

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

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Speaker: Mr. George Stevens

Conditions a Christian will face: Depression

Introduction.

At the start of this talk on Depression, I hasten to state that I am not a doctor. Any thoughts that I have on this subject are Bible-based and are for Christians in particular. The Bible being (in its original forms) God-breathed, God Himself has preserved, down through the centuries, His word to mankind. Today, we hold a reliable translation of that word as originally taught in the words of the Spirit of God Himself. Therefore, the Bible speaks to us with the divine authority of the Creator.

It is in Psalm 42 where we find a believer who is in a state of depression. In this psalm, depression is discovered and dispelled. The term "Maschil" in the title tells us it is a Psalm or song of instruction and understanding. Its main aim was to teach others from the experience of the psalmist himself.

Towards a Definition of Depression.

The psalmist gives us a definition of depression in the words of verse 5, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?" The force of the words "cast down" is to "bow oneself down" as if under a load or burden. The word "disquieted" has the meaning of "moving with sound" or "roaring". It suggests the roaring of a storm-tossed sea. So "*depression*" is the unhappy feeling of being constantly bowed down under life's loads with an unceasing turmoil of thought distorting right judgement and making everything seem hopeless.

The Causes of Depression.

Depression is found on the path to despair, the point at which a person may contemplate suicide. That pathway begins with disappointment or discontentment. These lead to discouragement, depression and, finally, despair. Let's trace that route again but note that the enemy of our souls, the devil, uses each step as a rake to draw us further away from God: disappointment or discontentment; discouragement; depression; and, finally, despair.

Aspects of these have been seen in a number of the more reputable servants of the Lord who reached the point where they asked the Lord to take their lives from them.

The first we find in Numbers 11. There, Moses reaches his breaking point. In verses 15 and 16, he says to God, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me I pray thee, out of hand..."

What had brought Moses into this depressed state? He had served the Lord his God mightily. He had negotiated constantly with the pharaoh of Egypt under enormous pressure. He had led the children of Israel out from Egypt into the wilderness. He had dealt with many previous complaints. He had set up the tabernacle system. Under opposition, he had set up the sons of Aaron for the priesthood. He had numbered and ordered the tribes of Israel. He had followed God's guidance by day and night as the whole camp moved from place to place. Yet the people continued to complain. At Taberah, the fire of the Lord consumed many of them. He continued to intercede on their behalf. Then they moaned about the manna that God had been providing - demanding meat to eat. The people complained so much that they wept. Above all, they blamed Moses.

As a result, the Lord was angry - as was his servant. Consequently, Moses questioned the faithfulness of the Lord towards him, saying: "Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them that thou shouldest say unto me, 'Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?' Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, 'Give us flesh that we may eat.'" It was at this breaking point that Moses asked the Lord to kill him.

Moses was disappointed in the constantly complaining people. Opposition to his leadership led to discouragement. In this state, Moses felt that he was a failure. He was depressed because he had failed in his duty to the Lord. Unbelief

shook his own faith and, despairing, he, himself, complained to God. In summary, hard work, coping constantly with people's complaints, opposition to his leadership and the resulting feeling of failure brought Moses down.

The next servant of the Lord who asked the Lord for death was the prophet Elijah. In 1 Kings 19:4, we read, "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.'"

Elijah had done many great acts for his Lord. He was a faithful man who prayed fervently and to great effect. Nevertheless, at this point in his life, he was hounded for his faith and constantly in danger of death. Nonetheless, he was bold for the Lord. He had recently challenged the prophets of Baal on the mount called Carmel. The Lord used him to turn the people back to Himself. It was a great victory. He followed this with good news of rain to Ahab, the king. There had been a long drought. In the storm that followed, Elijah matched the pace of Ahab's chariot all the way to Jezreel. However, the queen, Jezebel, upon hearing about Elijah's victory threatened his life.

So we find Elijah, weary in the wilderness under threat of death. Ahab the king had disappointed him because he was unable to control his wife. He was discouraged believing (wrongly I might add) that he was the last of God's servants. He was depressed because of persecution. Finally, being physically worn out and believing himself to be a failure, he despaired of his life. This mixture of physical tiredness, being let down, a feeling of loneliness and failure along with persecution brought Elijah down.

Thirdly, there was Jonah. He had deliberately turned his back on the will of God because he knew that the people to whom he was sent to preach would one day take his own people captive. He also knew that God would be merciful to the Ninevites, but Jonah didn't want the Ninevites to be saved. He attempted, foolishly, to sail away from God's commission. It was pointless because God persevered with him and caused a tempestuous storm which was calmed only when Jonah was thrown overboard by the crew of the ship he was in. He was then swallowed by a great fish. It was during the three days in the fish's belly that his faith was restored.

The fish vomited Jonah out onto dry land. Courageously, he went and preached in the great city of Nineveh. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown," was his cry. By the end of the period, the king and people had repented and were spared from God's judgement. However, instead of rejoicing at the success of his preaching and the mercy of God, Jonah was extremely angry and asked for the Lord to take his life from him. In summary, Jonah failed to trust the will of God. He was disobedient. He was tried and disciplined by God. Restored, he preached God's word to a Gentile people in a dangerous situation. Then, he was embarrassed that the Lord did not judge Nineveh as he had preached. This led to his anger and his desire to die.

If these men who were used so mightily in the service of the Lord could become depressed, then how common it must be for ordinary people and, especially, Christians to find themselves in a similar state. In the cases of Elijah and Jonah, their depression seemed to be a kind of delayed reaction to a blessing from God. So, if the Lord pleases that we receive some unusual blessing or victory in the faith, let us be wary in case such a reaction overtakes us a little while afterwards. But the main causes of depression in the cases quoted rotate about stresses resulting from hard work, physical tiredness, apparent failure, handling complaints, loneliness, hindrances, persecution and the occurrence of unusual events.

Towards a Cure for Depression.

In the story "*It's a Wonderful Life*", the character called George Bailey had managed to be an innovator in his community. Then one of the relatives who helped him in business lost £8,000. With an audit of accounts imminent, George flipped. Immediately, his business partner suffered his anger as George laid the blame at his door. His wife suffered his unreasonable behaviour as she tried to find out the cause of his sudden misery. His children suffered as their actions and requests, though small, were explosively annoying to their father inviting his anger. Leaving the family in some turmoil, he went out to be alone and ended up running his car into a tree. Soon afterwards, he found himself on a bridge contemplating suicide in the seething waters of the river below.

So, when depressed, it is the people that we are most close to who get hurt by us. Those who try to help us most are told that they don't understand and to leave us alone. On the one hand, our misery and anger gives them sorrow. On the other, our backbiting and unreasonable attitude breeds ill feeling. Fortunately, an angel intervened in the case of George Bailey, and showed him how things might have been in the community had he not been born. When George saw how many people had been affected positively by his own life, and counted his own blessings, his judgement was restored.

Returning to our psalm, we find its author expressing his depressed state.

- He is heavily laden with trouble and clearly perplexed.

- He is concerned about himself. Instead of eating, he weeps. "My tears have been my meat day and night." Therefore, loss of appetite, lack of sleep and weeping are symptoms of depression.
- He worries about his circumstances compared to his previous life - "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me." Reflections on happier times in more difficult circumstances exacerbate the problems.
- He sinks at the taunts of others towards himself and his God - "While they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?" The mockery of others deepens the depression.
- He feels the pressure of his enemies attacking him - "Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me." A lack of security creates a feeling of fear and reproach attacks a right judgement of self.
- On top of this, he felt lonely - "When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day."
- He felt disciplined by God - "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." This creates a fear that God is active against him.
- He reckoned God had forsaken him - "I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me?" He feels abandoned and betrayed.

Yet, what was the psalmist doing? He was trying to take back control of himself. In order to do this, he starts speaking first to God and then to his own soul. By so doing, he becomes more objective. He is able to weigh matters more wisely. Some people would say that talking to yourself is the first sign of madness, but this passage shows us that it is a tool that manufactures sanity. In fact, "talking treatments" are recommended by the medical profession as one instrument used in dealing with milder depression. Relatives, friends, doctors, counsellors or psychologists are available to depressed people in general. Other organisations have been set up to deal with more specific problems within the depression.

As a believer, the psalmist first expresses the real desires of his soul to God: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" His soul's longing is for God. He knows that God alone can satisfy his needs. Only God can quench his spiritual needs; but he is far from the house of God - in that day, the temple. He is unable to enter into the presence of God. Hence, the question, "When shall I come and appear before God?" Furthermore, he wanted to do this with other like-minded believers as he had in the past - "I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day."

Fellow Christians, have you ever longed for the presence of the Lord in this collective way? The Lord Jesus Christ stated that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He would be in the midst of them. It is, therefore, a wonderful privilege to meet with fellow believers in the presence of the Son of God Himself. This may be when we come together for prayer, for the Lord's Supper or under the teaching of God's servants. Think of it, the Lord is there! Oh that we might apprehend and advertise the thought more and our churches would be filled with joy and praise. Today, even if we cannot gather with others to the Lord's name, we still have, as *individuals*, the assurance of His presence at all times. But, let's not forsake the gathering of ourselves together. It is one of the things that helps to prevent depression. I'm sure that, in the case of those who do not believe, meeting with others regularly is a means of reducing the risk of depression.

The writer then speaks to his own soul, saying, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance." He asks his soul why he is so burdened and in turmoil and then gives him some advice. Hope comes first. Help comes second. The word "hope" has the force of "waiting with hope". The fact that the hope is in God shows that the writer is advising his soul to wait patiently for God to act. He is to trust implicitly in God and His timing. He knows that God will give the help of His countenance or face. This seems to be a strange thing to say, but in Numbers 6:24-26 we read, "The LORD bless thee and keep thee; The LORD make his face shine upon thee, And be gracious unto thee; The LORD lift up His countenance upon thee, And give thee peace." The face of the LORD is linked with His unmerited favour towards us. Knowing this, the writer is ready to praise his God. Christian, is your soul cast down? Fear not, God will be gracious to you - just wait for Him to act. Trust in Him implicitly. Keep praying!

Interestingly, many people suffering with depression would recover over a long period of time. Modern antidepressants are often prescribed to deal with the symptoms of depression; but even they take two to four weeks before they take effect. Furthermore, a normal course of antidepressants may last up to six months after the symptoms have ceased. Information about "Depression" may be found on the "www.patient.co.uk" website. However, if after hearing this broadcast you think you may be depressed then you should first visit your doctor.

In verse 6 of the Psalm, the writer, still absent from the presence of God states that he will remember Him. Christian, let us remember what God has done for us. He sent His Son into this world to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

By virtue of Christ's sacrifice, He gives the assurance of forgiveness and eternal life to those who trust in His Son. Their eternal destiny is secure, namely, to be with Christ and like Him in the glory. Furthermore, nothing is able to separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus their Lord. Hence, they have the firm belief that all things work together for good in this life - in preparation for that which is to come - a life of love, joy and peace..

In the psalm, "Jordan" means "Descender"; "Hermon" means "rugged"; and, "Mizar" means "small". These meanings remind me of the chorus:

*"When the road is rough and steep,
Fix your eyes upon Jesus.
He alone has power to keep;
Fix your eyes upon Him.
Jesus is the sinner's Friend,
One on whom you can depend.
He will keep you to the end.
Fix your eyes upon Him."*

The psalmist then expresses God's discipline falling upon him: "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." It worked because the next words show us that he was still close to the heart of God: "Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life."

We have to remember that it is because God loves us that He chastens us. Hebrews 12:5-6 state: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, Nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: For whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, And scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." When we have been corrected by God then the peaceable fruit of righteousness is the result.

As for the unbeliever, God may well allow detrimental circumstances to occur in your life also, with the intention of drawing you closer to Himself. Even if you lay the blame for your circumstances at His door, at least you are acknowledging His existence and His interest in your life.

In verses 9 and 10, we see, on the one hand, that the psalmist believes that God has forgotten him and as a result his enemies oppress him so much that he mourns. Their taunts are like a "murder" in his bones. Yet, on the other hand, his faith still states that God is his rock. The immovable, unchanging One is his Protector.

Finally, he repeats the question to his soul, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?" but this time continues with, "Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God." He again tells his soul to trust God. He claims God as his own possession - "My God". He knows that he will overcome ultimately and praise God. He also describes God as "the health of his countenance". So just as God would be gracious to him, so he, once restored, would be gracious to others. As Christians, we are able to claim Christ as our possession; to be found covered by the Rock of Ages; to know that we are on the victory side; and to be made more like Him. We are to be his channels of blessing to others. Our love for one another shows that we are his disciples.

To know that God is for us in every situation of life is greatly reassuring and like the psalmist we should realise that He is faithful and will see us through. In the case of Moses, the Lord instructed him to share his burden with seventy elders of the people and he supplied meat for the people in the form of quails. However, the Lord also caused a plague to come upon them as they ate. God was not mocked!

As for Elijah, the Lord allowed him to sleep. He then sent an angel twice who provided him with a meal each time. The Lord then sent him on a long journey before revealing Himself to him in a still small voice. The Lord sent him on another mission and on the way; Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha, his successor.

Finally, the Lord used a gourd and a devouring worm to teach Jonah that his anger was not justified. The Lord gave Jonah a lesson in compassion. Christian, you may find that you are bowed low under many a burden, but God may want you to share those burdens and delegate some of your responsibilities. Out of your circumstances, He may wish you to know more about Himself. Then again, He may have a lesson to teach you. May God give us all the grace to build positively upon life's bumps and burdens.

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