

WHAT ABOUT DEPRESSION? PART 1

News reports give us daily reminders about the depressing times in which we live. Polls indicate that millions anguish over their marriages, children, health, finances and job security. And many suffer the darkness of depression for no apparent reason at all. Depressed individuals make up a steady stream of clients for therapists, physicians, pastors, and others who counsel.

Depression is said to be the common cold of mental health. It is the reason for more visits to counselors than any other, and Christians are certainly not immune. Many great people of God have suffered incredibly with depression. Read the Psalms and you will find that King David struggled with overwhelming bouts of depression. Add to him Elijah, Job, and the apostle Paul to name a few. We tend, as Christians, to be ashamed of such a condition. After all, are we not to be an example of peace and joy to the secular world? What kind of a witness are we if we are heavy-laden with a depressed spirit? These are legitimate questions. The problem is that the more we conceal and hide our heavy and saddened hearts, the worse the problem seems to grow. Four out of seven of you know exactly what I am talking about because you have been there. Why must Christians, with everything to live for, experience this?

Fortunately, we currently know more about depression, its causes and its cures than ever before. There are known methods and medications that bring about relief. So if you or a loved one is suffering from depression, take heart and know that God does not want His children to remain in a such a state. Depending on how it is approached, personal depression can either be devastating and immobilizing, or growth-producing and victorious, leading us closer to God than we ever thought possible.

DEPRESSION AND ITS CAUSES

Mood fluctuations or feelings of sadness,

disappointment, or frustration may last minutes to a few days at most. We all experience this. However, clinical depression is a more serious condition that lasts several weeks to months, and sometimes even years. This more severe depression is the type with which individuals will probably need help to overcome.

There are various possible causes of depression. These can be grouped into six categories. If depression is determined to be of a *biological-genetic* nature, an imbalance in brain biochemistry is present. More specifically, the depression may be due to a deficiency in norepinephrine or serotonin, two neurochemicals needed for proper brain functioning. Antidepressant medications can be highly effective at restoring brain chemistry. Lack of sleep, lack of regular exercise, poor diet or nutrition, overwork or exhaustion, or some physical illnesses can be *physically-derived* sources of depression. There can also be *spiritual issues* which result in depression. St. John of the Cross referred to this as "Dark night of the soul" (Is. 50:10). The "dark night" is not something bad or destructive. It is to set us free. It may be a sense of dryness, emptiness, even feeling lost (the wilderness experience). It is one of the ways God brings us to a stillness so that He can work a transformation in us. *Personality issues* such as temperamental vulnerability, loneliness, irrational, negative and destructive self-talk, and anger turned inward (guilt and shame) can also be a source of clinical depression. On an *interpersonal* level, marital and/or family difficulties and dysfunction often have a significant impact on the course of depression. And lastly, large *environmental, societal, and cultural factors* such as political unrest, economic recession, high divorce rates, unemployment, and poverty also contribute to the high rate of depression.

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What about depression? Part two