

**“The Downcast Soul” [PART 2] (Psalm 42)(8.21.22)**

**Psalm 42**

For the director of music. A *maskil* of the Sons of Korah.

<sup>1</sup> As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, O God.

<sup>2</sup> My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?

<sup>3</sup> My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while men say to me all day long,  
“Where is your God?”

<sup>4</sup> These things I remember  
as I pour out my soul:  
how I used to go with the multitude,  
leading the procession to the house of God,  
with shouts of joy and thanksgiving  
among the festive throng.

<sup>5</sup> 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 <sup>6</sup> my God.

My soul is downcast within me;  
therefore I will remember you  
from the land of the Jordan,  
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

7 Deep calls to deep  
in the roar of your waterfalls;  
all your waves and breakers  
have swept over me.

8 By day the Lord directs his love,  
at night his song is with me—  
a prayer to the God of my life.

9 I say to God my Rock,  
“Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I go about mourning,  
oppressed by the enemy?”

10 My bones suffer mortal agony  
as my foes taunt me,  
saying to me all day long,  
“Where is your God?”

11 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.

Psalm 43 (NIV84)

<sup>1</sup> Vindicate me, O God,  
and plead my cause against an ungodly nation;  
rescue me from deceitful and wicked men.

<sup>2</sup> You are God my stronghold.  
Why have you rejected me?  
Why must I go about mourning,  
oppressed by the enemy?

<sup>3</sup> Send forth your light and your truth,  
let them guide me;  
let them bring me to your holy mountain,  
to the place where you dwell.

<sup>4</sup> Then will I go to the altar of God,  
to God, my joy and my delight.  
I will praise you with the harp,  
O God, my God.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

## **The word of God for the people of God.**

LET US PRAY.

Title: **"The Downcast Soul" [PART 2]**

INTRODUCTION:

Somebody asked a lady, "What do you do when you get down in the dumps?" She said, "When I get down in the dumps, I get a new hat." Her husband said, "I wondered where you'd been getting them." While that is funny, we are addressing a much more serious and wide-encompassing matter.

This is a sermon series to help us cope with the challenges of life. People are anxious. People are fearful. They feel weighed down. When the pressure upon us continues, seemingly without end, we can become depressed. Our downcast soul feels disturbed, surrounded, distant, and alone.

If you have not experienced depression, likely a friend or family member has dealt with depression. One of the ramifications of the pandemic was a widespread sense of isolation and disconnectedness. The CDC reported that in 2020, 20.3% of adults received mental health treatment, which would include counseling or medication. That was up one percent from 2019. I can only imagine that the mental and emotional health challenges continue to be compounded.

Depression has always been part of being human:

Moses cried out to God in Numbers 11:14–15 (NIV84)

<sup>14</sup> I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup> If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin.”

After dealing with prolonged conflict, the prophet Elijah was tired of running and wanted to give up. 1 Kings 19:4 (NIV84) while he himself went a day’s journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.”

The reluctant prophet Jonah was unhappy with the way the LORD was using him; a mission through which God was growing him: Jonah 4:8 (NIV84)

When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

Some people have the mistaken impression that Christians should not get depressed. Experience tells us otherwise. Often you have heard me quote the Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon. He had a long battle with debilitating depression.

Why would such a great man and great Christian preacher suffer depression? We do not know, but here are a couple of possible explanations. Spurgeon preached several times per week to thousands of people at a time. He also founded and supported an orphanage and other Christian endeavors. Of course, this made him a target for Satan to attack.

All that preaching, leadership, and administration required a lot of work. While Spurgeon made sure to honor the Sabbath each week, Wednesday was his normal day off, the other six days were long hours. Overwork, with the accompanying stress, can wear us out until, like our downcast soul, we feel poured out.

Today, I will share with you an article from the magazine, Psychology Today, which I found shocking. Then we will look at some ways our Downcast Soul shares the solution to his disturbed soul within him.

BODY:

On July 24<sup>th</sup>, one month ago, Psychology Today published an article by Dr. Noam Shpancer (Ph.D). He is a professor of psychology at Otterbein College and a practicing clinical psychologist in Columbus, Ohio. The shocking title of the article is "Depression Is Not Caused by Chemical Imbalance in the Brain."

**DISCLAIMER – DO NOT stop taking your medication without consulting your doctor.**

KEY POINTS

- There is no convincing evidence that depression is caused by serotonin abnormalities.
- Many people take antidepressants believing their depression has a biochemical cause. Research does not support this belief.
- The notion that antidepressants work by elevating serotonin levels is not supported by the evidence.

Major depression is one of the most common psychological disorders, affecting more than 23 million adults and adolescents each year in the U.S. It carries economic costs in the hundreds of billions and is a major risk factor for suicide.

The causes of depression have been long debated, yet a common explanation holds that the culprit is “chemical imbalance” in the brain. This notion emerged, not coincidentally, in the late '80s with the introduction of Prozac—a drug that appeared to be helpful in treating depression by increasing levels of the brain neurotransmitter serotonin.

Pushed [heavily](#) by the pharmaceutical industry, as well as reputable professional [organizations](#) such as the American [Psychiatric](#) Association, this storyline has since become the [dominant narrative](#) with regard to depression, accepted by the majority of people in the U.S., and leading more and more people to think of their psychological [difficulties](#) in terms of chemical brain processes. Depression treatment, in turn, has leaned ever more heavily on antidepressant medications, widely touted as the first, and best, intervention approach.

The idea that depression is caused by chemical imbalance in the brain—specifically lower serotonin levels—and can therefore be treated effectively with drugs that restore that balance appeared for a while to be an all-around winner. It provided clear answers for both physicians and their suffering patients—an elegant explanation of the symptoms and a readily available remedy in pill form; pharma companies made money.

Before long, however, two nontrivial problems have emerged regarding this promising storyline. First, antidepressant drugs turned out to be far [less effective](#) in treating depression than once hoped and advertised. About [half](#) of patients get no relief from these medications, and many of those who do benefit find the relief to be incomplete and accompanied by distressing side effects.

Moreover, [research](#) has shown that drug effects are often no better than those achieved via [placebo](#), and may [not](#) lead to a better quality of life in the long term. A 2010 [review](#) of the literature summarized: "Meta-analyses of FDA trials suggest that [antidepressants](#) are only marginally efficacious compared to placebos and document profound [publication bias](#) that inflates their apparent efficacy... Conclusions: The reviewed findings argue for a reappraisal of the current recommended standard of care of depression."

Antidepressant [medication](#) is no miracle cure.

Second, the "chemical imbalance" hypothesis—the notion that low serotonin causes depression and that antidepressants work by elevating those levels—has failed to find empirical support. Over the past several decades, research into the serotonin-depression link has branched out into multiple lines of inquiry. Studies have looked to compare levels of serotonin and serotonin products—as well as variations in [genes](#) involved in serotonin transport—for depressed vs. non-depressed people. Other studies sought to artificially lower serotonin levels (by depriving their diets of the amino acid required



to make serotonin), looking to establish a link between low serotonin and depression.

A [recent](#) (2022) **exhaustive** "umbrella review" (a review of meta-analyses and other reviews) of this diverse literature by Joanna Moncrieff of University College London and colleagues examined the accumulated evidence in all the above lines of inquiry. The conclusions are clear: "The main areas of serotonin research provide no consistent evidence of there being an association between serotonin and depression, and no support for the hypothesis that depression is caused by lowered serotonin activity or concentrations."

Lead author Joanna Moncrieff [said](#), "I think we can safely say that after a vast amount of research conducted over several decades, there is no convincing evidence that depression is caused by serotonin abnormalities, particularly by lower levels or reduced activity of serotonin... Many people take antidepressants because they have been led to believe their depression has a biochemical cause, but this new research suggests this belief is not grounded in evidence."

The review **did** find a strong link between adverse and [traumatic](#) life events and the onset of depression, which points to the possibility that environmental [stress](#) factors in the emergence of the disorder more heavily than do internal brain processes. Moncrieff notes: "One interesting aspect in the studies we examined was how strong an effect adverse life events played in depression, **suggesting low mood is a**

**response to people's lives and cannot be boiled down to a simple chemical equation."**

The upshot of all this for laypersons is twofold. First, you should realize that while antidepressants may work for you, they do not work for everybody, and we do not know how they work. Anyone who tells you differently is [lying](#)—to you or to themselves (or both).

Second, if you hear a medical professional using the term “chemical imbalance” to explain depression, you are hearing a fictional narrative (or a sales pitch), not scientific fact. Look for better-quality care.

So, for 40 years most all of us have been taught and believed that chemical imbalances in the brain were a major cause of depression. That so-called “truth” was taught to our future doctors and counselors. It has been so fully integrated and ingrained as a commonly held belief that it is even in my biblical counseling resources. But, it is not true. And, some people made a lot of money selling pharmaceuticals.

You may be thinking, “Wait a second pastor, why would antidepressants work for anyone?” One answer is that we just don’t know. For another critical answer, next week we will discuss the placebo effect mentioned in the article: what it is; and, the implications.

It is clear my friends that the human race is not omniscient – knowing all things; but, the Bible says God is omniscient. The human race is not omnipotent – all powerful; but the Bible says God is omnipotent. No one in the human race is omnipresent – present everywhere

at the same time; but, the Bible says God is omnipresent.

God's presence is a crucial element in the case of our Downcast Soul here in psalms 42 and 43. Surely he knew the truth of Psalm 139:7-8 (NIV84)

<sup>7</sup> Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

<sup>8</sup> If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

Psalm 139 is expressly stated as a Psalm of David (King David) and many scholars believe that David is the Downcast soul in psalms 42 and 43.

But it is one thing to know the truth in your head and another thing altogether to know that truth in your heart. Or more likely, the weight of his circumstances are compressing his spirit – depressing him.

You cannot miss the extreme desire for God as his "soul pants for God." It seems there is a geographic separation, maybe as David is fleeing for his life. To the downcast soul and the enemies that surround him, he is mocked by the seeming desertion of God's presence. "Where is your God?" they taunt him. The downcast soul beseeches the Lord, "Why have you rejected me?"

In what ways does our downcast soul identify his God? Water was an extremely valuable commodity in that part of the world and without water, there is no life. God satisfies with life-giving water. God is worthy of worship. God is worthy of exhilarating and enthusiastic worship -

with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

God is savior, rescuer, and protector. God is a personal God – my God. The downcast soul's Lord is a God of love. God receives prayers. God is sovereign over our lives. God is judge of all. God is our stronghold. **God IS** the source of **light and truth**. AND, this light and truth are meant to guide us. God is the Downcast Soul's joy. God is his delight. God is worthy of praise.

#### CONCLUSION:

Our Downcast Soul knows the solution to all his difficulties. It is the Lord of the universe; the Creator of all things. The presence of the Almighty and all knowing God will dissolve the downcast soul's depression. Notice that each of hymns today addressed a close relationship with God: "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me;" John sang, "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross;" "Near to the Heart of God;" and, "Nearer, My God, to Thee."

In the refrain, the downcast soul sings three times, put your hope in God. It is part of the refrain, part of the chorus. In depression, hope is the lifeline. What do I mean by this hope?

"It is the confidence that, by integrating God's [redemptive](#) acts in the past with trusting human responses in the present, the faithful will experience the fullness of God's goodness both in the present and in the future. Biblical faith rests on the trustworthiness of God to keep His promises. The biblical view of hope is thus

significantly different from that found in ancient Greek [philosophy](#) (and in most modern minds).

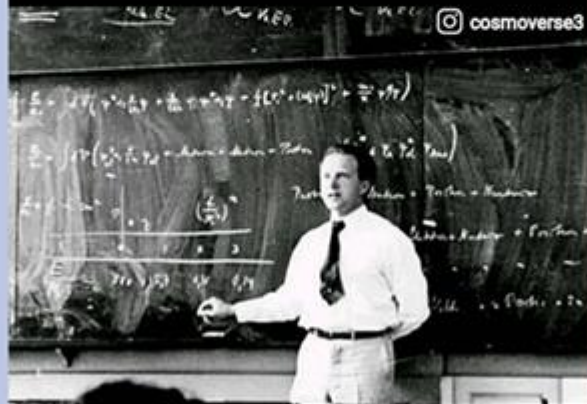
The Greeks recognized that human beings expressed hope by nature; however, this kind of hope reflects both good and bad experiences. The future was thus a projection of one's own subjective possibilities. Biblical hope avoids this subjectivity by being founded on something that provides a sufficient basis for confidence in its fulfillment: God and His redemptive acts as they culminate in the birth, life, [death](#), and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Because of the finished work of Jesus, we have the living God's presence actually, in reality, living within us. This is the truth that will sustain you. Take hold of this lifeline. Take hold of this promise. What the downcast soul did not yet have, we have – no comprehensive scientific study will ever refute this truth.

AMEN & AMEN. Let us pray.

## The Limitations of Human Intellect

**"The first gulp from the glass of natural sciences will turn you into an atheist, but at the bottom of the glass God is waiting for you."**



**Werner Heisenberg**  
**Father of Quantum Mechanics**