

Despair Must Fall

Introduction

Would you join me in the thirteenth Psalm?

Illustration

John Bunyan wrote about Christian and Hopeful who ended up in Doubting Castle as prisoners of the Giant Despair. He threw them into the dungeon of Doubting Castle, beat them mercilessly, and left them suffering in the cold, wet, dark dungeon.

Then next day he returned and said they might as well kill themselves, because otherwise they would continue suffering terribly in the dungeon. And again he brutally beat them — and left them to suffer.

That happened again the next day. And the next day.

So there they were. Thick dungeon walls. Locked cell door. Powerless before a sadistic Giant.

They were without hope.

Illustration

"Most people make the decision to attempt suicide shortly before doing so impulsively rather

than planning it out extensively.

While there are many factors that can influence a person's decision to commit suicide, the most common one is [severe depression](#). Depression can make people feel great emotional pain and loss of hope, making them unable to see another way to relieve the pain other than ending their own life" (<https://www.verywellmind.com/why-do-people-commit-suicide-1067515>).

Introduction

Despair means "the [feeling](#) that there is no [hope](#) and that you can do nothing to [improve](#) a [difficult](#) or [worrying situation](#)" (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/despair>).

In this thirteenth Psalm, David expresses his heart when he experienced despair. Listen to the first four verses.

Bible

(1) How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? (2) How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? (3) Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; (4) Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

Psalm 13:1-4 - KJV

Introduction

The Psalm opens with this sense of despair. Four times David asks a question, each beginning with the phrase *how long*.

- Two of the questions demonstrated despair related to God (v. 1).
- One question demonstrated despair related to himself (v. 2a).
- One question demonstrated despair related to his enemies (v. 2b)

We are unaware of the specific background of this experience in David's life. However, an experience that lines up with it is recorded in 1 Samuel 30. Would you join me there in your Bible?

Bible

(1) And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; (2) And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way. (3) So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. (4) Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep. (5) And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. (6) And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself

in the LORD his God.

1 Samuel 30:1-6 - KJV

Introduction

Prior to this, David fled from Saul whom he served faithfully. He was betrayed by the Philistine king whom he had fled to. Now, his home was sacked and his wives and children were gone. Not only that, the men he had gathered to himself, men that no one else would receive, now spoke of stoning David. Sounds like pretty good reasons to despair, don't they?

Can you relate to David? Are there points during specific time periods and circumstances in your life that you are tempted to slip into despair? Do you face issues within your marriage, family, and home that seem like they persist and will never change? Have you lost hope of spiritual renewal and restoration in your relationship with God or others? Have there been disappointments that have led to discouragement, depression, and finally to despair?

David was concerned that his despair would ultimately bring about his destruction (vv. 3-4). Not just in a physical or temporal sense, but in a spiritual sense.

Then, everything changes in verse 5. The conjunction *but* is one of the most exciting words throughout the Bible. It is often used in a position just like this.

Bible

(5) But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. (6) I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.

Introduction

You see, David knew what to do when he was tempted to despair. Rather than letting it destroy him, he won the victory turning despair into triumph.

I want to preach to you on this important subject in Psalm 13: What To Do When You are Tempted to Despair?

As we examine Psalm 13, we find three actions to take in response to the temptation to despair.

These are spiritual steps for responding to a spiritual dilemma. I recognize that there are times when physical abnormalities that may require medical intervention. However, there are many times when the reason for our despair cannot be diagnosed by a doctor and the solution for our despair isn't found in a bottle.

1...Rest in God's Mercy (v. 5a)

Explanation

Do not miss that David was already addressing God. He is laying out his disappointment, discouragement, and distress before the Lord. He is questioning God.

Do you ever question God?

I have recently had several conversations with people about questioning God. I do not see in

the Scripture where it is inherently wrong to question God. Take the example of Zacharias and Mary in Luke 1 to identify the difference. Both received a message from God about what he intended to do in their lives. Both asked how this could be. However, they were responded to differently. Zacharias was offered correction, but Mary was offered comprehension. What was the difference? Zacharias asked from a position of unbelief, Mary from belief.

There may be times in your life when you question what God is doing or why he is doing what he is doing, but do not question the mercy of God!

Do you note David's response following the conjunction in verse 5? When David was tempted to despair, he remembered and rededicated himself to his former trust in God. Earlier in the text, David expressed the assessment of his own reasoning, but now he was choosing to rest in the Lord's nature.

Specifically, he trusted God for His mercy. *Mercy* in this text speaks of the kindness and steadfast love of God. This was an attribute of God that David had experienced and was very familiar with.

Look at David's testimony of mercy in Psalm 25:6.

Bible

(6) Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old.

Psalm 25:6 - KJV

Explanation

As David look back at the course of his life, he recounted all the experiences of the mercy of God. Beyond that, David understood that God's mercies are eternal as He is.

God gave Israel a most eye-opening response to their question about God in Isaiah 49. Listen to this text.

Bible

(14) But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.

Isaiah 49:14 - KJV

Explanation

Isaiah 49 is a messianic prophecy. However, Israel questioned what they heard because of their captivity. God gave them a clear demonstration of His care for them by illustration and then by application.

Bible

(15) Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. (16) Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.

Isaiah 49:15-16 - KJV

Explanation

How was Israel graven upon His hands?

In the same way that I am: through the scars of the nail-prints that are found on Jesus.

When they questioned God's mercy, God directed their focus to the future when Jesus, God robed in human flesh, would come to the world and give himself for their salvation.

Application

When you are tempted to despair, rest confidently in the mercy of God!

Bible

(21) This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. (22) It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. (23) They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. (24) The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.

Lamentations 3:21-24 - KJV

Application

How can you rest confidently in the mercy of God?

While God called upon Israel to look forward and see themselves graven in His hand, we can look back. Whenever you are tempted to despair, look at the nail-prints and trust the mercy of

God!

2...Rejoice in God's Salvation (v. 5b)

Explanation

Would you notice the complete change in emotion? Earlier David was clearly distressed and now he is jubilant. What made such a difference? Before David was controlled by his feelings, now David is controlling his feelings.

Application

Friend, there is something to be said for the contrast of being controlled by your feelings or taking control of your feelings. Better yet, let the Holy Spirit take control of your feelings.

Explanation

David chose to rejoice in light of God's salvation. The word here means deliverance. David knew the salvation of God.

Turn with me to 1 Samuel 17. We'll look at verses 33-37, followed by verses 45-46.

This was an example of God's salvation in David's life. David's past experiences gave him reason to rejoice even in the present difficulty.

Bible

(33) And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with

him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. (34) And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: (35) And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. (36) Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. (37) David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee.

1 Samuel 17:33-37 - KJV

(45) Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. (46) This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

1 Samuel 17:45-46 - KJV

Application

When you are tempted to despair, make up your mind to rejoice in God's salvation. Your despair will quickly turn to triumph.

3...Remember God's Goodness (v. 6)

Explanation

David determined to sing praise unto the Lord at the remembrance of the goodness of God that he had experienced again and again.

Bible

(1) Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. (2) Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. (3) Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. (4) Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. (5) For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

Psalms 100:1-5 - KJV

Application

When you are tempted to despair because of questions about God, yourself, and your enemy, remember the goodness of God you have experienced and sing about it!

Did you know that singing has physical and emotional benefits?

1. Relieves stress
2. Stimulates the immune response
3. Increases pain threshold
4. May improve snoring
5. Improves lung function
6. Develops a sense of belonging and connection
7. Enhances memory in people with dementia
8. Helps with grief
9. Improves mental health and mood
10. Helps improve speaking abilities

(Information from <https://www.healthline.com/health/benefits-of-singing#benefits> accessed on 1/24/21)

Singing unto the Lord has the added advantage of being spiritually beneficial!

Bible

(19) Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

Ephesians 5:19 - KJV

Illustration

So what did Christian and Hopeful do?

They prayed

They prayed from midnight almost until daybreak.

They prayed — and God answered.

Christian suddenly remembered —

What a fool am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty!

I have a key in my bosom called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle.

The Key of Promise

So they tried the key in the dungeon door — it opened!

They went out and tried the key in the castle door — it opened, too!

So they escaped from Doubting Castle and the Giant Despair — by using the Key of Promise.

Bunyan's comment

Here's a note John Bunyan included at the bottom of the page —

Precious promise! The promises of God in Christ are the life of faith, and the quickeners of prayer.

Oh how oft do we neglect God's great and precious promises in Christ Jesus, while doubts and

despair keep us prisoners.

Conclusion

The change that is evident in this Psalm could not be more noticeable.

What had happened?

David's circumstances hadn't changed, but the Lord had changed David. That change took place when David stopped focusing on his feelings and his foes, and instead – by faith – started focusing on the Lord.

When you are tempted to despair, do the same! The change will not be the change of your circumstances, but the change will be in you when you too stop focusing on your feelings and foes and – by faith – start focusing on the Lord.