

Introduction

This is a sermon I preached at Raleigh RTP SDA that talks about the ways we go through difficult times. I Go through a lot of points that can also be found in "The Wounded Spirit" by Tim Keller, add a few of my own points, and then talk about my person experience going through a very difficult time my Sophmore year of college.

TLDR: Skip to the "Hope Through it" section of the article

Hope You are Blessed!

We will go through difficult times

The bible is clear, we WILL go through difficult times. **Psalm 34:19 (NKJV)**

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the Lord delivers him out of them all.

John 16:33 (NKJV)

33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. **In the world you will have tribulation;** but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Ecclesiastes 11:8 (NKJV)

Indeed, if a person lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but **let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many.** Everything that is to come will be futility.

And we will specifically be referring to difficult times as exactly that, "days of darkness".

I define days of darkness as any of the following:

- Lack of will to live life
- Lack of hope
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Among other things

And everyone uses a combination ways to respond to these days of darkness. The ones that I can think of re and we'll be talking about are.

- Ignore It

- Relativize it
- Explain it
- Accept it

There may be more but we'll be talking about these points mainly.

And the goal is that by the end of this message, we can deal with the dark days in a way that gives life to our lives.

Ignore it

This is the one way we do not see in the bible people responding to the darkness they feel in life.

Psalms 57:2 (NKJV)

2 I will cry out to God Most High, To God who performs all things for me.

Psalms 88:1-2 (NKJV)

88 O Lord, God of my salvation, **I have cried out day and night before You.** 2 Let my prayer come before You; Incline Your ear to my cry.

We see people always end up crying out to God in the midst of their troubles. We never see anyone in the bible ignoring how they feel.

They not only cry out to God, they often do more than what most people would imagine pious bible characters would do.

Psalms 88:15-16 (NKJV)

15 I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth; **I suffer Your terrors; I am distraught.**
16 Your fierce wrath has gone over me; Your terrors have cut me off.

No one would imagine a pious person in the bible ever saying things like this.

Lamentations 3:4-6 (NKJV)

4 He has aged my flesh and my skin, And broken my bones. 5 He has besieged me And surrounded me with bitterness and woe. 6 He has set me in dark places Like the dead of long ago.

So we not only see people in the bible recognizing their pain, they cry out to God often in anger. They scream out to God!

This is not to say that ignoring it is wrong at times, but we can certainly see ignoring the dark days not bring us through every dark day.

Relativize it

There likely is a more specific term for this, but this is usually when you're reminded (typically by another person) that you're suffering isn't the worst suffering in the world.

For a good deal of things this work. When you complain or get frustrated about your airpods not fitting in your ear perfectly, it's a good reminder. Or when you sprain your ankle and have to let the people around you know about the excruciating pain every other minute so we can sympathize with you.

And there is no recorded mention in the bible of relativizing the dark times we go through besides one which we'll talk about later. I say this to say this may work sometimes, but is not always the most perfect way to explain away dark times we go through.

This doesn't work with everything though, since as far as we can tell, in our own experience we have it pretty bad and our dark times can feel unbearable even if we know other people have had it worse.

Explain it

I want to talk about this delicately, and I want to be clear that I'm not making a generalization here, but talking about specific cases.

Often times there are obvious reasons why we fall into dark days.

One of my favorite sermons by the preacher Tim Keller actually tackles this very problem and gives a unique view. In the sermon he talks about how if you look at people who try to help you when you through dark days, often times they will try to say the reason why you feel this way is because of one thing.

The term he uses is reductionistic. So many people don't honor the complexity of human beings and how so many different aspects of our complexity can be bring us down.

The Bible, on the other hand, has scriptures that talk about many aspects of our life that may lead us into dark days.

Medical

Proverbs 14:30 (NKJV)

30 A sound heart is life to the body, But envy is rottenness to the bones.

This talks about how the emotional health is tied to physical health, the opposite is true also. Often times our physical health can affect our emotional health or bring us into dark days.

If you're not eating right, or not getting any exercise you can experience dark times. The slightest chemical imbalance can throw your entire day into darkness.

Those of you who know people with thyroid issues, my mother being one. The slightest chemical imbalance can cause you to lose the hope to live

Just this week I had trouble getting work done or wanting to get work done, and it wasn't until I realized I hadn't been drinking enough water and went out to buy a big water bottle that I started to feel more energy to get things done.

Emotional Relational

Proverbs 12:25 (NKJV)

25 Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, But a good word makes it glad.

Sometimes what we need is someone to show us a little love. There have been times I'm sure many of us have felt loneliness or just a desire to hear someone's kind voice or just to be with people. Not having that for a long time can lead you to dark days. Sometimes you just need some love

Moral

Proverbs 28:1 (NKJV)

28 The wicked flee when no one pursues, But the righteous are bold as a lion.

This is a reference to an earlier biblical passage that said when people do wrong, fail morally, they'll flee, they'll run away, though no one pursues them. This is talking about guilt, conscious.

You can go into dark times because of shame and guilt over some way you believe like you haven't lived up to the standard

Existential and Philosophical

Proverbs 14:13 (NKJV)

13 Even in laughter the heart may sorrow, And the end of mirth may be grief.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 (NKJV)

5 For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward,
For the memory of them is forgotten.

Not going to go too deep into this, but we can fall into dark times because we remember that we're going to die. In high school this terrified me, paralyzed me. Thinking about how one day I was going to die shook me to my core.

If we don't have someone or something help us with that problem, some school of thought we'll more than likely at points in our life be consumed with how vane living life can be.

Life can feel like nothing more than how the author of Ecclesiastes says in **Ecclesiastes 2:18 (NKJV)**

18 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

He went into days of darkness, he found no join in life.

Hope Deferred

Proverbs 13:12 (NKJV)

12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.

Hope deferred means something you putting your hope in not meeting your expectations. If you make something the prime motive for your life and you lose it, bore of it, or get disappointed in it then that can be a reason for darkness.

We see this on a small and large scale. If you expected a job to fulfill some longing in your heart and then after getting the job realize it's mediocre (as most people do) you may experience a bit of despair.

If you, for example, are in a relationship and the other person is what you live for, if anything happens to them, or they reject you, you very likely will feel despair.

It's complicated

So we see that there are

- Medical
- Emotional
- Relational

- Moral
- Existential/Philosophical
- Hope deferred

And what we see so often is that people only every really considering one. When my mother first started struggling deeply with anxiety all the doctor wanted to do was give her a pill. All my grandmother wanted her to do was tell her pray more. All the therapist wants to do is think about the emotional.

We'll go from person to person from book to book to try and get an explanation, but the honest truth is, we're complicated, so many different things can cause days of darkness.

That sounds like a downer, but all of that is just to say that another thing we try and do in the face of lack of vigor for life, is explain and remedy it.

But the fact that we're so complicated makes it hard.

Proverbs 21:2 (NKJV)

2 Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, But the Lord weighs the hearts.

What that means is that even you don't know why you do or feel certain things either.

Accept it

So what do we do? Ignoring it doesn't work, relativizing it only goes so far, and we can't always explain why we experience dark days.

The last thing we can do, is accept it.

There are two preeminent ways I see in life we often accept the dark days

1. Despair in it Giving up all hope and form of motivation to live another day.
2. Hope through it Which is still accepting you feel a certain kind of way But despite not being able to explain it or make it go away having hope that you will see happier times.

(You may flop between the two)

Despair in it

One reason we may despair through our dark days is because we don't see the way we expect to make us happy as feasible anymore.

We talked about this with the last point of explaining it, if you put your hope in something to bring you joy, and it doesn't you'll experience despair. Or, for example, if you don't see any way of getting that person you really like, you know the one with the dimples that farts smell like rainbows, you lose hope.

Let me say, it's easy for this to happen! If you have ever watched a basketball game and one of the teams is losing by 100 points, you see their motivation to keep fighting dies, why? Because the thing which they believe will make them happy seems impossible at this point!

Secondary to this is losing hope because you don't *believe* there is anything that can bring you happiness in the first place.

Someone who doesn't believe even playing basketball will be entertaining won't have any will to fight when playing.

My story

And, I want to be clear that everything I've talked about so far has honestly been anecdotal. Things I have experienced. And before I go onto the final point, I want to give context for when and where all of this came from.

I've mentioned multiple times now how I used to be a very introverted kid in high school. I wasn't just introverted I was a pretty depressed kid. All day every day I would listen to sad music or lay in my bed gripped with fear over the fact that I would one day die.

I would be constricted with guilt over mistakes I made with the few friends I had, and I would have an overall dread of life. But when I began taking my faith seriously and went through the whole transformation process of accepting Christ when I was 17, I felt like my life was changed forever. I stopped listening to sad songs, I stopped having panic attacks. And I believed that's how my life would always be, until the summer of my Sophomore year.

Not to drown in details, but for reasons I can't even explain I started feeling this dread over life. When the semester started it didn't quit.

The first thing I would do is try to explain it. I'm a proactive person.

So I said: the reason why I feel this way is bc I'm not exercising enough, so I would go to the gym for an hour 5 days a week. And that would help for a few days but then the dread of life would come back.

So then I said: the reason why I feel this way is because I'm not reading my bible or praying enough.

So I kicked my devotionals up a notch, I'd force myself to go through my prayer list every morning and read my bible for at least an hour before starting my day. And it would work for a few days, I would think I found my solution, but then the dread would come back.

So then I said: the reason why I feel this way is because I'm not connecting with people enough

I didn't believe this one actually, since I had a ton of friends, I would hang out with great church people every week and for Triangle SDA, our young adult, group in the area I'd be able to meet with so many people every week. Yet sometimes after hanging out I would say: ah, this is the cure! Only for the next day for me to feel worse than before I hung out with a great group of people.

So then I said: the reason why I feel this way is because I don't have enough goals in life

I'm a very driven person, and I like to get things done. So I told myself I don't have enough goals, I need to aspire and hope to do things more. I need to set goals for me to feel good. So I would set up goals like expecting myself to get this goal to reward myself, or hoping for this or that. But my hope was deferred every time since either the goal didn't live up to its expectations or I would just forget about it.

Sometimes I would have a few friends I would mention not feeling the best to, I never really told anyone how dark I really felt, and they try to relativize it for me and say at least you're not starving in Africa. And you know they had a point, but that obviously never helped for more than a moment.

This went on and on. I would cycle between all these things, keep telling myself "I can explain it" or "I should be grateful", or this that or the other.

And I remember it came to the point where I was alone on the bottom floor of the library, literally the day after being part of an amazing event/activity where I had lots of fun, was able to connect spiritually, after a week where I was exercising drinking water, bathing in scripture, yet I was so weak from despair that I could barely walk and I just broke down in tears while listening to a song, first time in a very long time I cried like a baby.

It all came to a climax this summer.

I was in a completely new state, California. I was working a job I worked really hard for that I was privileged to have, in a state I had always wanted to live in. And I was struggling.

- I would spend most of my day alone in my room since my team was mostly remote.
- I started so early that I was the only intern in my entire building
- Every time I made friends with local students they'd disappear since they'd be going back home over summer

It was bad, I felt horrible, but I pushed through

I'm proactive, so decided to pounce on any opportunity I got to meet people. One day my buddy invites me to go play basketball with him at the school gym. I gladly get off of work (which was beyond boring) an hour early to play

shortly before the game ended, one of the boys leaps up in the air to try and jump over me to grab the basketball, and accidentally elbows me in the mouth. I immediately realize something is wrong as I can't close my mouth.

I'll spare the details, but for the next two days, I would be unable to eat until I could get everything fixed by the dentist.

So here I was in my cramped room in constant fear that I may have permanently damaged my mouth, unable to talk, in pain, unable to eat, unable to exercise do work, and I was alone.

I would spend the days just laying in pain on my bed, wondering why God would choose to put me in this spot. Even after I committed my life to serving Him, sacrificing so much to live a life for Him. And it was during this period of my life, during the weeks that followed, that I began to despair in my suffering.

I decided that I was going to be in pain, I didn't find satisfaction in doing anything

Every expectation I had for life was disappointed

I still remember what it feels like.

But it was during this time that God spoke to me. Something new. I had no choice but to spend my time listening to things on youtube. I started listening to a new preachers and podacasts, and a talk one of them gave which I don't even remember the name of popped into my recommendation.

I remember I had just finished eating out since I didn't have enough energy to even make food. And while I was dragging myself back home, the preacher said something that caught my attention.

It went along the lines of "Some of us serve God with our agenda and expectations for how life ought to go". That sounds harsh right, but it hit me. Most of the sadness I was dealing with at the time was my dissatisfaction in life not going the way I expected. Not being able to have all the friends I want, or feeling satisfaction from the job I worked.

From then on I listened in closely to multiple sermons, and came across some principals that fundamentally changed how I would go through my dark days. These are the points that brought me to not despair in the dark days, but hope through them

Hope through it

- Forget your expectations of God
- Remember the love of God
- Remember the sacrifice of God

Forget your expectations of God

We touched on this before I told my story, but large reasons for despairing in the dark days is because

1. We don't see the way we imagine to make us happy as attainable and
2. We don't believe there is anything that will make us happy anymore.

Both of these principles are rooted in the idea that we know how to make ourselves happy and if God doesn't fulfill it in the way we desire, there's a problem, he must not love us.

But, if you just google "we don't know what makes us happy" you'll see numerous studies and articles that show that time and time again when studied and asked what we expect to make us more happy in reality it under delivers.

If you remember **Proverbs 21:2 (NKJV)** and how we talked about us not knowing why we do or feel certain things at times, how much less so the things that will make us happy?

Proverbs 14:12 (NKJV)

12 There is a way which seems right to a person, But its end is the way of death.

The reason why we should forget our expectations of God and life is because frankly they more than likely would leave us feeling just as unfulfilled as before and secondly, God knows better what will bring us joy in life.

Which brings us into our second point

Remember the love of God

In Psalm 37:4 it says,

Psalm 37:4 (NKJV)

4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

This passage is specific, it says delight yourself in the Lord, and *He* will give you the desires of your heart. Not that you'll be able to get them yourself, but He will give them to you.

That's because God is the one who knows your desires the best. Not only that, He loves you so much that he doesn't want to withhold that joy from you

Psalm 84:11 (NKJV)

11 For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; **No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.**

We see this in the main passage for today also

Lamentations 3:31-33 (NKJV)

31 For the Lord will not cast off forever. 32 Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion According to the multitude of His mercies. **33 For He does not afflict willingly, Nor grieve the children of men.**

God's desire is to give us joy. That's why the author of Lamentations can say

Lamentations 3:22-24 (NKJV)

22 Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. 24 "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"

God is merciful, compassionate, and bent on giving you joy.

The question is then, how do we know God loves us? How do we know that God wants to give us joy. How can we know that for sure?

It's easy to read verses that says the God of this universe wants us to be happy, but it's nearly impossible to reason that when we stare into the face of all the pain and sorrow we're going through.

And the reason is because in the face of all the sorrow and pain we go through, He decided to go through it with us.

Remember the sacrifice of God

We can be certain that the reason we go through so much pain and suffering and trials is NOT because God doesn't love us. We know this because He decided to go through the pain and suffering with us.

- God decided to come down as a person like me and you.
- He decided to go through pain in life like me and you **Isaiah 53:3 (NKJV)**

3 He is despised and rejected by men, **A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.** And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

- He decided to go through the worst pain imaginable in order that me and you can one day experience uninteruptible joy

He went to the cross to die to rid the world of the problem of sin that brings us all this pain in the first place.

Christ brought Himself to the cross. He willingly subjected HIMSELF to dying for the sins of the entire world that we might experience joy in the morning.

Romans 5:8 (NKJV)

8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And this is the only place in the bible that we see our pain being relativized, and it's so different than the way our friends typically try to do it for us. Because of the ultimate pain God went through, we can know that God loves us and has every desire in His heart is to bring us joy.

And after that sacrifice, He decides to be close to us in our pain

Hebrews 4:15 (NKJV)

15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

God understand the trouble we go through. He understands the trouble with our sin, and sympathizes, and I would even go as far as to say feels it with us. When I was in pain, laying on my bed in California unable to do anything, God was hurting with me. When we go through these dark days, God is right there next to us, hurting with us.

And this is what our hearts desire the most. Someone who truly understands our hearts. Someone who loves us deeper than we can ever understand. And God gives that to us by giving Himself to us.

Lamentations 3:22-24 (NKJV)

22 Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. 24 **"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"**

To summarize all these points (Forget our expectations of God, remember the Love of God, and remember the Sacrifice of God), we can say:

Expect, and expect only, God to give you Himself and His Love.

And that's why we can continue to hope. Because if we have these two things, even though the dark days may come and we feel the brunt of pain on our shoulders to the point where we may not even be able to fall out of bed, we can still hope. God is looking to show us compassion in the morning.

It was when I realized these three things that I looked at my dark days differently. Did it make the pain I went through any less? In a sense yes because I had hope that even though I was going through these dark days, God would bring me into joy, whether that's in this life or the life to come.

His compassions are new

In closing, I want to wrap up the story.

I realized God's compassion in a very real way this summer. A few weeks after I learned these things I started to come out of my dark days, I flopped between despair and hope a lot, but by the end I looked at life with a positive outlook. I noticed that God had shown me mercy in multiple ways.

3 weeks before I went to California and a little over a month before the accident, I got an email saying that my school had enrolled me in dental care. I was like "I don't need dental care" I brush my teeth and floss daily and plus had basic coverage through my father so tried to get it cancelled. But received an email saying that I can't cancel it because they're offering it for free to all undergraduates on financial aid.

It was that dental insurance that I was trying to cancel that ended up paying for the entire procedure to fix my mouth. And I was blessed that by the end of the summer the dentist told me I would likely not need anything further done.

It was that following month that I was surrounded by amazing new friends and was able to go through many amazing experiences for the remainder of the summer.

And I realized that at one point I had given up, I thought that I would have no more joy in life. I gave up, yet my joy in life was just a morning away.

I want to recognize that Sometimes we may flop between despairing in the dark days and having hope in them.

When I remember the sacrifice God made for me and that I will one day experience joy, I have faith that no matter the darkness of the days we go through no matter how deep we are to despair, we can hope that in the morning we will experience joy. God loves you, and wants you to experience joy.

So let's forget our expectations of God and life, Remember the love of God, and remember the sacrifice of God.