

**Sunday Sermon**

**8-28-2022**

**Delivery My Life**

**How to Fight Depression**

**Psalm 6**

## Introduction

David is experiencing DEPRESSION, in Psalm 6. Depression goes by many names, perhaps as many names as there are people. For some reason, I've referred to it as the black dog, or the black cloud. Once I counseled a man from Africa, who described it as a baby elephant, that climbs up on your back, and weighs you down, and so you throw it down and kill it, but then it comes back to life again, and climbs back up on your back again. You know, he said. And I thought, no, I've never had a baby elephant, but I DO know what you're talking about.

We have to use METAPHORS to describe depression, because it is a formless, shapeless, invisible enemy. That's part of its insidiousness - as I heard one woman say once, Don't ask me to describe it exactly. After all, how do you describe NOTHING? How do you define ZERO?

And yet it is a very REAL enemy. One that affects us, as we will see, in the soul AND the body.

Today we will see just how David himself moves from being rendered INERT by depression, out of that ZERO, to a courageous heart, and constructive action. That constructive action will seem quite FOREIGN to us. Someone asked me if this was written over time, and the final part added later, but I don't think so - I think this was all written in one sitting, WHILE David was still in the midst of his turmoil. We want to get where David ends up.

The Psalm has four stanzas, but can be broken down into TWO parts - v. 1-7 is the suffering of it. then v. 8-10 is the CHANGE that God brought about. So I'm going to look at each of those, but in the middle, I want to look at the ONE theological truth that brought about that change. Three points, three words: the SUFFERING of depression; secondly our STABILITY in depression, and thirdly, the SALVATION from depression, that God can bring. Suffering, Stability and Salvation. First the suffering.

## The Suffering

We need to note again the superscript - this is a Psalm that was sung IN church. The Sheminith was probably a tune. There should be a place in the worship of the people of God to sing out with mournful notes - to play the minor key notes. But as we will see, God gives David grace to end on middle-C again.

David begins by asking for mercy. Verse 1 convinces me that the setting for this Psalm is like the others we've seen so far - AFTER David had sinned grievously. If you've not been here before or you'r not familiar with the story, David took another man's wife - Bath-Sheba, while he stayed back from war. Then after she became pregnant, he had her husband Uriah - a good and faithful man - murdered. Then he hid it, for a long time.

Then his son Absalom tried to take the throne, and this Psalm is probably written during that time, while David is still swirling in the consequences of his sin.

And David cries out to God; first for God to restrain His hand of anger and discipline. After all, didn't Saul end up dead for lesser things?

David's anguish goes down even to his bones, v. 2. He asks for grace because, v. 3, his entire person is GREATLY troubled. God could relieve it - how long, O Lord?

If you've ever struggled with guilt and shame over your own sin, I think you can relate. I can. It is an iron-clad torture, like being in a metal straight-jacket, to stay in v. 1-3. You might even start bargaining with God - God, if you restrain your hand, I'll never do that again! I'll pray every day and read my Bible - just lift this pain! How long, O Lord!

But we can feel this way even if, objectively speaking, we never did ANYTHING wrong, but grievous wrong was done TO us. We can still carry a sense of shame and guilt on our souls, that makes us think that we somehow deserved that abuse. Abuse can leave a lingering stain on your soul that says to you, you're just WRONG, period.

The turn comes for David in v. 4-5. He does not stay in v. 1-3 - he cries out to God, asking Him to deliver him, to save him. We will return to this, and ask ourselves HOW he gets there.

But in v. 5 David sort of reminds God, who needs no reminding, that if David dies, literally or figuratively - and that's what depression often feels like - living death - if I stay in this place, how will I fulfill what YOU want from me - to give YOU praise? For I cannot praise you in Sheol, meaning the grave. I can't do it.

Have you ever been in church, and depression just kept you from even saying the words? I have. Let me say that again: Christians can feel this way. Not BAD Christians; not GOOD Christians - ANY Christian. For all who are in Christ are three things in this

age, at the same time: yes, we are saints. But we are also SINNERS and SUFFERERS. We are all three, at the same time. And sometimes the sinner and sufferer parts get the upper hand on the saint part.

But David does not stay in v. 4 & 5 either. He moves on to be very candid with God, v. 6-7. He is exhausted by his groaning. Have you ever felt that? He floods his bed with tears, his pillow drenched by weeping.

How long, O Lord?!

His eyes are red and worn out from his grief, v. 7. He looks like he's been crying, a lot. Because of all his foes.

When David sinned, it created an opening, not just for Absalom, but for all his political enemies to get a foothold against him. Politics were just as complicated then as they are today - just read the books of Judges and Kings. Sin is the great complicator of life, and as a consequence of David's sin, he finds himself in a complex rat's nest of turmoil.

In the same way, we should note that the FOES that cause depression are not always so easy to identify. They too can be very complex, because we are complex creatures. Sometimes depression can be affected by our personalities. And yet again, we are all sinners, sufferers and saints. And then the evil that we face in the world comes in three categories: the world, our own flesh, and the devil himself. And each of these categories has complexities: the world possesses countless ways of getting at us; our own hearts and bodies are wondrously complex; and the devil himself is really good at what he does.

Yet in all this complexity, David demonstrates in this Psalm a way out - and one that does not depend on personality types, or on solving all of that complexity, but on God. More specifically, on what God SAYS and DOES.

## **The Stability**

We want to find the stability that David finds. We want to get to that strange, foreign place that HE gets to in v. 9, no longer crying out, but now saying:

The LORD HAS heard my plea; the LORD ACCEPTS my prayer.

David moves from bargaining with God, from feeling hopeless, to resolute confidence and constructive ACTION. He's no longer INERT and STILL. He's on the move again.

How?

This is where THEOLOGY is REALLY meant to come alive. We learn theology in cold-blood, when times are easy, so that we can HOLD ON to it, for dear life, like sailors on old sailing ships, who, when in violent storms would literally TIE themselves to the main mast of the ship, to keep from being blown overboard. Theology is our main mast.

We learn theology so that we're not blown overboard, in ANY storm.

What's the theology here?

In 2 Samuel 7, after God has given David security and success, it occurs to David - hey, I'm sitting here, in this wonderful palace, but God's house is still the mobile worship tent from the wilderness years! This isn't right. Nathan, the prophet: I'm going to build a house for God. What do you think? And at first, Nathan says, Sure, go ahead. But then in v. 5-16 of 2 Sam 7, God tells Nathan that very night, no, David won't build Me a house. Have I EVER asked for a house? I'm God. No, but I will build David a house. ALL of David's blessings have been the product of MY undeserved, sovereignty given grace. God is NO ONE's debtor. I am the GIVER, God says.

Then God promises that He will raise up offspring from David - Solomon. And the passage ends with this:

*13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, 15 but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.' "*

In short, God made with David a unilateral covenant, a solemn promise, that was entirely based on the initiative of God - all by GOD's grace, his undeserved FAVOR to

David. David had done NOTHING to deserve it. And yet it was so strong that even his own sin could not break it.

After Bathsheba, their baby died, and the sword of conflict did not leave his house. But they had a second son, and it said the Lord LOVED him. And so God gave Solomon a nickname - Jedidiah - meaning, the one whom the LORD loves. Solomon, the son of the adulterers, Bathsheba and David. Yes, David and his sons may be disciplined, but his throne would be established FOREVER, unlike how God withdrew His love from Saul. God keeps His covenants.

And thus in the middle of his depression, when consequences swirl around him, David remembers God's covenant. It is no different than how God revealed himself to Moses, in Exodus 34:7 - yes, God visits the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations, but He keeps His steadfast love to THOUSANDS - THOUSANDS of generations. Yes, David is disciplined. AND, AND . . . God WILL keep His promises. By faith in God's promises, David regains stability. Stability to keep moving, to keep crying out to God, past his feelings. He lashes himself to the main mast of God's grace.

So what is God's promise, His solemn covenant to us? Though Israel would later be severely punished for its awful idolatry in time, we read at the end of Jeremiah that God did indeed preserve an offspring of David, and from that king would come another king one day, another Son of David, Jesus.

He too would be disciplined with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but not for HIS iniquity, but for OURS, as our substitute. And yet, in the Garden, as He sweat as though it were drops of blood because of HIS grief, He too believed this covenant - that though He would die, He, THE son of David would always be King. And so God's steadfast love did not depart from this greater David either, and God raised Him from the dead. And now HE sits on the throne of David, forever, under the steadfast love and never-ending approval of God.

And when He died, God cut a NEW covenant, with US, building on the older covenants. Jesus took the bread and the wine, His body and His life, and He broke it, saying, THIS is the NEW covenant in My blood.

This new covenant envelopes in all the blessings of God's covenant to DAVID and his sons, but now expands it, to ANY who BELIEVE in THE Son of David, Jesus. That though there IS evil, within and without, and though sometimes God disciplines us,

His steadfast love will NEVER depart from us, any more than it will His own Son. And this covenant is ENTIRELY dependent on the saving grace, the loving initiative of our God.

And so whatever the source of your depression, we find our footing to put one foot in front of the other, to cry out to God, past our feelings, and then move on to courageous and constructive ACTIONS, by faith, faith in this new covenant, by lashing ourselves to what C.S. Lewis called the deeper magic - this covenant of God, which is deeper than all we know and feel and experience. We cannot see it during depression - that's why it's by faith.

## **The Salvation**

Now, I want to get more practical, but what has come and what follows is only me drawing a map. JUST a map. A map provides you with directions on where to travel, but a map leaves out a million details along the way - the weather, the conditions of the road, the traffic, accidents, the scenery, the company you keep in the car - a million details. So it is here.

Now, before we look further at the map, I want to say this: your depression is YOUR depression. So then, please don't say, well, there's other people suffering a lot more than me. Please don't say that. Because God's covenant means He cares about EVERY detail of YOUR suffering. Your suffering is YOUR suffering. Isaiah 53:3 says that Jesus was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. In HIS suffering, YOUR suffering is KNOWN, and NOT devalued, but in fact, MORE valued.

Now, to do the most basic of map-drawing: as complex as depression may be, it is an evil, and evil, as I said before, can have ONLY three categories of causes. There is much to explore in each category, but there are only three: the world, the flesh, and the devil. By the world, I mean everything external to our selves that could possibly harm us. By the flesh, I mean both our bodies, and our sin natures. By the devil, I don't necessarily mean that he is whispering into your mind, but in the end, our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against cosmic powers. He doesn't need to be that overt - he's got lots of tools at his disposal, in the first two categories. Thus it is good that we not over-emphasize the devil's role among these three, but keep each of these in balance in our fight. After all, we all have subtle ways that we disobey God, as a course of life, as a habit, and that can BUILD up over time, and cause depression. I'm not saying SIN is the cause of all depression, but it's one rock we should look under.

But all of that to say, we are in a fight, and in the church, no soldier should ever fight alone.

**Ever.**

Why did depression and suicidality go up during the COVID lockdowns? Because we were never meant to live with SCREENS between us. We are not machines, who connect through machines. Just as the Bible is best read in paragraphs, not by the individual words, so God did NOT design us as ATOMISTIC individuals. And in this, the church has been the victim of its own folly. For so long we've made church to be this place where we INDIVIDUALS go to consume a spiritual product, and then we individuals all go home again, as atomized individuals. We sing about me, myself and I. But that's not true - we are an US.

Sunday, September 18 will be "Small Group Sunday", and we've got what I think are some really cool things in the hopper - mark your calendars to here then. But the point is that the CHURCH is the antidote to the solitary depression that COVID exposed. This one reason why, if you are a member here, we EXPECT you to pray through the directory, and as you pray, to reach out to one another, to find out how to make that praying more intelligent. How can I pray for you? Is perhaps THE most important question we can ask each other.

Because the GREATEST of Christians can experience depression. Charles Spurgeon, and the great hymn writer William Cowper come to mind. When we experience the "dark night of the soul," we need friends who can come alongside us, who will listen A LOT and say a LITTLE. A suffering person can only hear a few words anyway. Presence can be so powerful.

This week a friend of mine told me of how he simply visited a suffering friend at her house. And she told him later, you didn't know this at the time, but the day that you came by, I was going to commit suicide. All he did was stop by. And saved her life, without knowing it, by his presence - which, SHE didn't know at the time, communicated to HER the steadfast love of God, come close. God wore HIM as His mask that day.

So let me speak directly to the issue of suicide for a second. If you ever get low enough to consider that, let's talk. You won't surprise me or the other elders; we're not afraid of the darkness you might reveal to us. We love you, and in this platoon of God's, no one suffers alone; no soldier is left behind. Let's talk.

I once heard it said that Sigmund Freud imagined a worldwide system of "centers" where people could come and receive healing for their "psuche" - the Greek word for "soul", where we get the word psychology from. Church - you are living Freud's dream! In fact, it was not Freud's dream first - you are God's dream, for the healing of souls!

But for all of us who suffer, the way out will always come by CRYING OUT to God. This is hard, because depression has an ODD filter. It bends the light of everything DARKER. You read in Scripture of God's steadfast love, and you say to yourself, oh that's not for me. Or you read of God's judgment, and you say, ooh that's definitely for me. So when we experience depression, we must fight with one simple discipline: keep breathing IN God's Word, especially His promises to you, and keep EXHALING out prayer, from the Word. Breathe in Scripture, and exhale out CRYING out to God.

Because depression IS a temptation too. Depression involves PAIN, but that pain tempts us to DESPAIR, to give up on God. That temptation must be fought tooth and nail. Go ahead, ask questions of God. Say with David, How long, O Lord? That's OK. But to become resentful towards God, to give up on Him - that would be a grievous sin, and that's to be avoided more vigorously than you ever fought COVID. Because the resentment virus is far more dangerous. COVID can only kill the body.

Faith believes that God WILL bring the breakthrough. I don't know if it will be in a moment, or over time, but God WILL do it. I don't know if it will involve help from the outside, and I haven't mentioned medication yet. And nothing I've said should diminish the observations of those who have studied depression - we should humbly listen to their observations. And you can EXPECT that that breakthrough will bring you to GREATER courage than you've ever known. We see this with David, as he speaks forthrightly to his enemies, in v. 8 - 10. Those who struggle against depression are the most courageous people I know. For they fight an invisible enemy. But they fight with an invisible power that is deeper and greater than the foe they face.

It may be that through your darkest times, the glory of the light that illuminates the face of Jesus Christ will be seen far brighter in you than it ever could otherwise. Keep going. Don't stop believing. The breakthrough WILL come.

And you will find yourself taking courageous and constructive steps, perhaps in a relationship where you were once enslaved by FEAR; perhaps in a sin that seemed to enslave you; perhaps in a world that seems so against you. You WILL move and speak

in NEW WAYS. If you are in Christ, He IS resurrected, and He is still resurrecting YOU - to NEW life.

Let's pray.