

Bible Study on Psalm 6

Penitential Psalms – Crying to the Lord for Mercy

In penitential psalms, the psalmist is often alone and ashamed, like a man in a dark alley searching for his friend. The two have walked together, but the psalmist has gone his own way. Now he huddles in pain, hoping to see his friend's face, to receive his forgiveness, and to see the friendship restored again. Sin has separated the psalmist from God, his friend. The psalmist pleads that God restore the relationship that the psalmist has broken. God's mercy is his only hope. And it's our only as well. (LL)

The penitential psalms also call upon God to save the psalmist from the results of his own sins. He complains of physical weakness (Ps. 38:5-8), spiritual anguish (Ps. 130:1-2), and broken relationship (Ps. 38:11) – all of which result from sin. The psalmist cannot save himself from those consequences any more than from his guilt. He could easily fall into despair. Yet these psalms show us that like the psalmist, we, too can cry out to God for help with our sin and with its consequence. (LL)

In the penitential psalms, we see a desire for a stronger relationship with God, an ongoing relationship. Forgiveness and deliverance from the current difficulty are not enough because those remedies – wonderful as they are – could become merely “quick fixes” apart from a close fellowship with God. Such continued fellowship gives us confidence that God will always forgive us and that He will work in us the faith and power we need to grow in faith and obedience. (LL)

A few psalms that fit into this category are Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143.

A prayer in time of severe illness, an occasion seized upon by David's enemies to vent their animosity. This psalm pictures a man in deep distress because of illness. Yet, his distress is not only about his illness. It is about the guilt that has brought these consequences upon him. His greatest need is for peace with God.

Sin hurts. It hurts us and it hurts our heavenly Father. It can also hurt family members, friends, and others around us. In this psalm, David expresses the hurt cause by unconfessed sin. He also cries out for God's forgiveness. The psalm opens with an appeal.

1. For what three or four things does David ask of God in verses 1-3?
2. What would “rebuke in anger...discipline in your wrath” look like? Can you think of a time when this happened?
3. What is David feeling in verse 2?
4. What do you think “bones are in agony” means?
5. Does every illness come from un-confessed sin?

6. What does “How long, O Lord, how long?” imply?
7. What is the comfort in verse 4?
8. What is David suggesting in verse 5?
9. David’s anguish leads him to experience physical effects in his body. What are some of these (vv. 6, 7)?
10. Satan can use the anguish our sins cause us to make us doubt God’s love, mercy, grace, and His eternal plan for us. What help does our Lord provide for us when we struggle with guilt and Satan’s lies about God’s forgiveness? See 1 John 3:19-20 and James 5:16.
11. What do verses 8-10 reflect?
12. What words or phrases from 1 John 1:9 provide the most comfort to you when you confess your sins?
13. What does David mean when he says “away from me, all you who do evil (v. 8)?”
14. What does verse 10 imply?

David pleads with the Lord for deliverance from anxiety, physical discomfort, and sickness caused by a growing awareness of his sinful condition. Luther referred to such mental torment as *Anfechtung*, a German term for the state of despair and doubt we human beings experience when coming to terms with the consequences of our failure to meet the demands of God’s Law. Scripture clearly reveals that the result of sin is death (Rm 6:23), but how seriously do we take this threat? Consider this: nearly 2,000 years ago, our sinful condition was so desperate that God sent His own Son to pay the price. God be praised! Through faith in Christ’s redemption, our sins have been forgiven. • Lord, hear my plea, and accept my prayer through the merits of Jesus, who prays for me. Amen. (TLSB)

Some Answers to the above Questions:

1. In verses 1-3, David asks God not to impose the penalty he deserves for his sin. David also asks God not to rebuke him or discipline him in anger, but to be merciful toward him. In verse 3, David asks God, "How long?" David boldly asks God this question, because he believes in God's righteousness and love for him. He also knows that God is faithful to His people. David believes that God will act on his behalf. In his anguish he wonders when God's aid and forgiveness will come.

2. The full penalty David deserved for sin was death. It's also the penalty we deserve.

3. A number of verses in this psalm show David's distress and fear. In verse 2 he states, "I am faint...my bones are in agony." In verse 3 he says "my soul is in anguish." In verse 6 he says, "I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears." Verse 7 states, "My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes." Other answers will vary.

4. Physical effects of sin David mentions include weakness or fainting spells, pain, fatigue, burning eyes or blurred vision. We can probably include other symptoms as well. Worry and guilt can indeed make a person physically sick,

5. No specific situation need be mentioned. On one hand, many of us could take sin more seriously than we do. Our sins caused the death of the sinless Son of God! On the other hand, God does not want us to wallow in guilt feelings and remorse, thus damaging the bodies He's given us. Jesus died so we could live free from guilt and the terror of our sins.

6. Answers will vary.

7. The verses listed in the question found in Psalms 16, 17 and 73 show that the OT people did indeed believe in a life after death and that for the believer, this life included being with God. Ps. 16:9-11 says that the body will "rest secure," and that God will not abandon His people to the grave. These verses go on to say that God will fill us with joy in His presence. Verse 10 in particular talks about resurrection from the dead. The "Holy One" refers to Jesus Christ whose resurrection makes our own bodily resurrection possible. Ps. 17:15 says, "when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing Your likeness." When believers awaken from physical death, we are at once with God. Psalm 73:23-26 says that after physical death, God will take His people into glory (heaven).

8. David was apparently talking about his body which, once buried in the grave, would not give praise to God until after the resurrection. Our souls return to God

immediately upon death; at the resurrection soul and body are reunited to an eternal and glorious existence.

9. Throughout all of Holy Scripture, God constantly reassures us of His grace toward us in Jesus Christ as well as of His forgiveness of our sins for Jesus' sake. In John 3:19-20, the Holy Spirit assures us that when our consciences condemn us we can remember that God is "greater than our hearts." His verdict on our lives counts and the verdict is "Righteous!" in Christ. James 5:13-16 urges us to confess our sins to one another and to pray for one another. This practice can be of special help when we struggle with a guilty conscience.