

How to Study Depression

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[0 : 00] Well, today we're going to continue our series called Christians Get Depressed Too.! Two weeks ago we saw The Crisis.! That was the title of the chapter, Depression, the Crisis.

And today's lesson is entitled The Complexity. The Complexity. Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. That's probably not a name you're familiar with, but he was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court for a long time at the beginning of the 1900s. Very influential, very esteemed.

And he said this, I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.

And that sums up very much what I want to talk about this morning. There is a simplistic way or ways of thinking about depression that is uninformed.

[1 : 07] And it's simple, not because it's worked through all the complexities and all the implications and all the complexities of the problem and come to grips with it and understood it, but because it really hasn't dealt with the whole scope of the problem.

And so there is a simplicity that has never faced the complexity of the matter. And so when you have a simple theory, it's not just in this, but in anything, it makes it easy for you to think that you know everything you need to know, just on a surface and on a quick examination.

It's easy to be dogmatic, to speak ex cathedra, which I don't know if Roger Michaud is here, but he could tell you what it means from his Roman Catholic days.

When the Pope speaks ex cathedra, it means from the chair. Roman Catholics say that he can speak nothing wrong. He's infallible.

So there's no error, and it's impossible for him to be wrong. Well, sometimes we can almost have that kind of attitude when we're looking at people, that we're, our certainty, and we look at their problems.

[2 : 27] But Holmes says there is a simplicity that comes on the other side of complexity. There is a simplicity. So for Holmes, it's when you've wrestled through all the different opinions, when you've wrestled through all the different law opinions, when you've looked at all the data, when you've looked at all the implications, when you've examined the ramifications of a law, when you've wrestled through all the details of a situation, when you've examined it, and you've looked at that situation in particular, and you've looked at all the details of the matter.

And if you then can find a simple conclusion, he's saying that is a simplicity that's worth having. When you've brought all that data together and you've compiled it and you've boiled it down to something simple, he says that's something, obviously he's speaking hyperbolically, that's worth your life to have.

And I'm saying that there is a certain complexity. There is a real complexity to this matter of depression that makes the wisest pastors and the godliest men slow down and think through things and take their time and vary their opinion and maybe change their prescriptions or tailor make their conclusions.

There's a complexity here that should make us humble and kind and avoid extremes, extreme one-sided opinions, extreme one-sided answers.

And so today we want to think about that and we want to think about how we should study. Two weeks ago we looked at why we should study this. It's something that's relevant.

[4 : 25] It's something that's not unheard of. It's something that touches us spiritually. It's something that the Bible talks about. And so we talked about why we should be talking about this.

And today we want to talk about how. How we should think about it. How we should study it. With what attitude. With what spirit. How we should study it. How we should study it. How we should study it. How we should study it. And so again, it's easy, brothers and sisters, to be opinionated.

It's easy for me. And I'm sure it's easy for you to be opinionated and proud and quick. But again, that is not biblical wisdom.

The Bible's view of wisdom is the attitude of humble discernment. It's humble, slowly thinking through everything.

And that involves us. It says about us and our problems. Ready to learn. So I just want you to listen to some Proverbs as we begin. And just listen to the attitude.

[5 : 27] That's really what we're after today. This attitude. The wise in heart accept commands. But a chattering or a babbling fool comes to ruin.

I'm not going to explain that. But the question is there. Are you more interested in expressing your opinion? In talking? Or in listening?

In learning? In being corrected in your way of thinking? My son, if you accept my words. I just want you to think about that.

The matter of accepting something is a humble position. If someone gives you something, you have to have the humility to receive it. My son, if you accept my words. And store up my commands within you.

Turning your ear to wisdom. And applying your heart to understanding. And if you call out for insight. And cry aloud for understanding. And if you look for it as for silver.

[6 : 26] And search for it as for hidden treasure. Then you will understand the fear of the Lord. And find knowledge. Find the knowledge of God. Then you will understand what is right.

And just. And fair. Every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart. So wisdom is out there. But it's on the other side of humility. It's on the other side of learning. It's on the other side of vigorous searching. You saw all the vigorous searching.

Or you heard that. Of calling out. Of looking for it like silver. Looking for it like treasure. Those things aren't passive. Or easy going.

They're vigorous searching. And so. Wisdom is out there. It's on the other side of complexity. Of other side of looking at all the details. Not on the side of. Just superficial.

[7 : 26] Thinking. So. Here at the beginning. We want to talk about why. What is it about depression that is complex? What is it about it that is complex?

And why then should we deal with it. So humbly. And carefully. When we're thinking about it in ourselves. Or thinking about ourselves. I should say. Or thinking about it in others.

I have a few reasons. The first is this. Because there is. This overlap. Of body. And soul. And it's complex. Because. We are complex creatures.

And this is touching an area. Where that complexity. Is especially. Relevant. And especially. Prevalent. We are fearfully. And wonderfully.

Made. I know. We've. I've said that. Again. And again. But. We must. Give it. The weight. It deserves. We must give it. The weight.

[8 : 23] It deserves. And we have to wrestle. With the implications. Of it. Or. And see the. The possibilities. Of that. So. Take your Bibles.

And turn to. Proverbs. 18:14. Proverbs. 18:14. We're going to be looking at a few Proverbs this morning. And here's where we're going to start. 18:14.

18:14. This is what it says.

A man's spirit. Sustains him. In sickness. But a crushed spirit. Who can bear?

A crushed spirit. So we're body. Soul. Creatures. There's this overlap. And you see just on the surface. Of this proverb. That. One. Affects the other.

[9 : 16] And so I want. I want to think together. With you. About this verse. If you're sick. You're physically sick. And. But. But you're thinking.

And you're feeling. Your emotions. You're. You're. You're. You're. You're thinking. Those things are. Properly working. If your mind and your spirit are in good working order. But you're physically.

Your body. You have a bodily sickness. What are you able to do? How are you able to encourage yourself. Or cheer yourself up. Or just sustain yourself. Just give me some.

Ideas. So you're sick. But. Your mind. Your emotions. Everything is in good working order. There. So.

Okay. You could. Turn on some praise music. You can. Pray. What else could you do? You get the medicine you need. Whether it's.

[10:12] Amoe boosting. Or. Pharmaceutical. To help with the infection. Or whatever. Is going on. From your body. Okay. So you're saying. You have the.

Clarity of thought. To go to the doctor. To get whatever medicine you need. What else? Ask. Ask for help.

Or accept help. From someone. You know. Whether it's your own family. Or if you're in the dead. And you can help. Right. Right. So. Sorry to interrupt. Like. If you're sick.

And everything's working. You say. Oh. Can you help me? What else can we do to sustain. What else do we do to sustain our spirits? When we're. When are. We're bodily sick. Remember that the Lord is sovereign over our sickness.

We. Okay. We're remembering. God's sovereignty over our sickness. And. Let's take that. That's a particular example. But we can. Expand that out.

[11:09] We can remember. The truth. And apply the truth. Roger. You can. Talk to yourself. And say. I've been through this before. So. Temporary.

It will pass. And look forward to. When you're better. Right. So. You can. Be talking to yourself. You can read scripture.

Right. You can believe the promises. You can cheer yourself up with the truth. If you're thinking. And you're feeling. And all of that is working. Then you have this ability.

To sustain yourself. In any number of ways. So. Now. Is it harder when you're sick. Than when you're better.

To cheer yourself up. I'm saying. Is it easier to feel better. Emotionally. When you're well. Than when you're sick. I think the answer is yes.

[12:05] We all know that. Of. Here I am. I have the flu. And I've had it for five days. And. I'm probably not. The happiest. Person on the world. Right. On the planet right now.

But. You can do it. You can sustain yourself. But the. Proverbs says. There's another side of things. Where your spirit is crushed.

It puts its finger on something. Where. Your spirit is crushed. And. Then. There's no. The answer. The solution to that. Is much more difficult.

And he says. And just to think about. What that looks like. A crushed spirit. You've seen things. That are crushed. Charles.

I think it was Spurgeon. I'm not sure. I read this somewhere. But I can't think. Couldn't find it. He. He said. It's like when your soul. Is caught between two millstones. So you know how they.

[13:00] Used to grind wheat. Maybe they still do. Grind wheat with millstones. But there's no wheat there. That's just your soul. Getting crushed. What then.

When you're. You're mentally. Or you're emotionally. Crushed. And falling apart. And you can't. And it's there. It's like you. You can't cheer yourself up. And God seems far away.

And the promises. Don't. Seem to be connecting. With what you're feeling. And. It's like there's this gap there. And you can't. Cross it. And when you read your Bible.

And. And it doesn't seem to help. And maybe you even hear. Condemnation. Instead of help. Because your spirit is crushed.

I read of. One woman who. Who went through. A season of depression. And. She was a Christian.

[13:54] And so she would go to her Bible. And she would look for help. And encouragement. But something was really wrong. And first. So she would read first John three. And I just want you to read this. Or listen to this.

This is what first John three says. And this normally should be a great encouragement. This is this. This then is how we know. That we belong to the truth. And how we set our hearts at rest.

In his presence. Whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts. And he knows everything. Now. That verse is meant to encourage believers.

If your heart is condemning you. Dear child of God. Then realize God is greater than your heart. Your condemning heart.

Doesn't have the final say. God does. And so God says we're his children. And you can think about first John. And it's totality of. We're his children. And he loves us.

[14:51] And Jesus Christ laid down his life for you. In that verse is saying. God is greater than your heart. This is where you can find rest. And what God has said about you.

That's what it means. But this woman became absolutely convinced. That. And there was nothing that anyone could tell her otherwise.

To. That. What this scripture meant. Was that if your heart condemns you. That's only the beginning. God is greater than your heart. You think your heart condemning you is bad. Wait until God gets a hold of you. Wait until God's condemnation comes to you. And so the verse that was meant to bring her help. She couldn't think clearly enough.

Or rationally enough. And couldn't be convinced otherwise. And. And that verse just drove her to more despair. She couldn't be reasoned with.

[15:48] Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones talked about dealing with people. Where he felt like. He was a tangent to their circle. So. We got to think geographically.

Or. Geometrically here. So you know. You have a circle. And a tangent is like this. And he felt like. Everything I said. Just ran off. It never penetrated.

No matter what he did. No matter what he said. It couldn't penetrate their hearts. And their minds. And. The truth would just skip across the surface. Because they were so disturbed.

And so distraught. And they weren't really functioning. Normally. And. So this woman was doing what she was supposed to. She was reading and praying. And. She was doing the things that normally cheer her up.

But a crushed spirit. That's really hard to deal with. And. That's why Proverbs. Says a crushed spirit. Who can bear. It's. It's not something to take lightly.

[16:48] It's. It's a hard thing. And. I think the idea is. Is just how terrible that is. But look over at Proverbs 17.

22. We run into this crushed spirit again. Proverbs 17. 22. And it says. A cheerful heart is good medicine. But a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

So again. You see the. There's this back and forth. Body to spirit. Spirit to body. And that again. This is why this is so complex. And that's why we need to avoid the simplicity.

That just says. It's purely. All. Completely. Spiritual. Or. It's purely. All. Completely. Physical. It generally. Is probably not.

A hundred percent. One. Or the other. And. And you see. Just from these verses. And a lot of other verses. That one side. Always.

[17:44] Affects the other. One side. Always. Affects the other. And so. Depression. Falls at this place. Where body and soul. Connect. And overlap. And that. There's a lot of implications there.

And a lot of possibilities. That need to be reckoned with. And that's why it's complex. Now secondly. Why is it complex? Because the devil. Confuses us.

In this area. The devil. Confuses us. He's at work. He's at work. To confuse us. To. To sow deceit. To sow confusion. To sow darkness. And. So. I want to. I want to read a quote. From Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones here. And. This is what he says. And he's giving a talk.

To the Christian Medical Society. In England. And this is what he said. Now we turn. To consider. The wiles. Of the devil. As they are to be seen.

[18:42] In the confusion. He creates. Between the physical. The psychological. And the spiritual realms. The subject. Is one of the most practical. We can ever consider. We are strange creatures.

Made of body. Mind. Spirit. There. That are. Interrelated. And react. Upon one another. Many of our troubles. In life. Are due to the fact. That. And our failure.

To realize. The place. And function. And sphere. Of each one of these. Many Christian people. In fact. Are in utter ignorance. Concerning this. Realm. Where the borderlines. Between the physical. And the psychological. And the spiritual. Meet. Frequently. I have found. That such leaders. Had treated. Those. Whose trouble. Was obviously. Mainly physical. Or psychological. As purely spiritual.

And if you do. So. You only. Don't help. You aggravate. The problem. Now. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones. [19:36] Is called. He is a doctor. He's not a. PhD. He doesn't have. His doctorate. In theology. He was a medical doctor. He was.

The assistant. To the royal physician. At one point. So. He was a pretty good doctor. By all accounts. He was a trained doctor. An amazing pastor.

Amazing theologian. And preacher. And. But. But notice. What he says. This is. This is why. This is so complex. Because the devil. Will sow confusion. In this. It will.

He'll confuse. Us. And. He's at work. Right here. Where. To confuse. All of these. Categories. And. And. These. These. These. The physical.

Spiritual. And what he calls. The psychological. And. What does the devil. Want. He wants. To hurt. People. He was.

[20 : 31] A murderer. From the beginning. And. So. What does he do? He. He confuses. The helpers. He. He confuses. The needy.

The person. He confuses. The ministers. He confuses. Christians. Who really want to help. He confuses. The person. That is suffering. He confuses. The people. That are around.

That person. Now. Jones. Puts his finger. Especially. On ministers. Who treat people. Only in a spiritual manner. When really. They have a. What he calls. A psychological. Or physical problem. And. He says. What really happens. Is. They're not only. Not helped. They're actually. Positively hurt. But. In defense. Of ministers. I want to say this.

And. Especially. In our. Environment. That we live in. In the world. That we're living in. Now. The devil. Also. Does that. In the other. Direction. Where.

[21 : 27] He'll say. It's only. Physical. Or. It's all. And only. Psychological. So. People. Run. To a doctor. Or. To a therapist. For something.

That is really. A heart issue. A sin issue. And. So. They take medicine. Instead of. Dealing with. Heart issues. And.

What ends up. Happening is. They're no better. For it. They're actually. Positively. Worse. There's confusion. And either way. People are hurt. So.

So. We're complex. Or. This matter is complex. Because. The. We're complex. The devil's at work. And. It's.

Also. Complex. Because. We're dealing. With. Different. People. Different. People. And. Different. People. Are. Different. They.

[22 : 23] Have. Different. Genetics. And. Histories. And. Different. Temperaments. And. Different. Experiences. And. Different. Idols. And. Different. Loves. And. Different. Passions. And. Different. Hobbies.

They're. Different. Different. Families. They're. Different. and even the kind of the sort of depression that they get might be very different turn over to Proverbs 14 in verse 10 this proverb is so full of wisdom obviously all of them are but look at what it says each heart knows its own bitterness and no one else can share its joy so let's just take the bitterness side the sad side no sorrow is exactly the same because the person who is feeling it isn't the same as anyone else and depression and sorrow comes in different forms some is mild and you can sort of fake it some cases are so acute or so powerful that they can leave people unable to talk or unable to reason just think of again Charles Spurgeon was so overthrown with the events at the Surrey Garden when someone yelled fire and people were trampled and it was just terrible he was so overthrown that he could hardly talk for two weeks and it haunted him for the rest of his life he says it would often come back in the winter now we understand I think we all have a sort of a category of you're in the winter you're cooped up and it's easy to start to feel down in his book Lectures to Students he writes this that ministers shut up in their studies in the dim months of fog have all the ingredients for a seething cauldron of despair so you're just and he pictures this student this man this pastor foggy cold hasn't been outside in his books writing writing writing bent over not standing up and he says that's all the ingredients for despair for this great depression that he's talking about and and so he would experience that he could experience that as he went through the winter and sometimes for him it would just be a debilitating terror or debilitating misery and he would be inconsolable his wife tells of a time they were going over some mountains and they were obviously riding some mules or something

I don't know exactly what but and one of the baggage mules in their group nearly slipped off and fell down the mountainside and Charles Spurgeon saw it he was in no danger in and of himself he just saw it and he was stunned and he was paralyzed and he slumped down into the snow and just sat there catatonic we would say the fight flight freeze mechanism in his brain kicked in and he froze and he just sat there in the snow and he shut down and this is what his wife said Susanna we coaxed and pleaded to no purpose and so we sat down with him in the snow that awful night at Surrey Hall was responsible the delicate organism of his wonderful brain had then sustained so much pressure in some part of it that any sudden fright would have power for a moment or two to disturb its balance so his depression and anxiety and those two things very often go together could totally sideline him for a time now what I'm saying is it's complex because that's what happened to him that doesn't happen to everyone and to that extent and so some are worse and some are

milder and some come from one source and some come from another and so what I'm saying is that it means we should have humility and slowness to speak about people we need that wisdom that James talks about that is quick to listen slow to speak and slow to become angry slow to become angry because again each heart knows its own bitterness and no one can share its joy sometimes

I guess what I'm saying is we do wrong when we assume that that person is just like me that person is just like me or that person is just like another person I know no we're different my cup of gall and bitterness sadness could be different than yours now we're similar obviously but we're different we're all humans we all partake of the human experience and all of that but yet at the same time we're unique creatures of God we're not robots that are all the exact same so we have much in common and yet within that there is a unity and there is also a diversity and we need to come to terms with both of those so it's complex it's complex because it crosses mind body spirit because the devil is at work to confuse us to hurt people to damage people and he and it's complex because we're different and things affect us differently and this depression can be very different so what does that humility look like

[28 : 55] I think I've gave you some ideas of what that humility looks like as you're thinking about it what does that carefulness and appreciating the complexity look like I want to just give one particular personal not personal to me but personal to you application and then I want to look at how two different experienced pastors handled it and the one personal practical application for when you're thinking about yourself is I think we need to be very careful when we are trying to self diagnose ourselves because actually one of the worst persons the least objective probably the most confused the one that's not dealing with all of the ramifications and all the implications and all the possible alternatives is you and so there you want to say you know what

I want to go talk to a pastor or I want to talk to an experienced a real experienced Christian I want to talk to someone who can maybe speak objectively into my life self diagnosis I think that's probably the bane of the medical field right now right because people go on WebMD diagnose themselves go to the doctor tell the doctor what's wrong with them and it's not what's wrong with them we can do that and so we need to be careful and so having the humility to say you know what I need someone else to talk to me I need to talk about this with someone else go to one of the pastors go to a spiritually mature person go to someone and ask them to talk into your life be very slow to then try to diagnose yourself for any number of reasons now I want to talk about how two experienced pastors handled this complexity and really please don't get caught up in the exact particulars or try to argue with them

I just want you to appreciate their attitude their attitude the first is from Ian Murray's biography of Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones and this is Ian Murray this is a long quote from him but he's talking about how Dr.

Martin Lloyd Jones dealt and helped when people came to him for help it says this is what Ian Murray says in interviewing a person who had come for help MLJ followed some basic procedures beginning with diagnosis there were certain broad questions which he always asked himself such as was the person a Christian or a non-Christian that's an extremely important question to try to put your finger on find the answer to was the problem spiritual or were there indications of the individual had physical or mental problems requiring medical advice or treatment preliminary diagnosis of this MLJ regarded as far from easy and he often emphasized to his fellow ministers the harm that could be done by wrong evaluations quote we are dealing with souls with persons end quote his method was to listen at length if necessary and with occasional questions which might at times cut at right angles across the speaker's own line of thought so he would be asking pointed questions that would make them think and maybe even think from a different perspective because he wanted to see what they said and what they were thinking so how do you deal with the complexity of depression well you take your time you look at different possibilities you listen you ask questions and

Jones was very much against easy pat answers he said this again to the medical society the first task is always diagnosis let me say it once it is something that is extremely difficult again this is why I'm saying don't try to diagnose this on your own don't try like get someone else's opinion I find that differential diagnosis in this realm is usually much more difficult than in clinical medicine difficult as that may be at times do you hear what he's saying like I've done diagnosis in the medical clinical setting that's hard a lot this is even more difficult do you just appreciate he's not flippant he's not like

oh I have all the answers I know everything this is easy to deal with that's what humility and appreciating the complexity looks like this is hard there's multiple sources multiple routes of treatment

[34 : 03] I need to listen I need to be careful because I'm dealing with souls here well what does it look like here's a different pastor and this one is from way before modern medicine and Sigmund Freud and modern psychology and I very much appreciate he's a Puritan Richard Baxter and I appreciate what he has to say because he's coming at it from a totally different historical mindset and he's not bound up with the modern considerations he sort of has a fresh take even though it's extremely old take but he's not burdened!

you know the controversies and the difficulties and everything of today so he's not burdened! He has his own opinion and this is what Richard Baxter said now I do want to say Richard Baxter was an extremely practiced counselor he dealt and talked with individuals a lot this is what he said I'm going to have to do some translating here because he's talking in 1650s language he says this make as much of a discovery as you can how much of the trouble of your mind arises from your melancholy and bodily distempers in other words he's talking about sort of brain or bodily trouble problem how much of it arises from that brain problem or bodily problem and how much from discontenting!

afflictions in your worldly estates in other words unsettling painful afflictions that have happened to you or to you to those near you so deeply troubling painful things have those things happened to you and now you're sad you gotta look at that and he says according to your discovery make use of the remedy whatever that remedy is that matches that you need to make use of that remedy now I put these two causes of trouble together in the beginning because I will presently dismiss them and apply the rest of these directions only to those troubles that are raised from sins and wants in grace so he's saying we have at least two or three possibilities here you need to make a full discovery of them but here you have where does this depression coming from well it's from sins and wants of grace and he has lots of directions for that now we're almost done here so lots of possibilities and just think about what we've talked about earlier mind body overlap intersection interrelated that means a lot of these things are even going to be interconnected because when you're sick you have a tendency to to do to believe the worst about

God and so you're going to have to deal with your unbelief so you have a bodily problem that might be contributing to it but you also are inter interpreting it and maybe you need to interpret it differently it's you got to be careful well he goes on after that and he says well and again I want you to appreciate his humility and carefulness what he's dealing with he goes on and he says if this is from the disease of melancholy then get a good doctor to help and what is a good doctor you need to see a doctor and he says what kind of doctor do you need to see he says a godly one an ancient one and then he says choose a physician I don't know what he means by ancient I guess fairly experienced he says choose a physician who is specially skilled in this disease and has cured many others meddle not with ignorant boasters nor with young inexperienced men nor with hasty busy overdoing venturous men who cannot have time to study the patient's temper and disease that means their their attitude their spiritual way they look at things patient's temper and disease but choose experienced cautious men again that's what humility and carefulness looks like that's what he's after he's saying this is complicated if you do need to go to a doctor don't go to just any doctor who won't take their time to really listen and think through your whole case but go to cautious experienced men not busy overworked overdoing men so really what what is this morning about it's just a plea for humility a plea for carefulness and gentleness and kind being kind and even open mindedness when you think through this topic if Richard

Baxter thought it was tricky and Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones thought it was difficult then I really think we should have that same kind of humility and carefulness when we're dealing with ourselves when we're dealing with other people when we're dealing with this whole matter we need the same humility and carefulness that they had our time's up we're dismissed up