

Baggage: How To Deal With Depression

In his book *Depression A Stubborn Darkness* Ed Welch starts with these words, “When you are depressed, how can you take a step, let alone a journey? When all vital energy is devoted to staying alive and just making it to the next hour, how can you add anything else- like hope- to your day?”

These are the “how to” questions that in the face of depression seem almost impossible to answer. What you need is to go deeper than practical advise. You don’t need a series of “hoe tos.” In fact you could probably write a credible list of “how tos” yourself. “

“ Depression and the host of feelings and thoughts that get crammed into the word plead for a “why.” Why is this happening to me? Why work? Why love? Why believe? Why bother?”

A list of “how tos” can’t speak to the issues of purpose, hope, and the fundamental questions of questions of existence and belief that depression inevitably raises.”

“On the path ahead look for a partnership between the whys and the how tos. When the why questions appear, they will be religious. All why questions are. They will be about God. Depression takes you back to the basic questions of life. Ignore them to focus on the how questions and you might find a temporary shortcut to mental relief, but your heart will still be famished.”

Today we’re in week 2 of a series we’re calling *Baggage: Lightening the Load*. We’re taking an in depth look at issues like anger, depression, fear, worry guilt, and addictions.

All these are areas of baggage that we get tangled up in and sometimes can’t seem to shake. They don’t all affect all of us at the same time. That means something absolutely crucial to the long term success of this church body.

If the subject matter hits you personally grab onto all that you can from God’s Word. If it’s a piece of baggage that you’re not carrying around please don’t zone out on me here.

Keep your eyes and ears open because inevitably you’re going to have friends, relatives, coworkers, fellow church members who will be wrestling with these issues. God wants to change your life this morning but God wants to use you to serve others, too.

The church is a body. It's a living organism and we all need each other. I Corinthians 12 says *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ. (I Corinthians 12:12*

Now listen to the conclusion: *If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it: or if one member is honored all the members rejoice with it. (I Corinthians 12:26)*

We're here to be helped or to help one another so let's jump into the difficult subject of depression with that in mind.

I. Depression Is Genuine Suffering

Obviously we all have down times in our life where things just don't seem right. That's not what we're talking about here this morning.

Here's how real depression feels. "Hell" comes up often. "Hell came to pay me a surprise visit." "If there is a hell on earth, it is to be found in a melancholy heart," The poet Robert Lowell wrote, "I myself am hell." Others have called it "A room in hell, a lonely private hell, the dark night of the soul..

In Dante's inferno Dante understood the intimate connection between hell and the hopelessness of depression. The entrance to Dante's version of hell reads "Abandon hope all ye who enter here."

I had someone a while back who was caught in the grips of depression tell me "That's exactly what I feel like." If hell was a perpetual state of hopelessness than hell would be the ultimate torture. And that's exactly what I feel like. I'm in the pit of hell."

Depression is genuine suffering, And if you've never been thorough it you'll have a hard time even explaining the anguish to others.

Now if you get a concordance and begin to look up the words depressed or depression in the Bible you'll find a pretty short list. In fact, in some translations you won't find the words at all!

But, if you begin to seek out biblical references to people whose struggles parallel what we call depression today all of a sudden some famous people come out of the woodwork, Elijah, Saul, Jeremiah, and Jonah.

But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the LORD, "O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." Jonah 4:1-3

Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am faint; O LORD, heal me, for my bones are in agony Psalm 63:1

Add to that list situations of tribulation, despair, hopelessness, pain, suffering, and all of a sudden you realize that the whole Bible is filled with direction, insight, and encouragements.

Depression is genuine suffering.

But now I want you to think about this: Turn to James 1 page 1072

Read verses 2-4

Now you might say, “Ed, the way I feel right now I’m not up for a passage like that.” I can understand those feelings. But here’s what I want you to think about:

James purposely expands out the scope of suffering to include all kinds of trials. By doing this he invites those who are truly depressed to learn that whatever the cause of depression, depression itself begins to reveal the true extent of our faith and serve as a catalyst for growth rather than a reason for despair

I believe that the Bible turns the spotlight on at least 4 possible causes of despair..

1. *Other People* People betray, abuse, make commitments they never keep, they wound, scatter, and destroy because their top priority is themselves.

Unfortunately sometimes we’re the people causing the pain. So don’t be surprised if behind some depression is lurking your own fears, resentment, and bitterness.

2 *Our Bodies* Joni Erickson Tada, who was left as a quadriplegic through a diving accident tells of the hours she spent in her hospital bed trying to come up with ways to end her life. Her saving grace was when you’re a quadriplegic you can’t move so you can’t harm yourself.

Today Joni Ericson Tada is one of the world’s most outspoken advocates for the disabled. She would tell you how much she’s thankful to God that she wasn’t able to take her own life.

Our bodies grow old and weak. We face all kinds of challenges just getting through the day.

3. *Another very real cause of human suffering is Satan himself* When you read the book of Job you get one of those rare curtain pulling back times when we’re allowed to see into the inner workings of spiritual warfare.

Satan lies, he can bring physical distress. And his whole job is to basically convince us to doubt God.

4. Then the 4th factor in depression can be God Himself.

The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich He brings low and lifts up.(I Samuel 2:6-7)

I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.(Isaiah 45:7)

Ed Wealch writes, “God is over all things and nothing happens apart from His knowledge and will. By the time suffering or depression comes to our door God did it. To believe in anything else is to opt for a random and out of control universe with no ultimate meaning or purpose.”

There are multiple causes to depression. They make us ask questions like Where is God? How can we say he’s faithful and loving? How could Go really care about me? How can he really be good?

Here’s the key. There’s 2 ways to answer those spiritual questions. One is with a clenched fist and the other’s with an open heart.

My prayer today is that some fists that may have been clenched for a long time might let go today.

II. Jesus Christ Shared In Our Suffering

As we’ve mentioned many times before, Biblical Christianity is the only faith in which the Creator became one of His creation. But God went even further than that. He not only became one of His creatures but He suffered an unspeakable death so that they’d be spared.

Even the prophets who God used to write the Old Testament hardly had inklings that the Creator would become the suffering savior.

If you’re idea of God is that He’s some indifferent aloof being here’s the biblical revelation. From the foundation of the world God knew about your sufferings and declared hat He Himself would take on human form, and participate in them..

I don’t know how that strikes you, but it just blows me away. And the older I get and the more I learn about the character of God the more absolutely astounded I am at His character.

Sufferers have a way of recognizing other sufferers. We have a suffering Savior. He was called the Man of Sorrows, The sheep led to the slaughter, He was oppressed and afflicted and despised and rejected.

So Jesus shares in our suffering.

III. *God is Good*

Turn to Psalm 166 page 544 Read verse 12

Listen to Psalm 145 *The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works.*

God is good all the time and all the time God is good.

When we're depressed we're convinced that the only way God could be good is if He removed our depression. Then He'd be good! Otherwise we doubt His goodness..

But let's go back to what we already know: Jesus, the dearly beloved of the Father suffered the pangs of hell for us. When we suffer what seems like endless pain it gets real hard for us to believe that God actually loves us. But Jesus' sufferings on the cross already prove that. That doesn't always mean we'll understand what goes on behind the scenes, but it's true nevertheless that love and suffering can co-exist.

Not only that but we have the promise on Romans 8:32 *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*

There's only one thing that's going to persuade us that God is good and generous at the same time. It isn't your bank account. It isn't how your friends treat you. It isn't family.

It's the cross. That's it. Not health, not wealth, not success. It's the cross and the cross alone. There is no arguing with someone who was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, not for friends but for enemies!

When the memory of Christ's costly sacrifice becomes distant or wrapped up in the pain of the present, we need to quickly turn back to the solid reminder of those rough wooden timbers and see our Savior writhing in pain with nails through his hands and His feet.

We need a vivid reminder that our God says, I've sacrificed my Son for you. Do you really think that I'm not continually obsessed with your well being?

When children don't get their way they can get so frustrated and angry with their parents that they can say some very hurtful things. To a child that's mom and dad's not showing love.

But parents have a much more sophisticated love. Their love sees way beyond the immediate wants of the child.

So does God. He's not stingy or unfeeling. He is good and generous. This isn't the power of positive thinking. This is the power of biblical understanding.

The thing is we just want God to flood us with happy feelings. We want the depression to go away immediately. God doesn't work that way.

Before we left for Guyana I had to have the head gasket fixed on our Subaru, I had it done but when I picked up the car the Check Engine light came on.

The car ran, but the light was on. So I had several options at that point. I could just ignore the light and hope it would eventually go away. That was a possibility. Of course by the time the light went away I could have seriously damaged my engine. That light was on for a reason.

Another option was to crawl up under the dash and pull out the bulb. That way I wouldn't have to have it annoying me all the time. Who wants to have a Check Engine light glaring at you every time you get in your car.

Of course there was always a third option. I could take it back to the shop which I did. They found a defective module that they had missed before so they fixed it.

That's a lot like some of the warnings we get in life. Depression can be one of them.

Our symptoms of depression grow but we just ignore them. We hope they eventually go away. If it's just a case of the blues they might go away on their own.

The problem comes when the symptoms not only longer, they start to get worse. Unfortunately, these days it seems like the first line of defense is psychotropic drugs.

We go to the doctor and describe our symptoms. There is no blood test or brain scan today that can identify a depressed person. It's all up to the doctor's evaluation. So he says, "You have a chemical imbalance in your brain (which nobody knows for sure. It's all a big guess) and he puts you on medication.

Now this is not an anti-medication message. If you are on medicine prescribed by your doctor please don't say Pastor Ed said all medicines are wrong and stop taking what you've been prescribed.

Just think about this. If all we do is take a drug that makes us feel better we've effectively pulled out the check engine light. That light was warning us of a problem, but if we're not careful we can ignore the problem long enough till we have really serious consequences.

A few months back Newsweek had a major report on anti-depressants and plainly showed that they are the most over prescribed drug in the country.

Beyond that nobody knows how or if they work. They've had plenty of success giving people placebos.

If you listen carefully to the drug adds on TV (which has to be one of the all time worst ideas we've ever come up with) they always say we think this drug works by...

Let me repeat, if your on some medication don't say this is unspiritual and throw it out. But sit do with as trusted Christian friend and begin to talk about the loburdens that are weighing you down. It just could be as you seek out God' answers that you and your doctor together could slowly try reducing what your taking.

I was a heavy duty drug user. I probably took a hundred or so acid trips. I was physically, emotionally burned out. I ended up in a hospital and you know what the treatment plan was? 5 times a day they'd pas out our meds.

After a few week they sent me hope. I asked. "Wait a minute. You haven't helped me yet. " they said this, "Oh, we can't help you. You have to help yourself!"

It took me almost a year to get myself off the drugs they gave me in the treatment center.

When Sandy and I were first married I'd have such intense anxiety attacks shed have to take me out at night and walk me around the block over and over again.

I believe that God would have us look at that depression, anxiety, confusion, whatever it is as a warning light that there's a bigger problem and ultimately He's the answer,.

You know the Bible says *A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. (Proverbs 17:12)*

In fact, Proverbs 17 is a great chapter to begin to work your way through on the road to recover from depression.

It's not a easy road. There can be a lot of hidden twists and turns that your going to discover along the way. But God is a God of hope.

Joy takes practice. Study joy in the Psalms. If you're willing to start on that difficult journey towards joy the Psalms will see you along the way.

The goodness of God is woven through Creation, God's Church, and God's people.

When you can't see it go back to the beauty of the cross and what Jesus did there for you. Appreciate the beauty of His sacrifice- His willingness to become like us to redeem us. Appreciate the beauty of His love. Behold it. Admire it. Take it all in.

Everything won't instantly change in your life. Some things will never change. But have the mindset of David,

*One thing I ask of the LORD,
this is what I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.*

⁵ *For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle
and set me high upon a rock.*

Psalm 27:4-5