

“How to Respond to...”

DEPRESSION & SUICIDE

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Introductory Thought:

Statistics show that on average, 1 out of 10 people suffer from severe depression. This kind of depression is often described as “clinical depression” and is commonly treated today with various forms of medication that God has graciously made available to help. But as many medications and treatments of depression exist, so are the many definitions and descriptions of the word “depression.” In general, depression is a state of sadness and a feeling of hopelessness. So, although 1 out of 10 may suffer from “clinical depression,” many, if not most have had bouts with some level of depression at some point in their lives.

What does God’s Word say about DEPRESSION?

You won’t find the word “depression” in the Bible often [NKJV has it only once in Proverbs 12:25]. Instead, you’ll see the Bible use similar words such as *downcast, sad, lonely, discouraged, downhearted, mourning, troubled, miserable, despairing, and brokenhearted*. God’s Word indicates that depression can strike anyone:

- *Poor and rich*, like Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi [Ruth 1:1-13], and very rich people, like King Solomon [Ecclesiastics 1:1-18].
- *Young and old*, like David [Psalm 6:6-7], and Job [Job 10:1].
- *Men and women*, like Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet,” and Hannah, who was barren [1 Samuel 1:6-7].
- *If disaster strikes*, depression obviously may set in as the case: *“When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep.”* [1 Samuel 30:3-4]
- *Even when success occurs*, emotional letdowns can come as a result. After a stunning display of God’s power on Mt. Carmel against the prophets of Baal [1 Kings 18:38]; God’s Prophet Elijah,

instead of being encouraged feared Jezebel's revenge, and was weary and afraid. [1 Kings 19:4-5]

- *Jesus Christ*, who was tempted like we are in all things but without sin [Hebrews 4:15], was truly faced with depression at times. On the night that Jesus was betrayed, He spoke to His disciples in view of His coming payment for our sins on the cross, *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."* He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, *"O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but Your will be done."* [Matthew 26:38-39]

So how does God teach us to respond to Depression?

Is depression *always* a sin? A mother suffering from postpartum depression may become doubtful and angry with God as a *result* of her depression, but the depression itself is a *result* from living in this imperfect world. The Bible does not show God punishing His people for their sadness. In fact, we see clearly in His Word that He is a loving Father who teaches us in the midst of trials:

"David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God." [1 Samuel 30:6; c.f. also 1 Samuel 1:19-20; 2 Corinthians 7:5-7]

God's Word gives us sure and endless hope in all times of trouble, including depression. His forgiving message is clear. When depression hits, fix your eyes on Jesus, and see God's love for you:

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." [Heb. 4:15-16]

"The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears, And delivers them out of all their troubles. The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all." [Psalm 34:17-19]

"Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." [Isaiah 41:10]

And Jesus said, "And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. [Matthew 28:20b]

[c.f. also Deuteronomy 31:8; Joshua 1:9; Psalm 9:9-10; 42:6-11; Isaiah 41:10; Jeremiah 29:11-12; Lamentations 3:21-23; John 14:16; 2 Corinthians, 5:1-7; and many more!]

But how would God have us approach the subject of SUICIDE?

On average in America each year, one of the top 10 causes of death is suicide. Of those suicides, roughly 90% are caused by some form of depression. Even in view of all the comfort and direction the Lord provides, depression still leads some to suicide.

Suicide is not a new idea. The Bible records seven suicides:

- **Abimelech** [Judges 9:52-54] asked to be euthanized after an injury in his revolt.
- **Samson** [Judges 16:25-30] pulled the Philistines' idol temple down on them and himself.
- **Saul** [1 Samuel 31:4] wandered from the LORD's guidance and fell on his own sword after losing a battle.
- **Saul's armor bearer** [1 Samuel 31:4] followed Saul's example.
- **Ahithophel** [2 Samuel 17:23] an advisor to Absalom, seeing that his advice was defeated went and hanged himself.
- **Zimri** [1 Kings 16:15-20] burned his house down on top of himself after following Jeroboam's idolatry and seeing his city fall.
- **Judas Iscariot** [Matthew 27:3-5] depressed and unbelieving God could forgive his betrayed, went out and hanged himself.

So what does the Bible say then about taking your own life?

The LORD has created us in His image [Genesis 1:26-27]. He created us for a special purpose [Genesis 2:7]. Therefore, God has a very specific and beautiful plan in mind for each one of us. The prophet Jeremiah reminded the hopeless Children of Israel saying to them:

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." [Jeremiah 29:11; c.f. Acts 16:25-34]

God's plan is for life, not death. The Bible teaches both physical and spiritual death are results of our sin and disobedience to God. Jesus taught death and destruction are works of "the thief" (Satan).

"The thief comes only to steal and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." [John 10:10]

In John 8:44 Jesus goes on to say that Satan is a "murderer" and the "father of lies." The feelings of despair that lead to suicide are caused by some of his lies that lead us to doubt God's loving plan.

Life belongs to God. Related to God's protection of human life in the 5th Commandment we see that *homicide*, *genocide*, and suicide are all sins against this commandment. Most wouldn't label a soldier dying to protect a fellow soldier a suicide. Neither would they call a parent dying to protect a child as a suicide, though they did kill themselves (suicide), both were in a sacrifice for others.

The apostle Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote this helpful lesson to the Christians in Corinth:

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” [1 Corinthians 6:19-20]

Taking one’s own life out of desperation is not honoring God. And we do not have the authority or right to take our own life in suicide, no matter how tough and unbearable life gets. David wrote many hymns about his intensely dramatic life of both highs and lows:

“But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD; I say, ‘You are my God.’ My times are in Your hand.” [Psalm 31:14-15a; Deut. 32:39]

How do I Respond to Suicide?

When it comes to those severely depressed and contemplating suicide, what has been read so far is helpful to remember and remind them. But when one has sadly taken his/her own life,

What is the eternal spiritual outcome for that individual?

In the past some have erroneously thought that every soul that commits suicide is automatically damned to hell. This thought more than likely stems from what the Bible heavily points to as Judas Iscariot’s eternal outcome. The suicides mentioned earlier in the Bible (except Samson), show pretty clear signs of damning unbelief.

When thinking of the soul of someone who’s committed suicide, the first thing both family and friends need to do is to STOP, and remember Who *alone* is the Judge and Savior. Let us keep in mind that not every individual who claims to be a Christian is going to heaven. Likewise, not every *Christian* that commits suicide, may end up in hell. Christians also have mental breakdowns and suffer mental illnesses too. Paul makes it clear here that it is our just and merciful God who sees and searches the heart:

“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God.” [1 Corinthians 4:3; and c.f. also 1 Samuel 16:7; Revelation 16:7]

Summary

When responding either to depression or suicide, remember what God’s Word says of both. Remember that God is the eternal judge of all souls. Lastly, remember to focus on bringing the comfort of Christ’s forgiveness to those who yet remain in this world.

Other available resources:

- “And She Was a Christian”
- Prevent Suicide Wisconsin - preventsuicidewi.org