

## *The Chord Progression of My Soul*

Psalm 130

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PD Mayfield

This morning, we will be continuing our short series looking at various Psalms in a section from Psalm 120 to 134. And this portion of the Psalms are called songs of ascent. And I think everyone can resonate with today's song. I know that I can. It is a journey. It's a journey out of the depths from the despairing that we may feel within ourselves to the hope that we have in the Lord. It is a journey and a process as we look to Him in faith.

Hear now God's word from Psalm 130.

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning. O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray.

Father, add blessing to the hearing of your word. May you strengthen and encourage your people this morning as we see you as our only hope as we look to you in confidence as we realize our need for you, our need out of our depths that shines the light on the darkness of our soul where we are found guilty. And yet, your grace abounds all the more. Lord, may we see Jesus this morning. May we see your grace. We pray in His holy name. Amen.

My wife and I recently watched a YouTube series called *How Hamilton Works Musically*. My wife and I love *Hamilton*. We've probably watched it over a half a dozen times so far since it's been out for streaming. And so what you do inevitably is also go on these rabbit trails on YouTube and watch interviews or other videos. And this video series discusses the musical *Hamilton* by showing how the compositions of various songs work to convey the story, how the compositions develop the characters, and how they evoke emotion within us. Now, I'm not a musician. I don't always understand the music theory. But my soul resonates with what the music is doing.

Another example of this is just this past week, Randy recommended that I listen to Stevie Wonder's *Songs in the Key of Life*. I knew several of the songs already, but I had never put it together as a whole album. And listening to that album from beginning to end is an experience. I love the lyrics that Wonder says in his song "Sir Duke." "Music is a world within itself with a language we all understand, with an equal opportunity for all to sing, dance, and clap their hands. Just because a record has a groove don't make it hit the groove, but you can tell by the dance that lets you in when the people start to move." What he is singing about is certainly for the joy-filled foot tapping and body moving songs. But it's also true for the sorrowful, gut-wrenching, soul-gripping songs. And sometimes like a cello, joy can flow in tandem with sorrow, and you see beauty in the very same note that expresses both. The music weaves with the story, and we are moved.

For example, in Leonard Cohen's song "Hallelujah," in the very first stanza, he sings, "Now, I've heard that there was a secret chord that David played, and it pleased the Lord. But you don't really care for music, do you? It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth, the minor fall, the major lift, the baffled king composing hallelujah."

As we look at Psalm 130 today, I invite you to follow along in terms of a chord progression. Again, I'm stressing that I'm not musical. But I've asked Julie just to demonstrate some chord progressions. First, I want to reference Cohen's song. So, take it away, Julie. "It goes like this, the fourth, the fifth, the minor fall and the major lift."

And there's plenty of other examples. We're going to do two more. This is a minor chord progression. And then this is a major chord progression. Thank you, Julie.

I'm curious, if we had more time for discussion, what moves you? How do you think when you hear those different examples of chord progressions? What moves are stirred within you?

The songs of ascent describe themes that are relevant to a pilgrim's journey to Jerusalem. It's about going up to the house of the Lord. And some of the songs explore when troubles come such as dangers and perils from the outside. Some explore when resources and relationships and other securities fail, even our life's toil.

Psalm 130 explores the opposition that occurs inwardly within our very soul. The psalmist doesn't give any specific details on any particular occasion, but we observe that this is a song of repentance. It's a beautiful psalm. You, the individual, resonate with the personal experience of the writer. We are brought in, and we go on the journey, the internal journey, with them from the depths of our sin to the heights of our hope, and we find refreshment in the assurance that we have in our hope in the Lord.

As we look at this psalm, we're going to look at three chord progressions. The first chord, I cry to the Lord in verses 1 through 4. The second chord, I wait for the Lord, verses 5 and 6. And then the final third chord, we hope in the Lord, verses 7 and 8.

Let's look at this first chord, I cry to the Lord, from verses 1 through 4. And what we see the psalmist doing in these very first verses are two main things. He's seeking the presence of the Lord, and he's seeking the Lord's forgiveness. Let's look first at verses 1 through 2. "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!" The psalmist is calling upon the Lord to hear him, to pay attention, to take notice of his plight. And why? Why does he do so? He's crying out of the depths.

Now, the depths in scripture can refer literally to the depths of the water or the depths of the pit. But they're most often used poetically to describe something that is happening within us. It's a deep place of distress. For example, in Psalm 69:2 and verse 14, this same word is used where the psalmist says in verse 2, "I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me." And Psalm 69:14, "Deliver me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters."

Similarly, we see in Lamentations 3:55, "I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit." We see Jonah in his distress in chapter 2 when he says, "I called out to the Lord out of my distress, and he answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol, I cried, and you heard my voice." Whatever the situation, the psalmist is in deep distress and is asking earnestly for the Lord to hear his supplication, his pleas for His mercy.

And then verses 3 and 4 give further information about the cause of his distress as the psalmist seeks the Lord's forgiveness. Verses 3 and 4, "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared." Here, the psalmist is poetically asking this rhetorical question, and it lands with poetic effect. We were drawn into the question, and by doing so, he's capturing attention and a suspense. He wonders, who could stand if the Lord were to see, if the Lord were to observe my guilt? But the suspense there in that tension is resolved as the psalmist recalls the very attributes of God. The Lord is holy and righteous where none can stand. However, the Lord forgives. And that phrased, "That you may be feared," is awestruck wonder. It is not a terror. It is not a

fear of retribution. It is inspiring reverence for this God who both cannot abide by my presence in my guilt but makes it possible for me to be clean to be forgiven.

Here, we have the psalmist calling out to the one who can deliver, the one who can provide such solace. The opposite, though, in our own lives and certainly in our current times, we see a contrasting hope. And such despair that's found in the depths of our soul finds no solace from self-help. If you think about that as a genre of books, they offer general wisdom. The better ones certainly offer evidence based approaches, whereas the weaker ones and usually the unhelpful ones offer some sort of pseudo-scientific spiritualized philosophies that offer some version of salvation that comes from within yourself, and it's of your own making. The irony of such messages, however, is that the author is the messenger outside of the situation providing the encouragement to find the resolve to change with some kind of knowledge that can be found, that can be unlocked or unleashed from within. In self-help, the person's actual deliverer is the person who awakens them to their own self-help. And I don't know if you've experienced this, but I've experienced it with my daughters. To me, it is like that scenario when a small child runs to her father saying, "Look! Look what I did," just after mom did it for her.

Here, we see a chord progression that begins to weave together your story. And you find yourself at the crossroads of self-help or actually humbling yourself before the Lord and crying out to Him. And so an application for you is to reflect on what it looks like for you to be in the depths. What does it look like for you to be cognizant of your iniquities or your guilt before a holy and righteous God? And at what point do you realize you can't do it on your own?

Irwyn Ince in his new book *The Beautiful Community* writes this.

"Biblical scholars have rightly pointed out that the death sin brought into the world was threefold. It was physical where we became subject to decay. It was judicial. We lost our innocence and became guilty before God. And it was spiritual. We lost intimacy and fellowship with God. We have been trying to hide ever since, but God was not and is not content to let us continue deceiving ourselves into thinking that our efforts at camouflage actually work. A central facet of the Bible is God's desire and commitment for us to know Him as Lord."

In the moments of our depths, what we cry out to may very well reveal who we place our hope in. And as you acknowledge your guilt, do you seek the Lord, and do you seek and desire His forgiveness?

As we move from the first chord of crying out, we move to the second chord, I wait for the Lord in verses 5 and 6. "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; my soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning." The psalmist is waiting, which is an eager expectation. It's looking with intense anticipation. It's not merely passive. It's not biding your time as if you're waiting in the dentist's office.

And we see here in these verses that he's doing two things. His waiting is with a confidence in the Lord's word and a confidence in the Lord's approach. And the confidence that he has in His word, we see this all over scripture. And as we think about it in terms of the psalmist rejoicing in God's word, which is the very overflow of His character, here are just a couple examples from Psalm 119:81. "My soul longs for salvation. I hope in your word." Psalm 119:114, "You are my hiding place and my shield. I hope in your word." We see that trust and confidence in His word is connected to waiting upon the Lord's arrival, His approach, His presence.

Here, the psalmist repeats himself kind of like a small refrain focusing on that. You might have even noticed how I just paused just to soak that in. In the midst of this song, there's a repetition there to engage our heart, our very body of what we're longing for and placing that trust upon the Lord. The music is weaving together with the story of God's people, and we see God uplifting them with His coming.

For example, do you remember the time in Jesus's very early life, the story of Simeon and Anna? If you want to, you can flip to Luke 2. I'm going to read starting at verse 25.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. [ESV]

And just a few verses later in verse 36.

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem. [ESV]

Waiting "more than the watchmen for the morning." Luke is recording the very longing of their hearts that was rooted in the promises of God's word, the chord progression of God's redemptive history bringing it to a place where we see the tension of what God has already accomplished and not yet experienced fully. Simeon and Anna had lived a lifetime in that tension, and they got to see a glimpse of it in the arrival of Jesus. Likewise, the people of Israel in the time of worshiping in the temple, even maybe singing Psalm 130, living in the already of the Exodus and the not yet of the full culmination of all of God's purposes, the waiting for God, His glory and His redemption.

And in the moments of our waiting, we have to ask what we place our confidence in. And what we place our confidence in may very well reveal our motivation for the waiting. As you wait for the Lord, is your confidence in His word? Is your confidence in His nearness?

Moving along in this chord progression to chord number three in verses 7 and 8, we hope in the Lord. I hope you are tracking with the music as you're tracking with the substance of what the psalmist is saying. We're ascending from the depths to the heights of His hope. Did you notice how he switched the pronouns in verse 7? "O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities." The beginning of the Psalm is "I." "I cry out to you, O Lord." "I wait for the Lord." And here, he points it to a collective hope of what God is doing through His covenant. O Israel, hope in the Lord.

And he draws attention to two things. He's drawing our attention to knowing God's character and knowing God's actions. We see two key things here about God's character, His steadfast love being one of them. This is the core covenantal characteristic of the Lord God that we see throughout scriptures, His goodness and His kindness. The translation might also say loving kindness. The God of creation and the God of redemption has revealed Himself, and He has made a covenant with His people to be their God, and for them to be His people. He is loving kindness. He shows loving kindness. And the psalmist is pointing us to that.

And as we see His steadfast love, that goes hand in hand with His plentiful redemption. It's a characteristic of abundance, of plenty, of greatness, of multiplication, of overflowing, of just being lavish with what He pours out. It's an abundance. It's exceeding. And in His loving kindness is what it means for Him to redeem. And that's fleshed out further in verse 8 where the very idea of "redeem" means ransom here in this text. At its basic meaning, it involves the transfer of ownership from one to another through payment of a price or an equivalent substitute. He will ransom Israel from all His iniquities.

Now, in the Old Testament, there are plenty of examples where ransom or liberate is a legal term. There are various situations that you can find through the law of Moses in the legal contexts of what it means to redeem, to ransom. We actually see that being played out in why Mary and Joseph and Jesus are in front of Simeon, for they were keeping the law for purification and to consecrate Jesus being first male born in their family. We see this ransom, this buying back, vividly in the Exodus where the Lord redeemed Israel out of bondage from Egypt. And in the New Testament, we see this perfectly fulfilled in the ransom of our savior Jesus Christ.

Here are just a couple verses. Ephesians 1:7-8, "In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us." Colossians 1:13-14, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption and forgiveness of sins." We sang about that this morning. We were pointed to that from Romans 5. We saw the assurance from Hebrews of what is happening through Jesus's life, His death, and His resurrection. God in His mercy meets our guilt and pays it. He pays it not in part but in all. The record of the debt is cancelled, and there is freedom, and there is peace restored between us and God.

And in this chord is a progression that begins to weave together, again, our story with so many stories who have looked to God in this covenant, to see and to call out for His promises, to bring them out of the depths of their sin and bring them to the heights of the hope that we have in Christ. Our crying out, our waiting for the Lord's salvation has been fulfilled. And the glory of that will be demonstrated in a few moments when we celebrate communion with our God. His loving kindness is extended to you. It is an invitation to be with Him, for He has come to be with you. And in the experience of our hoping, we are reminded of God's covenant promises. And as we hope, as we hope in the Lord, are we being encouraged by who He is? Are we being empowered by what He has done?

Those questions are points of reflection because it is not something that we then pile back on the guilt. If your answer to those questions might be no, or maybe not to the degree that I would prefer or wish or hope, those are not opportunities for you to be enslaved to your guilt again. It's to be called out to the wondrous grace of God. It is to be invited into that space with Him that He comes to dwell with His people, bringing peace and redemption.

Now, I made note of the switch of the "I" to the "we." I think that's incredibly important in this psalm as it is a song of repentance. And a song of repentance in the beginning when we're down in the depths, when we're aware of our sin, we don't stay there because we don't climb out of that, for if it was up to us, we are stuck in our despair. We are stuck in our sin. But we look to Christ, our hope, the very one who brings us out, lifts us up, renews us from the inside out, frees us from the bondage, enlivens us from the despair. And we can't do that by ourselves, and it's not meant for ourselves alone. It certainly involves us. We are to grab hold of Christ by faith. Your faith, His death, His life, His resurrection for you, when you take of this cup and eat of this bread, it is for you. But it is a meal shared for us, and it is something in which we get to participate together.

At the beginning, I briefly mentioned Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" song. It's a beautiful song. Cohen through the stanzas takes our hand and leads us to listen to the music, and we walk with him through the lyrics. I become immersed in the storytelling. It's beautiful. It's inspiring. It's moving. But I also find it hopeless. I don't know if you've ever heard the song all the way through or if you've thought about it in that way.

On the first hearing, however, our soul feels elevated as he weaves biblical imagery throughout the song. And he brings us down and inward to find the place of springing upward and outward as we sing hallelujah. Even if you don't know what that word means, it's Hebrew. You're saying to praise Yahweh. Praise the Lord. But it's not the intention behind the song. As we see on closer inspection, what feels elevated is fleeting because such rapturous praise actually comes from within but is not tethered to Him. It's actually tethered to your own experience of what you're bringing to that chorus.

A couple stanzas later after we did the first stanza at the beginning,

"You say I took the name in vein. I don't even know the name, but if I did, well really, what's it to you? There's a blaze of light in every word. It doesn't matter which you heard, the holy or the broken hallelujah. I did my best. It wasn't much. I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch. I've told the truth. I didn't come to fool you. And even though it all went wrong, I'll stand before the Lord of song with nothing on my tongue but hallelujah."

It certainly resonates with the human experience, but it's vacuous. It's empty. The music takes me toward hope, but it offers nothing but myself. My soul is fearful. My soul is anxious. My soul is full of longing. My soul is guilty before a holy and righteous and mighty God. And my soul is well aware that I have no power to bring myself up out of the depths and ascend to those heights. The strength of my hope is as sure as the presence of the one who enters with me into the depths to find me, to pick me up and pull me out.

And so my soul follows this chord progression of the one who knows me intimately and knows me fully. The Lord knows me and He is with me. He pulls me up. He hears my cries. He forgives my iniquities. He is the object of my waiting and the basis of my hope. He will lift me up because of His steadfast love. And He will not leave me nor forsake me because of His overflowing redemption.

This is how I can come to this psalm in the fulfillment of Jesus Christ with great hope because when I come to God in my sin, I cry out to Him seeking His presence, desiring His forgiveness. I wait for Him in trusting His word and longing for His closeness. And I don't do that alone. I do that with us, His church. We hope in Him knowing His character and knowing His redemption. Let's pray.

Our father in heaven, may we indeed know your beauty. May we know your strength. May we know your glory that is manifested in Jesus Christ. And may we partake in this meal in a few moments strengthened by faith of hearing your word and to respond by faith. Come to us in our depths. Forgive us our iniquities and bring us to a place of healing, of renewal, bringing us to that place of hope and confidence in you. This I pray in Jesus's name. Amen.