



# The Psalms

Book 2: Songs of Community

## *Singing the Blues:*

A JESUS-TUNE FOR TIMES OF DEPRESSION

Psalms 42-43

*“Sometimes I feel like a motherless child...  
Long way from home, long way from home.  
Sometimes I feel that I’m almost done...”*

Jill and I recently visited the Legacy Museum in Montgomery and were reminded of the human suffering that inspired this old negro spiritual. The slave market in Montgomery often meant that slave families experienced the anguish of separation: husbands from wives and parents from children, brothers and sisters from one another.

Similarly, I recently listened to an audio recording of the children of illegal immigrants crying because they had been separated from their parents.

Music scholars say the blues, as a genre, began among southern slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But Psalms 42 and 43 *prove* that the blues started long before then. For wherever there has been sadness and music, the blues have been sung.

The Psalmist describes sadness as being “sunk down”. All of us are sad sometimes. And there’s plenty to be sad about. We live in a fallen, sinful and broken world. Sometimes sadness lasts a season, for good reason. Sometimes sadness is deep, prolonged and persistent – and that’s when we call it **depression**.

A study published in January conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that suicide rates for U.S. *veterinarians* are much higher than those of the general population.

The 36 year study of 11,620 veterinarian deaths concluded that female veterinarians were 3.5 times and male veterinarians 2.1 times as likely to die from suicide than the general population.<sup>1</sup> From 2000 to 2015, roughly 10% of deaths among female veterinarians could be attributed to suicide.<sup>2</sup>

Why? Researchers point to a mental health crisis exacerbated by financial struggles, a poor work-life balance, compassion fatigue, depression and other factors.

You are veterinarians and veterinarian students. A crisis is before you. It’s time to learn to sing the blues.

- I. So, what does depression look like? How do we experience it? Let’s listen to the Psalmist sing the blues to find out.
  - a. Verses 1-2: *longing – stretched out -- painful*
  - b. Verse 3: *tears, taunting questions, social isolation*
  - c. Verse 4: *regret, loss*
  - d. Verse 5: *sunk down (deflated, sinking); disturbed/ restless*
  - e. Verse 7: *overwhelmed – “breakers and waves”*
  - f. Verse 9: *“forgotten” – alone; doubting, self-critical*
  - g. Verse 10: *like physical pain – “shattering bone”*
  - h. 43:1: *Pressure, oppression*
  - i. 43:2: *rejected by God*

<sup>1</sup> Today's Veterinary Business DEC 2018

<sup>2</sup> Time online; By **JAMIE DUCHARME** December 20, 2018

Elizabeth Wurtzel, in her book *Prozac Nation*, describes depression as “a complete absence; absence of affect, absence of feeling, absence of response, absence of interest. The pain you feel in the course of a major clinical depression is an attempt on nature’s part to fill up the empty space. But for all intents and purposes, the deeply depressed are just the walking, waking dead.”<sup>3</sup>

- II. So what’s going on when I get depressed? How do the scriptures help me understand it?
- a. Understanding longing and loss
    - i. God made us longing creatures
      1. With image of God (spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical) appetites
      2. What is the psalmist longing for?
        - a. Life with God (:1), life with others (:4), life with self.
    - b. We were made for such life. When it is diminished or lost, we become sad, deflated, sunk down.
      - i. *When my fallenness (sinfulness/ brokenness, emptiness, loneliness) and the fallenness (sinfulness/ brokenness, etc.) of the world fall on me and fill my soul, I get sad. I get the blues.*
      - ii. It is right to be sad for what has been lost. The trouble comes when we get stuck in the sadness, when sadness becomes depression. We get stuck or “sunk” in our sadness through anxiety and anger.
        1. **Anxiety is the unrelenting fear of loss.** Anxiety feeds off of the future. It is consumed with what may be lost.
          - a. “when” questions.

2. **Anger is the unrelenting protest of loss.** Anger feeds off of the present and the past. It is consumed with what is and has been lost. (:4, 6)
3. Unrelenting, anxiety and anger become a powerful, downward vortex into depression.
  - a. The gerbil cage - exhaustion
  - b. There are important medical exceptions. God made us body-souls so we take both body and soul seriously. Get a good physical exam. Consider psycho--active medications as part of but not the whole solution.
  - c. But depression is almost always rooted in *something we will not let go.*

I need to know how to live with my sadness. Southern slaves have passed on to us a more ancient prescription that, given a healthy brain, will lead us through sadness to joy. They sang the blues, and today, in Psalm 42 & 43, God teaches us to sing out our sadness, too.

- III. Can there be beauty in the blues? Can good come out of our sadness, even our depression? Psalms 42 and 43 say “Yes” and show us how.
- a. Pour out your sadness! This psalm exists because someone, one of the sons of Korah, labored to release his sadness into song.
    - i. “sons of Korah”, original blues brothers?
    - ii. :4 “These things I remember *and I pour out my soul within me.*”
    - iii. **Cooped up sadness kills us.**

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Wurtzel, *Prozac Nation* (New York, Riverhead), 22.

- iv. Psalm points to three key relationships where our sadness needs to be “poured out”, expressed.
1. “pour out” your soul to God  
42:1, 6-7, 43:1-3,
    - a. 42:8 – *His* Song becomes *our* prayer.
  2. “pour out” your soul to the community of God 42:2-4, 8-10, 43:4
    - a. God has provided His people, His community, to walk with us through depression. Find someone to trust. Someone to talk to who will give you the presence of Jesus in your depression.
  3. “pour out your soul” to yourself 42:5, 11, 43:5
    - a. Most of us listen to our souls. In these Psalms the writer is speaking to his soul!
- b. God invites us to pour out our souls, to sing the blues, because that how the blues become the way to something beautiful. First, singing the blues helps us engage the reality of our longings, our sadness and our hope.
- c. Sin alienated us from ourselves. We don’t know ourselves, so...
1. Singing the blues brings us face to face with our **longings**
    - a. 42:1-2 longing for God
    - b. 42:3-4 community (enemies then friends)
    - c. 42:5 etc. hope, peace, joy, truth (43:3)
2. Singing the blues points us to our **sadness**
    - a. Jill teases: “What’s wrong?” on Sunday. It’s Wednesday before I realize what’s wrong!
    - b. Ever been singing a song and been surprise by tears, or a knot in your throat?
    - c. Three questions: “when” (:2), “where” (:3); “why” (5, 9 11, 43:2, 5)
  3. Singing the blues points us to our **hope** (what or who you count on to meet your longings)
    - a. Today’s culture hopes is in medicine, politics wealth, freedom or relationships.
    - b. The Psalmist’s hope in sadness is to see the face of God. He speaks of “*the saving acts of His presence (literally, face)*.” “*When will I come before His face?*” (42:2) In Jesus Christ, God has come face to face with all who believe: 2 Corinthians 4:6.
    - c. Instead of responding with anxiety and anger, the pain of longing and the pain of loss can point us to the One who both joins us in our sorrows and saves us from our sorrows.
  4. God has done two things in response to our sadness. He has done two things that grow beauty out of the blues:
    - He has come face to face with us, to carry our sadness.

- He has come face to face with us to redeem our sadness.
- a. Jesus Christ knows every trouble of the human experience, yet without sin. When Jesus went to the cross, He took not only all our sin, but also all our sorrows, all our longing, all our losses with Him so that He might be united to us in our sadness. He now longs and weeps with us.
  - i. Isaiah 53:4 describes this union in suffering. *He has borne our griefs. He has carried our sorrows.*
  - ii. *“He will not despise the affliction of the afflicted, nor will He hide His face from Him.”* (Ps. 22).
  - iii. **In Christ, we are never alone in our sadness.**
- b. Jesus Christ also came down so that **our suffering would not be for nothing.** As Christ’s suffering was the path of His redemption, united with Him, our suffering becomes part of that redemption story. Christ defeated all sadness and rose from its smothering weight, turning our sadness into joy, our suffering into renewal. Here is our hero, our champion, our hope -- our Redeemer!
  - i. Our sadnesses are changing us -- Romans 5:1-5 -- so that your face may not be ruled by your sadness but by His hope and glory.
- ii. So, sing the blues in your sadness. They are the Jesus Blues, where sadness and His glory meet.

NOTES:

God commands the gospel (chesed) in the day and sings it to us in the dark...and like a child we sing it back to Him as a prayer. (:8)

His presence always outlasts our pain.

See God at work (speaking) through the loss/sadness: “deep calls to deep at the sound /voice of your waterfalls. All your breakers and waves have rolled over me.” (:7) Our sadness opens us up more deeply and God speaks the gospel into that greater depth.