

Water Brooks

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The Christian and Depression



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Editorial

by Dn Franco Wong

Every man has faced setbacks, disappointments, and defeat in their lives before. However, every man seems to have a different perception and responses to them. Christians are not exempt from depression as unbelievers too. Should Christians then seek the coping mechanisms and cure as the world also?

If we do not see God in the

picture, we will not be aware that depression, the cause and complications of it, is spiritual. Take God out of the picture, and you take God's solution out of your life.

May this issue of Water Brooks speak to you, whether you have felt depressed in the past, or are struggling through a bad patch now, to look up to

God, to know He knows,
and He cares. Let His Word
lead you to green pastures,
to the still waters, and His
comfort the balm that
sooths the wound of the
heart and mind.

Psalm 73:25- Whom have I
in heaven but thee? and
there is none upon earth
that I desire beside thee.

Does Christian Depression Exist?

by Bro Samuel Joseph

Introduction

Depression is becoming a prominent cause for concern in the world today; it is part of what has been called a “mental health crisis.” Schools and other institutions are now making concerted efforts to raise awareness concerning depression and to offer avenues for those suffering from it to find help.

From a psychological perspective, depression is classified as a

mood disorder, one characterised by symptoms such as persistent sadness and loss of appetite; it can lead to self-harm, and even attempts to take one’s own life. Depression is acknowledged to be a complex, potentially multi-factorial problem: environmental factors may be involved; genetic factors; and physiological factors. There are several methods used to treat depression. Such treatments

may involve the use of drugs (“antidepressants”), as well as various therapies including light therapy, electroconvulsive therapy, and psychotherapy.

The question arises, however, of the Christian approach to this subject.

How should Christians approach the problem of depression? Can a Christian suffer from depression?

To answer these questions we must consider the Christian view of the human mind, before considering some examples of “Christian depression” from Scripture.

The Christian View of the Mind

It is important to mention that we are not suggesting that the world’s approach to the issue of depression is entirely wrong – the treatments mentioned above are not necessarily bad, or useless. We are not suggesting that depression is never a medical phenomenon, nor that it cannot be dealt with medically.

At the same time, however, we recognise that the world in general, even in the field of medicine and psychology, treats man as biological rather than as spiritual. Inasmuch as the field of psychology approaches the human mind, it makes its approach along the lines of biochemistry, neurobiology, and so on. This is all

well and good, of course; but it is an incomplete picture of man. We know from Scripture that there is an irrevocable spiritual dimension to human life - we are spiritual beings. And this spiritual dimension, it seems, does bear quite significantly on the question of depression.

This is evident, for example, as we consider the biblical description of human beings as fallen creatures, heirs to a spiritual corruption passed down from Adam as our representative. This sin nature, this “fallenness,” certainly influences the mind: there are problems in our thinking (of which depression may be called for instance) that can be traced back to sin and its curse. After all, human beings

were originally created as part of God’s “very good” creation – there were no disorders, mood or otherwise!

Also, the relevance of the spiritual dimension of human life is evident, as we consider the biblical revelation that we have a spiritual enemy, who delights in our death and destruction. Thus the devil is called a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44), who continually seeks to bring human life to ruin. In this light, it is significant to note what kind of effect demon possession – as it is presented to us in the gospels – frequently had on the individuals who were afflicted by it: they were thrown into utter desolation and left wretched and broken (consider, for

example, Mark 5:2-5).

Again, we are not arguing that all cases of depression must be caused by demon possession or some other demonic activity. The point is simply that, in the view presented by Scripture, there is a spiritual dimension to human life: one which is largely ignored by the world, but crucial to a complete understanding of who we are as human beings, and why we are afflicted by things like depression.

Now if we accept the reality of this spiritual dimension; if we acknowledge the mental and emotional effects of sin; if we maintain the original goodness, according to Scripture, of God's creation – then since depression is a disorder, it

must have its origin (as do all other disorders) in the curse of sin. We are then immediately led to the recognition that there can be no complete solution to this or any other human problem that does not involve salvation, regeneration, and the new birth promised in the gospel. Only then can we be renewed in the spirit of our minds (Ephesians 4:23).

But does this mean that Christians, who have been thus transformed, are immune to depression? Are we immune to all the effects of sin in this life? Clearly this is not the case. Even the redeemed and regenerated continually struggle against sin – the Apostle Paul describes this powerfully in Romans 7. But even in this continual struggle, there is the hope of ultimate

victory, which is assured in Christ (Romans 7:25a); there is the expectation of consummation of salvation, where all lingering effects of sin are no more. And even in this present life, there is grace to help us in our time of need – there is a biblical solution to the depression that Christians may face. This we can see more clearly, as we consider some biblical examples.

Examples from Scripture

We may begin with the psalms, where we find a record of God's people dealing with both the highs and the lows of spiritual life. In Psalm 42 we find one of the low points – the psalmist expresses his deep distress: he is filled with

sadness, because he is facing reproach, and is surrounded by enemies who mock him (v3, v10). This is something very distressing; it is not just general mistreatment, but also something aimed at doing psychological (spiritual) damage. His enemies are trying to drive him to depression and despair! Hence the mocking refrain, “Where is thy God” – they want him to be without hope and to give up: and these attacks came upon him like waves of the sea (v7).

Surely we can identify with this as Christians! Are we not sometimes cast down because of this very thing? Is this not an attack many of us face? Are there not times when God seems very far away, and our enemies seem too powerful, our friends

too few? We see another example of this in Elijah when he fled from Jezebel (1 Kings 19) – he felt his own weakness and inadequacy; “I am not better than my fathers,” he said. He despaired of further service to God. And sometimes to us, the devil also whispers, “God has forgotten you; God has forsaken you; you are too sinful, and God does not want you.” These are often our lowest moments as Christians, when the waves of trouble come crashing down, one after the other, and there seems to be no refuge. This is Christian depression.

Conclusion

It can indeed be tempting to give up and give in to despair. But once again in Psalm 42, we find the

psalmist, in the midst of all these attacks, instead of giving in to despair, he clings on all the more to God (v5, v11). He asks the question to his own soul, “Why art thou cast down” – as if to remind himself that there is actually no good reason for his depression! And so his deliverance comes as he turns his thoughts away from self, and turns to God. He turns to praise God, and here is a great lesson for us on the subject of Christian depression.

This posture of praise, of adoration, of worship, is really a posture of great strength. It may be said that our greatest mental, emotional and spiritual strength comes as we are engaged in praise and worship – for what advance

can the devil make against one filled with the love of God? Can he allure away one who is gazing raptly at the beauty and glory of God? How can he tempt to despair one who constantly sings of the grace and mercy of God? Christian depression occurs when we are led away from praising God; when we become so focused on ourselves and our problems that we begin to wallow in self-pity and despair. But let us learn to say, like the prophet Habakkuk,

**“Although the fig tree
shall not blossom,
neither shall fruit be
in the vines; the
labour of the olive
shall fail, and the
fields shall yield no
meat; the flock shall**

**be cut off from the
fold, and there shall
be no herd in the
stalls: yet I will
rejoice in the LORD, I
will joy in the God of
my salvation.”**

Why do Christians Get Depression?



by Rev Dr Jose Lagapa

Depression is a condition that many people experience. This condition includes bouts of intense feelings of sadness leading to suicidal thoughts, extreme discouragement that results in hopelessness and emotional fatigue that affects physical health. It may begin with some disappointing or sorrowful events in life that may cause a person to feel sad or tired. It may prolong over time,

resulting in moodiness and a lack of interest in engaging in any other activities. An escalation of these kinds of situations can lead to depression.

In Singapore, it is estimated that 1 in 16 people are diagnosed with depression in their lifetime (healthhub.sg). This condition does not exempt Christians, even those already mature in the

faith. Some situations in life bring a Christian down in the dumps and cause them to experience some bouts of depression.

We may be tempted to ask why this emotional struggle comes into the Christian's life. Are Christians not supposed to be immune to these circumstances because the Spirit of God indwells them? Who is the Comforter? Is God unable to keep His children from having painful conditions? Why is a Christian unable to cope with depression when the promises from the Scriptures of how God cares for His children are too good to forget?

Let us not, however, forget that there are complexities in understanding depression. Some would associate the

spiritual state with man's emotional well-being, perceptions of things, and even the chemical balances in the brain, which may result in a depressed state. For example, if a Christian goes through cancer treatment, he may suffer brief episodes of depression. Fear of death or side effects may result from chemotherapy that causes the person to be down. It can also be said that depression is a subtle mix of all of these factors and even more. Sound medical advice is still crucial since bodily infirmities may result in spiritual downturn and depression. Biblical doctrines, however, are far more critical in understanding the emotional problems of believers. A Christian can better understand the reasons behind depression and any emotional situations

based on God's Word. Christians who adhere to Biblical doctrines can discern more than those without the mind of Christ. Thus, sound Biblical doctrine is an excellent diagnostic standard for psychological health, especially depression, if the Christian is willing to apply it to practical life.

Let us consider some characters in the Bible and learn from the lives of these men who had great faith and yet had experiences that manifested depression, just like the experiences of modern-day Christians. The valleys of these great men of the Bible are a reasonable basis for understanding why Christians today get depression.

1. Depression Comes in Times of Trials and Testing in Life – Job and Jeremiah

Trials and testing are part and parcel of the Christian's life. "The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth" (Psalm 11:5). "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12). Job was a man was under great trial by God's permissive will. At the same time, Jeremiah was a prophet under significant testing because of the sins of his fellow Jews.

Job was convinced that he did not do what was worthy

of the great suffering that he experienced. He did not see the spiritual battle that went on in his life. He struggled with sadness and despair because of the material loss and physical infirmities that he had experienced. These emotional stints might be comparable to many circumstances among Christians today having depression. Listen to the words of Job,

"After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day. And Job spake, and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it;

let the blackness of the day terrify it. As for that night, let darkness seize upon it; let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein. Let them curse it that curse the day, who are ready to raise up their mourning. Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark; let it look for light, but have none; neither let it see the dawning of the day: Because it shut not up the doors of my mother's womb, nor hid sorrow from mine eyes." (Job 3:1-10).

Matthew Henry commented, "Surely his wisdom failed him, (1) He took so much pains to express his desire that he had never been born, which, at best was a vain wish, for it is impossible

to make that which has been not to have been. (2) When he was so liberal of his curses upon a day and a night that could not be hurt, or made any the worse for his curses. (3) When he wished a thing so barbarous to his own mother that she had not brought him forth when her full time had come, which must inevitably have been her death and miserable death. (4) When he despised the goodness of God to him in giving him a being (such a being, so noble and excellent a life, such a life, so far above that of any other creature in this lower world), and undervalued the gift, as not worth the acceptance, which now at length came upon him, after many years enjoyment of its pleasures."¹

Although Job understands the sovereignty of God over his life, he "said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). The pains of his friends' false accusations affected his faith and trust in the Lord.

Thus, when a Christian is under great trial without any support but attacks from the brethren, there is more tendency of a spiritual unsoundness in life. That is why believers are told to bear the burdens of one another (Galatian 6:2). "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one

¹ Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Whole Bible Commentary, in SwordSearcher Deluxe Version 5.3.1. Broken Arrow: StudyLamp Software LLC., 2008), "Job 3:1-10."

member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12:25-26).

Similarly, Jeremiah expressed what Job had in times of great duress from his people, "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day whercin my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad. And let that man be as the cities which the LORD overthrew, and repented not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noontide; Because he slew me not from the womb; or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me.

Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?" (Jeremiah 20:14-18).

Calvin comments, "the Prophet teaches us here that he was not only opposed by enemies, but also distressed inwardly in his mind, so that he was carried away contrary to reason and judgment, by turbulent emotions which even led him to give utterance to vile blasphemies. For what is here said cannot be extenuated, but the Prophet most grievously sinned when he became thus calumnious towards God; for a man must be in a state of despair when he curses the day in which he was born. Men are, indeed, wont to celebrate their birthday, and it was a custom which

formerly prevailed to acknowledge yearly that they owed it to God's invaluable goodness that they were brought forth into strong light. As then it is a reason for thanksgiving, it is evident that when we turn to a curse what ought to rouse us to praise God, we are no longer in a right mind, nor possessed of reason, but that we are seized as it were with a sacrilegious madness; and yet into this state had the Prophet fallen."²

Sufferings from the persecutions of men give more a heavy toil than bodily infirmities. Jeremiah received criticisms and struggled inwardly. He felt he could not take those words from men and wished to die rather than continue hearing the harsh words

of the people whom he loved.

2. Depression Comes in Times of Terror and Trouble in Life - Elijah and Heman

During the times of Ahab, king of Israel, the great Prophet Elijah proposed that sacrifices should be publicly offered to determine whether Baal or Jehovah was the true God. The "contest" was done on Carmel with the result that "...when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God" (1 Kings 18:39). Thus, was the victory of God in Elijah's ministry. The prophets of Baal were then put to death,

and no one escaped.

Notwithstanding, Jezebel, the queen, enraged at the fate that had befallen her priests of Baal, threatened to put Elijah to death (1 Kings 19:1-13). Elijah fled in alarm to Beersheba, thence went alone a day's journey into the wilderness, and sat down in despondency. "And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is too great for thee.

And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." (1 Kings 19:5-10).

Elijah was in despair, for his life was hunted down instead of receiving a testimony. He forgot the victorious help of God upon him, and he succumbed to discouragements

and depression. Men tend to go into the lowest ebb of their spiritual state when they forget God and are overwhelmed with terror. Fear had a paralyzing impact on the Prophet as he turned into self-pity and away from the Lord. The threats were magnified, which resulted in a state of depression.

Another man of God who wrote Psalm 88 had these bouts of depression as seen in his expressions of words. "A Song or Psalm for the sons of Korah, to the chief Musician upon Mahalath Leannoth, Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite. O LORD God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before thee: Let my prayer come before thee: incline thine ear unto my cry; For my soul is full of troubles:

and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: LORD, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee. Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall

the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? But unto thee have I cried, O LORD; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee. LORD, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off. They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." (Psalm 88:1-18).

The Psalmist was acquainted with painful exercise and affliction of spirit. He was not a man of weak mind and shallow wits, for Heman might be one among the wisest of all Israel (and inferior to none for wisdom, except for Solomon alone). But under the heaviest exercise we can imagine possible for a saint, Neale and Littledale described this Psalm as one that stands alone in all the Psalter for the unrelieved gloom, the hopeless sorrow of its tone. Even the very saddest of the others, and the Lamentations themselves, admit some variation of key, some strains of hopefulness; here only all is darkness to the close."³ Sorrows of the troubles of life will surely affect the believer's spiritual condition. He may not be like the unbelieving who

³ Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Volume 2, Part 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 9.

resorts to harming himself by committing suicide, yet the troubled heart will result in a sad countenance and melancholy spirit.

"What trouble of wounded spirit some of God's children have felt in former times, others dear to God may find the like in after ages, and all men ought to prepare for the like, and should not think the exercise strange when it cometh, but must comfort themselves in this, that other saints whose names are recorded in the Scripture, have been under like affliction."⁴

3. Depression Comes in Times of Transgression and Treachery – David and Jonah

David, guilty of his transgressions, expressed this, "O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins

are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me. My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off." (Psalm 38:1-11).

David describes his physical and mental anguish. "Physical, because he is suffering. Mental, because he is suffering from sin. The words "because of," repeated three times in verses 3 and 5, leave no doubt that this was a judicial illness in David's mind. He was being

punished for a serious transgression."⁵ Although not all sickness is punishment and most conditions are not direct judicial acts from God, "(i)t is important to say this because physical suffering depresses us mentally. In such depressions, we are inclined to see connections between our past sins and our present sickness that do not necessarily exist."⁶ Nonetheless, such convictions of transgressions during times of bodily infirmities bring the believer into depression and prolong mental anguish because of guilt.

Disobedience that leads to betrayal causes depression because of wilful desires. Jonah received a command from the LORD to preach to Nineveh. In disobedience,

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2005), 332.

⁶ Ibid.

he fled in the opposite direction to escape from the task. A storm stopped him and, at his request, was hurled into the sea, where a great fish swallowed him. He remained alive in the belly of the fish for three days. The command to go to Nineveh was renewed upon his release from the fish. Jonah obeyed and announced that the wicked city "shall be overthrown". When the men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of the Prophet, Jonah was grieved that the oppressing city should be spared. Jonah wished for the destruction of the people that threatened to swallow up Israel. Jonah "... was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I

fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live." (Jonah 4:1-3).

Calvin noted, "when anyone wishes to die, because he fears for himself as to the future, or dreads to undergo any evil, he also struggles against God; and such was the fault of Jonah; for he says that death was better to him than life, — and why? Because the Lord had spared the Ninevites. We see how he was blinded, yea, carried away by a mad impulse to desire death." The leading cause of his depression is his rebellion. A Christian who wilfully

turns away from God and seeks his way will always be depressed. He will realise he cannot go against the will of God, yet in his stubbornness, he continues to stray away and heads towards destruction. Such an act of treason before the sovereign God will indeed stir emotional instability and mental depression.

Conclusion

Genetic and environmental influences are the symbiotic cause of many diseases - diabetes, cancer, obesity, and depression. However, as Christians under the care of our God, the Almighty and whose life He carefully takes care of, we have to see the state of depression not in the eyes of the world but using the spectacles of faith

in the Word of God. We have seen that 1) depression comes in times of trials and testing in life as exemplified in the lives of Job and Jeremiah, 2) in times of terror and trouble in life as exemplified by Elijah and Heman, and 3) in times of transgression and treachery as exemplified by David and Jonah.

An environment of loneliness will often create a stricter set of depressive conditions, while understanding the indwelling Holy Spirit's abiding presence will result in a correct perspective in life. Satan's role is to bring the believer into misery into his life where he feels helpless and hopeless amid the situation. When the believer does not turn to the Word of God and the Holy Spirit's illumination in

discerning the problem, the condition worsens to the point of depression. Thus, we can no longer blame depression and other chemically-based brain aberrations on man's sinful nature.

Many believers suffer from depression because they are ignorant of the problems and symptoms. Satan's prime objective is to make the Christian miserable and his witness ineffective. A depressed Christian is robbed of his present joy by not seeing trials and testing from the perspective of God's sovereignty. Instead of considering the future, he becomes terrified and troubled that anxieties cloud his vision about the coming events of his life. Because of the transgressions and his wilful treachery from

the will of God, he will soon have vain regrets for the loss of years of service as a Christian.

Some Christians are so depressed that observers regard them as unsaved. We should not be quick to condemn them with such judgment. Those characters we have mentioned above were not faithless men. They were just like Peter when he walked on water. He failed to think through what the Lord Jesus had told him. His doubts and depression caused him to sink. Before he started to walk on the sea, the waves were present, but the great storm destroyed his focus upon Jesus alone. Nevertheless, Jesus was there, ready to give His loving hand to rescue Peter. No one, even Christians,

is ever exempt from depression. However, believers should not dwell long on their depression. **Christians must understand the sovereignty of God from the Word of God, which is sufficient and trustworthy for every situation in life, even in the most difficult of circumstances.**

How do Christians deal with Depression?

by Pr David Chew



Introduction

The Westminster Confession of Faith states, “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture...” (I.6). In seeking how the Christian ought to deal with seasons of depression, we must go back to the Bible.

What does the Bible teach us about how the Christian is to deal with periods of depression in life? The Bible gives us a record in the book of Psalms of the thoughts of faithful men who have gone through periods of melancholy. The book of Psalms has encouraged many Christians in such seasons of despondency, and Rev Timothy Tow has rightly described the book of

Psalms as **the balm to the soul**. Therefore, it would do us good to look into how the psalmists dealt with seasons of depression, and in doing so, may we also learn how we can deal with dejection, disappointment, and despondence.

1. By Crying Out to God for Help (Psalm 18)

In Psalm 18, David praises the Lord for how He delivered him from the hand of Saul. In this psalm, David depicts his calamity and his deliverance. David described his situation as having the “sorrows of death” (v.4) and “sorrows of hell” (v.5) compass him. He was in dire straits being pursued by Saul. He had to

hide in the wilderness, and his life hung in the balance. He lived every day on a knife edge – he did not know when his last day would be, and when Saul would finally catch him and kill him. In such a situation, one would easily despair. But in all this, David recounted in verse 6,

“In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.”

There are a few lessons that we can learn from David in dealing with seasons of distress and depression. Firstly, David sought the Lord when he was in distress. He did not take matters into his own hand

and kill Saul when he could have. He did not seek to remove the source of his despair in a sinful manner, but he simply sought the Lord. The Bible here uses two verbs to describe David's seeking of the Lord – "called" and "cried". The word "called" here refers to a general appeal to God for help, while the word "cried" refers to crying aloud. In other words, in his time of distress, David appealed to God for help and cried out to Him to hear him. He was desperate and he wanted God's attention. He wanted God to look upon him in his distress. David knew that the only one who was able to help him out of his distress was the Lord. This was David's heart, and this must be our heart as well when we fall into despondency. We may be

distressed and saddened by situations that are outside of our control. Or we may not even know why we are distressed. At such times, let the Christian cry unto his God for help, and He will hear him.

Secondly, in crying to the Lord, there is hope. When we seek men for help, there is only so much that a person can do to help us. Many at such times would seek the help of family, friends, psychologists, and physicians without looking to God for help. Many things are outside of man's control. But when we seek the Lord for help, nothing is outside of His control. In fact, He is in control of all things, and He promises that He will hear us. David cried to the Lord, and God heard him. His cry came

into his very ears. Not only did the Lord hear David, but the rest of the psalm elaborates how the Lord moved heaven and earth to deliver him. Just as David called this God “my God”, this same God is our God today. In seasons of depression, remember that this God who is in control of heaven, earth, and your heart is the God who is able to help you. Cry out to God in faith, believing in who He is, His love for you, and His power to help you. Trust that His way for you is perfect (v.30). No man may ever be able to comprehend how you feel. You may not even be able to articulate what is in your heart. But the Lord Jesus Christ knows how you feel. “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;

but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4:15). Knowing this, the author of Hebrews exhorts us, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:6).

Thirdly, the basis for the Lord hearing David’s cry was not simply because he was His child. Rather, it was because David had kept himself upright and kept himself from sin, and God, being the Just One would deliver the righteous. David records, “I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from mine iniquity. Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight.”

(vv.23,24). David was not afflicted because of his sins or wrongdoings. Instead, he was afflicted because of his righteousness. Likewise, for us, we must make sure that we are not going through periods of despondency because of our sins. If we are, we must quickly repent of our sins and turn to the Lord, and in doing so, the Lord will be pleased to forgive us and aid us.

2. By Encouraging Yourself in the Lord (Psalm 42)

Another way in which the book of Psalms teaches us how we ought to deal with depression is to speak to our own hearts and encourage ourselves in the Lord. The psalmist in Psalm 42 was

facing great sorrow within his soul. He repeatedly describes his soul as “cast down” and “disquieted” (vv.5,6,11). To be cast down has the idea of being brought low to the point of despair, while being disquieted has the idea of the heart being in commotion and turbulence, much like how the psalmist describes in verse 7. Once again, we see the deep sorrow of the psalmist. His enemies had risen against him, and his soul was greatly discouraged and despondent. He was crying day and night because of the mocking of his enemies (v.3). At such a point, the psalmist speaks to his own soul, “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.” (v.5).

In the case of the psalmist, it was not that he did not know who God is, or that he did not believe in His power. He knew that God would hear him when he cried to Him, and yet because of his continual crying and the seeming lack of response from God, the psalmist felt as if the Lord had forgotten him (v.9). He knew the truth about who God is, but because of the current distress, his soul was still in turmoil despite what he believed of God. Have we not experienced similar situations? We know in our minds that God is powerful and that He is able to deliver us. Yet, because of the present situation, we are in despair and feel as if God has forsaken us. In such times, we must speak to our

own soul, just as the psalmist did. We must teach our hearts what our minds know about God. We must ask ourselves why we are despondent when we know we have a God who is powerful and mighty. We must teach our own soul to trust in the truths of Scripture. Even when all those around us are against us, we must encourage ourselves in the Lord. This was what David did in 1 Samuel 30 when the Amalekites took Ziklag. The Bible tells us in 1 Samuel 30:6, “And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.” David’s family was taken, and his

own men wanted to kill him. In such great distress, David spoke to his own heart, reminding himself of who God is, and strengthened himself with that knowledge of God.

The attributes of God are not only to be studied and memorised. They must be believed in, and we must use them to encourage ourselves in particular circumstances. **God is omnipotent**, meaning that He is in control of the very situation that you are facing right now. Do you believe that? **God is omnipresent**, meaning that everything is before him and there is no place or situation which God does not see. Do you believe that? **God is omniscient**, meaning that He knows everything that happens in your life,

the cause of your despondence, and how He will deliver you. Do you believe that? To believe God does not mean simply acknowledging certain truths about God. To believe God means to trust Him and to rest in who He is. The psalmist told himself to hope in God, which means to patiently wait in expectancy for how the Lord will deliver him. His hope in the Lord was so strong that he looked forward to the help that the Lord would render him, and he affirmed his praise of God for the deliverance that was yet to come (v.5). May we ask the Lord for such a faith.

Another psalm that shows the psalmist encouraging himself in the Lord in a time of distress would be

Psalm 77. Here, Asaph first cries to God for help (vv.1-3). He then spoke to himself to remind himself of who God is (vv.4-9). After which, he reminded himself of God's wonderful works which He had accomplished in the past (vv.10-20). This is the pattern of self-encouragement that we ought to follow in seasons of depression.

3. By Worshipping God (Psalm 73)

Psalm 73 teaches us a rather unexpected way in which we ought to respond in times of despair and depression: worship. In this psalm, the psalmist Asaph, much like the psalmist of Psalm 42, had an understanding of who the Lord is. He could proclaim in the first verse,

“Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.” He knew this truth about God; He was good to His people. However, in the very next verse, Asaph proclaims, “But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.” Although he knew God was good to his people, in his situation, he could not presently see how God was good to him. He was in distress because he saw the wicked prospering, and with his finite mind, he could not comprehend how God could be good to him. In fact, he was so despondent that he even despaired living a righteous life, for he wrote, “Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened

every morning.” (vv.13-14). Here, Asaph was stricken, and he felt as if he was punished for his righteous doing. In fact, when he tried to work things out in his mind, it was too painful for him. “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me;” (v.16). He was unable to understand why he was being afflicted, or why he was in distress. The more he thought of his situation, the more painful it was. It was only when he worshipped the Lord did he understand. “Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.” (v.17). In order to have a right view of our despondency, we must see it with God in the picture.

Firstly, we can learn from Asaph’s experience that worship is key in seasons of

depression because it reminds us of who God is. When Asaph went into the sanctuary of God to worship, he understood that God is the one who will judge the wicked (vv.18-20). He would have known that truth all along, and that was why he was able to say in verse 1 that God was good to Israel. However, in his distress, he lost sight of who God is and began complaining against God. But it was when he went to seek the Lord in worship that he understood the end of his enemies. He was reminded of how God was just and He will not allow the wicked to go unpunished. Therefore, worship is important as it reminds us of who God is.

Furthermore, worship gives us the true focus of the

purpose of our lives. Many feel extremely hopeless when they go through periods of despondency. They desire to simply be happy and free of trouble. But God did not call us to a life free of trouble. He called us to a life that would glorify Him. This shifts the focus away from ourselves – our problems and our desires to be free from them – and turns us to God and His purposes instead. In seasons of depression, it is very easy to slip into self-pity. It is easy to end up despairing that we are despairing, and we get stuck in an emotional downward spiral. But instead of looking at ourselves, worship directs our attention to God and what He desires for us in our lives. It directs our minds to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness even in the

midst of our trouble, and to trust Him to supply all our needs (Matthew 6:33). It focuses our hearts on glorifying God, even in the midst of our undesirable situations. It brings the soul to put his trust in this God who has allowed this period of difficulty to come into his life for a purpose. In seasons of depression, Christians must not neglect worship.

Lastly, worship brings God's presence. From verse 21 onwards, Asaph repents of his foolishness of distrusting God. He then affirms how he will continue to draw close to the Lord no matter how the situation may unfold, and he trusts that the Lord will be with him. Asaph remarks, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt

guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.” (vv. 23-28). When we worship the Lord and draw near to Him in times of depression, the Lord will be near us to guide us, counsel us, and help us. He will comfort and encourage us from His word. He will teach us what we ought to do. But if we forsake the Lord in such times, the Bible

says that we will perish (v.27). Why perish when the Lord has made it possible for us to draw nigh unto Him through the Lord Jesus Christ?

Conclusion

God’s word is the perfect guide to teach us how we ought to deal with seasons of depression. Dear reader, are you going through a period of depression right now? Look to your God and trust in Him to deliver you. Cry out to Him in faith, and He will hear you. Speak to your heart and remind yourself of who He is. Keep worshipping the Lord even as you feel disheartened. The same Lord who has delivered you from death and hell will not forsake you now.