



## Psalm 6 - Prayer for Recovery from Grave Illness

To the leader: with stringed instruments; according to The Sheminith. A Psalm of David.

### Introduction

This is an individual lament, also from David. It is especially suited to one whose hard circumstances have led him to see his sins and to repent of them. For this reason Psalm 6 is often included in the 'Penitential Psalms', i.e. Psalms 32, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143.

### Psalm 6:1-5 - Plea for Mercy.

These verses arise from some life-threatening situation; a sickness would fit the description, as would a number of other desperate crises. The song interprets the situation as coming from God's displeasure because of some particular sin. This does not mean that all desperate situations are evidence of God's displeasure, only that some may be; the psalm provides a vehicle for singing to God properly in such circumstances.

<sup>1</sup> O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger,  
or discipline me in your wrath.

### Psalm 6:1

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger. The occasion of sin is not revealed, but because of his sin David sensed he was under the rebuke of God. Therefore, he called out to God to lighten the chastisement.

Discipline me in your wrath. It is known that God's chastening hand is not primarily a mark of his displeasure, but it is a mark of adoption. Hebrews 12:7

makes it clear that chastening is evidence of our adoption: If one endures chastening, God deals with them as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? When God corrects them it does not feel pleasant, but it is good and for their good.

Living before the finished work of Jesus, David had less certainty about his standing with God. On this side of the Cross believers know that all the anger God has towards them was poured out on Jesus at the Cross. God chastens the believer out of correcting love and not out of anger.

- <sup>2</sup> Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;  
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.
- <sup>3</sup> My soul also is struck with terror,  
while you, O Lord – how long?

### Psalm 6:2-3

I am languishing; my bones are shaking with terror. David knew the trial of physical weakness and pain. In the midst of this kind of chastisement, he cries out to God for mercy.

My soul also is struck with terror. David knew the trial of spiritual weakness and pain. The difficulty of these trials drove David to seek mercy from God: <<*Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul*>> (Job 7:11), <<*Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – “Father, save me from this hour”?*>> (John 12:27a), and: <<*I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart*>> (Romans 9:2). These trials of body and soul were amplified by David’s sense of God’s anger against him. When one is not confident in God’s love and assistance even small trials feel unbearable.

How long? David sensed he was under the chastisement of God, but he still knew he should ask God to shorten the trial: <<*How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself for ever? How long will your wrath burn like fire?*>> (Psalm 89:46), and: <<*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save?*>> (Habakkuk 1:2). There is a place for humble resignation to chastisement, but God wants believers to yearn for higher ground and to use that yearning as a motivation to seek him and get things right with the Lord. David seems to be troubled as the result of his sin, more than the sin itself. Ideally, a believer should be terribly grieved by sin itself, but there is something to be said for confession and humility for the sake of the result of sins.

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

#### Psalm 6:4

Turn, O Lord, save my life. In his agony David pleads for deliverance - but on the ground of God's mercy, not his own righteousness. David knew that the Lord's chastisement was righteous, but he also knew that God is rich in mercy. Turn, also translated as return, may indicate that David felt God forsaken him and that he felt distant from God: <<*Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted*>> (Psalm 25:16). This was part of the agony of the trial. When one senses God is near one feels that one can face anything, but when one senses him distant one is weak before the smallest trial.

For the sake of your steadfast love. The note of confession of sin is not strong in this Psalm of Penitence, but it is not absent. The fact that David appeals to the mercy of God for deliverance is evidence that he is aware that he does not deserve it. Those who are penitent appeal to God's love and mercy, and not to their own well-being. They also have faith to know that God will answer their call: <<*In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer. This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you*>> (Isaiah 54:8-10).

- 5 For in death there is no remembrance of you;  
in Sheol who can give you praise?

#### Psalm 6:5

For in death there is no remembrance of you. It would be wrong to take these agonised words of David as evidence that there is no life beyond this life. The OT has a shadowy understanding of the world beyond. Sometimes it shows a clear confidence: <<*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth*>> (Job 19:25), and sometimes it has the uncertainty David shows here.

**Paul writes:** <<*Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory*>> (2 Timothy 2:10), which says that Jesus brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. The understanding of the after-life was murky at best

in the OT; but Jesus greater knowledge about heaven and hell than anyone else could. Jesus could do this because he had first-hand knowledge of the world beyond. David's point is not to present a comprehensive theology of the world beyond. He is in agony, fearing for his life, and he knows he can remember God and give him thanks now. He does not have the same certainty about the world beyond, so he asks God to act according to his certainty.

Sheol is a proper name in Hebrew; sometimes it serves as a poetic name for the grave, to which all go, for example: <<*Like a rock that one breaks apart and shatters on the land, so shall their bones be strewn at the mouth of Sheol*>> (Psalm 141:7), and other times it names the dim destination to which the wicked go but not the faithful: <<*Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me*>> (Psalm 49:14-15). If it refers to the grave here, the idea is that the dead do not have the privilege of recounting God's praise in public worship. The verse expresses the fear that the psalmist's sins, if not forgiven, would separate him from God's presence.

#### Psalm 6:6-7 - Weariness and Weeping.

Now the psalmist describes the effects of realising that his circumstances stem from his sins; he moans and cries and loses sleep from sorrow over his sins.

- 6 I am weary with my moaning;  
every night I flood my bed with tears;  
I drench my couch with my weeping.
- 7 My eyes waste away because of grief;  
they grow weak because of all my foes.

#### Psalm 6:6-7

I am weary with my moaning. God's chastising hand was heavy upon David, as it did on Job: <<*For my sighing comes like my bread, and my groanings are poured out like water*>> (Job 3:24). His life seemed to be nothing but tears and misery. David's trial has at least three components: he felt God was angry with him, he lacked a sense of God's presence, and he could not sleep.

Every night I flood my bed with tears. This is a good example of poetic exaggeration. David did not want others to believe that his bed actually floated on a pool of tears in his room. Because this is poetic literature it can be understood according to its literary context. This understands the Bible literally, according to its literary context.

My eyes waste away because of grief. David's eyes were red and sore from all the tears and lack of sleep. Spurgeon commented 'As an old man's eye grows dim with years, so says David, my eye is grown red and feeble through weeping.'

They grow weak because of all my foes. David is brought so low that his enemies no longer spur him to seize victory. He seems depressed and discouraged.

### Psalm 6:8-10 - The Lord Has Heard.

Those who are truly sorry for their sins can be assured that God hears their cries for mercy and will not give them over to the schemes of their enemies.

<sup>8</sup> Depart from me, all you workers of evil,  
for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.

### Psalm 6:8

Depart from me, all you workers of evil. This seems to be spoken to those who would take advantage of the singer's distress, slandering him and perhaps even trying to hasten his death. However, if the Lord has heard, then these enemies are 'all bark and no bite.' Jesus uses these words in Luke 13:27, likening any Jews of his day who resist his message to the enemies in this psalm; they will discover in the end that Jesus really does have God's favour.

<sup>9</sup> The Lord has heard my supplication;  
the Lord accepts my prayer.

### Psalm 6:9

The particular supplication and prayer is that of vv.1-5; the Lord, in hearing it, forgives.

<sup>10</sup> All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror;  
they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.

### Psalm 6:10

There is a reversal here: the singer's bones and soul were troubled (vv.2-3), but now the enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror.