

Overcoming (Part 10): Self-Pity

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Forerunner, "Bible Study," June 2001

When things go wrong, instead of responding appropriately, many indulge in loneliness or despair until it becomes a melancholy mindset, a distorted way of thinking, seeing, and feeling. Many times, such people feed their sadness by becoming dependant on their despondency to provide them with a sick sort of comfort. Just as a famine can lead a person to make a more intense search for food, one wallowing in self-pity must strive to find a cure for this morose state of mind (II Corinthians 7:11).

When times get hard, those who have sunk into apathy curl up in self-pity. Conversely, the faithful patiently and quietly wait, trusting God to make things right in His perfect time. Those who pity themselves because of the circumstances of their lives fail to see God at work in them, while the faithful understand that God always has their best and eternal interests at heart. In this final Bible study in the series on overcoming, we will analyze the sin of self-pity.

1. What is the difference between pity and self-pity? James 5:11; Job 19:21-22; Proverbs 19:17; Psalm 103:13; I Peter 3:8.

Comment: In Job 19 and Proverbs 19, the Hebrew word *chanan* is translated "pity" and means "to incline toward" or "be gracious." Pity is usually tender feeling for another person who is in misery or distress because of some unforeseen, uncontrollable or accidental crisis. It is similar to compassion but differs with respect to whether the person in distress is sinning. The feeling of pity is motivated primarily by the weakness, misery or degraded condition of the person being pitied. "We pity a man of weak understanding who exposes his weakness; we compassionate the man who is reduced to a state of beggary and want" (George Crabbe, *Dictionary of English Synonyms*, 1816) through little or no fault of his own. In contrast, self-pity is self-indulgently dwelling on one's own sorrows or trials.

2. Should sinners be pitied? Deuteronomy 7:16; 13:6-8; 19:11-13. Should we sorrow for ourselves? Jeremiah 30:15; II Corinthians 7:9-10.

Comment: We may deduce from God's instruction to the Israelites that they "should have no pity on" the wicked nations around them and that we should not pity ourselves for incurring the penalties of sins we chose to commit. Everyone is personally responsible for his own actions. In pitying ourselves, we say, "Poor thing, suffering for your own sins! It's all right if you sinned. You shouldn't have to suffer for it." Self-pity actually involves lying to oneself. It is a result of sin, and it is incurable without repentance. Repentance from sin is the difference between self-pity and sorrow. Self-pity involves no repentance, while godly sorrow produces repentance.

3. What is God's reaction to His servants' self-pity? Exodus 4:10-13; Jonah 1:1-3, 10; 4:1-4, 8-11.

Comment: It is a natural human tendency to respond to life's difficulties with self-pity. Humans exercise a "woe is me" reaction, feeling their suffering is undeserved. When Moses pleads with God to excuse him from leadership, God rebukes his thinly veiled

self-pity as faithlessness. Similarly, Jonah feels so sorry for himself that he lacks pity and mercy for the inhabitants of Nineveh. God tells Jonah those whom he should pity: the 120,000 little children who shared none of Nineveh's guilt, in whom the practice of willful sin had not developed.

4. What can we do to combat self-pity? I Kings 19:4-15; Job 10:1; Psalm 31:10; 42:6; 69:1-20.

Comment: While pitying himself, Elijah asks for death, saying, "It is enough! Now LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" His situation reveals several problems that can fatigue and erode our attitudes: He presumes the outcome, focuses on the problem and himself, and becomes physically exhausted. God provides the solutions to alleviate self-pity: Pray for God's help, rest, find a new focus and new expectations, repent of sins, and take obedient action. When Elijah crawls into his shell, God commands him to get up and get moving. He wants Elijah to choose godly action based on obedience rather than inaction based on his emotions. Genuine repentance and a clear view of our true condition, not a distorted one, fights self-pity.

5. What is the ultimate cure for self-pity? Matthew 18:33; II Corinthians 2:5-8; James 2:8-10; I John 4:18; Revelation 12:10-11.

Comment: In the New Testament, the Greek word *eleeo* occurs only once (Matthew 18:33, "pity"), and it means "to be kind," "tender." In contrast, self-pity is the opposite—not tenderness to oneself but an abusiveness that causes great stress and harm. It shows faithlessness by breaking the first commandment in placing oneself higher in importance than the Creator God. This obsession with self interferes with God's development of righteous character in us.

In essence, self-pity is excessive love of oneself. Thus, a simple cure for self-pity is caring for someone else's welfare more than self—in a word, selflessness. Outgoing concern, love, toward others is outlined by the Ten Commandments, for they show love toward God and love toward neighbor. The saints who overcome Satan and the world are known by the trait that "they did not love their lives to the death." They are willing to lay down their lives for their friends (John 15:13).

It is a misconception to believe that life's pressures lead to self-pity. In reality, how we handle those pressures leads us either to self-pity or to overcoming. By following Jesus Christ's selfless example, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome.