

How Psalms Can Help Those Struggling With Depression

Psalms 42 and 43 actually constitute a single song dealing with depression. Psalm 43 forms the third stanza, closing with identical language used at the end of stanzas 1 and 2. (See Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5.)

J.B. Priestly wrote concerning **despair**: “You go on for years and years building up a position for yourself until at last you have a place of your own. Then in less than 6 months, without you having any hand or say in it, it is all suddenly taken from you. What was the good of trams going up and down the city road? What was the good of having a city road at all with shops opening and policemen keeping the traffic right? What was the good of paying taxes and going round to doctors and dentists and reading newspapers and voting, if this is what can happen any minute ... ? What was the good of it all?”

Indeed a dominant mood within depression is the feeling of hopelessness. Nothing seems worthwhile. **Life is not worth living.**

Admitting Emotional Pain

For the Spirit-filled believer, such thoughts are especially burdensome because we know one fruit of the Spirit is joy. Added to depression, therefore, is **guilt** for having it.

I find helpful the example of Jesus. On the very same evening He assures the disciples of His joy remaining in them (John 15:11), He discloses His own deep sorrow.

Jesus could have kept His burden to himself and not been **vulnerable**.

But instead He gathered His three most trusted disciples

around him and “began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,’ he said to them. ‘Stay here and keep watch’” (Mark 14:33-34, NIV).

The same Lord who promised us the infilling and empowerment of the Spirit, with all their consequent **joy**, also tells us: “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33).

Psalms 42 and 43 show us we are not abnormal or out of His will when we hurt with emotional pain—rather, we are to take these psalms and speak to ourselves and one another with them. (See Ephesians 5:19-20.)

Feeling Rejected

In lament or woeful psalms, three root causes may be blamed for painful feelings: self, others or God. Yes, sometimes, like the psalm writers, we falsely even blame God for our problems; and He is magnanimous enough to hear our gripes against Him even though He would never bring us harm. In Psalms 42 and 43, the blame against self is absent.

The depression dealt with in Psalm 43 arises out of a real **rejection** from others and a perceived rejection by God Himself (vv. 1-2).

Injury from others may arise either from neglect or intention. A person who deliberately wounds us leaves a far more hurtful sting than someone who brings us harm simply because he or she was careless.

Physical wounds heal more quickly than **emotional** ones—and it’s obvious from Psalms 42 and 43 that the trauma to the psalmist by “deceitful and wicked men,” persons who “oppressed” him, had been unrelenting over a substantial duration. This brought dryness of soul (42:2), tears (42:3), loneliness (42:4) and personal suffering (42:10).

The turning against him by others results in the psalmist's falling into the trap of even doubting God's loyalty by assuming God has rejected him as well. (See Psalm 43:2.)

Never Alone

However, the psalmist never gives up on God, which is the key to spiritual recovery from depression. He still asks the Lord to help him: "Vindicate me, O God. ... Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell" (vv. 1, 3). He promises the Lord that, if he gets back "home," he will exuberantly praise God with emotion and instrument (v. 4).

At the contemplation of a successful resolution to a long-term problem, the sons of Korah revisit for a final time the question posed in soliloquy: "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?" (v. 5).

Will you make the psalmist's answer to depression your own? "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."

You may have more than three stanzas in your own song of **depression**—but as with Psalms 42 and 43, there will be at some point a final word. Let that final word not be one of despair or abandonment. Keep going until the Holy Spirit has helped you resolve your despair with hope and trust in the Lord.

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