

Lamenting injustice (Psalm 13)

How long, O Lord?

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Psalm 13 fits a typical pattern for psalms of lament: an invocation and complaint, a petition, and a statement of trust and words of praise. Like all good liturgical language, it transcends its time and place to be a source of comfort to many. Its language is spare enough to fit many situations: illness or death, physical and metaphorical enemies, despair and suffering of various kinds.

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

For months I carry this refrain around in the back of my mind as I go about my work in affordable housing and homelessness services. I carry these words with me as I research the effects of housing discrimination on people of color in my community.

With my head bowed over my computer, I assemble presentation slides of two maps. The first shows neighborhoods that were redlined by federally backed mortgage programs in the 1930s and 40s. The second shows rates of poverty by neighborhood nearly a century later, and the maps line up exactly. As I stare into these maps I voice lament over the decades-long injustice of it all.

How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

The lament lingers as I learn that business innovation by Black entrepreneurs, when measured in patent filings, peaked in the late 1800s and early 1900s—and lynchings

of Black Americans peaked a couple of decades later. Black business innovation has never been the same.

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

Reading Isabel Wilkerson's *The Warmth of Other Suns*, I am reminded yet again of how the racial wealth gap only seems to grow in this country: "The layers of accumulated assets built up by [better-paid whites] generation after generation, would factor into a wealth disparity of white Americans having an average net worth ten times that of black Americans by the turn of the twenty-first century."

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long must I bear pain in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

The psalmist found a way to turn the corner from despair and lament toward hope and gratitude. But I am not yet sure how to turn this corner. In this season I stay with my lament over the inequities in housing and wealth-building that racist systems have created. I lament the persistence of these systems over decades and centuries.

The psalmist's plea lingers in my soul. It lingers as I read and learn. It lingers as I stand before congregations and people of goodwill. It lingers in my daily work.

How long, O Lord?