

God's Answer to Depression

1Kings 19: 4-8 Psalms 4: 1-8 Pastor Lentz
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God's answer to depression is tailored to you. There are many different answers to depression in the Bible, and if you look at them closely you will find that they address people differently. From when I first started looking for Biblical answers to depression I have found many. At first I saw one, then another and now I realize there are many more than I can possibly see. At first I couldn't see many because I was looking too narrowly at what an answer would look like. When I expanded my search as I grew wiser, I saw more and more how relevant the Bible is to us for everything that we ever face. It is as if the Bible recognizes that we are individuals and we need different things, even at different times. These two passages address depression through very different means and offer us two methods of dealing with depression.

Elijah is depressed and he is taken care of even nurtured for a while as a part of the treatment. How amazing is it that the Bible would prescribe nurturing for someone who is depressed. Let's admit that depression is a time that most of us are willing to be nurturing to ourselves. It is certainly a time when we would like for God to be nurturing toward us. We have been through a difficult time, whether it was self-imposed like being way too hard on ourselves, or by fearfully experiencing events in our life that we didn't choose; either way we want or need some nurturing.

Some theorists claim that depression is the body's response to a prolonged fearful experience. They say that depression is the body's way of corralling the cortisol in the body from the traumatic experience so that it would minimize long term damage. They say that depression is a way the cortisol is kept in one area instead of having access to the

entire body. Cortisol which is a steroid can create havoc on our body over time. It is how come that stress can be harmful.

Other theorists say that depression is a way of protecting ourselves from the pain of things to come. They claim that a person puts on a quilt blanket of depression in order to protect themselves from ongoing pain. The implication is that the mental trance of depression is something that gets triggered when there is a need for it. The need can come from a difficult or stressful time as easily as a fearful one. When a person doesn't feel as if they have any options everything feels overwhelming, and potentially scary.

Elijah had been through a difficult and stressful time. He was running for his life. He started wishing that he hadn't been born. He was wanting to just end everything. Most of us have thought or felt that way at some point. Depression is something that most of us have dealt with in one way or another. There are lots of other reasons that a person gets depressed. Some folks find themselves depressed when grief of loss had become overwhelming. Sometimes it is the loss of a friend, family member or loved one, and then sometimes it is the loss of a life style, ability, or position. Loss is loss but how we deal with it makes all the difference in the world.

That God built in ways for us to be more self-nurturing and even times and ways that when depressed we tend to look for others and God to nurturer us. We want someone else to do some of the heavy lifting. We want to be taken care of even if it is a little bit. Our deep desire to have someone else help often gets us into relationships that can be very helpful to us and to others. Sometimes our deep desire to have someone help us causes us to help others. When that happens we win in a magnificent way, because our efforts to help then get us into a better place. Ultimately, that was exactly what God invited Elijah to do. It is the natural thing to do, after we have been nurtured to be nurturing to someone else. Of course another approach is to do for others what we want done to us, and find ways of getting things from our actions. That way is also effective.

Yes, exercise helps us to feel better if we can actually do it. Elijah had to walk a long distance, and after a rest he had another long distance to walk. It would likely help change how he felt. All of us can't exercise in ways that will give us rest from depression. Limitations, and physical pain may make it difficult for a person to exercise. The Bible offers ways that are more sophisticated than relying on one way.

Notice that the approach in Psalm 4 doesn't involve any of the ways that are mentioned in the other passage. Here we are invited to have a serious discussion with God and expect that God will answer. In the Psalm God does answer, it is said so matter of fact that it becomes difficult to tell if it is you or God speaking. That is the way it is in real life. At times we don't know whether we are hearing from God or from our own desires. Who of us haven't had a discussion with God when we were not sure whether it was our desire or God's speaking to us. It is not an easy distinction.

When we pray asking God for direction it is difficult to easily know whether we heard God speaking to us or our own desires. When a person is depressed it is even more difficult to tell because they also know that their feelings are getting in the way, and they are not sure of anything. It is when it would be nice to have someone else assisting us because it is so difficult to see through the haze of emotion and sort between what is God saying and what are we wanting, and are they the same thing. Although there are other ways to tell the difference one way is to remain not knowing and to be hopeful that it was God and continue to look for assurance of it being from God or not.

I love it. Psalm 4 says "Tremble and^[d] do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent." When a person is depressed they are usually also afraid. When we follow the advice of this Psalm and examine our hearts and be silent we will get blessed. An honest self-examination when depressed can offer us genuine insights so we can make better decisions. It also tends to lift some of a negative mood. It is a way of being real with ourselves and with God. It can help a lot. I know people who have used this approach and even look forward to

times when they are depressed so they can use it some more. They are very blessed by the genuineness of being open with God and examining themselves so completely. It is one of the things we are encouraged to do before communion. Some churches remind people that the first Sunday is when Communion occurs so that they will have more likelihood of examining themselves.

However wonderful that verse is, the next sentence in the Psalm is absolutely brilliant. We are told to offer the sacrifices of the righteous. That means we are supposed to treat ourselves as if we are righteous. It is what Job did. When you treat yourself as righteous you are believing God who said you are forgiven. That is who and how we become righteous. No one simply follows all the rules, and avoids sin. Job wasn't free of having committed sin, he was simply free of it because he trusted that he was forgiven. He did the ritual things that were required of him to deal with sin and he then trusted in the Lord as he was told to do.

Guess what believing that you are righteous because God declared you forgiven does for you. It amplifies your relationship with God. You get to feel closer to God, and you get to feel as if God cares more for you. It makes God your friend, guide, mentor, confessor, priest, doctor, lawyer, and even playmate.

When you can feel that close to God there are times when you see the sky, or some wonderful event, you feel as if your playmate just brought you joy. It is a wonderful experience.

On the other hand if a person was depressed, they could recognize the times that Biblical folks were depressed such as Ecclesiastes, Elijah, or David to name a few. When we identify with important Biblical figures it can alter our mood. We can also appreciate the messages to us in the text that will help us. Elijah was given a task to do that would likely alter his depression. David works through it by talking to God, on one occasion. The Psalms record several different approaches that can be used to alter depression, and Ecclesiastes embraces the depression and

uses the time to examine life and comes up with wisdom that he wouldn't otherwise. He says that with depression comes wisdom. God clearly offers us many different methods that personalize how to deal with our emotions. Isn't it amazing what a book that we have from God that offers us such deep wisdom and tools to deal with our emotions? It helps me to feel valued, and I hope that it does you as well. Amen.