

## How Long Must We Sing This Song?

When you are a kid, the question of every summer road trip is, “how much longer?” Or, “are we there yet?”

Someone else is driving, you are stuck in the back seat with your brothers and sisters, everything out the window looks the same. All you can do is ask, “how much longer?”

When you ask that question, would you agree that the answer you are looking for isn't so much, “one hour, 18 minutes and 42 second”, but “will we ever get there?”

My niece Julie was 2 and a half, and her dad was pushing hard to get home after a camping trip. She finally grabbed her own hair in both hands and said, “I'm going crazy!”

How long?

To follow Jesus is to be on a road trip. We are in the crowd with our brothers and sisters. We can't even see where he is taking us. He's told us that it is into a good place, a better place, but we can only ask, “how long?”

If you have a daughter who has struggled with depression for years and years and every so often there are glimpses that she might be turning a corner. You wonder, “how long?”

If you have prayed and tried for years to have a baby while other couples have three or four kids in the same time. “How long?”

If you are 16 and you really want a job, but you live in small town southern Ontario and it is really hard to find anything....

“How long?”

Sometimes elderly people who have been sick for a long time and who are ready to go and meet Jesus, wonder why they are still alive. They lay there in their beds and ask, “How long?” “What am I doing here?”

What are our ‘how long’ prayers?

As a congregation, what are we longing for and hoping for and waiting for?

What are your family’s ‘how long’ prayers?

What are your very own?

‘How long?’ is also the cry of a broken world to God.

How long must we go on killing each other? How long must we go on destroying the earth? How long must people starve to death? The Irish band U2 ask the question in their song, Sunday Bloody Sunday. The song was written in response to the violence they saw in Ireland. It has been picked up around the world because it dares to ask, of each other and most of all, of God, “how long?”.

Rolling Stone magazine included it on their list of the top 500 (286<sup>th</sup> place) songs of all time. It has been covered by many other artists.

Here is Saul Williams’ version from 2 years ago.....

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keqAQk1YuOs>

After the introduction to the Bible (Genesis 1-11) the story starts with God calling a couple to follow him. He promises them a home and a future and that through them he would bless the whole world. They would have this great family,

as uncountable as stars in the sky or sand on the beach. But they had no children. The story of the Bible, the story of God walking with his people starts with a couple waiting and hoping for a baby and wondering, “how long?”

How long?

David asks the question four times in Psalm 13.

How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

Is it that everything and everyone else on your list is more important than me?

Did the fan on your desk blow my little slip of paper into a corner?

Hello!?

In 1986 I was a seminary student, just married and far from home. We got a call that my Mom had a lump in her breast. I shared that with the small prayer group I was part of. We were led by the best prof at the seminary. He could pray these beautiful prayers. But that day he was all caught up with the fact that he was turning 40. When he led us in prayer he forgot about my Mom.

I know I have done the same thing here to some of you when you have asked to have loved ones included in the congregational prayer. I hate when that happens, because I know how awful it feels to be forgotten. It feels like we do not matter. Worst of all is when we feel that God has forgotten us.

“Some crushed by failure or hardened by pain, give up on life and hope and God” Contemporary Testimony par. 3

*How long will you hide your face from me?*

One of the things we love the most is to be greeted by name. And when that greeting comes with a hug it is like the icing on the cake. School is going to be starting again soon. Now suppose that you go back to school, the same school and same friends, whom you have not seen since June, act like they don't even know you. They turn away, they hide their faces from you. That would be so terrible. I am sure it will not happen to you, and that you will not do that to anyone else either. Maybe if a friend blocks us from their facebook page....

People turn their faces from us when they are ashamed by us or embarrassed by us. When our prayers go unanswered it can feel like the Lord is hiding his face from us. It can feel like the Lord is ashamed to know us. We start to wonder if maybe God really does not like us much. Maybe we are a disappointment to him. These are terrible thoughts.

I wonder if this is what was going through David's mind because he asks....

*"How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?"*

It's one thing to have questions and doubts and struggles and sadness for an hour here or there. But David is in a dark place. Those swirling thoughts are always with him. He just cannot get out of them.

Everything around him reminds him of his unanswered prayers. Every story he hears is of someone else who is blessed, or someone else with a great

testimony or someone else who was in the same place as he is, but now everything is great.

Maybe you know that kind of funk, that kind of dark place when we just cannot get on track again, or hope again or trust again.

How long will my enemy triumph over me?

David does not tell us who his enemy is. So take a guess. And for yourself, fill in the blank.

The catechism says that the sinful world, and the devil and our own flesh are the 'sworn enemies' that we have when we hear the call to follow Jesus. Sometimes our own struggles can become 'enemies for us'. The art critic John Bentley Mays wrote about his own struggle with depression and called it, "In the Jaws of the Black Dog". He was fighting against a depression so visceral, so powerful that it felt to him like a great evil black dog that had him in its grip.

Maybe you know those kinds of enemies.

How long? It is the question that can swamp us if we cannot let it go. It can be a quicksand kind of question. Sort of like, "why?".

We can get bogged down in it and overwhelmed by it and we can lose heart. We can forget that we have options.

Now here is where David does something stunning.

He does something that strikes fear into the heart of the devil who would love to see him give up completely. He does something that can be especially hard for us if people have broken our hearts or abused our trust. That's why

Jesus speaks such harsh words of warning to anyone who would abuse a child. (Matthew 18) He does something against all the powers of this world that tell us, “this is how it will always be.”

He says, “But I trust in your **unfailing love**.”

The word for unfailing love is hesed. It is one of the most important words in the Old Testament because it is a word that describes God’s character. Hesed means love, kindness, mercy. It really refers to an act of love, kindness or mercy. It usually has to do with the way that family members come through for each other. God’s hesed though, is the hesed of adoption, it is the love that invites us into his family.

So David says, “I am calling out to you. I don’t see any answer from you, but I will remember your character. You are loving, you are kind, you are merciful and I will hang on to that and trust that whatever this time means, it does not mean that you have forgotten me or that you are ashamed of me or that you don’t like me or that when the last page of my story is told that my enemies will have the last laugh.”

You are the God of unfailing love. You will hear me. I will trust in you.

And that is the turning point. It’s the place where David finds a footing again in the quicksand of despair.

After generations of hoping and waiting, an old couple named Simeon and Anna went to the temple again. Waiting for God to finally do something to make the world right. It had been 400 years since anyone had

heard from the Lord. Why did it take 400 years? We don't know. But they were there that afternoon when a young couple came in with a baby.

That baby was Jesus, the Saviour. The apostle Paul tells us that God sent him, 'at just the right time', and 'when the time had fully come'.

He taught and healed and loved. And was put to death.

After the longest three days ever, he rose to life again. He is the first one of the resurrection. One day there will be a great resurrection and all of creation will be made right and new.

How long will it be till then?

We don't know.

How long will we need to wait for the answer to our prayers?

We don't know. But we do know this. God will come through.

And in the meantime, we do not wait in despair, we wait with confidence.

We trust in his unfailing love. We rejoice in his salvation. We sing to the Lord for his goodness. **(Here is what we do while we wait)**

Always pray and never give up. Luke 18:2

Including.... pray for our enemies. Matthew 5: 43-48

We give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15

We look to Jesus for strength and example. Hebrews 12

Remain in Jesus. John 15

May the Lord be gracious to you.

May the Lord be gracious to me.

And all God's people said, Amen.