

# **Bible Study on Psalms**

## **Penitential Psalms – Crying to the Lord for Mercy**

### **Psalm 6**

1. In Psalm 6, David expresses the hurt caused by unconfessed sin. He also cries out for God's forgiveness.
  - a. David asks God not to impose the penalty he deserves for his sin. David also asks God not 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 will act on his behalf. In his anguish he wonders when God's aid and forgiveness will come.
  - b. The full penalty David deserved for his sins was death. It's also the penalty we deserve.
  - c. 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.
2. The Lord has heard my weeping and we can tell evildoers to go away (v. 8). The hears our cry and accepts our prayer (v. 9). Our enemies will be put to shame (v. 10)

### **Psalm 38**

3. In more powerful language than perhaps any the other penitential psalms in this study Psalm 38 describes the anguish sin causes. What are the three areas of David's life damaged by his sin?
  - a. David describes physical pain and sickness.
  - b. Depression and emotional grief.
  - c. Pain of betrayal and abandonment by friends and family.
4. When conscience accuses, our hearts feel very heavy indeed. Such guilt quickly drags our mood down and weighs on our minds. We can fall into the kind of depression and hopelessness David describes.
5. The pervasive and debilitating effects sin produces in our souls, bodies, emotions, and relationships. Sins is painful and ultimately deadly.
6. Jesus' promises to take our burden and to give us rest provides much comfort if we remember that a major part of the burden we carry is the load of guilt.

## Psalm 102

1. Bodies burning and emaciated are powerful pictures of the effects of sin (vv. 3-4). In verse 6 the “owl” is mentioned in the NIV translation. It actually translates as the word “pelican” from the Hebrew. Both birds were ritually unclean according to OT Levitical law and both frequented desert areas and ruins. Verse 9 says, “I eat ashes as my food.” This phrase compares the psalmist’s anguish to mourning because it was a custom in that time to cover oneself in ashes when mourning the death of a loved one.
2. The psalmist’s focus shifts from his own sin to God’s holiness, goodness, and power.
3. God is eternal, constant, “enthroned forever,” and will remain even after his creation is gone. Go’s years will never end. Man, on the other hand, is limited, fleeting, sinful, and condemned without Jesus. The psalm pictures God and human beings as total opposites. He is the Creator; we are his creatures.
4. All members of the Triune God are eternal. All have existed forever (John 1:1-2). Because Jesus will never change, we can depend fully on him to save us. He will not abandon us to the judgment. Hebrews 6:16-20 says that our hope of salvation in Jesus is the “anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (v. 19). In Jesus we are securely anchored in life and in death. He will not let the winds and waves of sin, eternal death, and Satan pull us away from him.

## Psalm 143

1. Psalm 143:2 describes the condition of all humanity as unrighteous, as lacking right-standing before God.
2. Despite his unrighteousness, the psalmist confidently comes to God in prayer to ask for God’s forgiveness and help.
  - a. Despite his sinful nature, the psalmist can confidently come to God for help, because he knows that God is faithful and righteous (v. 1); he knows that God has worked for good for him before (v. 5); and he knows that God loves him without fail (v. 8).
  - b. We can have this same confidence, because we have been redeemed through the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. Christ’s “sacrifice of atonement” (Rom. 3:25) satisfied the righteous wrath of God and made us “at one again” with God. we can confidently come to God in repentance, because Jesus opened the way for us through his death. We can be confident of God’s forgiveness because “He who promised is faithful” (Hebrew 10:23).

3. Besides rescue, the psalmist also asks God to guide his whole life. He asks God to “teach [him] to do [his] will.” The psalmist doesn’t confess his sins as a “quick fix” for his immediate problems. Rather he wants God to work in him so that he can live in a God-pleasing way, doing what God wants for him.

After reading and rereading a psalm, ask yourself these questions. What words or phrases stick out to you? How do these words or phrases reveal the poet’s purpose for the psalm? What effect does this psalm have on you as you meditate on it?