

The Dangers of Self-Pity

Overwhelmed and undone, Job cried, “Have pity upon me, O ye my friends” (Job 19:21). His present **problems** were twofold: his awesome **troubles** and awful **self-pity**. Let’s give some thought to the latter.

An unhealthy, obsessive **sorrow** for oneself arising from a selfish viewpoint of one’s troubles, self-pity afflicts us all. Whenever it arises, **anger**, **unthankfulness**, and **unmercifulness** are also present. We’re inwardly angry because of unfair treatment, real or imagined, from people—and God, who, in our view, isn’t helping us sufficiently!

We’re unthankful because we’re failing to appreciate our past and present **blessings**. We’re merciless because we’re ignoring or minimizing others’ sufferings which equal or surpass ours. For the moment we see no one but ourselves and nothing but our troubles. There’s nothing innocent or benign about self-pity.

It isn’t a natural transition, unavoidable letdown, or harmless passing mood. It’s satanic! When Jesus announced He was going to the cross, Peter responded, “Be it far from thee, Lord” (Matt. 16:22). By suggesting Jesus reject His divinely chosen hardship, Peter was urging Him to pity Himself: “Be kind to thyself, Sir” (YLT); or, “Spare thyself” (Gill’s Exposition); or, “Pity thyself” (KJV translators’ notes). Jesus’ response exposed the real spirit behind Peter’s suggestion: “Get thee behind me Satan!” (16:23). Let’s learn more.

Self-pity arises as a faulty reaction to **adversity—offenses**, injustices, indignities, injuries, or crosses which come because we’re doing God’s will or obeying or ministering His Word. It may also be triggered by **disappointment** over unrealized hopes; sinful attitudes, such as envy (1 Sam. 22:8); severe or prolonged sicknesses, as Job’s; God’s

correction; poverty; bereavement; or other hardships or losses.

Self-pity resides in our sin nature, which the Bible refers to as our “old man” (Rom. 6:6) or “flesh” (8:12). It’s one of the attitudes, or fixed patterns of thinking, that make up our unrenewed, unspiritual “carnal mind” (8:7).

Self-pity captivates us when we fail to recognize and “cast down” our self-sympathizing thoughts (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Or it may be suggested through the overly sympathetic words of friends, family, or fellow Christians who, though they mean well, lack a spiritual (biblical) viewpoint toward our problems (Acts 21:12).

Self-pity’s effects are powerful. It traps us in a revolving door of spiritual stagnation that keeps us from finishing the race set before us. It renders us weak and unfaithful in duty and encourages self-indulgence (excessive self-comfort). It moves us to slander our adversaries. It distorts our view of others, events, and ourselves.

Ultimately, it destroys us. It also stumbles our companions by causing them to misjudge and condemn those we complain about, and question God for seeming to neglect us. Highly contagious, it infects them. After talking with us, they lose their positive outlook and start pitying themselves!

Many overcome self-pity and finish their courses.

The apostle John rose above his lonely exile and received rich spiritual rewards: a vision of Jesus, an open door in heaven, and a “Revelation” like no other! John the Baptist forsook self-pity in prison and received high praise from Jesus (Luke 7:23, 24-28). In her widowhood Ruth threw off self-pity and God tossed rich blessings her way: a husband, home, child, and honorable family line. But others succumb.

King Saul indulged his self-pity until his soul was barren,

his spiritual walk halted, his anointing lost, and his destiny aborted. We must eliminate, not indulge, self-pity.

We remove self-pity by:

- Confessing our self-pity to God (1 John 1:9) and others (James 5:16)
- Commanding Satan, “Be gone!”
- Believing we can do “all things,” including mastering self-pity, “through Christ” (Phil. 4:13)
- Developing a spiritual mind by seeing our troubles through the wide viewfinder of Scripture, not the narrow spyglass of self-sympathy
- Accepting all difficulties come from our Father’s hand for “good” (Rom. 8:28)
- Thanking and praising God in our adversities, and for them, since only by mastering them can we become like Jesus
- Rising to minister to others’ needs, which breaks the chains of selfishness and frees us to live and serve joyfully
- Looking around us and considering how others are suffering as bad as we are, or worse!

If persisted in, these simple measures will eliminate self-pity and make us the rarest of wonders, overcomers—mature Christians who, no matter what happens to them, are able to continue walking closely with Jesus, worshiping Him, faithfully serving others, and giving thanks for what they have. If we don’t eliminate self-pity, it will eliminate our usefulness to God. So examine yourself.

Are you pitying yourself over anything present? Past? About to happen? If so, ponder and practice these few thoughts on self-pity.

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