

RESPONDING TO GOD

WEEK 6: PSALM 30

Following and obeying God does not ensure that we have an easy life. Throughout Scripture – especially in the Old Testament – we read of many people who spent time in dark and lonely places: prison, wildernesses, wells, wadis and caves. Elijah, as a fugitive, experienced overwhelming fear, but also showed signs of burnout and depression. (1 Kgs 19) In both the story of Joseph (Gen 37:20-29) and the story of Jeremiah (Jer 38:4-13), two outspoken and prophetic men were imprisoned in dry wells/ cisterns to silence them and their messages. These ‘pits’ were dark, cold and inescapable. There was a very real possibility of dying, either through starvation, exposure or despair. The only way of escape was by external help.

Psalm 30 is the first of two **Psalms of the Re-ordered World**. Just as ‘disorder’ is connected with sin and death, the ‘re-ordered’ world has parallels with the idea of resurrection/ rising from death. In Psalm 30, the Psalmist acknowledges that God has lifted or drawn him up. He uses the same language of drawing up water from a well. (eg Ex 2:16; Prov 20:5) With his rescue, came a change in perspective on life, priorities and faith. He suddenly realised that that he was not the captain of his ship and master of his destiny. With that knowledge, he evaluated his former attitudes and redefined the basis of his relationship with God.

ICEBREAKER: Many of us have experienced (or care for family members with) physical, mental and/ or emotional symptoms – or other circumstances (eg financial) - that have, effectively, trapped and isolated us. Some of us have thought about suicide or self-harm. What thoughts or verses sustain you during dark times?

READ: Psalm 30

Many writers link this Psalm with some physical illness and some see parallels with Ps 6 and Is 38.

- What does the Psalmist tell us about the nature of his calamity? Is it physical, spiritual, mental or emotional? What are some contemporary situations that you, your family or friends have experienced that might fit with his description?

The Psalmist uses multiple different word pictures to starkly contrast his previous distress and his present deliverance. In his mind, he was as good as dead, but now is alive.

- What words and phrases in this Psalm are opposites or contrasts? Look for words which describe:
 - the experience of the Psalmist (before and after)
 - the Psalmist’s action and God’s response
 - how he understood that God saw him at different points in time
 - contrasts relating to time
 - ways the Psalmist responded to God, during his crisis and afterwards

One contrast in Psalm 30 is between **prayer** (vis requests/ supplication) as distinct from **praise**.

- What verses show the Psalmist pleading (even wrestling with and trying to rationalize) with God? What strikes you about these prayers? Do you ever pray like this?

Jacobson says that in Ps 30:1, *“The psalmist playfully “raises up God” because God has raised up the psalmist.”*¹ Brueggemann highlights a simple praise formula in Ps 30:4: Sing praises! and Give thanks! He comments that “give thanks” acknowledges *“who it is that has given the new life. Thanks is more than just being grateful. It is a confessional statement, in some sense relying upon and committing one’s self to the*

¹ Jacobson, R. A., & Tanner, B. (2014). Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1–41. In E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, & R. L. Hubbard Jr. (Eds.), *The Book of Psalms* (pp. 289–299). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

other. To thank is to make commitment. ... The mark of new life, inexplicable and unexpected, is confession expressed as thanks.”²

- READ Ps 103:1-5. What are some of the benefits/ blessings that we need to remember?
- How can we help each other to constantly thank God for what he has done for us and for answers to prayer? Is this part of the culture and routines of your group? How can we do this better?

The Psalmist refers to God frequently as ‘O LORD’ (i.e. Yahweh), and occasionally adds ‘my God’.

- What does this Psalm suggest about the nature and characteristics of God?
- What does this Psalm tell us about the relationship between God and the Psalmist?

READ Ps 30:6-7. Kidner sees that “*The structure of the psalm is simple, its two outbursts of praise flanking the confession in verses 6–10 of overconfidence and its dire results.*”³ In some ways, the Psalmist is acknowledging that he had mistakenly thought that, lacking any major catastrophes in his life, that God was happy with him and that he was ‘bullet-proof’. When trouble came and he was facing death, he believed that God had deserted him and he was no longer confident of God’s favour towards him.

With this realisation, the Psalmist called and cried to God for mercy: to show pity, favour and to spare him. In doing that, he was possibly on his knees or lying flat on the ground, prostrate, with his face in the dirt. Many years later, the apostle Peter wrote to early Christians, encouraging us to adopt this attitude, each day:

“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (1 Pet 5:5-7)

- In what ways do crises remind us that we are not self-sufficient and in control of our own lives? Why is it important to maintain an attitude of humility and prayerful dependence on God at all times?

When we pray for God’s help, we need to recognise that it is ultimately the prerogative of God, whether he answers our requests in the way we ask. Jesus faced this in Gethsemane when he prayed “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” (Lk 22:42) God didn’t take his suffering away, even though his Father had previously, explicitly, said he was pleased with him. (Matt 3:17, 17:5).

- The Psalmist’s faith and perceived favour with God was disturbed by his calamity. Has your faith been shaken as a result of God not answering prayers in the way you wished, or when you have gone through a crisis/ trauma/ severe health situation? Did that experience change your view of God?

In Ps 30:1-3, the Psalmist viewed his recovery as respite from being mocked by his enemy, death. Mays writes:

*“In the thought world of Israel, death was viewed as a sphere and power that affected and threatened the living. [By associating] ‘the enemies’ with death (Ps 30:1), [the Psalmist] laid the groundwork for [personifying and naming] death as the ultimate foe in the New Testament (1 Cor 15:26; Eph 6:10ff). Death and resurrection are not yet in view in the New Testament sense, but the language of the psalm only awaits the Christ event for reinterpretation.”*⁴

- READ 1 Cor 15:20-28 and 15:54-58. What picture does the apostle Paul use, to describe what Jesus has done and achieved, by his death and resurrection, in relation to sin and death?
- What are some of the implications of being given an imperishable body and not being subject to the effects of sin? (cf Rev 21:3-5) How does that compare with the Psalmist’s calamity?

PRAY: *“You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever.”* (Ps 30:11-12) Praise God for his amazing grace in rescuing us from sin and death, and for resurrection hope.

² Brueggemann, W. (1984). *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (pp. 126–128). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

³ Kidner, D. (1973). *Psalms 1–72: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 15, pp. 145–147). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁴ Mays, J. L. (1994). *Psalms* (pp. 139–142). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.