

Helping People In the Midst of Their Depression

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Possibly one of the greatest problems people face today is the impact of personal depression. Some consider it to be the number one problem in our nation.

Each year over 125,000 are hospitalized in the United States for depression. Double of that number seek some psychiatric help. It is said that one out of every eight people in our nation is in need of professional help. While that can't be proven, there is a great need. Probably many are depressed because it is a spiritual problem as much as it is mental or physical.

I. Looking at the State of the Depressed Person

A. A truly depressed person usually does not snap back when difficult things take place. Rather any of the following can take place.

1. They gradually cease to function as they withdraw from life and retreat into crushing dejection, guilt and unworthiness.
2. They carry the world on their shoulders and find it very difficult to make simple decisions.
3. Their attention span narrows and they find it difficult to concentrate.
4. They often cannot assimilate what others are telling them.
5. They can be so preoccupied with self and their personal problems they cannot give full attention to anyone.

B. At one moment the person may be so depressed that the slightest movement may agitate him, at other times he may laugh at anything hilariously. This outburst of laughter is really a facade or coverup for the inner true feelings. He may come to what some counselors call manic depressive. Along with this he possibly will experience many exaggerated mood swings.

C. The depressed person is often irritable and touchy and the least little thing annoys him. He may be so taken up with self that any outside interference disturbs him. This can degenerate to the place that he is totally unaware of what is happening around him. He also generally loses interest in his environment. He may lost interest in his wife and children and idly sit. Or he may even sleep all week end or contemplate suicide because life appears meaningless.

D. David described feelings of depression as:

A broken heart and terrors of death, fearfulness, and trembling and a crushing feeling of horror. He desired to fly away like a dove and be at rest. (Study Psalm 38.) God comforted David when depressed over the hatred of a friend. God comforted David in time of sin and failure, and used it to drive him to seek repentance and forgiveness. (See Psalm 32.)

A person may be depressed because of the loss of a job, loss of a loved one, or financial or marital problems. **But these are not the roots of the problem.** They are contributing factors. Physiological problems are not included in root problems, though they may exist. These contributing elements are merely predisposing factors and may help pave the way for depression which is actually brought about by the root problems.

Depression may be anywhere from slight at one end of the spectrum to very severe at the other end. Almost every person has at times been depressed to some degree. For many Christians it could be only minor or for a short period of time. As they applied biblical truth their depression problem was cared for.

II. Consider Four Root Problems Which Cause Deep Depression

A. Depression Is Often Caused By *Internalized Anger*.

1. This is anger held inside:
Maybe the person has never verbally shared his anger but it is there. As anger is suppressed and thus internalized it grows until the person may be on the verge of exploding.
2. Anger destroys as it erupts in some way, like:
 - a. physical problem (ulcers, colitis, heart-attack, etc.)
 - b. or personal reaction (beating children, slapping wife, etc.)
 - c. or ruining personal relationships.
 - d. And it can bring physical disease and many other personal problems.

The direction anger takes determines its rightness or wrongness, its blessing or damage, felt or expressed.

1. Christ, as we read in Matthew 23, was angry and He sought to drive them to repent and face their sin.
2. Not all anger is wrong, every emotion is a gift from God to be under His control for His glory. Damaging emotions are a result of sin.
(See my book entitled Emotional Problems In Life.)
3. It is not a sin to feel anger, maybe its the only thing that will cause us to do something about a problem.
4. Suppressing anger brings depression, destroys relationships and bring psychosomatic disorders.

(Additional Thoughts) A Biblical approach to anger to share with others:

1. Anger itself is not sin. (Psa. 7:11) God is angry with the wicked every day. Anger is not sin in itself, but can lead to sinful action, and generally does. It is not wrong to be angry at sin. It is wrong when it produced by our pride or our hurt feelings. It is wrong with it is expressed in sinful and selfish ways. It is wrong with it is destructive to others.

2. Anger is an emotion and every emotion God has given to mankind is good, however the emotion can be misused. Anger is an emotion designed to mobilize force to care for something. Energies of this emotion should be directed in a loving way at the problem and not the person involved.

3. Anger should not be released hastily. (James 1:19; Eph. 4:25,27) But anger should not be held in for it can lead to wrath, bitterness, malice, desire for revenge, and then directly and indirectly it will produce depression.

We should release anger in accordance to Matthew 18:15-19. Be willing to forgive and to forget. If we are wronged we must be willing to forgive and reconcile.

If anger is held inside it brings guilt, ruins our relationship with others which in turn will produce more depression. It can bring physical disorders and ruin the spiritual life of the saint of God.

4. Resolving anger can free us to resolve the problems that occasioned the anger in the first place. It is much better to aim the response at the problem involved rather than to attack the person or an object. Some counselors suggest getting it off your chest by telling others off -- this is wrong. Some people have ulcers and some give them.

5. Don't be angry with the person-- but if angry, may it be with his attitudes or deeds. Make a difference between the person and the actions, words or attitudes the other person may exhibit. And be very willing and quick to recognize your own sins, shortcomings, faults, and not just your brothers. Forgive quickly and fully.

6. Realize many differences can be and should be overlooked. "*Discretion of a man defers his anger, his glory is to pass over a transgression.*" (Prov. 19:11; 30:33; 15:1)

7. Any anger problem should be short lived, dealt with daily and immediately if at all possible. (Eph. 4:26,27; James 1:19-21)

B. Faulty Thinking Patterns Often Cause Depression:

Is there hope for the depressed person? Is it something merely to be endured? Is it a result of sin or a trial to be put up with or an ailment like some sickness? Many feel depression is a disease and seek to treat it as such.

NO, depression is not something to be endured or to be put with as some chronic illness or sickness that has no answer. Rather it can and must be conquered. And at the same time it is not a disease. Now we will look at a number of faulty thinking patterns.

Thinking and Depression:

Our thinking is made up of internalized sentences.

1. A person's internal thought process will determine how a person will act or react and how a person will feel. We evaluate everything of any significance. We talk to ourselves about everything that impacts our lives.
2. Events do not cause positive or negative feelings. Rather it is the attitude toward the event that will determine how a person will feel or react. Actually is it our "***self-talk and belief system***" that determines our response to events, circumstances and people.
3. The writer of Proverbs said, "*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*" (Prov. 23:7) What is in the thought life will come out in words, attitudes and actions.

4. Renewal of the mind precedes behavioral changes. Behavioral change will not last unless it is preceded by mind change. (Eph. 4:23; Rom. 12:2)

Problems must be dealt with on two levels -- behavior and thoughts:

1. Tackling a problem only on the behavior level will only prove fruitless.
2. Thinking must be consistent with the Scripture. When we think biblical truth, then we can be free from depression. (Col. 3:15-17)
3. Behavior will be an outgrowth of our thinking processes.
4. If a person judges himself to be a failure, he (may) will perform on the level of a failure and feel as a failure. This in turn can bring depression.

A man was passed over in a promotion and a position where he worked. He indulged in self-pity and introspection. He became very depressed as his thinking and attitudes brought deep depression into his life. *Change or renewal does not take place or begin in the emotional or behavior center, but in the cognitive or thinking center or process.*

Attitudes and Depression

We must build positive attitudes.

1. Faulty thinking patterns must be identified for they build our attitudes. (See our book... Why Do I Feel As I Feel and Do As I Do?)
2. Unless the counselee (or person in need) can see the wrongness of the attitudes he embraces and the devastating consequences he will experience -- he probably will not be motivated to change.
3. The counselor (or mentor or parents, etc.) should take great pains in building a biblical case for change.

Development of proper attitudes.

1. Build an attitude of thankfulness. (Phil. 4:4; Eph. 5:20; I Thess. 5:18)
Mental sins lead to physical problems. Proper thoughts lead to a healthy countenance, a relaxed mind and a merry heart. (Prov. 17:22; Phil. 4:8)
2. Build a practice of right praying. (Phil. 4:6-7)

(Additional thoughts) We need to learn how to pray biblically, and the importance of a good prayer life.

1. Too often our prayers are nothing but a selfish pity party (for me, myself and I.)
2. Paul gives the some content for biblical praying. (Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-11)
3. Pray about everything and build a spirit of prayer. (I Thess. 5:17)
- 4.

4. We must supplicate and direct prayer toward God to resolve the problem for this will help us to overcome damaging, wrong emotions.
 5. Prayer should be aimed at resolving problems. ***Let God change YOU.***
 6. Pray with thanksgiving, for everything, for this will guard against self-pity. (Eph. 5:20; I Thess. 5:18)
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3. Build a practice of right thinking. (Phil. 4:8) We must think biblically. *Maybe the person needs to make a think list of all that God has done in the past. Go over this list daily, study about the benefits of right thinking.*
 4. Build a practice of positive living. (Phil. 2:13; 4:19; Rom. 8:28; 8:31; 8:32; 8:35-39) Anchored in Christ we can be an overcomer. By living a positive life, resting in the Lord and His promises we can overcome. An overcomer is one whose fellowship with Christ is real.
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(Additional thoughts) Right thinking leads to right attitudes, actions, behavior, and emotions.

We must identify the faulty thinking patterns that led to depression. We must expose these attitudes as sin, and inconsistent with Biblical Christianity. Unless the individual can see the wrongness of his attitudes and devastating consequences he will not desire change in his life. We must build the case for change. Consider Psalm chapters 73, 42, and 43.

God requires the believer to battle with the wrong thoughts (II Cor. 10:3-5) and requires right thoughts of the believer. Proper thoughts glorify God. *"Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I show the salvation (deliverance) of the Lord."* (Psa. 50:23)

Mental sins such as worry, complaining, murmuring, etc., lead to physical problems such as depression.

Rejoicing in the Lord, and a practice of praise can work wonders. Thanksgiving must become a habit of life and complete trust a normal response in all circumstances. (Psa. 27:14; Prov. 3:5-6; Phil. 4:4; Psa. 145-150)

God has everything in control, He is sovereign and will do right, and He is never late. Plan to make a thanksgiving list for which to praise and rejoice.

C. Faulty Living Is A Major Source of Depression:

Guilt and Depression

Guilt is an emotion we experience when we violate our value system.

1. Our value system consists of those things we have come to believe as being true -- from teaching at school, from the home, society, church, and the Scriptures.
2. Guilt come from the law that has been written on our hearts or imposed on our hearts. This may be taught as well as caught from our environment.
3. Conscience gives assent to the written and spoken law. (Rom. 2:14-15) All people, no matter their culture, know guilt. Gentiles did not have God's law as given to the Jews, but they had a law written on the heart.

Guilt is an attitude of condemnation and punishment.

1. When the conscience is violated, guilt steps forth like a prosecuting attorney, saying, “*guilty, guilty, guilty.*”
2. In several of the Psalms, David characterized his state well. (Psa. 32:4; 38:3, 7, 8, 10) Guilt rises up in the mind screaming words of accusation.
3. Guilt can be merciful or a destroyer. Guilt sent David to his knees and Judas to his death. After Judas acknowledged that he had betrayed innocent blood, he “*went out and hanged himself.*” (Matt. 27:4) His inner depression, guilt and pressures of his wrong so overwhelmed him that he did not seek forgiveness and reconciliation.

Guilt may manifest itself in a myriad of forms.

1. Unconscious payoff:
Guilt often demands the payment of a fine for an offense with a desire to make personal atonement. It is to offer something in return for a wrong. It makes the person no closer to God’s forgiveness though they may feel they have a part in personally atoning for wrong. (Much like the present Roman Catholic doctrines.) It was conscience money -- so to speak, doing something to try to atone for a wrong. Guilt still brings depression.
2. Blame-shifting:
As a counterfeit of the real truth, the guilty one hides and shifts blame from himself to someone else. This was Adam’s statement... “*The wife thou gavest me....*” “*The excuse is a lie wrapped in the skin of a reason.*” These kinds of actions can also bring depression because guilt is still manifested within.
3. Defensive aggression:
This can often be the action of a teen as a smoke screen to cover guilt, and we as adults are good at this as well. Anger may be shown over some lesser problem of another person while our true guilt is denied, ignored and unconfessed. Continue depression will still be a powerful force in the life.
4. Attitudes of persecution.
5. Extreme cleanliness, or some ritualistic actions... such as continual washing or bathing to try to alleviate the sense of guilt.
6. Free-floating guilt. The person has to deal with guilt on a daily basis over many small things because of the deep sins of the life never dealt with.

Consider:

1. When a person violates his conscience or value system he experiences guilt.
2. Guilt is usually a major cause of depression.

3. Many Christians may feel they must offer a psychological offering that consists of frustration, anxiety, and guilt before they can accept God's forgiveness or feel forgiven. Suffering pain is something they feel they deserve because of sin.
4. They may well believe that they must have feelings of depression as a result of their sin and wrong.
5. Depressed feelings of sorrow, anxiety over life-style, and fear about the future are often all associated with ongoing depression. Often this takes place because of the poor way the person has dealt with sin and and wrong.

Illustration: A saved woman in apathy and depression did not desire to study the Word of God, or pray and did not enjoy spiritual things. She was resentful and bitter toward God for she felt He did not answer her prayers. She harbored resentment toward a family member (not shouting, etc., but fuming within). The faulty relationships with others destroyed her relationship with God as well.

Removal of guilt:

1. Do not minimize guilt for the person needs to face its reality.
2. Confess sin. (Psa. 32:5; 38:18; I John 1:7, 9) Agree with God about the sin. Confession must be as broad as the offense. Thank God for His forgiveness whether you feel it or not; God forgives and forgets. Instead of extending your energy in psychosomatic suffering, use that energy to forgive, give thanks and move toward positive action.
3. Realign conscience with Scripture. (James 5:16) A woman, for sixteen years unfaithful to her marriage, had tried alcohol, and various therapies to relieve her guilt and depression. Confession, repentance, reconciliation and restoration go a long way to remove depression and guilt.

We need to help people to face guilt, for like pain, it is an early warning signal which will help to save the person from self-defeating behavior.

Guilt versus bad feelings:

1. If a person violates his belief system, he is still guilty. The guilt that we experience in such cases is still real. (Rom. 14:23)
2. Uneasiness or awkwardness is not sin. Many things should be distinguished as merely bad feelings compared to something -- that is sin. Guilt comes from deliberate violation of one's value system... in other words what he knows is right.

There are those who have a super sensitive conscience. For such people if they have biblically determined that a certain practice, action or decision is proper and not sinful, and there would not be an occasion for another to stumble because of their decision -- they should be free to go ahead and do it. If done in good faith and with freedom based on the teaching of the Word of God, good feelings will eventually follow.

Physiology and Depression

Physical and spiritual depression are not the same.

1. Physical depression generally has an organic base or reason.
2. Spiritual depression lies in the area of faulty responses to biblical truth. Spiritual depression can occur as much from ignorance as it can from a willful violation of Scripture. Many depressed people cannot tell you why they are depressed, but when their behavior and thinking patterns are Scripturally examined, sins of omission are often discovered. A judgment of inferiority is such an example.

Extensive and intensive data gathering will reveal the problem (s).

1. All problems fall into one of two areas -- organic or spiritual.
2. Spiritual problems can be broken into two areas -- behavior and thoughts.
3. Extensive data gathering brings all component parts into focus. Intensive data gathering is more narrow and "*hones in*" on possible clues in one area.
4. Generally there is no need to consider the physical until the areas of the spiritual have been thoroughly considered.

Possible areas of exploration. (Eph. 4:30-32; II Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 5:1-12)

1. Anger and resentment
2. Wrong beliefs such as "*I can never do anything right.*" or "*Everyone is against me,*" or "*all anger is sin.*"
3. Habitual areas of sin -- practices, thoughts, etc. (Masturbation, adultery in thought life, fornication, and an improper thought life, etc.)
4. Procrastination, poor scheduling, slothfulness,
5. indebtedness, poor financial management.
6. Bitterness, anger, malice, and desire for revenge against someone.
7. Anger with God, dislike of one's lot in life.
8. Battles in marriage, practicing scorn, contempt, etc.

Physical causes of depression.

Physical causes of depression can set the stage for depression of the soul. It is very important that the counselor (all of us, or a mentor, etc.) understand some of the disorders the physical body can suffer because of soul sickness or visa-versa.

1. Thyroid deficiency
2. Hypoglycemia or low blood sugar problems,
3. Ulcers from worry, fretting, and/or a workaholic life style,
4. Vitamin or mineral deficiency. Some need to change their poor diet, or we may lack exercise and inadequate rest.

On book states there are over 50 diseases resulting from sinful living.

D. Some Experience Depression Because of Negative Emotions:

All of us are subject to feelings and are *low at times*, or more calm at other times. Every day we come into contact with things that effect our emotions. We can experience restless nights, arguments, marital problems, etc., which can begin a path of inward depression. There are a host of things that may arouse our emotions to tension or relaxation, to excitement or depression, and the extreme we feel depends upon our attitude toward the events, circumstances and persons involved.

We are emotional beings, so....

1. The things we say, the things we do, and the things we think about produce feelings or emotions.
2. Emotions are a blessing, for they make us human. The problem comes when we allow negative feelings to dominate our attitudes and dictate our actions. If we are held by the cords of our own negative feelings and allow them to dominate life -- we will probably have a self-fulfilling habit and life of depression made by the forging of our own chains.

Negative feelings are not to be ignored.

1. They indicate a hidden problem. We can invite depression. We control our choice of feelings by controlling our thoughts, meditations, and imaginations.
2. The basic law is -- you feel as you think and act.

We are never commanded to be happy, but to praise.

1. All of this is a choice we must make daily.
2. We build the habits of continued response which then become the ***conditioning*** of our responses in future things that touch our lives.

Helps for the Needy Person

General Ideas:

1. Root out wrong thinking; medication doctors give us isn't enough.
2. To get to the bottom of any depression related problem, make two lists:
 - a. On the first list write down their faulty (sinful) responses to life.
 - b. On the second list write down responses God commands us to put in the place of the first list.

Illustration:

Old habits and patterns:

1. not submitting to authority
2. lying
3. constant griping
4. anger, resentments
5. continued introspection
6. slothfulness
7. misuse of the body
8. negativeness

New habits and patterns:

1. submitting to all authority,
2. truth telling
3. giving thanks in everything
4. solving problems daily, facing anger and resentments
5. involvement in life, get busy giving everything to God.
6. scheduling and goal setting
7. proper rest, diet, godly use of it
8. study God's word, note His faithfulness.

Some Major Steps In Overcoming Depression:

1. Recognize sinful habits most generally lead to depression. First we need a new life in Christ -- to be truly born again, saved by His blood. And there must be change in the life by application of biblical truth as a saint of God.
2. Realize the habits we need to break are habits of sin against God and himself. Whether poor organization of time, drinking, procrastination, slothfulness, anger, disobedience to God's will and Word -- all are sinful.
3. We must acknowledge depression is harmful, displeasing to God, wrong, and debilitating. Motivation must be biblical or change will not last. Habits of life must be seen as God sees them. We must face the need of change. We can change regardless of our environment. Depression is never the will of God and to continue to be in that state is to fall short of God's will and best for our lives.
4. The individual must believe he can successfully change. (Eph. 4:22-24; Rom. 12:2) God can give grace to keep and grace to lift up. Faith can make the difference! (Heb. 11:6) He must believe in the infinite ability of our Heavenly Father to sustain and to give grace and strength. (I Cor. 10:9-13)
5. We must acknowledge that depression is often the cause of the sin of unbelief, that it is the opposite of trusting and rejoicing. Only by faith can we have victory (Heb. 11). God's power is available for the drug addict, the prostitute, the homosexual, and therefore if that is true for them it is also true for the depressed person. Only by faith

can we be transformed from the kingdom of darkness into the family of God. And only by faith can the individual find the release from the bondage of depression and break the old habits that put him into the prison house of failure. (II Cor. 5:17; John 8:32-36)

6. Others to pray for the depressed person and provoke him to biblical obedience. He should stay away from people who give the wrong kind of sympathy and encourage his self-pity, excuse making, brooding, or the neglect of responsibilities. He does not need encouragement toward depression. (Study I Cor. 15:33; Prov. 22:24-25; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25 concerning the kind of companions one needs.)

7. We need to have a **“think and do list”** of profitable things to think upon and to do when we are tempted to be despondent. (consider Phil. 4:8-9)

- * profitable things in activity when tempted to be blue,
- * profitable things to think upon when tempted to be despondent,
- * profitable things we could do for others, rather thinking about self.

8. Make a list of responsibilities. Note which ones that are fulfilled well and regularly and also note those that have been neglected or he is prone to neglect because he does not feel like doing them.

- * Plan a schedule which gives time to do all that really must be done,
- * get busy and seek to fulfill these responsibilities,
- * don't focused on how bad one feels, or how we dislike the task.
- * Focus on God and His will, promises, blessings, and provisions.
- * Focus on the help God gives toward obedience in the things to be done, and
- * focus on God's presence, care and grace. (I Pet. 5:7; Heb. 13:5-6; 4:14-16)

9. Make a list of 30-50 blessings God has bestowed in every area the life.

- * spiritual, material and physical blessings,
- * family and social blessings,
- * financial and work blessings,
- * possessions and environmental blessings,
- * community and housing blessings,
- * opportunities and encouragement from others.

Consider Psalm 103:1-10 and 68:19. The blessings are there, we need to be in the habit of seeing them, recognizing what God has done and is doing, and be thankful for them. Make it a daily practice to give thanks for particular and specific things. (Phil. 4:8; Psa. 34:1; Eph. 5:20)

10. Maintain a regular practice of daily Bible reading and study, prayer and meditation. Plan your procedure, schedule a regular time for devotions, and put this plan into action. We ought to keep a record of what we gets out of our devotional time. Implement what you learn and then share it with others.

11. Focus on how you can serve God and others in practical ways for many depressed people are moody, blue, listless, and doing little to help their problem.

- * Make a list of abilities and gifts to use to serve others.
- * Ask others to evaluate your strengths and gifts,
- * Read Romans chapter 12 and see where you fit into the picture.
- * Make a list of specific ways in which YOU **can** and **will** serve others.
- * Begin immediately to put that list into practice.
- * Keep a record for a some time of how you are serving the Lord and others.