

Intervention #2
When God Feels Far
Psalm 22
4/3/16

- Have you ever been left behind? Forgotten? Abandoned? Maybe it was by mistake. Like your parents accidentally left you somewhere by mistake?
 - o Many of you know that my dad is a pastor and that I have three younger brothers. One Sunday evening after church, we all loaded up in the car to go home. We got home and realized that my younger brother, Allan, wasn't with us. He's the brother whose three years younger than me. He was probably early elementary age – maybe 1st or 2nd grade at the time.
 - o My dad rushed back to the church. No one was there, of course because we were always the last to leave. The lights were all off in the sanctuary where he started. He was calling for my brother who suddenly sat up from the place where he was sleeping. Apparently, he got tired waiting for my parents to stop talking to people after church and laid down on one of the pews in the choir loft and went to sleep.
 - o Oops. But, we always did a head check after that! 😊 Although we joked about that incident often, I don't think it did too much psychological damage to my brother.

- Yet, there are times when we feel abandoned and left behind or forgotten that have maybe have affected us deeply. The feeling of abandonment is probably one that most of us have felt at one time or another.
 - o Friends leave us for new friends or other priorities, there is a fight in a family that leads to broken relationships where people don't talk anymore or if they do, it's just tense and cordial, surface-level at best; marriages break down and head down a wrong path that leads people away from each other instead of toward each other; loved ones die.
 - o It's then when we feel so alone, maybe even abandoned in our pain and struggle.

- During those times, we want someone to intervene, someone to be with us and on our side; someone to rescue us, to fight for us. You know, that's the central feeling of abandonment – that feeling that you have no one to rescue or fight for you or just be with you.
 - o We hear stories of great rescue where people refused to give up in order to rescue the one that they loved. Like the little boy in Florida who was attacked by an alligator. The gator had his legs in its teeth, but his mother had his arms in her hands and she wasn't letting go. She dug her nails into his arms and held on until help came.

- Months later, when the boy was wearing shorts and you could clearly see the scars from the alligator’s teeth, the boy’s friends were asking about his scars. He said, “But wait until you see these scars.” Then, he showed them scars on his arms, scars from where his mother’s fingernails had dug in to hold on to her son. The little boy told his friends, “These are where my mom wouldn’t let go.”

- Sometimes, there are some alligators in our lives, right? And, it seems that they have their teeth planted firmly and painfully in our lives and they are about to drag us under. In those moments, we cry out for help, someone to dig it for us. Yet, at times, it seems no one answers our cries. Have you ever felt that way?
 - In those moments, too, you wonder if you should just check out and let the alligator win. That’s what feeling abandoned does – it makes you feel hopeless. Satan would love for you to feel abandoned and hopeless because it means that you lose your will to really live.
 - And, he would love for you to feel like even God has abandoned you.

- I think there comes a time, and typically more than one time, when God feels far away. Have you ever felt that way? Sometimes, it even feels like God has abandoned us. He’s left us behind.
 - I read a cute little story about a pre-kindergarten teacher who found an exciting new thing for her Sunday School class. The teacher wrote a song about popcorn, taught it to the children, and had them crouch down on the floor to sing it. At appropriate points in the song, all the children would “pop” up.” The teacher soon had them “popping” all over the classroom.
 - One day, the popcorn song was in full swing, when the teacher noticed one child remained crouching on the floor while the other children “popped” all over the room. “Why can’t you ‘pop like the other children?” The little child replied, “I’m burning in the bottom of the pan.”
 - While that is kind of cute, have you ever feel like you’re burning in the bottom of the pan? Where is God when I’m at the bottom of the pan? Where is He when I need Him the most? I’m burning down here, God! I’m feel the alligator teeth sinking in! I’m overwhelmed!

- Have you been there – when you’ve been so desperate for God and it seems like you can’t find him? You cry out, “God, you said you would deliver me. Where are You? God, I’m standing on Your word. Where are You?”
 - BELIEVE ME – I’VE BEEN THERE TOO! A lot of people have...Raise your hand if you know what I’m talking about or say “Yes! I know!”
 - We can relate to feeling like the burnt popcorn at the bottom of the pan or the alligator bait. We can all relate to feeling abandoned. Sometimes God feels so far away and like our prayers are bouncing off the ceiling, back to us.

- It's not something that we like at all. And, if we're real honest, the fact is some of our problems are brought on by our poor choices. Sometimes we're burnt popcorn because we got too close to the fire. Sometimes, we're alligator bait because we were teasing the alligator. That's our fault.
 - o But some of it comes just because ... "Life Happens." And it doesn't seem FAIR.
 - o We read the OT stories of God's miraculous acts. No matter what the challenge, God was ALWAYS with them in a POWERFUL way. We can see outright tragedy on one page...and then we turn the page and only a moment later He's there. We can clearly see God's intervention in the pages of Scripture. He intervened with fire from heaven, manna, water from rocks, victory over giants, walls falling down. Where are all of those miracles and happenings in my life?
 - o And when it doesn't happen that quickly for us, we feel abandoned.

- Yet, read through the book of Psalms and you will see another who knew well the feeling of abandonment. It's King David. And, unlike other Old Testament passages when we just see snippets of time, in Psalms, David shares his heart and his anguish through times of feeling abandoned.
 - o This morning, we are going to look at one Psalm in particular, **Psalm 22**. We're going to begin with the first 18 verses.

- Don't those verses sound horrible? David knew well the feeling of abandonment. We can hear David's heart crying out: *"God, you've forsaken me ... I cry out but you don't answer me...where are you? ...am I a worthless worm? ...I'm exhausted...I'm ready to give up...don't you even care?"*
 - o Have you ever felt like this before? Well, you're in good company because even David, the man after God's own heart, the greatest godly king in all of Old Testament history felt it.

- Believe it or not, even **Jesus Christ** felt it. In fact, he actually quoted some of these words on the cross. Did you catch it? It's the very first verse. The NLT version says, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me." But, other versions say, "My God, my God, what have you forsaken me." These are words Jesus said on the cross.
 - o This is so powerful and shows how the Old and New Testaments point toward one another. See, this psalm was sung regularly in the synagogues. Many of the psalms were.
 - o So, many at the crucifixion of Jesus would have recognized it. And, if they were paying any attention at all, they would have drawn the conclusion that this psalm was not just David speaking of his feeling of abandonment, but was pointing to and foretelling Jesus' crucifixion where he would face abandonment for our sake and for our salvation.

- Let's look - (v7) talks about the mocking crowd, (v12) the enemy presses in, vs. 14 is the picture of exhaustion, (v16) "an evil gang closes in on me...they have pierced my hands and feet...people stare over me...and (vs18) they divide my garments and cast lots (throw dice) for my clothing."
- This Psalm was a prophetic picture of the crucifixion of Christ.
 - What a POWERFUL picture of the PROVIDENCE of God – always in control!!! Why is this so important? It shows us two things. First, GOD IS IN CONTROL!!! This was written hundreds of years before Jesus' crucifixion. God was already making a way for intervention.
 - And, it shows that God understands my problem. Not only was David, a human just like us, going through this, but Jesus, the Son of God, would go through this. So, he understands.
- That's why Hebrews 4:15-16 says, This High Priest (meaning Jesus) of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."
 - He UNDERSTANDS your weaknesses. He understands how abandonment feels. He SYMPATHIZES with you. He HAS BEEN where you are. Most of all – HE SITS ON THE THRONE TODAY! And He can do something about it because YOU have an audience with the KING! We can go boldly before throne and know this:
- God will intervene. Let's read **Psalm 22:19-24.**
 - Even when David feels like he has been abandoned, he comes to realize that God simply can't do that. Abandonment...is just something God Cannot Do! He always comes to our aid.
 - In the NIV version, vs. 24 says, "He does not hide His face from us...but he listens to our cries for help."
 - GOD ALWAYS INTERVENES in the lives of His children! Did you hear that? Always. There is not a situation in your life that has happened or that will happen that God will not intervene for you as you trust him. Now, he might intervene in the way you always want him to, but he will intervene according to his knowledge and will.
 - It's his nature and character to intervene on your behalf. He cannot not intervene.
 - I saw a church sign once that said, "If you feel far from God, he's not the one who moved."
- See, that the real issue. The problem isn't so much that God is far and doesn't want to intervene. The problem is that we doubt his intervention and doubt cause us to

move away from God and toward other stuff, junk. Because people doubt the intervention of God and have believed the lies that Satan has planted about God's goodness and their unworthiness, it produces stress, anxiety, depression, tension and a host of other life-sucking conditions. It seems like everyone is stressed today.

- Anyone may go nuts on you today. Don't you feel, sometimes, that you have to walk around on egg shells because people are plum crazy and you never know if someone might just go off? Right? It could come from anywhere – a fellow driver (road rage), boss, cashier, person standing next to you in line.
 - Several months ago, I was in Stop N Shop and there were these two people who were chatting in the aisle in the produce section. Of course, they were blocking the aisle and the bananas. Now, that's annoying when you're trying to get through and get some bananas. I saw that they were chatting and went around a different way to get the bananas. But, another lady wasn't so nice about it. She went right up to the one woman's cart and signed heavily and loudly said, "Excuse me!" The women, busy chatting, didn't hear her.
 - So, the other woman bumped her cart against the woman's cart, again loudly saying, "I said, Excuse me!" The chatting woman, looked over and said, "Oh, I'm sorry. Wait? Did you just bump my cart?!" The other woman said, "Well, you didn't move!" "Well, there's no reason to be nasty. I'll move." "Well, get then stop talking and move." "What is wrong with you?"
 - I'm watching this whole thing in case I needed to intervene. Yes, I'm that person that would intervene. But, I'm thinking, "This is crazy! Am I about to witness people going bananas right here in front of the bananas at Stop N Shop!"
- People are losing their minds. Stress and pressure are a real factor to all of this.
- KidsHealth, a nonprofit organization that studies children's health issues conducted a poll in 2006 of nearly 900 children between 9 and 13. They found that kids are stressed out. More than 4 out of 10 kids surveyed said they feel stressed out most of the time.
 - I read about a lawyer in San Antonio who was young, newly married. He was up-and-coming. He took a gun, crawled up in a sleeping bag and blew his brains out. He left a note to his wife: "It's not that I don't love you, but I'm so tired I've got to rest."
 - WHAT IS GOING ON???
- Well, life is like this glass. This glass is full of water. How heavy is this glass of water? Well, it doesn't really matter the exact weight. It depends on how long you try to hold it.
- If I hold it for a minute, that's no problem. If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm. If I try to hold it all day, we will probably be going to the hospital.

- In each case, it's the same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes.
- People are losing their minds because they are holding on to things rather than allowing God to intervene and take care of those things.
 - We weren't designed to hold on to that kind of load. That's why God's Word in 1 Peter 5:7 tells us to "Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you." We were designed to live in relationship with God who will help us carry the load of life.
 - However, instead of giving our worries and cares to God, we say, "But the job is just too big. I can't let it go right now." We think we can do it alone and then we wonder why we feel abandoned!
 - All the while, God is saying, "No, life is too big that you can't do it without me! I'm the author of life, not you! As the author of life, I know how to do life. I know how to live life. I know how to get you through life. I know how to intervene in life. And, I know how life ends. You don't know and can't do any of that! I haven't left you! I'm waiting for you to let go so I can help you! I'm waiting to intervene!"
- God is waiting for us to see that he hasn't left us, we just haven't let go to let him help us! What are you holding on to that you should be letting go of? Chances are, you are holding on to it because you doubt the very character of God to intervene in your life.
- If you doubt it, listen to his Word. He tells us his desire to intervene and promises intervention for us over and over in His Word.
 - When Moses was dying and he handed the leadership reins to his protégé Joshua and he gave Joshua this advice in Deuteronomy 31:7-8, "'Be strong and courageous! For you will lead these people into the land that the LORD swore to their ancestors he would give them. You are the one who will divide it among them as their grants of land. ⁸Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.'
 - Isaiah 43:1-3 says "'Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you.
I have called you by name; you are mine.
²When you go through deep waters,
I will be with you.
When you go through rivers of difficulty,
you will not drown.
When you walk through the fire of oppression,
you will not be burned up;
the flames will not consume you.
³For I am the LORD, your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

- And when Jesus spoke His last words on earth in Matthew 28:18-20, he said, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations,^[3] baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
- Did you notice He keeps promising His INTERVENTION!? That’s because it’s his job, his nature and his character.
 - Now what we are supposed to do becomes a little more unnatural for us even though we were designed and created to do it.
- We are to trust God’s intervention. Let’s read **Psalm 22:25-31**.
 - Do you see a shift in David’s outlook? This is still the same song. His prayer has yet to be answered. He has yet to receive intervention. His problems are still looming, but there is a shift because he has chosen to trust that God is going to intervene.
 - Here’s the thing about trust. Trust doesn’t exist until it is tested. Until what you are trusting is tested, it isn’t trust, it’s just a good idea. How do you learn to trust? Only by going through something bad to find out that what you are trusting is true.
 - We can never fully trust God’s intervention until we are in the middle of some problems and pain and situations. That’s when we determine whether we are going to trust or not.
 - If God always seemed close and nearby. If he always answered immediately. If he never let anything bad ever happen to you, you would never learn to fully trust him at his Word or fully trust his character.
- The U.S. military has an intervention standard set in place. It’s called “no man left behind.” Those serving in our armed forces trust that they won’t be left behind by their fellow service men. I can’t imagine a time when that trust would be tested more than when one might find themselves a prisoner of war.
- During the Second World War the US Army was forced to retreat from the Philippines. Some of their soldiers were left behind, and became prisoners of the Japanese. The men called themselves "ghosts", souls unseen by their nation, and were forced on the infamous Bhutan Death March, forced to walk over 70 miles, knowing that those who were slow or weak would be bayoneted by their captors or die from dysentery and lack of water.
 - Those who made it through the march spent the next three years in a hellish prisoner-of-war camp. By early 1945, 513 men were still alive at the Cabanatuan prison camp, but they were giving up hope. The US Army was on its way back, but the POW’s had heard the frightening news that

prisoners were being executed as the Japanese retreated from the advancing U.S. Army.

- Their wavering hope was however met by one of the most magnificent rescues of wartime history. In an astonishing feat 120 US Army soldiers and 200 Filipino guerrillas outflanked 8000 Japanese soldiers to rescue the POW's.
 - Alvie Robbins was one of the rescuers. He describes how he found a prisoner muttering in a darkened corner of his barracks, tears coursing down his face. "I thought we'd been forgotten," the prisoner said. "No, you're not forgotten," Robbins said softly. "You're heroes. We've come to bring you home."
- In times when you feel abandoned or wonder where God is that is when God is saying softly, "You are not forgotten. I've come to make a way for you. Trust me at my Word." You may not feel like a hero, or like someone that anyone should risk their life to save.
- But know what? It doesn't matter how you feel. What matters is how God sees you. What matters is that God is a hero who will come through for his people. He already proved that you were important to him. He says it over and over in his Word and he proved it by his actions.
 - He came for you. You are important enough that He has already given His life for you.
- He has intervened for you and HE WILL continue to INTERVENE FOR YOU! Feelings are real & powerful, no doubt. But, feelings are often very, very wrong.
1. FACTS are more powerful than feelings. The FACT is, God can't abandon you because He loves you too much, He has paid too much for you, He's promised you too much and He can't lie!
 2. Are you going to place your trust on those facts that have been proven over the course of history or on your feelings?
- When you place your trust on facts, then, like David, show you trust him by choosing praise & service. There is a shift in the psalm because David started praising. His problems were still there, but he had a different outlook because he chose to trust and he began to praise. When he began to praise, his trust grew even more. Trust and praise go hand in hand and increase one another exponentially.
- Why is it so hard to praise the Lord at times? Is it because your trust level is low? Is it because you are consumed by your problems and feelings and not by the facts of who God is? Is it because your focus is on your feelings rather than on your God? Is it because God feels far?
- Well, I know a way to feel the presence of the Lord – praise him! Even if you don't feel like it – praise him! Sometimes, you've got to fake it 'til you make it. You've

got to just do it until you feel it. God wants you to take him at his Word, not on your feelings. Sometimes he wants you to take the first step and then he will show up and take you all the way to the end. Praise him!

- Even if the problems in your life haven't all been solved – praise him! Praise him because he lifts up the needy and the poor. Praise him because he cares for you. Praise him because nothing you are going through is too big for him. Praise him that even though you don't have a solution yet, that you know he is working. Praise him that even though you can't see the end, he knows the end.
 - Praise him that the same God who has moved in the lives of people you know and people in Scripture; the same God who spoke from mountains and caused fire to fall from heaven; the same God who can heal the blind and wipe out cancer; the same God who sent his Son to conquer death, hell, sin and the grave is the same God who will intervene in your life with the same power!
 - Praise him that he will never leave you. He is here, he is here! Praise him, church, praise him!
- Then, you will see your problems begin to reduce in size. Then, you will see the intervention of God in your life. Often, the intervention of God is not that he calms the storm and solves the problems, but that he calms his children and fixes our heart problems so that we can focus on him rather than the storms.
- When that happens, then others will see God's ways through our lives. See, the result of God's intervention and his presence is always that God is glorified. When God's people tap into the fact that he is with them and begin to praise him regardless of their circumstances, that speaks volumes to others who are watching. It points them to Jesus. It gives glory where glory is due – to the King of Glory.
- Does God seem far this morning? You are not alone. We've all been there. Even the best have been there, like Jesus.
- Bank on and cling to with every fiber of your being that God promises to intervene. God promises to never leave you. God promises and God cannot lie.
 - And, praise him, praise him, praise him.