



APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN

Counseling and Family Services

515 Highland Street, Morton, IL 61550 ❖ Tel: (309) 263-5536 Fax: (309) 263-6841 ❖ www.accounting.org

UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION

Part 1 of 2

Psalm 42:5 "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."

Our life on earth is full of ups and downs, joys and sorrows. Sometimes, because of any number of factors, we may find ourselves struggling with depression. When you or someone you know is struggling with depression, you can have confidence that you are not alone in your struggle. One in 10 Americans has experienced depression at some point in life. Sometimes it creeps up stealthily and pulls us down slowly enough that we don't realize it until we're in quite deep. Sometimes it hits us in full force and unexpectedly. "Depression" can mean a lot of different things to different people.

It is important to understand that "Christian" and "Depression" are not mutually exclusive. The belief that "good Christians don't get depressed" can lead to unnecessary feelings of guilt, shame, and confusion when people are faced with certain forms of depression. In the Bible, David and Elijah provide us with two examples of God's people struggling with symptoms of depression.

There are a variety of factors that can make some individuals more susceptible to depression than others. These factors include biological influences such as genetics, chemical and hormonal imbalances, certain physical illnesses (e.g., thyroid problems, etc.), and side effects of some medications. Situational factors also increase vulnerability for depression. Prolonged stress, major life changes, chronic problems with friends, family, or a spouse, perfectionism and negative thinking in oneself or others close to you, and a history of trauma all can help set the stage for depression. Most, if not all, men and women struggle with one or more of these factors.

Depression in mothers of young children is common. It often occurs as young mothers are faced with the blessings and challenges of staying at home to raise children, helping the children with schoolwork, participating in church activities, keeping house, making meals, balancing endless household chores, all while striving to maintain and enhance her relationship with God, her husband, her family, her in-laws, and her friends. While not one of the components listed is bad, the demands of all of them combined are intense and never-ending. Is it any wonder that nearly twice as many women as men are affected by depression each year?

Men are also commonly faced with many stressors in their day-to-day lives. The responsibilities of men to provide for their families financially, spiritually, and emotionally are immense.

Types of Depression

It is helpful to differentiate between three different types of depression: 1) Spiritual Depression, 2) Situational/Reactive Depression, and 3) Clinical Depression. Each has different origins and is managed differently.

Spiritual Depression: Spiritual depression is a result of sinful acts and/or attitudes that causes guilt. Living in

sin, neglecting your relationship with God or your spouse, pride, greed, and bitterness can lead to Spiritual Depression. For example, King David felt this type of depression as a result of his sin. In *Psalm 32:2-4* he wrote, “Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” In other words, when he kept silent about his sin, he felt weak, troubled, and distressed. Relief came from a sincere acknowledgement of his sin to God and acceptance of God’s forgiveness.

Spiritual depression is not a result of a vindictive God who is seeking revenge. Rather, it is an opportunity to restore the relationship with a holy, loving God. *Hebrews 12:6* states “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” This process involves self-examination, seeking godly counsel, prayer, confession, reading of the Word, and fellowship with other believers. Please note: True guilt results from real transgressions. True guilt should not be confused with a false sense of guilt that is not linked to a specific sin. Satan often seeks to burden people with guilty feelings for things that aren’t sins and/or things that have long been forgiven by Christ. In fact, feelings of false guilt are often found in people dealing with the next two types of depression.

Situational/Reactive Depression: Another type of depression results from loss, stress, disappointments, illness, or relationship problems. The situations can vary in length and intensity. Examples include persistent health problems, strained relationships with a spouse or children, moving to a new location, loss of a loved one, infertility, and loss of a job. Any kind of change can trigger many different emotions. At times, the breadth and extent of these emotions can seem contradicting and overwhelming. Remember that it is normal to experience a full range of emotions, from anger to sadness, excitement to fear, etc. It is important to find a middle ground between stuffing emotions and allowing them to become out of control.

One of the best ways to deal with situational/reactive depression is through emotional expression to a supportive listener and/or in a journal. A good friend or a mentor will allow you to express and sort through your emotions. *Galatians 6:2* “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” *Proverbs 18:24* “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” He or she will understand that it is not wrong to feel emotions but that you are accountable for how you act on your emotions. In the middle of stress and trials, it can feel overwhelming. Jesus’ words in *John 16:33* are comforting, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” While everyone goes through hard times, when the issues are particularly complex, intense, or you are having trouble coping with the situation, it is often helpful to work with a professional counselor. Situational/reactive depressions that are not worked through effectively often lead to the next type of depression.

Clinical Depression: If Spiritual Depression does not improve after the necessary spiritual steps are taken for forgiveness, or if a Situational/Reactive Depression continues for longer than approximately two months, it may be a sign of Clinical Depression. You should seek out professional help if you think you are struggling with this type of depression. Clinical Depression is also known as Major Depressive Disorder. Some of the symptoms include:

- Sad or depressed mood that lasts most of the day, nearly every day
- A loss of interest or pleasure in activities that one normally finds enjoyable
- Change in appetite, weight loss, or weight gain
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of energy
- Observable changes in actions, such as clumsiness or slowed movements

- Feelings of worthlessness
- Excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Difficulty concentrating or indecisiveness
- Thoughts of dying or suicide

Being attuned to the signs of depression is important for numerous reasons as even minor bouts with depression can turn into major struggles. People who have had one episode of depression have an increased risk for developing additional episodes of depression at other points in their lives. There are several other types of clinical depressions including Bipolar Disorder (periods of low-lows with alternating periods of high-highs called manias), Dysthymia (long term, chronic depressions), and post-partum depression.

Next month we will continue our study of depression to include S.A.D., Seasonal Affective Disorder also known as “Wintertime Blues.”