

Psalm Sundays

Text
Psalm 126

Topic
The psalmist reflects upon Israel's tears of sorrow while in captivity,
and the
subsequent joy of their release and return

Title
"The Best Tears of Our Lives"

Who can keep up with all the lifehacks posted on the WorldWideWeb?

- 👤 Does your hotel room smell bad? *Tape a dryer sheet over the AC unit and turn it on.*
- 👤 Want to know if a battery is good or bad? *Drop it on a table from about six inches.* If it gives one small bounce and fall right over, it's good. If it bounces around more than that, it is either dead or on its way out.
- 👤 Tired of scraping ice off of your windshield? The night before freezing temperatures, *rub a half of a potato over your car's windshield.*
- 👤 *Doritos make great kindling.*

Be careful. Believe it or not, some things you read on the Internet are not true. That goes for this lifehack fail:

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👤 If you need to charge your phone but there are no plugs around, soak an onion in some Gatorade and your phone will charge once you plug it into the onion. (Because everyone carries Gatorade and onions).

Some hacks are obviously fakes:

👤 Are the batteries dead in your smoke alarm? Set out a JiffyPop Popcorn. When you hear the kernels popping, *Get out!!*

Worse than fails and fakes are lifehacks that can potentially be fatal:

👤 No pan to cook a grilled cheese sandwich? Tip your toaster onto its side and 'grill' the sandwich in it. Just make sure you have your fire extinguisher ready when you set everything on fire.

Back to helpful lifehacks, here is one for you to have a greener thumb: **Soak seeds in water before planting.** Especially larger seeds, or those that are naturally wrinkled. Soaking speeds the germination.

Presoaking seeds is an ancient hack. **It is hinted at in Psalm 126.** In verse five we read, "Those who sow in tears..." The psalmist is appealing to the familiar practice of sowing seeds and reaping the harvest as a metaphor. Sowing seeds "in tears" must correspond to a farming practice. It only makes sense if the farmers regularly presoaked their seeds. Just as a farmer presoaks seeds, *so the believer 'presoaks' his or her spiritual sowing for the Lord.*

The psalmist goes on to explain that the liquid for spiritual presoaking is "tears" from "weeping."

Don't be discouraged though. "Those who sow in tears **shall reap in joy.**"

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I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 Presoaking Your Walk With The Lord In Tears Intensifies Your Hope, and #2 Presoaking Your Walk With The Lord In Tears Increases His Harvest.

#1 - Presoaking Your Walk With The Lord In Tears Intensifies Your Hope (v1-3)

Psalm 126 commemorates the joy of Israel being released from their captivity to return to the Promised Land.

This is one of the fifteen travel psalms pilgrims sang on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate one of the annual feasts. If any psalms elicited an emotional response, it was these.

Do any particular songs move you? I'll bet your answer is, "Yes." National anthems... Military anthems... Maybe your school's Alma Mater, if you're feeling nostalgic.

Secular songs, too, can elicit emotion. Little Jackie Paper loved that rascal Puff, And brought him strings and sealing wax and other fancy stuff.

*A dragon lives forever
but not so little boys
Painted wings and giant's rings
make way for other toys
One gray night it happened
Jackie Paper came no more
And Puff, that mighty dragon,
he ceased his fearless roar*

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Made in the image of God, we are emotional creatures. Christians sometimes struggle with integrating emotion into their spiritual lives. One pastor put it this way:

[Our emotions can] occupy two ends of a spectrum:

- 🧠 One danger is emotionalism, in which we allow our feelings to interpret our circumstances and form our thoughts about God. This is putting feelings before faith.
- 🧠 The other danger is a kind of stoicism, where faith is rooted in theology but void of affection. This tendency removes feelings from faith altogether. While it is true that our emotions should not lead our theology, it is vital to our faith that theology lead to a deep experience of our triune God.

Doesn't it stand to reason that songs of praise ought to genuinely move you? It's a good self-exam to ask if songs to the Lord move you. If not, ask "Why not?"

Psa 126:1 A Song of Ascents. When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream.

"The captivity of Zion" the psalmist had in mind was most likely their years in Babylon. It was a doozy. In a series of three sieges, King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and, of course, Solomon's Temple. Jews were taken to Babylon, held captive.

Their captivity ended just as God prophesied it would:

- 🧠 Jeremiah had previously predicted their captivity in Babylon would end after 70 years (Jeremiah 29:10).

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👤 One hundred years before he was born, the prophet Isaiah called King Cyrus of Persia by name, and predicted he would issue a decree to allow Israel return and rebuild (Isaiah 44&45).

Bible prophecy. Wow.

"We were like those who dream." Their release from captivity, followed by the decree of Cyrus permitting their return, was like a dream come true. We'd say they were "living the dream."

For those in-Christ, Jesus has set us free from the power of sin, Satan, and death. We're promised that He will take us home. Unlike the Jews who returned to ruins, we're going to the New Jerusalem, where Jesus is building our forever mansions.

Psa 126:2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

Somewhere in church history, someone thought it was more 'spiritual' to be quiet and reserved; to speak in hushed tones in church; to wear your Sunday best; to establish tedious rituals.

I'll admit, sometimes evangelicals can cross a line and be downright disrespectful in church. Where is that line? All I can say is that we need to be led by the Holy Spirit. We can be too formal; we can be too casual.

Maybe this will help. Jesus calls us His "friends" (John 15:15). He is our friend, and He "presents" us to God the Father. It suggests a familial, healthy respect. Not overly formal or casual, but appropriate.

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When Jesus cried from the Cross, "It is finished," simultaneously the veil in the Temple separating the Holy of Holies from the outer chamber was torn from top to bottom. It signified that believers have immediate access to God. It signified the end of ritual approach to God.

Think, too, about the Lord's Supper. The original one, the one before Jesus was crucified.

Was it at all ritualistic? Not a bit. So why do churches try so hard to turn it into a ritual?

Sure, it replaced Passover. But the celebration of the original Passover also had very little (if any) ritual. Most of our ideas about Passover and the Lord's Supper are traditions we have added.

The psalmist mentions "laughter." He did not mean some crazy outpouring of holy laughter that was uncontrollable. But he certainly did mean laughing.

Don't we try to get infants to laugh? We do it because their laughter is precious, and contagious. So is the laughter of God's children on the earth.

"Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." No one can discount the historic facts:

- 👤 Greater, more powerful, empires subjected Israel. She survived them, and thrives.
- 👤 Nations have tried to completely exterminate Jews. They survived.

God made unconditional promises to Israel, and despite their disobedience and disbelief, He preserved them, and will save them in the end. "All Israel" who survive the future Great Tribulation will be saved.

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Psa 126:3 The LORD has done great things for us, *And* we are glad.

The psalmist makes it personal. In verse two, he spoke of “them.” Here he said “us.” It’s OK to make the Bible personal:

- 👤 “God so loved the world” becomes, “God so loved Gene.”
- 👤 “[God] is longsuffering toward [insert name of nonbeliever], not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (Second Peter 3:9).

Try it for yourself.

“And we are glad.” I have a tough time understanding the exact meaning of “glad.” It’s antonyms are *sad*, *unhappy*, and *upset*.

Bottom line: If I consider that my captivity to sin, Satan, and death is over, and that I’m going to Heaven in death or alive, I have no good reason to *remain* sad, unhappy, or upset.

It doesn’t mean we suppress our feelings. It means we process them through the lens of spiritual truth.

The apostle Paul suggested something like this to the church in Thessalonica. Believers were dying; The fellowship was crying. Paul told them to not “sorrow as others who have no hope” (4:13). Process sorrow through the lens of hope and you bring forth a sanctified sorrow.

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We haven't talked directly about presoaking thus far. The metaphor won't be introduced until verses four and five.

We can extrapolate from what we've discussed that the presoaking we'll read about **intensifies your hope.**

The hope we are talking about is the certainty of the return of Jesus in the clouds to resurrect the dead in Christ, and to snatch away living believers.

Do you feel strongly about that? Is that the hope that determines how you are "living the dream" as you wait?

#2 - Presoaking Your Walk With The Lord In Tears Increases His Harvest (v4-5)

Human beings are the only biological creatures on earth to shed emotional tears. Tears of emotion are chemically different than those caused by physical forces (e.g., wind, fumes, and allergies).

One scholar observed, "The Bible has no fewer than 510 references to crying and uses at least 11 words in New Testament Greek to describe crying."

The New Testament highlights three times that Jesus wept during His brief three-and-one-half year ministry. He cried a lot more as "the Man of sorrows," but these three are recorded:

1. He wept at the tomb of His friend, Lazarus, before calling him back from the dead (John 11).
2. He wept over Jerusalem on account of the judgment that was coming upon it for the Jewish leaders having rejected Him (Luke 13).

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3. He shed tears when He prayed hours before His death by crucifixion (Hebrews 5:7).

You've most likely read a devotional by F.B. Meyer. If not, look for titles he has written. F.B. Meyer explains sowing in tears in this typically illuminating sentence: "It is well when Christian workers [soak] their lessons and addresses with their prayers and tears. It is not enough to sow; we may do that lavishly and constantly, but we must add passion, emotion, tender pity, strong cryings and tears."

Tears are not just from pain; they can be from pity. Compassion can produce tears. Keep in mind we are talking about a gamut of emotions.

Jesus put it this way to the first century church in Ephesus: "I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love" (Revelation 2:4).

The church in Ephesus was doing a lot of sowing. But it lacked genuine emotion.

Let's say you have morning devotions. Have they become mechanical? On a human level, think back to when you first fell in love, and were dating. Didn't you think only of your beloved, and tremble when together?

A Christian's entire time on earth is a betrothal.

The honeymoon doesn't start till after we die, or are raptured. If we are acting as if "the honeymoon is over," Jesus went on to say, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works" (v5).

Psa 126:4 Bring back our captivity, O LORD, As the streams in the South.

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“Streams in the South” is also an illustration borrowed from farming. Certain crops in the South depended upon the overflowing of rivers in order to irrigate. No overflow, no crop.

The psalmist, representing all of Israel, was asking God to bless the land with abundance as He had done before the captivity.

The returning Jews found harsh conditions. It was typical for the invading armies to sow the fields with rocks to make planting difficult. The land had not been worked for 70 years. Imagine coming home to your yard after a 70 year absence - and no power tools.

Psa 126:5 Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy.

The first generation of returnees were sowing after the tears shed during their captivity. Some of them undoubtedly wept as they were sowing, tears of joy at their once again working their own inherited land.

This verse is a promise of God’s faithfulness. Yes, they had cried an ocean of tears in Babylon. But now they were reaping joy. It was like the farmer presoaking seeds before sowing to reap a greater harvest.

I wonder how many ‘got’ the illustration while sowing, before it was recorded in this psalm? God wants to ‘speak’ to you, to show you things, in ordinary, everyday activities and situations.

Psa 126:6 He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves *with him*.

This makes the spiritual application. As F.B. Meyer said, “we must add passion, emotion, tender pity, strong cryings and tears” to our sowing for the Lord. The



work deserves nothing less than our full heart, mind, and strength. The result will be a harvest - a spiritual harvest.

Maybe you are prone to thinking, "I see no abundant spiritual harvest through my impassioned service for Jesus." In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus addressed the question of yield. He said of believers, "But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept *it*, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred" (Mark 4:20).

Thirtyfold results don't make you a loser. Some fields prove more difficult.

I sometimes think those with the smaller yield will have the greater reward for the difficulties endured. You will have the appropriate "sheaves" when you stand before Jesus to be rewarded.

No talk about tears would be complete without referring to Psalm 56:8, where we read, "Put my tears into your bottle."

The tears of God's children are so precious that He preserves and treasures them as a costly liquid.

Emotional tears are composed of water, salts, antibodies, and antibacterial enzymes. They also contain concentrations of stress hormones.

Allow me a bit of speculation. Could it be that God distills all the tears of your life into a single bottle that has the chemical composition of the tears you cried? Each of our formulas would be unique - either a little, or a lot, different.

Maybe it will be a fragrance, made from tears. Eternity by Jesus Christ; Jadore by Jesus Christ; Eau de Gene; Yves Saint Gene.

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I don't know. If it is a fragrance, something the apostle Paul pointed out to the Corinthian believers is encouraging:

2Cor 2:14 Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

2Co 2:15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

2Co 2:16 To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life.

You function as a diffuser. Think of your tears as Heaven Scent-ed.

Infuse your walk with the Lord with "passion, emotion, tender pity, strong cryings and tears." Then diffuse.

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