

SESSION 6

Weathering the Blues



QUESTION 1:

What are some things that lift your spirits when you're feeling down?

THE POINT

God lifts us up when we feel down.

THE PASSAGE

Psalm 31:1-8

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Sometimes we just get down. I'm not referring to clinical depression—that's a whole different matter. Some call it the blues, the blahs, or the doldrums, but whatever it's called, we're not at our best.

January 18, 2021 has been identified as Blue Monday, “the gloomiest day of the year.” For more than fifteen years now, the third Monday in January has been identified as a depressing day because the excitement of Christmas is well past; many have failed in their New Year's resolutions by this time; they're now facing the bills and debt accrued at Christmas; and the weather remains bleak.¹

Well-meaning family or friends will try to “talk us out of” our feelings. “What have you got to be sad about?” “You just need to turn that frown upside down.” In my experience, those clichés don't help. But the issue remains: what do we do when we have a bout of the blues?

King David wrote some amazing psalms of praise, but he also wrote psalms that reflected his troubled soul. Through his words in Psalm 31, we find the best answer to the blues.

Psalm 31:1-2

1 In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness.

2 Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me.

We're not lacking for suggestions on how to beat the blues. Some advice focuses on connecting with others; for example, talk to a friend or play with a dog for an hour. Other suggestions center on the physical: engage in vigorous exercise, drink coffee, eat more seafood, and take vitamin and mineral supplements. Many of these suggestions are sound ideas whether we're feeling down or not. (I'm all for playing with a dog for an hour every day.) While many of these ideas may benefit some people but not others, I am confident that we can all practice and benefit from one task: trust in God.

Let me stress again that clinical depression is very different from the moments of depression or the blues we can all experience. Medical supervision or the use of prescribed medications may be necessary for many people dealing with clinical depression.

In Psalm 31, David was not explicitly fighting depression per se, but he obviously was facing circumstances that weighed heavily on him. Although we're not sure of the exact circumstances, many scholars think King David wrote this psalm when his son, Absalom, was in rebellion and attempting to take over the kingship. It was evident from David's instructions to his soldiers to treat his son gently that he loved Absalom deeply (2 Sam. 18:5). He wept bitterly when he heard Absalom was dead (v. 33). But earlier, David had to run for his life because of a threat from his own flesh and blood, the very one he loved and cared for (17:21-22). Such circumstances were not just an external challenge; David surely felt heavy-hearted at his situation. I can only speak for myself and

say that if one of my two sons rebelled and sought to take my life, I would experience more than the blues!

David didn't seek comfort in talking to a friend or from petting a dog; he went to God. "In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust." One could seek refuge in a mountain, harbor, or city, but David knew he could *trust* God to provide the only shelter he needed. Elsewhere, David acknowledged that God was his *constant* shelter: "The LORD is the strength of my life" (Ps. 27:1). Nothing and no one else could offer David the protection from disgrace that God provided.

As he looked to God for safety, David also requested, "Deliver me in thy righteousness." We live in a world of unrighteousness. In another psalm, David mentioned this sad reality. "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (14:3). David especially felt this reality as he wrote Psalm 31. He was being unjustly attacked, so he turned to the only One who is forever just and righteous. In His holiness, God will always do what is just and right. David ran into the refuge of the One who will protect him by His righteousness.

When we find ourselves in the pit of misery, sometimes we can't lift ourselves out. We have no righteousness of our own we can call on. But we can look to God. God brings His righteousness to all who choose to trust their lives to Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote about Jesus: "Whom God hath set forth ... To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom 3:26).

David's problems and concerns may have weighed heavily on him, but he looked to the Lord God he knew and trusted. Whatever weighed him down was no match for a righteous God. Just as David cried to God for His help and righteous intervention, we can too.

"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

QUESTION 2:

What are some circumstances that tend to bring you down?

Psalm 31:3-4

3 For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.

4 Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength.

David's request in verse 2 for God to "be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me" also reminded David that God had already been his refuge. He declared in verse 4, "For thou art my rock and my fortress." Looking to God for refuge was not a new experience for David. We see this repeatedly in David's life.

From the moment we are introduced to David in 1 Samuel 16, we see a young man who trusted God. In fact, even before David entered the picture, God announced through Samuel, "The LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). When David stood before King Saul and offered to face Goliath, he said, "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" (17:37).

God rewarded David's trust with victory, and he quickly rose in the ranks of Saul's men and in the eyes of the people. But David's trust would be continually put to the test. David knew he would be king—indeed, everyone knew David would be king—so when David was presented an opportunity to quickly and easily kill King Saul, he refused to do it (24:1-22). Later, David had a second opportunity to kill Saul, and again he spared his life (26:1-25). He

told Saul, “The LORD delivered thee into my hand to day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the LORD’s anointed. And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the LORD, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation” (vv. 23-24). David would not take matters into his own hands; instead, he trusted God to bring about his deliverance and kingship in His own timing.

David was not perfect. He sinned grievously when he slept with Bathsheba and then killed her husband in an attempt to cover up his sin (2 Sam. 11:1-27). David should not have tried to take matters in his own hands. His attempts to fix things only made things far worse. But when Nathan confronted David, the king was convicted of his wrongdoing (12:1-14) and remembered the Righteous One who was his refuge, and David came to God in repentance. He remembered God’s grace and faithfulness and humbly prayed, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies” (Ps. 51:1).

Later, David penned a psalm about God’s forgiveness, and in his joyous declarations he noted where he placed his trust. “Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance” (32:7).

Now, as David faced a new challenge, he turned again to God as his rock and fortress. He prayed confidently that God would “pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me.” Sometimes it’s easy to be “prayed up” and trust God with the problems we see in advance coming down the road. But sometimes, we’re struck unaware. When we experience those secret traps, we can feel defeated. A sense of depression comes over us as we face yet another challenge. In those moments, it is wise to remember that the God who loves us and has been our refuge and fortress in the past is still the same refuge and fortress. Our feelings or circumstances don’t need to rule us if we trust Him.

QUESTION 3:

What are some unhealthy ways you see people respond to depression?

Psalm 31:5-8

5 Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.

6 I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the LORD.

7 I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities;

8 And hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy: thou hast set my feet in a large room.

Listen to the absolute and total trust in David's words: "Into thine hand I commit my spirit." David had chosen, quite literally, to place his life in God's hands. Whatever came and whatever happened, David's life was in God's hands—and there was no better place to be.

Jesus uttered these same words on the cross. As his agony, suffering, and sacrifice for our sins came to a conclusion, the last words Jesus spoke before he died were loud and clear: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). Jesus completed the mission He had come to earth to accomplish; He endured the agony of the cross, and with His work on earth finished (John 19:30), He entrusted His work and life into the hands of the Father.

We too should express such total reliance on God. We don't need to trust our circumstances. We certainly don't need to trust our feelings. Instead, we should place our whole selves—body, mind, and emotions—in God's hands.

We know we're truly trusting God—not simply giving lip service to the idea of trusting—when our trust leads us to praise God. When David penned these words, he had not yet experienced the rescue he sought, but he trusted and knew God would deliver. David could “be glad and rejoice in thy mercy” for four reasons:

1. “Thou hast considered my trouble.”
2. “Thou hast known my soul in adversities.”
3. “Thou ... hast not shut me up into the hand of the enemy.”
4. “Thou hast set my feet in a large room.”

In our moments of despair and depression, we may feel no one sees or cares, but God sees and knows—and He cares. Even the most inconsequential issue does not escape His notice when it pulls us down. Instead of being led by our feelings, let's trust God who does not hand us over to the enemy.

I love David's declaration: “Thou hast set my feet in a large room.” He said this before he was actually rescued from his troubles and resting in that spacious place. That's faith. Faith is such a sure confidence in God that we act as though we have what we seek from Him before we actually have it. This is no blind faith or “name it and claim it” approach to faith. No, it is a sure confidence grounded in the nature and character of God.

In those moments when we're in a tight spot surrounded only by depressing thoughts and feelings, let's remember that God will *always* deliver those who choose to look to Him in spite of circumstances. God will set us free from the tight space of depressing thoughts and bring us to a spacious place.

- ▶ “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isa. 26:3).
- ▶ “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

QUESTION 4:

How do truth and love work together to keep us out or pull us out of depression?

QUESTION 5:

What steps can we take as a group to lift one another up during difficult times?

ENGAGE

Using the acrostic below, list some ways God has set you free from things that caused you to feel down.

R -

E -

F -

U -

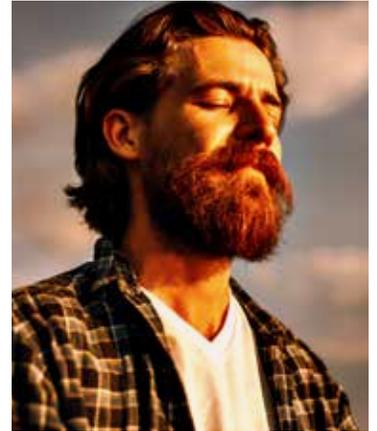
G -

E -

LIVE IT OUT

How will you respond in trust to God?

- ▶ **Worship.** Trust is expressed as you worship because it keeps you focused on Christ. Make the decision to actively engage in worship both with your church and in your private devotional life.
- ▶ **Study.** Identify Bible verses that teach what God says about the issue of depression and sadness in our lives so you can share them with others.
- ▶ **Seek help.** Do a serious personal evaluation about what causes depression in your life. Admit that it is real and it is serious. It might be time to talk with a close friend, pastor, or counselor about it.



END NOTES

1. Mary Bowerman, "Blue Monday: Is January 20 the most depressing day of the year?" *USA Today*, January 17, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2019/01/17/blue-monday-january-most-depressing-day-year/2604287002/>