

PSALMS

Chapter 6

O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. ²Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled. ³My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O LORD—how long? ⁴Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love. ⁵For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise? ⁶I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. ⁷My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes. ⁸Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. ⁹The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer. ¹⁰All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled; they shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.

A prayer in time of severe illness, an occasion seized upon by David's enemies to vent their animosity. In Christian liturgical tradition it is numbered with the seven penitential psalms (the others: Ps 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). (CSB)

According to. Represents a Hebrew preposition of varied usage (also found in the titles of Ps 8; 12; 46; 53; 81; 84; 88). (CSB)

sheminith. Occurs also in Ps 12 title and in 1Ch 15:21. It perhaps refers to an eight-stringed instrument. (CSB)

Lit, "the eighth," which may refer to a musical setting or to an eight-stringed instrument. (TLSB)

One of seven penitential psalms (cf 32; 38; 51; 102; 130; 143). The exact context of this prayer for deliverance is uncertain. As he writes this, David seems to be extremely ill as a result of mental anguish over sin. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–3, a prayer for mercy; vv 4–5, life and death; vv 6–7, mourning; vv 8–10, the Lord hears. (TLSB)

Psalm 6 is a psalm of prayer. It laments the great yet hidden sufferings of the conscience when on account of sins, one's faith and hope are tormented by the Law and anger of God and driven to despair or erring faith. This suffering is called elsewhere in the Psalter "the bonds of death" and "the ropes of hell," or "the misery of death" and "the anguish of hell." At the end of Psalm 6, the psalmist sees that his prayer has been heard. He is therefore a trustworthy example for those who find themselves in such affliction, so that they may not remain in it. The psalmist rebukes the workers of evil, that is, the false saints who generally hate and persecute such afflicted people. Because their comfort is in their own holiness, they know nothings of these trials. They are therefore the enemies of the true faith.

This psalm belongs to the First and Second Commandments because it commends the struggle of those who believe in God and pray against sin and death. It is in the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer, as are all other psalms of prayer, because its prayer is that God's name be called upon and blessed. (Reading Psalms with Luther)

This psalm pictures a man in deep distress because of illness. Yet, his distress is not only about his illness. It is about the guilt that has brought these consequences upon him. His greatest need, therefore is for peace with God. (LL)

This psalm may be from the time of Absalom's rebellion. If not, it may be from the time of Adonijah's conspiracy described in 1 Kings 1. During the weakness of David's old age his son Adonijah and some of David's most royal followers plotted to thwart David's plans to pass the throne on to Solomon, the successor chosen by God. This strife in David's family was the result of David's destruction of Uriah's family by his deeds of adultery and murder. (PBC)

It was the practice of early Christians to sing and read the penitential psalms on Ash Wednesday as part of their penance for sin. (Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

6:1–3 Initial appeal for mercy. Though the Lord has sent him illness to chastise him for his sin (see 32:3–5; 38:1–8, 17–18), the psalmist asks that God would not in anger impose the full measure of the penalty for sin, for then death must come (see v. 5; see also 130:3). (CSB)

6:1 *rebuke ... discipline.* That is, rebuke-and-discipline (see 39:11). (CSB)

The verbs “rebuke” and “discipline” are often synonymous. The “rebuke” of the Lord may be a form of judgments, but it may also come in the form of lesson in life (Deut. 4:36; 8:5; 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 94:10; Prov. 3:12) (Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

anger ... wrath. God's anger is always an expression of his righteousness. (CSB)

Hebrews 10:31 “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

But in so far as they are still carnal and controlled by the old Adam, God's anger is manifested against this element of their being, and correction gets to be correction in anger. (Leupold)

6:2 *Be gracious* – His burden is especially heavy because he feels his being disciplined for his sins. Although David deserves judgment, he asks God to soften his discipline because of his mercy. David's most urgent need is to be at peace with God. (PBC)

I am languishing – It speaks well for David that he regards his God as one who is moved by even the weakness of His children. (Leupold)

Heal me – Beyond physical restoration, this appeal can extend to both body and soul. (TLSB)

Healing is not limited to a physical healing. It may also be used for spiritual healing (as in “I am your healer” in Ex. 15:26), and for uplifting low spirits, as in one who has been dealt a harsh blow. The healing in this psalm most likely goes beyond physical healing. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

bones. “Bones” may refer to the whole physical structure of a person, but the words often means the spirit within the boney structure, the center of his painful distress. Everything within him is deeply troubled, the verb capturing the psalmist's spirit.

Troubled – “[A] conscience feels God's wrath against sin. This is unknown to secure people living according to the flesh” (Ap XIA 32). (TLSB)

Though the anguish of his soul is stated in physical language (“faint” and “bones”), the psalmist is using such terms as metaphors for his deep depression. The word “bones” signifies the depth and intensity of his depression, which has affected his most inner being. In Oriental fashion no clear distinction is made between “soul” and “body,” because man suffers in his whole being. (Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

6:3 *soul*. † In this verse refers to the psalmist’s entire being, equivalent to the personal pronoun “I.” (CSB)

Troubled – The “anguish” is even more intense because it seems that the discipline has no regard for human frailty and has no apparent end in sight. (Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

How long ... how long? Such language of impatience and complaint is found frequently in the prayers of the Psalter (usually “how long?” or “when?” or “why?”). It expresses the anguish of relief not (yet) granted and exhibits the boldness with which the psalmists wrestled with God on the basis of their relationship with him and their conviction concerning his righteousness. Very often the “righteousness” of God in the Psalms (and frequently elsewhere in the OT) refers to the faithfulness with which he acts. This faithfulness is in full accordance with his commitments (both expressed and implied) to his people and with his status as the divine King—to whom the powerless may look for protection, the oppressed for redress and the needy for help.). (CSB)

Verse 3 is incomplete with the final cry “how long?” because of the intensity of his emotions, he cannot complete his thought. Similar language occurs elsewhere in the Psalter (13:2; 35:17; 74:10; 79:5; 89:46; 90:13) but is usually complete. The sense could be rendered, “How long will it be before you heal me?” or “How long will it be before you deliver me?” (in anticipation of v. 5) (Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

We, too, can cry out to God when we find ourselves guilty and sick with anguish. Does every illness come from un-confessed sin? No. But guilt can cause consequences in our bodies. No matter what the reason for our distress, we can cry out to God for help. Holding in our feelings and our guilt may result in foolish acts or inner depression. Only pouring out our needs to God will bring healing. (LL)

6:4–5 Earnest prayer for deliverance from death. (CSB)

6:4 *turn of Lord* – Psalmist feels God has turned His attention elsewhere. To turn toward the psalmist again is to deliver him from adversity and, in this context, the fear of death. (TLSB)

The imperatives “turn,” “deliver,” and “save” indicate the plea is for an immediate rescue from the suffering of God’s chastening. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

unfailing love. The Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel (see Dt 7:9, 12) as well as to David and his dynasty (see 89:24, 28, 33; 2S if the 7:15; Isa 55:3). (CSB)

“Loyal love” is the covenant word; it expresses God’s unwavering faithfulness to his covenant promises to his people (Ex. 34:7-8; Deut. 7:9; 1 Sam 20:8). The loyal love of the Lord is the reason he should be delivered, not simply because he has a covenant that is characterized by God’s faithful love to his people, but because the covenant promises of the Lord’s loyal love would fall into disrepute if he did not demonstrate them by delivering the sufferer. David has no other basis on which to make his appeal than God’s faithful love – but he needs no other. God’s faithful covenant love is sufficient; that is why it is at the heart of all his dealings with his people, even when they are sinful and need discipline. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

2 Timothy 2:13 *“if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.”*

There is no thought of personal worth that deserves recognition. Such appeals reach into the very depth of God’s heart and being. Beyond that there are no depths of appeal that can be reached. (Leupold)

6:5† *in death there is no remembrance of you* – The psalmist urges that God’s praise is at stake. It is the living, not the dead, who remember God’s mercies and celebrate his deliverances. The Israelites usually viewed death as they saw it—the very opposite of life. The grave brought no escape from God (see 139:8). (Non-Biblical documents from the ancient Near East indicate a general conception that immortality was reserved for the gods but that the dead continued to have some kind of shadowy existence in the dismal netherworld.) The OT writers knew that man was created for life, that God’s will for his people was life and that he had power over death. They also knew that death was every man’s lot, and at its proper time the godly rested in God and accepted it with equanimity (see Ge 15:15; 25:8; 47:30; 49:33; 1Ki 2:2). Death could even be a blessing for the righteous, affording escape from the greater evil that would overtake the living (see 2Ki 22:20; Isa 57:1–2). Furthermore, the death of the righteous was better than that of the wicked (see Nu 23:10). There was an awareness that death (as observed) was not the end of hope for the righteous, that God had more in store for them (see especially 16:9–11; 17:15; 49:14–15; 73:24). But when the psalmists wrestled with God for the preservation of life, it was death as they saw it, in its radical contradiction to life, that was evoked. (CSB)

This is not a denial of eternal life. It is simply a plea for a longer life so that David can finish his work of passing the throne to Solomon and preparing for the building of the temple. (PBC)

No worship. (TLSB)

To remember God’s saving acts is to praise God for them, to keep them in the memory of the congregation. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The combination of “remember” and “praise” suggests that “remember” is more than an intellectual act of mental representation. It is an intense spiritual act bringing to the mind what God has done as the basis of gratitude and praise (cf. 111:4; 145:7). (Expositor’s Bible Commentary – Psalms)

6:6–7 Anguish at night because of the prolongation of the illness and the barbs of the enemies. (CSB)

6:6 *I am worn out from groaning.* The very center of the poem—thus underscoring the pathos of this prayer. This literary device—of placing a key thematic line at the very center of the psalm—

was frequently used (see notes on 8:4; 21:7; 23:4; 34:8–14; 42:8; 47:5–6; 48:8; 54:4; 71:14; 74:12; 76:7; 82:5a; 86:9; 92:8; 97:7; 113:5; 138:4–5; 141:5). (CSB)

Not every illness is a direct result of un-confessed sin. Nonetheless, guilt can affect our physical health. Think of a time you or someone you cared about experienced fears or even physical pain and distress because of guilt. Is such guilt, remorse, and physical revulsion over sin spiritually healthy or not? Explain. (LL)

Flood my bed – He says that his tears have been so numerous that they have all but made his bed to swim all the night long. Few men have taken their sins so seriously. (Leupold)

With tears – These tears are wept in the sight of God, they are a part of the earnest prayer unto God. (Leupold)

The experience of suffering produces tears. David did not know how much longer he could bear his anguish, insomnia, and tears. He was alone at night in his bed; but it seemed that instead of God's sustaining presence filling his mind, thoughts of his foes did. David could not renew his strength by himself. He was at his wit's end! The hyperbolic expressions in these verses portray David's utter despondency. (Expositor's Bible Commentary – Psalms)

6:7 *eyes grow weak ... fail.* In the vivid language of the OT the eyes are dimmed by failing strength (see 38:10; 1Sa 14:27, 29), by grief (often associated with affliction: 31:9; 88:9; Job 17:7; La 2:11) and by longings unsatisfied or hope deferred (see 69:3; 119:82, 123; Dt 28:32; Isa 38:14). (CSB)

The “eye” serves as excellent measure of his grief, weakness, and weeping; it represents his general condition (so perhaps a synecdoche, meaning that his whole body was wasting away). The first verb is used in Psalm 31:10 where it describes a wasting away that was the result of a long period of trouble, a life spent in sorrow. Even today the condition of the eye is a good measure of the person's general health and stability. The parallel colon says that his eye has become weak because of his enemies – if the eye looks weak, it is that he seems to have aged under the duress. There is not life or vitality in his eyes because he is totally worn. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Matthew 6:22-23 ²² *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”*

because of all my foes. (word from their mouth. The most frequent weapon used against the psalmists is the tongue (for a striking example see Ps 12. The psalmists experienced that the tongue is as deadly as the sword (see 57:4; 64:3–4). Perhaps appeals to God against those who maliciously wield the tongue are frequent in the Psalms because only in God's courtroom can a person experience redress for such attacks. (CSB)

6:8–10 Concluding expression of buoyant confidence. (CSB)

6:8 *depart from me ... workers of evil* – Any habitual sinner with evil designs. (TLSB)

This abrupt change in audience signals a striking change of mood that is so characteristic of lament psalms. The psalmist is now convinced that the Lord has answered his prayer to end the

chastening, and that means that the Lord was about to end the power of those evil enemies who were willingly afflicting him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Lord has heard the sound of my weeping – We can readily understand how one who has gone into the divine presence with his particular trouble and has freely unburdened his heart before the throne of the Almighty may be mightily comforted by having gotten the matter off his chest and by having deposited his burden with God. (Leupold)

6:9 *Lord accepts me prayer* – David reiterates his point that the Lord has heard (present perfect) his supplication and accepts (progressive imperfect) his prayer to deliver him from his enemies and restore his physical and emotional health. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

6:10 *shall be ashamed* – At the psalmist’s restoration, his enemies will be disgraced. (CSB)

The words “put to shame” expresses the sense of confusion, embarrassment, and dismay when matters turn out contrary to what one expected; it is often used for chaotic defeat (s.v. Ps. 31:1). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Turn back – Retreat, acknowledgment of defeat. (TLSB)

Ps 6 David pleads with the Lord for deliverance from anxiety, physical discomfort, and sickness caused by a growing awareness of his sinful condition. Luther referred to such mental torment as *Anfechtung*, a German term for the state of despair and doubt we human beings experience when coming to terms with the consequences of our failure to meet the demands of God’s Law. Scripture clearly reveals that the result of sin is death (Rm 6:23), but how seriously do we take this threat? Consider this: nearly 2,000 years ago, our sinful condition was so desperate that God sent His own Son to pay the price. God be praised! Through faith in Christ’s redemption, our sins have been forgiven. • Lord, hear my plea, and accept my prayer through the merits of Jesus, who prays for me. Amen. (TLSB)