

Responding to Depression

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[0:00] Well, I've been thinking a lot just going back a couple months about sleep and the relationship of our body and our souls and our souls.

A topic, it's certainly applicable because I'm sure someone here right now is probably wrestling with depression, if statistics are any indication.

I don't know who you are, but it is common to man. And it's even more common in winter, and that's the direction we're going. I read a story, a report that basically when we make that change, when we lose that hour during daylight savings when that ends, there's an uptick in depression because people are not getting the same amount of sunshine as they used to.

They're not out in the morning when the sunshine is. Instead, they're generally more out in the evening when the darkness is. And so what they see is this uptick in depression.

So I think it's a topic that I want to talk about because it's something that is common to us. It's common to this time of the year, certainly. And so I want you to pretend as we begin that you are a counselor and a woman comes to you.

[1:40] And she's depressed. She's down. She's feeling hopeless. She feels like God is far away. Prayer feels like talking to a wall.

She can barely get up out of bed in the morning. Her life just feels like one big, long sigh.

This is never going to get better. Maybe you don't have to pretend to be a counselor. Maybe that's kind of where you are at, what you're going through. But I want you to put yourself in that counselor's shoes.

What do you tell this lady? How do you take care of her? How do you want to take care of yourself? Where do you start? How do you begin? Do you say to yourself, depression, that trouble of soul is really just that?

It's something spiritual. It's something connected to sin in her life, perhaps. It's a spiritual problem. The Bible does say, rejoice in the Lord. And I'll say it again, rejoice.

[2:45] And so maybe what that lady needs to do is start doing that. Rejoicing in the Lord. To start believing the promises.

And if she would obey, if she would believe those promises, if she would connect to the gospel, connect to Jesus Christ, then her depression, her anxiety would trouble her no more.

And so if that's the tact that you're going to take, then you as a counselor are going to say that you need to start reading your Bible more, looking at the promises of God. You're going to direct her to those commands that would help her to obey.

And you would do your best to encourage her to believe, wouldn't you? You would do your best to show her those promises, impress those upon her.

The problem is spiritual, so the solution is spiritual. Or maybe you would say, on the other hand, that this depression, this anxiety, or this soul problem, it's a physical problem.

[3:50] It's a hormonal problem. It's a brain chemistry problem. And so perhaps what this lady needs to do is to take an antidepressant, to go to the doctor, to get medical treatment.

If the doctor can find the right medication at the right dosage and so forth, that that should help solve the problem. The problem is physical, and so the solution is physical.

Which one is right? Which one is the right treatment? Well, what does the Bible teach? That's what we want to know. And I think if we look on the Bible on the whole, if we think about it in its totality, and what we were talking about this morning, about preaching the whole counsel of God, if we're taking the Bible in its wholeness, I think we have to say that neither one is totally right.

Why not? Why isn't it spiritual? I think that's the direction that probably a lot of us would lean, or maybe some of us lean towards, why isn't it just physical?

Because both of those reduce humanity, reduces that person to something less than God made that person. because both of them reduce man's plight to something less than it really is.
[5:12] We don't just have spiritual problems, we have physical problems, and we don't have just physical problems, we have spiritual problems. And both of them fail to see just the full extent of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Jesus not only saves us spiritually, in the resurrection he saves us physically. He saves our bodies from the power of death and decay and destruction.

And so we need to, if we're looking at the Bible, we need to say man's problem and God's solution is neither one or the other, it's both. And this reduction isn't just sort of a theoretical problem, because we aren't talking about a theoretical problem here.

Like I said earlier, statistically, one or two or three or four of you are suffering from depression right now. This deep, lasting sadness.

We are real people. And becoming a Christian doesn't change the troubles that we face. And so we're real people, we live in real families, and we have real lives to live.

[6:20] And so does she have a spiritual problem with a spiritual solution, or does she have a physical problem with a physical solution? What does the Bible teach? The Bible teaches both.

Both. It's not necessarily either or. We probably need to address both sides. And I'm going to give you three reasons for that.

The first reason is that God made us physical, spiritual beings. And we have to reckon with that when we think about ourselves and our own problems, that God made us physical, spiritual beings. God made us embodied souls. Or to put the emphasis on the other side, God made us bodies with souls. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 2, verse 7.

Genesis 2, verse 7. This is a very familiar text. And I think it's helpful because it takes us back to what we are. It reminds us of how God made us.

[7:24] So Genesis 2, verse 7. It says there, So what is man?

What are we? Well, we are bodies that God has put souls into. We are physical beings, but we are also spiritual beings.

And while after death, for a short time, we are going to be souls that don't have bodies, at least not any kind of body that we would recognize, I guess.

Without these bodies, that's not normal. After death is not going to be the entrance into glory quite yet, or it's not going to be the entrance into our final salvation.

It's the entrance into a temporary period where we're just men, the souls of just men made perfect. Yet we're still without our bodies. So here we are.

[8:41] We're embodied souls. We are bodies with soul. And so man's problem can't be reduced to something spiritual. It can't be reduced to something physical.

Because we always have both. We are always living life with both going on. And there's not this thick line, this great wall of separation between the two.

Where there's like no overlap or no connection. Because what we do with our souls, we do with our bodies. And what we do with our bodies, we do with our souls. So Paul says, He who joins himself to a prostitute, joins Christ to that prostitute.

There's no purely spiritual sin. And there's no purely physical sin. We are whole creatures living in bodies, living as souls.

And so just right there, I think we hamstring ourselves, if we're to say that if we limit ourselves to looking for solutions to depression and anxiety and other mental disorders in the purely physical realm or the purely spiritual realm.

[9:54] Whatever problems we have, whatever challenges, whatever brokenness that we experience in this world, we experience as full men, as full women, living with bodies and souls.

Now that's the first reason God made us physical, spiritual beings. Here's the second reason that I think we need to generally look for solutions on both sides.

And that is our fall into and under sin was a body-soul fall. Our souls didn't just fall.

Our bodies fell as well. Both fell into the brokenness of sin. Both fell under the curse. And so we are very used to thinking of what happened to us spiritually when we fell.

But I want to think for a moment, what happened to our bodies when they fell into sin or under sin? Well, in the body, or in the beginning, our bodies were perfect, weren't they?

[10:57] They were perfect canvases to display our hearts, to display love for God. There were no counter-desires.

Our brains, our hearts, our hands, our feet were these perfect canvases to display and to carry out love and obedience. What Adam and Eve wanted to do in love and worship towards God, their body went along with it fully and perfectly.

But is that the case now? Our bodies are fallen, aren't they? And now we've been filled with all kinds of sinful desires. And those sinful desires are not merely spiritual.

They are physical. They are physical desires that are twisted and expressed in our bodies. Our bodies can yearn for what is sinful.

Sexual sin. All kinds of physical sins. Overeating, getting drunk, drugs, those sorts of things. Our bodies become enslaved to those addictions.

[12:07] Our bodies find it easier to seek comfort and sleep and food than to find comfort in God. When we want to pray, our brains wander off.

I think I've said this before, but I think sometimes the best way to fall asleep at night is to try to pray. And I couldn't sleep before, but now all of a sudden, I can.

You want to hear the word of God. But you also want to fall asleep. That's why Paul says, I beat my body and make it my slave.

Why does he have to say that? Why would he say that unless there was something that he had to restrain? That he had to control? There's something in our bodies that demands control, restraint, force.

And like Paul said, I find another power at work within my members. Something in me wants to sin. And it's not purely spiritual.

[13:14] It's this physical aspect to it. It's not just sin. It's also brokenness. The frailty. Under the curse of God. We don't die right away, but we enter into this process of dying.

To be born is to be set on that train going to death. That curse has brought weakness into our physical frames, into the way that we think and the way that we act.

The fall has not only damaged our souls, but our bodies as well. And so the canvas that used to be perfect, that used to go right along and display God's beauty and glory perfectly, it's not that way anymore.

It's been twisted. It's been torn. And so even if we can imagine a beautiful picture, even if we can imagine a beautiful painting, we aren't painting on a clean white canvas anymore.

All of us are living in these bodies that are slanted, that are sloped in a certain way toward brokenness, towards sin.

[14:27] And there's nothing we can do about it to a great degree. So here we are.

Just in this matter of depression. It's helpful to realize that 50%, they've done a lot of studies, and 50% of people's general mood and disposition, whether they're cheerful or not so cheerful, is genetically determined.

50%. So that's probably why, more than likely, you're kind of like your parents. But you're not altogether like your parents. Because 40% of your mood and your disposition is determined by your thinking.

So how you're thinking and processing life, that goes a great degree, a great deal. And then the other 10% is just your present circumstances. That's why one person can be in some circumstances, and they're fine, they're cheerful.

And then the other person can be in those same circumstances, and they're depressed, and they're down, and they're angry. So what I want you just to notice here is that if 50% of our general just sort of disposition is genetically determined, then we have to realize that your canvas very well may be slanted in a certain way.

[15:49] Just because of the way you were born. The way God knit you together in your mother's womb. It's well known that depression and anxiety run in families. That's not to say that this is inevitable.

That's not the point. But it's just to say that there is something in fact, there is just something to the fact that we are fallen body-soul creatures.

It's not something that we can just discount and do away with. It's not something that we can just forget about. It shouldn't surprise us if we are really body-soul creatures that heredity, that biology plays in our experience of life.

So that is part of everyone's circumstances, for good or for bad. So part of the way God has made you is in this area as well.

So here we are, fallen body-soul into sin. And so our trouble is not purely a spiritual trouble. There is a physical aspect to it. And then third, the Bible teaches that there is an ongoing interaction between our body and our soul.

[17:04] They're interconnected. We can't just focus on one without focusing or thinking about the other one. Because the Bible teaches that they're interacting. They're connected somehow.

Don't ask me how. They're connected, though. Proverbs 17, 22. A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

A crushed spirit dries up the bones. It's interesting. They've done studies on optimists and pessimists. I was telling someone just over lunch.

And pessimists, people who are pessimistic, who think the worst is coming, who have their eyes focused on the worst things, they suffer from heart disease and cancer and die of those things at a greater rate than optimists.

A cheerful heart is good medicine. A crushed spirit dries up the bones. Proverbs 16, 24. Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

[18:10] Psalm 32. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away. David's saying my physical health declined when I was keeping that guilt inside of me.

Proverbs 5 talks about the result of a life of sin. It says, That's what we see here.

When you are living with guilt, when you are living in sin, it's going to affect your body. But then we also know that our physical bodies can affect our souls and our minds.

Last month we talked about the lack of sleep. If you are not sleeping like you are, it's far easier to get depressed. It's far easier to get anxious. It's far easier to get angry.

And all the rest. You know those things because you've experienced them. If you're running on two hours of sleep and you do that maybe two or three nights in a row, you're going to have a hard time keeping it together, aren't you?

[19:23] On the other hand, when our body is getting the nutrition that it needs, it's far easier to be happy. Psalm 104 says, God gives wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their heart.

Physical, spiritual. Our bodily health affects our emotions. You see that when you're sick. It's far easier to get depressed when you're sick. Remember, think of Job.

Part of his suffering was not only the loss of his children and the loss of his livestock and all the rest. Part of his suffering that led him to grow bitter and depressed, I think to a great degree, was these painful sores.

And it says he sat there scraping it with his pottery. And the longer he sat in that place of being sick, of having comforters that weren't comforting, the more discouraged, the more demanding, the more shrill he became.

It was both mental and physical suffering that drove Job to that place of, God, I want an answer to that place of depression.

[20:35] And that's why I think when we are dealing with some mental problems, we shouldn't just think of the problem as purely spiritual, nor should we think of it as purely physical. We are body-soul creatures.

We are fallen body-soul creatures. And our body and our soul are constantly always interacting. So, that's theology. And I hope I'm not losing you.

So let's go back to the practical example. What do we do with our friend who comes to us and we want to help her? What does she need?

Where can we begin? Now, there's all kinds of ways to begin. But I think we want to say that the answer is looking at both sides of that issue.

We want to address both sides of the condition. There very well could be a physical side to her condition. There very well could be a spiritual side. So what does she need?

[21:38] What do you need? Perhaps she needs to work on getting sleep. Perhaps she needs a vacation.

Perhaps she needs sunshine. Charles Spurgeon had to vacation a month or two every winter, or his depression would become absolutely debilitating.

So that's what perhaps this lady, I mean, needs. For Charles Spurgeon, those cloudy, dark, English winters became too much for him.

All the work, the lack of sunshine. And he needed vacation. He needed sunshine. He needed warmth. He needed the Mediterranean. So every winter, usually between November and February, he would go down to southern France.

So perhaps a vacation. Perhaps just sunshine. Perhaps making sure the sleep and the rest are there. Perhaps this lady needs to go to the doctor.

[22 : 43] Perhaps medicine is a part of what she needs. Richard Baxter, the Puritan, was a well-known theologian. He was a theologian.

He was a well-known counselor, physician of souls. And I found what he said to be very helpful. Listen to what he said in this whole area. He's talking about depression.

And he says, this is just one of the many things, but he says, If other means will not do, neglect not medicine. And listen to this.

Although they will be adverse to it, as believing that the disease is only in the mind, they must be persuaded or forced to it.

And then he goes and talks about a woman who was depressed, and her depression would not lift. Her husband eventually died, and some doctor came over and stuck a pipe down her throat, and she got better.

[23 : 43] I don't know what they poured down that pipe, but that's what he's saying. Perhaps they need to be persuaded or forced to it. Then he goes on.

Medicinal remedies and theological remedies are not often to be given together by the same hand. But in this case of perfect complication of the maladies of mind and body, I think it not unfit.

If I do it, not unskillfully, my advice is that they that can have an ancient, skillful, experienced, honest, careful physician.

If they do, neglect not to use him. So rest, exercise, sunshine, better food, medicine.

Then a doctor might be exactly what our friend needs. But then there is spiritual work to do. And I'm running out of time, but I know I've been talking a lot about the physical, but there is the spiritual work to do.

[24 : 55] We need to do all that we can to encourage them, to do what we were talking about earlier, to help her along spiritually, to be her friend, to be a shepherding soul to her, to come beside her.

And we have to realize in these cases, a lot of times things don't just change quickly. They need the word of God, but they also need for you to stand beside them, to keep giving it to them, to not yourself be discouraged by their discouragement, not to throw your hands up saying, I'm fed up. Just believe. They need to be helped along spiritually. She needs the promises of God. She needs a strong dose of the grace of God.

The gospel is a cheerful sound. It gives joy to the heart to think all my sins are laid upon Jesus, and now God's heart is loving toward me. To hear the promise that we heard today, that we memorized, that this is his everlasting covenant with us, to never stop doing us good.

And so tomorrow, her eyes all, the only thing she might be seeing is, is the bad that is going to come. And we need to show that, no, God is going to do her good. That God loves his broken and hurting people.

[26 : 20] Now it's just to say that the physical and the spiritual are not opposed to each other because we live out our bodies as physical, spiritual people.

And so, just like Richard Baxter said, in this case where there's this perfect complications of body and soul, we need to look to both.

Now the last thing I want to say about all this is, is this, just this idea that we are these physical, spiritual beings. And that we all have experienced that kind of fall.

And we have experienced it differently. It should make us compassionate towards one another. Because we don't always know what our brothers and sisters are going through. We don't always know what it's like for them.

We don't know the physical challenges that they are facing, the cards that they have been dealt. Just because it's easy for us to be happy and strong doesn't mean it's easy for them to be happy and strong.

[27:30] God only knows everything that each one of us is dealing with. We don't always know what it's like for them. And so we need to be slow to judge, slow to condemn, slow to ridicule.

Perhaps there's more going on there than we realize. Perhaps the way that God has made them is different than the way God has made you.

And instead of saying, why don't you be happy like I am, maybe we need to move towards them with compassion and love. God moved toward us with mercy.

He moved toward our brokenness with mercy. And so therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness and humility and gentleness and patience.

And over all of these virtues, put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity. If God has done that for us, been all those things for us in our brokenness, then let us move toward our brothers and sisters with that same kind of compassion and humility.

[28:54] Humility that says, maybe it's different. Maybe I don't know everything. Maybe I need to do more listening and more believing and less saying, oh, I know what the problem is.

And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity. Let's be a loving, sympathetic congregation towards one another.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that you do call us your holy and dearly loved people.

We find comfort in knowing that that's how you feel, that's your attitude, your disposition towards us, that you will never stop doing us good.

and I pray that you would help us to understand more fully your mind and your heart especially, that we would know in a deeper way how we are made and we thank you for even teaching us these things.

[30:03] But we pray that above all this, that you would help us to be compassionate and kind and patient and humble toward one another. For any here that is suffering from depression and sadness that will not lift, Lord Jesus, you were called the man of sorrows and you are familiar and acquainted with grief.

You are not afraid to be sad and so we pray that you would draw beside them and in your kindness and your mercy that you would sustain them and lift them and encourage them and use us, use us as your hands and your mouth in whatever way you choose.

We ask these things in your name. Amen. .