

Prayers

To God

Praise God for His strength and power, and for His help in the situations you currently face.

For myself

Be with me, Lord Jesus, I pray. For I know I need Your power, Your truth, Your humility, and a thousand other spiritual qualities to help me on my way. I am not worthy to receive Your gifts, for my nature falls far short of Your holiness. But I trust in You, Lord Jesus, for by Your death and Resurrection You have made me worthy of Your love and Your grace; so in Your mercy, grant me those gifts I need to live this day as a true disciple of Yours. **AMEN**

For others

Weekly theme: embracing change

Pray for refugees in the world, who face the most enormous changes because of violence done to them as innocent people. There are many across the world, but we remember especially those fleeing Syria at this time.

Meditation

Lord of all, break down the barriers between Your people.
Between all of us who make up Your Body, Your Church,
And who sometimes find it so hard to all get along!

The young who cannot understand the elderly;
And the old who can't get along with the young.

Those who like to 'experiment' in worship;
And those who are comfortable with what they know.

The people who don't want to hold office in church;
And those who like to sit on committees and do jobs.

Evangelists who want to 'preach the Gospel';
And those who serve the needs of the faithful.

Those who think they know what Your Word is;

And those who know they have much more to learn.

The pastorally sensitive who perceive needs not met;
And activists with visions who keep everyone busy.

Lord of all, surely You have a way of enabling all Your people
To live together, to love each other, and work for Your Kingdom?
Fill us with Your Spirit, so we may all see Your love in each other!

Bible Passage

Psalm 30

A psalm. A song at the dedication of the Temple. Of David.

- ¹ I will make sure You are praised, O LORD, for You rescued me,
and did not let my enemies triumph over me.
- ² O LORD my God, I called out to You for help,
and You healed me.
- ³ O LORD, You brought me up from the grave;
You restored my life and did not let me go down to the pit.

- ⁴ Make music to the LORD, you His faithful ones;
and confess your remembrance of His holiness.
- ⁵ For His anger lasts only for a moment,
but His favour is for life:
Weeping may linger through the night,
but in the morning, comes joy.

- ⁶ As for me, I said when I felt at ease,
'I shall never be shaken.'
- ⁷ LORD, when I was in Your favour,
You made me firm like a mountain;
But then you hid Your face,
and I was dismayed!

- ⁸ I cried out to You, O LORD,
to You, my Lord, I cried for mercy:
- ⁹ 'What point is there in the loss of my life,
in my going down into the pit?
Will the dust praise You?
Will it testify to Your faithfulness?'
- ¹⁰ Hear, O LORD, have mercy on me;
O LORD, be my help.

- ¹¹ You transformed my weeping into dancing!
You striped off my rags and clothed me with joy!
- ¹² I will therefore sing glorious praises to You, O LORD my God;
and I will never cease to give you praise, for ever.

Review

This is a beautiful psalm about healing, with many colourful expressions about God's power to heal and save. Who can read this psalm and not dwell on phrases like this '*I called out to You for help, and You healed me*' (30:2); or, '*weeping may linger through the night, but in the morning comes joy.*' (30:5). Within the psalm there are phrases which fit many human situations and needs, and it repeatedly confirms God's desire to heal. The writer had undoubtedly been healed but also sought more healing. But as we will see, behind this theme is perhaps a deeper theme that will become apparent as we study it closer.

The first three verses recall David's escapes from 'enemies' while on the run, though the general theme is unmistakably about healing. Perhaps the real enemy here is illness, along with everything that pulls people down towards '*the grave*' (30:3), perhaps ageing? Then, most of the psalm (30:4-9) describes the emotions of people facing chronic illness. It offers thanks for salvation (30:3), reflects on trials of faith during illness (30:4,5), speaks of confessing ungodly attitudes (30:6,7), and it pleads with the Lord for mercy and life (30:8,9). The psalm concludes with glorious worship of God, who, in response to calls for mercy and help, enables those who have suffered to make the change from sadness and rejection, and then praise the Lord with zeal like that of David (2 Sam 6:15)!

You may have noticed that the psalm begins with some words just before verse 1 (part of the Hebrew text), which reveal that Psalm 30 was for '*the dedication of the Temple*'. Now, before David's death, he appointed his son Solomon to build the Temple (1 Kings 1,2), and Asaph to perform songs in it (2 Chron 16:7f.). Perhaps this psalm reflects these times, when the king was old, enduring the troubles of old age yet still rejoicing in God's salvation!

More than that, Psalm 30 reminds us that the Temple was not just built for sacrificial worship. It was a place of prayer where people brought their deepest concerns to the Lord, and in using such psalms, people could put their concerns about life and health to the Lord.

Going Deeper

Health and healing

But there is so much more within this psalm for us to discover. Verse 3, for example, is a remarkable affirmation of the power of God over death; something which we take for granted today because we know what Jesus did. But this is rarely commented upon in the Old Testament! Throughout the psalm, there are other indications of the spiritual nature of healing and also its relationship with repentance. These are important issues for us, and the whole psalm illuminates Christian faith.

I offer a word of caution. Psalm 30 does not describe healing in a way that connects with the stories of Jesus' healing miracles. There is no 'throwing away the crutches', or 'the blind receiving their sight'! This is because the psalm is about healing that comes, even physical healing, through being close to God, and it does not dwell on the dramatics of what happens physically when people are healed. We should remember that whenever Jesus performed a healing He gave thanks to God or encouraged those who were healed to do so (Matt 8:4f.). Perhaps those who were healed recited this psalm, available in the Temple for this precise purpose!

Being saved from death

The Hebrew words of verse 3 describe salvation from death as similar to being drawn up, like water, from a very deep well. It is a powerful image, and one which those who have been very ill will perhaps feel closer to than those who have not! However, the Lord is in control of death, and His authority over life is dramatically affirmed by this great verse. Healing, of course, is a miracle of God's grace which points to the greatest miracle of all, which is Jesus' own death and resurrection. Every healing we experience, whether under the surgeon's knife or by the direct hand of God, shows us His power over all life, and tell us that our eternal destiny is safe in His hands.

This psalm talks about being saved '*from the grave*' (30:3), and of course, all healing is ultimately a gift of life that keeps us from the grave! The Hebrew word for 'grave' is 'Sheol', a word used in ancient Greek for death, and in Hebrew for the dark underworld of soul-less existence after death. The psalm reminds those of us who live in the comforting world of medical services that all too often, illness is a step towards our final end. In this light, people who have chronic illness or who know they are suffering the degenerations of old age, face the fact that unless the Lord does something radical, their ailments are with them until they die. Many of God's people in such circumstances become very conscious of God's hand upholding them as their bodies fail. Active young Christians do not like to think about such things, but they are very real for many.

The sin of presumed self sufficiency

The wonderful miracle of God's healing grace is here set against the human sin of self sufficiency. Verse 6 speaks of '*being at ease*' and the feeling '*I shall never be shaken*'. Of course, if life goes well and we experience no illness, then even as Christians we may well feel like this. Dramatically, the psalm reminds us that there will be times when it seems that the Lord has '*hid His face*' (30:7). Christians typically feel like this when disease hits or danger comes and there seems to be no escape. We pray and nothing seems to happen; as the psalm says '*I was dismayed*' (30:7)

The psalmist realises that smug self satisfaction in a state of general health can be a delusion which is destructive of real faith and trust in God. In building up to this important point, the words of verse 4 are crucial. In many translations they read '*sing praises to the Lord, O you His holy ones, and give thanks to His holy name.*' (30:4 – NRSV). The reasons for this translation are complex, but a more straightforward reading of the Hebrew tells us that what is really at stake is the worshippers desire to remember and confess the holiness of God; '*make music to the Lord, you His faithful ones, and confess your remembrance of His holiness*' (30:4 - my translation). Self sufficiency in faith and life is a danger; the psalm specifically asks us to confess to the Lord and remember that we are dependent on Him.

Our confidence must be in Christ alone, but how easily do we slip into self confidence! Illness often challenges self sufficiency most strongly. Moreover, the time will most certainly come, through illness, old age or the calamities of our wayward planet, when our most treasured confidence in the provisions of this world, even if we believe them to be God given, will be shattered. But we have the benefit of the wisdom of this psalm and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to find our way through illness, to find the Lord's healing power.

Repentance and true praise

From verse 8 onwards, the psalmist repents of his worldly assumptions and cries out to God (30:8f.). Up to now, the evidence is that he has praised God because of the healing that the Lord has done for him (30:2,6) but illness and healing have changed his spirit, and the values of self sufficiency in faith and comfortable living in the presumed 'goodness' of the Lord have been cast aside. The real 'goodness of the Lord' lies not in the good things of life, but in salvation and liberation and healing. When people realise this, life is truly changed, and the route to this is through repentance (30:8).

Then, after removing the ritual garments of repentance (the rags of verse 11), the focus of his praise is no longer his own position and favour, but the assembly of God's people and the praise of the whole congregation within the Temple of God: *'I will therefore sing glorious praises to You, O Lord, my God ...'* (30:12). This final verse of the psalm echoes the earlier praises described in verse 4 and the psalm is complete as this praise is offered.

Discipleship

Application

Healing and repentance

Here in this psalm, healing is found in repentance, and not for the only time in Scripture (see Jesus and the healing of the Paralytic, Mark 2:1-12, in which Jesus calls the paralytic to repentance). It is by repentance that we turn away from self centredness to allow God to be the sole director of our life, and repentance and healing often go hand in hand. Sometimes we will never know whether sin has actually caused sickness, and it is presumptuous of us to suggest that it does; but there is no doubt that when we submit ourselves to God and repent of our sins, then the Holy Spirit is able to do great things.

Standing firm in faith - in the midst of trials

Before experiencing illness and God's healing, the psalmist felt quite secure in his relationship with God, he believed that his 'happy times' were a blessing from God, I quote *'Lord, when I was in Your favour, you made me firm, like a mountain ...'* (30:7). I have often heard good Christian folk quietly express this same confidence: *'everything is going fine, God has blessed me and I have so much more than I could have imagined ...'* When I hear this, I fear for the faith of the one from whom I hear it, for the true measure of faith is the ability to stand firm with Christ in the midst of all evil and against all odds; as Jesus so clearly taught (Matt 5:11-13).

Facing the end

At some point in our future, we will be faced with the ultimate end of all we hold dear, and death will look at us directly. Many Christians, as in many societies today, try to bury this thought and are happy to say 'we will deal with this when it comes'. I suggest this is to put our 'heads in the sand'. It is the testimony of many, and is certainly my own testimony, that life takes on a new perspective when faced by our mortality. The worldly person who has everything may well ask 'will I still be able to know God's presence when I die?' But if we know the healing power of God, our spirits are changed by the Holy Spirit, and we know the answer; we do not have to ask the question. We say with the psalmist *'You transform my weeping into dancing! You strip off my rags and clothe me with joy!'* This is Resurrection faith, and all of God's Word declares it!

Ideas for what to do

- I suggest you focus on the importance of repentance within this psalm; for it lies at the heart of the Psalm (30:4,8). Repentance is something we need to return to, over and over again; indeed, it should be a part of our life, a regular feature of our discipleship

whatever else we regard as important. Make sure that you take regular opportunities to repent and confess your sins to God, and you will find your life is transformed.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Have you had an experience where death has been near, and the Lord has spoken to you through this?
2. Is there any part of the psalm that you feel has not been adequately covered by the story of repentance and healing given above?
3. What reasons would you give for the lack of response to the altar call given by the preacher above?

Final Prayer

You have done all this for me, Lord Jesus. You have lived and died, and risen again, so that I might receive the forgiveness of my sins and be free before my Maker; thank You, my Lord and my God. Make my heart a spiritual 'open book' upon which You may write Your eternal truths, O Lord. AMEN