

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN LIFE FEELS BLAH?**PSALM 103**

I spent a good portion of my growing up years living in central Florida. Those of you who know that area of the country know that there are these vast groves of orange trees that seemingly go on forever in every direction. When the fruit is in season, all you see are trees loaded with oranges. I heard about a man who stopped for breakfast one morning as he was driving through this part of Florida. The man ordered orange juice with his eggs. The waitress said, "I'm sorry. I can't bring you any orange juice. Our machine is broken." The customer was dumbfounded. There they were surrounded by millions of oranges in every direction. It was obvious the restaurant had oranges in the kitchen because orange slices garnished his plate. What was the problem? A lack of oranges? No. A lack of juice? No. The problem was that the people who worked in the restaurant had become dependent on a machine to get it.

Followers of Jesus are like that sometimes. We are probably surrounded by several Bibles in our home, but we can become dependent on getting our own spiritual nourishment in only one way or from just a few limited sources. We might depend solely on one worship service a week. We might have a favorite speaker or author, but if his or her material is not available, we start to starve spiritually. The problem is not a lack of spiritual food. The problem is that often we don't know how to get spiritual nourishment for ourselves.

Have you ever gone through a period of time when your relationship with Jesus felt stale, blah or just lacked enthusiasm? Welcome to the club! In fact, maybe that's how you feel today. The good news is that you can indeed begin to do something about the spiritual blahs. The Bible can help us a great deal right here, but you have to know what that help is and how to access it. You can have a million oranges all around you, but if you don't know what to do with them – how to pick them, how to cut them, how to squeeze them or how to use a machine properly - you aren't going to get much juice. In the same way, you can have all kinds of spiritual truth around you, but if you don't know how to access that truth or how to apply it to your life, you won't benefit from it. What should I do when life feels blah? I believe part of God's answer to that very human question is found in Psalm 103. The author was David, Israel's greatest king. When you read his psalm, you get the sense that David had gone through a time of deep spiritual "blahness", but that somehow God had renewed his enthusiasm. What should I do when life feels blah? I hear three answers in Psalm 103. First,

GOD SAYS, "REFLECT ON MY BLESSINGS."

Let's read the first seven verses of Psalm 103 (NIV). What's David doing here? He's worshiping God and acknowledging His greatness. Yes, but how does David do that? He reminds himself not to forget. Forget what? All of God's blessings and the benefits of having a relationship with God. God had helped, guided, delivered and led David. Then in v. 7, David thinks about all the ways

God had helped the people of Israel. One reason we get the spiritual blahs is simply because we forget how truly wonderful God is. The cure to our lack of enthusiasm isn't found by focusing on our blahs but instead in reminding ourselves of God's greatness. You and I need to refresh our memories often and consciously recall what God has done for us. That's what David is doing here. As we follow his example, a spirit of gratitude and praise to God for all of His blessings will begin to well up within us.

David also reflects here on the marvelous abundance of God's blessings. Look again at v. 5, "... who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." There are two images embedded in that verse. The first one is of a mouth so filled with food that your cheeks are bulging out. God so fills our lives with His goodness that our spiritual cheeks can bulge out, too. There are those times in life when it just seems impossible that we could stuff even one more morsel of His grace into our lives. David also uses the image of an eagle. To experience God's blessing is to live like an eagle soaring high up in the sky. What's the secret of the eagle's power? Is it its wings? No. Its wings would be next to useless if it weren't the powerful wind currents that those wings access – the wind that lifts the bird up to heights it could never reach by lots of wing flapping. That image reminds me of how the Holy Spirit is sometimes compared to a strong blowing wind in the Bible.

Getting renewed and refreshed spiritually so often means a new, fresh surrender to the Holy Spirit. It's not so much trying harder and doing more as it is simply more giving up and giving in to Him. The Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, used this same image of the eagle. "But those who wait upon GOD get fresh strength. They spread their wings and soar like eagles; they run and don't get tired; they walk and don't lag behind." (Is 40:31 NLT) Give up and give in! I want and need the Holy Spirit to give me the capacity to soar up, over and above life's valleys because of the powerful winds of His love and grace. How about you?

Here's what I'm learning when I go through the spiritual blahs. Yes, sometimes it's about being physically tired or just needing a healthy change of scenery. Sure, that's one remedy. But more than often, spiritual blahs point to something I'm not fully surrendering to the Lord. An improper attitude that I'm indulging, but God wants to expel it. A sinful habit to which I'm clinging, but God wants to kill it off. A dream, a goal, a plan that I want to accomplish, but God never initiated it. A broken relationship that I want to keep on feeling resentment about, but God wants to heal it. Many times I get the spiritual blahs because I am resisting God in some way, shape or form. David learned that when he surrendered his life to God continually, it was like the eagle surrendering itself to those strong wind currents. How high you fly spiritually has a lot to do with how frequently you just consciously and obediently give up and give in to the Holy Spirit of God. What should you do when life feels blah? God says, "Reflect on my blessings." Please join me in doing that when we gather at the Lord's Table in a few minutes. Reflect again on what God has done for you, how much He has forgiven you and

how wonderful it is to have the Holy Spirit empower and lift your life. But here's a second answer to that question, "What should you do when life feels blah?"

GOD SAYS, "REJOICE IN MY CHARACTER."

Let's consider verses 8-13 just now. David exults in God's ability and willingness to forgive his sins. You can hear David's assumption that God forgave his sins not because David deserved it, earned it or somehow made himself worthy of it, but simply because of who God was and is. In other words, God forgave David on the basis of God's character. Do you know what's remarkable about these words for me? The cross – what we're going to focus upon in a few minutes through Communion - is the ultimate demonstration of God's character – the ultimate demonstration of God's love and compassion. There God took upon Himself all the guilt of your sin and mine. He absorbed the penalty for our sin in the person of His own Son, Jesus. But David lived long before Jesus, before the cross, before the resurrection. He was ignorant of this ultimate expression of God's character, and yet it was David who so marvelously captured the essence of God's grace and mercy in these verses.

David was a great man; he was also a great sinner. You might recall the famous incident with Bathsheba where David abused his power as the king, committed adultery with another man's wife, and then conveniently arranged for that man to be killed in battle when Bathsheba told David she was now pregnant with the king's child. David was an adulterer and a murderer. You may also recall that he refused to acknowledge his sin for a whole year. Who knows if David would ever have repented had not the prophet, Nathan, confronted him to his face?

In v. 10-12, David invites us to see the sheer, unbelievable, incomparable immensity of God's forgiveness. "He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve, nor pay us back in full for our wrongs. As high as heaven is over the earth, so strong is his love to those who fear him. And as far as sunrise is from sunset, he has separated us from our sins." (MSG) Have you ever gotten a panoramic view? I can still remember standing on top of Cadillac Mountain in Acadia National Park up in Maine and getting this magnificent view - miles and miles in every direction. It's as if God takes you and me up to the top of some lofty mountain on a brilliantly clear day and says to us, "My child, do you see that huge distance between sky and earth? Now that's how much I love you! Now look east (where the sun rises) and then look west (where the sun sets). That's how far I've separated you from the guilt of your sins."

David knew about God's forgiveness from personal experience! Some people give you the impression that God isn't big enough to forgive some of their sins. James Garfield was one of four US Presidents to be killed while serving in office. He was elected in 1880 but was shot in the back after only six months serving as President. At the hospital, the doctor probed the wound with his little finger to get at the bullet. He couldn't find it, so he tried a silver-tipped probe. That didn't work

either. Garfield was taken back to Washington D.C. He began to get weaker and weaker. Teams of doctors now were brought in trying to locate this bullet. They probed the wound over and over again. They even asked Alexander Graham Bell – the inventor of the telephone – to see what he could do about this bullet, but he failed to find it as well. Two months later, President James Garfield died. But he didn't die from the wound. Instead, he died from the infection. All that repeated probing which the doctors thought would help him actually eventually killed him because it caused and spread infection. What's the point? The same thing can happen to people spiritually when they dwell too long on their sins and failures and refuse to release all that junk to God and let the blood of Jesus cover it. Don't ever make your sins greater than God's grace!

David needed lots of forgiveness in his own life, because – quite frankly – he messed up a lot. When he blew it and then sincerely repented before God, God was faithful to forgive him, take away the guilt of his sin and restore him spiritually. Just in passing, right there is another possible reason for the spiritual blahs. What's that? Unconfessed sin. When you start pretending that what you did wasn't really all that wrong or you try to cover it up, excuse it, ignore it or just forget about it, the Holy Spirit withdraws any sense of peace or of God's presence. Spiritual emptiness is the inevitable result. The Bible says, "If we claim that we're free of sin, we're only fooling ourselves. A claim like that is errant nonsense. On the other hand, if we admit our sins—make a clean breast of them—he won't let us down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing." (1 John 1:8-9 MSG)

I love the imagery there in v. 3-4 of Psalm 103. "He forgives your sins—every one. He heals your diseases—every one. He redeems you from hell—saves your life! He crowns you with love and mercy—a paradise crown." (MSG) David recognized that not only had God forgiven his sin, God had rescued him from hell itself. And, then, God had put this crown of love and mercy on his head – a far greater, a far more beautiful crown than any crown of gold or silver the people of Israel put on his head as the king. David reveled in the forgiveness, the grace, the mercy of Almighty God. David rejoiced in the character of God. Do you? The more you rejoice in God's character, the less you will feel spiritually blah. What should I do when life feels blah? God says, "Reflect on My blessings. Rejoice in My character." Here's a third answer to that question.

GOD SAYS, "REMEMBER MY PERMANENCE."

Let me read the rest of Psalm 103 starting at v. 14. You young people out there today – you don't usually think a great deal about the shortness of life. Why should you? Your body is strong. Your mind is quick. Your whole life is ahead of you. You know that you'll die in a kind of remote, intellectual way, but you don't think much about the fact that one day in the not too distant future your body will be so much dust. It's not much fun to realize that your entire life is just the briefest of blips across the vast expanse of time and eternity.

Apparently, David was coming to grips with this reality when he happened to notice this beautiful wildflower one day. Whatever it was, it got his attention. But the next day when he looked for it again, that fragile flower had dried up, withered and blown away – a victim of the hot, desert wind. David realized that no one remembered or cared very much that that particular wildflower had lived and occupied that specific place. No one cared but David. Then David realized that every individual human life is just like that. Life is ever so short. You flourish for a few years and then this earthly life is over. Who will remember you? Who will even know or care that you lived? Yes, your immediate family and a few friends, to be sure. But when they're gone, who else will remember you?

God does and God will. God will always remember who you are and He will always know who you are. "Men and women don't live very long; like wildflowers they spring up and blossom. But a storm snuffs them out just as quickly, leaving nothing to show they were here. GOD's love, though, is ever and always, eternally present to all who fear him...." (Ps 103:15-17 MSG) God's love has no boundaries to it. He made you. He loves you. He sent His Son to die for you so that you might know Him and enter into an eternal relationship with Him.

I don't know for sure, but I've got a hunch that David was nearing the end of his life when he wrote this psalm. He realized God's permanence in the midst of life's shortness and that was one great, powerful answer to the question of life's inevitable blahs. For all we know, he was at the end of his life and he found this incredible comfort in the permanence of God's everlasting love for him. My friend, the more you remember – the more you spiritually internalize the greatness of – God's permanence, the less the spiritual blahs will trouble your soul. Instead, each new day can provide opportunities to discover fresh dimensions of God's blessings, God's character and God's permanence.

I heard about a young woman who used to think the stars were tiny specks of light just a few hundred feet above her head. I'm not kidding. And, no, she wasn't in grade school when she believed this. She was in college. She was a sweet, kind, redhead who spoke almost perfect Spanish as a second language. She was very intelligent in many ways. But one day in a conversation she mentioned that she had just learned that stars in the night sky were actually really far away. She was asked what she meant. She said, "You know, they're not just right up there. They're not just tiny dots. They're really far away." She was asked, "What did you think they were before?" Her answer? "I thought they were, you know, just right up above us."

Before you write off this young woman as incomprehensively dumb, let me ask you if you've got a good grasp on the stars above your head. Let's assume the distance between the earth and the sun (92 million miles) was reduced to the thickness of this sheet of paper. If that's the case, then the distance between the earth and the next nearest star would be a stack of papers like this one 70 feet high. And the diameter of the Milky Way galaxy in which we reside would be a

stack of papers 310 miles high. And our galaxy is just a speck of dust in the vastness of the entire universe. And yet the Bible says that Jesus holds the universe together by the word of His power.

Why does it matter that you get to know God better? For the same reason that it's worth knowing that stars aren't just tiny pinpricks of light a few hundred feet above your head. When you begin to discover the truth about God – His blessings, His character, His permanence - it fills you with wonder. When you begin to understand who God truly is, you'll be amazed by Him. You'll feel small as you contemplate His bigness. You'll start to worship Him as you ought. You'll run to Him for refuge and realize the great love He's shown in the measureless distance He's bridged to rescue you. When the blahs start to win and threaten to take over: reflect on God's blessings. Recognize God's character. Remember God's permanence. And then kiss the blahs goodbye!