

DEPRESSION – IT’S CAUSES & CURE¹

INTRODUCTION:

PSALMS 42 & 73 and LAMENTATIONS 3

CONTENTMENT here!!! – Phil. 4:10-12 cf. I Tim. 6:6 & Heb. 13:5)

“David, the Psalmist, says in Psalm 119:28, ‘*My soul melteth (pours out tears) for heaviness (emotional sadness): strengthen thou me (cause me to stand up) according unto thy word.*’ Notice how many times David in this Psalm reflects upon the Word of God in his time of ‘affliction’ (verses 67, 71, 75, 92 & 107).”

Jim Berg in his booklet “*Basics for Depressed Believers*” tells the story of a woman named Susan who had been depressed for some time. Her friend Carol had tried to encourage her, to no avail. “Then one evening Susan called and told Carol she wanted to ‘end it all.’ Alarmed, Carol begged her to get some help.”² Berg goes on to observe that “Susan’s emotions are clearly toward the low end of the negative-feelings spectrum, but all of us feel ‘down’ at times. **Negative feelings may range from mild disappointment to normal discouragement to serious depression like Susan’s.** If we are to understand depression—the most extreme ‘down time’—we need to look at its causes. Once we see the dynamics involved, we can seek a biblical solution.”³

“**Depression affects as much as 25% of the population.** But statistics offer little comfort. In fact, a depressive spin on them can make you feel worse: You wonder why so many people are depressed, and you’re afraid that means there is no solution to the problem... You are suffering and **suffering brings God into view... The soldier who escapes from a treacherous battle will instinctively thank God. The stockbroker who just lost a fortune might instinctively curse him. When hardships come, we either cry out to God for help, shake our fist at him, or do both.** There is actually a picture of this in the Bible: Throughout history God has taken his people out into the wilderness... **The journey in the wilderness is intended, in part, to reveal what is in our hearts, and to teach us to trust God in both good times and hard times.** Why does He do this? To show us those things that are most important. Don’t forget that God takes his *children* into the wilderness. He even led his only Son into the wilderness (Matt. 4:1ff). We shouldn’t be surprised if He takes us there as well.

“**While you are in the wilderness what are you seeing in your own heart?** How are you relating to God? Do you avoid Him? Ignore Him? Get angry at Him? Do you act as though he is very far away and too busy with everything else to attend to your suffering? Are you frustrated that God is powerful enough to end your suffering but He hasn’t?

“**In your depression, let God reveal your heart. You might find spiritual issues that contribute to or even CAUSE your depression**... You are on one of two roads: faith or isolated independence. **On the road of faith you are seeking and following God. You are calling out to him. You don’t understand what is happening, but ;you have not lost sight of how the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ assure you that He is good...** On this path, although you are suffering, you are still able to notice and marvel that God’s Spirit is empowering you to trust Him through darkness and pain.

“**The other path is the more common one, even among Christians...** You don’t feel as though you are consciously avoiding God. You are just trying to survive **But if you look closely, you will notice that you are pushing God away.** Look at the telltale signs:

¹ Compiled by Mike Edwards. The title came from Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ excellent book, *Spiritual Depression: It’s Causes and Cure* (William B. Eerdmans Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 1965) a compilation of sermons preached by him.

² Jim Berg, *Basics for Depressed Believers*, privately published, 1995, p. 1

³ Berg, *ibid*.

- You have no hope, **even though Scripture—God’s words to you—offers hope on almost every page.** Here’s just one example... [Lam. 3:21-23](#)
- You think life is meaningless, even though you are a servant of the King and every small step of obedience resonates throughout eternity... [Gal. 5:6](#)
- You think God doesn’t care, even though Scripture makes it clear that we run from God, not vice versa ([I Pet. 5:6-7](#)).
- In other words, in many areas of life, you simply do not believe what God says.”⁴

“Depression tries to tell us what is true and what isn’t. For example, it says that you will never feel any different, and you can’t continue to live in such a condition. It says that God doesn’t care, and no one loves you. It tries to persuade you that nothing matters. **Know, however, that depression lies!** **You have to tell it the truth, rather than listen to its interpretation of life...** Our emotions are loud, but they do not tell the whole story.”⁵

ORGANIC CAUSES

Depression is ***occasionally*** the result of a **BODILY MALFUNCTION**: a thyroid condition, certain infections, unstable hormonal activity, reaction to a medication, and so forth. A physician should be consulted if depression persists, in order to diagnose and treat any genuine organic causes.”⁶

Berg adds: **“True medical conditions of this kind, however, seldom cause the depression most of us encounter in our lives.** Nevertheless, even when no organic cause is identified, some physicians tell their patients that their depression is caused by a ‘chemical imbalance’ and prescribe an antidepressant.

“Often the drugs do give the patient a ‘lift,’ **but unless there is a truly identifiable medical condition, drugs merely mask the real cause of the problem: mishandled problems of living.** Unless such problems are addressed biblically, the medication has to be maintained to keep the patient ‘emotionally stable.’ **There is a better way, however, of dealing with the ‘down feelings.’**”⁷

“Medication can change physical symptoms, but not spiritual ones. It might give sleep, offer physical energy, allow you to see in color, and alleviate the physical feeling of depression. But it won’t answer your spiritual doubts, fears, frustrations, or failures.”⁸

OTHER CAUSES

“There is no one cause of depression, but there are some common paths that provoke a depressive spiral.”⁹

Observations on the causes of depression from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones:

1. **“We can now proceed to state some of the general causes of the condition [of spiritual depression]. First and foremost I would not hesitate to put—TEMPERMENT.** There are, after all, certain different types of people... I wonder whether anybody wants to say: ‘*When you are talking about Christians you must not introduce temperament or types. Surely Christianity does away with all that, and you must not bring that kind of consideration into a matter like this.*’ Now that is a very important objection, and it must be answered. We begin by saying that temperament, psychology and make-up do not make the slightest difference in the matter of our salvation... **It does not matter what we are by temperament; we are all saved in the same way, by the same act of God in and through His Son,**

⁴ Edward T. Welch, *Hope for the Depressed* (New Growth Press: Greensboro, NC, 2008), pp. 3-8

⁵ Welch, *ibid*, p. 9

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 1-2

⁸ Welch, *ibid*, pp. 18-19

⁹ Welch, *ibid*, p. 13

our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... Let me make this clear. It does not matter what your background is, it does not matter what temperament you happen to have been given in this world, all that does not make the slightest difference in the matter of salvation... **But while I emphasize, with all my being, the fact that temperament does not make the slightest difference in the matter of our fundamental salvation, I am equally anxious to emphasize the fact that it does make a very great difference in actual experience in the Christian life,** and that when you are trying to diagnose a condition such as that of spiritual depression, it is something with which you should start, it is something to put at the very beginning... In other words... **THERE IS NOTHING WHICH IS QUITE SO IMPORTANT AS THAT WE SHOULD WITHOUT DELAY, AND AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, GET TO KNOW OURSELVES.** For the fact of the matter is that though we are all Christians together [if you are saved], we are all different... We are all in the same fight, of course, as we share the same common salvation, and have the same common central need. **But the manifestations of the trouble vary from case to case and from person to person.**

“Here again, I can best illustrate my point by choosing an example from another realm. We are all human beings, and as such we all have fundamentally the same constitution, and yet, we know perfectly well that no two of us are alike, that in fact we are all different in so many respects Now you will often come across people... [that] would put the whole world on the same diet. They prescribe this universal diet which is going to cure everybody. That, I say, is impossible and quite wrong by definition. I have often said that the first fundamental law of dietetics is just that old word which tells us that: *‘Jack Spratt could eat no fat, his wife could eat no lean.’* Quite right!

“The point I am making is that you cannot lay down this kind of universal legislation as though men were machines It is wrong in the physical realm... and it is infinitely more so in the spiritual realm. It is quite clear that we can divide human beings into two main groups. There are the so-called **introverts and the extroverts...**not only [do] we belong to one or the other of these two groups, but furthermore that this condition of spiritual depression tends to affect the one more than the other. We must start by knowing ourselves and by understanding ourselves.

“Some of the greatest saints belong to the introverts; the extrovert is generally a more superficial person. In the natural realm there is the type of person who tends to be always analyzing himself, analyzing everything he does, and worrying about the possible effects of his actions, always harking back, always full of vain regrets It may be something that has been done once and forever but he cannot leave it alone... You are familiar with that type of person. Now all that is transferred into the spiritual realm and into their spiritual life. **In other words, it is obvious that the danger for such people is to become morbid... Surely the great Henry Martyn belonged to this type...** He was an introvert and he suffered from an obvious tendency to morbidity and introspection.

“Those two terms remind us that fundamental trouble with these people is that they are not always careful to draw the line of demarcation between SELF-EXAMINATION and INTROSPECTION... But what is the difference between examining oneself and becoming introspective? I suggest that we cross the line from self-examination to introspection when, in a sense, we do nothing but examine ourselves, and when such self-examination becomes the main and chief end on our life We are meant to examine ourselves periodically, but if we are always doing it, always, as it were, putting our soul on a plate and dissecting it, that is introspection. And if we are always talking to people about ourselves and our problems and troubles... it probably means that we are all the time centered upon ourselves. **That is introspection, and that in turn leads to the condition known as morbidity.**

“Here then is the point at which we must always start. DO WE KNOW OURSELVES? Do we know our own particular danger? Do we know the thing to which we are particularly subject? The Bible

is full of teaching about that. The Bible warns us to be careful about our strength and about our weakness. Take a man like Moses. He was the meekest man, we are told, the world has ever known; and yet his great sin, his great failure was in connection with that very thing. He asserted his own will, he became angry. We have to watch our strength and we have to watch our weakness... some of us by nature, and by the very type to which we belong, are more given to this spiritual disease called spiritual depression than others. We belong to the same company as Jeremiah, and John the Baptist and Paul and Luther and many others. A great company! Yes, but you cannot belong to it without being unusually subject to this particular type of trial.¹⁰

2. **“But let us pass to the second big cause—PHYSICAL CONDITIONS...Physical conditions play their part in all this...** In other words, there are certain physical ailments which tend to promote depression. Thomas Carlyle, I suppose is an outstanding illustration of this. Or take that great preacher who preached in London for nearly forty years in the last century—Charles Haddon Spurgeon—one of the truly great preachers of all time. That great man was subject spiritual depression, and the main explanation in his case was undoubtedly the fact that he suffered from a gout condition which finally killed him...And there are many... it seems quite clear to me that the cause of the trouble is mainly physical. Into this group, speaking generally, you can put tiredness, overstrain [stress], illness, any form of illness. **You can’t isolate the spiritual from the physical for we are body, mind and spirit...** Let us give a word of warning at this point. We must not forget the existence of the devil, nor allow him to trap us into regarding as spiritual that which is fundamentally physical.”¹¹
3. **“Another frequent cause of spiritual depression is what we may describe as a reaction—A REACTION AFTER A GREAT BLESSING, a reaction after some unusual and exceptional experience.** I...call attention...to the case of Elijah under the juniper tree. There is no doubt in my mind that his main trouble was that he was suffering from a reaction, a reaction after what had happened on Mount Carmel (I Kings 19). Abraham had the same experience (Gen. 15). For that reason when people come to me and describe some remarkable experience which they have had, while I rejoice with them and thank God, **I always watch them carefully afterwards and am always on the lookout and apprehensive on their behalf lest a reaction set in.** That need not happen, but unless we are aware of the danger it may do so. **If we but realized that when God is pleased to give us some unusual blessing we must be unusually watchful afterwards.**”¹²
4. **“Then we come to the next cause. In a sense, and in the last analysis, that is the one and only cause of spiritual depression—it is THE DEVIL, the adversary of our souls.** He can use our temperaments and our physical condition. He so deals with us that we allow our temperament to control and govern us, instead of keeping temperament where it should be kept. **There is no end to the ways in which the devil produces spiritual depression...** Obviously the whole strategy of the adversary of our souls, and God’s adversary, is to depress us.”¹³
5. **“I can put it finally like this: the ultimate cause of all spiritual depression is UNBELIEF.** For if it were not for unbelief even the devil could do nothing. It is because we listen to the devil instead of listening to god, that we go down before him and fall before his attacks. That is why [the] psalmist [in Psalms 42 & 43] keeps on saying to himself: ‘Hope thou in God for I shall yet praise Him...’ He reminds himself of God. Why? Because he was depressed and had forgotten God, so that his faith and his belief in God and in God’s power, and in his relationship to God, were not what they ought to be.”¹⁴

¹⁰ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 1965), pp. 14-18

¹¹ MLJ, *ibid*, pp. 18-19

¹² MLJ, *ibid*, p. 19

¹³ MLJ, *ibid*, pp. 19-20

¹⁴ MLJ, *ibid*, p. 20

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CAUSES OF DEPRESSION from C. H. Spurgeon:

“As it is recorded that David, in the heat of battle, waxed faint [2 Sam. 21:15], so may it be written of all the servants of the Lord. Fits of depression come over the most of us. Usually cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy. There may be here and there men of iron, to whom wear and tear work no perceptible detriment, but surely the rust frets even these; and as for ordinary men, **the Lord knows, and makes them to know, that they are but dust...** It is not necessary by quotations from the biographies of eminent ministers to prove that seasons of fearful prostration have fallen to the lot of most, if not all of them. **The life of Luther might suffice to give a thousand instances, and he was by no means of the weaker sort.** His great spirit was often in the seventh heaven of exultation, and as frequently on the borders of despair... Instead of multiplying cases, let us dwell upon the reasons why these things are permitted.

1. “**Is it not first [of all] that *they are men?*** Being men [i.e. human] they are compassed with infirmity, and heirs of sorrow... Good men are promised tribulation in this world, and ministers may expect a larger share than others, that they may learn sympathy with the Lord’s suffering people, and so may be fitting shepherds of an ailing flock.
2. “**Moreover, *most of us are in some way or other unsound physically.*** Here and there we meet with an old man who could not remember that ever he was laid aside for a day; but the great mass of us labor under some form or other of infirmity, either in body or mind. Certain bodily maladies... will for a while overcome him. As to mental maladies, is any man altogether sane? Are we not all a little off the balance? Some minds appear to have a gloomy tinge essential to their very individuality; of them it may be said, ‘*Melancholy marked them for her own*’ ... **These infirmities may be no detriment to a man’s career of special usefulness; they even have been imposed upon him by divine wisdom as necessary qualifications for his peculiar course of service...** Pain has probably in some cases developed genius; hunting out the soul which otherwise might have slept like a lion in its den... Grace has its triumphs still, and patience has its martyrs; martyrs none the less to be honoured because the flames kindle about their spirits rather than their bodies, and their burning is unseen of human eyes.”¹⁵
3. “**Our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression.** Who can bear the weight of souls without sometimes sinking to the dust? Passionate longings after men’s conversion, if not fully satisfied (and when are they?), consume the soul with anxiety and disappointment... How often, on Lord’s-day evenings, do we feel as if life were completely washed out of us! ... **It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus.** We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living sacrifices, whose lot is to be consumed... Moses’ hands grew heavy in intercession, and Paul cried out, ‘*Who is sufficient for these things?*’
4. “**Our position in the church will also [contribute] to this.** A minister fully equipped for his work will usually be a spirit by himself, above, beyond, and apart from others. The most loving of his people cannot enter into his peculiar thoughts, cares and temptations.
5. “**There can be little doubt that *sedentary habits* have a tendency to create despondency in some constitutions...** He who forgets the humming of the bees among the heather... the song of birds in the woods... the sighing of the wind among the pines, needs not wonder if his heart forgets to sing and his

¹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1954), “*The Minister’s Fainting Fits*” pp. 154-155, italics in the original, colorizing added.

soul grows heavy... A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best.

6. "***The hour of great success.*** When at last a long-cherished desire is fulfilled, when God has been glorified greatly by our means, and a great triumph achieved, then we are apt to faint. **It might be imagined that amid special favors our soul would soar to heights of ecstasy, and rejoice with joy unspeakable, but it is generally the reverse...** See **Elijah** after the fire has fallen from heaven, after Baal's priests have been slaughtered and the rain has deluged the barren land! For him no notes of self-complacent music, no strutting like a conqueror in robes of triumph; he flees from Jezebel, and feeling the revulsion of his intense excitement, he prays that he may die... **Excess of joy or excitement must be paid for by subsequent depressions.** While the trial lasts, the strength is equal to the emergency; but when it is over, natural weakness claims the right to show itself. Secretly sustained, **Jacob** can wrestle all night, but he must limp in the morning when the contest is over, lest he boast himself beyond measure. **Paul** may be caught up to the third heaven, and hear unspeakable things, but a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, must be the inevitable sequel. **Men cannot bear unalloyed happiness... without enduring secret humiliation to keep them in their proper place...**"¹⁶
7. "***Before any great achievement some measure of the same depression is very usual.*** Surveying the difficulties before us, our hearts sink within us... The cities of Canaan are walled up to heaven, and who are we that we should hope to capture them? ...Nineveh is a great city, and we would flee unto Tarshish sooner than encounter its noisy crowds... **Such was my experience when I first became a pastor in London. My success appalled me; and the thought of the career which it seemed to open up, so far from elating me, cast me into the lowest depth, out of which I uttered my *miserere* and found no room for a *gloria in excelsis*.** Who was I that I should continue to lead so great a multitude? I would betake me to my village obscurity, or immigrate to America, and find a solitary nest in the backwoods, where I might be sufficient for the things which would be demanded of me. It was just then that the curtain was rising upon my life-work, and I dreaded what it might reveal, of my own unfitness. I dreaded the work which a gracious providence had prepared for me. I felt myself a mere child, and trembled as I heard the voice which said, 'Arise, and thresh the mountains, and make them as chaff.' **This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry; the cloud is black before it breaks, and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy...** Immersion in suffering has preceded the baptism of the Holy Ghost... The low valley leads to the towering mountain. Defeat prepares for victory. The raven is sent forth before the dove. The darkest hour of the night precedes the day-dawn."¹⁷
8. "***In the midst of a long stretch of unbroken labor, the same affliction may be looked for.*** The bow cannot be always bent without fear of breaking. Repose is as needful to the mind as sleep to the body... Hence the wisdom and compassion of our Lord, when He said to His disciples, 'Let us go into the desert and rest awhile.' What! When the people are fainting? ...The Master knows better than to exhaust His servants and quench the light of Israel. **Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength...** It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less.
9. "***One crushing stroke has sometimes laid the minister very low.*** The brother most relied upon becomes a traitor. Judas lifts up his heel against the man who trusted him, and the preacher's heart for the moment fails him. **We are all too apt to look to an arm of flesh, and from that propensity many of our sorrows arise.** Equally overwhelming is the blow when an honoured and beloved member yields to temptation, and disgraces the holy name with which he was named. Anything is better than this.

¹⁶ Spurgeon, *ibid*, pp. 156-159, italics in the original, colorizing added.

¹⁷ Spurgeon, pp. 159-160, italics in the original, colorizing added.

10. **“When troubles multiply, and discouragements follow each other in long succession,** like Job’s messengers, then, too, amid the perturbation of soul occasioned by evil tidings, despondency despoils the heart of all its peace. **Constant dropping wears away stones, and the bravest minds feel the fret of repeated afflictions.**
11. **“This evil [of depression] will also come upon us, we know not why, and then it is all the more difficult to drive it away.** Causeless depression is not to be reasoned with, nor can David’s harp charm it away by sweet discoursings. **As well fight with the mist as with this shapeless, undefinable, yet all-beclouding hopelessness...** If those who laugh at such melancholy did but feel the grief of it for one hour, their laughter would be sobered into compassion... Simon sinks till Jesus takes him by the hand. The devil within rends and tears the poor child till the word of authority commands him to come out of him. When we are ridden with horrible fears, and weighed down with an intolerable [burden], we need but the Sun of Righteousness to rise, and the evils generated of our darkness are driven away; but nothing short of this will chase away the nightmare of the soul.

“If it be inquired why the Valley of the Shadow of Death must so often be traversed by the servants of King Jesus, the answer is not far to find. All this is promotive of the Lord’s mode of working, which is summed up in these words: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.’ **Instruments shall be used, but their intrinsic weakness shall be clearly manifested; there shall be no division of the glory, no diminishing the honor due to the Great Worker.** The man shall be emptied of self, and then filled with the Holy Spirit.

“The lesson of wisdom is, be not dismayed by soul-trouble. Count it no strange thing, but a part of ordinary ministerial experience. Should the power of depression be more than ordinary, think not that all is over with your usefulness. Cast not away your confidence, for it hath great recompense of reward. Even if the enemy’s foot be on your neck, expect to rise and overthrow him. **Cast the burden of the present, along with the sin of the past and the fear of the future, upon the Lord, who forsaketh not His saints.** Live by the day—aye, by the hour. Put no trust in frames and feelings. Care more for a grain of faith than a ton of excitement. **Trust in God alone, and lean not on the needs of human help. Be not surprised when friends fail you: it is a failing world. Never count upon immutability in man: inconstancy you may reckon upon without fear of disappointment.** The disciples of Jesus forsook Him; be not amazed if your adherents wander away to other teachers: as they were not your all when with you, all is not gone from you with their departure. Serve God with all your might while the candle is burning, and then when it goes out for a season, you will have the less to regret. **Be content to be nothing, for that is what you are...** Any simpleton can follow the narrow path in the light: faith’s rare wisdom enables us to march on in the dark with infallible accuracy, since she places her hand in that of her great Guide... **In nothing let us be turned aside from the path which the divine call has urged us to pursue. Come fair or come foul... be it ours, when we cannot see the face of our God, to trust under THE SHADOW OF HIS WINGS.”**¹⁸

¹⁸ Spurgeon, *ibid*, pp. 160-165, italics & capitalization in the original, colorizing added.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CAUSES OF DEPRESSION from Jim Berg:

“The depression most of us experience *IS THE RESULT OF A WRONG REACTION TO CERTAIN LOSSES IN LIFE.* Here’s how it works:

“God designed us to experience a ‘down’ emotion anytime we lose something that is important to us.

The loss can be **tangible** like the loss of a loved one, a job, a pet, a friend, or money. Or it can be an **intangible** loss like loss of respect in someone’s eyes or a loss of control in some area.

ILLUSTRATION: Years ago, a parent taking away a child’s music. Today, their cell phone.

“When we *think* about the loss, we experience what the Bible calls sorrow—the *God-given emotion of loss*; it is the inner ache or hurt we experience when we *think* about our loss. Jesus experienced sorrow in the Garden when He thought about the upcoming loss of fellowship with His Father. He would soon bear the sins of the world and experience the agonies of crucifixion (Matt. 26:38; Isa. 53); He would lose much for us. Christ’s example in the Garden is a clear testimony that sorrow, in itself, is not sinful.¹⁹

“DEPRESSION IS THE RESULT OF SORROWING WITHOUT HOPE. We lose hope when we start thinking that things will never get better, or that there is no purpose for our pain, or that no one else has to go through anything similar [cf. 1 Cor. 10:13]. When we become convinced that nothing can be done because the situation is hopeless, we experience depression—sorrow without hope.”²⁰

“Understanding and remembering the following warning can help us handle depression biblically:

Watch how you *muse*
and what you *choose*
when you *lose*.

1. FIRST, WATCH HOW YOU MUSE WHEN YOU LOSE.

“Muse means ‘to ponder or meditate; to consider or deliberate at length.’ Emotions are the byproducts of thoughts. We cannot sustain any emotion without thought. We cannot sustain romance without thinking about someone a certain way. We cannot sustain anger without thinking about what the other person has done to us. To change the emotion, we must change the thoughts. We begin by asking some hard questions and by giving some honest answers.

“ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING THREE QUESTIONS:

- a) “DID GOD ARRANGE OR ALLOW THE LOSS OVER WHICH I AM DEPRESSED BECAUSE IT WAS WRONG FOR ME TO HAVE THE THING I LOST IN THE FIRST PLACE?”

SOME EXAMPLES: Christian girl who lost the unsaved boy she was dating; Teen who lost his collection of worldly music when his parents threw them out; an adult who experienced a serious financial loss when he impulsively purchased a timeshare property, car, appliance, etc.

“It’s important to remember that there are some things God never intended for us to have (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; I John 2:15-17), and He mercifully arranges for them to be removed. Take a

¹⁹ Berg, *ibid*, p. 2, italics in the original.

²⁰ Berg, *ibid*, p. 2

moment to think about your own depression. What have you lost? Was it something God never intended for you to have? If so, what was it? Items that are not part of God's plan must be forsaken. Fellowship with God must be restored by confessing sin to Him and asking for His forgiveness (1 John 1:9; Prov. 28:13)."²¹

b) **“DID GOD ARRANGE OR ALLOW THE LOSS BECAUSE I WAS BECOMING DEPENDENT UPON THE THING I LOST INSTEAD OF UPON GOD FOR MY HAPPINESS AND STABILITY OR BECAUSE I WAS USING IT TO MAKE LIFE WORK MY WAY?”**

- **“If you made someone besides God the center of your life, and you lose him or her, you will feel isolated and without purpose. [or]**
- **If you feel like you failed in the eyes of other people, and your success and the opinions of others is of critical importance, you can slip into depression... Your success and the opinions of others have become your gods; they are more important to you than serving Christ.”**²²

SOME EXAMPLES: A college student who feels his happiness & stability is dependent upon getting straight A's receives a low mark on a test; a store manager whose relational philosophy is 'peace at any price' receives orders that he must lay off one-fourth of his employees due to financial cutbacks; a young man 'whose life is his work' loses the use of his legs in a car accident & is confined to a wheelchair; a perfectionist who has to 'have everything ;under control' & has to 'have his act together' experiences a major setback when his son is arrested for shoplifting.

*“What have you lost that you think you must have to make life work your way? See [Proverbs 3:5-6](#), [Isaiah 55:1-3](#) & [Jeremiah 2:13](#) for help discerning where your trust for security, happiness and so forth, has shifted from God to something else.”*²³

c) **“DID GOD ARRANGE OR ALLOW THE LOSS OVER WHICH I AM DEPRESSED BECAUSE HE SIMPLY WANTED TO SHOW ME THAT MY CHRISTIAN LIFE WAS TOO SHALLOW?”**

“If you genuinely are trying to do right but lose hope and become depressed when life is hard, God may be allowing the trial to further perfect and mature you. Carefully study [James 1:1-4](#), [I Peter 1:6-7](#) and [John 15:1-2](#)... John 15:2 says that when we begin to bear fruit, God will purge us to enable us to bear more fruit.

“If you are angry and don't practice forgiveness, you can easily slide into depression. The simple formula is sadness + anger = depression. What makes us angry shows us what we love and what rights we hold dear. Unforgiveness shows us that we are not willing to trust God to bind up our broken hearts and to judge justly. Deal with your sadness and anger... Use the Psalms as your prayers.

“One last thought about *thoughts*:’ Watch out for thoughts of hopelessness and self-pity. They are as dangerous to your mind as cyanide is to your body and must be rejected whenever you are tempted to entertain them.

²¹ Berg, Ibid, pp. 2-4, italics in the original.

²² Welch, ibid, pp. 13-14

²³ Berg, Ibid, p. 4

“**PSALMS 42 & 73 and LAMENTATIONS 3** describe men of God who were thinking that life was too hard for them and that other people had it easier. ***Both of them turned their despair around, however, by thinking the right way. [cf. MLJ below] Notice the transition in **Lam. 3:21ff, Psalm 42:5-6 & Psalm 73:16ff** ***when these men forced themselves to think the right way.*** When you are feeling depressed, **you must decide** you are not going to meditate upon thoughts of hopelessness or self-pity. You must allow the Scriptures to show you the right responses to losses.”²⁴

“The Apostle Paul in **Romans 15:4** tells how to increase hope. He reminds us that the Scriptures are filled with examples of how God is at work in the lives of His people...he says, ‘*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*’ (NKJV)

“David, the Psalmist, says in **Psalm 119:28**, ‘*My soul melteth (pours out tears) for heaviness (emotional sadness): strengthen thou me (cause me to stand up) according unto thy word.*’ Notice how many times David in this Psalm reflects upon the Word of God in his time of ‘affliction’ (verses **67, 71, 75, 92 & 107**).”

“INCREASE YOUR BIBLE STUDY AND MEDITATION.

This is not a time to abandon reflective time in God’s Word; *IT IS A TIME TO INCREASE IT.* Focus on His faithfulness and His promises. If you do not have a personal strategy for meditation, use the MAP Method [**Memorize the passage, Analyze the passage & Personalize the passage**²⁵]... **God promises stability only to those who will meditate upon His Word (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1; Matt. 7:24-28; I Tim. 4:15-16; James 1:21-25).**

“To honor God and to stay out of depression, you must ‘watch how you muse...when you lose.’”²⁶

2. SECONDLY, WATCH WHAT YOU CHOOSE WHEN YOU LOSE.

“You must also decide, however, not to *do* anything sinful when you are down.

Some examples: Indulging your lusts & passions in sexual fantasies or activities in order to ‘feel good’ again; Music or Movies; going on a wild spending spree in order to forget what has been troubling you or to make you feel better; ignoring important responsibilities at home, work, or school because you want a break from pressures; bingeing on food to experience a little bit of pleasure amidst all the disappointment; attempting an overdose or contemplating some other form of suicide; turning to alcohol or drugs for a ‘pick-me-up’ during the down times; indulging in some reckless or dangerous activity because of the temporary ‘rush’ it gives.

“**Many people complicate their lives by making wrong choices like these when they are depressed.**

Then they also have to face the debt, addiction, work termination, shame, guilt, and other results of their sinful choices when they were down.

“***You must ‘watch...what you choose when you lose.’***”²⁷

²⁴ Berg, *ibid*, pp. 4-5

²⁵ Note: See end of these notes for full explanation of the MAP method of meditation. –mwe

²⁶ Berg, *ibid*, p. 5

²⁷ Berg, *ibid*, p. 6

SUGGESTED TREATMENT FOR SPIRITUAL DEPRESSION:

[from Martyn Lloyd-Jones]

1. **“THE FIRST THING WE HAVE TO LEARN IS WHAT THE PSALMIST LEARNED—*WE MUST LEARN TO TAKE OURSELVES IN HAND.*** This man was not content just to lie down and commiserate with himself. He does something about it, he takes himself in hand... he talks to himself... [he] turns to himself and says: ‘*Why art thou cast down O my soul, why art thou disquieted within me?*’ He is talking to himself, he is addressing himself. **But, says someone, is that not the one thing we should not do since our great trouble is that we spend too much time with ourselves?** Surely it contradicts what you have already said. You warned us against morbidity and introspection, and now you tell us that we have to talk to ourselves!

“How do we reconcile the two things? In this way. I say that we must talk to ourselves instead of allowing ‘ourselves’ to talk to us! Do you realize what that means? I suggest that the main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self... This is the very essence of wisdom in this matter. **Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now [the psalmist’s] treatment was this; instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. ‘*Why art thou cast down, O my soul?*’ he asks [[Ps. 42:5, 11; 43:5](#)]. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says: ‘*Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you.*’ ... **The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself.** You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: ‘*Why art thou cast down*’—what business have you to be disquieted? **You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: ‘*Hope thou in God*’ [[Ps. 42:5 & 11](#)]**—instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way.”²⁸**

Welch agrees: **“Depression tries to tell us what is true and what isn’t... You have to tell it the truth, rather than listen to its interpretation of life...** Turn toward God and, instead of listening to your depression, listen to what he says about himself... **Here on earth the kingdom of heaven is riddled with suffering, but we know the King is with us and our suffering is only for a short while. We also know that the King takes our suffering, which seems senseless, and makes it profitable in his kingdom.** [e.g. Fanny Crosby, Joni Earekson Tada, etc.]. **Read all of [Romans 8](#)...** This is God’s message to you...

“The Spirit of God speaks most clearly to you from the Bible, so take the small step of opening it and reading it... Here are a few suggestions:

- **Read about Jesus’ suffering in [Isaiah 53](#) and [Mark 14](#).** *How does it help you to know that Jesus is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief?*
- **Use the Psalms to help you talk to God about your heart.** Make [Psalm 86 & 88](#) your personal prayers to God.
- **Be alert to spiritual warfare.** Depressed people are very vulnerable to Satan’s claim that God is not good. **Jesus’ death on the cross proves God’s love for you.** It’s the only weapon powerful enough to stand against Satan’s lies ([Rom. 5:6-8; I John 4:9-10](#))
- **Don’t think your case is unique.** (cf. [I Cor. 10:13](#)). Many have walked this path before you and God did not fail them.

²⁸ MLJ, *ibid*, pp. 20-21

- **Remember your purpose for living** (Matt. 22:37-39; I Cor. 6:20; 2 Cor. 5:15; Gal. 5:6).
- **Learn about persevering and enduring [by looking at Jesus & to God]** (Rom. 5:3; Heb. 12:1-3; James 1:2-4).

“When you read Scripture, you will find that many people have walked the same path.”²⁹

2. **“THEN, YOU MUST GO ON TO REMIND YOURSELF OF GOD:** Who God is, and what God is, and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do [cf. Dan. 11:32].
3. **“THEN, HAVING DONE THAT...DEFY YOURSELF AND OTHER PEOPLE, AND DEFY THE DEVIL AND THE WHOLE WORLD,** and say with this man: *‘I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God.’* [Ps. 42:11 & 43:5]³⁰

“THAT IS THE ESSENCE OF THE TREATMENT IN A NUTSHELL... The essence of this matter is to understand that this self of ours, this other man within us, has got to be handled. Do not listen to him; turn on him; speak to him; condemn him; upbraid him; exhort him; encourage him; remind him of what you know, instead of listening placidly to him and allowing him to drag you down and depress you. For that is what he will always do if you allow him to be in control. The devil takes hold of self [the old man, the old nature] and uses it in order to depress us. We must stand up as this man did and say: *‘Why art thou cast down? Why art thou disquieted within me?’* [Ps. 42:5, 11; 43:5] Stop being so! *‘Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance,’* He, *‘who is the health of my countenance and my God.’*” [Ps. 42:11 & 43:5]³¹

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

God does not want His children living without hope and filling themselves with self-pity. He does have an antidote, as you have read. Let’s review it briefly.

“Your hope rests on something much deeper than the alleviation of pain. **Depression can’t rob you of hope because your hope is in a PERSON, and that person, Jesus, is ALIVE and WITH YOU.** The apostle Paul put his suffering on a scale and found that it was outweighed by all the benefits he had in Christ. (2 Cor. 4:16-18).”³²

- a) **“WHEN YOU BEGIN TO EXPERIENCE DEPRESSION** (i.e. sorrow without hope), **IDENTIFY WHAT IT IS THAT YOU HAVE LOST.**
- b) **“ASK YOURSELF THE THREE QUESTIONS STATED EARLIER TO DETERMINE WHAT GOD MIGHT BE TRYING TO SAY TO YOU THROUGH YOUR LOSS.**
- c) **“EXAMINE YOUR THINKING.** Are you *‘leaning on your own understanding,’* or are you thinking about your loss from God’s perspective? What choices have you made while you were depressed that have further complicated your situation? Does anything (thoughts or choices) need to be repented of and forsaken (**Prov. 28:13**)?
- d) **“Seek the help of a parent, pastor, or other mature believer who can help you get your thinking about your loss in line with God’s perspective. And lastly,**

“WATCH HOW YOU MUSE AND WHAT YOU CHOOSE, WHEN YOU LOSE.”

²⁹ Welch, ibid, pp.

³⁰ MLJ, ibid, p. 21

³¹ MLJ, ibid

³² Welch, p. 21

CONTENTMENT

*“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for **I have learned**, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be **content**. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things **I am instructed** both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.” – Phil. 4:10-12*

Paul “sets out in this mighty passage [[Phil. 4:10-19](#)] with its staggering and astounding affirmation, to show the primacy of the Lord and the all-sufficiency of the Lord, while at the same time he shows his gratitude and his indebtedness and his love towards the Philippians for this manifestation of their personal care and solicitude for him. The real essence of the matter is found in verses 11 and 12. Here we have the doctrine...

“LET US FIRST LOOK AT THE CONDITION TO WHICH THE APOSTLE HAD ATTAINED.”

“He describes it by the word that is translated here as ‘content’—‘I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be ‘content’... **it is important that we should get at the exact and precise meaning of this word**. The word ‘content’ does not fully explain it; it really means that he is ‘self-sufficient’, independent of circumstances of conditions or surroundings, ‘having sufficiency in one’s self.’ That is the real meaning of this word which is translated ‘content.’

“...There is, for instance, an interesting example of it in [[Acts 16](#)]... describing the occasion of Paul’s first visit to Philippi where the recipients of this letter lived. You remember how he and Silas were arrested and beaten and thrown into prison with their feet made fast in the stocks. **Their physical conditions could not very well have been worse, yet so little effect did that have upon Paul and Silas that ‘at midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God’** ([Acts 16:25](#)).

CONTENT: Independent of circumstances, ‘*content in whatsoever state I am*,’ [4:11] to be self-satisfied, independent of surroundings.

“That is what you find also in the famous passage in [[2 Cor. 12](#)], where Paul tells us how he learned to be independent of ‘*the thorn in the flesh*,’ self-sufficient in spite of it.

“You remember also how he exhorts Timothy to take hold of this principle by saying: ‘*Godliness with contentment is great gain*’ ([1 Tim. 6:6](#)). **There is nothing like it, he says in effect, if you have that you have everything**. Paul had become an old man by then and he writes to the young man Timothy and says: The first thing you have to learn is to be independent of circumstances and conditions—‘*Godliness with contentment*.’

“The teaching of the New Testament, however, not only affirms that this was true of Paul, it makes it very plain and clear that **it is a condition into which we should all as Christian people enter**. [!] ...Our Lord makes this point in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew—‘*Take no heed for the morrow*’ [[Mt. 6:34](#)], be not over-anxious and worried about food, and clothing and things of that kind. That is the glorious, mighty independence of what is happening to us, **that we should all know and experience**. It is self-sufficiency in the good sense. [!]

“**But it is most important that we should have clear understanding in our minds as to what this means**. The word ‘content’ tends to provoke CERTAIN MISUNDERSTANDINGS...

- a) You can so interpret this statement by Paul as more or less to justify the charge that is brought against the Christian gospel that it is nothing but ‘**THE OPIUM OF THE PEOPLE**’...They say that it is a doctrine which has taught people to put up with all kinds of conditions whatever they may be, and however disgraceful and unjust... Now that is just rubbish and a total denial of what the apostle teaches here. Yet how often has it been interpreted like that... The Bible never teaches that; it does not say that man should be content to remain in poverty, that he should never endeavor to ‘better’ himself. There is nothing in the Bible that disputes the proposition that all men are equal in the sight of God and that all are entitled to equality of opportunity.
- b) “Neither does it mean mere **INDIFFERENCE TO CIRCUMSTANCES**. That is but the negative resignation of a pagan stoicism, and far removed from the Christian position.

“WHAT THEN DOES IT MEAN? To put it positively, what the apostle says here is **that he is not mastered or controlled by circumstances.** By all means if you can improve your circumstances by fair and legitimate means, do so; but if you cannot, and if you have to remain in a trying and difficult position, do not be mastered by it, do not let it get you down, do not let it control you, do not let it determine your misery or your joy [cf. I Cor. 7:21]... This is what he affirms of himself. ‘Whatever my condition or circumstance,’ he says in effect, *‘I am in control. I am master of the situation, I am not mastered by the situation, I am free, I am at liberty, I do not depend for my happiness upon what is happening to me. My life, my happiness, my joy and my experience are independent of the things that are going on round about me, and even of the things that may be happening to me.’*

“I WOULD REMIND YOU AGAIN THAT PAUL WAS ACTUALLY IN PRISON, probably chained to a soldier on his right and another on his left when he uttered these words, yet even while in that actual condition, he can say that he is independent of his circumstances. ‘My life,’ says Paul, *‘is not controlled and determined by what is happening to me; I am in a state and condition in which I rise right above them. These things are not the determining factors in my life and experience.’*”³³

“NOW THAT IS HIS CLAIM, and he was most anxious to emphasize the fact that it is AN ALL-INCLUSIVE CLAIM. Observe again his actual words. Having made the general statement he now amplifies it: *‘I know both how to be abased and how to abound, everywhere and in all things I am instructed’*—again he goes back to it—*‘both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.’* [4:12] He was anxious to make the all-inclusiveness of his claim perfectly clear.

“IT WOULD BE INTERESTING TO DISCUSS THE RELATIVE DIFFICULTY OF THESE TWO THINGS. Which is the more difficult, to be abased or to abound without losing the contented mind? I do not know whether we can ever answer the question. They are both extremely difficult and one is as difficult as the other.

QUOTE: “Can I be ABASED without feeling a sense of grudge, or without being worried, or without being anxious? Can I suffer the need of food and clothing, can I be abased in my profession or office or work, can I somehow or another be put down and still remain in spirit exactly as I was before! **What a difficult thing this is,** to take a second place, to be hurt, to be insulted... to suffer physical need or pain...how to suffer need in some respect. One of the greatest tasks in life is to discover how to suffer any or all of those things without feeling a sense of grudge, without complaint or annoyance or bitterness of spirit, to discover how not to be worried or anxious. Paul

³³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cure* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, 1965, 1981), pp. 277-280

tells us that he has learned how to do that. He had experienced every kind of trial and tribulation and yet he is unaffected by them.

“Then take the other side. ‘*I know how to ABOUND,*’ says Paul [4:12], ‘I know how to be full, I know how to enjoy plenty. What a difficult thing this is. How difficult it is for the wealthy person not to feel complete independence of God. **When we are rich and can arrange and manipulate everything, we tend to forget God.** Most of us remember Him when we are down. When we are in need we begin to pray, but when we have everything we need, how easy it is to forget God. “*I leave it to you decide which is the more difficult.*”

“*Lack is not necessarily a sign of God’s disfavor, nor plenty of His approval.*”

(Ryrie, Study Bible, p. 1800)

“But he is not content with that, he goes still further and says: ‘*In all things, everywhere*’ [4:12b] which means **in everything and in all things**—every single thing in detail, all things together... Then he adds... *whatever may happen to me, I am self-sufficient, I am not dependent upon them, my life and happiness and joy are not determined or controlled by them.*’

“**That, according to the apostle, is the way to live, that is Christian living.** It is good for us to face this mighty statement. *We are living in days and times of uncertainty,* and it may well be that the first and the greatest lesson we all may have to learn is **TO KNOW HOW TO LIVE WITHOUT ALLOWING CIRCUMSTANCES TO AFFECT OUR INNER PEACE & JOY.** And yet *perhaps there was never a time in the history of the world when it was so difficult to learn this lesson as it is today...* Even in a natural sense we are all so dependent on the things that are being done for us and to us and around and about us, that it has become most difficult to live our own lives... **The world is organizing life for us in every respect and we are becoming dependent upon it.**

“There was a good **ILLUSTRATION** of that in the early days of [WWII] when the **BLACKOUT REGULATIONS** [in Great Britain] were first imposed on us. We used to hear of something which was described as the ‘*boredom of the blackout.*’ **People found it almost impossible to spend a succession of nights in their own homes doing nothing.** They had become dependent on the cinema, the theatre and various other forms of entertainment, and when these things were suddenly cut off they did not know what to do with themselves—‘the boredom of the blackout.’ **That is the very antithesis of what Paul is describing here. But increasingly it is becoming the tendency in the life of man today...** [cf. “Facebook fasts”, “cellphone holidays”, etc.]

“**This, ALAS, is not only true of the world in general, it IS BECOMING TRUE ALSO OF CHRISTIAN PEOPLE...** Professor Whitehead uttered a great truth when he said in his definition of religion that ‘*Religion is what a man does with his own solitude.*’ You and I, in the [final] analysis, are what we are when we are alone...”³⁴ cf. Dr. Bob Jones Sr.:

“*Reputation is what men think you are, Character is what God knows you to be.*”

HOW PAUL REACHED THIS CONDITION.

“[Paul] makes a very interesting statement. You notice that he says: ‘I HAVE LEARNED,’ or better, ‘*I have come to learn.*’ **I thank God that Paul said that! Paul was not always like this any more than any one of us.** He had ‘come to learn.’ He has another interesting word also. He says: ‘*Everywhere and in all things I am INSTRUCTED both to be full and to be hungry.*’ The authorities are all

³⁴ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *ibid*, pp. 280-283

agreed here in saying that what he really says is, ‘*I have been initiated,*’ ‘*let into the secret,*’ ‘*let into the mystery.*’

“Paul says that he has come to learn how to be in this condition. **Now there are many intimations in the New Testament that this was particularly difficult for him.** Paul was sensitive, proud by nature, and in addition, he was an intensely active being. **Nothing could be more galling for such a man than to lie in prison.** He had been brought up as a Roman citizen, but here is enduring bondage, not spending his life among great intellectual people, but among slaves. How does he manage it? ‘Ah,’ he says, ‘*I have come to learn, I have been let into the secret, I have been let into the mystery.*’

HOW DID HE “COME TO LEARN?”

1. “In the first place it was **BY SHEER EXPERIENCE.** I need only direct your attention to 2 Cor. 12:9-10 about ‘*the thorn in the flesh.*’ Paul did not like it. He struggled against it; three times he prayed that it might be removed. But it was not removed. He could not reconcile himself to it. He was impatient, he was anxious to go on preaching, and this thorn in the flesh was keeping him down. But then he was taught the lesson: ‘*My grace is sufficient for thee.*’ He came to a place of understanding as the result of sheer experience of the dealing of God with him. He had to learn, *and experience teaches us all.* **Some of us are very slow to learn, but God in His kindness may send us an illness, sometimes He even strikes us down—anything to teach us this great lesson and to bring us to this great position.”**
2. “But it was not to be experience alone. Paul had come to learn this great truth **BY WORKING OUT A GREAT ARGUMENT.** Let me give you some of the steps of the argument which you can work out for yourself. I think that the apostle’s logic was something like this:
 - a. CONDITIONS ARE ALWAYS CHANGING, THEREFORE I MUST OBVIOUSLY NOT BE DEPENDENT UPON CONDITIONS. – [cf. I John 2:17 – “*The world passeth away & the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.*”]
 - b. WHAT MATTER SUPREME & VITALLY IS MY SOUL AND MY RELATIONSHIP TO GOD—that is the first thing. [cf. III Jn. 2 – “*I wish that thou mayest prosper & be in health as thy soul prospereth.*”]
 - c. GOD IS CONCERNED ABOUT ME AS MY FATHER, AND NOTHING HAPPENS TO ME APART FROM GOD. Even the very hairs of my head are all numbered. I must NEVER forget that. [cf. Mt. 6:27; 10:30 – “*The very hairs of your head are numbered*”]
 - d. GOD’S WILL & GOD’S WAYS ARE A GREAT MYSTERY, BUT I KNOW THAT WHATEVER HE WILLS OR PERMITS IS OF NECESSITY FOR MY GOOD. [cf. Rom. 8:28 – “*All things work together for them that love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*” etc.]
 - e. EVERY SITUATION IN LIFE IS THE UNFOLDING OF SOME MANIFESTATION OF GOD’S LOVE & GOODNESS. Therefore my business is to look for this peculiar manifestation of God’s goodness and kindness and to be prepared for surprises & blessings because ‘*His ways are not my ways, neither His thoughts my thoughts.*’ [cf. Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33-36]. What, for example, is the great lesson that Paul learned in the matter of the thorn in the flesh? It is that: ‘*When I am weak then am I strong.*’ Paul was taught through physical weakness this manifestation of God’s grace.

- f. I MUST REGARD CIRCUMSTANCES & CONDITIONS, *NOT IN & OF THEMSELVES THEREFORE*, but as a part of God’s dealings with me in the WORK OF PERFECTING MY SOUL AND BRINGING ME TO FINAL PERFECTION. [cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-10]
- g. WHATEVER MY CONDITIONS MAY BE AT THIS PRESENT MOMENT THEY ARE ONLY TEMPORARY [cf. II Cor. 4:7-5:8], they are only passing, and they can never rob me of my joy and the glory that ultimately await me with Christ. [cf. Rom. 8:31-39; etc.]

MLJ: “I suggest that Paul had reasoned and argued it out like that. He had faced conditions and circumstances in the light of the Christian truth and the Christian Gospel, and had worked out these steps and stages. And having done so he says: ‘*Let anything you can think of happen to me, I remain exactly where I was. Whatever may happen to me, I am left unmoved.*’

3. “The big principle that emerges clearly is that Paul HAD LEARNED TO FIND HIS PLEASURE & HIS SATISFACTION IN CHRIST & ALWAYS IN CHRIST. That is the positive aspect of this matter. We must learn to depend upon Him and in order to do that we must learn to know Him, we must learn to have communion with Him, we must learn to find our pleasure in Him. Let me put it plainly—the danger with some of us is to spend far too much of our time even in reading about Him. The day may come, indeed will come, when we shall not be able to read. Then comes the test. Will you still be happy? Do you know Him so well that though you become deaf or blind this fount will still be open? Do you know Him so well that you can talk to Him and listen to Him and enjoy Him always? [cf. Phil. 3:1-14]. Will all be well because you have always been so dependent upon your relationship to Him that nothing else really matters? That was the apostle’s condition.
4. “Finally, I believe that what helped him most to learn this lesson was HIS LOOKING AT THE GREAT & PERFECT EXAMPLE OF CHRIST HIMSELF. ‘Looking unto Jesus...who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame’ (Heb. 12:1-4). Paul ‘looked unto Him’ and saw Him and His perfect example. And he applied it to his own life. ‘While we look, not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal’ (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

“*I have come to learn in whatsoever state I am, therein to be self-sufficient and independent of circumstances.*’

“CHRISTIAN PEOPLE, CAN YOU SAY THAT, DO YOU KNOW THAT STATE? Let this become first with us, let this become our ambition, let us strain every nerve and do everything we can to get into this blessed state. Life may force it upon us, but even if circumstances do not, the time is bound to come, soon or late, when earth and every earthly scene will pass away, and in that final isolation of the soul we shall be alone, facing death and eternity. The greatest thing in life is to be able to say with Christ Himself at that hour: ‘*And yet I am not alone because the Father is with me*’ (John 16:32).

“May God in His infinite grace enable us all to learn this great and vital lesson, and to this end let us offer frequently that prayer of Augustus Toplady:

While I draw this fleeting breath
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I soar through tracts unknown
See Thee on Thy Judgment Throne,
Rock of Ages cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee.’³⁵

³⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *ibid*, pp.

The MAP Method of Meditation:

Memorize the Passage

“It’s important when facing difficult times or temptations to know *exactly* what God says *word for word*. Satan was able to gain a toehold in Eve’s life because she did not know exactly what God had said. Eve had a general idea, but that is not good enough when dealing with an enemy as deceptive as Satan. A man who cannot remember God’s exact words is in danger of ‘leaning to his own understanding’ (Prov. 3:5-6).

Analyze the Passage

“Study the passage asking the Holy Spirit to give you a thorough understanding of its message. List the major words in the passage and use an English dictionary to find out the meaning of each word. If possible, look up each word in a Greek or Hebrew dictionary, or check out the meaning for each in Strong’s exhaustive concordance. Once you are sure of each word’s meaning, put the passage in your own words. If you can’t put it in your own words, you do not yet know what it means.

Personalize the Passage

“Plan concrete ways for change in your life that are consistent with your understanding of the passage. Plans include schedules, details, techniques, steps, and procedures. Ask yourself, ‘*When have I failed to do this in the past? When am I likely to meet a similar situation again? What will be my response the next time I meet this?*’ Think through the ‘game plan’ *thoroughly and before the next temptation. Use the passage in personal prayer to God.*”³⁶

³⁶ Berg, *ibid*,