

“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so I long for you, God” Psalm 42 verse 1

It's probably true that most people suffer from some kind of sadness or depression at some time in their lives. For some it is perhaps mild and occasional, for others it is a lifelong, debilitating battle.

Psalm 42 is written by a person wrestling with depression. “My tears have been my food day and night” he says, as he remembers the days when he would joyfully go to worship. He can't even put his finger on the reason for it. “Why, my soul, are you so dejected?” he asks himself. “Why are you in such turmoil?”

What does he do? He instructs his soul again. “Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my saviour and my God.” I'd love to be able to say that his depression immediately lifts, but that doesn't seem to be the case. “I am deeply depressed,” he says “therefore I remember you.”

The bible is about real people's real lives. It doesn't always provide easy answers. Sometimes it simply describes peoples' struggles with the same things that we struggle with today. Does that help us? This psalm is certainly one of hope even in the depths of depression. I remember once talking to someone whose life seemed to be permanently locked in the deepest depression. I asked her what her hope was and without hesitation she replied “My only hope is Jesus.”

So the psalmist here doesn't seem to find an answer to his condition. The psalm doesn't end with a miraculous deliverance, but it does include his declarations of hope and faith. “The Lord will send his faithful love by day, his song will be with me in the night – a prayer to the God of my life.” And he concludes, “Why, my soul, are you so dejected? Why are you in such turmoil? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise him, my saviour and my God.”

Sometimes, in depression, when God's presence seems a million miles away, faith takes the form of memories of better times, the memories what God has done in the past and the hope that knowledge and previous experience of his love and mercy brings. The psalmist is sunk in depression, but he can still look to God for hope, he can still offer a few words of praise and he knows that God is still his saviour. If today you are suffering from depression, I pray that the words of psalm 42 will offer some encouragement.

Prayer.

Father, many people walk the dark road of depression, even those who know and trust you. Thank you that you offer hope, even in the deepest, heaviest darkness. May those suffering from depression know the hope that there is in you. Please help us, too, to be available to walk alongside those who suffer. In Jesus' name, amen.

All these devotionals can be found on our website inghamitechurch.org on the 'Resources' page. Click on the link to go there.