

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS TO COMMON PROBLEMS

Lesson – 14a

"The Problem of Depression – Part 1"

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Depression is, without question, one of the most misunderstood illnesses among Christians.
 - A. Some have such a misconception about depression that they refuse to even call it an ILLNESS.
 1. They believe depression is simply being “SAD,” feeling “BLUE,” or simply “DOWN IN THE DUMPS.” And since everyone has these feelings from time to time, people often tell the depressed person “IT’S ALL IN YOUR HEAD,” or to simply “SNAP OUT OF IT,” or “GET A GRIP.”
 2. Others believe depression is nothing more than an attempt to get sympathy, and that the depressed person is actually being MANIPULATIVE.
 3. Still others see depression as a sign of weakness – meaning that a person who slips into deep depression lacks

STRENGTH OF CHARACTER, and is nothing more than a “SISSY,” or a “WIMP.”

- B. However, according to the National Institute of Mental Health:
1. *A depressive disorder is an illness that involves the body, mood, and thoughts. It affects the way a person eats and sleeps, the way one feels about oneself, and the way one thinks about things. A depressive disorder is not the same as a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with a depressive illness cannot merely "pull themselves together" and get better.*
 - a. Just as you can't tell a diabetic to “SNAP OUT OF IT,” or a person with heart disease or high blood pressure to “GET A GRIP,” or a person with glaucoma to “PULL THEMSELVES TOGETHER,” neither can you tell a person suffering from chronic depression to “GET A HOLD OF YOURSELF and QUIT ACTING THAT WAY all the time.”
 2. There are also different KINDS of depression, some of which can completely devastate a life, unless it is properly treated.
- C. And the causes of depression can vary.

1. Almost every onset of depression is SITUATIONAL – meaning, there has been a major life altering event, or a SERIES of life altering events (either good or bad), that have come in QUICK SUCCESSION. Remember Job?
 - a. The symptoms of SITUATIONAL depression can last anywhere from a matter of days to several weeks.
2. Unless properly treated, or unless the SITUATION is resolved in a relatively short period of time, depression brought on as the result of a SITUATION will degenerate into depressive episodes that are PHYSIOLOGICAL – meaning, there has actually been a change or an alteration of brain chemistry that makes the victim plunge even deeper into depression, and who may experience recurring episodes of depression.
 - a. The symptoms of PHYSIOLOGICAL depression (where there has been an actual change in brain chemistry) may last months or even years.
 - b. Those who experience SITUATIONAL depression are often able to work through those depressive episodes, given time and support of family and close friends.
 - c. Those who suffer from PHYSIOLOGICAL depressive episodes are completely unable to work through the depression without proper medical treatment.

- D. Furthermore, depression is not a sign of weakness – or mental instability.
1. Some of the world's leading men and women were medically diagnosed or clearly manifested the classical symptoms of depression:
 - a. Civil War General William Sherman, World War II General George S. Patton, former astronaut Buzz Aldrin, former Israeli Prime Minister and Nobel Laureate Menachem Begin, former Russian President Boris Yeltsin, former National Security Adviser Robert McFarland, former press secretary, political advisor, educator and journalist George Stephanopoulos, former First Lady Barbara Bush, Mental health advocate and wife of former Vice President Al Gore - Tipper Gore, former first lady of Massachusetts Kitty Dukakas, former US Senator and Governor of Florida Lawton Chiles, former Prime Minister of England Winston Churchill, former President Calvin Coolidge, former President Richard M. Nixon, and former President Abraham Lincoln.
 2. There are also a number famous persons who have battled depression:

- b. People like actor and comedian Jim Carrey, actor and comedian Drew Carey, actor and comedian Robin Williams, TV personality Dick Clark, TV personality, actor and comedian Damon Wayans, former pro baseball player Ty Cobb, major league pro baseball player Mike Piazza, former NBA basketball player Kareem Abdul Jabbar, singer and songwriter John Denver, actor Harrison Ford, actress Audrey Hepburn, cartoonist and creator of “Peanuts” Charles Shultz, actor and comedian Danny Kaye, TV journalist Deborah Norville, recording artist Sheryl Crow, singer and songwriter Dolly Parton, singer Bonnie Raitt, author Tennessee Williams, singer Tammy Wynette, singer and songwriter George Jones, media giant and creator of CNN Ted Turner, Emmy award winning TV journalist Mike Wallace – the list is TURELY ENDLESS.
- E. Depression is not only one of the most misunderstood illnesses; it is also one of the MOST DEADLY.
- 1. The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, a division of the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, has released these statistics.

- Suicide took the lives of 31, 655 people in 2003 (NCHS 2003) – it ranks in the top ten as a leading cause of death for all age groups in America.
- In 2003, there were 438,000 emergency room visits for self-inflicted injuries (NCHS 2003).
- Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death for all U.S. men (Anderson and Smith 2003).
 - Males are four times more likely to die from suicide than females (CDC 2004).
 - Suicide rates are highest among Whites and second highest among American Indian and Native Alaskan men (CDC 2004).
 - More than half of all suicides were committed with a firearm (Anderson and Smith 2003).
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people ages 15 to 24. In 2002, 3,921 suicides were reported in this group (Anderson and Smith 2003).

- In 2001, 5,393 Americans over age 65 committed suicide. Of those, 85% were men and 15% were women (CDC 2004).
 - Firearms were used in 73% of suicides committed by adults over the age of 65 in 2001 (CDC 2004).

IV. Fortunately, there are some things we can learn about depression from the SCRIPTURES.

- A. In fact, the Bible provides us with the examples of at least FOUR MEN who faced this emotional storm.
1. Moses, Elijah, Saul and David – all FOUR had the storm of depression hit them full force. While the Bible never calls their situation as DEPRESSION, the Bible DOES describe in detail their SYMPTOMS – ALL OF WHICH are characteristic symptoms of depression.
 - a. They were all robbed of joy, and experienced the sense of worthlessness, guilt and apprehension that are common symptoms of depression.
 - b. They were drenched with the torrential downpour of despair and discouragement.

- c. And THREE were almost swept away in the tidal wave of hopelessness, while one WAS swept away to his death.
- B. To gain some valuable information from their experience, let's take some time to examine the PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL and SPIRITUAL conditions that brought on the storm of depression in the first TWO MEN – Moses and Elijah.
- 1. Keep in mind that these cases are of men who suffered from depression brought on by OVERWHELMING SITUATIONS in their lives – SITUATIONAL DEPRESSION.

BODY

- I. Let's turn our attention now to the first of these men – Moses.
 - A. Despite the fact that the children of Israel had been delivered from the hands of their oppressors, all they could do was complain.
 - 1. God miraculously forced the hand of Pharaoh to release his grip on the Israelites and let them leave Egypt.
 - a. But as soon as they saw the approaching army of Pharaoh, they began complaining to Moses that he had brought them out in the wilderness to die.

2. So, God miraculously parted the Red Sea, allowing the children of Israel to pass through and destroying the approaching Egyptian army.
 - a. But, safe on the other side, the people began to complain about what lay ahead.
 3. God miraculously provided them manna to eat.
 - a. But they complained about the manna.
 4. God miraculously gave them water to drink.
 - a. But they complained about the taste.
- B. The trip to the Promise Land began as a wonderful dream for Moses, but was quickly turning into a terrible nightmare!
1. Day after day, year after year, as Moses walked toward the land of Canaan, he was followed by 2 to 3 million Israelites who complained every step of the way.
 - a. Complaints and criticisms constantly bombarded his ears until, finally, he was ready to quit!
 - b. **Numbers 11:10** – *Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused; Moses also was DISPLEASED.*

- (1). The phrase, "Moses was displeased (troubled - NIV)," is LITERALLY translated "Moses was DISTRESSED!"
 - (2). The word is also used to describe one who is experiencing "GREAT GRIEF," and who is "VEXED WITH TROUBLE AND SORROW."
 - (3). These are one of the LEADING causes of depression.
- b. So, he pours out all his pent-up feelings and utter despair to Jehovah.
- c. **Num 11:11-15** – *So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You AFFLICTED Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? 12 Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,' to the land which You swore to their fathers? 13 Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' 14 I am NOT ABLE TO BEAR all these people alone, because THE BURDEN IS TOO HEAVEY FOR ME.*

- (1). He's had it!
- (2). It's as if he's saying, "Enough is enough! I can't take it anymore! I'm finished! I quit! I resign!"

d. Then Moses reaches the height of total despair, "*Kill me... do not let me see my wretchedness!*" (v. 15)

C. WHY did Moses feel so dejected and ready to die?

1. How could someone who had spoken with God and seen His miraculous power ever become so depressed?

D. Let's track this "build-up" of depression in three areas (Physically, Emotionally, Spiritually):

1. Physically.

a. Moses had a tremendous leadership problem.

(1). He was trying to do all the work himself, and, as a result, he had stretched himself so thin that he snapped.

(2). Moses' depression was clearly JOB RELATED STRESS.

(a). Medical researchers know that STRESS is one of the leading causes of depression.

(b). And it appears this was also the cause of MOSES' depression.

b. So, God offers a solution for Moses' STRESS.

- (1). In **(v. 16)** the Lord instructed Moses to gather seventy other men to share the burden of leading the people. This was not new advice.
 - (2). Back in **EXODUS 18**, we see that Moses had **already** been warned about this tendency to take too much on himself.
 - (3). However, it appears that Moses had failed to apply those principles in this current situation.
- c. So, Moses was physically exhausted.
2. Emotionally.
- a. Moses had taken all the problems of 2 to 3 million people upon himself, instead of letting them take responsibility for their own problems.
 - b. Moses was emotionally drained.
 - (1). *"The BURDEN IS TOO HEAVY for me."* **(v. 14)**
 - (2). He tried to shoulder all the weight of the people's burdens.
 - (3). Unfortunately, it crushed him emotionally.
3. Spiritually.
- a. Moses was feeling a distance from God, and was beginning to wonder why God was now against him. **(v**

11) – *Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight...?*

- b. He lost perspective.
 - (1). He forgot that the children of Israel weren't HIS children, they were GOD'S.
 - (2). Therefore, it WASN'T Moses' problem to solve, it was GOD'S.
 - (3). Moses wasn't responsible for the people's growth, that was GOD'S responsibility.
- c. And, by the way, Jehovah WASN'T against Moses, but in his depressed state of mind, Moses forgot that fact.
- d. So, God tells Moses to simply, "Slow down! Delegate the work! You're trying to do the work of 70 people!"
- e. The Lord knew that once the PRESSURE was off, Moses' spiritual life would return to normal.

E. Do you see a pattern here?

- 1. Do you know anyone like Moses? Maybe you?
 - a. Someone who is OVERWORKED – trying to do it ALL ALONE?
 - (1). Someone who is EMOTIONALLY DRAINED?
 - b. Someone who is constantly feeling GUILTY over things you can't control.

- c. Someone who feels a DISTANT from God?
 2. If you combine all these INGREDIENTS together, you have a RECIPE FOR DEPRESSION.
- II. Let's consider another example of depression, this time in the life of Elijah.
 - A. When we come to ELIJAH'S depression, we see that the land of Israel had been going through a three-year-long drought that had been prophesied.
 1. Added to all the heat and parched earth were a group of men known as the prophets of Baal.
 - a. They had poisoned the minds of the people of Israel with false doctrine and idol worship – worship that degenerated into the most licentious kind of pagan worship imaginable.
 2. Jehovah reached a point where He would no longer tolerate this brood of vipers, and sent Elijah to KILL THEM ALL – all **450** of them. **(1 Kings 19:1)**
 - a. When Queen Jezebel learned that ELIJAH was responsible for purging the land of these men (men whom JEZEBEL had made the spiritual leaders of the people) she became enraged and decided to get even!

(1). Jezebel sends Elijah a death threat – **1 Kings**

19:2 – *Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them [the prophets of Baal] by tomorrow about this time.”*

(2). Now the great prophet of God has a bounty on his head.

b. Elijah the PROPHET quickly became Elijah the FUGITIVE.

B. In just a short period of time, he had gone from an exhilarating experience on a mountain top, to running for his life and hiding under a juniper tree!

1. In total desperation, Elijah calls out to Jehovah, **1 Kings 19:3-4** – *And when he saw that, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!"*

2. It's as if Elijah is saying, "I can't take this any longer! I quit!
Please, take my life!"
 - a. Sound familiar?
- C. Once again, let's look at the causes for Elijah's depression in three areas (Physically, Emotionally, Spiritually):
 1. Physically.
 - a. Like Moses, Elijah was **TOTALLY EXHAUSTED**.
 - (1). He had been through 3 years of famine.
 - (2). Faced and slew 450 **PROPHETS OF BAAL** **ALONE** in a day-long confrontation.
 - (3). Missed several meals and lots of sleep.
 - (4). Spent a long time in intense prayer.
 - (5). Been up and down Mount Carmel twice.
 - (6). Made a 30-mile run down to Jezreel, outracing Ahab's chariots.
 - (7). Received a death-threat.
 - (8). Fled for his life to Beersheba.
 - (9). And finally, traveled another day's journey into the wilderness.
 - b. Elijah's depression was **CLEARLY** the result of stress brought on by **OVERWHELMING EXHAUSTION**.
 - c. But there is also one other ingredient – **SELF-PITY!**

2. Emotionally.

- a. As great as he was, Elijah was suffering from a MARTYR COMPLEX.
- b. When the Lord came to him and asked what he was doing, Elijah replied, "*I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.*" (v. 10)
- b. You can almost hear him.
 - (1). "I've given you everything Lord, and NOW I'm all alone. There's NOBODY else. I'm the ONLY ONE standing for the faith."
 - (2). His focus was entirely on himself.

3. Spiritually.

- a. Elijah's spiritual condition can be diagnosed from his response to Jezebel's death threat.
 - (1). Up to that moment, Elijah had managed to keep his eyes on the LORD.

- (2). But now, Elijah suddenly turns his eyes from the LORD to focus on his enemies, and he was terrified!! – *"he RAN FOR HIS LIFE."* (v. 3)
- b. So, the Lord began Elijah's PHYSICAL rehabilitation by sending him food: **1 Kings 19:5-8** – *Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat." 6 Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you."*
- (1). Notice, there were no strong rebukes for being depressed, no preachy sermons with 10 points for avoiding depression – simply encouragement, the single most important benefit a person suffering from depression can receive.
- c. Then Jehovah began to revitalize Elijah's EMOTIONAL and SPIRITUAL STRENGTH.

- (1). First, in **verses 11-13** Jehovah revealed His awesome power and strength, helping Elijah get his focus back where it belonged.
- (2). Then, in **verse 18**, Jehovah corrected Elijah's perspective by reminding him he wasn't alone – there were 7,000 others who had also not bowed down to Baal.
- (3). Finally, in **verses 19-21**, the Lord gave him a **FRIEND** who would be there to minister to him – Elisha.

D. Do you see another pattern here?

1. Do you know someone like Elijah? Maybe someone like you?
 - a. Who believes the whole world is against you?
 - b. Who has taken your eyes off God and focused your attention on your enemies, because they've made you the target of their persecution?
 - c. Who needs a FRIEND to give support, but thinks you're standing all alone – that no one else is facing the same kind of problem you're facing?

CONCLUSION

- I. Do you see yourself anywhere in the lives of these two men?
 - A. As we studied the depression in the lives of these two men, did you see any personal storm warnings that threaten your own peace of mind?
 - B. If you see yourself in the situation these men faced, then we need to consider some PRACTICAL GUIDELINES that will help us weather the storm of depression.
 1. And that's what we're going to do in PART TWO of this lesson.
 2. In our next lesson we'll look at some practical solutions for depression that come straight from the pages of God's Word.
- II. But in the meantime, there's one thing you need to remember about depression.
 - A. Depression is the DESTROYER OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH.
 1. Therefore, it doesn't come from God – and neither does any other disease.
 2. The scriptures are filled with passages where the Lord wanted His people to experience JOY – real, genuine, authentic JOY!
 - a. That's the Lord's desire for you.
 3. And He's given us some practical ways of experiencing that kind of joy – not just partially but fully.

- a. Jesus said, *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you... I have told you this so that MY JOY may be in YOU and that YOUR JOY may be COMPLETE."*

(John 15:9, 11)

- B. You can begin to experience that kind of joy by either:
 1. Surrendering your life to Jesus Christ in obedience to Him – making Him the Lord of your life.
 2. Or by turning back to Him in complete trust and obedience – making Him the Lord of your life once again.