

Healing for Damaged Emotions 4 *“Dealing with Depression”*

I mentioned this last week, but hasn't it been a gray winter? Have any of you experienced or heard of others who experience Seasonal Affective Disorder, (SAD)? It is a medical condition that affects some people adversely during certain seasons of the year. It affects most people who live where the nights are long and days are short; and places and times where there is an overall lack of sunshine. I'm not making light of this condition; but I think many North Dakotans suffer from this malady during our often long, and occasionally gray winters.

I'm going to use this hook to introduce our topic for this morning: “Dealing with Depression.” One of the emotional scars some people deal with is depression, and not just Seasonal Affective Disorder. Some folks who have suffered trauma in life see depression as the resulting effect. There are many related psychological disorders and many different forms of depression; bi-polar disorder, anxiety disorder; and deeper psychiatric conditions that I won't have time to discuss today. I know some of the differences and distinctions and will try not to minimize any of those by ‘lumping’ them under this umbrella discussion of depression. But I think there is merit in considering how we might be healed from some of the damage resulting from depression.

I want to begin by answering a few questions, **first**, the most basic: **Can Christians be depressed?** If we are truly saved and made new creatures by the death and resurrection of Jesus, how can we be depressed? The reality and truth is, yes, Christians can be depressed, even sincerely saved, sanctified and Spirit-filled ones! How can I say that so assuredly? Well consider these scriptures from King David, apparently written during a “down” or depressed time or period of his life. Maybe it was a gray winter where he lived too – I don't know:

*Day and night I have only tears for food, while my enemies continually taunt me,
saying, "Where is this God of yours?" (3)*
My heart is breaking as I remember how it used to be. (4)
Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? (5)
Now I am deeply discouraged. (6)
*"O God my rock", I cry. "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I wander
around in grief, oppressed by my enemies? (9)*
Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? (11) Psalm 42

Lest we think he was just having a bad day, and these references are confined to the 42nd chapter, consider that there are 150 Psalms in the OT, and 48 of them mention some form of depression, discouragement, or disillusionment! That's 48 out of 150, fully 1/3 of all the Psalms take up this discussion. Apparently it was significant in the Psalmist's life. Note also that following his triumphant battle with the prophets of Baal; Elijah, one of the greatest of Israel's prophets cowers in a corner of a cave and cries out to God: "*O, Lord, take away my life.*" Or Jonah – "*It is better for me to die than to live!*" Or even Jesus praying in the garden: "*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death.*" Apparently many Old and New Testament hero's, and even Jesus himself dealt with the condition we might call depression. The scriptures are much more realistic, kind and sensitive to our conditions of depression than are some misguided Christians who blame all depression on the devil or on the depressed person for lacking faith!

The biographies of many saints also deal with this. C.S.Lewis was prone to depression, and wrote of it often. John Wesley spoke and wrote often of the dark nights of his soul. A bit later we'll look at Martin Luther's struggle with depression and some of his strategies for dealing with it. So, yes, and sadly, Christians can be depressed.

The **second** question: **Is Depression a sin?** Or, does depression reveal a lack of faith? To be honest, there is a line of logic that goes like this: sin causes guilt, and when guilt is left unresolved, depression can be a result. But, depression is not sin. To be depressed is not necessarily a sign of spiritual weakness, nor is the opposite true; that not being depressed is a sign of spiritual maturity or strong faith.

And the **third** question. **Isn't depression just a personality or temperament disorder?** Yes and no. YES, depression certainly affects some types of personalities differently and more than others; and YES, some people have a more depressed temperament than some others. But NO, depression is not limited to just certain types of people, and certain temperaments. Some depression is seasonal, some is chemical, some is personality, some is circumstantial, and some is caused by the abuse of another, or tragedies, or traumas of a hundred different origins. And some has no original, identifiable source or origin. And NO, God doesn't save us from our personality. And NO, God doesn't save and change our temperament when he saves and changes our lives! Sometimes I've wished God would have made me more sensitive or less needy or this or that. God made us the way we are, and we have to deal with it.

The **fourth** question I want to tackle today. **What Causes Depression?** There are likely about as many causes of depression, as there are people who suffer from depression. As we've said throughout this series, some of us have been victimized by the inappropriate actions of other people, family members, friends, even strangers. And sometimes the past haunts us and causes us to be depressed. You see the catch 22 there, right? Though some past experience might have hurt or wounded us, it still remains our responsibility to bring some resolution to that past, in order to live above that past. Many people who are depressed have unresolved anger issues or unresolved injustice issues. Unresolved anger is going to come out somehow; sometimes verbally or emotionally, sometimes physically; as in disease; and sometimes it comes out psychologically – we get depressed when issues of pain or hurt are left unresolved.

Some people get depressed because some injustice has been done to them; or something they perceive as unjust has been done to them or not done for them. I know people who are so mad at God for something that God did or didn't do to or for them.

“God didn’t answer my prayer, God didn’t prevent this tragedy, God let this “bad” happen to me or someone I love.” Issues of unresolved or perceived injustice can lead to depression.

And just to be clear, there are many other cause of depression, and some of them are chemical. Some of us have, or develop chemical imbalances in our brains and minds; which sometimes, leads to depression or other mental illness. This is one of the insidious lies that are seldom mentioned in the context of discussing the effects of drugs and alcohol. Did you know for instance that one of the by-products of smoking marijuana in young adult men; is the creation of a chemical imbalance that sometimes triggers bi-polar disorder?

Question number **5**: **What are some Practical ways to deal with depression?**

Well, obviously resolving anything that is unresolved is important, we’ve already mentioned that. I also mentioned that Martin Luther struggled with depression, resulting from a ‘to-strict’ religious family among other causes he identified. He developed a little list, and I’m going to add to that some Practical ways to work through or help manage, or even overcome depression.

A - Get enough Sleep. Studies abound about how sleep deprived especially we Americans are. And I’ll say this to you “super” Christians out there who think just because you’re a believer you play by different rules. You don’t get a special dispensation of being able to get by with less sleep, just because you are a pastor, or professional church worker, over committed lay person, or good hearted Christian! There is a difference between being tired and being weary. If you are tired, the most spiritual think you can probably do...is SLEEP. If you are weary, then you have to change something in your life. Give up some responsibility, take a new job, create a new hobby, change your routine, at least for awhile.

B – Eat good Food. Talk about hypocrisy. I'm a terrible eater, and I know I'd feel better, look better and probably be less stressed, and less depressed if I'd practice better eating habits. I better move on, I'm getting depressed.

C - Think good thoughts. I know that this is sometimes hard in the middle of a dark episode; but the principle I mentioned last week applies here. We are to let God transform us by renewing our minds, by changing the way we think. I know that convincing yourself to think good thoughts is about as helpful as extricating yourself from quicksand by pulling on your own hair. But there is a spiritual truth here. What we think determines what we believe, and what we believe determines how we live. So to the best of your ability, think good thoughts.

D – Avoid being alone. There is danger in self-obsessing which is easier to do when we cut ourselves off from other people. I know that depression is a lonely disease, and I pray for good friends and good support and good help from caring others for all of us. And I know there are times when we all want, even need to be alone; but when your alone time leads to or leaves you feeling depressed...then seek out trusted friends, or caring brothers or sisters.

E – Get good counseling. There are professional people available to help in times of depression, and with ongoing issues of depression. As a Christian, don't be too proud to ask for help, and don't try to act so spiritual thinking you can fix yourself and others. And don't expect immediate results for long-standing issues that need resolution. There are good counselors and there are good Psychologists and there are good Psychiatrists in this community, don't be afraid to seek professional help.

F – Take LEGAL drugs. Under the supervision and at the prescription of qualified Doctors, avail yourself of all that you need to regain the balance necessary to enable you to process life in more manageable ways. It is no spiritual discredit to take helpful drugs...it might in fact be one of God's mysterious ways to give you a miracle of healing. I know some sincere Christian people disagree with me, who avoid any drugs, and espouse only Spiritual healing through prayer; but I'm of the opinion that it shows no lack of faith to trust doctors who have been gifted by God to treat people just like me!

G – Sing and make Music. You might claim to be musically challenged, or you might actually BE musically challenged – but we cannot deny how often in the scriptures making music gave restorative power to all kinds of people in all kinds of sickly situations; even depression! So make music, or listen to good music, or hear the songs in nature, or even the rhythm of tires on the pavement. Hear life as music, and I bet your soul will be lifted!

H – Praise and Give Thanks. No question about it, there is always something to be thankful for. And I know in the deep boughs of depression it's sometimes hard to hear that; but we all have something for which to be thankful. We all have something for which to praise God. God is good, and even when life stinks, or the sun never shines, or we've been hurt, or whatever...God is still God, and God is still good.

I – Lean heavily on the power of God's Word. I underlined Power, because that is what the Word is! The Word of God, reading the Bible, reciting favorite passages, exploring new chapters; all set the table for God to come and "sup" with us! We hear God's word most clearly through God's Word! There is power for all kinds of things contained in the scriptures; and I'm afraid many of us keep ourselves emotionally crippled by never accessing one of the easies resources at our immediate disposal. Why not rediscover God's word in God's Word.

J – Trust confidently in the presence of God’s Spirit. As I said earlier, depression is a lonely disorder. Many people don’t understand it, so avoid those who have it. But there is comfort in knowing that even if everyone else in this world has forsaken us...God has not! Jesus promised that he’d leave the Holy Spirit to take his place while he was away for awhile. That Holy Spirit is with us always.

Susan and I have had surgeries in recent weeks. Nothing major, and we are doing fine, but it reminds me of a story. There was an elderly man who was facing open heart surgery, not unlike Bernice Salzer a few weeks ago. He was nervous, until a caring nurse sensed his anxiety, and came along side him. She asked: “Are you afraid?” “Yes”, was the only feeble reply he could make. “I’ll tell you what,” she said, “You notice how I’m holding your hand right now?” “Yes,” he uttered. “Well,” she went on. “During your surgery, while they remove your heart to work on it, I’ll be holding your hand. During the time when they replace your heart, I’ll be holding your hand. And when in the recovery room, when you are unable to speak or understand what is going on around you...just feel the presence of my hand in yours, and know...as long as you can feel my hand, you will be alright!”

That is the promise of the presence of the Holy Spirit. In the midst of whatever depression we might be facing or living...we are not alone...as long as we can feel His hand in ours...we’ll be alright! Amen.

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- 1: Can _____ be depressed?
- 2: Is Depression a _____?
- 3: Isn't depression just a _____ or temperament disorder?
- 4: What _____ Depression?
- 5: What are some _____ ways to deal with depression?

A - Get enough _____.

B – Eat _____ Food.

C - Think good _____.

D – Avoid being _____.

E – Get good _____.

F – Take _____ drugs.

G – Sing and make _____.

H – _____ and Give Thanks.

I – Lean heavily on the _____ of God's Word.

J – Trust _____ in the presence of God's Spirit. .