

## From Dave's Laptop

Tuesday, August 19, 2014

**I loved him, too.** Robin Williams was on my short list of favorite actors (the others are Cuba Gooding, Tom Hanks, Morgan Freeman, James Earl Jones, and Denzel Washington), and I was unaware of his struggles with depression and substance abuse prior to the news of his suicide last week. That news reminded me of a poem by Edward Arlington Robinson:

“Whenever Richard Cory went downtown,  
We people on the pavement looked at him:  
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,  
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

“And he was always quietly arrayed,  
And he was always human when he talked;  
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,  
‘Good morning,’ and he glittered when he walked.

“And he was rich—yes, richer than a king—  
And admirably schooled in every grace:  
In fine, we thought that he was everything  
To make us wish that we were in his place.

“So on we worked, and waited for the light,  
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;  
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,  
Went home and put a bullet through his head.”



After the news of Robin's suicide, Dick Cavett recalled a moment with Robin years ago in a small club: “He came off stage after lifting a cheering audience to its feet. ‘Isn't it funny how I can bring great happiness to all these people, but not to myself?’” And in an interview with *TIME* magazine last week, Dick recalled wondering after he had interviewed Robin on his show, “Can this be good for anyone? Can you be able to do all these rapid-fire personality changes and emerge knowing who you yourself are?”

I suppose actors may be especially good at . . . well, *acting*; but I suspect that many of us know more about attempting to cover up our inner anguish than others may suspect. Who do you think authored the following lines?

“I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better, it appears to me.”<sup>1</sup>

“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that the LORD brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?”<sup>2</sup>

“May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’ That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it.

---

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Lincoln

<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah (Lamentations 1:12)

May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light.”<sup>3</sup>

“I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted . . . for with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.”<sup>4</sup>

It was a springtime day more than twenty years ago. I had just taught a Bible study at a luncheon at our church, and I had dismissed the crowd. I was still standing at the lectern when these thoughts ran through my mind: “I have just taught the Bible for an hour, which I love to do more than just about anything else, and I did a good job. I am with people who love me and whom I love. It is a gorgeous springtime day . . . so why do I feel so awful inside?”

It was the early nineties, and I was teaching pastoral counseling at Southern Seminary in the midst of an intensifying and ugly denominational battle that was taking its toll on all of us on the faculty. In that moment of painful insight at the lectern, God enabled me to see that I, the teacher of how to counsel depressed people, was in fact one of those depressed people.

I went to see my physician that very afternoon and began a course of antidepressant medication and therapy that eventually took me out of the seminary and back into congregational ministry. While the depression I suffered during that year was by no means as bad as depression can be, it was painful enough to give me a whole new level of empathy with persons who suffer such distress.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, **5-10% of the American population is depressed at any one time.** Statistics indicate that **at least one in five Americans will suffer a significant depressive episode over the course of their lives** (one in four women; one in ten men). Women appear more likely than men to seek appropriate treatment for depression, while men tend to deal with depression with substance abuse and antisocial behavior.

Nearly two-thirds of depressed people do not get appropriate treatment because they don't recognize the symptoms, are so disabled that they are unable to reach out for help, are misdiagnosed and wrongly treated, or blame their despair on personal weakness and allow their sense of shame to isolate them.

While I suspect that virtually none of us would attribute a broken bone to “personal weakness,” and we would experience no shame whatsoever in allowing a physician to put a cast around our broken limb to hold it together while God heals it, many of us unfortunately attribute a broken heart to personal weakness. Seeking treatment for a broken heart is essentially allowing physicians and therapists to “hold our hearts together” while God heals them.

While it's important to know that willpower alone cannot and will not alleviate the intense emotional pain and the debilitating despair of depression, the good news is that

---

<sup>3</sup> Job (Job 3:3-5)

<sup>4</sup> Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes 1:14-15, 18)

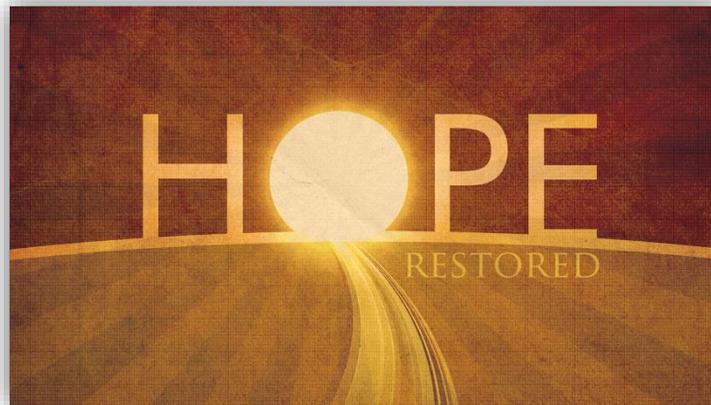
<sup>5</sup> One of my very good friends, an attorney, suffered with major depression to such an extent that he had to stop practicing law and was barely functional for nearly a decade. I'm happy to say that his life is in a much better place today.

depression is usually quite treatable through a combination of medication and wise counsel. Antidepressant medication, appropriately used, puts “a bottom” in our despair so that we have the assurance that our darkness will not be endless. This security and the increased energy the medication allows gives us the strength to do the soul work that is usually needed to sort through the sources of our despair on the way to Hope.<sup>6</sup>

Returning to Robin Williams for a moment, we know that something like **15% of those persons who experience the physical and mental pain of depression will complete suicide**. There are some essential pieces of information that all of us need so that we can care effectively for each other in times when Darkness threatens to overwhelm us. **Knowing this information is just as important as knowing CPR**, and I have attached several handouts with this *Laptop*. It’s a lot to read, but you’ll be glad you did.

*What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? . . . For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. . . . **We have this Hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.***<sup>7</sup>

Dave



---

<sup>6</sup> While much depression is “dynamic,” or related to problems in circumstances and relationships, some depression is “endogenous,” or completely physiological, rather like a thyroid disorder, etc. In any event, once any depression reaches a certain threshold, the path to Hope virtually always requires pharmacological intervention, like an overwhelming infection. That is, in fact, what most depression is: a disease of Hope.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 8:31-32, 38-39; Hebrews 6:19

## ***The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know*** O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)

### **Week thirty-three: THE JOSHUA CODE**

*“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8).*

Success is not a four-letter word! God’s will for us, like His will for Joshua, is that we have “good success.” Here, in the Joshua Code, we are told that if we keep the Word of God in our minds and in our mouths, day and night, and put it into practice, we will have “good success.” But the Lord does not define *success* like many in our world do today. For the believer, *success* can be defined as the ability to find the will of God for your life . . . and then doing it! As reflected in this verse, the Joshua Code incorporates three important issues.

#### **THE JOSHUA CODE INVOLVES A CONSTANT PRACTICE**

The challenge is to meditate on the Word of God both “day and night,” and meeting that challenge involves constant practice. This verse is a high-water mark in discipleship. No one before had ever been instructed to receive orders from God through the words of a book. Abraham obeyed God’s voice when he was called out of Ur of the Chaldees. He did not have a Bible. He did not have a book. Joseph received God’s revelation through God-given dreams. Moses heard the voice of God speaking through a burning bush (Genesis 12:1, 4; 37:5–10; Exodus 3:2, respectively).

Now, as Joshua stood at the threshold of the Promised Land, Moses was dead. However, Moses had left Joshua the Books of the Law that he had received from God—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Thus, Joshua was the first man to learn the Word of God in the same way that we learn: from the words of a book. Joshua was to keep it in his mouth and in his mind. The emphasis for Joshua—and for us—is upon making Bible study a constant practice.

#### **THE JOSHUA CODE INCITES A COMPLETED PURPOSE**

*Reading* the Bible gives us knowledge about God. Anyone can do that. Knowledge is simply the accumulation of facts. *Obeying* the Bible is what enables us to have a knowledge of God. Many of us obey the Word . . . partially. We seem to pick and choose on occasion what it is we will obey and what we will ignore. Our completed purpose, in the eyes of God, will be to move beyond simply reading and studying the Bible, to an act of obedience as we put these words into practice in our own experience.

#### **THE JOSHUA CODE INVOKES A CONDITIONAL PROMISE**

Note the important four-letter word *then*. When we obey the Word, *then* we will have “good success.” And how do we do this? We do it through the constant practice of meditating on God’s Word and keeping it in our hearts, letting it permeate our very being and so direct the thought processes of our minds that we speak it with our mouths at points of need. In the initial psalm, the psalmist indicated that his delight was found in the Law of the Lord and “in His law He meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). Thus, we then complete the purpose of not simply hearing the Word, but also doing it as we put it into practice through personal obedience.

**Here is true success in life: to stay in the *Word* of God until we find the *will* of God so that we can *walk* in the ways of God.** The Word. The will. The walk. These bring “good success.”