

## Bargaining With God

by Ryan Boyer

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Psalm 6 appears to be a poem uttered to God in the midst of physical suffering. The author cries out, "I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled" (vv. 2b-3). The suffering must be terrible. Gerald Wilson says something about this word, troubled, in his commentary on Psalms. He writes that the word, "...does not bring out sharply enough the sense of terror associated with the expression. Elsewhere the word translated 'are in agony' (bhl) is rendered 'terrified out of one's senses'; here it describes not just the agonizing pain of illness and disease but the suffocating fear that can attend deteriorating life force and loss of control. At the very core, in the 'bones,' fear has taken root that threatens to undo the psalmist.... Not only are the bones, the core of the physical self, terrified out of their senses; the very core of his being, the *nepeš* [soul]—that source of selfhood created by the divine animation of the physical body—is even more terrified (lit., 'terrified out of its senses indeed!'). As the body fails, the psalmist senses even the animating life force provided by God slipping away."

Perhaps, when we appreciate the depth of suffering that the author is enduring, then we can understand his current state in vv. 6-7a, "I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief..." In the midst of this awful suffering, the author begs God for salvation, "Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love" (v. 4).

The next verse is one that caught my attention, "For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?" (v. 5)? Read that again. The author is saying to God, "Deliver me...save me, because if I'm dead I can't remember you or praise you." The author's bargaining chip is that he is worth more to God alive than he is dead; and so based upon that he asks to live.

I wonder if we, individually, are able to play this card? Am I able to say to God, "Please allow me to live because I am worth more to you, here and now, than I am dead." I can think of all kinds of reasons why I might ask God to let me live: I like my life, I don't want to leave my wife and kids behind without a husband and a dad, I don't particularly want to die. But I wonder if I can say to God, "Let me live so I can serve you more."

Paul was able to say just this. In Phil. 1:18b-26 he wrote, "18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again."

Here is my prayer for the week: God, help me to make all the days my life worthwhile TO YOU!