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WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES OVERWHELM



What are some things that lift your spirits when you're feeling down?

QUESTION #1

THE POINT

God lifts us up when circumstances pull us down.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

In the book *A Woman Overwhelmed*, Hayley DiMarco stated, “There are a lot of things to be overwhelmed with ... worry, fear, faith, doubt, loss, gain, failure, rejection, acceptance, finances, love, hate, regret, responsibility, organization, mess, loneliness, hopelessness, inability, lack, abundance ... and the list could go on. ... But if I’m honest with myself, I’m not so much overwhelmed with my life as I am with everyone else’s. ... If everyone would just do what I want them to do, I wouldn’t be so overwhelmed.”

She concluded, “There are two results of comparing yourself with another human being: pride and depression.”¹

In the two psalms we look at in this session, we find that even the psalmist had times when he was depressed and distressed. But God’s presence can give us the encouragement we need. He helps us look above and beyond our circumstances. In these verses we see the constant reminder to put our hope in God and worship Him in spite of anything we may face.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Psalm 42:1-3

¹ As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? ³ My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?”

We all go through times when everything seems to be coming at us at once. We may feel like we’re drowning. Whether we call it “the blues” or full-blown depression, we feel overwhelmed. Biblical leaders, historical figures, and great preachers all have experienced times of overwhelming hopelessness.

- ▶ **Moses.** Moses felt so overwhelmed by the Israelites’ endless complaining he urged God, “If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness” (Num. 11:15).
- ▶ **Elijah.** Elijah was overwhelmed with his fear of Jezebel that he prayed, “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers” (1 Kings 19:4).
- ▶ **Abraham Lincoln.** As a lawyer, Abraham Lincoln suffered such depression that his friends kept all knives away for fear he might commit suicide. He wrote, “I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. . . . To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better.”²
- ▶ **Charles Haddon Spurgeon.** The great preacher from London was plagued with depression: “I, of all men, am perhaps the subject of the deepest depression at times. . . . I am the subject of depression so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to.”³

How can our circumstances make us feel abandoned, alone, or far from God?

QUESTION #2

What does this tell us? Some of the greatest believers, mightily used of God, have experienced low spirits. Experiencing times of depression does not mean we're less spiritual. During these difficult times we need to become like the deer the psalmist described in verse 1.

This is how we should long for God in our lives. The psalmist thirsted for the only true God. It was his way of saying he was tired of the false gods that people put in the place of holy God. At this point, we likewise need to make a decision. We must decide that, even in the midst of the overwhelming nature of life, we would rather have God's presence over everything else. Like the psalmist, we need to "thirst(s) for God," ask when we can be with Him again, and shed tears when we sense that we are not near Him.

Psalm 42:6b-8

^{6b} My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

⁷ Deep calls to deep at the roar of your waterfalls; all your breakers and your waves have gone over me. ⁸ By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.

Distressing times are opportunities to remember the goodness of God. The psalmist leaned on his heritage of being a Hebrew. He sang about the promised land that God gave to his people. The land was a sign of God's blessing to His chosen people. The Jordan River, Mount Hermon, and Mount Mizar were all recognizable landmarks to the Jewish people of his day. They were reminders that God never gives up on His promises, and one of those promises is His presence in our lives. Even when we struggle with an overwhelming sense of depression, we have many lingering reminders of God's presence with us.

How does remembering God help when facing dark times?

QUESTION #3

STRESS INVENTORY

To what degree do you feel overwhelmed by the following?

	A light weight			A heavy burden	
Financial issues	1	2	3	4	5
Health issues	1	2	3	4	5
Family issues	1	2	3	4	5
Employment issues	1	2	3	4	5
Emotional issues	1	2	3	4	5
Physical issues	1	2	3	4	5
Spiritual issues	1	2	3	4	5

Write a prayer to God highlighting questions and requests you have for Him. Then trust Him to help you find the help you need for each category.

*"I have learned to kiss the wave that
throws me against the Rock of Ages!"*

— CHARLES SPURGEON

The psalmist felt like he was drowning. “All your breakers and your waves have gone over me.” It was as if every time he came up for air, he got another mouth full of water! Even though he felt like he was drowning, he affirmed what he knew to be true: the Lord loved him and would be with him no matter what.

In troubling times, we can experience the consistency of God’s faithfulness and love. Sometimes we have the chance to struggle with life in the light of day, but what about the terrors that wait to pounce on us in the middle of the night? It does not matter. God is present at all times and in all states of affairs. No matter what we are facing, we can hold on to Him in prayer. Even in trying times, we can choose to have a song of joy in our hearts and not a funeral dirge.

Even in his “cast down” state, the psalmist still spoke with confidence. The psalmist knew God would be faithful. The One who has been faithful to us in the past is the same One who will be faithful to us in the present and the future.

When we’re driving, it is good to glance periodically in the rearview mirror, but we can’t fix our eyes on what’s behind us or we will have a wreck. Perhaps our overwhelming circumstances are tied to something we’ve done. We can’t continue to look back at our bad decisions, bad experiences, broken relationships, past mistakes, and sins. Instead, we should embrace the faithful love of God as expressed in Jesus Christ. Confess the past and move forward in Christ. Affirm that God is the God of your present and your eternal future. He is faithful and will come through!



Psalm 43:3-5

³ Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! ⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God. ⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

It's one thing to know in our minds that overwhelming circumstances are not the end of us, but it's another thing to move our hearts to that place as well. We can take the sting out of our feelings of abandonment by remembering that God is still with us. But we always need to take another step. We want to get from that thirsty place of wondering about God's presence to enjoying a deep encounter with Him. Interestingly, the only way to do it is to trust in God's revelation to us.

There is no shame in asking, "Why?" The psalmist repeatedly asked, "Why?" In fact, it is healthy to engage God in honest prayer when we have doubts. When you don't feel like worship, pray anyway. It's the only way we can progress from feeling distant from God to the reality of intimacy with Him.

The psalmist knew deep down that his focus needed to be on God. Therefore, he made a statement of faith three times, declaring, "I shall again praise him" (42:5,11; 43:5). Each time he said it, he demonstrated how his outlook had changed, proclaiming how he had come to view the Lord intimately.

Our only hope for victory is to focus on Christ and praise Him as our Savior and our God! In Psalms 42 and 43, the psalmist acknowledged his feelings and despair, worshiped God in the midst of them, affirmed the truth in spite of how he felt, and chose to worship God no matter what.

His view of God and his relationship with Him changed. His outlook on life and his circumstances also changed as a result. Circumstances in life will either make us or break us. We can either be the *victim* of them or the *victor* over them!

What hope do you see in these verses?

QUESTION #4

How does God send light and truth to lead us out of dark places?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

God is greater than your circumstances. What will you do with that truth? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **Talk to God.** If you are hurt, angry, or disappointed with God because of your circumstances, talk to Him about it. The psalmist wrote honestly about his feelings and circumstances, and an honest prayer is the place to start in getting rightly focused on God.
- ▶ **Worship.** Make a concerted effort to worship God. Worship and praise during your private devotional life and actively engage with others as you worship at church.
- ▶ **Talk to someone.** Do a serious personal evaluation about what causes depression in your life. Admit that it is real and it is serious. It might be time to talk with a close friend, pastor, or counselor about it.



We all have times when we feel overwhelmed. The psalmist certainly did. But in those times we can bare our hearts before the Lord and look to Him for help. Sometimes He'll send that help through others.

My thoughts

1. DiMarco, Haley. *A Woman Overwhelmed*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017.
2. Letter to John T. Stuart, January 23, 1841. *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Vol. 1, p. 230.
3. *The Complete Works of C.H. Spurgeon*, Volume 12.