

This morning we continue in the Psalms series of this summer. The month of June is *Psalms That Meet Us in Our Sorrows*. Next month it will be *Psalms That Lead Us in Worship*. The last couple of weeks we've been looking at what are called 'individual laments' by the psalmist David. Psalm 3 and Psalm 13 are two examples where he is particularly pouring out his heart, what is going on in his life. Often they were connected with real historical events that were taking place. But there is also another form of lament, where there is the pouring out to God struggles and doubts and anxieties and difficulties---and it's not just an individual, but it is particularly what are called 'corporate laments.'

This morning you'll see on the screen before you the inscription which has been carried over from the Hebrew, and it says, "For the director of music. For Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A psalm." What does that mean? This means that in the books of 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles there was a group of men who were charged with writing music for the people of Israel who would gather together, who would sing together of God's faithfulness---crying out to God. And they actually formed a choir. There were instruments being used: trumpets and cymbals. Jeduthun and Asaph were two of those members. You can go back and see this in 1 Chronicles 16 and 2 Chronicles 29 where examples of instructions are given. This is one of the Psalms that was written for the choir and for the public singing of God's people as they gathered together, as the nation of Israel, for worship.

Now why would I go to the trouble of explaining that, and what application does it have for us? Let me say here that actually all of the Psalms, though there are individual laments and though there are individual moments within the Psalms---all of the Psalms were intended to be for the body of Israel, the nation of Israel, to use as their worship hymnal. So it is instructive for us because no longer does God have particular favor over a nation. There is certainly the nation-state of Israel in the world today, but it does not have more favor before God, because God, through Jesus Christ has created a new kingdom. That new kingdom is marked out by the Church of Jesus Christ. So the church has replaced Israel as the place and thing through which God is making the light of Christ known to the world. That isn't to say that somehow the Scriptures tell us that Jews are still important to the Lord---that may very well be the case, but that is not my point here this morning. There is no escaping the fact that no longer in the New Testament does Israel have a particular favor before God. Rather, it is his church.

But that doesn't mean that the Psalms are no longer of value. In fact, the Psalms are still meant to be the place where the people of God---that is, the church---find great value, refuge, truth, power, and instruction in worship. As I read through this Psalm this morning I want you to remember that though you see the first person pronoun, 'I,' you'll see that the great weight of the Psalm, particularly in the second half, is for the people of God, as he cries out on their behalf and as the choir would sing out. I want you to think, as I read here, think of this as a hymn that we might sing. With that said, it's meant to be jarring. Do we sing like this anymore? Think about this.

Psalm 77

I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me.
When I was in distress, I sought the LORD; at night. I stretched out untiring hands
and my soul refused to be comforted.
I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint.
You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak.
I thought about the former days, the years of long ago;
I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired:
"Will the LORD reject forever? Will he never show his favor again?
Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time?
Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"
Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High."

I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.
I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds.
Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God?
You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.
With your mighty arm you redeemed your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.
The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and writhed; the very depths were convulsed.
The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen.
You led your people, like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

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

Will you pray with me? Lord, you have put before us a wonderful Psalm. I ask you, O Lord, that you would meet your body, the body of the Lord Jesus Christ as it is exhibited here in this local expression of Columbia Presbyterian Church. May you teach us, O Lord, of the deliverance that you offer in the midst of our afflictions, not just as individuals, but as a church, as a body of what you are doing in the world. Help us, we pray, to sing and to pray like this, because that is what you invite us to do, because in that prayer you show us your deliverance. In Jesus' name, Amen.

This Psalm, as I said, is the third in a series on particular Psalms of Lament, and they are supposed to teach us. They're teaching us how to pray. They are teaching us how to worship. And if I may say boldly, they teach us how to deal with our emotions. You remember a couple of weeks ago I shared with you one of the valuable lessons that I learned from one of my teachers. I was taught that we are not called to suppress our emotions. So oftentimes there are many people who believe out of fear of what people may think, because we want other people to like us, or in the religious sense, we want to make sure that God is not angry at us. We are afraid to express full-throated emotion. So oftentimes we treat emotion as something to be put down. "Are you angry?" "No I'm not. No, I'm...fine. I'm not angry." And so we suppress it. The other side of that spectrum is how the culture has taught us to deal with emotion, and that is that emotion and its expression is an end in and of itself. How we deal with emotion is to vent it, to just dump it. Somehow there's this intrinsic value in doing that. You've heard people say, 'Well, I'm just being honest. I'm just being transparent.' You see, we've learned in our culture to somehow give great virtue to someone being transparent. But I will tell you, just being honest---as one philosopher said, 'Honesty is a thin virtue.' Just because you're dumping or venting your emotion regardless of what other people think, doesn't somehow make us a virtuous people. It just makes us incapable of understanding the right context in which to do that or how to do it.

So the Psalms actually teach us, and I believe the Psalms which find their full expression in the gospel of Jesus Christ teach us, that we are called through the gospel neither to suppress our emotions, nor to simply vent them. We learn in the Psalms, as I have learned, to pray them. We've looked at for two weeks how we pray our emotions: very difficult, disturbing, convoluted emotions. But here we hear the church, the body of Christ that is here in its expression in the Old Testament of Israel, expressing in Psalm.....when was the last time you heard a hymn like this: Where are you, O God? Why aren't you answering me? I can't even sleep! My spirit is troubled. When was the last time we've sung like that? Have we gotten to a place where we feel that when the body of Christ comes together, that we're to take our emotions and all that they are and put them in the nice little suitcase of Christian religion and say, 'Well, I'll just keep those in here for another time.' No, I want to say boldly that the choirmaster here is telling us that it is exactly in worship when the body of Christ, and here the nation of Israel, is to find the ultimate place where the expressions of doubt, deep, disturbing emotions, are to be expressed.

And let me say by way of introduction before I jump into the text, I know that in the county that we live

in, not everyone is all alike, but as a general rule, we have an extremely high percentage of people who are very, very educated. And there is a great positive to that in that we value the life of the mind. But it has its underbelly, in that somehow we believe and have come to practice that how we deal with our emotions is to simply think about them. Or that the expression of theology is mentally an intellectual pursuit. I will tell you the Scriptures will never allow us to park theology in the life of the mind, nor will they merely allow us to park theology and its study in just the heart. It's always the heart and the mind together. I'm here to say that if you're afraid to express emotion in worship, to express doubt in worship, I will tell you---I am sorry for in any way, shape, or form, that I have invited you to somehow check your emotions at the door. We are never called to check our minds or our hearts at the door. Bring them here. And people of God that are Columbia Presbyterian Church, let me say to you, may we be careful of overthinking our faith without applying it to our hearts, for Jesus Christ came to give us new hearts and new minds. So let us go to this Psalm together that meets us in our mind and meets us in heart and calls us to a full-throated worship, where we learn that here, when we express our doubt, God shows us deliverance in the midst of affliction.

Are you ready? Let's go. Three points, and then I'm going to take all my application, and I'm pushing it to the end. So we're going to go quickly, and I know there are kids here who are usually in children's worship and they're already looking for crayons. I totally get it, alright. So let's work together.

Three things as we look at this Psalm. *Seeking God*, verses 1 through 3. *Thoughts in the Night*, verses 4 through 9. *Courage from the Past*, verses 10 through 20. Let's look together, then, at what we learn about the people of Israel as they're called into worship, what it means to seek God in verses 1 through 3. Notice it says here early on something about the posture of God's people in worship. Notice what he says: "I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands..." We've become good, churchgoing folks. We've learned how to sit in chairs. How often, however, we have lost physicality in worship. The Psalms, all over the place, tell us something about the posture of God's people in worship. It's all over the place. They lie prostrate before God. They are bowed down on their knees. Their heads are bowed down. Their heads are lifted up. Their hands are outstretched. Their hands are up. Sometimes, may I say it in a Presbyterian church, they are even dancing before the Lord, Psalm 150.

If we think that our posture isn't to be part of the expression of our worship, we're missing what is at the heart of the Psalms. When was the last time that you were in deep emotion, sharing something from your heart, that somehow that was not inflicting some kind of change in your physical behavior. I happen to be a 'hand person.' I gesticulate all over the place. And when I'm excited and when I'm moved emotionally, you can bet I'm squirming---it's just the way I am. Some of you may not be that way, but I will tell you, every person in this room who has experienced emotion deeply, expresses it physically. In worship, God's people are called to raise their hands. It doesn't mean all you have to do it, I understand that, but you need to note there is freedom in doing so, because the psalmist tells us so. 'I stretched out my untiring hands.' Now let's be honest, folks, that when the person next to you in all the hymns does this...[raises hands]. You're wondering when they might be putting them down, right? I've thought that. When I was first a Christian, I wasn't accustomed to anybody expressing that kind of thing. I didn't know what to do it. We still don't know what to do with it. But the psalmist tells us what he's doing is not about physical expression. It's about sharing his heart. He's crying out to God on behalf of the people, as a part of the choir. He's stretching out untiring hands, and there's something about the posture that the psalmist tells us in seeking God. Bow before him. Have you ever felt weird singing a hymn that says, 'Bow before the Lord,' but we're actually not bowing? 'Kneel before the Lord, our God, our maker,' but we're not kneeling? I've felt kind of odd. Because there's something about it. When we seek God, we do so not with our minds alone, not with our hearts alone, but with our very bodies.

But there's also something else that is even more profound in these verses 1 through 3. It's not just the posture, it's the earnestness. Listen to the ways he describes: He cried---out loud. He was in distress. His soul was incredibly turned upside down. He groans. He muses. And he refuses to be comforted. In fact, he tells us---notice verse 4---'I was too troubled to speak' as he's thinking back on praying for the people of God. He was so troubled, he couldn't even utter the words. The best he could do, the best he could muster, is just groaning. Presbyterians have groaning down. If you've been in a Baptist church, they're not afraid to say when they're moved, they say, 'Amen.' In the Presbyterian church when we're praying and we're moved, we say, "Hmmm." We've got the corner on that one. We understand. That's groaning. But that groaning is to be from an earnestness. God does not intend that we bring only our happy faces into worship. And if there are those here this morning that do not believe, have not received the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, or who are visiting this church for the first time---whether you know Christ or not, I will tell you it's a discombobulating thing to come into a body like that, because you don't know what they're going to do in worship. But we, body of Christ, must recognize that most of the world believes that church is just for putting on our happy face, putting on the masquerade, the facade that I've got it together, there's nothing wrong. I will tell you the psalmist says, "Uh-uh. That's not the case." Because the psalmist leads us in crying out, begging God to hear, groaning, longing, questioning, doubting---and they're singing about it. That tells us something about our approach to God. Do you notice what I've just said? What I've just described to you, what I explained earlier, it's no way suppressing emotion, nor is it merely venting. It is praying the emotion. That is what the body of Christ is called to do in seeking God.

But then he transitions to go yet deeper in this *Thoughts in the Night* in verses 4 through 9. Now what I want to tell you about verses 4 through 9, this *Thoughts in the Night* as I've described them---what you need to note is he's getting ready to present a lot of questions. In the third point, you're going to hear the answers, and there is instruction. Oftentimes we believe in prayer and in worship that somehow our worship is motivated because we *have* the answers. The psalmist is worshiping God and taking [to him] all that he has. Even though he is seeking him, he doesn't have all the answers. Sometimes all that he has are questions. Let me say, please, bring your questions to worship. (Including the one where you are saying, I have no idea what this pastor is talking about---so stick with me.) Bring them in here.

Here are questions. In verses 4 through 9 we see the first question, and I have phrased it this way. What is going on, Lord? What in the world is happening? Let's see how he expresses that. We've just left verse 4 where he talks about that his eyes will not close, he's at night, and he cannot sleep. He can barely speak. And then in verse 5 he says, "I thought about former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart..." now listen to this---"My heart mused and my spirit inquired..." Now hear these questions that all are in some sense asking, What in the world is going on, Lord? Verse 7: Will the Lord reject us? Has he stopped in his unfailing love forever? Has he forgotten his promise? Have his promises failed? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in his anger withheld his compassion?

In asking this question, through various questions and in parallel form, 'What in the world is going on, Lord?' he is expressing doubt. I want you to be encouraged, both those who profess faith and those who do not, that so oftentimes doubt is assumed to be something that only those who do not believe struggle with. But what this Psalm teaches us, that when he's saying in various ways, 'What's going on, Lord?'---he has no idea what's going on, he's doubting---it means that doubt isn't merely the acreage for those who don't believe. It also happens to be well-traveled ground for those who do believe in God. Doubts inhabit the hearts of those who believe and those who don't.

Let me go further. Let me illustrate it this way. A great professional golfer of years gone by was David Duval. Now many of you may not remember his name unless you follow the sport, but between the

years of 1997 and 2001 David Duval won no less than thirteen professional tournaments. His last great victory was winning the British Open in 2001. Then everything came unglued for him as a golfer. Because after winning the British Open, he would go to his next tournament, or the next couple of tournaments---I don't remember when---and he went over and he stood over his ball and he was hitting it just like he always had. The problem was, he was finishing 18 over par, 25 over par. And he went from being number one in the world to number 80, from number 80 to number 216, from number 216 to not playing golf.

Why? Because when he went to come over the ball to hit it he was experiencing a severe form of vertigo that would leave him almost in a state of nausea. If you know anything about golf, vertigo is not what you want to experience. Some of you don't play golf, but some of you have experienced what vertigo is about. Vertigo is as if the world that you once experienced with order and with straightness and with value and foundation, is now suddenly being turned upside down physically. You can't gain your balance, you fall over, you fall off of things, you don't know what to do. The room is spinning, you have to sit down, and even when you're sitting down, it feels like how I feel when I go with my daughter to the amusement park and I go on one of those spinny things. I can't do anything else the rest of the day. Some of you have been battling this, as surely as I speak. I know, because you have shared those prayer requests. It's debilitating.

I want to say to you that that's exactly what this psalmist is experiencing. He's experiencing spiritual vertigo. It's as if his world turned upside down. He cannot sleep. He is groaning. He's looking around at his situation, and he's writing this hymn, and he's remembering back, and he says, 'Lord, what is going on?' Notice he doesn't suppress it, and he doesn't merely express it. He's praying it, and now he's singing it. And he wants us to sing our doubts. How is that a good thing? Because if you have doubts, if you have deep struggles, I am saying to you as a minister, if all you're doing is talking to those around you.... First, you need to talk to people around you, you need people praying for you, you need people walking with you in the midst of your very difficult situations. But if all you're doing is talking to those around you and not praying your doubts, and if I may invite you, singing your doubts before God, then you are missing the one thing the psalmist is teaching us. Because in asking this question, 'What is going on, God?' these thoughts in the night allow God to answer. We need to be singing our doubts, Church; we need to be praying our doubts, Columbia Presbyterian. We need to be singing our discombobulated feelings that don't make sense to the very one to whom they ought to be directed and the one from whom we hear the invitation, Come to me, for I am a God of redemption and mercy and compassion. He has said to the people of Israel, I am your God and you will be my people. Through you I will be a blessing to all nations. I will redeem you. He is the one that we are to go to.

Not only does he ask, 'What is going on, Lord?' he's asking the question, 'Where is God's benevolence? Where is God's benevolence?' That's the second question. You hear it housed within these questions when he says this: He talks about God's favor, verse 7; he talks about God's unending love, verse 8. He talked about God's promise in verse 8; he talks about God's mercy and compassion in verse 9. So in the very place that he's asking God these questions and expressing and singing this doubt, he does it by appealing to God's benevolence, and he's asking the Lord, 'Where is your favor? Where is your unending love? Where is your mercy? Where is your compassion?'

Now here, let me particularly speak to those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If all you're doing is asking that of other people, and you're not asking God---that, I will tell you, will end up in a very spiritually barren place. It is right to have other people along with you, praying these things, but I will tell you, you must pray them. Because when we are praying our doubts to God, when we're asking and calling upon his benevolence, we are not sinning before the Lord, we're expressing our humanity. We are not omniscient. We don't know all things. We're not all-powerful. We are not everywhere present as God is. And when we go to the one who is all of those things, that is not sin. In fact, we're

doing the very thing God has invited us to do. Go to the Lord with all of these things, and we ought to be doing so as a body of people. So in these thoughts in the night, as he's asking these questions, 'What is going on, Lord?' and 'Where is God's benevolence?' he's actually preparing us for how God is going to medicate and deal with this vertigo.

And that is *Courage from the Past*, verses 10 through 20. Notice what he does. He does two things in verses 10 through 20. One, he talks about God's mighty acts and number two, God's thunderous power. Let's look at God's mighty acts. He says in verses 10 through 20, he says to himself where he's now written this as a Psalm, saying, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to appeal. I've been expressing these doubts, I've been wondering where God is and asking about his benevolence. Here's the answer. Let me appeal to what God has done in the past and there he will find courage. So what he does, is he thinks about God's mighty acts from the past. Here's what he says: God's right hand, verse 10; performed miracles, verse 11. He meditates on them, and then he finds the locus and the power of these miracles by remembering how God led Israel out of Egypt in the book of Exodus. And here is how he talks about them. He talks about the waters and how they responded to God, God in his power. The waters convulse, meaning he's talking about leading the nation of Israel through the Red Sea. He created a path---that was the miracle. God's power protected the nation of Israel in the cloud. Here we talk about the lightning bolts---it's what he's talking about, God's arrows. He's protecting his people against their enemies, and he's going to lead them through a path of deliverance through a mighty sea. That is nothing other than the psalmist telling the people of God, remember God's mighty acts in the past. Because when we look at them in the past and appeal to them, we find courage for the present and hope for the future. That if this is what God has done in the past, we can appeal to God's mighty power in the past---Lord, if you have done this long ago, can you not do them now? And if this is how you led your people through a mighty miracle of taking them through the Red Sea, then can you not lead us through this difficult affliction that they are experiencing as a nation?

Because there he finds courage and strength. Because why? That's the answer to God's unfailing love and benevolence. He goes back to remember how God expressed his benevolence, his mercy, his compassion, his unfailing love in the past. Because he knows that if this is what he's done in the past, by appealing to God's character, he will have courage for the present. That is what the people of God are called to do, not just remember God's mighty acts, but also God's thunderous power. Look at verse 18. "Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen." They could see God going before them, providing a way out from those who were their oppressors who were chasing them down. The psalmist is saying, the world can't see God's footprints. And oftentimes neither can we. But what we can see is God's mighty power, his benevolent acts because of his thunderous power. God said way back in Genesis, 'In Abraham I will make a mighty nation through you. I will be your God. You will be my people.' And here now, the choir master of that nation has written a hymn for the nation of Israel in Scripture, expressing the doubt, expressing the questions, to do nothing other than to find courage from the past to express it in the present that there will be hope in the future God has promised.

That means no matter what our circumstances say, no matter what the present may scream out about the church of Jesus Christ in the world, membership declining, people leaving the faith, people doubting the truth of the Scriptures, people wondering that God created all things from nothing---that's just mere myth, there's no real Adam and Eve---all the doubts that are being thrown at the church, all the accusations, Jesus Christ isn't the only way. And what begins to happen, slowly but surely, for many Christians in many churches, is the idea is that it us versus them. That is not what the psalmist does. The answer for the Church of Jesus Christ, as for Israel, is not us versus the world. It is this: it is God who is for us. It is what God is doing. And God has said, I am coming again through my Son and I will redeem you. And we believe that this is not the way things will remain. I believe as a pastor

as I read the Scriptures, that Jesus is coming again and [before] he comes again there will be another great bringing in and growth of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Because I will tell you, that is what is already going on in the present. In the world, all the way from the Middle East to the Far East, South America, they're not wondering whether God is on the move--- God is on the move. They're sending missionaries to America. God is bringing in those thousands upon thousands every day to know him and his Son. Because that is what God has done in the past, and we must appeal to that.

So what does this Psalm mean for the Church of Jesus Christ? This psalmist teaches us about singing our doubts and singing our afflictions because in it we find deliverance. It's teaching us how to worship and to pray and to sing, and what in the world to do with our emotions. I will tell you when I read this, I was thinking, as I was reading through the commentaries, as I was reading a great pastor, Dr. Jack Miller, in his book---a fabulous book, but he's no longer with us, but he wrote this book, "Outgrowing the Ingrown Church." He talked about as a pastor, he had forgotten how to really pray. And he talks about this experience where he had wanted his church to gather together for prayer, and under his leadership, people stopped coming to the prayer meeting. One night, one Wednesday night, when they were gathering for prayer, it was 20 minutes to 8, and no one had arrived. Nobody, not even the faithful five. He went out to the parking lot. There was not a person in the parking lot. He was left alone. Ten years later, while serving another church he began another prayer meeting, and there was literally no room, except to stand. No more parking spaces in the parking lot. And do you know why, he said, as he reflected. He reflected as a pastor that the failure was not the people of God. The failure first began with him, because he had forgotten to pray to a God of mighty thunderous power.

How do we know God's mighty thunderous power? By singing out and crying out to God's Spirit. Praying that God, by his Holy Spirit, would usher in renewal to God's people. That we would feel both the freedom to pray and to sing our doubts, to ask for God's benevolence, knowing that he is powerful through his Spirit to answer, because this is what he has done in the past and we must appeal to that in the past and say, God, give us courage and strength for the present and hope for the future by your Spirit. I want to say to you as a pastor, I, too, have forgotten oftentimes the power of the Spirit, forgotten to pray to God in that way. God gave this to me four years ago when I was at this church in New Jersey, where I was pastoring. I was in the sanctuary by myself, and I was completely convicted that the way in which I had been pastoring was on my own strength. I'd not been calling out enough for God's mighty acts to be poured out on his people. And when we gather together for worship it's not about the kind of music or anything else. It's about God's Spirit coming in and moving us to believe that he is a God of thunderous power who will deliver us from our affliction and bring renewal to our midst. And I said, Lord, forgive me. Help me to pray for your Spirit.

And here's what enabled me to turn. And I leave this with you in conclusion: Luke, chapter 11. Notice what he says in Luke chapter 11. If you don't have it, that's okay, you can hear it. This is Jesus's teaching on prayer. He's just instructed on the Lord's prayer and here's what he says. He says to those around him, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.' Then the one inside answers, 'Don't bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can't get up and give you anything.' I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man's boldness [now we have it translated in English as 'boldness' but it's actually translated as shameless boldness]---because of his friend's [shameless] boldness, he will get up and give him as much as he needs. So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?

Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

The psalmist is leading us to a God of redemption that finds its full expression in Jesus Christ. God in his love sent forth his Son. Though we were his enemies, though we were evil, he gave us that for which we did not ask---he gave us a redeemer. And if he gives us a redeemer while we were evil and his enemies, how much more will he not give us and open the door and give us more than bread. He will give us his thunderous power of his Spirit to renew his people, to deliver his people in the midst of affliction.

Let me say this, particularly to the church that is Columbia Presbyterian Church. We do not want to grow deeper as a body because we know more intellectually. We want to grow deeper as a body because we are asking the Lord by his Spirit to take what we believe and to make it real in our hearts. [cell phone rings] That is my phone. I'm so sorry. I want to answer that one. Okay, okay, so the reality is, that has never happened before. *Lord?* Okay. He does not want to grow us by tricks of the trade. He wants, by his Holy Spirit, to make us a people that want to go deeper in the gospel, because we want to apply it more to everyday life. Secondly, he wants the Church of Jesus Christ, not just CPC, but the whole church of Jesus Christ, not to grow by sheep going from one church to another church--he wants us to grow because the Holy Spirit wants to come in and convict those who do not believe the amazing grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that brings salvation. And those who do not know him, come to know him. For this we must pray. It is a twin prayer. Lord, by your Spirit deliver us from the affliction of our complacency. Deliver us from the affliction of doubting your benevolence. Deliver us from the shortsightedness that we have of our faith, and give us your Spirit, and renew your church. For you have done it in the past, and by your thunderous power of your Spirit make us new, make us deeper, but make us more winsome for those who do not know you. Deliverance in affliction.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I want to thank you for your goodness and your grace. I thank you for the patience of my hearers. But Lord, it's about what you're doing in me and I just want to share it. Father, you have taught me again and again you simply want me to get out of the way. You need to work. Father we ask you, we share with you, we desire to grow deeper in the gospel, to know that grace is more than an idea---it's to change us from the inside out. And that the cross is not something that we come to once in a while, it's where we live. Lord, help us to do that. But Lord, I pray, too, that those who do not believe, may they know your incredible grace, that we, too, as believers, struggle with doubt, that they can struggle with doubt. But Lord, we find in you benevolence, we find in you goodness, that you answer in our doubts. Maybe our circumstances do not change, but there is courage, there is power, there is your Spirit. Come, we pray, and renew us. And may this small expression of your body be a part of what you're doing in Howard County, in this region, and throughout the world for Christ and his kingdom, for you are delivering us from our affliction. In Jesus' name, Amen.