

Biblical Living (11) – Depression (Part 2)

Nine helpful questions to ask depressed people

The importance of gathering data:

Things our questions are hoping to identify:

• physical contributions • unconfessed sin • disappointment • sadness • anger • fears • passivity • inward focus • failure • meaninglessness • neglect of duties • wrong views of God

1) Have you had a medical check-up to identify any genuine physiological contributions to your feeling blue? heart disease thyroid vitamin deficiency etc.

2) What are your diet and sleep patterns?

Poor eating habits and haphazard sleep patterns negatively affect emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

Screwtape's advice to Wormwood regarding temptation:

Never let him notice the medical aspect. Keep him wondering what pride or lack of faith has delivered him into your hands when a simple enquiry into what he has been eating or drinking for the last twenty-four hours would show him whence your ammunition comes. (CS Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, 79)

Questions about life circumstances:

Proverbs 15:15. *All the days of the afflicted are bad ...*

3) What is happening in your life?

This seems like an obvious question, but note the following.

Note: This question might bring to light a physical sickness, wrong responses to failure, disappointment, tragic circumstances, fears, and a wrong response to being sinned against.

4) What are your unmet desires or expectations?

Depression often comes from unmet expectations.

Job 30:26-27. When I expected good, then evil came; When I waited for light, then darkness came. I am seething within and cannot relax.

5) If you believe you are a failure, whose standards are you trying to live up to? Yours? Others'? God's?

The false expectations of perfectionism:

We live in an imperfect world, and we must come to terms with the possible. Setting more modest and realistic goals would bring great release to many an idealistic perfectionist. (J. Oswald Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, 47)

Comment: A proud, false sense of guilt often drives the mood swings of the perfectionist.

6) What life responsibilities have you been or are you currently neglecting?

A warning to the depressed person: Proverbs 18:9. *He also who is slack in his work is brother to him who destroys.*

7) Have you allowed your depression to affect your love for others?

Jesus' command was to love your neighbour as yourself.

The apostle Paul's example of loving others:

2 Corinthians 1:3-4. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

Questions about spiritual issues:

8) Is God pointing out sin in your life?

9) Do you want to change?

The *Yeah, but* habit:

Point out to the person his "Yeah, but ..." habit. Every encouraging word is met with a "Yeah, but" argument. It's just a habit, and can be consciously replaced by a willingness to be encouraged.

Proverbs 26:12. *Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.*

Proverbs 28:26a. *He who trusts in his own heart is a fool ...* 24

The lies of discouragement:

The depressed person who refuses to be encouraged is almost certainly believing the *four lies of depression*:

1. My pain is unique. 2. God has abandoned me. 3. This is more than I can handle. 4. There is no way out.

God's four-fold answer: 1 Corinthians 10:13. 1. *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man;* 2. *and God is faithful,* 3. *who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able,* 4. *but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*

Twelve solutions to depression:

1) Get a full medical check-up to identify or rule out genuine medical problems.

2) Start doing what is right (or stop neglecting life responsibilities).

Depression is a downward spiral. Doing what is right helps reverse the plunge and starts moving the person back up the spiral.

Genesis 4:6-7a *Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?"*

1 Peter 3:10-11. *The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. He must turn away from evil and do good ...*

The Bible frequently points out that right feelings and the enjoyment of life come from doing what is right. The depressed person needs to understand and benefit from this reality: "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?"

Observation: God-focused and other-focused acts of love and duty replace the relentless and destructive self-focus of depression.

A warning:

Pleasing Christ is the ultimate goal of doing right. In other words, the depressed person must be encouraged to avoid idolising feeling better. He should do right to please Christ, fully understanding that feeling better is the normal result of sowing good actions.

Applied to decision-making:

A depressed person needs to reverse the downward spiral of neglecting life responsibilities, including decision-making. If he has delayed making difficult or painful decisions, help him evaluate and act. Delay has only brought frustration and depression.

The principle restated: *Do the next right thing.*

Depressed people need to be taught the life-changing principle of doing the next right thing.

- You don't feel like getting out of bed, but it's the next right thing.
- You don't feel like brushing your hair, applying makeup, and dressing attractively, but it's the next right thing.
- You don't feel like going to work, getting to your housework, or interacting cheerfully with others, but it's the next right thing.

3) Implement a schedule.

The emotional energy and time spent on brooding, worrying, or wallowing in a sticky-sweet sense of failure needs to be redirected. Making a schedule and doing the next right thing redirects the person's energy to loving God and loving neighbour.

A schedule helps counteract the habit of swapping day and night.

General suggestions regarding a schedule:

- *Go to bed and get up at the same times each day.*
- *Eat at appointed times.*
- *Exercise at appointed times.*
- *Have a schedule for the day.*
- *Write down one thing you agree to work on every day.*

Physical exercise:

Spurgeon (from a chapter entitled "The Minister's Fainting Fits"): *A day's breathing of fresh air upon the hills, or a few hours' ramble in the beech woods ... would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive. A mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is next best. (Lectures to My Students, 158)*

Two pitfalls to avoid in creating a schedule for a depressed person:

1. Don't overdo it.
2. Don't neglect accountability.