

Christian Perspective on Mental Health
During Times of Uncertainty

Depression

Kristina Franklin – LPC, LCMHC, LMFT

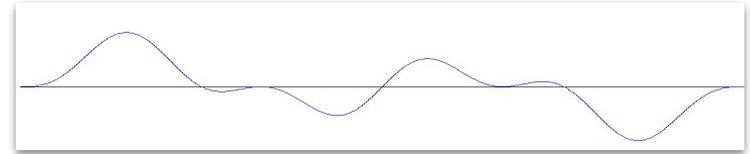
Bryan Franklin - LCMHCA

Why talk about depression right now?

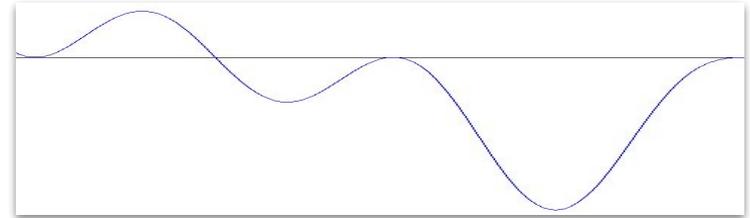
| COVID -19 | INTERRUPTED WORK + SCHOOL | POLITICAL TURMOIL + RACIAL UNREST | GROUNDING @ HOME | THWARTED PLANS |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Unknowns | Added Pressure | Division + Discord | Cancelled athletic events | Traveling Vacations canceled |
| Potential for Sickness + Death | Crowded Sharing | Polarization | Church @ home | Family holidays limited |
| Masks – breathing, can't see smiles | "Home" schooling within Public School System | Fear | Shopping by Amazon | Changed in Entertainment |
| Distancing + Avoidance of People | Technology Increase (Fatigue) | Anger | Gyms close | \$\$ Financial Changes |
| | Less Personal Time | Media/Social Media | | |
| ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ | ↓ |
| Fear, Isolation, Uncertainty | Frustration, Decision Fatigue, Powerlessness | What's Real? More Fear, More Anger. Less Eye Contact. Color Emphasized. | Increased Substance Use, Loneliness, Escalates present problems | Tired Disappointed Lonely |

Am I Depressed or Just Sad?

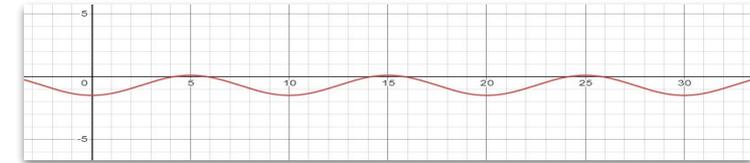
We all experience emotions (ups and downs)



When the lows become exaggerated or extended you may be experiencing depressive symptoms



Persistent low grade depressive symptoms look different than clinical depression or dysphoria.



in some personal news, im thrilled to announce that im tired all day no matter how much sleep i get



Brandon Scott Wolf ✓
@BrandonEsWolf

I don't struggle with depression.
Like at this point I have it down.
I'm good at depression.

Me: "I'm going through a lot, I should really talk to someone,"
Anxiety and Depression: "Isolate yourself from everybody and sleep instead"



When you suffer from depression and somebody tells you to just cheer up..



"Depressed people have a heightened sensitivity to sounds, touch and colors."
Melissa Bernstein



Different Types of Depression

Depression can be grouped into three general categories

Major (clinical) Depression

This is generally genetic, and is predominantly a chemical imbalance in the brain that shows up intermittently throughout a lifetime. It doesn't need a trigger. Things can be fine... and then it's not fine... at all. It looks different for different people. Some people won't get out of bed for days. Some people can minimally function. They do the things they have to do but nothing else. Joy and pleasure are lost during these times.

These seasons can last days, weeks, months, even years. Sleep is generally affected (too much or too little). Medication and counseling are often necessary to manage this condition.

Dysthymia

This type of depression is personality based and exhibits as a persistent mildly depressed state. If you have always felt this way all of your life, and you have a mildly negative perspective, a "glass is half empty," view of life regardless of the circumstances it may be dysthymia. Meds do not usually help with this type of depression. It takes an intentional effort to look for good and to train an attitude of gratitude and contentment.

Dysphoria

This is the "healthy" depression because we all experience this. It has a situational trigger. Something bad happens and a person gets sad. Sometimes for a long time. It can look like Major Depression, because it can be dark and last a long time. But working through the situation or experience that caused the depression (grief, loss, disappointment, etc.) can make a person stronger and better on the other side of this type of depression.

Self Diagnosis

Depression is not just feeling sad. We all have a range of emotions and we can feel sad from time to time. Depression is a marked loss of motivation, pleasure. It is “getting stuck in the sad.”

Depression DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria – 5 or more symptoms within 2 weeks

- Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day
- You do not enjoy things you used to enjoy
- Changes in appetite or significant weight loss or gain
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Others are concerned about you slowing down
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt
- Lowered ability to think, concentrate or make decisions (brain fog)
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

Loneliness & Isolation... Deeper Depression

The Pandemic, Racial Unrest and Political Polarization along with Virtual Church, masked or canceled community and separated extended family has heightened loneliness and promoted isolation.

- Many of us are alone. Literally and/or emotionally.
 - We may live or work by ourselves. You are waking up alone, drinking coffee and completing your daily tasks by yourself. Some time by yourself is good. Too much time by yourself can create a sense of sadness. When people don't see the world the way you do, or experience things that you experience you begin to doubt your value as a person.
 - We may be physically with other family members, but if we do not have a good relationship connection, then increased time with them simply brings to light how far apart and alone you actually are. Repairing relationships takes courage, perseverance, and is sometimes unsuccessful. We must repair and maintain our relationships to help us manage our own emotional health.
- Recognize: we are designed by God to need connection. Both with Him and with others. If our present situation doesn't include connection, we need to act to increase connection or depressive symptoms can be a natural outcome.

“Burnout” Can Look & Feel Like Depression

Burnout is becoming more common in times of stress because many people are working harder than ever before. People are working more hours, taking on more responsibility (more of what they were doing as well as things they never anticipating having to do), doing multiple things at a time, and preparing for situations they have never experienced before. Fear of failure and/or loss can make us over-extend ourselves and become burned out.

| | Burnout | Depression |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day |  |  |
| You do not enjoy things you used to enjoy |  |  |
| Changes in appetite or significant weight loss or gain |  |  |
| Fatigue or loss of energy |  |  |
| Others are concerned about you slowing down |  |  |
| Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt |  |  |
| Lowered ability to think, concentrate or make decisions (brain fog) |  |  |
| Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide |  |  |

What does Scripture say about Depression?

(Depression is not a modern problem)

Job: *“I loathe my very life; therefore, I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.” (Job 10:1)*

Elijah: *“I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors”(1 Kings 19:4).*

David: *“I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. I groan because of the turmoil of my heart.” (Psalm 38:6, 8)*

Jeremiah: *“Cursed be the day I was born ... why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?” (Jeremiah 20:14, 18)*

Paul: *“We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.” (1 Corinthians 1:8)*

Jesus: *“My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch” (Mark 14:34-36).*

Peter: *“The trial (struggle) of our faith is more precious to God than gold which perishes. It will bring praise, glory and honor to Him” (1 Peter 1:7)*

Thoughts on Christianity & Depression

Is Depression directly correlated with spiritual health? Not necessarily. You can have a good relationship with God and still experience depression. God gave us a physical body that has chemicals (serotonin, norepinephrine, endorphins) that can vary by person and situation.

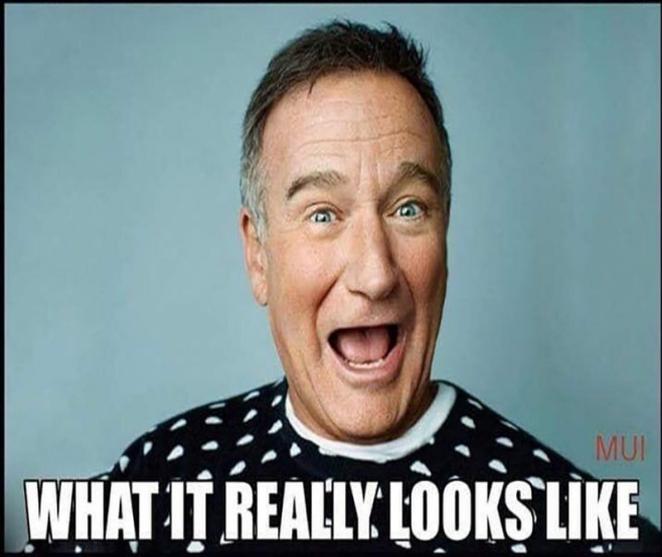
Depression is not addressed with simply trying to think happier thoughts. David encouraged readers of the Psalms to meditate/delight on God's law/word at all times. One could conclude that the more "Christian" you are, the less "sad" you will be. Rather, God encourages us to find peace in our salvation and process of sanctification. Peace does not mean that you only experience happiness. Peace is found in the knowledge that salvation is not tied to you, your emotions, or your circumstances. Peace brings contentment. Contentment helps to moderate emotion.

Does prayer help depression? Absolutely. Prayer (done well) is a recentering of our focus on God, how He sees us, and how we should respond. We can ask our Heavenly Father for help as we make efforts to use and change our emotions.

Is there an oppressive spiritual component to depression? Yes. Bible refers to it as "a spirit of heaviness." How much of your situation is physical, psychological, or spiritual? Good question. Very good chances it is all three. We don't know the ratio. It is wise to address all three.

Are emotions bad / is Depression sinful? Emotions themselves are amoral – how you respond to them and how you use them gives them value. Honoring God with our emotions – even when we are struggling through them glorifies Him. If we use our emotions to avoid God, focus on ourselves, focus on our surroundings, and blame other people then we can sin in our depression. We can sin in anger and happiness as well.

Why does God allow suffering? God became human and experienced grief, suffering and depression. He understands how we feel and comforts us in our sadness, brokenness and despair. We are not alone in our pain. When we turn to God and ask for His strength in our times of weakness He is there and gives us comfort and help. He helps us to move through depression and not get stuck in it. We bring Him glory when we lean on Him through our deep struggles.



Functioning Depressed

- *Hides true degree & intensity of depression
- *Gives energy to what has to be done-- leaving nothing leftover for fun or healthy living
- *30/100 units of Energy
- *Normal tasks feel heavy, hard, even overwhelming
- *Sleep is altered: either too much or too little

If You Are Depressed Because You Failed



Intrusive Thoughts + Suicidal Ideation

We all have intrusive, unwanted thoughts - it's what we do with those thoughts that matters

Depressive Lens: Guilt, Shame, Disappointments, Stress, Decision-making Fatigue, Trauma (big trauma or small traumatic experiences) often fill one's thoughts when in a Depressive slump.

Majority of the time, suicidal thoughts do not mean a person actually wants to die -- it just means they want the pain to stop. It would be easier to be gone. It's like battle fatigue. A person is just really tired of fighting.

If someone you love has clear signs of depression

- Don't avoid talking about if they have considered suicide. Bringing up the topic does not increase their desire to do it. It shows that you are willing to talk about the reality of depression and the exhaustion. Listen.
- If they are taking medication - they need to keep taking it until a professional decides they shouldn't. People who decide to stop taking their medication and believe they can handle it alone are at a high risk of taking their lives.

Why is Depression hard to recover from?

Depression kills your motivation. Anxiety over drives your motivation.

You want to feel better. You remember feeling better. You just can't seem to get there.

Why? Because you are tired of fighting the depression without energy.

Other people don't understand how doing simple things without any motivation is so hard.

Since other people don't understand, you isolate which makes it worse.

What can I do? GET MOVING!

Get moving! Depression is like a swamp... if you don't move you will sink!

Become aware that you have been affected.

Accept the reality of your circumstances: Realize: You have choices about how you handle situations.

- You can choose to accept the situation
- You can choose to change the situation
- You can choose to leave the situation

Purpose to go THROUGH (not around, not avoid) the hard time. Going through may make us tired, but often makes us stronger, better.

See the Value: Hard things shape us in a way easy things cannot. Working through depression is hard, but it has value.

Self Talk: Remind yourself of what is true. Add in positive truth to offset the negative fears.

How to help yourself get mentally & emotionally more healthy this week:

Today I got up, cleaned the kitchen, vacuumed, folded and put laundry away. My house actually looks clean. Take that depression.



- Exercise – 30 minutes of sweating REALLY helps offset depression and clear your mind
- Get in person! Isolation is a problem. Even if you have to be socially distanced, find creative ways to see people's faces and spend time talking. Allow other people to push you. Trust that they can see the situation more clearly than you can.
- Choose cheerful media.
- Get outside – Sunshine really helps.
- Intentionally engage in things you used to like to do. Even if you don't want to.
- Forgive yourself. Your worth is not tied to your performance.
- Set small goals, and accomplish them. (put on makeup, drive-through treat)
- Significantly decrease drinking. Alcohol is a depressant – it makes Depression worse.
- Do something for someone else (check on a friend, cook a meal, mow someone's grass)
- Watch out for negative thinking! Be in the now. Look for good. Depression often focuses on the disappointments of the past, while anxiety stresses about the worries for the future. Be where you are.

What if it's not enough...?

Talk with a Therapist, Christian Counselor, Church Elder or Pastoral Staff

Talk with your doctor about medication. Sometimes a light, consistent dose of an antidepressant can take enough of the depressive edge off so that you can do the healthy things that will pull you out of depression