

The Dark Night of the Soul

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[0 : 00] One of the great benefits of the Psalms is that they teach us how to pray through various seasons of life. There are so many different types of Psalms.

People through the years have attempted to categorize them. Sometimes that's helpful, sometimes it's not so helpful. But undoubtedly, the Psalms are varied in their content.

They're varied in their mood and in their tone. They teach us liturgically, worshipfully, ways to speak to God, worship God, commune with God throughout varying seasons and circumstances of life.

There are Psalms of Adoration that teach us how to praise God when we encounter His nature and His character. Praising God, worshiping Him for who He is.

There are Psalms of Thanksgiving. They teach us how to recognize God's benevolent love, common grace maybe even, that He would extend to all people.

[1 : 00] But then especially His special love, giving to His own people. They teach us how to praise Him for what He's done in addition to who He is.

There are what we call imprecatory Psalms. They teach us how to pray about our enemies. We saw a bit of that last week in Psalm 5.

Then there are Psalms of lament. Lamentations that give us a framework for processing and speaking to God in our grief.

Not just in basic sadness. In deep, sometimes indescribable, sometimes unspeakable grief.

Psalm 6 is fundamentally a lament. And it's not very hard to see that at all, is it? David is absolutely overcome with grief.

[2 : 09] Think about the language that we just read. He pleads with God, my bones are troubled. My soul is greatly troubled. Heal me.

Save me. Deliver me. At the heart of the Psalm is this amazingly vulnerable moment where He says, I just lay in my bed and I cry.

I just cry. Deep grief. Deep depression, we may even call it. Psalm 6 is fundamentally that.

It's a lament to God, a prayer to God in the midst of really deep brokenness. It's also the first of what are traditionally categorized as penitential psalms.

Throughout church history, many have viewed this as a psalm that teaches us how to confess our sins to God. How to respond to God when we're in the midst of facing the consequences of our very own sin.

[3 : 16] A penitential psalm is so categorized and labeled because it has some expression of sorrow or regret for sins that have been committed.

And it teaches us basically a posture for genuine repentance. It gives us a pattern for confessing our sins. And in this psalm, David recognizes that the circumstances that have left him greatly troubled, the surface level things that have put him weeping on his bed night after night, he's come to realize and recognize those things are his fault.

That ultimately, it's the result of his own sin. The consequences of his sin are being felt and lived out in his life.

His enemies have once again mounted against him. Death feels imminent to him here. It seems as though God's blessing has been removed from his life, that he has lost a sense of God's presence with him and a sense of God's presence for him.

And it seems as if David understands all of that to be the discipline of God. That he is facing what he's facing because he's sinned and God is judging him for that sin.

[4 : 38] And it's, without a doubt, the most emotional prayer that we have covered so far in this book. It's one of the more emotionals in the entire collection of psalms.

There is no shortage of feelings in this song, is there? Sometimes that makes us uncomfortable, doesn't it? Depending on maybe how you grew up and your family, depending on what the nature of your connection with church was, what your church was like, the personality of your church growing up, sometimes we feel like vulnerability is almost a sin in and of itself.

That to show emotion and feeling in worship or in conversation with others is to admit a kind of weakness that God would be displeased with.

As if to be vulnerable in any given moment is to reflect a lack of faith. And yet, David doesn't lack faith in this psalm.

He's actually quite emotional. I think we see the opposite of it. It's not always in times of grief. We read a psalm to open our service in Psalm 47, a psalm from the sons of Korah.

[5 : 52] It was very emotional, wasn't it? Sing loud songs of praise. Reflect on God's kingship over the whole earth and let that overflow with a shout of joy.

Why does that make us so uncomfortable? Why does it make us so uncomfortable to maybe even attend a worship service where the intention is that we gather with other people who believe what we believe, who have experienced what we have experienced in the work of Christ, in the work of the Holy Spirit, and yet we're so reserved and offering up joyful praise and intentional, emotive praise to the Lord.

That's not the picture that we have in the psalms at all. And when we come to this one, we find there is no shortage of feelings for David here. David's sin has brought his enemies close.

It's caused him to feel as if God has left him. And the combination of those things has brought him into this experience of what older writers called the dark night of the soul.

A deep spiritual depression, the likes of which only God can remedy. That's what we find here. But it's not just depression here.

[7 : 13] There's actually a powerful sense of hope that courses through the psalm, isn't there? The same God who disciplines us in our sins is the same God who renews his children, who restores their worship through his steadfast love.

There are consequences for sin that bring immense grief into our lives. There's also forgiveness from God that brings unspeakable joy. As deep and dark as our spiritual depression can be, even more so is the brightness of the joy that can be experienced in Christ from God.

And Psalm 6 gives us this opportunity to explore those two truths simultaneously so that we too may know how to escape the dark night of the soul.

Because inevitably, there will be times when you will indeed, like David, have nights where you lay upon your bed and weep.

And how nice, gracious of God to give us a psalm that we can resort to in those moments, right? My hope, my prayer is to be clear.

[8 : 40] I hope that I'm clear. I hope that I don't overcook the message here. Honestly, my heart this morning is that if you are in one of those seasons, a dark night of the soul, that kind of depression that is deeply spiritual, that in this psalm, you will see that there is actually true hope.

And that hope can be yours. It's a gift from God. Two facets of Christian experience are evident in the song here.

We've already noted them really in passing. The first one is spiritual depression. The second one is saving hope. There's also a pathway described to each of those things.

David didn't just wake up one day and decide he's going to be spiritually depressed. It didn't happen that way for him. There was a road that he walked that led to this moment.

There was also a road that he walked that led him to the confident joy and hope that we find in the closing verses of the psalm. So what I want us to do this morning is walk these two roads together.

[9 : 55] Rather than break it up in its different stanzas, I want us to look at spiritual depression first, and I want us to trace it through the psalm. And then I want us to return to the beginning of the psalm and then trace saving hope all the way through as well.

Okay, that's the goal. That's the structure as we work through. The first thing we want to really look at is this idea of spiritual depression. There are two waypoints in the psalm that lead to the destination of spiritual depression.

The first one is very simply sin. Sin. Look at verse one. Oh Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath.

This verse, it includes language that in Psalm 2, we studied a few weeks ago, was reserved for the raging nations and the plotting peoples that rebel against God and face his divine judgment. You can probably set your eyes on it. Look at verse 12 of Psalm 2. Kiss the son lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.

[11:07] Who is it kindled towards? Who is being called to escape the anger of the Son of God? Those who have rebelled against him.

So it's peculiar then that when we get to Psalm 6, that David, who often typifies the blessed man of Psalm 1, would now be crying out for God to withhold anger and wrath from him.

Rebuke me not in your anger, God. Please do not discipline me in your wrath. And there can only be one reason for this kind of prayer.

David traced his affliction back to some moment in which he walked in the way of sinners rather than delighting in the law of God. And in recognizing his sin against God, he pleads that God would bring an end to the rebuke.

He pleads that God would withhold further discipline that he's now enduring, that he believes has brought him to the brink of death. There's many moments in David's life where it was the sins of others that brought him grief.

[12:26] You know what that's like. You know what it's like to face deep discouragements in your life, not because you did something wrong, but because someone did something wrong to you. David knew that.

He knew that experience. This is not the experience of David here. David's grief, many times in the Psalms, it stems from his own sin.

We don't know exactly which circumstance this is a reflection on. We could easily work through the narrative of David's life and find a number of different possibilities.

The exact nature of it isn't the point. The point is that he recognizes that his condition is the result of his own sinfulness.

Now, I want to be clear at this point. That doesn't mean that every hardship, that every mental health crisis that you may face is the direct result of some wrongdoing in your life.

[13:34] That's not what I'm saying. It's not what I intend for you to hear. We understand severe bouts of depression can arise from many things, including mental ailments that are beyond our control.

It's also true that too much effort seems to be put into avoiding sinful behavior as a real and dominant cause of emotional distress.

Why would we expect something different than that? God has made it clear in his word. Sin destroys. Sin kills. Sin does not make things better for you.

Sin always makes things worse. And it will be to our own detriment if we scoff at the idea that mental anguish is divorced from rebellion against God.

Sometimes it is. Sometimes it is. But it isn't always. And David proves that to us here in this psalm. The particulars are unspecified. But a sense of guilt for sin is basic to the psalm.

[14:45] David ties his experience directly to God's judgment. Sin is the first step on the pathway to this spiritual depression that he experiences in this psalm.

Which brings us to the second point. Affliction. Affliction. David speaks of tremendous affliction flowing out of his sin.

Look at verses 2 and 3. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing. Heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled.

My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O Lord, how long? Whatever it is that's come about in David's life at this moment, it has rocked him to his very core.

Derek Kidner said it this way. Whether his sense of God's displeasure is the cause or the effect of his sickness, he is shaken to the depths and he fears even for his life.

[15:50] My bones and my soul are probably not meant as a contrast between the material and immaterial, but as an alternative expression for the whole man.

What is David saying here? He's saying my whole being is distraught. It's greatly troubled. What is that? Affliction.

Affliction. Anguish. His affliction had so permeated his being that it's as if he could not even finish his sentence in verse 3. Look at it.

You, O Lord. How long? It's almost as if he's going to continue his prayer, but overcome with this feeling of affliction that he experiences in this moment.

He stops his prayer and he just says, How much longer, Lord? How much longer will you pour out your anger? How much longer until you deal with my enemies?

[16:52] How much longer until you restore me in your kindness? You ever prayed a prayer like that? You ever got to a point in your life where you just didn't even know what to pray anymore?

And maybe all you can muster in the course of your devotion to God is, How much longer, Lord? How much longer will this continue? How much longer until you intervene? Until you do something? Of course, the affliction is multifaceted, isn't it? One facet was physical. David pleads for God to be gracious to him for he was languishing.

To languish, it means to grow weak physically. It means to grow weak or feeble so that you can make no more progress in life. He's come to the end.

That's what he feels like here. There's a physical dimension to this. Whether through some kind of sickness, it seems like there's a threat of enemies that are coming against him. Whatever it was, David believes that his death is imminent.

[17:58] It could happen at any moment. And that's contributing to his grief. Look at verses 4 and 5. Turn, O Lord, deliver my life. Save me, he says.

In death, there's no remembrance of you. In Sheol, who will give you praise? He thinks he's going to die. Another facet of the affliction, maybe the dominant facet, is deeply spiritual here.

Verse 4, he asks for God to turn, which is the word for repentance. Now, he's not suggesting that God had done something wrong. He was asking God to turn from judgment to salvation.

Turn, O Lord, deliver my life. But I want you to consider for a moment the spiritual realities that are underscoring this prayer.

There's kind of an undercurrent of spiritual distress here. David obviously felt that what should be happening to God's enemies, another reflection perhaps on Psalm 2, what should be happening to God's enemies was happening to him instead.

[19:15] And for someone who has walked with God, a man who, the Bible says at one point, is a man who had God's heart. A man after God's heart. Imagine the spiritual distress he would have felt.

Now God is treating me as if I'm an enemy. He surely senses this deep sense of separation from the God that he loved and had served. Perhaps he'd lost the sense of God's favor and blessing on his life.

He was in anguish over the fact, I think, that his sin had interrupted his fellowship with God, which was being evidenced in the physical suffering that God was allowing him to endure in this moment. And again, that doesn't mean that every time you face physical suffering or hardship or mental distress, that it's always the result of sin. But in this case, it was. It was.

And it's possible that in your case, it is. That brings us to the third step, which is the depression itself. Verses 6 and 7.

[20:23] I'm weary with my moaning. Every night I flood my bed with tears. I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye waste away because of grief.

It grows weak because of all my foes. Again, a reflection on this physical suffering, perhaps from the threat of his enemies. This is the cry of a deeply broken individual, isn't it?

His moaning, his tears, his weeping. They're all rooted in his grief. That's what he says in verse 7. My eye waste away. That's a reflection of all of his crying that he's been doing.

It wastes away because of grief. Because of this internal struggle. But his grief is layered. On the surface, it relates to his enemies who seem to have been successful against him.

But it's deeper than that, isn't it? His lament is fundamentally about his sin against God. And the brokenness that has come as a result of it. So that the intensity of David's affliction paired with the realization that it's all the result of his own sin.

[21:36] It has produced in him this deep spiritual depression. This dark night of the soul. Have you ever experienced something like this?

Maybe even just a taste of something like this? I would venture to say that at least at the moment of your conversion, you felt some sense of what David feels here.

Recognizing that your sinfulness has produced nothing but death in you. Casting yourself then on the mercy of God. But perhaps even since you've become a Christian, you have had seasons that

felt very much like what David describes here.

Ever drenched your bed with weeping? There could be a lot of reasons for that that have nothing to do with what I'm talking about right now. But have you ever considered that your depression might actually be spiritual?

That like David, your circumstances have come as a result of sin. And what you're facing is not something that can be diagnosed and treated with medicine or therapies.

[22 : 52] That the only hope you have is a supernatural hope that comes from God. Well, I want you to know that there is true saving hope in your grief.

Whether you're experiencing that grief now or whether you'll experience that grief sometime in your future. There is hope and it's here. Which brings us to the second primary point. Saving hope. We've seen spiritual depression.

Now we're going to kind of work through the psalm again. Looking at the saving hope that is intertwined with it. There's a road map to spiritual depression here. There's also a road map to saving hope.

The first stop on the path. Repentance. Repentance. What do I do when I discover that what I feel that the grief that I have is really the outworking of my sin?

The first thing you do is the first thing David did. You turn from that sin. Verses 1 and 2. Oh Lord, rebuke me not in your anger. Do not discipline me in your wrath.

[23 : 55] Be gracious to me. I'm languishing. Heal me. My bones are troubled. He recognizes his guilt. Knowing that God's anger and wrath are his just reward.

So rather than double down on his rebellion. Claiming that God has been unjust toward him. What does he do? He agrees with God about his sinful condition.

Rebuke me not. Nor discipline me. Be gracious to me. Heal me. Those are all expressions of a penitent heart. That's why the church historically has categorized this as a penitential psalm.

The heart of David here is one of repentance. Of turning away from sin in order to pursue God once again. David didn't only seek deliverance from his circumstances.

I don't think that's true. Clearly that's on the surface. I think he also sought forgiveness for his sins. Otherwise, he would have defended himself rather than plead for God's mercy, wouldn't he?

[25 : 00] When facing God's discipline for your sin, you will always be tempted to be angry with him. As if in contrast to what John said in 1 John 1.5, you convince yourself that there actually is some kind of darkness in God.

There is some type of injustice in God. Why would he do this to me? After all I've done for him, why would he do this to me? And rather than acknowledging the reality of your sinful condition, you charge him as if there's something wrong with him.

That's always going to be a temptation when you are facing grief as a result of sin. But no hope will come to such a hardened heart.

No hope. It is a broken and a contrite heart that God will not despise. That's what David says in Psalm 51. And it's echoed throughout the Old Testament.

God does not despise those who recognize and agree with him about their condition. In fact, he moves toward them with hope and love and grace.

[26 : 11] Which brings us to the second point. It's not only repentance that we find here. We find faith. Faith. Verses 4 and 5.

Turn, O Lord, deliver my life. Save me for the sake of your steadfast love. For in death there's no remembrance of you. In Sheol, who will give you praise?

So in partnership with repentance is the faith that God is willing and able to show mercy in salvation. Again, that's what surfaces in his language here, isn't it?

He's convinced that hope can only be found in the Lord. So he prays for God to deliver him. And underscoring this prayer for deliverance is faith that God will, perhaps another reflection on Psalm 2, bless those who take refuge in him.

So David then makes his appeal on the basis of God's steadfast love. Notice again, verse 4. Save me for the sake of your steadfast love.

[27 : 23] David essentially prays here. Deliver me, O Lord, because you love me. Come to my aid, God, because I know you love me. And that your love for me does not end.

You ever said that to your wife after a fight, sweetheart? Now, now, I know you love me. You can't be mad at me forever.

Some might say this is awfully presumptuous of David. That it's a great presumption that he's made here that God does love him and will continue to love him, even in his sinfulness. And they'd be right. It is presumptuous if there's no basis for his claim. But David didn't invent this idea.

David didn't conjure up and fabricate this idea of God being full of steadfast love. It's used hundreds of times in the Bible to describe God.

[28 : 29] In 52 different Psalms, steadfast love is noted as praiseworthy, as part of who God is.

Every Psalmist that is actually noted, including David, but also the others, the sons of Korah, Solomon, Moses, Asaph, they all mention at some point in their Psalms the steadfast love of God. That's interesting, isn't it? It's not just David. Where are they getting this idea? To those who are suffering with any type of depression, really, it's hard to believe that anyone will love you, let alone God.

So how can the Psalmist and the other authors of the Scripture be so certain that God loves them? Because God himself declared that he did.

Because he said he loved them. Because he backed up that statement by proving it over and over and over and over.

[29 : 31] Isn't that what we learned as we studied those six months in the book of Judges? You know what the biggest question is at the end of Judges? Why does Israel still exist?

Why are they still here? And there's only one answer. The steadfast love of the Lord. He exemplified that love. He showed that love to them even when they did not seek it.

Boy, that sounds real familiar, doesn't it? He shows his love, though we do not even seek it. David wasn't being presumptuous.

He was just simply believing the Bible. God said this to Moses in Exodus 34. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.

How did God want Moses and the people of Israel to know him as being full of steadfast love? Why is David so certain of that?

[30 : 47] Because it's God who said that he loved him. And of course, the greatest display of God's steadfast love is seen in the person and the work of his son, Jesus Christ.

Greater love hath no man than this, Jesus said, than that a man laid down his life for his friends. Greater love has never been known in all the world than that God himself would humiliate himself to become a man, to live, honestly, a wretched life, to identify with sinners and bear their sin.

There is no greater love than that. And that is not a love that has been fabricated in the minds of those who just really wish it were true. It is a love that is proclaimed by God himself, displayed by God himself at the cross, which is why Paul reflected on it in Romans chapter 5.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would even dare to die. God shows his love to us in that while we're sinners, not good people, Christ dies for us. Of course, you know John 3, 16. God so loved the world. How do we know that he gave his only son so that whoever will believe in him will not die, but will have eternal life?

[32 : 28] Now, how can anyone believe that God is full of steadfast love to forgive and deliver those who come to him in faith? Because he proved it. He proved it in the person of Jesus.

He dies as a substitute for sinners, making propitiation for our sins, full satisfaction for God's wrath. And then Christ rose from the dead to show that his death was enough. It was enough.

What love is that? And then what does he do? He invites you into this loving grace, doesn't he?

He extends his arms wide open and he says, come to me. Come all who are weary and heavy laden, I'll give you rest. Is this not the faith that David exemplifies in the midst of his depression?

[33 : 36] He turns from his sin and he trusts in the steadfast love of the Lord. He doesn't trust in his ability to work his way back into favor. No, he just cast himself holy on the mercy of God.

That is true faith. True faith. And that brings us to the final thing, which is hope, the hope itself.

Verses 8 through 10. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity. Interestingly enough, just as a side note, Jesus quotes this. He quotes this phrase in Matthew chapter 7.

He's speaking to a different group of people though. He's speaking to the religious people who will come to him in the final judgment and say, Lord, Lord, have we not done many wonderful things in your name? And Jesus says he will turn to them and he will say, depart from me, you workers of

iniquity, you workers of evil.

Interesting, isn't it? David says this confidently about his enemies, making it an appeal to the righteous judge. Jesus says it because he is the righteous judge.

[34 : 42] Interesting, huh? Notice the confidence. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. The Lord has heard my plea. The Lord accepts my prayer. All my enemies shall be ashamed and greatly troubled.

They shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment. This is quite the mood swing, isn't it? He went from utter despair to confident joy.

There's so much we can unpack here. I wanna give you maybe two or three things that I think will be an encouragement to you as we bring this to a close. The first thing is this.

God is not indifferent to your grief. He is not indifferent to your grief. Notice how David emphasized, God had not only heard his prayer, God had heard his weeping.

Do you see it there in verse eight? The Lord has heard the sound of my weeping. If you're in a dark night of the soul, whether it's related to your sin or not, God is not callous to your condition.

[35 : 47] He may not seem present, but I promise he is. He's there. He hears. He sees. He hears your cry. He knows your tears. He's not indifferent to the despair that you feel so deeply in your soul.

Your weeping speaks to him as if it was words. He's not indifferent to it. He's not callous to it. Secondly, notice that hope can come before relief.

Hope can come before relief. Now, notice he speaks in past tense. The Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.

The Lord has heard my plea. The Lord accepts my prayer. Those are confident assertions. But the next phrase is future.

He, all my enemies, shall be ashamed and greatly troubled. They shall turn back and be put to shame in a moment.

[36 : 52] This indicates David's physical circumstances, those things that have surfaced as the consequences of his sin, they haven't changed yet. The judgment of his enemies is still a future reality.

So the hope that he expresses here was not after God brought relief. It was before. And this shift is so helpful, isn't it?

Because it shows us that deliverance from spiritual depression doesn't require a change in physical circumstances. Hope doesn't come through a change in your situation.

Hope comes through knowing God. Hope comes through turning from sin. Hope comes through trusting in his steadfast love. You don't have to wait for life to get better before you can experience the hope of Christ.

You need only turn and believe. And the Spirit of God will produce this joy in you that is inexpressible, Peter says, and full of glory. Maybe we could add a third thing here, a third encouragement.

[38 : 00] And that is for the believer, deliverance is a certainty. It's a certainty. It's a certainty. David's confident that his future was brighter than his present. Because he knew God.

He knew his enemies would be put to shame. He may not have known exactly how or exactly when, but he was confident at some point in his future, things would be better than they were then.

Those in Christ know the future is brighter than the present, don't we? We know that salvation is certain. Know what a glorious truth that is.

Let's finish this way. Do you see how the psalm is so beneficial for your worship? This particular psalm. You maybe wouldn't pray this prayer every day.

If maybe you would. Hopefully you wouldn't need to. But you can see moments where this would be useful, right? I know it's moody. And people don't usually like to dwell on depressing songs.

[39 : 07] I get that. But Psalm 6 is indicative of real life. It's full of hardship and grief, often resulting from our own failure.

And perhaps that's the worst kind of grief. When you know it's your fault. You did this. God is judging you. But it also reminds us of God's steadfast love.

giving us hope for forgiveness and salvation. So that whenever you enter a dark light of the soul, you can turn and pray this psalm to the Lord.

You may not always sense his presence, but you can always trust his word. Which is why we want to study them. And reflect on them.
And remember them.