

Biblical Living (10) – Depression (Part 1)

Definition of depression:

Four biblical examples of depression:

1) Cain: Genesis 4:3-7

Situation: Cain's sacrifice rejected by God/Abel's accepted (v. 3-4) Response: disappointment and anger (v. 5) Expectations: divine approval, equality/superiority to his brother Solutions: do what is right to feel better (v. 7) master your sinful desires (v. 7)

2) Elijah: 1 Kings 19

Situation: aftermath of the Baal/YHWH contest (1 Kings 19:1-3) Response: discouragement, suicidal thoughts (19:4, 9-10) Expectations: protection and company as reward for faithfulness (19:10) Solutions: food and sleep (19:5-7) assurance of God's presence (19:11) given a positive task to do—anointing two kings (19:15-16) correction of his wrong thinking that he was alone (19:18)

3) David: Psalm 30

Situation: life-threatening physical sickness (30:2-3, 9) Response: weeping, dismay, mourning (30:5, 7, 11) Expectation: perpetual personal prosperity (30:6) 3 Solution: understanding that success is a gracious gift (30:7)

4) Paul: 2 Corinthians

Situation: conflict among and accusations from the Corinthians (2:5-11; 1:17-18; 10:10; 11:7, 11) Response: despair, sorrow, conflict, fears, second guessing (1:8; 2:1-4; 7:5, 8-9) Unmet desires: peace in the church, open relationships with them (11:28-29; 6:11-13; 7:2) Solutions: divine mercy (4:1; 1:3) resilient, enduring attitude (4:8-11); Prov 24:16a desire to please God (5:9) God-focus and other-focus (4:15; 5:13) love for Christ (5:14) thankful confidence in God (2:14; 3:5; 4:7) resurrection focus (4:17-18) pursuing reconciliation (7:2-3) godly friendship (7:5-7) reflection on past grace (12:7-10)

Thirteen things often associated with depression:

1. Failure.

Kent Hughes (a well-known preacher in the US): *My gait had lost its characteristic energy and I often appeared downcast. Barbara knew that it had to do with my work, for she observed that*

when things were going well at church I was OK, but otherwise I was discouraged. If church attendance was up, I was up; if it was down, so was I. And the numbers had been going down for a long time. (Liberating Ministry from the Success Syndrome, 14)

2. Disappointment.

3. Sadness and anger.

Psalm 6:2, 6-7. Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am pining away; heal me, O LORD, for my bones are dismayed I am weary with my sighing; every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears. My eye has wasted away with grief.

Welch's formula: *Sadness + Anger = Depression. The wisest way to approach this subject is to assume that you are angry. (Welch, Depression: A Stubborn Darkness, 153, 154)*

Jonah ... followed a well-worn path. His dashed hopes and anger descended into self-pity. "Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:3). (169) 5

4. Fear.

5. Loneliness.

Psalm 31:9, 11-12.

6. Lack of enthusiasm and passiveness.

Ecclesiastes 9:10. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might.

7. Meaninglessness.

Point: People who have become depressed tend to feel their work is meaningless; less often do they *become* depressed because they feel their work is meaningless.

- Purposelessness. Elderly or retired people who, deprived of the life-long external motivations of work or family obligations, can fade into a despondent silence.
- Lack of focus. A person who faces many responsibilities at once, unsure of where to start to tackle the multiple tasks demanding his attention, may vacillate, jump from task to task, become frustrated with apparently minimal progress on all fronts, and eventually feel like his work is purposeless.

8. A sense of impotence to change unpleasant or painful circumstances.

9. Inward focus.

Everything turns inward in depression.

10. Fatigue.

People going through severe depression often swap day for night—sleeping excessively during the day and staying awake late at night. This often makes scheduling an important part of the solution to depression.

11. Neglect of life responsibilities.

Note: There is a difference between *feeling down* and *depression*. Depression includes a *significant neglect of life responsibilities* due to despondent feelings.

Point: You can feel down and not be depressed—you press through by God's grace and do your basic responsibilities, not being tripped up or dominated by your feelings of discouragement.

12. Unconfessed sin.

Psalm 31:9-10 Psalm 38:2-11

13. Wrong views of God.

Insight from Ecclesiastes:

Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes to help us deal with the frustrations of living in a Genesis 3, sin-cursed world. Therefore, Ecclesiastes identifies many things that lead to discouragement and—potentially—depression.

- relentless pleasure seeking (2:1-2)
- self-focused kingdom building (2:4-11)
- placing undue hope in human education, intellect, and ingenuity (2:12-17)
- death as the thief of all human accomplishments (2:18-21)
- overwork (2:22-23; 4:6)
- sinful comparing (4:4; see also Ps 73:1-3)
- pursuing satisfaction in making money (5:10)
- injustice (7:7a; 8:14 (note *mad* in 7:7 is the Hebrew word for *insane*))
- focusing on the "good ol' days" (7:10)

Is depression an emotional problem?

Jay Adams: 9 *When a client feels depressed or high, or anxious, or hostile, there really is no problem with his emotions. His emotions are working only too well. It is true that his emotions are not pleasant, but the real problem is not emotional, it is behavioral. Solutions aimed at relieving the emotions directly (... e.g., chemical methods like pills or alcohol), therefore, must be considered to be nothing more than the relief of symptoms. (Competent to Counsel, 93)*

Is depression a disease, and therefore, to be treated with medicines such as anti-depressants?

Severe depression is often accompanied by physical symptoms such as sleep loss, fatigue, and feelings akin to physical pain stemming from despondency, sadness, and disappointment. But is depression a *physical* problem? At root, no. The body does not cause thoughts. The body may contribute towards moods and dispositions. But depression is ultimately a way of thinking, something the body cannot do alone.

Key principle: Depression is a *response*.

James 1:14-16. *But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.*