

RF Australia – Overcoming Depression

Notes for Pastors & Bible Counsellors

Introduction - Depression

The World Health Organisation says that more than 350 million people worldwide suffer from depression and it is a leading cause of disability. Approximately 10% of young adults report a major depressive episode each year and women are more likely to be diagnosed with depression than men.

It is directly related to stress (or distress), it is increasing at a staggering rate and is the key factor in Australia's alarmingly high suicide rate. Eight young people die every week from suicide!

What is it?

Depression is a word used in everyday language to describe a number of feelings, including sadness, frustration, disappointment and sometimes lethargy. It's common to feel this way in response to bad news or an unhappy experience and feelings change often as we experience many different situations. If we receive good news, we often feel happy or content. Generally, life is balanced between good and bad and we don't stay down for long.

Clinical depression is not only going down but staying down

While we all experience these 'down' feelings from time to time, some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time (weeks, months or even years) and sometimes without any apparent reason. Major depression is a serious condition that significantly interferes with effective day-to-day functioning

Depression is an illness that is increasing rapidly in society and in the church. Many people have no understanding of the illness, are not able to identify it in themselves or others and have no idea how to deal with it or how to seek help, counsel and healing from the Scriptures.

It is important that people understand that there is no condemnation in seeking medical help or in using medication in combination with what I call Biblical Cognitive therapy. *(this is not intended to describe an accredited*

medical therapy but is based on cognitive behavioural principles in combination with the Word of God).

For some people it is necessary to take anti – depressants to achieve some stability before they can apply themselves to counselling, cognitive therapy, prayer and the Word of God.

Depression is a downward cycle characterised by some or all of the following:

- persistent sadness, darkness, heaviness or emptiness
- physical symptoms, such as sleep disturbances, chronic tiredness, headaches, indigestion.
- low tolerance level, and inability to cope with the pressures of life – irritability and bad temperedness.
- low self-esteem, anxiety, worry and fear
- a sense of hopelessness (no hope of improvement)
- negativism & pessimism (seeing only problems and no solutions)
- despair

If the downward cycle is not arrested it may lead to suicide. Getting down is one thing, getting down and out is another.

We deal with the causes, not the symptoms

Depression is not caused by one thing, but probably by a combination of factors interacting with one another. Many biological and psychological factors interact in depression, although precisely which specific factors interact may differ from person to person.

The range of factors can include:

- genetics (family history)
- hormones
- medical illness
- brain pathology
- drug and alcohol use
- ageing
- long-term pressures, such as abusive relationships, bullying, work stress
- stressful or traumatic events, including major life changes
- loss and grief

- trauma in childhood – ongoing abuse or neglect in childhood/adolescence

Because medical conditions can contribute to depression (including hormonal imbalance, diabetes, glandular dysfunction, post-natal and post-surgery conditions, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases) a thorough medical check- up is advisable.

Other factors contribute to depression also, such as covetousness and dissatisfaction as a result of the pressures of consumerism and marketing in our society.

Thinking styles also contribute to depression. Unbiblical thinking or sinful behaviour also contribute, particularly if the sin is unconfessed (i.e. it remains concealed without help being sought) and there is no repentance and forgiveness.

While physical illness and external stressors may contribute to depression, we need to understand that we are still responsible for our behaviour and that we can make positive changes using the Word of God to guide us.

We must learn to respond biblically to any difficulties, and not according to our thoughts and feelings. This is difficult when you are depressed, but part of overcoming depression involves ‘bringing every thought into captivity’ and learning to manage thoughts and feelings more effectively.

Background

Mission Australia Youth Survey Report 2017:

The most important issues for young people are:

1. Mental Health: National 33.7% Female 38.5% Male 27.8%
NOTE: National 20.6% in 2016 and 14.9% in 2015
Therefore sharp increase in awareness / concern.
2. Alcohol & Drugs: 32%
3. Equity & Discrimination: 27.3%

NYC at Stanwell Tops May 2018 revealed the need for teaching / mentoring / support / ministry for mental health throughout the fellowship.

The Adelaide Fellowship has also had a young people’s camp this year dealing primarily with mental health issues.

NB: The resources listed are only those that I have been involved with. There will be many others that we will agree should be made available.

Ministry introduction

In the church as in society generally there is an increasing awareness of the occurrence of depression ranging from mild to very severe (suicidal).

There are many resources and organisations in the community that provide understanding and support for people suffering from depression.

In the church we have the responsibility and opportunity to provide the prayerful and scriptural and practical support that will bring spiritual and physical healing now and eternally.

These notes are by no means exhaustive but have been prepared to assist pastors and others in the church to gain some understanding of depression and for them to learn and apply some practical techniques with people so that the Word of God can take root and produce the wonderful promised healing in their lives.

This approach is totally based on Psalm 107:20 ' He sent His word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions'

The challenge is for a person who is depressed to be able to take disciplined practical, mental and spiritual action.

The ministry will be a form of cognitive therapy using the word of God as the primary tool.

Cognitive - behaviour therapy

Cognitive behaviour therapy is based on the key idea that what you think affects how you feel and what you do. Sometimes, without meaning to, people get stuck in vicious cycles, where the things they do to cope with a problem can inadvertently keep it going. We can make changes in our thinking and actions to improve how we feel

If a Christian interprets events in his life in a non-biblical way (i.e. failing to believe what God has said) then he will be at the mercy of his thoughts and feelings. People can develop core beliefs about themselves, the world and

others that are unhelpful and inconsistent with God's promises for them; these core beliefs can lead to depression.

The bible says that 'out of the heart come the issues of life'.

Our heart is not just a pump that is the driver of our physical life – it is the spiritual and emotional centre of who we are.

Proverbs 4:20-23 *'My child pay attention to what I say – listen carefully to my words. Don't lose sight of them, let them penetrate deep into your heart, for they bring life to those that find them and healing to their whole body. Guard your heart above all else for it determines the course of your life.'*

You will be '*transformed by the renewing of your mind*' WHEN you ensure the word of God in your heart determines who and what you are.

The Word of God

We replace wrong carnal thinking about ourselves with the truth of what God has said about us and of who we are in Christ.

Renewing the Mind

Scriptures : see detailed list below.

Circumstances do not determine how we feel – our response to them does.

If we fail to believe what God has said we are at the mercy of our thoughts and feelings!

Changing the Software

Our brain will function according to the beliefs we feed into it. A wrong belief system can lead to depression. In contrast Jesus came to give us an abundant life. He said '*Peace I leave with you ...in Me you may have peace ...I have overcome the world*'

Romans 12:2 '*...be transformed by the renewing of your mind*'

We are able to have peace which is governed by our heart and mind and not by our circumstances.

Counselling

The principle is to assist and guide the person to reprogram their thinking by actively applying the Word of God through the Holy Spirit.

NOTE: You cannot simply tell someone to 'believe God and snap out of it' or 'pray about it and it will go away'.

But you can and must pray with them for God to heal them, for He may do it instantly as they believe the Word, or it may be a longer process.

The sequence over several times of counselling might be:

1. If they have not already been medically diagnosed, ask them to answer a simple checklist (questionnaire) available from Beyondblue: the National Depression Initiative, to ascertain if they are suffering from depression or not. Remember, some people don't know they have depression because it's '*the way I've always felt*' or '*isn't this the way everybody feels?*' N.B. The beyond blue questionnaire is just a screening tool. Diagnoses should be done by a registered health professional, e.g. GP or psychologist. However this tool is useful for people to gauge how they are going.
2. Ask questions about their background, childhood, relationship with parents, siblings and peers, experiences at school, college, university, work, any traumatic events, marriage relationship. Listen, listen, listen and take notes as you do.
3. Don't bottom line – simply try to understand how family of origin, past events and circumstances may have caused them to think (and therefore feel) about themselves, their self- esteem, sense of worth, their relationships with other people and their place in the world, their satisfaction, peace, happiness with life in general, and most importantly about their relationship with God.
4. Encourage them to talk about their thinking and feelings now, and the situations, circumstances or triggers that bring them down or not able to cope, have negative thoughts and are without energy or motivation.
5. It is essential that you are able to develop genuine sympathy, understanding and empathy with them, so that they will accept and trust your counsel and direction.

You can then work together with them in the following four ways:

1. ENCOURAGE and monitor some simple practical things which can help.

- Do not remain in bed or sleep for more than 8 hours a day. Do not stay up late and sleep in late – hiding from the world.
- Go outside and exercise for at least half an hour in daylight hours – bright light and moderate exercise have an anti-depressant effect.
- Reduce sugar and junk food consumption.

2. DIRECT them to use the following stress reduction strategies and keep checking on what they are doing.

- Avoid major life changes.
- Be aware of and reduce anxiety creators wherever possible.
- Resolve personal conflicts. Your counselling and Matthew 18 will help.
- Engage in enjoyable and distracting activity.
- Avoid working long hours and taking on additional responsibilities.
- Learn to say no – so that they are not overwhelmed by new commitments.
- Repeat – regular gentle exercise.

3. HELP them to start and maintain a daily diary.

Even though the person might not ‘feel’ like it, this is an important component of the self - discipline required.

The diary is not simply to record events and the effect on the person and whether they feel good or bad, but a monitoring tool to assess and then rationalise and change thoughts in response to situations.

The aim is to demonstrate to themselves that their current feelings of fear, anxiety, depression etc. are not well founded in experience or fact and to replace the wrong thought with a true thought.

At the same time they should add in the diary a simple truth out of the scripture of who they are in Christ and what God thinks about them. The scripture will probably come from what they are doing in **4** below.

4. CONTINUE to work together and 'labour to enter into His rest'

Provide a list of scriptures for the person to use ONE or TWO per day at the most. The scripture should be written out in a parallel diary to 3 above and then prayerfully considered.

A time of 30 minutes each day should be set aside for reading and writing down the scripture and then praying about it and writing down what it means to them personally. The Spirit may bring other scriptures to mind and should also be written down, prayed about and the understanding written down.

This is the key to establishing the Word in the person

- to them having the mind of Christ,
- to replacing the thoughts of the carnal mind with the Word of God,
- to the Word healing them.

You should meet with them weekly to pray and to monitor, assist and discuss. You will also probably involve other family members because the depressed person will need their understanding, support and prayerful encouragement.

The time will come when the person will know that they are healed and that if they have been taking medication that it is no longer needed.

Scriptures

Some basic truths:

- Every child of God has been justified by faith in Jesus Christ.
Rom.3:21,22; 1 Cor.1:30; 2 Cor.5:21
- There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ.
Rom. 8:1; John 5:24
- God is now for us.
Jer.29:11; Rom. 8:2;
- God is in control – there will be a good outcome! If God is for us who can be against us?
Rom. 8: 28-31
- We don't have to prove anything to anyone any more.
1 Cor.4:3,4; 2 Cor. 10:12,
- We are no longer slaves to sin.
Rom.6:12,14:16-18.

- God who has met our greatest need ... life and godliness
Rom.8:32, 2 Pet.1:2-4
- God is always in charge of our lives
1 Cor.10:13, Rom.5:2
- Grace is God's ability in the place of our inability – come boldly to the throne of grace.
Heb.4:15-16.
- The trials and problems (challenges) which God does permit are opportunities
Rom.5:3,4; Jas 1:2- 4
- Complaining about our feelings or circumstances indicates we are not trusting God.
Phil.2:14,15; 1 Thess.5:17,18.
- God's word is sufficient to guide & counsel us in life.
Ps.19:7-11; Ps.119:105; Jer.10:23; Prov.14:2; 2 Tim.3:16,17.
- To walk in obedience to God's ways will result in blessing. Ps.1:1-3; Josh.1:8; Matt.6:33, Jas.1:25; Ps.84:11 & 12:2; Chron.16:9.
- Disobedience to God's ways ...chastening in love.
Heb.12:5-12
- God's chastening is temporary.
Ps.30:5; Lam.3:19-23
- Whenever we stray from God's path ...repentance, forgiveness, restoration.
1 John 1:5-9
- The Christian life is to be lived in the resurrection power and life of Jesus Christ.
Col.3:4; John 15:4,5; Gal.2:20
- Therefore we must not live our lives trusting on our own limited resources.
Prov.3:5-7; 2 Cor.3:4-8
- I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me
Phil. 4:13.
- Our weaknesses and inadequacies do not limit us, but open us up to the grace & power of Christ.
2 Cor.12:1-10
- The resurrection power of Christ manifest in our life.
Luke9:23,24; John12:23,26

- We deny ourselves by loving God.
Matt.22:37-39; 1 John 4:20,21
- When our goals line up with God's goals ... joy & peace.
2 Cor.5:9; Col.1:9,10
- God's goals are never burdensome – rest for our souls
Matt.11:28-30; 1John 5:3

These truths are only some of the basic beliefs Christians are meant to live by, yet many are not familiar with them nor do they align their thinking with them. Consequently, they live as victims of their emotions.

Hosea sums up the situation well. *'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge'* Hosea 4:6

The word 'repent' means to have a change of mind. Biblical counselling is largely a work of bringing people to a place of repentance, i.e. turning from unbiblical ways of thinking and renewing their minds according to God's Word and ways.

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were downcast because of a faulty belief concerning what the scripture said about the Messiah. They did not believe that the Messiah could suffer and die and so were unable to cope with the crucifixion.

Jesus, the wonderful counsellor, took them back to Moses and the prophets and showed them from the Word that Christ had to suffer first before entering into His glory **Luke 24:26**.

When Jesus had finished his Biblical counselling their hearts, previously 'sad' were 'burning within them' with joy **Luke 24:17,32**.

When our thoughts are a distortion of reality, we need:

- To be helped to see the truth
- To be brought to a place of repentance, turning from a faulty belief system and aligning our thinking to the truth of God's Word
- To be encouraged to structure our life, responses, behaviour, according to our thinking and not according to our feelings.

Downward spiral behaviour

In addition to feelings of depression being a product of wrong thinking, the Bible reveals that depression can result from wrong behaviour. Symptoms that we would describe as depression today are sometimes precipitated by sin. For example, David, under the conviction of sin, described his experience in these words:

‘I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly. I go mourning all the day long ... I am feeble and severely broken, I groan because of the turmoil of my heart ... Lord, all my desire is before You, and my sighing is not hidden from You. For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me.’ **Psalm 38:6,8,9,17**

There is an abundance of scripture indication that depression may result from unconfessed sin, unbiblical response to problems and bondage to sinful habits. When sin is dealt with properly, through confession and repentance, then depression can be overcome. However, when sin is handled in a wrong manner this plunges us further into the downward spiral and deeper into depression.

This principle is illustrated in the account of Cain in **Gen.4:1-16**.

The way of Cain

This account provides the first mention of depression in the scriptures. It is neither a new phenomenon nor always a disease. In this passage it is shown to result from a faulty belief system intensified by sinful behaviour.

Cain had four serious flaws in his belief system:

- Cain and Abel knew the right way of approach to God, through a blood sacrifice, because the writer to the Hebrews tells us that ‘... *by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain*’ **Heb.11:4**.
- We know that faith comes by hearing the Word of God **Rom.10:17**. If Abel had not heard from God his act would have been based on presumption not faith. Having received the knowledge of God’s ways, Cain said ‘*my way is better*’.
- When we know the way God wants us to behave in a situation, why do we insist on doing things our way instead? We might answer that it is because of rebellion. Why do we rebel? Surely it must be because we really do not believe that God’s way is the best way for us. We must either think he is incapable of knowing what is best for us, or that He plans for us to have an unhappy life.

- God's way is always the best way, and the blessed way **Ps.1:1-3, James 1:25**. The word 'bless' means to empower one to prosper. It is from the Hebrew word 'baruch', meaning to have a pleasant, fulfilling journey. Life is a journey. A good question to ask ourselves is 'how am I travelling?' God's way is the only blessed way.

God gave testimony that Abel's offering was more excellent than Cain's. He blessed him openly and visibly. But Cain's offering was rejected.

Conclusion

We cannot do any of this unless we have been filled with the Holy Spirit and therefore have the mind of Christ and the opportunity for salvation. Without the Holy Spirit our natural (carnal) mind will distort and fail us.

It is clear that we must know and apply the scripture in our thinking and our physical life.

It is not going to get easier – as the return of Jesus draws closer the pressure from the anti-Christ world system will continue to increase.

A short list of further helpful scriptures is below.

Encourage the person to look at the whole verse and context and dwell upon and pray about what it says.

BECAUSE THEY ARE IN CHRIST, WHAT WILL HAPPEN IS THAT THE THOUGHTS THAT CAUSE THEM TO FEEL DEPRESSED WILL BE REPLACED BY THE TRUTH OF GOD.

1 Cor.2:12-16 ... we have the mind of Christ

2 Cor.10:3-5 ... every thought unto obedience to Christ

Phil.4:8 ... finally brethren ... meditate on these things

2 Tim.1:6,7 ... a sound mind

Col.2:3,9&10 ... you are complete in Him

Bob Beverley 23.04.2019