

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, December 10, 2014 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

THE PROBLEM WITH CHRISTMAS “Dealing with Depression at Christmas” *Selected Scripture*



“Charlie Brown, you’re the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem!”

Christmas time is the most likely time of the year to experience depression. The suicide rate is higher during December than any other month, which tells us that Christmas depression should be taken quite seriously. Depression at Christmas time can be triggered by a multitude of things, such as:

3 Triggers to Christmas Depression:

- 1. Loss**
- 2. Failure**
- 3. Loneliness**

These elements are exacerbated this time of year. People who have had deaths in the family or have experienced divorce or the loss of a child are more prone to depression, especially during

the holiday season. It can be especially difficult to cope with a Christmas depression because of some of the following reasons

Things That May Worsen the Problem of Depression at Christmas:

1. **Everyone else seems so joyous** – Therefore... reaching out feels more awkward and more remote.
2. **We don't want to bring down those around us** -
3. **We don't want to feel "different" or alienate ourselves** - We don't want to draw attention to ourselves either.
4. **We tend to disassociate ourselves from our own feelings and ask ourselves self-defeating questions** - Questions like... What's wrong with me? Why are I so different? We worry about being worried? Why can't I be happy? I'm a terrible person. We wonder what's wrong with us and why we can't just jump right on into the holiday cheer. This is supposed to be the happiest time of the year and yet we can barely drag ourselves out of bed and become functional human beings.
5. **On top of feeling sad and dysfunctional, we feel out of place, and somehow illegitimate in our feelings** - Not all holiday depression has anything to do with loss or failure or death, or even anything obvious. Sometimes people tend to just get depressed around the holidays.

Here is big problem in all of this for us... Christians should never suffer depression. Right? Wrong? That's a common attitude from some people and it is decidedly wrong. People who claim Christians should never suffer depression have failed to understand a basic truth, that it is not something the person chooses to do. It is not showing a lack of faith or that they are lacking in their spiritual life. Depression is often, quite simply, a medical condition like asthma or any other sickness. We don't tell the person who has asthma it is because they don't have enough faith or they are lacking in their spiritual life or if they prayed or believed more the asthma would go, we get them medical help. Why do we take a different attitude when it comes to depression?

Can I suggest the biggest problem is because people, especially those who have never suffered from it, don't understand the problem? It is not a spiritual failing on the person's part. Some people think faithful followers of God don't experience depression, but there are several people in the Bible who did, such as:

Biblical examples of those who suffered depression:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Moses (Numbers 11:10-15) | 6. Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-2) |
| 2. King David (Psalm 6, 13, 38) | 7. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 20:14,16) |
| 3. Hannah (I Samuel 1:9-18) | 8. Jonah (Jonah 4:1-3) |
| 4. Elijah (I Kings 19:1-18) | 9. Habakkuk (Habakkuk 1:1-3:19) |
| 5. Job (Job 3:1-26 and 6:1-7:21) | 10. Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4, 2:1) |

Similarly, there have been many leaders, preachers, and missionaries in the history of the Church who have also struggled with bouts of depression. Some of the more notable examples are:

Christian leader examples of those who suffered depression:

1. **Martin Luther** (founder of the Protestant Reformation)
2. **David Brainerd** (missionary to Native Americans)

3. **Hudson Taylor** (Founder of the China Inland Mission)
4. **A.B. Simpson** (founder of the Christian Missionary Alliance)
5. **Adoniram Judson** (missionary to Burma)
6. **Charles Haddon Spurgeon** (19th century revival preacher)
7. **Mother Theresa** (missionary to the poor and destitute of India)

Statistics tell us that in America alone, 1 in 4 women and 1 in 10 men will suffer from depression at some stage in their lives, and that nearly 151 million people struggle with this problem in any given year. And at Christmas time this is heightened. We are told every year that more people experience depression at Christmas than any other time of the year. So Christmas is not the “merry” or “jolly” holiday that it is billed to be. What they need along with our prayers is support, encouragement, as well as practical help from Christians, the church and from God’s Word.

Sometimes it is in the hard times, the depression and darkness that God speaks to us most clearly, even David found that out. Read some of his psalms **Psalm 6, 14, 25, 51, 77** are just a few examples. There are others. You will also see it in **1 Kings 19** where Elijah hid away from the world and his responsibilities in a depressed state, till God encouraged him and drew him out of it by speaking to him, by reassurance and providing practical help in the form of Elisha. No one is immune to depression, not even the Christian. It usually hits us at surprising moments, yet there are times when we can almost predict it. Fighting it is never a pleasant experience. Some depressions are deep and complex – lasting for months...even years. On the other hand, some may last for shorter periods of time. Tragically, some result in devastating consequences. Some leave lasting scars on one’s life.

People make a lot of statements to depressed Christians. Not all of them are helpful, nice or even true. These are some of the worse things that get said. A lot of these sayings can be quite hurtful and damaging to the person on the receiving end, and they really don’t help or address the problem. If someone says these things, they need to be educated about what depression is and is not. Most of these sayings come from ignorance about the problem of depression and often reflect a deeper spiritual problem on the part of the one offering the unsolicited advice.

If you have been on the receiving end of some of these statements in the midst of your own hurt and struggle, you know how painful and further damaging they can be.

Religious or spiritual things that get said:

- **There must be something wrong with your spiritual life**
- **Repent and ask forgiveness for your sin!**
- **Real Christians don't get depressed**
- **You need to have more faith / have faith in God**
- **Taking antidepressants is playing God, He can heal you**
- **Scripture says everything that happens is for your own good!**
- **You've been prayed for, why has nothing changed?**
- **Depression is a self-discipline problem**
- **You should be praying about this.**

- **You just need to rebuke that spirit of depression and tell it to leave you. Don't let Satan steal your joy.**
- **There's no such thing as mental illness, it's all in your mind**
- **You've got nothing to be sad about**
- **It's your own fault you're depressed**
- **Pull yourself together**
- **You're just being lazy**

Let's consider three of God's men who suffered from a bout with discouragement and depression – the feelings of extreme despair, undue sadness, unrealistic grief, or hopelessness.

I. VICTIMS OF DEPRESSION

Though each man suffered the same kind of depression and discouragement, each one's struggle was different: Moses had an inferiority complex; Elijah had a martyr's complex; and Jonah had a superiority complex. In reviewing each man's case, we will note physical, emotional and spiritual reasons for their depression.

1. **Moses (Numbers 11:1-15)** – Moses had been miraculously used by God to lead the Israelites from Egypt. The people knew little else than a life of miracles – safe passage through the Red Sea, steady diet of nourishing manna, ample water, Divine guidance (cloud by day, fire by night) – yet they griped about everything. It was neither the Promised Land nor the promising future on which they focused, but Egypt. Weary of their God-given daily diet, they longed only for the leeks, garlic, and onions of the land of their bondage. The text in **verse 10** reports, *“Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance of his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled.”* (NKJV/KJV “displeased,” NLT “very aggravated”) *literally the words translated as “troubled” means “depressed.” Interesting! He was so despairing, discouraged and depressed that in **verse 15** he asked God to kill him says, in speaking to God, *“If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now...”* (v.15). Why was he depressed, do you think?

- (1) **Physically – exhausted and frustrated (vv.16-17)** He was exhausted and overworked because he had not learned to delegate his work load. He tried to handle it all by himself (see Ex. 18:13-23 where his father-in-law, Jethro, advised him to delegate so that he would “be able to endure.”)
- (2) **Emotionally –inferior and inadequate (v.15)** Moses had an inferiority complex; he held low view of his self-worth. Remember that he made many excuses for his own feelings of inferiority and inadequacy when God originally called him to lead His people to freedom. He took the situation here with the people personally... as one of personal failure. They were really rejecting God not him. Moses was diligent in his leadership, and yet had as his reward griping and complaint.
- (3) **Spiritually – punished and out of favor (v.11)** Moses felt distant from God. He said to God in **verse 11**, *“... why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?”* Do you hear the implication spiritually? What does Moses' words reveal about how he felt about his relationship with God at this time?

- (4) **How God handled him** – (vv.16-25) Moses as instructed by God to spread his work load, to slow down. He was to find seventy men to do the work he alone was trying to do.
- (5) **What God says to us - (v.17) You don't have to carry your burdens alone** “... *They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.*” We do not have to carry the burden alone. God, Himself, and other that He provides will help carry the load. When we are discouraged and depressed seek the support and encouragement of God and others.

2. **Jeremiah (Lamentation 3:1-26)** –Jeremiah was called the “weeping prophet” because he was called to address a people... God’s people, who had forsaken God and turned to other gods (Jer. 6:10-16). He wrote two Old Testament books, Jeremiah and Lamentations. Jeremiah’s messages were given in times of great stress and upheaval. Much disaster, death and destruction were witnessed by his hand, and he no less experienced the personal effects of those things than anyone else in his day. Jeremiah and Lamentation revealed that called men of God, experience depression and the heartache of it along with everyone else. Sometimes for that devoted one the heavy weight of sorrow, grief and misery, barrenness and pain are intensified because of their strong sense of hope and faith that can become dashed in those times. Again from Jeremiah we find in Lamentations an exhausted, discouraged, depressed man of God. Why?

- (1) **Emotionally – drained and spent (vv.1-2)** In his fear and concern for own his people and at God’s command and calling , Jeremiah had literally walked daily through the streets of Jerusalem preaching and pleading for a return to God. Not only was he weary from his day in and day out journey and preaching, emotionally he was drained and saw no hope in sight. He had missed sleep and meals... he was worn out physically and in graphic language he pictures it in **verse 2, “He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light.”** In other words, “God sent me... drove me out to do the impossible. To be a light where there was only darkness and I am exhausted, spent emotionally.”
- (2) **Physically –exhausted and worn out physically (vv.4-6)** **“⁴ He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. ⁵ He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. ⁶ He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead.” (Lam. 3:4-6)** This highly figurative passage effectively communicates the severity of the affliction and depression that Jeremiah felt during this time. It is compared to the weariness of aging and the pain of broken bones. The wasting away of vital force is a typical motif in expressions of lament. Verse 5 could be a reference to the actual horrors felt during the siege of Jerusalem or to the “bitterness” experienced by a person surrounded by insurmountable trouble. The intensity of the suffering is compared to the darkness of the abode of the forgotten departed dead... a definite reference to feeling of deep depression.
- (3) **Spiritually – distant and unheard (vv.7-9)** **“⁷ He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains. ⁸ Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. ⁹ He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked.” (Lam. 3:7-9)** Jeremiah felt as though God had

built a wall around him and bound him with heavy chains to make sure there was no escape from his depression and affliction. Like a prisoner in a dungeon, his cries to God went unanswered. Like people seeking their way out of a maze of depression, whatever direction they turned for relief was blocked and thwarted. One of life's darkest moments is to experience the absence of God and have one's prayers go unanswered.

(4) **How God handled him** – God didn't rebuke Jeremiah. Instead, listen to Jeremiah's words in Lamentation 3:21-26, *"²¹ Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: ²² Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, 'The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' ²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."* God reminded Jeremiah of His faithfulness, to wait on Him, and trust. God spoke to Jeremiah and flooded his soul with a quiet reminder of His love and faithfulness, of His provision and care, of His sure salvation.

(5) **What God says to us – God is at work, behind the scenes even when we don't see Him**

3. **Jonah (Jonah 4:1-11)** – In the wake of a miraculous escape from Egypt, Moses slumped into depression. In the wake of a display of Divine superiority over the prophets of Baal, Elijah fell under depression's spell. Jonah, in the wake of perhaps the greatest evangelistic success ever recorded, became its victim. The entire city of Nineveh (the capital of Assyrian Empire) repented and turned to God. Note the same words, but from a different man in verse 3, *"Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."* Why did Jonah battle such discouragement and depression?

(1) **Physically – exhausted and fretful (vv.1-3)** He had fought hard against God. He had attempted a trip to Tarshish to avoid preaching in Nineveh, and in the process had survived time in the belly of a fish. He had preached his way across Nineveh, and effort that took three days to achieve.

(2) **Emotionally – anger and bitterness (v.2a)** He was a bitter man, angry at God for showing His compassion and grace to the people he himself despised. He felt superior to them. Jonah was a bigoted nationalist more than he was an evangelist.

(3) **Spiritually – a hard and unteachable heart (vv.2-3)** Jonah was carnal. Anger was the tell-tale symptom of his deeper spiritual problem. In this instance he wanted to preach without seeing the results for which an evangelist usually hoped.

(4) **How God handled him – (vv.4-9)** God brought the facts to his attention and pointed out that he had no reason to let his anger kindle.

(5) **What God says to us – (vv.9-11) We must surrender our ways and thoughts to God and let Him take care of it.** Jonah had a way that he wanted things to work out and when his plan didn't work out as expected he was angry, discouraged and despondent... even to the point of wanting to die. God said to Jonah in verses 10-11, *"... You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more*

than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city.”

II. SOME HELP FOR DEPRESSION AT CHRISTMAS (or any other time)

Five significant lessons emerge from this study which, if applied can help us to not only to deal with depression and discouragement at this time of year (Christmas), by anytime this problem threatens us, and to perhaps actually finding ourselves growing in our faith despite this struggle.

5 Lessons for Growing through Discouragement and Depression ath Christmas or any time:

- 1. Realize that depression is not a sin, it is a symptom –**
- 2. Maintain a consistent program of relaxation and rest... especially at Christmas –**
You may have to delegate some of your work load to do this.
- 3. Guard against those subtle complexes (feeling of inferiority, down on myself, I’m no good, there is no hope, all is lost, it will never get any better) –** Keep your eyes on the Lord and away from yourself.
- 4. Remember that God is for you, not against you –** It is not His design to make your life miserable, but meaningful.
- 5. Don’t forget, Satan and his demons may bring depression –** It’s one of his sharpest darts.

“Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him my Savior and my God.” –Psalm 42:5