



HG226: God's Promise Of: **Enduring Love**

Psalm 126:1-6

Home Group Study Notes

25 July 2021 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

As lockdown is eased once again (19 July 2021) what
are you most looking forward to?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Psalm 126:1-6

Home Group Sermon Notes

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Introduction. We conclude our Home Group series this morning *on God's Promises In the Psalms* with *God's Promise Of Enduring Love* from Psalm 126. This is another of those psalms of ascent which Rachel spoke about a couple of weeks ago. These psalms are grouped in threes: a psalm of trouble, a psalm of trust and a psalm of triumph. This is the first of three, so it is a psalm of trouble. Psalm 126 looks back to when the captives returned to Jerusalem following their long exile in Babylon. They had suffered so much, and now they suddenly found themselves back in their homeland, back in Jerusalem, back in the beloved city of God. It reminded them of God's promise of His enduring love.

a. Times of trouble. We all go through hard times, and sometimes when you are in the thick of sorrow, it feels like it will never end. When you wake up each morning with tears, and you go to bed each evening with tears, it is difficult to see your way forward. You begin to lose hope. You begin to wonder, "Is this all that God has for me? Will I ever be happy again?"

When you are going through a time of deep sorrow, Psalm 126 is strong medicine for your soul. It carries a powerful message of hope. It tells you that times of trouble and sorrow do not last. It tells you that God will turn your sorrow to joy and your tears to laughter. It even tells you what you should do while you are waiting. This is a psalm that we need during times of crisis and especially as we become to come out of the COVID pandemic – in the UK at least. This psalm reminds us that God has a plan to bless us and use us for His glory in the future.

If you are going through a challenging time, I trust this psalm will speak to your heart. Whatever you're going through, it will get better. God will change your tears to joy. I know it seems hard to believe, but it was hard to believe for the Jews returning to Jerusalem, too. Psalm 126 has two sections. The first one encourages us to marvel at how God has helped us in the past and the second section encourages us to trust God to do it again!

1. Marvel At How God Has Helped You In The Past vs1-3. Look at verses 1-3: "*When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*" Don't just think about it, don't just reflect on it, don't just remember – marvel at what God has already done,

a. I must be dreaming! When God delivers you, it can feel like you're in a dream. That's what we see in verse 1: "*When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.*" The year was 538 B.C. The Jews had been exiled to Babylon seventy years earlier. The people had settled down. They had established homes in the new land. Some of them had been born in exile. It was all they knew. And then suddenly, Cyrus, the new king, made a proclamation allowing all the Jews to go home (Ezra 1:1-4).

The Jews had experienced seventy long years in captivity, and then in a moment, God turns things around. Just like that! They were in shock. They couldn't believe it. It was too good to be true. It was impossible. It couldn't have happened, and yet it did! They were now back in Jerusalem, back in the holy city, back in Zion, the place where God dwells with his people, and it all felt like a dream. You can see why this psalm became one of the psalms of ascent. The pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem each year for the feasts would have been acutely aware that this was the same route the captives had taken when they returned. And they would have marvelled at God's graciousness in returning the captives to Zion.

b. Laughter and songs of joy. Look at verse 2: *"Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy."* Before we can understand their laughter and joy, we must first understand their sorrow. The captives experienced great sorrow and mourning in exile. In fact, some of the most heart-breaking passages in the Bible have to do with the exile of the Jews to Babylon - passages in the book of Lamentations or like these heart-breaking words in Psalm 137:1-4: *"By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?"*

Their tormentors demanded songs of joy, but they just sat by the waters of Babylon and wept. How can you sing when you are held captive in a foreign land? But now by an amazing work of God they were suddenly back in Zion. And their mouths were filled with laughter and songs of joy. Joy is mentioned four times in this psalm. Songs of joy are mentioned twice (see verse 6). Joy is all over this psalm, which is ironic when you consider it is one of the psalms of trouble.

When you are drowning in tears and sorrow, you sometimes wonder if you will ever laugh again. Psalm 126 says you will! In God's time your sorrow will be lifted, and God will fill your mouth with laughter and songs of joy.

c. Glory to God and joy for us. And when God does a work like this in your life, it brings glory to God and joy for us. That's what we see in verses 2-3: *"Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."*

"It was said among the nations." What God did for Israel was so amazing that even the surrounding nations had to sit up and take notice of what God had done and give God the glory. And then notice that after the nations give glory to God, so also does Israel. *"The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."* These verses remind us of our responsibility to tell others what God has done for us. Do your friends and neighbours know what God has done for you? Do you share testimonies of God's goodness with those around you on a regular basis? Will you take the opportunity to invite one of them to Alpha in September?

Notice that verse 3 is the only verse in this psalm that is written in the present tense. Verses 1-2 are in the past tense. Verses 4-6 are in the future. Verse 3 expresses joy in the present based on remembrance of the past and hope for the future. When God does a work of deliverance in your life, it brings glory to God and joy for us.

2. Trust God To Do It Again! vs4-6. Look at verses 4-6: *"Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him."*

The captives were back in Jerusalem, but there was still much work to be done. They needed to rebuild the temple and rebuild the walls. They faced discouragement from within and opposition from without. God had worked a great deliverance for them in the past. Now they needed to trust him to do it again. Lamentations 3:22-23 says: *"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."*

You may face fresh troubles each day, but God has fresh mercies for you each day to face them. God has done great things for you in the past. Now you need to trust him to do it again.

a. Pray for God's full restoration and blessing. This second part of the psalm teaches us to do three specific things when we find ourselves in times of trouble. First of all, pray for God's full restoration and blessing. Look at verse 4: "*Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.*" That word "restore" is the same word that is translated "brought back" in verse one. And this is the first of two images that the psalmist uses to speak of how God works in our lives.

The first way is when God works suddenly and unexpectedly. That's what this first image of "streams in the Negev" means. The Negev was the southern part of Judah. This was a normally dry and arid land. But in the winter and spring, rains could suddenly send waters rushing through the desert. Grass and flowers would spring forth almost overnight. This first image speaks of a sudden outpouring of God's blessing.

Do you ever feel like your life is a desert? Spiritually dry and parched? Then you need to pray for God to restore you. God says in Joel 2:25: "*I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten.*" Pray for God's full restoration and blessing. Ask God to pour out his Spirit in your life like streams in the Negev. We need to pray this not only for ourselves but for our church, our community and our nation. This is a prayer for revival. The return from captivity for Israel was something only God could do. And in the same way revival is something only God can do. We need to pray for God to open the floodgates of heaven and to pour out his blessing upon us.

b. Know that God will turn your sorrow into joy. We have this beautiful promise from God in verse 5: "*Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.*" Know that God will turn your sorrow into joy. We now turn to the second image we have in this section of the psalm of sowing tears. The first image points to a work that is all of God – sudden and undeserved blessing. The second image points to God working through your efforts – working and waiting. It's the difference between God's miracles and God's providence. They are both examples of God working but in different ways.

We see this in life all the time. For example, if you are ill, you pray for healing, but you should also go to the doctor and take the appropriate medications. There's an old saying, *Pray as though it all depended on God but work as though it all depended on you.* Perhaps the better way to put it is this: work and pray as though it all depended on God working through you. We long for the sudden deliverance, and we rejoice when it comes, but God's normal way of working is much slower. The image of sudden streams in the desert now turns to the image of God's slow but certain work in our lives of sowing and reaping.

When the people of Israel were carried off to Babylon, they sowed many tears. For seventy years they endured exile in a foreign land. But those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. And so, God brought them back. Isaiah prophesied it. He proclaimed in Isaiah 51:11: "*The ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.*" Are you going through a time of sorrow? Are you sowing many tears? Know that God will turn your sorrow into joy. Psalm 30:5 says: "*Weeping may remain for a night but rejoicing comes in the morning.*" There has never been a sunset yet that was not followed by a sunrise! "Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy."

c. Commit yourself to the Lord and continue to do good. What do you do in times of trouble? 1) Pray for God's full restoration and blessing. 2) Know that God will turn your sorrow into joy. And then 3) Commit yourself to the Lord and continue to do good. Look at verse 6: "*He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.*"

This verse expands on the image of verse 5 and focuses on the sower going forth to work and eventually returning with the harvest in his hands.

It reminds us that even in times of sorrow, there is work to be done, and that good work will bear good fruit in our lives. Galatians 6:9 gives us this word of encouragement: *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”* We read these beautiful words in Revelation 21:4: *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*

Times of sorrow are hard. Sowing in tears is difficult. But nothing is wasted in God’s economy. You can trust God with your tears. As Charles Spurgeon once said: *“God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.”* What do you do when you are walking through a time of sorrow? Marvel at what God has done in the past. And then trust God to do it again. Pray for God’s full restoration and blessing. Know that God will turn your sorrow into joy. Commit yourself to the Lord and continue to do good.

Conclusion. As always, we look to Jesus for the ultimate fulfilment of this psalm. Hebrews 12:2 tells us: *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus ... who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame.”* Jesus knows the trouble and sorrow we face in this life. He shed many tears of his own during his life on earth. Jesus went to the cross weeping, carrying seed to sow, and he returned from the dead with resurrection songs of joy, carrying sheaves of believers with him. If you are a believer this morning, you are part of his glorious harvest.

Psalm 126 is a psalm of trouble, but it’s a psalm of trouble with a twist. It’s a psalm that offers you hope when you are in the midst of trouble and tears. It tells us that times of trouble and sorrow do not last. God will turn your sorrow to joy and your tears to laughter. Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning. And one day we will leave all the sorrows of this world behind for the eternal joys that await us in heaven. There is a time for sowing and a time for reaping. Perhaps you are in a time of sowing right now. Take comfort. Your time of reaping will come. The harvest awaits. Your tears will turn to joy. This is God’s promise to you. His promise of enduring love.

Emmanuel Text 2021

WE HAVE
this HOPE
as an anchor
for the
SOUL
firm and secure.
Hebrews 6:19

A Landon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD
P 01277 632120
E Emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org
W Emmanuel-church.info
FB Emmanuel Church Billericay
T Emmanuel CM12
YT Emmanuel Church Billericay



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: Write a six-line psalm of praise. Or a psalm of ascent: trouble, trust or triumph, and share this with your group.

2. How does knowing what God has done in the past offer encouragement to the uncertain circumstances that you face in life?

3. What "history" do you have in your own life where God "restored" you?

4. Notice the poetic contrasts in verses 4-5. Do you know people in your own life that need this sort of restoration? Take time right now to pray these verses for their sake.

5. In what places is the church in decline today, and where is the church experiencing tremendous growth?

6. What, out of all that we have studied during this series on *God's Promises In the Psalms* really sticks in your mind?

What has strengthened your faith the most?

What has challenged your faith the most?

What has inspired your faith the most?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD

P 01277 632120 E Emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org W Emmanuel-church.info
FB Emmanuel Church Billericay T EmmanuelCM12 YT Emmanuel Church Billericay

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