



HOPE IN GOD.

“WHY ARE CAST DOWN, O MY SOUL,
AND WHY ARE YOU IN TURMOIL WITHIN ME?
HOPE IN GOD; FOR I SHALL AGAIN PRAISE HIM,
MY SALVATION AND MY GOD.”

PSALM 42:5, 11; 43:5

The year was 2017, and the most popular trend was fidget spinners. Stores couldn't keep them from flying off the shelf. People could buy their spinner in all sorts of colors with different types of logos on them: their favorite band or favorite baseball team. Their soaring popularity was proof positive of the widespread epidemic they were created to ease: anxiety. A couple years ago, the New York Times printed an editorial labeling our society as the “United States of Xanax.”¹ Anxiety, and overwhelming fear and constant worry, and its favorite counterpart, depression, are also cause for concern in our Christian life. We feel these same things toward God: anxiety toward our relationship to him and his actions toward us, and depression, overwhelming sadness and dread because we fear he has abandoned us.

This is going to be the topic of our conversation in our new series! That's right. We are going to kick off this spring by doing a study on spiritual depression. Welcome to the new year everybody! In all seriousness, I'm really excited to study God's Word with all of you and consider what it has to say to those of us who have struggled, are struggling, or will struggle through periods of spiritual depression. A definition of spiritual depression that we'll work with is this: **a severe sadness and darkness of soul linked to a crisis of faith.** Here's what I know, though. For those of you who have felt its effects, words don't do the pain justice. It's a feeling of loneliness unimaginable, of internal agony indescribable, of screaming silence, of excruciating apathy. Spiritual depression is the soul's panting for God without finding any refreshment.

Throughout this series, my aim will be to look at the Scriptures in order to determine some significant causes of spiritual depression as well as provide its cure. In the coming weeks, some of the causes we will study are: misunderstanding the basic doctrines of our faith, big sins in the past, fear of the future, chasing the wrong thing for happiness, and more.

At this point, want to make a clear note. **This series is NOT an attempt to talk about the physical treatment of depression. That is the work for a medical doctor, which I am not.** I believe that medicine, counseling, doctors, and counselors are gifts from God, and should be celebrated. However, those things are rarely the cure. They may be treatments, but there is a cure. Physical conditions, however, certainly influence the spiritual. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a medical doctor-turned-preacher, said it like this: “You cannot isolate the spiritual from the physical for we are body, mind and spirit. The greatest and best Christians when they are physically weak are more prone to an attack of spiritual depression than at any other time and there are great illustrations of this in the Scriptures.”² Since the Bible speaks clearly about the physical and spiritual in relation to spiritual depression, so will we.

Finally, why would we do a study on spiritual depression? And why should you care to listen? That answer is fairly simple, really. Consider you and your friends. Think of how often you hear the words “depressed” and “anxiety” to describe how you feel. My guess is that you can't remember the last time you went a full day without hearing those two words. Those realities are a part of our everyday normal. And statistics paint an even clearer picture of just how common a condition depression actually is. According to an American College Health Association survey in Spring 2017, “nearly 40% of college students said they had felt so depressed in the prior year that it was difficult for them to function, and 61% of students said they had ‘felt overwhelming anxiety.’”³ Last year, FGCU's on-campus counseling service, CAPS, treated over 1,700

¹ Williams, A. (2017, June 10). *Prozac Nation Is Now the United States of Xanax*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/10/style/anxiety-is-the-new-depression-xanax.html>

² Lloyd-Jones, D. (1965). *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 19.

³ Reilly, K. (2018, March 19). *Record Numbers of College Students Are Seeking Treatment for Depression and Anxiety — But Schools Can't Keep Up*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/5190291/anxiety-depression-college-university-students/>

students for a variety of reasons, with the top four being: depression, anxiety, relationship concerns, and stress.

Christians battle depression and anxiety too. It's not a new phenomenon, either. You may be shocked to "notice the frequency with which this particular theme is dealt with in the Scriptures... It seems to be a condition which has afflicted God's people right from the beginning, for you find it described and dealt with in the Old Testament and in the New."⁴

Some of you tonight may be suffering spiritual depression. I pray that this series will be a comfort to you as we speak honestly about the issues causing you misery and pain. Not only that, but I want you to know that God has never desired for his church to be known by sadness. That distinguishing mark of Christ's church in the world is joy! In a sense a depressed Christian is a contradiction in terms. Know this: there is hope. Jesus himself said in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." There is hope for all Christians to once again enjoy life in Christ.

BIG IDEA:

The steadfast love of the Lord is our hope in the midst of spiritual depression.

"Causeless depression is not to be reasoned with, nor can David's harp charm it away by sweet discourings. As well fight with the mist as with this shapeless, indefinable, yet all-beclouding hopelessness. One affords himself not pity when in this case, because it seems so unreasonable, and even sinful to be troubled without manifest cause; and yet troubled as the man is, even in the very depths of his spirit. If those who laugh at such melancholy did but feel the grief of it for one hour, their laughter would be sobered into compassion. Resolution might, perhaps, shake it off, but where are we to find the resolution, when the whole man is unstrung? The physician and the divine may unite their skill in such cases, and both find their hands full, and more than full. The iron bolt which so mysteriously fastens the door of hope, and holds our spirits in gloomy prison needs a heavenly hand to push it back."⁵ - Charles Spurgeon

SOME CAUSES OF SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION

1. Personal temperament
2. Physical conditions
3. Life events that demand a response
4. Spiritual warfare

UNDERSTANDING THE BATTLE:

- Depression's Taunt: "Where is your God?"
- Our Hope: *The Steadfast Love of God* - God's unfailing, unrelenting, covenant love toward us - his people.

PREACHING HOPE TO OUR DEPRESSED HEARTS

"Have you 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 are 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 [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says: "Self, listen for moment, I will speak to you."⁶ - D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

1. When I fear God has abandoned me, I will cling to God my Rock (vv. 1-4; 9)
 - **Pain Point:** I'm panting for a God I once tasted, but I'm finding no refreshment!
 - **Preach Hope:** God says, "I see you, I hear you, and I know."

Exodus 2:23-25 - "During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, D. (1965). *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure.*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 10.

⁵ Spurgeon, C. (2010). *Lectures to My Students.*, (Hendrickson Publishers), 168.

⁶ Lloyd-Jones, D. (1965). *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure.*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 20-21.

their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.”

- **Preach Christ:** Jesus Christ is our Cornerstone.

1 Peter 2:4-6 - “As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

2. When I feel like God has forgotten me, I will remember God my Life (vv. 6-10)

“Mockery takes dead aim at our staunchest natural defense and tries to blow it away. Mockery aims to shred human dignity and therefore [strip] its victim in a specially devastating way. [During WWII] Nazis used mockery not only to entertain themselves but also to demoralize their victims.”⁷ - Cornelius Plantinga Jr.

- **Pain Point:** If he really cares about me, why is this happening?
- **Preach Hope:** God draws close to us in our weaknesses.

2 Cor. 12:7b-10 - “... a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times, I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 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 of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

- **Preach Christ:** Because of Jesus, I have mercy and grace in my time of need.

1 Pet. 2:4-6 - “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

“By all the castings down of his servants God is glorified, for they are led to **magnify** him when again he sets them on their feet, and even while prostrate in the dust their faith yields him praise. They speak all the more sweetly of his faithfulness, and are the more firmly established in his love. Such mature men as some elderly preachers are could scarcely have been produced if they had not been emptied from vessel to vessel, and made to see their own emptiness and the vanity of all things round about them. Glory be to God for the furnace, the hammer, and the file. Heaven shall be all the fuller of bliss because we have been filled with anguish here below, and the earth shall be better tilled because of our training in the school of adversity.”⁸ - Charles Spurgeon

3. When I worry God has rejected me, I will trust God my exceeding Joy (43:1-4)

- **Pain Point:** Won’t this ever stop?
- **Preach Hope:** The Lord’s steadfast love toward Christians endures forever.

Psalms 136 - “... to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, *for his steadfast love endures forever*, and brought Israel out from among them, *for his steadfast love endures forever*, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, *for his steadfast love endures forever*, to him who divided the Red Sea in two, *for his steadfast love endures forever*, and made Israel pass through the midst of it, *for his steadfast love endures forever*, but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, *for his steadfast love endures forever*, to him who led his people through the wilderness, *for his steadfast love endures forever*... It is he who remembered us in our low estate, *for his steadfast love endures forever*, and rescued us from our foes, *for his steadfast love endures forever*... Give thanks to the God of heaven, *for his steadfast love endures forever*.”

- **Preach Christ:** Thanks to Jesus’ work, I live today in the power of the Holy Spirit and will enjoy heaven forever.

⁷ Plantinga Jr., C. (1996). *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin.*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.), 32.

⁸ Spurgeon, C. (2010). *Lectures to My Students.*, (Hendrickson Publishers), 169.

Jude 24 - "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy."

"Continue, with double earnestness, to serve your Lord when no visible result is before you. Any simpleton can follow the narrow path in the light: faith's rare wisdom enables us to march on in the dark with infallible accuracy, since she places her hand in that of her great Guide. Between this and heaven there may be rougher weather yet, but it is all provided for by our covenant Head."⁹ - Charles Spurgeon