

The Bible and Depression

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“The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?”

Proverbs 18:14

The DEFINITION OF DEPRESSION

- A. It is generally described as “a sinking of the spirit; dejection; a state of sadness; want of courage or animation; as depression of the mind. Pressed down, dispirited, dejection of mind. Abnormal state of inactivity and unpleasant emotion. A psychoneurotic or psychotic disorder marked by sadness, inactivity and self-depreciation.”
- B. We shall define it as the moods, feelings, or thoughts of hopelessness which become a person’s excuse to cease from handling life and its problems.

The POPULARITY OF DEPRESSION

- A. If you converse at all today with others, you can just about count on hearing it daily.
 - 1. Everyone wants to let others know how their circumstances are getting to them.
 - 2. Everyone wants to let others know in advance an excuse for their foolish conduct.
 - 3. Books and counselling are exploding in quantity without any significant improvement.
- B. It is used an excuse for all sort of ungodly behavior by our wicked generation. Deceitful and wicked hearts will try to justify it and its attendant foolishness (Jeremiah 17:9).
- C. It is a manifestation of the perilous times of the last days (II Timothy 3:1-5).
 - 1. Men are lovers of their own selves and indulge themselves in introverted worship.
 - a. Men have always had a sin problem with pride and self-love. But it was difficult for servants to use it as an excuse for folly when masters did not really care about “depression.” But when even servants and their foolish children are taught to love and value themselves, you can count on an epidemic of self-centeredness. While men exalt the terms self-love and self-esteem which surely seem proper enough, they are practiced by self-pity, selfishness, self-protection, etc.
 - b. This is easily the greatest and chief general cause of depression. For envy, jealousy, self-pity, emulation, frustration, impatience, covetousness, anger, and hatred among other sins are sins of self-centeredness and self-protection.
 - c. The Bible does not know of an “inferiority complex” in the natural heart that leads to depression. This is the lie of modern psychology and the coverup proud human beings use to

justify their haughty resentment of others.

- d. The person who says he feels bad about himself because he is not as good as others (1) does not believe what he is saying, (2) is saying it for you to correct him, (3) resents life for not treating him as well as he believes he deserves, (4) resents everyone else for being better than he is, and/or (5) resents God for not having given *him* more than others.
 - e. Man has a sin problem with a pride/superiority complex rather than a sin problem with a humility/inferiority complex. Man may even have a sin problem with a pride/inferiority complex where the pride resents God and others for their superiority. However, scripture does not warn of a problem with low self-esteem.
 - f. Constant negative criticism of a child MAY reduce its ambition and courage or it MAY increase its ambition and recklessness for approval; but it NEVER takes away from a child the innate love and esteem of self inherited from Adam. The lethargic, withdrawn, and resentful spirit comes from resenting others for not esteeming them as much as they naturally esteem themselves.
2. Men are incontinent in their undisciplined and unrestrained approach to life.
- a. Consider PMS and women telling us they “cannot” properly manage their periods.
 - b. An angry rage today is called having a temper, drunkenness is called alcoholism, uncontrolled brats are called hyperactive children, rude impatience is called assertiveness, wallflowers excuse themselves with reserved personalities, etc.
 - c. The crying need in our generation is temperance – the ability to rule one’s self.
 - d. Depression is succumbing to a lust of the flesh just like any other temptation.
3. Men are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, that is, they are addicted to their feelings of pleasure and self-indulgence rather than the word and commandments of God. And as such, they maintain an outward form of godliness but are unable and unwilling to grant it any authority or power.
- D. While many treatments of this subject deal with it compassionately and justify it as an acceptable part human existence, I shall not.
- 1. God has not called me to be a psychiatrist or psychologist, but He has called me to preach His word instantly regardless of the season (II Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 2:15).
 - 2. When I consider what God has to say about men, their circumstances, and their duties, I do not find any excusing or justification or compassion of depression.
 - 3. I hope I shall address it as God would (Job 38:1-3; 40:7), or as Solomon would (Proverbs 25:28), or as Paul would (I Corinthians 16:13; Hebrews 12:11-13).

The SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- A. Emotional: hopelessness, pessimism, apathy, gloom, black, blue, bleak, dejected, forlorn, sensitive, despondent, introverted, indifferent, emotional pain, fearfulness, disgust, confusion, overwhelmed, etc.
- B. Behavioral: cries more easily, seldom laughs, moody, sighs, eating habits change, critical, frets, distracted, insomnia, withdrawn, suicidal, rejection of comfort, cynicism, hypochondria, detached,

unproductive, irritable, etc.

- C. Physical: inactivity, fatigue, sad facial expression, looks down, ulcers, headaches, etc.
- D. Whether a person is merry or depressed, his face will reflect his heart (Proverbs 15:13).
- E. While a merry heart affects us well like medicine, a broken spirit dries us up (Proverbs 17:22). Instead of a healthy existence and vitality that affect others positively, we become dried up and drooping and useless to ourselves and others.
- F. A sound heart is the life of the flesh, but an ungoverned one is rottenness (Prov 14:30).
- G. The depressed man is one always seeing the evil rather than the good, cannot bear himself, and neither can he be born to others (Proverbs 18:14: 15:15).
- H. Consider the following examples that give us an actual picture of ourselves sometimes.
 - 1. Jacob was cast down about losing Joseph and refused to be comforted (Gen 37:35).
 - 2. Hannah was cast down by the continual provoking of her adversary (I Samuel 1:8).
 - 3. Ahab was cast down by Naboth's refusal to give him his vineyard (I Kings 21:4).
 - 4. Elijah was cast down in his spirit after hearing Jezebel's threat (I Kings 19:1-4).

The CAUSES OF DEPRESSION

- A. Consider these physiological reasons: hormonal, improper diet, hypoglycemia, birth control pills, chemical imbalance, tiredness, insomnia, physical inactivity, etc. These excuses are often given more attention than necessary, and they can be corrected easily.
- B. Consider these environmental reasons: humidity, temperature (Jonah 4:8; Rev 16:8-9), darkness, rain, etc. These excuses are quite insignificant, show an exceedingly ungoverned spirit, a total lack of faith and trust in God's providence, and can usually be corrected with witty inventions.
- C. Consider these emotional reasons: anger, worry, resentment, jealousy, guilt, stress, etc. These excuses are choices we make as none of them are able to rule a child of God.
- D. Consider these circumstantial reasons: finances, health, mechanical failures, sin, etc.
 - 1. Man is surely destined for trouble, so it ought not to surprise us (Job 5:7; 14:1).
 - 2. We should not measure God, life, or anything else by circumstances (Eccl 9:1-2).
 - 3. What should Paul have done with his set of circumstances (II Corinthians 11:24-33)?
- E. Consider temperamental reasons. Some will argue that they are predisposed to depression by the temperament God gave them. Sounds like Adam blaming God for Eve, doesn't it?
 - 1. The temperaments in order of predisposition to depressions are melancholies, phlegmatics, choleric, and sanguines. Phlegmatic-melancholies and choleric-melancholies are also quite susceptible to depression.
 - 2. While such predispositions are true in different areas with different temperaments, they can never be used as an excuse for sinful conduct.
 - 3. The melancholy is most susceptible to depression for (1) his great weakness of self centeredness, (2) his weakness of perfectionism, and (3) his idealism.

- F. Living wickedly against better knowledge will bring constant and proper guilt (II Pet 2:8).
 - 1. Fellowship with God – the basis of true happiness – requires holiness (II Cor 7:1).
 - 2. David understood the vexation of the wickedness of the wicked (Psalm 119:136,158).
 - 3. Your heart will have no reason to condemn, if you are righteous (I John 3:18-22).
 - 4. A grieved and/or quenched Spirit of God will destroy joy (Eph 4:30; I Thess 5:19).
- G. Discontentment with what you do have and ungodly desire for what you do not have.
 - 1. The wise man compared the sight of the eyes with a wandering desire (Eccl 6:9).
 - 2. Desire kills the slothful (Prov 21:25-26): it can cause many sorrows (I Tim 6:9).
 - a. Sluggards have desires (Pr 13:4), but they do not have the ambition to earn them.
 - b. Sluggards have a more difficult time both perceived and real (Proverbs 15:19).
 - c. Sluggards enjoy comfort too much to consider diligent labor (Pr 19:24; 24:30-34).
 - d. Sluggards are too frightened by obstacles to attack them (Pr 20:4; 22:13; 26:13).
 - e. Yet his conceit keeps him from obeying wise reasons from others (Prov 26:16).
 - f. Desire does not have to be a depressant where ambition and diligence dwell.
 - g. But greedy covetousness will vex any soul that assesses its deficiencies (Ee 5:10).
 - 3. Ahab was depressed over Naboth's vineyard that he righteously kept (I Kings 21:1-4).
 - 4. Amnon's lust for Tamar was sufficient to make him sick with vexation (II Sa 13:1-2).
- H. A selfish choice is often the cause of depression as men desire to use it for evil ends.
 - 1. Those in love with themselves choose to think about themselves more than others and feel a great need to wallow in the feelings of self-pity that rise in depraved hearts.
 - 2. Those in love with themselves choose to draw attention to themselves by depressions. The threat of suicide is one of their greatest tools for more attention from others.
 - 3. Those in love with themselves choose to punish others by their depressions. If they are going to feel bad and become unproductive, they want to ruin others' usefulness.
 - 4. Those in love with themselves choose to manipulate others by their depressions.
- I. A cycle of wallowing in one's own discouragement is the intemperate indulgence of a weak generation. Once feelings or thoughts of discouragement enter the mind, the weak and wicked creatively conjure up all the negative things they can think of, thus driving themselves even deeper into a depression. Excessive introversion is a great blight.
- J. Physical tiredness can be a cause of depression by depleting the reserves of strength.
 - 1. Elijah was apparently tired after his great success on Mount Carmel (I Kings 19:4).
 - 2. The Lord warns us against unreasonable care and exhorts us to sleep (Psalm 127:2).
- K. Unrealistic expectations will discourage and depress the idealistic and foolish person.
 - 1. Disappointment in accomplishments comes from having targets too high (Pr 13:12, 19).
 - 2. The pride of the perfectionist rejects any compromise of his goals (Psalm 127:2).
 - 3. Unrealistic comparisons with others whom God has given more hurt (Matt 25:14-15).

4. Those who set goals too high (1) usually cannot keep them, (2) accomplish less than the man with realistic goals, and (3) end up depressed with the whole process.
 5. This error is (a) being too concerned with a project, (b) expecting appreciation and not getting it, (c) putting everything into a business or investment opportunity, (d) a woman craving a child, (e) parents putting everything into children, (f) hoping a lover will return, (g) joining the “perfect” church only to find sinners, (h) expecting ministerial labor to make significant differences, and so forth.
- L. Guilt is a significant cause of depression, but it is quite easy to remedy with Scripture.
1. Justified guilt results from unconfessed sin in a child of God (Ps 38:1-22; 51:1-12).
 2. Unjustified guilt results from confessed sin in a faithless child of God who (1) will not believe the promises of God or (2) has too much pride and perfectionism to accept forgiveness without inflicting self-punishment and agonizing in self-pity.
 3. There can be too much sorrow (II Cor 2:7). We are not pagan masochists. God forgives (I John 1:9), and He forgives quickly and easily a broken heart (II Sa 12:13).
- M. A great loss can often trigger the emotional response that leads to a depressed spirit.
1. The Shunamite woman was grieved in her heart after losing her son (II Kings 4:27).
 2. Losing a spouse, health, a relative, a limb, a friend, an investment deal, your marriage, a child, a job, or a promotion can lead to depression.
 3. The prayer of serenity works well here with the two categories of human trouble.
- N. Life in general sometimes appears quite hopeless and depressing: it should, for it is.
1. Solomon told us that life was a vexation of the spirit (Eccl 1:14; 2:17,26; 4:4).
 2. Paul said that we were made subject to this vanity against our wills (Rom 8:18-23).
- O. Dilemma between alternatives for those with difficulty making decisions causes despair.
1. The difficulty is perfectionism and an unmercifully critical spirit even of one’s self.
 2. Paul was perplexed at times, but it did not send him into despair (II Corinthians **4:8**).
 3. We are not perfect; our decisions are of little importance; and mercy to self is good.
- P. A legalistic/pharisaical approach to life misses life’s enjoyment (Col 2:20-23; I Tim 6:17).
- Q. Learned behavior from parents or others who allowed depressions and defended them.
- R. A wrong perspective of life considered long enough will eventually bring depression.
1. Asaph had errors about the wicked and the righteous and their ends (Psalm 73:1-14).
 2. An emphasis on the negative rather than the positive is an innate “ability” of some.
 3. Even the wise man himself despaired when he considered the evil of life (Eccl 2:20), but please notice that it was a choice he made to let this fact cause despair.
- S. Too much dwelling on the past rather than the present and future. God forgives and forgets, and we should do the same. There is little value in worrying about the past. “What am I going to do?” is significantly more important than “What have I done?” “What am I going to make happen in my life?” is more important than “What has happened to me?”

- T. Too much concern about others and their problems is another “good” cause of depression. It is pride and a desire to be God that drives men to want to save the human race. We must learn to let others “bear their own burdens” and skin their knees (Gal 6:5).
- U. Too much care and responsibility will wear the human spirit down by dilution of strength.
 - 1. As Moses with Israel, men sometimes try to do everything themselves (Ex 18:13-18).
 - 2. This error is (a) being unable to say “no,” (b) inability to delegate, (c) thinking yourself to be indispensable, (d) being responsible for others, (e) always being “productive” and “active,” (f) guilt from doing nothing, and so forth.
- V. Lack of love resulting in fear and torment relative to others will bring depression through missing the peace and joy of love and friendship.
- W. Envy is a terrible evil that will consume men day and night (I Samuel 18:5-11; Job 5:2; Proverbs 14:30; 27:4; Ecclesiastes 4:4-6; James 3:14-16; 4:5).
 - 1. The person who desires to be what God did not make him will always be frustrated.
 - 2. Envy will cause you to (a) emulate the superior person or (b) destroy him.
 - 3. Our nation, ignoring differences that God makes, preaches that all can be great.
- X. Demonic oppression, possession, or influence can cause a change in spirit (I Sam 16:14,23; 18:10; 19:9; Mark 5:1-5).
- Y. Living on feelings rather than faith is a sure way to get in trouble with depression.
 - 1. Those who love pleasure more than God will exalt feelings out of their proper place.
 - 2. God does not care whether we feel like obeying or not; He demands and expects it.
 - 3. When feelings are exalted to a place of importance, the initial feelings of depression are accommodated when they should be blown away in disgust and discipline.
- Z. Folly in the family is a heavy burden for men to bear (Genesis 26:35; Prov 10:1; 17:25).
- AA. Wisdom actually becomes a source of depression without faith in God (Eccl 1:14,18).
- AB. Talking to yourself too much. We often talk ourselves into depression, anger, etc. An indulgence in day dreaming, introspection, verbalizing your thoughts, time alone, and other habits will bring depression. Consider the verbalization that often takes place.
- AC. There is often a psychological letdown after completing a major goal (I Kings 19:4). No one goal should be made so important that our spirit depends upon it. God only deserves this place of honor. And every goal and project should be submitted to His will.
- AD. Pride can be a source of depression by fixing our perspective for eventual frustration.
 - 1. Happiness by beating others will cause dejection when someone better is encountered.
 - 2. Inability to admit mistakes will (a) create excessive caution and (b) death for errors.
 - 3. Such persons cannot endure the humbling character of tribulations out of pride.

The NATURE OF DEPRESSION

- A. Once you entertain the initial feelings or mood or thoughts of depression, they initiate a downward spiral

that compounds itself by further feelings and thoughts of depression. A simple negative event can bring you to view your whole life as a colossal failure.

- B. When you are depressed, you are usually not in the frame of mind to seek help. You want to avoid those who will rebuke you. You should condition yourself to seek help from friends when you feel depression coming on, and you should instruct them to pursue you righteously when they detect your depression.

The SIN OF DEPRESSION

- A. Evil and sorrow will certainly occur, but how do we react to them is the crucial point.
1. Consider the choice God put before Cain and how he miserably failed (Gen 4:1-8).
 2. Consider the life of the apostle Paul and his reaction to adversity (II Cor 4:8-9).
 - a. He was troubled on every side (far more than us), but he was not distressed.
 - b. He was perplexed with great care, but he did not allow himself to despair.
 - c. He was persecuted, but he never complained nor believed he was forsaken.
 - d. He was cast down, but he did not let this discouragement destroy his usefulness.
 - e. Even when apparently sorrowful, it did not overwhelm his rejoicing (II Cor 6:10).
 - f. He learned to glory in infirmities to show God's strength (II Corinthians 12:7-10).
 3. The feelings of depression are our infirmity, but how will we react (Psalm 77:10)?
 4. Who has had occasion to be depressed like Job? Yet consider his proper initial response (Job 1:20-22; 2:3,9-10). He may have mourned, but it did not destroy him.
 5. Jesus was troubled in spirit as friends grieved, but He did not sin (John 11:33).
 6. Jesus had reason to be depressed facing the cross, but He did not sin (John 12:27).
- B. Depression is definitely sin when it excuses wickedness i.e. overeating, fornication, forsaking the assembly, anger, disrupted relationships, slothfulness, etc.
1. Remember that service to the Lord must be done with joyfulness (Deut 28:47-48).
 2. Remember how a bad mood of depression can cause haste in our speech (Ps 31:22).
 3. Distress, despair, feelings of being forsaken, and destruction are clearly sins.
 4. Implacability is a sin (Romans 1:31), and it is often a symptom of a depressed spirit.
 5. Burying your talent and not multiplying it with usury becomes a sin (Matt 25:24-25).
 6. How many draw back from a life of faith due to a depressed spirit (Heb 10:38-39)?
- C. Sorrow and mourning is good (Eccl 7:2-6), but not to the destruction of our usefulness.
1. David made diligent search of his own soul (Psalm 77:6), but it moved him to profit.
 2. The Bible tells us to examine ourselves (II Cor 13:5), but not to our destruction.
 3. Surely Job mourned his afflictions (Job 1:20; 2:13), but he did not sin against God.