

“Back to School: Psychology Class,” a service of Lynn Haven United Methodist Church

“Back to School: *Psychology Class*”

October 11, 2015

Welcome/Opening Prayer

Introduction

Pastor Rick Warren said the following in a sermon following the tragic suicide of his son Matthew, who suffered from severe depression:

“We are all mentally ill to one degree or another. No one is completely well emotionally speaking. We all have fears, worries, doubts, and compulsions.”

The Centers for Disease Control claims that half of all Americans will be diagnosed with some form of mental illness in their lifetime. Sadly, there is still a great deal of stigma attached to mental or emotional illnesses.

1. What has been your experience with depression, either personally or with someone you know?
2. Discuss some examples from recent news that have added to the negative opinion or misunderstanding of mental or emotional illnesses.

Listen to what one author says about her struggles with depression & anxiety:

“There is an estimated 57.7 million people just like me. People that battle with their minds every single day. It took me a long time to understand what I was experiencing. I’ve never understood why physical health takes a priority but mental health is rarely on the scale. You would never tell someone with diabetes to just ‘get over it.’ You would never tell someone with cancer, ‘It’s all in your head.’ You would never look at someone with a broken arm and say, ‘But someone has it worse than you.’ Mental illness, just like physical ailments, are real.”

Here are some facts and figures about depression, the most prominent form in our country today:

- 11% of adults in America (27 M) are currently taking antidepressants, including 23% of women in their 40s and 50s.
- 1 in 8 adolescents suffer from clinical depression and about 30% of college students do as well.
- Depression goes hand-in-hand with many physical ailments and affects 25% of cancer patients, 1/3 of all heart attack survivors, and 50% of Parkinson’s sufferers.
- At some point in their lifetime, 20-26% of women and 8-12% of men will be diagnosed with clinical depression (and as many as 1 in 5 older adults).

What we’re talking about is clinical depression of the moderate to severe variety that

influences the person's sense of well-being and ability to function normally, not just an occasional case of the blues.

"I was clinically diagnosed with severe depression and anxiety in November of 2013. I had symptoms before then, but nothing like the crippling wave that crashed over me that fall. If you've never experienced depression, if you've never stared down the depths of that kind of darkness, it's easy to misunderstand it. It's generally assumed that if you're depressed, you have a reason to be depressed. While that is somewhat true, it isn't always true. I grew up privileged, in an upper-middle class family, in a great Christian home. I had, in the eyes of the world, nothing to be depressed about...[but] part of mental illness is the irrationality that comes with it...The debilitating sadness and anxiety that overwhelms my body on some days is not something that I choose. It's not a hell I would wish on anybody. It's not a life that anyone with mental illness chose."

If not treated, a downward spiral may develop with devastating and destructive consequences:

- It contributes to 41,000 suicides each year in the United States (about one every 13 minutes and 25 times that many attempts).
- We have as many of our fellow citizens die by their own hand in a month as have been killed by terrorists in the 14 years since the 9/11 attacks.

Here's how it feels in the words of someone who's been to the brink of death:

"There are days when my body and my soul ache so violently that I can't get out of bed. Sometimes it's a good day if all I do is sit up. I know what it's like to crave a physical pain to drown out the pain inside. I have stared down the blackness of the barrel of life and dared to pull the trigger. I know what it's like to lose all hope, to lose all meaning."

3. After reading the above statistics and personal testimony, what surprised you/what was new about to you about depression?

The Bible shows believers that we are not immune from mental anguish.

"As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. ²I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him? ³Day and night I have only tears for food, while my enemies continually taunt me, saying, 'Where is this God of yours?' ⁴My heart is breaking as I remember how it used to be...⁵Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again—my Savior and ⁶my God! Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember you...⁸But each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me, and through each night I sing his songs, praying to God who gives me life. ⁹'O God my rock,' I cry, 'Why have you forgotten me? Why must I wander around in grief, oppressed by my enemies?' ¹⁰Their taunts break my bones. They scoff, 'Where is this God of yours?' ¹¹Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again—my Savior and my God!" (Psalm 42 NLT)

4. Examine the scripture from Psalm 42. Underline the parts of the scripture that indicate depression. Circle the parts that seem to be solutions for depression. Discuss what you marked.

Break It Down

Throughout Scripture, we find many other persons suffering similar symptoms, namely Moses and Elijah.

1.) Moses

The Israelites' journey from Egyptian captivity to the Promised Land began like a dream come true, but it quickly turned into a nightmare.

“Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. He asked the Lord, ‘Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you...? I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me...’” (Numbers 11:10-11, 14-15 NIV)

What caused his depression?

- Physically, Moses tried to do most of the work himself, so he was exhausted.
- Relationally, he felt like the whole world had turned against him as the Israelites whined, day and night, at the entrance to his tent.
- Spiritually, Moses felt distant from the Lord as he allowed his work for God to become a substitute for his relationship with God.

Consequently, like many depressed people, he held the Lord responsible for his problems.

2.) Elijah

For several years, the great prophet had been on an emotional roller coaster:

- He endured three years of famine, had a confrontation with the prophets of Baal which resulted in a marvelous victory, and then had a bounty placed on his head by the evil queen, Jezebel.
- Running for his life, Elijah found himself in the middle of the desert
- He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, Lord,” he said. “Take my life...” (1 Kings 19:4 NIV)
- Elijah had decided he had had enough and life was no longer worth living.

What caused his depression?

- Physically, Elijah was totally depleted from the lack of food and water, survived an intense battle with 450 prophets of Baal, then made two trips up and down Mount Carmel, a 30-mile dash to Jezreel, and a day's journey into the desert. So, like many depressed people, Elijah laid down and wouldn't get up (see v. 5).
 - Relationally, he was under a death threat from the most powerful person in the nation and justifiably suffered from a martyr complex. "I am the only one (righteous) left, and now they are trying to kill me too." (1 Kings 19:10c NIV)
 - Spiritually speaking, Elijah's tank was empty. Despite previously experiencing God's presence and supernatural power, Elijah reacted to Jezebel's threat by being afraid and running away, and he felt like his efforts on behalf of the Lord were fruitless.
1. Think about each example. Which man's action do you identify with the most?
 2. Discuss how that action/thought affected you negatively.

One important lesson can be learned from them: depression is not necessarily a sign of sin or spiritual failure. More times than not, it is a warning light that signals something is wrong.

Suggestions on How to Deal with Depression:

1) Maintain a regular, disciplined routine.

Sometimes we become depressed because we're living beyond our human limits. We simply need some rest, relaxation, a proper diet, exercise regimen, regular work schedule (cf. God's response to Elijah = eat, drink, and get more sleep).

2) Avoid being alone and seek help from others.

Withdrawing breeds isolation, and isolation breeds alienation...more depression. Make a conscious choice to counteract your feelings and get with others.

3) Praise the Lord and give thanks.

Paul didn't tell the Thessalonians to "give thanks" when they felt like it, but "in all circumstances." (1 Thessalonians 5:18 NIV)

4) Lean heavily on the power of God's Word.

One of the best places to turn is the Book of Psalms because its authors are so open about their own feelings & the help they receive from the Lord. (see Psalm 23, 42)

5) Realize that your true identity is found in your relationship with God.

One of the reasons people get depressed is because they allow their circumstances to determine how they view themselves. Our identity and character, as believers, is determined by our relationship with God. We are the precious children of God, adopted into His family by His grace, made into the very character of Christ by our faith in Jesus our Savior.

6) Pursue the presence of the Lord.

Moses and Elijah found relief when they turned from being self-absorbed to being God-absorbed. Rick Warren said, "Pain is not relieved by explanations; pain is relieved by the presence of God in your life." God's presence is now available to each and every one of us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the Lord has promised, "I will never leave you; I will never abandon you." (Hebrews 13:5b GNT)

7) Use your pain to help others.

Listen to these words of the Apostle Paul, who appeared to battle some form of depression at times himself:

"God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others." (2 Corinthians 1:3b-4a NLT)

One final quote from Rick Warren, "God wants to take your greatest hurt and turn it into your greatest life message."

1. Think about the suggestions mentioned above. Which ones are more difficult to follow?
2. What are some ways you can overcome these difficulties to be able to follow the suggestions?
3. How have you seen God take someone's biggest hurt and turn it into his/her greatest life message? It does not have to be about depression.

Close in Prayer.

Pray for God to heal you or someone you know from depression. Spend time praising God for who He is and thanking God for the blessings in your life.

*If you are struggling with depression and need some help, contact our church office (265-5231) to make an appointment with one of our pastors. Women are invited to attend the Depression Impact Group that meets on Tuesdays 6:00-7:00 p.m. in the Chapel at Transmitter. Contact Cathy Byrd, cathy@mylhmc.net or 832-4052 for more details.