

Depression

What is it?

Webster's:(1): a state of feeling sad: Dejection (2) a psychoneurotic or psychotic disorder marked esp. by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, a significant increase or decrease in appetite and time spent sleeping, feelings of dejection and hopelessness, and sometimes suicidal tendencies.

Norm Wright in *The Christians use of Emotional Power* describes depression as follows:

A depressed person has feelings of pessimism, discouragement or dejection. He may feel apathetic or despondent. Emotional exhaustion may set in with a preoccupation with life and misfortunes. Contemplation of suicide is a common result. In depression there is real mental pain - a combination of anguish, despair, self-disgust, intense guilt with anger and fear. Hopelessness is a frequent companion. Depression affects us not only mentally but physically as well. Aches and pains, stomachache, pressure in the head and many other physical symptoms may occur.

Depression may be defined as

1. A specific alteration in mood: sadness, loneliness, apathy.
2. A negative self-concept associated with self-reproaches and self blame.
3. Regressive and self-punitive wishes: desire to escape, hide, or die.
4. Vegetative changes: anorexia, insomnia, loss of libido.
5. Change in activity level: retardation or agitation.

Depression is common to life. It is seen in several of the Old Testament saints including David, who described his in **Psalm 42**; Elijah (described in 1 Kings 19) and Hezekiah (described Isaiah 38). But just because something is common means that it is right. Sin is common, and it is wrong.

Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote in his book, *"Spiritual Depression"* concerning depressed Christians:
. . . that such people are very poor representatives of the Christian faith. As we face the modern world with all its trouble and turmoil and with all its difficulties and sadness, nothing is more important than that we who call ourselves Christian, and who claim the Name of Christ, should be representing our faith in such a way before others, as to give them the impression that here is the solution, and here the answer. In a world where everything has gone so sadly astray, we should be standing out as men and women apart, people characterized by a fundamental joy and certainty in spite of conditions, in spite of adversity. Now that, I think you will agree, is the picture which is given of God's people everywhere in the Scriptures, whether it is the Old Testament or the New. Those men of God stood out in that way and, whatever their circumstances and conditions, they seemed to possess a secret which enabled them to live triumphantly and to be more than conquerors. It therefore behooves us to examine the state of spiritual depression very closely.

What is sad is that instead of helping a fellow believer with depression learn how to work through depression, too often what occurs within the Christian community is that the person who is struggling with some emotional difficulty i.e. depression, anxiety, fear, etc. is simply told that they are sinning because of their emotional state and must stop. Yet no help is given to help them overcome the problem. No direction is given to the path of recovery. And the guilt that is laid upon the poor individual who is already emotionally stressed drives them deeper into their problem. We need to help people overcome their problems, not just give a Christian cliché that often gives little help or comfort, and occasionally makes the problem worse. If we want to help ourselves, or someone else overcome depression, we must stop our condemnation of each other and start dealing with the problem as we co-journey on this path of life. The place to start is understanding the various origins of depression.

Types of Depression

| | The Blues | Mild Depression | Severe Depression |
|----------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| TIME | < 1 week | 1-2 weeks | 2 weeks or more |
| Symptoms | 0-1 | 2-3 | 3 or more |
| | No significant loss of pleasure | some loss of pleasure, but rebounds | major loss of pleasure |
| | No change in responsibility | insignificant change in responsibility | significant loss in activity/responsibility |

Symptoms:

1. Rational. Major cognitive disturbance. Extreme critical thoughts
 - A. Self: View of oneself in absolute, derogatory terms i.e. loser, bum, idiot, etc.
 - B. World: The world is a terrible, empty place with no pleasure at all.
 - C. Future: There will be no change in me or my world.
2. Volitional/Behavioral. The person depressed no longer initiates pleasurable or responsible actions
3. Emotional. Everything is gloom, apathy, suicidal thoughts
4. Physiological. Sleep disorders, weight disorders, sluggish, loss of energy. More than normal forgetfulness

Medical Depression. More is being discovered everyday about the inter-relationship of our physical, mental, and emotional natures. It is a known fact that our physical state, i.e. the health of our bodies will have a major effect upon our emotional and mental outlook. Mild depressions often accompany physical sickness. It is also now a known fact that certain chemical/hormonal imbalances in the body's will cause a state of depression or will result from depression. It is this chemical/hormonal imbalance that is being referred to here as Medical Depression. Christians can and do suffer from this. The emotional state can fluctuate as the medications are adjusted to the proper dosage. There can be periods of time in which someone in this condition can appear perfectly normal, but then sway back into depression from dosages that are either too low or too high. A person in such a state wants to hide from everyone, and could easily sleep 10-15 hrs a day. Such individuals can often overcome their emotions by a determined will, but it can still be a great struggle.

At the same time in saying this, we also must recognize that we live in a time when many doctors quickly prescribe medication just so the person is not depressed. Taking medication without also working diligently to overcome the root causes of that depression just makes the drug a "happy pill" which does more harm in the long run than good, especially as dosages are increased or new medications added in order to achieve the same effect.,

In the remainder of this discussion the focus will not be about Medical Depression. It is only mentioned here because there needs to be some understanding that there are many people who are suffering from depression because their body is not functioning properly, not just because of an incorrect understanding or view on life.

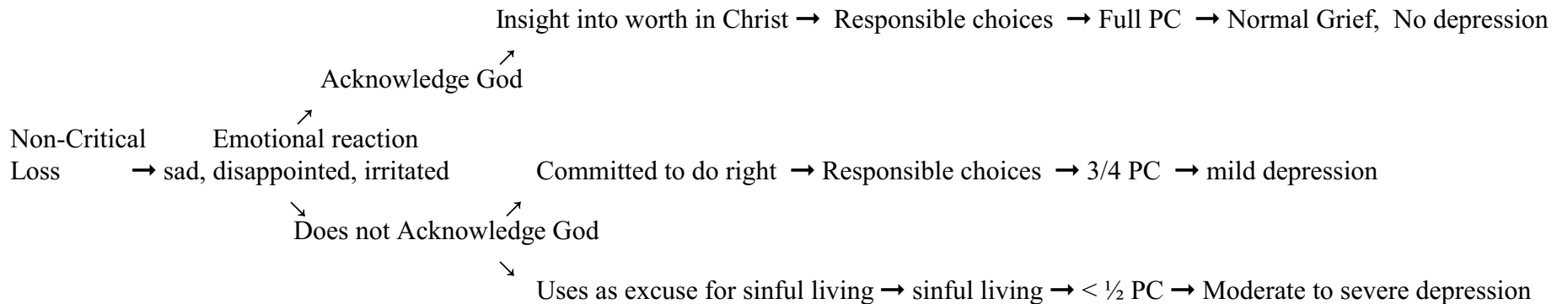
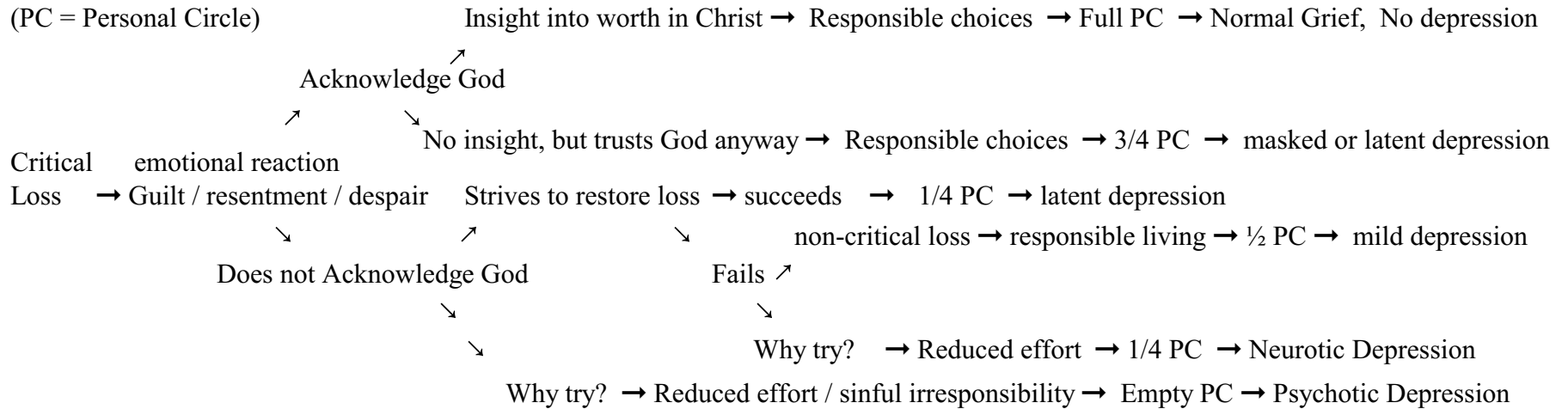
Basic Spiral into Depression

Step 1. There is some loss or failure related to a goal believed necessary for personal worth (initial reaction may be frustration and anger)

Step 2. Perception develops that further effort to reach the goal is futile

Step 3. Futility of effort yields to cessation of effort resulting in despondency, depression

(PC = Personal Circle)



In **1 Kings 18**, the prophet Elijah held a contest with the prophets of Baal to find out who worshiped the true God. If you will remember, they both built altars upon which they prepared their sacrifices. Then they were to pray to their God, and the God that sent fire down from heaven to consume the sacrifice would prove Himself to be the true God and the people were agreed that they would then worship Him. As you recall, the 450 prophets of Baal prepared their altar first and began to call on Baal. They called out long and loud, they cut themselves until the blood gushed out of them, and though they did this from morn till eve, there was no answer. (V.27-29) Elijah has the altar he built drenched in water 3 times until the water filled the trench around the altar, Elijah then simply prays to God and fire falls out of heaven consuming the sacrifice, altar, and then licks up the water in the trench. Elijah then kills all the prophets of Baal, prays for God to end the 3 ½ year drought, and then when it starts to rain, he out runs king Ahabs chariot to Jezreel some 15 - 20 miles away. Now at this point we would say that Elijah is the least likely candidate for depression on the earth. He as just been the instrument of a couple of supernatural works of God. He has slain his enemies, and the people have agreed that “ the LORD, he is God”. He was so energized that he was able to outrun a horse over a distance of 15-20 miles.

Now look at **1 Kings 19**, and note A) some of the evidences of his depression, and B) some of the reasons that may have caused his depression.

(Blocked Goals)

1. Frustration. (futility) v. 1,2 : All of that work, and the king and queen still do not believe. v.4 “It is enough; now, O LORD take my life, for I am not better than my fathers.”
2. Fear. v.2,3: Jezebel threatens to kill him (Note, Elijah kills 450 prophets of Baal - 1 Kings 18:40 but this one woman causes him fear, a sign of depression) and Elijah is afraid. (2 Tim 1:7 “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, love, and of a sound mind”)
3. Fatigue. 18:37,40,42,46. 19:3-5. Elijah was tired physically, mentally, and spiritually.
4. Forsaken. Feelings of being left alone to do the task. No one else cares or will help (v.10,14)
5. Failure of Faith. (Increases as depression sets in, but is the key to overcoming it) Note v.15-18. God was still working his plan, there were still many who were following God and God was protecting them.

Read the following Psalms and note symptoms of depression and means by which it is overcome:

Psalm 6

Psalm 13

Psalm 32

Psalm 38

Psalm 42-43

Psalm 73

Psalm 102

Overcoming Depression

1. Things not to do!

- A. Give in to the feelings
- B. Become introspective about it (praying in the wrong way - telling God of all your woes and how bad it is - Note 1 Kings 18:10,14 without praising God for His working in your life and the opportunity to grow by the experience - James 1). Do not become wrapped up with the circumstances. The depression comes from your attitude toward the circumstances, not from the circumstances themselves.
- C. Shun activities and responsibilities, become sedentary and a recluse

2. Things to Do!

- A. Physical considerations. Get both adequate rest and adequate exercise. (Both are important!)
- B. Act! Do Something. Note 1 Kings 19:13-19. God comes to Elijah and asks him why he was there. God gives him a list of things to do, and Elijah goes v.19. Do not spend excess time in thinking about your circumstances and your woes. Move on and do the things that you know God wants you to do. Do not sit around waiting for God to solve all your woes. Use the gifts that He has given you - a mind, body, abilities, talents. We rely totally on God for everything that we have and everything that we do, but He expects us to use the abilities that He gave us.
- C. Praise not “prayer.” In Psalm 31 and 42/43, David’s response to his depression and circumstances is to focus on God and who He is which lead him to break forth in praise. If your prayer is not bringing you into a greater trust of God for the circumstances of life, then you are praying incorrectly. 1Peter 5:7 “ casting all of your cares on Him, for He cares for you.” See also Matthew. 6:25f.
- D. If you are not able to handle the depression (or any other emotional problem) alone, then seek out Godly counsel from other believers. That is part of the function of the body of Christ. Often it takes someone else to examine our lives in order to get the insight we need to change. They can help point out the wrong goals we are pursuing (depression is basically a blocked goal), and hold us accountable to take the steps necessary to change our attitudes and responses to the circumstances of life.

Counseling Situations Depression

Read through all the situations below. Pick one or two and write out how you would respond to the situation and counsel those involved. Include in your answer:

- *What test of their faith may be involved or what sin(s) to which they are yielding
- *The questions you might ask to uncover what might be going on in their Emotional; Volitional; Rational and Personal circles;
- *Relevant Bible verses that would expose sin and encourage them in their faith and a righteous response;
- *Advise you would give them on how to handle the situation they are facing.

Remember the basic counseling flow chart & basic stages of counseling handed out previously

1) 38 year old male, married with two daughters (10 & 8) and one son (4) expresses that his circumstances have gotten the best of him and is feeling down. Upon initial questioning you learn the following. He described his family life as “normal.” He thinks of his wife as a strong woman who was holding the family together. His children’s disrespect toward him discourage him, but thought that was to be expected. He and very few friends and no interest in social contacts, though in the past he had been friendly and outgoing. He had a good job with a high middle class income. He works hard, but no longer finds the job fulfilling and has to drag himself out of bed to go each morning. His debt load was increasing despite his good income. He described his wife as tending to overspend. He attends church regularly and professes faith in Christ, but has no consistent devotional life for himself or family. His libido is low and decreasing. His recent physical checkup gave him a clean bill of health with the admonition to get more exercise, but he still complains of various aches and pains, being tired and poor sleeping. He gets little exercise except an occasional tennis game if asked by someone else. He plays with the children some, but does not initiate it, and often bows out of family activities claiming to be too tired. He handles his routine chores fairly well, but only with increasing effort. Among his significant statements are: *“I am not very excited about life, I guess I feel down a lot.” “Sometimes I feel like a real failure. I can’t seem to measure up anywhere. I don’t know how to handle my kids. My wife is much stronger than I am.” “Nothings seems to really interest me anymore.” “What’s the use of trying hard. Nothing seems worth the effort.”*

2) A woman who has been a member of your church for many years is in a deep state of depression over the recent death of her husband of over forty years. You talk with her about it and find that she is not eating and has lost her desire to live. How will you counsel her?

3) You become acquainted with a member of your congregation and find out they have been in several mental institutions over the last three years. The individual has now come to you for help with her “manic-depression” believing the answer must be in Christ rather than in human wisdom. What would you look for in her life to help them deal with the root problem which brings on manic-depression? How would you counsel her? What medical considerations would you have if any?