

## Christians Get Depressed Too

### Session 4: What Causes Depression? - 2022-05-15

#### STRESS

“When you stretch a piece of elastic, you can often extend it to two or even three times its size. However, the further you stretch it, the greater the tension on the rubber, the less flexible it becomes, and the greater the danger of its eventually snapping. Like rubber bands, we are all “stretched” from time to time. We are stretched by life events, which we have little control over, and by our lifestyle, over which we do have considerable control.” – David Murray

#### *Life events*

“Think of a computer with too many programs open and working at the same time and how this slows down all the processes until eventually the machine ‘crashes.’”  
– David Murray

#### *Lifestyle*

“While we have little if any control over life events, we do have substantial control over our life style the proportion of time and energy we give to work, socializing, shopping, traveling, recreation, exercise, rest, and sleep. Much of the increase in depression and anxiety today is largely the result of an unbalanced lifestyle where people are, on the one hand, working too hard and spending too much and, on the other hand, are exercising, resting, and sleeping too little. This deliberate stretch beyond our capacities and abilities is not glorifying God in our body and spirit (1 Cor. 6:20).” – David Murray

## **PSYCHOLOGY (The Way We Think)**

“One consequence of the Fall is that we are brought up in a world that has been damaged, and our own experience of being brought up is likely to have damaged us in at least some ways. No matter how loving our parents have been, they will not always have reacted in the ways that we really needed. For some of us, our experience with our parents will have been largely a good one, for others it may have been very bad. Whatever your own experiences, it is likely that as you grew up you learned a range of helpful and unhelpful rules about how you see and judge yourself, other people and the world around you. It is in childhood that these central ways of seeing things are first learned from your relationship with important people such as parents, brothers or sisters. In these relationships you should have received love, consistency and support, but sometimes the opposite occurs—rejection and inconsistency—and this can undermine us as we grow up. These central ways of seeing things are called core beliefs. Common core beliefs may be based around positive themes such as seeing yourself as good or successful at something, or more negative themes such as being a failure, bad, worthless, unlovable, incompetent, foolish or weak. Most people develop a range of both positive and negative core beliefs during their childhood and these can stay with us into our adult lives.” – C. Williams, P. Richards, I. Whitton

### **Third, Sin**

“Non-Christians may be depressed because of their sin, in which case the cure is repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Sadly, many depressed unbelievers are being treated with chemicals when what they need is conversion. If you are unconverted and depressed, then seriously consider whether your depression is related to a guilty conscience and conviction of sin.” – David Murray

“True spiritual causes of depression are not common. Most Christians with an apparently religious content to their depression in fact have one of the mental/emotional causes rather than a true spiritual cause. I cannot emphasize enough that solely spiritual causes of depression are infrequent in Christians.” – John Lockley

“David and other psalmists often found themselves deeply depressed for various reasons. ‘They did not, however, apologize for what they were feeling, nor did they confess it as sin. It was a legitimate part of their relationship with God. They interacted with Him through the context of their depression.’” – Steve and Robyn Bloem

“We completely agree that there are always spiritual aspects to anxiety and depression (as there are in everything in life for a Christian). However, we see these as being a secondary consequence of the emotional distress that is part of these illnesses. Strong claims that all anxiety and depression is spiritual in origin are unhelpful because they miss the point that the actual problem is anxiety and depression.” – Chris Williams, Paul Richards, and Ingrid Whitton

“For the Christian, truly spiritual causes of depression usually involve behavior which the Christians knows to be wrong, but which he still deliberately and arrogantly persists in.... I am not talking about repeated sin that the Christian wishes he could control but can’t...but a deliberate and continued rebellion against God.”

He then provides some searching suggestions from the book *Hope for the Depressed* written by biblical counselor Ed Welch. He asks in the book, “Do you see any of these things in your life?”

- If you made someone besides God the center of your life, and you lose him or her, you will feel isolated and without purpose. Can you see how this can give way to depression? You made another person your reason for living and now, without him or her, you feel hopeless and unable to go on. You may not realize it, but the Bible tells us that this is idol worship—you are worshipping what God created instead of him.
- If you feel like you failed in the eyes of other people, and your success and the opinions of others is of critical importance, you can slip into depression. Can you see the spiritual roots? Your success and the opinions of others have become your gods, they are more important to you than serving Christ.
- If you feel like you did something very wrong, and you want to manage your sin apart from the cross of Jesus, depression is inevitable. We always want to believe that we can do something—like feeling really bad for our sins—but that is just pride. We actually think that we can pay God back, but this attitude minimizes the beauty of the cross and Jesus’ full payment for sin.
- If you are angry and don't practice forgiveness, you can easily slide into depression. The simple formula is sadness + anger = depression. What makes us angry shows us what we love and what rights we hold dear. Unforgiveness shows us that we are not willing to trust God to bind up our broken hearts and to judge justly. Deal with your sadness and anger by pouring your heart out to God. Use the psalms as your prayers. Ask for faith so that you can trust God to be your defender and your helper.

#### **Fourth, Sickness**

“Just as the curse on this world and our bodies can cause mechanical, chemical, and electrical problems in our hearts, our livers, our pancreas, our eyes, and other body parts, so we can also have mechanical, chemical, and electrical problems in our brains, which may affect the way we think, and even our personalities. Many of us have seen friends or loved ones with brain injuries, bleeds, or tumors undergo distressing personality changes.

Nutritionists have demonstrated how certain foods can affect our moods and thoughts, our feeling and thinking. Emotions can also be affected by exhaustion, diabetic hypos, exercise, hormonal changes, gland disorders, high blood pressure, and even sunshine.” – David Murray

“Treating a depressed person with medication is often no different from my giving my eight-year-old daughter one of her many daily injections of insulin for diabetes. I am not merely alleviating symptoms, but addressing the cause—depleted insulin due to dying or dead cells in her pancreas. And if she is lethargic, weepy, or irrational due to low sugar levels, I do not ask her what commandments she has broken... I pity her, weep for her, and thank God for His gracious provision of medicine for her.” – David Murray

## **Fifth, Sovereignty**

**Genesis 50:19–20 (ESV)** — 19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

**2 Corinthians 12:7–9 (ESV)** — 7 So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

“God will sometimes allow His children to descend into the depths of depression ‘to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all further occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.’” – (Westminster Confession of Faith 5.5) David Murray

**Isaiah 53:7–11 (ESV)** — 7 He[Messiah/Jesus] was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? 9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. 10 **Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief;** when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. 11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

[Job 1:20-22; Acts 4:25-29]