

iMope

Job 3:1-10 ¹

It was a fine morning in May. I had just finished teaching a Bible study for a luncheon group at our church in Louisville, and I was still standing at the lectern as the group began to leave. As I stood there, I had these thoughts: “It’s a gorgeous spring day. I have just done something I love to do, and I did it well. I’m with people whom I love and who love me. So why do I feel so terrible?”

As a professor of psychology and teacher of counseling, the answer to the question was pretty obvious: I was depressed. The poisonous atmosphere of denominational warfare at the seminary, combined with the fact that I really wanted to serve in the church proper rather than in a school setting, had combined to cause me to become clinically depressed. I left the church, called a friend who happened to be my physician, and began treatment that same afternoon.

Thankfully, that season of darkness lasted less than a year and led to my leaving the seminary and returning to congregational work; but living through the Darkness from the inside was a most instructive experience, and one in which I actually have a lot of company.

On January 23, 1841, Abraham Lincoln wrote to his law partner, Congressman John Stuart, “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.”²

Jeremiah cried out, “*Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable?*” (Jeremiah 15:18). “*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?*” (Lamentations 1:12).

Or how about Elijah? “*Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he . . . went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die*” (1 Kings 19:3-4).

The author of Ecclesiastes wrote, “*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*” (Ecclesiastes 1:14-15, 18).

And finally, in today’s text, *Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth.*² *He said:*³ “*May the day of my birth perish, and the night that said, ‘A boy is conceived!’*⁴ *That day—may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine on it.*⁵ *May gloom and utter darkness claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm it.*⁶ *That night—may thick darkness seize it; may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months.*⁷ *May that night be barren; may no shout of joy be heard in it.*⁸ *May those who curse days curse that day. . . .*⁹ *May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn,*¹⁰ *for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes* (Job 3:1-10).

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, Maryland on July 22, 2012.

² <http://www.thelincolnlog.org/view/1841/1/23>

If you're reading the Bible on the schedule I am, we're currently in Job. In one of our readings this week, Eliphaz, one of Job's friends, commented that "*Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward*" (Job 5:7). And Jeremiah wondered, "*Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?*" (Jeremiah 20:18).

I don't feel like that all the time, but sometimes I do. Perhaps you do, too. And it's probable that at least a few of us here this morning are in that place right now; if that's where you find yourself today, then this message is for you.

Have you ever cried out to God by day and by night, with the feeling that your prayers fade into emptiness, echoing mockingly from a silent sky? Sometimes we use the phrase "God-forsaken" about awful places of one sort or another, but such use is too flippant, perhaps used most by those who know little of the reality of that agony.

To be without God is to be rootless, formless, helpless, adrift at the mercy of the shifting sea, beginning at no beginning and working toward no end. In experiencing the seeming absence of God, we begin to understand the true nature of hell—the burning remorse for what could have been; the emptiness of what is not; the fear of what will be. What is hell if not the state of a spirit with whom God will not have anything to do?

Our agonizing seasons of feeling "God-forsaken" ought to be quite enough of hell. We taste thereby its awful reality and become motivated to avoid the path that leads to its yawning door of no return. Some of our experiences of "God-forsakenness" come as the result of our own actions, but some come unbidden, as did the awful disasters that fell upon Job prior to this morning's text, and we cry out to God, as he did.

This morning we turn our attention to those seasons of life in which our light turns to darkness. And, as Jesus noted, "*If the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*" (Matthew 6:23). I'm going to talk a little bit about what depression is, how to tell whether you are depressed, some of the ways you can escape from it, some of the potential benefits of it, and where God might be in all of that.

Depression is a complex disorder that affects your whole being—body, mind, and spirit. Depression is unfortunately quite common, yet is usually also quite treatable. About one in four American women will experience significant depression at some point in their lives, as will about one in ten American men. While depression sometimes becomes so severe that normal functioning becomes impossible, most depression is less severe, causing us to function at a much lower level than our best.

Depression affects how we think, how we feel, and how we behave. Here are a few of the most common symptoms in each of those areas:

THINKING
Having the conviction that nothing will get better Difficulty Concentrating Difficulty Making Decisions Difficulty Remembering Helplessness Hopelessness Irrational Guilt Pessimism Slowed Thought Processes Thoughts of Death or Suicide Feelings of Worthlessness

FEELING
Anger Anxiety Feeling "Blue" Feeling "Depressed" Feeling "Empty" Feeling "Numb" Feeling "Joyless" Irritability Loneliness Restlessness Sadness Uncontrollable Crying

BEHAVING
Apathy Clumsiness; Accidents Chronic Pain without Clear Cause Digestive Disturbances Fatigue Gaining or Losing Weight Loss of Energy Loss of Interest or Pleasure in Things You Used to Enjoy Relationship Issues at Home and at Work Sleep Disturbances Suicidal Attempts Withdrawal from Relationships

Depression generally comes from one of five general causes, which I'll call (1) situational causes; (2) physiological causes; (3) psychological causes; (4) interpersonal causes; and (5) spiritual causes. Let's look at each of these briefly.

1. Situational Causes. There are many situations that can lead to some level of depression. Some of the major ones have to do with reactions to various losses such as the death of a loved one or the loss of a job. These losses can be actual, perceived, or simply anticipated. Life stresses such as preparation for major holidays, weddings, and graduations, though generally positive, can lead to being overwhelmed and depressed. Being promoted into a job for which one feels inadequately prepared can lead to depression; as can being in an abusive situation of some sort. One of the most frequent situations that leads to depression is ambivalence about making a major decision of some kind.

2. Physiological Causes. Sometimes chemical changes in our bodies can lead to depressive symptoms. There are many endocrinological and neurological changes of this sort, some of the most common being PMS, post-partum depression, and mid-life changes that affect both men and women. Some persons are biologically predisposed to depression, rather like others are biologically predisposed to have arthritis; but no matter how depression begins, if it continues long enough, it takes on a physiological character that requires medical care.

3. Psychological Causes. A major component of most depression has to do with faulty thought processes that lead to unhelpful conclusions, such as negative self-image. Sometimes such negative self-image is the result of the harmful input of others, such as parents, and sometimes we create such input ourselves. There are fortunately a number

of helpful ways to learn how to experience more constructive self-talk, working with a skilled counselor being one of the most effective.

4. Interpersonal Causes. Although unredeemed relationships are a frequent contributor to depression, most people prefer to believe that their depression is related to their biochemistry rather than to their relationships. Even so, unresolved interpersonal conflicts, internalized anger, and the resulting bitterness that takes up residence in our spirits is often a key source of depressive experience.

5. Spiritual Causes. Unrecognized and unrepented sin in our lives is a frequent contributor to feelings of guilt that can lead to depression. While there is indeed such a thing as false guilt that results from inaccurate thought processes, sometimes we feel guilty because we are guilty, and are in need of forgiveness from God and from other people.

On other occasions the spiritual root of depression is more existential than relational, taking the shape of emptiness and meaninglessness. When depression is the result of such a crisis of meaning, it is more accurately called **despair**. As with all of the other kinds of depression except the primarily physiological, working with a skilled pastoral counselor is one of the most effective ways to work through depression that has a spiritual root.

What we can do on a Sunday morning is obviously quite limited, but happily there is a fairly simple way to begin the process of spiritual healing of depression, and you actually already know what it is. While I haven't been a huge fan of Robert Schuller over the years, it was he who helped me to understand Jesus' Model Prayer as illuminating a very effective path to recovery from depression. The King James Version of that prayer that most of us have memorized goes like this:

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen (Matthew 6:9-13).

Here's Dr. Schuller's take on those words as they relate to depression:³

“Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”

I overcome my feelings of inferiority as I discover that God is my Father, that He knows all there is to know about me, and that He still loves me with a love that will not let me go!

“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.”

I overcome my discouragement and depression as I discover that God has saved me to call me into His service of love. God has given me particular gifts through which I may serve others, and God invites me to participate in pushing back the Darkness and bringing in the New Creation. My life is redeemed from meaninglessness and despair, and I discover Hope.

“Give us this day our daily bread . . .”

I am released from feelings of anxiety as I realize that God will provide the things I need, both now and in the future.

³ Robert Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco: Word, 1982).

“And forgive us our debts . . .”

I am released from my guilt for past, present, and future failures. I am forgiven.

Schuller points out that forgiveness is much more than justification and the removal of sin. This is the essential, but negative meaning of forgiveness. The positive meaning of forgiveness is that God trusts us by entrusting to us His daring, divine dream for Creation.

“As we forgive our debtors.”

I am released from resentment, because, as I am established in a positive relationship with God, I am able to establish a relationship of forgiveness with others.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

I am released from fear, for I know that the powers of Darkness can have no final victory over me.

What you and I must always keep in mind is that our lives on earth are not the Real Story. What happens here, both of joy and sorrow, is real enough; but our lives here are really a proving ground for the Life that is to come.

Only two things will cross over with us into eternity: our character, and other people whom we've brought to Christ. **Our purposes in this life are that we allow God to so shape our character that we are willing, ready, and eager to spend eternity with Him, and that we bring as many others with us as we can.**

Our lives are like stained glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out; but in the Darkness, beauty is seen only if there is a Light within.⁴ As was the case with Job, God may sometimes allow us who follow Him to experience the Darkness so that His Light may shine more brightly out of our lives into a hurting world.

It was for this reason that Paul wrote, *“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe”* (Ephesians 1:17-19). It was the answer to such a prayer as this that caused Job to exclaim after all his horrible, but faithful, suffering, *“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you”* (Job 42:5).

Out of the agony of the worst that could ever happen, God brings the best that could ever be: *“Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed”* (Isaiah 53:4-5). *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:18).

⁴ Unknown, *Leadership*, vol. 1, no. 2.