

The Gospel & Mental Health: Depression, part 1

What is depression?

“Depression is a common mental disorder that presents with depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy, and poor concentration.” – World Health Organization

Less Severe	More Severe
<i>“The Blues” Situational depression Dysthymia</i>	<i>Clinical depression Major depressive disorder Manic-Depressive</i>

Symptoms: *depressed mood, diminished interest/pleasure in anything, weight loss/gain, insomnia/hypersomnia, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness/guilt, diminished ability to think/concentrate, indecisiveness, recurrent thoughts of death, psychomotor agitation, persistent aches/pains/cramps/ headaches/digestive problems*

What does depression feel like?

“Depression...involves a complete absence: absence of affect, absence of feeling, absence or response, absence of interest. The pain you feel in the course of a major clinical depression is an attempt on nature’s part...to fill up empty space. But for all intents and purposes, the deeply depressed are just the walking, walking dead.” – Elizabeth Wurtzel

“Profound melancholia is a day-in day-out, night-in night-out, almost arterial level of agony. It is pitiless, unrelenting pain that affords no window of hope, no alternative to a grim and brackish existence, and no respite from the cold undercurrents of thought and feeling that dominate the horribly restless nights of despair.” – Kay Jamison

Depression in the Church

“Being depressed is bad enough in itself, but being a depressed Christian is worse. And being a depressed Christian in a church full of people who do not understand depression is like a little taste of hell.” –John Lockley

Job (3:20-22, 7:15-16), Moses (Numbers 11:14), Elijah (1 Kings 19:4)

CS Lewis: *“My heart is empty. All the fountains that should run with longing are in me dried up.”*

CH Spurgeon: *“I have suffered to the extent and to the depths of which I hope none of you ever has to suffer.”*

William Cowper: *“Darkness long has veiled my mind...”*

Oswald Chambers: *“Nothing but the overruling grace of God and the kindness of friends kept me out of an asylum.”*

“It is all very well for those who are in robust health and full of spirits to blame those whose lives are sicklied or covered with the pale cast of melancholy, but the [malady] is as real as a gaping wound, and all the more hard to bear because it lies so much in the region of the soul that to the inexperienced it appears to be a mere matter of fancy and diseased imagination. Reader, never ridicule the nervous and hypochondrichal, their pain is real; though much of the [malady] lies in the imagination thought-processes] it is not imaginary.” – C. H. Spurgeon

Causes of depression

Physical problems

- Genetic predisposition
- Unhealthy lifestyle (too little sleep, poor diet, lack of exercise, overwork/underwork, conflicting medication, physical pain/sickness, biochemical imbalance)

Self-Focus

- Extreme introspection
- Unhealthy self-regard
- Self as the center
- *"For every look at self take ten looks at Christ."* Robert M'Cheyne

Spiritual problems

- Sin (nouthetic counseling)
- Unconfessed sin
 - "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer."* - Psalm 32:3-4
- Pride: alienating oneself from God and others
- Imposed guilt: unwarranted guilt

Circumstantial

- Major life transition (relocation, pregnancy, graduation, loss of relationship, death, etc.)
- Unmet expectations
 - "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life."* – Proverbs 13:12
- Unforeseen happenings

"Abandoned" by God

- Book of Job
- Hezekiah: *"God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart."* (2 Chronicles 32:31)
- The "dark night of the soul"

How to look at depression

- Understand how common it is
- It is a complicated issue with no easy answers
- Consider all the possible causes before taking medication or some other type of action
- Realize that it is a consequence of living in a fallen world
 - "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves..."* (Romans 8:22-23)
- Point to/look to God
 - "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar."* (Psalm 42:5-6)
- Know that it is not incompatible with joy.
 - o *"Sorrowful yet always rejoicing..."* (2 Corinthians 6:10)