

**What To Do When God Seems Far Away**  
**Psalm 13**

**06-28-09**

It took me a long time to receive Jesus Christ  
Although I knew the truth And I knew it was the truth  
I couldn't say yes  
First I recognized that salvation was significant – life-changing  
I wasn't sure I was ready for it  
And at the same time I didn't feel worthy enough  
I wanted to clean myself up first  
I wanted to become a good Christian before I became a Christian  
But one Sunday I was sitting in the pew during a communion service  
The pastor was reading from 1Cor telling us to examine ourselves  
So I did - and it wasn't pretty  
While the communion plate was coming I said a very short prayer  
And received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior  
With that short prayer I felt better – in fact I felt good – really good  
I leaned over to Jackie and said  
I have just become a Christian – don't tell anybody  
Now I had no knowledge of the Christian life at all  
I did have a pagan's belief of what a Christian was and did  
And I suspected that I would instantly be cleaned up  
I would immediately have significant changes  
In character purpose and power  
All those things I wanted to change before I became a Christian  
I thought would just happen  
I believed that I would automatically begin to live the life  
I felt all real Christians should be living  
And if they didn't live it they be phonies – hypocrites  
I felt good for a couple of days  
However you can imagine my shock and despair  
When those old sinful desires not only didn't leave  
But instead they seemed to grow stronger  
I went from a high to a low  
I felt like that Erma Bombeck book title  
Only put a little differently  
If the Christian life is a bowl of cherries, why am I always in the pits  
I began to question my salvation  
I was now that dreaded hypocrite that I had always said I despised  
And I didn't know what to do about it

So instead of fessing up I kept silent and lived in two worlds  
During the weekend I was Ken the Christian  
During the week I was Ken – lover of the world  
Let me assure you that didn't help  
I just kept getting drier and drier  
Wondering if I really was a Christian  
And if I was then why did I think and act this way  
Guilt piled upon guilt  
I considered giving it up  
At least before I was a Christian  
I lived without this profound sense of guilt  
I enjoyed studying the Bible but I didn't do it on my own  
I only did it in Sunday School or at Bible studies  
My non-Christian friends told me - Ken you're not as much fun  
How could I be - I always felt guilty  
My Christian friend who disciplined me told me  
Ken you don't hunger and thirst for righteousness  
They were both right  
I thought I could fool everyone but I was only fooling myself  
Uncomfortable wherever I was – whatever I was doing  
I didn't fit in anywhere  
I was miserable  
And I kept thinking – where is God in all this  
I came to the conclusion –  
Either everybody else is a phony too  
Or I am missing something real relevant about the Christian life  
You see I had to be taught about faith  
And what I had to learn was this  
You not only enter the Christian life by faith  
It is also faith that drives you forward  
**Faith is the key that unlocks the power of Christianity**  
I felt unsaved or phony  
Remember the poster that read  
Everything I needed to know about life, I learned in kindergarten  
Mine would read – everything I know about life  
I learned by getting smacked upside the head  
I learned - as usual for me - the hard way  
**That your feelings can mislead you**  
I played a little basketball and sometimes I played center  
When I guarded the other center without facing him

Every so often I would have to reach back and touch him  
Just to make sure he was still there

**And when doubt assails you**

**You need to reach back and touch the base of faith**

Now the longer I have been a Christian

The more I have come to realize

Just how common my original experience is

All of us go through times

When we experience the highs of the mountaintop

That feeling I had when I first was saved

And we go through times

When we face the lows of the valley

When we feel that God isn't there or He doesn't care

And for most of us it happens over and over again

The truth we have to realize is this

**During the lows**

**God's presence in our life is just as real**

**As it is during the highs**

During those time when we don't feel God's presence

We have the opportunity to grow leaps and bounds in our faith

Because these are the times when we learn to walk by faith

Regardless of our feelings

For like I said regardless of how we feel

It doesn't change the fact that God is always there

**Practicing the presence of God in our lives**

**Is not a feeling we depend on**

**It is truth – it is a faith we live by**

That is the lesson King David learned.

Just like us he had times when he couldn't feel the presence of God

David begins Psalm 13 by asking questions I think we've all asked

**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; having sorrow in my heart all day long?**

David felt completely alone - abandoned by God

Have you ever felt that way

I hope you never do but the truth of it is

If you haven't – you almost certainly will

There will be times in your life when God seems far away

And experiencing His presence 24/7

Seems like nothing more than a fading memory or a distant dream

Did God really do that for me  
Did I really have those feelings  
Where did they go and why have they gone  
When this happens  
You have an opportunity to become closer to God than ever before  
**When God seems far away**  
**He is giving you the opportunity to walk by faith not by feelings**

Today we are going to look at **Psalm 13 (READ)**  
This Psalm teaches us how to respond when God seems far away  
David wrote it when he was going through an emotional valley  
Yet he continued to find strength and direction from his faith  
If you are feeling isolated from God  
David gives you three excellent responses  
**First - Assume God's presence and do what you know you should do**  
**Then - Cling to what you know is true**  
**And then finally - Keep giving praise to God**

**Assume God's presence and do what you know you should do**  
David says - **I trust in your unfailing love**  
Now that is confidence  
When all seems like it is lost  
**When the world seems like it's turned upside down**  
**Trust in God's love for you – believe what God has told you in His Word**

David made up his mind – I will not let despair get the best of me  
I know you are watching me – taking care of me  
Leading me along the way  
And regardless of my feelings I am going to live like you are  
Now that's faith  
My company was reorganizing and no job was secure  
Every one had to apply for a job  
At my level there were only three positions available  
And one of them was taken immediately  
I applied for marketing manager  
I was told – we have someone in mind already. He is better than you  
And you know what – he was  
There was only one position left  
I had no feeling that I would end up with any job  
But I continued working hard – believing God would take care of me

A few weeks later I received a call from a Sr. Vice President  
Offering me the job that would define my career for the next 8 years  
The man who got the position I wanted became one of my best friends  
Later we worked together as partners  
Did I know that would happen – of course not  
I didn't even know I would have a job  
But I trusted God and kept going  
He had taken care of me all those prior years  
I believed He would take care of me then  
And of course He did

What David did what I did  
And what I am saying is this

**Regardless of how you feel**

**Assume God's presence in your life**

**And do what you know you should be doing**

Assume God's presence – assume God's love - assume God's mercy

Assume His guidance – assume His protection

And do what you know you should do

This is how you - in David's words – Trust in God's unfailing love

This means among other things

**Continue the habit of getting up early and spending time with God**

Whether you feel like it or not

**Go to church each week and serve the body**

Whether you feel like it or not

Live for Him in business whether it seems to be to your advantage or not

**Turn your heart to Him in prayer throughout the day**

Whether you feel like it or not

**Don't trust your feelings – trust the Word of God**

Your feelings will mislead you

So read the Word, pray, serve others and trust God

**Remind yourself -**

**Even when you don't feel God's presence - He is there**

It is a matter of saying

God regardless of how I feel; I am going to keep on doing what I know I  
should be doing. Because by faith, I know You are here with me. I trust you.

Say it and then live it

Assume God's presence and do what you know you should do

**Then cling to what you know is true**

David writes

**My heart rejoices in Your salvation and  
I will sing to the Lord, for He has been good to me**

Now one thing you shouldn't do

Don't pretend you feel something you don't

**God knows how you feel – be honest with Him**

If you're angry tell Him – if you're frightened tell Him

You aren't telling Him anything He doesn't already know

**But just being honest with God will help you**

Then after you have vented

Get into the Word and rediscover old truths that now seem distant

**Remember past victories**

Search your heart for those things you know to be true - and cling to them

**Remember God's faithfulness**

God has helped you through rough times in the past

Each remembered victory is a hilltop

On which you can stand for the next victory

**Remind yourself of the things God has done for you**

**And rejoice in them**

There is a wonderful old hymn called "Count Your Blessings"

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed

When you are discouraged thinking all is lost

Count your many blessings name them one by one

And it will surprise you what the Lord has done

**Start a journal**

**And document answered prayer and unexpected blessings**

Write down everything God has done in your life

It will surprise you what God has done

When I think about my life B C I am filled with gratitude

When I think of how good Jesus has been to me

I am filled with gratitude

God has protected me guided me

Been there for me and sent people into my life to encourage me

God has made a difference in my life – I know that

He is still interested in me and will never desert me

I cling to that – I thank Him for it – I count on it

Recall with gratitude God's sovereign mercy in your life

Remember – God is love and God is power

**In His love God has promised to take care of you**

**And with His power He is able**

Assume God's presence and do what you know you should do

Cling to what you know to be true  
And finally do what I will call a self-fulfilling prophecy

**Keep giving praise to God**

It is self-fulfilling because once you start  
It will take you to where you long to be  
You have heard it said before that love isn't a feeling  
It is something you do  
Most of us already know that  
What we sometimes forget is that

**Praise or worship isn't a feeling either – it's an act you do because God is worthy**

Praise is often an emotional experience  
Sometimes when your heart is overflowing with joy  
You just cannot help but sing praises to God  
When that happens it is wonderful  
But sometimes your heart isn't bubbling over

**In those time Lift up your voice in praise and sing to God**

That is what David did  
He begins this Psalm by admitting that God seems far away  
And he ends it by saying

**I will sing to the Lord, for He has been good to me**

David didn't write that because he had an emotional turnaround  
He was suddenly back on top of the mountain

**David understood that praise is an act of worship – not of feelings**

And he is really saying  
I will sing to the Lord regardless of how I feel – for He is worthy  
That's how we should live

**We are to praise God all the time**

**Regardless of how we feel**

Feelings will come and go - praise should be constant  
God understand emotions

And I believe He is more pleased with your praise  
When you aren't overflowing with joy  
Than He is when it just bubbles out of you

**To praise Him when He seems distant is an act of obedience**

**And obedience always leads to blessing**

Let me illustrate this for you  
Suppose you gave your teenager a car  
This car's yours buddy – have fun  
He or she would most likely be overcome with joy

Words like thank you thank you thank you  
Would be coming out of his or her mouth  
They would be sincere and you would appreciate them  
Now let's suppose you woke that same teenager up  
At 6 AM on a Saturday morning and said – let's go clean the garage  
And while he or she was groggy and half awake and grumpy  
They said - I really love you – I am so glad you are my father  
After you passed out  
Wouldn't those words spoken under those circumstances  
Give you more pleasure than the others  
It is easy to praise the Lord when you receive blessing after blessing  
In the midst of blessing His presence seems near to you and praise just flows  
But when you continue to praise Him even when He seems far away  
I believe He is especially pleased  
And there is a side benefit that some of us have discovered

**Your emotions follow your will**

When we praise Him in the tough times  
When we feel lost and alone and worried and heavy and scared

**When we praise Him in spite of our circumstances**

**In spite of our feeling like He isn't there**

**It is surprising how often He shows up**

The praise lifts us into His presence  
Sometimes in the morning I come to the church  
And I just don't feel joyful and full of praise  
I get out the praise book take it into the sanctuary  
And just start singing to the Lord  
And maybe to the flower lady next door  
I'm sure God appreciates it – I suspect she doesn't  
Getting into songs of worship  
Has never failed but to make me feel better – lift my spirit  
It can do the same for you

There are cycles in the Christian life  
Over time your feelings will go up and down  
There will be times when you feel so close to God  
That you can almost reach out and touch His presence  
And other times when you feel He has left you and is far away  
And wouldn't hear you if you yelled

**Trust that Jesus is always there**

When Jesus said – I will never leave you nor forsake you

Those weren't casual words  
An off the cuff remark made to make you feel better  
They were the promise of God to those whom He loves  
And the Bible is pretty specific about Him being faithful  
Even when we are not  
Those feelings that God is far away are inevitable  
We should not be driven by our feelings and we don't have to be  
Even those times God seems distant  
You can experience the power of His presence in your daily life  
Regardless of how you feel -  
Keep on doing what you know you should be doing  
Regardless of how you feel -  
Keep on clinging to what you know to be true  
Regardless of how you feel -  
Keep on singing praises to God  
That is what David meant when he said  
**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**  
Living the life of an around the clock Christian  
Is the life God has designed for us  
We live continually in His presence  
But you are not able to live on an emotional high all the time  
If you did you would wear out – collapse into exhaustion  
So live a life that is driven by faith  
Trusting God's goodness mercy love and faithfulness  
The Christian life is not a feeling we depend on  
And when the feeling goes so goes the practical aspects of Christianity  
No - it is not a feeling we depend on  
**The Christian life is a truth that we know**  
**It is a relationship that we have**  
**It is a faith we live and practice**

**What To Do When God Seems Far Away**  
**Psalm 13**

**6-28-29**

Faith is the key that unlocks the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christianity  
Your \_\_\_\_\_ can mislead you  
When \_\_\_\_\_ assails you, you need to reach back and touch the base of faith  
During the lows, God's \_\_\_\_\_ in your life is just as real as it is during the highs  
Practicing the presence of God in our lives is not a feeling we depend on; it is \_\_\_\_\_ – it is a faith we live by  
When God seems far away He is giving you the opportunity to walk by \_\_\_\_\_ not by feelings

**Assume God's presence and do what you know you should do**

When the world seems like it's turned upside down, \_\_\_\_\_ in God's love for you – \_\_\_\_\_ what God has told you in His Word  
Regardless of how you feel, assume God's \_\_\_\_\_ in your life  
Do what you \_\_\_\_\_ you should be doing  
Continue the habit of getting up early and spending time with \_\_\_\_\_  
Go to church each week and \_\_\_\_\_ the body;  
Turn your heart to Him in \_\_\_\_\_ throughout the day  
Don't trust your feeling – trust the \_\_\_\_\_ of God  
Remind yourself: Even when you don't feel God's presence - He is \_\_\_\_\_

**Cling to what you know is true**

God knows how you feel – be \_\_\_\_\_ with Him  
Remember past victories; remember God's \_\_\_\_\_; remind yourself of the things God has done for you and rejoice in them  
Start a \_\_\_\_\_ and document answered prayer and unexpected blessings  
In His \_\_\_\_\_ God has promised to take care of you, and with His \_\_\_\_\_  
He is able

**Keep giving praise to God**

Praise or worship isn't a feeling; it is an act you do because God is \_\_\_\_\_  
Lift up your \_\_\_\_\_ in praise and song to God  
David understood that praise is an act of \_\_\_\_\_ – not of feelings  
We are to praise God \_\_\_\_\_ the time regardless of how we feel

To praise God when He seems distant is an act of obedience, and obedience  
always leads to \_\_\_\_\_

Your emotions follow your \_\_\_\_\_

When we praise Him in spite of our circumstances, in spite of our feeling  
like He isn't there, it is surprising how often He \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ that Jesus is always there

The Christian life is a truth that we \_\_\_\_\_, it is a relationship that we  
\_\_\_\_\_; it is a faith we \_\_\_\_\_ and practice

**How are my emotions right now:** \_\_\_\_\_

**My Commitment** \_\_\_\_\_