

# Class #5: Depression [*Despair*]

Providing biblical help & hope for those going through “the dark night of the soul”

Sunday, February 3, 2019 | Geoff Kirkland

“In depression, the new way of living is to believe and act on what God says rather than feel what God says. It is living by faith.” (Ed Welch)

“The key to warding off depression, then, is this: do not follow your feelings when you know that you have a responsibility to discharge. Instead, against your feelings, you must do as you should. And when you do, even if at first you do so mechanically, simply because you want to please God and you know that He wants you to do this, in time your feelings will change. You must not wait until you feel like it, or you may never feel like doing that task. Nor must you try to change your feelings directly; you cannot do that. Do what you know God wants you to do, WHETHER YOU FEEL LIKE IT OR NOT, and a change in feelings will take place, as a by-product, in time.” (Jay Adams)

There is one who can conquer the deadly foe of depression. He does not live in a world oblivious to pain and unaffected by suffering. He felt every pain, he endured every test, he was forsaken and abandoned by all. Yet his life conquered the darkness and turned evil into good and death into life. Hope is found in a living and real Person – Jesus Christ. (Bob Somerville)

## 1) Introduction:

- “An Estimated 1 in 10 U.S. Adults Report Depression” [CDC — *Centers for Disease Control & Prevention*]
- “Depression is a mental illness that can be costly and debilitating to sufferers. Depression can adversely affect the course and outcome of common chronic conditions, such as arthritis, asthma, cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and obesity. Depression also can result in increased work absenteeism, short-term disability, and decreased productivity.” (CDC)

“Depression is everywhere” (Andy Thompson, psychiatrist at Univ of Virginia)

**Defining depression:** “a debilitating mood, feeling, or attitude of hopelessness, which becomes a person’s reason for not handling the most important issues of life.”

## 2) The Causes of Depression in the Secular Understanding:

Most medical professionals practicing today believe that depression is caused by an equal combination of *biological* (including genetics), *social*, and *psychological* factors. A treatment approach that focuses exclusively on one of these factors is not likely to be as beneficial as a treatment approach that addresses both psychological and biological aspects, such as psychotherapy & medication (John Grohl, psychiatrist).

*The most common model today in the professional, medical community is what's called "The biological or medical model"*

This theory proposes that **depression is the result of a chemical imbalance in the brain**. Today, most would hold that depression is the result of low levels of the neurotransmitter, serotonin.

But, brain physiology is still so poorly understood that no neurotransmitter imbalance or balance has ever been documented. Even if brain chemical levels were able to be measured, one could not determine if the chemical levels caused the depression or if the depression changed the chemical levels. In other words: they can't be *objectively* sure of the hypothesis.

## 3) The Secular Solution, or Treatment:

According to the professionals, there are three well-established types of treatment for major depression:

**1. Medications.** Medications often effectively control the serious symptoms of depression. It often takes two to four weeks for antidepressant medications to have their full effect.

**2. Psychotherapy.** Several types of psychotherapy have been shown to be effective for depression, including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy (IPT). Support groups offer opportunities to share frustrations and successes, referrals to specialists and community resources, and information about what works best when trying to recover. Research has shown that mild to moderate depression can often be treated successfully with either medication or psychotherapy alone but that both together are often more helpful. Severe depression appears more likely to respond to a combination of medication and psychotherapy.

**3. Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).** ECT is a highly effective treatment for select severe depression episodes and for severe depression with psychosis. When medication and psychotherapy are not effective in treating severe symptoms (e.g., acute psychosis or thoughts of suicide) or if a person cannot take antidepressants, ECT may be considered. Memory problems can follow ECT treatments, so a careful risk-benefit assessment needs to be made for this intervention.

"Calling depression a disease is depressing because it offers no hope."

—Jim Newheiser

## 4) Understanding the *Real* **ROOT** of Depression **Biblically**:

Biblically, depression *always* involves a feeling/attitude of hopelessness & it *manifests* a low view of God at that moment.

### 3 crucial biblical counseling *diagnostic questions* related to depression:

1. Could God have changed the circumstances? (yes)
2. Did he? (no)
3. Is God good? (yes)

We must constantly repeat this in our counseling our own hearts (and others)

Depression often arises because of feeling-oriented versus commandment-oriented ways of living (Matt. 7:24-27). [E.g., I ‘feel’ that I should have gotten this, but I didn’t; so now I *feel* worthless, hopeless...]

Circumstances are *not* the issue. The issue is always how we *RESPOND* to the circumstances. Consistently responding sinfully to circumstances is what feeds the feelings of depression (hopelessness, aimlessness).

The goal is to honor and please God, *not* to get my way or have my feelings change (2 Cor. 5:9-15).

We must learn to talk to ourselves instead of listening to ourselves (Ps. 42:11, 43:5). Our feelings often lie. We must tell ourselves the truth (Phil. 4:8).

“Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them but they are talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man’s treatment [in Psalm 42] was this: instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul?” he asks. His soul had been depressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says, “Self, listen for moment, I will speak to you.” (Martyn Lloyd Jones)

“Think not on the comforts you want, but upon the mercies you have. Look rather at God's ends [purposes] in afflicting, than to the measure and degree of your affliction”  
(Christopher Love, *The Dejected Soul’s Cure*).

Another key element in getting to the root of depression (biblically) is that depressed people seem to focus on themselves far too much. Depression often stems from, manifests & leads to selfishness & self-centered thinking.

## 5) Some Biblical Examples of Those Who Were “Depressed”:

**Biblical terms:** downcast, despair, countenance falling, disturbed, near death, darkness, waves of death, blackness.

### **Biblical examples:**

- Cain – Genesis 4:6-7
- Elijah – 1 Kings 19
- David – Pss. 13, 32, 38, 51
- The Psalmists - Pss. 42, 43, 88
- Jeremiah – Lam. 3
- Paul – 2 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor 7:6

## 6) Can Christians Battle With This?

Christians *still* may struggle with depression. Why?

### **Here are SIX reasons why...**

- (1) Struggle with indwelling sin (Galatians 5 – our flesh has been crucified, that is, finally and ultimately judged by God).
- (2) Have not perfectly put off the old man with its corrupt patterns and practices and put on the new man which is renewed in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:22-24)
- (3) Have the temptations of difficult circumstances and people (1 Cor 10:12-13)
- (4) See through a mirror dimly and know only in part (1 Cor 13:12)
- (5) Have only an earnest, a down payment of our inheritance (The Holy Spirit; Eph 1:13-14).
- (6) Struggle with the world, the flesh, and the devil (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 6:10–18; Gal. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12)

“My spiritual conflicts were unspeakably dreadful, heavier than the mountains and the overflowing floods. I seemed enclosed in hell itself; I was deprived of all sense of God, even of his being; and that was my misery... My soul was in such anguish that I could not eat, but I felt as I supposed a poor wretch would, that is is just going to the place of execution.” (David Brainerd)

Remember Hebrews 2:17-18  
Remember Lamentations 3:24  
Remember Romans 8:37-39

*We're not content with using therapeutic terms and methods. We come with the power of the gospel & the power of a Person to bring about God-glorifying change in responding to the situation.*

A depressed Christian is a contradiction in terms and is a very poor recommendation for the gospel” (Martyn Lloyd Jones).

### **The Testimony of One Depressed Young Lady:**

I met with one of my university professors, who was a biblical counselor, and after talking together, it became evident (based upon past medical conditions, sleep habits, stress levels, and thinking, responsive patterns) that I had depression.

I thought: Christians should never be depressed. They're supposed to find their joy in the Lord! But I quickly had to learn that as spiritual and physical beings, depression is more than just sadness, it can become a debilitating state that comes as a result of spiritual or physical infirmities.

Looking back to my “episodes”, I can honestly say that those were the darkest times in my entire life. I felt like I had even been deserted by the One Person who I had always turned to during trials. It felt like my Savior had left me. I no longer felt like I had a relationship with Jesus Christ and that I really was all alone to suffer this way for the rest of my life.

But no matter how much I *felt that way*, I had to constantly remind myself that it wasn't true! I had to learn that no matter how much my body and mind seemed to be changing, God was never-changing! God is constant and loves me just as much through those times as He does any other time. I had to depend and lean on God every minute of every day. I had to learn to trust that God would keep His promises no matter what.

Still, as a believer, I continually deal with wrong thoughts, anxieties and feelings. But God is gracious. He continues to give me strength daily and courage to face those things. I have learned to pray through all things -- every concern, question, or anxiety. This has given me a *closer relationship with my Savior that I do not regret*.

Three most important things I would recommend to another Christian facing depression:

1. Get a medical exam -- to understand the state of the physical body.
2. Speak truth to your heart *daily*. Learn to start talking to yourself instead of listening to yourself.
3. Remember Romans 8:28 - I had to remember God does what is best and that is most glorifying to him and that which is best for His children (v.29 -- to conform us to Christ).

– Morgan

## **7) Glorifying God *Through* the Dark Times:**

“We don't just tell people about what they can *do* but a *Person* in whom they can trust. Hope is found in the Person *Jesus Christ*, not in a pill or a prescription and not in just knowing facts or

changing your circumstances” (Bob Sommerville, *If I’m a Christian: Then Why Am I Depressed?*)

And now, Lord, for what do I wait? *MY HOPE IS IN YOU!* (Psalm 39:7)

**We don’t deny the reality of great hardship & pain, nor do we deny the physical component of pain, so how can we learn from the examples of God’s people so we deal with the ‘dark night of the soul’ in a God-honoring way? Where is help and hope found?**

### **1. The example of David — Psalm 102 (and see Psalm 31)**

- Title: he is ‘faint’ & pours out his complaint before the LORD
- How does the believer *walk through the afflicting, debilitating days of despair?*
  1. Cry out to God in despair (1-11)
  2. Reaffirm the character of God in your despair (12-22)
  3. Rest in the comfort *in God* even without all the ‘answers’ (23-28)
- Health Lambert writes: One of the most challenging aspects to these verses is that even while the Psalmist believes that God is angry with him, he does not forsake God as the source of his hope (vv.12-22)
- But, the end of the psalm brings us back to reality: It is as if the Psalmist was so moved by the building worship of verses 18-22 that he tries to raise up in celebration only to have the intense pain of his condition drive him back to his bed. Having gotten his hope renewed only served to make this bout with suffering more devastating. So this Psalm, like life, does not fade off into “happily ever after.” But it’s not just chronic pain. It might be parents who lost a child coming home to an empty bedroom or having to face that birth date every year. Or the cancer patient who goes back every few months and faces the tests again. Or the faithful spouse who sees dozens of cars in the same make, model, and color of their spouse’s former lover and grows angrily nauseous. In times like these we are tempted to return again to the “Why?!” questions because an “eternal perspective” just does not cut the pain.

### **2. The example of Paul — Acts 27**

- The shipwreck traveling to Rome
- V.20b - “from then on *all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned*”
- V.21 - no food, hopelessness for ‘many days’
- V.22 & 25 — Encouragement
- V.23-24 — Turn to & Receive the Promises of God
- V.25 — Believe in God’s Promises
- V.35 — Give thanks to God for what He has given!

- Vv.39-44 — Labor, Endure, Persevere, Work Hard!

### **3. The example of Jesus — in Gethsemane (Matt 26:36ff & Luke 22:39-46)**

- Note the expectation in John 12:27 - now my soul has become troubled [the word means strong emotional horror/anxiety/stress].
- See Luke 22:43-44 - an angel from heaven strengthened Jesus because he was *being in agony and praying very fervently, his sweat became like drops of blood*.
- Matthew 26:36ff
  - V.37 - Jesus began to be 'grieved and distressed'
  - V.38 - he said: "my soul is deeply grieved -- to the point of death"
- What did Jesus do?
  - He fell before God! (39a)
  - He cried out to God! (39b)
  - He submitted to God! (39c)
  - He was aware of temptation! (v.41)
  - He kept continuing to pray (=3 hours) (vv.39, 42, 44)
  - He trusted God's plan (v.39, 42, 45)

Consider Jesus: "it is as if the sufferings of another can temporarily take us out of ourselves. The sufferings of Jesus can, indeed, elevate us and take us out of ourselves.

The cross says that life will not be easy. If Jesus serves, we will serve. If Jesus suffers, we, too, will experience hardships. No servant is greater than his master. Yet things are not always the way they appear. Suffering is part of the path that leads to glory and beauty. "He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him" (Ps 126:6). Suffering has a purpose. It is changing us so that we look more and more like Jesus Himself. 'When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.' But that death is not the end of the story." (Ed Welch).

## **8) A Practical Process for Counseling the Christian Who Battles with Depression:**

### ***Counseling the depressed soul (yourself or others):***

#### **1. Ask the heart-searching questions.**

- a. Are you angry? Do you have a right to be angry?
- b. Why are you so downcast?
- c. Where is your treasure? What have you lost?
- d. What happened that you didn't think should have happened? Why did it affect you so much?
- e. Where is God currently in your thinking? What part did God have to play in this event/situation?
- f. Are you especially worried about something? Why are you so afraid?

- g. Why do you feel so guilty?
- h. What do you feel like you must cover up?

**2. It may benefit to have a current, thorough medical exam.**

**3. Establish a God-centered view of life (Rom. 8:28-29, 2 Cor. 5:9, 1 Cor. 10:13)**

**4. Understand the cycle of depression, including:**

- a. Circumstances versus your own response (what happens & how you respond to what happens)
- b. Commandment-oriented living versus feeling-oriented living
- c. Feelings follow actions (did you act/do what your *feelings* led you to do?)

**5. What does your depression teach you about your own heart?**

- "I am afraid"
- "I am guilty" or "I am ashamed"
- "I lost something"
- "I need something"
- "I should have gotten this/that"
- "I feel lost, aimless, wandering & without purpose"
- "I am angry"
- "I must avoid something"
- "Woe is me"
- "I have no hope"
- "I am trusting in Christ and waiting on Him"

**6. What do those beliefs, thoughts, desires, and motives reveal about who or what I am worshipping? What are my idols?**

**7. Confess and repent of anything that does not honor God. Actively trust in Christ.**

**8. Practice the put-off and put-on principle. Change thinking and beliefs (Rom. 12:1-2 & 2 Cor 10:3-5)**

"The only way to change how we *feel* inside is to change what occupies our minds -- to 'renew' our minds with the Word (Rom 12:2). Our minds are renewed through the truth about our merciful and loving God as we do battle with our hearts to believe the promises of God. God's Word will wash you and draw you back to Himself and in His presence is fullness of joy" (Ps 16:11). (Bob Sommerville).

**9. Habits you want to develop:**

- a. Thankfulness (Eph. 5:20)
- b. Serving and ministering to others (=eyes/thoughts/focus *off* of self/situation & *onto* others; Phil 2:3).
- c. Taking every thought captive. Thinking on things that are true (2 Cor. 10:5, Phil. 4:8)
- d. Thinking biblically about God, self, and circumstances (1 Pet 4)
- e. Pleasing God versus changing feelings or circumstances (Daniel chapters 1-6)
- f. God-confidence and self-discipline (Prov. 14:26, 1 Tim. 4:7)

**10. Seek another believer to join with you & help with constant intercessory prayer.**

Martin Luther said this (in a letter he wrote from 1527):

For more than a week I have been thrown back and forth in death and Hell; my whole body feels beaten, my limbs are still trembling. I almost lost Christ completely, driven about on the waves and storms of despair and blasphemy against God. But because of



the intercession of the faithful (*intercessory prayers of the saints!*), God began to take mercy on me and tore my soul from the depths of Hell.

# Overcoming Depression

Christ Fellowship Bible Church  
Biblical Counseling

## ***To conquer depression to the glory of God, you must...***

- 1.** Personally know the salvation which is in Jesus Christ.
- 2.** Meditate regularly on God's Word, the Bible (daily food/sustenance).
- 3.** Fulfill your God-given responsibilities (work hard/diligence).
- 4.** Confess and forsake your sins.
- 5.** Faithfully spend time in prayer to God.
- 6.** Praise and thank God in every situation (every!).
- 7.** Practice the presence of God by disciplining yourself to see all of life and every circumstance from a God-centered point of view.
- 8.** Conscientiously serve God and other people.
- 9.** Use the gifts, abilities, and resources God has given you to help people.
- 10.** Practical biblical thinking and living in every situation.
- 11.** Replace every pessimistic, defeatist thought with a biblical thought (put off / put on).
- 12.** Regularly seek fellowship with God's people (when the doors are open, be there!).
- 13.** Focus on becoming more like Jesus Christ in your character and attitudes.
- 14.** Take care of yourself physically (sleep, exercise, diet).
- 15.** Enjoy the variety of good things God has provided (and thank God for them *all!*).

— Adapted from Wayne A. Mack, *A Homework Manual for Biblical Living: Volume 1*, 61-62.

“In depression, the new way of living is to believe and act on what God says rather than feel what God says. It is living by faith.”  
— Ed Welch

***For Further Studying*** [in order of readability & preference]:

1. Robert Somerville, *If I'm a Christian, Why Am I Depressed?* (Xulon Press, 2014).\* [most lay level\*\*]
2. Jay Adams, *What to Do When You Become Depressed* (P&R, 1975).\* [great biblical counseling resource]
3. D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression* (Eerdmans, 1965).\* [detailed, lengthy & thoroughly biblical]
4. Ed Welch, *Depression: The Way Up When You Are Down* (P&R, 2000). – booklet
5. Ed Welch, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness* (New Growth, 2004).