

Why Study Depression?

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[0 : 00] Well, today we're going to begin a new Sunday School series. It's really related and connected. It's in the same ballpark as our series on the happy Christian..! But instead of talking about happy Christians, we are going to be talking about what we do when we're depressed.

So, you know, maybe if I was thinking about this a long time ago, I could have started with the depressed Christian and moved to the happy Christian. But we're just going to look at the same stick from the other direction.

We're going to be using David Murray's book, this little book called Christians Get Depressed Too. There are several really good resources available, books available, but we're going to use Dr. Murray's book just for a couple of reasons.

One is it is very small. It's easy to read. It's very logically put together, and so it provides a good backbone for a Sunday School series.

And it goes well with what we learned about in the happy Christian. You're going to see a lot of the same themes and a lot of the same ideas. And so it's a way that we can review and keep this subject in mind, because if you're anything like me, it takes time for you to change your mind and change your habits and change your life.

[1 : 27] And so we want to give ourselves chances to review as well. So Christians get depressed too. Like I said, we're primarily going to be using that book, but there are a lot of books available, and I'm going to be filling in and drawing from a lot of resources for the Sunday School lesson.

I guess, first of all, we need to talk about, when we talk about Christians get depressed too, I'm not talking merely about spiritual discouragement.

We need to make a distinction about these two ideas. Because discouraged people generally can be encouraged.

Now, depressed people can obviously be encouraged, but discouraged people generally have this just discouragement. It may take a bit, but what they need is encouraging truth.

We looked at all of that in our last luncheon series about why are you so downcast, oh my soul. We talked about that for every reason that we might be downcast, there is no ultimate reason that a Christian needs to be downcast or stay downcast because the truth is more encouraging.

[2 : 49] There's always greater encouraging truth. So a discouraged person primarily needs spiritual encouragement.

Now, depression is not exactly the same as discouragement. There is a lot of overlap. There are a lot of the same features, a lot of the same feelings.

But it is sort of like the difference between a first degree and a third degree burn. Now, if you have a first degree burn, it's caused by too much heat.

It blisters your skin. But if you have a third degree burn, it's definitely a much more serious situation. And the treatments for a first degree burn are different than the treatments for a third degree burn.

Third degree burn. I'm sure you've burnt your finger on a hot pan or your thumb on a hot pan. And what do you need to do?

[3 : 52] You need to put it under cold water, maybe put a Band-Aid on it, and it's going to blister, but it will heal over time. A third degree burn, if somehow you have one of those, you don't need to run it under cold water and put a Band-Aid on it.

You need to go to the doctor. You need serious treatment. And in a way, it's probably not going to recover in the same way as a first degree burn.

And so maybe discouragement and depression, maybe they started out the same or even started in the same place, but you don't treat them the same way. And we want to talk about the difference between depression and normal sadness.

Sadness. Sadness is just one of those. It is one of the feelings, emotions that God has given to us. It's normal to be sad.

You hear bad news and you're sad. When someone dies, it's normal to be sad, even for a very long time.

[5 : 03] Or you have a hard day and it's normal to be discouraged. Depending on what you're reacting to, sadness and discouragement can last a few days, can last longer.

But the key idea is it's a normal, reasonable, proportional reaction to some sad event or circumstance. It's normal, it's reasonable, it's proportional.

That means that the degree of your sadness matches the degree of the circumstance. So when we're climbing up a real hill at work or in our family and things aren't going our way, it is normal to be discouraged or sad about that.

And you'll need to find encouraging truth to help you with that. But I've had occasions, not very many, thank the Lord, where I've worked really hard on getting all my sermon notes ready and typing it all out.

And I come back the next day to print them out and the whole file is corrupted. And you know that, like, for cover file, that thing doesn't work.

[6 : 14] And when I bring up the file, it's nothing but scribbles and nonsense. And now it's Saturday night, and I don't have anything on paper.

That is very discouraging. That's reasonable. But I bounced back. I didn't stay down. I took a deep breath. I talked to some people. I got them praying for me.

And I doubled down and I got to work. For a moment, I wasn't thinking, I don't want to do this.

I was upset. But I bounced back and I felt energy to get back to work. That's normal sadness. That's normal discouragement. That's normal dealing with a setback.

I needed some encouraging truth. I needed to have faith. And I needed to respond to that truth. That's how it should work.

[7 : 08] And that's how it normally does work. Here's how one Christian author put it. He writes this. My first job was teaching and coaching high school basketball.

To put it mildly, we were bad. That year, we played 30 games. Our final record was 1-29. It was a long year. Many nights driving the team bus home after getting stomped by 40 or more points.

I would wonder if I was cut out for this. I was discouraged. But after a night's rest and some time to get refreshed, I was okay and ready to get back to practice with the boys.

In fact, when that season ended, we began working right then on getting ready for the next year. You see, I was discouraged. But I wasn't depressed. I was able to bounce back and go on the offensive.

Now, the same author went through depression, and he calls it his train wreck time. He says this.

[8 : 11] Long-term depression is not like that because it sucks the life and the joy out of you. Instead of bouncing back and being recharged, you seem only to slip into a deeper darkness.

In spite of your circumstances and any attempts to be happy, it seems to be impossible. My 2000 train wreck was severe and devastating.

It seemed as if everything I had ever believed was tossed into a washing machine and violently churned back and forth. It was a time of testing and despair that had been unmatched in my life up to this point.

So what I'm saying is, is discouragement and depression, while they have many things in common, they have many things in common.

They aren't exactly the same. With discouragement, you still have some energy. Discouragement is generally an issue related. And what I mean by that is, it's tied to a particular issue, a particular problem.

[9 : 18] Problem. Discouragement is generally issue based. So it's not that your whole life is that way. It's just this one area or these two or three areas, this particular problem.

But you still have other, you still have energy, you still have hope for other areas of your life that can be encouraging. But what does depression sound like?

Psalms 88. Darkness is my closest friend. So when I look out, I just see darkness.

And what feels closest to me is darkness. And the only thing that I really know and see and can relate to is darkness. Everything hurts. Everywhere, there is despair.

It's not one thing I'm discouraged about or even two or three things. It's everything. It's the simplest things.

[10 : 29] So I can't do the dishes. I don't remember what I'm supposed to do. I don't, I just stare at them trying to think of what I'm supposed to do. Or the laundry.

Here's how one lady put it. Laundry may very well be one of the hardest things I have to do when I'm depressed. I recently went eight months without washing my bedding.

I have a pile of washed but unfolded laundry that has been sitting on a table for close to a year. My laundry basket is currently full of towels, which while folded, have been sitting there for over a month.

I've purchased additional underwear when I've run out. I'm not above reusing a towel that I find lying somewhere on the floor. It isn't something I typically advertise. I don't say to my friends, you see this shirt, I haven't washed it for a month.

It's not a fun problem to have, and it is a real problem. Laundry requires many steps, and I believe it's for that reason it can be so difficult. Think about it.

[11 : 29] The list of things that need doing is pretty long. Gather, sort, load, unload, dry, or hang, sort, fold, put away, and in a very short time, repeat.

Each step is arduous, especially so when deeply mired in depression. So, I guess what I want to say is that there's more going on there than simple spiritual discouragement.

It's a whole bunch of words. It's a whole bunch of ideas, but maybe it can simply be put into one word, and that's why. Why is this happening to me?

Why love? Why work? Why worship? Why believe? Why live? Why bother? It's a deep, abiding, dark despair.

So, darkness is my closest friend. And so, when you ask a depressed person how they feel, or who they are, or what's going on, they don't generally say, I'm just discouraged.

[12 : 46] Another person said, the doctor came to my room and said, I'm going to ask you a question. Answer me if you can. If you can't, please don't. Who are you? What do you mean?

When you look inside, who do you see? It was horrible. When I looked inside, I couldn't see anyone. All I saw was a black hole.

I saw no one. C.S. Lewis put it like this, my heart is empty. All the fountains that should run with longing are in me dried up.

Others have said, I feel as though I died a few weeks ago, and my body hasn't found out yet. So, depression is this absence. It's absence of feeling, absence of response, absence of interest, and what fills it up is just pain.

Spurgeon wrote, I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for. David said, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

[14 : 00] John Bunyan, Pilgrim's Progress, one of his characters says, I am now a man of despair, rejected, abandoned, shut up in this iron cage from which there is no escape.

Abraham Lincoln, I am the most miserable man living. I must die or be better. So, it's just the pain gets into everything.

One person wrote, no one knows how badly I want to die. Or the mind is just stuck. I am in a straitjacket. I'm completely bound and tied up.

There's a gag in my mouth. Panic. Self-reliance seems impossible. Infantile dependence is the only way to survive.

Being alone is terrifying. Abandonment is a constant fear. I tried to sleep, but I couldn't. No matter what I did, I couldn't concentrate except on questions like, am I going insane?

[15 : 05] What have I done to deserve this? What sort of punishment is this? Elijah prayed to die. He said, I'm no better than my fathers. His fathers are in the grave.

He's saying, I might as well die. This is how I feel. So, I hope you understand that it's just a little more going on than discouragement.

There's something deeper and darker at work. And so that's why we're going to talk about that. We're going to talk about some of the causes. We're going to talk about what is it like, some of the thought processes that's going on, some of the cures, things like that.

But today we want to just talk about why, why should we study this? Why should we study this? And I think I have seven, seven reasons.

The first is because the Bible talks about it. Because the Bible talks about it. It never says explicitly Bible character A had depression, not in our terms.

[16 : 13] Or Bible character B had this mental illness, or some words that we would understand in how we talk about things. But it does show us men and women who, whether it was for a long term or whether it was for a short term, went through what we would call depression.

So, listen to Moses in Numbers 11. I cannot carry all these people by myself.

So Moses feels completely overworked and with not the ability to do this. I cannot carry all these people by myself. The burden is too heavy for me.

If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now. If I found favor in your eyes, and do not let me face my own ruin. Now, we could say, oh, you shouldn't feel that way.

I just want you to notice that that's how Moses felt. Whether it was good, bad, right, or wrong, that's where Moses was. Or you could think of Hannah crying uncontrollably in the tabernacle at the beginning of 1 Samuel.

[17 : 29] Again, this didn't happen in a moment. Not in this case. She faced barrenness and tormenting from her rival and shame for years on end.

And we know that her husband probably didn't do that great of a job of comforting her because do you remember the thing that he said to help her out? Does anyone remember?

Am I not better than 10 sons? Elijah in 1 Kings 19.

We have his story. There's various psalmists. I've quoted Psalm 88. I think it's Psalm 38. Just thinking off the top of my head where David is talking about his groaning all day long.

His bones are aching. And Psalm 88, it's this perfect psalm that captures this despairing, depressed believer because there's no pick-me-up at the end.

[18 : 38] There's no sudden hope or help. It's just rolling in the deep darkness. And it doesn't get better. And the thing we need to realize is that that psalm is inspired.

It puts its finger on something that Christians and believers can go through. And we need to understand that.

Steve Blome, a pastor who himself has gone through depression, writes, The Psalms treat depression more realistically than many of today's popular books on Christianity and psychology.

David and the other psalmists often found themselves deeply depressed for various reasons. They did not, however, apologize for what they were feeling, nor did they confess it as a sin.

They interacted with him through the context of their depression. Or listen to how Charles Spurgeon put it. You are not the first child of God who has been depressed or troubled.

[19 : 48] Even among the noblest of men and women who ever lived, there's been much of this kind of thing. Do not, therefore, think that you are quite alone in your sorrow.

Pharaoh. He's just looking back over the biblical characters and the biblical life, and he says, If that's happened to you, it happened to them first.

And you're not quite alone. Well, number two. So number one is, the Bible talks about it. Number two is, Why study this? Because it is, it's common. Now, we do need to make the distinction, I don't think it's as common as what modern psychologists have made it out to be, where almost anything and everything gets labeled as depression.

And now everyone is realizing, we have way over-diagnosed. We have way over-medicated. Now, that's not to say that it's not out there, and that medication isn't a real thing, and a real need.

But, the world has gone way too far, and we have the tendency then to over-react in the opposite direction. But we do want to say, that it is relatively speaking common.

[20 : 58] It's not one in a million. It's generally about 10% of people will go through something like this in their life. So just as Charles Spurgeon said, Do not therefore think that you are quite alone in your sorrow.

It's not uncommon in the world, and it's not uncommon in Christians. Just to say this, we are impervious to the shocks that happen to people, to bad news, to traumatic events, to physical difficulties.

Christians in this life, and in these bodies, that are still yet not resurrected and perfected, are not immune to biology, to genetics.

We are not immune to the effects of sin, our own sin, or the sins of others. It's not like you become a Christian, and instantly you have this Teflon coating that keeps every hurt and sadness away from you.

Before they knew of such things, or a way of putting it, Spurgeon could talk about people being marked from birth. So he recognized that there are people that, this is what we would say is genetic, and this is what he said, all our birds are owls or ravens.

[22 : 24] So if a bird could describe you, what bird would it be? Would it be a colorful, happy bird? And he's just saying, all our birds are ravens and owls.

We live in the darkness, or tend to, when one is born with a melancholy temperament. Richard Baxter wrote that he had seen otherwise sound minds suddenly cast into melancholy, or depression, by a fright, or by the death of a friend, or by some great loss, or cross, or some sad tidings, even in an hour.

So, something traumatic, something hard, something extremely difficult, something extremely frightening, it happens to you. And you can be thrown into this.

Most of you know that Charles Spurgeon himself, when he was a young man, a young preacher, was preaching before thousands, in a place, and someone, some prankster yelled fire, and there was a huge stampede, and seven people died.

I think it was seven people died. And it shook him up, and I think three or four weeks later, he preached his first sermon after that event, and said, the Lord knows, I do not feel like I could be here.

[23 : 46] I'm overcome with sorrow, but may the Lord help me. And that reoccurring darkness came back to him because of those events, and even his own physical ailments.

What I'm saying is that we should study this because it's not uncommon, and it's not impossible for Christians to struggle, and perhaps struggle for a long time with it.

Number three, because it impacts our spiritual life. Seems like I've been saying this a lot, but we are body, soul, creatures.

And our emotions and our thoughts, they overlap, both of those elements of body and soul. We know that thinking is a brain activity, but we also know that out of the overflow of our hearts that we have our thoughts and our words.

So, it's both. Thinking is a physical activity. Thinking is a spiritual activity, and feelings are very much the same. When our body is sick, our spiritual and emotional lives are affected.

[24 : 59] And when our spiritual life is in a very poor condition, we suffer physically. Again, read Psalm 38. Guilt and fear can eat your body up.

That's what the psalmist talk about, and that's what the proverbs talk about. Now, so, it's a spiritual issue. A depressed person cannot concentrate to read or to pray.

so much of the time. She doesn't want to meet people, so she may avoid church and fellowship. She often feels like God has abandoned her. And so, why should we talk about it?

Because it's a spiritual issue. It touches our spiritual lives. It's not merely physical. That's all the world wants to say. It's just merely physical. It's not. It has spiritual connections.

Fourth, why talk about it? Because depression may be prevented or mitigated. And mitigated just means softened or shortened or made easier to deal with.

[26 : 06] So, it can be prevented or mitigated. Again, many people have a genetic predisposition to depression. I mean, they just know that fathers and sons and children after them, they can all suffer from this or at least statistically more.

But, the thing to realize is that doesn't mean that it's a foregone conclusion that you'll experience that. Just because your mom and dad went through it doesn't mean that you will necessarily go through it because there are ways of preventing it.

Or maybe the trigger that sets it off never happens in your life and it happened in their life. And so, we want to be, know how to prevent it if we can. Being smart and doing those ten happiness habits that we talked about last, or, was that last week?

They can, two weeks ago, that can keep you from developing it. Again, those are, those ten habits are ten ways to be happy but they're also ten ways of kind of giving yourself some protection against falling into this depression.

Again, others have no genetic predisposition but they do react to some sort of traumatic event. Again, Richard Baxter, the Puritan who, what, 400 years ago now, or 350 years ago now, realized this, that he had seen otherwise sound minds, otherwise healthy, normal, happy people suddenly thrown into melancholy by some sort of terrible event.

[27 : 42] again, knowing and understanding the causes and the cures can help. David Murray gives us another benefit of understanding and that's that the knowledge about depression can prevent dangerous and damaging misunderstandings or mismanagement about it.

He mentions especially the misunderstanding very common among Christians that views going to the doctor or getting medication as just an outright rejection of God rather than perhaps a provision of God and his grace.

Again, we want to understand and have wisdom so that we can deal with it effectively. We're going to talk about medication and what to think about it or at least some parameters.

I'm obviously no doctor but just some biblical parameters to thinking about it later. But why study it? Because it can be prevented. It can be mitigated.

Fifth, why study it? Because it will open doors for usefulness. It will open doors of usefulness. Increased understanding means more usefulness.

[28 : 59] If we saw someone fighting for their life in the middle of a blizzard, the last thing that we would do would be to take their coat from them.

That would be cruel, that would be heartless, that would be thoughtless, and to be under the delusion that we're actually helping them would be incredibly naive.

But the Bible says that's what we do when we tell a depressed person to cheer up. Snap out of it. Come on. Be happy. Let me sing you some songs.

Proverbs 25, 20, like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on soda, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

But we have to realize that proverb is there because people have the tendency to do that exactly that exact thing, to minimize the difficulty and to heartlessly do something that does more damage.

[30 : 07] So we're going to talk about it and how to help people who are going through this because it will make us more useful to our brothers and sisters. We will love them better. Our love will grow in wisdom and insight, and we will be able to care for them with more sympathy.

the general rule is that those who listen most and speak least are the most useful.

But if you want to be useful, it's best to understand the problem and how you can help. And really, the greatest gift that we can give someone who's going through this is sympathy.

However they got there, there's a call for sympathy. And sympathy is the key that opens the door. And sympathy comes with deep understanding of what a person's going through.

Not from some sort of superficial, preconceived notions, and you've already decided everything about them, but when you listen and you're sympathetic with them. So, study it because it opens doors of usefulness.

[31 : 20] Number six, why should we study it? Because it is so misunderstood. Again, it is so misunderstood. People think about depression and they think about people with depression based too much on their own theories, on their own ideas, on their own preconceived notions, on their own self-contained experiences.

We all do this. We all look at people's lives and judge them so much based on what we think and how we would react.

Instead of walking a mile in their shoes, we just look at them walking and judge what they're doing. So, people who have never experienced it have a hard time sympathizing or even grasping why someone is struggling.

They say, I've been sad, and you need to snap out of it, or you've sinned and you need to repent. That was Job's counselors.

It's so misunderstood. Just to emphasize, we need to realize that our own experiences can go a long way.

[32 : 39] our experiences are so strong when we're looking at someone, and our own experiences can lead us astray. This is how one pastor put it.

His name is Jim Glutman. He's a reformed pastor in British Columbia. He said this, and I think it's true. Those who have personal experience with depression, either themselves or their family members, tend to be more sympathetic to the medical model.

That means they tend to be more sympathetic to, wow, there is something really physically, medically going on here. Maybe that's not all of it, but they bring that in more. Those who have little or no personal experience tend to be attracted to the it is sin model.

We need to recognize that it is often our own personal experience which taints our perspective on this issue. And I guess that could work both ways.

We could just put it all up to medical because we've had experience in that direction or we could put it all up to sin because we don't have any experience in it.

[33 : 51] But then Jim Klutman, this pastor, goes on, be on guard because our natural tendency is to judge. Be very careful that you understand their life.

Some of these people have struggled for years with something you have only heard second hand. Think about living in their situation and be compassionate.

Some Christians think it is just sinful to be depressed. We're going to talk about that all later. Now, sin may or may not be at the root of it and sin may or may not be the most important issue.

What we can say is, I think what I can say is this, is that sin is going to have some part with it. There's going to be needs for some repentance, but that doesn't mean that repentance is the first and only thing and repentance is the only issue or the lack of it is the only cause.

we just need to be careful and be slow before we judge people. It's misunderstood.

[35 : 06] So some Christians think that their depression is saying that God is angry with them or that they aren't saved. But that's not the case either.

Again, Charles Spurgeon wrote, depression of spirit is no index. It's no measure of declining grace. Your spiritual life, this is what he says, your spiritual life does not depend on nature or it might expire.

It depends upon grace and grace will never cease to shine till it lights you into glory. It's just to say this, our feelings do not save us.

Whether they're really ecstatic and happy, or when they're really sad or depressed, our feelings do not save us. Jesus saves us. It is Christ and not the absence of depression that saves us.

So why study it? Because it's misunderstood and when we misunderstand, we hurt people. Again, go back to Proverbs. We take away a man's coat, we take away the thing that maybe he's leaning on and helping him to get through a winter storm.

[36 : 25] We take it away. We hurt people when we misunderstand them. We can be so reckless with God's people and with God's children, and we can treat them in a way that we ourselves would hate to be treated, and we can treat them in a way that God himself is displeased with, because he's their father, and he cares for them, and he knows that they are but dust.

And so, just as a pastoral aside, I would beg you, if you err, err on the side of compassion or too much mercy or however you want to put it, err on the slowness to judge, you can always turn up the confrontation.

You can always turn up how strict you're being, but it's very hard to turn that knob down when you've already gone to an 11 on it. So be careful with others.

Last of all, seventh, last of all, it is a talent to be invested. Depression is something that comes from God's hand that we can invest for him.

It's an investment for God. In the coming weeks, we're going to watch a video, and we're going to be alternating some videos and some lessons, but in the coming weeks, we're going to watch some videos, and what we're going to see is real-life people, real-life Christians, who are talking about their experience, and in every case, what you are going to see is a real-life person who has gone through something like this, and they have come out on the other side, and God has used that depression for their good.

[38 : 14] God has used it to help them. People come away with a bigger, better view of God. I'm thinking of this one pastor who talks about, I've gone through these dark valleys, but I've come out on the other side, and saying, God is so good, I never realized how good he was.

That's the strange thing about this is that God uses it to grow his people. God uses it to bring glory to himself. God often, and God really only, uses broken people.

You know the book *Passion and Purity* by Elizabeth Elliott? She quotes Ruth Stahl of Peru. I don't know anything about this lady, but she said this, this Ruth Stahl said this, if my life is broken when given to Jesus, it is because pieces will feed a multitude, while a loaf will satisfy only a little lad.

So when that little boy had his one loaf, it would feed him, but when he gave it to Jesus, and Jesus broke it all to pieces, it fed a multitude. And so depression is not out of God's hands.

However it gets on our doorstep, however it gets there, we're going to talk about all the different causes. It comes from the sovereign hand of God, and it's something to use. It's something to give back to him.

[39 : 45] It's something to give him and say, here, Lord, use me through this. Use me in despite of this. Take this and use it for your glory. And that is part of the hope in the darkness that God can bring glory to himself through it.

God doesn't just have one instrument that he can bring glory to himself. He doesn't just have a happy trumpet. He can take a sad instrument. I think of like an oboe and it's sad sounds.

God can use that instrument to bring glory to himself. So it's a talent to be invested. And so we need to learn how to invest it. Whether we're going through it ourselves or whether we're just helping people who are.

Well, we're out of time. We're dismissed.