

*“ If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,” even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. ” – Psalm 139:11-12*

There are many different forms and experiences of depression – what is true for one is not necessarily true for all. Tim referenced two broad categories ‘spiritual depression’ and ‘clinical depression’. You should expect to walk free from spiritual depression which shouldn’t be your ‘steady state’ your 24/7 situation – this is a form of depression which will affect all of us. Clinical depression, is an illness of the mind, as arthritis is an illness of the bones and anaemia of the blood – this condition requires a miracle to be set free from – just as much as arthritis does – God can do it, and I believe we should ask Him to, but He may not in this lifetime. However, faith and enjoyment of God is not dependent upon mental capacities, on good mental health – it rests on grace always and for all

**Read Psalm 23**

### **1. Fields of Green Grass (verse 1-3)**

The first and immediate lesson to learn here is this: God is the shepherd - which makes you a sheep. This picture is an extremely helpful one, not least as it comes from David who spent many years working with sheep and he concludes ‘yep, I’m a sheep’. A ‘good shepherd’ knows his sheep. He can identify and name them. When they call to their sheep, the animal hears the voice of the shepherd and will follow. It is a voice they have come to trust, ‘that’s my shepherd calling – he has somewhere better for me to be, therefore I must follow Him’.

Green grass and calm waters - it is a picture of safety, security and peace. Do not doubt that this is precisely how our Lord Jesus works in our lives - seeking to lead us to a place of peace, provision and rest. Notice the language David uses - first person, very personal experience. Also notice the testimony language, it’s bearing witness. David is telling others of present experience of God. David is reflecting to others what he has come to enjoy and understand. This is a man who sounds very happy and content in God – celebrating God’s goodness and faithfulness. David knows that ‘green pastures’ and ‘still waters’ are the destination the Good Shepherd’s has for his sheep.

**What’s your response to being called ‘a sheep’? How is it encouraging to know we are led by God to ‘green pastures’?**

### **2. When the Grass Isn’t Green (verse 4-7)**

David is no longer looking out horizontally – telling those around him of the green grass he is enjoying. In this moment, it’s as if his eyes look up – and he begins to speak truth to his soul. David is now entering into a season where he needs to speak truth to himself because he doesn’t have what he had in verses 1-3. He isn’t in this moment telling the world how green the grass is; he is telling his heart how faithful his God is.

During times of depression, when the experience God’s presence is hard to find, bitterness calls to you, alcohol calls to you, pornography calls to you, gambling calls to you, greed calls to you; ‘come follow me, let me be your shepherd’. Sick sheep are extremely vulnerable and are at risk of following the stranger’s voice.

**What challenges can we face when it feels hard to experience God’s presence?**

### **3. Preach to Yourself**

‘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? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man’s treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, “Self, listen for moment, I will speak to you.”’ - *Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones*

**Can you relate to Lloyd-Jones description? How can our souls be ‘cast down’, and how do we respond?**

**Read 2 Corinthians 10:5**

Here’s the most common path to depression: entertaining a pattern of thinking that is opposed to God’s plan – a lustful thought, malicious thought, greed or envy. The moment that thought presents, you have a decision – to take the thought captive. If repentance doesn’t happen at this point, then a cycle of behaviour can kick in - before you know it you’re in a rut.

**How can we take practical steps to help capture the first thought?**

### **4. Hope not Condemnation**

Clinical depression is not the same thing. Mental health is wide-ranging. Illnesses of the mind are out of the control of the person affected by them – but they can directly impact the enjoyment of God (although not necessarily). For those with clinical depression, there is not that initial thought to take captive, and no reason to feel condemned – although there is hope in Jesus.

Nor should the spiritually depressed be condemned. Those who did not capture the initial thought and are caught in a pattern of thinking opposed to God. In Christ there is no condemnation – but there is conviction. Our hope does not come from feeling guilty and down about our behaviour. Our hope is in Christ. He will convict us – show us what we are doing wrong. He will lead us to repentance – to turn from that behaviour.

Jesus is our hope and our truth. He sympathises with us in our dark times. He was a man of sorrows. He experienced spiritual depression on the cross – cut off and alone, feeling forsaken by God. Jesus knows what it is like to suffer. We are known by Him during our suffering too.

**What role do we have to bring hope for those feeling condemned or trapped by depression and darkness?**