

Muzzle Eeyore

Favorite Psalms Part 33
Psalm 42-43 pt.4 1-3-2016

Summary: Your continual, ongoing conversation with yourself determines the direction of your life. Do it wrong and you end in depression. Do it right and it brings joy. The right way is to instruct, rather than just listen to, the natural responses of your soul (your Eeyore self). Talk to God about your troubles and talk to yourself about God. Remember his past goodness and be thankful, and look forward to his future goodness.

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Psalm 42 For the director of music. A maskil of the Sons of Korah.

1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. **2** My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? **3** My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" **4** These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. **5** Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and **6** my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar. **7** Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. **8** By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life. **9** I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" **10** My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" **11** Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior (the salvation of my face) and my God.

Psalm 43

1 Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. **2** You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? **3** Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. **4** Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. **5** Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Introduction

Your Voice

Think of how many different voices are constantly trying to get your attention – especially this time of year. Advertisers come at you from every direction, talk show hosts, newscasts, fundraisers, preachers, teachers, friends, family, God... Some of those voices you listen to more than others – most of them you filter out. But there is one voice that always, always gets through. When that voice speaks, you listen to it and take to heart what it says every time, without exception. That voice is yours. Paul Tripp: “No one is more influential in your life than you are because no one talks to you more than you do. You're in an unending conversation with yourself. You're talking to yourself all the time, interpreting, organizing, and analyzing what's going on inside you and around you.” That’s true, isn’t it? You may be talking to yourself about why you feel so tired today. Or you might be reliving a conversation that didn't go too well. Maybe you’re weighing the pros and cons of the decision, or trying to make sense out of something that happened. There is a constant internal conversation with yourself, and that conversation is shaping who you are. So ask yourself: *How is that conversation going?* Tripp goes on: “What do you regularly tell yourself about yourself, God, and your circumstances? Do your words to you inspire faith, hope, and courage? Or do they stimulate doubt, discouragement, and fear? ... How wholesome, faith-driven, and Christ-centered is the conversation that you have with you every day?” One of the things we learn in Psalms 42-43 is how to improve that inner conversation – especially in times of discouragement or depression.

Before the holidays we were studying this prayer that spans these two psalms, but we didn’t quite finish before Christmas, so we have one more message today. You will remember our working outline is summed up in three points PEP. The first P is pray for help. The E is enjoy God’s presence. Today we finally come to the final point – Preach to your soul.

This psalm has a chorus that appears three times - word for word the same all three times.

42:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and 6 my God.

God is teaching us the right way to carry on that inner conversation when life gets hard.

Keep Fighting for Joy

Getting your joy back isn’t going to be easy. He doesn’t give us a quick fix. Ed Welch has an excellent book on depression titled *Depression: a Stubborn Darkness*. If you have ever struggled with serious depression you know that’s a fitting title. It really is a stubborn darkness. And you can see that in this psalm, because even after all his solutions – all his prayer and calling on God and remembering past grace and preaching to his soul and focusing on attributes of God and trying to drawn near to his presence and placing his hope in future grace – even after all that, look at the very last thing he says in both psalms

42:11 & 43:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

He makes progress toward joy, even to the point where he is singing, but then the darkness comes back. And he keeps fighting it. The picture here is of a man won’t give up in the fight for joy.

And that’s saying something, because the number one weapon your depression will use against you is to try to get you to give up the fight for joy. You will be tempted to just stay in your pajamas all day and park yourself in front of the TV or in bed, and just kind of check out. And it’s crucial in those times to keep moving.

I love to go off-roading in our Jeep, and a number of times we’ve gotten into snow or mud and the wheels are spinning, and we are just barely creeping along. And everyone is tense, because we know that even though the wheels were spinning and we’re barely going anywhere, as long as there was a little bit

of movement, we have hope. But if we stop, we're stuck. And that is the way our emotions are when we get discouraged. As long as you keep moving, eventually you will get to a spot where you can get some more traction and get back up to speed. But if you stop, you'll sink down in the mud and it will really be hard to get going again.

So don't give up. When you get depressed, be like this psalmist - keep moving. Get dressed, get out of the house, get around people, keep serving your family, keep serving in ministry - your wheels might be spinning, but keep moving.

Don't Sabotage Yourself

The grammar here is interesting. All three times when he asks that question, **Why are you downcast, O my soul?** The word for **downcast** is a reflexive form so the natural translation would be, **"Why are you casting yourself down, O my soul?"** The depressed soul tends to press itself down. The depressed soul clings to its own pain and refuses to let it go. Like Jacob or Rachel in Scripture, where it says they refused to be comforted. The downcast heart can get to the point where if anyone comes along to try to offer hope that hope is rejected. God's blessings are all held at arm's length and we cling to our own sorrow. The imagery in Psalm 73:21 is that we take our pain and use it like a knife to stab ourselves.¹ Something inside us wants to wallow in the pain and so we actually resist the very comfort we long for.

Don't give in to that. No matter how hopeless it feels, keep fighting. Keep those wheels moving, and eventually you will get some traction again. And the thing that will determine whether you stop or keep moving is that inner conversation. Be careful what you say to yourself. You would be amazed how much damage you can do to yourself with pessimistic thinking, a negative outlook, focusing your attention on bad things instead of good things, looking down instead of up - if you go too long doing that, your emotions will take such a pounding that you will never find your way out of that stubborn darkness. Your feelings will tend to follow your thoughts. So let's see what we can learn from the psalmist about how to use your inner conversation to move our emotions out of darkness back to joy.

Talk; Don't Listen

Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote a whole book on the psalm titled *Spiritual Depression*. And he makes an interesting observation about how this psalmist takes control of that inner conversation and speaks to his soul.

"I suggest that the main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self. ... Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?"

One of the worst things you can do is to just passively listen to the natural thoughts that rise up in your soul when hardship comes. Don't ever trust the voice of your troubled soul. When it gets agitated and troubled and is in pain, it will lie to you about God. A troubled soul can't be trusted - it needs to be spoken to, not listened to.

If it's confusing to talk about the two selves - let's name them. The voice that you should not listen to - let's call that your Eeyore self. If you don't know who Eeyore is, you need to read more Winnie the Pooh. Eeyore is the donkey who is always so negative and pessimistic. Our natural way of responding to suffering and hardship is with our natural self, which is your grumbling, complaining, negative, pessimistic inner Eeyore. The other voice is your eternal self - the part of you that is going to live forever in heaven with God, and that can see the big picture. Many of you have just sat and listened to the Eeyore voice for years, and it's destroying you. We just subject ourselves to the winds of our natural responses to suffering - which is all Eeyore. And we need to stop listening to Eeyore and start instructing him. If you have to, stop and say it out loud: "Shut up Eeyore! Just shut up for once and listen to me."

¹ A literal translation there would be, "My heart embittered itself and my insides pierced themselves."

Talk to God about Your Sorrows

“Does that mean I can never think about my hardships?”

No, I’m not saying that. When painful things happen to you, you need to process what happened. The point isn’t to just ignore reality and pretend nothing is wrong. You can think about your troubles, but there is a way to do that that will drag you down into despair and there is a way to do it that will keep your joy intact. Here’s the rule of thumb: Talk to God about your troubles, and talk to yourself about God. If something painful happened, process it all you want, but do that in prayer. If you are talking to God about your troubles, that will keep God in your view the whole time you’re thinking about the trouble, and you won’t be prone to forget that you have a Savior and a refuge, and so it won’t drag you into depression.

Pour Out Your Soul

When your soul is in anguish, that is the time when your prayers will tend to be the most powerful, because that is when they will tend to be passionate.

42:4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul

If you want to know what pouring out your soul means, we see it in vivid, living color in 1 Samuel 1, when Hannah was praying her heart out because she was childless.

1 Samuel 1:10 In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. ... 12 As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk 14 and said to her, “How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine.” 15 “Not so, my lord,” Hannah replied, “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD.”

The reason my mouth was moving without me realizing it was because it wasn’t an ordinary prayer. I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. So to pour out your soul means to pray with such intensity that you are oblivious to your surroundings, nothing else in life matters, and your anguish drives you to desperation before God. It is kind of similar to the figure of speech a coach uses when he talks about “leaving it all out on the field.” You leave it all there on the prayer closet floor.

What you do with all the pain and sorrow and agony in your soul when you are suffering? Are you supposed to just bottle it up and pretend it isn’t there? No, do what this guy did – pour out all your frustrations and disappointments and confusion and fear and worry – pour all that out, but pour it out to God, not to yourself. Pouring it out to yourself is just inner grumbling and self-pity, which is the fastest, surest highway to depression. If you talk to yourself about your sorrows, and pour out your heart to yourself, you will develop a “woe is me” perspective, which will end up making it impossible for you to even see God’s blessings on your life.

Talk to Yourself about God

So talk to God about your sorrows, and talk to your self about God.

Why are you downcast O my soul? ... Put your hope in God!

There are two parts to what he says to his soul. When you stop listening to your Eeyore self and start talking to it instead, what do you say? Two things.

The Folly of Depression

First, remind yourself of the folly of depression.

Psalm 43:5 Why are you downcast ... Why so disturbed within me?

That question is in the form of a rebuke. “What are you doing downcast? You don’t have any business being downcast.”

Given the kind of God we serve, being downcast and disturbed is irrational. When you become downcast, it’s because Eeyore has forgotten what God is like. Why be disturbed if you have got a Savior and Refuge? It’s kind of like that question in Micah 4:9.

Micah 4:9 Why do you now cry aloud—have you no king? Has your counselor perished, that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labor?

That’s what you can preach to your soul.

“What’s the matter, soul? Has your Savior died?”

We all go through the dark night of the soul, but when you do, does your reaction make it seem like God has died, or that God is more real than ever? Martin Luther was prone to depression, and one morning when he was particularly down his wife Katie came downstairs dressed all in black. Luther asked why she was dressed for a funeral, and Katie said, “Because evidently God has died.” She was making the same argument that Micah was making, and that the writer of Psalm 42 was making with his own soul. You can’t have a clear view of who God is and what He is to you and at the same time be discouraged and depressed. Emotions are a response to your assessment of the way things are. And the way things are, for someone who has God as his rock and the gladness of his rejoicing, is really, really good.

So when he rebukes himself for being downcast, it’s not just a rebuke. It is corrective. He doesn’t say, “Why are you downcast, stupid soul? What’s the matter with you? You’re such a lame Christian – you’re probably not even saved.” The purpose isn’t to beat up on yourself. Beating up on yourself will only perpetuate more self-pity, which will make the problem worse. Preach to yourself not about you, but about God. Remind yourself that you have no business being downcast, and then explain why. You have no business being downcast because you have a Savior that is worthy of hope. That is why part 3 of this series was so crucial - where we talked about understanding the nature of God. God is worthy of our trust. When you have the right conception of God, it doesn’t matter how things look. It doesn’t matter how the circumstances shake out. You are so confident that God is powerful and God is good, that no set of circumstances will shake your faith. Spurgeon: “When you cannot trace God’s hand you must trust his heart.” When you look at God’s hand – what he’s doing, and it doesn’t seem to make any sense, you trust his heart. You say, “I can’t make heads or tails out of what God is doing, I just know God is powerful and God is kind. He is in charge of everything that’s happening, and he is for me, not against me. So what is happening is ultimately for my benefit, even if I can’t imagine how.”

Resolve to have five delightful thoughts about God for every one thought about your troubles. If a discouraging thought comes to mind, respond by thinking, “OK, what are five wonderful truths about God?”

- 1) God is patient (then take a few moments to think about examples God’s patience with you)
- 2) God is faithful (then a few moments pondering why His faithfulness is such a great thing)
- 3) God is kind...” and keep going until you get five.

Then you get another anxious thought – five more.

It’s hard to control your thoughts when life gets really unfair. Eeyore gets really loud. No matter how hard you try to divert your thoughts to something else, anxious thoughts just pop back up every few seconds. Any time you struggle with obsessive thoughts like that, the solution is to crowd those thoughts out with something that takes enough concentration to use up all your attention. One thing I like to do if my thoughts are running away and obsessing about something and I want to regain control, I’ll think of one attribute of God for each letter of the alphabet. Try that. And after each letter stop and thank God for being that way toward you. That takes enough mental energy that you can’t do anything else while you’re doing it. And if you are still struggling at the end, go through again with a different attribute for each letter. Talk to God about your troubles, and talk to yourself about God.

Hope in God

And the main thing you need to tell your Eeyore self about God is that he alone is worthy of your hope.

43:5 Why are you downcast O my soul? ... Put your hope in God!

Hope is when something really great is going to happen in the future, and you are so sure that it's going to happen, and that you're going to like it, that you already feel good now. Any time thinking about something you have coming up makes you feel happy right now, that feeling is hope. And you need that to live. Depression is lack of hope.

And very often it is caused by placing your hope in something that ultimately disappoints you. It sounds like that's what this guy did. Evidently, he had slipped into putting his hope in being treated fairly. So when these people treated him unfairly, he got discouraged. He had his hope in people telling the truth about him, so when they lied about him, it killed his joy. Maybe his hope was in his plans going well and for things to turn out the way he expected, so when they didn't, it got him down. We put our hope in all kinds of things that are unworthy of hope.

"How do you know if something is unworthy of hope?"

Something is unworthy of hope if it might let you down. Never put your hope in something that might let you down.

It is perfectly okay to look forward to it or to enjoy it, as long as you don't put your hope in it. How do you know if your hope is in it? If you lose it, and find yourself downcast, then you know your hope was in that thing and not in God. That's what this guy is discovering. Some things went wrong, his soul got downcast, and so now he realizes he has a hope problem. So he says to his soul, "Why are you downcast Eeyore? Put your hope in God."

If you want to see this principle in action, take a look at Lamentations 3. The writer of Lamentations had full-blown, clinical depression in the extreme. He is so miserable, by the time you're done reading the first half of chapter 3, you'll be depressed. This guy has zero hope ... until verse 21. After all that misery, suddenly something happens and in verse 21 and he has hope. How did he go from abject depression to suddenly having hope? Did his circumstances change? No, the only thing that happened was he called something to mind.

Lamentations 3:19 I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. 20 I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me.

Now here comes verse 21:

21 Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope

What did he call to mind?

22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

In the depths of his depression he just got to thinking about God's compassion and His faithfulness and His love and His creativity. And suddenly he had something to look forward to. What? Whatever this marvelous, loving, faithful, creative God is going to dream up in my future. You see, you don't have to know what God is going to do; you only have to know what kind of God is going to do it. He is creative. Isn't it true that over this past year, God gave you some gifts that He never gave you before? Hasn't He given you new insights into His Word that you never knew before? Maybe a friendship reaching levels it has never reached before? Sunsets and sunrises different from anything you've seen before? New appreciation of foods, new restaurants? Most of us probably can't even remember 99% of the new mercies that came for the very first time in our lives in 2015, but if we had bothered to write them down when they happened, it would be reams of paper. 2015 was one of the most painful years of my life, and yet it was loaded with new expressions of God's love. A year ago, when I turned 47, it seemed like I'd

seen pretty much everything. If you asked me then, “What new thing could God give you?” I would have been at a loss. And yet there were countless new gifts from heaven. That’s the way it’s going to be forever. That is why heaven will never get boring, because God’s mercies will be new every day forever.

“But how can I get excited about what God has in store for 2016 if I don’t know what it is?”

The joy doesn’t come from knowing what it might be. It comes from knowing what God is like. The writer of Lamentations didn’t say, “I’m miserable and depressed, and yet I have hope because I just thought of this great thing God might do in the future.” He didn’t think of anything specific – he just thought about what God is like. He called to mind God’s faithfulness, love, mercy, and creativity. Just thinking about the fact that God is like that made Jeremiah realize that blessing IS around the corner. You don’t have to see a light at the end of the tunnel. All you need is to think about the nature of the God of the tunnel.

My son Josiah has the gift of giving. When I get a Christmas present from him, I know two things:

- 1) It probably won’t be anything that was on my list
- 2) I’ll probably like it more than anything that I put on my list

He is just really generous and really creative. And so when you get a gift from someone like that, you get excited even while the gift is still in the box. And the fact that you can’t imagine what it might be makes it even more exciting.

When you look at your future and it doesn’t bring joy, it’s because you have forgotten what God is like. Focus on his character. And the more specific and detailed the understanding of God’s character the greater the hope. “God is loving” is too general. Jeremiah was more specific than that. Not just love, but creative love.

Lamentations 3:22-23 ... for his compassions ... are new every morning

Have you ever stopped to appreciate the fact that it was God who made mornings? When God created the world, Genesis 1 makes a point of saying He divided time into days, which gives us all a new beginning every twenty-four hours. Can you imagine if there were no days – time just droned on incessantly and you could never say, “I’ll try again tomorrow” or “I’ll start fresh next week”? God is a God of new beginnings and fresh starts, and He even built that into the creation with days and weeks and months and seasons and years.

Zephaniah 3:5 The Lord ... is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail...

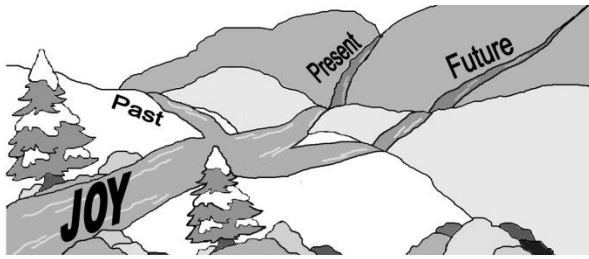
Jeremiah called to mind the fact that God is creative in the ways He blesses His people. And if a God like that is in charge of my future – I’ve got something to look forward to! I can’t imagine what. The gift is still wrapped up in the box, but I know what He’s like, and so I’m excited.

Jeremiah didn’t try to comfort himself by minimizing his suffering. He did not say, “Well, at least this didn’t happen...” No – he saw his suffering for what it was – real suffering. But he was comforted in the midst of that suffering by turning his attention away from his circumstances and to the character of God, from whom flows an inexhaustible fountain of creative kindness. If you struggle with depression, spend what little energy you have focusing on the goodness of God. Not only does God have infinite wisdom to guide you in life, infinite resources to provide for you, infinite knowledge to teach you, infinite mercy to care for you, infinite compassion to comfort you, infinite love to restore you, and infinite strength to protect you; but on top of that He has also given future promises that are wonderful beyond imagination or comprehension.

Give Thanks

So when you preach to your Eeyore soul, what do you talk about? Talk about what God is like, and the implications for your future. And while you’re at it, talk about what God has been like in the past. One of the iron bars that will lock you into depression forever is ingratitude. But thankfulness can awaken joy because it enables you to enjoy God’s goodness in the past. Remember when we started this study we

talked about in joy in God past, present, and future? All three of those streams have to be flowing in order for you to have enough joy.



If one of those streams gets choked off, your flow of joy won't be enough to make it over the rocks of hardship and suffering. And one of the things that will clog up the stream of joy flowing in from the past is ingratitude.

It doesn't matter how much

God has blessed you in the past, how many joyful, wonderful, delightful experiences you've had – ingratitude will make it impossible for you to get joy in your life from the past. Ingratitude makes you remember the hard things and forget about the wonderful things.

Fellowship

When the psalmist looks back into his past for some joy, he specifically mentions gratitude.

42:4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

And as an aside – notice that when he remembers God's past goodness, it is in the context of fellowship.

42:4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

His joy was all wrapped up with fellowship. When you get depressed, you don't have the energy to deal with social interaction, so you will tend to withdraw. But all that does is make the depression worse.

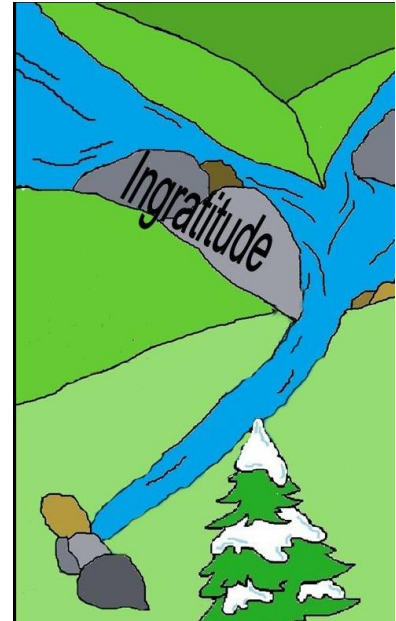
Elijah ran for 100 miles, then he left his companion and went off by himself into the desert and just wandered for a whole day, and finally collapsed under a broom tree and begged God to take his life. Going off by yourself is not going to help – you need to get around some people who have enough energy to keep pointing you to hope even when you don't have the energy. Paul had overflowing joy even in the midst of horrible suffering, and one of the main sources of that joy was simply remembering the saints and being thankful for them.

Philippians 1:3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your fellowship in the gospel...

God gives us joy, in large measure, through his people.

If you want to have a robust joy, pay attention to the joy of other people during corporate praise. Pause periodically throughout the morning to thank God for some delightful characteristic you see in one of the saints around you. That helps me. I have some precious memories from the hundreds of times I've sat there in the front row worshiping with all of you. There been times when your voices just cascaded over my troubled soul, and the problems that seemed so overwhelming on Saturday faded from view as my soul rejoiced in being surrounded by a hundred other people who desire the glory of God. Once in a while I'll hear certain voices and my heart is just flooded with love for that dear saint that I'm hearing.

Let the joy of fellowship in the church lodge in your memory. File it away in a place that is easily and readily accessible. Sometimes I'll remember feeling the sense of being used by God in ministry, and it lifts my spirits.



I'll remember times at the Lord's Table when God spoke the gospel to me in powerful ways, like a few months ago when Andrew made the comments about Jesus praying for me. I remember the supernatural times in this room. I think of all the souls that passed from death to life in this room. I think of the grace that poured over people to bring spiritual strength and health, and all the moments when God opens someone's eyes to some marvelous truth from His Word in this room. So many times, thinking about all that has just melted the icicles of my sorrows to nothing.

And if you want to know the secret of having memories of amazing moments of fellowship with God's people, here's one: have lots of moments of fellowship with God's people. The more moments of fellowship you have with God's people, the more often one of those amazing moments will come (assuming you have the right attitude). There is a reason why the people in Acts 2:42, from the very first days the church existed, were *devoted* to fellowship. When the writer of this psalm slips into darkness and depression, he fights for joy by remembering times of delightful fellowship with God's people.

Count Your Blessings

So that's the end of the sidebar about fellowship. But the main point here is that of the connection between gratitude and joy. Turn your heart toward thanksgiving to God.

How many good meals has God given you in your life?

How many breaths of air?

Has God ever provided you any money or possessions?

How many times in your lifetime has God caused the sun to rise in the morning?

How many of His raindrops or snowflakes have benefited you?

How many people has God given you to love?

How many days has God spent watching you sin or waiting for you to repent?

Has he provided forgiveness for you sins?

How many of your sins has He forgiven?

What did it cost Him to provide that forgiveness?

Isn't it true that He adopted you into His family?

Didn't He give you a spiritual gift, and a special calling into His service in His church?

Doesn't He pour out grace to you through other people spiritual gifts and through the Scriptures and through the creation?

Don't you have the Holy Spirit living inside you, who is working to conform you to the image of Christ every day?

And did God give you countless great and precious promises, and aren't those promises yes and Amen in Christ Jesus?

Hasn't He promised you guidance and provision in spiritual riches and spiritual fruit and love and peace and protection and intimacy and friendship and rewards?

Hasn't He blessed you in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ?

Didn't He say that He is going to wipe away every tear from your eye and give you a seat at His table and lavish you with everlasting, exuberant, rich, deep, profound, perfect joy forever?

And total deliverance from sin forever?

And the privilege of living with God face-to-face forever?

If He didn't hesitate to give you His own Son, what good thing do you think He is going to withhold from you? Gratitude enables you to enjoy good things God has done ... again. You enjoyed them when they happened, and you can enjoy them again now through gratitude.

Self-Pity

The opposite of that is self-pity. When you fall in to self-pity, you turn a blind eye to all of God's blessings and focus only on the things that are going wrong. Self-pity will block off all three streams – past, present, and future.

But this guy hasn't given in to self-pity. We can tell that because when he thinks about the past, he remembers blessings rather than hardships. You can tell you are infected with self-pity when your soul spends most of its time staring at your troubles, and very little time considering your blessings. But this guy isn't doing that. He still saying things like this:

42:8 By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life.

There's a huge difference between self-pity and godly sorrow. Godly sorrow recognizes hardship for what it is, and weeps. But self-pity makes hardship the only thing it sees, and ignores blessing. It is not necessarily a sin to feel down emotionally, or to have waves of sorrow or depression and darkness come over you. The key is, when that happens, to keep God's blessings in view. Then you can be like Paul - struck down, but not destroyed. Self-pity basically just gives up in the fight for joy.

The bias of your soul is exposed by the objects of its memory. When you go into the warehouse where all your memories are stored - which items are you going to pull off the shelf? Memories that will further your self-pity? Or memories that will spark gratitude toward God?

Take time to think about what God has done in the past, take time to connect the dots in your mind between those wonderful things in God's love for you, and give thanks. Just start taking those things off the shelf one by one and enjoying them, and offering God thanks for them, and you will feel the joy start to come back. Try to make that a routine at several points in your day each day. One thing I like to do is to thank God for one marvelous thing He did in the past 24 hours, one thing He did in the last several years, one thing He did in the past 2000 years, and one thing He did in biblical history. For a while I had a routine of doing that every night right before bed. It's a great way to gain joy from God's past kindness, because it reminds you what He's like.

Conclusion

If you are fighting for joy but the darkness still hasn't lifted, hang in there. Don't give up. Don't grow weary in well doing because at the proper time you will reap a harvest if you don't give up (Gal.6:9). Persevere. You know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). Don't lose heart. Even if you are wasting away on the outside, remember that inwardly you can be renewed day by day. Your light and momentary troubles are achieving for you an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. Fix your eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen (2 Cor. 4:16-18). The principles we have learned in this series *will* work. They will. Draw near to God, and joy will come. The closer you approach to his presence the more the darkness will give way to light. So don't give up fighting.

Fight hard against the six joy-killing pitfalls that push you far from God's presence:

1. Sin in your life that isn't dealt with
2. Self-pity and inner grumbling
3. Ingratitude
4. Listening to your Eeyore self instead of speaking to it
5. Pouring out your soul to yourself instead of God
6. Placing your hope in the wrong things

If you really want your joy back...

- Confess and repent of sin in your life (go to the altar).
- Reject every trace of self-pity or inner grumbling.
- Fill up your life with thanksgiving and gratitude toward God.
- Talk to God about your troubles, and talk to yourself about God.
- Put your hope in God alone and never in things that disappoint.

Benediction: 1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Describe your life right now in terms of the Jeep illustration (stuck and sinking into the mud, wheels spinning and barely moving, rough road but decent traction, flying down the highway, etc.). How would you describe your inner conversation about that (inspiring faith, hope, and courage, stimulating doubt, discouragement, and fear? Christ-centered, trouble-centered, faith driven, fear driven, etc.).
- 2) Which of the six joykillers from the sermon is the biggest problem in your life? (Unrepentant sin, self-pity and inner grumbling, ingratitude, listening to your Eeyore self instead of speaking to it, pouring out your soul to yourself instead of God, placing your hope in the wrong things)
- 3) Which solutions come most naturally to you? (Confess and repent of sin in your life, reject self-pity or inner grumbling, gratitude toward God, talk to God about your troubles and talk to yourself about God, put your hope in God alone and never in things that disappoint). Is there one of those solutions you especially want to work on?