

A Brief Guide to the Psalms for the Depressed

- Psalm 6** Describes the feelings of depression: faintness, bones in agony, soul in anguish, weeping, sorrow.
- Psalm 13** The psalmist begins with the sense that *even God* has forgotten him. Describes feelings of depression, but ends in faith, trusting God's goodness.
- Psalm 25** Expresses confidence in God and a teachable spirit. Describes some of the characteristics of depression (lonely, afflicted, troubles of heart, anguish, acknowledgment of sin)
- Psalm 27** Expresses strong confidence in God. Verse 10 is great for those with a rough childhood. The NASB translation of verse 13 expresses the importance of hope.
- Psalm 31** Expresses the feelings of depression, but also contains a strong affirmation ("But I trust in you...") that leads to praise and hope.
- Psalm 32** Major psalm on depression. Describes the feelings of depression, and the relationship of depression to sin. Includes an exhortation to others who are suffering.
- Psalm 38** Major Psalm on depression. Probably the most complete biblical description of the emotional and physical devastation of depression.
- Psalm 39** Deals with frustration and repressed anger. Notice that the psalmist recognizes that he is frustrated directly with God (v.9-10). Note also Psalm 40:1-4 as a follow up, kind of "the rest of the story".
- Psalm 42** This psalm deals with the sense of despair one can feel even when pursuing God. The psalmist is undergoing opposition and oppression (vs 3, 9, 10), and feels forgotten by God. This psalm illustrates the truth that we must rein in thoughts of hopelessness (as Paul says, "bring every thought captive," 2 Co 10:5), and have hope in God's promises (v 5, 11). This is a beautiful psalm.
- Psalm 46** Deals with important issue of trusting in God's sovereignty even though our world is collapsing.

- Psalm 51** Major Psalm on depression. This psalm contains perhaps the most theologically complete confession of sin found in Scripture. In it the psalmist confesses both sin as a deed (v. 4) and sin as a nature (v. 5). The psalmist realizes that his acts of worship are not legitimate when confession of sin is needed (v. 16-17). But once a clean heart has been established (v. 10), “then you will delight in righteous sacrifices” (v. 19). This is a psalm of healing, and is useful when a sufferer has been able to separate the morally neutral components of depression from the sinful components, and is ready to deal with the sinful aspects.
- Psalm 55** Deals with emotional damage done by the betrayal of a close companion.
- Psalm 62** Expresses confidence in the sovereignty and goodness of God (especially vs. 11, 12). The psalmist confesses that in God alone is his hope (vs 1-2, 5-7), a crucial perspective to which the sufferer of depression must attain.
- Psalm 63** What Ps 62 was from the perspective of hope, Ps 63 is from the standpoint of desire. The psalmist is satisfied with the presence of God (v 5). He expresses this desire for God in the midst of a dry and difficult time (see v1b, and 9-11). This is important as depressed individuals normally have attached their desires and hopes to something less than the presence of God.
- Psalm 69** Describes the torment of David when he was the object of a conspiracy. Notice his deep grief and sorrow, (vs 1-3, 10, 20-21), his sense of sinking in mire and drowning in a flood (14-15), and pain (29). Notice also his determination to glorify God in the midst of his trouble, (v. 30). This psalm also has Messianic application (cf v 9, 21).
- Psalm 71** Expresses praise in the midst of trouble. Note recognition of God’s sovereignty (v 20).
- Psalm 73** Details the depressing effect of envy and bitterness. See verses 2-3, 13-14, 16, and 21-22. The Psalmist is delivered as he takes a long-term view of life (contrast v 17-18, with 23-24). He recognizes that God is sovereign (v 18, “you set them... you cast them...”) and that God Himself is sufficient (v 28).
- Psalm 77** This psalm describes some common aspects of depression: choosing to remain depressed (v. 2), sense of conviction and weakness (v. 3), insomnia (v. 4), dwelling on the past (v. 5), sense of alienation from God (vs. 7-9). It also contains the decision to end depression, and to trust and praise in spite of feelings (vs 11-20).
- Psalm 86** Psalm is an excellent prayer for those who have decided to give up their depression. Includes recognition of personal need (v. 1), expression of commitment (v. 2), a cry for mercy (v. 3), recognition of availability of forgiveness (v. 5), statement of God’s faithfulness (v. 7), submission to

God's purpose (v. 11), commitment to praise and glorify God (v. 12), recognition of God's love (v. 13), recognition of the reality of difficult circumstances (v. 14), and a request for help (v. 16). Could be prayed aloud by those committed to recovery.

Psalm 88

At first glance, this psalm may not appear to be helpful to the depressed. Leupold calls it "the gloomiest psalm found in the Scriptures." In it the psalmist cries out to God for deliverance from death, and he experiences no small measure of despair. Absent from this psalm is a sense of hope or deliverance (except v 1, "God of my salvation"). He reminds God of His faithfulness (vs 10-12), but seemingly to no avail. We too sometimes have the experience that God is far off, and not listening. The Holy Spirit left us with this Psalm as a reminder that God does not fear us confronting Him with our sufferings. His faithfulness is not impugned in those rare times in which He chooses not to deliver. Paul and Job both had this experience, and learned from it that God Himself, not circumstances, is our comfort. The lesson for the depressed believer in God from this psalm is that the silence of God does not equal the absence of God. Sometimes He permits us to continue in our suffering for reasons known only to Himself.

Psalm 91

Expresses promise of help to those who trust in God, even in the midst of trying circumstances.

Psalm 95

A psalm of great praise, but containing a warning to those who insist on holding onto their grumbling and complaining spirit (vs. 7b-11).

Psalm 103

This is a tender psalm of reassurance, strengthening our faith and understanding of the compassion and love God has for us. Helpful for those consumed by doubts and fears, or those with a warped image of God. Also a great praise psalm.

Psalm 107

This psalm demonstrates the mercy and faithfulness of God through several small snapshots of life-situations. Verses 4-9 speak of those hungering and thirsting. Verses 10-16 speak of those who rebel against the Word of God. Verses 17-22 speak of those who stubbornly insist on continuing in sin. Verses 23-32 speak of those who are overwhelmed by circumstance (not necessarily sin). Verses 33-42 are a general statement of the judgment/blessing of the Lord. Note verse 43. For sufferers of depression, the psalm demonstrates that when we cry out to God, He will deliver.

Psalm 116

Expresses praise for deliverance from great trial.

Psalm 121

Expresses confidence in God's sovereign oversight of our lives.

Psalm 130

This brief psalm encourages the suffering to wait patiently for God's deliverance. In many ways, Psalm 130:5-6 is the answer to Psalm 88.

Psalm 139

This is a beautiful psalm that stresses several concepts important to a biblical self-image: that God knows us perfectly (and still loves us!), that He is always present with us, that He has created us in great detail as He wants us to be, and that He has planned the events of our lives. Apparently what is most important to the Psalmist is not what he thinks of himself; in other words, the Psalmist focuses not on himself, but on God's works on his behalf.

Psalm 142

The psalmist brings his troubles to the only One Who can truly help. In verse 4 we find the pitiful perspective of the depressed: no one really cares. The psalmist recognizes that God alone is his refuge.

Psalm 143

This is a general cry for deliverance, that especially evidences a teachable heart and spirit. Psalm 143 makes a good personal prayer for one suffering from depression.

Psalm 146

Psalm 147

These Psalms are songs of victory and confident praise of the goodness, deliverance, and sovereignty of God. They are great statements of faith, helpful for the depressed person who has chosen to trust God in spite of his/her feelings.