

Series FolkSongs of Faith

This Message An Appeal for a Restored Relationship

Scripture Psalm 6

David was the author of 73 of the Psalms in our Bibles. Many of his writings were inspired by experiences in his life. For examples, he wrote songs praising God for deliverance from enemies. He also wrote songs describing his emotions as he was pursued by enemies, and when he was in dangerous situations. Psalm 6 was written during a period of severe illness. Not only was David suffering physically, but his enemies added to his distress through criticism and threats.

There is a lot of deep meaning and theology in the songs written by David. Psalm 6 is one of the heavy-weights. Let me read it as expressively as I can.

Read Psalm 6

In the early Christian tradition, this Psalm was associated with six other Psalms which, collectively, were referred to as “Penitential or Confessional” Psalms. They were a group of writings which acknowledged and expressed sorrow for sin. There is no specific mention of sin in this Psalm, nor is there any note of confession. However, this Psalm describes the LORD’s rebuke and discipline of David, and therefore it is assumed that his suffering was the consequence of some sinful behavior he had committed. David does not protest his innocence anywhere in the Psalm, nor does he suggest that God is treating him in an unjust way, so the theme of punishment because of sin is validated, and the identity of Psalm 6 with the other Penitential Psalms is warranted.

The two words in verse 1 which establish the context are “rebuke” and “discipline.” Some translations use the word “chastise.” Obviously the LORD was displeased with something David had done, and David was experiencing the LORD’s anger and wrath.

Let's consider David's life. Overall, we know from Scripture that David was honored by God for his faith. He was declared to be a "man after God's own heart." There are a great number of examples in Scripture of David's faith in action — of how he sought the LORD's direction and help and walked in the LORD's ways.

However, there were times when David was not consistent in living out his faith. After he had consolidated his kingship, and the political, economic, and religious conditions for the Israelite people had become stable and secure, David lost his spiritual edge. He began to drift along, abuse his kingly authority, and satisfy his own selfish and occasional lustful desires. He forgot about God, the One who had called him from tending sheep and enabled him to overcome his enemies. As king, he was a high profile individual, and, as a professed follower of God, his sinful indiscretions were a major public embarrassment and dishonor to God

There were several occasions when David had to be confronted by God for his deliberate, willful, sinful actions. God spoke to him through prophets, priests, and counselors, and through circumstances. After being confronted, David was always quick to acknowledge his sins, repent, and seek a restored relationship with the LORD, but when he was under the load of his guilt he was a miserable man. At such times, he felt the displeasure and anger of the LORD and pleaded for an outpouring of the LORD's mercy.

Notice verse 2. David pleaded for mercy and healing. He knew that he deserved God's wrath, but he asked that God would deal with him with divine love. One way in which God demonstrates His "mercy" is when He chooses to withhold His wrath. "Mercy" means that God does not give sinners what they deserve. Last week I mentioned that "mercy" is a very comprehensive word, referring to God's "lovingkindness" and His "unfailing love" and "compassion." The point is that all sin is deserving of death, but God looks upon those who acknowledge and repent of their sin with love and compassion, thus showing mercy.

This does not mean that there are never any consequences for sin. In this Psalm, David described the agonies that are produced by guilt. He was "faint" — that is, without strength and helpless. He stated that "his bones were in agony." Literally, his bones "were troubled," or "shaken." In verse three he added that "his soul was troubled" (same word). David's guilt was weighing on him body and soul. In the same way, every follower of God who has a deep sense of personal sin will be similarly affected.

David's reaction to his sin is the reaction all of us should have to our sins. David did not consider his sin to be insignificant, something to be brushed off casually and quickly. He recognized that all sin, whether it might be considered gross or minor, greatly displeases God. Every sinful action is a serious matter to God. He never deals with sin in a casual way. Like David, we need to understand the seriousness of sin in our lives, and, when we sin, we need to appeal to God's mercy.

David knew what the LORD would eventually do. His question in verse 3 was "How long?" that is, how long before the LORD would act. The question in verse 3 is an incomplete sentence. We have to supply some words to complete the thought. We might insert, "How long, O LORD, will I remain ill?" or "How long will You afflict me?" or "continue to chasten me?" Or perhaps "How long will You delay Your mercy?"

Any of these possibilities could fit the context. However, the statement in verse 4 indicates that the question concerns "mercy." Notice the reference to the LORD's "unfailing love" — that's another way to describe His mercy. David prayed that the LORD would look upon him with love and compassion and restore the relationship which had been broken by his sin.

In times of rebellion and sin, the believer can feel that God is far off. There is no sense of close relationship. This is why David pleaded for the LORD "to return ... and deliver him." That's the literal meaning. From David's standpoint, it seemed that the LORD had moved far away from him, and he wanted to have restored his close fellowship with the LORD again. He wanted the LORD to deliver him from his despair. His deepest agonies were not the physical pains, but the sense of spiritual separation from the LORD.

David understood that he could not atone for his sins on his own. His only hope was in the mercy and "unfailing love" of the LORD. Only the LORD had the ability to lift him out of his deep depression and restore his sense of well-being. David knew that he could not base an appeal for mercy on his personal righteousness. Notice the appeal that David made in verse 5. He wanted to be in the position to praise God. Everyone understood that it was only those who were physically alive, and not the dead, who had the ability to experience, remember, and declare the works of the LORD. David knew that if God were to remove him from this world, he would be deprived of further opportunity to praise the LORD. David wanted the LORD to save him from his distress so that he could be, once again, a spokesperson for the LORD among people.

Let's review what we have covered so far. In the first part of this Psalm David expressed his physical and spiritual anguish because of the LORD's chastisement. The next section described his sense of the lack of the LORD's closeness. In verses 6 and 7 David introduces another condition which was affecting his life: he couldn't sleep. He was worn out. We can imagine how he tossed and turned throughout the night. Instead of restful sleep, he "flooded his bed all night long with weeping."

He wrote how his eyes were "growing weak" and "failing." This is a poetic way of explaining that his eyes were dimmed by failing strength. During the hours when he was alone in his bed, instead of the peace and confidence that the LORD's presence should have provided, permitting him to have deep sleep and tranquility, his mind was active with deep sorrow and remorse, and filled with thoughts of his foes and probably many other personal problems and fears.

The picture which emerges from the first 7 verses is that of a person who was tormented by the guilt of deliberate sin. People who claim to belong to the LORD, yet deliberately violate God's standards of behavior, will likely have a similar experience. New Testament believers have been given the Holy Spirit. It is the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit to "convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (*John 16:8*). David was under heavy conviction. The Apostle Paul wrote about the need for believers to hold on to faith and a good conscience. David did not have a clear conscience. None of God's followers can have a good or clear conscience after deliberately sinning.

There is a radical change of tone in this Psalm beginning in verse 8. Instead of further lament, David expresses his relief and excitement that the LORD has, at last, responded to his distress. Notice that David reports two times that "the LORD heard" his appeals, and also that "the LORD accepted his prayer." The LORD had been working in David's life to bring about necessary spiritual change, and verse 8 expresses David relief that the period of discipline was completed. For him it was as if he had been rescued from death, or as we might say, brought out of "a living hell." The Psalm does not specifically mention forgiveness, but it is obvious that David had the confidence that he had been forgiven.

Notice in verse 9 that David calls attention, for the third time in this Psalm, to the LORD's mercy. Yes, God disciplined and chastised David — with illness, a troubled conscience, and many worries, but in the end, he received mercy. His awareness of God's mercy meant that the close relationship between himself and the LORD had been reestablished. One result of this is that David was no longer concerned about the evil foes who had been bothering him, or any other fears which had been troubling him. Probably these evil doers would still be around to pester and annoy him, but with his relationship with the LORD restored, all the normal problems and worries that David had to contend with became less bothersome to him. By focusing on God, all his earthly problems were minimized.

In the last verse David predicted that all his enemies would be shamed and dismayed. David understood what his enemies were facing. When his sin was found out, David had himself experienced shame and dismay. He was the king, and he had been caught in some terrible act of wickedness, which undoubtedly made him the subject of public ridicule and embarrassment. Because of his actions, David had made himself one with his evil foes. He had become no less evil than they. But David had called on the LORD, cast himself on the LORD's mercy, and been restored to wellness of body and soul, and he knew that God would respond to him differently than God would respond to his tormenters. They would be shamed and dismayed while he would go on in fellowship with the LORD.

I want to summarize and conclude this message by cross-referencing with a New Testament passage, from the letter written to the Hebrews chapter 12: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Those words were quoted from the Old Testament book of Proverbs. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews continued: "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (*Hebrews 12:5-11*).

Psalm 6 helps us to understand the consequences of deliberate sin. God does not want His followers to act like the evil people of the world. When we displease Him and thereby become an embarrassment to Him, He may find it necessary to discipline us in order to reveal the seriousness of our actions, and to make us eager to return to Him. God's discipline can result in physical illness, and lead to anxiety and fears, as it did in David, but God can discipline through other means as well.

There is a passage in the writings of the prophet Haggai which describes what God does to those among His people who do not honor Him: "The LORD Almighty says, 'Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.'" The LORD is not without a variety of ways to reprimand His people when they misbehave.

Here's some thoughts to keep in mind:

1) Not every illness suffered by God's people is the consequence of sin. David suffered because of deliberate, willful sin.

2) We need to remember that God only disciplines us for our good. As the passage in Hebrews stated, the motive behind God's discipline is "love".

3) We need to remember that our heavenly Father wants us to be holy, and to maintain a life of holiness. He must sometimes use discipline as the means to train and guide us in the ways we should live. However, it is far better for us to live a life of faithful obedience.

If our actions are pleasing to the Father, then He will not have to resort to drastic measures to keep us in line. Our daily prayer must be, "LORD, teach me your ways," "give me the desire to walk in them," and "keep me close to You."