

Rest for the Depressed

Introduction

You can't rest if you're depressed.

**When you're focused on self, focus on Christ and your blessings through worship.*

Once again, let's pretend again that it's bedtime. Only this time, even though you're exhausted, you dread going to bed. For several nights now, you've lain awake staring at the ceiling, hour after hour. You're unable to rest because you are so upset, discouraged, distressed by a troubling situation that you find yourself in. You're struggling. You're in a hard time. You can't stop thinking about it, and you're losing sleep over it.

Last time we met, we talked about worry. We discussed how we can lose sleep by worrying about things that haven't even happened yet, how we use our imaginations to speculate about what might happen. But what do we do when the things we worry about actually become reality? Those medical tests we were worrying about? We got the results, and they weren't what we were hoping for. Those bills that were worried about paying? They're due, but we don't have the money to pay them. That sick loved one we worried about? She just passed away. What do we do in those times, when things are hard and we are so distressed and depressed that we lose sight of Christ?

Why is it so hard to rest in Christ during the difficult times?

Often in the hard times, we become focused on our circumstances or on ourselves and our own problems. What we're going through can be so overwhelming that we can't see past it. But I'm reminded of a quote by Corrie Ten Boom. She lived through some difficult times. She, her father, and her sister hid Jews in their home during World War II. Eventually, they were caught and imprisoned, where they endured some horrific things. Corrie's father and sister both died during their imprisonment. Corrie, by a miracle, was released due to a clerical error shortly before the other women in the camp was executed. Throughout her horrible ordeal, Corrie looked to God for strength and comfort. She had many wise things to say, but my favorite quote is where she says, "If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. If you look at God you'll be at rest."

Praise Him in the Storm

The only way to find rest in Christ during the midst of hard times is keep our focus on Him instead of on ourselves or our circumstances. We must look up instead of looking around. How can we do that? Paul and Silas give us an example in Acts 16:16-25.

What did Paul and Silas do when they were in the middle a hard time?

They prayed and they sang hymns. These men had been falsely accused, arrested, beaten, and thrown in jail. In spite of all that, while sitting in prison, they had a worship service! They were praising God! If that was their response to what was going on, it should be ours also. No matter how hard things are, no matter what kind of storm we find ourselves in, we can praise God.

One of my favorite songs by Casting Crowns is called “Praise You in this Storm,” and it says that very thing. The chorus says...

And I'll praise You in this storm
And I will lift my hands
For You are who You are
No matter where I am
And every tear I've cried
You hold in Your hand
You never left my side
And though my heart is torn
I will praise You in this storm

Even in the midst of trials and storms, we should be able to praise and worship God. That's not easy, though, is it? In order to worship God during the hard times, we must understand what worship really is.

More than a Sunday Service

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “worship”?

I think many people, when they think about worship, focus on the Sunday morning service, which we call the “worship service,” where we sing, pray, hear Scripture read and preached. Some people may even limit their definition of worship to just the singing portion of the service, equating worship with music. Our Sunday morning service certainly is a form of worship, what we call corporate worship, because we're worshipping together corporately as a church body.

However, worship goes far beyond just singing, or even the entire Sunday service, as we see in Romans 12:1, which says, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

For God's people in the Old Testament, their corporate worship included offering sacrifices for the sins of the entire nation. Individuals also brought their own sacrifices as a personal form of worship. So, worship in the Old Testament revolved around sacrifice. Some people mistakenly believe that it was the actual act of offering the sacrifice that brought salvation to these people. That's not true. The sacrifices themselves did not save anyone. They were merely external acts of obedience and worship.

God often dealt with His people in the Old Testament in a physical way that foreshadowed the spiritual realities of the New Testament. For example, the Israelites were delivered from physical slavery in Egypt, which foreshadows our spiritual deliverance from slavery to sin. They were promised physical blessing for obedience, while we are promised spiritual blessings for our obedience. In the same way, offering physical sacrifices was the Old Testament means of worship and obedience, but our sacrifice is offering ourselves in a spiritual act of worship. Although we can do this corporately as we worship together, it's something that we must also do individually. We should each worship God on our own.

Acknowledging God as Worthy

Donald Whitney, in his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, defines worship in the following way: “To worship God is to ascribe the proper worth to God, to magnify His worthiness of praise, or better, to approach and address God as He is worthy.”¹ Basically, to worship God is to recognize and to acknowledge that God is worthy of our praise and honor. It's focusing on who God is and what He is

¹Whitney, Donald, *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life*, 87.

capable of doing, and responding to Him in a way that reflects that. The same is true of Jesus. He also is worthy of worship and praise.

What are some things that you know about God or about Jesus that make them worthy of our worship? How does knowing those things make it easier to endure the hard times?

God is good, merciful, forgiving, compassionate, loving, sovereign. He will not do anything to harm me. He can bring good out of even the worst circumstances. He has never failed me or forsaken me in the past and He will not in the future.

By focusing on these things, we take our focus off of ourselves and our problems. Instead of looking around us at what's going on, we need to be looking up at Christ. When our focus is on Him, our problem, the storm we're facing, suddenly doesn't seem so bad anymore. We can view our problem as Paul does his in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18:

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

So, when we're dealing with hard times, we should think about God and who He is. By doing that, we can praise Him even while we're in the middle of the storm, and even if He doesn't end the storm. That Casting Crown song I quoted earlier starts with the following words:

I was sure by now
God, You would have reached down
And wiped our tears away
Stepped in and saved the day
And once again
I say, "A-men" and it's still rainin'

But as the thunder rolls
I barely hear Your whisper through the rain
"I'm with you"
And as Your mercy falls
I'll raise my hands and praise the God who gives
And takes away

So, even when the rain is falling all around us, and the thunder is booming, and things look scary and grim, we can still worship God because He is worthy of our praise and worship. Of course, we shouldn't wait until the hard times. We should be worshipping God every day.

Eight Ways to Worship

How do we do that though? What are some actual things we can do to worship God?

In 1 Chronicles 16, the Israelites, under the leadership of King David, are celebrating the Ark of the Covenant being brought to Jerusalem. David writes a song of praise to be sung on that occasion, which actually tells us a lot about how to worship God. I've identified from this passage eight ways that we can worship God.

1. Thanksgiving (v. 8a, 34) — “Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good” (v.34)

How can we worship God by giving thanks?

Even in the hardest times, there are always things to be thankful for. When we give thanks to God for the things He has given us, we are acknowledging His character—His goodness, love, mercy, and grace. We are also humbling ourselves before Him by acknowledging our need for Him rather than taking His blessings for granted.

2. Praising God (v. 8b-9, 24) — “Make known His deeds...declare His glory” (v.8, 24)

How can we worship God by praising Him?

We are commanded to praise God by sharing with others what He has done (His deeds) and who He is (His glory). This can be done through evangelism or in every day conversation as you share with others what God is doing in your life. This is especially important during the storms of life. When we are able to praise God before others in the midst of our trials, people notice.

It’s also important to praise God directly through our prayers. Instead of just asking for things, we should tell Him what we appreciate about His nature or works.

3. Singing (v9a, 23, 33) — “Sing to him, sing praises to him” (v.9)

How can we worship God by singing?

Singing is perhaps what most people think of when they think about worship. Singing is a great way to praise God. If we have trouble knowing what to say, we can borrow words from the great hymn writers. Music can also be very uplifting, helping us to get in the mood to worship. I personally enjoy putting music when I’m down or having a bad day. The songs get stuck in my head, and I find myself singing them as I go through my day.

4. Seeking God’s Presence (v. 10-11) — “Seek his presence continually” (v.11)

How can we worship God by seeking Him?

We often act as if God is out there somewhere. We may go hours or even days without really acknowledging God’s presence. However, God is always with us. If we are truly aware of God’s presence, it should lead to a continual attitude of prayer and praise.

When we’re aware of God’s presence, we’ll also be more aware of what He does for us throughout the day. If we realize that He’s constantly with us, then I think we’ll see His hand at work in what otherwise might seem like coincidences.

5. Rejoicing (v.10b, 31-32) — “Let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!” (v.10)

How can we worship God by rejoicing?

Joy is one of the Fruit of the Spirit, so it’s clear that believers are expected to rejoice. However, we often allow things to steal our joy. It’s particularly hard to rejoice when we’re dealing with a hard time. As we choose to be joyful in spite of our circumstances, though, we are expressing our confidence and trust in God, which is an act of worship.

Unlike happiness, joy is not based on circumstances. It comes from the inside, and it's result of being saved. It's evidence of our changed hearts. When we are aware of all that God through Christ has done for us, when have every reason in the world to be joyful.

6. Remembering God's Wondrous Works (v.12-22) — "Remember the wondrous works that he has done" (v.12)

How can we worship God by remembering His works?

I'm sure we can all look back over our lives and see God's hand at work. Remembering the blessings and guidance that God has given us in the past can lead to praise and worship. God has never left us. He's not forsaken us. He's always provided for our needs. And since we know He doesn't change, He'll continue to do so. We can be confident that He who has done great things for us in the past will continue to do great things in the future.

7. Recognizing God's Character (v.27-29a) — "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name" (v.29)

How can we worship God by recognizing His character?

Sometimes we simply need to remember who God is. As we think about the attributes of God, such as His holiness, righteousness, mercy, goodness, etc., we can't help but praise Him. We've already talked about what makes Him worthy to receive praise.

8. Bringing an Offering (v.29b) — "Bring an offering and come before him!" (v.29)

How can we worship God by giving an offering?

A tangible way to worship God is by giving back to Him a portion of what He has given to us. We should give a regular tithe to our local church, as well additional offerings to special causes as we feel led by the Spirit. The concept of giving a tenth of your income is based on Old Testament principles. The New Testament doesn't mention an amount, but does teach that we should give cheerfully and sacrificially. This again shows our dependence on God. It's acknowledging that all we have is from Him. He's given to us generously, so we should be willing to share that with others, trusting Him to provide for us even as we give.

It's not always easy to keep our focus on God when things are hard, because our circumstances can be so overwhelming. It takes a conscious effort to keep our gaze on Him by focusing on His character, His works, and His worth. But God is worthy of all praise and worship. When we use these eight ways of worship on a regular basis, we can find rest in Christ even in the worst storms.