

Depression

Good Morning! For some of you...

Anyone ever been depressed?

This morning, I am going to tackle a very hard topic in Christian circles... This topic is depression & Anxiety...

For many of us, we have grown up with the belief that depression or anxiety are sin... Anyone who exhibits these symptoms is lacking in faith. Today I want to talk plainly and scripturally about these things in the effort to dispel some man-made religious ideas... I want to tackle these head on, scripturally and bring some clarity to the issue.

First, let me ask a question... How many people do you think have come to church and had troubles with social anxiety or depression and yet have put on a smile and faked feeling great to simply fit in?

Second, let me ask this... How many people want to look like they have a lack of faith? How many want to be judged by their peers in church?

Third, How many people have failed to receive prayer and support from the body of Christ when they are sick, anxious or downtrodden due to fear of how they will be perceived?

Have you ever failed to ask for prayer or support because of fear of condemnation by your brothers and sisters?

Let me start by saying this: "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." Romans 8:1

In saying this do we understand that he has not condemned us but He has set us free?

Folks, do we all agree that he has set us free?

Then let's assess who are we to condemn others who come to the church with needs?

Has there been so much insecurity in the church that we have a need to feel superior when someone isn't 100%? Why do we judge them? If we are looking down on someone who is ill, anxious, grieving or depressed when they come to the house of God, we seriously need to look inside at why?

Now there are many Christians have problems with others who are not 100% because of a genuine desire to see them at 100% and their reasoning is not due to pride or wanting to be superior, this group has a genuine desire to understand the issues that the person is facing scripturally... They want their brother or sister to seize ahold of everything that Christ has for them. We need to discuss approach

Forgive me but to make my points this morning it is necessary to generalize a bit. Not everything is black and white but let me be really clear here... There are things that well meaning Christians, with the best of intentions, get wrong...

As a shepherd it is my responsibility to bring definition to the scriptures and to clear out man made assumptions...

What makes illness difficult is sometimes issues are spiritual not physical in nature.

Point Number 1

Depression isn't what some people in God's kingdom make it out to be...

Friends, depression is not always a spiritual disorder, and emotional dysfunction or a character defect in the individual.

We have talked time and time again about choice... And so many get the idea that one can choose to be depressed or happy. For a few, this is true... but to those who are truly clinically depressed, it is not a choice.

Asking someone to choose to not be depressed is like telling a man who has been shot in the chest to stop bleeding.

I state here and now that God is sovereign and he can and will heal whom he chooses, when he chooses.

Where the problem in the church is... is that we choose to judge the person who is suffering with the phrase: "If only you had enough faith!" While this may be true, it is a problem, let me show you why...

Before we get into that I ask you to consider, how many Band-Aids have been placed on people who needed real healing?

(Wait for a response)

Great so if our theoretical gun shot victim is prayed for and isn't immediately healed; do we stand around in the ER pointing fingers and asking who didn't have enough faith and ultimately blame the dead patient. Of course not!

So what is the difference with depression or anxiety? The difference is we can't see the person mentally bleeding... "It's all in their head"

Now as a pastor I have seen depression due to demonic attack, I have seen unresolved issues in the past or suppressed anger etc. And while I know that there is definitely a spiritual element in mental illness, many times there is a chemical imbalance in the brain or a traumatic brain injury or various other causes.

What I am saying people, is that we need to use spiritual discernment. We can't just throw around moral pronouncements. We need to pray and ask God to guide us on the best course of action.

Does it help a depressed person to tell them to have more faith?

(or)

Does it help a depressed person to show them how to have more faith?

You see many times we tell people to have more faith because it is just the easy way to deal with the problem at hand. It's like a doctor telling a gun shot victim to not bleed...

You see, it is far easier to tell a person to Choose to believe or have more faith then it is to sit and build relationship; To listen to their problems and to help them process them.

Do we agree that God can heal anything?

So then, why does the scripture say: "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion." Romans 12:15

Why should we weep with those who weep?

Food for thought isn't it...

Matthew 5:4

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Point Number 2

Mental Illness and Depression are not always sin, sometimes it is, but it doesn't matter the cure is the same...

Have you considered that maybe just maybe, God is working in the individual's life? That God is bringing something in the person's life to the threshing floor? Have you ever considered that God is causing them to find comfort by remembering the Word of God, Maybe the depression is the result of impending change?

Isaiah 1:18

"Come now, and let us reason together,"

Says the Lord,
"Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.

As Christians, we can judge only by the fruit of the Spirit in an individual's life, not by their mental state...

Friends, have we fallen so far from God's grace that we have come to believe that mental illness is a sin?

How many people here today know that sin in a person's past can cause depression?

How many people here today know that physical abuse in the past can cause depression?

How many people here today know that substance abuse in the past can cause depression?

How many people here today know that unresolved anger in the past can cause depression?

Truth is there are lots of causes of depression, some spiritual, some physiological.

It can feed itself

How many people here today have seen sin continue as a coping mechanism for those who are suffering with guilt and condemnation?

A guy smokes pot because he feels he needs to escape life, then he feels guilty about it, gets depressed, feels unworthy, needs to escape and smokes some more pot... The enemy uses condemnation to trap people. He uses unresolved hurt to prevent change.

Folks, why would we as Christians do anything to prevent someone from seeking help in the church, or from the body of Christ? If our

mindset is stopping people from reaching out to Jesus, Guess what has to change...

When mental illness is the result of sin and a person is not simply convicted over the sin but condemned, the result is always the same, Isolation and Alienation

Why would the word of God tell us to confess our sins to each other and tell us that fellowship is so important if when we get together we prevent each other from getting the help we need, due to a man made, religious viewpoint?

Do we want to be a museum for saints or a hospital for sinners?

When depression is the result of sin and we condemn the person for it, it prevents them from getting treatment!

We are far better off to be loving and relational. Being judgmental prevents people from coming to Jesus for help. Not all healing is instantaneous or miraculous. For some healing, God expects us to walk on a journey with each other...

When we want to deal with depression and anxiety we need to deal with the root cause of the hurt, anger or trauma that caused it in the first place. Enough with the Band-Aids already! We need to care enough to not be judgmental; we need to have enough faith to walk the journey knowing that God knows what's best.

Here is my point, even if a person does not have enough faith to be healed, judging how much faith a person has is not our call... Our job is to keep showing the person Christ until they do have enough.

Point Number 3

Easy answers and the Word of God

Philippians 4:4-6

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.
Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

How often we say be anxious for nothing, yet did you know that the context of this scripture is to be united, joyful and in prayer?

While true we are to be anxious for nothing, this happens when we are united as a body supporting each other, being joyful with each other and raising the spirits of those who are down and utilizing a principle of praying and handing our problems over to God...

This is not meant to be a moral pronouncement thrown at one in the body who suffers, it means be encouraged we are with you, God is with you and we are going to walk this out together...

Another one I always hear is Matthew 6:25-34

“ Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

“ So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

“ Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘ What shall we eat? ’ or ‘ What shall we drink? ’ or ‘ What shall we wear? ’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

This is an amazing scripture that is an encouragement to each of us that God will take care of us.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus placed this wonderful encouraging scripture right between Matthew 6:24 and Matthew 7:1

Matthew 6:24 says: "" No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

Which is an admonishment to not focus your life on material wealth

And Matthew 7:1-5 which reads:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, " Let me remove the speck from your eye "; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Smart Guy that Jesus!

We don't place our focus on money but on faith in him and relationship with each other. Immediately followed by an admonishment to not get judgmental over another's issues in the church but take care of our issues so that we can actually help each other.

You see for way too long lazy exegesis of scripture has hurt people. We need to be scholars of the word and look at the larger intent.

Friends, what scares me is that when a person is really anxious, depressed or down, by our very actions we can actually hurt each other by convincing people that in their illness they are not obeying God. That he is apart from them.

What we really should be doing is making sure that they know that he will never leave them nor forsake them, that he stands closer than a brother and that he loves them with an everlasting love.

We cannot judge this because God's hand isn't always obvious. We all want a blab it and grab it miracle, but sometimes God wants more.

Remember King David's psalms... in some of them he literally laments in psalms 31:12:

I am forgotten like a dead man, out of mind;
I am like a broken vessel.
For I hear the slander of many;
Fear is on every side;
While they take counsel together against me,
They scheme to take away my life.

Does this sound like a happy man?

What am I saying here?

Let's not pull out our Bibles and start throwing out of context scripture at each other. Instead let's follow Christ's example and look to each other in the body of Christ in love. Let's take the examples from scripture realizing that even those in the Word of God struggled. Let's examine how God led them through the difficulty, but most of all let's let the Holy Spirit do the job of conviction, because we are only capable of condemnation... Let's not be the enemy's tool in the church. Let's do love.

Point Number 4

Depression isn't always obvious

Friends, people who are depressed can become very good at hiding their symptoms... I have heard one person in the church say to another: "I am depressed" to which the other responded: "But you seem so happy all the time!" Our culture has attached such a stigma to depression that

it often is hidden from friends, family and doctors. Churches shy away from talking about it, because it appears to be a lack of faith. Because of this the elder, worship leader or Sunday School teacher suffers silently.

Here is my appeal to you this morning!

Since Jesus is the great physician and he came to heal the sick and the lame, isn't about time as his body we start to take back our role in society and lead our culture to do the same?

I for one do not want to hinder a Christian who needs guidance and support. While we don't have professional psychologists on staff we do have the Elders, Pastors and leaders filled with the Holy Spirit and the Love of God and filled a love for each other. We need to look at spiritual solutions, and not stigmatize medical treatment.

We need to be a safe haven. We need to be non-judgmental. Most of all by not using Band-Aids on Gunshot wounds, we need to be ready to celebrate recovery!

We need to create a culture of honor, a society wherein healing is achieved through a prayerful, loving community open to allow God to move and to heal in its midst.