

"Finding Relief From the Holiday Blues"

12/30-31/06

6 p.m., 9 & 10:45 a.m.

Selected Scripture

OPEN to Philippians 4 (**PAGE** 1830)**INTRODUCTION**

"Back in the early 1930's during the Great Depression, Pastor William Stidger was with a group of friends talking about the depression and how it was so discouraging to so many. As they talked, he sensed God speaking to him: 'Why don't you give thanks to those people who have been a blessing in your life and encourage them during this terrible time?'

He remembered a school teacher who had gone out of her way to put in him a great love of literature. It affected all his writings and his preaching. So he sat down and wrote a letter to this woman, now up in years. It was only a matter of days until he got a reply.

'My Dear Willy: I can't tell you how much your note meant to me. I am in my eighties, living alone in a small room, cooking my own meals, lonely... and like the last leaf of autumn lingering behind. You'll be interested to know that I taught in school for more than fifty years, and yours is the first note of appreciation I ever received. It came on a blue, cold morning, and it cheered me as nothing has done in many years.'"

Then he thought of a kindly bishop, now retired, an old man who had recently faced the death of his wife and was all alone. This bishop had taken a lot of time, given him advice and counsel and love when he first began his ministry. So he sat down and wrote the old bishop. In a few days a reply came back.

'My Dear Will: Your letter was so beautiful, so real, that as I sat reading it in my study, tears fell from my eyes, tears of gratitude. Before I realized what I was doing, I rose from my chair and I called my wife's name to share it with her, forgetting she was gone. You'll never know how much your letter has warmed my spirit. I have been walking around in the glow of your letter all day long.'"

The "Holiday Blues" are very real. Sometimes they're triggered by

past experiences and they happen each year at the holidays. Sometimes they're caused by a recent event, like the death of a loved one... and it's the first Christmas without them.

The "**blues**" can involve depression, loneliness, hopelessness, a general sadness or unhappiness. It can be as extreme as despair and feelings of suicide; or a general pessimism about one's self or circumstances. It can involve unfulfilled desires or expectations, or deep discouragement.

And, it isn't limited to the Christmas and New Year's season:

"On July 28, 2004, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released the results of an extensive survey on depression and sadness. They contacted 166,000 people in 38 states and discovered the average American spends three days a month feeling 'sad, blue, or depressed.'"

Depression: One in fourteen American men suffers from depression and men in their twenties are the ones most likely to suffer from it. (Parade, 6/20/04)

One man said, "When I'm feeling down, I like to whistle. It makes the neighbor's dog run to the end of his chain and gag himself." *Misery loves company!*

In dealing with things that have us down or anxious, there's a pattern of three key elements that God often directs:

1. Pray,
2. Focus our minds on positive truth,
3. Take appropriate action.

For instance, in dealing with Anxiety, worry, stress: Let's look at these three elements:

1. Pray

Philippians 4:6-7 **"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by PRAYER and petition (*entreaty, needs*), with thanksgiving, PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD.**

7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

2. Focus our minds on positive truth

v. 8: Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things.

3. Take appropriate action

v. 9: Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."

Next, when dealing with *trials*; all different kinds:

1. Focus our minds on positive truth,
2. Pray,
3. Take appropriate action.

1. Focus our minds on positive truth

James 1:2-4: "CONSIDER it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,
3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

2. Pray

5 If any of you lacks wisdom (*if you're confused about the trial, the testing of your faith*), he should ASK GOD, Who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

6 But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

7 That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;

8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does.

3. Take appropriate action

v. 22: Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. DO WHAT IT SAYS.

v. 25: But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but DOING IT - he will be blessed in what he does."

This pattern can apply to any kind of emotional turmoil or experience that you are dealing with.

So, let's take a few minutes and look at each of these three elements:

I. When You're Struggling With the Blues, Pray

King David wrote of many of his personal struggles in the Book of Psalms. One of his major themes is that GOD IS HIS REFUGE.

David uses different word-pictures and descriptions when He talks about God being a refuge:

GOD his REFUGE: This word is used literally of taking shelter from a rainstorm or from any danger in the high hills. It's a place of protection.

GOD his ROCK: The high rocks were a place to run to for safety from enemies. Horses could not follow and it was dangerous to follow on foot because of the many hiding places in the rocks.

GOD his FORTRESS; STRONGHOLD; TOWER OF STRENGTH; HIGH TOWER: A literal fortress; a castle; made of rock; where one could flee to gain protection from his enemies.

GOD his SHIELD: A hand-held protection that prevented the enemy from striking one's body.

And, a warmer idea than these battle terms:

WINGS of God: God is pictured as a mother bird... possibly an eagle... who spreads her wings to cover her young and protect them in the high, wide-open spaces where an eagle's nest would be.

"Shelter of Your wings;" "Shadow of Your wings;" "Under God's wings." A picture of warm, confident protection.

When we pray, we are taking refuge in God. We are going to Him and saying, *"I need Your help!" protect, shield*

How do we pray? What do we say?

We tell God what is going on, how we are feeling and what we think we need. We don't have to candy-coat it or "spiritualize" it, or "sanitize" it.

God is big enough to handle our real feelings.

Listen to some ways David prayed:

Psalm 44:23-24 **"Wake up, O Lord! Why do You sleep? Get up! Do not reject us forever.**

24 **Why do You look the other way? Why do You ignore our suffering and oppression?"**

Psalm 42:9a **"I say to God my Rock, 'Why have you forgotten me?'"**

Psalm 43:1-2 **"O God, take up my cause! Defend me against these ungodly people. Rescue me from these unjust liars.**

2 **For You are God, my only safe haven. Why have You tossed me aside? Why must I wander around in darkness, oppressed by my enemies?"**

This is how he felt... so it's how he talked to God.

He also asked for what he felt he needed: deliverance from people who were hurting him... Relief from emotions that were immobilizing him. A sense of God's presence. God's help.

Philippians 4:7 **"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."**

I. When You're Struggling With the Blues, PRAY!

II. When You're Struggling With the Blues, Focus Your Mind on Positive Truth (v. 8)

Here's why: (it's a progression)

1. What we choose to focus our minds upon will affect our perspective. (*if you focus on 10% bad instead of 90% good... your perspective becomes that everything is going wrong!*)
2. Our perspective or mind-set will affect how we feel; our mood.

This is a process that can happen slowly over time or quickly in a given situation. But, it is what happens.

The Bible explains this in Romans 8:

Romans 8:5-6 **"Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.**

6 **The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."**

So, again, if you continually focus on the 10% negative that is true, you will not be able to see the 90% positive that is more of the truth.

But, how do you focus on positive truth, when you're suffering?

Romans 8:18 **"I consider (mentally thought it through) that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."**

Things will get better!

A Christian's "future glory is so great that present sufferings are insignificant by comparison. Also the glory is forever, whereas the suffering is temporary..." (BKC)

This is a man who was very familiar with suffering: multiple physical beatings, relational betrayals, hunger, homelessness, pain, sleeplessness, etc. (2 Corinthians 11:24-29)

All this because he was following Jesus Christ.

Now, if Paul's controlling thought in this situation was "Stop the pain!" then he would have stopped serving Christ... because it was his service for Christ that was bringing the suffering. But he didn't. Why?

Because he **"considered"** that his present sufferings were not worth comparing to the glories of heaven and the glorious rewards of serving Christ.

That is, he thought it through, he **"considered"** his suffering:

"Why am I suffering?"

Because I am obeying Christ and His call on my life.

"Is obeying Christ worth the suffering?"

Yes.

"Why?"

- *Through it people are coming to Christ and eternal life.*

- *Through it I am sharing in the sufferings of Christ.*

- *My sufferings are producing a crown of glory (James 1:12)*

- *The positive truth is that eternal glory will last much, much, longer than temporary suffering in this life.*

Paul **"considered"** that his present sufferings were not worth comparing to the glories of heaven and the glorious rewards of serving Christ.

I. When You're Struggling With the Blues, PRAY!

II. When You're Struggling With the Blues, Focus Your Mind on Positive Truth

III. When You're Struggling With the Blues, Take Action

Philippians 4:9 **"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."**

- Get involved in serving/helping others (Contact Advancing Vibrant Communities at www.vibrantcommunities.org : basic help of others, from driving to a medical appt. to making phone calls, to doing simple tasks for the elderly or handicapped that they can't do for themselves anymore)
- Get involved in a small group (reinforce prayer, positive truth, taking action. Call the church office or ask someone you know if they're in a group)
- Get involved in some enjoyable activity (gardening, going to the library, bowling, walks in the park, or drive to the park or a nearby elementary school and watch children playing)
- Stop the behavior that is causing the problem...
something that is making you guilty.

"Karl Menninger, the famed psychiatrist, once said that if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75 percent of them could walk out the next day!" (Today in the Word, March 1989, p. 8)

- Sometimes the "blues" is caused by something that happened in the past that we deeply regret, wish we'd never done.

Guilt can cause depression, anxiety, withdrawal from people and life.

Confess sin; make amends with person as long as it won't cause harm to the person or others.

- See a Dr. to see if your problem is caused by something physical.

CONCLUSION

I. When You're Struggling With the Blues, PRAY!

II. When You're Struggling With the Blues, Focus Your Mind on Positive Truth

III. When You're Struggling With the Blues, Take Action

This deals with the whole person... mind, body, emotions, spirit.

"Dear God, thank You for showing me how to deal with issues that hit my mind and emotions. Please help me to apply praying, focusing on the positive truths in Your word, and then taking action. You are good! In Jesus' Name, Amen."