

WHY, MY SOUL, ARE YOU DOWNCAST?

These are hard and confusing times.

- The Bible is full of stories of God’s people caught in hard and confusing times, caught right there in that long, endless moment of not knowing how it would turn out, not knowing when or even if the story was going to take a good turn again.
- Have you ever felt like that? Do you feel like that right now?

One of the most confusing times for the followers of Jesus was that time after hearing the bad news of Good Friday and before hearing the good news of Easter.

- The Bible reading today is the Emmaus Road story, from Easter day, about two of Jesus’ followers who did not yet know Jesus had risen from the dead.
- The two men are on a journey to Emmaus. Jesus joins them but they don’t know it’s Jesus.
- They think Jesus is dead. The men are so burdened by the current events around them that when Jesus asks them about it, it says, *“They stood still, their faces downcast.”*

Catch that word? “Downcast!” That’s a word a lot of us can relate to, “downcast.”

- We don’t know when our story is going to get better either; we just know we’re still caught in the bad part.
- We don’t even recognize that Jesus is also right there alongside us on our downcast journey. You don’t notice what’s up when you’re just looking down.

Psalm 42 cries out, “Oh my soul, why are you downcast within me?”

- Hear this, dear one, there is no judgement in being downcast.
- God’s word gives us permission, even encouragement, to be honest about having a downcast soul.
- God’s word also doesn’t leave you stuck there either. God’s better things are coming.
- God’s better things first come to us through God’s word.
- To be “Rooted in Christ” begins with having God’s word “rooted in us.”

I’ve begun a Fall virtual Bible study called, “On my Knees Empty, Lord.” We’re learning skills for going directly to the Bible to find spiritual and emotional support for this long season of the downcast soul... skills for effectively reading the Bible on our own. You are invited to join us.

Sometimes we know only something is wrong, but we don’t know exactly what.

Step one is diagnosis.

- You go to the doctor. The doctor runs tests to determine the diagnosis.
- Only after you have the diagnosis do you move to prescription or treatment plan.

“Why is my soul downcast within me?” is a spiritual question seeking a spiritual diagnosis.

- It is also a prayer.
- Take some time to sit with that diagnostic question in prayer and listening.
- What do you sense the Spirit is telling you in response?

The pandemic has left countless cases of downcast souls in its wake and for many reasons.

Loneliness is one of the leading causes.

- There's an epidemic of loneliness happening not only here but across the globe.
- It was already happening before COVID-19. Get this... back in 2018, the United Kingdom actually appointed a "Minister for Loneliness."
- The current need for physical distancing has caused a huge spike in loneliness.
- In other crisis's, people have been able to be physically together for support through it. Not this one. Our spirits and souls are suffering from the separation.
- Loneliness is especially serious for those who live alone and at higher risk for even some of the other lower-risk connections that people are taking. As more than one of you has said to me, "Others at least have someone else in their house with them."
- The feeling of "I'm alone" easily leads to a downcast soul.

Close to loneliness is the feeling of being estranged.

- It's when you do have people, maybe in your own home, but you've drifted apart.
- The divisiveness of political opinion these days is part of this, driving people apart, the very people who should be there for one another to support each other through these times...
- Can you find a way to still be there for one another even if you differ in your opinions?
- The feeling of being estranged easily leads to a downcast soul.

The diagnostic list of possible reasons for a downcast soul goes on:

- Overload - "I just can't do it anymore; I didn't sign up for this; it's too much."
- Identity Isolation - "I'm different and other people are indifferent or cruel to me because of it."
- Poor Coping Choices - "I'm not doing well, and I'm doing stuff I shouldn't be doing just to try to cope with it."
- Sin - "I'm guilty. I need forgiveness."
- Fear - "I'm so afraid for the people I love."

Maybe somewhere in that list is the reason why your soul is downcast within you?

If yes, you've made a good start. You can't tame it until you name it.

Back on the Emmaus Road, those disciples walked a long time not realizing Jesus was walking with them. But they later realized that along the way their downcast faces had been replaced by this feeling of God's empowering Spirit burning in their hearts.

How did that happen? By Jesus opening the Scriptures to them.

- In God's word we find for our souls both diagnosis and prescription or treatment plan.
- You just have to walk with God's word long enough and in a way that the word is opened up to you to bring healing for your downcast soul.

We, too, will eventually get to the better part of the story we are in. We're just not there yet. But do know that Jesus walks with us too, even though the road is long. Amen.