

Psalm 130: Out of the Depths of Self-Inflicted Chaos

Psalm 130 focuses specifically on the chaos churned up in our lives by our own sins. The 7 penitential Psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) offer an honest portrayal of the damage done to humans by their own sins and by the sins of others. These psalms combine that truth about sinful human people and systems with the amazing truth of YHWH's character. I sometimes think of YHWH as the "ideal parent" we humans long for: all-powerful yet unfailingly loving and merciful, all-knowing and wise yet overflowing with grace and forgiveness, consistently just and fair in discipline, and 100% committed to what is best for each one of us.

Lent's focus on *repentance* helps us look again at our beliefs about who God is and who we are. We ponder God's character and our personal brokenness—our wounds and our sins. We ask God to search us and point out beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of ours that need to change to align with the facts of our lives being "hidden with the king (Jesus Christ) in God." (Colossians 3:3) The Apostle Paul explained it like this:

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with the Messiah. I am, however, alive, but it isn't me any longer; it's the Messiah who lives in me. And the life I do still live in the flesh, I live with the faithfulness of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:19-20, N.T. Wright's *Kingdom New Testament*, 384)

Psalm 130, written as an individual lament offered to the psalmist's community, is one of the Songs of Ascent that expresses faith and dependence on YHWH. It strongly expresses trust in YHWH.

The weight of sin, confession of guilt, and confidence in God form an individual expression on behalf of others. (Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 5, p. 799)

1. First, notice how it neatly falls into 4 parts, 2 verses in each part:

The psalmist *laments* in 130:1-2, *confesses sins* in 130:3-4, *waits* for YHWH in 130:5-6, and expresses *confidence* in YHWH's *undeserved redemption* of his children in 130:7-8.

The Hebrew word for "depths" usually connects with words for water or sea, and these often refer figuratively to chaos. Think realistically about recent times when you have added *chaos* to your own life (internally and/or externally) by sinful, self-referenced attitudes or behaviors.

What would it look like for you to *lament* as the psalmist did in **130:1-2** instead of continuing to *react* to your feelings of loss of control and/or alienation from God?

2. What is one of the purposes of God's *forgiveness* of our sins according to **130:4b**?

Explore these Old Testament scriptures about *forgiveness*: Exodus 34:6-7, Nehemiah 9:17, Daniel 9:9, and others you know and love

Consider how your understanding of God's *forgiveness* impacts how you treat him.

3. Having reminded himself of his helplessness apart from YHWH's forgiveness of his sin, what does the psalmist do? How do you picture the setting of **130:5-6**?

How might you apply the psalmist's example of his soul (whole being) waiting and hoping to your own acceptance of God's forgiveness?

4. The psalmist gives us an example of heartfelt confession of personal sins, of abandoning himself to God's grace (waiting, hoping in God) which returns him from his self-referenced sinning to God-centeredness.

God hears his cries and draws him back into trusting relationship with God not just for the psalmists's sake, but for the sake of his community. God longs to forgive and redeem his people. (**130:7-8**)

"Self-referenced" sinning describes our *flesh*, our sin nature that pursues independence from God. It is a serious, slippery enemy, on the list with the *world and Satan*. It's especially treacherous for those of us who seek to include God in our lives. We create "religious false selves." We can be looking really good on the outside and still be full of dead men's bones. We can be seeking to have God in our lives *on our terms*.

Religious false selves tend to be fearful, angry, self-protective, possessive, manipulative, destructive, self-promoting, indulgent. Religious false selves habitually make distinctions that lead to focus on differences with others instead of union in Christ with God. (I put this list together from *The Deeper Journey* by M. Robert Mulholland Jr. and started using it to guide my personal confession.)

Our annual Lenten challenge is ***greater abandonment to God, on his terms***, not ours.

How has God worked in your life in the past to draw you out of your "religious false self" and how might he be doing that now?