



**Title: Story and Song – Psalm 6**

**Text: Psalm 6**

**Date: July 17, 2022**

**Main Idea:** When God's people bring their agony to Him, He hears.

## **Personal Study Guide**

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**READ ENTIRE TEXTS: PSALM 6**

## **Highlight – What stands out?**

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1. What words and phrases show how David is feeling?



- Thanksgiving – the life that is delivered
- Praise/Hymn – the life that is content

1. Based on these explanations above, what kind of psalm is this one? How would you explain your answer?

2. The ESV Study Bible points out that Psalm 6 is an “individual lament” of David “that is often included in the ‘Penitential Psalms.’” The passage does not specify what is troubling David—it does not tell us why he says “rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath” in verse 1, but God’s anger is clearly on his mind. Read the following passages to remind yourself of the trials that David faced because of his failings before the Lord.

- 1 Chronicles 13
- 1 Chronicles 21:1-8, 14-18
- 2 Samuel 11:1-5, 14-27, 12:15-19
- 2 Samuel 12:1-14, 20-22

3. Again, Psalm 6 does not tell us *why* David is in agony, but in verse 4 he asks the Lord to deliver him from it. In that verse, what characteristic of God does David appeal to? Let’s look at examples of how this played out elsewhere in David’s life:

- 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-13
- 1 Samuel 18:8-11, 19:9-10
- 1 Samuel 23:25-28
- 2 Samuel 7:8-16
- 2 Samuel 23:1-5
- Psalm 5:7
- Psalm 13:5-6
- Psalm 58:9-10
- Psalm 89:19-24

4. By the end of the psalm, how does David feel about his request? What does he expect from God?

## **Apply – How does this change me?**

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1. In this psalm of disorientation, meaning a psalm that talks about what life in this broken world is like, David cries out to God about his anguish. How does this compare to how you pray when you are deeply troubled?
2. Not only does David cry out to God with his true, deep emotions, he expects that God will accept his words and not turn him away. Do you feel like you can express your hardest feelings to God? Why or why not?
3. How can we be certain, like David, that God hears our prayers? The following passages may be helpful reminders:
  - Matthew 6:5-6
  - Luke 11:5-13
  - Romans 8:14-16, 26-28
  - Hebrews 4:14-16
  - Hebrews 5:7-10
  - 1 John 5:14-15
4. Hebrews 12:7 offers us comfort should we feel stricken like David because of our sin. What is that comfort?

## **Respond – What’s my next step?**

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1. How can you grow in bringing all things, even your hardest feelings, before the Lord?
  
2. Spend some time praying and reflecting. Is there anything, any hurt or sin or request you felt was “too big,” that you have yet to bring to God in prayer?

## **Commentary: Taken from “The Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life” by Dale Ralph Davis**

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### **6**

#### **WET PRAYER**

#### ***PSALM 6***

*For the music leader. With stringed instruments.  
Upon the sheminith. A psalm of David.*

- 1 Yahweh, don’t rebuke me in your wrath!  
Don’t chasten me in your hot anger!
- 2 Show grace to me, Yahweh, for I am withering;  
heal me, Yahweh, for my bones are terrified.
- 3 Yes, my soul is greatly terrified!  
But you, Yahweh—how long?
- 4 Turn back, Yahweh, rescue my life;  
save me because of your covenant love.
- 5 For in death no one remembers you;  
in Sheol who gives you praise?

- 6 I have become weary because of my groaning;  
all night long I make my bed swim,  
I dissolve my couch in my tears.
- 7 My eye has wasted away because of grief;  
it has grown old because of all my foes.
- 8 Turn away from me, all workers of wickedness!  
For Yahweh has heard the sound of my weeping!
- 9 Yahweh has heard my plea for grace!  
Yahweh will accept my prayer!
- 10 Let them be ashamed,  
Yes, let all my enemies be greatly terrified!  
Let them turn back,  
let them be ashamed all of a sudden!

Many of us are likely familiar with the 'ACTS' pattern for prayer: adoration-confession-thanksgiving-supplication. Not a bad guide, especially since it stresses that prayer is more than petition. But sometimes our neat formulas have to be smashed. It just won't do for us to stand on the sidelines here at the first verse of Psalm 6 and scold David with 'No, no, you can't do that; you forgot—that's supplication, and you have to save that for last.' Sometimes emergencies demand that we ditch recommended patterns. Sometimes we have to plunge right in with petition. As David does here. Let's track our way through this prayer, for it too teaches us to pray.

### The agony he knows

Looking at the psalm from David's vantage point, we first run into the agony he knows (vv. 1–3). These verses constitute a sort of this-is-the-mess-I'm-in section. What is it that feeds his agony?

Probably the *problem of wrath* (v. 1). 'Don't rebuke me in your wrath! Don't chasten me in your hot anger!' Some think that David may only be saying that he doesn't want God to be angry that he is bringing this matter (his need for God's intervention) up again in prayer. However, I think it more probable that there may be some sin that God is chastening him for—or that David thinks that God is chastening him for. And David does not want Yahweh to deal with him severely but to moderate his anger. We'll come back to this.

He mentions the *problem of weakness* (v. 2): 'I am withering.' He is wiped out with it all. It's difficult to know sometimes whether these descriptions are literal and physical or mostly metaphorical and figurative. Verses 6–7 seem to point to some degree of physical exhaustion. Add to this the *problem of fear* (vv. 2b–3a). The verb in the text is not merely 'dismayed' or 'troubled' but rather 'terrified.' Both bones (2b) and soul (3a) are in this state—hence the whole person is terrified. What causes this terror? From the psalm it might be the

disfavor of God (v. 1) or sickness (v. 2, 'withering ... heal me') or the threats of enemies (vv. 8, 10)—or maybe all of the above.

And the *problem of time* contributes to his agony (v. 3b). This is one of our perennial problems with God's ways. We have our calendar. We have figured about how long we can hold out. And somehow Yahweh allows our urgent deadlines to pass. Why? David's 'How long?' means: How long will you allow this to go on? Why don't you intervene and give me relief? Why does he wait? Why does he hold off? When we say God will intervene sooner or later, why does it always seem to be later? Our troubles, it seems, are as much with God as with our circumstances.

But perhaps the most pressing of these matters is whether one is under the displeasure of God (v. 1). Is there any agony like the loss of the friendship of God? What can Yahweh's servant do when he is under Yahweh's wrath? Simply pray as in verse 2: 'Show grace to me, Yahweh ...; heal me, Yahweh.' You go to the Bringer of wrath with a plea for grace. Where else can one go?

My father would tell of a particular occasion (as opposed to others!) when he spanked my oldest brother. Walt was a toddler and, for some apparently just reason, he came under the sway of the parental hand. My father was a pastor and had his study at the house. After the spanking he went back to his work. After a while, Walt came round the corner, into the study, crawled up on Pop's lap, put his arms around him and said: 'Papa, I love you.' I don't think we need to say that was 'sweet' or 'precious.' I think we need to think about how he was thinking. He seemed to be assuming, instinctively perhaps, that the hand that had struck him would nevertheless welcome him. Perhaps that's what drives David's plea in verse 2—he knows that the God who strikes him is often a 'striking and healing' God (Isa. 19:22).

### The argument he brings

Secondly, we should notice the argument he brings (vv. 4–7). David both brings his petitions to God and presses his reasons upon God; in the middle of the emergency he argues his case; he tells Yahweh why he should and must deliver him.

The first argument has to do, David might say, with *the God I have*: 'save me because of your covenant love' (v. 4). This is an argument that rests on the character of God. 'Covenant love' here is *hesed*, the devoted love that pledges never to let go of us. David praises Yahweh for this in 2 Samuel 22:51; there he says that Yahweh is 'the tower of deliverance for his king, the One who keeps acting with devoted love [*hesed*] toward his anointed, to David and to his seed for all time.' True to his promise in 2 Samuel 7, Yahweh had brought nations to acknowledge David's supremacy (2 Sam. 22:44–9). This, of course, is simply a particular application of Yahweh's faithful character, for he is 'rich in *hesed* and fidelity' toward all his covenant people (Exodus 34:6). We might paraphrase David's petition as: 'Save me for you have pledged yourself to deal lovingly with

me and I am holding you to your word.' It's an argument that rests on God's promise, or even beneath that, on his character.

Peter Collier tells of Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.; he had been in World War I and came back to fight in World War II as well. He was one of the few fighting generals the Americans had. He had been in North Africa and Italy, and then on the eve of D-Day he demanded that General Eisenhower allow him to go ashore with the first wave of attack at Utah Beach. He was fifty-seven years old, crippled with arthritis, having to use a cane to get around—and he wanted to hit Utah Beach. What was his argument? 'My men expect it of me. I'm the son of Theodore Roosevelt.' One could paraphrase: 'I have to—it's who I am; it's part of my character.'

That is David's argument here. He is resting in Yahweh's character, in the sort of God he had declared himself to be. Sometimes this is your only stay in trouble—simply what God has said about himself and about what he will do. Which suggests how massively important the doctrine of God is for the Christian life.

David's second argument centers on *the praise I give* (v. 5): 'For in death no one remembers you, in Sheol who gives you praise?' The verb 'remembers' has to do with expressing praise in worship, as the next line of this verse makes clear. Sheol is the realm of the dead. This may make you antsy, but let me paraphrase what I think his argument is. It's as if he is saying: If I die, if I succumb, if my enemies get me, if you do not deliver me, there will be one less to praise you, for I won't be able to sing 'Praise ye the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation' among your people; they don't sing 'O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing' in Sheol; dead folks don't get up and sing 'Let us love and sing and wonder, let us praise the Savior's name!' Now, let's not get on 'rabbit trails' here: this verse does not mean David had no hope beyond death, nor is it some form of bribery. Let us think about verse 5 in terms of what he is *assuming* here.

Assumptions are frequently revealing. Some time ago I was on the campus of a prominent evangelical seminary and while in one of the buildings decided to use the men's room. After I had washed my hands in the lavatory and reached for a piece of paper towel, I was startled by a sign attached to the towel dispenser: 'Please do not flush paper towels in the toilet.' Now I knew *why* the maintenance department did not want paper towels flushed down the toilet—they would clog up the drain; they were not intended to be disposed of that way. I began to think: Why was such a sign necessary? Why would anyone commit such an offense anyway since one would have to take the trouble to walk away from the waste paper container and go back to the toilets in order to do so? What was this sign saying about the propensities of the future pastors of evangelical churches in my country? Assumptions are revealing.

Now that is the case here. When David so much as says, If I end up in Sheol, I can't sing your praise, he is assuming that the whole purpose of his life is to praise Yahweh. That is a bit searching. Oh, I know in one way someone could say this is 'old hat,' because we have our cliché in our prayers about giving God

all the glory, etc.; but this cuts deeper and is no cliché. This agonized prayer then tells you that your whole reason for existence is not to make a living, not to become the most outstanding servant of Christ possible, not to get a superb education, not to advance rapidly in your profession, nor to excel in the sport of your choice ... but to praise God. David's prayer in verse 5 may expose you. How you answer the question, What's wrong with death?, will do it. The only correct answer is: Because then I wouldn't be able to stand at that padded pew at Woodland Presbyterian (or wherever else) and join my voice in singing, 'I greet thee who my sure redeemer art—my only trust and Savior of my heart'—because that is my whole reason for existence!

David's third argument underscores *the misery I know* (vv. 6–7). Here is the toll David's trouble has taken on him; he is emotionally and physically 'shot.' The groaning, the tears, the grief, the exhaustion—why does David rehearse all this to God? Does God need this information? What does this have to do with an argument in prayer?

Well (back to assumptions again), what is he assuming about God? He is making an assumption about the mercy of God. He is assuming that all of this really matters to God and that Yahweh will be touched with pity over his condition. He assumes that our misery arouses God's mercy, touches God's heart. A prayer like this assumes that the Father is like Jesus—always going around being moved with compassion.

Perhaps these individual 'arguments' are of some help to us, but what general instruction should we derive from this matter of argument in prayer? That the use of argument is entirely proper in prayer, that it is beneficial, or even necessary! While I was teaching in seminary, I would sometimes have a student ask to take a scheduled exam at another time. Students (as a rule) knew that they couldn't simply tell me that they didn't feel up to an exam on a Wednesday. They knew a pitch like that would be turned down flat. They knew they had to make a 'case.' But if a student came in and told me that he had been reviewing for the exam but that two days ago his wife had gone into labor and was in the hospital with their second child, that while he had been with her, their two-year-old under a babysitter's care had fallen from a bunk bed and broken his arm, that his mother-in-law had been on her way to come help but the water pump had gone out on her car en route and she was delayed, and that he had not gotten more than forty-five minutes of sleep in the last two days, well then, one who had some modicum of mercy would allow him to re-schedule his exam.

I don't want to reduce prayer to an exercise in logic. But I would guess that too few believers give much thought to the use of arguments in prayer. No one can fail to see how highly emotional Psalm 6 is. And yet—with the place it gives argument in prayer—it is highly rational as well. Pushing ourselves to bring reasons for our requests may help us see how shoddy some of our petitions are—or it may encourage us if we seem to muster a cogent case. Argument in prayer shows that we are called to *thinking* worship.

## The assurance he finds

Briefly and lastly, David's prayer shows us the assurance he finds (vv. 8–10). Verse 10 shows that the *actual* deliverance is still in the future; verse 10 is anticipatory—the decisive help has not yet arrived. And yet verses 8–9 show that he has *present* assurance of coming deliverance. On the basis of this assurance he defies his enemies (v. 8a). His assurance rests on the certainty that Yahweh has heard (vv. 8b–9):

For Yahweh has heard the sound of my weeping!  
Yahweh has heard my plea for grace!  
Yahweh will accept my prayer!

Prayer doesn't change things, but prayer lays hold of God who changes things and who, in prayer, changes you. And sometimes in the midst of it all he gives you the assurance that your plea has been granted.

Notice especially David's terminology for prayer in 8b: 'the sound of my weeping.' *Yahweh has heard the sound of my weeping.* What a way to describe prayer. God can even make out what your tears long for. Shades of Romans 8:26 already! You probably ought to underline that; you can go through a lot with a text—and a God—like that!

Did you notice that strange heading to this psalm? All about the music leader and stringed instruments and perhaps the tune to be used? All of which implies the continued use of this psalm in public worship by the Lord's people. And why not? For there will be many of the Lord's flock post-David who also come with the sound of their weeping and will need the assurance that God will see their tears (cf. Isa. 38:5). And why shouldn't he? For he has given them a Savior, who, in the days of his flesh 'offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears' (Heb. 5:7)—and he was heard.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, [\*Way of the Righteous in the Muck of Life: Psalms 1–12\*](#) (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 73–81.