

Psalm 6 • O Lord, Deliver My Life!

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I don't know how many of you find prayer easy— and when I mean, praying. I'm just talking about going before the Lord and laying out your heart. Sometimes it's very difficult.

Just as I was praying here this morning, I really believe that the Psalms are a wonderful training ground for us as we go through these on praying. I hope that we're all willing to learn something from David and the others who wrote in the Psalms about lifting up our needs and laying them out before God and doing what I, or what the Bible refers to as crying out to God.

It's a lost art to be honest with you. We pray in the sense that many times it's just the laying up of our needs, and we do it almost like you'd write, I Want List to Santa Claus when you were a kid.

And we do the same thing now, as adults, to God. Lord, I just pray that you'd do this, and pray that, and then pray for this and hope that this thing works out, and thank you. Okay. Amen. We're good, but crying out from, I mean, the depth of your heart—

I had two very challenging emails that I received just today. One of them from a young dad from Jamaica and another one from a young, single gal in India. And they're both going through really challenging times— I mean, really challenging times.

The young dad from Jamaica, just this last February, lost his four-year-old boy to cancer, and he's just devastated. And the young gal, lovely young gal, is just gone—just grown up with without a dad, and then when her mom remarried, that man was not good to them and made life pretty miserable. Now she's carrying just a great deal of hurt, and finding it very difficult to deal with life.

And both of them wrote me and were like, pastor Paul what do I do?— as if I'm the person who has all the answers. You know what my answer is? Cry out to God. It's pretty simple really, and I'm not trying just to pass off something that's very difficult. I really believe it's the answer.

When this young dad said—he was basically describing the grief that he's having a very hard time getting through—and he's like, pastor Paul, can you give me any advice? I said, yeah, cry out to God from the depth of your heart. Just lay it all.

God is not bothered with any of us just pouring out our hearts to him. He's not intimidated. He's not offended. He's not scared to hear you and I lay it out in very real and intimate terms.

That's one of the things I love about the Psalms, I love about how David prayed. And it's one of the things that I'm trying to encourage people to do when they're going through the depth of whatever is going on. Don't talk to people first. Cry out to God. Get on your knees and cry out to the Lord. The Bible says and promises that He is near to the broken hearted. That's a promise from God's Word.

Here's these two people that wrote me today and they're broken hearted. Different reasons, different circumstances, good grief, different hemispheres, I think, but they are both dealing with issues that are just overwhelming them to the point where—I don't know what to do. Well, cry out to God, because you know what? I don't know what to do either. That's the bottom line in terms of giving you some answer that's going to be a fix-all for your situation.

As we get into Psalm chapter 6, we're going to see that David is again feeling very much under it—and there's other things going on that we're going to look at. I want to read through the Psalm. It's just 10 verses. Then we'll go back and take a look at it.

David writes:

- ¹ O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath.*
- ² Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.*
- ³ My soul also is greatly troubled.
But you, O LORD—how long?*
- ⁴ Turn, O LORD, deliver my life;
save me for the sake of your steadfast love.*
- ⁵ For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who will give you praise?*
- ⁶ I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;*

*I drench my couch with my weeping.
7 My eye wastes away because of grief;
it grows weak because of all my foes.
8 Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.
9 The LORD has heard my plea;
the LORD accepts my prayer.
10 All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled;
they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.” (ESV)*

Well, right from the opening of this Psalm, you can tell that David is suffering. We don't know the cause of his pain in this particular Psalm, but whatever it might be, he recognized that God was his answer, and he went to the Lord for that answer and for that relief.

And this is frankly where many Christians stumble. We're all together in the sense that we go through trouble, but where we separate many times is the belief that somehow if I'm suffering perhaps due to my own mistakes. And you can see that David is talking here about the possibility of having made some serious mistakes in this situation because he has a sense that the Lord is disciplining him. But many people, when they have a sense that maybe they are at fault, they will refuse to go to the Lord.

Isn't that interesting? I've talked to many people who will just tell me about the burdens or the difficulties they're going through and I'll say, well, have you brought this thing before the Lord? And they look a little sheepish for a moment and hang their head and they say, well, I'm just so ashamed because I got myself into this. It was my own poor choices, my own bad mistakes, my own poor judgment. And now I feel like going to the Lord is just wrong.

I want you to know without any sort of condemnation that David didn't operate under that sort of an idea at all. In fact, he fully embraced one aspect of God's attributes, and that is His mercy. David understood and operated in the reality that God is merciful.

That is what enabled him to move past that tendency that many people have for guilt and self-punishment, to approach God for healing and restoration anyway — even though I'm at fault, even though he's at fault, even though you're at fault — and to push past that tendency or the condemnation and accusation of the enemy that says to you: You have no right to go before God; you're the big scumbag here; you're the one who's at fault. You think God's going to look kindly upon you now, crawling back on your knees? No, He's going to let you

go through every single bit of these consequences, and He's probably even enjoying watching you suffer.

That's the voice of the enemy, but it's a voice we all too often listen to and even respond to by pulling back, withdrawing from the Lord and not bringing those things to God.

But I love how David, even in this prayer, how he recognizes that—he senses that the Lord may be disciplining him for something that he's done, he yet brings it still before the Lord for resolution, for restoration and for healing.

He begins here by saying in verse 1: Lord, please don't rebuke me in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. In other words, David is saying: Listen, God, I understand that there is a need from time to time for you to bring correction into my life, but I'm asking you, please don't do it in anger or wrath.

And I don't think that David was necessarily assuming that God was angry with him. We often do, particularly when we're at fault, when we've made a mistake. Sometimes, even if we don't know if we're at fault but we just know that we're suffering, people will come and sometimes even ask, is God angry with me? It's a very natural kind of conclusion that we reach.

But here's the deal as Christians who've read through the New Testament: We know and understand that although God does discipline us, He does not do so in wrath—and that's something you and I can be confident of even when we're being rebuked.

God will rebuke us from time to time. Believe me, He's been really busy in my life and bringing discipline into my life for various things, but I know from the Word of God He has not done it in wrath.

Let me show you a passage that Paul mentioned or gave to the Thessalonians when he wrote them in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 on the screen. He writes:

1 Thessalonians 5:9 (ESV)

... God has not destined [or APPOINTED] us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

... God has not destined (and that means, appointed) us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have to remember something about God's wrath, okay? Please hear me when I say this. On your behalf, God's wrath has been expended. You hear me? On your behalf, God's wrath has been expended on the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. He poured it out completely on Jesus for you. And that's something you and I need to remember, even when we're going through hard times, okay?

Now, God does still discipline us, and when He does, it's very painful. Let me remind you of what the writer of Hebrews said:

Hebrews 12:11 (ESV)

... all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

...all discipline (he wrote) seems painful, rather than pleasant, but later, it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Did you notice the last words of that verse: “*to those who have been trained by it.*” That's very important because we know that God's discipline isn't automatically beneficial to us; we have to be willing to be trained by His discipline. Okay? That's what it says. It says, “*it yields peaceful fruit and righteousness to those who have been trained by it*”—and that means our willingness to recognize what the Lord is doing in our lives is discipline.

And by the way, we're supposed to treat all hardship as discipline, and then to come before the Lord and say, I want to learn. I want to grow through this situation, whatever it may be. I want to grow in my understanding of You. I want to grow in my understanding of what You're doing in my heart. Because there's always a purging and pruning going on in my life—and I'm assuming the same is true for you—the sooner we can come to terms with that work and recognize it and embrace it, and say, Lord, I embrace your discipline—

I think about my years growing up as a child how many times I rebuffed discipline. When my parents tried to discipline me or my teachers tried to bring some level of discipline into my life, my natural tendency was to stiffen my neck and to refuse to accept it, or refuse to embrace it and learn and grow from it, and so forth, because I was a kid—and you know about kids.

When we do begin to embrace the discipline of the Lord, and we open our heart to it and that training, there's a promise that it's going to bear fruit in our lives.

But right now, David is on the painful end of God's discipline. Look at verse 2, what he says here. He says in verse 2:

“Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing.”

Your Bible may say, *“I am faint or my life is fading”*—and that's the idea here: My life is fading. David wasn't trying to be overdramatic.

David was not a drama king. He was a passionate man, but he wasn't trying to be overly expressive to the Lord. He genuinely felt like his life was slipping away, fading away, and he told the Lord about it. And so, he cries as he goes on here in verse 2:

“heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.”

And you'll notice this is where David is talking about the physical part of the discipline and the results of this work of discipline that he feels God is bringing into his life. It's having a physical effect where he finds his strength is waning. He says it has troubled his bones.

But then he goes on to speak of the emotional and mental difficulty that he's dealing with in verse 3 when he says:

“My soul also is greatly troubled.”

Now, you know that the soul is the seat of our emotions, the seat of our intellect and the seat of our will. And so, when David says, *“My soul is ... greatly troubled,”* he's saying he's emotionally stressed out; he's under it; he's feeling that kind of pain and difficulty of heart, and mentally—

Have you ever been through a situation where you just can't shut off your brain and it's just either replaying a hurtful thing, or it's just something is going on in your brain and it just will not shut off and you're like, oh ugghh? In fact, there's another song where David even says, how long must I wrestle with my thoughts? He'll give voice to that particular issue. Well, he's talking about it here as well, and so he asks the question here at the end of verse 3:

“But you, O LORD—how long?”

A very simple question, *“how long?”* Now, when David asks this question, I don't believe he's necessarily waiting for God to come and say, well, next Thursday at 3:30, this thing's going to let up. That's not what he's asking.

He's not asking for a timeframe. The question of how long is meant to simply communicate to God the depth of his pain, that he's wearied in waiting for the

Lord, and he's looking for the Lord to quickly and decisively respond on his behalf. And so, all of that is encompassed in those simple words: "*how long?*"

Listen, when you cry out to God and you say, "*how long?*" He knows what you mean. He knows what your heart is trying to express.

Here's David's simple prayer in verse 4. Look with me there; he says:

"*Turn, O LORD*, (and the word "turn" literally means "return" or "come back." Okay? And he says) *deliver my life; save me* (and then notice what David bases his request upon) *for the sake of your steadfast love.*" Or in other words, because of your steadfast love.

Now, what's truly amazing to me about this statement is that David is suffering intensely. Now, listen to me, people. This is important. David is suffering intensely and he still believes God's love is steadfast.

I find that amazing because I don't share that same conclusion most of the time when I'm suffering. When I'm suffering, I question God's steadfast love typically, and I allow my circumstances to essentially color my understanding or my view of God. That is very typical, and I see it all the time in other people.

We end up questioning God's love when we're going through hard times. I don't feel like God even loves me. Do you know what? That's something that we have to be very careful about.

David, although he was not a perfect man by any stretch, he did not allow his suffering to alter his view of who God is and what God is like. And for that, I appreciate this man so much because I'm not like that. I wish I was, and I want to be more like that. I want to be steadfast in my understanding of the character of God, regardless of what I'm going through, or regardless of what I'm seeing other people have to endure.

We have this quick phrase that we throw out sometimes when we hear somebody going through a hard time, or we're telling about ourselves going through a struggle.

Like somebody might say, well, hey, lost my job today, but God's good— and you can tell that it's this tape recording. It's what we say, lost my job today, but God's good. Yeah, wrecked my car today—total, but God's good.

Now, wait a minute. Wait a minute. God is really good. He really is truly good. And when we allow our circumstances to change the reality of who God is,

that's when we get into trouble. That's where we fail. That's where our faith falters.

David would be going through some of the most intense pain and he would say, Lord, I appeal to you on the basis of your steadfast love. And what that means is, I understand, God, that your love will never run out and it will never forsake me. I understand that, and so, I'm coming to You on that basis.

Do you understand that's what motivated David to pray? That's what moved him to pray. But the opposite of that is what keeps you and I from the place of prayer. Who wants to go to somebody that you think isn't listening? Who wants to go and tell somebody their woes when you don't think they care? I sure don't.

If Joe Schmigelhaben was sitting next to me and I happened to know that Joe didn't care about me one single bit, would I turn to him and say, hey, Joe, I wanted to tell you what's going on in my life? No, I wouldn't say a word to him. I'd look at him and go, well, he didn't care.

And people look that way at God all the time. They look at God and they go, well, He didn't care. He obviously doesn't care. How do I know that? I'm suffering, right?

Well, David didn't come to that conclusion. It just wasn't part of his understanding of God and the character of God. He didn't go through hard times and look at God and say, He doesn't care. He would come to God and go, wait a minute, You're full of steadfast love. Your love never goes away. I'm going to go to You.

It's incredibly rare, but it's something that you and I need to lay hold of. And by faith, we need to express what we know to be true, regardless if our emotions are telling us otherwise.

All right, now be careful as we get into verse 5. He writes:

“For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol (and that means the grave) who will give you praise?”

Stop there. David is not making a theological comment here. He's not saying—and this is not a proof text for no life beyond the grave. David is speaking of his physical body now, okay? And he's basically saying that a corpse has no memory nor an ability to praise God, so please don't make me one before my time.

And you got to know, too, that the understanding in David's day of life after death was somewhat murky. When we read through the Old Testament, we see these rare glimpses. Some of them even appear in the book of Job and elsewhere where there are these rare glimpses of clarity related to life after death. But a lot of it was murky; a lot of it was just held by faith.

But—and here's what we need to understand about the issue of our eternal life and the life that we have after death and so forth. The gospel is responsible for giving great clarity in that respect. Can I show you a statement that Paul made to Timothy in his second letter to Timothy? Look on the screen. He writes:

2 Timothy 1:10 (ESV)

...our Savior, Christ Jesus, abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

...our Savior, Christ Jesus, abolished death (and look at this) and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Jesus, through the gospel, brought to the light, into the light, the whole idea of immortality and in— well, and that sort of thing. Our understanding of life got a huge shot in the arm. Life after death got a huge shot in the arm through the gospel. We have great understanding, much more understanding than even was had in the Old Testament.

David continues now with his prayer. Verse 6, he says:

*“I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
7 My eye wastes away because of grief;
it grows weak because of all my foes.”*

Now, David is adding the fact that not only is he experiencing physical issues, but he's also experiencing issues with his enemies who are threatening him to some degree. We don't know exactly what it was, but I want you to listen carefully to these final words of his prayer.

He says in verse 8:

*“Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.
9 The LORD has heard my plea;*

the LORD accepts my prayer.
¹⁰ *All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled;
they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.*

Pretty amazing, isn't it? I mean, because this is a guy who is going through some pretty rough stuff, and yet, here in these last couple of verses, it almost sounds like he had an angelic visitation, doesn't it?

It almost sounds like an angel came into his room, or something like that, or his prayer place, and said, I just wanted to let you know, David, everything's cool. God has heard your prayer; He has heard the sound of your weeping, and your plea has come before the Lord, and He accepts your prayer.

But you know what? I am confident that did not happen. I am confident that David is speaking from faith. I am confident that David did not hear those words. I'm confident that David really at this point did not even see the answer to his prayer.

He did not see his enemies becoming ashamed and greatly troubled, turning back in shame. He did not see the acceptance of his prayer before the Lord. He did not know other than by faith that God had heard his plea or seen his tears. He simply knew by faith that those things had taken place. He accepted by faith.

Why? Because he knew the character of God, and it was based upon his understanding of the character of God. When you know someone's character and you're convinced of their character, there's a confidence that enters into your dealings with that individual where you stop questioning. Even if it looks a little bit weird, if they do something or say something or you hear that they did or say something from somebody else and you're going, wait a minute, that doesn't sound like so and so. I know their character. I've known this person for 25 years or whatever. I know they would never say something like that. They would never do something like that, because you just know.

Well, we make those boasts even about people. Imagine how much more possible it is to be confident before the Lord about His character, which truly never changes. And yet, how often do we not express our confidence in His character? How many times, in fact, do we question His character related to the suffering we're going through and say things like, well, I sure hope God's listening rather than I know the Lord has heard my plea?

I wonder if the Lord even has seen one tear that I've shed instead of saying, I know the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. I know.

People, that's faith. You, guys, that's faith. David had to operate on the same faith that you and I have to operate on. He didn't have any special magic looking glass to peer into the heart and mind of God and see things or know things that you and I can't see or know. He took the Word of the Lord on faith and the character of God on faith. And so, he ends with this beautiful expression of confidence in the Lord. I have to believe that he didn't feel like expressing confidence in the Lord, but David understood.

And people, I hope we will come to terms with this someday in our own lives—if we haven't already. David understood that faith and feelings are two different things. I believe one of the biggest challenges to our faith in the culture that you and I live in is this incredible emphasis that is placed upon living according to our feelings. We're tempted by the world around us to embrace our feelings as the final barometer, the final standard of good, bad, right, wrong, dark, light, you name it. How does it feel? Do you feel like that's true to you? Does it feel true to you? Well, then it's true for you.

That kind of nonsense is something that has been hammered into us over the years, and even though we may feel like—or we may be able to recognize that as fallacy, we're affected by it. Don't think we're not. I am. I come out regularly to you guys and I tell you that this feelings-over-faith stuff is a bunch of bunk, but you know what? I continue to struggle with my feelings over my faith. I know that it's bunk and you do too; but we've been raised in it and it has affected us deeper than we even realize.

Feelings are not the final barometer especially when it comes to knowing God and understanding how He works in our lives. Faith is the final barometer.

Here's why: Because our faith is in His Word, and His Word will never pass away. His Word is sure.

See, if I asked you to put your faith in my word, I would be asking a lot of you because I don't have the ability to make my word sure; because nothing in my life is sure, just like nothing in your life is sure. I could say to you, trust me; my word is sound. But that only goes as far as my human capability can take it, right? As a human, I'm only so sound, right? We're still vulnerable to any number of things taking place in our lives.

God is not. He's not vulnerable at all. When God says this, when He says, I am good, when He says, I will never leave you nor forsake you. When He says, my love is steadfast. When He says, my mercies are new every morning. When He says, I delight to show mercy. You and I can hold fast to that reality from the

standpoint of knowing that we know those things are true. And this over here is the thing to be doubted.

All these feelings that we're going through—good grief, if we're going to doubt anything, doubt your feelings. Cast those into doubt. Don't doubt the Word of God. Don't doubt the character of God and the promises of God. Those are the only sure things we have.

And you know what? If you and I kick out the only sure things we have, what are we left with? A life that is unsure, and that's all there is. If we throw away the rock of our salvation, all we have is shifting sands. That's all that's left.

Although David was a man of deep feelings, he ultimately understood that those feelings had to be subordinate to what he knew to be true about God.