

## DEPRESSION

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The problem with depression is that medical opinion is divided as to its correct definition.

It is said that probably all of us will have depression at sometimes in our lives. But is it depression? If I am sad and upset and cannot put my mind to things because of a bereavement that does not count as depression does it?

The Mayo Clinic states that depression is a medical illness, a mental illness in fact, which causes a persistent feeling of sadness, loss of interest and can cause physical symptoms.

That seems an inadequate definition because one can experience these feelings without being depressed or mentally ill. As indicated, the obvious example is the bereavement of a loved one. It is natural to feel sad and have a loss of interest in everyday things and suffer some physical symptoms.

Merriam Webster states that depression is a psycho-neurotic or psychotic disorder marked especially by sadness, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and lack of concentration, an increase or decrease in appetite, time spent sleeping, hopelessness and sometimes even suicidal tendencies.

The NHS Clinical Knowledge states that depression results in a loss of both interest and enjoyment in ordinary things and has a range of emotional, cognitive, physical and behavioural problems.

Again, one could say that bereavement can produce these symptoms but is bereavement a mental illness which can be called depression?

Grief over the loss of a loved one has been considered as quite different from depression although it may show the same symptoms such as sadness, crying and the inability to concentrate. An article in The Lancet by Dr Kleinman deals with this.

Some people who have been badly treated by circumstances or by other people and who, consequently, may develop the symptoms of depression but is it right to call these resultant feelings depression? They may show understandable signs of justifiable anger. There would be something wrong if they did not.

People dismiss these feelings as paranoia which is defined as having a persecution complex. This is often unfair and inappropriate. If someone has been seriously violated for years then they have been persecuted and it is appalling that they should be labelled as paranoid or mentally ill.

As with grief, a time limit cannot be put on recovery from a sad or tragic event. Unfortunately, some medical people and therapists insist on a time limit to overcome persecution and grief. Consequently, pressure is put on the sufferer which adds to their problems.

Anger over personal injustice can be turned into healthy assertiveness. It can be expressed without hurting any innocent party and can be a positive emotion. It can be a helpful experience and a useful deterrent to avoid any such situation happening to you again. So writes Boots Web MD.

It is said that some people suffer from paranoia, feelings of persecution. But the fact is that some people are really and savagely persecuted. Do we expect them to jump for joy and laugh at the awful persecution that they are enduring?

One of the distressing things is that if you have been violated, burgled and subject to ongoing injustice

you have a right to closure and justice but often that is not possible. A large percentage of rogues and crooks are never apprehended.

Dr Roland Zahn of Manchester links some depression to social behaviour such as pride and guilt.

There are countless people who feel guilty and cannot shed these feelings and some of these feelings go back decades. It eats them away.

Biblical teaching may not appeal to everyone but it has helped some.

Guilt is the fact and state that you have done something wrong. It may result in remorse and self-reproach.

Some people go through life with regular and terrible feelings of guilt.

Others do not feel guilt but blame every misfortune on someone else.

The Bible defines guilt as being bound and, therefore, being in bondage or liable to face an action at law. Guilt is associated with sin, iniquity or transgression. These three definitions all mean a breach of God's law.

The Psalmist in Psalm 51 speaks of the misery of his guilt. For I acknowledge my transgression and my sin is ever before me, he wrote. He also wrote of the burden of guilt that played on his mind. For mine iniquities are gone over my head; as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me (Psalm 38.4).

He was in great distress when he wrote Psalm 40 saying, For innumerable evils have compassed me about ; mine iniquities have taken hold of me so that I am not able to look up ; they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth within me.

After the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost, the Jews realised the awfulness of their putting the Lord Jesus to death and their consciences were smitten with grief and they called out, What shall we do?

Guilt is prompted by conviction. I have done wrong!

The children of Israel in Numbers 21.2 spoke to the Lord and said, We have sinned for we have spoken against the Lord.

In the case of David, God forgave Him for all those iniquities. David is mentioned as a man of faith in Hebrews 11.32. He repented of his sins and acknowledged them.

As for the children of Israel, God forgave them and brought them into the Promised Land. They repented. Years later they sinned again and grievously and God had to punish them.

God forgives all sin upon true repentance. The one sin that can never be forgiven is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which is the denial of the Deity of Christ and the non-acceptance of Him as Saviour.

A matter that is easily forgotten is that often another person causes you to sin. We read in the Old Testament that King Baasha caused the nation to sin and God held him responsible (1 Kings 16.13)

Parents, family and friends can cause or influence us to sin.

We had a girl at school who stole from shops because her parents told her to. Her parents were lazy people smoking, drinking and watching television all day. Their benefits went on fags and booze as someone said and so food had to be stolen.

I am aware of some awful women who train and teach young girls how to give sexual pleasure to men. The girls are paid but their parents receive the money. At least one girl was rushed into hospital with injuries. Another girl, who was twelve, said she had been doing this for two years, twice a night and each night with at least three men.

Who is guilty in these instances?

Upon repentance, God forgives although we and others do not always accept this and, sadly, some take their guilt to the grave.

But this should not be so.

Redemption! Oh wonderful story  
Glad message for you and for me!  
That Jesus has purchased our pardon  
And paid all my debt on the tree.

The Old Testament (Micah 7.18ff) speaks of forgiven sins where God says, Thy sins and iniquities I will remember no more. I have cast them into the depths of the sea.

Canon Guy King used to add, And God puts up a notice, No fishing!

The passage in Micah talks of God who pardons iniquity and that God does not retain His anger for ever and loves to show His mercy.

Someone once said that God loves to mend broken lives!

If God has forgiven you, you must not retain any guilt, since that, among other things, is doubting God Himself!

One denomination believes that a constant sin which is regularly repeated can be forgiven time after time after time but, if that is so, then there was not true repentance in the first place. Repentance and forgiveness is not an automatic door as in a large store.

I have heard people say that they have not repented but they talk about their wrong doing with genuine tears and remorse. Is that not an act of repentance?

There are people who cannot forgive themselves but, surely, the fact that God has forgiven them is totally sufficient. We are never told to forgive ourselves.

Consider this. What purpose is served by your punishing yourself? What is in the past should stay in the past. You cannot beat yourself up daily. You are best advised to stop any self-inflicted punishment and look to the present and the future. I accept that that is not always easy and there may be moments when an unpleasant past event hits you, but don't dwell on it.

Two years ago, in 1996, I was betrayed by someone who deceived me of £17,000 and I was justifiably angry and was so upset that I developed heart trouble. I have only just recovered from this treachery but I entertained bad thoughts and wanted some sort of revenge. I even thought, What wrong have I done to deserve this?

That person needs to repent before forgiveness can be considered and they have to make restitution, but my anger served no useful purpose. I was wrong to be torturing myself.

Sadly, human nature is fickle. There may be people who know of your indiscretions and may talk about you and even snub you and it may sometimes hurt. But we should not be in bondage because of their judgmental attitude and evil speaking.

The Bible has a great deal to say about the tongue and its usage. It instructs us as to what not to talk about and how to keep our tongues from evil and our lips from speaking guile (Psalm 34.13).

The word evil is usually taken to refer to something that is very wicked such as murder or terrorism, but the word also means that which causes harm such as slander and defamation of character which is to speak unfavourably about someone and their circumstances. The word evil is the opposite of kindness, gentleness and graciousness.

Guile refers to deceit, a snare or a bait. Deceit is to mislead, to be unfaithful to one's partner, to repeat something said in confidence. A snare is a trap for an animal or bird, but it is also something that could trap a person unawares. Bait is best described as a piece of food on a hook to catch a fish or other creature, but it is also something to annoy or tease another person. It can also mean something to entice a response....in other words, to wind you up.

To say something about someone which is personal and unkind is guile. It is also malice as it can cause harm or upset.

When you are in a marriage or a relationship, you will have times to privately discuss problems you have with people because there needs to be trust in such a relationship.

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice, writes Paul in Ephesians 4.31.

Bitterness, wrath and anger are similar words. It can also refer to unwarranted hatred. The Bible warns, Be not angry and sin not (Ephesians 4.26). Anger can lead to injudicious speech and sin. Often someone can be angry with someone else and express that evil speaking to an innocent party.

But there is justifiable anger. If you have been spoken to unfairly, perhaps cruelly, if an attack has been made upon you or your circumstances, if a confidence has been broken, then anger is understandable. Even if what someone says may be truthful but is unkind or derogatory, it can still engender anger.

'There is always rubbish in your garden and you need to get out there and tidy it up' may be true but it could be unkind and not anyone else's business. It is an attack on you as a person and against your character.

That they did not mean to upset you is no excuse. The fact is, it did.

Saying sorry is ineffective today. It is just a word and people believe that to say sorry is sufficient to bring closure to a matter.

Clamour is the word that describes the cry of a raven and is used to indicate an outcry which is a protest. It is understandable to protest at someone interrupting and commenting, for example, on my garden needing attention, but the Bible instructs us to deal with the issue as far as it is practicable and to inform that interfering person to cease from their comments.

It may seem unfair but the Bible teaches us to avoid people who taunt and cause us distress. It also teaches repentance on the part of the wrongdoer and if that repentance is real then we should be forgiving.

Luke 17 makes it clear. If they do not repent and continue with derogatory comments then you are not expected to forgive. If someone offends you and repents, then you forgive.

Titus 3.2 tells us to speak evil of no one but to be gentle and kind to all.

This verse needs to be understood for, at first, it implies that you have to be a doormat and let others walk all over you.

In the context of the epistle, Paul is telling us to be occupied with good deeds and words, to be public-spirited and he is referring to the dealings with other believers. In churches today, people do talk unkindly about other believers and that is evil speaking as some of us can testify. We are told to judge not lest we be judged.

If, for example, George in our church, (there is no George in our church) has a seriously-wrong doctrine we do not judge George and speak against him. We graciously explain the doctrine trusting that he will accept it.

Take the case of Ian Huntley who murdered two girls in Soham last year. He is evil and what he did was evil. We are not expected to refrain from expressing our horror and disgust at his evil ways.

The comments made about my garden are certainly not evil in the same sense but they have caused me to be offended and it was nobody else's business. The Bible teaches that we speak to that person kindly but firmly, and trust that we receive the appropriate apology and no further adverse comment.

What we say can affect our whole being. James 3. 6 tells us that the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity; it defileth the whole body and setteth on fire the course of nature and is sets the fire of hell.

Here is someone who harshly criticises the appearance, dress and character of another and that evil criticism remains with the one who is offended. It affects their mind, thoughts and behaviour and causes continual and real distress which does not ease up.

There is man in my road who is a Rastafarian. He is very unkempt and has metal piercings in his face and he smells, but I talk with him and he is very intelligent and a kind man. I hate to think what others say of him.

But to return to the person criticised about their appearance, dress and character and how these remarks have caused them great distress over a period of time. The do-gooders will say, 'Oh, forget about it' but damage has been caused by this evil speaking and a remedy is the only answer. God is the God of Justice. The Psalmist wrote, The Lord executeth righteousness and judgement for all that are oppressed (Psalm 103.6).

This introduces the fact that evil speaking causes oppression. The Biblical word for oppression is the power that someone has to harm another. Oppression means anything from 'to put someone down', to be controlled by another, to be treated cruelly or simply with disdain which means to be treated as being inferior.

People offend others and speak evil of others because they have the power and believe that they have the right to exercise it. In a marriage or partnership, one expects honesty and frankness and both parties should accept that.

There are those who believe that an offended person should leave the remedy to God alone and let Him deal with it. Matthew 18. 15 tells us otherwise.

Another matter should be mentioned. Often people are very kind to another and help them out sometimes in very serious cases and do not get a thank you commensurate with the kindness they have been shown. Often the benefactor is treated badly whereas the Bible teaches, Let not your good be evil spoke of.

There are people who dwell on your shortcomings and forget the good that you do.

I know a man where his wife constantly belittles him and in public and does so with venom. That is evil speaking; it is unkind; it is not the thing a partner would do. What action should he take?

Evil speaking includes insults and one definition of abuse is insult. An insult is to treat or speak to someone rudely. It has to be dealt with, or that person will continue to be insulting and offensive.

There is another problem. What if the insults and offensive remarks are being made to you by a family member? What does one do?

It will be said that the family member may be going through a bad patch. Maybe they are ill or experiencing some private trauma, although you may not know about it.

This behaviour is unreasonable and it is a form of bullying and if you do not take action it may continue and give the bully the impression that it does not offend you and you don't mind, whereas you do.

One does not want to be at loggerheads with anyone in the family but the principle of Matthew 18 still applies. You have to tell the offender that harm is being caused to you and tell them to cease, apologise and refrain from future abuse. Some of us are very sensitive; it is our nature and unchangeable. We cannot live our lives having to adopt a different set of rules for every person and situation we encounter.

There is an old rhyme

Sticks and stones  
May break my bones  
But words will never hurt me.

It is simply not true.

Many people, even those who are not Christians, approve in principle to the Ten Commandments, one of which is Thou shalt not bear false witness. This bans lying, attacks and abuse upon a person and false comments which are paraded as evidence. Exodus 23.1 also says, Thou shalt not give a false report or join forces with others to issue a wicked report.

2 Thessalonians 3.11 talks about those who are disorderly with nothing to do but be busybodies. 1 Peter 4.15 defines a busybody as someone who does not attend to their own business and circumstances and who take pains to meddle in other people's matters. 1 Timothy 5.13 takes it further calling such people idle, going from house to house and gossiping and spreading rumours. Others are called tattlers meaning babblers and garrulous. A babbler is someone who talks, often in a fast way, speaking foolishly or in a muddled way. But one definition refers to someone who discloses secrets carelessly to the detriment of others. Garrulous means always talking and chatting. This is gossip, idle talk usually about other people's private lives and comments of a disapproving or malicious nature.

This is rife in churches where a newcomer is jumped upon and almost immediately invited to tea and is asked many questions which constitutes prying and nosiness and yet the ‘ interviewers ‘ wrongly call this fellowship. It is meddling, interference and can be offensive. Gossip usually follows. Fellowship is not tea, gossip and cake.

Some years ago a group of Christians had a slogan, Let’s gossip the Gospel!

We will leave the last word to the apostle Paul to Titus chapter 1 verse 10 ff

For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching and saying things they ought not to!

One of the most remarkable sayings of the Lord Jesus was when He was on the Cross and said, Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.

And what were they doing? Killing an innocent man who did nothing but good and was the Son of God. Father, forgive THEM.

That was not weakness on His part but love and mercy. The depths of those attributes are unsearchable.

It passeth knowledge, that dear love of Thine,  
O Jesus, Saviour, yet this soul of mine  
Would of Thy love, in its breadth and length,  
Its height, its depth and everlasting strength,  
Know more and more.

It passeth telling, that dear love of Thine,  
O Jesus, Saviour, yet these lips of mine  
Would fain proclaim to sinners far and near  
A love which can remove all guilty fear,  
And love beget.

Mary Shekelton 1827-83

A love that can remove all guilty fear.

However, as we have said, forgiveness is not an automatic door. There has to be repentance on our part and our resolve with God’s help not to repeat the offence.

We cannot live in the past and be haunted by the mistakes of that time. If we have offended someone and sinned against them, we can use our best endeavours to put it right but if that is not accepted then there is nothing else we can do. We must not torment or torture ourselves with guilt. For one reason, God loves us and requires that we walk in His ways and be at peace with ourselves.

Great God of wonders, all Thy ways  
Are righteous, matchless and divine;  
But the blest triumphs of Thy grace  
Most marvellous, unrivalled, shine;  
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?  
Crimes of such horror to forgive,  
Such guilty, daring worms to spare;  
This is Thy grand prerogative,

And none can in that honour share;  
Pardon, O God, is only Thine;  
Mercy and grace are all divine.

In wonder lost, with trembling joy,  
We hail the pardon of our God,  
Pardon for crimes of deepest dye,  
A pardon traced in Jesus' blood.  
To pardon thus is Thine alone;  
Mercy and grace are both Thine own.

Soon shall this strange, this wondrous grace,  
This perfect miracle of love,  
Fill the wide earth, while sweeter praise  
Sounds its own note in Heaven above;  
Who is pardoning God like Thee?  
Or who has grace so rich and free?

S. Davies 1723- 61

There is nothing more that needs to be said.

The medical profession generally classifies illness into categories namely that which is physical and, therefore, if it is not physical, it must be mental.

Many in the medical profession do not recognise the condition ME since they cannot seem to find a cause for it. But it is inflammation of the brain and the spinal cord. Arthritis is inflammation of the joints and that is a physical condition as is any other inflammation malady.

ME is Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and stands for myalgic encophomyalitis.

Until comparatively recently, PMT was described as a mental illness or a personality disorder. Sufferers can have headaches, swollen ankles and other joints, water retention and the like. These are physical symptoms as there is with period pain. None of this is a personality disorder or a mental illness. The same can be said of the menopause. The changes of hormones in the body can cause imbalance and result in physical symptoms. The menopause has physical disruptions such as night sweats, failing oestrogen levels and loss of vaginal elasticity. Sex can be very painful and demoralising to women. These are physical aspects. It is not a mental disability but, because there are emotional reactions, people think it is a mental condition.

Physical pain can cause emotional distress.

Cures for depression are advocated in several ways such as

1. Depression is due to some underlying medical condition
2. It takes time to find suitable treatment and so the trial and error method has to be used.
3. You must not rely on medication alone but engage in therapy and exercise.
4. Get social support and attend support groups.
5. Remember recovery takes time and the process itself has many ups and downs.

6. Learn to manage stress.
7. Find a good therapist.
8. Build better relationships.

These 'cures' have major problems. The most serious is associated with group therapy sessions where everyone gets up and talks about their depression and illness and you have to listen to all this negativity. Of all the people I have known over 40 years who have attended such therapy sessions, not one has been helped. In fact, their conditions have worsened. The other major problem is that the therapist or counsellor, having no personal experience of the conditions, are inadequate to help.

In other fields, and to quote one example, an alcoholic is best helped by a recovered alcoholic.

I have written elsewhere that there are many people in churches, particularly Pentecostal, charismatic and house churches, who believe they have the power and a Divine gift to resolve such problems in others. This is nonsense. Psychosomatic conditions can be healed often by a 'good talking to' but the world is full of Christian healers who are charlatans.

If I had a drug addiction I would go to someone who had the same problem and had overcome it.

The matter of stress needs to be clarified. Much of the stress we endure is caused by others or circumstances beyond our control. Under Tony Blair's shocking government countless people suffered immense stress due to his policies.

The cure for depression is really self-help and include these objectives:

1. Be true to yourself.
2. Look to the present and the future.
3. Focus on positives.
4. Move forward.
5. Work on self-confidence and self-esteem.
6. List all the things you are grateful for.

This may seem to be an attack on the medical profession but all that is written here can be shown to be perfectly true. Obviously, some patients have been helped in the ways advocated by those in the medical profession and had sympathetic therapists but I, and very many others, have evidence to support the failures of the medical system and that the six points mentioned above are more effective and, therefore, preferable.

It is totally wrong and demoralising to claim that natural and understandable feelings constitute mental illness and depression.