

Let me try some statistics I've tracked down on you. See what you make of these...

- Depressive disorders affect approximately 18.8 million American adults or about 9.5% of the U.S. population age 18 and older in a given year.
- Everyone will at some time in their life be affected by depression -- their own or someone else's.
- Pre-schoolers are the fastest-growing market for antidepressants. At least four percent of preschoolers -- over a million -- are clinically depressed.
- The rate of increase of depression among children is an astounding 23% p.a.
- 15% of the population of most developed countries suffers severe depression.
- 30% of women are depressed. Men's figures were previously thought to be half that of women, but new estimates are higher.
- 54% of people believe depression is a personal weakness.
- 41% of depressed women are too embarrassed to seek help.
- 80% of depressed people are not currently having any treatment.
- 92% of depressed African-American males do not seek treatment.
- 15% of depressed people will commit suicide.
- Depression will be the second largest killer after heart disease by 2020.

(cited at http://www.upliftprogram.com/depression_stats.html#1)

Depression is a huge and growing issue in our day. In a congregation like ours, for example, statistically, around 20-30 people will be suffering right now from some kind of depression.

This week and next week, we will be thinking about the message of two psalms, Psalm 42 and 43, which address this issue of depression. The psalmist asks himself, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?" That is his condition. And we are going to take these two weeks to listen carefully to the message as the psalms offer a single, coherent response to the reality of spiritual depression.

So look with me today at Psalm 42, and I want you to notice simply the problem diagnosed and the treatment prescribed. First of all, the problem diagnosed.

The psalmist expresses the reality of his condition in verses 1 and 2, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, So pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” You see his condition? He is in a spiritual drought. He is thirsty for God. He wrestles with what he perceives to be the distance between himself and his God. He is like a deer stranded in the desert panting for a drink of life-giving water. Maybe you can relate to that sense of missing God. Where is He? Instead of a sense of God’s presence, all you have is a sense of His absence.

But there is more to it. Notice the psalmist’s question in verse 2, “When shall I come and appear before God?” What does he mean? He knows that God is everywhere. This is not a statement of doubt about that. But he, nevertheless, feels separated and cut off from God in a very real way. Now why is that? Well, the heart of the psalmist’s problem becomes clear when you notice his *location* in verse 6. He is somewhere in the land of Jordan, among the mountains of Hermon, on a small elevation known as Mizar Hill. And then notice his *identity* in the title of the psalm. He is one of “the sons of Korah.” These were the Levites whose job it was to lead the worship of God in the Jerusalem Temple.

In other words, this man has a rich appreciation of the place and role of the Temple as the meeting place of God with His people. God had appointed the Temple in Jerusalem as the only venue in which God’s people could meet with the actual presence of the covenant LORD. And for some reason he has been providentially hindered from attendance at the one place he knew God had promised to meet with him.

The psalmist knows what some of us may need to learn, do you see: that amidst spiritual depression what we need is not to withdraw from God’s ordained meeting place but to attend to it with renewed diligence. That meeting place is now no longer a building, of course. There is nothing sacred or holy about church structures any more. Instead, as 1 Peter 2:4-5 explains, the Temple we must attend to today is a structure built from hearts and lives trusting in Jesus Christ, not from bricks and mortar. Peter says this: “Coming to Him—that is to Jesus Christ—as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

The church of Jesus Christ, coming to Him by faith, united and gathered around His Word, raising their voices together, and surrendering their lives together to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God: *that* is now the unique place God has ordained to meet with sinners in His grace. It is His spiritual house, His New Covenant Temple. And some of us need to hear the instruction woven into the psalmist's longings in this psalm. Look at verse 4, for example, "When I remember these *things*, I pour out my soul within me. For I used to go with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, With the voice of joy and praise, With a multitude that kept a pilgrim feast." Where does the psalmist long to be, as he pants for a drink of soul refreshing fellowship with his God? He longs to be in the Temple of God, with the people of God, engaged in the praises of God.

When we struggle with spiritual depression, we must capitulate to the very real temptation to withdraw from the means of grace and the worship of God and the fellowship of His people. It is the easiest thing in the world to do when we feel submerged in the darkness of our condition. We just want to back off and withdraw, isn't that right? But instead, we need to recognize that *this* is precisely where God has promised to meet us. We must come to recognize with the psalmist that our continued distance from *God* is very often connected to our prolonged absence from the ordinances and the worship and the assembly of *His people*.

It unmasks a deep disorder of the soul to say with the psalmist in verse 1, "As the deer pants for the water brooks so pants my soul for You, O God." and then to fail to express the parallel longing for the corporate worship and body life of the church of Jesus Christ.

But there is another dimension of the psalmist's depression, isn't there? His distance from the worship of God and the fellowship of His people is only part of the issue. Another part of it has to do with opposition. He is being attacked and mocked and taunted by wicked men.

Look at verse 3, "My tears have been my food day and night, While they continually say to me, 'Where *is* your God?'" Or look at verses 9-10, "I will say to God my Rock, 'Why have You forgotten me?' Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, 'Where *is* your God?'"

While the psalmist in his depression is asking, “Where are you God? The enemy are all around me. I need you. Where are you?”—while he is asking that, there are those around him who are taunting him with glee asking the *same* question, “Yes indeed!” they say. “Where *is* this God of yours, now that you need Him so much?” He is being attacked and mocked and his faith assaulted.

There are few experiences more painful or difficult for a Christian than when depression gives place to doubts, and then those doubts are reinforced by the venom of others.

So what must we do in that circumstance? How will we respond? What does the psalmist do? What is the treatment prescribed? Well, he does two important things here. First, he engages in *confession*.

In verse 4 and again in verse 6, the psalmist honestly confesses the facts of his case. He doesn't cover up. He doesn't whitewash his struggles. He doesn't pretend things are better than they are. Instead, he rehearses what has happened to him. In verse 4 he remembers what he has lost, how he used to go up to the Temple with the congregation with joy and praises to keep the pilgrim feast. In verse 6 he makes a full confession of his own sorrows to God. “O, my God, my soul is cast down within me;” In verse 7 he reflects on his sufferings, “Deep calls unto deep at the noise of your waterfalls; all your waves and billows have gone over me.” It's been like going over a waterfall or having a tsunami crash down on my head, he says. But note this: these waves that have swept over me, they are *your* waves. The roar of this waterfall that still echoes in my life, it is *your* waterfall. The *source* of my trials ultimately must be traced back to the wise providence of my God. All this, including my suffering, comes from your hand.

It is critically important as we suffer trials, and the depression that can sometimes be triggered by them, to face them *honestly*. And spiritually, it is even more important that we recognize the sovereignty of God superintending and governing them, because unless we can confess that the waves that seem ready almost to drown us are *God's* waves, we will be unable to do what the psalmist does next.

He does not simply confess the facts, does he? He moves on from that. He also *proclaims the truth*. In verse 7 he has confessed that all these waves are *God's*

waves, all this trial is part of *God's* plan. But hard as that truth might seem, it allows him then to proclaim the note of hope that comes next (verse 8): “The LORD will command His loving-kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life.”

Unless we can confess that God is sovereign over and in my sorrows, we will have no basis for confidence that He can bring about any change in our condition. Unless we can confess that God works all things together, we cannot see how those things can possible work together *for my good*, if I love Him and am called according to His purpose. Unless I see that the waves of affliction I endure are *God's* waves, I will not recognize, nor will I have any basis to hope for, God's hand *stilling those waves*.

It is precisely because the psalmist has this perspective on his suffering that he is able to say with confidence, “The LORD will command His loving-kindness in the daytime and in the night His song shall be with me.” He has begun to move from confession of the hard facts, to proclamation of the good news.

And that note of proclamation actually becomes the refrain that sounds throughout these two psalms. We meet it twice in Psalm 42, don't we? Once in verse 5, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And *why* are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him *For* the help of His countenance.” And again in verse 11, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.”

You see what the psalmist is doing? He has moved beyond expressions of his despair. He has moved beyond an honest confession of his situation. He has come now to a bold proclamation to his own heart of the good news that can and ought to anchor our souls, even when God's waves and billows roll over us.

The finest book of pastoral advice I have ever read is Martyn Lloyd Jones' *Spiritual Depression: It Causes and Cures*. I would say that every Christian who loves the health of their own soul ought to makes sure they read this volume. Lloyd Jones has this to say about this passage,

“I suggest that the main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self...

Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? ... The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul, “Why art thou cast down’ - what business have you to be disquieted? You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself: ‘Hope thou in God’ - instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way. And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, who God is, and what God is, and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. Then having done that, end on this great note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil, and the whole world, and say with this man: ‘I shall yet praise Him for the help of my countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God.’” (D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, 20-21)

That is what we see going on here, isn't it? He is no longer listening to himself and he has begun to preach to himself. That he repeatedly engages in it, as a kind of chorus running through these two psalms ought to remind us that preaching to yourself is far from instantaneous in its effects. We need to keep at it. We will lapse back into dark thoughts and bleak moments, but keep fighting, keep preaching. Take up the refrain, “Why are you cast down, O my soul? Hope in God.”

And look at the heart of this sermon preached from the pulpit of his own heart. He says to himself: “Look to God.” Hope in God. The NKJV translation obscures this somewhat, but the language in verse 5 and again in verse 11 is identical, and the last line of both verses should really read, “hope in God, for I shall praise Him yet, *my Savior and my God.*”

The psalmist preaches the gospel to himself, doesn't he? He does not whisper false promises. He doesn't say that God will make everything okay or cause all our difficulties to dissolve. He says God is my *Savior*. Trust Him. Too often we struggle with spiritual depression because we view *this* world as home, and its comforts as *vital* to our lives. And so when *they* crumble, and *we* fail, we are *devastated*. But the psalmist reminds himself that *God is his savior*, and that, therefore, his hope and faith are to rest in Him. The most important issues in my life are not bound up with finance or relationships or health or reputation, but with whether I am rightly related to my God.

When you can answer *that* question, you will have a solid basis from which to defend yourself against all that assaults of spiritual depression. Is God your Savior, through faith in Jesus Christ? Is He the ground of your hope? Are you right with God? Can you say that Jesus Christ has washed your sin away, cleansed your consciences, robed you with His righteousness? Has His blood atoned for your sin and satisfied God's wrath? Are you right with God? Is He your Savior? Unless that question is settled, you have no real basis for defense against the assaults of spiritual depression. But if Christ is your Lord, if He has saved you from sin and death and hell and you are right with God by faith in Him, then you are safe. You belong to God. His promises will never fail you, and His grace abounds towards you.

The psalmist proclaims the good news to his heart that God is his Savior and his God. He preaches the gospel of free redemption and adoption into God's family by grace through faith in Christ alone.

Some of us continue to struggle with spiritual depression because we have gotten the gospel wrong. The gospel is not come to Jesus and God will straighten out your life. The gospel is not a guarantee that hard times will cease and your passage through life will be easy from here on in. If we preach that gospel, which is no gospel at all from the pulpit of our hearts, there is no wonder we continue to struggle with depression. It is a false basis for hope because it is a false gospel. And if you are hoping in it, when it doesn't deliver, your world will come crashing down.

We need to get the gospel right if we are to fight back against spiritual depression. The good news is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The good news is that God has laid on Christ the iniquity of us all. The good news is that in the fullness of time Jesus Christ was born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those under the law. The good news is that God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. It is that Jesus bore our sin in His body on the tree. It is that in Him we have redemption by His blood, the forgiveness of sin. It is that Jesus Christ saves to the uttermost all who come to God by Him. It is that God has demonstrated His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Get the gospel right. Cling to Christ crucified. Receive the forgiveness of your sins. Take hold of the freely offered pardon purchased at the Cross, and you will find a peace with God and peace from God. You will no longer live for life but for the Lord who gave His life for you.

Others of us continue to struggle with depression because, though we get the gospel, we have not persisted in preaching it with boldness to our souls. We have from time to time found comfort in it. But like clouds parting for a moment to let sunlight through, only to watch them close again like a curtain of grey, our comforts have been fleeting because we have not done what the psalmist does here. We haven't persisted in preaching to ourselves. We need to keep pounding the truth down into our consciences. We must refuse the lies that self screams at us and shout them down with declarations of Gospel truth. We must keep preaching the cross to our hearts. We must say: look at the Crucified Savior and see there the measure of how much you are loved, soul of mine! We must say: look at the cross and remember that none of your sins could repel Him from loving you this much. He saw your rebellious heart, He saw your sin, He saw it all, and He did not hesitate to die to purchase your pardon! He was not repelled by your sin. He loved you despite of it. And His love redeems you from it.

Keep pounding the gospel home until faith takes a hold of it and begins to rest in it. Imitate the best preacher you know and let the winds of free grace blow, till the clouds of spiritual depression are finally chased from the sky of your soul.

The diagnosis is spiritual depression, but the cure is the gospel of free grace.

Amen.