

Prayers

To God

Praise You Lord Jesus Christ, for You fill my soul with joy and gladness. Joy because I know You are alongside me in everything I do, and gladness because You bring the best out of me in every situation. These gifts of grace enable me to stand above the strife, suffering and evil in this world, and when they touch me, I can know for sure that Your love will restore my body and soul, and lead me back again to You. Thank You Jesus; AMEN

For myself

Pray for your health. Pray that you will have the wisdom to know when to call a doctor, when to ask the Lord to help you and when to do both.

For others

Weekly theme: The press

Pray about the whole matter of social media and the future of information dispersal on the internet. Some think that the days of the newspaper are numbered, for example, but what do you think? Pray for truth to prevail as such things develop over the years

Meditation

Brother, sister, friend; the Lord watches His people, so ...

Take time to speak to friends who need help and comfort;
Especially those with whom you have had your differences.

Offer love and affection to everyone within your family;
Especially to any who find it hard to show love to others.

Give attention to those who seek your help, whatever the need;
Especially the poor and downtrodden, rejected by others.

Present yourselves well, and speak no ill of colleagues;
Especially those who make life difficult for you, or hate you.

Take care to finish your work properly, you do it for the Lord;
Especially when time is precious and others depend on you.

Bring your prayers to the Lord, day or night, as needs arise;
Especially if life is tough, and you need even more of His help.

Brother, sister, friend; the Lord watches His people, and he loves them..

Bible Passage

Psalm 6

For the director of music. With stringed instruments. According to sheminith. A psalm of David.

- 1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.
- 2 Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony.
- 3 My soul is in anguish.
How long, O LORD, how long?
- 4 Turn, O LORD, and deliver me;
save me because of your unfailing love.
- 5 No-one remembers you when he is dead.
Who praises you from his grave?
- 6 I am worn out from groaning;
all night long I flood my bed with weeping
and drench my couch with tears.
- 7 My eyes grow weak with sorrow;
they fail because of all my foes.
- 8 Away from me, all you who do evil,
for the LORD has heard my weeping.
- 9 The LORD has heard my cry for mercy;
the LORD accepts my prayer.
- 10 All my enemies will be ashamed and dismayed;
They will turn away in sudden disgrace.

Review

Psalm 6 is a cry from the heart of one who suffers, and it seeks the Lord's help for various physical and spiritual problems. But it ends with a shout of triumph at the Lord's deliverance! Again, as with all the psalms ascribed to David (see superscription), we can imagine David bringing such a pray to God in the midst of his various troubles. We can also imagine Israelites using the prayer throughout the centuries of the Israelites nations and beyond, and today, a worshipper can use the psalm to bring their own troubles to the Lord.

This is the fourth psalm of David in a row (Psalms 3-6) in which a worshipper comes before the Lord with troubles. It is different from the others however, because it deals not with suffering in general or the sufferings of Israel as a nation, but with the suffering of an individual. Here, the worshipper pours out feelings of distress, physical pain and mental anguish (6:1-7) before finally finding deliverance (6:8-10). Because of this, the psalm particularly suitable for use in the church's healing ministry. In addition, Christian tradition links this psalm with Jesus' weeping in the garden of Gethsemane (see verses 6 and 7), and because it speaks of deliverance (see verses 8-10) coming after death (see verse 5), it tells a story of salvation, consistent with the Gospel!

Before we go further, there are two things of interest within the psalm. Firstly, most of its verses can be found elsewhere in Scripture, either in the Psalms or in Jeremiah (Psalm 38:1, 42:4, 109:26, Jeremiah 45:3, Psalm 31:10, 119:115, 35:4,26 and 83:13). This is somewhat remarkable, and it suggests that the sentiments of Psalm 6 may have been important in Old Testament times. Also, the superscription (before verse 1) is very interesting, because it gives musical instructions which contains a rare Hebrew word, '*sheminith*', meaning '*eighth*'. What could this mean? It could be a request for the singers to sing the psalm in musical '*eighth's*', or as a musician of any age would understand it, in unison. If sung in this way, the psalm would have a considerable sense of '*gravitas*', very much in line with its theme!

Historically, psalm 6 is the first of what are called the seven '*Penitential Psalms*' (6,32,38,51,102,130,143). These are used in Christian worship for confessing sin and asking the Lord for help. Most of psalm 6 is an anguished cry for help, and it seems obvious that it would be used by someone who was in trouble. The striking feature of the psalm is the way that it leads a worshipper to calls out to the Lord, confident that He has done what was asked of Him, and given victory (6:9)! The worshipper has cried out for help, and is almost startled by God's answers to prayer (6:8-10)!

The first six verses of this psalm describe suffering of one kind or another, but it does not say exactly what the suffering is. We are left with some generalised phrases that can describe any number of illnesses or trials. So, verse 2 talks about '*bones*' being '*in agony*', but verse 3 the worshipper calls out, '*my soul is in anguish*' (6:3), but no specific illness is described. We might assume that this means mental suffering, but we should be careful, because in the Old Testament, the word '*soul*' refers not just to the '*non-physical*' or '*spirit*' part of the individual, but to the whole person. So, the suffering described in psalm 6 might be either physical, mental, or indeed spiritual. But whatever it is, it causes the worshipper to break down and cry out to God, '*how long, O Lord, how long*' (6:3)! The psalm is an appeal for God's mercy rather than His discipline, and in verse 4 the worshipper cries out for God's '*unfailing love*', a word in Hebrew which describes God's great covenant love for His people, His relationship with those He has chosen.

In the next verse (6:5), a pertinent question is asked; does this love of God extend beyond the grave (6:5)? In Old Testament times, the answer to this was not known. In David's day, people did not believe in the resurrection as we think of it today; for them, the afterlife was believed to be a shadowy existence separated from God, in a place called '*Sheol*' (otherwise called Hades' in New Testament times), underneath the earth. So here, David fears and its consequences (6:5), loss of sleep with worry (6:6), and physical distress (6:7). He wonders whether God will hear the suffering of His own. Even though today, we can answer his question confidently knowing that Jesus has saved us from death, people still fear separation from God, and this psalm still speaks to such fears.

Then quite suddenly, verse 8 comes with a surprise! The worshipper cries '*away from me, you evil doers!*', and then begins to praise God (6:8-10). What does this mean? I suggest this is a shout of confidence from the heart of a worshipper who has come to the Lord in deep suffering, but who has been inspired by worship to trust the Lord again. Then, having accepted the Lord's mercy, the worshipper looks to the future in confidence, saying, '*all my enemies will be ashamed and dismayed, they will turn away in disgrace!*' (6:10).

We could imagine a worshipper coming before the Lord in the time of David, presenting troubles to the Lord, perhaps reading from this psalm and therefore being encouraged by the uplifting tone of the last three verses. The psalm was used by many as a prayer, and it was also used by Kings of Israel or Judah in troubled times, bringing problems to the Lord and seeking assurance from the psalm that God would save His people.

We now read this psalm as Christians, because it reflects the saving work of God in Christ. Using this psalm, a worshipper today can bring to the Lord the troubles of life, knowing that in Christ, they may be confident of victory. The victory of Jesus' life, death and resurrection

encompasses all things, and all life and death are in the Lord's hands. Ultimately this is what matters, whatever our health issues, and whether or not the Lord grants us special healing for particular woes. In this psalm, we claim everything Christ has already done for us and for our ultimate deliverance!

Discipleship

Application

Turning disaster into hope

Trouble and disaster can be life changing, either for good or for ill. It is therefore a great blessing to have a psalm such as this, which encourages the user to submit everything to the Lord God and trust in His salvation. When in trouble, people can easily become swamped by what has happened; this can lead to despair and ongoing misery. The only way to avoid this is to overcome the negativity of trauma and find new life, and of course, this new life is found foremost on God who gives this gift to those who trust Him and believe in Him. Psalm 6 leads people away from gloom and despair to hope in God, but this comes by way of worship and acceptance that the God who made the world is the only one who can grant this gift.

Coping with suffering and with stress

I have found that the resolution of suffering can come through prayer for healing, or it can come through handing over my condition to God and being content that He is in control of my life. It is so sad that many people leave the church because they can find no way of coping with suffering or sadness, when in reality, the Lord alone is able to offer the only way out of such inner turmoil and distress. It is therefore all the more important that I and everyone else with a testimony of God's grace, should speak out about what God has done for us. The message of God's love is needed out there!

Ideas for what to do

- Within this psalm, a great deal of suffering is resolved eventually by faith. What does trouble and strife do to your life of Christian discipleship? Ask yourself some hard questions about whether anything stops you from following the path of discipleship. How can you deal with it?
- Pray for those who struggle with suffering, and especially any people you know personally who have difficulty with suffering and their faith.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Recall times when you believe that God has saved you. What has changed in your life as a consequence?
2. Look at the expression 'save me because of Your unfailing love' (6:4). Reflect on God's 'unfailing love'. Is that how you experience God now?
3. What enemies do you feel it right to ask God to 'strike down' or 'put to shame' (6:10)?

Final Prayer

Lord God, we are restless in our spirits until we find our rest in You. Give us a purposeful and single-mindedness approach to life, so that nothing stops us from pursuing all that is good, true and beautiful in this world, and nothing stops us from finding You within Your world. AMEN
