

The Cure for Despondency

By A.W. Pink

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me?”—Psalm 42:5

When the Psalmist gave utterance to these words, his spirit was dejected and his heart was heavy within him. In the checkered career of David there was not a little which was calculated to sadden and depress: the cruel persecutions of Saul, who hunted him as a partridge upon the mountains, the treachery of his trusted friend Ahitophel, the perfidy of Absalom, and the remembrance of his own sins, were enough to overwhelm the stoutest. And David was a man of like passions with us: he was not always upon the mountain-top of joy, but sometimes spent seasons in the slough of despond and the gorge of gloom.

But David did not give way to despair, nor succumb to his sorrows. He did not lie down like a stricken beast and do nought but fill the air with his howlings. No, he acted like a rational creature, and like a man, looked his troubles squarely in the face. But he did more; he made diligent inquiry, he challenged himself, he sought to discover the cause of his despondency: he asked, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” He desired to know the reason for such depression. This is often the first step toward recovery from dejection of spirit. Repining and murmuring get us nowhere. Fretting and wringing our hands bring no relief either temporally or spiritually. There needs to be self-interrogation, self-examination, self-condemnation.

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” We need to seriously take ourselves to task. We need to fearlessly face a few plain questions. What is the good of giving way to despair? What possible gain can it bring me? To sit and sulk is not “redeeming the time” (Eph 5:16). To mope and mourn will not mend matters. Then let each despondent one call his soul to account, and inquire what adequate cause could be assigned for peevishness and fretting. “We may have great cause to mourn for sin, and to pray against prevailing impiety: but our great dejection, even under the severest outward afflictions or inward trials, springs from unbelief and a rebellious will: we should therefore strive and pray against it” (Thomas Scott).

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” Cannot you discover the real answer without asking counsel from others? Is it not true that, deep down in your heart, you already know, or at least suspect, the root of your present trouble? Are you “cast down” because of distressing circumstances which your own folly has brought you into? Then acknowledge with the Psalmist, “I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me” (119:75). Is it because of some sin, some course of self-will, some sowing to the flesh, that you are now of the flesh reaping corruption? Then confess the same to God and plead the promise found in Proverbs 28:13: “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” Or are you grieved because Providence has not smiled upon you so sweetly as it has on some of your neighbors? Then heed that injunction, “Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity” (Psalm 37:1).

Perhaps the cases suggested above do not exactly fit that of some of our readers. Not a few may say, “My soul is cast down and my heart is heavy because my finances are at so low an ebb, and the outlook is so dark.” That is indeed a painful trial, and one which mere nature often sinks under. But, dear friend, there is a cure for despondency even when so occasioned. He who declares “the cattle upon a thousand hills are Mine,” still lives and reigns! Cannot He who fed two million Israelites in the wilderness for forty years minister to you and your family? Cannot He who sustained Elijah in the time of famine keep you from starving? “If God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you. O ye of little faith!” (Matt 6:30).

Returning to our opening text, let us observe how that David not only succumbed not to his sorrows, interrogated his soul, and rebuked his unbelief, but he also preached to himself: “Hope thou in God!” Ah, that is what the despondent needs to do: nothing else will bring real relief to the heart. The immediate outlook may be dark, but the Divine promises are bright. The creature may fail you, but the Creator will not, if you truly put your trust in Him. The world may be at its wits' end, but the Christian needs not be so. There is One who is “a very present help in trouble” (Psa 46:1), and He never deserts those who really make Him their refuge. The writer has proved this, many, many a time, and so may the reader. The fact is that present

conditions afford a grand opportunity for learning the sufficiency of Divine grace. Faith cannot be exercised when everything needed is at hand to sight.

“Hope thou in God.” In His *mercy*: You have sinned, sinned grievously in the past, and now you are receiving your just deserts. True, but if you will penitently confess your sins, there is abundant mercy with the Lord to blot them all out (Isa 55:7). In his *power*: Every door may be shut against you, every channel of help be closed fast; but nothing is too hard for the Almighty! In His *faithfulness* : Men may have deceived you, broken their promises, and now desert you in the hour of need; but He who cannot lie is to be depended upon—O doubt not His promises. In His *love*: “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (John 13:1).

“For I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance.” Such is ever the blessed assurance of those who truly hope in God. They know that, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” (Psa 34:19). God has told them that “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa 30:5). So Christian reader, when the fiery trial has done its work, and your bonds are burned off (Dan 3:25), you will thank Him for the trials which are now so unpleasant. Then hopefully anticipate the future. Count upon God, and He will not fail you.

Let each Christian reader who is not now passing through deep waters join with the writer in fervent prayer to God, that He will graciously sanctify the “present distress” unto the spiritual good of His own people, and mercifully supply their temporal needs.