

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

“Stripes above Measure”

Introduction

What are some of the things that cause depression in life?

Possible answers:

- *Guilt*
- *Rejection*
- *Sickness (infirmities)*
- *Physical trauma*
- *Calamity*
- *Death*

We explored the life of four men who had opportunity with depression before the cross. We then looked at the One who overcame depression through the cross for the joy that was laid before Him. Let us now see how one after the cross is to deal with sorrow and distress.

A Case for Depression

If we could think of a man in the New Testament who seemingly had the right to be depressed, it would have to be the Apostle Paul. Let's take a quick inventory of reasons he might have had to feel dejected.

Guilt-

Acts 22:4

I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, NIV

As tightly knit as the Christian community was, do you think that Paul had occasions of running into people whose relatives he had helped put to death? Once he had found out the error of his ways, would not the weight of his guilt be overwhelming?

1 Tim 1:15

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst. NIV

To his son in the faith, Timothy, he confesses that of all sinners, he was the worse. Surely he had the right to curl up into fetal position and suck his thumb as he cried for all the evil he had done. After all, when Judas realized that he had betrayed innocent blood, he went and hung himself. In persecuting the body of Christ, Paul had done no less than Judas. And yet, guilt didn't crush him.

Rejection-

A) By former associates-

Acts 22:17-22

- 17 "When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance
18 and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'
19 "'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you.
20 And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'
21 "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"
22 The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" NIV

After Saul was converted, he stayed in the area of Damascus for three years. His return to Jerusalem would have been somewhat monumental. The shining star of Judaism was returning home. Oh what influence he could have for Christ as he shared the gospel with his former associates! Such was not to be. Not only did they not receive him, they wanted him dead!

All of us have lost friends for the sake of Christ. Mostly, we are thankful to no longer be in the council of the wicked. But it is still painful to have them reject you and curse you. Paul was rejected by a class of people among whom he had been prominent.

B) By unbelievers-

Acts 16:16-24 NIV

- 16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.
17 This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."
18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.
19 When the owners of the slave girl realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities.
20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar
21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice."
22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten.
23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully.
24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Imagine the indignity of it all. There you are trying to help people and keep them out of the fires of hell, and what thanks do you get? Whipped, beaten, and imprisoned!

C) By fellow ministers-

Acts 15:36-39

36 Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."

37 Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them,

38 but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.

39 They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, NIV

Barnabas and Paul had one of the closest working relationships recorded in Scripture. Yet, they parted company on bad terms over a disagreement regarding Mark!

2 Tim 1:15

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. NIV

Near the end of his life, Paul had few friends left that he could count on.

Sickness (infirmities)-

Gal 4:13

As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. NIV

Trauma-

Acts 14:19

Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. NIV

There is reason to believe that they thought him dead because he was!

Calamity-

Acts 27:33-44

33 Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food-you haven't eaten anything.

34 Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head."

35 After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.

36 They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves.

37 Altogether there were 276 of us on board.

38 When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

39 When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could.

40 Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach.

- 41 But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.
- 42 The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping.
- 43 But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land.
- 44 The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety. NIV

It is bad enough to be arrested. Worse yet to be deported. But then to have to suffer two weeks at sea in a storm? And if that wasn't bad enough, they became shipwrecked! Is there no cause for complaint?

Death-

2 Tim 4:6 NIV

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.

Paul knew that his last imprisonment would end in martyrdom. He was on death row and the day of his execution was looming close. His life to this point hard, his friends gone, and his neck in jeopardy, he may have been tempted to curl up in despair and die in complaint.

Paul summarizes his suffering in one of his letters to the churches. But his perspective on his trials is interesting. He calls it being a minister of Christ.

2 Cor 11:23-28

- 23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.
- 24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.
- 25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;
- 26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;
- 27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.
- 28 Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. KJV

Paul certainly had a case for depression. But he didn't fall prey to it. Did he have pain, anguish, sorrow, and disappointment? Certainly, but one read through Philippians would show that joy and rejoicing, not depression, characterized the Apostle. How was he able to rejoice in his afflictions? He had the perspective of heaven.

The Perspective of Heaven- Guilt-

Guilt, real or imagined, is a major depressant. The thing about guilt is that we cannot get rid of it by denying it. It must be dealt with. Paul understood that in Christ, his guilt had been dealt with.

1 Tim 1:15-17

15 Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst.

16 But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. NIV

*He understood that Christ Jesus came to save **sinners!** He didn't languish in the guilt of his past sinned, but lived in thanksgiving to the One who had saved him from it!*

Rejection-

Paul understood that no matter who rejected him, what mattered was who had accepted him.

Eph 1:3-6

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

6 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. KJV

Furthermore, if we are rejected for Christ's sake, it is not we who are rejected, but Him.

Luke 10:16

"He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me." NIV

1 Thess 4:8

Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. NIV

Sickness (infirmity or weakness)-

2 Cor 12:7-10

7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. NIV

He learned that when he was in a weakened condition, due either to persecution, hardships, or sickness, to look for the strength of Christ to be made manifest. He did not focus on himself but on Him who would manifest Himself!

Trauma-

2 Cor 4:6-9

6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;

9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. NIV

An amplification of verses 8 and 9 would be as follows:

“We are pressed like grapes, but not totally crushed; we are out of our own resources and don’t know what to do or which way to turn, but we are not without hope or the resources of God; we are hunted and chased with evil intent, but not left behind or deserted; we are thrown down, but not destroyed.”

Regardless of how hopeless the situation looked, Paul kept his gaze on Jesus his Deliverer. And the suffering was not without purpose.

2 Cor 1:3-11

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

5 For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.

9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,

11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many. NIV

Paul understood that his trials made it possible for him to minister comfort to those who would go through similar trials. When trials come, praise God. He is preparing you for ministry!

Calamity-

Acts 27:20-26

- 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.
- 21 After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.
- 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.
- 23 Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me
- 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'
- 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.
- 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island." NIV

The Lord not only told Paul how he could help avoid the calamity (verse 21), but He assured him in the midst of the storm. Similarly, we should heed the Lord's voice to avoid calamity if we can. But even if we can't, we should trust that He will save us through the storm.

Death-

1 Cor 15:55-58

- 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"
- 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
- 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- 58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. NIV

2 Tim 4:6-8

- 6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.
- 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.
- 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. NIV

In all these challenges, Paul determined to see them through heaven's eyes, knowing that it is about Him, not us.

2 Cor 4:11-18

11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death **for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.**

12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,

14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.

15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. NIV

The perspective of heaven demands that we focus on that which we cannot see, on His eternal power and Godhead!

The Power of a Forfeited Life

When our life is no longer our own, those things which can put us in the pit of depression and keep us there lose their power. Why? Because it is no longer about us, how we feel, where we are, or even how we are being treated. It is about the Lord and what He is working for His kingdom through us.

King David was the Captain of the Distressed, but for a season he was so distressed that he ran to the Philistines (read Gentiles) to hide from Saul (read Jews). In contrast, the Lord sent Paul to the Gentiles for an ingathering of the Jews.

Rom 11:11-15

11 Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

12 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

13 I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry

14 in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? NIV

In avoiding the will of God to bring repentance to the Gentiles, Jonah wound up in hell. In contrast, Paul wished himself in hell if it meant the salvation of his people.

Rom 9:1-5

1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,

- 2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.
- 3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:
- 4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;
- 5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. KJV

Unlike Elijah, who interceded against Israel and thought that he was the only one, Paul recognized himself to be a part of a larger remnant chosen by grace.

Rom 11:1-6

- 1 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.
- 2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah-how he appealed to God against Israel:
- 3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"?
- 4 And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."
- 5 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.
- 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. NIV

Job recognized his need for an intermediary to plead his case before God. In his suffering, he was at a loss and asked "Where are you, God?" Paul knew his Mediator and the One whom he had trusted.

2 Tim 1:8-12 NIV

- 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,
- 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life-not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,
- 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.
- 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.
- 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

Because Christ had suffered the sorrow of death, Paul was able to experience the joy of life through Him.

Rom 5:1-5

- 1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. NIV

Phil 4:4-7

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. NIV

In all these situations, it is evident that the Apostle did not regard his life as his own. If he suffered, it was for the sake of others. If he was rejected, it was for the cause of Christ. If he was weak, it was to manifest Christ's strength. If he died, it was a sacrifice well pleasing to God. In short, it was not about him because he had been purchased and had offered himself up, as we should.

2 Cor 5:14-15

14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. NIV

Rom 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship. NIV

When we truly understand that our life is not our own, we are free to trust in Him regardless of what happens to us. We are freed from receiving the debilitating injury of depression.

Proclamation

The Lord Jesus has delivered me from death and depression. He has bestowed upon me a crown of beauty for ashes, the oil of gladness for mourning, and a garment of praise for a spirit of despair. I present my body to Him as a living sacrifice. I am no longer my own, but belong to Him, for He died for me. For indeed, if I suffer with Him, I shall also reign with Him. His Holy Spirit is my comfort and the joy of His salvation is my strength. Therefore, I will joy and rejoice in the Lord, amen!