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Depression, Loneliness, and Anguish

A Reflection on Psalm 6

Depression, loneliness, anguish - these are not very "positive" words, yet they describe conditions that all of us face at one time or another in our lives. When a person must deal with some-thing that causes such feelings, a common thought is, "I am all alone with this", or "No one has had to deal with what I am dealing with right now". Yes, at such times, feelings of isolation seem to swell up like a mon-

ster wave and make things even worse.

Although a person may "feel" isolated, the psalms clearly show that this is not correct. In fact, throughout the Bible, many of the great people of faith had to deal with serious problems that left them in turmoil, depression, and anguish. At one time, Paul was so discouraged and anxious that, when an opportunity to spread the Gospel opened, he decided to seek Titus instead. After Peter denied the Lord three times, the cock crowed, and Jesus looked at him. Peter fled from the courtyard, and wept bitterly.

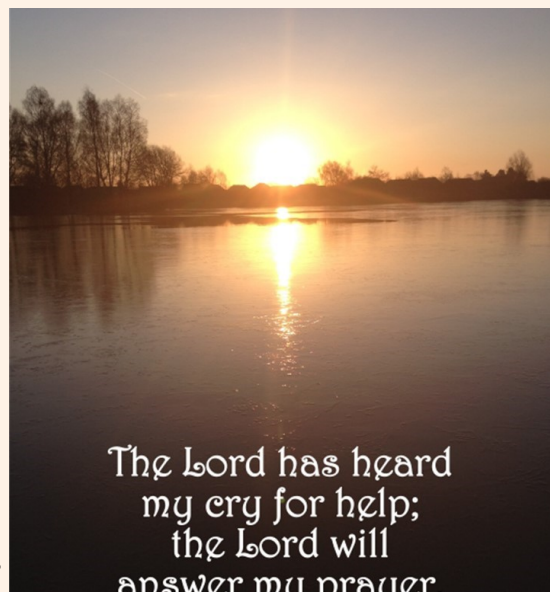
The Lord instructed Samuel to tell King Saul that he was cut off from the Lord due to his disobedience. Samuel did what the Lord told him to do, but his grief for Saul was so deep, that the Lord told him to get up and go to Bethlehem. What about Abraham? What were his thoughts as he took Isaac up to sacrifice him to the Lord? No, the terrible emotions that accompany the trials of life are not reserved simply for people today. Men and women throughout the centuries have had the same problems.

This is why the words of David in Psalm 6 are so relevant for us today. In this Psalm, we find David trying unsuccessfully to deal with a very heavy load. It may have been at night, we do not know, but his turmoil is very evident. Look at the words that describe his anguish, "I am faint Oh Lord; heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long O Lord, how long?" (vs. 2-3)

How often have we echoed such words? In verses 6 and 7, David continues, "I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes." David's foes were certainly real enough; but during the night, they were - coming to him in his thoughts and dreams. Sometimes the worst foes we face are at night in our thoughts.

If Psalm 6 ended with verse 7, then the mood and message would be very bleak, and there would appear to be very little comfort for us as we face our trials and foes. But David continues in verses 8-10. As he considers the events in his life, he turns to the only source that can truly provide help and comfort - prayer to the Living God.

In this psalm - this prayer - we can see David beginning to put things back into perspective. Yes, he was facing severe problems. Yes, his foes seemed to be too numerous to count. Yes, he saw no immediate solution. But he knew that he was the Lord's Anointed King over Israel. He knew that the Lord was with him despite



what his emotions were telling him, and he knew that the Lord would help him. As he prayed, the problems and foes began to recede into the background.

Notice that the Lord did not answer his prayer with an impressive miracle, or instant answers. In this Psalm, we see no evidence that the outward foes were gone. Instead, the Lord answered his prayer in his heart and soul. That was where true peace and healing would begin.

Today, many Christians repeat the words of David. "How long, O Lord, how long?" Our Father's answer may not be immediately apparent. When we wake up the next morning, the problems of life will still be there. But our Father will respond immediately within our souls.

David's peace came from the fact that he was able to face what was ahead. As Children of God, as members of God's Household, how much more can we expect help when we pray for healing and release from our anguish?

Depression, loneliness, and anguish exist in life. Christians are not guaranteed a trouble-free life in this world, but in Jesus Christ, we KNOW that the Lord will help us. We KNOW that today's problems will fade. We KNOW in Christ that we CAN overcome our foes. Faith, trust, prayer practiced everyday works! Psalm 6 - What a jewel!

Jim Shelburn

San Antonio, TX

Perfect Peace

"In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: 'We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks. Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in. You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for in Yah, the Lord, is everlasting strength. For He brings down those who dwell on high, the lofty city; He lays it low, He lays it low to the ground, He brings it down to the dust.'"
Isaiah 26:1-5

What is perfect peace? Men seek peace in many places and in many ways. We convince ourselves that if we can just leave this place and find some isolated island, we will find peace. We believe that if we quit this job and find another one, we will have peace. There could be certain situations that are so chaotic that to depart and find calmer waters might produce some form of peace. However, the peace that God offers is not dependent on locations or the most favorable circumstances. His is a peace that passes understanding. The Apostle Paul

affirms, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7). Paul states that this peace can be ours in "everything." Does that mean in every place and in every situation?

What is it that makes us anxious? When the bills pile up, we may despair if we cannot pay them. If our spouse decides he or she wants out of the marriage, it can be unsettling and leave us feeling isolated and alone. If a child is diagnosed with a serious illness, we are devastated and upset. Can God bring perfect peace in all these circumstances? Can he calm such troubled waters?

The *Amplified Bible* translates Isaiah 26:3, "You will keep in perfect and constant peace the one whose mind is steadfast [that is, committed and focused on You--in both inclination and character], because he trusts and takes refuge in You [with hope and confident expectation]." The *New*

Living Translation renders it, “You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!” No matter what translation we read, it is evident that the peace spoken of in this verse is based on certain conditions. The heart that is committed and focused on the Lord is the one that finds calm amid the storms. It is the man who trusts the Lord and his promises who will be empowered to chart a course through the wilderness of depression and isolation.

We sing a song entitled “Peace, Perfect Peace” written by Edward Henry Bickersteth (1875):

1 Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?
The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.
2 Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed?
To do the will of Jesus, this is rest.
3 Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours?
Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.
4 Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?
Jesus we know, and he is on the throne.
5 It is enough: earth's struggles soon shall cease,
and Jesus call to heaven's perfect peace.

Bickersteth states in verse one that it is the blood of Jesus that whispers peace within. The peace of God is not dependent on external circumstances. Even during the storm there is a place of calm and peace. He reminds us that doing the will of the Lord will lead us to rest. He exults in the conquering power of Jesus Christ who has vanquished death. He trusts in the hope that all the struggles of life will one day be dissolved by heaven's perfect peace.

But do we have to wait until the Lord returns to experience peace in our lives. The Bible's answer to that question is “No.” We can have peace despite life's circumstances. In Isaiah's imagery he

pictures a throng of people entering the city singing a song of salvation. It is a strong city, and its walls and bulwarks declare salvation. Those within this city are safe. The enemy may rage and threaten outside the walls, but inside the walls is a place of rest and peace. The righteous nation which knows and keeps the truth may enter through the gate. Their mind is focused and stayed on the Lord. They trust in the Lord for strength. They know that their power to conquer fears and anxieties lies in the strength of the Lord. Within his gates there is peace.

The Hebrew text of Isaiah 26:3 has an interesting twist. The part that is translated “perfect peace” in Hebrew is “shalom, shalom.” The word shalom means completeness, soundness, welfare, peace (*Strong's 7965*). In English we would say, “Peace, peace.” The idea conveyed is one of completeness, there is nothing lacking. The perfect peace we find in the Lord is a wholeness and maturity within, that reigns despite all the chaos outside the walls.

What is the secret of this peace of which Isaiah sings? We must consider the conditions that Isaiah describes. First, there is the character of the one who is at peace. His mind is focused on the Lord. The object on which he is fixed is not himself, or his riches, or his companions. His heart is intensely concentrated on God. He trusts in him implicitly and believes his words are true and faithful.

Secondly, there is the promised blessing that God will keep in perfect peace those who trust in him. It is more about God's power and ability than it is our own strengths or accomplishments. We experience this blessing when we pray along with Jesus in the garden, “Nevertheless, not as I will but as you will.” It is the surrender of our wills to God's will that delivers us from the bondage of anxiety and worry. We know that in every circumstance of life God is working for our good.

Thirdly, there is the duty enjoined on us to trust God. When we are contemplating or listening to expositions on the word of God, our duty to trust him seems so easy. But in actual life our faith is tested and sometimes we fail. It is a blessing to know that our peace does not depend on our perfection but on God's trustworthiness. We are assured that the Lord is everlasting strength. We can depend on him, and he will not give up on us. Jeremiah writes, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'Therefore I hope in Him!'" (Lam. 3:22-24). The condition of heart expressed by Isaiah is one that is focused on the Lord. Such a heart leads to the confidence that God will keep in perfect peace those who are stayed on him.

James Banks in his book *Peace Through Prayer* (pp.12-13) writes this about God's perfect peace:

The "perfect peace" God promises in Isaiah 26:3 can find its way in regardless of life's difficulties. This is the experience of God's people throughout Scripture; peace is a gift our Abba Father longs to give to us. It's available to the single mom who's doing her best to put food on the table and somehow have enough energy left to help her little boy with his homework. It's there for the man who thinks he has his whole life in front of him until he receives the pathology report showing a life-threatening battle with cancer ahead. It's accessible to all of us. The Bible points to this peace as something that transforms us, a nearness to the One whose "love is better than life" (Psalm 63:3) because "the Lord is peace (Judges 6:24 NLT).

The peace God offers to us looks at the future and is not fearful, looks at the past and is reconciled, and looks at the present and is restful. It can do all of this because of the One who gives

it, the One who does "all things well" (Mark 7:37 ESV). Our part is to receive it and walk in it---but that's not always as easy as it seems. I'm reminded of something a wise friend and mentor in ministry told me once during a candid conversation over coffee: "James, sometimes you sound holier than you really are." I winced at the words, but I had to admit he had a point. He was warning me against a faith where we say what we're expected to say but where words that are good and true lose their meaning from overuse and end up sounding like jargon. It's one thing to talk (or write) about peace; it's another entirely to live there.

There must be trust before there can be peace. God cannot give his perfect peace to the untrustful. We can be confident that God wants us to have peace, but we must not fool ourselves with empty jargon. Trusting God in the heat of battle can be difficult. Will he deliver? Can we trust him?

Burton Coffman writes in his commentary: "Isaiah 26:3 has the words 'perfect peace'; but the Hebrew from which this is rendered reads: 'peace, peace,' Which means positive well-being, not merely lack of strife." Trusting God does not mean the battle is over. It means that the Lord is on our side, and he will help us in the conflict.

Joshua was chosen to lead the Children of Israel after the death of Moses. God gave him these assuring words: "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you" (Josh. 1:3-5). These words must have built great confidence in the heart of Joshua. However, after these inspiring words were spoken, Joshua

still had to lead the people forth and engage in battle to win every place that the sole of his feet trod. It was important for Joshua to trust God and to remember his promise every day and every step of the way. He had to stay focused on God and not on the obstacles in front of him.

The same is true for us. God's peace does not mean the end of our striving. Perhaps it is like a child who jumps from the top of a wall into the waiting arms of his father. He trusts in his father to catch him. Such trust moves him to action, and he leaps from the wall. And underneath him are the arms of his loving father.

Deuteronomy 33:27-29 reminds us, "*There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; He will thrust out*

the enemy from before you, and will say, 'Destroy!' Then Israel shall dwell in safety, the fountain of Jacob alone, in a land of grain and new wine; His heavens shall also drop dew. Happy *are* you, O Israel! Who *is* like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places."

The imagery of this passage is that of a battle with the enemy. While we may not be in a literal battle, we are engaged in a struggle with forces that threaten to defeat us and leave us depressed and alone. In the face of the enemy God promises us his perfect peace. God is our refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms. Do we trust him?

L Scott Gage
Fayetteville, AR

Almost Invisible

There is a spot in North Carolina that I've visited twice and long to visit again. Max Patch is a lovely hill intersected by the Appalachian Trail. From atop the hill one can see for miles. There are no trees of any size on Max Patch, only lovely meadow with occasional shrubs and wildflowers.

It was at Max Patch I first encountered a flame azalea. When I spotted it, I thought I was looking at some colorful piece of trash someone had discarded. The brilliance of its orange blossoms was amazing to me. Since that day three years ago I've promised myself to return again in June some year to gaze upon the beautiful flower. That's the only place I had seen it.

All that changed a couple of days ago. While visiting Kingdom Come State Park in Harlan County, Kentucky, I noticed something orange on the edge of the woods. Yes, it was another flame azalea, not quite as large and showy as the first I had seen, but beautiful, nonetheless. Here it was, in the area in which I had been raised.

A similar occasion of serendipity happened a couple of years ago on the hillside above my mother's house. These were woods I had roamed freely as a young boy. Now there were mountain laurel shrubs everywhere on that hill displaying delightful blooms. Had these been here when I was young? If so, I had paid them no attention. And that, to me, was a very sad thought.

How many other things are almost invisible to me? Daily I pass them by, never glancing in their direction. Then one day, for some reason, I notice. From then on, I am astonished by how common the sight is, if only I had been looking.

Are people nearly invisible to me? They are so common; I pass them by every day, rarely glancing into the eyes of anyone in particular. Have I allowed God's most wonderful creatures to become almost invisible to me?

Jesus didn't suffer from such impaired vision. He saw people that others of His day didn't notice. He spotted Zacchaeus, the tax collector, even though

the small man was in a tree (Luke 19:5). He saw the sorrow of a widow who had just lost her only son (Luke 7:11-13). He perceived the spiritual thirst of sinners and tax collectors, people that “good folks” didn't want to be around (Matthew 9:10,11).

How could Jesus see those whom others rarely noticed? Because He was interested in helping them. “For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost,” He said at the end of his visit with Zacchaeus (Luke 19:10). By taking time to be with this outcast man, salvation came to the tax collector, and his life took a turn for the better.

Do we want to do well with our lives? Then hear this advice from James: “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well” (James 2:8). If you wonder who that “neighbor” might be, spend a few minutes with the Lord as He answers that very question in Luke 10:25-37. May we open our eyes and see that which may have become almost invisible to us. May those who have been created in God's own image (Genesis 1:27) never become obscure in our sight.

Timothy Hall

LightGrams, June 25, 2009

Victory Over Unforgiveness

Immediately after teaching His followers to pray, Jesus gave a warning about allowing unforgiveness to reside in the heart. He said that those who refuse to forgive others won't be forgiven by the Father.

They who won't forgive break fellowship with God because their unrepentant attitude gets in the way of their own humble attitude of confession and repentance. The Lord cannot ignore sin, and His Spirit will bring wrong behavior to the believer's attention until he or she deals with it.

Forgiveness is an act of the will more than an act of the heart. Often people don't feel like being merciful to someone who has wronged them. But a resentful spirit grows into a terrible burden. The Lord knows that forgiveness is necessary, even when it is difficult.

You won't deal with a sin until you see it as God does. So assume full responsibility for your unforgiving attitude, and acknowledge that it is a violation of His Word. Claim the divine mercy He offers, and ask Him to enable you to lay aside anger and resentment against the other person(s). As part of the decision to move forward in grace, make a habit of praying for those who hurt you. And if God so leads, seek their forgiveness for your wrong attitude.

A bitter and resentful spirit doesn't fit who we are in Christ. Nor is it healthy to carry an angry attitude through life. That's why Scripture emphasizes the need to forgive. Choose to be liberated from your burden--Jesus promised to make us free when we release our sins to Him (John 8:36).

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Email: Lsgage129@cs.com

www.basicchristianity.net