

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 exploring discipleship

- *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.*

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

Prayer

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

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Secularism

Whilst we pray against the many evils hidden within secularism, pray for those good people who are 'secular' by conviction but who seek the things of God. Pray for their blessing.

On-going prayers

- *Ask God to save us from all irresponsible use of the world He has given us*
- *Give thanks for the opportunities God has placed before you*
- *Pray urgently for Iran and its people*

Meditation

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

Take time to speak to a friend who needs 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 your colleagues;
Especially those who hate you, or make life difficult for you

Take care to conclude your work properly, for 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, whenever the need arises;
Especially if life is tough, and you need His help all the more.

Brother, sister, friend; the Lord watches out of love.

Bible Study - 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 back in sudden disgrace.*

Review

This is the fourth psalm of David in a row (psalms 3,4,5,6) that deals with the evil of suffering; but it has a different feel in comparison to the others. It describes an acute sense of physical pain and mental anguish (6:1-8) before deliverance is found towards the end (6:9,10). Consequently, the psalm is often used in healing ministry. Generations of Christians have also linked verses 6 and 8 with our Lord's weeping in the garden of Gethsemane, and noticed that psalm moves from describing death (6:5) to deliverance (6:8-10). Looked at like this, the psalm seems to tell the story of salvation, as won for us by Jesus! This interpretation is a long way from the psalm's possible origins in the life and times of David, but it illustrates its power to help people over more than two and a half thousand years!

Before we go further, there are two things of interest about the psalm. Firstly, most of this psalm can be found elsewhere in either Psalms or Jeremiah (Psalm 38:1, 42:4, 109:26, Jeremiah 45:3, Psalm 31:10, 119:115, 35:4,26 and 83:13), and this indicates that psalm 6 may have been very influential from the earliest of times. Also, the superscription (before verse 1) is interesting and concerns musical instructions, but the word 'sheminith' is rare. This means 'eighth', and it could be a request to sing in 'eighth's', or as a musician would understand it, in 'octaves', meaning in unison. This would give the psalm a considerable sense of 'gravitas' that would not be out of place with its theme!

Historically, psalm 6 is the first of the seven 'Penitential Psalms' (6,32,38,51,102,130,143), used in Christian worship for confessing sin and asking the Lord for help. It is not immediately obvious that the worshipper in this psalm is asking for forgiveness (that is, someone who is 'Penitent'), but it is there in the first few verses within the appeal of the soul for help in the midst of distress. For example, 'rebuke' and 'discipline' (6:1) are words often found in 'wisdom' literature (e.g. Proverbs 3:11: 'My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his rebuke'). Here, God deals with His penitent children who need His guidance, just like the worshipper in psalm 6, who seeks the Lord's help because of sickness (6:2).

Most of this psalm describes suffering of one kind or another. In verse 3 the 'soul' is said to be in anguish, and we assume that this means mental suffering. We need to be careful, because in the Old Testament, the soul really means the whole person, not just one part of the person. Therefore, the suffering in psalm 6:3 may be anything, physical, mental, or spiritual, but whatever it is, it causes the individual to break down and cry out to God 'how

long, O Lord, how long' (6:3)! The psalm is an appeal for mercy rather than discipline, and verse 4 calls upon God to save the sufferer because of His 'unfailing love', the great faithful characteristic of God that he will always show, without fail, until the end of time. All who suffer depend upon God's faithful love in times of trouble and distress.

The situation is not resolved, and verses 5,6,7 all continue to pour out troubles to God; fear of death (6:5), loss of sleep with worry (6:6), and physical distress (6:7). However, we should bear in mind that all of this describes the suffering of one person. The things described may mean different things for different people, but each sufferer experiences many forms of suffering that all add up to the horror of what they feel. Verses 6 and 7 describe the consequences of such suffering; exhaustion, weeping and failure. In Hebrew, the 'eye' (6:7) is picture language for 'me' (Isaiah 64:4), and the eyes that weep are like a pouring out of the soul to God.

Then quite suddenly, verse 8 comes on us with surprise! The victim of this suffering shouts out 'away from me, you evil doers!' but where does this courage come from? It is a cry of confidence, a rebuke of the enemy, and, for a Christian, it is the eviction of Jesus' enemy, Satan! (Matt 7:23, 16:23) The verbs of verses 8 and 9 are emphatic, declaring what God has done; 'He has heard my weeping', 'he has heard my cry'. Then the psalm moves on with a further unexpected change of expression, and in verse 10, the psalm demonstrates confidence in the future 'my enemies will be ashamed ...'. A prayer that has been offered once will have a continuing effect in the future!

What lies behind this sudden and most important change? It may be that when the psalm was first used, someone presenting themselves (and their problems) before the Lord in the Temple said the first seven verses; and after they had said them, a priest pronounced verse 8, before the worshipper concluded with the last two verses. One other possibility is that the King (imagine King David), comes to the Lord in penitence, then pulls himself together and declares his true authority (6:9,10). In so doing he takes hold of the victory that is his; he knows that the Lord has heard him because of His 'covenant' mercy (6:9 see also 6:2) and that in the Lord's strength he has total victory over his enemies, spiritual or physical. At the end of the psalm, he does not need physical healing, but Victory!

What was true for David is true for us now in Jesus Christ. For the Christian, the victory of Jesus' life, death and resurrection encompasses all things; our life and death are in the Lord's hands. This is what matters, whatever our health issues, whether or not the Lord grants us special healing for particular woes. We claim what our Lord has already done for our ultimate deliverance!

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)?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

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