

On Being Forsaken (Part 3)

Tom Beohm

Recorded on July 20, 2019

Before we begin today, I'd like to (especially for those who might be listening or watching this late) provide a couple points of reference for what we're going to share today. What we're going to talk about is actually part 3 (and yes this will be the final part) of a series of studies that I started sharing with you last year. If you're coming into this cold, no worries, my intention is that what we're going to talk about today will certainly stand on it's own. For reference parts 1 and 2 can be found on the sermon archives on the Pacific Church of God website; that's pacificcog.org and those two messages are dated March 10, 2018 and June 23, 2018 respectively. For those listening live—those here today—I apologize, you cannot put me on pause and replace me with something different, you are stuck with me today. If you're listening or watching this later, feel free to catch those first two parts and come back and join us for part 3.

I would like to start with a bit of a bookend. Turn with me to Psalm 131. We're going to read the first three verses from the New Living Translation and in part 1 this is actually where we started. I would like to recenter here as we begin the final part of our study together on the idea of being forsaken. A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem; a psalm for David.

Psalm 131:1 *Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp.*

2) Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me.

3) O Israel, put your hope in the Lord — now and always. (NLT)

By way of some background, the subject of our study together today is that of being forsaken. In the first part of what we've been talking about, we covered the essence of verse 1. We took a more contemplative approach to this subject and we introduced our case study characters from scripture; Elijah, David, Paul and Jesus Christ. We use excerpts of their experiences as recorded in scripture to introduce and define what it means to be forsaken and how our experiences in our lives might interrelate.

In the second part, we talked about what we know. We addressed some key concepts that helped us to understand that the idea of being cast aside, or of fellowship being broken, was prophesied to happen—is rooted frankly in our human weaknesses and selfishness—and that ultimately we can rest our hope in our sovereign Creator, knowing that He is in control and sees all and looking at what we just read here in Psalm 131, capturing the essence of verse 3.

What we're going to talk about today speaks to what we read in verse 2; that being, when we find ourselves in situations or circumstances in which we are feeling abandoned or deserted, the 'what we can do'—the concrete, actionable concepts that

can help us to move forward. I know for my part personally, I find this aspect of the process to be maybe the easiest to process. We've made a bit of a progression; we started by addressing the hardest aspect first, which is coming to terms with the reality or admitting that a problem exists in the first place and we're going to tackle this problem head on—we're going to address this. Then through the mental and intellectual concepts, now we're down to the brass tax of being able to take some action and perhaps with God's Spirit guiding our actions, move the needle if we find ourselves in the condition of being alone or forsaken. So, let's dive in.

We understand that being forsaken has, and will continue to happen and that God is in charge and people will fail us, so what do we do? What's the first step? Let's return to a passage that we have spent some time on previously, to learn from a master at this first step. Turn just a few chapters back to Psalm 55:16 and 17 and again from the New Living Translation.

Psalm 55:16 *But I will call on God, and the Lord will rescue me.*

17) *Morning, noon, and night I cry out in my distress, and the Lord hears my voice.* (NLT)

We've spent some time in the past studies looking at the experience of David and this—what we just read—comes right from the account of his being forsaken by his most trusted advisor, Ahithophel. We talked about that previously. These two verses define our first action step and that first action step is simply to seek God—seek God. What better person to start with than the man after God's own heart, right? One of the beauties of scriptures, it really is a warts and all book; we see the good, we see the not so good, which provides us with a relatable historical record. We can see that David could have this moniker of being a man after God's own heart while at the same time, being terribly and even tragically flawed. I think that can give us some tremendous hope and inspiration for us too—we'll talk a little more about that as we go along. Let's dig in here in verses 16 and 17. First, in verse 16 we have the word "call" and the word used here in Strong's, makes the comment about the word having this idea of *accosting* which I thought was really interesting. When I found that, there was a parable that jumped right to my head and we're going to take a look at this. Turn to Luke 18 please. Luke 18:2-5 and we will read through this, keeping in mind this idea of crying out, calling out to God and accosting. You're probably very familiar with this particular parable. We're breaking into the thought here—this is Jesus giving this parable.

Luke 18:2 *"In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man.*

3) *There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, Give me legal protection from my opponent.'*

4) *For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, 'Even though I do not fear God nor respect man,*

5) *yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.'*" (NASB)

We're familiar with that but notice the point of the parable—jump back up to verse 1.

Verse one tells us he was telling them a parable that at all times, they ought to pray and not lose heart. Notice—at all times. Not unlike again what we read back in Psalm 55:17—how did that verse start? Morning, noon, night—at all times. You may be thinking, okay this is pretty obvious, we should be doing this, we all know this. If it was that obvious, if it was that natural or assumable, why the parable? Why the instruction we find in Matthew 17 and Luke 11 to ask, seek and knock? We'll come back to that in just a moment.

The reality is, we easily lose heart, don't we? Perhaps we don't even get that far; perhaps we don't even ask. Do we assume that God's not interested—it's just little ole me or because I'm such a sinner, I'm such a terrible person that God can't hear me, He's too far removed from that; He's too far removed from me. Or do we take it upon ourselves to try and rectify the situation. I got this, I have it completely under control, I don't need to ask God, I've got this covered. Or do we assume that it's God's will being done so why bother bringing it up—why bother asking? I know if I'm honest with myself, these thoughts have crossed my mind at one point or another in my life when under trial or under duress. The reality is far from that. Let's go back to Psalm 55, we're going to read the same verses but we're going to put the emphasis in a different place. Let's turn back to Psalm 55 where we'll read verses 16 and 17.

Psalm 55:16 *As for me, I shall call upon God, [notice] And the Lord will save me.* (NASB)

A lot of confidence in that statement—the Lord will rescue me.

17) Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur, And He will hear my voice. (NASB)

This petitioning—this seeking with full faith and confidence and assurance that God not only hears, but He's interested. He wants to help and He will help—He will rescue. In Jesus' words, back in Luke 18—turn back with me please—this time we'll read verse 7 and I'll read this from the New Living Translation. Yes, if I was nice, I would have had you put bookmarks because we've been flipping back and forth but I'm keeping you awake—there's a method to the madness.

Luke 18:7... *So don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off?* (NLT)

Since we're here in the book of Luke, turn back a few pages to chapter 11. We talked about the ask, seek, knock principle—let's notice what Jesus says starting in verse 11 of chapter 11; this is all in the same concept as that principle. We'll pick up in verse 11 and read through verse 13. We're looking at all of this in the context of seeking and crying out to God.

Luke 11:11 *Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he?*

- 12) *Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he?*
13) *If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"*
(NASB)

I think it's interesting that in the first part of this section (we didn't read it) we have the analogy drawn of a friend asking another friend for loaves of bread. That friend gets those loaves of bread through being persistent in the process—you can read that in verses 5 through 8. Then the analogy moves to what we just read in verses 11 through 13 of a parent-child or father-son relationship. Again, with enough seeking, we will find. We can be encouraged that we will find because God is our Abba. He is our Father and He is deeply, deeply invested—think sacrifice of Son—that's a pretty deep investment in the success of His plan and those that He is calling and working with. The question for us—the question for you and for me is—God is doing all this work, God is calling, Jesus is knocking (think Revelation 3, letter to the church of Laodicea) are we answering? Are we calling back? Are we seeking as much as we are sought? We'll come back to this idea later but for now the take away is, while we may be forsaken by other people, while we may have to endure severe relationship strains and trials and issues in this life, the relationships that we can fully bank on—guaranteed—are those with our Father and our Elder Brother.

Another point of note, notice in all the passages we've read so far, there's a level of passion or directness or familiarity involved. Think of that Hebrew word we read back in Psalm 55 meaning accosting. That's a very active, almost assertive connotation there. The widows persistent nagging over and over and over again. Jesus' use of friends and family to illustrate His point about asking and seeking and knocking. In my experience in church—I've grown up in the church, second generation—I've noticed we have put a tremendous emphasis on formality, protocol, making sure everything is done decently and in order (heard that a lot growing up as a kid). We formally regiment our prayer and our study time, our worship services, our church organizations. Not to say that these formalities are wrong or they aren't necessary or even beneficial but we have a tendency to take this concept and overlay it on our perspective in our personal relationship with God. We've relegated that relationship to a battery of check list items. I've done my prayer, I've done my thirty minutes of Bible study—check, check, check—I move on with my life. Instead of fostering what any good parent would hope for; an open, honest, loving relationship with his or her children. My point in mentioning this; seeking God shouldn't happen solely in a formal, liturgical sense. We've read it before and I'll just read for the sake of time—we'll look at the example of Jesus Christ. We talked about this in part one—you can jot down Matthew 27:46 as a reference scripture; we're all very familiar with it. As Christ was hung on the stake and was dying, I'll read Matthew 27:46.

Matthew 27:46 *About the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (NASB)

I've heard a couple of different perspectives over whether Christ was truly forsaken here, but regardless, look at the circumstances. Were these words uttered liturgically or deliberately—to fulfill prophecy—let me say this and now we can move on. Was this just a resuscitation of scripture (we'll take a look at Psalm 22 in just a second) or was this a genuine, heartfelt, cry out to God. In part 1 we read passages in Psalm 22 that tie to this and we're going to pick up some verses now that I intentionally left out in the first part. Turn with me to Psalm 22, we'll read the first five verses.

Psalm 22:1 *My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.*

2) *O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; And by night, but I have no rest.* (NASB)

We can stop here and ask a question—maybe we need to be persistent? Yes, we may be, but bear in mind our perspective is finite. I always appreciate the analogy that Rick uses of looking through life through soda straws; it's a very small, very narrow (I think my soda straw is the type that has the little bendy bit in it—so I don't even see that far out the other end) but we see very little in terms of the grand scheme of things—the overall picture. Notice David's perspective here. It was surely shared by his son later as he hung later on the stake.

3) *Yet You are holy, [Confidence, acknowledgment of God and His sovereignty] O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.*

4) *In You our fathers trusted; [notice] They trusted, and You delivered them.* (NASB)

Again, confidence in the experience.

5) *To You they cried out and were delivered; In You they trusted and were not disappointed.* (NASB)

We seek, we cry out, we accost (if you will) with consistency, with persistence but in faith knowing—knowing—that we're heard and, in His time, there will be justice. In His time, there will be reconciliation. We will not at the end of the day, be disappointed.

There are many more examples of heart felt seeking after God—crying out after God; very skillfully expressed in the Psalms. I would encourage us all to take the time to read through them and to read through them in their entire context; not just to cherry pick out the verse of lament but start with that, read through the whole context. What you're going to notice, if you haven't already, is there is a bit of almost a story arc. You start with this anxiety or upset or trial or test and then you end with clarity; you end with answers; often and with praise at the end of the thought. For now, we're going to move forward to our second concept—this, what we can do when faced with being forsaken.

One quick note before we move on, each of these concepts we're talking about—these three concepts we're going to cover—build on each other sequentially. Any action we

take, if it be in the circumstance of being forsaken or any other in life, should always start with seeking God's will; with crying out to Him and seeking His action in our lives. Before our second concept, let's go back to our case study we started with in part 1 and that was of Elijah. Turn with me to 1 Kings 19 and we're going to read verses 9 through 16. Some of this we've already covered in the previous two studies but we're going to revisit to get some continuity in context. We're breaking into the story of Elijah.

1 Kings 19:9 *Then he came there to a cave and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

10) *He said, [this is Elijah speaking] "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."* (NASB)

As we talked about in the first part, this is Elijah expressing his condition of being forsaken. The context might be important to call out and we'll rehash this a bit. Remember this is not just after the amazing display—the show down with the prophets of Baal; where who is the true God of Israel and what transpired there—all those prophets were slaughtered and then Jezebel comes along and says, Elijah you're a dead man, so he hits the road. You have that scenario, but you have the mercy extended and the miracle of sustaining Elijah to not just survive once he ran off into the wilderness, but to get to this point where we are at now where he had the strength to travel for forty days and forty nights to Horeb. You can see that in verses 5 through 9. We have that backdrop—God's obvious miraculous involvement; let's continue to verse 11 and see God's response with that in mind.

11) *So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.*

12) *After the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle blowing.* (NASB)

We can stop here and ask a very simple question: Why? Why the drama and why this big production? Why was the Lord not in the wind and the earthquake and the fire and all these things that were going on? The honest answer is, we don't know for sure because it doesn't say. If anything, this certainly got a strangle hold on Elijah's attention. I think this is interesting in light of (you may be familiar with this) a technique that can be used in conflict resolution or dealing with hostile situations or someone who is very, very emotionally charged, in which the individual trying to mediate the situation will confront the other individual and bring their voice up to the volume of the person that's upset and then slowly walk them back down again—once they have their attention—to a more reasonable level for communicating. Perhaps—just my theory, just my speculation, take it for what it's worth—what we see here is God leveling up the

communication to guide Elijah's emotionally charged condition. He's been going crazy with everything that is going on, down to a point where Elijah was willing and able to listen. That's the first part of our second concept—to listen—simply to listen. Once the drama simmered down, what was left? It was a gentle blowing and now notice Elijah's reaction, verse 13 of 1 Kings 19—what did he do?

13) When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. And behold, a voice came to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (NASB)

So this wrapping his face in his mantel—this was a cultural sign of respect. Elijah knew at this point who was in that gentle blowing and had his attention.

14) Then he said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the sons of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets with the sword. And I alone am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." (NASB)

We don't really have any clues as to tone but I have to wonder—again speculation, take it for what it's worth—but putting this whole context together, if the words we read in verse 14, might have been a little more coherent, maybe a little calmer. Same words that we read before—exact same words—maybe a different approach, we don't know. Notice God's response the time, to the same words.

15) The Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you have arrived, you shall anoint Hazael king over Aram; 16) and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. (NASB)

Details here—not important to what we're covering today—but the point we can draw from verses 15 and 16 is this: If we stop and we listen to that gentle blowing in our lives, the power of God's Spirit working in our hearts and our minds, we can be afforded clarity. We can be afforded a path to move forward and we must then step out in obedience and do it. In all, what we have for our second concept, putting this all together—simply put—listen and obey; listen and obey. The first challenge is getting to the point where we are willing to listen in the first place. In this account we just covered, what's missing? There is something markedly missing. Yes, we see Elijah dialoguing with God, we have this experience taking place—what we don't see is Elijah seeking God's will. However, we do see—amazingly—our merciful God providing every opportunity and preserving Elijah's life, despite how Elijah thought about things. We didn't cover it in 1 Kings 19:4; he was done. He wanted it to be over with. Faith, obedience—these are relatively easy when everything is going our way. It's easy to obey when it means doing what I want to do; pretty straight forward then.

When things don't go according to our plans, what happens to our faith? If our faith is shaken, are we in a mental condition to really, truly listen? If we're not, how do we get back to the point where we can hear and comprehend what God is doing in our lives? Maybe turbulence. maybe having what we consider the bedrock of our lives shaken, destruction of what we may consider to be sacred to us. Once God has our attention, then that gentle, still, soft, voice can speak to our hearts and minds in a way that we would have mentally and emotionally trampled over otherwise.

As a parent, I think of kids when they're real little—not your age now, I'm not throwing you under the bus—when they're real, real little and they get all worked up and just this ball of fury, you can sit there and say, it's okay, it's okay—they're not going to hear you. They are spun out. You have to start by saying, okay let's talk. Do we view our trials—the calamity that maybe fall our relationships with others, as potential shake ups—to get our attention. Are we listening for God's voice to follow such trauma with wisdom, direction, listening with respect and humility? If we are then what we will learn is that not only does God have everything under control—we talked about that in part 2—but he has a plan and a purpose for each and every one of us. The next challenge in obedience is, are we willing to do, regardless of the outcome?

Our case study of Christ is the perfect example of this. We're not going to take the time to re-read it; we're all familiar with His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane—you can find that in Matthew 26 and Luke 22—really crystalizes this point. We have the petition made for the cup to pass but what was the answer; the answer was no—He had to drink of that bitter cup. In the account in Luke 22:43, we find something there worth noting and I'll just read. In the midst of that activity in the garden, it says:

Luke 22:43 *Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him.*
(NASB)

Jesus was given the power and the support to carry on despite—if you look at his circumstance—he was forsaken there by his disciples (remember what they were doing—they were asleep). Along with the reality—you couple that with the reality of that request being no, the cup will not pass; you will have to drink of this cup. This is an important point—if we are listening and acting in obedience, we will be provided for. When all others around us may fail, our God and our redemption, they will not. We have this example and we have the promises to fall back onto. I'll just reference Hebrews 13:5 and 6.

Tying this concept together, we have the example of one of our other case studies; that being the example of Paul. Let's look at the process he underwent to become the instrument that God intended him to be and the impact that it had on his relationships. I think that ties in very neatly—very relevant to our topic of being forsaken. Turn to Acts 9:1, we're going to skip around through the first twenty-six verses—we won't read them all. We're looking at the example of Paul and the process he underwent at the start of his conversion.

Acts 9:1 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest,

2) and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

3) As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him;

4) and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

5) and he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,

6) but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."

7) The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one.

8) Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus.

9) And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. (NASB)

Let's stop for just a moment. What we see is a very dramatic display of power; kind of thinking along the lines with Elijah, to get some attention. The blinding of one that—for all intents and purposes—surely considered himself full of vision and clarity, based on his pedigree. You can see that in Philippians 3:4-6. Surely he knew it all, saw it all, surely his power and authority being exercised had him riding high in the religious order of the day, but what happened? Paul went from leading the charge, if you will, to being led. A role that he would fill spiritually from this point forward. While the part Ananias plays in the story is frankly, amazing in and of itself, we're going to pick this up in verse 15. We're going to see what Ananias is told.

15) *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;*

16) *for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake."* (NASB)

When our Creator gets our attention through our experiences, do we bear in mind that we too are chosen instruments? We are a kingdom of priests; we are the bride of His Son. In the context, we're talking of an individual being individually commissioned, but what's telling is not just the commissioning but the reality expressed of what will need to be endured—we read that in verse 16. Again, personalizing this, have we not too been shown what we may have to endure in our lives? While we may not know our individual details and the nuances there of, we have certainly been given both in word and in example, in this book, of what we should be prepared to face. Let's read on.

17) *So Ananias departed and entered the house, and after laying his hands on him said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*

18) *And immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he regained his sight, and he got up and was baptized;* (NASB)

We don't see it here, but Paul later testifies and we find it in Chapter 22:16 of the book of Acts that he was to be immediately baptized. So what do we see, putting the picture together? Paul's attention grabbed, listening, an immediate obedience and this, in the overall context of what we read back in verse 16, of suffering for My name's sake. We're going to see that that nearly, immediately happened if you skip down to verse 22.

22) *But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Christ.*

23) *When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him ...* (NASB)

Remember this is a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law of Pharisee. In Galatians 1:14, Paul says of himself (I'll read it from the Contemporary English version) he says: *I was a much better Jew than anyone else my own age and I obeyed every law that our ancestors had given us.* So we see his people here, both family (literally and religiously) planning to do away with him. Verse 24.

24) *but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death;* (NASB)

This wasn't just getting kicked out of the synagogue, this was termination—end of life.

25) *but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.*

26) *When he came to Jerusalem, [notice this] he was trying to associate with the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple.* (NASB)

We tie this back in context to our topic of being forsaken. You have this guy between a rock and a hard place. The Jews are out to get him and then you have this new sect that he's fallen into that don't want to associate with him, don't want to let him in. Talk about being alone—he was between a rock and a hard place, but did this stop Paul? While listening to the commands of Jesus and following through left him in a bit of a bind at this point, it didn't stop him from moving forward.

With all of this being said, the very next verse provides us with a nice segue to the final concept we'll explore and what we can do when facing being forsaken.

27) *But Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus.* (NASB)

According to Thayer's, the Greek word used for “took”—where it says that Barnabas took hold of him—that word can mean (I’m quoting from Thayer’s) *metaphorically to rescue one from peril or to help*. Barnabas took stock of the situation, came to Paul’s aide and helped build a bridge between the fledgling Christian world and this individual who had vehemently worked to oppose it—now converted. Once we have sought out God’s will—we are willing and truly able to listen and are given instruction or guidance to follow in obedience—we then have a choice. Our choice ideally should reflect what we’re instructed—by our case study of Paul—in Galatians 5:13, I’ll read this from the New King James version of the Bible.

Galatians 5:13 *For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (NKJV)*

So we have a calling, we’re called to liberty, we see God’s will; the instruction then is very, very clear.

14) *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (NKJV)*

Our third concept, love one another—love one another. For the relationships we do have, for the opportunities that do exist as Romans 12:18 puts it, as much as depends on you; invest in, support, encourage, edify, strengthen those relationships. The warning if we don’t is very clear, verse 15.

15) *But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another! (NKJV)*

Does that sound familiar—probably does. Rending with reproach, wounding the soul, wasting, ruining, inflicting injury, consuming—these are all outcomes of the damage that comes from casting our fellow brethren aside, from forsaking fellowship. We each have a choice; we can choose to participate in this biting and devouring of one another or we can choose to demonstrate love. We can essentially be part of the problem or part of the solution. What we see demonstrated in scripture is that God will provide a path towards a solution. We didn’t cover it specifically and we won’t turn back there, but do you recall in the example of Elijah, in 1 Kings 19, after the events we covered, what immediately happens next in scripture? In my Bible there is a section heading and that heading is *The Call of Elisha*. God as promised (because he told Elijah) provided him with a successor; another person to work with, a path forward, a solution in the form of another human being to help him out. The challenge for each of us is, are we willing to take on this role? Are we willing to be a Barnabas?

As we read in Galatians and as we talked about earlier, do we see these processes sequentially culminating in the fulfillment of the law of liberty in our actions? Perhaps, a rhetorical question. Perhaps an easy, ‘but of course’. Consider Barnabas, consider what he was doing; he was advocating for an individual that was considered a threat on both sides. That’s a tough place to be.

Another one of our case study characters was also deemed to be a significant threat and was shown tremendous love, none the less. We're going to take a look at his example; turn with me to 1 Samuel 20—we're going to read verses 30 through 33—I'm going to read this from the Contemporary English Version of the Bible. As you're turning there, [I'll] give some background to the story. We've got David and he is being hunted by King Saul. He doesn't totally understand why, so he's worked with his dear friend Jonathan to try and sort out Saul's true intentions. They decided not to show up for the New Moon Feast and Jonathan has this canned answer for why he's not here and we'll see what happens. So we see what happens—1 Samuel 20, picking up the story in verse 30 we see King Saul's response.

1 Samuel 20:30 *Saul was furious with Jonathan and yelled, "You're no son of mine, you traitor! I know you've chosen to be loyal to that son of Jesse. You should be ashamed of yourself! And your own mother should be ashamed that you were ever born. [Notice verse 31]*

31) *You'll never be safe, and your kingdom will be in danger as long as that son of Jesse is alive. (CEV)*

King Saul is telling Jonathan, you're putting yourself in mortal danger; you're going to destroy yourself; you're going to destroy the entire kingdom—you're putting us all in danger for this guy—this outlaw, this traitor. But did this dissuade Jonathan? Let's read on, verse 32.

32) *"Why do you want to kill David?" Jonathan asked. "What has he done?"*

33) *Saul threw his spear at Jonathan and tried to kill him. Then Jonathan was sure that his father really did want to kill David. (CEV)*

Talk about remove all doubt—Jonathan stood up for his friend David in the face of his own life being threatened by his own father—that's pretty severe. Jonathan's faithfulness to his friend David didn't stop with that scenario—that situation; turn a few pages forward to chapter 23 and we'll see this love and devotion demonstrated again. 1 Samuel 23:16 and 17.

1 Samuel 23:16 *And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, [notice what he did] and encouraged him in God.*

17) *Thus he said to him, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also." (NASB)*

So what do we have if we step away from this story a bit. We have an outlaw, we have a traitor, we have a guy on the run and we have the prince—the next in line for the throne—and he's fraternizing with the enemy. Not only did Jonathan know that David was to be king, but was a vehicle of encouragement, all in the face of steep adversity; a threat to his own future, a threat to his own father throwing a spear at him. As we look at these examples, are we willing to go this far for one another? Are we willing to stand

side by side, shoulder to shoulder, with our brothers and sisters in a time of being forsaken even if those luxuries aren't afforded to us? Even if we're standing in the breach alone? Are we going to be part of the problem or are we going to be part of the solution?

Going back to our case study of Paul; we see in letter an example of this attitude and perspective that really embodies this concept. Turn with me in Colossians 1, we're going to read verse 4 to set the stage and then skip and read verses 9 through 12. I'll read these passages from the New Living Translation.

Colossians 1:4 *For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people ... (NLT)*

As we recognize God's power—God's Spirit, working in others—and we see those fruits demonstrated, what should our reaction be to that? Let's see what Paul's perspective of the fellowship in Colossi was because we've obviously established—he said I've heard of this—we've seen this in action. Skip down to verse 9 and let's see what his response is.

9) *So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God [notice the things that are being requested] to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding.*

10) *Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.*

11) *We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy,*

12) *always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. (NLT)*

Let's extract a few of these details that I think is important to stop and think about, because we oftentimes spend much of our prayer time in the context of praying for other people—doing what? We spend most of that time praying for those in trial—those suffering, those in need—we get the prayer requests and we do that and that's good and we absolutely should do that; but are we mindful of those, as well, that are doing well—are doing good—are following in the ways that God should have them go in and petitioning the Father on their behalf because the fact is, we all need God's intervention in our lives on a constant basis, even if we're not going through an explicitly defined trial. We all need (and just going through these verses) complete knowledge of His will; spiritual wisdom and understanding, to be strengthened, to have endurance and patience and to be filled with joy. When we hear of those of faith, those that are showing love for God's people, those that are not forsaking others, are we proactive in our love and support of them?

We can look to both the words of Paul as well as the example of Jesus Christ as a

source of strength and encouragement to exercise this love and support for one another. Turn with me to Hebrews 12, we'll read the first two verses and then skip down to verse 9 and read verses 9 through 15.

Hebrews 12:1 *Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us [hold on to that], let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us ... (NASB)*

We can stop here for a moment and reflect back on what's covered in the previous chapter, in Hebrews 11—the heroes of faith, of times past. We read those examples and take tremendous encouragement from them, knowing as we talked about, that in spite of weaknesses, in spite of failures, God can and does work with His people to accomplish His will. While we have not yet, as individuals sharing this time together today, passed into history, the question that we can pose is this: What's to keep us—what's to keep you and I today—from being part of this cloud of witnesses from one another and helping those of us that are encumbered, to move forward? The image of running a race that is used here and the word “witness”, I think is kind of interesting. According to Thayer's, the word witness that's used here can mean, *one who is spectator*. In the world of sports, if you've ever watched sports on television or been to a sporting event, what are the spectators—what are the witnesses doing at a sporting event? In the past couple of years, I have had the opportunity to take both of my kids to a Portland Trail Blazers, NBA Basketball game and they will tell you, it's a riot—almost literally. The fans are rabid for the home team and it's not just to encourage the team when they're in a slump; as the team does better and better, the crowd goes wild. If they are on a hot streak or run, they just go nuts. Not just to encourage the team when it's not doing so well but to fire the team up when it's doing great—to do even better. Let's read on in verse 2.

2) fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NASB)

Our ultimate example of looking past the conditions extant today and towards the joy that was set before Him. What was that joy—what was the joy set before Him? Yes, it was the fulfillment of the Father's will; yes, it was the overcoming of sins ultimate penalty but it was for us. It was to enable Him to intercede on our behalf and ultimately bring many sons to glory; it was for His bride. What tremendous hope; what tremendous encouragement that can give us. As an embodiment of our topic—our study—of having to endure being cast aside, having to endure being forsaken (we've talked about that)—enduring all of these things in a physical life so that you and I can be anything but forsaken. Rather, to be in eternal fellowship with Him and His Father. Skip down to verse 9, Hebrews 12.

9) Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

10) *For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.*

11) *All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*

12) *Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble ... (NASB)*

We have the examples, we have the admonitions, we understand that being disciplined is part of the process; we've been empowered with this information. With all of this in mind, we are to help, to support, to encourage one another—Verse 13.

13) *and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.*

14) *Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. (NASB)*

We talked about this earlier in the context I mentioned—Romans 12—it's our duty for our part to pursue this condition and what better way to do so than being proactive; to pursue peace, being proactive in support of one another versus an uneasy detente, if you will—Verse 15.

15) *See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; (NASB)*

We see this passage conclude with instruction on accountability. We are clearly instructed to be accountable to one another and for good reason. Not working in support of one another leads to that root of bitterness that we see in verse 15, germinating. When it fully matures, produces the fruit of separation, division or forsaking one another.

Let's start to wrap up. We find in Acts 2:41 (you don't need to turn there) we read that, on that Pentecost in which the Spirit was given, about 3000 souls were baptized and added to the fellowship. In Acts 5:14, we're told (I'll just read it from the New King James version).

Acts 5:14 *And believers were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women ... (NKJV)*

We have recorded not only tremendous growth in that early church but power and enthusiasm being exercised in the fledgling church. Now fast forward a few thousand years—in 1990 the Worldwide Church of God peaked in weekly attendance at 133,000 and there were congregations all over the world. I remember, growing up in the church, we would have combined holy day services on the high days and it would be two or three congregations—it wasn't a whole lot—but we would have 1000 people pretty easily. But then what happened? In the record of scripture, we see the book of

Revelation and we're left with the lone voice of the Apostle John in exile on the island of Patmos. Obviously, he wasn't the only person left, but it's a very stark contrast to what we read in the book of Acts and that sixty-ish years transpire; how about us? Our once united organization shattered into hundreds of splinters and the splintering continues to this day, nearly thirty years after the peek. Congregations of hundreds to congregations of tens or ones. It's easy to look at these realities and it's easy to either get depressed by, or put stock in, number of men. Frankly, it just doesn't matter—simply doesn't matter. What matters is what our Father is doing. We won't turn there for the sake of time but I'll refer you to the parable of the wheat and tares—you can find that in Matthew 13. The master of the field is very aware—fully aware of what's going on, fully aware that we're mixed with those that don't share the same values, don't share the same perspectives and he is allowing us to commingle and allowing things to play out and none of this is catching Him by surprise; none of this is taking place without Him at least being aware or passing on what's taking place.

Also, what matters is what our Elder brother is doing. He has told us, in John 14 that He has gone to prepare a place in His Father's house for you and for me. These things are what matters; the Father and the Son are working, They are faithful, They are true, while men can and men will fail us. Relationships will come and they will go. The Father and the Son are engaged and working on a plan since the foundations of the world. For us to experience life more abundantly with Them. Today, we experience the joys and the pains of this life, learning and growing and in the experience of being forsaken, of being cast aside—have we seen that this experience has been shared by those that have gone before us? Yes, it has. Do we know that men are weak and subject to treating one another poorly—unfortunately yes. Do we know that this behavior and experience was foretold to happen to God's people—yes. Do we know that God is sovereign over His creation and works with our best interest in mind—yes. Can we cry out to Him and seek His faith to help in time of need—yes. When we do that, do we have the opportunity to listen and execute on what we're instructed—yes. Finally, in turn, can we be part of the solution and serve one another in encouragement and support—absolutely yes.

Let's close where we started—Psalm 131. We'll again read the first three verses, I'll read this from the New Living Translation. A Song for the pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem, A psalm of David.

Psalm 131:1 *Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I don't concern myself with matters too great or too awesome for me to grasp.
2) Instead, I have calmed and quieted myself, like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother's milk. Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me.
3) O Israel, put your hope in the Lord— now and always. (NLT)*