

## **Understanding Depression**

*“The Common Cold of Emotional Life”*

### **Biblical leaders who suffered depression:**

- Elijah – sat under a tree and wanted to die
- Jonah – despondent that God didn’t destroy Nineveh
- Jeremiah – lamented about the day he had been born
- Job – was advised by his wife to just curse God and die

### **What is depression?**

Everyone gets the blues now and then, but when there is little joy or pleasure after visiting with friends or after seeing a good movie, there may be a more serious problem. A depressed mood that stays around for a while, without letting up, can change the way a person thinks or feels. Doctors call this “clinical depression.”

Depression (also known as major depressive disorder) is a serious medical condition that can impact the way you feel and act towards others. Many people with depression feel that life is no longer worth living. They may feel hopeless, like there's "no way out."

Depression is a common, serious illness and not a personal weakness. Depression can happen to anyone, at any age, and to people of any race or ethnic group. It is never a “normal” part of life. Depression, which is treatable, can come from chemical imbalances in the brain, hormonal changes, medications or things going on in your life.

Women suffer from depression twice as often as men. One out of four women may have depression sometime during their lifetime. Many people suffer with depression but do not seek help.

Over 14 million Americans are affected each year by depression.

### **What are the symptoms of depression?**

If a person experiences five or more of the following symptoms and they last for more than two weeks, or if the symptoms interfere with the daily routine, formal evaluation for major depressive order is recommended:

1. a persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood, most of the day
2. sleeping too little (insomnia) or too much (hypersomnia) , most of the day
3. reduced appetite and weight loss, or increased appetite and weight gain
4. loss of interest or lack of pleasure in activities once enjoyed, including sex
5. restlessness or irritability
6. persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (such as headaches, chronic pain, or constipation and other digestive disorders)
7. difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
8. fatigue or loss of energy, most of the day
9. feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless, most of the day
10. recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

## What causes depression?

Many things can lead to clinical depression. Following are factors that can contribute to the illness:

- Biological - People with depression may have too little or too much of certain brain chemicals (norepinephrine or serotonin).
- Cognitive - People with negative thinking and low self-esteem are more likely to develop clinical depression.
- Gender - Women experience clinical depression nearly twice as often as men. The reasons for this are still not understood, but may include hormonal changes women go through during menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause. Other reasons may include the stress caused by the many responsibilities that women have.
- Sin: attitudes like bitterness, resentment, hatred; guilt and unrepentance over sinful behavior; backsliding or turning away from the Lord; lack of trust in God as sufficient provider.
- God-sent Trials – difficult or stressful times of trial may lead to periods of depression.
- Demonic Attacks – Satan’s attacks can oppress people to the point of depression.
- Co-occurrence - Depression is more likely to occur along with certain illnesses, such as heart disease, cancer, Parkinson’s disease, diabetes, Alzheimer’s disease and hormonal disorders.
- Medications - Side effects of some medications can bring about depression.
- Genetic- A family history of clinical depression increases the risk for developing the illness.
- Triggering Situations - Difficult life events, loss or major change including divorce, financial problems or the death of a loved one can contribute to clinical depression.
- Unbiblical self-talk or misbeliefs – blowing things out of proportion, focusing only on the negative, can distort the way one views one’s self, the world and the future in a negative way.

## How is depression treated?

Depression is the most treatable of all mental illnesses. About 60 percent to 80 percent of depressed people can be treated successfully. Depending on the case, various kinds of therapies seem to work.

- Treatments such as psychotherapy and support groups help people deal with major changes in life.
- One method helps patients recognize and change negative thinking patterns that led to the depression.
- Another approach focuses on improving a patient's relationships with people as a way to reduce depression and feelings of despair.
- Antidepressant drugs can also help. These medications can improve mood, sleep, appetite and concentration. Drug therapies often take time before there are real signs of progress. It is important to keep taking medication until it has a chance to work. After feeling better, it is important to continue the medication for at least four to nine months to prevent a recurrence of the depression.

## The Pastor’s Role

- Maintain an awareness of the symptoms of clinical depression and suicide
- Possess skill in strategic pastoral counseling: brief, time-limited, bibliotherapeutic, wholistic, structured, spiritually focused and explicitly Christian.
- Have an identified resource for professional counseling if needed