

Why Are You So Downcast? – Psalm 42:1-5

The Treasure that is Your Life in Christ #12

Introduction – We have considered the means God has given to cultivate our life in Christ (Worship, the Word, Prayer). We have studied various hindrances to the experience of this joy and practical steps to correct those hindrances (Confession of Sin, Forgiveness, Guilt, Shame). But what are we to do with that broad category of melancholy, depression, the blues, and other forms of unhappiness? Often it seems that these things exist quite apart from any particular sin or any particular trial. This sermon addresses those of us who are depressed or know others who are.

The Psalmist – I could choose any of a number of Psalms that lament before God for all kinds of woes. In Psalm 42 the psalm-singer longs to have his thirst for God quenched by God but cannot seem to draw near (vv1-2). He is left only with his tears and the mocking of enemies (external and internal, v3). He remembers the times he went with the multitude in joyful feasting before God (v4). And then he stops listening to himself and starts speaking to himself (v5).

Telling God Your Problems and Feelings – There is this tension in the scriptures where we learn to pour out our troubles before the Lord (Psalm 38:22, 62:8), complain to God (Psalm 13:1, 89:46-47), and yet to rest in the Lord without anxiety (Psalm 31:24, Phil 4:6, 1 Pet 5:7). How do we do both? If it is big enough to aggravate you, it is important enough to talk to God about. You can pour out vehemently and with passion to God – but without the whiney voice (1 Cor 10:9-10). And then you also let the Psalms teach you how to address those melancholy feelings.

Clinical Depression – If there appears to be no particular sin or trial that is bringing on the blues, is it just a chemical imbalance? If dopamine levels are low, is it a sin to put some more in? No. Our bodies are full of chemicals and we know that changing levels of chemicals does things to us and for us. All food and drink is made up of chemicals and so we cannot help but shape and direct our moods to some extent by what we ingest. Therefore it naturally follows that some drug therapy can be a valid way to help in this fallen world. The problem is when this truth is applied in a culture that denies spiritual and covenantal connections to depression.

“The Age of Melancholy” – That is how one psychologist has coined our generation. We live in a therapeutic culture where far too often we will not address the root issues from a biblical foundation (“it’s not sin, it’s a sickness”). Statistics are fuzzy things sometimes but here are some. One in six Americans are on psychiatric drugs, most of them antidepressants. One in four women between 50-64 are on them. More children are diagnosed as clinically depressed than ever before. Yet studies show that between 70-87% of all patients diagnosed with depression receive little benefit from the diagnosis or the treatment (*Hodges, “Good Mood, Bad Mood”*). We are like the woman hemorrhaging in Jesus’ day (Luke 8:43).

What Has Produced this Age? – Consider. A culture of radical individualism and the rejection of covenant community. A culture of self-indulgence and immediate gratification. A culture of amusements and boredom. A culture of fatherlessness. A culture of materialistic Darwinism. A culture of blood-guilt from 50 million abortions. Maybe God is using depression and sadness to make us cry out to Him. *“Why are you cast down, O my culture?”*

The Sanctification of Your Whole Spirit, Soul, and Body (1 Thess 5:23) – Christian discipleship includes everything with regard to every part of our being, and every part is connected. We are not spirits encased in bodies. And this means that when one part of our being suffers, the other parts suffer as well. Fighting depression (a “body” thing) is never just a “body” thing, or a chemical thing. Here are several suggestions of how to “*hope in God*” (Psalm 42:5) with your whole spirit, soul, and body.

The Bedrock of Joy – The grand indicative of the Gospel. Jesus Christ was crucified, died, and rose again. The world is made new and nothing can stop it. Sins are forgiven; eternity is secure. Preach the gospel to yourself all the time.

Recognize the Warfare – Satan is an accuser and a liar. He tells you your sins are too nasty, your faith is too weak, and that God would never love a loser like you. He tells you that you have no reason to live. Spot the lie. Turn to the truth. Use God’s Word.

Use the Psalms....Really – *“If you are depressed, you are going to have to learn to be a liturgical worshiper”* – Ed Welch. Sing and pray through entire psalms and let them teach you how to discipline your emotions; not squelch or deny, but discipline. Don’t be discouraged when Psalms seem to go faster than your emotions. These are condensed versions of a long learning process. To move from the depths of despair to a confident hope takes practice.

Sword and Trowel – Use the disciplines of the Word (reading, singing, praying, memorizing, meditating) as a sword when attacked. But use them as a trowel when you are not being attacked. Build that wall now for another battle will come.

Thankfulness as a Weapon – Count it all joy by faith, not feeling, when you go through trials (James 1:2-4). Repent of placing your faith and hope on what you can see (Heb 11:1). Sometimes faith feels buoyant, but sometimes faith feels depressed and lifeless. Feelings don’t define faith.

Repent of the Soft, Warm Goo of Self-Pity – Stop thinking about you. ‘nuff said.

A Community of Gladness – As we seek to cultivate a community of gladness, thankfulness, joy, and care for one another, we become a place to *“comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all”* (1 Thess 5:14). And that means that if you, as you, or when you struggle with depression, you are welcome here.