Oh, My Soul - A Biblical Primer on Depression

Northeast Fellowship Ladies Advance

1. Introduction:

* Video: “Does God Even Care” (4 minutes)

Don’t raise your hand, but have you ever been there? Questioning God’s goodness, hopelessness, questioning everything, knowing that God can take it away but He doesn’t. living in isolation. I have.

Depression is common:

* There are an estimated 30million people in America struggling with depression right now. That’s roughly 1 in 10 people. That number doesn’t take into account the parents, the spouses, the children, and the friends living with and around the depressed person.
* 1:4 young people will struggle with depression between 13 and 24years of age.
* The World Health Organization estimates that by 2030 depression will be second only to AIDS/HIV as the highest cause of disability worldwide. So, either you struggle with it or you know someone who struggles with it and it’s only growing as a problem.
* Because depression is common in the human condition, it’s common in the Scriptures. People in the Bible like Joseph, Moses, Jeremiah, Jonah, Elijah, Job, John the Baptist, the apostles Paul and Peter, and king David – a man after God’s own heart.

**6** I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. **7**My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes. (Psalm 6:6-7)

**1** My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? **2**O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. (Psalm 22:1-2)

Even though it’s so common, there’s risk in talking about it. Some people think it’s a mental thing and should be left to phycologists. Others don’t think it’s a problem at all and people just need to get over themselves. There will be those who think their situation is unique and, therefore, the Bible and the Gospel don’t apply to their struggle so we should all get off their backs. And, there are all kinds of opinions about the role of medication in dealing with depression. So, it’s just as likely that I’ll offend you as help you today, but I’ll take that risk.

If the Gospel is truly Good News than it’s good news even in the midst of really **DARK** places.

Definition:

Depression can be defined as a **LINGERING** sense of gloom or **SADNESS** that persists for weeks, months, or even years. It is often accompanied by a diminished interest in pleasure, a sense of numbness, chronic fatigue, an inescapable sense of fear, the inability to concentrate and, potentially, recurrent thoughts of death and suicide.

Q. What would you consider to be some of the common causes of depression?

Other people’s choices to hurt you, lie to you, betray you, etc. Our own sinful choices. Depression is one consequence of unrepentant sin. Our difficult circumstances or the trials of life. Our bodies – some health conditions can affect the chemistry of the body. Satan and spiritual warfare can be a cause (just ask Job). God can lead us into dark seasons of life for His own good purposes in our lives.

1. A Biblical Primer on Depression:

* See Psalm 42–43:5

What we know from the context is that the author was experiencing some form of persecution. People had turned away from him and were mistreating him and this produced a thirsting for God deep in his soul. The right picture here isn’t of the deer frolicking in the woods…it’s of the deer dying of thirst in the desert. This is the Psalmist going through a season where his soul is parched and dry because he’s out in the wasteland and he feels overwhelmed and abandoned by God.

In verse 4 he’s looking back on how life used to be and, for him, it was awesome. He was serving the Lord. He felt close to the Lord. He was happy. He led the congregation in worship and praise and he describes it has a “Multitude keeping festival.” So, he holds up his present struggles and hardships alongside how it used to be…how he used to feel and it caused a deep emotional response from him because the only thing he’s certain of is that it’s not that way now.

It’s said that in depression certainty is replaced by uncertainty and the only thing that seems certain is the belief that things will **NEVER** change. Depression often results in **CATASTOPHIZING** where our minds run to the worst possible outcome.

Life will never get better. The way it is and the way it feels is the way it’s always going to be and the way it’s always going to feel. That taunting voice asking, “Where is your God?” can just as easily come from inside your own head. So, what happens is that life takes on this grey haze that colors everything and we begin to spiral deeper into depression.

The mind gets **STUCK** on repeat and we keep listening to the same script over and over again which only reinforces the negative **EMOTIONS** that these negative thoughts give birth to.

Let me say two things here:

1. It’s important to understand what are emotions are saying because they’re saying something **ABOUT** **US**.

All emotions work this way. We tend to think that our emotions are a response to a set of circumstances but in reality they are a response to how we interpret our circumstances. So, in that way, our emotions reveal what is most important to us and what we’ve put our hope in.

“Depression doesn’t come out of the blue. Your reasons for your depression will show you how you’re experiencing, interpreting, and reacting to your world. When you discover the root of your depression you will also discover what was most important to you. The loss, the pain, the unmet expectation, the shattered dream all point to what you believed would make life worth living and it will reveal your false savior.” (Ed Welch)

1. Emotions are great indicators that something is going on but they are terrible **LEADERS** and often **LIARS**.

So, we need to listen to what they’re saying we just can’t always believe that they’re telling us the truth. The Psalmist takes the most critical step in anyone’s journey through depression – he stops listening to himself and he starts talking to himself. Notice verse 5…

* See Psalm 42:5, 42:11, and 43:5

Three times the Psalmist recognizes the depressive state of his soul. Three times he asks himself what right he had to feel that way, and three times he commands himself to do the same thing. This step of learning to preach truth to our own soul is critical in any person’s battle with depression.

Notice what the Psalmist does:

1. He **RECOGNIZES** his emotional state.

* The phrase “Cast Down” speaks to being brought low, it’s the act of being thrown to the ground, to be humbled, to be brought to grief or to mourn the loss of something or someone.
* The word “Turmoil” speaks to making a loud noise, to groan or to cry out loudly, to lament and wail, or to be stirred up like an ocean churning on itself. He’s feeling this in his gut right now and he doesn’t pretend like that’s not happening.

1. He **CHALLENGES** these emotions.

He asks, “Why”? Why are you feeling this way? What has happened? What are the realities at work here and not just the emotions? These emotions reveal something at work in him but he doesn’t allow them to define him nor to control his responses.

1. He **COMMANDS** himself to actively look to and respond to the Person and Promises of God.

He commands himself to “Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God.” Hope – hope in the Scriptures is not an “I really hope this works out.” Hope is a confident expectation that God will keep His Word so I will bear up under this difficult circumstance until my Deliver delivers me.

1. Conclusion:

Practical Steps:

1. Talk to **SOMEONE** you trust as soon as you can (a pastor, doctor, etc.).
2. Commit to always doing the next **RIGHT** thing. We’re still responsible to honor God.
3. Elevate your **PERSPECTIVE** to see what God is doing.

**8**For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. **9**Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)

1. You must recognize that at some level **SPIRITUAL** **WARFARE** is taking place (Psalm 43:2).
2. Begin to **INTREPRET** your circumstances through the Gospel.

Q. What would that mean in respect to depression and the causes of depression discussed   
 in our first question?

It would mean that God is in control. That my sin is forgiven in Christ. That my sin is not my identity. That this trial will not last forever. That the devil is defeated and he cannot do more than God allows – and whatever God allows, He redeems. That this circumstance is designed to conform me to the image of Christ (who had His own dark night of the soul).

Q. What are your questions?

The Psalmist recognized that his greatest need wasn’t relief from his suffering. It wasn’t to be delivered from his enemies. His greatest need was for God. Likewise, your greatest need isn’t freedom from depression. Your greatest need is God.