

Second Sunday Q & A
What Does the Bible Say about Overcoming
Depression and Anxiety?

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Assembly

Introduction:

As is our custom, the second Sunday night is reserved for answering questions that have been submitted by members or guests of the congregation. This month, our question is not doctrinal in nature, but practical. "What does the Bible say about overcoming depression and anxiety?"

According to **Galatians 5:22**, two of the fruit of the Spirit are joy and peace. In **Philippians 4:7, 9**, the promise of the Gospel is that the peace of God which surpasses all our ability to understand should guard our hearts and minds. When God promises this, why are Christians facing depression and anxiety as often as folks in the world? I do recognize that where people are facing actual medical conditions, they will need medical help. I do not wish to minimize that at all. Further, nothing I say in this lesson should be construed as a medical opinion about how to deal with medical problems. Having said that, I think we must all be very careful. We live in a day and time when every sin with which we struggle is given a supposed medical reason. We can very easily be handed pills that alter our moods when what many need is to change their behavior. Whatever choice we make, let us make sure we do not mask sin with medicine.

So, what does the Bible say about overcoming issues such as depression and anxiety? No doubt, we are all aware of **Philippians 4:6** which instructs us to cast our cares upon the Lord and He will care for us. But, if you are like me, you wonder exactly how we do that. Does that mean simply pray or is there more to it? I think there is more. I think there is a lifestyle we must adopt that will, over time, replace our depression and anxiety with peace, joy and comfort. Before we look at that lifestyle, let me say it is not simple, nor instantaneous. It will take work and time. If you are depressed or anxious today, there is nothing I can say that will have the problem fixed by tomorrow. There are no band-aids for this, only a change of life based on the word of God.

With all of this background, where can we go to find out how to have joy and peace? **Matthew 5:3-10** provides God's answer to depression and anxiety. In these verses, He explains how we can be blessed, that is, how we can have a joyous, contented happiness based upon the gifts of God in our life. These beatitudes are a guide for casting our cares, even our very lives, upon the Lord, which will, in turn, provide us with joy, peace, contentment that guards our hearts and minds.

Discussion:

- I. Blessed are the poor in spirit who mourn.
 - A. Jesus' statement seems counterintuitive. How can the mourning broken in spirit overcome depression and anxiety? It would seem these, by definition, are filled with depression and anxiety. What this demonstrates to me is depression and anxiety may not be the utter darkness we often think they are. In fact, if dealt with properly, these are the very beginning of having true joy and peace. The problem is, we often approach these issues incorrectly. We think it is bad to be depressed and have anxiety so we try everything we can to cheer people up, to pump them up, to make them feel better about themselves. Perhaps what we need to do instead, is help each other embrace what our depression and anxiety says about ourselves. We are weak, helpless and hopeless.
 - B. In **Romans 12:3**, Paul says we should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Yet, most of the time, when someone faces brokenness, we spend all our time trying to get them to think more highly of themselves. The problem is, we have all sinned (**Romans 3:23; Ephesians 2:1-3**). Because of that, we have no hope in the world (**Ephesians 2:12**). We are weak, helpless and hopeless if we continue to rely on ourselves. If we continue to pump ourselves up and try to make ourselves feel good about ourselves, we will never do any better than what Paul describes in **Romans 7:7-24**. We will constantly think we should do better than we are doing, we will constantly try and we will constantly fail. We will constantly have an emotional roller coaster as we pump ourselves up, only to fail ourselves again and again.
 - C. Instead, let us embrace our brokenness. Let us embrace our weakness and our inability to be worthy and valuable on our own. Only when we truly recognize how broken we are, will we turn to the source of strength who will comfort us by granting us the kingdom. Only then will we be

able to say along with Paul in **Romans 7:25** that Jesus Christ will deliver us from this body of death. Only then will we be able to say with Paul that because we are weak, we are strong in Christ (**II Corinthians 12:9-10**).

- II. Blessed are the meek who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- A. No doubt, a major problem for some is being caught in their depression and anxiety and never going anywhere with it. While we have presented those mental and emotional states in perhaps a better light than we normally think, we must not believe we will accomplish anything by merely resting in our depression and anxiety. Rather, our depression and anxiety should cause us to recognize our own weakness, hopelessness and helplessness, causing us to turn somewhere else for strength, peace and joy—turning to Jesus.
 - B. We could, no doubt, spend an entire hour or more discussing the meaning of meekness (or gentleness in some translations). Instead, suffice it to say that meekness “is the attitude of heart so emptied of self it turns to the only source of strength and support it knows—God. Gentleness is not living a weak life because it cannot be helped. It lives a life of personal choice and strength held in check to follow the will of the One whose will is best. Gentleness lives in voluntary obedience to the One whose will is right.”¹
 - C. The meek and gentle demonstrate their utter submission to God by their hunger and thirst for righteousness. The word for hunger in **Matthew 5:6** is the same one used in the previous chapter to describe Jesus’ hunger after His forty day fast. This is absolute hunger. But the hunger is for righteousness. It is not for fortune, fame or influence. It is for the righteousness that comes only from God. Consider the example of Paul in **Philippians 3:3-11**. Here was one who meekly hungered and thirsted for righteousness. He was so hungry, he was willing to give everything up to meekly submit to God and His will.
 - D. If we wish to be blessed, if we wish to have joy, peace, contentment and true happiness we have to be willing to count everything else as rubbish. We have to be willing to give everything else up as loss in order to attain righteousness. Too often, we want enough righteousness to get us into heaven while we cling to our other hungers as well. God has promised, if we meekly submit to Him, pursuing His righteousness above all else, we will be satisfied. I know that is hard for us who are constantly falling to fathom. But God has promised we will be satisfied. If we continue in our hunger for money, for power, for fame or even just for happiness, we will never be satisfied. Consider the Preacher of Ecclesiastes in **Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:17**. His conclusion was that life was vain and he hated it when he pursued other courses. Depression and anxiety will become the mainstay in our lives. However, when we meekly submit to God, hungering for His righteousness, He will give it to us. We will be satisfied. Even the **Ecclesiastes** writer recognized that in the end proclaiming our entire purpose is to fear God and keep His commandments (**Ecclesiastes 12:13**). No doubt, we will have lapses. We will have times when we return to God in mourning for repeated sins. However, knowing His forgiveness for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, we have contentment and peace. But, let me repeat, this only comes when we are willing to cut off all the other things for which we hunger. If God blesses us with other things, fine. But if we are trying to pursue them alongside righteousness, we will always fall short. We will always linger in depression and anxiety.
- III. Blessed are the merciful pure in heart.
- A. The previous beatitudes have focused on our own mental states and our own personal goals. Jesus now explains that blessedness, true joy, peace, contentment and happiness depend on how we relate to others—including our relationships with other people and our relationship with God. If we wish to be blessed, we must be merciful and pure in heart.
 - B. The mercy refers to our relationship with others. According to Bullinger, being merciful means to be “actively compassionate, not merely unhappy for the ills of others...but desirous of relieving

¹ Edwin Crozier, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, Streamside Supplies, Spring Hill, TN, 2006, p 70.

them; not merely pity, but beneficent aid promptly applied.”² The great biblical example of mercy is found in **Luke 10:30-37**. The Samaritan showed mercy to the robbed and beaten Jew. Mercy is showing active compassion. It means doing more than telling those in need to be warmed and be filled but rather to invite them in saying, “Let me warm and fill you” (cf. **James 2:16**). Mercy means seeing those in need and filling their needs. Mercy means doing good to everyone as we have opportunity, especially for those of the household of faith. Here is the crux of this beatitude. We often say God helps those who help themselves. This beatitude demonstrates that God actually helps those who help others. If we wish to have peace, joy, contentment and true happiness based on the blessed gifts of God, we need to quit pursuing all the mercy we want from God and start striving to grant mercy to those around us.

- C. But we must also focus on our relationship with God. We may be tempted to think the pure in heart refers to the concept of having our sins removed. However, in the context of the beatitudes, that was already accomplished in being satisfied with righteousness. This purity actually deals with being single of heart. As **James 4:8** says, “Purify your hearts, you double-minded” (ESV). When our heart is divided in loyalty, it has become impure. If we wish to have blessed peace, joy and contentment, we must be singly devoted to loving and serving God. Only when we are intently devoted to Him, will we be able to see Him. By seeing Him, we do not only mean to see Him in the end for eternity, but being able to see Him even now. Only through single-hearted devotion will we be able to see His hand even as we endure the bad things of this life. Only through single-hearted devotion will we be able to know that His hand surrounds us no matter what we face in this life. Only through single-hearted devotion can we know that our God has not abandoned us but is with us every step of the way (**Hebrews 13:5-6**).
- D. Thus, if we want to have peace, contentment, joy and happiness, overcoming our depressions and anxieties, we have to be less focused on ourselves and more focused on God and others.

IV. Blessed are the peacemakers who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

- A. Finally, if we want true peace, joy, happiness and contentment based on the sure blessings of God instead of the fickle emotions caused by circumstance, we need to take what we have been given by God and get it out to others. It simply makes sense that if we have two great loves, being purely and singly devoted to God and also working daily to bestow mercy on others that we will want to bring these two relationships together. We will want to help others overcome their depressions and anxiety by working on their relationship with the only one who can give them peace and joy beyond comprehension. We will take the message of brokenness, mourning, meekness, hungering for righteousness, mercy and purity to others, not to put them in their place. We will not do so to prove we are better. We will not do so to show superiority. We will do so to help them have peace, joy, contentment through salvation in Jesus Christ. Amazingly, through our attempts to help others, we ourselves will be helped, reminded of what God has done for us, blessed by that knowledge.
- B. No doubt, many don't want to hear it. Many, though wanting to overcome their depression and anxiety, will not wish to do so by embracing their brokenness and turning to Christ, submitting entirely to His will. Therefore, many will persecute and malign us. However, even in those moments of hardship, we are so grounded and rested in the strength and blessing of God that our peace, joy and contentment is not hindered. Rather, like the apostles, even at those times we rejoice because we have been able to suffer for Jesus' name (**Acts 5:41**).

Conclusion:

Through this kind of lifestyle we are casting our cares upon God. Through complete submission to Him, we are saying, “Lord, take care of my life and my problems.” Yes, we must pray. We must ask for God's help. However, peace and joy do not come through a magical period of prayer that takes over our heart. Peace and joy come from turning away from self and turning to God. This won't happen overnight. But, if you work on it daily, it will happen. You too can be blessed, bearing the fruit of joy and peace that passes all understanding.

² E.W. Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1975, p. 495.