

Pastor Little's Word for the Week

When God Seems Far Away

Psalm 13

“How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? (vs 1)”

The longer I have been a Christian, the more I've come to realize that the walk of faith is an uneven affair. You go through times when you experience the highs of the mountain top, then you go through times when you face the lows of the valley. And it doesn't happen just once — it happens again and again throughout the course of your life.

It is important to realize that even during the valley-lows, God's presence is just as real as during the mountain-top experiences. In fact, when you're going through the valley — when you don't feel God's presence — you have the opportunity for exponential growth in your Christian walk, because these are times you learn to walk by faith.

Regardless of how you feel, it does not change the fact that God is always there, and you can live in his presence 24 hours a day, seven days week, 52 weeks a year. Practicing the presence of God is not a feeling you depend on, it is a faith you live by.

This is a lesson King David learned. He went through times when he couldn't feel the presence of God.

One example is found in Psalm 13. He begins by saying...

How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? (vs. 1-2)

Have you ever felt that way? I hope you never do, but the fact is this: if you haven't, you probably will. There will be times when God seems to be far off, and the joy of feeling his presence will seem like a fading memory. When this happens, you have the opportunity to become closer to him than ever before, because this is when you learn to walk by faith, not by feelings.

Psalm 13 teaches us what to do when God seems far away. It was written when David was going through an emotional valley. Yet he continued to find strength in God. There are three things we can learn from David.

1. Understand that God is ever-present, and act accordingly.

After detailing his desperate situation in verses 1-4, David says...

But I trust in your unfailing love. (v. 5)

Regardless of how you feel, assume God's presence and do what you know you should do. This means you continue the habit of getting up early and spending time alone with God — regardless of how you feel:

- Come to church each week regardless of how you feel.
- Continue to serve regardless of how you feel.
- Include God in your work life regardless of how you feel.

Even when you don't feel God's presence, he is there. Believe in your heart that God is an “ever present help in time of trouble” and do what you know you should do. This is how you put your trust in his unfailing love.

It's a matter of saying, "God, even when my feelings don't cooperate, I will keep doing what I should do, because by faith I know you are right here with me."

2. Stand on what you know is true.

My heart rejoices in your salvation... (v. 5)

I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me. (vs. 6)

When God seems far away, stand on what you know is true. Remember what God has done for you. Rejoice in it. Offer thanks to God. "Lord, you have made such a difference in my life. You have given me joy. You have provided for me. You have forgiven my sins. You have given me eternal life. You have answered my prayers."

As you remember and rejoice in what God has done for you, you will find yourself strengthened in him.

There is no need to pretend feeling something you don't feel. God knows your feelings; you can be honest with him. Search your heart for what you know to be true, and cling to the truth.

When I feel as if God is far away I sometimes think about where my life would be if I had never become a Christian. Based on where I was before I met Jesus, what would my life be like had it followed its logical progression? What kind of career would I have pursued? What kind of person would I have married? What kind of father would I have become?

Every time I think through this, I am overcome with gratitude for God's sovereign mercy. Even when he seems far away, I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that he has made a difference in my life. I stand on that. And I thank him for it.

3. Keep singing praises to God.

Love is not a feeling, it is something you do. What we sometimes forget, though, is that praise (or worship) is not a feeling either; it's something you do.

It is true that praise is often an emotional experience. Sometimes when your heart is bubbling you overflow with praise, and you can't help but sing to God what you're feeling in your heart. When that happens, it's wonderful.

However, even during those times when your heart is not bubbling, you should continue to worship him. Even when the feelings aren't there, you should lift your hands to him. Even when he seems far away, you should continue to sing praise to him.

This is what David did. As we have seen, he begins this Psalm by admitting that God seems very far away. And he ends it by saying...

I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me. (vs. 6)

It's easy to praise God when you are happy and gay, but if you continue to praise him even when he seems to be far away, he is especially pleased.

There are cycles to the Christian life. There will be times when you feel close to God, and there will be times when you feel like he is far, far away. That is inevitable. But you need not be driven by your feelings. You can be driven by faith. Even during those times when God seems distant, we can experience the power of his presence.

Regardless of how you feel, keep doing what you know you should do. Regardless of how you feel, stand on what you know is true. Regardless of how you feel, keep praising God.

This is what David meant when he said...

But I trust in your unfailing love, My heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me. (vs. 5)

This is how we get beyond surface level emotionalism into a life driven by faith. That is what mature Christianity" really is. *It is more than a feeling you hope for, it is a faith you live by.*