating in that, then we miss that opportunity and we miss that blessing.

I realize that sometimes our suffering is too intense to participate, but often it's just not and I loved how Ashley described the fact that even during her treatments she tried as best as she could to be in church and be part of Wednesday night Kids of Faith even when it was hard.

Here's a second reason, our second way to pursue the Lord in addition, that's not covered in the passage. Not only to be involved in local church as much as possible, but to read the word. You know, when you are suffering, you will discover so many passages on suffering in the word. They are literally everywhere. In fact, let me just tell you a little bit about my week. It took me an hour to figure out which passage I was going to teach on this morning because I started in Colossians 1, I went to James 1, then I went to Job, then I went to Romans, then I went to Habakkuk, then I went to 1 Peter, then I went to Lamentations, then Revelation, then Hebrews and finally I decided on Psalm 13. So it's pretty much this: if you're suffering, open your Bible and there is going to be something for you as a sufferer. It's on almost every page of the Bible.

Then here's what David also does: he communicates to the Lord the power of his enemies. In verse 4, he says, "My enemy will overcome me and my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken." In other words, what he says is, "Lord, either you're going to rescue me or I can't be rescued because I cannot overcome my enemy on my own. It's not possible." You know, David in his life had a lot of enemies and we don't know which version he's actually referring to right here. He had his father-in-law as an enemy. He had the nations around him as enemies. In fact, he was constantly at war. He had lots of enemies, but we don't know which one it was and I think that's actually helpful for us because the identity of the enemy was actually not as important as how his response was to the enemy and we can relate to that too.

There are some people who have wayward children and there doesn't seem to be anything they can do to change the direction of their children. Some of them have a spouse that is

making foolish, unwise decisions and they just simply have no power to stop it. Some have the loss of a close family member, especially when they were young. Some are experiencing cancer and they're just crying out, "Lord, our lives are going to be forfeit without your intervention. If you don't fix it, it's not going to be fixed. There isn't an answer that we have to this one." A lost job or a physical ailment that no one can find the answer to or explain. Someone just has an issue and nobody knows the answer to why they have the issue.

Can I suggest to you that this kind of thinking, this kind of idea of going to the Lord and saying, "Lord, I'm just not strong enough," is the very way in which we came before the Lord when we came to Christ to begin with. We didn't come saying, "Lord, we're awesome and surely you want us on your team." We came as broken and we came saying that, "Lord, there's no way that I can do anything to save myself. I need the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ as my only hope of salvation and so I'm begging for your forgiveness now." That's how we come, we come empty handed. Can I suggest to you that the way we go to the Lord even after we're saved is empty handed? We say to the Lord, "Lord, I'm not strong enough to do this. I need your help. You need to solve this. You need to rescue this or I'm simply not going to be rescued."

Friends, if you have never placed your faith and trust in Christ, you have never gotten to that place, you have never cried out before the Lord as a person who is helpless and in need of salvation, can I encourage you to do it today? We never know how long we're going to get and I want to encourage you that if you've never gone before the Lord empty handed, today is the day.

Believing friend, if you have enemies in your life, trials, suffering, that seem to be getting the better hand, go to the Lord confessing that you just don't have the ability to solve it yourself. Say, "Lord, I understand. You're going to have to solve this. You're going to have to fix it and if you don't, I'm simply going to be overcome." David confesses in verse 4, he says, "Lord, my enemy is going to say I'm overcome and my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken. Lord, if you let my enemy win, they're going to have a party on my grave."

Now, we've covered two appropriate responses to be a good steward of our suffering. One is to actually cry out to the Lord and the second is to pursue him, now the third one is found in verses 5 and 6: to trust in the character and the responsiveness of God. It is interesting that verse 5 is actually found just a couple of verses after verse 1, huh? Because after all, he says in verse 1, "How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?" and now what he says is, "But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me." You see, what David is doing here is he gets a different perspective. He evaluates his life a little bit differently now and that is he confesses that God is in fact trustworthy and his heart rejoices in his salvation and I want to encourage you to follow that model to confess that God is in fact trustworthy, and your heart does rejoice in his salvation. You see, for David, David loved God's lovingkindness. It was his favorite attribute. He speaks about it in almost every Psalm that he writes. He recognized the significance that God

had in his life as a loving, kind God and so even when it felt like God had abandoned him or forsaken him, the reality is that God always had a positive disposition toward him because of his lovingkindness.

Then he says, "I'm going to rejoice in my salvation." He's acknowledging the fact that the suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared to the glory that is yet to be revealed and he says, "Even if I forfeit my life, that's okay, because I understand that salvation is coming and it's even better." So, again friends, if you're suffering and you're struggling, can I encourage you to read Revelation 20-22 describing the new heaven and the new earth? And having one eye on eternity and recognizing that one day all of the sufferings of the here and now will be exchanged for the glories of heaven?

I want to suggest to you that the only way you get there is by going through verses 3 and 4. You're not going to get this perspective of trusting in the character and responsiveness of God bellied up at the bar. You're not going to get this smoking something that is illegal. You're not going to get this to be found in a job or in a career. And it's not going to come from another person. It's simply not going to be found there. The perspective only comes by pursuing a holy God.

That's why in Psalm 73, the Psalm of Asaph, he says this, "When I pondered to understand this," and the "this" that he's referring to is the fact that the righteous suffer and the wicked seem to prosper and the more he thought about it, "It was troublesome in his sight." But here's when his perspective changed. It wasn't when he was at the bar. It changed when he "came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end." That's what gave it to me, that's what gave me the new perspective. I wasn't exchanging the glories of God for some cheap substitute, instead, I began to see God as he is and they as they are and I realized that their end and mine were very different. That doesn't remove the difficulty but it does put it in perspective.

Then confess that God's goodness occurs even in spite of pain. One of the things I love about the phrase "I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me" is it's personal. He's not just speaking about, "Oh yeah, God is great. He's good and he's kind." He is saying, "God is good to me." He's saying, "I can remember times in which God worked in my life and I can be thankful for the way in which God works in my life and I can end with the conclusion that God has in fact been good to me."

So can I suggest to you that there is some good news and bad news with Psalm 13? The good news is that when a sufferer runs toward the Lord, to Jesus, then perspective, the right perspective is only a matter of time. But here's the bad news: when you see someone running somewhere else, running away from the Lord to some other source of joy or satisfaction, slavery to a ruthless taskmaster is inevitably the result. You will be a slave to a ruthless taskmaster if you don't run to the Lord.

So for those who are suffering, let me just encourage you to do a couple things. Remember that the Scripture speaks to your situation so if you're suffering right now, the word of God has something to say directly to you. Remember that the biblical writers

thought like you do and so if there were ever any moment in which you were thinking, "Man, I shouldn't be saying this but, Lord, it seems like you've forgotten about me." The biblical writers thought that too and God wasn't afraid to put it in his word. Then the progression helps you understand where you are in the process. You see, you can do a little self-evaluation, "Do I live in verses 1 and 2 where I'm just simply crying out to God and saying, God, how long? Or have I moved to verses 3 and 4 where I'm starting to confess, Lord, consider and answer, enlighten my eyes. Or am I in verses 5 and 6 where I'm trusting and I'm acknowledging God's goodness to me?"

Now, for those of you who are not suffering right now or those of you who are ministering to someone, then Psalm 13 helps you too. It helps you to be disciplined about your concern for their suffering. Life might be good for you right now and if it is, praise God for that, but it doesn't mean it's good for everybody. It helps you to understand where your friends are in the process. Just as it helps your friend understand where they are, it helps you understand where they are. Are they in verses 1 and 2? Or 3 and 4? Or 5 and 6? Then Psalm 13 helps all of us teach others how to suffer. I express my concerns to the Lord. I go to him honestly. I then pursue the Lord in prayer and in the word and in his church. Then I trust in his goodness and responsiveness.

Let's pray.

*Father, thank you for your lovingkindness. Thank you for your grace in our lives and thank you for your love for us. Lord, we're asking that you would please help us to suffer well, to do so as a good steward should you call us to that. Lord, thank you for the testimony that Ashley gave that really described this Psalm in living color, put a face to it, a name to it that described a hardship and yet crying out to the Lord, continuing to pursue him and trusting in his lovingkindness. So we ask that you would help us to do the same. In Christ's name. Amen.*