

Depression — a Gift of God!

Hardly anyone in this culture would consider a depressed state of mind to be beneficial, but think again. The word of God has quite a lot to say about this matter, and the message our Creator gives us is that a depressed state of mind is not only good, but essential in order to draw close to Him. Let us carefully examine this matter through the lens of God's word.

I don't intend this subject of depression to be a psychoanalytical session, but I want to show that, because all of us experience periods of highs and lows in our daily lives, it is good to have a better grasp of why this is ... *what is the purpose* of these vascillations of moods? Why can't we always just be filled with joy and exuberance instead of sadness and lowliness?

Well, it turns out that there is a great purpose for what we might term these down-side emotions, and our Creator is well aware of these moods. After all, we read in James 5:13,

“Is anyone among you *suffering*? let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.”
suffering = *kakopatheo*, “undergo hardship.”

Even Jesus Christ experienced periods of hardship, as we read in Isaiah 53:3-4.

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. Like one from whom men hide their faces, He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He took on our infirmities and carried our sorrows; yet we considered Him stricken by God, struck down and afflicted....”

This is not going to be a discussion on such hopeless depression where a person is unable to function in day-to-day life, but we will be examining the periodic times we are truly suffering in what we might call a depressed mood. Let us see what God has to say about this.

I have prepared a 14-page paper on this subject of depression that is included in the list of articles on this website, which goes into some depth regarding the physiology of this condition. We obviously cannot cover the entire subject in this short article, but what I want to zero in on is (1) examples in Scripture of this very condition, then (2) look at the purpose of this lowly state of mind, and finally (3) examine how we should deal with it.

I will not get into the physiological causes of depression except to say that it can be caused by ...

1. Negative emotions: fear, anger, pride, jealousy, etc.
2. Genetic predisposition
3. Stress
4. Drugs and certain health problems

I think we need to understand that, while the brain is pointed to by medical science as the source of our thoughts and emotions, the Bible says otherwise. God shows us that the *heart* is the organ of the body so closely tied to our emotions and feelings. Both Testaments concur with this understanding.

Old Testament: *heart* = *leb*

The heart [when used as a noun] includes not only the motives, feelings, affections, and desires, but also the will, the aims, the principles, the thoughts, and the intellect of man. In fact, it embraces the whole inner man, the head never being regarded as the seat of intelligence. While it is the source of all action and the center of all thought and feeling, the heart is also described as

receptive to the influences both from the outer world and from God Himself. *Leb* means heart; mind; midst. It is used of God and man.

As the seat of emotions (Deuteronomy 6:5; Exodus 4:14), the heart can be merry (Judges 16:25), fearful (Isaiah 35:4), or trembling (I Samuel 4:13), but also is regarded as ...

- (1) the seat of knowledge and wisdom (Deuteronomy 29:4; I Kings 3:9).
- (2) an organ of memory (Job 22:32).
- (3) the center of conscience and moral character (Job 27:6; II Samuel 24:10).
- (4) the fountain of man's deeds (Genesis 20:5; I Kings 3:6; Isaiah 38:3).
- (5) a source of rebellion and pride (Genesis 8:21; Ezekiel 28:2).

Moreover, Scripture indicates that God controls the heart by giving a person a new one (Ezekiel 36:26), creating a clean one (Psalm 51:10), causing a believer's heart to fear His Name (Psalm 86:11), and He tries the heart (I Chronicles 29:17).

The heart represents the inner being of a person, the man himself, and is the fountain of all he does (Proverbs 4:4). "All his thoughts, desires, words, and actions flow from deep within him. Yet, a man cannot understand his own heart" (Jeremiah 17:9).



New Testament: heart = *kardia*

Kardia means much the same as *leb* in Hebrew. It essentially is used to represent man's entire mental and moral activity, including both his rational and emotional elements. *Kardia* can mean the following.

- (1) The hidden springs of personal life
- (2) The seat of depravity, the center of man's inner life that defiles what he does (Matthew 15:19-20)
- (3) The sphere of Divine influence, the "hidden" or "real" person (Romans 2:15; Acts 15:9; I Peter 3:4)
- (4) The seat of moral nature and spiritual life, of grief (John 14:1; Romans 9:2), joy (John 16:2), desires (II Peter 2:14), affections (Luke 24:32), perceptions (John 12:40), thoughts (Hebrews 4:12), understanding (Matthew 13:15, reasoning powers (Luke 24:38), imagination (Luke 1:51), conscience (Acts 2:37), intentions (Hebrews 4:12), purpose in life (II Corinthians 9:7), will (Romans 6:17), and faith (Mark 11:23; Hebrews 3:12).

Truly, the heart has perhaps more to do with our emotions, thoughts, and walk through life than the brain. Besides, it has been proven that memories are stored in cells and organs throughout the body — somewhat akin to the memory of certain compounds imprinted in water in homeopathy — a fact that has taken on special life from the stories of organ transplant recipients. Here are two such stories, taken from G. Absi, "Is the brain the only place that stores our memories," November 11, 2014, on www.sites.bu.edu.

"One of the more famous cases includes a woman named Clair Sylvia. In the 70's this woman received a heart and lung transplant from an 18-year-old boy who died in a motorcycle accident. After her surgery Sylvia had cravings she never had before like beer and burgers. After some time, she contacted the family of her donor and was in shock that he enjoyed the same foods. She wrote a book on her experiences entitled *A Change of*

The heart does much more than just pump life-sustaining blood throughout the body. It comprises the seat of emotions.

Heart: A Memoir.

“Another extreme case was an 8-year-old girl who received a 10-year-old girl’s heart. After her operation she began to have nightmares of a man trying to kill her. Her dreams were so vivid that she went to a psychiatrist who actually believed they were real. It was found that the donor was murdered, and the recipient who had the nightmares described the man in such detail that the police were able to find the killer, and he was convicted of murder.”

If you experience being downcast — and we all do from time to time — be encouraged. You are not alone, and are in fact in really great company! Notice the following true-life Biblical examples.

King David. A man after God’s own heart, he was oftentimes afflicted with depressed feelings. His symptoms oftentimes portrayed him as a psychological basket case! He was afflicted with virtually all of the symptoms of depression. These included crying (several Psalms; II Samuel 12:22), a loss of interest in usual activities (II Samuel 11:1), attempts to maintain relationships with people who harmed him (I Samuel 18 and 19), attempts to console and enable his abuser Saul (I Samuel 18 and 24), seeking thrills of what is forbidden (II Samuel 11), pleasure-seeking (II Samuel 5:13; I Chronicles 3), expressing hopelessness (several Psalms), a lack of appetite and weight loss (Psalm 102:5), and frequent insomnia (Psalm 22:2).

Jonah. This prophet to Nineveh was swallowed by a fish ... enough to make anyone feel down! Read Jonah 4:1-9.

Job. He had every reason to feel down, having lost all of his wealth as well as his children. Notice particularly Job 3:1-6.

Jesus Christ. Even our Savior was affected by the in-born traits of the flesh, as evidenced the night He was betrayed. Mark 14:36 shows that He asked the Father to remove His suffering if He could, and Luke 22:44 indicates He sweated great drops of (as it were) blood...probably albumin forced out his pores due to the great stress.

Many others. Elijah, Jeremiah, Moses, and so on.

The origin of depressed thoughts is *sin*:

(1) Within our own mind ... expressing the fruits of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21)

(2) From a sinful world around us ... like Jesus Christ being rejected, and suffering grief from that (Isaiah 53).

We all want to be accepted, but we are rejected by this world because we do not have the spirit of this world (John 15:18-19). Jesus, the sinless One, could not be tolerated by the leaders of this world because His sinlessness threatened their entire erroneous religious construct, convicting them of evil and hypocrisy. No wonder He could not be accepted by the world’s system, any more than God’s elect of this age can be tolerated by the erroneous religious system that surrounds us.

A Depressed State of Mind Is a Good Thing!

How is that for a controversial statement! A depressed state of mind is a good thing! How can I say that?

1. It leads to humility, which is essential to bring you close to the Creator. Read Isaiah 66:2, Psalms 34:18, Psalm 51:16-17, and especially Matthew 11:28-29.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My

yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

lowly = *tapeinos*, “depressed, figuratively humiliated; that which is low and does not rise far from the ground; of no degree.” This word is translated as follows in the King James Version: “of low degree” (Luke 1:52; James 1:9), “humble” (James 4:6; I Peter 5:5), “base (II Corinthians 10:1), “cast down” (II Corinthians 7:6), “of low estate” (Romans 12:16).

What is apparent here is that Jesus Christ, the Creator of this world (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16), does not think of Himself as being great or high in stature, but rather of low estate, as He showed Himself when He rode into Jerusalem as King, on a young donkey (Luke 19:35-37). Talk about humility, displayed by the coming King over all the earth! Moreover, recall that He washed the feet of all 12 disciples the night He was betrayed, showing He did not consider Himself to be superior even to these men, who all ended up deserting Him (John 13:2-16); rather, He reversed the traditional roles of lord and teacher, to kneel on the ground and wash their feet as a servant would ... for indeed that is the message He was trying to portray, just as Paul said in Philippians 2:3 and 5, “... but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.... Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

We must be humble as our heavenly Father and Jesus Christ are humble, not considering ourselves of any repute, not being lifted up in pride and self-centeredness, but rather we must take on the character of our Elder Brother as stated above in Matthew 11:28-30. Being “lowly” is akin to being depressed, not vaunting the self, understanding the reality of oneself and not trying to make yourself into someone you are not. Jesus Christ was the epitome of that quality, the *I AM*, the self-existent one who is exactly what He says He is. We also must strive to be exactly what God has made us to be.



Depression provides a door to deeper understandings of God’s truth as it leads to humility and a closer relationship to our Creator.

2. Its unpleasant effects on the mind and body force us to examine ourselves and repent of the sins we are committing. Repentance is, of course, the focus of our Christian walk. It is the first arrow in the quiver of us all, for as Peter said at Pentecost, “Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit” (Acts 2:38). *Repent* is the Greek word *metanoeo*, “to perceive afterwards (*meta*, meaning after, implying change; *noeo*, meaning to perceive, versus *pronoeo*, to perceive beforehand”); literally, to change one’s mind.”

We all came out of a world wherein sin (lawlessness) predominates, and when we received the gift of the holy spirit the law was written in our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 8:10). That law in its spiritual intent oftentimes conflicts with the habit patterns of our carnal nature, so our inner being had to be reprogrammed to the Eternal’s pattern. Such a change does not happen overnight ... “because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be” (Romans 8:7).

David stated,

“Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me” (Psalm 19:12-13).

secret = *cathar*, “to conceal, hide, or shelter.” These secret faults are the hardest of our sins to root out, as the word in its several contexts throughout Scripture indicate

- Cain was hidden from God’s presence, implying a separation (Genesis 4:14).
- To hid oneself (*cathar*) is to take refuge (I Samuel 23:19).
- *Cathar*, can mean to shelter oneself from one’s enemies (Jeremiah 36:26).
- By hiding (*cathar*) God’s face from our sins is asking Him to ignore them (Psalm 51:9).
- *Cathar* can mean withdrawing God’s favor, as from Judah (Isaiah 8:17).

presumptuous = *zade*, “arrogant; from *zuwd*, “to seethe and be insolent.”

Our concealed sins are the most difficult to detect, but we all have them. We must ask God to reveal them to us, for they can easily lead to depression for which we have no explanation. This has been so true for me personally, since habit patterns passed down from my parents sometimes led to behaviors that resulted in a depressed state of mind. God has revealed these hidden errors over time, for which I am very grateful.

The really good news is that once repentance occurs, the weight is lifted and the depressed spirit is removed. We are not speaking of possession by an evil spirit, which can produce depression, such as when Saul was removed from being king over Israel and “... a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him” (I Samuel 16:14). With baptism and receiving the spirit of God with the laying on of hands, any evil spirits cannot abide within the mind and heart of the new convert; good and evil cannot coexist: “For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?” (II Corinthians 6:14).

The Cures for Depression

The world says: drugs, psychotherapy, electroconvulsive therapy, transcranial magnetic stimulation. Yet, none of these treat the root cause of the problem, except possibly getting good advice from Christian therapists based on God’s word to cast out sin.

God says:

(1) Practice good health habits. Follow the laws of clean and unclean meats (Leviticus 11), fresh and unprocessed, unpolluted foods (Exodus 20:15), plenty of rest, positive friendships with brethren (Acts 2:42; Romans 12:10), exposure to fresh air and sunlight, avoidance of accidents, and regular exercise (I Timothy 4:7).

(2) Make the resurrection and your future in the Kingdom of God a profound reality. There is no better way to remove hopelessness and discouragement from your life than to understand how wonderful that future new Eden will be (I Corinthians 2:9-10; Acts 3:19-21), and your part as a king and a priest in it (Revelation 5:10). Recall that without vision the people perish (Proverbs 29:18).

(3) Recognize that an anxious and depressed state of mind and heart are signals for you to examine yourself and see how you may be conflicting with God’s laws. Remember that a broken spirit is to God a sacrifice, not a curse (Psalm 51:17), designed to make us repent and draw closer to our Creator.

(4) Work. Keep working, at both your servile and spiritual work! Never give up, but keep moving forward with patience (Hebrews 12:1), but run so as to win the race (I Corinthians 9:24). It is God’s desire that we work with our hands to give to those who have need (Ephesians 4:28), and that it is the diligent people at their work that bear rule (Proverbs 12:24). By doing whatever you do with your might (Ecclesiastes 9:10), and by throwing yourself into your work, you automatically take your thoughts away from yourself and find worth and fulfillment in your achievements.

(5) Gain encouragement through fellowship with brethren. Fellowship is so very critical in keeping our hearts and minds focused on what is really important, helping us avoid the “woe is me” discouragement habit of thinking. I enjoy the words of Ronald Dart in an article he wrote about the holy spirit and the encouragement it gives to us brethren.¹¹ Of course, our fellowship with one another has the same effect.

“Why does Jesus refer to the *Holy Spirit* as a ‘*Comforter*’? The Greek word is *parakletos*. I stumbled onto something interesting about the root of this word in a curious passage in 2 Corinthians: ‘Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all *comfort*: Who *comforteth* us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to *comfort* them which are in any trouble, by the *comfort* wherewith we ourselves are *comforted* of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our *consolation* also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your *consolation* and salvation. And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the *consolation*’ (2 Corinthians 1:3-7 KJV).

“In five short verses, Paul uses the same Greek root ten times, making a deliberate play on words.

“The Greek root is *parakaleo*, the verb, and is expressed as *paraklesis*, in noun or adjective construction. It is translated in the KJV as ‘comfort’ and ‘consolation,’ and years ago I ran a word study through all uses throughout the New Testament. There are nearly 140 instances of the words in the New Testament. As I ran the study, it slowly dawned on me that, in modern terms, comfort and consolation don’t quite say what Paul and others intended to say. The best renderings of the root were the English words ‘encourage’ and ‘encouragement’ and for the Holy Spirit, ‘Encourager’.

“And out of this comes one of the most important things to know about the Holy Spirit — it is an encourager, not a discourager. Those who are led by the Spirit encourage, they do not discourage. I believe we need to be more sensitive and more responsive to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.”

In Conclusion ...

The apostle Paul made clear the thoughts we need to focus upon in our daily living to avoid falling prey to discouraging thought patterns. Watching or listening to newscasts can easily demoralize a person — as much as we need to keep in touch with world events — and perhaps in the days of Paul there was plenty to become discouraged about as well. Here is what he said, and this is what we need to think about.

“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. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy — meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:4-8).