

## Seeking the only comfort!

Dear listeners,

It's great to have you tuned in to another episode of the Voice of the Church. I pray that what you hear will be a blessing to you. We have been looking at passages of Scripture that help us understand what kind of perspective we should have on life. This message calls us to have an upward orientation when feeling down.

It's no secret that more than ever before people are plagued with anxiety and depression. Certain times of the year can be particularly difficult for housebound seniors, the shut in and those who suffer from what is called Seasonal Affective Disorder. Traumatic events and sudden changes can cause one to feel melancholy and sad. Maybe you have had times where you found yourself unexplainably sad with tears running down your face. Dragged down mentally and emotionally you have no physical get-up and go to do the very things you know are good for you. Perhaps you tried going to church and hoping to find answers and relief. Maybe you "tried Jesus" but after being on an emotional high for some time found yourself back where you were beforehand.

Anyone who struggles with depression knows firsthand how it does a number on you mentally, physically, emotionally and even spiritually. It changes how you think, affects your perceptions and memory. You wake up in the morning with a dark, heavy cloud hanging over you. Depression loves to get a stranglehold on your life, killing your joy, comfort and hope. It tends to play with your mind and highlight your mistakes. Those struggles do not go away the moment you become a Christian.

The Bible is not silent on the subject of depression. In this short time that I have with you the radio listener I will be referring to one Psalm that encourages us to look up to God when downcast and to hope in him. Psalm 42 reads as follows:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me -- a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Psalm 42 states very specifically the reason why the psalmist is downcast. There used to be a day that he would gladly attend the worship services. He recalls how he accompanied the multitude that made their way to the house of God, how he led the procession with songs of thanksgiving. He was a worship leader! But matters changed dramatically. Rather than offer to God a song of praise, he now draws near before him with a lament, deeply troubled and afflicted. Rather than serving the Lord in the temple he cries out to him from afar -- in the extremities of the inheritance. His grief stems from something good that he has lost. He feels like he has been swamped and overwhelmed by life. Verse 7 says, "Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me." The psalmist says, "My life is in chaos! There is no order or structure and I feel empty. I have been hit by a tsunami of troubles." The psalmist is

deeply discouraged because his plans have not been fulfilled. He has to miss out on temple worship and ceremonies that testified God was near his people.

The psalmist's feelings and emotions are agitated and confused but in the end he sees that there is comfort and hope in what he experiences. If you take a close look at Psalm 42 you will notice how it is held together and anchored by two alternating realities that run like interconnecting threads. The first is the question: why are you downcast? The second thread puts things in perspective: the psalmist deliberately reminds himself to hope in God. He knows that, as with everything else, he must respond to his depression in faith by turning his attention outward and upward. For if he was to simply look inward and analyze what he was feeling he'd get even more stuck in his depression.

The psalmist turns his focus upward, seeking strength for his heart in the Lord and this is where he finds it! A new perspective is born in the pain of his depression. He says "By day the Lord directs his love and at night His song is with me!" Even though he cannot do the things he would like to do, even though he cannot stand in the temple and lead the people in song and worship, he knows of the presence of the Lord. God will hold him in the hollow of his hand. Isn't that comforting? Depression cannot separate me from God's love in Jesus Christ. Although I may feel very alone I am not alone. The Lord holds me in his providential hand and gives me hope. God goes with me not only when I walk high but also when I am bent low.

Repeatedly the psalmist needs to climb out of the valleys of sadness to proceed to the heights of God's faithfulness. Recalling how God is ever faithful does not mean all problems and struggles disappear and all our questions are answered. Coming through the valleys can be a bitter and life-long struggle for many children of God. They will have times when they will cry out "why?" In Psalm 42:9 we read "I say to God, my rock: 'Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?'" The question "why" is often asked by those who in faith wrestle with the manner in which the Lord is directing their lives. And the reason we ask "why?" isn't to get an explanation but to continue living by faith.

At the close of Psalm 42 the psalmist climbs the mountain of expectation and hope. He struggled and wrestled prayerfully. He let out the darkness and melancholy of his heart so that now the rays of sunshine and hope begin to brighten his life. The peace of God, of knowing Jesus is coming to heal the sorrows of his heart, settles him down. Hoping in God and his promise of salvation changes his disposition. Knowing that God will grant him full salvation in Christ allows him to sing. "I shall yet praise Him" he says. The psalmist has an inner determination to praise God! Yes, out of the depths the psalmist rejoices in the Lord, his help and Saviour. He knows that, if not today, then tomorrow or sometime in the future, he will praise the name of the Lord. This is what you may know too!

Although depression may not stem from a lack of faith the answer to depression and being downcast is found in the Lord. Your emotions may swing back and forth like a pendulum from despair to hope. But the bottom line is ever and again your hope and confidence in the Lord. So when you are feeling down, for a day or for a long time, look up to God in faith. Live in the certainty that your distress and depression will not last forever. For then you will one day praise God perfectly and you will say with awe and reverence, "He is my Saviour and my God!"