What Would Jesus Say the Depressed?

(Depression)

What would Jesus say to someone who is depressed?

In a recent front page of the Miami Herald was this fascinating article; “Murder Suicides Take 11 Lives in 2001.” The front paragraph reads

“in an alarming trend that confounds experts, Broward County has become what some would call a hot spot for murder suicide, a crime that is rare nationwide but has claimed already 11 lives in Broward since the new year began.”

The article goes on to say

“There is also a nationwide increase in depression which is a significant factor in murder suicides, study show.”

Let me share some vital statistics on depression. 1 in 5 people suffer from it. It is a leading cause for all sorts of addictions. It affects all ages, all races, and all economic groups. Even children can be seriously depressed.

In the paper today, there is a story about Mathew Perry, the actor and star of the hit TV show Friends, how he is strung out on mood altering drugs. Why? Because he’s depressed!

Half the people suffering from depression don’t get the proper treatment. Untreated depression is the number one cause of suicide. Depression is second only to heart disease in causing lost workdays. So if you are a business owner, large or small, you have a vested interest in this issue of depression. It’s the leading cause of disability.

I.

Three Simple Things That Help!

There are three simple things that we can do to help us deal and cope and overcome our depression. And they are very simple.
The first is eat right! It’s been found that those people who are depressed tend to run toward comfort foods which are full of Sugar! They are full of sugar and carbohydrates. Now sugar and carbohydrates aren’t the best thing for your mood swings and feelings. They will push you up and then they will let you down. So, a simple thing is to eat well balanced meals on a regular schedule!

The second thing that you can do is to exercise. In addition to helping you look better and feel better, the US Surgeon General has reported that physical activity protects against depression.

The third thing we can do to overcome depression is stress-reduction. Time needs to be set aside every day and each week to bring down your body to a state of relaxed calm. At least once every day! And then once a week you have got to relax and calm down for the whole day. Some people wonder why they can’t sleep! Well is it any wonder? They haven’t been relaxed for days! This is what the fourth commandment is all about. Honor the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Rest your mind and refocus your spirit. Very few of us are physically exhausted, but we are soul tired. We are tired in our spirit and we need rest. (By the way, Harvard did a study on taking a day off. They found that those people who take a day off are more productive, not less.)

Like I said, these are three simple things you can start doing today to help you overcome depression. Eat right, exercise, reduce stress.

II.

Simple Things We Can Do For Others

Now, what are some of the simple things that we can do to help other people in their depression?

The first and simplest is to shut-up and listen! Listen! The most healing organ in our body is the ear! When someone shows signs of being depressed listen to what they have to say! Be present; let them finish the end of their sentence. Be present.

The second thing that you can do is to empathize. Put yourself in their shoes. Try and understand where they are, and where they are coming from.

If a loved one is suffering from depression in your family, learn as much as you can about it. There’s a lot of information out there. Just get on the Web,
click on depression and you’ll come up with a wealth of information. Knowledge is power! Knowledge can also be healing.

The fourth thing that you can do to help someone in their depression is to take it seriously. If they say anything about committing suicide, take it seriously! Let me remind you that suicide is the second leading cause of death among our teenagers. We have to take it seriously. Ask, what do you mean? Tell me more about that! What are you thinking about? Have you actually contemplated it? Will you promise me that you will never do it? Promise me right here and now that you will never do it before you call me! Suggest that they go their Pastor or their doctor. If they won’t do that then ask them permission to go and speak to their Pastor yourself. Take it seriously.

And finally, make sure that those in your family or loved ones who are experiencing depression are keeping their appointments and are taking their medication. Someone once said to me, actually recently, that they were counting their spouses pills to make sure that they were taking them. And they were kind of a little embarrassed about that and they felt somewhat guilty about it and quite frankly I thought that was an excellent idea. They’re counting their pills to make sure that they were taking them and taking the right amount. Not too many and not too few.

III.

**Good Depression:**

Now having said all this, there is such a thing of good depression. If we call ourselves human beings, there are some things that we should get depressed about like: Lying, cheating, and stealing. If we are involved in such things we ought to feel a bit depressed. There is such a thing as good depression.

Besides, if you’ve never gotten depressed, it may be that you’ve never tried very hard at anything. There are going to be times when life is a struggle, and you are going to get hurt in the back and forth of life. You’re going to have to give up some things and loose some things. Mistakes are going to be made. From time to time life is going to offer some unpleasant lessons that will involve pain and you’re going to get depressed. Some have the mistaken view that normal in life is when everything is going well… that what is normal in life is when there are no problems. But having no problems is not normal, its fantasy land. The only people who don’t have any problems are those lying in a graveyard, and some of those have even
bigger problems now that they’re dead. Some people get depressed because their life isn’t what they think it should be. But life is supposed to be hard. It’s the hard times that bring out the greatness in most people. We all have to let go of some things from time to time, and that will cause us to become a bit depressed. This is not bad. It’s life.

St. Paul said it this way in Romans 5:3-4,

“We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials for we know that they are good for us, they help us learn, learn to be patient. And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady.”

There is such a thing as good depression.

Interestingly enough, most Bible translations have no mention of the word depression whatsoever. In the King James Version, in the New International Version, there is no mention of the word depression in any of the 66 books of the Bible! If found that astonishing! No mention of it whatsoever!! But this is not to say that the Bible’s heroes did not get depressed. Certainly King David got depressed. Psalm 143:7 Kind David said

“Answer me quickly, O God; my spirit fails! Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit.”

King David knew what depression was all about.

And the prophet Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, certainly he knew what depression was all about! It was he who wrote:

“Cursed be the day I was born! Cursed be the man who brought my father the news that a son was born to him... O that I had died within my mother’s womb and that I had been left in the grave! Why was I ever born for my life has been but trouble and sorrow and shame?” (Jer. 20:14-18)

Old Jeremiah knew what depression was. He is intimately acquainted with it. And he had good reason for his depression as did many of the Bible’s
heroes. There have been many walks through the valley in my relationship with the Lord. But remember what the scripture says, “Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me.” Just because he is with you does not mean that you are not going to walk through the valley of the shadow. Just because he is with you does not mean that from time to time you will fall into the black pit of depression!

IV. Exaggerated Reasons For Depression:

But having said this some of us have exaggerated reasons for being depressed.

I read an interesting book entitled Feeling Good by Dr. David D. Burns. I bought it because it said on the front that it’s the definitive study of depression and coping with depression and that there are over 3 million copies of this book in print. So I thought, wow! This guy must know what he’s talking about! He makes the claim that there is a tremendous relationship between what we think and how we feel. In other words, our thinking has a tremendous influence and impact on our moods and feelings. This is not new. Proverbs 23:7

“For as one thinketh in his heart so is he.”

In other words, your thoughts will determine your feelings. Again, this isn’t new. Norman Vincent Peele in his book “The Power of Positive Thinking” has been saying this for 50 years. Robert Schuler the TV evangelist on the Hour of Power has been saying this for 25 years over the airways. Your thoughts have a tremendous impact on your feelings. And if you’re going to insist on being negative, negative, negative, you’re going to likely be depressed, depressed, depressed!

Some of us are obsessed with the negative. We magnify the negative and minimize the positive! We see it all the time? The quarterback of the winning team will have a fantastic game, he’ll be interviewed on TV, and the announcer will ask, “That was a great game that you played, you threw 375 yards and threw 2 touchdown passes! How do you feel?” And the quarterback will drop his head and focus on the one interception he threw. He had a wonderful game, but what does he focus on? The one mistake!

Some of us will rehab our house. It will be a beautiful job, but we won’t allow ourselves to see the beauty because we’re focused on the one corner
that didn’t come our quite right! We magnify the negative and we minimize the positive! Do you know anybody like that?

And there are those who simply filter out the positive altogether, they can’t see the positive because they won’t see it! Some people simply disqualify the positive. When people do such things, when they dwell on the negative and minimize the positive, is it any wonder that they would be a bit depressed??

So some of us suffer from good depression but some of us suffer from exaggerated depression. We’re depressed all the time because we’re just negative. And we lie to ourselves. You know the scripture says that the heart is deceitful above all things. Our hearts are deceitful. We lie, and the person we lie to the most is ourselves. Life is not nearly as bad as we make it out to be.

Some of us suffer from good depression, some of us suffer from exaggerated depression, and some of us suffer from clinical depression.

V

Clinical Depression:

Clinical depression is depression that occurs for what seems to be no circumstantial reason. It’s more than a blue, down in the dumps, period of time that can be caught because of a rainy day or broken heart or a wounded conscience. It is more than a down mood. Clinical depression can dominate a person’s life and bring it to a screeching halt. It feels like things are off and wrong. You aren’t hopeful or happy about anything. You’re crying a lot, either about nothing or about something you normally could handle. You feel like you’re moving and thinking in slow motion. Getting up in the morning requires a major effort. Carrying on a normal conversation is a struggle. You’re finding it difficult to express yourself. You have trouble making decisions, smiling seems stiff and awkward. It seems that there’s a glass wall between you and the world. You find it difficult to concentrate and you’re anxious and worried a lot. You feel like you can’t do anything right. You have recurring thoughts of death, and suicide seems like a welcome option. You have a feeling of impending doom, like something bad is going to happen. You feel as though you are drowning and are suffocating. You’re agitated, jumpy and anxious much of the time. Your senses seem dulled and food tastes bland and uninteresting. Music doesn’t affect you anymore. Memories of every failure and every bad and
uncomfortable experience seem to come incessantly to mind. That’s what it would feel like! And it’s a terrible thing. Can you imagine feeling this way for no obvious reason?

Now, here are some things that we should not say to someone who is clinically depressed.

“Come on, get over it! They can’t! They would if they could! Or how about:

“It’s all in your mind”? Well, you know something, that actually may have some element of truth to it. It may all be in their mind, but it may be bio-chemically in their mind.

“Stop feeling sorry for yourself!” You know, for many of the clinically depressed, they’d like to feel something, anything positive, rather than just the gray numbness.

“Have you been praying and reading your Bible?! Oh, that’s a wonderful leverage of guilt. Yeah, that’s going to lift them right up!!! You know, if you’re that concerned about their personal devotion, rather than ask them that question, why don’t you simply offer to read it to them!

“Why don’t you just pull yourself together?!?” Believe me, they would if they could. Those are some examples of some things you probably really shouldn’t say. They wouldn’t be all that effective.

Now, what are some of the things we can say? The most obvious thing you can say is: “I love you.” That’s the best.

The second thing that you can say is: “you are not alone and you don’t have to walk through this valley by yourself. I am here, I am with you. We will do this together.”

Something else you could say that would be helpful is: “I am sorry about your pain, don’t worry about me, I am here for you”. People who are clinically depressed want to help other people, but they are not in a position to do that. Reassure them it’s OK, it’s OK, I am here for you.

Something else you can say is: “You know, I can’t fully understand what you’re going through, but I want to understand as much as I can”. Don’t say: Oh yeah, I know exactly what you’re going through! Oh no you don’t! You don’t! So don’t say it! You don’t know!!! You don’t know exactly where they are or how they feel so don’t bother even saying it! Tell them, admit, be
honest right up front: Look I don’t know exactly what you’re going through or how you’re feeling right now, but I want to understand as best I can, as best I am able, I want to.

And something else you can say is to reassure them that this will pass and we will ride through it together. We’re going to go through this together. Those are examples of five helpful things that you could say to someone who is clinically depressed.

VI.

What Would Jesus Say?

Now what would Jesus say?

When Jesus stood up to offer His Sermon on the Mount Jesus reserved His first blessing for those who were depressed. He said

“Blessed are the poor in spirit for there is the Kingdom of God.”

Blessed are the poor in spirit! What does that mean? I don’t know about you but whenever I am depressed I am poor in spirit, and when I feel depressed I feel furthest away from God and His Kingdom. But in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus turns this feeling upside down and reassures us that when we feel furthest from God, when we are poor in spirit, it is then that we are closest to Heaven’s gate. It’s when you are poor in spirit that you know your own limitations, and when you know your limitations it is then that you are most likely to ask for God’s help. When you can’t think your way out of a problem. When you know there is only so much you can do, and you’ve come to a point where you need God! Where God is really the last best hope! He is the only one whose right hand can lift you up out of the pit. He’s saying that precise moment, when you are humbled and laid low before God that you are closest to His heart. When you recognize your limitations and His power, it is then that you are closest to His loving heart. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Are you poor in spirit today? Did you come to church looking for something, something more, something that will lift you up?! The good news is that you’re closer than you think you are, for Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for yours is the Kingdom of God. You are close to the gates of glory. Wonderfully close.

Something else that Jesus would say to someone depressed.
“Come unto me, all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you shall find rest for your soul.”
Matthew 11:28

I don’t know what your experience is with depression, but when I am depressed I am weary and I am heavy laden. I am carrying a burden that is far too much for me to bear. And Jesus says, “come to me.” Notice He doesn’t say go and seek the happiness that will overcome your depression. He doesn’t say find such pleasure that will blow you through your depression. He doesn’t say get yourself so financially secure that nothing can touch you. He says come to me. What is interesting is that Jesus never says, “Put down your burden.” If we could, we would, but we can’t. When we’re depressed it all but impossible to just put it down. Instead Jesus says something completely different. He says, take my yoke upon you. In other words, take on something more! Take my yoke upon you!

The first church I ever served as a pastor full of dairy farmers. And I learned something about a yoke. A yoke is something that you put on a horse or ox, not so that it can pull less but so that it can pull more… and pull it with comfort and ease, without strain or stress. The Lord wants you to put on His yoke, that you might be able to bare whatever it is that is on your shoulder!

And the third thing that Jesus would say would be very simple, and that is, “I love you.” I love you not because everything is right, not because you are good or bad. I love you not because you’re religious or because you have it all together. I love you not because you are mentally stable. Not because you are up or not because you are down, I love you for no reason whatsoever! I love you because it is my nature! My loving you has nothing to with you; it has everything to do with the Lord! I love you. And no circumstance, no dark hole, no depression can separate you from the love of God and Christ Jesus.

Psalm 139 offers us a wonderful promise of Gods unfailing, unrelenting love. In Psalm 139:7 the Lord says this: Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to Heaven, you are there. If I make my bed in Hell, behold thou art there. There is nowhere that you can go where He is not willing to be present with you. The question is never is the Lord willing and able to be with you. The only question that remains is whether we are willing to have Him. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Because
they are close to the gates of Heaven. Come to me all ye who labor and are
heavy laden and I will give you rest and I love you. I love you. I love you.
Let’s bow our heads for a word of prayer.

Lord, life can be difficult and just darn right hard sometimes and often it is
so easy to fall into a dark pit, into a depression. And Lord we pray that we
would be humble enough to receive you wherever we are to welcome you, to
hear your word to us. Lord, we know we are not worthy but the wonderful
thing is that we don’t have to be. You make us worthy. Your love will lift us.
And when it doesn’t lift us Lord, it will sustain us. And when it doesn’t
seem as though it doesn’t even sustain us, it will offer us that hope. Lord,
may we trust you. May we trust that you know what you’re doing and may
we lean on you with all our heart and soul. Bless each man and woman here.
Bless them in their joys and in their sorrow. When they are up and when
they are down. Bless them Lord as only you can with the power and the
glory of your presence. In your wonderful name we pray. Amen.