

Enter the presence of our Heavenly Father:

The unsearchable riches of Christ have been declared to us by God’s chosen messengers. This is the mystery kept hidden in God who created all things and now has made known his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. That in him and through faith in him we may approach God in freedom and confidence.

Prayer of confidence in our Father’s presence:

My dear Father, holy and all powerful yet merciful and patient. I adore you and gladly receive the privilege to come before you to learn more of your ways and glorious actions. I want to be made clean from any darkness in my soul that holds me back from your better ways for my life. And this day through your word please cure me of depressive complaining ways and lead me in that way of thanksgiving which is pleasing to you and enlivening for me.

I ask in Jesus’ Name, your beloved Son. Amen

The Lord’s Prayer.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.
Amen.

Hymn: by C. Wesley

Fainting soul, be bold, be strong, wait the leisure of thy Lord;
Though it seem to tarry long, true and faithful is His word:
On His word my soul I cast, He cannot Himself deny;
Surely it shall speak at last; it shall speak, and shall not lie.
Every one that seeks shall find, every one that asks shall have
Christ, the Saviour of mankind, willing, able, all to save;
I shall His salvation see, I in faith on Jesus call,
I from sin shall be set free, perfectly set free from all.
Lord, my time is in Thine hand, weak and helpless as I am,
Surely Thou canst make me stand; I believe in Jesu’s name:
Saviour in temptation Thou; Thou hast saved me heretofore,
Thou from sin dost save me now, Thou shalt save me evermore.

Scriptures:

- Psalm 20. A reminder that we are to call on the Lord in distress and avoid all helps other than those the Lord brings to us.
- Ezekiel 20:39-44 This section is echoed in much of Ezekiel showing the Lord’s patient mercy disciplining his people to know that ‘He is our Lord’. Through our struggles and pain, he is leading us into better ways.
- Hebrews 12:7-29 The word discipline implies pain in the learning process. This passage is classic. With all these Scriptures, compare with our Lord’s great

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statement for mental health, in fact all health; that we cannot live on bread alone, we must have an appetite for the Word of God.

Hymn: by W. Cowper.

1. Oh! for a closer walk with God, a calm and heavenly frame;
A light to shine upon the road that leads me to the Lamb!
2. Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul-refreshing view of Jesus and his word?
3. What peaceful hours I once enjoyed! How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void the world can never fill.
4. Return, O holy Dove, return! Sweet the messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made thee mourn and drove thee from my breast.
5. The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne, and worship only thee.
6. So shall my walk be close with God, calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road that leads me to the Lamb.

Mental Health Series, Part 2: Depression; purpose and hope.

This message is purposed to bring comfort and strength to those laboring under depression. It is an encouragement to understand that the purposes of God are alive and operative in your life.

Most diseases are incurable, but thankfully, some are manageable. Better if we get them early. Thankfully, one day all of this will be eradicated by ready access to healing blessing in the Heavenly City of the New Creation. But that blessing still awaits.

More perplexing are the sufferings and complexities of the human mind, the soul. And their healing more evasive and trickier. Here we encounter a pervasive malady in its many varied forms and expressions. Some are burdened with terrifying fear and dreaded anticipation. The feeling that there is nothing good ahead for me ever! Neither tonight nor tomorrow nor ever!

For others, it is the crippling paralysis of utter meaninglessness, like being trapped in time and circumstances where no window, let alone a doorway to meaning or freedom, exists. And there are many hideous varieties in between. The fact is this is often the human condition shared only amongst humans. This is the sickness of the human soul. But what treatment is there for it?

The one strongest single answer that has any hope of answering this assault on the mind and being is Hope itself. Victor Frankl, the Jewish concentration camp survivor, testified in his post-liberation reflection that the conviction of hope, held him together in that brew of enormous evil. Having meaning, a ‘why’ is mightier than a ‘what’. Whatever circumstance afflicts and imprisons, to find meaning where there is none opens a door to hope and healing.

The classic account of human depression is in the Book of Job, who amid awful isolation and pain, even in relation to his post-death hope and being said; *But I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the end He will stand upon the earth. Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I will see Him for myself; my eyes will behold Him, and not as a stranger. How my heart yearns within me!* Was that a mighty objective statement with scarce feelings of support? Or was it a glance of hope from on high his mind grabbed for solace?

When it comes to the treatment of the human soul and its health, the Bible is pre-eminent. The eminent psychiatrist, Frank Lake, in his monumental work Clinical Theology, demonstrates the

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roots of depression are diagnosed and described in certain Psalms and other allied texts. Words like ‘afflict’ and ‘despair’ occur over a hundred times and if you add ‘confusion’, ‘torment’, and ‘trouble’ the count is vast. Yet, though they smash like waves against a mighty sea bulwark of hope, the rock stands.

Psalms seventy-seven, eighty-eight and sixty-nine are examples of this shuddering realignment of soul to receive the peace of Christ in the place of self-sought temporary peace. The Psalmist, at times like you and I, is learning or relearning our dependency for life and abundant life on our Living God.

Through these times our Father in heaven is sharpening our appetite for his word of promise and hope ahead of all other comforts and remedies. This sermon will not bring comfort on its own, it will point you to the One who insists on being your primary comfort and counsellor. The Lord Jesus. And when he is through this period of your life you will look back aware of real hope and confidence building in your life. Listen to some basic testimony from God’s chosen leaders.

*We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.*ⁱ Admits the great apostle, Paul, the founder of the concept of the individual’s freedom and dignity.

When the scourge brings sudden death, He mocks the despair of the innocent. Job 9.23 Job shuddering at the unanswered injustice to innocent despairing sufferers.

Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none; for comforters, but I found none. The depression of isolation. Actually, a prophecy of the coming of Christ. Psalm 69.20

James Procter, the Richard Dawkins of his day lectured on life without God in all kinds of intellectual venues with arrogance and self-assurance. Until his world fell to pieces and in despairing depression became beggarly in all human strength and put his trust in Jesus, finding peace of soul. He wrote: “My soul is night, my heart is steel—I cannot see, I cannot feel;” that steel had to be melted by the intense fire of Gods dealing with him.

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God. Ps 42.5. David has learned how to answer depressive moods when they arise, perhaps by association of ideas through the senses or whatever.

*I waited patiently for the LORD; He inclined to me and heard my cry. He lifted me up from the pit of despair, out of the miry clay; He set my feet upon a rock, and made my footsteps firm. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD....*Ps 40.2. This man is learning the ways of feeding on God and his trustworthy word as a way of life albeit with occasional depressions.

But I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the end He will stand upon the earth. Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I will see Him for myself; my eyes will behold Him, and not as a stranger. How my heart yearns within me! Job 19.25 Job holds onto the promise of meaning in the face of a horrible end to his life. So must we if challenged in that way

See, Lord, how distressed I am! I am in torment within, and in my heart, I am disturbed, for I have been most rebellious. Lam 1.20 The prophet is honest enough to own his complicity in his depression. If necessary, we must with a soft heart admit wrongdoing to our Father with no excuses and then freshly trust ourselves to Christs shed blood and mercy.

And here there is something extraordinary. Depression in all its forms, while usually referred to as breakdown becomes truly ‘breakthrough’. That is a doorway to health restored. It is a breakdown

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of ‘soul-systems’ ready for a soul-reset and restoration. I am convinced that, stronger than any smashing depression of soul, is hope for its renewal.

I’ll state it simply like this: We are created to know something which most of our contemporary pseudo-life portrayals today noisily ignore. We are made to live by truth that lives. Jesus the Word of God said, “man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” . And these sufferings, however fierce and terrifying, are avenues under God to rich blessing in days to come and for a lifetime. And more!

There comes a time, especially for you who feel the trouble, when God our Father takes you back to what Jesus calls, not depression, but “poverty of spirit”. This is the first Beatitude or step to lasting joy and sometimes we have to start again, or rather ‘started again’ to rebuild a weakness in our lives only God can see. A state where we are helpless and frightened with no answers. That in fact is how it has to be. The removal of all barriers to hope and the beginning of life by the Word of the Father.

As a minister of the Word, I have seen the most naked and despairing of human souls start new life from such poverty and brokenness.

You see we must learn somewhere, sometime whatever our past experience to live properly by the words of our true Father, our Heavenly father.

Start with the Bible. Yes, you may be given an inspirational word that comforts you. Even so, the Scripture is given for your *“endurance and encouragement that we might have hope”*.²

You can rest an anxious mind in any word that inspires you in Scripture, the living word of God, hearing something good in your mind. That will be the Holy Spirit. It won’t be Satan, that’s for sure. That dark spirit will be trying to rob you by accusation, lying and confusion. But you must deliberately choose the word of hope and life.

You can do it. You were created and redeemed to do it. Absolutely.

And here is another tip. The outcome of this hard training will have the result of making you a more fruitful member of Christ’s redeemed community. You will want to submit to others in that community of believers for their benefit and blessing. You will want to serve them more sincerely. That is the goal. And that is how you can discern the true work of the Holy Spirit for you.

So, anyone reading this for mental health’s sake, feed your soul on whatever you might get from Holy Scripture with its promises and warnings. This word aligns you to your true God given life of health and hope. Jesus for himself put it this way: “my food, is to do the will of him who sent me to finish his work”. He knows how to guide you.

Prayer (for despairing in spirit, looking to Holy Spirit for help);

Dear heavenly Father,

I have tried so many times but have failed, I now call out to you. Forgive me for arrogantly believing I can live by my own intelligence to achieve abundant life of peace of mind. Please help me. I give you a ready mind. Please shield me with heavenly wisdom as your word in James’ epistle promises. Thank you for proving to me my weakness apart from you. Thank you for letting me fall and fail that I might learn poverty of spirit. I understand now that is the beginning of real blessedness.

You are my life, I receive the Lord Jesus afresh, I will feed on Scripture and the thoughts you bring to me. I will hope according to your promise as I should and learn afresh your ways. I put myself at your disposal to be a useful member of the church of your Son and to his

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glory. Please forgive sin in my life and keep cleansing even though it is painful. I want you to be my constant and dearest friend forever.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Hymn, James Procter

I’ve tried in vain a thousand ways my fears to quell, my hopes to raise;
But what I need, the Bible says, is ever, only Jesus.

My soul is night, my heart is steel—I cannot see, I cannot feel;
For light, for life I must appeal in simple faith to Jesus.

He died, He lives, He reigns, He pleads; There’s love in all His words and deeds;
There’s all a guilty sinner needs, Forevermore in Jesus.

Though some should sneer, and some should blame, I’ll go with all my guilt and shame;
I’ll go to Him because His name, above all names, is Jesus.

James Procter was a founder member of the Atheist society "The Free Thinkers" becoming its president. He was the Richard Dawkins of his day. He originally wrote the poem lines “I’ve tried in vain a thousand ways. My fears to quell, my hopes to raise;” and only after his conversion added the remaining lines. For Procter, depression ,despair was the brokenness that prepared the soil to receive the Gospel seed.

Benediction:

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your entire spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The One who calls you is faithful, and He will do it.

And may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who by grace has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good word and deed.

This service was prepared by Rev Ian Clarkson for HopeNet SA

¹ 2 Corinthians 1.8,also 2 Cor 4.10,11

² Romans 15.5. It is worthwhile studying the purpose of Scripture in Gods hands for our mental health. Look for the purpose in such Scriptures such as 2Timothy 3. 16,17. 1 Corinthians 10