

Overcoming Despondency

Samuel Shoemaker once said, “Everyone has a problem, is a problem, or lives with a problem.” Unfortunately, he was right. All of us face problems and hardships at times. And when we do, we can become despondent. Despondency involves a lack of hope or courage; it refers to a feeling of dejection. The Psalmist was certainly despondent when he penned Psalm 42. He says in verse 3, “My tears have been my food day and night.” Have you ever been so distraught that you couldn’t even eat, and the only thing you felt like doing was crying? That’s where the Psalmist was. Yet, he pressed through his despondency and found hope in the Lord. Let me share some of the steps he took to overcome his despondency.

First, draw near to God. That’s what the psalmist did. He said, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God” (vv 1-2). The picture here is of deer thirsting for water, maybe because of a drought or maybe because it is running from a predator. Either way, the deer is thirsting for water and relief. So too in times of trial we need to thirst for God’s presence, for only the Lord can give us the help and relief we need. Unfortunately, some people don’t do this. Instead of turning to the Lord when they go through tough times, they turn away from the Lord. Jesus warned of this. He compared it to seed being sown in rocky places. This speaks of people who initially receive the word with joy, but when trouble or persecution comes they quickly fall away (see Mark 4.17). Yet, this does not have to be the case. Our trials should *increase* our pursuit of God not *decrease* it. When we go through difficulties, we should draw near to God; and when we do, he will draw near to us (see James 4.8).

Secondly, affirm God’s faith-fulness. Verse 8 reads, “By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.” When we are going through tough times, we can’t rely on our feelings or circumstances. We must rely completely on the faithfulness of God. After Jerusalem and the Temple had been destroyed, the writer of Lamentations still confessed, “Because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (3.22-23). He may not have felt like God was faithful, but he knew it was true and he affirmed it even in the midst of disaster. We too need to affirm God’s faithfulness and cling to it no matter what we’re facing.

Finally, choose hope rather than despair. Twice the Psalmist tells himself to hope in God. He says, “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (vv 5, 11). Sometimes, like the Psalmist, we need to talk to ourselves. Sometimes we need to say ourselves, “What are you thinking? Don’t give up now. Hang in there, and God will see you through.” I know one thing: if we put our hope in God, we will never be disappointed. God can do anything but fail.

Pastor Mark