

Battling Depression – Pursuing Joy in the Midst of Sorrow
Selected Text – Part 4

Introduction (Remember to Give Credit to Edward T. Welch)

It's been a little over a month that we began our study on Battling Depression by considering the need for us to be "honest with God." The first passage that we considered was Psalm 88, which graphically details the psalmist struggle with despair. Two weeks ago, we considered the five possible causes of suffering in our life. We concluded that instead of focusing on the identification of a source of suffering, our focus should be the Lord who has a holy purpose in the suffering we endure. Last week, we saw how Jesus himself shared in our sufferings and were reminded that in spite of what we sometimes perceive, God is still good and generous.

Transition – This week, we conclude our series with some practical points on how to wage the battle against depression in our pursuit of joy in Christ.

Exposition

I. Battle depression physically.

In Paul's two letters to Timothy, he addresses two physical aspects of Timothy's life that I believe are important for us to see. Timothy was most likely a young pastor who struggled with discouragement. In **2 Timothy 2:1**, Paul writes, "You then, my child be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Throughout the rest of the letter, Paul consistent reminds Timothy that suffering in faithful obedience to Christ is to be expected. Paul's call for Timothy to be "strengthened" and his constant refrain to "suffer" makes me think that Timothy was prone to feelings of sadness and sorrow. So what are the two physical aspects that Paul addresses in Timothy's life? Answer: Exercise and Diet.

- **1 Timothy 4:7-8** – "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."
- **1 Timothy 5:23** – "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments."

If you take these two passages together, while it is true that spiritual concerns are of the utmost importance, Paul still has concern for the physical concerns in Timothy's life. The implication of exercise for Timothy is that it "holds promise for the present life." Regarding his diet, Paul recognizes that a little wine could go a long way to help Timothy with his stomach issues and frequent ailments.

As long as we have these bodies, we should take care of them as good stewards. If Paul cared about Timothy's physical being, we should care about ours.

Now, what does that mean for battling depression? Obviously not everyone here is going to run out of church today and join a gym. Some may not even be able to exercise. So what's my point? My point is that God has so designed our bodies that sometimes there are physical causes of our depression that can be addressed with simple lifestyle changes and a better understanding of our physical health.

One example will prove my point: a good friend of mine was counseling a woman for several weeks that felt like she was on the brink of a mental breakdown. She didn't know what the problem was. My friend suggested that she visit a doctor. A few days later after her doctor's appointment, she called him to let him know there would no longer be a need for them to meet for counseling. While she was at the doctor's office, she found out that she was pregnant. This simply point illustrates that sometime all we need is a change in our exercise routine, our diet, our rest, our medicine dosages, or our perspective about our health in order to battle depression.

If you are typically an upbeat and happy person, but have recently noticed an unexplainable dip into sadness or despair, I would encourage you to make an appointment with your doctor for a general checkup.

II. Battle depression personally.

God has never intended for mankind to dwell in isolation. He created us for fellowship with him and one another. Most of you are familiar with the two great commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and Love your neighbor as yourself. These two commands reflect our inherent need for relationship.

As we saw a few weeks ago, feelings of isolation are some of the hardest for those battling depression. I believe that is why **Galatians 6:2** is particular important for us in this regard. It says, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

We were not made to bear all of the burdens of this life by ourselves. We need each other. I need you to help me bear my burdens. You need me, and others to help you. It is a group effort rooted in the grace of God!

But what makes this possible? The gospel of Jesus Christ does! You see, one of the greatest lies that the enemy feeds us is that others will not understand our struggles and burdens. We believe that they will reject us. They won't accept us. And admittedly, in the world, this may be true, but in the church of Jesus Christ, it **MUST NEVER BE TRUE!** **Ephesians 4:32** says, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

If you are struggling to fight depression this morning, then I want to encourage you to battle by being with others that can point you to the hope that is in Christ. If you are able, find a small group here at the church to plug into. They meet on Sunday mornings at 9:30am. If you can't make it to that, then come be a part of our prayer meetings on Wednesday night where we break up into small prayer groups and bear one another's burdens to Christ.

In addition to these opportunities, we have the men's Thursday night Bible studies here at the church building for men that might be interested. For the ladies, you could be a part of the retreat this weekend or plug into the monthly opportunities that our ladies ministry affords you. We've even got the bowling league available for you! The point, though, is simply: you need others in your life to help you live! We all do!

Maybe you have a friend or a family member that is living in isolation from others, and you are not real certain how you should help them. Let me say this: Don't wait for the struggling one in your life to call you. You seek them out. Do it carefully. Do it sympathetically. Do it subtly. But however you decide to do it, seek them out.

III. Battle depression prayerfully.

Psalm 40:17 says, "As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me." What a wonderful thought?!? The Lord of the universe takes "thought" of us in our poverty and need. Because He takes thought of us, we can, as **1 Peter 5:7** tells us, "cast all our anxieties on him." Prayer is warfare. It is battle. In his famous discussion on spiritual warfare in **Ephesians 6**, the apostle Paul tells Christians to "pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication."

But what about those times when we don't know what to pray? **Romans 8:26** says, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

Prayer is indispensable in the battle against depression. Even when we don't know what to say, we simply need to get silent before the Lord with our minds focused upon Him and allow the Holy Spirit to plead our case before Him.

As Leonard Ravenhill said, "Failing here, we fail everywhere." May we NEVER view prayer as a second-class form of ministry or service in the church. It is vital! I'll admit it: we have a difficult road ahead of us as a church. We inhabit a facility that was meant to be supported by hundreds more people than we currently have. We are located in a transitioning neighborhood. Our needs are great, and resources seem low, yet a week doesn't go by that I am not told by at least someone in this church that they are praying for me or praying for this church body! Every week a small but faithful number of people meet in this sanctuary and bombard heaven with our anxieties, our needs, and our concerns, and I know that the Lord takes thought of us! Others faithfully pray at home for the needs of others and the needs of this church.

The importance of prayer cannot be overstated, whether it be in the life of the church or in the life of the individual. We will make no progress without it, yet we will see the Lord move mountains in answer to it. Brothers and sisters, as you fight the good fight, fight prayerfully!

IV. Battle depression purposefully.

In the darkness of depression, it is easy to feel as though our life has no purpose. It is easy to believe that there is no point to our existence. Yet, God tells us otherwise! While the world would like to sell us on the idea that life is all about us, we **MUST** reject this notion. Life is not ultimately about you! It is about God. Specifically, it is about His glory.

After considering the vanity of the world, the preacher from the book of Ecclesiastes tells us what this life is all about. In **Ecclesiastes 12:13**, he writes, “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” The apostle Paul would state it like this in **1 Corinthians 10:31**, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

To glorify God means to reflect the beauty and holiness of God in our words and deeds. It is to show others what our God is like.

This means that in spite of the difficult that we experience, we, by the grace of God, must realize that our ultimately obligation to God is not severed by situation. Whatever the case, good or bad, making much of God must be our priority. It must be the purpose of our life!

How do you do this? It begins and continues with a growing understanding and love for what Jesus Christ has done for us! According to **1 Corinthians 15**, Jesus died for our sins so that we might be forgiven and freed from the penalty of death and judgment that we deserved. No matter how bad we perceive things to be in this life, because of the work of Jesus in His death and resurrection, we can be sure that they are only temporary.

Therefore, we can live for him, because He has died for us. And that’s not just some cheesy cliché. It is true. Our ability to face trials and sorrow in this life is dependent upon the hope we have in Jesus. Whether it is the loss of a job, a cancer diagnosis, the death of a child, or one of a thousand other awful realities, we can be sure that **NOTHING** can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord! (**Romans 8:39**)

V. Battle depression patiently.

Edward T. Welch makes the point in his book that “Depression says, ‘Surrender!’ The message is relentless, and many comply because even when you know that there is a purpose to your suffering, the battle seems too long.” Yet, while depression says, “surrender,” God’s Word continually says, “Be patient! Persevere! Endure! Hope!”

Romans 5:3 – “More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance.”

Romans 15:4 – “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instructions, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

2 Timothy 2:3 – “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

Hebrews 12:1 – “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and lest us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

James 5:7-8 – “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

My prayer for you and for myself today is that God would work such patience in us by His Holy Spirit that we might endure. We must not succumb to this “instant, on-demand” society that we live in. Growth in this area of our life takes times! It takes perseverance. It takes patient.

Conclusion

This battle is not easy. It will not be won over night, but praise God, it will not last forever! In the meantime, by the grace of God, let us battle physically, personally, prayerfully, purposefully, and patiently, while we wait for the day when everything wrong about this world will be forever reconciled and restored by the One who tells us: “Surely I am coming soon!”

To which we say: Even so, Come, Lord Jesus!