

DELIVER MY LIFE // PSALM 6

From the series, Summer in the Psalms

Psalm 6 may be considered one of seven penitential psalms (the others are 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143). There is no confession in this psalm, but there is a mysterious background that appears to refer to some sin in the life of the psalmist.

This psalm also deals with a recurring theme from Psalms 3-5: pressure. In Psalm 3, the pressure is physical; in 4 it is emotional; in 5 it is religious or spiritual. In Psalm 6, the pressure is medical or a bodily pressure manifested in the form of illness. David is a sick man.

Main Idea: When sickness comes, it is no time for self-pity. Instead it's time for prayer.

1. David's call to the Lord for great grace (v.1)

Why is David asking the Lord to be gracious to him? Although God does not punish his children (because he punished his Son in our place), he does discipline his children as a means to our spiritual maturity and growth. Is David suffering because of sin? In these situations, it should not be our knee-jerk assumption, but sickness can sometimes be used as chastisement. This same principle is seen in the book of James, when a sick believer is instructed to "call the elders of the church, and let them pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord" (James 5:14). The idea is that when seeking the Lord in a matter of illness, begin with prayer and repentance. Question whether there is anything in your life standing between you and the Lord.

2. David's condition of his body and soul (v. 2-3)

David's "bones are troubled," but his "soul is also greatly troubled." There is a sense in which the body and soul are so closely linked that they catch each other's diseases (a notion attributed to C.S. Lewis). If the body and soul are so interconnected, we ought to take care of the soul even better than we take care of the body. We see this reflected in the Psalms, which John Calvin called the "anatomy of the soul."

3. David's case for the Lord's hand of healing (v. 4-5)

David asks the Lord to save his life (an encouragement to always pursue life, even when death seems more desirable). He asks this not for his own sake, but "for the sake of your steadfast love." David is concerned that the opportunity he has on earth to minister, serve, and praise the Lord not be shortened by Sheol, the grave.

4. David's crying in the darkness of the night (v. 6-7)

David paints a picture of intense nightly suffering. The Puritans recognized the spiritual torment of the "dark night of the soul," and we have all had the experience of our physical illnesses seeming worse in the night. David, an emotional man, demonstrates that tears are not out of place in the face of suffering. Emotions illustrate what's going on inside.

5. David's confidence in the able actions of the Lord (v. 8-10)

What will get us through difficult circumstances? Confidence in the Lord's faithfulness. Never look back and question, "Would this be different if I had prayed?" Pray now. The question may arise, however: What if I've been praying for a long time and I'm not getting better? Psalm 103 gives us three points of insight.

1. Healing is on the horizon. Healing may not happen on this side of glory, but when we can be assured of heavenly healing, it brings hope back to our everyday life. For those in Christ, pain will not last forever. The inverse is true for those not in Christ: it will only get worse from here.

2. Your suffering is not about you. Someone is watching you suffer; so suffer with strength and grace in Christ for the benefit of others.

3. God does answer prayer. He hears us and answers us, and he may be using your pain to draw you into closer communion with him. If dependency is your goal (and it should be), then weakness is to your advantage.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has God used a period of illness in your life to help you grow or draw closer to him?

2. How has seeing others suffering faithfully impacted your Christian walk?

3. What is our knee-jerk reaction when faced with physical illness? How does this psalm give us a better plan for dealing with sickness?