

SOME CURES FROM THE PSALMS

3. "Cure for Depression"

Psalm 118

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We are in the middle of a summer sermon series entitled, "Some Cures from the Psalms." We started with "worry" and "fear." Today's cure is for depression. I mentioned earlier in this series that calling it "Some Cures from the Psalms" is probably promising more than this or any other sermon on these topics can deliver. It is a way of saying, "listen up, why are we allowing these things to take control of our lives?"

You could of course reply back by saying, "listen preacher, we don't have any choice. This is the way we feel. I feel depressed a lot and you nor anyone else can do anything about it!" Sometimes we have no control over depression and at other times we do. Maybe it was something you ate or didn't eat (more on that in a minute) that brought on a depression, maybe it was something you did that you weren't very proud of and when you thought about it you got depressed. Some people unfortunately are genetically predisposed to the illness. Statistics say that about 30% of Americans suffer at one time or another from some form of depression. It can go on a scale from a mild depression that lasts a few minutes or a day to a moderate depression that might last a week or two to a full blown manic or clinical depression that can go on for years if left untreated. Of those suffering from depression over 80% go untreated. Why? Because some have tried drugs and don't like the side effects and aren't sure the drugs work anyway, others think it is just part of the life cycle and the "feeling" of depression will soon go away.

The causes of depression are as numerous as the people who suffer from it. One person suggested that the chief problem is we are living in a Technological Age with our minds and emotions and a Stone Age with our physical bodies. So, we need to match up our physical body with the times in which we live. In other words physically we are still "hunters and gatherers" and our modern life isn't active or social enough. We spend too much time in front of the TV screen or the computer screen or on Facebook. One solution would be to sell everything and move to the forest with 30 of your closest relatives. Another solution if the first one doesn't sound practical is to change your diet and your life practices. Eat more omega-3 fatty acids that come from fish oil found in salmon among others. We use to get that naturally when we ate more naturally out in the forest. Change your life practices like being more engaged in activities like Music Fest across the street this weekend maybe, physical exercise in walking around the block or running or doing a tread mill, get 15-20 minutes of morning sunlight every day, get involved in conversations with family and friends, and sleep at least 8 hours a night.

Now that makes it sound as though depression is a modern illness. It certainly is more prevalent today than a hundred years ago. But depression is at least as old as the Bible and probably in lesser degrees as old as the human race. Again back in the Stone Age our ancestors were concerned about survival and fighting off the other clans or finding food every day, preparing it and then cleaning up. They didn't have time to sit around and think about being depressed.

Depression is no respecter of people. From the most famous people of faith, to those in the arts and music and literature; in the history of our times and the life that you and I live from day to day, depression works its way in and out of our existence.

Abraham Lincoln suffered bouts of dark depression. Churchill called it a “little black dog” that nipped at his heels everywhere he went. Shakespeare suffered from bouts of melancholia and morbid introspection. Macbeth, King Lear and Hamlet did not emerge by accident. The author knew and had known futility and the hopelessness of life. Musicians from Mozart to Tchaikovsky to Shuman have suffered from depression. Artists from Michelangelo to Van Gogh have been plagued by this malady. In literature, writers from Dostoevski to Kafka have had an attachment to the morbid. I do not need to tell you that the rich and the poor, the married and the single, the black and the white, the male and the female, the student and the professor, the successful people, the educated people and the simple plain Jane and John Does’ of the world including butchers and bakers and candlestick makers and pastors and lawyers and doctors and therapists have all suffered from depression.

The psalmist knew about depression too. In Psalm 118 the writer is in a sorry fix. Anything you had ever seen or heard or felt of the pressures of the world, he had already experienced. He says, “Out of the depths—out of my distress I cried unto you, O God.” (Ps. 118:5) I mean it was heavy. There was a time that night I didn’t think I would make it through. But, I knew where to turn. Where do you turn, my friends, when you need help? What resources do you look for first of all? What do you say when you have had enough at the end of the day and you have no more to give? Do you hide it under all kinds of complaints and diversions and drinks and dodges and running and screaming and sulking and fighting? Or, as the Psalmist, do you say, “Lord God, it’s awful.”

The Psalmist continues, “I was pushed hard so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation.” (Ps. 118:13-14) If God doesn’t have the power to help you then who on earth does? If Christ cannot come to meet you, who on earth will? If in the hour of need, the Christian church does not answer it, then we are the most hopeless of people and the most helpless on the earth.

The Bible is full of stories of the way God’s people found their courage, and of how depression is part and parcel of the way and journey of their lives, or how they went down and rose up again, how stupid and fragile they all were, and how faithfulness is forged in the fire of one’s failures.

Abraham had lied and for his own safety gave his wife Sarah to the great Egyptian leader. Moses stuttered and he killed a man. The remorse of David was his tears. Elijah at the moment of his greatest triumph went off to a cave and was so depressed they thought he would take his life. Noah, when the ark came down after 40 days, got drunk. And Jeremiah was so caught up in how unfair the great Creator was that he complained bitterly. Jonah sulked under a broom tree when things did not go his way. Samson in the Phoenician pits lamented how stupid he had been to allow Delilah to entice him. The fine prophet Isaiah, walked nude through the streets. Little Malachi presented arguments with God. One Psalmist after another talked of what God had told

them. Job lamented the day he had been born and Peter was a victim of his impetuous anger and Paul prayed for release from his inner scourge and Judas killed himself.

What is positive and final is not that God's people had it easy, but that from the middle of the boiling cauldron and the perils and the broken promises of this mortal life they emerged again. They found their courage, not on the great high road, but in the valleys. They overcame depression and found the cure in the struggles of the human soul.

So let me try and organize it a little better from these different directions I have come and suggest how to cope with your depression and how to overcome it if you could in Jesus Christ it might sound something like this: Jesus Christ gives you an ultimate destiny. Isn't that the real problem with depression that underneath it all, the foundation block on which it all rises, is that you feel out of touch with the universe, that it's all unfair, that somehow it is incompatible with your highest hopes, and for everything you give you get so little back? Isn't that it? And when Jesus weeps in the Garden of Gethsemane and the tears run down his cheeks, he was depressed. And when he screams out loud on the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" he is angry, but you can be sure he is also depressed. Yet he knows at the end of that time in putting it all into perspective, he comes out of it with a smile and with an acquiescence, with an agreement. Okay Lord, if that's your will, I'll take it. Not because I want it, less because I like it, but because if that's the burden I have to bear, I shall bear it.

Jesus also gives you the strength to manage it. He doesn't always make the going easy, because in the time and providence of God he cannot. But what he can do is tell you if you can't make it alone, "I shall be there to hold your hand." In the darkest night, the Psalmist said, "He gave me light. He opened the gates..." It is like we are locked in a room with open doors, and he lets us out in the glory of the beauty of the outside meadow. He gives us the strength we need.

The last thing you will need, taken from Romans, where it says, "The love of God will be poured into your heart." (Rom. 5:5b) What is inside you now? Is there some anger there? Some regret? Some depression? Some worry for the future? Some worry for someone you love? How is your heart filled these days and what is there? Paul says in Romans, just like he had a big vessel of love, God will tilt that vessel and pour that love "right into your heart." He will replace what is there with the power of his love and held securely in his arms, you can make it through the night. Christ will see you through.

What is the cure for depression? You could try the solution of eating better, more engagement with the world around you, more exercise, 15-20 minutes of sunlight every morning, social interaction with family/friends, and 8 hours of sleep. Or, become engaged with Jesus Christ. Realize that Jesus is your destiny and believe in him, know that Jesus can give you the strength to see you through and let him fill your heart with love.

Psalm 118 begins and ends with a core affirmation of faith, "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!" This affirmation brackets everything else in the Psalm. All other things are in-between "giving thanks to the Lord for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever." In between is distress and depression, under threat, pushed to the limit—in all circumstances of life, we are supported nay we are buttressed on all sides by God, who is good

and whose steadfast love endures forever. When we are down and out and ready to give up when we are ready to cash in our chips and say, “I give up, Lord.” We hear God’s response in the voice of the psalmist, “I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.” (Ps. 118:17) Amen.