

The Christian And Depression

Introduction. In recent years it seems that more and more brethren are struggling with the very serious problem of depression. No one can live their life exclusively on an incline. It will have its valleys and peaks and its highs and lows. But depression is not the routine struggles of life but rather a profound, deep sense of hurt, disappointment, and even despair.

There are a lot of reasons why a Christian may struggle with depression. I am no doctor and this is not a medical lesson, but it is reasonable to think that just as the kidneys, liver, skin, etc., can develop problems, so too can the organ of thought: the brain. In other cases, depression occurs because of sickness, pain, or physical ailments. Depression can also have its roots in profound emotional problems such as deep disappointments, guilt, and grief.

Regardless of the cause, Christians are not immune to suffering from or struggling with depression. But most concerning of all, some Christians who struggle with depression quit serving God. They quit worshiping God. They quit filling their place of work in the local congregation. Men quit being fathers and husbands and women quit their work as mothers and wives. They can become reclusive, withdrawn, fearful, and isolated.

For those reasons, depression can be a very serious spiritual threat. Medicine and counseling no doubt have an appropriate role to play in helping Christians who struggle with depression. But just as surely, medicine and counseling are not the only effective tools in combating depression. God does not want us to be depressed, discouraged, and despondent. His message is, "Be of good cheer" (Matthew 17:27; John 16:33), and "Be of good comfort" (Matthew 9:22; Mark 10:29). We want to see how we can be this way.

I. ***Depression Is A Serious Problem***

- A. In the beginning of the Corinthian letter, Paul argued that he and his companions were "burdened beyond measure" and they "despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8-11).
- B. The trouble that Paul faced because of his preaching was serious. He was imprisoned in Philippi, chased out of Thessalonica, smuggled out of Damascus, and laughed at in Athens. He must have reached great depths of emotional despair. Yet, notice what helped.
 1. Paul learned to rely upon God (2 Corinthians 1:9). Paul is not saying it is wrong to consult with doctors. He is saying, though, that when you despair even of life itself, your trust needs to be in God.
 - a) Paul was helped by his understanding of all that God had done for him in the past (2 Corinthians 1:10). Paul said that God did deliver them, does deliver them, and will still deliver them.

- b) Surely it is helpful to those struggling with depression to stop and consider the past, present, and future. God has helped us richly, God is presently helping us richly, and God will continue to help us richly in the future.
- c) Paul knew that his sufferings were bridges to something greater (Philippians 1:12; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).
- 2. Paul also benefited from being with his brethren (2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:5-7). Paul said they had trouble on every side. On the outside were conflicts, on the inside were fears. However, he was comforted by the coming of Titus.
- 3. Prayer helped Paul (2 Corinthians 1:11). Now you and I can pray anywhere at anytime. But there is something special about joining together in prayer with brethren for a common cause (Acts 12:12; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

II. ***The Dangers Of Depression***

- A. Depression can cause a cessation of prayer.
 - 1. If you struggle with depression, is it not true that you need to spend a lot time in prayer? How much time do you spend each day? 5 minutes? 2 hours? Is two hours a day is unreasonable?
 - 2. If it is reasonable to spend 2 hours a day in front of the television, is it not reasonable, perhaps even necessary, to spend two hours a day in prayer (Psalm 42:5, 8; 1 Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:6-7)?
 - 3. If you struggle with depression, know for certain that prayer is essential to finding the strength you need -- and prayer with brethren, praying with you and for you, is vital.
- B. Depression can cause a cessation of activity.
 - 1. What you need to do, to the maximum extent possible, is to get up and get back to work. Not because it is easy, but because it is what you need (Ecclesiastes 9:10).
 - 2. Work has been called "the meat of life." Vince Lombardi said, "The harder you work, the harder it is to surrender." Most discouragements will be found in an overactive mind and an under-active body.
 - 3. The Lord said that we find life by losing it (Matthew 10:39). If you dig someone out of their troubles, you will make a hole in which to bury your own.
- C. Depression can cause isolation.
 - 1. Depression can cause Christians to seal themselves off from God. Consult the doctors and consult the counselors, but never forget to lean completely upon the blessings of God. Isolation will feed depression and lead to downfall.

- a) God knows our every weakness, difficulty, trouble, trial, sorrow, disappointment, failure, and hurt. There will be no trials beyond our ability to endure (1 Corinthians 10:13).
 - b) Nothing is too great for God (Ephesians 3:20-21). Nothing is beyond His reach and His influence. Nothing stands outside the borders of His providence.
 - c) Even though Paul knew that no physical person was with him, he knew the Lord stood with him (2 Timothy 4:17).
2. Furthermore, do not seal yourself off from contact with your brethren.
- a) We know our brethren are far from perfect, but the fact that our brethren are far from perfect is fitting because we ourselves are far from perfect. Imperfect brethren can lean upon each other and gain strength (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).
 - b) Why seal yourself off from what can lift you up? Why lose out on the encouragement from brethren (Hebrews 10:24-25)? Why seal yourself off from a study of the Bible which is able to build you up (Acts 20:32)? Why shut yourself off from uplifting and encouraging singing with the saints (Matthew 26:21-30)?
3. Someone might say, "You do not know what depression is like," or think, "Nobody has the problems I have. Nobody can understand." Self-pity is usually an attempt to disqualify the person who is attempting to help. When someone attempts to help, they may actually know what you are suffering. In fact, they may have it worse than you.
- a) Ultimately I may not know how you feel, but Jesus does (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:15). Jesus Christ was ridiculed, rejected, betrayed, misunderstood, accused, tested, insulted, turned against, injured, spit upon, and murdered. Before His betrayal, arrest, and murder, He pleaded with His Father that if it were possible, that what was coming His way might pass from Him (Matthew 26:39).
 - b) To whatever extent external abuses by others might lead one into depression, Jesus had every reason (from a human perspective) to suffer from deep depression and emotional distress.
- D. Depression can cause one to give up.
1. Matthew 18:8-9 is a passage we usually discuss relating to the purging of sin even if it means plucking out an eye or cutting off an arm. Understanding that depression can become a serious threat to your salvation, then maybe you need to adopt the same attitude. You must do whatever you need to do in order to get over, past, beyond, or around the problem of depression.

2. It is better to limp along in this life emotionally and be saved in the end than to lose your soul.
 - a) Suppose I, because of emotional difficulties or depression, became terrified to drive my car and I had nobody in my family that could drive me to services to worship God. Do I stop attending, or would it be better, if required, that I depend upon some good brother or sister to pick me up and take me to services?
 - b) Suppose I suddenly, by reason of emotional difficulties or depression, became scared or anxious to sit in a crowd of people for worship? Do I quit attending and worshipping God? Or should do whatever it takes to overcome my challenge? If I had to sit in the back of the auditorium, or even in the foyer during worship -- would that not be an example of doing all that is possible to somehow, someday, by some means, get around, past, through, over, or beyond it?
 - c) There is deep meaning in the words "strive" (Luke 13:24; Philippians 1:27) and "diligent" (Hebrews 11:6; 2 Peter 3:14). We should exert tremendous effort to make it to heaven.
3. If it is necessary -- whether emotionally, physically, or mentally -- for you to drag yourself one day at a time to the day of judgment so that you might be saved, then by all means do it! Eternity hangs in the balance. Do not allow a struggle with depression to so tear you down that you lose your salvation.

Conclusion. C. C. Grafton said, "God does not despair of you, therefore you ought not to despair of yourself." Our feelings of depression and despair tell more about ourselves than about the way things really are. The Christian's main occupational hazards are depression and discouragement, so we have to rely on God, our brethren, our work, and prayer to fight the temptations associated with an ailing mind. Christ wants us to press on to the end (2 Timothy 4:5; Hebrews 11:27).