

“Thinking Clearly About Your Problems”

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

1/17/10

Romans 12 says, “*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*”

Today I want us to talk about thinking clearly about your problems that you will inevitably face in your life. Now we know, what happened in Haiti is so extreme that there is never an easy answer to such a disaster. Really, there are no easy answers to any of the problems we face in life. But we face them.

Life is basically a series of mountains and valleys, good times and bad times, obstacles and opportunities. They both come at you at the same time. You will have some depressing days. No doubt about it. Days when you feel like, “Why did I get up this morning?” Days of disappointment where you feel like you’re just not making any progress. You will have days of defeat. You’re going to feel like, “Why bother?... Why make the effort?... Why keep on trying?... It’s not working.” And you will go through some dark days, days where you haven’t the slightest idea where you’re headed, no idea where you’re going and you can’t figure out what to do next.

What do you do in those kinds of days? How do you get through those kinds of problems?

Somebody who handled a lot of problems in the Bible was the Apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 4 he tells us about some of the problems he went through. Vs. 8-9 say, “*We are pressed on every side by troubles but we’re not crushed and broken. We are perplexed but we don’t give up and quit. We get knocked down but we get up again and we keep going.*”

Here is a man of incredible endurance. He says I’m knocked down but I’m not knocked out. I just keep on keeping on. How do you get it? How do you keep from being beat up by your problems? He tells us in verse 18 “*We set our eyes not on what we see but on what we can’t see. What we see will last only a short time. What we can’t see will last forever.*”

God says, “Don’t look at the external. Look at the eternal.” I don’t look only at my problems. I look at God who can solve them. I don’t look only at the difficulty. I look at the Deliverer, the one I know who can help me out.

The classic book on learning to think clearly in the Bible is the book of Psalms. Most of it was written by David who had all kinds of problems and fortunately he wrote down his prayers. Often his thinking was quite fuzzy, confused, just like you and I are with our problems. But inevitably God helps him work it out and begin to think more clearly on what is going on.

So today I want us to look at some of the different Psalms and I want us to see from David’s example three important keys to handling the depressing and the defeating and dark days of life.

You may not be in this situation right now, and that’s great. I hope you’re not. But at some point in life, we all have problems that arise. Maybe that’s the start right there—we get so conditioned from our society to think that we should never have bad days, and if we do things right we will all have success. Even us preachers can get caught up in that—have the right faith and your problems will go away. Pray hard enough, and you’ll get what you want.

But we know that’s not reality. Problems do arise. So what do we do?

When your situation looks depressing, you need to think about the goodness of God.

Depression is a serious matter that many struggle with. And it can be debilitating. And so there are professionals around us that you can and should talk with if you are truly depressed.

Sometimes it may be a situational depression, or seasonal depression.

Whatever the case, something critical for us to remember: Feeling depressed does not mean you are weak or a flawed person. Yes, you may have done something that caused you or someone else harm, something that made you feel bad for doing it.

But sometimes our minds and emotions go deeper and we lose perspective on it all and feel depressed.

We can all get sucked into what you might call the All-Or-Nothing thinking syndrome. It's a trap, which goes like this: Somebody criticizes you and you think, "Everybody hates me!" All-Or-Nothing thinking. It's exaggerating, catastrophizing. It's making the problem bigger than it really is. You go through a delay or difficulty and you say, "Everything is wrong in my life!" No, it's not. Something may be wrong. There may be several things wrong in your life, but everything is not wrong in your life. When you make a mistake you say, "I can't do anything right!" That's not true. You can do some things right. But in All-Or-Nothing thinking you're bound to get depressed.

If I were to go home today after church and turn on the faucet in my kitchen and no water came out, it would be kind of silly for me to go outside and yell in the street, "The world is out of water!" No, the world isn't out of water it's just that my faucet isn't working. Yet how often do we do that with our problems? All-Or-Nothing thinking. You forget the good things in your life.

So that's when it's time to remember God. Don't insulate yourself from God or those around you. That can be our first reaction sometimes, just pull back and isolate ourselves. It's a natural defense.

But if I'm cold, I turn on the heat.

If I am in a dark room, I turn on the light.

Remember God's goodness. That you are loved. That God's grace abounds.

Psalm 27:13-14 says, "*I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord... Be strong, and let your heart take courage; Wait for the Lord.*"

God has your best interest at heart. You simply must trust Him. God sees things that we don't see. He knows things that we don't know.

The Bible tells us in Romans, "*All things work together for good for those who love God.*"

It can take time for that to happen which is difficult. Remember that there are others around you that you can rely on. There is nothing like feeling alone.

Because not only are there situations which look depressing, there are also situations that come into all of our lives that look defeating. We feel a sense of failure about. What do you do when you feel defeated?

When your situation looks defeating you think about the greatness of God.

The fact is, you will fail at many things in life. Failure is a part of all of our lives. Things don't always go as we expect it or as we planned. Because of those failures we often run out of energy and we don't know where to turn next. We feel like giving up. We begin to think things like, "I've tried and I've tried but nothing changes. It's hopeless. What's the use of even trying?"

Maybe you've tried and tried to change your marriage. And still it's the same and you feel defeated. Or maybe you've tried and tried to connect with one of your kids – you've talked and talked – but nothing seems to be changing and you feel that sense of failure. Or maybe you've prayed and prayed about a health problem and you're still facing it one more year. Maybe you've worked and worked at a career and it's still the same. Or maybe you've tried to change

yourself, become a new person. You look at yourself and think, ‘It’s the same old me in a new day. Here I go again!’

What do you do with this sense of failure that comes into our lives?

One of the occupations in which failure is the least acceptable is that of a trapeze artist. But even a trapeze artist when they miss the bar, what do they have at the bottom (hopefully!)? A net. And the minute they miss the bar they start thinking, “I’m guaranteed with the net.” They’re grateful for the net. They thank God for the net.

Some of you feel like in your life right now that you’re working without a net. One more defeat, one more failure, one more fall and it’s over for you. But I’m here to tell you, you are *not* working without a net. The greatness of God is that His hands are great enough to catch you no matter what the failure in your life, no matter how many people you’ve let down, no matter how disappointed and devastated you are, God’s hands are there to catch you. That’s the greatness of God.

Psalm 147, *“How great God is. His power is absolute. His understanding is unlimited.”*

Count on the God factor.

David knew of and counted on the “God factor.”

When David went to face Goliath, his people the Israelites already felt defeated before they even tried. They were scared.

But David confidently says, “Let no one’s heart fail.”

David had absolute confidence that God was going to back him up.

This story is about God. Yes, it is about David’s courage to stand up to the giant, but he did that because he knew whom it was he served—God.

Is God bigger than Goliath? Yes, and David knew it. Is God bigger than a situation you are in right now? Yes. Is God’s perspective bigger than my own? Yes.

Thomas a Kempis in *The Imitation of Christ* wrote, “God, who is eternal, infinite, supremely mighty, does great and unfathomable things in heaven and in earth, and there is no understanding his wonderful works. If the works of God could easily be grasped by human understanding they could not be called wonderful or too great for words.”

When your situation looks dark you need to think about the closeness of God.

He’s always with you. He’s never left you. He’s present. He’s there at that very moment, with you and in you.

You’re going to have dark days, no doubt about it. Dark days are days of worry, days of fear. They can be dark days of financial difficulty. Some of you are going to go through dark days of loneliness, dark days of not knowing which way to turn, confusion. Have you ever had a dark week? A dark month? A dark year? When you go through a crisis that takes you months to recover from.

Some of you no doubt are going through dark days right now. What do you do?

Psalm 112 tells us what to do. *“Praise the Lord. For all who fear God and trust Him are blessed beyond expression. When darkness overtakes him, light will come bursting in. Such a man will not be overthrown by evil circumstances. God’s constant care of him will make a deep impression on all who see it. He doesn’t fear bad news nor live in dread of what may happen. For he has settled in his mind that God will take care of him.”*

Settle in your mind that God is going to take care of you.

You don’t have to have all the answers when you know that God does. You don’t have to figure it all out when you know that God’s got it figured out. When you’re going through dark

days you need to remember you're not going through them alone. Remember and focus on the closeness of God.

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and He saves those who are crushed in spirit." He hasn't abandoned you. He's still with you. He is aware and He cares.

We don't like dark days because in dark days you can't tell where you're going. You can't tell where it's going to end up. It's scary to be in the dark.

I don't want this to sound like I am giving you some cheap answers or false hopes. You need to hear this clearly. The problem that you're in probably didn't happen overnight. You're not likely going to get out of it overnight. It may take a while.

You need to trust God. He is a good God and He sees what you don't see and He knows what you don't know. He will help you but it may take some time. Psalm 37:34 says, *"Keep traveling steadily along His pathway and in due season He will honor you with every blessing."*

Be confident even when you're just putting one foot in front of the other. Be confident that He is with you every step of the way. Be patient and keep traveling.

The ultimate expression of the greatness, the goodness, and the closeness of God is seen in what Jesus Christ did for you at the cross when He gave His life for you. The problem is we often forget what Jesus did on the cross. We don't think about it much. It just doesn't fill our minds. But remember that in Christ God even defeated death, what to some seems to be the ultimate darkness. The Light of Christ shines through the darkness, giving life, giving us hope forever. Amen.