

Psalm 42[a][b] NIV

For the director of music. A *maskil*[c] of the Sons of Korah.

1 As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.

2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

3 My tears have been my food
day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”

4 These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One[d]
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng.

5 Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

6 My soul is downcast within me;
therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,

the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

7 Deep calls to deep

in the roar of your waterfalls;

all your waves and breakers

have swept over me.

8 By day the Lord directs his love,

at night his song is with me—

a prayer to the God of my life.

9 I say to God my Rock,

“Why have you forgotten me?

Why must I go about mourning,

oppressed by the enemy?”

10 My bones suffer mortal agony

as my foes taunt me,

saying to me all day long,

“Where is your God?”

11 Why, my soul, are you downcast?

Why so disturbed within me?

Put your hope in God,

for I will yet praise him,

my Savior and my God.

John 1 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one

thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life,[a] and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Soul Reset - When Depression Hits

A few years ago, I faced a crisis in my life. I was a part-time lawyer and a part-time pastor. But what was really going on was that through my own choice to overwork, I actually had two full-time jobs. And I was only one ordinary human being with a limited amount of time, energy and resources. I thought that I could do it all, and my pride got in the way. You see, I thought **only I** could do the things I was doing. I had gotten my priorities all out of whack. I was ignoring God's commandment to love the Lord with all of my being which included taking regular Sabbath rest and drawing near to God through my daily practices.

There were many warning signs in my life that I should have paid attention to ---- my blood pressure got so high I had to take medication. I was feeling anxious, and I was crying throughout my day for no apparent reason. Instead of feeling joy in my days, I felt hopelessness and dreaded going to work. I began to have some of the worst thoughts. My brain was just not functioning right --- I wasn't my normal self. The stress of my life was overwhelming me. I was so messed up that I even thought I was too busy to seek professional help. I now recognize that I was experiencing a period of anxiety and depression. I was exhausted, and I was suffering mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. But I kept putting on a mask of happiness and carrying on with my ordinary life the best I could.

Psalms 42 is titled "Longing for God and His Help in Distress." The message of this day is that when we are in distress, when those we love are in distress, God hears our cries of longing for healing. As we continue this sermon series called Soul Reset, I invite you to continue to examine your own soul -- to think about how it is with your soul. I invite you this Lent to be honest with yourself, to be honest with your God, and to be honest with the people who love you. If we learn nothing else from the Psalms, we can learn that honesty before God is healthy and healing and will bring us to wholeness so that we can truly live with the joy and abundance that Jesus intends for us.

This section of the Psalms from Book II - Psalms 42-72 - is filled with instructions for how the community of God should face exile. This Psalm in particular, Psalm 42, is described as being "focused on hope and committed service born of loss." (NIB Study Bible). And in Psalm 42, the writer seems to know what it is like to be depressed, to mourn, to be filled with anxiety, fear and stress. Listen to how different Bible versions describe the Psalmist's feelings in verse 6:

My soul is cast down within me. (NRSV)

My whole being is depressed. (CEB)

I am deeply discouraged. (ESV/NLT)

My soul is in despair within me (the burden is more than I can bear). AMP verse 6

You can just feel the anguish in the way the writer cries out to God --- longing for God, his soul thirsting for the healing presence of God. One thing we can learn from the psalmist -- is honesty --- because we aren't always honest about the state of our souls.

So let's be honest right here and now. The World Health Organization says: Depression is a common illness worldwide, with more than 264 million people affected. Depression is different from usual mood fluctuations and short-lived emotional responses to challenges in everyday life. Especially when long-lasting and with moderate or severe intensity,

depression may become a serious health condition. It can cause the affected person to suffer greatly and function poorly at work, at school and in the family. At its worst, depression can lead to suicide. Close to 800,000 people die due to suicide every year. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15-29-year-olds.

I learned this week that Arkansas ranks 9th in the country for its rate of suicide per capita. 9th. Mental illness is a serious problem. But it seems that depression is a health crisis that we would prefer to ignore -- to just sweep under the rug. To pretend it doesn't exist and to suffer in private.

The World Health Organization says that although there are known, effective treatments for mental disorders, between 76% and 85% of people in low- and middle-income countries receive no treatment for their disorder because of barriers to effective care including a lack of resources, lack of trained health-care providers and social stigma associated with mental disorders.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>

Now, before I bear down in a big way on the amazing healing power of God, I want to talk about another way that God can work -- that is through people who are trained and gifted by God to treat us when our souls are downcast -- to walk us through some treatments when we are suffering. For some reason there is this stigma associated with depression and other kinds of mental illness. There is a stigma associated with getting professional help when we face anxiety or grief or extreme stress. Maybe together we might begin to break down that stigma. You see, if we have diabetes or high blood pressure or an ear infection, we tell people we aren't feeling well, and we seek out treatment.

So, I am going to offer you a couple of challenges for this week. The first one is to become educated about depression -- I encourage you all to go to a fantastic website - the national institute of mental health. There are some great resources there. I want all of you to check out this site and look at the information you see. Over the next few weeks, the church will be sharing some of this information with you in printed form because we hope to get some resources into your hands that might help to educate us and break down this stigma.

There are a few basics I want to bring out. First, depression can happen to people of all ages. It can be short term or it can be long term. The signs of depression include:

Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood

- Feelings of hopelessness, or pessimism
- Irritability
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Moving or talking more slowly
- Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes

- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment.

The causes of depression can be genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological. Risk factors include: Personal or family history of depression, major life changes, trauma, or stress, certain physical illnesses and medications. There are many avenues for treatment including talk therapy and medication. There is no shame in seeking help in all these ways in addition to crying out to God for healing. You would seek out help for healing of your body. There is no reason not to seek out help for healing of your soul and your mind. The National Institute of Mental Health's website gives so much information -- please go check it out this week and learn as much as you can about depression and other mental illnesses. Surely being educated will help to break down this stigma.

On the other side of my own experience, I regret not seeking professional help immediately. God created a lot of smart and compassionate people whose life's calling is to walk people through these times and issues. Nevertheless, I can now look back on that time and realize that God was with me through it all. The whole narrative of scripture screams out this message, doesn't it? From Genesis to Revelation, we can read about the faithful love that God has for us even when we experience the worst of times--even in the depths of pain. The psalms are no exception in portraying God's steady healing presence.

Not only is the psalmist honest about his anguish, but he reacts in a couple of ways that might help us. First, the psalmist remembers. He remembers. When his tears are his food day and night, when people taunt him by saying, "Where is your God, now?" He remembers. He remembers how he went with a group of people up to the temple to worship God -- to worship with shouts of joy and songs of thanksgiving. He says, "Even though my soul is cast down within me, I remember you. I remember your steadfast love, I remember your song, I remember that you are the God of my life." One commentator talked about it like this: "Memory is a key to hope in waiting confidently for God to act. **God's presence is pervasive, though never predictable or one-dimensional.**" (NIB Bible, 788).

The second thing the psalmist does is continue to praise God through the storm. Listen to this:

Why, my soul, are you downcast?
 Why so disturbed within me?
 Put your hope in God,
 for I will yet praise him,
 my Savior and my God. (Psalm 42:11, NIV)

The psalmist says, even though my soul is torn apart, yet will I praise God, yet will I hope in God. The psalmist says, even though it feels that God has forgotten me, I will hope in God. The psalmist continues to recognize God as the one who saves.

We can remember. We can praise.

And we can seek God in spiritual practices. This psalm models two practices of prayer -- seeking answers through conversations with God and through conversations with ourselves. Last week, the spiritual practice we tried was to examine ourselves. The practice we challenge you to

try this week is to write a prayer to God. And maybe writing out this prayer will be a form of remembering, of hoping in God and become an act of praise and thanksgiving.

The practice is this --would you rewrite Psalm 42 in your own words -- as your own prayer to God. Take your bulletin home -- we have the instructions written out for you. And then also don't forget to check out the website for the National Institute for Mental Health. When we become educated about depression, when we become willing to talk about it, the stigma will lessen. And maybe when the stigma is lessened people will reach out for help -- not only from the healing power of Jesus, but also from every avenue available to us through modern scientific advances. Maybe our becoming educated and talking about these things will save someone's life one day.

I was in Orlando this past week for a conference, and we took the time to go to Universal Studios and play for a few hours. It's a great place to go -- the park is all about Universal Studio movies and tv shows including a lot of things about super heroes. I don't know if you have a favorite super hero, but mine is Wonder Woman. I'm so old that I grew up watching Lynda Carter as wonder woman on tv. I especially love the idea of having a lasso of truth. And her power pose is just amazing. It just makes you feel great standing that way!

And I found this great cup in Orlando with Wonder Woman's symbol on it. And when I got home with it, I realized this cup could serve as a really important reminder for me --- the reminder is this: there is only one Wonder Woman -- and it is NOT ME! Furthermore, Wonder Woman is a fictional character.

I am not Wonder Woman.

Coming to that realization is the way that God healed me from the stress, anxiety and depression in my life. I realized that I could not do two jobs. I was only called to one job, and I learned the hard way that I had to do it with God's help and in God's way.

You see, I came to know that God does not **expect me to be** Wonder Woman. God's love is not conditioned on

what we do

or what we accomplish

or how strong we are

or how beautiful or handsome we are.

And not only that, but God loves us through our breaking down and our falling apart.

God just loves me.

And God just loves you.

And I am convinced that God wants me to tell you that today: **that God loves you.**

Every single one of you. Including you who are listening on the radio or the podcast or reading this sermon. God just loves you -- no conditions.

The Lord your God does not expect you to be Wonder Woman or Super Man. Instead, God expects you to enjoy his presence and love him back. Nothing more. Nothing less. That is the kind of redemptive love we have in Christ Jesus. This love of Christ is the light that shines all over us -- and the darkness will not win.

So, we say this day, Light of the World, Holy God, even when our souls are in despair, yet we will praise you. We remember your loving presence with us, and we cling to your strength and your grace. We pray that you would pour out your Spirit of healing upon those who suffer --

we pray for ourselves,

we pray for our friends and family,
and we pray for the healing from guilt and sorrow for those whose friends and family
have accomplished suicide.

We pray that you would help us to be honest about how it is with our souls. We pray for
boldness to be vulnerable so that the stigma of getting help might be erased, and so that others
might hear the good news of great joy found in you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.