

FUNERAL SERMON
Click Funeral Home - Farragut, TN
April 13, 2023 at 11:00 a.m.

Psalm 6
A Song for the Sick

The book of Psalms mirrors every experience and emotion of the human heart. One man said the Psalms provide an “anatomy of the soul.” That is, they give us words when we have no words. They help us pray and sing, they help us live and die. In short, the Psalms serve our souls like no other passage of Scripture.

That’s never more true than with Psalm 6. It is the fourth of four consecutive psalms with a unique theme relevant to us all: pressure. David is the author of each, is under pressure. He is under physical pressure in psalm 3; emotional pressure in psalm 4; spiritual pressure in psalm 5; and in Psalm 6 he is under what we might call medical pressure.

The pressure of Psalm 6 is sickness. And oh what a pressure that can be. David is a sick man, anguishing and languishing. Few topics are more natural to our human condition than sickness. So it was with my mom, Vicki Thornton.

She was a sick lady. I’ve never known her to not suffer from some chronic illness. From early struggles with heart arrhythmia and rheumatoid arthritis, to a stroke at the young age of 36 to a mixed connective muscle disease diagnosis at the age of 47. She was sepsis in the ICU in 2018 with double pneumonia, follow that with two surgeries, renal failure leading to dialysis, a subsequent kidney transplant, and then nearly a year of infections that finally took her life. Words that describe my mother: perseverance, strength, courage, faith, humility, but also, sickness. She lived a life of sickness.

We can all relate. Some of you are caregivers to the sick and the terminally ill. For others, sickness is your story. Regardless, pick your family, pick your person, physical suffering is closer than we think. Someone is hurting right now. Suffering is the life-long commentary of so many. And therefore Psalm 6 speaks directly to us all. It’s a song for the sick.

Whether it be for a season or for a life, Psalm 6 teaches us how to suffer well in a time of sickness. The lessons we learn within could be observed in how my mother approached all of her life. That is why I chose this text for our short time today. Take notes, listen well, reflect upon Vicki’s example, understand that God is bigger than suffering, and he uses it to do something spiritual in us and in the lives of others who watch us. The Christian never suffers in vain.

In my mom’s life for example, for starters, her suffering provided a platform for two husbands. For 50 years my dad was married to my mom. Nearly all of those my dad spent caring for her through some sort of sickness. My dad grew to emulate Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” While at the same time, my

mother's suffering burned away the dross in her life, making her all the more ready for her true husband, the Lord Jesus, for she, like every Christian, is his bride. Thank you, dad. Job well done for us all to see and follow. I will be a better husband because of men like you.

So how does the Christian suffer well in a season of sickness? What did David do when he was sick? What lessons did my mom employ throughout her life? Allow me to share four lessons that emerge from the text.

1. Our first call must be the Lord. (v. 1-3)

*[1] O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath.*

David calls upon the Lord five times in four verses. It's always the right time to call upon the Lord. When sickness sets in prayer first, pity is second. When the body is sick and low, the life must be clean and clear. There are many tools in the chest of the Lord's discipline. May our sickness never be a result of sin. That is why David prays, he confesses, he repents. When the body is low, the heart must be high. My mother never doubted the Lord. She took her suffering in stride. Throughout the seasons she remained dependent on Christ. That's a good place to be.

*[2] Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.*

David feels the disapproval of God. It is that God has withdrawn from him. And now David is asking "why?" David is overwhelmed. He has had enough. "God what is happening? God what are you doing to me?" As my mom would say at times, "I'm over it." Sometimes the only thing we know how to pray is "Lord be kind." The grace of God sustains in our weakest moment, in our darkest hour.

*[3] My soul also is greatly troubled.
But you, O LORD—how long?*

David makes the connection: When the body hurts, so does the soul. C. S. Lewis, "The body and the soul live so close together, they catch one another's diseases."

Sickness can lead to depression. If only his body was sick, but now it is soul. David is experiencing what old writers have called "the dark night of the soul." The trouble has lingered. It threatens to go on forever. There is no end in sight. The Psalmist is being worn down. Have you been there?

My mother battled times of depression. And who wouldn't when you live a life of sickness. That is why David, like my mom, called to the Lord. Mom's suffering was her service to her family. She was a great encouragement to so many. Though she struggled at times to see the glass half full, Mom always said, "It could always be worse." No matter how bad your suffering may be, someone somewhere is suffering more than you. She would say, be kind to people, because you just never know what they are going through.

2. **Pursue life with every opportunity (v. 4-5)**

*[4] Turn, O LORD, deliver my life;
save me for the sake of your steadfast love.*

It is right to want to live. In life we serve the Lord, we enjoy the blessings and experiences of this life, as God made us. We are made in his image with a desire to work, produce, raise a family, “keep the garden and till the ground, to be fruitful and multiply.”

We are to never give up. If you are struggling to find contentment this morning, start with this: be glad that you are alive. In life you can live. Today is the day the Lord has made. And therefore we ask him to “turn.” To love in our lives, heal us, help us. For those fighting illness: pursue life. Make the appointment, take the medicines, go ahead with the procedure, walk the road to life and recovery. Let the Lord decide the outcome.

That is exactly what my mother did. When so many others would have, she never mailed it in. Her kidney transplant was no easy decision. I remember sitting down at the kitchen table with her and dad deciding what to do, weighing the options, counting the cost. Pursue life, leave the details to the Lord.

*[5] For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who will give you praise?*

The Psalmist desires to please the Lord with his life. God has given us a life for a reason, to use it for his glory. Deep within the heart of the Christian is a desire to live our lives for God and not ourselves, and that is what the Psalmist longs to do. And though heaven awaits, with all its joys and life, the dead person cannot praise God on this earth. Death puts an end to the pursuits and dreams of this life.

Mom would want me to say this: your suffering is not about you. Someone is watching you suffer, and therefore, please do so with strength and grace, ever dependent on Christ. Leverage your suffering for the benefit of others. Take your mind off of you and your sickness, and put it on the Lord and the life he has given you.

3. **It's always ok to cry.**

*[6] I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.*

David's in a place I don't want to go. Suffering produces a long watch of the night. Some of you have been there. Some of you are there. My mom was there, and it's dark. Sickness involves tears. David is an emotional man. He instructs us as such. It's ok to cry.

God may not have made you as emotional as some, but he has made you with emotion. For the sake of your mind and soul, you need to cry. Learn to express your emotion, not in pity, but in prayer and praise. As we say, “I feel better now that I've cried.” So cry it out.

*[7] My eye wastes away because of grief;
it grows weak because of all my foes.*

David has reached the end of himself, he has lost his strength. There is a sense within of spiritual and bodily fatigue. He is just too tired. It's the kind of tiredness you can't sleep off, even if you could sleep.

Dragging through the day of work. Hardly able to function. Getting home and going to bed. Lying awake throughout the night. Waiting on the morning. To start a new day and begin the whole desperate process over again. That was my mom on so many days.

Suffering has a way of dehumanizing us. Our sense of self is reduced to the pain of the body. And as I saw with my mother, pain wears on the body. Pain makes everything raw. If dependency is the goal then weakness is our great advantage.

4. Death will meet its match. (verse 8-10)

*[8] Depart from me, all you workers of evil,
for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.*

There is a dramatic change in David's mood and tone. He shifts to separate himself from enemies. They will not define him. They will not have the last word, God will. David's attitude is thus one of confidence in God who is mighty to save in this life and the next. David's faith may not be strong, but the object of his faith most surely is.

*[9] The LORD has heard my plea;
the LORD accepts my prayer.*

Twice David says, "the Lord has heard." If God has heard me, it makes no difference who hasn't. But if God has not heard me, it makes no difference who has.

The Lord is going to do what the Lord is going to do. We must be ok with it, because he always does what is right. Knowing that God is good, he is a good Father who can only do good things. He will always act according to his character. We are to place our lives willingly into his care.

God does answer prayer, so press on in it. Redeem the time, the days are evil days Paul. So pray. My mother prayed for herself, she prayed for me, she prayed for her family, she prayed for you. Suffering is a great occasion to know communion with the Lord.

*[10] All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled;
they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.*

David gets his arms around all of his enemies, and then he looks to the future. Enemies within and without. Sickness, struggles, pains and toils. But there is one enemy whose teeth are sharper than any: the enemy of death.

A Christian view of healing has less to do with a change in medical reports, and more to do with resurrection to new life. Because as healed as you may be, we are all going to die. The healing we need is not life before the grave but after it. Death is the enemy of the soul, not disease. Mom understood that truth. What she needed most, UT medical center couldn't supply. Doctors treat disease, but Jesus conquers death.

My mother was a Christian. She was a follower of Jesus. Mom identified with so many. And so many identified with mom. But there is one who identifies closer with you than my mom, and it is the one who identified first with her—the Lord Jesus.

Mom believed that Jesus lived the life that she could not, and that his death was her death. Dying in the cross, the Lord Jesus stood in her place as he took upon himself the wrath of God for Vicki's sin and your sin, our universal chronic illness. His death was hers, in her place he stood. As a glorious consequence her greatest enemy has been defeated. Jesus has shamed the enemy of death. He has turned it back, and put it to flight. Jesus took your suffering. So that your suffering can come to a close.

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians "Death is swallowed up in victory. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

Her body is dead, but her soul is alive. She awaits a new body, where she will live in heaven, in a kingdom, in the city of God, where there is no sin nor tear, forever more. For the Christian, the best is always yet to come. Both healing and heaven are on the horizon. Mom thought much of heaven, as we should too. What she then saw with her heart, she now sees with her eyes. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Authored in 1868 by American hymn writer and Baptist minister Robert Wadsworth Lowry (1826–1899) the words to his famous hymn "How Can I Keep From Singing?" have brought much comfort and clarity as to how to endure suffering, to care for those who do and to rejoice with those who have finished their race.

I close with the lyrics.

*My life flows on in endless song,
above earth's lamentation.
I catch the sweet, though far-off hymn
that hails a new creation.*

*Through all the tumult and the strife,
I hear that music ringing.
It finds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?*

*What though my joys and comforts die,
I know my Savior liveth.
What though the darkness gather round?
Songs in the night he giveth.*

*No storm can shake my inmost calm
while to that refuge clinging.
Since Christ is Lord of heav'n and earth,
how can I keep from singing?*

*I lift my eyes the cloud grows thin,
I see the blue above it.
And day by day this pathway smoothes
since first I learned to love it.*

*The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,
a fountain ever springing!
All things are mine since I am his!
How can I keep from singing?*

*No storm can shake my inmost calm
while to that refuge clinging.
Since Christ is Lord of heav'n and earth,
how can I keep from singing?*

Thank you for coming today.

Family Remarks:

Erika Thornton Scott

She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. Proverbs 31:26

Vicki was many things to many people. She was a devoted wife to my father for nearly 50 years; a loving daughter, sister, aunt, niece, grandmother, friend, and to me a loving mother and my best friend. She molded me and guided me for 34 years. While our time was short, I am forever grateful and blessed for our time together on earth.

Faithful. Resilient. Kind. What beautiful words to describe my mother. Due to her humble nature, she did not see the qualities she held. As a devoted mother, always putting others before herself, she never wanted to be the center of attention, yet she was the center of our worlds.

Over the past week looking at photos, my mom was always present. She gave 100% to her children and made sure we felt loved. She made every holiday, especially birthdays, very special. Earlier this year, mom was so upset that she was in the hospital and unable to handpick my birthday present. Even in her final days, mom still tried to provide for her family. She constantly asked if we were fed and insisted we snack on her hospital food. She had a servant's heart. Her love was evident in everything she did. I have so many fond memories I'll cherish forever.

Lastly, she was a God-fearing woman. She loved Jesus and shared her strong faith with others. She was eager for heaven, to be in the presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I would like to end by thanking you all for being here today. Your presence means a lot. During the course of Mom's illness, she was blessed with many cards, phone calls, texts, and uplifting messages. Hundreds of people were praying for her. She knew she was blessed. She knew she was loved. Her heart would be touched with the amount of people honoring her today.

I love you Mom.

Ashley Thornton

Vicki Thornton, my precious mother-in-law of 15 years, passed away on Monday. It's only been a few days, but already we feel her loss immensely. It breaks my heart for my husband who lost his mother. Our kids who lost their grandmother.

And for myself. Because Vicki was much more than just a "mother-in-law" to me. Through the years she became a trusted friend I treasured greatly. Someone I looked to for counsel and leaned on for comfort. I will always hold tight the relationship we had and the many lessons I learned from her.

I always enjoyed our time spent in conversation. Usually at the kitchen table. Just simple talking. I may miss that more than anything. Vicki was the type of person who made you feel that whatever you had to say was more important than anything else going on for her at that moment. It didn't matter what it was, she wanted to hear it. I pray the Lord allows me to prioritize relationships and love people the way she did.

Vicki showed me what it looks like to be thankful for every day. She didn't waste any of the days the Lord gave her here on earth. She may have suffered through many of them, but none were ever wasted. Through pain, hospital stays, dialysis, a kidney transplant and rehab, she persevered. Vicki was one of the strongest women I know. Life was precious to her. She knew there was a purpose for her and she clung to that truth every single day.

She loved the Lord with her whole heart. Found an abundance of joy in her family. And adored her grandchildren. She was always glad to see you. And sad to see you go. She made cakes for every birthday. And hung stockings for all of us on the mantel above the fireplace for Christmas. She was the best gift giver. She fussed over Thanksgiving dinner. And never missed an opportunity to tell you how much she loved you. Our world was richer because Vicki Thornton was in it.

I thank the Lord for her testimony in my life. I am a better wife and mother because of the example she set before me. I will miss her with my whole heart, as I already do.

Her legacy will live on through the generations. I love you Vicki. We all do. We'll see you again soon.