

Jesus Wept: The Bible and Human Emotions ***Hope Against Depression***

Lesson #7 for February 12, 2011

Scriptures: Psalm 42; 31:10; 39:2-7; 32:1-5; 1 John 1:9; Micah 7:1-7; Revelation 21:2-4.

1. This lesson is about depression and the loss of hope that it implies. Depression comes in many flavors—all the way from minor discouragement to major depression. How does God relate to mental illness? He understands it! Did God originally make us susceptible to depression? Or, did our capacity or ability to become depressed begin when sin entered? Mental health professionals teach us that some forms of depression result from a chemical imbalance in the brain. Does that imply that hope is a correct balance of brain chemicals?
2. There are many examples of depression in Scripture. Elijah actually asked the Lord to kill him. (1 Kings 19:4) Isn't that "suicidal ideation"? Elijah did not die. He went to heaven! Was Job depressed? Writing in Psalm 42, the sons of Korah suggested that tears were their only food. Tears are mentioned frequently in the Psalms: 6:6; 42:3; 56:8; 80:5; 102:10; 119:136.
3. Look carefully at the small notation under the chapter title for Psalm 42 in your Bible. While our *Bible Study Guide* suggests that it was written by David, these notations suggest it was written by the sons of Korah. Who were these sons of Korah? What do we know about Korah? Korah was one of the Levites—a cousin of Moses and Aaron—who was among the leaders of the children of Israel when they left Egypt. However, he, along with two men from the tribe of Reuben—Dathan and Abiram—determined to challenge Moses and Aaron for the leadership of Israel. (Numbers 16) Their rebellion caused a huge mess—the death of thousands.
4. However, it is interesting to note that while Dathan and Abiram's families apparently perished with them when the earth opened up, Korah's family did not! (Numbers 26:11) In the time of David, some of his descendants were some of the most important musicians in attendance at the temple. They wrote a number of songs. Psalm 42 was one of them. Others they wrote include Psalms 43-49, 84, 85, 87, and 88.
5. Is it a sin to be depressed? What is depression? There is a huge spectrum. Is there a clear delineation between deep discouragement and depression? We know that, at times, depression can become so severe that it may cause actual physical symptoms and cause a person to be almost incapacitated. At such times, it is easy to lose all hope.
6. Christians should instinctively turn to God in prayer when they are discouraged or depressed. But at times, it is necessary also to seek professional help. Apparently, some people even have a genetic predisposition to depression. Those people particularly need to seek professional help. It may be related to a chemical imbalance in the brain. This can overwhelm people, even women who have just given birth.
7. It is important for us as Christians and as human beings not to employ "catastrophic thinking." When things do not work out our way, it is sometimes easy to suggest to ourselves that we are "dumb" or "incompetent." We can even look at the world very pessimistically, suggesting that things are not fair to us. If this becomes severe, we can think the situation is hopeless and think that things could never possibly improve. Under such circumstances, depression becomes a very high likelihood.
8. What does God want us to remember when we might be inclined to have such feelings? First of all, we need to remember that we are children of our heavenly Father. Jesus would have come to die to save even one of us. (*RH*, April 1, 1880 par. 1; *RH*, April 19, 1887 par. 1; *RH*, March 13, 1888 par. 9; *RH*, August 14, 1888 par. 5; ***RH*, May 3, 1892 par. 8**) In other words,

in God's eyes you are of infinite value.

9. We also need to remember that even when things are looking very bad, there are things here on this earth that are good. (Philippians 4:8) We should think about those things.
10. And ultimately, the Christian must think about the future. No matter how bad things get here on this earth—even if we should be martyred—our future is certain if we do not give up on God. Heaven is an absolutely wonderful and glorious place, and each one of us can reach there if we do not give up hope.
11. Sadness—which may lead to depression—is not a sin. It is not a cause for feeling guilty. Things may seem to be going very badly, and our personal feelings may make it seem even worse than it is, but that is no reason for us to give up hope in God. Job was depressed, but he still trusted God. (Job 19:25) Where did Job get that confidence in God?
12. Read Psalm 34:18. Remember that God—especially Jesus—is near those who are discouraged. He loves the hopeless along with every single one of His children.
13. How can we know when a person is depressed? They have feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, despair, and they feel like there is nothing to live for. Think of some examples from the Bible of people who were deeply discouraged or in despair or even depression. Consider the case of Jacob (Genesis 32:22-32), David (Psalms 32:3-7), Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), and even Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-45; DA 694.1). Why did Jesus need an angel to come and strengthen Him? Would He have died without it? Will God send an angel to help us if the Devil is truly attacking us? How did their discouragement or depression impact these Bible heroes?
14. The antithesis of despair and discouragement is hope. What factors promote hope? Does it help to practice the presence of God in your life? When good things happen, trust God. When bad things happen, trust God. Is there any problem that God cannot overcome? It has been demonstrated again and again that verbalizing and sharing our burdens, despairs, or discouragements—even our depressive thoughts—helps to alleviate them. As Christians, we should turn immediately to God in prayer on such occasions. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17. When you feel discouraged or depressed, does it help to pray?
15. Interestingly enough, it has been demonstrated that when people feel hopeless and helpless, it is often very helpful to get them to turn their thoughts to how they can help someone else.
16. When reading stories in the Bible about people who were depressed, discouraged, or even sad, we notice fairly quickly that there are cultural differences in how people express their depression or sadness. Today, we would not consider wearing burlap or sackcloth and putting ashes on our heads. (Isaiah 58:5; Daniel 9:3) But, that was a common way to deal with such feelings in Bible times.
17. Consider some verses suggesting how Bible characters felt about their sorrow/sadness/discouragement/depression:
 - Psalm 31:10. Is it possible to be exhausted by weeping? Could it actually shorten one's life?
 - Psalm 77:4. Have you ever been so worried that you could not speak?
 - Psalm 102:4,5. Some people lose their appetite when they become depressed while others just eat. This psalmist apparently lost appetite to the point of becoming skin and bones.
 - 1 Kings 19:4. After that marvelous triumph on Mount Carmel, how could Elijah become so discouraged as to ask God to take his life?

These verses may help us to understand that depression can lead to some very serious consequences. Is depression a form of psychological pain?

18. Depression can take different forms. Here are just some of the typical depressed feelings:
- (a) a deep sense of sadness (sorrow), (b) a lack of motivation to do anything, even enjoyable activities, (c) a change in appetite and either weight loss or gain, (d) sleep disturbances, sleeping either not enough or too much, (e) feelings of low self-esteem, (f) poor reasoning and memory, and (g) thoughts of death and suicide. Some people experience just one or two symptoms, while others manifest several and suffer for months until the episode ends. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, February 7, 2011)
19. Look back over your own personal experience. Have there been times when you were depressed or discouraged? What kinds of things led to that discouragement or depression? What did you do to keep hope alive? Were you able to stay connected to God through that experience? What did you learn from it? “When temptations assail you, when care, perplexity, and darkness seem to surround your soul, look to the place where you last saw the light.” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 250)
20. In times of economic distress, it is not uncommon to hear examples of people who commit suicide—some of whom even kill members of their families—because of their despair and depression. To them, that seems a better solution than living on with the spiritual and economic pain. Those are the times when we must turn our thoughts to God.
21. Read Psalm 32:2-7. Notice in these verses that David took two different approaches to his depression. At first, he kept silent; and his suffering grew worse. But, when he turned to God—most likely in prayer—things apparently improved.
22. It is very important to recognize that particularly if there is serious depression, professional help should be sought. Initially, it is a good idea to talk to other church members or to a pastor. But, serious depression may need the services of someone who knows how to access greater resources such as a group counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist. But, always remember that our first resource is God, and He is on duty 24/7.
23. Remember the words of Ellen White in *4 Testimonies* p. 533, “Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.” God feels our pain. He knows every problem that we face, and He is ready to help.
24. But, we should not ignore the warnings that Jesus gave—in Luke 21:26, for example—when He said that in the end of time, people’s hearts will faint with fear. We should also remember Paul’s discussion in Romans 7:18-20 about the battle going on inside him. Why do you suppose Paul believed that sin was in control of his actions? Was he not fully converted? We need to remember that the Devil has access to our minds, and he can plant temptations of all sorts. He studies every one of us seeking ways in which he can tempt us.
25. Even Adam and Eve in their perfection in the Garden of Eden needed counsel from God and would have been fine if they had followed it. They had a lot to learn!
26. God counsels us to leave all our worries with Him. (1 Peter 5:7) That sounds wonderful, but it may not be easy to do. So often, our problems are of our own creation.
27. If during the time we have set aside every day for private devotions and worship of God we have grown accustomed to meeting God, we can trust Him when times of trouble face us. After his sin with Bathsheba, David realized that he needed true confession and repentance. Psalm 51 and Psalm 32 spell out his penitence.
28. However, unconfessed sins produce problems such as guilt and inward pain. It is often easier for us to help others than it is to take our own advice and live by it. We may know what God advises, but it may not be so easy to follow. But, we need to take God at His word. When we confess our sins and are truly sorry for them and sincerely desire to live a better

life, then we must take God's word for the fact that we are forgiven. (1 John 1:9) And we must move on and not dwell on our guilt or our past sins.

29. Try to imagine what Jesus prayed about. He could sometimes spend all night in prayer. (*Desire of Ages* 259-260) What did He talk about all night? Was He refreshed after praying and talking with God all night? What source of rest and rejuvenation did He tap into? Could we do the same?
30. We would certainly recognize that Jesus must have been in constant contact with His Father. He was an expert at practicing the presence of God. Is that what is implied by 1 Thessalonians 5:7? Through the process of Bible study and prayer, is it possible to learn to think things out God's way? Can we learn to think God's thoughts after Him?
31. During the days of Christ, it was sincerely believed by some that praying to God more than three times a day would weary Him! We certainly know better than that now.
32. Micah, whose small book is in the Old Testament, lived during a very disastrous time. It seemed like everything was failing. There were no crops. There was nothing to eat. Enemies were surrounding the nation and invading. Micah's response was, "When everything seems to go wrong, I will wait for God." (See Micah 7:1-7) If you read the passage, you will see how much evil was prevailing in the country in Micah's day.
33. Ellen White has told us that in our day as things heat up just before the second coming of Christ, some former church members will leave our ranks and become our worst enemies. (GC 608.2) Even members of our own family will be accusing us. And in those kinds of times, it is essential not to lose hope. Our faith and trust in God must not let go of His hand. Hopelessness leads to meaninglessness in life and frequently to giving up and even death. In his famous book *The Divine Comedy*, Dante imagined a sign over the gates of hell saying, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here"!
34. But, as sincere Christians, we must remember what is beyond the second coming and never lose hope. Read Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; and Revelation 21:2-4 just to hear some of the wonderful things that are waiting for us in heaven.
35. Without a doubt, our Savior suffered the worst kind of environmental pressures and temptations from the Devil. He was attacked with despair, and depression was pressed upon Him. His responses are recorded in the following words:

But now He seemed to be shut out from the light of God's sustaining presence. Now He was numbered with the transgressors. The guilt of fallen humanity He must bear. Upon Him who knew no sin must be laid the iniquity of us all. So dreadful does sin appear to Him, so great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father's love. Feeling how terrible is the wrath of God against transgression, He exclaims, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 685.

36. Can we look to the example of Jesus and take hope? Our experience will be something like His was. But, we must never, never give up. If God is our friend as we have repeatedly claimed, then to give up on Him at this point in history would be a very serious mistake. May God help us!

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