

The Divine Cure for Depression

William Cowper was one of the church's greatest hymn writers, a person mightily used by God. But this gifted composer was not without frequent bouts of deep discouragement, even depression. The first attacks of despair struck him when he was a young man. He was admitted to St. Albans Insane Asylum, where he made several attempts to commit suicide. One of the doctors gave Cowper a Bible, and he began to read it. In learning of the grace of God, he put his trust in Christ and was gloriously saved.

A year after his conversion, Cowper left the asylum and met the famous John Newton, who became his pastor and close friend. Newton and Cowper collaborated to publish a hymnal that included many cherished songs, including Newton's "Amazing grace" and Cowper's "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood." But in spite of his conversion and expanding ministry, Cowper still struggled with attacks of depression. These often left him discouraged to the point of desiring death.

His attacks of depression drove Cowper to pursue God more deeply. Out of this soul-racking experience he wrote his famous hymn, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," a song that expresses an unwavering trust in God. The hymn stands as a testimony to the renewed strength and comfort his troubled heart found in God. Here was a man who experienced great disappointment in life, but he learned to trust God.

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.

You fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and shall break in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face. (Steven J. Lawson. Holman Old Testament Commentary, Psalms 1-75, page 222).

Perhaps you can connect with William Cowper.

The Psalmist in Psalms 42 and 43 knew the bitter taste of depression and discouragement. Three times David pours out his deep feelings in a word for word refrain or chorus:

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted in me? Hope you in god: for I shall yet praise him for the help of His countenance" (42:5, 11; 43:5).

He also found the remedy in God. In these two Psalms, the author refers to God thirty seven times.

The language is so similar to David's in other Psalms that the author was very likely David. David writes when he is in exile away from the tabernacle where he loved to worship God. He expresses his discouragement as a fugitive in 42:4. Listen to David shares his love for God's house in Psalm 122:1-2.

We know David was in exile twice:

1. *The first time David was forced to flee for his life was when his boss*, jealous king Saul, attempted to kill David after David killed Goliath and became more popular.

The work place can be a place of great drama, politics, favoritism, disappointment or even depression.

2. *The second time David was forced out of exile was when his rebellious son*, Absalom usurped David's kingship and David had abandon his throne.

Instead of our place of residence being "Home Sweet Home" or "No There is no Place like Home" family can be the most painful, depressing place on earth.

David writes a song with three stanzas where he pours out his complaints to God. But because he took his burden to the Lord, the Lord helped David work through his problems.

There is a progression in these three stanzas:

1. *The Believer is in a Spiritual Drought in 42:1-5*. This part of David's prayer song is mostly negative. David is struggling with hopelessness. Almost every day is a bad day.

2. *The Believer is in a Devastating Storm in 42:6-11*. Now David battles panic. Jonah quoted this verse when he thought he was drowning. The second stanza is a mixture of negative and the positive. David vacillates between the two. One day David feels he will be rescued and the next day he has another panic attack.

3. *The Believer is in a Dark Cave in 43:1-5*. David twice was in a dark lonely cave surrounded by his enemy Saul and his army according to 2 Samuel. The last stanza is mostly positive with faith in God.

Where are you this morning?

If you are in the first phase and you are spiritually dehydrated "Hope in God."

If you are in the second phase where you are about to drown, “Hope in God.”
If you are in the third phase and you feel all alone in the dark, “Hope in God.”

Let’s work through these one phase at a time.

1. The Believer in a Spiritual Drought (42:1-5)

A. The Location of Depression (42:1-2a)

- 1) Perhaps David was at one of his favorite brooks in the wilderness which was dried up when a panting and hunted deer shows up to get water.
And David says as he looks at the disappointed deer, “That is just the way I feel about God. My soul thirsts for God the living God, but He is nowhere to be found.”
- 2) Until God satisfies his thirst, he must be content to drink only his tears (v. 3a).
- 3) David likens himself to a deer which needs water daily and not a camel which can go without water for a week to a month depending on weather conditions.
- 4) Listen to David in Psalm 63:1 “O God, you are my God; early will I seek you: my soul thirsts for you, my flesh longs for you in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.”

B. The Cause of Depression (42:2b-4)

- 1) GOD: We think God has abandoned us “When shall I appear before God?” “Why doesn’t God do something?” Until God satisfies my thirst I must be content to drink only my tears.
- 2) PEOPLE: Our enemies mock us, “Where is your God?” I thought you said God answers prayers?
- 3) WORSHIP is not what it used to be (42:4). David is in the wilderness by a dried up brook. He is not leading the procession of a marching band bringing the Ark of the Covenant back to the Tabernacle dancing in the streets.
 - a) What is worship? Is worship a feeling?
 - b) Worship is giving to God what He deserves because He gave to us what we did not deserve. He gave His Son. He gave us salvation.

C. The Cure for Depression is God Centered (42:5)

- 1) Have a serious conversation with yourself and ask yourself some serious questions:

“Why am I depressed?” “Why am I knocked to the mate?” “Is it a wrong view of God? Is it my focus on my enemies? Is it because my circumstance has changed? Is it because I don’t worship the way I used to? Am I going to stay down to the

count of ten? Listen to Paul in 2 Cor 4 who was all beaten up with life, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; **cast down, but not destroyed.**”

One of the greatest boxing matches in history was the 1974 Rumble in the Jungle in Zaire between Muhammad Ali and defending world champion George Foreman. Ali beat Foreman and became the greatest. Foreman went into a two year depression. He was down but he was not out. Foreman came back and has succeeded as a businessman with his George Foreman mean lean grilling machine.

2) Next answer yourself with God’s answers.

a) Hope in God not your feelings.

1. The just shall live by faith. We walk by faith not by sight.

2. Get back into the Word and get a Biblical view of God. God does not abandon His people.

b) Hope in God not your circumstances. Circumstances change but God doesn’t.

William Cowper wrote: “Behind a frowning providence God hides His smiling face.”

c) Hope in God not in people. Praise the Lord instead of complaining about your enemies.