

Psalm 30: In and Out of Deadly Trouble

Psalm 30 is an individual's song of thanksgiving. It tells the story of *going into trouble and coming out of trouble*.

Psalm 30 narrates the person's story of assurance and confidence morphing into self-sufficiency and conceit. Then the loss of self-sufficient well-being (prosperity, health) brings disorientation that resembles death. From the depths of the pit of despair at both his deathly circumstances and his own arrogance and complacency, the humbled psalmist cries to YHWH for mercy and help.

YHWH hears his pleas and cries, and YHWH "does it." YHWH answers his prayer! YHWH condescends to lift him up out of near-death. The speaker responds with this song of thanksgiving which he shares with his community as he offers his thank offering in worship.

Psalm 30 is an honest testimony of human failure and need and of YHWH's gracious intervention. YHWH answered cries and pleadings for mercy and help with restoration and with greater revelation of Himself. The psalmist experienced gratitude for YHWH and personal understanding of YHWH's transformative power to give inner joy and security. This authentic experience of gratitude and praise deepened his commitment to love and serve YHWH.

Psalm 30 might have been written by David during a pride-inducing time of success and power in his monarchy when YHWH humbled him with a sickness. Perhaps he also intended for it to be used when Solomon dedicated the Temple.

Centuries later, after the end of all the kings and the Babylonian exile, **Psalm 30** was used at the Second Temple rededication after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes in 165 BC. It remains a part of the traditional Hannukah celebration, an example of how a psalm is used far beyond its original setting.

1. The psalm begins in praise (vv. 1-3) because the speaker has just been given "a new lease on life" and wants to draw others into his thanks and praise. Notice the *four actions* credited to Yahweh in verse 1, 2b, 3a, and 3b.

Reflect on your own life experiences with God's rescues, healings, and reorientations. We can bring our own specificity to this text. Think about what God has done for you that you could not do for yourself.

Also notice the *imagery of death* in verses 1 and 3 and also in verse 9. What do you learn about the psalmist's view of death?

2. Who is the speaker asking to "sing praises" and "give thanks" in 30:4? What is his reason for asking in 30:5? His reason honestly points to the trouble he has experienced.

To “give thanks” in Hebrew (*toda*) means to make a confessional acknowledgment of who it is you are thanking and then to make a commitment to rely on that One.

3. In 30:6-10, the psalmist tells the story of his pride in his prosperity and how YHWH responded.

How does he describe YHWH’s response to him? (30:7)

In 30:8, perhaps the psalmist is recalling a former lament and realizing he again needs to cry to YHWH and plead for his mercy. How does he appear to bargain with God (rhetorical questions), and what are his urgent requests? (30:9-10)

4. How does YHWH’s response (30:11) impact the psalmist? (30:12)

Notice how verses 11-12 parallel verses 1-3 in attending to and celebrating YHWH’s decisive, transforming actions.

The Message paraphrase of 30:11 is “You did it!”

YHWH’s actions transform sullenness, numbness, and despair and make praise and thanks authentic.

What is your experience with desiring to experience praise and thanks even as you remain silent?

What impact, if any, has dialoguing with God through the Psalms and other Scripture had on your capacity to sing praise and give thanks with your whole being (“my glory”)?

5. The Psalms present both the agony of God’s absence and the joy of his presence.

Songs of Thanksgiving, like **Psalms 30**, *model* how we can encourage one another by sharing our stories of crisis, including our growing understanding of our contribution to the trouble. We can recall our laments and petitions and how God acted on our behalf.

Think about how God has acted in your “troubles” to do things for you and in you that you could not do for yourself. Ask God to give you courage to share your “deliverance” so others can experience the power of your testimony.

The purpose of the psalm appears to be to keep that memory alive, so that the occasion of transformation is kept alive. In the movement of transformation are found both the power to life and the passion for praise of God. (Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, p. 128)