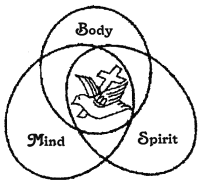


Don't Suffer Alone



"Be encouraged! There is light at the end of the 'depression' tunnel. There is hope for one walking through the pain. Please...don't suffer alone."

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Hebrews 4:14-16

Please do not ignore or minimize your "time of need". We have all experienced times of discouragement and depression. Depression has been called "the common cold of emotional illness". It is a problem that affects people from ALL backgrounds, ALL careers, ALL denominations, ALL age groups, and ALL cultures. It is also a problem that is often misdiagnosed, misunderstood and confused with a 'lack of faith'.

Depression can range from 'feeling blue' or 'down' to a serious disorder, including feeling suicidal. It is an 'emotional state of pain', a 'thinking state of confusion', and a 'physical state of dysregulation'. Psalms 6 & 13 uses expressions such as: "my bones are in agony, my soul is in anguish, I am worn out from groaning. I flood my bed with weeping, my eyes grow weak with sorrow. How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? Give light to my eyes or I will sleep in death." Certainly, our Lord does not ignore or minimize the emotional turmoil of the human condition and addresses it head on in His Word. The InterLutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness states that "Being emotionally well means feeling the full range of human emotions and expressing them appropriately. Self-awareness is the first step. Recognizing and honoring your own feelings and those of others - stress, contentment, anger, love, sadness, joy, resentment - will help you to live abundantly."

Depression can result from a genetic predisposition to chemical imbalances, trauma, loss or adjustment. Often early childhood trauma or abuse can trigger depression later in life. It can also be caused by burnout, unresolved grief, pent-up emotions, unresolved bitterness, stress, and sleep deprivation, among others things. Some symptoms of depression include: low self-esteem; low energy or fatigue; poor appetite or overeating, feelings of hopelessness; poor concentration; a persistent, sad, empty feeling; excessive crying or the inability to cry; loss of sleep or excessive sleeping; withdrawal from social activities; feelings of shame or inadequacy; difficulty thinking and concentrating; recurrent thoughts of death or dying, possibly with suicidal plans. If you notice any of these symptoms in your life or in the lives of those close to you, please talk to someone; a counselor, the pastors or the parish nurse. Don't suffer alone!

Treatment should include 1. Prayer and Godly counsel; 2. Reaching out to family and close friends, letting them share in the journey; 3. Spending time reading God's word for encouragement and times in worship; 4. Seeking out the possible cause and trying to resolve the underlying issues (medication side effects, loss, lack of exercise, situation changes, etc); 5. Seek professional help for help verbalizing and working through unresolved issues (from past or present); and 6. Medication may be needed to replace chemicals that are depleted in one's body, just as diabetics need medicine to replace what the body no longer produces. Antidepressants can help one return to "normal"; they aren't addictive, and often one may be weaned off after a while.

Depression may not affect your faith, BUT because it is a deep soul searching time of agony and doubt, you may not feel very spiritual. You may feel like you're worthless to God and others, and you may have difficulty understanding His grace. You may FEEL far from God, but He never leaves us, as the psalmist writes through his own trials. It can be a real 'faith testing time", and many people who have suffered depression come out stronger at the other end. The emotional sufferings of Elijah, Job and King David as recorded in the Bible should indicate that depression is NOT a sign of inferior discipleship.

Be encouraged! There is light at the end of the 'depression' tunnel. There is hope for one walking through the pain. Please...don't suffer alone.

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Sources: "Understanding Depression – The Common Cold of the Emotional Life". by Ingrid Lawrenz, M.S.W.
"Depression...What it is, what to do..." HOPE publication No. 186-1, Kalamazoo, MI