

The Great Depression

Psalm 42

You know it's going to be a bad day...

- When you wake up face down on the pavement.
- When you call Suicide Prevention and they put you on hold.
- When your birthday cake collapses from the weight of the candles.
- When you're following a group of hell's angels down the Interstate, when suddenly your car horn goes off and remains stuck.
- You wake up to discover that your waterbed has broken—then you remember you don't have a waterbed.

We all have those days when we are “down in the dumps” and our mood is affected all day long. But when those days turn into weeks, and those weeks into months, the problem then becomes one of depression. Depression has become so pervasive in our society it is now nicknamed “the common cold of mental illness.”

Now there's a difference between ordinary sadness, which we all experience from time to time, and depression. There's a difference between having the “blahs” and having the “blues.” Psychologists have described depression in this fashion: “A feeling of helplessness and hopelessness that leads to intense sadness.”

The problem with depression is that the initial feeling of depression often degenerates into deeper and darker phases of emptiness. Depression goes through phases, each more serious than the other. The following constitutes the way depression works:

1. A passive or listless feeling.
2. Sadness.
3. An attitude of “nothing seems to matter.”
4. A feeling of helplessness.
5. A feeling of hopelessness.
6. An attitude of feeling that nothing is ever going to get better.
7. An idea that no one cares or understands.
8. A sense of rejection.
9. An emotion of “I would be better off dead.”
10. A desire for death itself.

More than anything in the world I want this message to be a help for the hurting, and a hope for the hopeless.

One of the greatest heroes of the Old Testament, King David, battled depression and he wrote about it in the 42nd Psalm. In fact, he asks in Psalm 42:5 a question all people ask at some time or another: “Why are you cast down, O my soul?”

Listen to what David writes in Psalm 42...

Depression was both a malady and a mystery to David. Like some here today, David was in the valley of depression, but he didn't stay there. Let's look at how David climbed out of the pit of despair in his own life and see if there's not a lesson here for us today. Because he gives us in Psalm 42 two “do's” and one “don't”.

DO - face the fact of depression.

Three times David asks the question: “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” That’s a good, healthy start. He didn’t deny he was depressed. He didn’t ignore it. He faced it head-on. He said, “I’m depressed. My soul is cast down.”

Now if you’re depressed, the first step on the road to recovery is to simply admit it. Which is hard for some people to do. But realize this. You’re in good company.

Listen to what this man wrote: “I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or get better.” That’s Abraham Lincoln. Winston Churchill is remembered for saying, “Never give up, never, never, never, never give up.” He called depression a “black dog” that followed him all his life.

Realize this, too. If you are depressed, you are not ungodly. Sometimes it’s especially difficult for a Christian to admit that he or she is depressed, because we feel like depression is a sign of ungodliness, or that we’re not close to the Lord like we ought to be. Some people even believe that depression is a sin and that Christians should never be depressed. But nothing is farther from the truth.

Some of the godliest people in the Bible battled with depression. Moses, the man who single-handedly delivered the people of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, once became so depressed that in Numbers 11:15 he asked God to kill him.

Elijah, the first great preaching prophet in the Old Testament, right after his tremendous victory over those 400 pagan prophets on Mt. Carmel, fell so deeply into the pit of depression that he said in 1 Kings 19:4, “...**O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than it is to live.**”

The great preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote: “I, of all men, am perhaps the subject of the deepest depression at times. I am the subject of depression so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to...although my joy is greater than most men, my depression is such as few can have an idea of.”ⁱ

So, the first thing we must do is face the fact of depression.

Here’s the don’t. **DON’T - fear the force of depression**

Zig Ziglar often said, “Failure is neither fatal nor final.” Well, neither is depression. Practically all psychologists and psychiatrists agree that depression is caused by a combination of factors; sometimes physical, sometimes emotional, sometimes mental, and sometimes a combination of all of them.

There are basically four types of depression.

- Endogenous - caused by a chemical imbalance within the central nervous system.
- Reactive - a reaction to such things as a death of a loved one, a divorce, a breakup with a girlfriend or the loss of a job.
- Toxic - caused by a viral illness, the wrong prescription drug, or a poor diet.
- Psychotic— usually linked to a “nervous breakdown,” over exhaustion, a mental disorder, or even brain disease.

The first two types of depression (endogenous and reactive) account for most cases of depression.

Now as I look at depression from a biblical standpoint, I find a great deal of commonality between what I’ve just shared with you. Because in the Bible depression primarily was caused by three things. First of all, it may be a physical problem.

David said in v.3, “**My tears have been my food day and night.**” David was physically exhausted. He was getting absolutely worn out. He was not getting any rest, and all he could think about were his problems. Likewise, depression can afflict the modern day workaholic who works late at night, rises early in the morning, eats on the run, gets very little exercise, and stays physically run down.

It can happen to the housewife who has three children, unending household duties, crying babies, and more chores in her hands than hours in the day. It’s easy to get run down, to get irritable, to get frustrated and then to get depressed.

Second, it could be a chemical imbalance when the hormones in our body get out of sync and it stimulates the emotional reaction of depression. Make note of this. When you are physically run down and worn out, when your diet and nutrition is unhealthy, when you’re not getting enough rest, when your nerves are shot from pressure and anxiety, you’re a prime target for the monster of depression.

Third, it could be an emotional problem. David asked, “**Why are you cast down, O my soul?**” In scripture the soul is the seat of the emotions. It is an emotional problem. What the psychologists call today the psyche, the Bible calls the soul.

Emotional depression is the result of upsetting circumstances. The sudden death of a loved one. The news that the tumor was malignant. Your spouse of many years says they don’t love you anymore. And just like that, your emotions can come crashing down and you can be in the throes of depression.

But I believe sometimes, and more often than we realize, and perhaps in some way indirectly all the time, depression is a spiritual problem. The devil is a master strategist, a great tactician, knowing exactly when, where, and how to attack you and get you down into the dumps. Yet even then, don’t fear the force of depression.

Lastly, **DO - fight the feeling of depression.**

Now there’s nothing wrong with getting depressed. And there’s nothing wrong with being depressed. But there’s something wrong with staying depressed. God has not called us to wallow in the valley of depression but to walk on the mountaintop of victory.

I don’t believe there’s anything the devil likes better than to see a soldier of the Lord too depressed to fight a battle that has already been won. In our lesson this morning there are three simple, biblical, steps to take when you’re depressed. First - lie down. Sometimes what we need for depression is just some good old fashion R & R—rest and refreshment.

That’s why David said in v.6, “**Therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, and from the heights of Hermon, from the Mount Mizar.**” David was saying, “I’m going to just stop, lay down all of my worries and concerns, take a break, meditate, think, chill out, and rest.”

Martin Luther once said, “I have so much to do today I simply must go back to bed.” Sometimes that is the best thing we can do; just rest, relax, release, and rejoice.

Second - launch out. In verse 4 David says, “**These things I remember as I pour out my soul, how I used to go with the multitude; leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.**”

One of the most dangerous things you can do if you’re depressed is to pull down the shades of self-pity over your heart, knit your own cocoon, get into a fetal position and isolate yourself. Martin Luther also said, “Isolation is poison for the depressed person. For through this the devil attempts to keep him in his power.”

Psychiatrist Karl Menninger was once asked: "What would you advise a person to do who is experiencing deep depression and unhappiness?" Menninger said: "If you're really severely depressed, do this: Lock the door behind you, go across the street, find somebody that's in need, and do something to help them." Great advice.

Third - look up. David says in v.5. "Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him." And in v.11, "Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God." In other words, David got his eyes off himself and his circumstances. He shut down his little pity party, got his chin up, lifted his head, raised his eyes, and focused on the Lord.

Look up. Claim the promises of God. Believe in the providence of God. Rely on the provision of God. Cloak yourself in the presence of God and His word.

And that, with the love and support of this community, with continued therapy and counselling and care, the depression you experience today will become a thing of the past. You may be in the middle of a great depression, but as long as there is God, there is hope for real victory.

¹ *Spurgeon at his Best*, Compiled by Tom Carter, pp. 55-56.