

FBC POWELL, 4-9-17 AM NOTES
"FROM DESPAIR TO JOY"
PSALM 42:1 – 43:5
10 in Series, "Psalms: Medicine for the Soul"

Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is...joy..."

Joy—gladness of heart that flows out of God's grace

Numbers 11:14-15 "I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness."

1 Kings 19:4 "But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.'"

"[I was struck] with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same, can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair. I presently lost all relish for those studies, to which before I had been so closely attached...I had need of something more salutary than amusement, but I had no one to direct me where to find it."
—William Cowper

*There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged, beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.*

*E'er since by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.*

—William Cowper

I. The Focus That Results in Despair

A. Despair Is Often the Result of a Self Focus

Disappointment or Problem + Anger + Self Pity = Depression

"Depression is an internal temper tantrum."

—Dr. Charles Solomon

"I have never met a person who suffered from depression who did not have some underlying anger...Depression virtually always has repressed anger at its base."
—Les Carter

B. Despair Is Often the Result of a Backward Focus

C. Despair Is Often the Result of a “Why” Focus

“It is not wrong to ask God questions, but it is wrong to question God”

—Warren Weirsbe

II. The Focus That Results in Restored Joy

A. Restored Joy Waits for a God Focus

Psalms 42:1-2 (HCSB) “As a deer longs for streams of water, so I long for You, God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and appear before God?”

B. Restored Joy Waits for a Future Focus

Biblical hope is the joyful confident assurance that God in His time will fulfill everything He has promised.

Genesis 18:25b “...Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

Isaiah 50:10-11 “Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with firebrands, walk in the light of your fire and among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand: You will lie down in torment. Look in hope to God for His light and don’t light your own fire.”

C. Restored Joy Waits for a Faith Focus

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

“Lovingkindness” is a translation of a Hebrew word that is a combination of God’s mercy, grace and love.

Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV) “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

Chapter 10: From Despair to Joy

Psalm 42:1 – 43:5

The Hebrew word translated “despair” (NASB) is translated “cast down” in the ESV, NKJV and KJV; it is translated “downcast” in the NIV, but my favorite translation is in the HCSB – “why am I so depressed?”

In this message, I will use depressed, cast down, and despair, interchangeably. If I asked those who are cast down, in despair, or depressed to raise their hands and everybody was completely honest, I suspect that there would be many hands that would be raised. The opposite of despair, being cast down, and depression is joy. Joy, true joy is what the world is longing for, though they are not always aware that it is joy they seek. Here is a very, very important truth. Joy, supernatural joy that is not squelched by pain or vanquished by hardship and disappointment is something that can only be produced by the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22 says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is ... joy...”

What is joy? It is gladness of heart that flows out of God’s grace. God has a monopoly on joy. True joy comes from Him, through the Holy Spirit, as a gift of His grace. If you are struggling today with despair, I can tell you that some of the godliest people in the Bible, in Christian history, and even leaders of nations are fellow strugglers. I think of Moses who cried out in Numbers 11:14-15: “I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness.” Someone said that Moses discovered that you don’t have to be a cannibal to be fed up with people. Moses was in despair. One of the bravest men in Scripture was Elijah. Even Elijah cried out in 1 Kings 19:4: “But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.”

In Christian history, the godly missionary to the American Indians, David Brainerd, struggled often with discouragement and depression. Perhaps the greatest preacher who ever lived since Biblical times – Charles Haddon Spurgeon – suffered often from discouragement and even depression. Great leaders like Abraham Lincoln often suffered bouts of depression, as did Winston Churchill who said that depression followed him like a black dog.

One of the worst cases in church history was a man that you may not recognize his name but you will recognize his work. His name was William Cowper (pronounced “Cooper”). He was born in 1731 and died in 1800. Cowper attempted suicide three times, and was for a time in an “insane asylum.” You can read about his tortured life in John Piper’s book entitled *The Hidden Smile of God*. Cowper described his “cast down soul” like this:

[I was struck] with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same, can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair. I presently lost all relish for those studies, to which before I had been so closely attached ... I had need of something more salutary than amusement, but I had no one to direct me where to find it.

[John Piper, *The Hidden Smile of God*, page 86-87]

Yet, in spite of these problems, God mightily used Cowper to write poems that were turned in to songs that have blessed Christians for over 200 years. He is best known for this work:

*There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emanuel’s veins;*

*And sinners plunged, beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.*

While you may have never experienced anything so deep and so lengthy as William Cowper, all of us have had a taste of despair or a *cast down soul*.

These Psalms give us insight into what often causes it and how to deal with it. We will not be looking at this Psalm in an orderly verse by verse manner, but topically.

I. The Focus That Results in Despair

At the surface level, there is no end to the causes of a despairing soul. People lose their jobs, spouses leave after finding someone else, loved ones die, people get cancer and heart disease, children rebel, friends betray us, etc., etc. Pain and heartache over things like these are a part of being human and living in a fallen world. Being a Christian doesn't exempt you from these painful heartbreaking experiences. Know this, there are many who go through these heartaches and pain who do not have cast down souls. The causes of a cast down, despairing soul are more than the common heartaches of living on a fallen planet. From these Psalms, we can learn at least three causes of a despairing soul.

A. Despair Is Often the Result of a Self-Focus

Psalm 42 and 43 contain at least fifty personal pronouns. In one translation, the word "I" is used fourteen times, the word "me" is used sixteen times, and "my" is used twenty times. That gives us a hint as to why the Psalmist had a cast down soul. If you will think about it, most of the times you have found yourself with a despairing soul, it was preceded by a focus on self. It may have been the way someone treated you, your expectations not being met, having been rejected, or disappointed. The Psalmist had experienced disappointment (42:4). His plans had not been fulfilled. The gathering with God's people for corporate worship that he enjoyed was now impossible. Tim LaHaye wrote a book on depression thirty or forty years ago, and in that book, he gave a formula as to how depression typically makes its way into our life: Disappointment or Problem + Anger + Self-Pity = Depression. I would broaden that formula to include discouragement or a cast down despairing soul.

Think about that formula for a minute. There is a total focus on self and my rights. It assumes that I have a right to have my expectations met; I have a right to be angry because I didn't get my way; I have a right to feel sorry for myself because my expectations were not met. As I analyze my bouts of discouragement and a cast down soul, I wish I could blame a chemical imbalance or some other physical problem in the brain, but when I get open before the Lord, I find that the cause was almost always self-centeredness.

In addition, there is self-pity (42:3). There is not only self-pity here, he also seems to be a little miffed at God. To paraphrase, "Others can't see You in my life and they ask where You are since You have allowed this painful disappointing circumstance."

We see the same thing in Psalm 42:10 This anger, whether it is directed at God or others, pushes us down the path to a cast down soul. My friend Dr. Charles Solomon calls depression, "an internal temper tantrum."

One well known Christian psychologist said, "I have never met a person who suffered from depression who did not have some underlying anger... Depression virtually always has repressed anger at its base." [Les Carter, *Mind Over Emotions*, page 41]

Anger often has at its roots our rights (or perceived rights) being violated. I wish I could communicate clearly to you how devastating anger over disappointment, self-pity, and violated rights can be. This anger over our rights being violated (self-focus) **will** lead to a cast down soul!

B. Despair Is Often the Result of a Backward Focus

Of course, all looking at the past is not hurtful. When we see God at work in the past, it gives us hope for the future. What is dangerous is when we look into the past and see happy things that are no longer possible, or failures and missed opportunities that cannot be changed. It is that dangerous kind of looking at the past that the Psalmist was doing in Psalm 42:4. He is contrasting the happy times of the past with the exile he is now experiencing and his soul becomes cast down. Remember that “the good old days” were never quite as good as we remember them being. Whether our focus is on some joyous experience that we are no longer experiencing, some sin that we have repented of but have not embraced God’s forgiveness, some devastating pain, or some wrong done to us, the result will be despair, a cast down soul, or depression.

C. Despair Is often the Result of a “Why” Focus

There are at least thirteen questions that are asked in Psalm 42 & 43 Here are two examples: Psalm 42:9 and Psalm 43:2. The Psalmist asks “Why” ten times. He wants his plans fulfilled, his feelings improved, and his questions answered. “It is not wrong to ask God questions, but it is wrong to question God.” [Warren Weirsbe, *Meet Yourself in the Psalms*, page 73]

It is not only acceptable, it is essential, to ask God what He desires to do in your life while walking through the dark valley you’re walking through. It is wrong to become angry with God, rail at Him, and demand that He explain why He has allowed what He has allowed. We are not to live on explanations; we are to live on faith in His promises. Stop demanding explanations; God desires that you trust Him even when you don’t understand the *why*.

II. The Focus That Results in Restored Joy

You cannot avoid the pain of living in a fallen world, but you do not have to experience a cast down, despairing soul while going through the painful times. What do you do to overcome a cast down soul? Better yet, what do you do to avoid a cast down despairing soul while going through painful times?

A. Restored Joy Waits for a God Focus

The psalmist recognizes his problem of a self-focus, a backward focus, and a “why” focus. Restored joy starts with confessing your lack of Holy Spirit provided joy. If someone shoots himself in the leg, there are two courses of action he could take. He could sit down and ponder the fact that he has been shot, get on his smart phone and google books on gun safety and how to avoid shooting yourself in the leg, or he could say, “I’ve been shot; get me to the hospital.” When you are depressed, admit it to yourself and confess it to God.

The Psalmist begins this Psalm by setting his focus on God. He says in Psalms 42:1-2 (HCSB): “As a deer longs for streams of water, so I long for You, God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I come and appear before God?” He is not just flippantly saying, “Lord, it would be nice if you could help me in my cast down condition.” He is desperate for God. He uses the analogy of a deer probably being chased by dogs. The deer is panting, and heaving, and desperate for a drink. When you are cast down, living in despair without joy, repent of the anger and the self-pity, and seek diligently after God. Let’s get really practical. How do we reconnect with God after our soul in cast down? How do we pursue Him? Primarily we pursue Him through prayer and especially prayer that focuses on praise. Look at Psalm 43:4a. When your soul is cast down, admit your condition, and then pursue God through praise that is focused on His attributes. Don’t

misunderstand; I am not treating praise as a therapeutic tool to help you get over a cast down soul. You praise Him because He is worthy of praise. You praise Him because it is right, whether you feel better or not. You praise Him because that is what you were created to do! The fact is that if your praise comes from a repentant heart, it will take your focus off yourself and the cast down soul will rise up! As I praise Him, especially focusing on His sovereignty, I begin to realize that my painful times have not taken Him by surprise. He has a plan to use the pain in conforming me to the image of Christ. As I praise Him for His grace, I begin to realize that His enabling grace is available to me every time I have a need. As I praise Him for His love, I recognize that He accepts me in Christ – that I am redeemed, forgiven, and set free from sin’s bondage. Genuine praise and a cast down soul cannot co-exist!

B. Restored Joy Waits for a Future Focus

The Psalmist gives his soul a good talking to in Psalm 42:5. Hope always turns our focus to the future. Three times he says, “Hope in God” (42:5, 11; 43:5). Biblical hope is the joyful confident assurance that God, in His time, will fulfill everything He has promised. When we have a cast down soul, it is evidence that we likely are focusing on circumstances instead of what God has promised for our future. In Psalm 43, the Psalmist lists some things he is hoping in.

First, we see that ultimately God will give victory over all enemies (43:1). We trust Him to win the battles. Since God is holy, and just, and right, ultimately justice will prevail. Genesis 18:25b: “... Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”

Second, we are to hope in God’s strength (43:2a). God may not change our circumstances, but he will give us the strength to walk through them. We will see His power and experience His glory. Live in expectancy of His strength.

Third, hope in God’s leading (43:3). He has promised us light and wisdom to guide us when our way looks uncertain and dangerous. I would encourage you not to make a decision when your soul is cast down. Wait on the Lord, wait until He lifts the cloud, and then trust Him for the light to make the decision He desires. Decisions made in the dark valleys of life don’t have the Lord’s light and they’re usually the wrong decision. Wait for the light. The Prophet Isaiah said this in Isaiah 50:10-11:

Who is among you that fears the Lord, that obeys the voice of His servant, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who encircle yourselves with firebrands, walk in the light of your fire and among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand: You will lie down in torment.

Look in hope to God for His light and don’t light your own fire.

Fourth, hope brings God’s joy (43:4a). When I see the future, in light of His provision and sovereignty, I can have joy in an unpleasant present. I know that nothing will happen outside His sovereign causing or allowing. I don’t have to worry because I know how it is all going to turn out. Whatever happens between now and when things *turn out*, I know that I have his sufficient grace to enable me and strengthen me.

All depression, despair, and discouragement have an element of hopelessness in them. We come out of the cast down soul when our hope is in the Lord. We hope in His victory; we hope in His strength; we hope in His guidance; and we hope in His provision which restores our joy in the present. The future is as bright as the promises of God; hope in him!

C. Restored Joy Waits for a Faith Focus

Faith is simply resting in our hope – what God has promised. Hebrews 11:1: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Faith brings those promises for the future into the here and now and gives them substance – stands on them. It takes title deed to the promises and rests in God. That is why we do not have to be consumed with the “why” questions. We are trusting and resting in His promises. There is one primary promise the Psalmist is resting on (42:8). “His lovingkindness” is a translation of a Hebrew word that is a combination of God’s mercy, grace, and love. As he goes through the day, he will experience nothing that God’s love has not allowed and that His grace is not sufficient for. The last part of the verse 8 is likely referring to Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV): “The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”

Conclusion

We have so many more specific promises to hope in than did the Psalmist since we have received the fullness of God’s revelation. When God allows us to go through trials and painful circumstances, the important thing is not that we get out of them, but *what* we get out of them while we are in them. Hope in God, not in a change of circumstances.