

“The Downcast Soul” [PART 3] (Psalm 42)(8.28.22)

Psalm 42

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

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

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

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

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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 and⁶ 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)

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

² You are God my stronghold.
Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning,

oppressed by the enemy?

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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 3]**

INTRODUCTION:

Last week, I shared that an umbrella study showed a lack of empirical support that brain chemistry is related to depression. The article in Psychology Today stated that antidepressant drugs effectiveness were not much better than placebos. And, I promised to explain the placebo effect this week.

BODY:

[More Than Just a Sugar Pill: Why the placebo effect is real - Science in the News \(harvard.edu\)](#)

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BLOG

by Benika Pinch, who is a third year Ph.D. student in the Chemistry and Chemical Biology program at Harvard University.

If you watched the Rio Olympics, you probably noticed that several athletes, including swimmer Michael Phelps, were covered in bizarre circular marks. These bruises were caused by **cupping**, a therapy that uses suction to pull skin upwards into a circular cup, with the intent of increasing blood flow and reducing muscle tension. While athletes maintain that they benefited from the therapy, a **2015 study** found that patients who received cupping reported the same degree of pain relief as patients who unknowingly received a sham version of the therapy (in which the cups had a hole in

them and couldn't create proper suction). Given that cupping is a therapy with limited scientific support, why does it make people feel better? The answer may lie in a peculiar phenomenon known as the placebo effect.

A placebo is defined as a medically inert substance or technique, which is administered like a drug. As the staple [negative control](#) in clinical trials, placebos play a critical role in modern medicine. The placebo effect refers to the well-documented phenomenon in which patients feel better after receiving a placebo. In other words, the mere *thought* that a treatment has been received causes a beneficial physical response.

Now, to be clear, there is no evidence that a placebo can shrink a tumor or heal a broken bone, but **when it comes to ailments grounded in self-awareness**, such as pain, the placebo effect can be tremendous. In the 1980's, neuroscientist Jon Levine conducted what is now considered one of the quintessential analyses of the placebo effect. In this [study](#), postoperative patients received either a secret dose of 6-8 mg of morphine, or an overt dose of a substance described as a powerful painkiller (but was actually saline solution!). The results were remarkable: patients in both groups reported the same degree of pain relief.

If you think that all of this sounds a bit unbelievable, you are not alone. For decades the placebo effect was written off as an illusion, spontaneous remission, or biased reporting. However, recent research reveals that the placebo effect is a real biological response, and illuminates the underlying mechanisms driving this phenomenon.

Placebos elicit biological responses

Contrary to popular belief, patients don't just imagine placebo responses. Rather, numerous brain-imaging studies have confirmed that [placebos cause measurable changes in neurobiological signaling pathways](#). How can a sugar pill lead to a tangible physical response? The key to understanding the placebo is that it is not just the inert therapy itself, but also the expectation surrounding that therapy.

Conclusions and future directions

The placebo effect has traditionally been regarded as something negative, as a seemingly unexplained mystery at the heart of modern medicine. However, as we are beginning to understand the biological mechanisms underlying the placebo effect, it is becoming increasingly evident that placebos present a unique opportunity

to harness the power of the mind in controlling pain.

The placebo effect highlights the importance of the environment in which treatment is received, and indicates that patients can benefit from language used to boost expectations. But what if there was a role for placebos themselves in medical care – what if they could be prescribed as a treatment?

Of course, this unleashes a Pandora's box of ethical issues. The assumption is that placebos, by their very definition, must be concealed as a drug in order to work; they require deception. But maybe this doesn't have to be the case. Doctors could prescribe placebos honestly, a so-called "open-label" placebo. Sounds like an oxymoron, right? Well, it turns out that one [discussed application](#) is to administer blister packs of painkillers that contain both the active drug and the placebo, but the patient doesn't know which pills are which. Such pill packs might achieve the same degree of pain relief, but with less medication – thereby limiting side effects, cost, and problems with drug dependency. The next few years are sure to bring a multitude of studies, and ethical debates, of "honest" placebos.

Let's briefly return to cupping, a treatment that may not cause a real physical benefit, but makes

people feel better. **If the placebo effect teaches us anything, it's that the complex neuropsychological response that results in "feeling better" is not to be discounted.** And, with six medals added to his tally, I think it's safe to say that Michael Phelps was feeling great in Rio.

There are obvious implications. What is clear from this article is that what we believe is important. The connection between our minds and our bodies demonstrates that we are pretty miraculous creations. Our thinking can actually trigger complex neuropsychological responses.

Remember in part 1 of this sermon series that we established the fact that we are spiritual souls. I submit to you that if our physical responses can be affected by what we believe, **it should be even more conceivable that our spirit will be impacted by what we believe.**

This is why the Bible makes such a huge deal about being built up in our faith. This faith is a demonstrative act of trust in God Almighty. When we believe that our God is sovereign; when we believe that God demonstrated His love for us by sending His only begotten Son to save us; when we believe that we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus; then, our body, soul, and spirit are whole and healthy.

Forty-one times, the Bible tells us that God's love endures forever. Twenty-six of those are in each verse of Psalm 136. Make no mistake, the Holy Spirit wants us to know this truth. The Downcast Soul calls knows the Lord directs his love.

More than twenty-five times the Bible speaks about the faithfulness of God. And my favorite is 2 Timothy 2:13 (NIV84)

if we are faithless,

he will remain faithful,

for he cannot disown himself.

And, Jesus himself promises in John 10:10 (NIV84)

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full [or abundantly]."

These promises are why The Downcast Soul tells us to hope in God. You and I can have confidence in the character of the Almighty.

On Thursday, as I was leaving pickleball in Brigantine, a fellow player stopped me in the parking lot. She asked, "What is the world coming to? Yesterday, coming to the parking lot there was a woman on her phone talking and crying. Then I

just saw another person just now doing the same thing.”

I told her that the Lord Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.”

“But, it just seems to be getting worse,” she replied.

“Yes, and Jesus is coming back,” I told her.

She was at a loss for words. So, I just smiled and told her to have a blessed day. She thanked me and was on her way.

So, is it a life of trouble or an abundant life. Yes. When we are standing on the promises of God the abundant life is attained and maintained even in our troubles. Here is one of my devotions from two weeks ago that gives some background on our closing hymn.

August 17 **I NEED THEE EVERY HOUR**

Annie S. Hawks, 1835–1918

Refrain added by Robert Lowry

In the day of my trouble I will call to You, for You will answer me. (Psalm 86:7)

This deeply personal hymn came from the heart of a busy housewife and mother who had no idea of the spiritual strength that her own hastily written words would bring her later during a sorrowful time in her life.

The author, Annie S. Hawks, has left this account about the writing of her poem in 1872:

One day as a young wife and mother of 37 years of age, I was busy with my regular household tasks. Suddenly, I became filled with the sense of nearness to the Master, and I began to wonder how anyone could ever live without Him, either in joy or pain. Then the words were ushered into my mind and these thoughts took full possession of me.

Sixteen years later, Mrs. Hawks experienced the death of her husband. Years after, she wrote:

I did not understand at first why this hymn had touched the great throbbing heart of humanity. It was not until long after, when the shadow fell over my way, the shadow of a great loss, that I understood something of the comforting power in the words which I had been permitted to give out to others in my hour of sweet serenity and peace.

One of the blessings of a victorious Christian life is knowing the closeness of our Lord in every

circumstance of life. Like Annie Hawks, it is so important that we develop strong spiritual lives during the peaceful hours in order that we will be able to be victorious when difficulties come, which they surely will to everyone at some time.

I need Thee every hour, most gracious Lord. No tender voice like Thine can peace afford.

I need Thee every hour; stay Thou near by.
Temptations lose their pow'r when Thou art nigh.

I need Thee every hour, in joy or pain. Come quickly, and abide, or life is vain.

I need Thee every hour; teach me Thy will, and Thy rich promises in me fulfill.

I need Thee every hour, Most Holy One; O make me Thine indeed, Thou blessed Son.

Refrain: I need Thee, O I need Thee; every hour I need Thee! O bless me now, my Savior—I come to Thee!

Our successful navigation of one trial prepares us for the next stage of our spiritual growth. In our special music today, Graves to Garden, John sang for us that the God of the mountain is the God of the valley. One preacher observed that our Downcast Soul went through three stages, which the preacher recommends to us:

- A. Look Inward and Analyze Your Heart
- B. Look Upward and Recognize Your Help
- C. Look Onward and Realize Your Hope

Alexander MaClaren shared this illustration:

“In the cathedral of St. Mark's, Venice, there is a mosaic that represents Christ in Gethsemane. You remember that, like the psalmist [our Downcast Soul], He prayed three times there, and twice came back, not having received His desire, and the third time He did receive it.

The devout artist has presented Him thus: the first time prone on the ground, and the sky all black; the second time raised a little, and a strip of blue in one corner; and the third time kneeling erect, and a beam from heaven, brighter than the radiance of the Paschal moon, striking right down upon Him, and the strengthening angel standing beside Him.

That was the experience of the Lord, and it may be the experience of the servant. Do not give up the effort, at self-control and victory over circumstances that tempt to despondency or to sadness. Even if you fail this time, still the failure has left some increased capacity for the next

attempt, and God helping, the next time will be successful.”

These two psalms are a prayerful song. The Downcast Soul has a raging turbulence within himself. Trouble has fallen upon him like a raucous waterfall. He is caught in a vortex of swirling waves of water. That is a paraphrase of the seventh verse of psalm 42.

Where is the life preserver onto which he can hold? When the Coast Guard Auxiliary does boardings to conduct safety inspections, they always ask to see their life preservers. The Downcast Soul’s can be found in the next verse:

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

Let me address each one of those lines:

Paul in Ephesians 3:16–19 (NIV84)

¹⁶I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and

long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

How will the Downcast Soul respond to this love?
With worship. Psalm 40:3 (NIV84)

³ He [the Lord] put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear

and put their trust in the Lord.

Also in the refrain, given three times, is the ring of praise: “for I will yet praise him.” Praise is worship.

On many life rings, there are ropes attached. That way, the rescuer can throw it to the victim. When they take hold of it and get inside of it, the rescuer can pull them out of the dangerous waters. What is this rope, this lifeline for the Downcast Soul? It is prayer; a prayer to the God of my life he says.

No matter the circumstances we face we can always stay connected to our Lord through prayer.
No matter the circumstances we face we can always stay connected to the Lord through praise.

CONCLUSION:

It appears that the translators had a difficult time with the last line of the refrain, the chorus. Our NIV gives "my Savior and my God." The NASB says God is the **help** of the Downcast Soul's countenance. The KJV says God is the **health** of my countenance.

Countenance is an uncommon word for most of us – so I looked it up in the dictionary. The meaning most appropriate for the Downcast Soul's countenance is "face, visage, especially the face as an indication of mood, emotion, or character."

It is the presence of God that will help him. It is the presence of God that will restore him to health. His thirst will be satisfied. His circumstances will be overcome. The Downcast Soul's enemies will know that God is with him for he is singing praises of victory.

If a placebo can make you swim faster; if a placebo can help cure you; imagine what a full and healthy faith in the Creator of the universe might accomplish. Feed your faith. Worship the LORD in every circumstance. Pray continuously. Ensure that the light and truth of God are your guide. Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

AMEN & AMEN. Let us pray.