



SELF-PITY

Many people in India experience the nightmare of slow, undetected poisoning. Water from wells in rural areas contains trace amounts of arsenic that is killing thousands. Since the poison is colorless and tasteless, the villagers have no way of detecting it. Since the arsenic comes in such minute quantities, the negative effects appear gradually over many years. At such low concentration levels, it takes between 8 and 14 years for the physical symptoms to emerge. By then, it is often too late.

Spiritual poison works the same way. When persistently indulged, it destroys the soul with lethal toxins that, like arsenic, go undetected for years. Such is the deadly sin of self-pity. Self-pity can destroy you more quickly than anything else and should be resisted with every fiber of your being. Yet, we are all constantly tempted. We are bombarded with opportunities to feel sorry for ourselves. Every day we are misunderstood, overworked, underappreciated, and even abused, and regularly 'something unfair' will happen.

The irony is that the 'someone out to get me' is myself when I am consumed by self-pity. It comes in many forms. Consider these examples:

-A husband and wife have been together for 25 years. One day, the husband leaves for a woman 15 years younger than he. The wife becomes bitter toward God.

-A husband and wife make it to retirement. A few weeks later, the Doctor discovers intestinal cancer in the husband. He is faced with chemotherapy, sickness, and no guarantee of recovery. Withdrawing from family and friends, he moves deeper and deeper into self-pity.

-A truck ran a red light, crushing the civic and the driver's back. Out of work for three months and in chronic pain, the question he could not shake was "Why me?" He envied healthy people and became more and more depressed.

What is Self-Pity?

The roots of self-pity are pride in action. It is the propensity to feel sorry for yourself because you are not getting what you feel like you deserve. Self-pity assumes that you deserve good things from God and other people. It assumes this because it decrees that you are good and you are entitled to good. Self-pity exposes **self-centeredness**. The magnifying glass turns on

you and your problems. It has no energy for God, no interest in others, no capacity in the outward focus that signals spiritual health and true happiness.

Self-pity comes with the “I AM A VICTIM” worldview. It fits nicely into our contemporary mindset. We are victims of earthquakes, floods, terrorist attacks, and tsunamis. Self-pity is a vacuum into which gratitude cannot enter. In fact, self-pity and thanksgiving cannot coexist. Ultimately, self-pity is self worship, and that is what makes it so deadly. In the quest to be worshipped, God must be dethroned so that self can be given the throne.

Symptoms of self-pity

1. **DEPRESSION** – Some find a perverse joy in the gloominess of feeling sorry for themselves. Sometimes when a person says, “I am feeling depressed,” they are really saying, “I am feeling sorry for myself.” They say, “I am worn out when I get up, and I’m worn out when I go to bed. I am tired all the time. I don’t even have enough energy for normal, everyday activities.” Self-Pity may be the debilitating culprit. For some, it feels so good to feel so bad. The reason for their depression is that you can’t gain your life when you are gripping it with all your strength. (Matthew 16:25).
2. **ENVY AND JEALOUSY** – Self-pity can manifest itself in “I want what you have or I deserve what you have.” Cain envied Abel. He could have rejoiced in his brother’s success, but Cain felt that he deserved the good treatment that Abel was getting. In his anger and self-pity, he murdered his brother (Genesis 4:5-8).
Ahab wanted Naboth’s vineyard, but Naboth would not sell it. Ahab went into his house and wallowed in his self-pity (1 Kings 21:4). Listen to what it says: He was vexed, sullen, face-to-the-wall, and not eating. Ahab lusted for what he could not have and felt as though he rightfully deserved it. Jezebel manipulated Ahab’s sin, and it cost him his life.
3. **ANGER** – Anger gives voice to self-pity. People who wallow in self-pity are consumed with the good deals others get in contrast to what has been meted out to them. Their mantra is “I want something but I can’t have it.” Anger erupts. It rains down its ugly debris on those who are close by (or it goes along at a slow boil, simmering like a pot on a stove). Touch it and you will get burned.
4. **BITTERNESS** – “If God was really good, _____ would not have happened. I would be married by now.” Is anything more counterintuitive than bitterness toward God? Think about it. He holds all the cards. He made you from nothing, and breathed life into your soul. He gave His Son for you. Everything you have is a gift from Him. Yet, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34). A heart saturated in self-pity expresses itself through constant complaints, negative speech, critical speech, and malicious gossip. These are the calling cards of self-pity.

Self-Pity Dethrones God

Self-pity draws its life through a tap-root embedded deep in pride. Self-pity says, “I deserve _____.” “I should not have to go through _____.” It reminds me of a statement made by Thomas Brooks on pride that fuels self-pity:

Other sins strike at the word of God, the people of God, and the creatures of God, but pride strikes at the very being of God. He bears a special hatred against pride. It was pride that turned angels into devils. They would be above others in heaven-and therefore God cast them down to hell. Pride is a sin, which of all sins, makes a person most like Satan.”

Because its fundamental cause is sinful flesh, Satan pushes and drives this sin. Self-pity is a flashing neon light that says, “Pride resides here.” Should I put self-pity to death because it is ruining my life? No. Should I put it to death because it robs God of His glory? Yes. Unless my motive is fundamentally God-centered and God-dependent, self-pity will still sit on my personal throne.

Overcoming self-pity

The cross shows us how God feels about sin, including the sin of self-pity. The alternative to the self imposed misery of self-pity is God-given joy and thankfulness. Often those trapped in self-pity cannot see their sin or apply the message of the cross to themselves. That is because the foundation of self-pity is pride, and the nature of pride is blindness.

1. Read Job 42. How did Job avoid self-pity?
2. No matter how bad the circumstances, the person who truly sees the cross of Jesus Christ will overcome self-pity with joyful gratitude. Because Paul understood the cross, he would not yield to self-pity. Read Philippians 4:4-7.
3. Every circumstance in Paul’s life –beatings, shipwrecks, hunger, betrayal, persecution, imprisonment, sleeplessness, hard work, and more-became an occasion for joyous thanksgiving (2 Cor. 11:21-29). Despite deplorable circumstances, Paul was grateful. He knew what he deserved. He knew what Christ had given for him. To the degree that we see ourselves at the cross, self-pity will gain little traction in our thought life.