

“And this Gospel,” shall be preached... Matthew 24:14

Sermon Summaries from Ministers of the Worldwide Church of God

Depression: Its Causes and Cure

Depression — low spirits, blue moods, gloominess, dejection, sadness, discouragement, despair, feelings of inadequacy, a generally negative outlook on life — afflicts just about everyone once in a while, at least.

I am not a doctor, psychologist or psychiatrist. I will not deal with these problems in a technical way, but I do want to discuss them as a minister of Jesus Christ, who helps people through their trials. I'm going to use layman's terminology and speak from my experiences. Also I'm going to use material from the classes I have taken and the reading I have done on the subject.

Depression is a symptom, a warning sign, given by the body or mind to tell you that something going on inside needs attention. Depression itself is not the problem but a symptom and warning of a problem — a warning to investigate and find and attend to whatever is the real problem.

Eight causes of depression

I'd like to discuss eight basic causes of depression; some are simple and some complex.

1) Poor eating and sleeping habits. The body needs fuel and time to repair itself each day. When its basic needs are not met, it doesn't function efficiently, and sometimes a listless depression results. This commonly happens to students pressed for time, busied by social activities, exams, and the same also happens to elderly folks and people living alone, because "it's no fun cooking for only one." Poverty may also prevent an adequate diet and thus cause depression.

2) Reaction to drugs, toxic depression. Most medications and drugs can have bad side effects of one kind or another, even common medications taken for colds. People need to be cautious and heed competent medical advice rather than attempt to doctor themselves up with all sorts of remedies from the corner drugstore.

Some people have basic imbalances in their body chemistry and suffer reactions to certain foods. For example, we've all heard of hypoglycemia.

3) Significant changes in bodily functions. These can open the way for depression. Included are such normal bodily changes as menopause, postnatal recuperation, even the normal menstrual cycle.

4) Repressed anger. There is a right time and use for anger but there is also a wrong and destructive use. God warns not to let the sun go down on your anger (Ephesians 4:26). In other words don't keep anger bottled up inside, carry grudges or let it build into hatred and eat away till it begins to tear you up.

5) Grief or loss. This is probably one of the largest causes of depression. An interesting study was done in which Americans were asked to list the personal tragedies they most dread. Here are their answers — 10 leading causes of grief and consequently depression: Loss of a child, death of a spouse, a jail sentence, an unfaithful mate, major financial difficulties, business failure, being fired, a miscarriage, divorce, marital separation. All these are high anxiety situations.

6) Self-pity and self-guilt. I don't mean just momentary disappointment after bungling some minor situation or task. I'm talking about being immersed in self-pity over an extended period of time. This kind of self-pity really comes from a negative self-image and a negative or cynical outlook toward the world and life. If everything now is perceived as rotten and evil, despondency often ensues, and the future too seems bleak and discouraging. Of course, the Bible teaches us the opposite, that our future is bright, wonderful, busy, fantastic and assured — if our hope is in God and His plan!

7) Sin. When someone is consistently doing something he knows is wrong, a conscious depression is bound to result. Of course, one needs to be careful and ask himself if his standards are realistic. No one attains

total perfection in this life. All humans sin, and all need to repent constantly and remain in an attitude of repentance (1 John 1:7-10). But if one doesn't resist sin and in weakness slips into major sins continually, then discouragement and depression are apt to follow.

8) Living in a depressing environment, like a slum, or in chronic unemployment, poverty, loneliness. We are all strangers and sojourners on the earth, looking to a better Kingdom from heaven and to the time when God establishes His government on earth. We can all have hope of a better future. But there are also things one can do here and now to overcome the depressing effects of his surroundings and situation in life.

Elijah's despondency

How then do we face depression and overcome it? Let's examine and learn from a remarkable example found in 1 Kings, chapters 18 and 19. This is the story of Elijah. Elijah became despondent — despondent, the Bible says, unto death. In other words, he became suicidal.

Now to bring the story into focus, let's notice the events reported in chapter 18, which set the stage for Elijah's subsequent despondency. Elijah had just gone through a spiritual "high." Elijah took on the entire priesthood of Baal, and he *decisively* won the confrontation because God intervened for him, even sending fire from heaven to light the altar and burn up the sacrifice, confirming that Elijah was God's true servant. Afterwards, Elijah had the prophets of Baal destroyed (1 Kings 18:40).

Here is not only a major miracle by God, but the complete destruction of Baal worship at this time — the wiping out of a major religious effort that had been destructive to God. Talk about success; this was total victory!

Elijah was so "high;" it says in verse 46: "And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah; and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel." He had run 20 miles ahead of the horses! Here we have one of those major, once-in-a-lifetime accomplishments and at the same time total physical and emotional exhaustion.

With that in mind, we find in 1 Kings 19:1-2, "And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time."

When he heard this threat by the queen, Elijah ran for his life and came to Beersheba. He left his servant there and went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came down under a juniper tree. Then he asked God that he might die. He said, "... It is enough; now O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" (verse 4).

Elijah had built himself up for his confrontation with the false prophets. It must have taken everything out of him — a tremendous physical and emotional exhaustion. And as if that wasn't enough, he had run 20 miles into the city. He was totally fatigued. Now, what did he do at that critical moment? He listened to the one *negative* voice instead of all the positive voices. The negative voice was that of Jezebel, a woman who said, "I'm going to kill you." He temporarily forgot about God's help and power, zeroed in on the one problem he was having and forgot the rest. As a result, he got depressed and despondent.

Now I want you to notice how God handled Elijah, because I believe that here we have the perfect method for handling this type of depression.

This sermon was given by Steve Martin, area coordinator for the southwestern United States.

Elijah slept, then ate a meal *miraculously* provided by the angel to sustain him 40 days. This part is clearly miraculous. Incidentally none of us should try fasting like that! God was summoning him to come and meet Him (1 Kings 19). (Here we learn that in the average, normal depression case one might at least apply the *principle* of taking care of the basic needs of rest and proper diet.)

"And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?" (verse 9). Simply, God asks Elijah, "What's the cause of your problems?"

"And he said, I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (verse 10). We see that Elijah is zeroing in on the one negative aspect of his life. He has temporarily overlooked and forgotten all the good.

Notice that *God listens* to him. God hears him out. He doesn't say, "Now, Elijah, my people don't get despondent. People with my Holy Spirit don't ever have depression. You shouldn't be depressed. Therefore, don't be depressed," and walk away. No, God listened to what the man had to say. He let him get it all out.

And then God, in verse 11, said: "... Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord, and, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire..." God is showing that He controls the *power* of the wind and the earthquake and the fire.

But after the fire, verses 12-13, "... A still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here Elijah?" I think the still small voice is representative of understanding, compassion, empathy, kindness. Even though God has the power of the universe, *He still spoke to Elijah kindly, gently, with understanding*. So we have seen the three parts of God's program to help him through his depression.

The first step: God gave him food, drink and rest. The second step: He let him talk it all out. The third step: He gave him empathy; He gave him understanding. He let him know that He was concerned.

And then the next step, God said, "... Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria" (verse 15). In other words, God told him, "Go, get back to work. Surround yourself with activities again. Don't allow yourself to just sit and feel sorry for yourself. Get busy again!"

I believe that in those four steps is a very good way of helping people deal with depression. It's applicable for anybody whether a family member, a friend, whoever it may be.

Elijah gently corrected

Notice that nowhere do you find God "chewing him out." God did not even contradict his untrue statement when he said, "... I only, am left..." You'll find a little later that God corrected him and said that Elijah wasn't alone; there were 7,000 others, too. But He didn't hit him with correction when he wasn't ready for it. He waited.

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God gently corrected Elijah. Elijah had listened to only one small negative voice from Jezebel. He had forgotten his friends. He had forgotten there were 7,000 others. And you find that God did not severely correct him but reminded him *gently* that what he had to say was not true.

So I think we have a very good plan for helping people with depression.

To solve the problem of depression, you need to ask yourself or whoever it is that's going through the problem: "What is it that you are doing or thinking that is causing your depression?" What is the cause? Depression itself is just a symptom. When you understand that, then you can begin to deal with it.

Now if indeed it's a physical thing — if it's because of a diet, then change your diet. If it's a postnatal depression, then just recognize what it is. It surely can help you get through it when you recognize it. If it is a

significant change in life, then recognize that it is a cause of depression; at least knowing that can help you understand how to get through it.

Since depression is only a symptom, what can you do so that you can change that which is causing the depression? Depression is in a way emotional pain, just the same as we have physical pain. If you put your hand on a hot stove, it will hurt you, and you ought to be very grateful that it does hurt. Because of that hurt, you'll take your hand off the hot stove and not receive further hurt. God has placed into our fingers nerve endings that convey pain sensations so that whenever we touch things that are wrong for us, we immediately know about it. That's the reason for the pain.

Depression is like an emotional pain. What we need to do is find out the cause of that depression. Once we find out, then we need to change that cause. Once we change it, then the depression will go away.

There are usually reasons for depression. Unfortunately most people don't attend to those reasons. Most people don't concentrate or look at or study what those causes are. They just feel blue; they feel down. But

they can look at those reasons; they can understand those reasons. And if indeed they will understand and correct those reasons, then they have the means to turn off depression. Just as surely as they have created the depression, it can also go away, because they can let it go.

Proverbs 24:16 tells us, "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again . . ." We might tend to think it's the unjust, the unrighteous, that become despondent, that fall, trip, stumble. Most of us probably feel that depression is sin. It's bad. Now it's certainly hurtful to you, and it can be caused by sin, but there are other causes for it. It's the just man who analyzes it, understands it, picks himself up and rises up again.

Life is full of troubles. It is a training ground in which we must learn to act and think like God so we will be ready to receive everlasting life and handle it rightly. Learning to cope with and overcome depression is part of what God wants us to master. The future is always bright and hopeful when we consider what God is planning and offering us!