

# Psalm 77

## God's Cure for Depression

PART 1

### I. Introduction

The United States has seen a significant increase in anxiety and depression since the COVID pandemic began in early 2020. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention put out a report in August 2020 about the impact of COVID-19 on the nation's mental health. According to the report, "Among people ages 18-24, one in four (25.5%) 'seriously considered suicide in the past 30 days,' according to the survey. That translates into 82.5 million young men and women across the country contemplating ending their lives. Furthermore, 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance use in the prior 30 days, according to the CDC data."<sup>1</sup> The results of a survey conducted by the Mental Health America organization, found that in September 2020 the rate of moderate to severe anxiety and depression peaked with over 8 in 10 people scoring moderate to severe symptoms.<sup>2</sup> This means 80% of people you come across during daily life will be struggling with depression or anxiety. One online therapy/telehealth company reported a 65% jump in clients from mid-February to May 2020 showing how much people are looking for help.<sup>3</sup> The Kaiser Family Foundation found that 30% of adults in U.S. report having symptoms of anxiety or depression, but over 20% report needing, but not receiving, mental health counseling or therapy.<sup>4</sup>

1. What are some reasons "mental health/illness"<sup>5</sup> issues have skyrocketed during the pandemic? What are the dangers if it these issues go unaddressed in people's lives?
2. Why do Christians often feel intimidated or inadequate to address depression through biblical counseling?
3. How do 2 Peter 1:3 and 1 Timothy 3:16 encourage believers to wade into the water to help?
4. What is the problem with society referring to depression or anxiety as a "disorder" or "disease"? What is the solution to this problem?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/press-releases/demand-for-mental-health-and-addiction-services-increasing-as-covid-19-pandemic-continues-to-threaten-availability-of-treatment-options/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> "The State of Mental Health in America 2021" <https://mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america>, Accessed January 22, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> William Wan, "The Coronavirus Pandemic is Pushing America into a Mental Health Crisis," The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/04/mental-health-coronavirus/> Accessed January 22, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> "Mental Health and Substance Use State Fact Sheets" Published Nov. 19, 2020. <https://www.kff.org/statedata/mental-health-and-substance-use-state-fact-sheets/> Accessed January 22, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> "Mental illness" is a term that, although it can refer to real problems, is loaded with meaning from the psychology world I do not agree with – in particular that anxiety and depression are an physical illness.

## II. Understanding Depression (What is it?)

1. What descriptive synonyms or words come to your mind when you hear the word depression? (cf. Ps. 31:10; 69:20; Prov. 15:13; Lam. 3:17; 2 Cor. 1:8)

### DSM-IV Criteria for Depression (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* – American Psychiatric Association)

1. “Five or more of the following symptoms have been present during the same two-week period and represent a change from previous function; at least one of the symptoms I either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure.
  - a. Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day, as indicated by either subjective report (e.g., feels sad or empty) or observation made by others (e.g., appears tearful). Note: In children and adolescents, can be irritable mood.
  - b. Marked diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day (as indicated by either subjective account or observation made by others).
  - c. Significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain (e.g., a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month), or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day. Note: In children, consider failure to make expected weight gains.
  - d. Insomnia or hypersomnia [can’t stay awake] every day.
  - e. Psychomotor agitation or retardation nearly every day (observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down).
  - f. Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day.
  - g. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day (not merely self-reproach or guilty about being sick).
  - h. Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day (either by subjective account or observation made by others).
  - i. Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying); recurring suicidal ideation without a specific plan; or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide.
2. The symptoms do not meet criteria for a Mixed Episode (fast manic depression -daily change for a week).
3. The symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
4. The symptoms are not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or a general medical condition (e.g., hypothyroidism).
5. The symptoms are not better accounted for by bereavement; for example, after the loss of a loved one, the symptoms persist for longer than two months or are characterized by marked functional impairment, morbid preoccupation along with worthlessness, suicidal ideation, psychotic symptoms, or psychomotor retardation.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Robert D. Smith, M.D. *The Christian Counselor’s Medical Desk Reference* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts: 2011), 222-223.

The DSM-IV, like other aspects of psychology, offers good descriptions and observations of behaviors and problems, but only offers bad conclusions and prescriptions for those problems because of its non-biblical world view. It also doesn't help us nail down a clear definition of depression. "Psychological labels are descriptions which say little about cures or ultimate causes."<sup>7</sup>

**a. World's Definition of Depression**

- i. "Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act. Fortunately, it is also treatable. Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease your ability to function at work and at home."<sup>8</sup>

**b. Biblical Description of the World's Definition Depression**

- i. "Depression is a debilitating mood, feeling, or attitude of hopelessness, which becomes a person's reason for not handling the most important issues of life...Depression comes when a person uses bad feelings as a reason to not live according to biblical principles. The bad feelings may be the result of not handling normal problems of life in a biblical way, or one may simply experience the blues, discouragement, disappointment, perplexity, or physical afflictions that are a part of living in a sin-cursed world."<sup>9</sup>

2. What are the similarities between the two descriptions? What is the significant difference between the biblical description of depression and the worldly description? How is this difference encouraging for people struggling?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why is the worldly description of depression and the worldly way of treating it so appealing? What good can we acknowledge about psychologists and the field of psychology? (i.e. what common means of grace does God disperse through this?)

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<sup>7</sup> Jim Newheiser, "Biblical Counseling: Depression," Level 1 Care & Discipleship Student Handbook, Version 2.0 (Escondido, CA: IBCD, 2013), 70.

<sup>8</sup> American Psychiatric Association, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression/what-is-depression>

<sup>9</sup> Robert D. Smith, M.D. *The Christian Counselor's Medical Desk Reference* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts: 2011), 206, 207.

### c. The Problem with Calling Depression an Illness

#### i. It Disregards Objective Science and Pathology

“With depression, there is no proof that something is wrong with the body. The diagnosis ‘depression’ is based on thinking and behavior, not on something wrong with the body. The diagnosis is based on subjective criteria – not objective or empirical criteria. Subjective criteria come from the person’s description of his feelings and thoughts. The diagnosis is also based on an interpretation of the individual’s thinking and behavior. There is nothing wrong with any tissues of the body in depression. There are not laboratory tests that will show there is damage or malfunction of any body tissues; thus depression is not an illness. The use of chemicals that have definitely improved the feeling of depression has contributed to the idea that it is an illness...chemical imbalance is a theory, not a fact. The most popular theory today deals with serotonin...However, there is no test to prove there is an abnormal serotonin level in the body that produces depression.”<sup>10</sup>

#### ii. It Disregards the Bible’s Holistic View of Man (body/soul)

1. Our soul is embedded in the body
    - a. Gen. 2:7 ***“then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”***
    - b. 2 Cor. 5:8 ***“Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”***
  2. What happens to the body influences the soul
    - a. Job 2
    - b. Psalm 32:3-4 ***“3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah”***
  3. What happens to the soul may influence the body
    - a. Prov. 14:30 ***“A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.”***
    - b. Proverbs 17:22 ***“A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.”***
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1. How does a biblical, holistic view of man impact how we approach counseling someone who is depressed? What imbalances in our approach should we watch out for?

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<sup>10</sup> Robert D. Smith, M.D. *The Christian Counselor’s Medical Desk Reference*, 198-199.

“Depression will always have a spiritual component and will usually have a physical component.”<sup>11</sup>

*Where do you see, or do you see, a line between the medical and the spiritual regarding these depths of despair?*

Dr. Lee Edmonds<sup>12</sup> answers this question this way:

“That’s a common question, which I get asked frequently. One might see the body, as cared for by medical science, as actually separate from the soul cared for by pastors, but that really is not correct. Genesis 2:7 says, ‘then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.’ Humans are not either spiritual or physical, but rather an alloy of both components without a clear line. If you think of the example of steel, you cannot separate steel into carbon and into iron and still have steel. They’re really an alloy, which is fused. We as humans are the same. That means that sometimes the body and the soul live in such close proximity that they catch each other’s diseases.”<sup>13</sup>

“The point I think, as we boil this down, is that we address a person holistically. We can’t allow a secular field to narrow down one aspect of a person and think that that’s addressing a person toward true and legitimate health. We have to begin to address some of the specific spiritual issues that arise and to see that there’s biblical hope to be found even when dealing with very complex issues...”<sup>14</sup>

### **iii. It Disregards the Bible’s View of Sadness**

1. Sadness is not a sin, but a normal response to a sin cursed world.
  - a. Psalms of Lament (e.g. Ps. 88) & Lamentations
  - b. God is grieved over sin (Gen. 6; 1 Samuel 15)
  - c. Jesus wept out of love and sorrow over sins effects (John 11:35)
  - d. The Holy Spirit is grieved by sin (Eph. 4:30)
2. A gift of God toward sin that leads to salvation (2 Cor. 7:10)

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<sup>11</sup> Jim Newheiser, “Biblical Counseling: Depression,” Level 1 Care & Discipleship Student Handbook, 71.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Lee Edmonds has a Bachelor’s degree from Bucknell University and Medical Degree from Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. His advanced training was at the Mayo Clinic as an active teacher in the field of medicine, and he holds the position of Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons; and an ACBC certified member.

<sup>13</sup> Lee Edmonds, Samuel Stephens, Dale Johnson, “Despair: A Medical Perspective,” Truth in Love, Episode 275, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/despair-a-medical-perspective/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Dale Johnson, “Biblical Answers for Bipolar Depression.” Truth in Love, Episode 264, June 22, 2020. <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/biblical-answers-for-bipolar-depression/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

1. How does the world view sadness? How should we view sadness in light of the Bible? What is sadness ultimately meant to do to a believer spiritually?

“We are essentially reconfiguring misery, sadness, and fear. We’re reconfiguring that misery of life into an illness. This is all in an effort to address these problems, that can’t be ignored, without objective morality or objective truth. The psychiatric industry at large, definitely clinical psychology and psychotherapeutic approaches, are all about assuaging guilt, removing the concept of disease and replacing that with dis-ease—discomfort and anything that would cause us pain.”<sup>15</sup>

2. Understanding that sadness is a normal response to living in a sin-cursed world, and not a sin, really helps restrain over use of the term “depression.” How can we discern between normal sadness and could be called “disordered sadness”?

“Disordered sadness comes without reason and stays without any good explanation as to why or when it is going to come or go. You can recognize normal sadness in an individual by talking to them, they will tell you. In that case in biblical counseling we have just a wealth of resources in the Scriptures to help people deal with the losses of life. We can show them in the Scriptures how they should respond, also what and how God will use this in their life to His glory and to their benefit. It is understanding the difference, I believe, between normal and disordered sadness.”<sup>16</sup>

“It is common for spiritually mature men and women who feel depressed to think they are doing something wrong... On earth...however, God doesn’t prescribe a happy life. He doesn’t legislate emotions... When your emotions feel muted or always low, when you are unable to experience the highs and lows you once did, the important question is, ‘Where do you turn – or, to whom do you turn – when you are depressed.’”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sam Stephens, “The Diseasing of Anxiety and Depression,” Truth in Love, Episode 260, May 25, 2020. <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/the-diseasing-of-anxiety-and-depression/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Amy Evenson, Charles Hodges, “Is it a Sin to be Sad?” Truth in Love, Episode 24, Nov. 16, 2015, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/til-024-is-it-a-sin-to-be-sad-feat-dr-charlie-hodges/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Depression: a Stubborn Darkness* (Greensboro, NC: NewGrowth Press, 2004), 15.

#### **d. Since Depression is Not an Illness, Is Medicine for Depression Ok?**

##### **i. Pragmatism Does NOT Mean Medicine is Right**

“One of the strongest reasons for considering depression an illness, is the improvement people feel as a result of medication. When feeling-oriented people feel better, they function better. The logic is that since the medication affects the physical feelings of the body, there must be something wrong with the body. Even though the improvement is sometimes considered a ‘cure,’ that term is incorrect. The word cure means that medication is no longer needed. But with depression, the feelings of these people, are controlled only for as long as they take the medicine. To use a previous illustration, this is like giving a pain pill to a person sitting on a tack.”<sup>18</sup>

##### **ii. Pragmatism Does NOT Mean Medicine is Wrong**

“I mean medication isn’t necessarily a sin, and the benefits are sometimes great. Medication can be used to take a psychotic or delusional person who might even think they’re Jesus and bring them back to an area where they can have a cogent discussion where we can counsel and we can work with them. Unfortunately, much of the medical profession and society really has come to rely too heavily upon medication and the medical model alone. There’s a common cultural and medical misperception actually regarding the most common diagnoses in the DSM realm like depression, anxiety, eating disorders, insomnia, PTSD.”<sup>19</sup>

##### **iii. Don’t Impersonate a Doctor – It’s Dangerous and a Felony**

“DON’T START OR STOP HIS MEDICATION. Encourage an appropriate medical evaluation to rule out any diseases that produce depressed feelings...If someone is already on an antidepressant, don’t tell him to stop taking it...For people already started on them, the antidepressants have possibly improved their feelings. So the medication has become a crutch to help them deal with life. Even though the Bible has superior answers, counselees may not know or understand that when they come to you. The drugs are replacing biblical principles. Until the crutch is replaced by biblical principles, the person will not be successful without it. Teach him the principles he needs for his life, and let the Word demonstrate the uselessness of the medication. When he has reached the point of understanding this and wants to stop the medication, send him back to the physicians who put him on it”<sup>20</sup>

**Note:** Be aware that “psychotropic drugs have adverse side-effects and often lose their potency.”<sup>21</sup> Loss of weight, appetite, thoughts of suicide, depression and many others can be negative side effects which might drive someone to get another drug to counterbalance these side effects which can produce even more!

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<sup>18</sup> Robert D. Smith, M.D. *The Christian Counselor’s Medical Desk Reference*, 195-196.

<sup>19</sup> Lee Edmonds, Samuel Stephens, Dale Johnson, “Despair: A Medical Perspective,” Truth in Love, Episode 275, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/despair-a-medical-perspective/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Robert D. Smith, M.D. *The Christian Counselor’s Medical Desk Reference*, 215.

<sup>21</sup> Jim Newheiser, “Biblical Counseling: Depression,” Level 1 Care & Discipleship Student Handbook, 71.

**e. Understanding Sources of Temptation That Can Lead to Depression**

**i. External Circumstances and Other People**

1. Overwhelming circumstances (Ps. 42:1-7, 9-10; 43:2; 2 Sam. 17:23; Job 1-2)
2. Injustice (Ps. 73:2-14)
3. Relationships (Jer. 17:5-6)
4. Death

**ii. Satan** (Job 1-2; 2 Cor. 12:7-11)

**iii. Ourselves**

1. Sin and Guilt (Ps. 32:3-4; 38:1ff.; Jer. 2:13)

**iv. Our Bodies**

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <i>Any Chronic illness or disease (e.g. cancer)</i></li><li>2. Parkinson's Disease</li><li>3. Strokes</li><li>4. Multiple Sclerosis</li><li>5. Epilepsy</li><li>6. Head trauma</li><li>7. Lupus (SLE)</li><li>8. Vitamin deficiencies</li><li>9. Post-surgical changes</li><li>10. AIDS</li><li>11. Hepatitis</li><li>12. Hyperthyroidism</li><li>13. Hypothyroidism</li><li>14. Cushing's Disease</li><li>15. Premenstrual depression</li><li>16. Viral or bacterial infections</li><li>17. Certain types of headaches</li><li>18. Heart disease</li></ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>19. Post-partum changes<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>a. Emotional, struggle to function, lack of excitement, no feelings of love for child, paralyzed by basic tasks of caring for child and themselves</li><li>b. Sleep deprivation</li><li>c. Expectations of mothering vs. reality (unmet expectations)</li><li>d. Labor/trauma of delivery &amp; recovery time</li><li>e. Traumatic delivery</li><li>f. Hormonal changes (9 months of changes, then a "4<sup>th</sup> trimester")</li><li>g. Nursing not going well</li><li>h. Anxiety of development and milestones of child's growth</li><li>i. Relationship changes (in-laws)</li><li>j. Guilt over not feeling certain ways (e.g. not feeling love for child, over not being able to care for the child, or self-care, or care for other family members, or care of the home)</li></ol></li></ol> |
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1. What would happen if you only addressed the spiritual aspect of depression but ignore the physical? What if you addressed physical but not spiritual?

**Note #1:** It's important to remember that God is never a source of temptation in any way! (1 Cor. 10:13)

**Note #2:** You will not always be able to identify the exact cause of depression (e.g. Job). God’s goal is not for you to always find the cause (“what?” “when?” and “why?”) but to find God Himself in the midst of depression (“who?”).

“The reason Scripture doesn’t give clear guidelines for assigning responsibility is that it is not essential for us to know precise causes. Job, once again, is the model. Although we know that Satan caused Job’s suffering, Job did not... We might uncover some of the reasons for our suffering but we might never find them all. There is a mystery in suffering, just as there is ultimate mystery at the end of all human investigations. Instead of teaching us how to identify the causes of suffering, Scripture directs us to the God who knows all things and is fully trustworthy. In other words, Scripture doesn’t give us knowledge so that we will have intellectual mastery of certain events; it gives us knowledge so that we would know and trust God... Somehow, turning to God and trusting him with the mysteries of suffering is the answer to the problem of suffering.”<sup>22</sup>

“God ordains that His children walk in sorrow and pain, sometimes because of sin (cf. Nu 12:10-12), sometimes for chastening (cf. Heb 12:5-12), sometimes for strengthening (cf. 2Co 12:7-10; 1 Pe 5:10), and sometimes to give opportunity to reveal His comfort and grace (2Co 1:3-7). But there are times when the compelling issue in the suffering of the saints is unknowable because it is for heavenly purpose that those on earth can’t discern (cf. Ex. 4:11; Jn 9:1-3).”<sup>23</sup>

#### **f. The Progression of Depression**

##### **i. Depression Cycles Down**<sup>24</sup>

1. Begins with a problem followed by a sinful response to that problem which leads to a complicating problem
  - a. Example: concerned about politics, overwhelmed with worry, leads to hopelessness, stop working in order to watch news...etc.
2. Hopeless thoughts lead to greater hopelessness
3. Failure to perform duties/chores makes one feel more guilty and depressed, which makes it harder to perform duties
4. Depressed people can cycle back up again
5. People who are prone to depression tend to cycle in and out of depression
6. Many have patterns of alternating high activity followed by depression (e.g. “bi-polar” or manic-depressive)
7. It often takes a long time for a person to come out of depression

1. How does knowledge about the cycles of depression help prepare someone for dealing with depression in their own life or helping someone struggling? (cf. Gal. 6:1-2)

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<sup>22</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Depression: a Stubborn Darkness* (Greensboro, NC: NewGrowth Press, 2004), 43.

<sup>23</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*, updated ed. (Nashville: Nelson Bibles, 2006), 682.

<sup>24</sup> Jim Newheiser, “Biblical Counseling: Depression,” Level 1 Care & Discipleship Student Handbook, 72.

**g. Biblical Examples of Depression**

- i. Elijah (1 Kings 17-19)
  - 1. Contributing Factors to Breakdown
    - a. Conflict and confrontation
    - b. Response of Fear
    - c. Response of self-reliance, self-focus, failure to trust the power of God
    - d. Fatigue and response of isolation and despair
  - 2. God the Counselor
    - a. Rest and Physical Nourishment (tokens of His grace)
    - b. The Diagnosis: Gathering Data
    - c. The Cure
      - i. Knowing God
      - ii. A Proper Perspective (v.18)
      - iii. A Task to Accomplish
- ii. Jonah (Jonah 4:1-9)
  - 1. Jonah was suicidal on multiple occasions
  - 2. Jonah would have been described as manic depressed by psychologists today.
- iii. Job
  - 1. Job's Condition
    - a. Job 3:3, 20-26
    - b. Job 30:16-27
  - 2. God's Counsel (Job 38:1-3ff.)
  - 3. Job's Response (42:1-6)
- iv. Jeremiah
  - 1. Jeremiah's Condition (Lamentations 3:1-18)
  - 2. Jeremiah's Hope (Lamentations 3:21-33)

# Psalm 77

## God's Cure for Depression

PART 2

*The spiritual cure for depression is commitment to seek God despite how you feel.*

### I. Seek God Through a Commitment to Pray (vv. 1-9)

#### a. Take Your Suffering to God (vv. 1-3)

*“0 To the choirmaster: according to Jeduthun. A Psalm of Asaph.*

*1 I cry aloud to God, aloud to God, and he will hear me.*

*2 In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord; in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying; my soul refuses to be comforted.*

*3 When I remember God, I moan; when I meditate, my spirit faints. Selah*

1. The NASB captures the Hebrew grammar more literally with **“My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud; My voice rises to God, and He will hear me.”** What words are repeated? What is the psalmist communicating through repetition? (vv. 1-2)
2. According to verse 2, what does the psalmist prayerfully seek in the midst of his trouble? Why is this significant? What is the first thing we tend to seek, even if it's in the form of a prayer? (v. 2)
3. What happened when the psalmist reflects on God? Why does this happen? (v. 3)
4. What does “Selah” mean? What does the psalmist want us to do based on this word? (v. 3)

**b. Take Your Questions to God (vv. 4-9)**

*4 You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.*

*5 I consider the days of old, the years long ago.*

*6 I said, "Let me remember my song in the night; let me meditate in my heart." Then my spirit made a diligent search:*

*7 "Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable?*

*8 Has his steadfast love forever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time?*

*9 Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" Selah*

1. What kind of suffering does the psalmist poetically describe in verse 4? (v. 4)

“This is a portion of the psalms that appealed strongly to Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who identified closely with Asaph’s physical and spiritual anguish. Spurgeon’s studies of the psalms were produced between 1865 and 1885, and during those twenty years he experienced much ill health, which continued to deteriorate until his death in 1892. He had neuralgia and gout, which left him with swollen, red, painful limbs, so that he frequently could not walk or even write. He had debilitating headaches, and with these physical ills came frightful bouts of depression, leading almost to despair. In his later years he was forced to leave London for the sunnier, drier weather in southern France during the months of November, December, and January. In fact, he was in France at the Mediterranean village of Mentone when he died. This gives us some appreciation for what he was talking about when he wrote on Psalm 77. Spurgeon said, ‘Some of us know what it is, both physically and spiritually, to be compelled to use these words; no respite has been afforded us by the silence of the night, our bed has been a rack to us, our body has been in torment, and our spirit in anguish. ... Alas, my God, the writer of this exposition well knows what thy servant Asaph meant, for his soul is familiar with the way of grief. Deep glens and lonely caves of soul depressions, my spirit knows full well your awful glooms!’”<sup>25</sup>

2. In light of his sleeplessness and distress, how does the psalmist comfort himself? (vv. 5-6; cf. Ex. 15:1-18)
3. What happens when the psalmist dwells on God’s faithfulness and the glorious days of the past? (vv. 7-9)

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<sup>25</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 41–106*, vol. 7 of Boice Expository Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 638-639.

## II. Seek God Through a Commitment to Trust in Him (vv. 10-20)

### a. Take Captive Lies About God (v. 10)

Note the differences in translation between the ESV:

*10 Then I said, "I will appeal to this, to the years of the right hand of the Most High." (ESV)*

and other translations:

*10 Then I said, "It is my grief, That the right hand of the Most High has changed." (NAS95)*

*10 So I say, "I am grieved that the right hand of the Most High has changed." (HCSB)*

*10 Then I said, "I am sickened by the thought that the Most High might become inactive." (NET)*

1. How might someone interpret the ESV's translation of the psalmist in verse 10?
2. How might someone interpret the other three translations in verse 10? How could it be understood differently, especially in light of the previous and following verses (i.e. context)?

"Asaph is saying: 'Then [as a logical sequence to my questions] I said, 'It is my affliction [my mental and spiritual distress and depression] that [I dare to imagine that] the right hand of the Most High has changed.'"<sup>26</sup>

3. How do we struggle with suffering and God's sovereignty like the psalmist? How can you take captive thoughts? (2 Cor. 10:5)

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<sup>26</sup> Dr. Bill Barrick, "Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies," (Bereans Sunday School: Placerita Bible Church, 2006), 4. [https://drbarrick.org/files/studynotes/Psalms/Ps\\_077.pdf](https://drbarrick.org/files/studynotes/Psalms/Ps_077.pdf)

## Expose the Deception of Depression

“As you consider God, expect to find fallacies in your thinking about yourself and God. In other words, although you may think that you know all you need to know about God – or all you want to know – you don’t.”<sup>27</sup>

### 1. Deception #1: You are Alone

- a. Answer: You are not alone (1 Cor. 10:13; Matt. 28:20b; John 14:17,20, 23)

### 2. Deception #2: You Cannot Endure

- a. Answer: God is faithful and will provide a way to endure (1 Cor. 10:13)

### 3. Deception #3: God Does Not Sympathize

- a. Answer: Jesus Understands Perfectly (Is. 53:10; Matt. 26:37-46; Heb. 2:10; 1 Peter 2:20-24)
  - i. List all the different pains and sufferings you can think of that the gospel writers described Jesus enduring while on earth? (e.g. did he lose loved ones? Was he ever tired? Was he ever hungry? Was he ever hurt physically? Emotionally?)
  - ii. “Have you noticed that sometimes, in the presence of someone whose suffering seems greater than our own, our suffering seems lighter, less intense? It is as if the suffering of another can temporarily take us out of ourselves. The sufferings of Jesus can, indeed, elevate us and take us out of ourselves.”<sup>28</sup>

### 4. Deception #4: Life on Earth is Supposed to Be Happy

- a. Answer: Living in a sin cursed world is fraught with suffering, and following Christ is full of sacrifice and suffering, but in Christ, one will never be without joy. (Lk. 9:27; John 15:10-11; 16:22; Phil. 4:4; James 1:2-4)

### 5. Deception #5: God is Unkind and Unloving

- a. Answer: God is infinitely good and loving and purposes all things for our benefit (Rom. 8:32; James 1:17)
- b. Illustr. God’s goodness is not determined by our wishes just like a child’s wishes do not determine the goodness of the parents whether they cater or not.

### 6. Deception #5: I’m a hypocrite when I say that I believe and trust in God, but I still feel sad and wrestle with doubts.

- a. Answer: The only job God has given us, is to simply believe. Because of our fallen nature, we are continually pressing forward in belief in obedience despite our feelings.

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<sup>27</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Depression: a Stubborn Darkness*, 47.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

**b. Refocus on What is True About God (vv. 11-20)**

*11 I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.*

*12 I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.*

*13 Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?*

*14 You are the God who works wonders; you have made known your might among the peoples.*

*15 You with your arm redeemed your people, the children of Jacob and Joseph. Selah*

1. How does the psalmist respond to the temptation to doubt God's character and goodness? (vv. 11-15; cf. Phil. 4:8)
2. What attributes does he reflect upon?
3. Most of us know that we should trust God. How would you explain to someone "how" to trust in God?

**How to Trust God**

1. The question often asked is "What do I do when I am suffering?" To which the answer is "trust God." But the question often not asked, or is often poorly answered is, "**HOW** do I trust God?"
  - a. **Definition:** "You trust God when you evaluate your problems in light of his ways that he has revealed in his word and then you rest your confidence that he will ultimately deal with you consistently with those ways."<sup>29</sup>
  - b. **Application:** Simply put, we trust God by learning, knowing, submitting to, and resting in His revealed purposes and character in Scripture.
  - c. **Illustration:** sometimes making sense of grief and learning to trust in God is like working with puzzle pieces out of context. At first, when you are handed the grief, it is like being handed a single puzzle piece without any of the other pieces and without the picture on the box for reference. You have no idea what you are looking at, how it works with everything else, and how it makes sense in relation to God's character. But when you start to interpret the suffering in the context of Biblical truth, in the context of God's revealed purposes and character, then you have something concrete to trust in and make sense of the senseless.

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<sup>29</sup> Don Green, "Trusting God When You Don't Understand," Sermon, Habakkuk 1:1-11, April 15, 2016, <https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/422161752163.pdf>

- d. “All suffering is intended to train us to fix our eyes on the true God. Therefore, depression, regardless of the causes, is a time to answer the deepest and most important of all questions: Whom will I trust? Whom will I worship?”<sup>30</sup>
- 2. “Instead of teaching us how to identify the causes of suffering, Scripture directs us to the God who knows all things and is fully trustworthy. In other words, Scripture doesn’t give us knowledge so that we will have intellectual mastery of certain events; it gives us knowledge so that we would know and trust God... Somehow, turning to God and trusting him with the mysteries of suffering is the answer to the problem of suffering.”<sup>31</sup>
  - a. ***“Though he slay me, I will hope in him,”*** (Job 13:15 ESV)

***16 When the waters saw you, O God, when the waters saw you, they were afraid; indeed, the deep trembled.***

***17 The clouds poured out water; the skies gave forth thunder; your arrows flashed on every side.***

***18 The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind; your lightnings lighted up the world; the earth trembled and shook.***

***19 Your way was through the sea, your path through the great waters; yet your footprints were unseen.***

***20 You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.”***

- 4. Who is the subject of the psalm in verses 1-12? Who is the subject in verses 13-20? What does that say about the cure for spiritual depression?
- 5. What event in Israel’s history is the psalmist alluding to in verses 16-20? (cf. Ex. 14)
- 6. What is comforting about the final verse? How does God lead his people according to this verse? How is this similar to how he leads us in trials now?

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<sup>30</sup> Edward T. Welch, *Depression: a Stubborn Darkness*, 43-44.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

### III. Application

#### 1. Listen (Do Not Diagnose)

##### a. Seek to fully understand someone's pain

- i. Prov. 25:20 *“Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.”*
- ii. James 1:17 *“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak,”*
- iii. Proverbs 18:2 *“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”*
- iv. Proverbs 18:13 *“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.”*
- v. “What we need to realize is that no two peoples’ experience of depression are ever the same. In fact, oftentimes the same person’s different bouts of depression aren’t even the same. Because of this incredible diversity, the label “depression” may be helpful for the sake of gathering statistics or for pursuing treatment in a medical context, but it’s not very helpful in seeking to understand the specific struggle the person sitting in front of you is experiencing. Everyone fills the word “depression” with different meaning. The question that must be asked isn’t simply “Do you have depression or not?” but “What do you fill the word ‘depression’ with?” In this way, you can’t hope to understand someone’s struggle with depression by diagnosing it; you must listen to it.”<sup>32</sup>
- vi. “When you lean heavily on the diagnosis of depression, you can feel ill-equipped to be used by God in helping someone deal with their struggle. However, when you listen intently to a person’s struggle, understanding the ways in which they are uniquely and particularly suffering, you may find that you’re more equipped than you ever realized. “Depression” can seem intimidating and confusing. But, when you listen for more than just the label, you end up hearing struggles like hopelessness, guilt, shame, coping, sadness, joylessness, worthlessness, etc. These may not seem like issues that are any less complicated to deal with, but they are issues that we see repeatedly addressed throughout the Scriptures. Is this even Scripture’s territory? Absolutely.”<sup>33</sup>

##### b. Help Remove Stigma of Despair

- i. 1 Corinthians 10:13 *“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*
- ii. Depression is not a disease! You are not a weirdo. You are experiencing what we all experience in a sin-cursed world.

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<sup>32</sup> Scott Mehl, “Listening to Depression,” Sept. 16, 2014, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/listening-to-depression/> Accessed, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Scott Mehl, “Listening to Depression,” Sept. 16, 2014, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/listening-to-depression/> Accessed, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

- iii. "...we need to try to (in the church in general) reduce the stigma associated with suicide, and all the mental anguish that people suffer. People are really quick to raise their hand in church and ask for prayer over their recent cancer diagnosis and then ask for support, but not in the area of despair. The church needs to become a place of help and hope, regardless of the nature of a person's struggle. The Lord knows we all struggle, and we need to have the church be a haven and not an illusion of heaven—as though we don't have struggles here. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." We all have a lot to learn in our journey with Christ."<sup>34</sup>

## 2. Give Hope

### c. Biblical Hope is Grounded in God

- i. Hope in God's Character
  - 1. "Hope is the firm belief in God's ability and His promise to bring goodness out of chaos"<sup>35</sup>
  - 2. Ps. 39:7 "And now Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You."
- ii. Hope in the Gospel of Jesus Christ
  - 1. Phil. 1:6
  - 2. John 10:27-29
  - 3. Christ is the anchor (Heb 6:19)
- iii. Hope Through God's Provisions
  - 1. Word of God
  - 2. Prayer
  - 3. Indwelling Holy Spirit
  - 4. Body of Christ
  - 5. Biblical Counselors
- iv. Hope Through God's Purpose
  - 1. Bodily/brain weakness **cannot** prevent spiritual growth!
    - a. 2 Cor. 12:7-9
    - b. 2 Cor. 4:7-10, 16
- v. Hope in the Father's Loving Discipline

### d. Biblical Hope is Grounded in Reality

- i. Depression is often a long-term struggle (not an overnight fix)
- ii. Hope comes with knowing that I will struggle and fight alongside you (Gal. 6:2)

### e. Biblical Hope Acknowledges Good Things Someone is Doing

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<sup>34</sup> Lee Edmonds, Samuel Stephens, Dale Johnson, "Despair: A Medical Perspective," Truth in Love, Episode 275, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/despair-a-medical-perspective/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Somerville, *If I am A Christian, Why Am I Depressed?* 34.

- f. **Biblical Hope Emphasizes Fighting Well Over Feeling Well**<sup>36</sup>
    - i. Persevere (Ps. 42:5, 11; James 1:3-4; Rom. 5:3-5)
      - 1. If you have not rejected Jesus as your only hope, Lord, and Savior, then you are persevering.
    - ii. Focus on Eternity, not on healing (2 Cor. 4:16-18)
      - 2. God Promises to Conform us To Christ (Rom. 8:28-29)
      - 3. He promises the He is at work in our suffering (Rom. 8:18)
      - 4. He promises that He loves us and that nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:35-39)
    - iii. Know and Honor Your Physical and Emotional Limits in Humility
      - 5. Sleep, exercise, nutritious food, carefulness in schedule making, taking time for physical and emotional replenishment is wisdom
      - 6. This is not worldly self-care, but humble acknowledgement we are earthen vessels with a the great treasure of the gospel inside.
    - iv. Don't Fight alone, but don't put your ultimate hope in others (Jer. 17:5-8)
    - v. Remember you are part of an army, not a single soldier (Heb. 10:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:15)
3. **Ask Someone to Describe Their Feelings (Data Gathering)**
    - a. This will help you gather data on what fears, failures, losses, frustrations, and broken relationships might be attached to the feelings.
  4. **Ask Questions About Physical Well Being (Data Gathering)**
    - a. Quality of sleep (regularity, quantity, quality)
    - b. Quality of nutrition (regularity, quantity – overeating/undereating, quality – healthy/junk)
    - c. Medicine (over the counter, prescription, duration of use)
    - d. Overall Health (ongoing health issues of any kind)
  5. **Expose the Deception of Depression**
  6. **Trust God**
    - a. “You trust God when you evaluate your problems in light of his ways that he has revealed in his word and then you rest your confidence that he will ultimately deal with you consistently with those ways.”<sup>37</sup>
  7. **Refocus Your Thoughts**
    - a. Take thoughts captive (2 Cor. 5:10)
    - b. Think about what is true (Phil. 4)

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<sup>36</sup> Jim Newheiser, “Strategies for Fighting Depression Well,” October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/strategies-for-fighting-depression-well/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Don Green, “Trusting God When You Don't Understand,” Sermon, Habakkuk 1:1-11, April 15, 2016, <https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/422161752163.pdf>

## 8. **Align Your Goals with God's Goals**

- a. To follow Christ no matter what.
- b. Not to find happiness or have your desires fulfilled but to glorify God in all situations
- c. God's perspective on suffering "Trials meant to draw you closer to God, that's the lens with which to view suffering that gives an eternal value to trials and eternal meaning."
- d. "Counselors needs to be aware of some vital principles in dealing with depression. The first one is the most difficult. **THE GOAL IS NOT TO GET RID OF DEPRESSION OR THE DOWN FEELINGS.** Dealing with the feelings of depression is like responding to the red light on the dashboard by smashing it. Or, to repeat a comparison mentioned earlier in the book, like giving a pain pill to a person who is sitting on a tack. In depression, that goal can, and most of the time has become, more important than pleasing God. This is worshipping 'feeling better' rather than pleasing God. *The goal is to please God* and become more like Christ no matter how one feels. Find out why a counselee is depressed, and help him deal with those issues biblically. God has answers, hope, and purpose in the midst of God's problems and bad feelings. A person needs to see life from God's perspective. In order to have real victory, the person must live by God's Word, not his feelings."<sup>38</sup>

## 9. **One Step at a Time Despite How You Feel**

- a. **Good Feelings are the result of right thinking and actions**
  - i. John 13:17
  - ii. James 1:25
- b. **Pray Every Day Despite How You Feel**
  - i. "Give us our daily bread"
    1. More than just physical sustenance
    2. Daily and hourly dependence on him
- c. **Serve**
  - i. "Counseling for believers should be aimed at glorifying God in the middle of a trial. All of us eventually face medical problems that are uncomfortable, inconvenient, and at times expensive. In that experience, God intends to use the trial to shape us into the image of his son. He also gives opportunities to serve others out of our struggle."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Robert D. Smith, M.D. "The Christian Counselor's Medical Desk Reference," (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts: 2011), 212.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Hodges, "Dealing with Winter Time Depression," Biblical Counseling Coalition, January 20, 2016. [https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2016/01/20/dealing-with-winter-time-depression/?utm\\_content=buffer9a34e&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer&fbclid=IwAR2\\_ZyHJMrOeVRIwlcBxE3527vY2V6wXRHeI9iEWbLiHyklwK3awtxdnNIA](https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2016/01/20/dealing-with-winter-time-depression/?utm_content=buffer9a34e&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer&fbclid=IwAR2_ZyHJMrOeVRIwlcBxE3527vY2V6wXRHeI9iEWbLiHyklwK3awtxdnNIA) Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

## 10. Be a Rope Holder

- a. Galatians 6:1-2 *“1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*
- b. Pray with and for someone
- c. Be there with and for someone (Job 2:11-13)
- d. Initiate and lead someone in activities
- e. Let them borrow your faith and love
- f. Intervene to protect someone if they are suicidal through family or police
  - i. First of all, we have to understand that there’s not a second chance with suicide. This is an important issue, and all counselees carry the risks associated with suicide. Those are the various stressors, the very reasons they came asking for help—relational, financial, or whatever those things are. We need to ask a few important questions. One is: Do you ever think about hurting yourself? Do you have a plan to hurt yourself? Do you own a firearm? Fifty percent of suicides are by firearms. Asking those questions doesn’t increase the risk, it actually reduces the risk of suicide. We need to ask those questions of our counselees—all of whom have the risks for suicide.”<sup>40</sup>
  - ii. “...there are a couple of things that the medical field can do when they’re necessary. One of those would be to secure and protect a suicidal person. You might call that “suicide watch.” The medical profession has the capacity to take people and lock them up against their own free will. Sometimes that’s necessary to keep people from harming themselves. You want to remember that there isn’t a second chance in suicide. If that’s necessary, we should ask that the medical profession help us with that.”<sup>41</sup>

## IV. Conclusion

Even though psychologists want to help and do help many people, the ultimate cure for depression can only come from God’s Word. “It’s in critical for us to see that we’re allowing them to define what is healthy, as opposed to allowing the Scriptures to define what it means to walk in peace, to walk in purity, and to walk in health before the Lord. We’re not allowing the Scriptures to define what normalcy really is and what normalcy really means. We’re stripping Jesus as the pinnacle for how it is that we are restored—by His grace, by His work, by His power, by His Word, by the Spirit. We are stripping the power that God has given in His sufficient Word to restore us and we’re looking to something else.”<sup>42</sup> When we look to the Scriptures for the cure to depression, then we will find comfort, hope, and strength to endure to God’s glory.

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<sup>40</sup> Lee Edmonds, Samuel Stephens, Dale Johnson, “Despair: A Medical Perspective,” Truth in Love, Episode 275, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/despair-a-medical-perspective/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> Lee Edmonds, Samuel Stephens, Dale Johnson, “Despair: A Medical Perspective,” Truth in Love, Episode 275, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/despair-a-medical-perspective/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.

<sup>42</sup> Dale Johnson, “The Diseaseing of Anxiety and Depression,” Truth in Love, Episode 260, May 25, 2020, <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/the-diseaseing-of-anxiety-and-depression/> Accessed January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021.