



Group Leader Guide “Forsaken” – Famous Last Words March 21-22, 2020

Group Creed

We come together as a Group with the goal of Spiritual Formation; encouraging one another to become the same kind of person that Jesus is, so that we can live out every part of our lives inside of His Kingdom.

// Message Summary

Ben Foote continues our series, **Famous Last Words** with Jesus cry in **Matthew 27:46**: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Using this story, along with his own experiences with feeling forsaken by God, Ben shows us the hope that we can have even in the darkest moments of our lives.

// Biblical Context

Matthew 27:46: I previously wrote about how this quote from Jesus is a direct quote from **Psalms 22** during the Building Blocks series (I will include those notes below). However, I wanted to point out something else interesting upon further study. The end of **Psalms 22** is full of hope and salvation, specifically for two groups of people: the poor and the rich. While this can be viewed as a literary device, called a merism, that is meant to encapsulate *everybody*, I find it interesting that this particular merism is used here. Money is often something that we place our faith in instead of God. Because of this, we tend to feel forsaken by God in our financial lives frequently. This is interesting because this isn't the only place in the Bible where feeling forsaken and our financial lives have a direct tie. **Hebrews 13:5** says, “Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (The writer is quoting **Deuteronomy 31:6**.)

Psalms 13: This Psalm was written by David (ca. 1000BC). It is general enough that it is nearly impossible to pinpoint where exactly in David's life he wrote it. Some say he wrote it during the time before he was king when he was being persecuted by King Saul. Others say it was during his son Absalom's rebellion. Some say it was written by David (or even someone else) in the midst of sickness. Jewish people use this particular Psalm to pray for people dealing with illness. **Old Testament References** (*from the Group Leader Guide published for the weekend of October 12-13, 2019*)

Psalms 22: When Jesus says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” He is directly quoting **Psalms 22:1**. This is a psalm that David wrote a thousand years before Jesus. It is a psalm that describes a righteous sufferer in the hands of enemies, but also hope and a petition to God that He will deliver him. It ends with this declaration: “they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, *that he has done it.*” (**Psalms 22:31 ESV**, emphasis mine) “He has done it” (“it” being the securing of salvation) sounds very familiar to another quote from Jesus on the cross: “It is finished!” **Psalms 22** has a lot of allusions to the crucifixion, which makes sense of why Jesus would be identifying with it and quoting from it. Here are a few:

Mockery: “All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

“He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” (v. 7-8)

Thirst: “my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth” (v. 15 NIV)

Pierced: “they have pierced my hands and feet” (v. 16)

Casting Lots for Clothes: “they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots” (v. 18)

Alongside these allusions of suffering, the latter half of the Psalm also alluded to the salvation that Jesus will procure: “The psalmist expects not only that God will deliver and vindicate him, but also that God’s salvation will extend to the poor (v. 26), and the rich (v. 29), to generations that have died (v. 29), and to generations yet to come (v. 30). Indeed, God’s salvation will be so comprehensive that: “All the ends of the earth will remember ad turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. (Psalm 22:27-28 NIV)”*

Also, the word for God that Jesus uses here was the Aramaic “Eloi” or “Eli,” which sounds very similar to the Hebrew and Aramaic for the name “Elijah.” This is why people thought that he was calling for Elijah to come and help him directly after this (in Matthew 27:47-49). Elijah was seen as sort of a “patron saint” for rabbis in need.

// In Preparation

The “Christian” response to people who are struggling with feeling forsaken by God is to just tell them to “have more faith.” It also seems to be the response when the “advice giver” simply has nothing else to say. This usually isn’t the best way to respond, however. After all, Jesus had more faith than we will ever understand, and *He* felt forsaken by God. David, “a man after God’s own heart,” often felt forsaken by God, as we see in the Psalms. Job, as well. Faith does not always keep away the feelings of feeling like God has forgotten about you or forsaken you. So, with that said, don’t give people this patented response when leading them in group. It has the tendency to be received as condescension instead of encouragement. It is also usually deflating and shaming to the person. At best, it is simply too vague and unhelpful.

This week’s group discussion will revolve around when the people in your group have felt forsaken by God, or possibly still are feeling forsaken by God. You may feel the pressure to give advice or counsel, but this isn’t always necessary. Be a listening ear and share your own story and experience. You don’t have to have all the answers. If something comes up that you don’t feel qualified to speak to, that’s ok! Send them our way, and we will do our best to support you. Pray for wisdom and understanding as you lead group this week, knowing that God is working in every single person’s life, even if they can’t understand it yet.

// References

Keener, Craig S Ph.d. *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. InterVarsity Press, 2014.

* Wright, Christopher J. H. *To the Cross: Proclaiming The Gospel From the Upper Room to Calvary*. IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017.

Group Discussion Questions “Forsaken” – Famous Last Words March 21-22, 2020

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// Bible References

Matthew 27:46; Psalm 13:1-2, 5-6

// Community Questions

1. What has been a meaningful song in your life?
2. What was the big and little thing you prayed for this week?
3. How did you show the people closest to you that they were at the top of your priority list this week?

// Core Questions

1. Describe a time where you felt totally forsaken by God.
2. If you are no longer in that season now, what was God teaching you through that silence?
3. Read **Psalm 22**. What hope does the end of this Psalm bring you in the midst of silence and/or suffering?
4. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus, too, felt forsaken by God (and actually was) in His darkest moment?
5. What hope or encouragement does it bring you to know that that forsakenness didn't last forever, but was actually done for a purpose?
6. If you are still in that season of feeling forsaken by God, is it possible to acknowledge that He hasn't actually forsaken you, but is trying to teach you something or do something for you? What might that be?
7. Read **Psalm 13** aloud together. Is it hard or easy to actually praise God in the midst of feeling forsaken? Why?

// Challenge

This week's challenge is different. There is no call to go and do something, but simply to read this excerpt from Dallas Willard's book *Life Without Lack*. Ponder what Dallas is teaching and decide for yourself how you can put this type of faith into practice, especially in the times where you feel that God has forsaken you.

“Seek the Lord and wait for him to show up. Set time aside to devote yourself to prayer and other spiritual disciplines that will strengthen your faith and prepare you to receive from him. Listen for God when you pray. Watch for him and wait on him throughout the day. If the Lord

does not show up when and how you think he should, you must not be upset with him or with yourself. Just keep seeking. When we begin to seek the Lord, some things must change—some outside of us and some inside of us—before we can bear the vision of God. These changes can take time, and God, in his mercy, gives them time.

We have this promise from Jesus: ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him’ (John 14:23). Jesus means that he and the Father will be moving through and about us in our lives. He will speak to us. He will act on our behalf, and we will know the presence of God in our lives. If you are in doubt about this I beg you not to say, “Oh, well, I’m just supposed to believe.” Do *not* do that. Seek the Lord. Ask him to reveal himself to you and give you the faith of sufficiency that knows no bounds.

Of course, it may be that you will not recognize him as you begin. We all have certain expectations and ideas about God and what it would be like for him to show up. This is what Jesus was getting at when he asked his disciples, “Who do men say I am?” When they gave the various answers, he then put the light on them: “But who do *you* say that I am? (Mark 8:27, 29). He asks this same question of us, and does so by revealing himself to us in ways we do not expect. Who do you think he is? God will not try to fit within your expectations, but he will reveal something precious to you.

If you want to have a deeper, more trusting faith, seek God and be prepared to go with him...”

Willard, Dallas. *Life without Lack: Living in the Fullness of Psalm 23*. Pgs. 116-117. Thomas Nelson, 2018.