

# The Way Back to Spiritual Health

Psalm 30

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**Main point:** When we acknowledge and repent of our sin, God restores us by turning our sorrow into joy and praise.

I will extol You, O LORD, for You have lifted me up,  
And have not let my enemies rejoice over me.  
<sup>2</sup> O LORD my God,  
I cried to You for help, and You healed me.  
<sup>3</sup> O LORD, You have brought up my soul from Sheol;  
You have kept me alive, that I would not go down to the pit.  
<sup>4</sup> Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones,  
And give thanks to His holy name.  
<sup>5</sup> For His anger is but for a moment,  
His favor is for a lifetime;  
Weeping may last for the night,  
But a shout of joy comes in the morning.  
<sup>6</sup> Now as for me, I said in my prosperity,  
"I will never be moved."  
<sup>7</sup> O LORD, by Your favor You have made my mountain to stand strong;  
You hid Your face, I was dismayed.  
<sup>8</sup> To You, O LORD, I called,  
And to the Lord I made supplication:  
<sup>9</sup> "What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit?  
Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your faithfulness?  
<sup>10</sup> "Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me;  
O LORD, be my helper."  
<sup>11</sup> You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;  
You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness,  
<sup>12</sup> That my soul may sing praise to You and not be silent.  
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

## PSALM 30

### INTRODUCTION:

Have you ever been so broken by sickness or trouble that it lifted to the surface hidden sins in your heart that you didn't even know were there, and you needed to repent of? Today, if you will give me your attention, I want to speak to you on the way back to spiritual health.

C.S. Lewis, the British professor, and writer of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, once said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain. [Pain] is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."<sup>1</sup>

In the life of every Christian, there are times when we fail to listen to God and choose not to obey His commands. Then in perfect wisdom and tender mercy, He uses affliction as a painful discipline to correct us in love. And when sin is *recognized* and *repented of*, He turns our *sadness* into *gladness* and our *sorrow* into *song*. The fruit of God's merciful invention is a life of singular focus, high praise, and a strong witness to a watching world.

**Psalm 30 is significant for two reasons:** 1) It shines a light on the pitfalls to be on the lookout for so that we avoid the painful seasons of God's rod of correction. 2) It gives us an example of the way back to spiritual health when our false sense of confidence has been cut, carved, and laid bare by God's pruning knife.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

**The key theme of Psalm 30 is praise** (vv.1, 4, 9, 12). This psalm is bracketed by a joyful outburst of praise, which bookends this psalm (vv.1, 12). David launches with praise (v.1), and he lands with praise (v.12).

**The key phrase in Psalm 30 is “give thanks”** (vv.4, 12). Classified as a psalm of *thanksgiving*, David’s praise is rooted in and prompted by a memory of a recent deliverance from death (*Sheol, pit, dust*, vv.3, 9) and the removal of tears of grief (vv.5, 11).

**Psalm 30 commemorates David’s deliverance** from some physical sickness. We do not know what kind of sickness it was, but the absence of the specifics creates a blank spot to fill in whatever affliction you might be suffering from in your life right now or soon will be. The ailment is in the past. The tears have dried up, the physical infirmity has been healed, but this *shout of joy* has lasted all these centuries. Written and given on the day of dedication of David’s house, this psalm lays out *the roadmap for renewed spiritual vitality*.

Throughout the years Bible teachers have used the SPECS acrostic as an aid to help readers make personal application of a text in their lives.

- The “S” stands for *a sin to avoid*.
- The “P” stands for *a promise to claim*.
- The “E” stands for *an example to follow*.
- The “C” stands for *a command to obey*.
- The “S” stands for *a supplication to make*.

In verses 6-7, we find *the sin to avoid*—It is the sin of self-sufficiency and self-confidence. When things are going well, we stand in danger of the hidden attitude of self-dependence, which often wraps itself in religious tones. In verses 2, 4, 8, and 12, we find *the example to follow*—If we learn what David learned, then our story will read like his story and we will know the joy that David knew. Let’s step into this psalm, where first of all, we discover David...

## **EXPOSITION:**

### **A. THE REJOICING AFTER GOD’S DISCIPLINE (vv.1-5)**

I will extol You, O LORD, for You have lifted me up,  
And have not let my enemies rejoice over me.

<sup>4</sup>Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones,  
And give thanks to His holy name.

<sup>5</sup>For His anger is but for a moment,  
His favor is for a lifetime;  
Weeping may last for the night,  
But a shout of joy *comes* in the morning.

The psalm begins with David *looking back* and *giving thanks*. Oh, listen, dear friends, reminiscing about the good old days can get you stuck-in-the-mud of the past, but recalling the dark days and how *God’s intervening mercy* carried you through produces *rejoicing*. As David looks back, notice how determined he was to exalt the Lord because God had rescued him out of a deep hole near death.

Notice, how,

## 1. David exalted the Lord. (vv.1-3)

A vivid word picture is drawn of David being “**lifted up**” from the pit of death. Like water from a well in a bucket, David was rescued by the divine hand of God. This is what God’s deliverance can look like in our lives.

Think of the times when you were gripped by trouble. If you could have climbed out of the situation by your own strength, you would’ve done so. But you could not; you were stuck. Trapped. Powerless. Alone. But God’s gracious hand of intervention drew you out, and you knew that it was no one but the Lord Himself. Now will you praise Him?

The reference to “**enemies**” in verse 1 can be interpreted in two ways. The first is *death*—and in 1 Corinthians 15:26, Paul called death *the last enemy*. Secondly, enemies could refer to those whom the sick frequently encounter. In other words, a sickness had taken David to death’s door, and in that crisis, *even friends became like enemies. Because, like Job’s friends, they assumed the sickness was a divine judgment from God.* Now, whether they were right or wrong is not the point.

What David *did* in his time of crisis gives us our example to follow. Verse 2—

- <sup>2</sup>O LORD my God,  
I cried to You for help, and You healed me.  
<sup>3</sup>O LORD, You have brought up my soul from Sheol;  
You have kept me alive, that I would not go down to the pit.

It appears as if David was on the cliff of death, and the Lord pulled him back. The use of the participle in verse 3 of “*would not go down*” conveys the word picture of a long line of people waiting to enter the grave, and God plucked or snatched David out of the line. Oh, David would die someday, BUT NOT THAT DAY—because God had plans.

**Application:** Answered prayer ought to produce determined and delightful praise to God in our lives! When was the last time God answered your prayer? Just look back on the past eight weeks. Has a provision been given? Has a mercy been granted? Has a temptation been resisted? Did it produce ongoing praise, or did you just move on to the next situation with very little heartfelt gratitude to God? Matthew Henry once said, “*Thanksgiving is good, but thanksgiving is better.*”

Charles Simmons—“*Our thanks should be as fervent for mercies received, as our petitions sought.*”

J.C. Ryle explains why our thanksgiving can often be so small. “*Thankfulness is a flower which will never bloom well except upon a root of deep humility.*” And this is why God often has to humble us through trials and affliction, but the end that He has in mind is more precious than we could imagine. I love the way Eugene Peterson puts verses 1-3 in his paraphrase; it catches the flavor and punch of David’s praise.

“I give You all the credit, GOD—  
You got me out of that mess.  
You didn’t let my foes gloat.  
GOD, my God, I yelled for help  
And You put me together.  
GOD, You pulled me out of the grave,  
Gave me another chance at life

When I was down-and-out.”

**Here’s a takeaway** that we can lift from the first stanza for personal application.

- *God’s grace often comes clearly into view when we look back at His tender mercies.*

There is nothing wrong with going down memory lane in your life—except to think about sin. But, if you want to experience *praise in your hearts*, you need to go back and think about the many ways that God’s grace delivered you.

Don Moen, the contemporary Christian songwriter, asked a rhetorical question in his song, *Think About His Love*, when he wrote,

How can I forget His love  
And how can I forget His mercies?

We know *how*. We get caught in life when things are good, and troubles are few, and we start to slip-slide away in our affections to the point that God’s grace does not move us as it once did.

As David drove down the memory lane of God’s mighty deliverance in his life, he got excited, and his enthusiasm led him to...

## 2. David encouraged others. (vv.4-5)

Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones,  
And give thanks to His holy name.

David sends out an invitation to the covenant community (church family) to join him in singing praise to the Lord. But this is not the first time this has happened (*Cf. Ps.27:6; 28:7; 30:12*). Two acts of meaningful praise are encouraged. To “**sing praise**” can be translated, “play music” and to “**give thanks**” in this context means *to worship in song*, and the playing of music and giving of thanks is directed to “God’s holy, set apart, distinct, covenantal name.”

The preposition “**for**” points us to a lesson David has learned about God’s character and His dealing with His people that we all need to know. Verse 5 has been a favorite of believers across the centuries.

- <sup>5</sup>For His anger is but for a moment,  
His favor is for a lifetime;  
Weeping may last for the night,  
But a shout of joy *comes* in the morning.

This one verse has two parts, but one thought. In the first part, there is an obvious antithesis (exact opposite) between “**His anger**” and “**His favor**.” There is a similar antithesis between a “**moment**” and “**lifetime**.” The meaning then of the first part of the verse is that “*the anger lasts for a moment; the favor lasts for a lifetime*.” There is a *brevity* of the one, and the *perpetuity* of the other.

But if we didn’t get it, David takes another shot as he passes to the second part of the text. You will notice that there is a double antithesis. “**Weeping**” is set over against “**joy**,” the “**night**” over against the “**morning**.” The juxtaposition of contrasting words gives a feeling of balance.

"Weeping" and "joy" are personified as two guests who come into the lives of believers. One, dark-robed and visiting in the after-hours of "the night." The other bright and sunny, coming in the fresh dawn of "the morning." For God's people, tears are "permitted to stay the night," but like an unwelcomed guest—they must be on their way by morning!

**What did David learn that he wants to encourage us with?** David is seeking to teach us this:

- Divine displeasure is not an eternal fixture of life for Christians.

David wants us to see the contrast between "a moment" spent in the experience of *God's anger* over against "a lifetime" of God's favor. Think of it as concentric circles that ripple across your life. The moments of God's anger are as a drop in the pond compared with the circles of favor that stretch over the whole of our lives. He learned how to discern what is temporal in our experience versus what is permanent in our experience. Or, what is *momentary* versus what is *continuous*. This is what Kirk Franklin was speaking of when he wrote,

You don't have to worry, and don't you be afraid,  
Joy comes in the morning, troubles they don't last always.  
There is a friend in Jesus, who will wipe your tears away.  
And if your heart is broken, just lift your hands and say,  
I know that I can make, I know that I can stand,  
No matter what may come my way, my life is in Your hands.<sup>2</sup>

**Application:** Some troubles are *abbreviated*, and others are *prolonged*, and we have no control over providence, but we can regulate our emotions. We can choose what perspective we will have or what our eye will focus on—and that perspective makes all the difference in the world in our character, our confidence, our buoyancy, and our resolution.

**David also learned something about God's character that we need to see. How do we think rightly about God's anger and God's favor?** Both words describe the basic character of the relationship between God and mankind. False conceptions of God's character and the Gospel lie at the root of many Christian's lack of assurance and maturity.

**God's anger** is the response to human sin. **God's favor** is the divine response to goodness, but it is also the happy blessing of *repentance* and *faith*. In Micah 7:18, the prophet reveals to us that both these attributes are a part of the character of God.

- Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity  
And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?  
He does not retain His anger forever,  
Because He delights in unchanging love.

The Puritans were known to say, "God was never angry until sin made Him so." But who among us does not sin against the Lord *daily* either by *sins of omission or commission*? Or by sins of thought, desire, attitude, or deed? So, is God angry with us every day? What are we to understand about *God's anger* and *God's favor* in His dealings with us?

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<sup>2</sup> Kirk Franklin, *My Life Is in Your Hands*

Thomas Watson beautifully reminds us that

"God's justice is one of His essential attributes, but the exercising of justice is God's *strange* work; His *familiar* work is mercy. God is like a bee; it only stings when it is provoked."

Paul tells us that there is a wide difference between being a "*child of wrath*" (Eph.2:1) and a *child under wrath*. And as Christians, we are not *children of wrath*, but we can be under the wrathful displeasure of God.

In order to see *God's anger* rightly, we must not divorce it from *God's love*. We understand this on the lower level of human relationships. As a child, I learned that my parents were most upset with me when I had wounded their love. There was no contradiction in their response of anger and love, for I knew that the only reason they got so angry was because they loved me so much!

Do you think that an angry parent has no love for their child? If we can understand that love and anger can be blended in our imperfect lives, how much more with God? Jesus put it this way,

- **Luke 11:13**—If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?

He used an argument from the lesser to the greater. On the lesser level—if human fathers who are evil lovingly provide for their children, how much more will the perfect God who loves perfectly not also give what is best to His children? But there is a passage that sheds light on God's momentary anger with His children and His eternal favor.

- **Hebrews 12:4-11**—You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; <sup>5</sup> and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; <sup>6</sup> FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."  
<sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? <sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us for our* good, so that we may share His holiness. <sup>11</sup> All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

**Application:** Another takeaway under this first stanza might be this...

- God desires far more than our *happiness*; He is resolved that we share His *likeness* and *holiness*.

This means that sometimes, the afflictions that He brings give way to *the deepest sorrows* and bitterest tears and create wounds that penetrate deep into our bleeding hearts. But they all come from a loving Father with our greatest end in mind. Perhaps this is why David said in Psalm 119:71,

- It is good for me that I was afflicted,  
That I may learn Your statutes.

## B. THE REASON FOR GOD'S DISCIPLINE (vv.6-7a)

What was it that led to David's *downfall and affliction*? Just so that there is no speculation, David explained what was in his heart. Only he and God would know this, but David shares it with us so that we might have an insider's view of *the cause of his troubles* in this instance.

The reason for God's discipline in David's life was his self-sufficiency. In his health and prosperity, David had come to a position of *self-confidence*.

- <sup>6</sup> Now as for me, I said in my prosperity,  
"I will never be moved."  
<sup>7</sup> O LORD, by Your favor You have made my mountain to stand strong;

David is swollen with pride. He thought that what he had was the consequence of his own achievement. Now, I can hear someone say, "Pastor, what's wrong with being proud of your own achievements if you have worked hard for them?"

Well, if you were taught the Old Testament well, you would know that *self-confidence* was one of the most fundamental sins that the people of God were warned against.

- **Deuteronomy 8:11-18**—Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; <sup>12</sup> otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived *in them*, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, <sup>14</sup> then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. <sup>15</sup> He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, *with its fiery serpents and scorpions* and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. <sup>16</sup> In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. <sup>17</sup> Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' <sup>18</sup> But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day.

When things were going great, David said, "I got it made—the Lord is blessing me! I am the king of the mountain..." then it happened...

Now we discover...

## C. THE REALITY OF GOD'S DISCIPLINE (v.7b)

You hid Your face, I was dismayed.

Notice, David does not describe God as one striking down his children with disease and sickness, but rather, God just looked away, and it all fell to pieces. When God's face of favor was toward David, he was *as strong as a mountain*, but when sin and self-confidence filled his heart, God hid His face, and his life collapsed and unraveled.

"**To hide the face**" is an image for *the withdrawal of divine favor and support*, and the result leaves us feeling *rejected, isolated, vulnerable, and terrified*. In Psalm 27:9, David said, "

- Do not hide Your face from me,  
Do not turn Your servant away in anger;  
You have been my help;  
Do not abandon me nor forsake me,  
O God of my salvation!

What becomes clear, if you are tracking with me, is that David's *praise* and *thanksgiving* had a double thrust. On the one hand, he is thanking God for healing from his sickness (v.3); on the other hand, he is thankful for the forgiveness, which made the healing possible.

Now, we know that David is suffering not as a righteous sufferer, but he suffers as the consequence of his sinful self-confidence. Pride is often hidden in our hearts, and it takes the loving hand of a gracious Father to bring it out.

**Application** Examination is healthy as a daily discipline in our lives, not merely when affliction visits your life.

- **Psalm 139:23-24**— Search me [*dig deep*], O God, and know my heart [*implied is: make it known to me*]; Try me [*sift thru me and examine the quality of things that come between us*] and know my anxious thoughts;  
<sup>24</sup> And see if there be any hurtful way in me [*painful, grievous way that grieves You and hurts my witness and work*],  
And lead me in the everlasting way [*this is the way of purity and holiness*].

Here David was on his high horse, and God used sickness to knock him down and turn him around. But remember, God's hand upon him was not *retribution*, but *correctional*. God used the affliction to turn Him around and mature his faith. **Here is the takeaway** under this third stanza:

- Ground your hope and confidence in God alone.

Money, a good job, a 401k, or material things can offer us a false security or the kind of power leading us to think that *we can manipulate our circumstances and exercise control over our lives and others*. David, as well as the writer to the Hebrews, cautions us not to find our security in any circumstance like a fickle feeling or a human source of power.

- **Hebrews 13:5-6**— *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"* <sup>6</sup> so that we confidently say,  
  
"THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID.  
WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"

The way God deals with us is not always through *physical affliction*, but the reality of God's discipline was a sign of his sonship and God's favor. The question is, what is the way back?

The rejoicing after God's discipline.

The reason for God's discipline.

The reality of God's discipline.



## D. THE REMOVAL OF GOD'S DISCIPLINE (vv.8-12)

- <sup>8</sup> To You, O LORD, I called,  
And to the Lord I made supplication:

When David saw the sin in his own heart, he “**called**” upon the Lord. He made “**supplication**”—with the knowledge that God knew what He really desired. We must do the same. David turned from it, and God restored him to his senses. He was not *blessed* because he had *worked hard*, or because *he was smart*; it was all because of God's intervening grace.

And because his repentance was true, he reasoned with God by stating two rhetorical questions that anticipate a negative response.

- <sup>9</sup> “What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit?  
Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your faithfulness?”

In other words, what good am I on earth if I am dead? What witness can I give if I am in the grave? I cannot be a witness for You and win souls if I am dead! Have you ever noticed that there are no yard sales at cemeteries? When is the last time you heard dirt preach a sermon and stand in the sanctuary to sing, *How Great Thou Art*?

Oh, do you hear David's desire for mercy? Do you sense that he wants to be used of God? He doesn't think that his work is finished on earth, and he is asking God, “don't let me die—I want to finish my work and honor you with my life until the time comes!” Is that what you desire today? Do you want to be useful to the Lord and serve His purpose while you are on earth? If you have gotten away from God's high, holy, heavenly calling in your life, the way back begins with repentance, but it continues with faith—trust, and a deep desire of willingness to be used of God.

David's pledge should become ours today. David asks for help and health that he might praise and declare God's faithfulness. Then a remarkable example of how God converts mourning into joy.

- <sup>10</sup> “Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me;  
O LORD, be my helper.”  
<sup>11</sup> You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;  
You have loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness,  
<sup>12</sup> That *my* soul may sing praise to You and not be silent.  
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

As David looks back, hence the verb in verse 11, the night visitor called “**mourning**” who came to him in the night, has been transformed into a new guest called “joy” when the morning dawned. What transformed it? God did when he repented. “**Sackcloth**” is the uncomfortable garment of mourning and sorrow, and God had loosened it and tightened him up with gladness!

**Now how did it take place?** Was there a substitution of one for the other as in a basketball game? Or, is this a transformation where sorrow is turned into joy with a shining face by the grace and power of God?

We do not know. Perhaps both are true. But when God gives joy in our lives, one of the abilities it creates is a soul that sings, and it cannot be silent!

- <sup>12</sup> That *my* soul may sing praise to You and not be silent.  
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to You forever.

## Conclusion:

Here is what God would have us to know, do, and feel as we come to the conclusion of this psalm.

- Divine discipline is not God saying, "I'm through with you." Nor is it a mark of being abandoned by Him. Rather, it is clear evidence of the Father's love acting for your good and bringing a straying child back to Himself.
- When life is good, self-sufficiency creeps into our hearts and seeks to rob us of God's blessing. The way to keep God's all-sufficient grace and mercies before you is to study the Word, serve the Lord, and share the Gospel.

James 5:13-16 gives us this instruction:

- Is anyone among you suffering? *Then* he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; <sup>15</sup> and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. <sup>16</sup> Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

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