

GREATER THAN: My Depression Psalm 77ⁱ

INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, Trinity! It is great to see you. Those of you that are guests with us today, we say a very special welcome to you. My name is Chris Wigley, I serve as one of the Pastors here at Trinity. Whether you are in the room or you are joining us online, we are excited you have gathered with us today. On behalf of our church family, and our staff team, we welcome you.

We would love the opportunity to be able to connect with you. You can let us know you are here in a couple ways. You can text the keyword, "TBCMP," that stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. When you do that, a reply text will be sent with a link you can click on. That will direct you to a form that will then provide us with basic contact information to follow up with you.

Or you can stop by the information center in the lobby area. We have a gift we'd like to give you there. Again, we look forward to connecting with you.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

Today we series that we have called, "Greater Than." We have talked through the are wrapping up an 8-week fact that Jesus is greater Than the grave, greater than our worry and anxiety, greater than grief, than family challenges, our failures, relational conflict, and that He is the ultimate sacrifice for our sin. Today, we will be discussing the fact that Jesus is greater than my depression. So, let's grab our bibles and turn to Psalm 77 and we talk about dealing with depression.

Let me begin today by asking you a question. Have you ever been depressed? I'm certain you have. It is my experience that at some point, everyone has dealt with a bout with depression. My prayer is that we all find hope this morning.

Dr. Nicholi the II, a Harvard psychiatrist, said, "Mild or severe depression affects more people in our culture than any other emotional disorder."ⁱⁱ In fact, depression is often called the common cold of mental illness. And according to a study published in 2019, that's pre-covid, 19.4 million adults in The United States had at least one major depressive episode in 2019. 7.8 percent of the adult population.ⁱⁱⁱ

Add on top of that a world-wide pandemic requiring quarantining and isolation and the death of loved ones, and it only complicated the issue. According to a study done by Mental Disorder Collaborators, the pandemic led to a 27.6% increase in cases of major depressive disorders globally.^{iv}

My point is that depression and other similar forms of mental illness is very common. And not only that, it seems to be increasing with the instability we are experiencing globally. Unfortunately, well-meaning Christians representing the Church, don't understand depression and often wind up saying things like, "You just need to have more faith," or "if you'd pray harder, read the Bible more, deepen your walk with The Lord, you wouldn't have this problem,"^v or "come on, get yourself together."

Now, certainly, depression can be caused by spiritual influences or the lack thereof. But to say that it is the sole cause is to neglect to understand that there are times and circumstances where depression is not preventable. Mental illness is a very real thing, and the Church rarely speaks on the issue. And here's my position. The Bible speaks about such instances, so why shouldn't The Church be the place where people that are struggling find hope?

I think it is very important, just like I mentioned in our sermon a few weeks ago on anxiety, to acknowledge that there are times when a spiritual solution is the answer to what is causing depression. But there are other times when what we are experiencing is a medical and physical problem requiring medical and physical solutions. If you are experiencing the effects of prolonged and what is referred to as major depressive disorder, I want to encourage you to seek the opinion of a medical professional.

Listen, depression is a serious issue. I believe it is wrong for the Church is say pull yourself together or pray harder and do more. That only adds to the weight of depression. We would never say that to someone that has cancer. So, why say that to someone struggling with a mental illness.

Now, I say that, but on the far other extreme, we often treat all depression as a medical issue. That's not necessarily the case, either. So, what do I do? Well, if you are suffering from the feeling of depression, I would say three things to you: 1) Have a conversation with your doctor, 2) Get counsel from a Christian leader, and 3) Listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit and obey it.

Now, all that to set the stage for our conversation this morning. In our time together, I want to look at the topic of depression from three perspectives. I want to define depression, show you examples of biblical characters that dealt with depression, and then talk through 4 things to do when you are depressed. Our time is short this morning, so I will not be able to do all that in an exhaustive way, but I want to give you hope and tools this morning.

MESSAGE:

First, let's attempt to define depression.

1) What is depression?

One article I read described depression as, "a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness that leads to sadness."^{vi} Ever been there? If so, you're in good company. I want us to look at our text this morning and see how the Psalmist describes his depression. Psalm 77:1-3.

*I cry aloud to God, **aloud** to God, and he will hear me. ² In **the day of my trouble** [the word trouble meaning a feeling of the walls closing in] I seek the Lord; in the night **my hand is stretched out without wearying**; [that means that he can't sleep, and he is grasping for something but unable to get ahold of it. What else?] **my soul refuses to be comforted** [In other words, I've tried to shake this off and I can't]. ³ When I remember God, **I moan**; when I meditate, **my spirit faints**.*

This, my friends, is depression. We see sleeplessness, fatigue, a loss of enjoyment, anger and dissatisfaction.^{vii} The Psalmist, here is depressed.

There are different types of depression. Postpartum depression, seasonal depression, persistent depressive disorder, major depressive disorder, and even psychotic depression. These types of depression vary in degree and intensity.^{viii}

One person I read this week suggested that there 4 different stages of depression.^{ix} Let me mention those. First, a feeling of being downcast. That is often a word used in the Scriptures. Several of the Psalms say, "Why are you downcast, O my soul?"^x The feeling of being downcast is when we would say, things are rough right now. The second stage of depression is discouragement. This is where we would say, things are rough right now and it's negatively affecting me. The third stage is depression itself. Things are worse than rough,

and I can't see a way out. The last stage would be despair. This is where things are as bad as they can get, and it will never get better. Perhaps you can identify which of those stages you are in today. Know that you are prayed for today.

So, we've defined depression. Next, I want to consider...

2) Biblical Examples of depression.

If you ever find yourself depressed, I want you to know that you are not alone. When you examine some of the biblical characters throughout the Scriptures, you will find that many of them suffered from depression.

Moses, when he felt the weight of leading God's people and their lack of response, got depressed. Job, who lost everything, wanted to die. Elijah, after a great victory found himself in a depressed state. 1 Kings 19:4 is where we see the state of Elijah's depression. *⁴ But he [Elijah] himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."*

King David got depressed. He authored a vast number of the Psalms and many of them describe his depression. Jonah got depressed and pouted under a little leaf wishing he'd never been born. Nehemiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah all expressed being depressed. Peter, after he failed Jesus, was depressed.^{xi} You see the point. The greats of our faith were not immune from feeling this way.

And if the greats of our faith are not immune to the feelings of depression, then we are not either. We've all felt it. Whether the result of a setback, a loss, or extreme stress, we all have experienced depression in some form. And we join in the company of the greats of our faith.

So, we've established that depression is scalable, there are different types of depression, and that the Bible often describes people's feelings of depression and discouragement. I want to, now, answer one final question.

3) What should I do when I feel depressed?

I want to offer 4 approaches to dealing with depression. Now, I hesitate to present this because I think when we are often burdened, the last thing we need is to be burdened by a to-do list. So, I want to offer 4 ways to approach

the feeling of depression based on what we see the Psalmist doing in Psalm 77. First, ...

1) Be Honest with God.

Our Psalm of study begins with a prayer. He cries aloud to God. Asaph, the writer of Psalm 77, did not run to fellow man or anything else but to The Lord. And he did so with an expression of pain, communicating the darkness he was feeling.

In his prayer, he asks questions of God. Look at verses 7-10 of Psalm 77. *7“Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? 8Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? 9Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” Selah 10Then I said, “I will **appeal** to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High.”* Asaph went to God and was completely honest with Him.

This is important. Because I have known people that instead of running to God in what they were dealing with, they ran to other things like food, shopping, alcohol, gambling, drugs or any number of other means to cope. The problem with that approach is two-fold: 1) It doesn't deal with the root of the issue, it only masks it temporarily, and 2) it only creates another problem.

When you feel down, cry aloud to God, be honest with Him, run to Him. If you can tie any behavior to cope to the onset of your depression, then you need to determine if you have created a dependency issue. That's the danger in running to other things before running to God.

I think often we don't feel like we can be honest with God. In many ways, we've be led to believe that we are not to question God or ask questions of Him. But the Psalmist does. Now, as we are going to see, even though Asaph went to God with questions and a wide range of emotions, he never lacked reverence or humility. He was genuinely bearing his soul to God. He believed that hope could be found in seeking The Lord.

Listen, don't be ashamed to confess your feelings to God thinking that you will offend Him. Please know; God wants to hear from you. Pour out your heart to God, be honest with Him and begin there. Secondly, ...

2) Preach to Yourself.

This is exactly what Asaph did in Psalm 77. Look at verses 11 and 12 with me. *11 **I will remember** the deeds of the Lord; yes, **I will remember** your wonders of old. 12 **I will ponder** all your work, **and meditate** on your mighty deeds.*

When we feel downcast, we need to redirect our thoughts by preaching to ourselves. Take time to remember God's faithfulness, to remember the ways in which He's worked in your life. When we remember God's faithfulness, it allows us to regain perspective. Have you ever needed to preach to yourself?

Martin Lloyd-Jones, a physician turned pastor, wrote in his book, *Spiritual Depression*, "Have you not realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man's treatment was this; instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself..."^{xii} IOW, preach to yourself.

When you feel depressed, where do your thoughts take you? It leans toward how bad it is now and that often leads us to believe that it will always be that way. But if we can remember God's faithfulness in the past, we can avoid the feelings of despair because we know God will be faithful again.

ILLUSTRATION: Peel the Onion

Let me give you a practical tool on how to do this. Not that long ago, I was feeling the beginning stages of depression. I had a friend of mine that I knew struggled with that. So, I picked up the phone and gave him a call. He wound up taking me through an exercise he called "peel the onion." Let me explain.

When you begin having thoughts about how bad your situation is, peel the onion. For example, you might think, things around me are spinning out of control. Peel onion. "Okay, what happens next if that comes true?" Well, if things spin out of control, people are going to think less of me. Okay, then what? If people think less of me then they won't want to be around me. Okay, then what. If they don't want to be around me, I'll lose all my relationships with the people I love. Okay, then what? And eventually, you will get to the bottom where there is nothing left to say or do. When you reach that point, ask yourself three questions.

First, even if all that comes true, which we can talk about how much of what we think and worry about doesn't come true, but let's say it all comes true.

Question 1, "Is Jesus still on His throne?" Yes. And 2, "Do you belong to Jesus, and nothing can ever change that?" Yes. And 3, "If you belong to Jesus and He is on the throne, is He big enough to take care of you in any situation?" Yes and amen. See, this is what it means to preach to yourself. Listen, Jesus is greater than anything you might face. That's what this series has been about!

When you begin to feel the onset of depression, or when you are in the middle of it, be honest with God and preach to yourself. Thirdly, ...

3) Press In.

Our natural tendency when we are feeling down is to isolate, to withdraw. But it is vitally important to fight that tendency. The Psalmist resisted that response and instead he pressed in. Verses 13 and 14 of Psalm 77.

13Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God? 14You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples.

What is Asaph doing here? He's worshipping God.

Scripture tells us that Asaph was from the tribe of Levi. And King David placed him as the one in charge of singing in the house of God. He was a worship leader. Here is a worship leader and yet he is struggling with depression. Pastors, elders, ministry leaders are not exempt from the feeling of depression either.

The point I am trying to make is that Asaph may have very well forced himself to attend worship among God's people. He pressed in. Maybe he did that because it was his job, I don't know, but the point is he resisted the urge to withdraw and found himself among God's people worshipping Almighty God. Asaph willed himself to come to worship.^{xiii}

Community among God's people is vitally important especially in times of depression. It is in the context of community that you can ask your brothers and sisters to pray for you. Sometimes your faith is so weak, you need to borrow from the faith of those around you.^{xiv} Asaph did that.

Be honest with God, preach to yourself, and press in. Fourthly, ...

4) Get Outside Yourself.

Look at verses 15 through 20 of Psalm 77. ***15 You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah 16 When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled. 17The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side. 18The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook. 19Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen. 20You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.***

The Psalmist moves from recalling God's faithfulness to himself to what God is doing in the lives of others. He is looking beyond himself. A practical way you and I can look beyond ourselves is by serving, volunteering, and being a part of something that is bigger than you.

I remember in a season where I was feeling the effects of depression, I started to serve more, volunteer, in my church at the time. Sounds counter intuitive, doesn't it? When you are feeling down, minister to others? Yes. Here's what I found. When I began serving others, I realized a couple things. 1) There are people that are suffering from things far worse than I am. That helped me gain perspective. And 2) It makes you feel good when you make a difference in other people's lives. That will increase Dopamine and Serotonin hormone levels which will help. Exercise helps with that as well.^{xv}

When you feel depressed, how should you approach your feelings? Be honest with God, Preach to yourself, Press in, and get outside yourself.

CONCLUSION: I want to invite the band to come back up and lead us.

Now, some of you have been wiping tears away from the moment you sat down this morning because this is real for you. You are struggling. In fact, I think there are three types of people in this room today. There are those of you heading into the darkness. You can feel it, you can sense it. There are others of you who are in the midst of the darkness. God brought you to church today. And there are others that are just coming out of the darkness, and you've seen God's faithfulness. You're either heading in, you're already there, or by God's grace you're headed out.

I want you to know something. Jesus is Greater Than what you are facing today. And we would love to minister to you today. [PRAY]

ENDNOTES:

ⁱ Works consulted in preparation of this message: Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Classic Reflections on the Wisdom of the Psalms, Volume 2* Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA; Connor Bales, *The Dark Side of Life: Depression & Anxiety*, preached at New Beginnings Baptist Church, Gilmer Campus, 2017; Bruce Hennigan, M.D., *Depression: Reject the Guilt, Embrace the Cure*, article published by Focus on the Family, January 1, 2001; Martin G. Collins, *Sermon: Overcoming Discouragement And Depression*, preached August 17, 2002, published by Bible Tools; Dr. Adrian Rogers, *Dealing with Depression*, article published on Sermonsearch.com, accessed, May 31, 2022; Lloyd Stillely, *Sermon: When You are Troubled and Depressed*, published by LifeWay on Wednesday, January 1, 2014; Steven J. Cole, *Psalm 42-43: Dealing with Depression*, published on Blue Letter Bible in 1993; J.D. Greear, *Smoke From a Fire: Depression*, preached at Summit Church; Skip Heitzig, *Radioactive*, sermon preached at Calvary Church Albuquerque; Dr. Jack Graham, *Help! I'm Depressed*, sermon preached at Prestonwood Baptist Church, posted on YouTube, October 8, 2019; Alistair Begg, *Dealing with Depression: Trusting in God's Unfailing Love During Times of Despair*, published by Truth for Life, June 23, 1985.

ⁱⁱ Primary source could not be found. Dr. Nicholi's quote was mentioned in Steven J. Cole's message mentioned in previous footnote.

ⁱⁱⁱ Healthline Article found: <https://www.healthline.com/health/depression/facts-statistics-infographic#prevalence>.

^{iv} COVID-19 Mental Disorders Collaborators, Global prevalence and burden of depressive and anxiety disorders in 204 countries and territories in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Study accessed here: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(22\)00187-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(22)00187-8/fulltext).

^v Examples taken from Bruce Hennigan, M.D.'s article posted on Focus on the Family.

^{vi} Adrian Rogers, "Dealing with Depression."

^{vii} While these symptoms can be drawn from Psalm 77, the article on healthline names these very symptoms as indicative of depression.

^{viii} Healthline Article: <https://www.healthline.com/health/depression/facts-statistics-infographic#prevalence>.

^{ix} Connor Bales, *The Dark Side of Life: Depression & Anxiety*, preached at New Beginnings Baptist Church, Gilmer Campus, 2017.

^x Multiple verses in Psalm 42 for example.

^{xi} Each of these examples were mentioned in greater detail in Lloyd Stillely's sermon, *When You are Troubled and Depressed*.

^{xii} D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*, Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids, 1965, pages 20-21.

^{xiii} Stillely.

^{xiv} Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Darkness is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness*, Brazos Press: Ada, MI, 2006, page 88.

^{xv} Henry Ford Health, *How to Boost Feel-Good Hormones Naturally*, posted May 3, 2021, accessed: <https://www.henryford.com/blog/2021/05/how-to-boost-feel-good-hormones-naturally>.