
Brokenness and Assurance

Psalm 6

Main idea: Yahweh restores and assures the broken-hearted and weary who turn to Him in faith.

The Psalms contain what an early reformer called, “the anatomy of the soul,” because they express a sort of “x-ray” picture of what *goes on deep within our lives emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually*. They supply soul care for the depths of trouble we face in our lives.

Historically, if we place this psalm at the time of David’s flight from Absalom, we discover what a *draining experience* this was for the king. And likewise, it brings home to us how great the inward and outward trouble of a believer may be. David is not a pip-squeak or a “wet noodle” kind of man. David is a man’s man; he is a king’s king, a soldier’s soldier, an able Commander, but here, he’s *broken* and *weeps*. Strong Christians secretly weep too. He has a *crown* on his head, but no crown can keep *sickness* away. He has a *palace*, but no home can keep *pain* away. He has *servants*, but no resources can keep *suffering* away from the body and the mind. What we discover is how the *stress* and *pressure* of a situation affect the mind, the emotions, the body, and even the spirit of an individual. What would God have us to know when we are *weak* and *wounded*, *sick* and *sore*? I ask for a hearing on the subject of *Brokenness and Assurance*.

For the choir director; with stringed instruments, upon an eight-string lyre. A Psalm of David.

O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger,
Nor chasten me in Your wrath.

² Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I *am* pining away;
Heal me, O LORD, for my bones are dismayed.

³ And my soul is greatly dismayed;
But You, O LORD—how long?

⁴ Return, O LORD, rescue my soul;
Save me because of Your lovingkindness.

⁵ For there is no mention of You in death;
In Sheol who will give You thanks?

⁶ I am weary with my sighing;
Every night I make my bed swim,
I dissolve my couch with my tears.

⁷ My eye has wasted away with grief;
It has become old because of all my adversaries.

⁸ Depart from me, all you who do iniquity,
For the LORD has heard the voice of my weeping.

⁹ The LORD has heard my supplication,
The LORD receives my prayer.

¹⁰ All my enemies will be ashamed and greatly dismayed;
They shall turn back, they will suddenly be ashamed.

Outline:

What can we learn from David about private pain, bitter tears, and wet prayer?

- A. The agony he knows (*vv.1-3*)
- B. The argument he brings (*vv.4-7*)
- C. The assurance he finds (*vv.8-10*)

Introduction:

Psalms 6 is a psalm of individual lament (sorrow). About two-thirds of the psalms are lament psalms—for God knew that His people would face deep pain and anguish in life, so He prepared us to understand them with the help of the psalms. As a believer, you must expect pain and know how to prepare for it. Dale Ralph Davis called lament psalms “wet prayers.”

Songs of heartache are as old as the Bible itself. We both love them and need them. They speak to us of a *contradiction of desire*—wanting one thing; experiencing another.

As a young boy, William Robinson heard a story of lament that captured his attention and filled him with intrigue. It was an Italian opera *Pagliacci*, about a clown who must make the audience laugh while he weeps behind his makeup because his wife betrayed him.

This young boy grew up to become quite a singer himself. Not of the opera-type, but of the Motown sound. While trying to think of something significant that would touch people’s heart, the sad story which gripped him as a boy, returned to his mind. *The clown that cries*—and after he makes everyone else happy with the smile painted on his face, then he goes into his dressing room and cries because he’s sad. That was 1967. The song was released in the United Kingdom as a single in July of 1970. It became a #1 hit on both the Billboard Hot 100 and R&B Singles charts. The singer’s name is Smokey Robinson. The song was entitled *The Tears of a Clown*. Perhaps you recall that line in it which said:

*Just like Pagliacci did, I try to keep my sadness hid
Smiling in the public eye
But in a lonely room, I cry
The tears of a clown
When there’s no one around*

Can you identify with Pagliacci? Putting on a smiling face on the outside but inside, you are dying with grief. In this psalm, deep grief strikes David, but it is not from a wife’s betrayal, but from his own sin and trouble in life.

Here David teaches us how *private tears can touch/arouse God’s heart and result in assurance and satisfying worship*. Let me set three headings before you.

Exposition:

A. The agony he knows (vv.1-3)

O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger,
Nor chasten me in Your wrath.
² Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I *am* pining away;
Heal me, O LORD, for my bones are dismayed.
³ And my soul is greatly dismayed;
But You, O LORD—how long?

What is it that is feeding David’s agony?

1. **The first thought is the problem of wrath.** In the first stanza, David is very conscious that he is under the divine displeasure of God for his involvement with Bathsheba and the death of her husband,

Uriah. He knows he deserves to be rebuked. He knows that his sins have resulted in a valid warrant for his arrest, so he prays, not to *escape* God's rebuke or chastening, but rather, that God would not deal with him in anger, "...do not rebuke in Your anger...nor chasten me in Your wrath."

It is as if David prays, "Lord, I know I deserve a spanking, but Lord don't kill me!" Spurgeon said, "Don't let Thy rod become a sword, lest, in smiting, thou should also kill."¹

We hear something of this plea from Jeremiah.

- **Jeremiah 10:23-24**—I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself,
Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.
²⁴ Correct me, O LORD, but with justice;
Not with Your anger, or You will bring me to nothing.

So, how does David pray? He does NOT pray, "*Don't rebuke me, God!*" Because God *always* rebukes the people He loves (*Heb.13:5*). He does not pray, "*free me from chastening.*" Because God *always* chastens the people He loves (*Heb.13:6*). What David pray for is not *leniency*, but *grace*. He does not pray for *fairness*, but *mercy*. Although he KNOWS he must be rebuked and chastened by God, while God does it, he cries, "*don't frown upon me, God.*" At least let me see *Your loving face*. Reduce the suffering. Sweeten the discipline. Moderate Your anger, please Lord. Don't frown upon me, if I must be chastened, rebuked, and dealt with, go lightly upon me Lord because of Your covenant love.

Application: Can we stop for a moment and thank God for the honesty of the Psalmist? Because, the truth is, when we face suffering, we also think that *maybe*, just *maybe*, the Lord is punishing us for the sins of our past or youth—and He is being too severe.

The Psalm does not tell us whether David is right or wrong about the reason for his troubles, but this is the way he sees it. And it's the way some of you see your pain right now.

God's wrath is problematic for us as sinners. Moses thought so. In Psalm 90—which is the first psalm written—Moses links *God's wrath* with the consequences of a shortened life and death that follow.

- ⁷ For we have been consumed by Your anger
And by Your wrath we have been dismayed.
⁸ You have placed our iniquities before You,
Our secret *sins* in the light of Your presence.
⁹ For all our days have declined in Your fury;
We have finished our years like a sigh.
¹⁰ As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years,
Or if due to strength, eighty years,
Yet their pride is *but* labor and sorrow;
For soon it is gone and we fly away.
¹¹ Who understands the power of Your anger
And Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?

Who understands the power of Your anger? Did you know that there are only two parties in all the universe who truly understand the power of God's anger? One is those now in hell right now (the unrepentant, the unbelieving, the unpardoned). They now fully know the power of God's

¹ C.H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David, Volume 1*, p.56

unmitigated, eternal, divine wrath. The other person is *our precious Savior, the Lord Jesus Himself* (2 Cor.5:21) who drank the full cup of God's wrath on the cross when He suffered and died for the sins of all who believe. Wrath is problematic.

2. **The second thought is the problem of weakness.** *"I am pining away...my bones are dismayed...my soul is greatly dismayed..." (vv.2-3a)*

The word "**bones**" was a poetic way of describing *his inner turmoil*. The weakness is physical. It is also emotional, for he speaks of his "**soul**"—his inner being was downcast and discouraged. It would also include how he feels "mentally." The verb for "**dismayed**" (*bahal*) means more than troubled, but rather he feels *"terrified...disquieted...shaken with terror, vexed, or in agony."* Christians know and experience deep agony. But why such terror? Because he feels that 1) *he is under the disfavor of God*, 2) *sickness is killing him*, and 3) *enemies are threatening him* (vv.8, 10).

Now when all four kinds of troubles (*physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual*) come crashing down on you, what do you do? What will you do? Before you attempt an answer, factor in one more element that contributes to the *agony he knows*.

3. **The third thought is the problem of time.** *"But YOU, O LORD—how long?" (v.3b)*. Sixteen times the question of "**how long**" appears in The Psalms. It expresses the anguish of a weary soul seeking comfort from God. I believe we all have our own "internal time clock," that is, this mental countdown as to how long we can *hold out* in pain before we lose it! Regardless of how great your pain threshold is, usually, our time is much different than God's time—and we ask like David, like Jeremiah, like Job, *"how long, Lord? How long?"*

Eugene Peterson, who I can't go along with on all of his theology, but in his extraordinary paraphrase of this psalm, I think he nails it. He writes,

Please, GOD, no more yelling,
no more trips to the woodshed.
Treat me nice for a change;
I'm so starved for affection.
²⁻³ Can't you see I'm black-and-blue,
beat up badly in bones and soul?
GOD, how long will it take
for you to let up?
⁴⁻⁵ Break in, GOD, and break up this fight;
if you love me at all, get me out of here.
I'm no good to you dead, am I?
I can't sing in your choir if I'm buried in some tomb!
⁶⁻⁷ I'm tired of all this—so tired. My bed
has been floating forty days and nights
On the flood of my tears.
My mattress is soaked, soggy with tears.
The sockets of my eyes are black holes;
nearly blind, I squint and grope.

The problem of *wrath*. The problem of *weakness*. The problem of *time*.

Application: What do you do when God allows your internal endurance timeclock to pass? Don't show your displeasure by refusing to come to church or small groups. Don't show your disappointment by stepping out of ministry or refusing to give or witness. Will you do what a saved person does? Will you do what a person who *really knows and loves God does*? What did David do?

He *went* to God. He *pleaded* with God. In fear that his intimacy with God was forfeited and sweet fellowship might be lost forever, David *ran*—not *away from* Him, but *back to* Him and he said, **“Be gracious to me, O Lord...heal me, Yahweh.”** This is the right way to plead with God if we would prevail. Don't plead based upon your goodness or your faithfulness; plead with your littleness and weakness.

That's how we know that some of you are not converted. Although from time to time, you see your sins, you don't *fear the anger and hot displeasure of God*. And even if you do fear it, you don't *go to God with your fears*. But the great mark of a Christian or a true believer is that they stand in fear of the holiness of God, BUT, *they still go to God in their fear in light of the cross*.

Illustrated: You've heard the story about the woman in her 30's who was sliced open by a man with a knife, and she thanked him for it—because the man was her surgeon seeking to save her life.

You've heard the story about the little boy who was spanked by a grown man, but he later crawled up into the man's lap and said, *“Papa, I love you...”*—because the grown man was the boy's father.

Listen, what *causes* a woman to thank a surgeon, and a boy to say, “I love you” to his father after a spanking, is the same thing that drove David to God—and it is this: David knows that the One who strikes Him is also the One who heals (Ps.19:19-22). Christians know agony and grief. They struggle with the fear of wrath, weakness, and time. Can anyone here relate to David?

Someone recently said to me, “Pastor, you get hold of that first point. You're like a dog on a bone—you won't let it go.” So, let me reluctantly let it go but only because I see another bone to go after. Notice with me now the second heading:

B. The argument he brings (vv.4-7)

- ⁴ Return, O LORD, rescue my soul;
Save me because of Your lovingkindness.
- ⁵ For there is no mention of You in death;
In Sheol who will give You thanks?
- ⁶ I am weary with my sighing;
Every night I make my bed swim,
I dissolve my couch with my tears.
- ⁷ My eye has wasted away with grief;
It has become old because of all my adversaries.

What case does David bring before God? What arguments does he use? There are three arguments in total, and they are serviceable for us today. First, *he petitions God*, then *he presses his reasons upon God*, and in the middle of the emergency that David is in, he tells Yahweh *why he should and must deliver him*.

1. Deliver me because of who You are. (v.4)

- ⁴ Return, O LORD, rescue my soul;
Save me because of Your lovingkindness.

The words, “**rescue**” and “**save**” are terms of *deliverance*. David is not praying to be saved spiritually, but from this ordeal! He knows where to look, and what arm to lay upon. He does not lay hold of God’s left arm of justice, but he reaches out to God’s right hand of mercy.

Someone recently asked me, “Is it okay to pray for God to take you out of something if you know that He is using it to make you Christlike?” And here is the answer—*David did!* There is another, stronger testimony in the New Testament. When Jesus was days away from the cross, and His soul was deeply grieved to the point of death, sorrow was killing Him, as it were. The gospel writers tell us that He fell on His face and prayed, “*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.*” (Matt.26:39).

The Hebrew word for “return” (*shuwb*) could be a reference to *what God has done in the past*, and now David is asking, “Do it again Lord, do it again!” Or, it could be that David’s misery is causing him to feel as if God has deserted him—and so he prays, “Return...return...return in closeness!” The main point to catch is that David’s argument rests on *the character and promise of God*—“*Save me because of Your lovingkindness.*”

God’s “**lovingkindness**” (*hesed*) is one of the BIG words of the Old Testament because it describes a kind of love that God has for His people that *pledges to never let them go.*

When God gave the Law to His people, this is how He described Himself.

- **Exodus 20:5b-6**—for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Later on, when the two tablets that Moses broke were replaced, God again said,

- **Exodus 34:6-7**— Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

God’s lovingkindness is His *covenant, loyal, unfailing* love. It has been described as a “stork-like” love because a stork is known for having a tenacious love and protectiveness of their offspring. This is true of God’s love for His people! David’s argument is, God, deliver me because *this is the sort of God that you have declared Yourself to be.*

Application: Come up close and listen, dear friends. Sometimes, this is our only hope in times of trouble. Simply KNOWING that God has *said something about Himself*, and *what He will do is the only thing that keeps you* (Heb.13:5; Num.23:19). And this is why the doctrine of God (understanding theology about God’s attributes) is important for the Christian life. It brings comfort when facing the troubles of life and suffering.

2. Deliver me because of why I live. (v.5)

- ⁵ For there is no mention of You in death;
In Sheol who will give You thanks?

What does David mean here? Does he mean that when believers die, they have no hope beyond the grave? Does he mean that death silences us forever, and we cease to exist? Absolutely not. Sheol was the Old Testament name for the place where the departed dead live on. It was not the place of the departed saved or righteous, but the place where the unsaved man or woman went to after physical death—when the lost die, they don't give thanks to God. Gratitude does not rise from the pit of hell.

David is not in fear of his *salvation*, and he did not have to wait until the New Testament to gain his doctrine of the resurrection. Psalm 16, as well as Job 19, informed his view of the resurrection. David believes in a bodily resurrection and eternal life in the presence of God. I believe what David is saying here is this: *"If I am in the grave, I can't glorify you on earth."*

Or, again as Peterson puts it...

- I'm no good to you dead, am I?
I can't sing in your choir if I'm buried in some tomb!

David had hope beyond death, but he is saying, "If I die, there will be one less heart to praise you on earth, Lord. I'm not ready to die yet. I still have praise to offer in life. I still want to fulfill my purposes on the earth..." Death robs us of the opportunity to *glorify* and *serve* God here on earth. So, if you want God to be *praised on earth*, you've got to do it *while you're on earth*. If you want to *serve God on earth*, you've got to do it *while you're on earth*; and we're only on earth for a very short time! In the grand scheme of things, our life is a vapor, a quick breath, and the clock is ticking away! Soon our bodies will be in the grave, and we will not have these opportunities to worship or serve God in the world.

David uses this as an argument as to why he should be spared. *"If I am spared, it is only to glorify you. Deliver me for your glory."* Is this at the heart of our prayers? "Answer, Lord that Your name might be praised!" This is where you see the radical difference between a believer and a non-believer—in life, in suffering, and in pain, the believer wants to *glorify God*.

Argument #1) *Deliver me because of who You are*. Argument #2) *Deliver me because of why I live*.

3. Deliver me because of what I feel. (vv.6-7)

- ⁶ I am weary with my sighing;
Every night I make my bed swim,
I dissolve my couch with my tears.
⁷ My eye has wasted away with grief;
It has become old because of all my adversaries.

The third argument underscores *the misery David feels*. Trouble has taken a toll on him *emotionally*, *physically*, and *spiritually*. He is shot. He cannot sleep. He cannot stop the tears from flooding his

eyes and racing down his face. When your body is wracked with pain, it is hard to sleep. The nights are long and lonely, and this is where grief often reaches its darkest point.

The “wasting” and weakness of the eye tell us that his body is in *a state of decline*. You remember it was said of Moses before his death in Deuteronomy 34:7, that “*his eyesight had not failed*” indicating that he was in a generally robust state of health at the age of 120 years old!

But David is going down fast. The *groaning, sighing, tears, grief, and exhaustion* have led him to make this argument. But why does David rehearse all of this to God? God doesn’t need information. What does this have to do with an *argument in prayer*?



If you are taking notes, write this down in CAPITAL LETTERS...*David is assuming something*. We all make assumptions. You assumed that when you came to morning worship, you would *sing, study, hear the Word preached, and fellowship* with other believers. But what is David assuming about God? *He is assuming that God cares about how he feels*. He is assuming that *God is merciful*. Does God care about those who hurt? Is God *touched by the misery of our condition*? Does our misery move God or arouse God’s mercy? David assumes that it does. He assumes that *God is a Father who has a heart*. Jesus proved that David was right.

- **John 1:18**—No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.
- **John 3:16**—For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
- **Romans 5:8**—But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that foll’west all my way,
I yield my flick’ring torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine’s blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.²

Application: In this psalm, we clearly see what place *emotions* have in prayer, but we also discover that there is a place for *rational, reasonable, sincere arguments* before God—as if we were making a case in a courtroom or with a parent.

² George Matheson, *O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*

- **Psalm 69:19-20**—¹⁹ Blessed by the Lord, who daily bears our burden, the God who is our salvation. ²⁰ God is to us a God of deliverances; and to God the Lord belong escapes from death.”

One final heading. The agony he knows. The argument he makes.

C. The assurance he finds (vv.8-10)

- ⁸ Depart from me, all you who do iniquity,
For the LORD has heard the voice of my weeping.
⁹ The LORD has heard my supplication,
The LORD receives my prayer.
¹⁰ All my enemies will be ashamed and greatly dismayed;
They shall turn back, they will suddenly be ashamed.



While in the place of weakness, fear, weariness, and tears, David finds an assurance. “*The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping...the Lord has heard my supplication...the Lord receives my prayer.*” What do you mean, David? How did you know? Did God give him a sign? Did a prophet meet him in the cave and give him a word from God? Did a fellow worshiper speak a word of assurance to him? Or, did an angel come and assure him, “David the request has been received in heaven’s email, and you should expect an answer shortly...”? David does not tell us. But, the New Testament teaches us that *assurance of salvation* comes in two ways:

1. Assurance comes *internally by Spirit*.

- **Romans 8:16**—The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

2. Assurance comes *externally by the Word*.

- **1 John 5:11-13**—And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.
¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

But assurance of *answered prayer* comes from praying in harmony with *the revealed will of God*.

- **1 John 5:14-15**—This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that He hears us *in whatever we ask*, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.

What are the things about which you are certain? That your spouse and children love you? That your family is not perfect? How about, this one—*that God hears your prayers?*

We know that *God answers prayer because the Bible says so* (2 Chr.7:14; Ps.116:1). But we also know that there are reasons for unanswered prayer like 1) *regarding sin in our hearts* (Ps.66:18-19), 2) *ignoring the Word* (Prov.28:9), and 3) *being cold toward the needy* (Prov.21:13). But this “Spirit-given certainty” comes to David as he finds himself *in the place of prayer* at the feet of His heavenly Father. Don’t let that fact escape you. The place of prayer *positions* you to hear from God.

Before we end, I would like to add a note of clarity from last week’s message. On the last point concerning *How to Pray the Bible Way* was this point: *prayer transforms us*. Now we’ve all heard the

mantra or the Christian cliché that “Prayer changes things...” But it is better theology to say, “Prayer doesn’t change things, but *prayer lays hold of God who changes things* and who, *in prayer, changes us.*”

Sometimes—not always, but according to God’s pleasure—He can give you the assurance that your plea is heard right amid your trouble. David would have us to walk away with this truth:

- Prayer puts us in the very best place to find the Solution to our troubles—and that is, *in the presence of Yahweh Himself who restores and gives assurance through faith in Jesus Christ.*

Conclusion:

In the 1940s during the Second World War, C.S. Lewis wrote a book that is still of great significance today entitled, *The Problem of Pain*. Why that title? Because pain is a problem for people who believe that God is both sovereign (in control) and good. For if God is truly *sovereign*, why doesn’t He remove pain? And if God is truly *loving*, does He have the desire to stop the misery? Either way, pain is *problematic for us*.

Lewis wrote this statement that is worth the price of the book ten times over,

“We can ignore pleasure, but pain insists on being attended to.
God whispers to us in our pleasure, speaks in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pain.
It is God’s megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”³

If things are going well with you right now...what is God whispering to you? Are you listening?

If God is speaking to your conscience, are you ignoring that still, small voice?

If God is shouting to you in your pain, remember what Jesus did.

- **Hebrews 5:7**—In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.

Do you want to find assurance in the agony of your troubles, weakness, fears? Then follow Jesus today. He was a Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief (*Is.53:3*). In His death, our griefs He bore and sorrows He carried (*Is.53:4*). Turn *toward* Him—for without Him; you will perish. But there is salvation in His name (*Acts 4:12*). He delivers and assures.

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

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