

**David's Darkest Hour:  
When David Felt  
Abandoned by God  
I Samuel 21:15-22:2/Psalm 13**

Psalm 13 may be the very deepest of all the pits of life David endured. In this Psalm David is all alone and momentarily felt that even God had left him. Note the exact spot these events take place in the text of I Samuel 21:15-22:2:

*1 Samuel 21:15-22:2 Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?" 22:1a David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam.*

**[Here is a space of an unknown duration of time; David is completely alone except for his fears and troubles which followed him into the cave; Psalm 13 is describing his experiences here]**

*22:1b So when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. 2 And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.*

### **The Cave of Emotional Darkness**

David left Gath and was so alone that he despaired. And now David feels abandoned as moves to a new location that is very foreign to him. David wrote **Psalm 13**—how to overcome the feelings of despair, abandonment and loneliness when we are in a very dark situation that seems hopeless. The tone of this whole period of “cave times” is described by David in the first verse of Psalm 13. Look there with me and note the very first verse:

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? —Psalm 13:1*

As a believer, regardless of the extent of our spiritual maturity, it's possible to reach a point so low we actually feel that everyone—even God—has abandoned us. That was David's desperate condition when he wrote Psalm 13<sup>1</sup>.

Psalm 13 reveals that Christ can't be our Refuge if we don't hear His invitation to flee to Him, or remember He's there. Sometimes we have to hit bottom, go through dark waters, or face incredible convulsions in our lives to really see Him even though He's been there all the time.

I deeply learned that lesson at 27,000 feet while flying home from a Shepherds Conference in Los Angeles. Through that harrowing experience I gained an unforgettable insight.

Having heard the preflight safety lecture dozens of times, I started to read and ignored it, never thinking about anything other than what I needed to do before landing in Tulsa.

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<sup>1</sup> DSS Chapter-9; 050814AM COR-12 WN-33

Initially, this particular flight seemed uneventful. An empty seat beside me became my desk, and as the world slowly drifted by outside my window, I worked. After a bit, clouds began to darken the sky, so I turned on the light and kept studying. An announcement to fasten seatbelts appeared ordinary, not at all uncommon.

Suddenly, the plane did its first roller coaster move; it quickly dropped and then immediately went straight up like an elevator. When a very hard jolt knocked open a few overhead compartments and belongings fell out, scattered cries of fear could be heard from all over the cabin.

From that moment on this unexpected twist captured my rapt attention and all I thought about was this: *Who, exactly, is up front flying this plane? How much experience do they have? How skilled are they in thunderstorm management?*

### **Who's Flying The Plane?**

What tremendous lesson did I learn on that flight? It's perfectly normal to not pay much attention to stuff in general as long as our lives are going along smoothly!

Who even thinks about the pilot until the weather gets rough? But when the plane jolts, jumps, rocks, and swerves—that's ALL we can think about. And then we want to know: *Who is steering this careening machine?* The pilot instantly becomes very important because our safety is in his hands!

The same is true in life. But let the rough family times, the roller coaster ride of our emotions, the crash of our finances, or the plummet of our health come—THEN the Pilot captures our rapt attention.

God was about to capture David's full attention after fleeing to the wilderness to live in the cave of Adullam. This launched David's "cave times" period, which would soon prove to be one of his deepest trials.

Psalms 13 appears to reveal what was happening to David *after* he fled Gath but *before* all his friends arrived at the cave, which is 1 Samuel 22:2. As he ran for his life, he felt abandoned by everyone—including God.

As a pastor, biblical counselor, and a follower of Christ for over forty years, I am convinced abandonment feelings are very common among believers.

### **Cave Times can Happen to Anyone**

What are some causes of such cave times? Here are just a few to help us identify with being in David's shoes:

- Cave times may start through a lengthy illness when strength never comes, future plans fade, and so does hope.
- Cave times often begin with an unanticipated job loss and subsequent tangled, growing, and seemingly hopeless financial needs.

- Cave times commonly occur in prolonged marriage and family difficulties. Wayward children can cause immeasurable pain to believing parents.
- Cave times can occur through a demanding and unreasonable boss, a grueling and monotonous work schedule, or a jealous, spiteful, and injurious co-worker.

Cave times usually make us feel depressed and all alone. Because others no longer seem as supportive or as friendly, an abandoned feeling leads into the downward spiral of thinking: *No one cares for me!* Like David, we may then conclude: *God has also abandoned me!*

After reading every commentary I have on the Psalms and the life of David, especially the time surrounding the 13<sup>th</sup> Psalm, I was amazed to find that there's little said or written in Christian literature about helping believers who feel abandoned by God. Even D. Martin Lloyd Jones's classic, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*, doesn't cover this topic.<sup>2</sup>

Why do you suppose this is? I think it is because we have been taught that Christians are not to experience such things, that we are only to have "life more abundantly" or to "live victoriously." Wasn't it the dying French atheist Voltaire said, "I am abandoned by God and man?"

We are not surprised to hear an unbeliever say that. But if any of us should admit to such feelings, many of our friends would look askance at us, shake their heads, and wonder whether we are Christians. Isn't that true? Isn't that the chief reason why you do not talk to other Christians about this or about many other problems?"<sup>3</sup>

### **Christians aren't Always Happy**

Thankfully, David talked about his painful loneliness. Aren't you glad he didn't cover up his struggles or hide his bad feelings? David didn't mind being thought of as weak, failing, or troubled; he simply cried out to the Lord all the more.

Now let's look at how David survived his deepest, darkest hour of loneliness which took place in that little junction of time between 1 Samuel 21:15 and 22:1.<sup>4</sup> Please read with me the song about some of David's darkest hours, Psalm 13:

#### **Psalm 13**

To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David.

<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 shall I take counsel in my soul,*

*Having sorrow in my heart daily?*

*How long will my enemy be exalted over me?*

<sup>3</sup> *Consider and hear me, O LORD my God;*

*Enlighten my eyes,*

*Lest I sleep the sleep of death;*

<sup>2</sup> D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms—An Expositional Commentary—Volume 1—Psalms 1-41* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), p. 106.

<sup>4</sup> I recommend you write this between 1 Samuel 21:15 and 22:1: Psalm 13—David felt abandoned.

<sup>4</sup> *Lest my enemy say,  
“I have prevailed against him”;  
Lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved.*

<sup>5</sup> *But I have trusted in Your mercy;  
My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.*

<sup>6</sup> *I will sing to the LORD,  
Because He has dealt bountifully with me.*

In the first two verses David expressed the depths of his soul in four cries of anguish. Each cry reflects something from his background, and is a figure of speech called **erotesis**—asking questions without waiting for or even expecting an answer. This is often a sign of deep emotional stress.

His four cries also represented a second form of speech called **anaphora**—when the same word is repeated at the beginning of successive sentences. David cried in anguish as he asked God four times: “How long?” He never paused because he was overcome with sorrow and grief.

The opening words in Psalm 13:1-2 reveal four deeply wounded areas of David’s life. His confessions sometimes strike a chord in our own hearts:

**1. When Life Feels  
Like an Endless Struggle**

*How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? (13:1a).*

Everyone had left David: he was being hunted by his own family (father-in-law); his own people (like Doeg the Edomite in Saul’s army); his covenant people of God; and threatened by enemies as he entered a bleak, desert region. With every fiber of his being, David felt dejected and abandoned.

**David was saying:** “I just can’t go on!” Perhaps you’ve also reached a point in your marriage, family, work, or school where you feel like saying, “I just can’t go on!” If so, remember this: David was feeling those feelings with you as he wrote how he felt, and yet he testified to the Lord’s faithfulness in all his constant struggles.

**2. When I Feel Like  
I’ve lost God’s blessing**

*How long will You hide Your face from me? (13:1b).*

Sometimes we don’t sense that God’s there, but He is; sometimes we don’t think He’s blessing us, but He is; sometimes we don’t think He’s watching over us, but He is. But in David’s distress he lost sight of God’s presence and blessing.

Reality and perception both deeply influence our lives. For example, if you perceive someone doesn’t like you, it doesn’t matter whether they do or not because your perception changes how you relate to that person.

When David perceived a lack of the apparent blessing of God, he said, “Nothing is like it used to be. Every part of my life is troubled and is suffering from a lack of Your blessing!”

### 3. When My mind seems So troubled

How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? (13:2a).

David's experience of being swept away by his emotions is common. He had ruminated so long on disaster after disaster that he was feeding on the dark thoughts of hopelessness. He couldn't stop it— almost like his thoughts were snowballing, going down faster and faster.

To go through an emotional upheaval like this, you don't have to be running from the Philistines or have a personal adversary who's trying to kill you. Here are some common causes:

1. **A person with a very emotional temperament.** David's temperament was probably the type most prone to discouragement. There are two main groups of personalities: flat-liners and up-and-downers

Can you tell which best describes David? If you read the Psalms much, it's easy to conclude he's an "up and down" type. He had unbelievable temperamental feelings prone to discouragement.

In his monumental book, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*, Lloyd Jones writes in the opening pages: "**foremost** among all causes of spiritual depression is **temperament**"<sup>5</sup>. There is no such thing as a good or bad temperament. Yet, "flat line" people often think that "up and down" people are out of control; and the "up and down" people view "flat line" people as not caring about anything because they have no feelings.

The truth of the matter is that God designed us all as beautiful, spiritual snowflakes; no two people are exactly alike. Because we're all wired differently, some, like David, are more prone to discouragement.

2. **A person with an acute physical weakness.** A plunge into disquieting thoughts and emotions can be caused by illness.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, one of the greatest evangelical leaders of the last century, suffered from severe bouts of depression. Why would such a spiritual giant, such an incredible expositor, such an extraordinary writer and pastor have severe bouts of paralyzing depression? The main reason is that he suffered from gout, marked by painful inflammation of the joints and an excess of uric acid in the blood. It was common in the last century due to their eating habits and lack of fresh air and exercise, and this drained Spurgeon's energies. Times of extreme fatigue and physical weakness are an open door for the devil or the flesh to try to push any of us down.<sup>6</sup>

3. **A person going through an emotional let own.** Another weak and vulnerable time is after great events. Following the feeding of the five thousand and preaching

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<sup>5</sup> D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Slightly adapted from James Montgomery Boice's *Psalms—An Expositional Commentary—Volume 1—Psalms 1-41* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), p. 109.

campaigns, Jesus retreated from the crowds because He needed extra time alone with God to refresh and renew His life. The same holds true for us as well.

**David was saying:** “I can’t stop these feelings of dejection and abandonment!” If this is a pattern in your life, watch out for let downs that can lead to an emotional roller coaster ride of rampant feelings of discouragement and abandonment. Learn to head off these pitfalls through a personal retreat in the Word and prayer. It’s a good idea to also ask your spouse and/or close friend to hold you accountable when you are succeeding. Because let downs often follow high moments, your accountability partner should remind you: “Be careful; this could be a vulnerable time for you. You need to constantly be putting ... *on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil* (Ephesians 6:11).”

#### 4. **When I Begin to Doubt God’s Plan**

*How long will my enemy be exalted over me? (13:2b).*

David said, “It’s no use. Saul is going to win. He has all the troops, resources, and time he needs. He will end up destroying me!” Do you realize what was really happening here? David was actually saying, “God, didn’t You promise me I was going to be the next king someday? But God, my enemy’s going to triumph over me! If it’s not the Philistines, Saul’s going to get me! But I thought Your Word said ...”

When David got to that point he was right where Satan wanted him. David was doubting God’s Word, God’s goodness, and God’s plan.

Most likely, you don’t have literal human enemies (at least not serious ones). But if you are a Christian, you do have one great spiritual enemy who is worse than any human enemy you can imagine—the devil, whom Peter compared to ... *a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour* (1 Peter 5:8).

How did David find the doorway of hope when he felt so hopeless? How did he find God’s presence in his perceived abandonment? How did David survive this terrible time?

#### **David’s turning point was Crying out to God in prayer**

To rise above the downward pull of his emotions, all he had to do was to look up and talk to the Lord—the One he thought had abandoned him!

In my own life, there have been times when dealing with everybody else’s problems, problems in the family, and personal problems, and then something happens like a car breaking down or the house needing repair, and suddenly it all feels overwhelming. When that happens, I tend to quietly retreat to my desk, but my sweet Bonnie always finds me—just looking down, not doing anything. So she asks, “Honey, what’s wrong?” If I reply “Nothing’s wrong” and fail to look up at her, she knows instantly that I’m looking down at my problems—meditating on them.

Anxiety is nothing more than meditating on problems rather than the One who holds the solution. But God clearly commands us to meditate on His Word instead:

*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall **meditate in it day and night**, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and **then you will have good success**. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:8-9).*

When everything seems overwhelming to me, how does my wonderful Bonnie minister to my pain? It's really very simple: she just puts her hand under my chin and says, "Honey, look up at me!" If I keep my eyes down she says, "No, I want to see your eyes." If you have children, when you're talking to them, you've probably said, "Look at me." If they keep looking down rather than looking you in the eyes, that's acting like a child, isn't it? That's what we often do with the Lord, just as David did. When he finally heard God say, "Look at Me!"—and looked up to Him—he got the lift in his soul that gave him the power to break free from his uncontrolled emotions.

David cries to God in this next verse: **Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death** (Psalm 13:3).

God never wants us to ruminate in feelings of abandonment, hopelessness, dejection, and despair. He wants us to think of Him as our Pilot by asking ourselves: "Who's really flying the plane of my life? I'm certainly not qualified!" That is what David said when he looked up to the Lord and asked these three things—and God answered him:

1. **Look at me:** *Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death* (13:3a). David felt as if God had turned His back on him, so he asked the Lord to turn around and look at him.
2. **Answer me:** *Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death* (13:3b). David felt like God had stopped talking to him. This Hebrew word literally means "answer." David was asking the Lord to let Him hear His voice again, just as he had in the old days; he wanted God to *answer* him. Applying that to today, this is when we should take God's Word and say, "Open Your Word to my heart again. Let me cling to Your Truth. Help my unbelief!"
3. **Restore me:** *Consider and hear me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death* (13:3c). David was saying, "Lift up my chin, Lord, so I can see You!"

### **The Wonderful Ending**

Now look at Psalm 13:4-6—

<sup>4</sup> Lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed against him"; lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved. <sup>5</sup> But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. <sup>6</sup> **I will sing to the Lord**, because He has dealt bountifully with me.

I love how Psalm 13 ends—David is *singing* to the Lord! In my mind's eye, I can easily envision this hunched-over man weeping and wailing and crying out, "How long? How long? How long? How long?"

But suddenly he stops, lifts up his chin, looks up toward heaven, and says, "Lord, consider me; answer me; enlighten me!" And in that moment God gives David the presence, power, and awareness he needed to sing praises to the Lord!

Wouldn't it have been great to witness David walking to the cave singing from some of the psalms he'd been inspired to write as he fled from Saul to Nob, to Gath, and now on his way the cave of Adullam?

*The Lord is my shepherd; I will fear no evil; for You are with me* (Psalm 23:1, 4)

*Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.* (Psalm 56:3)

*Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!* (Psalm 34:8)

### **To Feel Abandoned Means Once we were not**

If you find yourself feeling that the Lord has abandoned you, think on this: *To be abandoned means that once you were not.* You can't say your spouse abandoned you if you never had a spouse; you can't say your friends abandoned you if you didn't have any friends. So when David said the God he loved, knew, and walked with had abandoned him—that meant he once had a God who loved, knew, and walked with him.

In conclusion, the devil wants to make you doubt God's goodness, plan, timing, and Word. But if you let doubt take over your emotions, your temperament is running the show—piloting your plane. You'll quickly head into a nose-dive and roller coaster rides.

In that case, you need to examine: *Who, exactly, is up front flying this careening machine of my life?* Then look up and say, "Lord, don't let my temperament, my emotions, my doubts, or my feelings usurp Your rightful place as the Pilot of my life. For You I want to look at; You I want to listen to; You I want to rescue me!"

David found hope in his dark hour because troubles and temptations always pushed him toward the Lord. Even when he felt all alone, he discovered that his Pilot was still there flying him safely through the storms.

Dark times merely surfaced the reality deep down in David's soul: God was his choice, his habit, and his desire—because he supremely loved the Lord!

Do you share his passion? We can if we choose to!