

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 15, 2017 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



HANDLING HOUNDING HOUNDS
Biblical Help for What Hounds Us

“The Hounding Problem of Depression and Extreme Discouragement”
Selected Scripture

We use an idiom that asks, “What’s hounding you?” What does that mean? _____

To say that something is “hounding” you or that you are being “hounded” by something means essentially it is like it (whatever it is) is hunting you down... it means to be eagerly pursued by something, it speaks of pursuing relentlessly and tenaciously. And we are sometimes “hounded” relentlessly and tenaciously by certain problems and struggles in this life. Aren’t we? This Bible study takes a look at what “hounds” us in this life and how to deal with what hounds us as believers. It called **“Hounding Help”** and it’s not about helping out what hounds us. We are at times very good at feeding, growing, adding to... making worse what hounds. In other words making it worse by poor choices, wrong attitudes and actions, inappropriate responses to what hounds us. **This study is not about help out what hounds us, but rather help us out when we are hounded.** We need the help when we are dogged, hounded relentlessly and tenaciously by the problems and struggles of this life. This study takes a biblical look at what hounds us, and over the next few week we will look at some of these “hounds.” In this initial study we will take a Biblical look at **“The Hounding Problem of Depression and Extreme Discouragement.”**

The title of this study, **“The Hounding Problem of Depression and Extreme Discouragement,”** is not meant to diminish or lessen the severity nor the reality of depression. Depression and extreme discouragement, that sometimes leads to the pit of depression, are very real and at times extremely severe. The term “extreme discouragement” is simply tied to depression, perhaps because Christians sometimes shy away from using (or admitting) depression. We often prefer the more acceptable idea that we are not “depressed” just discouraged. Why? We say things like, “Christians should never suffer depression.” That’s a common attitude from some people and it is decidedly wrong. People who claim Christians should never suffer depression have failed to understand a basic truth, that **it is not something the person chooses to do.** It is not showing a lack of faith or that they are lacking in their spiritual life. Depression is often, quite simply, a medical condition like asthma or any other sickness. We don’t tell the person who has asthma it is because they don’t have enough faith or they are lacking in their spiritual life or if

they prayed or believed more the asthma would go, we get them medical help. Why do we take a different attitude when it comes to depression?

Can I suggest the biggest problem is because people, especially those who have never suffered from it, don't understand the problem? It is not a spiritual failing on the person's part. Some people think faithful followers of God don't experience depression or extreme bouts of discouragement, but there are several people in the Bible who were, in fact, hounded by the problem of depression and/or extreme discouragement:

Biblical examples of those who suffered depression:

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| 1. Moses (Numbers 11:10-15) | 6. Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-2) |
| 2. King David (Psalm 6, 13, 38) | 7. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:14,16) |
| 3. Hannah (I Samuel 1:9-18) | 8. Jonah (Jonah 4:1-3) |
| 4. Elijah (I Kings 19:1-18) | 9. Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:1-3:19) |
| 5. Job (Job 3:1-26 and 6:1-7:21) | 10. Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4, 2:1) |

Similarly, there have been many outstanding leaders, preachers, and missionaries in the history of the Church who have also struggled with bouts of depression and extreme discouragement. Some of the more notable examples are:

Christian leader examples of those who suffered depression:

1. **Martin Luther** (founder of the Protestant Reformation)
2. **David Brainerd** (missionary to Native Americans)
3. **Hudson Taylor** (Founder of the China Inland Mission)
4. **A.B. Simpson** (founder of the Christian Missionary Alliance)
5. **Adoniram Judson** (missionary to Burma)
6. **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** (19th century revival preacher)
7. **Mother Theresa** (missionary to the poor and destitute of India)

Statistics tell us that in America alone, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men will suffer from depression at some stage in their lives, and that nearly 151 million people struggle with this problem in any given year. What they need along with our prayers is support, encouragement, as well as practical help from Christians, the church and from God's Word. We ourselves need help for the hounding problem of extreme discouragement and sometimes even depression in our own lives.

In our most recent issue of our own Southern Baptist North American Mission Board Magazine called "OnMission" the following statistics were given from recent studies:

- *3 million adolescents in the U.S. ages 12 to 17 are reported to have had a major depressive episode in the past year.*
- *19.5% of females in the U.S. experience depression, compared to 5.8% of males.*
- *6.3 million youth ages 13-18 have an anxiety disorder, representing 25% of the adolescent population in 2015.*
- *30.1% of females have an anxiety disorder, while 20.3%, males are more likely to deal with anxiety over depression.*

Sometimes it is in the hard times, the depression, the discouragement and darkness that God speaks to us most clearly, even David found that out. Read some of his psalms **Psalm 6, 14, 25, 51, 77** are just a few examples. There are others like **Psalm 40:1-3**,

“I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. ² He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. ³ He has put a new song in my mouth—praise to our God; Many will see it and fear, and will trust in the LORD.”

No one is immune to depression, not even the Christian. It usually hits us at surprising moments, yet there are times when we can almost predict it. Fighting it is never a pleasant experience. Some depressions are deep and complex – lasting for months...even years. On the other hand, some may last for shorter periods of time. Tragically, some result in devastating consequences. Some leave lasting scars on one's life.

People make a lot of statements to depressed Christians. Not all of them are helpful, nice or even true. These are some of the worse things that get said. A lot of these sayings can be quite hurtful and damaging to the person on the receiving end, and they really don't help or address the problem. If someone says these things, they need to be educated about what depression is and is not. Most of these sayings come from ignorance about the problem of depression and often reflect a deeper spiritual problem on the part of the one offering the unsolicited advice.

If you have been on the receiving end of some of these statements in the midst of your own hurt and struggle, you know how painful and further damaging they can be.

Religious or spiritual things that get said:

- **There must be something wrong with your spiritual life**
- **Repent and ask forgiveness for your sin!**
- **Real Christians don't get depressed**
- **You need to have more faith / have faith in God**
- **Taking antidepressants is playing God, He can heal you**
- **Scripture says everything that happens is for your own good!**
- **You've been prayed for, why has nothing changed?**
- **Depression is a self-discipline problem**
- **You should be praying about this.**
- **You just need to rebuke that spirit of depression and tell it to leave you. Don't let Satan steal your joy.**
- **There's no such thing as mental illness, it's all in your mind**
- **You've got nothing to be sad about**
- **It's your own fault you're depressed**
- **Pull yourself together**
- **You're just being lazy**

Let's consider four of God's men who suffered from a bout with extreme discouragement and perhaps depression – the feelings of extreme despair, undue sadness, unrealistic grief, or hopelessness.

I. BIBLICAL HEROES HOUNDED BY DEPRESSION AND DISCOURAGEMENT

Though each man suffered the same kind of depression and discouragement, each one's struggle was different: Moses had an inferiority/insecurity issues; Elijah seems to have had something of a martyr's complex; Jeremiah... well Jeremiah was highly sensitive at a very difficult time and grew weary (tired) and discouraged/depressed, and Jonah struggled with prejudice, anger issues, frustration, discouragement and depression. In reviewing each man's case, we will note physical, emotional and spiritual reasons for their depression and extreme discouragement.

1. **Moses (Numbers 11:1-15)** – Moses had been miraculously used by God to lead the Israelites from Egypt. The people knew little else than a life of miracles – safe passage through the Red Sea, steady diet of nourishing manna, ample water, Divine guidance (cloud by day, fire by night) – yet they griped about everything. It was neither the Promised Land nor the promising future on which they focused, but Egypt. Weary of their God-given daily diet, they longed only for the leeks, garlic, and onions of the land of their bondage. The text in **verse 10** reports, *“Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased.”* (NIV “troubled,” NLT “very aggravated”) *literally the words translated as “displeased” or “troubled” in verse 10 means “depressed.” Interesting! He was so despairing, discouraged and depressed that in **verse 15** he asked God to kill him says, in speaking to God, *“If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me – if I have found favor in your eyes – and do like me face my own ruin.”* (v.15). Why was he depressed, do you think?

- (1) **Physically – exhausted and frustrated (vv.16-17)** He was exhausted and overworked because he had not learned to delegate his work load. He tried to handle it all by himself (see Ex. 18:13-23 where his father-in-law, Jethro, advised him to delegate so that he would “be able to endure.”)
- (2) **Emotionally –inferior and inadequate (v.15)** Moses had an inferiority complex; he held low view of his self-worth. Remember that he made many excuses for his own feelings of inferiority and inadequacy when God originally called him to lead His people to freedom. He took the situation here with the people personally... as one of personal failure. They were really rejecting God not him. Moses was diligent in his leadership, and yet had as his reward griping and complaint.
- (3) **Spiritually – punished and out of favor (v.11)** Moses felt distant from God. Notice **verse 11**, *“¹¹ He asked the LORD, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?”* Do you hear the implication spiritually? What does Moses' words reveal about how he felt about his relationship with God at this time?
- (4) **How God handled him – (vv.16-25)** Moses as instructed by God to spread his work load, to slow down. He was to find seventy men to do the work he alone was trying to do.
- (5) **What God says to us - (v.17) You don't have to carry your burdens alone “... They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone.”** We do not have to carry the burden alone. God, Himself, and other that

He provides will help carry the load. When we are discouraged and depressed seek the support and encouragement of God and others.

2. **Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-21)** – A series of events tracked Elijah’s life, including a famine that he himself had prophesied, and a confrontation on Mt. Carmel where he defied 450 prophets of Baal. After seeking out a solitary retreat next to a juniper tree, his reward was a threat on his life – issued by Jezebel. His words were like Moses’ in **verse 4**, *“⁴ But he (Elijah) himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, “It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!”* Again we have an exhausted, discouraged, depressed man of God. Why?
- (1) **Physically –exhausted and fearful (v.3)** In fear for his life, Elijah had just run approximately 30 miles. Not only was he weary from running, but also from relating to the cultic prophets on Carmel. He had missed sleep and meals... he was worn out.
 - (2) **Emotionally – used and abused (v.10)** Whereas Moses struggled with an inferiority complex, Elijah suffered from a martyr’s complex. Note his words in **verse 10**, *“...I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.”* He felt all alone, like there was no one else by him. Not so. God soon reminded him of that, saying that he was joined by 7,000 others in Israel who had refused to bow to Baal.
 - (3) **Spiritually – shrinking and shriveling faith (v.3)** His fear was an indication that his eyes were not on God, but on the enemy. Jezebel was anxious to take his life, and it seemed all were against him – Jezebel, the world, even God.
 - (4) **How God handled him** – God didn’t rebuke Elijah. Instead, God fed His servant and allowed him to sleep (vv.5-8). The food which the heavenly men delivered to him was so adequate that it kept his strength sustained for 40 days, until he reached Mt. Horeb. Not only was he well fed and well rested, but God also supplied him with a friend – Elisha (vv.19-21).
 - (5) **What God says to us – (vv.11-13) God is at work, behind the scenes even when we don’t see Him** The 3 phenomena, wind, earthquake, and fire, announced the imminent arrival of the Lord. The Lord’s self-revelation to Elijah came in a faint whispering voice (v.12). The lesson for Elijah was that Almighty God was quietly, sometimes imperceptibly, doing His work in our lives and we can trust and rest in Him.
3. **Jeremiah (Lamentation 3:1-26)** –Jeremiah was called the “weeping prophet” because he was called to address a people... God’s people, who had forsaken God and turned to other gods (Jer. 6:10-16). He wrote two Old Testament books, Jeremiah and Lamentations. Jeremiah’s messages were given in times of great stress and upheaval. Much disaster, death and destruction were witnessed by his hand, and he no less experienced the personal effects of those things than anyone else in his day. Jeremiah and Lamentation revealed that called men of God, experience depression and extreme bouts of discouragement... and the heartache of it along with everyone else.

Sometimes for that devoted one the heavy weight of sorrow, grief and misery, barrenness and pain are intensified because of their strong sense of hope and faith that can become dashed in those times. Again from Jeremiah we find in Lamentations an exhausted, discouraged, depressed man of God. Why?

- (6) **Emotionally – drained and spent (vv.1-2)** In his fear and concern for own his people and at God’s command and calling , Jeremiah had literally walked daily through the streets of Jerusalem preaching and pleading for a return to God. Not only was he weary from his day in and day out journey and preaching, emotionally he was drained and saw no hope in sight. He had missed sleep and meals... he was worn out physically and in graphic language he pictures it in **verse 2, “He has led and made me walk in darkness and not in light.”** In other words, “God sent me... drove me out to do the impossible. To be a light where there was only darkness and I am exhausted, spent emotionally.”
- (7) **Physically –exhausted and worn out physically (vv.4-6)** **“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.”** (Lam. 3:4-6) This highly figurative passage effectively communicates the severity of the affliction and depression that Jeremiah felt during this time. It is compared to the weariness of aging and the pain of broken bones. The wasting away of vital force is a typical motif in expressions of lament. Verse 5 could be a reference to the actual horrors felt during the siege of Jerusalem or to the “bitterness” experienced by a person surrounded by insurmountable trouble. The intensity of the suffering is compared to the darkness of the abode of the forgotten departed dead... a definite reference to feeling of deep depression.
- (8) **Spiritually – distant and unheard (vv.7-9)** **“⁷ He has hedged me in so that I cannot get out; He has made my chain heavy. ⁸ Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer. ⁹ He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my path crooked.”** (Lam. 3:7-9) Listen, these are the words of a discouraged, depressed man! Jeremiah felt as though God had built a wall around him and bound him with heavy chains to make sure there was no escape from his depression and affliction. Like a prisoner in a dungeon, his cries to God went unanswered. Like people seeking their way out of a maze of depression, whatever direction they turned for relief was blocked and thwarted. One of life’s darkest moments is to experience the absence of God and hone one’s prayers go unanswered.
- (9) **How God handled him** – God didn’t rebuke Jeremiah. Instead, listen to Jeremiah’s words in Lamentation 3:21-26, **“²¹ This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. 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!”²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. ²⁶ It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.”** God reminded Jeremiah of His faithfulness, to wait on Him, and trust. God spoke to Jeremiah and flooded his soul will a quite reminders of His love and faithfulness, of His provision and care, of His sure salvation.

(10) What God says to us – God is at work, behind the scenes even when we don't see Him

4. Jonah (Jonah 4:1-11) – In the wake of a miraculous escape from Egypt, Moses slumped into depression. In the wake of a display of Divine superiority over the prophets of Baal, Elijah fell under depression's spell. Jonah, in the wake of perhaps the greatest evangelistic success ever recorded, became its victim. The entire city of Nineveh (the capital of Assyrian Empire) repented and turned to God. Note the same words, but from a different man in **verse 3**, *"Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!"* Why did Jonah battle such discouragement and depression?

- (1) Physically – exhausted and fretful (vv.1-3)** He had fought hard against God. He had attempted a trip to Tarshish to avoid preaching in Nineveh, and in the process had survived time in the belly of a fish. He had preached his way across Nineveh, and effort that took three days to achieve.
- (2) Emotionally –anger and bitterness (v.2a)** He was a bitter man, angry at God for showing His compassion and grace to the people he himself despised. He felt superior to them. Jonah was a bigoted nationalist more than he was an evangelist.
- (3) Spiritually – a hard and unteachable heart (vv.2-3)** Jonah was carnal. Anger was the tell-tale symptom of his deeper spiritual problem. In this instance he wanted to preach without seeing the results for which an evangelist usually hoped.
- (4) How God handled him – (vv.4-9)** God brought the facts to his attention and pointed out that he had no reason to let his anger kindle.
- (5) What God says to us – (vv.9-11) We must surrender our ways and thoughts to God and let Him take care of it.** Jonah had a way that he wanted things to work out and when his plan didn't work out as expected he was angry, discouraged and despondent... even to the point of wanting to die. God said to Jonah in **verses 10-11**, *"¹⁰ But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?"*

II. HELP FOR THE HOUNDING PROBLEM OF DEPRESSION AND EXTREME DISCOURAGEMENT

Five significant lessons emerge from this study which, if applied can help us when we find our own lives hounded by depression and discouragement, but to actually mature and develop us in the midst of these hounds.

5 Lessons for Hounding Problem of Extreme Discouragement and Depression:

- 1. Realize that depression is not a sin, it is a symptom –**
- 2. Maintain a consistent program of relaxation and rest –** You may have to delegate some of your work load to do this.

3. **Guard against those subtle complexes (feeling of inferiority, down on my self, I'm no good, there is no hope, all is lost, it will never get any better)** – Keep your eyes on the Lord and away from yourself.
4. **Remember that God is for you, not against you** – It is not His design to make your life miserable, but meaningful.
5. **Don't forget, Satan and his demons may bring depression** – It's one of his sharpest darts.

“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.” –Psalm 42:5