When depression blankets you like a cloud – causes and cures of spiritual depression
Psalm 42

Introduction

Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the nineteenth century who started to preach at the age of 16 in a small Baptist chapel just up the road from where we live now, was well-known for his sparkling wit and his humour. But he also had a lifetime battle with depression. It was one of the reasons for his early death at the age of 58.

Depression is very common in England today. Doctors' surgeries are very familiar with the tears and sighs and stories of woe and broken hearts. The only source of company for many people is the television. But this is probably a cause of spiritual depression to which you and I may be susceptible.

Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones, in his book spiritual depression, said, **"The people who stand out most gloriously in the history of the church were introverts. Some of the greatest saints were introverted".**

But the most common causes of depression may be physical causes or temperament rather than just spiritual depression. We are spirit, soul and body and all three are bound together. Many people, including some believers, are seriously depressed because they have real problems of the spirit. Sin gets us down terribly. Guilt immobilises some people. Then there is the considerable power of Satan often leading to severe depression. Doctors can help with physical problems and psychologists can help with emotional problems but only **we** can help with spiritual problems!

So many people fear death and what happens next and they know nothing of the offer of the "bundle" of salvation – forgiveness, justification, hope, eternal life, heaven in the future and in the present joy, peace and reassurance because we have a Father God who loves us and will provide all we need. He is ever present with us by the gift of His Holy Spirit.

David's depression (v. 5)

Several great men in the Bible got depressed:

- **John the Baptist** got depressed, quite understandably, when he lay in his cell facing death and wondering if his ministry was a waste and asking himself what the Messiah was doing.
- **Jeremiah** wept many, many tears over the destruction of Jerusalem and as his own circumstances went from bad to worse.
- **Job** scratched himself with a bit of broken pottery and listened to his friends give their useless advice.
- **Elijah** fell into a deep depression after his victory on Mount Carmel and his 20+ mile race running in front of the chariot.

The Lord Jesus referred to these verses when He said. ***"Now is my soul troubled"*** (Jn. 12:27) and ***"My soul is very sorrowful"*** (Mk. 14:34).

So here we see David experiencing depression. He describes how he felt and what he did about it. At this point in David's amazing career from shepherd boy to being king he had been deprived of many things including regular attendance at worship. The question "why?" occurs 10 times in this Psalm. It appears that he was **dependent** on being with many other believers. He remembered when, ***"I would go out with the throng … with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival"*** (v. 4). This is similar to English Christians enjoying "Keswick", "Spring Harvest" or "New Wine". Places and

people have often played a big part in our experience of the Lord. But there was nothing like this where he was and so, with desperation in his voice, he says, ***"As a dear pants for flowing streams, so my soul pants for you, O God!"*** (v. 1) and this is right, for God, ***"Satisfies him who is thirsty and the hungry He fills with good things"***. (Ps. 107:9)

David fell into self-pity and felt himself forgotten.

Other people hadn't helped David much. Some of them took the opportunity to sneer at him, ***"As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me while they say continually, 'Where is your God?' "*** (v. 10)

It is bad enough feeling out of touch with God, but it is many times worse when other people, and particularly your enemies, notice it and deride you for it. ***"My tears have been my food …."*** (v. 3) David had got into such a severe depression that he was feeding on it. This only leads to deeper depression. There was no relief day or night. God appears to be absent. No one comforts him. There is only the presence of mocking men.

To make it worse, David fixed on his present sorrows – ***"When I remember these things"*** (v. 4). He went over all the dismal disappointments of his life until he couldn't think of anything else. He didn't share with anyone; he just had fading memories of the 'good old days'.

David's circumstances may be different from ours, but the symptoms of this depression are all there: self-pity, brooding, withdrawal, morose reminiscing, introspection etc. These have been the painful lot of all depressed people down through the ages.

Steps to recovery

1. **Admit the truth**

   David didn't only recount his depression; he went into some detail as to how he coped with his feelings. He admitted that he was depressed***, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?"*** (v. 5, 11). There is no evasion on his part. He was depressed, he knew it and he was prepared to admit it.

   Many who are depressed are not prepared to admit that they are in poor shape. The problem is not your circumstances, it is your condition. If you get shot in the leg, you can take a photograph of the wound. You can study books on ballistics and work out where the bullet came from. You can take a course on the psychology of assassins. A much better option is to shout, "I've been shot. Get me to a doctor".

   So step one is admit your condition, "I am depressed".

2. **Bring the Lord into the depression**

   David related his depression to the Lord. Note ***"the Lord"*** in some way or other is mentioned in every verse in this Psalm. Yet David asks a very good and honest question, ***"Why have you forgotten me?"*** (v. 9) David felt forgotten! It is easy to feel this way. When in a very difficult situation, it is not long before I begin to be tempted to question God's faithfulness. At such times it is worth remembering:

   "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Heb. 13:5)

   "I am with you always." (Mt. 28:20)

   And God cannot lie! So we must learn to keep what we **believe** in front of how we feel. This is the only way to live without getting deeply depressed.

3. **Try a little detective work**

Once you have been honest with yourself about your depressed state and you are convinced that you are the Lord's and that He is with you where you are and will never leave you, then it is time to ask yourself some questions. If you are really struggling, this may be difficult, so ask a trusted friend to ask you questions to find out the root causes of your depression the – ***"Why are you cast down, O my soul?"*** (v. 5) Why? Why? Why?

Be very careful as you ask your questions. Don't ask questions like, 'Why did this have to happen to me?" Those kinds of questions only tend to increase self-pity. David's question was, 'Why am I depressed?" This question can lead the depressed person into some deep personal discoveries:

- ✓ It may be the result of resentment. Something has gone wrong and you are angry with the person and angry with God for allowing it to happen. Slowly you have fallen into your own resentful mire.
- ✓ You might feel that as a "worker" you have "a divine right" to immunity from all problems! But we live in a sin distorted world. Read again what happened to the apostles, especially Paul, and the many painful problems they got into by being "workers".

Depressed workers make discoveries of themselves like this only if they are wise enough to investigate their own lives and thoughts. It is possibly easier to wallow in self-pity than to confront the reality that your depression may be a result of a childish resentment or superficial thinking!

4. **Report back to yourself**

You have learned some of the causes of your depression and now is the time to present the facts to yourself. There is a great difference between allowing your depressed state to talk to you and you talking to your depressed state. Do what David did. Give yourself a good talking to! Say to your soul something like, *"Listen to me soul. I have listened to your sighs and moaning long enough. I have had enough of this! You are not solving anything. You have been* ***"cast down"*** *long enough. The turmoil within must stop. My soul and I have decided and this is an order*, ***"Hope in God!"*** (v. 5)

When we start looking at the Lord and all His attributes and His immense abilities instead of all our failings and the situation we find ourselves in, then we will turn the corner. But a definite act of the will is required.

David said to himself:

- ✓ ***"These things I remember"*** (v. 4)
- ✓ ***"Therefore I remember You."*** (v. 5)
- ✓ ***"… For I shall again praise Him."*** (v. 5)
- ✓ ***" …. Therefore I remember You … From the land of Jordan…"*** (v. 11)
- ✓ ***"I say to God, my rock…."*** (v. 9)
- ✓ ***"I shall again praise Him, my Salvation and my God."*** (v. 11)

We all have a will and this has to be put into gear. [We also appear to have a 'won't'!] So put the "I will" into gear to drive out of depression.

So David was determined to remember the Lord, to concentrate on the Lord and to succeed in going forward believing God would enable him to do all that God wanted him to do.

We must learn to do this as well in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. Don't bottle up your worries so they lead you into depression. Make up your mind to "say to God" what is on your heart. Say it aloud if necessary. This is not because God is hard of hearing, but because it is good for you to listen to what you expect Him to listen to!

The word **praise** seems out of place in a discussion about depression. But David says, ***"I shall again praise Him, my Salvation and my God."*** (v. 5, 11). There is probably no better cure for depression than praise. It's not an evasion of truth and it's not an escape into unreality. No! It is an intelligent concentration of the mind on our Lord so that our heart is warmed as the mind thinks of all His characteristics and remembers all His faithfulness to us in the past.

So the cure for depression is neither to look at our grief, nor to look back to our past or around at our problems. We must look away from ourselves and up to the Living God. He is our help and our God and if we trust Him now, we shall soon have cause to praise Him again.

So think hard – don't mope.

Meditation is often associated with the mystical activities of Maharishis who prescribe repeated sounds like "om". David focused his thoughts on God. He speaks of the, ***"God of my life"*** (v. 8) and if God is the God of my life, then He is God enough to be God in all things that depress me!

David then goes on to speak about, ***"God my rock"*** (v. 9). When you are depressed and you have an awful sinking feeling, what could be better than to know that there is a rock beneath you on which you can stand with confidence? He can bear your weight. He will not shift His position.

"Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God." (v. 11) The Lord can make all the difference in our lives. He can so fill your thoughts that you forget your woes and begin to praise Him and rejoice in Him. [This was certainly Jonah's experience – see Jonah 2:3, 9]

Some commentators think Psalm 43 is a continuation of Psalm 42, for the theme of depression and its antidote are certainly found in both.

God <u>my</u> refuge (43:2)

God <u>my</u> exceeding joy (43:4)

God <u>my</u> God (43:4)

David was no longer filled with the poison of self-pity. His thoughts were filled with what is absolutely true. He focused on God who is unsinkable and whose goodness is immeasurable.

So the next time you sink into spiritual depression because of lost hope, lost confidence or lost trust, here is what to do:

- Examine the causes of depression.
- Remind your will of the need to act positively.
- Channel your mind into thoughts of God.
- Say to yourself ***"Hope in God"***.

Get your trust where it belongs and God will move your depression to where it belongs – in the depths of the oceans.

Is God your "exceeding joy"?