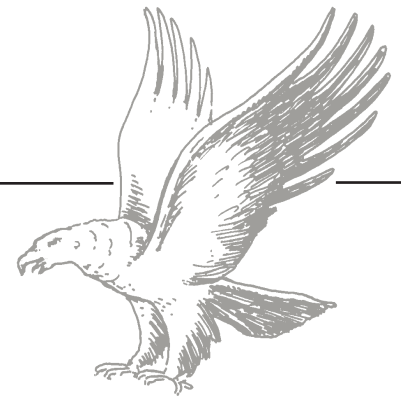


Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



April 26, 2015

Living With Depression

Depression is a very real illness that afflicts millions. Whatever the root causes, one Psalm gives the depressed person assurance that God understands . . . and is available to help.

"But to You I have cried out, O Lord, and in the morning my prayer comes before You. Lord, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?" (Psa. 88:13-14).



The heading identifies the author of this Psalm as "Heman the Ezrahite," usually reckoned to be the grandson of Samuel the prophet (see 1 Chron. 6:33; 15:16-17). His father, Joel, was a priest whose immoral conduct scandalized the priesthood (1 Sam. 2:12-17). Somehow Heman survived what must have been a tumultuous childhood to become a godly man and author of this Psalm.

The Psalm, however, reveals a dark side to this man's life. Heman's description of his mental state bears all the classic signs of *depression*, so much so that this has been called "The Psalm of the Depressed." Look at the details:

"You have laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the depths" (v. 6). "Shall Your wonders be known in the dark?" (v. 12). Those who suffer depression often describe their experience as being in a place of deep darkness.

"I am like a man who has no strength, adrift among the dead" (v. 4-5). Depression often robs its victims of all motivation to function in even the most normal routines of life.

"For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to the grave" (v. 3). "Lord, why do You cast off my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?" (v. 14). Whatever the root causes, depression fosters a sense of hopelessness and abandonment so overwhelming that it corrodes a person's will even to live. That's why suicide is often the tragic end of the depressed, especially among the young.

Speaking of the young, depression is usually a life-long affliction that starts in childhood. *"I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth" (v. 15).*

As if all this wasn't bad enough, the anxieties of the depressed person often drive away those closest to him. *"You have put away my acquaintances far from me" (v. 8). "Loved one and friend You have put far from me" (v. 18).*

What is such a gloomy composition like this doing in the Bible?

First, this dirge tells us that depression is a very real problem in the lives of some people. Telling someone who suffers from depression to "snap out of it" and become joyful doesn't work; in fact, it usually makes the problem worse.

Second, this Psalm provides hope for the victim of depression. It assures him that his condition, as painful as it is, does not mean that he is cut off from God. In fact, it gives guidance on how to deal with the problem. Notice that the entire Psalm is a plea to God for help. *"O Lord, God of my salvation, I have cried out day and night before You" (v. 1). "But to You I have cried out, O Lord, and in the morning my prayer comes before You" (v. 13). Therapy and medication has a useful place in the treatment of depression, but so does faith and prayer. Both the depressed and their friends should plead to God for help in coping with this terrible affliction.*

We don't know how Heman's struggle with depression eventually played out. But this Psalm suggests that at least he found a way to live with it.

— David King