

Undefeated

3. Undefeated Hope

April 17-18, 2021

Text: Psalm 42

I've been in a good mood lately! It's springtime, and I'm loving the warmer weather and feeling the sunshine. And I've noticed more hope in the air, too. People are starting to feel hopeful about the COVID pandemic coming to an end. It's not over yet, but with more and more people getting vaccinated, people everywhere are starting to think about life after COVID. I saw fans in the stands at the Pirates and Penguins games for the first time in a couple years. Not many, but they're there. And I even have airline tickets! I've got a couple of conferences coming up. After not flying for over a year, it feels like a little bit of normalcy. So, I'm in a good mood today. But over the last year, I also had some moments where I got down. That's the way moods work. They go up and down – especially during COVID. Some days we feel hopeful. Other days, not so much. So today I want to talk about how we can maintain hope amidst all the changes and challenges of life. If you have a Bible, please turn to Psalm 42. Psalm 42 was written by David, Israel's greatest King. It was meant to be put to music. It's like song lyrics. It would have been a sad song because David wrote this when struggling emotionally. He had lost hope and was depressed. ***3 My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"***

Have you ever felt like David did? Maybe you know what it's like to be on a diet of tears, or at least to lose the joy of life. When you don't feel like doing anything, even the things you've enjoyed in the in past, you wonder what difference it makes whether you try or not. It's hard to envision a better future. David felt that way, and the people around David were asking him, "Where's your God?" When we're struggling emotionally, sometimes people with good intentions try to snap us out of it by saying, "Aren't you a Christian? Where's your faith?" They assume a true believer would never get down or depressed. But that's just not the case. Throughout history we see godly people fall into periods of depression.

The Old Testament tells us that David and the prophet Elijah got depressed. Great leaders of the church like Martin Luther and CS Lewis battled depression. So did a famous hymn writer named William Cowper. Some years ago, speaker and writer Carlos Whittaker posted a picture [Picture shown on the big screen.] of his medication bottle, revealing that he has struggled with depression and anxiety for ten years, and for him, "a Paxil a day keeps the doctor away." Charles Spurgeon was one of history's greatest preachers. He lived in the 1800s, and huge numbers would come to hear him and find Christ. But he also wrestled with depression. He said, "[Depression] is not a virtue, I believe it is a vice. I am heartily ashamed of myself for falling into it, but I am sure there is no remedy for it like a holy faith in God."

Too often, there's a stigma that surrounds depression - particularly chemical depression - or major depressive disorders. That causes people to hide what they're going through from other believers and even from God sometimes. That prevents

people who are struggling to come forward and reveal how God is working in their lives. But David didn't hide that he was depressed. He reveals what he did to regain hope. In verse 5 he says, ***5 Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*** David preaches to himself! "Why are you downcast?" he asks himself. "Put your hope in God!" This is so important that he ends the Psalm by reminding himself of this, repeating the same words, v. 11: ***Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*** David shows us that the first step in regaining our hope is to talk to ourselves and tell ourselves God's truth. That's because **Our hope rises or falls depending on the voices we listen to.** We each have an inner voice narrating as we go through the day. It's an inner voice that only we can hear. That voice is either strengthening our hope or weakening our hope.

Sometimes the inner voice we're listening is **our own**. In verse 9 David writes, ***9 I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"*** Who says God has forgotten David? David does! "Why have you forgotten me?" He's going through his day telling himself that God doesn't see what's going on, that God doesn't care about him anymore, that God has forgotten him. Now, is that true? No, but that's the inner narration he has going on in his head. He says, "I have to live oppressed by my enemies." Is that what God told him? No, that's what David told himself. If we're feeling hopeless, we're probably talking to ourselves in hopeless ways like, "You'll never be able to succeed. You've always messed up when it really counts. No one will ever love you for who you are." When we listen to our fears, we grow fearful and lose hope. When we replay our past failures, we lose hope for the future.

Other times, the voices we're listening to in our heads belong to **others**. David had enemies who wanted to bring him down. And David heard what they were saying about him: ***10 My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"*** Notice that David could quote what his critics said about him. He memorized their mocking words. They echoed in his head. No wonder he was depressed. Sometimes other people's words can stick in our memories for years. We not only remember playground insults or a parent's angry words, we replay them in our minds. But those are not from God. If we constantly listen to them, we'll drain our hope and stoke our fears. We need to remember that just because we feel something doesn't mean it is real. It could just be an echo from the past.

My wife Linda got her second vaccination shot a couple weeks ago. She had a few side effects. She felt tired and achy. She felt very real symptoms of COVID, but she knew that she didn't have COVID. It was just after-effects of the vaccine. And it went away. You might have "symptoms" of having no future different than the moment. But that might be after-effects, echoes of other voices. Just because you feel anxious doesn't mean that something is wrong. Just because you feel down doesn't mean that your life is without meaning or that you have no future. God says you have a future. God says you are precious to him. That's what's true. That's what's real.

Martin Lloyd-Jones said, "Don't listen to yourself, preach to yourself." Don't let the voices in your mind go unedited. Replace them with God's truth. That's what David did. He told himself, ***put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my***

God. David was preaching hope to himself. We can do the same thing. Here are a few lines you can preach.

Preach to yourself -- God has blessed me. Verse 6 says ***6 My soul is downcast within me; therefore, I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.*** David was down, so he chose to remember God from the mountaintops God had given Israel. He was remembering how God had blessed [him] in the past. Preach it.

Recently, I got a call from a Crossroader who I knew had gone through a very hard time. Her husband died, and she had severe financial problems. There were family tensions. She also had serious health issues and couldn't leave the house for most of the past year because of her immune system. But during our phone call, all she could do was tell me how thankful she was for all the ways God had blessed her and how much she loved her friends. She wanted to help other people, and she looked forward to returning to church when her health allowed it. I was deeply humbled and inspired by her spirit. I started to think of the amazing ways I have been blessed -- too many to count. Ten years ago, I collapsed at the gym without a pulse. I was dead. But miraculously, God arranged for me to survive without any heart damage or restrictions. I was dead, and I have been given new life. What should I complain or about? And that is true for each of us who follow Jesus. Maybe you didn't have a cardiac arrest, but the Bible says we were dead in our sins, but Christ made us alive in our spirits, and that we will live eternally with him. Talk about blessing! Let's all preach this truth aloud together -- *God has blessed me.*

Here's another hope-building truth to preach to ourselves -- **God is with me.** David sometimes felt like God had forgotten him. But later he realized that wasn't true. He said in Verse 8 -- ***8 By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me -- a prayer to the God of my life.*** David is focusing on God's truth -- that God loves him. He focuses on the truth that God is present. His song is with him. God is with us, too. Jesus said, "I will never leave or forsake you." And our hope will grow when we don't just tell ourselves that but also act on that truth.

David didn't just tell himself that God was with him. He also chose to put himself in a position to experience the presence of God personally. Psalm 42 mentions two ways he put himself under God's faucet -- two practices that will build our hope. First, David worshiped with others. ***4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.*** This verse came to my mind several times over the past year of COVID. There were a few times that I felt down about not worshipping the same as before. I remembered the Christmas Eve services which were packed and full of electricity. When we regathered, I was reminded that the Holy Spirit is present in a special way when Jesus' people gather in his name and worship him together. I saw faith being released in people. The power of God is present to heal, and Jesus is in the midst of us. We need to worship with others, because ultimately, worship is not something we watch. It's something we do with others. It's a rehearsal for Heaven, where we will be gathered with countless others before the throne of God.

I am convinced that God is at work among his Church and Crossroads. He is doing a new thing. He didn't cause COVID, but he'll use it to refine us and lead us toward his purposes. We can be a stronger, renewed church that looks even more like

the Early Church, which was a movement of house churches. David valued gathering with God's people. And that will help us experience the presence of God so that we know he is with us.

A second practice of David was to seek God privately. **Verse 1** *As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?* David wanted more of God's presence so deeply that he compared it to panting in thirst. Thirst is powerful.

The book *Sahara Unveiled* [Photo shown on the big screens] tells the story of an Algerian named Lag Lag and a companion whose truck broke down while crossing the desert. They nearly died of thirst during the three weeks they waited before being rescued. As their bodies dehydrated, they became willing to drink anything in hopes of quenching their terrible thirst. The sun forced them into the shade under the truck, where they dug a shallow trench. They lay there day after day. They had food but did not eat it. They were afraid it would magnify their thirst. Those who are lost in the desert don't die of starvation. They die of dehydration. And thirst is the most terrible of all human sufferings. When sustained extreme thirst sets in, people will drink anything. Lag Lag and his friend started to drink rusty water out of their truck's radiator. Their thirst was so bad, and they were so desperate, that they were willing to drink what was essentially poison. We can do the same thing spiritually. When we get disconnected from God's presence, our souls become thirsty. They lose hope. We may not understand what is happening or what we really crave, but we can't live with a thirsty soul.

So if we don't turn to God, we will turn to other things to quench our soul's thirst. We will be drawn to things like money, sex, and power. We may not even understand why. But at a soul level, we think they will fill our inner needs. Unfortunately, those "thirst quenchers" are actually spiritual poison, a dangerous substitute for the "living water" of God. They might seem better than nothing at first. But they end up hurting us more than they help. The answer is to seek God's presence in a personal way. God is with us, so let's press in through public and private worship. When we connect with God presence, it will restore and maintain our hope even in difficult situations. Let's all preach this truth aloud together -- *God is with me.*

Let's read the final verse of Psalm 42 aloud together. **11** *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*