

Depression.

The book of Psalms reflects many human emotions. It's been described as the book of life. The Psalms depict life and show something of the difficulties that we face. In Psalm 77 Asaph, the writer, is feeling low. He's depressed. In this Psalm we see some of the causes and cures for depression. Depression is something that we've all experienced at some time in our lives. To be able to deal with depression we need to know how it shows itself.

There is often an overwhelmed spirit. Asaph says, "My spirit grew faint". Depression has been defined as a "lowering of spirit". It's makes you feel down. The Psalmist says in Psalm 130 verse 1, "Out of the depths I cry to you O Lord". Do you feel defeated and deflated? Memories of better days in the past contribute to depression. Asaph says in verse 6, "I remembered my songs in the night". There was a time when he could sing even in the dark hours, but now he finds it impossible. He wonders why and it adds to his low state of mind. Depression also robs you of sleep. In verse 4 we read, "You kept my eyes from closing". You lie awake with your mind agitated about your circumstances. Depression can drive you to silence. Asaph says in verse 4, "I was too troubled to speak". Depression makes you isolate yourself. You're thoughts are negative, and you find it hard to have a conversation with anyone. You're totally consumed with your own problems. Do you identify with Asaph? Are those some of your feelings today?

What can bring about depression? Pessimism is a key factor. Asaph says in verse 2, "My soul refused to be comforted". Some people have a pessimistic outlook on life. They dwell on the dark moments.

Sometimes a guilty conscience will make you depressed. We read in verse 3, "I remembered you, O God, and I groaned". Asaph was troubled in his soul. There was some unconfessed sin in his life. Are you depressed because you're holding on to some sin in your life? You must deal with that. Seek God's forgiveness. Paul said in Acts 24 verse 16, "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man".

Holding a critical spirit will lead to depression. Asaph talks about groaning and moaning. He says in verse 3, "I groaned". The person who does little else but complain will suffer from depression.

Another factor is an unhealthy type of self-examination. Asaph says in verse 3, "I mused and my spirit grew faint". And in verse 6, "My heart mused and my spirit enquired". There's nothing wrong with looking into our hearts. There's such a thing as healthy introspection. David prayed in Psalm 139 verse 24, "See if there be any offensive way in me". Asaph's introspection caused him to grow faint. There's a form of self-examination that is morbid; when all you see is bad. This can lead to spiritual, mental, and physical illness. A wrong attitude towards God in the trial can make you depressed. Asaph says in verse 9, "Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?".

There are some natural causes for depression too. A time of illness can make you depressed. Bad news and difficult circumstances have the same effect. The missionary Adoniran Judson lost his wife. He plunged into depression, even to the extent of doubting God. He said, "God to me is the great unknown. I believe in him but I find him not". Your temperament can cause depression. You simply have a melancholy personality. Some feel depressed on a cloudy dark dismal day. Failing to eat well can bring on depression. You don't eat the right foods and miss vital nutriment. Sometimes a visit to the Doctor may be the answer to some of those problems that bring on depression. What steps can we take to deal with depression?

From a purely practical point of view get plenty of rest and exercise. Remember the three F's: Fun, food, and fresh air. We should live an all-round balanced lifestyle that will glorify God.

There are some spiritual remedies too. Asaph says in verse 10, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the most high". He roused himself. He got a new purpose, and a fresh goal. Depression isn't sin. It's a weakness, but we mustn't pretend it's not there when we feel it. Paul admitted his infirmity. He says in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 7, "There was given me a messenger of Satan to

torment me” It caused him some grief. He recognised it and asked God to remove it. That’s a natural response to anything that we don’t like in life. But then Paul faced his problem, accepted it, and turned it around to make it a blessing with the help of God’s grace. He says in verse 10, “I delight in weaknesses⁸for when I am weak then I am strong”. Also, have a proper view of God as your heavenly Father. Asaph doubted God’s care. He said in verse 8, “Has his unfailing love vanished forever?” God always cares. He isn’t against you in your time of weakness. Trust him that he is working all things out for you good. Paul describes God in 2 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 6. He says, “God, who comforts the downcast”. Look to God. Trust him. He will draw near to comfort you in those low times of life.

Learn to pray when you feel downcast. Asaph addresses God in verse 13. He says, “Your ways O God are holy”. Here he lifts his heart to God in prayer. Don’t forsake that secret place of prayer. Jesus said in Matthew 6 verse 6, “When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father”. Tell the Lord in prayer how you feel. He’s listening. He’ll respond to you. He’ll give grace sufficient for the need you have.

Encourage yourself in the Lord. That’s what Asaph did. He says in verse 11, “I will remember the deeds of the Lord”. Think back to those previous times when you proved God to be your refuge and strength. Bring to mind previous deliverances and they will help you to trust God for present ones. If God brought you out of the depths before then he can do it now.

Renew your mind. We read this in Romans 12 verse 2, “be transformed by the renewing of the mind”. Fill your mind with the word of God and all his great promises. Bring them to mind when you begin to sink in despair. There’s no doubt that the way you think has a major impact on how you behave and cope. In John Bunyan’s book Pilgrims Progress, Christian falls into the miry slough of despond. His travelling companion runs away and leaves him there. Help comes. The character `Help` is the person of the Holy Spirit. Help lifts him out. Christian asks, “Can’t this be mended so travellers may pass on?”. Help replies, “The miry slough is such that cannot be mended”. You see, depression is one of those inevitable experiences of life we all pass through to some degree because we’re

fallen people in a fallen world. But we have the Spirit of God and the word of God, the Bible, to help us out of it.

When you enter the depths of the dark times of the soul remember these lessons and work them out in your life. You will prove God to be your deliverer.