

From Anguish to Assurance

Psalm 6

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Who do you turn to when you're fearful or experiencing tremendous sorrow and grief? If you are married, hopefully you can turn to your spouse. Perhaps you can turn to a trusted family member or a trusted church member to share how you're feeling. However, what if you are truly alone and have no one to talk to? Where do you go then?

What about this situation? Have you ever been in circumstances where your pain was so deep you had no words? What do you do when your tears are your only prayers?

Friends, Psalm 6 is a window into the soul of someone who has been there. It is a Psalm that King David wrote when he was in deep distress. It's a prayer soaked in sorrow, filled with regret, yet anchored in hope.

In Psalm 6, King David was in great anguish. He was in a dark valley with seemingly no way out. Dark words were being whispered in his heart in that dark place. Those words compounded his darkness of the pain in his heart and mind. It was as if he struggled to breathe because the pressures of life were pressing down on him and suffocating him. Have you ever been where David was?

Like Psalm 5, David opens his spiritual journal and lets us read his painful thoughts and emotions. They are more than just a confession. Psalm 6 is a raw and honest cry from someone who feels God's discipline, wrestles with physical and emotional suffering, and still dares to hope in God's mercy. Friends, all of us, at some point, will experience this kind of sadness, grief, or brokenness over sin. It is just unavoidable.

To prepare us for those moments lets dig into Psalm 6. Psalm 6 is one of the seven *penitential psalms*. This means it is a *psalm of repentance*. We don't have any historical context to tell us why David felt the way he felt. All we know is that David was stretched to the breaking point in his life.

I don't know if you noticed but there is a superscription with this Psalm and it tells us that David wrote it. FYI: *Superscriptions* are not inspired, but they are helpful. Sometimes they give us historical context surrounding the writing of the Psalm.

The superscription of Psalm 6 says it is to be "*according to the sheminith.*" *Sheminith* literally means "*an eighth.*" Most likely, it is referring to an eight-stringed instrument or a kind of tuning of the instrument.

There are four stanzas in Psalm 6. *Each stanza teaches us how to respond when it seems like God is silent and we are drowning in our pain and sorrow.* With that being said, let's walk through Psalm 6. I have four application points to walk us through the Psalm. These points help us learn how to respond to God in these dark painful moments in life.

I. In anguish, cry out for grace and mercy (vv. 1-3)

Notice how David began his prayer in v. 1. It was a desperate plea:

O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger nor discipline me in your wrath.

David knows he's sinned. He doesn't deny his guilt. He recognizes God's authority to discipline him. Then in v. 2, he's asks for grace. He pleads that it would come with compassion in order to relieve his suffering that seems to never end.

Look at what he says in vv. 2-3:

I am languishing... my bones are troubled... my soul also is greatly troubled . . .

LORD – how long?

In the Hebrew language, body parts are metaphors that represent emotional responses. When David said his "*bones are troubled,*" he meant the very foundation of his life is shaken to the core.

Then, in v. 3, he intensifies what he means when he says, “*his soul is greatly troubled.*” For the Hebrew people, the “*soul*” encompassed the whole life of the person.

David described the pain in his heart with very evocative language. He was in pain because of the sin he had committed or due to some tribulation in his life that had stunned him to the very core. It was like he experienced an emotional earthquake.

In his commentary on the Psalms, Pastor Allen Ross says:

*So the psalmist was weak, terrified, and anxious; his suffering at the hands of his enemies had wreaked havoc with his health and well-being. What made it so frustrating was that the LORD was silent and apparently willing to let him languish in pain and depression. He knew his suffering was divine discipline, so all he could do was appeal for a gracious deliverance.*¹

Have you ever been there? Have you ever gotten some news that simply made you physically sick, like it was bringing your life to an end? Have you ever been so spiritually crushed and emotionally undone that you felt like giving up? This was David’s condition, and he held nothing back as he went to the LORD in prayer. He didn’t pretend to be okay.

If you read Psalm 6 carefully, you find the shadow of the cross in David’s words. Jesus is the embodiment of this verse as He prepared to die on the cross. We can hear Jesus when He cried out, according to John 12:27,

“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.”

Friends, Jesus has been in this place of pain, but He didn’t cry out in this kind of pain because of His sin. Instead, Jesus was in this place of horrible pain where the foundation of His life was being destroyed because of our sin. Here’s the bottom line: *He bore our sins in His body on the cross so that in our great anguish because of sin or some other misery, we can cry out to God for mercy and grace.*

Friends, because of the person and work of Jesus, we can pour out our anguished, honest prayers to God. We don’t have to clean up our lives or language before we bring our prayers to Him. God invites the brokenhearted to draw near to Him in their anguish.

II. With expectancy, pray based on God’s faithful love (vv. 4-5)

Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love. ⁵ For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?

Did you catch what David prayed in v. 4? Listen to it again:

Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love.

Let’s press pause on this verse for just a moment and ask the question: *Why should God help David?* It is certainly not because David deserves it. It is not because he is sinless. It is not because of David’s power and position as the king. However, it is because of God’s *steadfast covenant love*. David doesn’t appeal to God based on his merit. Instead, he appeals to God’s “*chesed.*” That is God’s *steadfast faithful covenant love*.

This is one of the points I made in last Sunday’s sermon. So, you may ask, “*Why do we need to hear this point again?*” It is because the text repeats this point in God’s word for one very amazing reason – we have what is called “*gospel amnesia.*” In our lives, we repeatedly forget to press into the covenant grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we work through the Psalms, the psalmists will repeatedly appeal to God’s covenant love. God’s covenant of grace is a thread that is woven into the very redemptive tapestry of these poems and songs. The covenant love of God is key to understanding how to relate to God in the darkest moments of your life.

However, as we study the Psalms, we must remember it is not the Old Covenant that we look back to, but we look to the New Covenant that Jesus established in His blood. Jesus fulfilled all of the Old Covenant. Everything

¹ Allen Ross, *Psalms 1-41*, 264.

in the Old Covenant pointed to Jesus, and now we find the steadfast love of God in the person and work of Jesus on the cross and by His resurrection from the dead. It is the covenant of grace in the gospel that we must remember. Yet, because of our *gospel amnesia* we continually forget to apply the grace of God given to us in Christ.

So, now that we have established our covenant relationship with God based on His steadfast love seen in Jesus here's what we need to see next. Listen to v. 4 again:

Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love.

Friends, we find two turnings of the life of faith in v. 4. First, there is the turning of God to us and, second, there is our turning to Jesus in repentance and faith. The second turning is not possible unless the LORD first turns to us. 2 Timothy 2:25 tells us that we can't turn to God in repentance unless He grants it to us.

Here in v. 4, David cried out to God and asks Him to *turn to him and save him*. This is the cry of repentance that was granted to King David.

Next, David even pleads his case by saying,

"For in death there is no remembrance of you..."

David is concerned that if God doesn't give him saving grace and he dies in his sin, he can't praise and give glory to God. David makes a powerful appeal to God's glory in v. 5 as the reason to save His life. His appeal was to God's character of grace and glory. In other words, David is saying,

Turn and rescue me, Lord, for the sake of your great glory. If I am gone from this earth, who will recount your praise? Lord, what I want most in this situation is for you to bring glory to yourself. I want the pain to end, of course. Please rescue me, because I am about to break. But save me so that I can tell others about your great glory and power. At the end of the day, this is about you. Lord, whatever brings you glory is for my good.²

Now, let's think about v. 5 on this side of Jesus' death and resurrection. Here's the deal: Death was the last great enemy that Jesus destroyed when He rose from the dead.

Brothers and sisters, we will apply v. 5 when we take the Lord's Supper at the conclusion of the message. In the Lord's Supper, we will see the great reversal as we take the bread and the juice in *remembrance of Jesus' death on the cross*. Now, we glorify God because Jesus' death and His resurrection from the dead reminds us how He reversed the curse of sin. Friends, for those in Christ, death doesn't end our praise of God but only increases it. As Revelation 7:9-10 says,

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Friends, death may silence your voice among the living, but because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, it will not silence your voice for all eternity. Praise the Lord while you can in this life, and know that your death will not rob you of your ability to glorify God for all eternity.

So, in your struggle with sin and in your suffering, you can pray with expectancy knowing that God will deliver you for His praise and glory in this life or because of His steadfast love you will glorify Him before His throne in Heaven. Friends, because of the person and work of Christ, our death, as believers, is now the eternal remembrance of God's glory seen in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. So, we can pray with expectancy knowing God has already delivered us.

III. In sorrow, pray in brokenness before the LORD (vv. 6-7)

² James A. Johnston, *Preaching the Word Series: Psalms 1-41*, 79.

I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. ⁷ My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes.

Have you ever cried until you couldn't cry anymore? David used the literary device of poetic hyperbole (exaggeration) to communicate his pain. He didn't write these words to be dramatic. It was an honest prayer. His pain was relentless. His body was breaking down. He was depressed. He was anxious. His enemies seemed to be gaining ground against him. Finally, his sin was constantly being replayed in his mind.

And yet, what does he do? He prayed as his eyes flowed with tears. He soaked his bed with his tears. He had wept so much that it was as though his eyes had dissolved in their sockets. Now, he sits in his dark grief on his couch and weeps as he lifts his voice to heaven.

Commenting on vv. 6-7, Old Testament scholar Christopher Ash observed that King David prayed in *anticipation*, but Jesus prayed these words in *fulfillment*. You see, Jesus endured the deepest grief known to humankind because He understood that the hostility of His enemies toward Him was actually the wrath of God falling on Him for their sin and our sin.³ Jesus endured what He endured so that we will not go through these seasons of darkness and depression alone.

Listen, we've all had times or seasons where perhaps the physical pain or the grief is so great that we can't even get out of bed and get dressed. We're so tired that we can't even get in the car to go to work. We are too exhausted to clean the house or mow the yard. We feel so heavy with depression that we feel like we can't even get in the car to go to church. We're so burdened that we feel like we can't read the Bible. And finally, we feel too exhausted and lifeless to pray. This may be you this morning.

Here's what vv. 6-7 teach us. Friends, the prayer of faith doesn't always sound strong—it sometimes sounds like weak sobs. The prayer of faith doesn't always come out with beautiful, academic words that sound like carefully crafted theology. Sometimes it is simply a groan and moan of the Holy Spirit praying on our behalf. Listen, the bottom line is that we can come before the LORD in our brokenness and pray. This leads us to our last point as we move from *anguish to assurance* in prayer.

IV. In assurance, believe the LORD heard your prayers (vv. 8-10)

Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. ⁹ The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer. ¹⁰ All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled; they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.

Did you notice how the tone of Psalm 6 shifts? David said, "*Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard...*" He didn't say, "*I'm so glad I prayed this way because now I feel better.*" Instead, in v. 9, David said,

The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer.

Friends, David's circumstances didn't change. However, his heart changed. Now, he has confidence, not in himself, not in his prayer, or that he had resolved the situation. His assurance is in God.

What's the difference? David, by faith, knows God has heard his prayer. That's it. There is no miracle yet. There is no victory yet. David simply has *assurance* that God has heard his prayer, and that's enough to strengthen David as he faces his enemies. His *anguish* over his sin and suffering has been changed to *assurance* that he has been forgiven and that the LORD was with him as he faced his enemies.

There are two of eschatological implications to these last three verses. First, Jesus spoke v. 8 at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. As he concluded the sermon He said,

"Depart from me all you workers of evil"

³ Christopher Ash, *The Psalms: A Christ-centered Commentary*, Vol. 2, *Psalms 1-50*, 70.

In Matthew 7:23, Jesus told us that at the end of time, all will stand before Him and be judged. Before His Judgment Seat, He will banish all those who are false disciples with essentially the exact words of v. 8. In Matthew 7:2, Jesus said,

“And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

So, Jesus tapped into Psalm 6:8 when He concluded His Sermon on the Mount. In His conclusion, He calls us all to look forward to the Day of Judgment when we will all give an account of our lives to Him. He calls us to know that He will one day eradicate His New Heavens and New Earth of all evil. Everything will be made new and sin and evil will no longer be with us.

Second, Christopher Ash observes the eschatological implications of v. 10. He says, and I agree with him, that the little phrase at the very end of v. 10, *“in a moment,”* is the same phrase the Apostle Paul used in 1 Corinthians 15:52 when he described Jesus' return. Paul says Jesus' return will happen in the *“twinkling of an eye”* or *“in a moment.”* If you summarize the Apostle Paul's teaching, concerning the Day of Judgment, in effect, he says:

Sudden destruction will come upon them (in a moment) . . . [so that] every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.⁴

His point is that when Jesus' returns His judgment will be swift and final. Those who have trusted in Christ will be saved to their reward and those who failed to turn to Jesus in faith and repentance will be treated as His enemies and be put to eternal shame and suffering.

Friends, *penitential psalms* were written to teach us how to humble ourselves and consider our suffering as a warning to continually repent and return to the Lord Jesus. The Reformer, Martin Luther, said that God is *“a good persuader of the soul.”* He uses our suffering to warn us and remind us of how great the punishment is for those who do not wish to turn to God.

God can use this kind of anguish and distress of the heart, soul, and life so that in faith we turn to Him and find assurance, peace, and hope in our anguish. Listen, if you have ever experienced the anguish of your life under the well-deserved discipline of the Lord, you can find hope when you come to the Man of Sorrows who, in all His anguish, atoned for your sin on the cross.⁵ Trust in Him.

However, Psalm 6 creates an obstacle for us. And here it is: It is tough to pray when you feel like your prayers are not being heard. It is tough to pray when your heart is broken. It is tough to pray when you feel like you are wallowing in the mire of unconfessed sin. It is tough to pray when you are depressed and filled with fear and anxiety. It is tough to pray when you're exhausted by the circumstances and situations that leave you feeling drained. It is tough to pray when it seems like the Lord will for your situation is different than your will. I get it. What are we to do when this is the air we breathe?

What's the solution? Psalm 6 also teaches us how to behold Jesus in our sin and sorrow. Friends, in Jesus, we have a Savior who has walked this road and endured the deepest of sufferings for our sins so that when we are overwhelmed with our sins and with life, we can behold Him as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

He is the One who prayed for us when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane. It was because of our sin that He was under the wrath of God and He was experiencing God's wrath in ways we will never comprehend. He endured His suffering alone so that we would never be alone. The Lord heard His prayer in the Garden but didn't remove His wrath from Jesus so that we would always be heard by our Father in Heaven. Jesus' life *“wasted away”* on the cross so that we would never have to waste away under God's wrath for our sin. Bottom line is this: When

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 5:3; Philippians 2:10-11.

⁵ Ash, 73.

you are experiencing the discipline of God for sin in your life or suffocating under suffering because of your own foolishness or due to the evil of other, I hope you don't have *gospel amnesia*.

Friends, remember Jesus and fix your eyes on Him because for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorned its shame so that you would never be ashamed in God's presence.

The 19th-century Scottish pastor, Andrew Bonar, understood what it meant for Christians to behold Jesus in Psalm 6. He wrote:

David may have been led . . . to write [this psalm] when in anguish of soul, as well as suffering of body . . . But surely he meant to tell of the One greater than David, – “the Man of sorrows.” Perhaps David had some seasons of anguish in his wanderings in the wilderness of Judah that furnished a shadow of the grief of Him who was to come, “bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows.” Awakened souls experience horror of should and alarming apprehensions of divine indignation, such as this Psalm expresses . . . Still, it is chiefly of the true David that this is written. We may suppose every word used by Him in some of those nights which He passed in desert places, or in the garden of Gethsemane.⁶

⁶ Andrew Bonar, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms*.