

FOCUS: **Who** we truly believe God to be will be revealed by **how** we relate to him in times of trouble and suffering. Psalm 6 models the way.

FUNCTION: That hearers would reflect on their own picture of God and enlarge / correct this picture according to the truth of Psalm 6, thereby being strengthened in current or future suffering.

1. The psalmist in Psalm 6 is in a bad state...

Short series on psalms – not the joyful celebration ones or the quiet peaceful ones – the ones full of discomfort and anguish. But plenty of hope to be found.

- ¹ O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.
- ² Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.
- ³ My soul also is struck with terror,
while you, O LORD—how long?
- ⁴ Turn, O LORD, save my life;
deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.
- ⁵ For in death there is no remembrance of you;
in Sheol who can give you praise?
- ⁶ I am weary with my moaning;
every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
- ⁷ My eyes waste away because of grief;
they grow weak because of all my foes.
- 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 supplication;
the LORD accepts my prayer.
- ¹⁰ All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror;
they shall turn back and in a moment be put to shame.

This person (David) is in a bad way.

- May be sickness, lots of physical description, fear of death. “Lord heal me”
- It may be trouble of some other kind – sometimes physical symptoms are used as a metaphor for other suffering. In particular, tears play a big part. Literal – swimming on

my bed! For anyone who's cried til they are utterly exhausted and spent, you know this feeling.

- There is some pressure from outside too – foes, enemies, workers of evil - though it doesn't seem to be the root cause of the suffering. Perhaps the psalmist's sickness or trouble is being viewed in his community as a sign of judgement and people are blaming him, and questioning his character. This seems to make sense of the idea that if God rescues him, the enemies will be ashamed and have nothing to say.
- Above all, there is a sense of desperation. This person is so weary, worn out, fed up, completely sick of his circumstances. There is absolutely nothing he can do about it. The only hope left is God and God doesn't seem to be turning up.
- This is the crunch point of the psalm. Where is God? Why hasn't he rescued his faithful follower? How long is he going to let this situation go on? *While you, O Lord, how long?*

2. WHO does the psalmist believe God to be? "YOU"

- Underlying question – who does the psalmist believe God (Yahweh) to be?
- Brugg – “*The most stunning and decisive factor in the prayers of the Psalter*” (book of Psalms) – “*addressed to a known, named, identifiable You*” PATLOF, 34.
- You – simple and direct. Special emphasis in the Hebrew (not just normal 2nd pers). A marked difference for speech to gods at the time and maybe even now. Religions at the time would involve fancy convoluted speeches, where fancy titles and extravagant flattery were piled up to soften up the god, to gain favour, and also to impress anyone listening in. But for the Israelite psalmists and those who used the psalms, God is known and the pleas and praises are too focused, too personal and too urgent not to get straight to the point.
- Rabbinic prayer –
 - Where I wander – You!*
 - Where I ponder – You!*
 - Only You, You again, always You!*
 - You! You! You!*
 - When I am gladdened – You!*
 - When I am saddened – You!*
 - Only You, You again, always You!*
 - You! You! You!*
 - Sky is You! Earth is You!*
 - You above, You below!*
 - In every trend, at every end,*
 - Only You, You again, always You!*
 - You! You! You!* Cited by Martin Buber, in Brueggemann PATLOF 37.

3. What is known about the knowable You?

- His *hesed* – unfailling, steadfast, covenant love. Known about God because he describes himself so - “*Yahweh! The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailling love and faithfulness.*”

*⁷ I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations.
I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin.” Ex 34:6-7 NLT*

And because he has shown himself to be so – Exodus, making of covenant, forgiveness over again. *Hesed* described over and over in psalms – eg 36 –

*Your unfailing love, O LORD, is as vast as the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds.*

*⁶ Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the ocean depths.*

You care for people and animals alike, O LORD.

⁷ How precious is your unfailing love, O God!

Because *hesed* is covenantal – both parties can call for other to keep promises made.

- His power – Underlying feeling in this psalm that life is not just difficult or painful, it is very very wrong. God is the only one who can put things right.
- His responsibility – not only God can put things right but that he should! This is not how God's creation should be, not how life should be as his child. And God is responsible for putting things right.
- His responsiveness – the psalmist is clearly convinced that he is able to change God's mind, to convince him to act, to call on him to keep his promise! At one level this is outrageous! That a tiny insignificant human should be able to talk the God of the universe into acting! But it's not that humans are more important than we thought or that God is less important than we thought, it's simply the inexplicable grace of God in action. He actually listens to us! Mind blow!

4. How does the psalmist relate to God as You?

2 reasons to address You – “to celebrate that God is this particular You and none other” and “to insist that God should now be this known You When God has seemed to grow careless about that identity and character” (37)

And this is other thing about the known You – it affects how the psalmist relates to God.

How does the psalmist relate to God as You?

- Honesty. About himself - I'm languishing. I'm afraid. I think I'm going to die. I am fed up and weary. I am overcome with grief and sorrow. I am being laughed at, judged, mocked. I feel alone. I feel like giving up.
About God – I feel as though you're angry with me. You're not answering me. You're not acting quickly. You're letting this drag on. I feel as though you've let me down. I know in my head that you love me but I don't feel like you're acting like you said you would. You're a rescuer but I don't see you rescuing me, a deliverer but you haven't saved me. Come and be who you said you were!
How honest are you with God?
- Conversation – he is in dialogue with God. He is not doubting God's existence or even that God can hear him. He asks direct questions, including the big one – While You Lord, how long? He doesn't hedge. He even suggests that it would be in God's interest to save him – dead people don't sing praises!
Is your prayer a conversation with God? Do you leave him room to answer?

- Basic daring trust. He is willing to test God, to call on God. To ask for specific things, to hold God to who he is known to be. And the bigger the ask, the riskier it feels! I know this myself. Asking big things feel risky. If God doesn't come through, what does that say about him, about me, about what I believe? Are you trusting enough to ask for big things?
- Praise for answers. When God does answer, and he does! The psalmist's praise and thanks are loud and strong. For all his pleas –
- *⁴ Turn, O LORD, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love. (3 fold)
There are declarations of his faithfulness (3 fold)
the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.
⁹ The LORD has heard my supplication;
*the LORD accepts my prayer!**

Both speaking to God but also speaking about him to those around.

5. Jesus followed this pattern but takes it further...

We see this pattern of prayer in Jesus himself at the very crunch point of his life and mission – in the garden the night before he is crucified –

³² They went to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and Jesus said, "Sit here while I go and pray." ³³ He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he became deeply troubled and distressed. ³⁴ He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁵ He went on a little farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if it were possible, the awful hour awaiting him might pass him by. ³⁶ "Abba, Father,"^[a] he cried out, "everything is possible for you. Please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine." Mark 14:32-36 NLT

- We see Jesus go beyond Israel's 'You' to something much more – Abba, my father. This is so direct and intimate, incredible that we are encouraged to call God the same.
- Honest – Jesus is excruciatingly honest here. He is telling his father what is coming feels unbearable, too much to face, not sure he can actually do it. Asking for deliverance.
- Dialogue – Jesus is putting a question to his Father – everything is possible for you – is there a way out?
- But then – the daring trust takes on a whole new meaning. It's very easy to read this passage through and feel like it's a one sentence / one thought prayer. We can't know for sure but I feel there must have been quite some time of anguished prayer between these sentences. Enough time for the disciples to fall asleep in a cold garden on the ground. But in that time, Jesus' trust goes further than the psalmist felt able to go. Please please rescue me, but if it's not what you want, not your plan, then it's fine if you don't. It's impossible to overestimate the depth of this trust! Jesus is willing to go through the pain and torture he doesn't think he can bear for the sake of God's will. He places himself entirely in his Father's hands, trusting that although he will certainly die, God has the power, and the will to raise him to life again. And hallelujah that he did!

6. How do we relate to God in times of suffering and trouble?

So here's the heart of Psalm 6 – **who** we truly believe God to be will be revealed in **how** we relate to him in times of suffering and trouble.

- Remember WHO he is, who he has said he is – a God of unfailing love and faithfulness, whose covenant of love binds him willingly to us for eternity. A God is willing to listen, willing to respond, and willing and able to take responsibility for all that is wrong in creation, although he is the only one not responsible for its current state.

And then –

- Honesty, conversation, and daring trust – whether for God to act (and if Jesus can ask so can we!) or for strength to continue if that is his will.
- But we can only do it if we know with all our being that in the end, ULTIMATELY, God is faithful and his love endures forever. We read this passage only two weeks ago in Easter Sunday –

*On Mount Zion the LORD who rules over all will prepare
a feast for all the nations.*

*The best and richest foods
and the finest aged wines will be served.*

*⁷On that mountain the LORD will destroy
the veil of sadness that covers all the nations.*

He will destroy the gloom that is spread over everyone.

⁸ He will swallow up death forever.

*The LORD and King will wipe away the tears
from everyone's face.*

*He will remove the shame of his people
from the whole earth.*

The LORD has spoken.

And let's add one more verse...

⁹At that time they will say,

"He is our God.

We trusted in him, and he saved us.

He is the LORD. We trusted in him.

Let us be filled with joy because he saved us."

Time of silence

Abba Father, I want to recognise you now for the God you are – that knowable You...

Father, I want to be honest with you about how I am feel – about myself, my life, about you...

Father, I ask you to speak with me, to help me to listen for your voice, to make space for it and to discern what you are saying. I ask you to answer my requests like the loving Father you are...

Jesus, give me the daring trust that you showed that night before your death, that without sacrificing honesty or squashing down my questions, I might be able to have the trust to be at peace with whatever God's will is for me... Thankyou that one day, all will be set right.

Holy Spirit please strengthen and enable me to live out my love for you as you show your unfailing love for me every day.

Amen.