

Spiritual flatness, Ps 137 & 13

Getting started

1. What does it mean to feel spiritually flat?



2. Is it the same as depression? Why/why not?

Bible

3. Boney M recorded a song called "Rivers of Babylon" in 1978.
The words to the song (below) are taken from Ps 137.

By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down. Yeah we wept when we remembered Zion. (twice)
 When the wicked carried us away in captivity, required from us a song. }
 Now how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? } (twice)

Read Ps 137.

(a) Would you say the people in this psalm are spiritually flat? Why/why not?

(b) What is their context?

4. Read Psalm 13.
(a) How is David feeling?

(b) What things might he be struggling with?

(c) In verses 1-4 David expresses/cries out to God.
Why do you think this is important in times of feeling spiritually far from God?

(d) Even though David feels distant from God, what does he remind himself of?

(e) Why is this important when we feel spiritually flat (vv 5-6)?

(f) David said in v6: "*I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me.*"
What things can you give thanks to God for?

5. What might cause spiritual flatness?

6. If you have experienced times of feeling spiritually flat, share with your group:

(a) What helped your faith in Christ at those times?

(b) What was unhelpful at those times?

To finish

7. What might cure spiritual flatness?

Jason Helopoulos, writing for www.alliancenet.org (March 27, 2014) gives 8 causes of spiritual depression (which might be the same thing as spiritual flatness).

- physical tiredness
- not going to church
- trials and suffering
- worry
- self pre-occupation
- sin
- being lukewarm
- God's withdrawal of a sense of his delight

Another author suggested spiritual flatness may have resulted from "coming down" after the extreme "high" of a conversion experience.

Full article:

Physical Tiredness: Man was created body and soul. There are times that our physical bodies are just exhausted. Our bodies affect our souls, even as our souls affect the body. This physical tiredness can be caused by multiple things. Could you be labouring in your own strength as opposed to the Lord's (Col. 1:28-29)? Maybe you are leading an imbalanced life with respect to work and sleep. Have you neglected the weekly routine of rest on the Lord's Day? It could also just be a busy time of life that has taken a toll upon you. If this is the case, rest your body and bless your soul. Just as one of the remedies for Elijah's melancholy was found in the basic provision of food and drink (1 Kings 17:1-7), so it may be with a need for sleep.

Neglect of the Means of Grace: Even as we feed our bodies, we must feed our souls. We must attend to corporate, private, and family worship. We need to sit under the Word of God preached each week. Our affections need to be stirred in prayer and we need to feed our souls at the Lord's Table. Have we allowed ourselves to avoid the fellowship of the saints? If any of these are the case, then we are forsaking the oasis in the midst of the desert.

Trials and Suffering: Trials and suffering can lead to real spiritual melancholy. Maybe we have lost a job, a friend, our home, a spouse, or even a child. Persecution or betrayal has descended upon us and we are suffering the effects. At times we suffer spiritual melancholy because we do not have a healthy expectation of trials and suffering coming into our lives (Philip. 1:27-30). If that is the case, we need to remind ourselves to expect them (Matt. 10:38) and to persevere through them. This trial will end and we are not alone. Though we may feel abandoned, nothing could be farther from the truth. He is with us (Matt. 28:20).

Cares of the World: The homes we live in, the jobs we occupy, the recreations we pursue, the investments we hope in, and a myriad of other things in this world can begin to edge out our joy in the Lord (Mark 4:19). We can be too invested in the things of this world. We would do well to remember Demas. A man who enjoyed the inner circle of the Apostle Paul's ministry (Col. 4:14; Phil. 1:24) and yet fell in love with the world (2 Tim. 4:10).

Too Much Introspection: We are all to look inward and examine our spiritual lives. As the Puritans used to say, we must be a student of God and ourselves. However, there is a self-examination that goes too far or too long. A self-examination that constantly looks within and seldom looks up to God is an arrow of moroseness aimed at the Christian's heart; and it can easily spread a poison that leads to spiritual melancholy. Lloyd Jones said, "We all agree that we should examine ourselves, but we also agree that introspection and morbidity are bad...I suggest that we cross the line from self-examination to introspection when, in a sense, we do nothing but examine ourselves, and when such self-examination becomes the main and chief end of our life. We are meant to examine ourselves periodically, but if we are always doing it, always, as it were, putting our soul on a plate and dissecting it, that is introspection."

Sin: Giving in to a particular sin or sins may be the cause of our spiritual melancholy. Sin clouds our view of God's glory and our pursuit of Christ. It is not that His face is hid from us, but it can be obscured by habitual or gripping sin in our life. If this is the case, then mortification is the call of the day.

Lukewarmness: This is similar to the reason above, but because it is often the cause of spiritual melancholy and is rather particular, I mention it separately. There is a sin that consists of "going through the motions" and not being fervent in Christ and the things of Christ. It is seen in the warning given to the church in Laodicea (Rev. 3:15). A lukewarm heart is playing with fire and spiritual melancholy can sometimes be a sign to awaken us.

God's Withdrawing A Sense of His Delight: God does not do this maliciously, but as a Father with tender care for His children. He is not abandoning us or forsaking us (WCF 18.4). He merely withdraws. And He does so for our sanctification. He may withdraw a sense of His delight so that we might grow in our reliance upon Him, know the fruit of suffering, have our hidden sins uncovered, learn to seek Him more fully, be encouraged to look forward to the next life, see ourselves as pilgrims in this world more clearly, etc. (Job; Ps. 63:8; Rom. 5:3-5; Rom. 8:37). There are a multitude of reasons, but we can rest assured that it is always for our good and His glory (Rom. 8:28; Rom. 11:36).