

Understanding Depression

A. What is depression?

1. Depression is more than feeling a bit down. *Prov 18:14*
2. A major depressive disorder includes five or more of the following symptoms (DSM IV):
 - Depressed mood most of the day.
 - Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in almost all activities.
 - Significant weight loss or weight gain.
 - Insomnia or hypersomnia.
 - Psychomotor agitation or retardation.
 - Fatigue or loss of energy.
 - Feelings of worthlessness or excessive/inappropriate guilt.

- Diminished ability to think or concentrate. Indecisiveness.
 - Recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal ideation without a specific plan.
3. Depression is widespread in society and among Christians.
 4. Some people are more prone to depression than others.
 5. Cases of depression need to be handled with compassion. *Prov 25:20*
 6. Different kinds of depression include: major depressive disorder, postpartum depression, seasonal affective disorder, dysythmic disorder, etc.
 7. Psychological labels are descriptions which say little about cures or ultimate causes.

B. How are we to understand depression?

1. Many say that depression is merely a disease.
2. Many secular psychologists see mankind as merely physical and therefore tend to see depression as a physical problem with a chemical solution.

3. Christians recognize the dual nature of mankind – body and soul. *2 Cor 4:16; 5:8*

- The soul is embedded in a body (which is socially embedded).
- What happens to the body influences the soul. *Job 2*
- What happens to the soul may influence the body. *Prov 14:30; 17:22; Ps 38:1ff*
- What happens in one's social environment may affect both body and soul.

4. Depression affects both body and soul.

5. Depression will always have a spiritual component and will usually have a physical component.

6. Bodily (brain) weakness cannot prevent spiritual growth. *2 Cor 12:7ff; 4:7-10, 16-18*

C. Why do people get depressed?

1. Depression usually has spiritual (soul) causes.

- Sin and guilt. *Ps 32:3-4; 38:1ff; Jer 2:13*

- Overwhelming circumstances. *Ps 42:1-7, 9-10; 43:2; 2 Sam 17:23; Job 1-2*

- Injustice. *Ps 73:2-14*

- Relationships. *Jer 17:5-6*

2. Some depression may have physical causes – exhaustion, substance abuse, brain disease or weakness. *1 Kgs 19:4ff*

3. Sometimes there are multiple causes.

4. You may face cases in which you cannot determine the cause(s). *1 Cor 13*

D. Do drugs help depressed people? *Prov 17:22*

1. Psychotropic drugs are prescribed to bring brain chemistry back into balance.

2. Even if brain chemistry is out of balance it is not clear whether this is the cause of depression or the result of spiritual issues (see above).

3. In cases in which the cause is spiritual, drugs may address the symptoms of depression, but they do not address the cause.

4. Anti-depressants do not claim to cure depression.
5. Psychotropic drugs have adverse side-effects and often lose their potency.
6. We do not tell people not to use drugs or to get off of their drugs.
7. Our focus is addressing the spiritual issues which are always present. *1 Cor 10:13*
8. A counselee who chooses to get off of psychotropic drugs must do so under a doctor's supervision.
9. While I believe that drugs are over-prescribed for depression, I am reluctant to pass judgment in particular situations. *Matt 7:1ff*

E. Depression works in cycles.

1. Depression cycles down.
 - Depression often begins with a problem followed by a sinful response to that problem which leads to a complicating problem.
 - Hopeless thoughts lead to greater hopelessness.

- Failure to perform duties/chores makes one feel more guilty and depressed, which makes it harder to perform duties.

2. Depressed people can cycle back up again.

3. People who are prone to depression tend to cycle in and out of depression.

4. Many have patterns of alternating high activity followed by depression (“bi-polar” or manic-depressive).

5. It often takes a long time for a person to come out of depression. *Ps 88: 13-18*

F. Depression is very serious.

1. Some are debilitated.

2. Those who despair are at risk of suicide. *2 Sam 16:23; 17:14, 23; Jonah 4:3*

3. Depressed people are often angry at God, others and themselves.

G. It is very difficult and draining to counsel depressed people.

Counseling a Depressed Person: Data Gathering/Interpretation

- A. Listen sympathetically and patiently. *Prov 20:5; 25:20; Matt 7:1ff*
- B. What is the cause of this depression?
- C. What is the history/pattern of depression?
- D. What lies is your depression telling you?
- E. Are the counselee's physical needs being met?
- F. Who else is being affected? Depression is contagious.
- G. Offer encouragement.
- H. Pray with and for your counselee.

Exposition of Key Texts: Applying the Gospel to Depressed People

A. Psalm 32

1. Sin makes your life miserable. *Ps 32:3-4*
2. David's depression lifted when he repented of his sin. *Ps 32:1,5*
3. Our sin is covered, forgiven, and not imputed against us because of Christ. *Isa 53:3ff*

B. Psalm 73

1. Injustice in the world can test your faith. *Ps 73:1-14*
2. You need a change in perspective - from the here and now to the eternal and heavenly.
Ps 73:15-28
3. The world does not change, but the psalmist does, as he finds satisfaction in God alone.
Ps 73: 25-26
4. Christ endured injustice for us and makes us fit for God's holy presence.

C. Psalm 42-43

1. Understand how the depressed person feels— dry and drowning all at the same time. *Ps 42:1-4, 6-10; 43:1-4; Jonah 2:3ff*

2. Stop listening to yourself and start talking to yourself (MLJ). *Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5*
 - Don't judge reality by your circumstances. *2 Cor 5:7; 2 Kgs 6:16-17*
 - Remember your past enjoyment of fellowship with God. *Ps 42:4*
 - Remember God's covenant loving-kindness. *Ps 42:8; Isa. 49:15; Jonah 2:7*
 - Hope in God – practical eschatology. *Ps 42:5b, 11b; 43:5b; Jonah 2:9; Job 13:15*
3. You may have to keep reminding yourself of the same truths. *Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5*
4. Go to God to quench your spiritual thirst. *Ps 42:1-2, 4; Isa 55:1-2*
5. Praise God with joy – the circumstances do not change, but the psalmist is transformed from despair to joy. *Ps 43:4; 42:8*
6. Jesus suffered the ultimate spiritual thirst for you so that you would thirst no more. *John 19:28; 4:13-15; 7:37-39; 6:35; Matt 26:37ff*

D. Psalm 88

1. Depression can be very deep.
2. Depression does not always go away quickly.
3. Sometimes depressed people simply need to be encouraged to endure.

Homework for Those Who Are Depressed

- A. Make sure physical needs are being met: sleep, food, exercise, etc. *1 Kgs 19:4, 9-10*
- B. Deal biblically with depression.
 1. Confess and repent of sin. *Ps 32:5*
 2. Submit to God's sovereignty over your circumstances. *Ps 73:15ff; Rom 8:28; Gen. 50:20*
 3. Stop listening to yourself and start talking to yourself. *Phil 4:8*
 4. Hope in God. *Ps 42:5, 11; 43:5; Rom 8:29ff; Heb 13:5*

5. Offer thanks and praise to God. *Ps 43:4; 73:8; 32:11*

6. Start to cycle out of depression by serving God and others. *1 Kgs 19:12-17; Matt 6:33; 22:37-39; Phil 2:3-4; 2 Cor 5:9*

C. Biblical memory and study.

1. Psalm 32

2. Psalm 73

3. Psalm 42

4. Jeremiah 17:5-8



Books

Fitzpatrick, E. & Hendrickson, L., *Will Medicine Stop the Pain?*

Hodges, Charles, *Good Mood Bad Mood: Help and Hope for Depression and Bipolar Disorder.*

Lloyd-Jones, Martin, *Spiritual Depression.*

Mack, Wayne, *Down but Not Out.*

Mack, Wayne, *Homework Manual for Biblical Living Volume 1. "Depression Homework."*

Vincent, Milton, *The Gospel Primer.*

Welch, Ed, *Blame It on the Brain.*

Welch, Ed, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness.*



Booklets

Adams, Jay, *What Do You Do When You Become Depressed?* (pamphlet)

Black, Jeffrey, *Suicide: Understanding and Intervening.*

Welch, Ed, *Depression: The Way Up When You Are Down.*



Audios

Hodges, Charles. "Good Mood, Bad Mood: Help for Depression."

Newheiser, Jim. "Blessed Forgiveness – Psalm 32."

Newheiser, Jim. "Thirsting for God – Psalms 42-43."

Newheiser, Jim. "Why do the Wicked Prosper? – Psalm 73."

Scipione, George. "Depression."



Supplemental Resources

The Journal of Biblical Counseling 18 (2 Winter 2000).

The Journal of Biblical Counseling 18 (3 Spring 2000).

Welch, Ed. "Possible Homework Assignments and Strategies."