

Emotions, Emotional Distress and Addictions

Sunday School Class
Trinity Baptist Church

Part Two: Depression in the life of a Christian (TP 146)

What is depression?

- Everyone has experienced “normal” feelings of depression
 - Grief over loss of loved one
 - Times of significant change (e.g., divorce, retirement, job loss, etc.)
 - Periods of stress, busyness, etc.
 - Conflict with a loved one, etc.
- At any given time, about 20% of people are experiencing significant levels of depression—i.e., feeling downcast, discouraged, weary, overwhelmed, etc.
- Most people—about 70%—have thought about suicide at some point
- About 13% of the population can expect to go through a period of prolonged and persistent mood disturbance at some point in their lives—MDD
- Prolonged and persistent periods of mood disturbance characterized by:
 - Persistent feelings of sadness, melancholy, tearfulness
 - Loss of interest
 - Change in appetite/weight loss or gain
 - Insomnia or hypersomnia
 - Agitation or slowing of physical movement
 - Fatigue or loss of energy
 - Feelings of worthlessness, excessive self-criticism, inappropriate guilt
 - Poor concentration/memory
 - Indecisiveness
 - Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

What factors contribute to or are associated with depression?

- Genetics (depression runs in families)
- An early history of significant loss
- Trauma (accident, etc.) or severe ongoing stress (e.g., marital turmoil)
- Certain medical illnesses (e.g., thyroid dysfunction, etc.), head trauma, etc.
- Certain personality characteristics—i.e., perfectionism, self-criticism, dependency, pessimism, etc.
- Certain behavioural patterns
 - Social withdrawal, isolation, lack of physical exercise, habitual avoidance, procrastination, irresponsibility, etc.

- Certain ways of thinking—habits of thought
 - Catastrophizing, overgeneralizing, negative filter, jumping to conclusions, all-or-nothing thinking, magnification, excessive self-focused attention
- Unhelpful beliefs or attitudes which predispose us to responding negatively when life events impinge (e.g., “My value or worth as a person depends on what others think of me,” “If I fail at something, then I’m a complete failure as a person,” “Winners never quit and quitters never win,” or “I deserve the respect and admiration of others,” etc.)

Is there a spiritual dimension to depression?

Spiritual causes:

- Satan no doubt plays a role in depression for many
 - He is the “accuser of the brethren” (Rev. 12:10)—i.e., he can cause Christians to dwell on past sins, despair regarding their salvation, etc.
 - He is the “father of lies” (Jn. 8:44)—i.e., he plants and nourishes false and toxic ideas
- Sinful behaviour and sinful attitudes can lead to depression
 - Bitterness, unresolved anger, unconfessed sin, envy, pride, selfishness, etc.
- Incorrect doctrine, misinterpretation of scripture

Spiritual effects:

- Depression can also have a devastating impact on the spiritual lives of believers—robbing them of their joy, their assurance, their fellowship with fellow believers, etc.—and taking them “out of the game” with respect to Kingdom service

Note the importance of approaching depression as a highly complex, multifaceted phenomenon—avoid simplistic approaches (e.g., “it’s all just a chemical imbalance,” or “it’s just a matter of sin” “irresponsibility” etc.). Two errors: it’s all your fault—or there’s nothing you can do (except take pills).

Can Christians suffer from depression?

- Some of the great biblical heroes struggled with depression
 - Job (adversity)
 - David (Ps. 13; 2 Sam. 21:15) (extreme stress, conflict)
 - Jeremiah (melancholic personality) (Lam: 3)
 - Jonah (bitterness)
 - Elijah (weariness) (1 Ki. 19: 1-4)
 - Paul (2 Cor. 7:5,6; 2 Cor. 11:27-29) (adversity, weariness, etc.)
- Even some great heroes of the reformed faith
 - John Knox
 - John Bunyan
 - Martin Luther
 - C. H. Spurgeon

Why do God's children suffer from depression?

- Reference Spurgeon's lecture to his students entitled, *When a preacher is downcast*
 - God's preachers are still frail humanity
 - The preacher's work has much to try the soul
 - The loneliness of God's prophet tends to depression
 - God allows fainting after great victories lest we should be "exalted above measure"
 - Burden and weakness are given to humble us before great tasks
 - Failure to take regular periods of vacation and rest promotes fainting and weariness
 - The inevitable blows of betrayal, slander, criticism depress God's best preachers
 - God allows a minister's troubles for His glory
 - Victory in trouble is possible for God's man

How can we combat depression?

- Variety of medical and psychological treatments—speak with me more specifically about these
- Variety of practical things we can do to combat depression
 - Exercise regularly
 - Do not isolate yourself—seek fellowship with others even if you don't particularly feel like it
 - Create structure and routine—and follow it
 - Force yourself to regularly engage in activities that provide a sense of pleasure (fun) and of achievement (accomplishment)
 - Stop avoiding and procrastinating—face problems/issues/conflicts that you've been avoiding and deal with them
 - Accept things you can't change
- Variety of spiritual activities that can be helpful in combating depression
 - Regularly read, listen to, meditate on, submit yourself to and obey the Word—praying the Psalms can be a particularly good place to start
 - Bathe your mind in the doctrines of God's grace (quote Luther)
 - Do not forsake the gathering of God's people—attend church regularly
 - Avoid excessive self-focus—look at Christ
 - Let go of any shifting/changing/transient bases of identity and self-worth (e.g., appearance, social status, financial well-being, popularity, employment, personal accomplishments, etc.) and cling only for your sense of identity and worth to the fact that you are one who is beloved of God.
 - Confess and repent of any sinful behavior or attitude that may be entangling you or frustrating your running of the race (Heb. 12: 1-2)

How can we minister to those struggling with depression?

- Attitude of acceptance, compassion and understanding—of universality of depression—helps spare sufferers of depression from needless shame and guilt
- Don't try to "fix"—it may only get you depressed! Listen and love—but with limits.
- Don't enable passivity, irresponsibility, avoidance, etc.
- Don't get in over your head—know when you need to refer to someone with more expertise
- Take time to physically meet together—for exercise (!)
- Pray together
- Read the Word together
- Point to Christ