

Prepared to Answer

“Where was God when I needed him?”

Read Psalm 13; Galatians 4:4-6

"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?"

So wrote King David from his sickbed, tortured by painful thinking, yet unable to set it aside. "How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?"

"Ad-a-NAH!" is the sound of the ancient Hebrew word that David cried out four times.

"How long?" Literally, "Until when?"

It puts a picture into my mind of God pouring into King David's cup as a father would pour milk into a cup for a child, whispering, "Say when." Only, what poured so freely was pain into his mind and disease into his body. David cried, "Enough already! When!" Still God kept pouring, until David was lost in the dreadful feeling of abandonment, in the appalling thought that God had turned his face away.

Scripture says God won't give you more than you can handle, but that threshold seemed long past for David, so he cried out, "Ad-a-NAH, Adonai! Ad-a-NAH? When, Lord, WHEN?"

This is the cry of all humanity. All of humankind lies in the sickbed with King David. What is wrong with everything—all the sin, the shame, the futility, all the fractured relationships, the suffering children, the rumors of wars, the shadow of death—when put all together, becomes this one, weary, anguished cry.

"Until when?"

Such a curious thing, to find in a three-thousand-year-old hymn my own soul's complaint, the one each of us thought was private and our own. The God who inspired these words clearly knows the real me. And he knows when to say "When."

This time it's a Greek word, "*ho-te*," and it is found in Galatians chapter 4.

"When the time had fully come, God sent his Son," who slipped barely noticed into the warm lake of humanity. And so, after Mary's labor pains and the anguish of child-birth that went on God knows how long, she was the first one to look into the gray eyes of this infant and ponder the imponderable fact.

"It's really you."

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1. What do you think people mean by the statement, “Where was God when I needed him?”

God didn't help me when I wanted, asked, expected him to.

God ignored my prayers.

There is no God.

I deserve better

God didn't do something.

God is either uncaring or incapable.

2. What emotions might be attached to the statement, “Where was God when I needed him?”

Pain

anger

Sorrow

frustration

Confusion

self-righteousness

3. What are some things that people might consider to be their greatest “need?”

Economic stability

Purpose

A pain-free life (physically or emotionally)

Good looks

Justice/fairness

Someone to love me

Happiness/joy

4. If the things listed in #3 were, in fact, man's greatest need, what conclusions might a person draw concerning God?

God must love some more than others, because some get a larger measure of these needs.

God isn't fair.

God doesn't care about me.

5. What do you believe is your greatest "need"? Why do you think that?

A right relationship with God; forgiveness of sins; peace with God; peace from a guilty conscience.

These are eternal needs; most of #3 aren't. If I have #5, I appreciate the list in #3 more. Because if

6. If the thing you listed in #5 is, in fact, your greatest need, what conclusion can you draw concerning God? What emotion(s) does that generate in your heart?

God loves me, more than I can fathom. He has helped me see my biggest problem and has solved it.

Gratitude, love, trust, joy, appreciation for lesser gifts; true view of self.

7. Reread Psalm 13. Do you find anything unusual about this psalm and its inclusion in the Bible?

It begins as a complaint, questioning God's presence and plan. (Would we want our name on such a complaint published in our hymnal?)

It's a bit of contradiction; it swings from lamenting to rejoicing.

("What led to the change in David's heart?" He saw the "big picture" God's eternal plan makes our daily struggles bearable.)

8. What do you learn from Psalm 13?

It's okay for believers to share their "real" feelings with God. It's not necessarily unbelief.

"I trust in your unfailing love" trumps "I understand why this is happening."

9. Why does God allow suffering in the lives of his believers? (cf. Rom. 5:1-5; Heb. 12:10-11)

To give us the opportunity to look to and lean on God, his love, his plan and his promises.

To remind us that we're not in Paradise yet. Sin has consequences, but, for Jesus' sake, not eternally.

Some suffering is instigated by the Devil to pull us away from God.

Suffering makes our faith stronger, deeper, more valuable.

10. "Where was God when I needed him? Right where I needed him to be—on a cross." Explain.

God solved my biggest problem. He did what only he could do. Focus on facts, not feelings.

The disciples were getting beaten by the storm on the Sea of Galilee. The wind rose up and battered them. They rowed till their arms ached, past 3 A.M., getting nowhere. Where was Jesus when they needed him? He was watching and aching, sighing and crying. It is he who left heaven and entered the very center of human distress to pray to his Father *from there*. And, at just the right time, he was on his way.

"It is I. Don't be afraid."

And he's on his way for you. So be strong. Hold on. Endure. "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4)

My God will know when to say "When."

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11. So, how are you prepared to answer the statement, "Where was God when I needed him?"

God cared enough for a worthless sinner to give his life. My sins put him there; God's love kept him there. If he's given his Son, he'll take care of the rest, too. (cf. Romans 8:31-32)