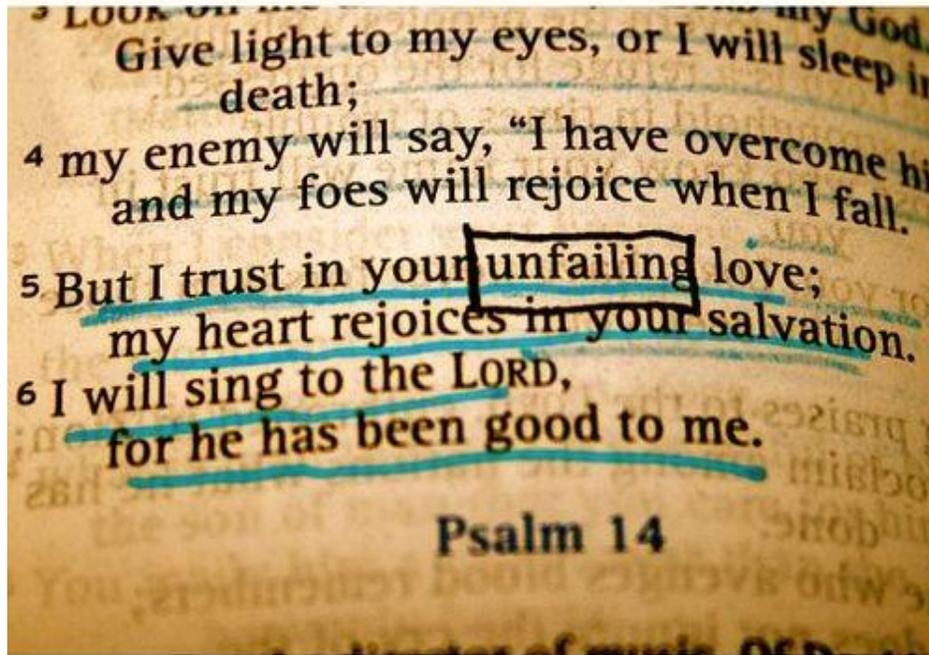


GRIEF TO TRUST

Prayers for Covid-19 #1: Psalm 13

July 19, 2020



Praying Psalm 13

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

- ¹ How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
- ² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?
- ³ Look on me and answer, LORD my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
- ⁴ and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
- ⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
- ⁶ I will sing the LORD's praise,
for he has been good to me.

Verse 1: *Usquequo Domine*

- ¹ How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Psalm 13

- 1) Grief is universal

- 2) Lament comes out of faith, not doubt

- 3) Every complaint reveals deeply held values

- 4) Lament offers a place to gather [Otis Pickett's "Lament for Charleston"]

Verse 2: What the Psalmist desires

- ³ Look on me and answer, LORD my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
⁴ and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

Psalm 13

- 1) David doesn't ask for his lament to end → he wants to know God cares

- 2) Light reveals how God is at work through my lament (Genesis 1; Isaiah 9:2; John 1)

- 3) Lament gives us the opportunity to name the enemy → COVID-19, racism, violence

Verse 3: A very different David

⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.

⁶ I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.

Psalm 13

- 1) "I" is emphatic → because the Psalmist has changed

- 2) Lament helps me find the love and salvation of God → Jesus reveals salvation

- 3) Lament prepares us for answered prayer
[Amanda Benckhuysen introduces us to Rizpah, 2 Sam. 21:14]

Todd Billings on the hermeneutics of lament at Reformation21:

Like Psalm 13, other Psalms of lament express grief, loss and anger, but they do not leave it there - they bring this cry before the face of the Lord. These Psalms do not just "vent" before God, they trust the Lord's promises enough to turn them into complaints: *how long will the Lord - who remembers his covenant people - "forget" me?* After these complaints and petitions, most Psalms of lament openly declare their trust and hope in the Lord. But even Psalms of lament that do not, such as Psalm 88, are saturated with trust: they trust God enough to bring grief and anger before his throne, to offer faithful complaints, trusting in his covenant promise. Laments such as Psalm 13 are not only poetry, but also prayers: prayers framed broadly enough for Israel to use them as a prayer book, and expansive enough for the New Testament authors to draw upon them again and again. Indeed, after the lament of Psalm 22 (prayed by Christ on the cross), the imprecatory Psalm 69 is the second most quoted Psalm in the New Testament. "Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them," this Psalm declares. Moreover, these imprecations don't appear to be signs of immaturity. Even the martyrs in Revelation cry out these imprecations in the mode of the Psalms: "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" ([Rev. 6:10](#))

So, if we are to receive the Psalms of lament as the New Testament's own authors do, then we need to find a way to embrace and pray these Psalms. How can we do this? Here, we face the question of what it means to read the Bible *as* Christian scripture, or according to "the rule of faith." As I show in [The Word of God for the People of God](#), in its doctrinal content, the rule of faith reflects the content of the baptismal (Apostles') creed - confessing that we approach scripture and the whole of life as ones who belong to the one God of the Old and New Testaments, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This confession derives from scripture, but in the patristic and medieval eras, it also served as a key conviction brought to the interpretation of scripture. In the Reformation and post-Reformation eras, this practice was not usually termed a "rule of faith," but a functional trinitarian framework was still embraced by the majority of Protestant biblical commentators.

The "rule of faith" provides a general account of how Christians receive God's word in scripture: as adopted children who have been united to Christ, enabled by the Spirit to journey on a road of growing in love of God and neighbor, anticipating the final, blessed communion with the Triune God. Thus, any particular scripture passage should be received, ultimately, as the Spirit's instrument for transforming us into the image of Christ, cultivating the love of God and neighbor, nourishing a people to be a sign and foretaste of Christ's kingdom in the world.

CHAPTER 13

לְמַנְצֵחַ מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד: 1

עַד-אֲנָה * יְהוָה תִּשְׁכַּחַנִּי נֶצַח עַד-אֲנָה * תִּסְתִּיר אֶת-פְּנֵיךָ מִמֶּנִּי: 2

עַד-אֲנָה * אִשִּׁית עֲצוֹת בְּנַפְשִׁי יִגּוֹן בְּלִבִּי יוֹמָם עַד-אֲנָה * יְרוּם אִבְי עָלַי: 3

הַבִּיטָה עָנְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָאֵרֶה עֵינַי פֶּן-אִישָׁן הַמָּוֹת: 4

פֶּן-יֹאמֶר אִבְי יִכְלְתִּיו צָרִי לְגִילּוֹ כִּי אֶמּוֹט: 5

וְאֲנִי בְּחִסְדְּךָ בָטַחְתִּי יָגַל לִבִּי כִּי־שׁוֹעֲתָה אֲשִׁירָה לִיהוָה כִּי גָמַל עָלַי: 6

Resources for further studies of prayer and the Psalms

This is a modern day lament for the Charleston Emmanuel AME Massacre in 2015 (not 1887!) by Otis Pickett at <https://www.reformation21.org/featured/for-such-a-time-as-this.php>

Steven Coles' "When God Seems Distant" at <https://bible.org/seriespage/psalm-13-when-god-seems-distant>

Spurgeon's "Howling into Singing" (#2310) is a wonderful application sermon of Psalm 13. It is attached to these sermon notes.

ThirdMill has an article by Joel DeMoore, https://thirdmill.org/articles/joe_demoore/joe_demoore.rusting.html, and Billy Dempsey, https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/https:%5E%5Ethirdmill.org%5Earticles%5Ebil_dempsey%5Ebil_dempsey.Forgot.html/at/What%20Do%20You%20Do%20When%20You%20%20Feel%20Like%20Go%20d%20Forgot?

desiringgod.org, John Piper's teaching ministry, has good articles on Psalm 13 at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/dare-to-hope-in-god> and <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-might-god-do-while-you-wait>

Todd Billings has a series on the hermeneutics of lament at Reformation21 at <https://www.reformation21.org/articles/the-hermeneutics-of-lament-part-2.php>

Derek Thomas has a short article at <https://www.reformation21.org/counterpoints/derek-thomashow-long-o-lord.php>

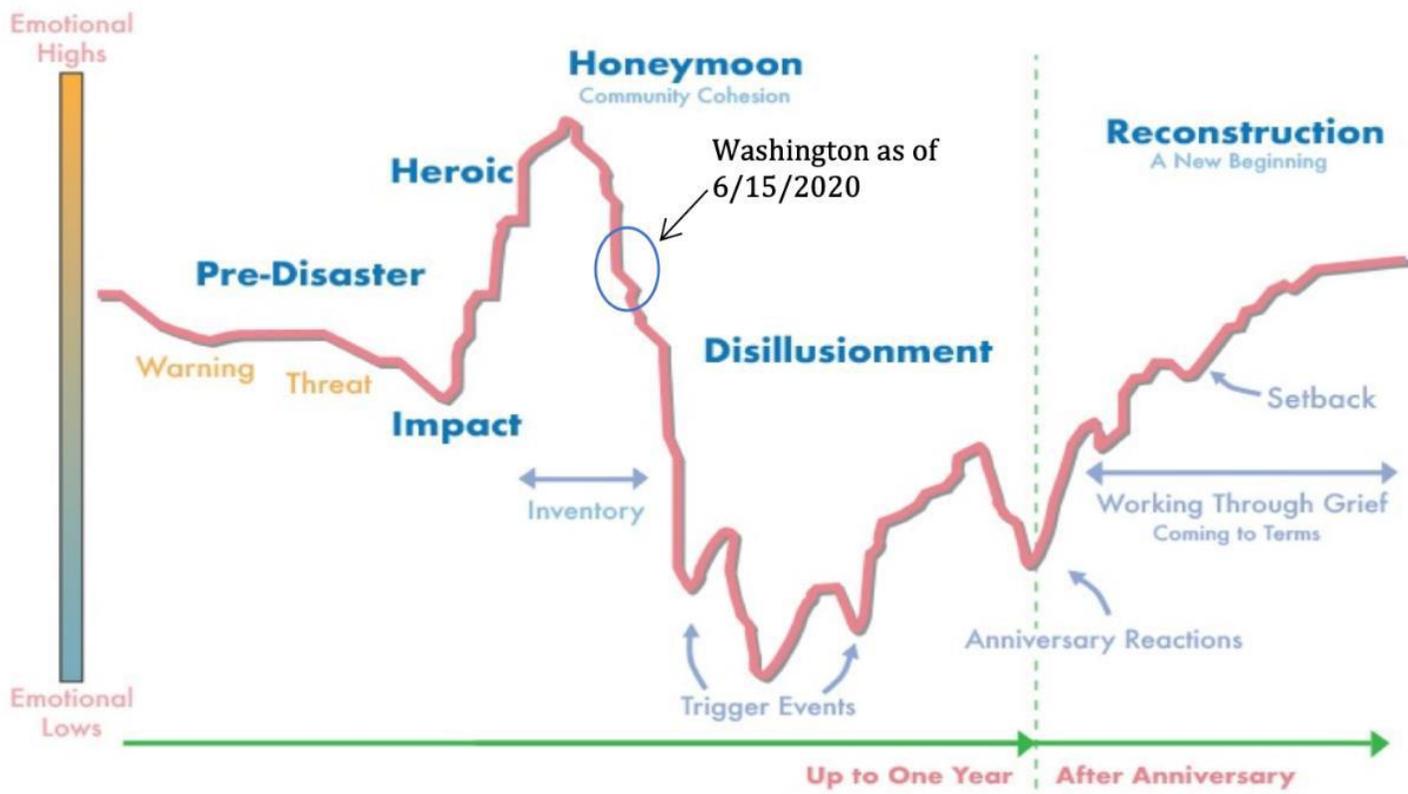
The Calvin Institute for Christian Worship has produced a wonderful resource for family study at <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/psalms-for-families-devotions-for-all-ages-psalm-13/>

This fine article (and free book) from TGC features Mark Vroegop; <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/next-steps-a-night-of-lament-for-racial-justice/>

Justin Deever's "Praying the Psalms" at <https://www.justindeeter.com/archives/2484>

The psalm, which is a deeply moving picture of despair and trust, realistically depicts the anguish of the soul yet is characteristic of a life of deep faith. The fourfold repetition “how long” (vv. 1–2) emphasizes the intensity of emotions. The threefold prayer (“look ... answer ... give light,” v. 3) calms the psalmist down to the point where he concludes with a two-part song in the midst of darkness (vv. 5–6). Delitzsch (1:199) expressed well the movement of the psalm:

The Psalm consists of ... three groups of decreasing magnitude. A long deep sigh is followed, as from a relieved breast, by an already much more gentle and half calm prayer; and this again by the believing joy which anticipates the certainty of being answered. This song as it were casts up constantly lessening waves, until it becomes still as the sea when smooth as a mirror, and the only motion discernible at last is that of the joyous ripple of calm repose.¹



¹ VanGemeran, W. A. (1991). [Psalms](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (Vol. 5, p. 139). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

HOWLING CHANGED TO SINGING

NO. 2310

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON, AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON LORD'S-DAY, EVENING, APRIL 28, 1889.**

“How long will You forget me, O LORD? Forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?...I will sing unto the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me.”

Psalm 13:1, 2, 6.

THIS is a very short Psalm, there are only six verses in it, but what a change there is between the beginning and the end of it! The first two verses are dolorous to the deepest degree, but the last verse is joyful to the highest degree. David begins many of his Psalms sighing and ends them singing, so that I do not wonder that Peter Moulin says, “One would think that those Psalms had been composed by two men of a contrary humor.” If I were asked, “Are there two men here, or is there only one?” My answer would be that there is only one, but that one is two, for every man is two men, especially every *spiritual* man. He will find within himself an old man and a new man, an old nature and a new nature; and even the new nature, itself, is subject to strange changes; so that, like April weather, we have sunshine and showers blended. Sometimes it seems as if all the showers were poured on top of the sunshine and the sunshine, itself, were quenched and could scarcely gladden us.

David was a wonderful man for changes of experience. God permitted him to go through many experiences, not so much for himself, as for the good of succeeding generations. Whenever you look into David's Psalms, you may somewhere or other see yourselves. You never get into a corner but you find David in that corner. I think that I was never so low that I could not find that David was lower; and I never climbed so high that I could not find that David was up above me, ready to sing his song upon his stringed instrument, even as I could sing mine! These are two instantaneous photographs. The first one gives us the man complaining, the second one gives us the man rejoicing. I wonder whether we shall get two such photographs, tonight; some sitting here complaining, who, before the service is over, will go their way rejoicing? God grant that it may be so!

Possibly somebody here says, “I do not understand what you mean by each man being two men.” Well, let me say a little more on that point. Every man is a mystery. He is a mystery to other people, but, if he ever thinks, he is a great mystery to himself! And, if he never does think, why then, I think that he is a mystery, indeed, that he should have such a wondrous faculty as the power of thought, and yet should let it lie idle! He who does not *study* himself may think that he understands himself, but it is the judgment of folly. He who has been accustomed to make a friend of himself and has had himself for his companion, and talked to himself, and cross-examined himself, is the man who will say, “I am puzzled. I cannot make myself out. I am often at my wits' end. I am such a strange mixture, and so dreadfully changeable.”

You must know yourself, dear friend, in some measure, or else I am afraid that you will never know the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you do not know Him, then you do not know what eternal life means, for to know Him *is* eternal life! But why is it necessary for us to know ourselves, that we may know Christ? You must have some knowledge of the disease that you may know what the Physician can do; and there is also this truth of God to be remembered; the Lord Jesus Christ is the model man, and only by knowing something about men do we know much about Him. Is it not strange that the Psalms are often so written that you do not know whether David is writing about himself or about the Lord Jesus? One verse can only be applied to Christ and you are *certain* that David is writing of the Messiah, but the next verse you can hardly apply to Christ, for there are some terms in it which would be derogatory to the Lord Jesus

Christ, so it must refer to David. The fact is that there is a wonderful union between David and David's Lord; there is a marvelous union between the saint and his Savior, between the believer and Him in whom he believes; and you cannot always tell where one begins and the other ends. So, if you have no knowledge of man, it is to be feared that you have no knowledge of that Son of man, the man of men, the Savior of men, the first-born among many brethren, to whose likeness we are yet to be fully conformed. I invite anybody here who has not yet known the Savior, to pray to God to make him know himself. It may be that the discovery of what *you are* will necessitate your discovering what Christ is! A true estimate of your own poverty may compel you to resort to Him for wealth. A true sight of your own disease may force you to apply to Him for His all-healing medicine. Certainly it is to be urged upon you by the highest of motives that you do not, with all your understanding, forget to understand yourself and that, while you have many books on your shelf, you do not read them so as to forget this Book which lies within, this wonderful Book which concerns you more than all the writings of men, the Book of your own nature, your own needs, your own desires, your own changes! God make you familiar with them, and then make you also familiar with the book of grace which is written in the life of the Son of man!

Now, with that as a preface, I invite you to the study of our text.

First, you will see, in the first two verses, *a man complaining*. Go three verses farther on and you will get to a man singing, about whom we will talk in the second place. And then we shall close our discourse tonight by asking, What are the connecting links between the man complaining and the man singing? How did this complaining man get up to concert pitch and begin to sing before he had gone more than a little way further on the road?

I. First, then, here is A MAN COMPLAINING.

Pardon me if I say that here is a man *howling*. Let me read the first two verses again; "How long will You forget me, O Lord? Forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" Said I not truly, when I called it howling? There is so much of complaining here, so much of questioning; "How long? How long? How long? How long?"—four times over, that we may call it, as David did once call his prayer; "the voice of my roaring." It is a kind of howling, roaring, moaning complaint before God in the bitterness of his soul. Let us take these four, "How longs?" and speak of them.

Here is, first, *the poor man's grief, as it seems to him*; "How long will You forget me, O Lord? Forever?" Think for a minute. Can *God* forget? Can omnipotence forget? Can unchanging love forget? Can infinite faithfulness forget? Yet so it seems to David. So it has often seemed to men in the deepest of trouble. "How long will You forget me?" You have been praying for mercy and you cannot find it; and you think that God forgets. You have been, perhaps, a seeker after peace for years, and yet you have not found it, and you think that God forgets. Or, perhaps, years ago, you were one of the happiest of the happy and you bathed in the light of God's countenance. But now you are the unhappiest of the unhappy, you are at a distance from your God, you have been trying to get back and cannot get back, and you think that God forgets you. Or else wave upon wave of trouble has rolled over you; you have hardly had time to breathe between the surges of your grief. You are ready to perish with despondency and you think that God forgets you! That is how it looks to you, but it is not so, and *cannot* be so. God cannot forget anything, it is impossible! "Can a woman forget her sucking child?" Mark that expression, the child that still draws its nourishment from her bosom. That is just what you are still doing, for, albeit you think that God forgets you, you are still living on what He *daily gives you* and you would die if He did not give you of His grace and strength. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget you." Lay hold of that great truth of God and dismiss that which can be only an appearance and an error. God has not forgotten to be gracious, nor has He forgotten you.

The next, "How long?" the next piece of David's howling, represents *his trouble as it really is*.

"How long will You hide Your face from me?" That is as it really is with some of you; God has hidden His face from you; not His heart, nor His mind. He has not forgotten you, but He has taken away from

you the comfort of His smile. Are you crying, tonight, “Lord, how long will You hide Your face from me?” I am glad you cry about it! The ungodly do not cry for God’s face to be revealed to them; they wish that God would always hide His face from them. They do not want either His face or His favor. But if you are longing to see His face, it is because that face is full of love to you. I do not wonder that you are unhappy if you have lost the light of God’s countenance, for he who has ever had it, cannot lose it, no, not for a moment, without feeling his heart ready to break! “There are many who say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.” Only give us to know that You love us and we will not envy the man who owns the greatest estate, or enjoys the highest degree of human applause. This is enough for us, to have God with us! Oh, dear child of God, if you have lost the light of your Father’s countenance, and you sigh after it, you shall have it, again! You shall have it very soon! By the degree of your longing, you may measure the length of His absence. If you long but little, He will be absent long, but if you long much, He will come to you soon. You will soon find that the hidings of His face are over and the light of His countenance is once again your joy.

This is what the trouble really is and a great trouble it is while it lasts, though it works for your good. What plants would grow if it were always day? Does not night make them grow as well as day? Brothers and sisters, if we always had fine weather, should we ever have a harvest at all? The Arabs have a proverb, “All sun makes the desert.” If there is no rain, how can there be verdure? There is a ripeness given to the fruits by the moon as well as by the sun. Grieve when God hides His face from you, but do not *despair* as well as grieve, but believe that even in this, He still loves you. It is a face of love that you do not see. You believe that, yourself, or else you would not wish to see it. If it were a face of wrath, you would not be longing to see it again. It is a face of love that is hidden from you. Therefore, be of good courage, you shall see it, by-and-by.

Notice next, that we have *the man’s sorrow as it is within himself*. “How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?” He talks to himself! That is the counsel he takes with himself and he does not get any very great help out of that. It is a mark of wisdom to talk with yourselves, sometimes, but not if you make yourself your own oracle. A man may talk to himself until he talks himself into despair, though there is a way of talking with yourself that will talk you up into the Light of God, such as David used when he said, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted in me? Hope you in God.” That is the way to talk to yourself! But yet, as a rule, there is not much good comes of talking to yourself unless there is a third One present; that blessed One who can construe what self may say in mystery; and set right what self might twist into error. Oh, yes, I know some who pour out their hearts within them! Do you remember what David says in the 42nd Psalm? “I pour out my soul in me.” Now, if it were possible to pour the contents of a jug of water out into itself, the water would be there, all the same, would it not? That is a grand passage where David says, “You people, pour out your heart before Him: God is a refuge for us.” Take your pitcher and turn it bottom upwards, and let the contents all run out. That is a true easement. To pour out from itself into itself is a poor change. To pour it out before God is to find instant relief. Beloved, it may be that you cannot get any relief and that daily, from morning until evening, you are still in a fret and a trouble. Well, that is the case with David, here; and my text is a photograph of you!

And, once more, the fourth, “How long?” *shows the man’s sorrow as it is without Him*. “How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?” It adds very much to a man’s grief when somebody from the outside says, “Oh, you are always miserable! It makes anybody wretched to be near you.” It was thus when Peninnah exulted over Hannah’s barrenness, and “provoked her sorely, to make her fret.” It happens to many Christians to have this sort of thing done by somebody, especially a very “candid friend.” A candid friend is only an enemy candied over with a little sugar, as a general rule, and one who takes the opportunity to say nastier things than a downright enemy would say. You may have some such person in your family. Above all, there is our great adversary, from whom may God deliver us, who also delights to triumph and exult over us whenever he can! And so our trouble outside is that Satan and his allies exult over us and we have not yet learned to say, as we ought to say, “Rejoice not against me, O my enemy,

when I fall, I shall arise.” That last touch may, perhaps, make the photograph depict somebody here who said, “I do not think that I shall see *my* portrait tonight. I have been roaming about and got into great trouble, and I am one by myself.” Well, but here is David, who is with you, and David’s Lord is with you, too!

That is the first photograph; a man complaining.

II. I am glad to pass from the first view and bring on the second one. The second picture of the same person is found in the sixth verse, where we see A MAN SINGING; “I will sing unto the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me.”

It is the same man that we saw before, but he has done with his howling and has taken to singing, for, first, *his heart is rejoicing*. Read the fifth verse. He says, “My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.” It is not merely the *appearance* of joy; it is *real* joy; his *heart* is rejoicing! Have you never seen a friend who has been suddenly lifted up by the Spirit of God out of great mourning and of whom you have said, “Well, I should not have known that it was the same person”? Grief throws a peculiar cast over the human countenance. Well do I remember, as a child, a lady who used to come to my grandfather’s house, whose face was terrible to look upon and when I asked who that sad lady was, they said, “Hush, child,” and they made me hold my tongue until she was gone. And then they told me that she was one who thought that she had committed the unpardonable sin. I do not know what it was that struck me, but there was something about her face which has never gone from my memory, though it must be pretty well 50 years ago that I saw her.

But when a person is full of joy, especially *spiritual* joy, have you ever noticed what a kind of transfiguration the face undergoes? You have been, yourself, to have your photograph taken, and the man places an iron clamp at the back of your neck and you go away, directly, I mean that *you* do. Your body stands there, but you, yourself, go traveling down the rod of iron, and you are not there at all, and the likeness is not yourself; it is your chrysalis, the case in which you used to be, but you are gone! Well, now, when you have joy in your heart, *really* in your heart so that everybody can see it on your countenance, your eyes begin to sparkle and your whole face is lit up, so that people say, “Well, really, he is only an ordinary-looking person as a general rule, but when he is in *that* state of mind, there is a wonderful kind of beauty about him!” Now, the Lord can work that change for some of you, so that when you go home, mother will say, “Why, Maria, you are quite different from what you were when you went to the Tabernacle! John, how changed you are! You went so dull and heavy, but now you seem to be quite another person.” Yes, the secret is that it is with him as it was with David; his heart is rejoicing! The next thing is that *his tongue is praising*. “I will sing unto the Lord.” That which is down in the well will come up in the bucket. That which is in the heart is sure to come up to the mouth before long; so the happy believer begins to sing and, very likely, he breaks out with the children’s hymn—

*“I feel like singing all the time,
My tears are wiped away,
For Jesus is a friend of mine,
I’ll serve Him every day.”*

You may try, perhaps, to repress your emotion, but if the Lord has really brought you up out of the horrible pit, such as I have been describing, your emotion will not be altogether repressed. You will feel as if, should you hold your peace, the very stones would begin to cry out! A rejoicing heart soon makes a praising tongue!

Notice, next, that *the man’s judgment is content*. That cool, calculating faculty now begins to read God’s dealings, and it comes to a very different conclusion from that which it arrived at before. Some of you used to learn, as children, a book called, “*Why, and Because*”; and it is a good thing to have a,

“why, and because,” for your own feelings. Now, says David, “I will sing unto the Lord, *because*, after weighing and judging the matter thoroughly, I can testify that He has dealt bountifully with me. I thought that He had forgotten me, but He has dealt bountifully with me. I thought that He had hidden His face from me, but He has dealt bountifully with me. I said in my heart that He treats me very harshly, but I take all such language back, Lord! I eat my own words with bitter herbs and I regret that I should ever have used them! You have dealt bountifully with me.” “Return unto your rest, O my soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.” This poor man who thought that he was forgotten, now looks at the food which God has put upon his table and he finds that he has Benjamin’s portion; much more than was given to the rest of his brothers; and his verdict is totally changed, now, as to the dealings of the Lord with him. He, says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

And now that his judgment has been set right, now that heart, tongue, judgement; all are right; *his resolve is right*, for he says, “I will sing unto the Lord.” “Not only am I singing now, but I will make up my mind to this, I have been sighing long enough, I will now sing. I have been groaning and complaining, now I will sing! I will sing unto the Lord.” I like this resolve, for it relates not only to present joy, but it is a resolution to project that joy throughout the whole of his life. “I will sing unto the Lord.” I trust that some of you will go out of the Tabernacle, tonight, saying, “Well, I will sing. Yes, I will. God helping me, I will. I will sing unto the Lord. I will sing at my work. I will sing on my bed. I will sing when I wake in the morning. I will sing when I go to bed at night. The Lord has put a new song into my mouth and I cannot keep it there; I must sing it out. I must sing His praises.” I am sure we will not try to stop you! We will encourage you to sing unto the Lord as much as possible.

There is not half enough singing in the world. The music of the early mornings in the country, at this time of the year, always seems to chide me. The birds are up and they wake us up, and when they are up, the first thing they do is to sing! And there is a kind of contention among them, each one tries to sing the most sweetly and the most loudly. And one calls to another and the other answers him. They sing as they fly and they sing as they build their nests! And they make such a wonderful chorus of song that it often astonishes us that such little creatures can make such cataracts, such Niagara of music as they pour forth from their tiny throats! Oh, that God’s people would sing more! I remember a servant who used to sing while she was at the washtub. Her mistress said to her, “Why, Jane, how is it that you are always singing?” She said, “It keeps bad thoughts away.” I remember an old Methodist brother who was pretty nearly eighty, and I never came across him, as he went along the street at a rather slow pace, without hearing him toot-tooting little bits of tunes as he walked. If you went by his door and heard a noise in his house, it was the old man singing! He never seemed to make any other noise but that of praising and blessing God. Oh, that we might do so continually!—

*“Sing a hymn to Jesus,
When the heart is faint!
Tell it all to Jesus,
Comfort or complaint,”*

and, when you have done that, sing another! And when you have finished that, sing another! Whether it is a hymn of comfort or complaint, still sing to the praise of His name and make this your resolution as you go out tonight, “I will sing unto the Lord, my God, as long as I live.”

There are the two photographs. Put them into your album and take care of them.

III. But how came this change to take place? What are THE CONNECTING LINKS BETWEEN THE MAN COMPLAINING AND THE MAN SINGING? How did No. 1 get to be No. 2? How did this howler become a singer? What process did he pass through?

If you read this 13th Psalm over again when you get home, you will notice that the first thing David

did was, *he pleaded with God*. He stated his case to the Lord. He mentioned the separate particulars of it and then he pleaded, "Consider and hear me, O Jehovah, my God: lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death." For you, mourners, the first step towards comfort is to go and *take the matter to your God*. You have Rabshakeh's letter in your pocket; it is a dreadful letter, enough to make you sad. While I have been preaching, you have been sighing to yourself, "Ah, me! When I get home, I shall be thinking about that letter. I shall be awake thinking of it." Some of you, who are rather of a nervous temperament, will let some little thing keep boring into you like an awl. You cannot get away from it. Now, I invite you to take that letter out of your pocket when you get home and spread it before the Lord. Many and many a time I have had great troubles; who can be the pastor of such a church without them? I have done my very best with the matter that has perplexed me and I have only made it worse and, at last, I have laid it before the Lord and prayed over it. And in such cases I have always said to myself, "I will never have anything to do with that matter again; I have done with it." I advise you to do the same. Cast your burden upon the Lord! Put it upon that shelf. But then if you take it down, again, what good have you done? No, leave it there! *Leave it there* and have done with it! The Lord will bring you out of the difficulty when you clear yourself of it. Do not go on hugging your trouble; take it to the Lord in prayer! If you have a solicitor and there is a suit at law, and the person against whom the suit is laid comes to you and says, "I want to hear what you are going to do," do not say anything to him, except, "I have left that with my solicitor. You must be so good as to see him. I refer you to him." If there are two of you to manage the business, one will be a fool, and I think I know who that one will be! Either do not have a solicitor and be your own lawyer, or else, if you have somebody to attend to the suit for you, let him do it! Why keep dogs and bark, yourself? So let it be in all things. If you lay the matter before God, then do not begin to take it on your own back, as well. That will be an absurdity! Although I made you smile, just now, by quoting an old proverb, I do seriously urge upon you, my friends, the impropriety of attempting to undertake a case which you have laid before God in prayer. Leave it there. If you have done so, let your Advocate see you through with the business. Come, beloved, you shall soon begin to change your mode of talking if you will go and tell your trouble to God, straight away. "Well, I shall see my brother, tomorrow." Do not see your brother; go and see your Father! "Oh, but I want to call in a friend!" That is what *I want you to do*, but not the friend you are thinking of; call in the Friend of friends! Tell Him everything about your trouble and your difficulty and when you have done that, have done with it and leave it with Him. You will, then, soon begin to sing.

The next thing is that David, having prayed and brought his cause before God, *trusted in the Lord*. This is the chief point. Read the 5th verse and you will see that the whole story is made plain; "I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation." I seem as if I could leave all you troubled saints, now, just to say to any sinner here who is in deep soul trouble, what you have said to yourself, "That first photograph was very like me. I cannot say that I am at all like the second one." No, but you will be like that second one if you will, from your heart, say this, "I have trusted in Your mercy." This is the remedy for the disease of sin, and for the disease of the heart; trust Jesus! There He hangs on yonder cross. Trust Him! "I cannot realize that He is mine," you say. Did I tell you to realize that? Trust Him! "Oh, but I do not feel as if I had a good heart to bring to Him." Did I tell you to bring Him *anything*? Trust Him! Trust Him! Trust Him! Oh, child of God, this is the lesson you need to learn; TRUST! Oh, old sinner, this is the essential lesson for you if you would enter into light of God and peace; TRUST! "I have so many sins." TRUST! "But I have such tendencies to sin." Trust Him to overcome those tendencies. "But I have tried." No, I did not say, *try*, but TRUST. "But I, I, I will try." No, do not *try*. I did not say, *try*. "Sir, I was going to say I will *try to trust*." I did not say *try* to trust! Trying to trust is the very reverse of trusting! If Christ is a liar, do not trust Him. If He is true, trust Him. If He cannot save you, do not trust Him, but as He is the Almighty Savior, trust Him. Oh, that I could shout that word loud as a thousand thunders speaking at once, TRUST! O soul, the way of the law is OBEY; a hard word, with which you cannot comply, for you are too weak. But the gospel way is trust, trust, TRUST! When you have learned that way, you shall afterwards learn how to obey and you shall obey through trusting! But the first thing is, trust! Is your leg broken, so that you can not walk? Lean on Him who can carry you. Have you a great weight? Lean hard, then. Is it greater than ever it was? Lean harder, then!

Trust, implicitly trust! As the blind man puts his hand into the hand of him who can see, that he may lead him, so trust in Jesus. Put your hand into the hand of Him who was crucified and trust Him tonight. There, you may put away that first photograph. You may sit down, now, if you have trusted, and we will take your likeness again, and I am sure your likeness will agree with the 6th verse, and you will say, "I will sing unto the Lord; I will go home singing! I have trusted. I have found salvation!" Lord, lead these people to trust You! Why can they not trust You? What have You ever done that they should doubt You? Lord Jesus, if I had a million souls, I would trust them all with You, fully persuaded that You could wash them all whiter than snow! Trust, then, beloved friends! Trust Jesus. God help you to trust, for Christ's sake! Amen.

A Lament for Charleston

[Otis W. Pickett](#), June 19, 2015

"Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

[Esther 4:13-14](#)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Please know that as I write this it is with an incredibly heavy heart and a heart still deep in mourning. Yesterday I spent the entire day in lament, with my brothers and sisters in Christ in prayer at a historic African American congregation in Jackson, MS (Mt. Helm Baptist Church) and then had a healing time processing these events with my brothers Carl Ellis, Mike Higgins and Jemar Tisby on the Reformed African American Network's podcast called *Pass the Mic*. You can check that out [here](#).

I was angry, I cried out to God with tears and mourning. I petitioned God to fix this and I ended the day with trust that God is sovereign, He is on His throne and that Jesus reigns. I trust that Satan will not have the day and that we, God's soldiers, are still waging war against hate, sin, racism and violence. We wage this war with love, hope, prayer, service, brotherhood and truth. While we wage this war we look symbolically to the East, as Gimli, Legolas and Aragorn looked for the first light on the third day in hopes of seeing Gandalf riding down the slopes of Rohan to their rescue at Helm's Deep. For we have one greater than Gandalf, a true hero, who is real, who will come and rescue us and ultimately remove evil and sin, death and destruction. As my friend the Rev. Curt Presley says "When death took on Jesus of Nazareth....He took on too much." This is what the Christian must cling to in the midst of these times. We must live as if this is true and "lean into" that truth as my brother Jemar Tisby is inclined to say. We must hope for a day when we will see:

"a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." [Revelation 21: 1-4](#)

However, in the present, I feel that this lament will go on for a while. I don't think it is something I will ever forget in my lifetime. I will share with my children and grandchildren where I was and what I did on July 18, 2015. I am not writing this piece to "comment" on this situation or to offer any insight that hasn't already been offered. I am writing because I believe God has been preparing me for such a time as this. He has been preparing me from my childhood for days like yesterday. I am only deeply saddened that it is this event, this tragic, hate-filled, terrorist act that the Lord is using my experiences, studies and even my childhood to speak up. I am someone who is a white male, grew up in Charleston, became a Christian in an African American Baptist church in Charleston, who went to high school across the street from Emanuel AME, who went to graduate school (History M.A.) at the College of Charleston (again...across the street from Emanuel AME), who was a graduate assistant at the Avery Center for African American History and Culture in Charleston, who has a heart for racial reconciliation in Charleston, who knows and loves the history, the city and the people there, who studied the African American religious history of Charleston, SC (at University of Mississippi) for his Ph.D and is now a member of a multiethnic PCA church in Jackson, MS. It has been pretty clear to me that God has called me not to be silent for such a time as this. Also, for me, writing is important in the process of lament. It is my hope that my words might provide some context, some hope, some encouragement, some hard truth and some vision for moving forward.

I wish to follow in the great footsteps of the Rev. John B. Adger, the Rev. John Lafayette Girardeau, Sarah and Angelina Grimke, my grandfather Dr. Otis W. Pickett, Jr., The Honorable J. Waties Waring, Armand Derfner, Ted Stern, Jack Bass and other white friends and advocates for African Americans in the city of Charleston. All

of these people have sacrificed something for the good of their African American brothers and sisters. All of those people have done far more than I have ever done or will ever do, but it is my hope that one day I will be counted among their number. It is my hope that white Christians in Charleston, across the South, and across the country would also want to stand up, speak, act and use whatever resources we have access to in order to be advocates for our African American brothers and sisters. I realize that there are also millions of interactions that go unseen. These are interactions that happen with teary-eyed hugs, moments of kindness, writing of checks, invitations into homes, holding hands in prayer and "behind closed door" kindness. These are the kind of actions that Christians are called to and I have witnessed them from white and African American Charlestonians for decades. Please know that there are many white Christians of good will in Charleston. However, many of these people and these interactions only God, and those involved in the interaction, will know about. Christian, do not expect the world to report on these events. You will not see them, but they are happening. I believe that there are hundreds of thousands of those kinds of interactions going on yesterday and today in Charleston. They will be happening over the next several weeks. I have hope that they will continue and will outnumber and overwhelm the actions of hate with actions of love. I also have hope that these lives will not be lost in vain and that God will use some good out of this action to continue to undo racism in our society.

Yet, I must also speak of a harder history. For to only mention the former would be like describing heaven to someone without also describing hell. There is a history of whites in Charleston who have sought to dehumanize, kill, rape, injure, murder, pillage, defame, degrade and demean our African Americans brothers and sisters for centuries. This began when the first African American slaves entered the port of Charleston and would spend a lifetime in degrading slavery: a slavery that dehumanized people to property and to treatment like animals for multiple generations. There was never any hope of freedom for many of these slaves, only a lifetime of bondage and constant fear and suffering. Words cannot describe what hell this life must have been like. There is a history of whites in Charleston that hanged Denmark Vesey and thirty five other members of Emanuel AME church in a farce suspected of a slave insurrection in a farce of a trial and many of those whites in Charleston later burned Emanuel AME because they didn't want African Americans congregating autonomously in worship spaces. There is a history of whites in South Carolina who murdered six African Americans in 1876 in what was called the Hamburg Massacre. Those white men in Hamburg were charged, but never tried. In 1877, whites began systematically removing the vote from African Americans in South Carolina through violence and intimidation. In the late 1890s, South Carolinians began segregating schools, hospitals, neighborhoods, worship spaces and work spaces thus relegating African Americans to the lowest and meanest forms of labor.

There is a history of whites in South Carolina, who participated in lynching of African Americans, and of whites in Charleston who sought to deny African Americans their constitutional rights to participate as first class citizens. There is a history of whites in South Carolina who murdered three young African Americans in 1968 in Orangeburg, SC, (in what is called the Orangeburg Massacre) injuring twenty eight others. Finally, as of June 17, 2015, we have added yet another massacre to the list: The Emanuel AME Massacre of 9 brothers and sisters in Christ. This is disturbing on many levels because it is not only a mass shooting (something we have grown too accustomed to in America over the last few decades), but also a targeted, racially driven attack on African Americans. On yet another level, this should also hit close to home for any Christian as we are now entering a time in Christendom across the world where Christians are being murdered, beheaded and slaughtered. This is disturbing on many, many levels. The only bible verse I can think to describe a reaction to this is [John 11:35](#)...."Jesus wept."

I add the Emanuel AME massacre to the history because it is a terrorist crime of hate specifically targeting African Americans. I remember giving a tour one day at the Avery Center for African American History and Culture and I was talking about the center's historical display interpreting violence, through the institution of slavery, against African Americans in South Carolina. One older African American gentleman in the group stopped me and he said something I will never forget. He said, "Otis, I want you to know that terrorism against this country and its citizens did not start on September 11, 2001. It started in the murder and lynching of my African American relatives who were American citizens in the 1890s." He was absolutely right.

We must not, as white Charlestonians, South Carolinians, Americans and Christians, explain away Dylann Roof as a lone, crazy, mentally disturbed individual on drugs. As Christians, we must see this as evil. It is hate, it is evil and all people, because they are sinners, are capable of such evil. There is real evil and sin in this world and it manifested itself on June 17, 2015. One of my African American pastor friends asked this question, which I think really touches on this issue. He asked "Just asking: Why don't we Americans say Arab suicide bombers must've had mental illness issues when they terrorized a community?"[1] Or why is it that ISIS is evil and white, racist terrorists are mentally unstable? How else, but through racial hatred, can one describe shooting nine people, with heads bowed in prayer and letting a woman live so she could hear him say "Yes. You are raping our women and taking over the country." Dylan Roof then "took aim at the oldest person present, Susie Jackson, 87" and according to Mr. Sanders's aunt, "[Mr. Sanders told the man to point the gun at him instead, but the man said, 'It doesn't matter. I'm going to shoot all of you'.](#)"

As Americans, South Carolinians and Charlestonians, we have to realize that this evil started somewhere, was cultivated somewhere and was supported by people in Dylann Roof's life. Yes, Dylann is a sinner and capable of this and it started in his heart ("The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." [Genesis 6:5](#)), that is clear. What is unclear is how the structures in place around him (parents, family networks, schools, government institutions, and culture, media, peer networks and symbols) allowed a sinful disposition of racism to grow and cultivate in his heart to the point that he became determined to kill African Americans in prayer. In order to understand how this hatred was promoted, we must recognize that this young man grew up in a state with a history of racial violence and with a history of racism. If we recognize this then we must also know that in some way this culture and history contributed to a cultivation and refinement of racism and violence in his heart and mind. I say refinement because he was able to make connections between the confederate flag license plate on his [car](#) to [apartheid flags](#) of South Africa and Rhodesia. For those that are not aware, many southern segregationists, like South Carolinian and former Dixiecrat candidate Strom Thurmond, talked openly about [supporting Rhodesia](#).

Indeed, there are structures still in place in the State of South Carolina that augment and buttress the opinions of individuals with racist views. When young children grow up in South Carolina and are not taught about the history of the flag, what it stood for during the Lost Cause era and during the Civil Rights movement, then they do not realize that for the last one hundred and fifty years that flag stood for individuals who supported slavery, segregation, racism and hatred. If parents or teachers do not correctly provide the frameworks and context for children to understand what these images mean then children end up accepting the message of these images along the lines of how their community, family and friends interpret the flag. Many times you hear things like, "This is our heritage. No Yankee (and a Yankee can be anyone who is non-white and not from that person's particular hometown. I have heard of Charlestonians referring to North Carolinians as Yankees and people from one county in Pickens, SC calling people over in Oconee, SC county a Yankee. Anyone determined by a small group of people to be an "other," in any way can be a Yankee) is going to come down here and tell me I can't fly this flag." This kind of attitude and speech can send the wrong signals to white children who trust their family and peer networks deeply and sometimes see teachers, professors, African Americans and non-South Carolinians as liberal outsiders who want to "defeat" them by taking away their beloved images. I don't think it is too much of a stretch to say that Dylann Roof may have heard utterances like the ones I mentioned above. If you grow up in South Carolina...you hear stuff like that and there are images and vestiges of this all over the place including Confederate flags, streets and buildings named after segregationists.

Worse, this culture can begin to captivate the church and biblical doctrine into what Dr. Carl Ellis calls "Christianity-ism" or "anti-Christian institutions couched in Christian terminology." The KKK is famous for this as is the Lost Cause movement and segregationists in the 1950s and 60s who used biblical terminology to defend segregation, intermarriage between African Americans and whites (then called amalgamation) and to prevent African Americans from joining white churches. Many hate groups today justify their activities and beliefs in abhorrent mis-interpretations of the bible and of Christian theology. Since Christianity is woven into the fabric of South Carolina culture it is impossible sometimes to separate the two. The culture informs the religion and sometimes the religion informs the culture. However, we must recognize that the institution of

slavery and how white Christians dehumanized African Americans for centuries can color the lenses of how many Christians in America view race. We must understand that the church has been culturally captive and had lost its prophetic voice in the late eighteenth century to speak into how the culture at the time viewed African Americans. The church would continue to lose its prophetic voice to speak against slavery, segregation, violence and mistreatment of African Americans up until very recently. The church must regain its prophetic voice and Christians must speak into the culture declaring "African Americans are our brothers and sisters; they have value, dignity and their lives matter." We must do everything we can, especially in light of our failures in history, to do everything to ensure that society values our brothers and sisters and that we can make sure that institutions within our society not mistreat them in any way because of their race.

Finally, the message this can also send to young South Carolinians, who might be developing racist views toward African Americans because of the images, structures and rhetoric surrounding them is that they can "make daddy (or whoever they are hearing racist language from) proud" and stand up to the perceived threat through displaying a "southern honor" by violence (If you haven't yet read Bertram Wyatt-Brown's wonderful history of this called *Southern Honor* then I would encourage you to do so). The father of Dylann Roof gave him a gun on his twenty first birthday after the young man had just been arrested. Is it too much of a leap to say that the culture of racism and violence surrounding him might have given him the worldview possible to begin down a long road of racist thoughts and hatred cultivated in his heart over time, which would ultimately lead to murder.

Indeed, there is a long, long history of "honor" violence in South Carolina's history and much of that still runs in the culture and mannerisms of white "red faced, hot blooded and fire eating" South Carolinians. There is a reason why South Carolinians like Preston Brooks and Ben "Pitchfork" Tillman are the only legislators to have started fights on the floor of the U.S. Senate (Preston Brooks almost beat abolitionist Charles Sumner to death with a cane in 1856). There is a reason why South Carolina seceded first, wanted to secede in the 1830s over the Tariff of Abominations, why it was the first to fire shots on Union territory (Fort Sumter) in 1860 and why one state representative described it as a place "too small to be a republic and too big to be an insane asylum."

Violent honor culture is not only limited to South Carolina, but for decades South Carolina has defined it. Charlestonians and South Carolinians need to stop saying "this massacre doesn't reflect our state and our city" and own the fact that "we have a long history of racial violence, that we continue to facilitate racial violence by not removing symbols of hate and fail at appropriately educating our citizens to deal with and walk through our troubled past openly and honestly." It is time to just own it.

In terms of moving forward, the state of Mississippi has been incredibly blessed by institutes working for Racial Reconciliation (<http://winterinstitute.org>), Mission Mississippi, the oldest organization working for Racial Reconciliation in the country (www.missionmississippi.net), and through the very powerful work of multiethnic churches like Voice of Calvary, Redeemer Jackson (PCA) and One Church. Mississippi still has a long way to go, but I believe it is much better equipped to deal with questions on race because they have been dealing with it for so long and have developed paid positions for people to think through these issues, provide resources to the state and its leaders in government and to push the conversation forward. I also cannot begin to say what a blessing being a member of a multi-ethnic church has been. I think we need to support the development of multi-ethnic churches, the support of education for African American teaching elders and to see multi-ethnicity as a biblical issue, not just a cultural one.

May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have mercy on us and may our Lord and savior Jesus Christ shepherd us through this time and may we lean into the truth of Revelation 21 and actually live today like we believe it is true.

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