

## July 28<sup>th</sup> – Gettin’ Defencive About Depression

Introduction – Moses, King Saul, King David, Elijah, Jonah, Job, Jeremiah all had something in common which they also have in common with many Christians today; “they struggled with serious forms of depression, and so do many of us. Contrast the depression of King Saul and King David. Saul had the potential to be a great king but squandered God’s blessing through arrogance and disobedience, and when David came along and threatened Saul, 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 18:12 says; “Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had departed from Saul.” Saul would eventually take his own life in the midst of battle, but 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 10:13-14 says; “Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.” King David too suffered with depression but he humbled himself and continued to cry out to God, even when he failed. At one point he wrote; Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive (Hebrew...physical or mental pain) way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24). His anxiety and sorrow he didn’t deny, and he never stopped seeking God’s help.

We have a similar choice when it comes to depression. When we are suffering from anxiety and sorrow which begins to overtake our emotions, which then leads to physical complications, we are at risk of becoming like Saul who stopped inquiring of God and sought the advice of a medium, or David, who made no fewer mistakes, but he continued to seek God even as he dealt with the consequences of his poor decisions in life. If we struggle with depression, we are in the company of all these bible characters, as well as many geniuses, well-known believers, and 40 million other adults in our country, of whom only 37% seek treatment. According to the American Psychiatric Association: “Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, the way you think and how you act. Fortunately, it is also treatable. Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease a person’s ability to function at work and at home. Depression symptoms can vary from mild to severe and can include: Feeling sad or having a depressed mood...Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed...Changes in appetite — weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting...Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much...Loss of energy or increased fatigue...Increase in purposeless physical activity (e.g., hand-wringing or pacing) or slowed movements and speech (actions observable by others)...Feeling worthless or guilty...Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions...Thoughts of death or suicide.” That is why we in the church must be “Gettin’ Defencive About Depression because either we are struggling with some form of it, or someone we know and can help is struggling with it. Like everything else in life, many factors contribute to depression, but it is a problem which takes all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength to manage, and we can’t exclude God from that process.

Remember, it is Jesus who invites us; "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Mat 11:28-30)...Jesus is ready to lighten your load of anxiety and despair by teaching you to find strength in the calm and confidence in submission. Marshall Segal of John Piper's "desiringGod.org" wrote; "While many are lost to their depression — helplessly wandering in their own darkness — Christians have somewhere to turn, truths to rehearse until our hearts catch up with the faith in our minds. Not only did Christ save and deliver the brokenhearted, but he experienced all the pains and temptations we face and more. At the cross, he dove headfirst into the darkness, so that we might have eternal, unfading, always-increasing hope and happiness." As believers we have a resource to share in and to share with so that the darkness of depression doesn't overtake us or those we know.

Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he says "I am in chains for Christ." He had dedicated himself to preaching the gospel to the Gentile world, but he was now unable to travel serving an indeterminate sentence. He could have been depressed at this circumstance, but instead he writes to his Philippian friends and encourages them to: "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think (reconcile) about such things. (Php 4:4-8)...13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength." He is speaking from experience when laying out this simple plan to deal with anxiety. First, Rejoice in the Lord, be calm in His strength because He is translational. Then, no matter the situation, which is causing your anxiety, present your Request to God who is ready to give you transcending peace. Last, Reconcile everything through the power of transformative thinking because you know you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength. If we rejoice, God can translate our depression into something with which He is intimately involved. If we request that He be intimately involved in every situation which causes us anxiety, His transcendent peace forms a barrier around our heart and mind in Christ Jesus. If we reconcile everything we are thinking in light of God's truth, righteousness, purity, love, positivity and praise, it transforms us as our minds are renewed so we can seek God's pleasing and perfect will. Such a process is designed to accomplish everything Christ has planned for us, even if we are in chains, even the chains of depression. You can still be effective and make an impact right where God has you because that is where God has you. The truth is that God doesn't expect us to try to do all this on our own. The very context of his letter to the Philippians was to thank them for their support of his ministry even though he was in prison. We all need help.

God always has those “Defensive Backs” who help us when Satan’s runs get too far into our thinking. We have friends who are sometimes professionals we can call on to help us deal with our anxiety by correcting our thinking so we can enjoy the peace that passes understanding. We have expertly trained and talented secondaries who are ready to help us when needed. It takes the mind-body-spirit approach to cope and conquer our depression, or to help others conquer theirs. God has raised up a new generation of Christians whose heart is to counsel those who require an extra level of defence. We sometimes feel we are outnumbered and overwhelmed by evil in this world. That is all part of Satan’s tactic to put too many men on the field so you will panic instead of pray. God just wants us to cry out to Him for help when we think the odds are stacked against us. God gives us cornerbacks, and strong-safties and free-safties who are ready to shut down the advance of Satan in our lives.

God gives us cornerbacks whose job it is to lockdown the effort of Satan to advance deep into our way of thinking with devastating deep throws. I compare that to the preachers and pastors we can listen too who make it their life’s work to expose what Satan is trying to do to us. We have strong safety like friends who back us up when they see the devil trying to overwhelm us. They rush up behind us and push back that effort with words of perspective and prayer. But we also have free safeties too. Those professional counselors and doctors who can save us when Satan has advanced in our lives. They are specifically trained to test and treat the physical and emotional, and we are especially blest if they are trained to do that in respect of the spiritual. It is their job to prescribe whatever is needed to help us, and trust me, they most often are God’s instruments for healing. (AACC Professionalism) But it is all hands-on deck so we need the whole team to support us body-mind-spirit so we can push back against Satan’s schemes.

Sheila Walsh might be known to some of us older folks. She was an award-winning Christian music singer who was well known in the 80’s. She later joined Pat Robertson on the 700 club. Most recently she has been sharing her testimony online and at women’s conferences. She reveals that she was struggling with the image her mentally ill father had imprinted on her and then she broke.

If we want to push back against Satan’s offensive attacks to create anxiety leading to depression, we must coalesce all the resources God has made available to put up de-fences to stop them. We must use our faith, we must depend on our families, we must take advantage of the friendlies who are trained to help us. We must take care of our bodies with proper activity. We must take care of our minds with proper attitudes. And we must take care of our spirits with proper awareness. Whether it is us suffering mild to deep depression, or someone we might know. It is our privilege to rejoice with them, request with them, and reconcile with them that truth that God is with us, He always hears us, and He always wants us to think about the good things He is doing for us. Don’t do nothing when mental suffering is observed. Act quickly and decisively by enjoining a whole team to address it.