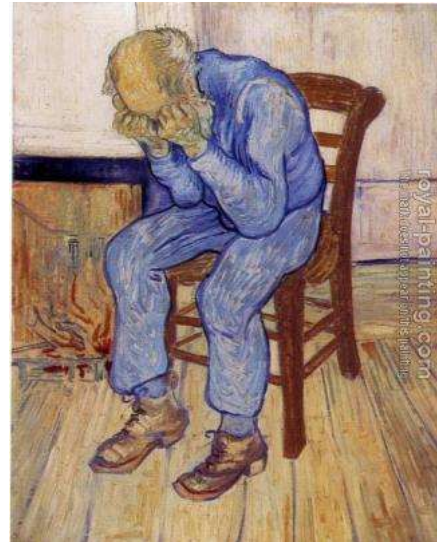


## Psalm 6

It is not possible to plumb the depths of this psalmist's anguish as he pours out his heart to God. Even he runs out of words to express them, breaking off mid-sentence as he asks in desperation, "How long?"

What we do know is that he is "troubled in his bones" (physically sick?), has been for a long time, and is now close to death. This in turn causes him to be "greatly troubled of soul", i.e. his whole being is in turmoil – body, mind and emotions. His anguish is exacerbated by enemies, who presumably taunt him (vv. 7, 8, 10). Perhaps, not unlike Job, they are former friends who have abandoned him, having concluded that God is punishing him for some serious sin. Whatever the case, it's all more than he can bear. But he hasn't given up hope, and he doesn't want to die. This is understandable, given that only in the later Old Testament period is there any indication of any belief in a joyous afterlife. As far as the psalmist is concerned, in Sheol the soul is totally cut off from God. The horror of this thought, along with the fact that there is no benefit to God in it, makes death all the more repugnant.



So, naturally, the psalmist cries out to God for deliverance from his troubles. Given the mention of God's anger and wrath it is surprising that there is neither confession of sin nor prayer of repentance. The psalmist fully accepts that God is in control and is entitled to be angry, and to rebuke and discipline him, but the normal justification for this would be awareness of sin. That does not seem to be the case. What then has provoked God's wrath? We cannot say, and perhaps the psalmist does not know, yet he continues to hope in God.

First, he pleads for deliverance on the basis that he has surely suffered enough – how much longer must this go on for? He follows this up with an appeal to both God's graciousness and his steadfast love. If God "has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek 33.11), surely he will want to deliver this poor wretch? Thirdly, as noted above, he argues that there is nothing to be gained from his death – for himself or God. But he can't go on as he is either; he will drown in his tears.

Then something happens, we know not what, which causes him to swing from despair to hope (v.8). The Lord has heard him and turned (v.4). The tables are turned on his enemies: they are now the ones "greatly troubled" (cf. v.3). Vindicated by God, he sends them packing. God has acted in grace and steadfast love. The psalmist was right to hope in him.

### To ponder

What difference does it make that we, as Christians, now know death is not the end?

### To pray

Gracious and loving Father, I thank you that when I cry out to you, you hear my prayer. Help me to bear suffering patiently when I must, to look to you for deliverance, and not to be affected by doubters. May I be a comfort to others. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.