

WHAT ABOUT DEPRESSION? PART 2

In the last newsletter, I listed six possible causes of depression. They were biological/genetic; physical; spiritual; personality; interpersonal; and environmental/societal. These can all play a part in depression. Whatever the cause, God can and does bring healing through this wilderness experience. For those of you who have never suffered with depression, perhaps Psalm 69:1-3 best sums up the feelings the depressed experience. *"Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail looking for my God."*

Although the Bible does not use the clinical expression "depression," we know from the symptomatic descriptions in the Bible that what some of the great men of old experienced was without doubt what we have termed "depression". Take Elijah for example. After fleeing into the desert out of despair and fear, he prayed, "I have had enough Lord. Take my life...Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep" (1 Kings 19:3-5). Elijah concluded that his work was fruitless and consequently that life was not worth living. This is a predominant feeling demonstrated by those who experience depression, regardless of its cause. The rest of the story illustrates what we should first of all do when someone we know is depressed. "All at once an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' The angel of the Lord came back a second time after Elijah went back to sleep and again said, 'Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you'" (1 King 19:5-7). It is very common for the depressed to do nothing but sleep and hope never to wake up. They stop eating and stop all activity of any kind. What is called for is that the sufferer be adequately nourished for the "journey" ahead. It can be a tough road and all possible energy must be mustered up. Idleness also perpetuates the condition. Depressed persons must be encouraged to "get up, and take care of your physical needs" (i.e. nutrition, exercise,

productivity). This is the beginning of one's way out of depression. The depressed mind will eventually be stimulated back to healthy functioning. Depression cannot be given into.

HOPE IN THE FACE OF DESPAIR

When we, as Christians, encounter depressed persons, first we are to make sure their physical needs are taken care of. Next, without question, we must encourage Hope. Hope must be with a capital "H" in the healing, sustaining ability of our God, not a small "h", having hope in ourselves or others to heal us. Paul wrote in Romans, "If we lose hope, we are of all people most miserable and to be pitied." The reason for this is that hopelessness leads to self-pity and self-pity is perhaps the most dangerous of human conditions because it perpetuates itself. We must attempt to turn the gaze of the depressed from the brooding darkness to a Hope that tomorrow's reality will be better than today's. Hope has been called a habit, a way of thinking. Epictetus, a first century Greek philosopher had the idea that "men are disturbed not by things or circumstances, but by the views which they take of them." We must transcend our circumstances and find God. It is there that the depressed will find rest for their weary souls. This is not contingent on changing our external circumstances, but our internal attitudes.

ON SUFFERING

I will be teaching a new course on God's perspective on pain and suffering. It will run on Thursdays from 7-8:30 p.m. starting September 19, and will be held at First Christian Church. The course will be a case study of the book of Job. Many people know about Job's trials and tribulations, but few people know what God's purposes and plans were for allowing such seemingly senseless despair. If you are interested in this course, call the church at 223-5770 to pre-register.

NEXT ISSUE... Depression part 3. Counseling for depression. Is medication Christian?