

## Depression and the Christian

Lately depression has been in the news. Over the past two weeks, I have watched and listened to several programs on depression. The interest in the issue stemmed from the surprise suicides that happened recently. One was an engineer who strangled his son and then jumped to his death. The cause of the distraught was chronic depression. The other case was a twelve years old student who jumped to his death, and gave the reason that he could not managed the workload from his Chinese teacher.

Both these cases show that adults and children are susceptible to depression. The causes that lead to depression differ. Some may be cause by chemical imbalance that comes after childbirth or menopause. Others may be due to stress arising from the lack of ability to cope with life changes. Some doctors even attribute it to heredity. But the most difficult to understand are those depression arising from unknown causes. There may be a number of multiple factors are play. Like other atypical sicknesses, when the reason is unknown, the results can sometimes be unpredictable. And in the case of depression, the behaviour is even irrational. This is why it is common for a depressed person to contemplate suicide as an alternative to end the distress.

Depression, for a Christian, can be difficult to endure. This seems ironical, for isn't the believer promised the grace of God in all situations? The grace of God indeed is sufficient for all our needs. It is certainly able to bring healing to a depressed person. But the problem is, as most caregivers will realize, this is not how a depressed person perceives it. In his distorted frame of mind, he tends to reinterpret his spiritual life differently.

1. Rather than seeing God as present to help him in his crisis, he sees God as deserting him. He comes to this conclusion because he perceives that everyone is ignoring him.
2. He questions his own faith because he rationalizes that a believer should never feel this way. And since he is distressed and depressed, he finds himself living a life that is contrary to the joy expected of a believer in Christ.
3. He feels himself a failure in life. And he will see himself in the same manner spiritually. He finds it hard that his ways are approved before God. And no matter how hard he tries, he finds that he cannot be right with God. All these wrong thoughts can only aggravate the depression. He becomes guilty and prayer and worship becomes impossible.

There is help for a depressed believer. The help is first of all prayer, care and counsel from Scriptures. Since he is not able to do this on his own, someone should be by his side to assist him in this recovery activity. Besides this form of spiritual counsel, it is very necessary at times to take the person to seek psychiatry help. The use of drugs and medication has been proven to be an effective way to reduce the stress and tension inherent in every depression. This can speed up the recovery process.

In an age where depressant drugs were unavailable, how did the saints of God cope with depression? Elijah, Job, David all suffered a form of depression. How did they cope? Think

about it and tell me what you discover.

Depression is diagnosed as one of the top sicknesses in Singapore. Unlike SARS, the person is not isolated physically. But emotionally, he feels isolated. Providing godly care and support is important. What can we do? Email me your thoughts if you have any.

**By Pastor Cheah Fook Meng**