

Health and Healing

Optimism: Happiness and Healing

Lesson #11 for June 12, 2010

Scriptures: 1 Kings 19:2-18; Psalms 27; 42; Luke 8:14; 10:38-42; Romans 8:35-39; 2 Corinthians 12:9,10; 1 Thessalonians 5:16,17.

1. In an earlier lesson, we learned that approximately 90% of human illness and disease has its beginning in the mind. The focus of this lesson is to explore ways in which biblical heroes in very difficult situations rose above their depression and despair through faith in God. How can we do the same?
2. What is the difference between depression and despair? Think of some of the biblical characters who had every reason to be depressed! Adam and Eve when they were cast out of the Garden of Eden. Joseph when he was thrown into prison for not going to bed with Potiphar's wife. Jeremiah as he was starving while suffering through the siege of Jerusalem. Jesus in Gethsemane and at Calvary. How did these biblical heroes deal with their despair and depression?
3. Do you naturally tend to see the glass as half-empty or half-full? To what extent are our emotions controlled by external circumstances?
4. What is the role of emotions in Christianity? Do our emotions affect or have any relationship to our faith in God? Can we control our emotions? If so, how? Is optimism a feeling, an attitude, or an approach to life? Does feeling have anything to do with faith?
5. A great deal of medical research has gone into studying depression. It is a very common illness in our day. There seem to be two types of depression. It is normal for a human being to feel somewhat depressed when faced with death, an illness, a job loss, or a broken relationship. That is called **reactive depression**. But there are other human beings who have a chemical imbalance in their brains which is genetically controlled and which tends to make them feel depressed much of the time. This is **major depression**. Those of us who may not suffer from that type of depression must never judge or stigmatize such people. We need to recognize that depression is an illness which needs medical treatment.
6. The book of Psalms is full of examples such as David and others crying out to God because of what was perceived as awful circumstances. In Psalms 42, the sons of Korah cried out claiming that tears were their only food! At such times it is easy to ask, "Where are you, God?" In Psalm 43:2 (a continuation of Psalms 42), the authors cried, "Why have you abandoned me?" It is interesting to note that Jesus was not the first one to cry those words.
7. Read 1 Kings 18. We must realize that the worshipers of Baal believed that Baal was the one who sent the rain! So, this story relates a direct showdown between Yahweh, the one true God, and Baal, a false god. For most of the day, the 850 prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth (his female counterpart) did everything they could to get a fire going under their sacrifice. No doubt, the God of heaven made sure that none of their efforts would succeed. Alone, Elijah finally knelt down before the altar, the wood, and the sacrifice soaked with the 12 barrels of water and began to pray. Fire—probably a lightning bolt—shot out of the clear sky and consumed the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the water.
8. Elijah had an incredible emotional high as he stood up on God's side almost as a single man versus the entire nation on the top of Mount Carmel. He saw the fire come down from God, consuming his sacrifice, and confirming his statements about God. But then, he was

asked to kill 850 of the prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth. We have no way of knowing whether he did that personally or just supervised the killings of all those wicked men. But in any case, when it was all over and he had led the chariot of Ahab back to his home in Jezreel through the pouring rain, Elijah was emotionally drained. The next morning when Jezebel threatened his life, he ran! He felt certain that he was the only one left who was following the true God. He even became suicidal. But instead of taking his life into his own hands, he asked the Lord to kill him. (1 Kings 19:4) But, God had a much better plan for Elijah, and not long thereafter, Elijah was taken in a fiery chariot to heaven without tasting death!

9. Have you ever felt that you were standing alone against the sin and evil in the church? In the school? At your work? Or even in the world? No matter how bad the conditions around us are, we still have the option of making choices. We can still claim God's promises.
10. Do you find it useful to read hopeful passages in Scripture when you feel tired, lonely, or depressed? Read Romans 8:35-39. Should we memorize such verses in preparation for the time of trouble?
11. Is it possible to develop habits that promote hope? Is it possible to hand our despair, melancholy, frustration, and loneliness over to God?
12. Sometimes, our lives become buried in our work, our responsibilities at home, and in other activities so that we have scarcely a moment to look up. **Is it a sin to be too busy?** Do we crowd out optimism and hope by burying ourselves in all of those activities? Read Micah 6:8. How would our lives change if we really believed and acted on that verse?
13. How many of us are killing ourselves by trying to build "bigger barns"? (Luke 12:16-21) Think of the number of hours and lives spent in pursuing what is regarded as success. How many of our hospitals and schools are really struggling because some key worker or workers have left because they can earn a little more money elsewhere? How much money is your life worth? What would happen if we changed our goals from pursuing financial success to seeking spiritual significance? How will our daily accomplishments be viewed in the light of eternity? Are we allowing the "urgent" needs of every day to crowd out the important things of God?
14. Read 1 Corinthians 15:19. Do you agree with the sentiments of this verse? If Christ were not coming back, what kind of a life would you choose to live? If there was nothing beyond this life, would you abandon your Christianity? Or, are you convinced that living the Christian life is the best possible life even here and now? Is the Christian life supposed to be miserable here? How many of us are living under the tyranny of the "urgent"?
15. As we struggle with evil, sin, despair, and depression, isn't it helpful to remember that God has already won the great controversy? Thus, we do not have the option of losing if we stay on God's side. Considering all that God sees every day, how does He keep from being depressed? What kept Jesus sane in the Garden of Gethsemane? What did He have to look forward to? He could only rely on what He had learned earlier about His Father.
16. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16,17. What do you think Paul had in mind when he said, "Pray without ceasing" and "Rejoice evermore"? Are those just Pollyanna ideas? Or are they really feasible goals for ordinary Christians?
17. Jesus is supposed to be our ultimate example. How did He deal with His struggle with Satan in the Garden of Gethsemane and on Calvary?
18. Down through the centuries, many Christians have died for their faith, and many are still dying for their faith. A review of history shows that in times of persecution, the Christian

church has grown more rapidly and has been stronger in areas where persecution was taking place. Why is that? In A.D. 197, writing in *Apologeticus*, Chapter 50, Tertullian made the famous statement, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church." Is anyone happy to be martyred? Why do you think that is? Does persecution force us to make serious choices? Does it force us to ask what we really care about? The Adventist Church is growing very rapidly in India, even in places where it is illegal to change one's religion!

19. How do you feel about the promise suggested in Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Of course, Paul answered his own question in Romans 8:35-39 with the words, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God." There are plenty of verses in the Bible telling us of God's love. Should those promises and statements of God prevent us from ever despairing or losing hope? Is it helpful to realize that all of the sadness and misery is coming to an end? (Revelation 21:4)
20. What are the common causes of despair and depression in our day? How many of us are bringing those problems upon ourselves by trying to keep up with the Joneses, setting unrealistic goals for ourselves, or living unreal lives in the imaginary world of television?
21. So, how did the biblical heroes overcome their most troubling situations? Does focusing on our surroundings make us more vulnerable? As we suggested earlier, if our emotional health is based on external circumstances, Satan will use that to control us. (See Revelation 13) This is one modern form of demon possession. That is why we need the "self-control" that comes from the Spirit. (Galatians 5:23)
22. Did Jesus ever laugh? What is the role of laughter in the life of a Christian? Read Proverbs 17:22. A very famous book entitled *Anatomy of an Illness* written by Norman Cousins describes his being struck by a life-threatening illness. Despite all the help he could get from doctors, he kept getting worse. Serendipitously, he noticed that when he laughed at the comedy which he saw on television, he felt better. So, he asked his nurse to read humorous stories, and he began watching videos of famous comedians. Then he began to exercise more as he was able to move easier. In time, he fully recovered from his illness. What had changed in his life?
23. Notice this paragraph from the Bible study guide:

Yes, there are physical benefits to laughter and joyful thinking. Laughter exercises the lungs and stimulates the circulatory system. As a result, increased oxygen enters the blood. Laughter acts as a relaxant, and in the long term it can be associated with mild decreases in blood pressure. Laughter increases the production of the chemical endorphins that soothe and relax the mind, relieve pain, elevate the mood, and increase immune cell activity. This optimism and merry heart will be entirely appropriate, because they are founded on the knowledge that God is in control of our lives.

We know that it is not possible or feasible to be happy and to laugh continuously. We can, however, seek to have a positive attitude. *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for June 10, 2010.

24. As Christians we can claim the promise that God is always with us. We should choose to show a positive and benevolent attitude toward others around us, and that will help us to feel better as well. Ellen White wrote:

Smile, parents; smile, teachers. If your heart is sad, let not your face reveal the fact. Let the sunshine from a loving, grateful heart light up the countenance. Unbend from your iron dignity, adapt yourselves to the

children's needs, and make them love you. You must win their affection, if you would impress religious truth upon their heart. {AH 432.2}

25. Compare another passage that Ellen White wrote:

Nothing tends more to promote health of body and of soul than does a spirit of gratitude and praise. It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it is to pray. If we are heaven-bound, how can we go as a band of mourners, groaning and complaining all along the way to our Father's house?—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 251.

26. Do we really believe that feeling is not faith? What is the relationship between faith and our feelings? Jesus trusted His Father under the worst possible circumstances. Could we do the same? Might we need to learn that skill if we are to live through the final days of this earth's history? Crowds followed Jesus. Was it because He was so happy?

27. We know that a great controversy is taking place—a controversy over the character and government of God. Satan will do everything he possibly can to destroy the faith, the lives, and the hope of Christians. But, we have the option of developing a true faith relationship as friends of Jesus and the Father. If we know that God Himself is our Friend, what discouraging circumstances could ever stop us?

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