

## Graceful Healing Part 8

### Depression and God's Great Grace

This morning we are going to talk about depression and God's great and all sufficient grace. There was a time when depression was one of those things we didn't talk about in church. The attitude seemed to be that Christians don't get depressed. In fact, just a couple of years ago I heard a pastor speaking at ORU, a man whom I admire, comment about all the Christians and pastors even that were battling with depression and taking anti-depressants. He said then that Christians shouldn't be depressed. I agree. Christians shouldn't be depressed. Christians shouldn't be sick. Christians shouldn't have bad days. We shouldn't even have flat tires or car trouble or have our washing machine break down, but we do.

God's people, born again, redeemed, on fire on their way to heaven folks sometimes battle with depression and all the struggles associated with real life. We don't just live on the mountaintop. Some of the best fruit grows in the valley. And life is about God's grace and his faithfulness working in our lives on the mountain tops and in the valleys.

What is depression? Norman Wright, a Christian and a counselor said in many cases depression is merely a response to what a person is doing to his life. Depression can be a normal reaction to what is happening psychologically or physically to a person. It can be an emotional scream that says, 'something isn't right. Something is out of balance. Pay attention because something needs to change.'

Let me add, I'm not a psychologist or counselor, I'm just a pastor who has battled with depression. Depression seems universal. To some extent almost all personality types given the right (or wrong) circumstances or environment can experience some level of depression. Maybe not what we would call clinical depression, but most everyone experiences depressed moods. Everyone has a bad day every once in a while. Everyone experiences sadness and grief at some point. But there are some of us who have struggled at a deeper level with depression. Here are some **Characteristics of depression:**

- 1. Hopelessness, despair, sadness, apathy,**
- 2. Loss of perspective** (everything is colored by depression)
- 3. Changes in physical activities** (eating, sleeping patterns)
- 4. Loss of self-esteem** (low self-confidence)

5. **Withdrawal from others.** Fear of rejection. You avoid seeing others or being with people.
6. **Desire to escape from problems and even from life itself.** You want to run away.
7. **Over sensitivity to what others say and do.**
8. **Difficulty handling feelings and emotions.** Anger and frustration quickly rise.
9. **Guilt.** What am I doing wrong. It must be me. God is angry with me.
10. **Dependence upon others.** Depression can lead to a state of dependence upon others. "I can't do that, you'll have to do it for me." Once a person starts becoming depressed, they often behave in a fashion that reinforces their depression.

Don't feel condemned or guilty about these characteristics. I've had all of them. You aren't alone. Here are some **Causes of depression:**

1. **Insufficient rest and poor diet.** The body can't function without adequate rest and food.
2. **Drug reactions.** Chemical changes can effect emotions. There can even be toxic depression from too much medication. You should see a physician. If you have symptoms of depression, see your dr. first.
3. **Physical causes.** Tumors. Hypoglycemia. Glandular problems.
4. **Repressed anger.** Anger turned inward.
5. **Reactive or grief depression.** Natural after a loss of any kind.
6. **Bio-chemical depression** caused by internal disturbance in the body's chemical system. Post partum depression. Baby blues.
7. **Faulty and negative thinking.** Low self-concept and self-image. Self-pity can lead to depression.
8. **Unrealistic expectations** (of self, God, others).
9. **Faulty behavior.** Inappropriate behavior that is contrary to one's value system.
10. **Spiritual attacks.** Spiritual warfare, oppression.
11. **Real or imagined loss.** Fear of loss.
12. **Burnout.** In work, especially in caring professions. Compassion fatigue.

Any combination of the above.

Okay, so there are a lot of things that can cause depression. It's not a sin to be depressed, it's a symptom of something going on. But what are we going to do about it? What does God want to do about it? He wants to bring healing and deliverance. He wants to supply the grace

you need to walk in health, to walk in understanding, to walk in confidence with God.

Let me show you a couple of men in the Bible who struggled with depression and how God responded to these men to bring healing and help to them. Turn to **Numbers 11:10-15**

Moses is leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the land of promise but...the people were complaining about everything. **“The rabble with them began to crave other food and again the Israelites started wailing.”** (11:4). Whining and complaining. Moses was weary, depressed, burned-out. (Remember the symptoms of depression I shared?) Look at verse 14-15. Moses felt hopeless, over-burdened. He lost perspective. He felt mistreated (“If this is how you are going to treat me God, just kill me right now!”) He wanted to run away, to escape. He was angry. He wanted to die.

What were the causes? Insufficient rest and food. Faulty thinking. Moses thought he was in charge rather than God. (I remember saying I felt responsible if someone didn't get healed. If someone's marital problems didn't get resolved.) Moses assumed burdens and responsibilities that didn't belong to him. He failed to delegate responsibility to others. Compassion fatigue set in as he was on call 24 hours a day, caring for others.

What did God do? Punish him? Did God tell him he was a sinner? That he didn't have enough faith? That he was a failure and to quit the ministry? No. Did he tell him to cowboy up? Toughen up? No. **God brought Moses to the source and cause of the depression.** God doesn't want to leave you as you are. He wants to bring you to understanding, to health, to wholeness. He wants to “grace” your life!

God told Moses, “I will give you help so you won't have to carry the burden alone.” God didn't magically take away the depression, but he showed Moses how to be whole again. **God had Moses participate in the recovery.** Moses chose 70 leaders to serve with him and help him and God put the Spirit of leadership upon those 70. Moses began to discover again that God could be trusted. His perspective began to change. His attitude changed. He was able to rest with the help of the other elders and he could continue to lead the people. God wants to help us. He wants to lead us in paths of redemption and wholeness. He wants to grace your life with his peace and rest and his help if you are battling with depression.

Look with me at one other example. Elijah. **1 Kings 18-19.** Elijah had just come through an intense time in chapter 18. He had called down fire from heaven. He had the

prophets of baal killed. I think he believed that all of Israel would turn to the Lord. Instead, Jezebel swears she will have him killed and morning finds Elijah running for his life. Look at what we know about Elijah and his symptoms and possible causes of depression.

**Elijah is physically and emotionally exhausted.** He outran Ahab's chariot. Even though that perhaps involved a supernatural miracle, it would leave him physically and emotionally drained.

**Unmet expectation.** Instead of being thanked for ending the drought, Jezebel wants him dead.

**Loss of perspective.** Instead of focusing on the power of God Elijah has focused on Jezebel's threat. God had just sent fire down from heaven at Elijah's command and yet all he can see and hear is the threat of Jezebel to have him killed.

**He runs away from possible support and help.** He runs for his life and sits alone in a cave, away from family support and friends.

**Distorted thinking.** Elijah feels as if he is the only one left that loves God. Wallowing in self-pity. Angry. Frustrated. Feeling God has let him down.

**Wanted to die.** "If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now." That's what Moses said and Elijah feels the same. "I have had enough Lord. Take my life." 1 Kings 19:4

That's a pretty good list of potential causes and symptoms of depression. Elijah had all these and more. Was God angry at him? Did God reject him or punish him? What did God do? Look at the gracious acts of God in response to Elijah's troubled heart. First of all, **God gave him physical rest and nourishment.** (1 Kings 19:5-9). Began to restore health and balance to Elijah's physical and emotional system. Sometimes the best thing God can do to restore you is to give you sleep and something to eat. It's the maternal side of God our Father. Cookies and milk and a nap can fix a lot of things.

**God then allowed Elijah to express his feelings.** He even allowed him to express his anger and frustration at God. "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left and now they are trying to kill me too." (And it just isn't fair and you know it!) God allowed him to express all of this, and then continued his healing and restoration. The Lord showed Elijah his power in the wind, in the earthquake and the fire but then spoke to Elijah in a still, small voice. A gentle whisper. Look at this. God let Elijah vent

and get all this off of his chest and then he quieted him down. God quieted Elijah's spirit so he could hear what God had to say. He spoke to him in the quiet, the stillness, and **In the quiet, God began to restore perspective for Elijah.** With adequate rest and nourishment, Elijah could see things from a new perspective. Maybe he wasn't the only one that still loved God. Maybe God's hand was still upon him.

**God gave Elijah opportunity to learn from the journey.** God told Elijah, **"Go back the way you came."** God told Elijah to retrace his steps. I think he gave him an opportunity to look back to see how he got there. "So, there is where I started to lose sight of God's faithfulness. There is where I stopped praying, where I stopped sleeping, where I rejected wise counsel, where I decided to go my own way." God may want to show you how you got here so you can take a different path from now on. Learn the lessons that depression may be teaching you. Learn the lessons of the valley.

**God gave Elijah a renewed sense of purpose.** (19:15-16) God gave Elijah an assignment. "I'm not finished with you yet Elijah. I have a job for you to do. People to anoint as king in Aram and in Israel and you will anoint Elisha to succeed you as prophet in the land." God told Elijah he would take care of his enemies. God showed Elijah he was not alone. He still had 7,000 men who had not bowed their knee to an idol. God graced Elijah once again and brought him through this season of depression and despair.

For Moses and Elijah, God had work for them to do. He did not condemn them for being depressed. Instead he gave them rest and healing. He showed them that his grace was sufficient.

Next Sunday I want to share a bit of my personal testimony about depression and share some additional thoughts as to what you can do if you are battling with depression. But this morning I want you to hear this: God has not abandoned you in your depression or despair. It may feel that way because it is the nature of depression to make us feel alone, isolated, hopeless.

But the bible says, **"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." Psalm 34:18.** He is close to you. He is nearer to you than the breath you breathe. And it is his intention to save and deliver you from the crushing burden of that depression. He wants to grace your life with the peace of his presence. It may not all go away. You may still struggle someday, but if you can understand that he is close to you. Grasp the truth that he is with you and his grace will sustain you. He will see you through. Can you picture it? Like a

good and gentle shepherd he is leading you into green pastures and still waters. That's him, leading you, close to you, saving you from that crushing burden.

He lifts up the countenance of those who are cast down. He comforts those who are broken and in despair. The bible says he is **"...the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles..." 2 Corinthians 1:3** Oh what good news. The father of mercies is the God of all comfort. He wants to heal you, to hold you, to restore balance and order to your life. He is the good shepherd who will restore your soul!

**"But God, who comforts the downcast..." 2 Corinthians 7:6** This is who he is! The God of all comfort. The God who is close to you. The God who comes to comfort you and restore you. Trust him. Look to him. Rest in him and receive his grace and his peace. Like Elijah, he wants to restore you and he has a plan and purpose for you. He still has work for you to do. Paul says God comforts us so we can then comfort others with that same comfort. He isn't finished with you yet!

For you that are struggling this morning – go back the way you came. Can you see causes and reasons for the depression? Is your body and your life, your lifestyle, is it telling you something? Do you see the need for change? Can you begin today making those changes? Are you willing to make the changes? God wants to lead you into healing and restoration if you will begin to walk with him today.

You that are overwhelmed with burdens and worries, anxiety. The bible says, **"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7.** Are you ready to unload it all on Jesus today? Cast your cares upon him because he really does care for you. He is close to you and your broken heart today. He is here to help you and sustain you. Hear Jesus' invitation to you this morning. **"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30.**

Let's pray.