
The Pilgrim's Languishing

Psalm 6⁷

Russ Kennedy

Setup

Sad...

Depressed...

Weary, tired, unable to go on...

Situation

We do not know the specific in King David's life that this was written. We have indications that he is older, weary and sick. He is struggling with God and it is affecting him physically. This could be after his sin with Bathsheba or during his son's rebellion, many years later. Our pilgrim singer is being chastened by God. And he is struggling and suffering.

Struggle

Three times he used the Hebrew word *bahal*, which means "faint, weak, troubled, terrified." It was also used to refer to when a stick would dwindle or dry out. He seems to be wasting, writhing and withering.

This song is one of seven that are called, "penitential" Psalms. It means the song reflects the pilgrim's sorrow over sin and repentance. It is an "I'm sorry" song. Let's explore it together.

Under Discipline for Sin

(v. 1-3)

The prayer opens with the pilgrim's plea to God who is chastening him.

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?

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Our Relationship

The pilgrim under chastening has both his Lord and his Father.

Eight times David addresses God as his Lord. This is the covenant keeping name of God. It is not just a title related to His being in authority. This is the name by which God shows Himself to be faithful to His promises. Under chastening, the pilgrim is greatly comforted by remembering that God is a promise keeping God.

David sees God as his Father. The language of the Psalm is that of chastening, child training, of correction. He may not understand it clearly, but he has learned through the Scriptures that God is chastening him so as to change him. So his pain is that which is being administered by a wise and loving dad.

Our Lord will keep His Word. He will do what He says. Our Father will chasten His children. He will do what wants. But because He has punished Jesus for our sins, we are not being punished. We are being chastened and corrected as children.

Our Request

David feels God's hand as anger and wrath. This is because he is in the Old Covenant. He does not fully understand as we do. He understands that his sin deserves the anger and wrath of God. He asks that God then not deal with him according to God's displeasure. Thank the Lord, this prayer has been answered in Christ. The anger and wrath of God against your sin has already been satisfied.

As one writer put it, "There is a chastisement which proceeds from God's love to the man as being pardoned and which is designed to purify or to prove him, and a chastisement which proceeds from God's wrath against the man as striving obstinately against, or as fallen away from, favour, and which satisfies divine justice." (Keil & Delitzsch, 1996, p. V.5 P.79)

Our Reasons

Prayer has its logic. We have reasons for asking God what we ask. We ground our request in God's grace and in our groaning. Be gracious to us Lord because we are hurting. We are suffering the consequences of our sins and the chastening of our Lord. You, O Lord, are full of grace. We, O Lord, are full of pain. So heal us.

God's chastening also troubles our souls. It is sometimes hard to understand. It is hard to bear. The cry of David rings true in our own hearts, "How long, O Lord?" We can endure the chastening for a short season. But when it seems to go on and on. What if it doesn't end? What if a promise keeping Lord and faithfully loving Father chooses to continue to afflict us?

With Death in View

(v. 4-5)

The pilgrim prays to God with death in view.

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?

Our Plea

(v. 4)

If God does not heal his body and his soul, then he is afraid he will come to death. It seems that King David is quite sick. He is declining. He may be using a metaphor but it sure seems real. He is sinking, slipping, sliding towards death. There is little he can do.

Even in the troubled state of his soul, David does not want to die. Sometimes in his problems and perplexities he seems to. But not when he knows that he is in this place because of his sin. He does not want his death to be the result of displeasing God. The sin weary pilgrim is not looking for escape. He does not want out. He wants to go on. He wants his life to be delivered.

Too often we are praying these things because we are loving ourselves. Self-love then sees self-preservation as all important. The pilgrim asks to live because of the unwavering and unchanging love of God. We seek to truly live because of God's love that promises and preserves.

Our Perspective

(v. 5)

Look at his perspective. Why should God preserve his life? In death, the pilgrim will not remember nor praise God. What does David mean by this? Is he truly not a pilgrim? Has he no theology of life after death? Has he no sense of paradise or heaven?

Or is this an afflicted conscience? His confessed sins have been covered but they still weigh on his conscience. He trembles before an angry God. He pleads for mercy and grace. He has no advocate before the throne yet. Jesus has not died. He does not know our great New Covenant privilege of clean heart and a clear conscience. So he fears that in death he will not enter the joy of the Lord.

In an odd way, he is appealing to the self-interest of the Lord. Now God's self-interest is right, good and holy. It is our greatest joy. The pilgrim looks into the face of his Father and Lord and says, "Let me live so that I may know you and praise you." And the Father assures us that we have eternal life now and forever. We will know and praise Him forever.

Look at all these words that are spoken to move our Father and our Lord's heart. Be gracious... Your mercy... Your steadfast love... Your praise... In our own languishing do we speak with such God centered, God knowing, God loving appeals?

In Despair of Sorrow

(v. 6-7)

We would hope that the Psalm would turn here. But no, he seems to sink even deeper into the despair of sorrow.

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.

Our Groaning

(v. 6)

David reflects our own groaning. Is this writing for effect? Is he really so depressed that he is sighing and crying every night? What he is conveying is his deep pain. He is troubled. He is weighed down. He is crying – he is a man who is stricken with the situation. He may be a man of war but he is also a great poet and singer. His affections are easily moved. He experiences life deeply.

Our Grieving

(v. 7)

Yes, groaning and grieving are often twins born of the same trouble. But there is a surprise here. This groaning and grieving is because of his foes. The opposition to him weighs heavily on his heart. This would be one indication that this was written later in his life and possibly during Absalom's rebellion. Then sick, broken, struggling with the consequences of sin and folly, he is fleeing.

Let us not miss the connection between these two stanzas. The pilgrim feels the heavy hand of God. And he feels the hurried feet of his foes. This is a hard place to be. We have offended our loving and gracious Father and we have given the enemies of God reason to pursue us. Bodies are afflicted. Our souls are troubled. Our adversaries press in against us. Tear soaked beds and sobbing praying are not too extreme.

Or are they? I know many of you resonate with the emotions and feelings that saturate this Psalm. You listen and say, "Yes that is me. I feel that. I suffer that. I understand that. I live that." Are those feelings flowing from the spring?

And many of you struggle to understand people who suffer like this. This is very alien to you. Your life is relatively easy. Your troubles are few. Your emotions are even. If we are not careful we will think that our way is superior. Yes God wants us to sober and stable saints; but He does not want us to stoic. The aim of Christian growth is maturity and stability in our response to the troubles around us.

But it may well be that some of you appear mature and stable when actually your life is relatively free of trials and troubles. Now I am going to say this as kindly as I know how: ease and situational peace are not the norm for the Christian life. O, one day it will be. For that all pilgrims yearn. But we long for that because it is not our normal experience now. Suffering, struggling, problems, persecution – these are the norms of the life and walk with God. Preaching and teaching that promises the victorious Christian life

full of prosperity, pleasure and peace is simply lying to you. You will have it one day when your pilgrimage is over. But here, now – you will have deliverance from the power of sin and you will have peace with God. But you will be living in an alien land where adversaries are many, troubles are great, disease afflicts, difficulties abound. But you will have God and His people. You will have a mission and purpose and life eternal. And one day this long, wearying journey will be over. And everything God promised will be yours.

Until Delivered by God

(v. 8-10)

The pilgrim is groaning under discipline for sin, with death in view, in the despair of sorrow until delivered by God.

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.

Do you hear the change in voice? From speaking to God, David now speaks to his adversaries. Notice the structure of this stanza as well.

Our Rebuke of the Wicked

David rebukes the wicked. He sends them away. This reflects a rising confidence and expectation the Lord has heard him. As the king he has the authority to do this. While it may be largely symbolic, he is rising up in his soul. I don't hear desperation here. I hear a resolution. He says, "You had no care for my sorrows. But God did. The Lord has heard my weeping. So now, go away. Be gone."

Our Reassurance from the Lord

He speaks with confidence because he has an assurance from the Lord. He has been heard. His prayer has been accepted. He has been reconciled. He senses the smile of God once again. The troubles may still abound, but now he lifts up his head for God is leaning toward him and listening to him.

Our Relief from the Adversaries

Now he turns to us in this final refrain. The adversaries will lose face and place. They will be embarrassed. They will make their exit. They will be troubled. The harm and hurt they had intended to inflict on David now is their portion.

Reflect and Respond

Here is the movement of any pilgrim's soul:

From hopeless grief and groaning to confident declaration...

From sinking down in depression to rising up in prayer...

From God's heavy chastening hand to God's mighty victorious arm...

From pursued by adversaries to protected by God...

From the possibility of death to the certainty of life...

We sometimes can sing sinking songs. Our eyes may be wet with tears but our lips are speaking to God. Our souls may be sinking down but our faith will be rising up.

This is the common experience of saints in the New Covenant. Listen to how the *bahal*, the struggling and suffering is transformed in a Christ-centered way.

2 Corinthians 1:3-11 (NLT)

³ All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. ⁴ He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. ⁵ For the more we suffer for Christ, the more God will shower us with his comfort through Christ. ⁶ Even when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your comfort and salvation! For when we ourselves are comforted, we will certainly comfort you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. ⁷ We are confident that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in the comfort God gives us.

⁸ We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. ⁹ In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us. ¹¹ And you are helping us by praying for us. Then many people will give thanks because God has graciously answered so many prayers for our safety.

2 Corinthians 4:7-16 (NLT)

⁷ We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

⁸ We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. ⁹ We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. ¹⁰ Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

¹¹ Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies. ¹² So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you.

¹³ But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, "I believed in God, so I spoke." ¹⁴ We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you. ¹⁵ All of this is for your benefit. And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.

¹⁶ That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day.

Notes