

Book Title: Depression: A Rescue Plan

Author: Jim Winter

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Reviewer: Pastor Cheah Fook Meng

Jim Winter is qualified to write about depression. He has been a pastor for over twenty years. He holds a PhD in pastoral psychotherapy. And I am particularly keen in what he has to say about depression as a Reformed pastor. What he says in the book is sound, insightful, pastoral, and helpful. The book begins with a discussion about the nature of depression and ends with a very helpful guide to those suffering from it.

What then is depression? Winter first brings us the case of Job and proceeds to explore the common elements found in a depressed person. After providing a few psychological definitions of depression, he gives us a helpful biblical description of what it is. The Bible, he says, uses words like “cast down”, “disquieted” to refer to this condition. Understanding this “cast down spirit” is difficult. For it can be due to a number of factors: stress arising from failures, moral guilt, ill-health, biological changes, etc. To help us diagnose depression, Winter presents a list of nine symptoms, like “fatigue, or loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness, diminished ability to think or concentrate or indecisiveness” etc.

In diagnosing depression, Winter tells us that it is important to distinguish the mood from the condition. A person may be affected by a depressed mood, but this, Winter says, should be distinguished from the condition of depression.

As Christians, we are particularly interested in understanding depression biblically. Winter has many things to say from a biblical point of view. In fact, the book speaks mainly about Christians and depression. It is of course easy for a Christian to feel depressed about his life. The devil attacks him, his sense of sin and guilt condemns him, his imperfect life frustrates him and trials weary him. In handling depression.

Winter says that we should always have God’s sovereignty in view. He writes, “A depressed Christian needs to know that God has allowed this depression; that it is serving his eternal purpose; that healing will come in due time; and that, in the end, they will benefit from their suffering.” He discusses this benefit in one chapter “Positive aspects of depression”. Depression, Winter asserts, can also be a sanctifying process. What Winter says about guilt and depression is also insightful. There are three chapters about sin, guilt, moral failures and depression. Here he tells us to face our guilt and not deny it. It is by dealing with it before God that the conscience is healed and forgiveness is experience. What is especially helpful here is what he writes about guilt as the verdict of a judge and the feeling of guilt that is experienced in the troubled conscience. Coping with a guilty conscience can be devastating. But with forgiveness, this can be overcome.

Every chapter in this book is helpful. The technical discussions are easy to read. Winter’s spiritual perspective helps us to see things from God’s point of view. And the last chapters are full of helps other than seeing a psychiatrist. Friends, families, recreation, relaxation etc are all important for the recovery process.

This book has helped me enormously in my series of sermons on Job. It has also given me an

insight into my own moods and spiritual and psychological conditions. If you want help, and want to be a helper, read this book.