

Down in the Dumps with David

*My soul is in anguish.
How long, LORD, how long?*

Psalm 6:3

Introduction: When you hear, "*The man after God's own heart*," who comes to your mind? There is only one person in Scripture described that way – David (*Acts 13:22*).

We know that David delighted in the law of the Lord and often meditated on it. And we think of *Psalms* as the result of his meditations – beautiful poems of praise, love, devotion, and thanksgiving. If there is one book in the Old Testament that Christians turn to more than any other, it is probably *Psalms*.

But if you are familiar with *Psalms* and with the life of David, then you know that there is another side to this man after God's own heart and to his writings. He also was often a very troubled man, extremely human, plagued with discouragements that came both from the persecution of his enemies and from the consequences of his own very serious sins.

David was a man who was actually often "*down in the dumps*," and many of his psalms are in fact laments and just the opposite of the positive praises that we sometimes stereotype his writings to be.

Psalm 6 is one of those psalms. Read it carefully and see how this man after God's own heart dealt with his deepest feelings of anguish and despair.

Psalm 6

¹ *LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.*

² *Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint;
heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.*

³ *My soul is in deep anguish.
How long, LORD, how long?*

⁴ *Turn, LORD, and deliver me;
save me because of your unfailing love.*

⁵ *Among the dead no one proclaims your name.
Who praises you from the grave?*

⁶ *I am worn out from my groaning.*

*All night long I flood my bed with weeping
and drench my couch with tears.*

⁷ *My eyes grow weak with sorrow;
they fail because of all my foes.*

⁸ *Away from me, all you who do evil,
for the LORD has heard my weeping.*

⁹ *The LORD has heard my cry for mercy;
the LORD accepts my prayer.*

¹⁰ *All my enemies will be overwhelmed with shame and anguish;
they will turn back and suddenly be put to shame.*

A. David's Experience with Feelings of Anguish and Despair

Notice how David honestly and openly expressed his feelings to God. Here are some examples from *Psalms* 6. You could probably add more.

- He was afraid of God's anger and discipline (verse 1).
- He had feelings of total frustration (verse 2).
- He was about to give up (verse 3).
- He was afraid of death (verse 5).
- He was drenched in tears (verses 6 & 7)

A counselor might say, "*David, it sounds like you are distressed. Am I hearing you right?*"

Note also how often this type of feeling is expressed in other *Psalms*. Here are some examples. Again, you could probably add more.

- "*Why O LORD, do you stand far off . . . ?*" (*Psalms* 10:1)
- "*How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?*" (*Psalms* 13:1)
- "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (*Psalms* 22:1)
- "*Hear me, O God, as I voice my complaint.*" (*Psalms* 64:1)
- "*The waters have come up to my neck.*" (*Psalms* 69:1 – 4)
- "*Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure.*" (*Psalms* 79:13)
- "*You have put me in the lowest pit.*" (*Psalms* 88:6)

Does this sound like a book of praises?

All of the above quotes, except the last two, are words of David. Does this sound like the words of a man after God's own heart? The singer of Israel? The shepherd king?

What are some of the sources of David's distress?

1. Persecution, slander, being despised by his enemies (*Psalms* 6:7)
 - a. Especially from King Saul in David's earlier days.
 - b. Then, after David became king, there were rebellions against his throne. (At least 3 times; once by his own son.)
2. Rejection by friends (*Psalms* 55:12 – 14)
3. Death of family and friends (his son and his friend Jonathan)
4. Loneliness and despair
5. Doubts about God and the benefits of righteousness
6. Personal sin and guilt and its consequences

Basically, the same as what we experience. This is why looking into the heart of David and his writings is so revealing and beneficial to us today.

Being a man after God's own heart did not mean that he was never down in the dumps. These experiences were certainly not times that he could look back on with joy. But it is the way that he

handled these times that show him to be the kind of person "*whose heart beats in rhythm with God.*" (Charles Swindoll)¹

Think carefully about your answers to these two questions:

- Can you identify with the experiences and feelings of these psalms?
- Do you feel comfortable bringing them to God?

B. David's Discovery of Peace

David's complaint was turned into his confident statement that God heard his cry and accepted his prayer (*Psalms 6:8 – 10*). David could have dwelt in self-pity and retreated from God. But he took it to God and honestly laid it out before him

And God accepted it!

It seems that God did not disapprove of David's honest doubts and frustrations as long as David did not use them as an excuse to forsake the LORD.

And the result was one of David's frequent praises, as can be seen in the next three psalms.

Note how this also happens in the other psalms of complaint referred to earlier. Basic psalm movement: complaint to praise.

What was David's secret? (Application)

1. David was honest to God (which could also be the title of this study).
 - a. He went to God with his feelings and expressed himself.
 - b. He focused on God's presence and found an answer to his doubts.
 - c. I believe that this is a key insight into the heart that is in tune with God. Not that everything is always necessarily rosy, but that we are taking our lives to God's presence. I'm not encouraging complaining. We hate to complain. But pretending that everything is OK is as bad, if not worse, than complaining.
2. David did not dwell in self-pity. He didn't give up.
3. He always let his trust in God take him through the situation.

This honesty with God and refusal to dwell in self-pity show us some of the reasons why David is called a man after God's own heart.

Two more questions to think about carefully:

- Do you believe that God wants you to be this honest with him?
- Are you willing to do that right now?

Conclusion: What do we learn then from David?

- Discouragement and distress are not strangers to righteous living. Those times of deep anguish will come to godly people.
- God does not disapprove of being honest about our feelings and expressing them to him. It is certainly preferable to pretending that everything is OK. We probably know when we are just complaining and dwelling in self-pity, but don't be ashamed to tell God how much it hurts.
- But we cannot use these feelings as excuses to forsake God and his work. He will give us rest at those times, but it is not a time to totally give up. Rest in God and make any necessary and reasonable changes to your lifestyle, but don't give up on God!

Let's not speak simplistically. Discouragements and distress are real. I hope that during your times when you are experiencing what David experienced that you will think about this "*man after God's own heart*" and that you will react the way he did.

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¹ Charles Swindoll, *A Man After God's Heart, study notes on David's life*.