

## **Psalms, Teacher's Guide**

### **Week 2: Learning to Lament Faithfully**

#### **Psalm 13**

##### **Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)**

Psalm 13 is the classic short lament, and it is a gift to anyone who has ever felt that God was slow to act. What is doctrinally at stake this week is the legitimacy of lament within faith, and the nature of the God to whom we lament. Scripture gives believers permission, even instruction, to bring God their raw complaint, and it does so without treating that complaint as a failure of faith. The hinge of the psalm is the phrase “steadfast love” (Hebrew *hesed*), God’s loyal, covenant-keeping commitment to His people. The whole turn from despair to song in verses 5 and 6 rests not on changed circumstances but on the unchanging character of God. Help students see that biblical faith is robust enough to hold honesty and trust together in the same breath.

This psalm is also pure formation. Many of your students carry the unspoken assumption that good Christians do not question God, so they have learned to pray in a tidied-up voice while the real struggle goes unspoken. Psalm 13 gently dismantles that. It models a movement every believer needs to learn: name the pain plainly to God, keep addressing it to God rather than to bitterness or to the crowd, and then deliberately turn the eyes back to His steadfast love. The goal is not to manufacture cheerfulness but to teach the soul the path David walked, from “how long” to “I will sing.”

So aim at both. Give students a clear theology of lament, that it is honest, God-directed, and hope-bound, and the assurance that God is not fragile before their pain. But also send them home having actually practiced it, having told God the truth about something hard and having begun the turn toward trust. Read through Christ, the psalm points us to the One who prayed His own laments and was vindicated, so that our turn to trust now rests on surer ground than David’s.

##### **Question 1**

###### **Student Question:**

*David begins by asking “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” (v. 1). Lament like this fills roughly a third of the Psalms. What does it tell us about God and about the life of faith that He has given His people a language for complaint, and how is faithful lament different from mere grumbling or unbelief?*

##### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Open by helping the class feel how much of the Psalter is lament. By common reckoning, somewhere near a third of the psalms are laments, prayers born of grief, fear, injustice, or confusion. This is not an accident or an embarrassment; it is God providing His people with a vocabulary for suffering. The mere existence of these prayers tells us that God welcomes honesty.

Define faithful lament carefully so students do not confuse it with grumbling. Israel's grumbling in the wilderness (Numbers 14) was complaint aimed away from God, a refusal to trust that hardened into rebellion. Lament is the opposite in its direction: it is complaint carried straight to God because the sufferer still believes He is there and still hopes He will act. The grumbler walks away from God; the lamenter clings to Him while protesting.

Show the structure of the psalm as a model. It moves from complaint (vv. 1–2) to petition (vv. 3–4) to trust (vv. 5–6). Most laments follow some version of this arc. Lament is not despair given the last word; it is a journey that begins in the dark and presses toward hope.

Reassure students that lament is an act of faith, not its failure. It takes more faith to bring God your anger and confusion than to walk away in silence. The God of Scripture is not threatened by our questions; He is grieved by our distance.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Lament as a God-given, faith-filled category of prayer (roughly a third of the Psalms).
- The difference between lament (complaint to God) and grumbling (complaint away from God).
- The typical lament arc: complaint, petition, trust.
- God's welcome of honest prayer; He is not fragile before our pain.
- Faith robust enough to hold honesty and trust together.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why do you think God filled so much of the Psalms with lament?
- What is the difference between lamenting and grumbling, in direction and in heart?
- How might learning to lament actually deepen rather than weaken someone's faith?

### **Question 2**

#### **Student Question:**

*David says he wrestles with "sorrow in my heart all the day" (v. 2), carrying the same painful thoughts in endless circles. What is the worry or grief that your mind keeps circling back to when it has nothing else to do? Be specific, and consider why that particular thing has such a grip on you.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the first self-examining question, and the aim is honest naming, not analysis. David speaks of carrying sorrow “all the day,” the exhausting experience of a mind that keeps circling the same wound. Invite students to identify their own circling thought, the one that surfaces the moment life goes quiet.

Help the class see that naming is itself a spiritual act. We often keep our griefs vague because vagueness feels safer, but vague pain cannot be brought to God specifically. David names his; so should we. Encourage specificity without pressuring anyone to share more than they wish.

Watch for the student who minimizes (“others have it worse”). David does not rank his pain against anyone else’s; he simply tells God the truth about his own. Comparison is not humility here; it is a way of avoiding honesty.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The value of naming our specific grief rather than leaving it vague.
- Honest self-knowledge as a doorway to honest prayer.
- Resisting the false humility that minimizes our own pain by comparison.
- The exhausting nature of rumination and the need to bring it to God.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What thought does your mind circle back to in the quiet moments?
- Why do we tend to keep our deepest worries vague?
- How could naming it plainly to God begin to loosen its grip?

### **Question 3**

#### **Student Question:**

*Notice that David takes his complaint directly to God rather than away from Him; every “how long” is addressed to the Lord. What is the difference between lamenting to God and simply venting to other people or to ourselves, and why does honest prayer keep us close to God even when it sounds like complaint?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Draw attention to the direction of David’s words. Every “how long” is addressed to the Lord. He is not muttering to himself or rehearsing his grievances to a sympathetic crowd; he is speaking to God. This is the defining feature of biblical lament.

Contrast lament with venting. Venting discharges emotion but often leaves us more agitated and more isolated, and it can harden into a habit of complaint that never reaches anyone who can help. Lament discharges the same emotion in God’s direction, which keeps the relationship intact and opens the door to His comfort.

Make the relational point. Strange as it sounds, an honest complaint spoken to God is a form of nearness. The person who stops praying because they are angry has moved away; the person who brings the anger to God has stayed in the room. Help students see that continued, honest prayer is itself a refusal to let suffering separate them from God.

Note that lament also has a community dimension. We can carry one another's laments and pray honestly together. The fellowship of the church is meant to be a safe place for honest grief, not only for tidy testimonies.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Prayer directed to God as the defining mark of lament.
- The difference between venting (discharge) and lament (relationship).
- Honest prayer as a way of staying near God in suffering.
- The church as a community where honest lament is welcomed, not hidden.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is the practical difference between venting and lamenting?
- How does continuing to pray honestly keep us close to God in hard times?
- How can our fellowship make room for honest grief and not just good news?

### **Question 4**

#### **Student Question:**

*When the answer to your prayers is delayed, where are you most tempted to take your complaint instead of taking it to God, to other people, to social media, to silence, to bitterness? What would change if you brought that same honesty to God first?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-focused question presses the previous truth into habit. When prayers go unanswered, each of us has a default destination for our complaint. Help students identify theirs honestly: the friend who will agree that life is unfair, the scrolling that numbs, the simmering bitterness, the withdrawal into silence.

None of those outlets is necessarily sinful in itself, but each can quietly become a substitute for taking the matter to God. The danger is not that we talk to friends; it is that we talk to everyone except the One who can actually act.

Steer toward the constructive half. The invitation is to make God the first address for our complaint, not the last resort after every other outlet has failed. Encourage one concrete reordering this week: God first, then wise counsel from others.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Identifying our default outlets for complaint.
- How good outlets become substitutes for prayer.
- Bringing complaint to God first, then to wise community.
- Bitterness and withdrawal as the fruit of complaint that never reaches God.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where does your complaint usually go first when prayers feel unanswered?
- When has an outlet for venting quietly replaced prayer for you?
- What would “God first” actually look like in your next hard week?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*David pleads, “Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” (v. 3). Even at his lowest he still calls God “my God” and asks Him to act. What does this teach us about the nature of saving faith, that it can hold on to God and protest to God at the same time?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Focus on the small but enormous word in verse 3: David still says “my God.” In the middle of feeling forgotten, he has not let go of the relationship. This is the paradox of faith under pressure, the ability to protest to God precisely because one still belongs to God.

Explain what this reveals about saving faith. Faith is not the absence of struggle or the suppression of hard questions; it is the refusal to finally let go of God in the middle of them. David grabs God with one hand even as he shakes his fist with the other. Job does the same. So does the father in Mark 9:24: “I believe; help my unbelief.”

His petition is concrete: “light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.” He is asking God to revive him before he is utterly spent. Note that lament does not stay in complaint; it moves to asking God to act. Honest faith both protests and petitions.

Apply this pastorally. Many believers fear that their doubts disqualify them. Reassure them that a faith strong enough to argue with God is still faith, and often a deeper faith than one that has never been tested.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Saving faith that can protest to God while still clinging to Him.
- “My God” as the language of covenant relationship even in distress.
- Doubt and struggle as compatible with genuine faith (Mark 9:24).
- Lament that moves from complaint to concrete petition.

- Reassurance for believers who fear their doubts disqualify them.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How can someone protest to God and trust God at the same time?
- What does it mean that David still says “my God” while feeling forgotten?
- How would you encourage a believer who fears their doubts have disqualified them?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*David asks God to “light up my eyes,” the look of someone whose strength and hope are nearly gone. When your own eyes have grown dull from a long, draining season, what have you reached for to feel alive again? What would it look like to ask God Himself to renew you rather than chasing a quick lift somewhere else?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-focused question takes the image of dull, dimmed eyes and turns it toward the student. A long, draining season leaves us depleted, and depletion sends us looking for something to feel alive again.

Help students name their go-to lifts honestly, the things they reach for to feel something good when the soul has gone gray. Many are harmless in moderation; the issue is whether they have become our source of life in place of God.

Point to David’s instinct: he asks God Himself to “light up my eyes.” The deepest renewal is not a distraction from the weariness but the presence of God within it. Encourage one concrete way to seek renewal in God this week, in Scripture, in prayer, in worship with the church, rather than only in a quick external lift.

#### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Seeking renewal in God rather than only in external lifts.
- The difference between distraction from weariness and renewal within it.
- Good things becoming substitute sources of life.
- God as the true reviver of a depleted soul.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What do you reach for when your soul has gone gray?
- When has a harmless comfort quietly become your main source of life?
- What would it look like to ask God Himself to renew you this week?

### **Question 7**

**Student Question:**

*In verse 5 the psalm turns: "But I have trusted in your steadfast love." The Hebrew word translated steadfast love describes God's loyal, covenant-keeping commitment to His people. What does it mean that David anchors his turn from despair to hope not in changed circumstances but in the unchanging character of God, and where do we see that steadfast love most clearly displayed for us?*

**Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 5 is the turn, and the anchor of the turn is hesed, steadfast love. Spend time on this word. It describes God's loyal, committed, covenant-keeping love, the love that does not quit when we are unlovely or when circumstances are grim. It is the most repeated description of God's character in the Old Testament.

Stress that David's circumstances have not changed between verse 4 and verse 5. The enemy is still there; the rescue has not arrived. What has changed is the object of his attention. He turns from staring at the trouble to remembering the character of God. Hope is not the denial of the trouble; it is the decision to look at God in the middle of it.

Show where steadfast love is most fully revealed for us. Every display of God's loyal love in the Old Testament finds its climax at the cross, where God demonstrated His love in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). The Christian has a fuller view of hesed than David did, because we look back on Calvary.

Help students make this practical. Anchoring hope in God's character rather than in changed circumstances is a learnable discipline. It means rehearsing what is true of God when nothing in the situation has improved.

**Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Hesed (steadfast love) as God's loyal, covenant-keeping commitment.
- Hope anchored in God's unchanging character, not in changed circumstances.
- The cross as the fullest display of God's steadfast love (Romans 5:8).
- The Christian's fuller view of God's love than David had.
- Rehearsing God's character as a learnable discipline of hope.

**Discussion Prompts**

- What does "steadfast love" add to your picture of who God is?
- Why is it significant that David's situation had not changed in verse 5?
- Where do you see God's steadfast love most clearly, and how can you rehearse it?

**Question 8**

**Student Question:**

*David's circumstances had not changed by verse 5; what changed was where he fixed his attention. Think about the last time your mood lifted in a hard season. Was it because something outside you finally improved, or because you turned your eyes back to God? What helps you make that turn when nothing in your situation has moved?*

**Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This self-examining question makes the turn personal. David's mood lifted not because the enemy retreated but because he deliberately redirected his gaze. Ask students to recall their own last lift and to notice what actually produced it.

Many will admit that their hope tends to rise and fall with circumstances. Gently expose how fragile that makes us, tossed up and down by things we cannot control. The psalm offers a sturdier alternative: a hope tethered to God's character, which does not move.

Get practical about the turn. What concretely helps a person stop staring at the trouble and look to God, a remembered promise, a sung hymn, a friend who points us back, the Lord's Supper that re-centers us on Christ? Help each student name one tool they can reach for next time.

**Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The fragility of hope tied to circumstances.
- Hope tethered to God's unchanging character as the sturdier alternative.
- Practical means of redirecting our gaze to God.
- The Lord's Supper and the gathered church as aids in re-centering on Christ.

**Discussion Prompts**

- Does your hope usually rise and fall with your circumstances? Be honest.
- What practically helps you turn your eyes back to God in a hard season?
- What is one tool you can reach for the next time your mood sinks?

**Question 9****Student Question:**

*The psalm ends, "My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me" (vv. 5–6), spoken in confidence before the rescue arrives. Jesus Himself prayed words of lament, in Gethsemane and from the cross, and was heard and vindicated. How does the saving work of Christ give the Christian an even surer ground than David had for turning lament into trust, even while we are still waiting?*

**Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The psalm closes in confident song before the rescue has arrived: “I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.” David speaks of deliverance in the past tense while still waiting for it, because he is so sure of God’s steadfast love that the outcome is already settled in his heart. This is faith singing in the dark.

Now read the psalm through Christ, carefully. Jesus knew lament from the inside. In Gethsemane He prayed in anguish, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death,” and asked that the cup pass from Him (Matthew 26:38–39). From the cross He prayed the opening of another lament, Psalm 22. He did not float above human sorrow; He entered its depths. So when we lament, we are not falling away from Christ; we are walking a road He Himself walked.

But Christ did more than model lament; He gives our trust a surer ground than David had. Jesus was heard, raised, and vindicated. The Father did not abandon Him to the grave (a truth we will explore in Psalm 16). Because Christ has been raised and reigns now, the believer’s turn from lament to trust rests not on a hopeful guess but on an accomplished victory. Our future is secured by His resurrection.

Help students hold the “already and not yet.” Like David, we often sing of deliverance while still waiting for it. But our confidence is greater, because the decisive rescue has already happened at the empty tomb. We grieve, but not as those without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13), and we wait, but as people whose King already reigns.

Be careful not to use Christ’s victory to shut down honest lament too quickly. The point is not “cheer up, Jesus rose, so stop hurting.” The point is that the resurrection gives our lament a destination. We can be fully honest about the pain precisely because we know how the story ends.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Faith that sings of deliverance before it arrives, grounded in God’s steadfast love.
- Jesus as one who truly lamented (Gethsemane; Psalm 22 on the cross).
- The resurrection and present reign of Christ as the sure ground of Christian hope.
- Grieving with hope, not as those without hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13).
- The “already and not yet”: the decisive rescue accomplished, the full deliverance awaited.
- Christ’s victory as the destination of lament, not a reason to suppress it.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- How does it help to know that Jesus Himself prayed prayers of lament?
- Why does the resurrection give the Christian a surer ground for hope than David had?
- How do we honor honest grief while still resting in Christ’s finished victory?

### **Question 10**

**Student Question:**

*Look back across the whole psalm, from the fourfold “how long” to the closing song of trust. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through David’s journey from complaint to confidence. What is the single truth from Psalm 13 that you most need to carry into this coming week?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This capstone asks students to trace the whole arc, from the fourfold “how long” to the closing song, and to name one way Jesus is forming them through it. Give a moment of quiet before discussion.

Press for something concrete and livable. The lesson of Psalm 13 is not merely “it is okay to be sad”; it is a learnable pattern: be honest with God, keep the complaint aimed at Him, then deliberately turn to His steadfast love. Help each student name where on that arc they most need to grow.

Close by lifting their eyes, as the psalm does, to the steadfast love of God shown fully in Christ. The goal of lament is never to wallow but to walk through honesty into trust. Send them home with permission to grieve and a path toward song.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The learnable arc of faithful lament: honesty, God-directed petition, turn to trust.
- Christ-centered hope as the destination of honest grief.
- Spiritual formation that is specific and livable, not vague.
- God’s steadfast love in Christ as the anchor of the whole journey.

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where on David’s arc, honesty, petition, or trust, do you most need to grow?
- What single truth from Psalm 13 will you carry into this week?
- How will you practice turning lament toward trust the next time pain lingers?