

The holiday season is certainly a wonderful time of the year. We get to enjoy family, friends, gifts, and food. There many things to be excited for, and it is no wonder that we often refer to it as the happiest time of the year. However, for all of the good thoughts, feelings, and memories the holidays bring, for some the holidays are dark days full of sadness and despair. Many have noted the legitimacy of the annual spike in the number of individuals who become depressed during the holidays. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, 4-6% of the US population suffers from winter depression with another 10-20 percent having a more mild form of Seasonal Affecton Disorder. Because of these numbers and the recent rise in attention to mental illness in this country, I would like to have a serious discussion this morning about the Christian and depression. Let's consider what the Bible has to say on the subject. God's Word can influence all parts of our lives, but we just need to open it up, read it, and let it do what God designed for it to do. Here are four important facts that we need to be aware of when we consider the Christian and depression.

I. Depression is a serious issue.

- A. Depression can be defined as simply feeling down to being clinically depressed.
 1. Anxiety is at the root of depression. (**"Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down" Prov. 12:25**)
 2. Different levels of anxiety can lead to different levels of depression.
 3. Some people can handle and react to anxiety better than others.
- B. Depression is not something to be taken lightly.
 1. 1 out of 4 American women suffer from depression.
 2. 1 out of 8 American men suffer from depression.
 3. 1 out of 10 children suffer from depression by age 12.
 4. \$30 million Americans suffer from depression and that causes a \$16 Million drain on the economy.
 5. The World Health Organization estimates that depression will be the 2nd highest medical cause for disability by 2030.
 6. No person is biologically or mentally immune to depression, even Christians.
- C. A depressed person of God cannot be nearly as effective for the Lord as a Christian in good spirits. We need to be willing to talk to one another, admit that we might be depressed, and be willing to help each other overcome depression.

II. Sometimes, God's people become depressed.

- A. Moses
 1. Moses had to lead and put up with a people who were constantly nagging him about many things.
 2. Moses has finally had enough of their complaining about the manna and they desired meat.
 3. He expresses his depressed state and admits that the burden of the people is too heavy for him. He goes so far as to ask God to just go ahead and kill him. (**Num. 11:11-15**)
- B. King Saul
 1. Saul experienced a tumultuous reign as king of God's people. His mental state seemed to be quite shaky at times.
 2. Once David comes on the scene, you can almost image Saul constantly looking over his shoulder just waiting for David to "try and take his throne." His depression and lack of mental stability ends up leading him to falling onto his own sword in battle. (**I Samuel**)
- C. Job
 1. Job suffered from every imaginable cause for depression. He endured financial loss, family loss, rejection, disappointment, and physical suffering. (**Job 1**)
 2. Job expresses his depressed spirit multiple times throughout his book.
 - Job's 3 friends come to sympathize with and comfort Job during his trials because of his broken spirit. (**Job 2:11,12**)
 - "Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire?" (**Job 3:11**)
 - Job is truly broken within his soul as he is goes through these horrific trials. (**Job 30:16-23**)
- D. Jeremiah
 1. Jeremiah lived and prophesied during 40 of the most difficult years of the history of God's people.
 2. Many have referred to Jeremiah as the weeping prophet because of the down trodden spirit of his writing.
 3. Jeremiah expresses his despair in **Jeremiah 9:1**, "Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people."
- E. It is clear that even God's people are not immune to being down in their spirit and depressed at times.

III. There are many causes for depression.

- A. Chemical imbalances or biological malfunction
 1. Some have denied that depression can be caused by biological means.
 2. However, science has clearly shown that an imbalance of chemicals within our bodies and specifically our brains can cause mental instability just the same as other factors can cause physical ailments.
- B. Anger
 1. While anger alone is not sinful, built up anger that is not resolved can lead to discouragement and depression.
 2. Someone might say something hurtful that upsets us and we allow that anger to continue to build over time.
 3. Or some event my trigger immense anger within a person that continues to grow and fester as the days go on.
- C. Self pity, feeling unimportant, lacking self worth, & having low self esteem

1. That unresolved anger can lead us to question our self worth. Our self esteem might greatly fall because of this.
 2. The constant feeling of self pity, self worthlessness, and unimportance leads a person down a long and dark road that ends in near certain despair and depression.
- D. Feeling alone, isolated, and detached from others
1. When one feels worthless then he or she tends to separate him or herself from those around them.
 2. This results in a feeling of isolation or detachment from others. This is a sad thing, but it traps a person in a hard to end cycle of anger, self pit, and isolation.
- E. Feeling disconnected from God, Feeling a spiritual void in your life, and feeling as if you're powerless, helpless, and hopeless
1. This type of anxiety on the mind of a spiritual individual more times than not is also compounded with feelings of disconnect from God. When a person does not have contact with others who would encourage them in their faith, then they often begin to feel a complete disconnect from God.
 2. That part of a person that is filled with godly influence is gone and a void is left there. That person might begin to feel helpless and powerless against the constant despair within their minds and the cycle just continues to go on and on.
- F. Unresolved Guilt
1. Guilt can destroy the spirit of a person until they cannot seem to go on any further.
 2. King David harbored immense guilt in his heart from his sin with Bathsheba. David was flat out depressed because of the great sin he had committed against God that had caused so much pain and heartache for many people.
 3. David's depression is expressed in **Psalms 32 and 51**. **Psalm 32:3-5** paint a very vivid picture for us of David's state of mind as he dealt with this burden that was upon his heart.

IV. We can have victory over depression!

- A. While those suffering from depression might see it as an unbeatable force, depression is in fact very beatable. Drs. Frank Minirth and Paul Meier in "Happiness is a Choice" claim that depression is 100% treatable and in fact 100% curable.
- B. The reason many fail against defeating depression is because they fail to address the spiritual aspect of depression. **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Phil. 4:13)**
- C. Lean on God for strength.
1. The battle against depression seems hopeless to those fighting and suffering, but God can do more than we can even imagine and He can help us have victory over depression. **(Eph. 3:20)**
 2. We who follow and trust in God are blessed by His protection from all types of evil and danger than we might encounter in this life. He can guard and protect us against all kinds of evil whether it attack us mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. **(I Peter 1:3-5)**
 3. Jesus, Himself, constantly went away on His own to have some time alone with God in prayer. As He is about to suffer through the pain of the cross, we find Him in deep prayer with the Father in **John 17**.
 4. The strength to overcome is not within ourselves. God is the provider of our strength and if we trust in Him then we can have the victory over depression.
- D. Be encouraged through Scriptures of promise.
1. God's Word provides us with many wonderful promises to provide us strength and defense against the corruption of this world as we grow in spiritual strength. **(II Peter 1:4)**
 2. Jesus, while here on earth, promised to give a more abundant life to His followers. **(John 10:10)**
 3. The Psalms are sometimes referred to as God's antidepressants because nearly 1/3 (48 out of 150) of them address the depressed person who might be struggling.
 4. The desire of David in **Psalm 55** is to just escape the anguish that he is facing. **(Psalm 55:4-8)**
 5. The end response of David is to put trust in the Lord's power and promises and cast your burdens upon the Lord. **(v.22)**
- E. Look to serve others.
1. Jesus faced His difficulties on earth by serving others through His trials. **(Phil. 2:3-5)**
 2. H. Norman Wright in "Beating the Blues" said, "One of the best remedies for depression is to be more active."
 3. When we are focused on the needs of others we have less time to focus on the difficulties that we might face.
 4. Self pity can be overcome by focusing on the needs of others. We might soon realize that others have it even a little worse than we do, and that can cause us to be thankful instead of depressed.
- F. Live with a positive outlook on life.
1. We need to be living lives that rejoice in the Lord. Paul had plenty to get him down but he lived with an upward focus on God and the good things. **(Phil. 3:1)**
 2. Instead of focusing on the bad aspects of life and allowing ourselves to become depressed, we need to be focusing on those good things of this life. **(Phi. 4:6-9)**
 3. Through focusing on the good things of God and living with a positive outlook we can have peace in this life and avoid the depression that can quickly bring us down and make us unfruitful for the Lord.

Depression is real. It can affect anyone at anytime, Christians included. There are many practical things that we can do to keep from becoming depressed, and then to be able to overcome a depressed spirit. It all rest on our faith and trust in God. He can give us strength. He has promised us many great things that can keep us uplifted. We can serve others while living with a great positive attitude. May God help us to be encouraged in our faith. We can overcome and live a full and faithful life for the Lord, regardless of the difficulties we might face!