

Feelings & Faith
Psalm 22 (5/8 reading)

Today we are talking about feelings and faith. So, let's start with some words of Jesus that represent his deep feelings on the cross. **45 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. 46 At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Matthew 27:46**

Why would Jesus say this? He's being honest with his own feelings. Seems like a totally unfiltered, no holding back, statement. But, does it make sense?

Now, to our passage for today, which is Psalm 22. This is many generations early written as poetry, probably sung. That's what the book of Psalms is about. Many of the Psalms were written by King David, others were collected from out of the people of Israel. Some Psalms are so closely tied to events in David's life that it's obvious that he wrote them. This is not one of those. But, for simplicity's sake, we are going **attribute this to David.**

If you are visiting, we have been reading through the Bible chronologically. We encourage you to **jump right in** where we are. Don't worry about what you've missed, the story will still make sense, and we believe **God will communicate with you** when you do it. The books we have been reading recently are **very different than the book of Psalms.** Those books were **historical books, tracking the people of Israel.** Psalms is not a historical book. The Bible wasn't originally organized chronologically, but rather in types of writing. **The two poetry books, Psalm and Proverbs, are put together for that reason.** This is in the pre-Jesus part of the Bible that we call the Old Testament.

So why are we reading the words of Jesus on the cross generations before he is born? I think you'll figure it out in **verse 1** of Psalm 22. **My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? Psalm 22:1**

Jesus, much later in history, is quoting Psalm 22. I guess we should pay attention to this. We will get to the "why" later in the sermon.

Today we are talking about feelings and faith. How do these two things interact or come into conflict with one another? Both are built into all human beings. There are emotions of all kinds that we experience. **That's what makes us human.** But, also I believe that we have a **built in desire to have something to believe in that is bigger than any one person.** Something divine. **So, we have feelings and faith, both a part of how we were created.**

It's easy to feel the emotions in this first sentence of our passage. Maybe better said instead, a lot of which is felt very deeply. David was...Feeling abandoned by God.

In times of great need, God feels nowhere to be found. David is on his own. It's the difference from **your mom being in the room next door** when you have a **scary dream** or she is on a work trip to **Boise, Idaho**. You don't need **mom in theory**, you need mom right there beside you saying, "it's ok." **You don't need mom tomorrow morning on a phone call.** That's too late. **You probably won't be scared then**, but now you are terrified because something under the bed is going to get you.

It's easy to smile and tell that kid it's ok, it's not real. We know that by lunch this won't be an issue. **Kids are easily scared** of feeling abandoned. **But because adults never feel that way toward God, we should scrap this whole sermon and put Psalm 22 to the tone of happy birthday and sing our way to lunch.**

But the reality is that **David was an adult who knew God very well.** Most of us in **this room are adults**, but we would be lying if we said **we've grown out of feeling abandoned by God.** Sometimes it feels like **he isn't there when you need him.** He's missing.

Here's the first thing **David and people like us need to know** when feeling this way. What we need to know is that...**Feelings are not necessarily reality.**

In other words, don't believe everything you feel. This is not a **"facts are good, feelings are bad, so ignore or stuff your feelings and move on"** kind of sermon. **Keep a stiff upper lip and keep going.** No, this means that **everything that I'm feeling isn't reality. It's real because I'm feeling it and, therefore, I must deal with it; but my feelings don't tell the whole story.** And our ability to feel is part of **God's design for us that connects us with him.**

Let's be honest, most of us believe that we are very practical making decisions based upon facts, not emotion, but that just isn't true. **We are emotional, some more than others, but we are emotional, and emotions aren't bad.** You can't **read more into them** than is there. And let's settle something right now, **this isn't just for women, because men are practical.** Yes, that's right; **go to any golf course** and listen to what you hear after a couple of bad shots. You hear emotion, you will hear anger, despair, fear, self doubt...

Now that we've settled that, let's read a little further. Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer. Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.

Here's a new feeling. **He doesn't listen to me.** He has deserted me and doesn't take my calls. **Then there's these two little powerful words...³ Yet you are holy,**

enthroned on the praises of Israel. ⁴ Our ancestors trusted in you, and you rescued them. ⁵ They cried out to you and were saved. They trusted in you and were never disgraced. 2-5

Here's where we have a conflict. The Psalm now has the vocals on a different key from the guitar. Two ideas are **fighting against each other**. God's past behavior is not consistent with these feelings. These feelings are not bad, they are what people go through. But in this case, these "yet you" statements conflict with how David is feeling.

This verse makes at a minimum two things clear. After this "Yet you..." statement makes clear that the **past behavior has clearly demonstrated** that God is...Near in time of need. This is in direct conflict with the feeling that God has abandoned me at my most desperate time of need. And as we read more, you will learn more about how desperate David felt his situation was. And God's past behavior **clearly demonstrates that God is...Listening and responding**. Which runs counter to the feeling that he isn't listening and, therefore, cannot respond.

Don't take everything you feel at face value. Don't attach to your feelings too much meaning other than this is what I'm going through at this moment. **It's not bad**. How I react to these feelings could be bad if I believe that this is how it's going to be forever, from this point on. **Don't stuff them or ignore them**. God may just want to use this for his glory and for your benefit.

Oh, but it gets worse. David is going to describe these feelings and the depth of the pit he is in. But I am a worm and not a man. I am scorned and despised by all! ⁷ Everyone who sees me mocks me. They sneer and shake their heads, saying, ⁸ "Is this the one who relies on the Lord? Then let the Lord save him! If the Lord loves him so much, let the Lord rescue him!" When you feel like this it's easy to think that everyone knows and sees you the same way. ⁹ **Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb and led me to trust you at my mother's breast.** ¹⁰ I was thrust into your arms at my birth. You have been my God from the moment I was born. ¹¹ Do not stay so far from me, for trouble is near, 6-11

If feeling abandoned and not heard is not enough, this feeling leads to even deeper feelings...Feeling worthless and unloved.

This is the next logical step. When a person believes that they have been abandoned by the one they love, and that person doesn't listen to them, this leads to issues of self-worth. If _____ has abandoned me and doesn't listen when I call for help, then I must not be worth much and that's why _____ doesn't love me.

If God has abandoned and doesn't care to listen, then it stands to reason that I'm not worth much to him and he doesn't really love me.

But again, there's a "Yet you..." statement. I feel this way, but who you are doesn't fit. **God's past behavior demonstrates that He greatly values and deeply loves us.** And here's the really good news; we are of great value to him and loved by him, even when we feel like he doesn't. This doesn't shake God's confidence.

Let's keep reading as David continues to try to describe what he is feeling. **My enemies surround me like a herd of bulls; fierce bulls of Bashan have hemmed me in! ¹³ Like lions they open their jaws against me, roaring and tearing into their prey. ¹⁴ My life is poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, melting within me. ¹⁵ My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead. ¹⁶ My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; an evil gang closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and feet. ¹⁷ I can count all my bones. My enemies stare at me and gloat. ¹⁸ They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing. ¹⁹ O Lord, do not stay far away! You are my strength; come quickly to my aid! ²⁰ Save me from the sword; spare my precious life from these dogs. ²¹ Snatch me from the lion's jaws and from the horns of these wild oxen. 12-21**

It's not paranoia if people really are out to get you. David believes and I don't doubt that there are enemies all around him who want to do him harm.

So, we are feeling abandoned which leads to deeper feelings of being unloved and worthless. **Here's the cherry on top...Feeling weak, helpless, and defenseless.** Because after all, feeling abandoned, worthless, and unloved, now I am fair game for my enemies, and I don't have it within me to mount any defense.

We have all these feelings and "Yet you" God are the opposite of what I'm feeling. **There is a gap between what I feel and what is real about God.**

If we stop here in this dark place, with this gap, without a message of what to do about it, then this isn't a Psalm, it's a funeral dirge. It's a bunch of third graders playing stringed instruments. It's awful. **But there's hope for David and for those of us who have these feelings sometimes.**

As dark as these feelings are, something radically changes in this Psalm.

For me as it's Sunday evening through Monday afternoon. It's a feeling of being empty and remembering all the ways I have fallen short and let people down. **It's a desperate feeling.** There's no answer where I say, "Well, I could do this or that and it's going to be ok." You can't when you are empty.

And yes, there are times when I wish God would just take me now. Then I could get some peace. That's what I feel, but it's not the whole story. There is a gap between what I am feeling when I wish I could see my son Quinten and all the "Yet you" things I know to be true about God because I've experienced them.

Here's the only thing David could do.

As we read the rest of this Psalm, I want you to try to notice what is happening in David's heart. Are there phrases or words that tell you what he is doing? Mark them in your Bible or on the words in your outline. **I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people.** ²³ Praise the Lord, all you who fear him! Honor him, all you descendants of Jacob! Show him reverence, all you descendants of Israel! ²⁴ For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy. He has not turned his back on them, but has listened to their cries for help. ²⁵ I will praise you in the great assembly. I will fulfill my vows in the presence of those who worship you. ²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied. All who seek the Lord will praise him. Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy. ²⁷ The whole earth will acknowledge the Lord and return to him. All the families of the nations will bow down before him. ²⁸ For royal power belongs to the Lord. He rules all the nations. ²⁹ Let the rich of the earth feast and worship. Bow before him, all who are mortal, all whose lives will end as dust. ³⁰ Our children will also serve him. Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord. ³¹ His righteous acts will be told to those not yet born. They will hear about everything he has done. 22-31

Here's what I noticed. **I will proclaim** your name to my brothers and sisters. **I will praise** you among your assembled people. ²³ **Praise the Lord**, all you who fear him! **Honor him**, all you descendants of Jacob! **Show him reverence**, all you descendants of Israel! ²⁴ For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy. He has not turned his back on them, but has listened to their cries for help. ²⁵ **I will praise you** in the great assembly. I will fulfill my vows in the presence of those who worship you. ²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied. All who seek the Lord will praise him. Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy. ²⁷ The whole earth will **acknowledge the Lord** and return to him. All the families of the nations will **bow down** before him. ²⁸ For royal power belongs to the Lord. He rules all the nations. ²⁹ Let the rich of the earth **feast and worship. Bow before him**, all who are mortal, all whose lives will end as dust. ³⁰ Our children will also serve him. Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord. ³¹ **His righteous acts will be told** to those not yet born. They will hear about everything he has done. 22-31

As I read through those bolded statements, what do they all have in common? What is David actually doing in this paragraph? **He is praising God. This gap is closed through praise...**

The question we ask that gets our focus off our circumstances and troubles and onto God and his goodness is, "God how can you be so good?" This is a better question than, "How am I doing?"

We know this, but it's hard to come up with when we are in the pit, in the dark. This isn't some sort of "turn that frown upside down." This isn't someone saying, "You shouldn't feel that way, don't you know kids are starving in Africa." Come on, buck up. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps. This is applying truth that the one who is in the pit puts out into the universe. **He offers this praise to the one who feels so far away.** It's not a "fake it till you feel it" because you know these things to be true about God that you are offering as praise to him.

"...only some prophetic experience within the context of worship can explain the psalmist's sudden shift from despairing language at the beginning of the psalm to the affirmations of complete assurance in 22:24-26. Either the psalmist has heard some priestly/prophetic pronouncement of deliverance or has had a renewed personal experience of the presence and mercy of Yahweh in the midst of worship. It is in this sense, then, that the psalmist can say that "my praise" is "from you (the Lord)"—either as a pronouncement from God or from being in his presence." The NIV Application Commentary, Psalms Vol. 1 by Gerald H. Wilson

God is present in our praise. We praise him because we trust him, even in the pit when we can't feel him. But God either whispers in our ears the truth about how he feels about us or because he lives in our praise, we start to feel his presence when we couldn't before.

This gap is closed through praise...but what kind of praise. Here's the next phrase...**that recognizes his presence then, David's praise is recognizing that even though he feels abandoned, worthless and unloved at this moment he is going to give praise to the God that is present with him even when he doesn't feel this.**

David is putting his focus on God's goodness in the face of feelings that are the "polar opposite." (Read one of my "lie cards" as an example.)

Let's put this all together. **This gap is closed through praise... that recognizes his presence then...comes feelings of assurance through the Holy Spirit!**

Don't you just want to know that he's there and you are assured again of his love for you? He does love you, he is aware of what is against you. We get

assured that he is for us even if no one else is and even if your enemies do their worst.

This is choosing faith; God is now who he has been, faithful, and I am going to praise him for it and that praise, maybe not immediately, but eventually will lead to a different feeling and that's what we call assurance.

We could stop right there. That is, in fact, what this Psalm was originally written for. This is the story and lesson Psalm 22 says. But that's not why we know this Psalm, we know it because of its secondary meaning. David was writing about himself, but probably without knowing as he is writing about his feelings, he is also prophesying about Jesus. Every Easter season we read these two verses.

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan for help? Psalm 22:1

Let's go back to where we started. **45 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. 46 At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Matthew 27:45-46 Why do we read this one?** Because Jesus quotes this verse while hanging on the cross, giving his life for us.

What does this sound like to you? Maybe you aren't familiar with the crucifixion story and if you aren't I'll explain. 17 I can count all my bones. My enemies stare at me and gloat. 18 They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing. 17-18

Here's what this is prophesying. 23 When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes among the four of them. They also took his robe, but it was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. 24 So they said, "Rather than tearing it apart, let's throw dice for it." This fulfilled the Scripture that says, "They divided my garments among themselves and threw dice for my clothing." So that is what they did. Matthew 19:23-24

What am I driving at? This isn't simply what Jesus felt. Jesus didn't just feel abandoned, worthless, unloved, weak, and helpless, he chose this. Jesus chose to be abandoned, as if worthless and unloved which made him weak and helpless. He chose those things when he had the power to avoid all of this. He chose those things not just because this provided a way for us to be saved, but so that the people like David, like you and like me, who feel all these terrible things can know that we follow a God who understands because he experienced it. Not only experienced feeling it, but the reality of it.

He isn't disconnected with the human experience. He was fully God and fully human and the human part experienced and felt all of this. That's why we should worship him and give our allegiance to him, no matter the cost.

If there was ever a sermon, we needed to do something about it's this one. That means taking...**Steps of Obedience.**

Step #1. **Choose faith over feelings caused by life.** You will not make it in following Jesus without being able to make this turn from feelings to the reality of faith. You will say, "Because I feel far from God, he must either have abandoned me or just isn't real, therefore I will trust myself and take action." This leads to **compromise and sin.**

Here's a way to process when you have this gap between what you are feeling and God's past behavior. Repeat this...

- **I'm feeling this _____** There is power in naming your feelings. Then you can look at them more **objectively.** It's part of learning to be more **self-aware.** It will **help your relationships** because you will be more aware of how mysterious feelings are **messing up your relationships.** These can be named and brought into submission to **Jesus.**
- **I choose to believe _____ about God.** Be specific about **God's character.** Even put a **verse** down that you repeat when you feel this way.
- **I will praise him for who He is (see above) and for His faithfulness to me.** This is where you **recite his past behavior** not just in the bible but in relationship to you and your life.
- **I choose to believe by faith that God is with me.** Claim this as truth, **even before you feel** that way about your situation.

Step #2. **Praise God in those circumstances.**

This isn't the "power of positive thinking," or some sort of "look on the Brightside" or putting lipstick on a pig. This is **faith applied to circumstances.** We are going to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to us right now. Then **I'm going to guide us** through a time of prayer.

Picture Jesus approaching you. What does his face say to you, even before he speaks? He says to you, "**You are my beloved. I will never leave you or forget you. I see you and I hear you when you call out to me.**"

You can trust me even now as you are feeling abandoned without protection...worthless...unloved...weak and helpless...fearful and anxious.

Now picture yourself speaking back to him words of praise for his faithfulness to you in the past. And for how you believe he will continue to be faithful to you into the future.

Now open your eyes and read these words of praise as your own to God.

Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of this your church. Those who came before us in the faith trusted in you, and you rescued them. They cried out to you and were saved. They trusted in you and were never disgraced.

Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb and led me to trust you as I grew. I was thrust into your arms at my birth. You have been my God from the moment I was born.

We are going to feel some of what David describes here. Are you ready with a "Yet you" of your own. And we have a God who chose these awful feelings so that he could save us, and we could know that he understands.