

**SOUL RESET:  
When Depression Hits**

**Psalm 42**

*Even from the depths, we can reset our soul.*

A sermon preached by  
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Fort Smith, Arkansas  
March 3, 2020

For me, the king of all comic strips is still *Peanuts* by the late Charles Schulz. I'm glad the newspapers still run some of the old strips, at least on Sundays. Charlie Brown, Lucy, Linus, Snoopy and the gang were part of my childhood and have remained cherished companions along life's journey.

Much of the humor in *Peanuts* grew out of the feelings of inadequacy and sadness that Charles Schulz himself felt. Those usually came out in the feelings expressed by Charlie Brown. In one of his most famous comic strips, Linus says to Charlie Brown, "You look kind of depressed, Charlie Brown."

Charlie admits, "I worry about school." Then he says, "I also worry about my worrying about school." Then he and Linus sit, and Charlie Brown sighs, "Even my anxieties have anxieties."<sup>1</sup>

Nobody alive today is a stranger to anxiety, stress, worry, depression, or fear. It's probably always been this way, but it is for sure this way now. If we let those forces of negativity control our thoughts and emotions, we may find ourselves needing a "soul reset." That's what we are talking about this Lent: resetting your soul, getting back on track spiritually, defeating the negative forces, becoming all that God intends for us to be, and grasping the abundant life that Jesus came to give us.

Roy Beth, DeeDee and I are using a book for this sermon series called *Soul Reset* by Dr. Junius Dotson, now the head of Discipleship Ministries for the United Methodist Church. Last week we talked about burnout, and this week Dr. Dotson shares how he had to overcome depression in order to reset his soul.

Dotson was a highly successful United Methodist pastor. He started a church in California that grew into a large, multi-ethnic ministry. He was pouring himself into his church. But while everything on the outside looked wildly successful, Junius Dotson was crumbling on the inside. He began experiencing sudden bouts of uncontrolled crying when he was alone. Then one Monday morning, after a busy Sunday, Dotson could not get out of bed. It was physically impossible to move. He stayed that way all day Monday, then Tuesday, then Wednesday, unable to do any of his normal activities. On Thursday, he called his wife home from work and finally admitted that he had just hit a wall emotionally.

They found a psychologist who would see him immediately, and she diagnosed Junius with an emotional breakdown. He was suffering from clinical depression. In the days and weeks to come, Junius remembered episodes of depression stretching back to his teenage years. He finally saw his need and sought out help and began a reset on the depression in his life.<sup>2</sup>

Make no mistake about it, depression is a real thing. It's not just something you can snap out of. It's not just laziness. It's a real mental health issue. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that 17 million American adults have had at least one major episode of depression, which is defined as at least a two-week-long

emotional state which impairs normal functions like eating, sleeping, working and hygiene. That's about 7% of all adults, slightly more females than males. Among adolescents, the frequency of depression is almost twice as high—13%, again a little more weighted toward the girls. Of those who experienced depression, two-thirds experienced severe impairment of their lives.<sup>3</sup>

Depression is more than temporary sadness; we all have a bad day occasionally. Normal grief after losing a loved one is not considered depression. But there are some situations that can cause depression. Women often experience depression either before or after having a baby; this is perinatal depression. Some people get depressed during the winter; this is called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) and is caused by lack of sunlight. Chronic diseases or health conditions—cancer, Parkinson's, ALS, MS—can cause a health-related depression.

But some forms of depression are not related to any external situation. It just hits you out of nowhere. Psychologists say there are different factors—genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological—that can bring on a clinical depression.

Depression exhibits several pretty clear symptoms:

- Persistent sad or anxious mood.
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism, guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Decreased energy, fatigue, inability to concentrate
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Change in appetite or loss of weight.
- Suicidal thoughts
- Aches, pains, or digestive problems with no apparent cause.
- Need for self-medication with alcohol or drugs.<sup>4</sup>

These don't always all show up together, and the fact that you have one or more for a short period is not necessarily conclusive of depression. But if these things are happening to you on a regular basis, you probably need to see a health professional.

If you feel like you're depressed, there are some things that you can do to help yourself:

- Stay active physically; exercise.
- Break up your tasks into simple chores.
- Spend time with family and friends, not alone.
- Avoid self-medicating with alcohol or drugs.
- Call a crisis line. (I put one in the bulletin.)

If you don't personally suffer from depression, that's great. But somebody you know does, and here are some ways you might be of help to them:

- Be supportive and encouraging, patient and understanding.
- Listen well and long.

- Don't ignore suicidal comments.
- Help a depressed person increase their physical activity.
- Encourage them to see a health professional if they have symptoms.
- Be hopeful. Remind them that with proper treatment, depression will eventually subside.

There are two main therapies for clinical depression. One is medication. There are anti-depressants that are very effective and safe for the treatment of the disease. Don't think that taking medication for an illness is wrong or a bad thing to do. You wouldn't hesitate to take drugs for strep throat. Clinical depression is just as much a disease as anything bacterial or viral.

The second and most prevalent therapy is counselling or psychotherapy, sometimes called talk therapy. Depression is usually helped by talking about it with someone who is trained to respond. Again, some people still have a stigma against seeing a counselor or therapist. But I can tell you from personal and pastoral experience, a good counselor can do wonders to help you cope with whatever struggle you are having.

The resources of talk therapy and medication are gifts of God that can help us overcome depression. But our faith also can bring some resources to the table. A study by Rush University Medical Center in Chicago found that “belief in a concerned God can improve response to medical treatment” in patients diagnosed with clinical depression. The researchers compared the depth of depression with the sense of “religious well-being” of 136 clinically depressed adults. And they found that people with a strong faith were 75% more likely to experience improvement in their depression and a sense of hope for the future.<sup>5</sup> The important thing was faith in a God who cares for us—anybody believe that? Believing that God cares about you is the first step toward overcoming depression.

Although people in Bible times had no conception of clinical depression or mental illness, you can see evidence of depression throughout Scripture. Read the stories of Moses, Elijah, Ahab, Saul, David, Jeremiah, or Jonah, and you will see instances where they were incapacitated by their emotions, or they despaired of their life and wanted to die.<sup>6</sup>

The Psalms have several chapters of lament, in which the writer pours out his soul to God in sadness and despair. Our Scripture text today is a perfect example of what Dotson calls “spiritual dehydration.” “*As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.*”<sup>7</sup> The dryness of the desert was familiar to everyone who worshipped in the Temple, and sometimes it is a perfect description of the state of our soul—spiritual dehydration.

You can feel the anguish in the words the Psalmist sings, *“My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’ ...Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? ...My soul is cast down within me; all your waves and your billows have gone over me. ... I say to God, my rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me? Why must I walk about mournfully because the enemy oppresses me?’ As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’”*<sup>8</sup> Pretty depressing stuff, right?

So how does the Psalmist find hope? We’ve got to get from depression to hope somehow. Swiss theologian Emil Brunner said, “What oxygen is to the lungs, such is hope to the meaning of life.”<sup>9</sup> So the Psalmist sings, *“Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”*<sup>10</sup> Twice he sings that! How does he get there?

First is remembrance. He remembers good times from the past. Good memories fill our hearts with joy and peace. The Psalm says, *“These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival.”*<sup>11</sup> I remember how we used to have church! I remember times when I felt so close to God! When we practice the remembrance of God—all those close personal experiences of faith—it gives us hope that the trouble of today will soon fade away. We can have hope for tomorrow.

The Psalmist also finds hope in prayer: *“By day the Lord commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.”*<sup>12</sup> One way to help prevent depression, to cope with depression, or to have hope beyond depression is to spend time with God. We can pour out our heart to God. We can lift up concerns for others to God. We can just be still and listen for God. Prayer is like talk therapy with the greatest Counselor of all—the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we can regain our attitude of hope through praise. This is the refrain of Psalm 42 and 43, apparently the same Psalm split apart in the editing of the book: *“Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”*<sup>13</sup> The New International Version translates this verse, *“Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”*<sup>14</sup>

Junius Dotson latches on to this word “yet,” and says that it is “yet” that defines our attitude toward the struggles in life. He writes, “My favorite thing about this psalm is his ‘yet praise.’ He shifts from despair to praise, as if to say, ‘Even here in the pit of depression and desolation, yet will I praise the God who is good and faithful no matter what I’m facing.’ I’ve learned to have a ‘yet praise’ mentality when I feel depression setting in.”<sup>15</sup>

The “yet praise” mentality is an attitude of worship that permeates, that spreads throughout the experiences of life, like you’re living in the presence of almighty God, because you know what? You are! Dotson goes on to say, “Being in God’s presence is the emotional lifter, but being in God’s presence doesn’t just happen at church. When you are feeling overwhelmed by financial pressure, it’s time to worship. When you are feeling like a failure after a broken relationship, it’s time to worship. When life is crushing in on you, it’s time to worship. When you’re surrounded by a set of circumstances that threatens your faith, it’s time to worship. Worship is a lifestyle that reminds us of our ability to ‘yet praise’ in the midst of difficulties.”<sup>16</sup>

So I want to leave you with three challenges this Sunday. Each week in the Soul Reset series, we are going to offer a spiritual practice for you to consider. Last week it was the Prayer of Examen from St. Ignatius. This week it is praying the Scripture. In your bulletin are the instructions. Spend some time to get quiet in the presence of God and read Psalm 42. Then try re-writing the Psalm in your own words or for your own situation. Be sure to end with words of hope and praise. If the whole Psalm is too much, just paraphrase a verse or two. Then spend some time praying your paraphrase over and over to God. Repetition is good. It focuses our minds. Try to breathe deeply while you repeat the Psalm. Breathing and praying will bring you deeply into God’s presence.

The second challenge is to go to the website printed in the bulletin.<sup>17</sup> There are all kinds of resources if you want to know more about depression or any number of mental health issues. It’s good information.

Then finally, I would like to challenge you to copy down the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number printed in your bulletin.<sup>18</sup> Stick it on your refrigerator or put it in a safe place that you can actually remember. If you or anyone you know is thinking about taking their life, call this number. Trained people are available 24/7/365 to help talk you off that ledge and get you into a safer place emotionally.

As we close today, I would like to spend a couple more minutes with Psalm 42, reading it together and pausing to reflect and pray. What is God is saying to your heart today? (Three sections: vv. 1-4, 5-8, 9-11) Today, and every day, hope in God, for we shall yet praise God, our help and our God. Amen.

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- <sup>1</sup> Charles Schulz, *Peanuts*, King Features Syndicate.
- <sup>2</sup> Junius Dotson, *Soul Reset* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2020), 35-38.
- <sup>3</sup> <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/major-depression.shtml>.
- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/index.shtml>.
- <sup>5</sup> Jennifer Harper, "Studies: Belief in God Relieves Depression," *WashingtonTimes.com*, February 25, 2010.
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/7-bible-figures-who-struggled-with-depression.html>.
- <sup>7</sup> Psalm 42:1.
- <sup>8</sup> Psalm 42:3, 5, 6, 7, 9-10.
- <sup>9</sup> Emil Brunner, *PreachingToday.com*.
- <sup>10</sup> Psalm 42: 5, 11.
- <sup>11</sup> Psalm 42:4.
- <sup>12</sup> Psalm 42:8.
- <sup>13</sup> Psalm 42:5b, 11b, Psalm 43:5b.
- <sup>14</sup> Psalm 42:5b, NIV.
- <sup>15</sup> Dotson, 45.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.
- <sup>17</sup> <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/index.shtml>.
- <sup>18</sup> 1-800-273-TALK (8255).