

# 5 Things You Need to Know About Depression, Mental Illness

Many know all too well the debilitating effects of mental illness. We do a great disservice when we tell those struggling to “just get over it and think positive thoughts” or “read your Bible more.” Although positive thinking (the right kind) is biblical, and it’s crucial to meditate on God’s Word, one cannot simply turn depression, anxiety and hopelessness on and off like a light switch. But on the flip side, there are factors that contribute to mental anguish. After many years of praying with, talking to and counseling thousands of people, I’ve found five factors that stand out that may cause mental pain. (Watch the short video here outlining these same points.)

**1. Chemical imbalances and other physical factors can cause mental illness.** Medication has a place, such as when neurotransmitters and hormone levels need assistance. In the same way that diabetes needs to be treated with insulin, some struggling with emotional pain may need medication, such as serotonin reuptake inhibitors, but medication doesn’t always fix the problem. Often, it complicates it. Before jumping immediately on the medication bandwagon, consider the next four points. There isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach, but we can look at a combination of things that may be adding to mental anguish.

**2. The consequences of besetting sin can cause mental pain.** In Psalm 32:3 (NASB), David said, “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.” Ongoing unrepentant sin leads to mental anguish, depression and anxiety. I’m not discounting deep emotional and psychological pain, but I do want to remind you that God makes

provision for all our needs through a relationship with Him and obedience to His Word. Counseling with those skilled in the Word is invaluable and desperately needed, but all the counseling in the world will not work if the heart is not right. As a pastor, it would be highly inappropriate for me to neglect this point. If besetting sin or being out of God's will isn't the number one reason for mental pain, then it's a close second.

Again, I'm not suggesting that those who struggle with mental illness are engaged in sin—I hope that's not your takeaway—but unrepentant sin does lead to misery. For example, it was eventually revealed that two Christian leaders in my area who committed suicide were also engaged in extramarital affairs. And in the case of unbelievers, much of their depression, shame and guilt is tied to the fact that they don't know God. Once repentance and trust in Christ take place, the enormous burden is lifted.

This is why pastors should preach repentance when God leads. People need to be lovingly encouraged but also lovingly confronted from time to time. Repentance is a beautiful word that reestablishes our relationship with God. We need to abort sin as soon as it's conceived (James 1:14-15). Sin has a life cycle—it either grows or withers, depending on whether we feed or starve it.

If you believe that your depression is being fueled by unrepentant sin, take time now and confess. God can restore and rebuild your life. If you're not sure where the depression is coming from, then spend time in prayer and reading God's Word. Ask Him to reveal blind spots that may have developed over time, or if there are other issues causing it. Many years ago, I heard an incredible sermon series from a pastor who struggled for years with depression. One day God showed him that he was too concerned about the size of his church and his reputation. He was also negative and critical. As soon as he repented and got his heart right, the depression lifted. It

was an amazing testimony.

**3. A toxic diet can affect mental health.** No surprise here ... what's eating you may have to do with what you're eating. Most people know that poor food choices affect physical health, but they fail to see the connection with mental health. Unhealthy food is a toxic choice when we factor in growth hormones, antibiotics, GMOs, drug residue, pathogens, biotoxins, chemicals and carcinogens that wreak havoc on our bodies. Poor food choices cause a severe lack of vitamins and minerals that actually stabilize our emotions; this lack plays a huge role in mental instability. For example, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders lists caffeine-related disorders such as caffeine intoxication, caffeine-induced anxiety disorder and caffeine-induced sleep disorder that lead to depression, severe anxiety and extreme irritability. If we believe that we can drink a high-powered stimulant day in and day out and not have it affect our health, we are gravely mistaken. The same is true with alcohol. It's a powerful depressant. Both caffeine and alcohol harm physical and emotional health, as well as prevent deep healing sleep.

This then begs the question, "How many are suffering mentally and physically simply because of poor health—continuing the addiction rather than removing the cause of the problem?" For example, type 2 diabetes is a diet-related disease. Did you catch that? Type 2 is caused by our diet. Not in all cases but in most, depression, anxiety, irritability and the like could be severely curtailed if health (spiritual and physical) was a priority. Ironically, a lack of sleep is very common in those with high anxiety. Do you see a connection here? Sadly, even when I share this information, very few want to change.

Many Christians reference Charles Spurgeon's depression. No one knows what caused it, but after poring over his biographies, I'm left with the impression that physical health was not a priority. How do we know that this didn't play a role in his depression and gout? Gout is caused by excessive

uric acid in the blood, often fueled by certain foods. Spurgeon was an incredible preacher, and physical health should not be our main priority, but we should not overlook the health of our bodies.

We were created to consume living, life-sustaining, God-given foods that nourish and support a healthy body—not dead, life-depleting food from a factory. The life of the food is to be deposited into the body to support and maintain life and health. Ironically, when food is withheld, as in the case of fasting, healing often follows. Dr. Yuri Nikolayev, a psychiatrist at the University of Moscow, treated schizophrenics with water fasts for 25 to 30 days. This was followed by eating healthy foods for 30 days. As a result, 70% of his patients remained free from symptoms for the duration of the six-year study. The health benefits of fasting are incredible. (For more help in this area, download my book, *Feasting and Fasting*, for free [here](#).)

**4. A demonic attack can affect mental health.** We can't rule out the possibility of a spiritual attack. Throughout the New Testament, demonic activity caused mental anguish. If a person takes high-powered drugs, they may only increase the problem and could open the door to further demonic activity. *Pharmakeía* (from where we get our word pharmacy) means to administer drugs. In the Bible, it was often tied to the practice of magic and sorcery. Medication for depression can cause suicidal thoughts. It's an area we need to be careful in.

How do you know if an attack is demonic? Take it to God in prayer and fast for a day. Read the next point and see if your spiritual diet is playing a role. Ask for wisdom and deliverance if necessary. Have you opened any obvious doors such as palm reading, tarot cards, alcohol, drugs or Ouija boards? Is there a family history of occult practices? Have those strong in the faith pray for you regularly. Sometimes strongholds have to be pulled down one brick at a time.

Saturate your mind in the Word, and pray and worship throughout the day.

Satan also looks for open doors from our past. Just this week I spoke to a young man who struggled with anxiety from a very young age. Medication didn't fix it; meditating on God's Word did. He realized that the stronghold took a tight grip when his parents divorced, leaving the influence of a broken home at a young age. Only a renewed mind and prayer against this stronghold delivered him.

**5. An unhealthy spiritual diet negatively affects mental health.** What are you feeding your mind? Are you fueling fear and paranoia by spending too much time listening to the media? Are you watching horror movies—especially paranormal and excessively violent ones—and ungodly entertainment? What kind of music do you listen to—uplifting and encouraging or worldly and sensual? Take time and read Philippians 4 to see what the apostle Paul has to say about our mental diet. What you put into your mind plays a huge role in your mental health. If you have a lot of time for entertainment but no time for God, mental health will suffer. The most difficult challenge for me as a pastor is witnessing the tragic results of people dying spiritually because of the choices they are making. Many are sowing to the wind and reaping the whirlwind by not putting God first.

I'm writing this last paragraph as I'm preparing for a memorial service for someone who took their own life. Suicide hurts those closest to you; the pain lasts a lifetime. It's one of the cruelest things we can do to those we love, especially if children are involved. The guilt for family members can be unbearable.

If you find yourself trapped in addiction, misery and depression, there is hope. God continually calls us back to Him. If you return with all your heart, He will return to you. That's a gift of the greatest value—a promise that will never

fail. He is our only hope. But if you've done that and have a vibrant relationship with God, yet still struggle, keep pressing on. Bouts of depression are common to most of us as a by-product of this fallen world, but the reward at the end of the race will far exceed the disappointments of this world. Don't give up—look up!

Special note: I'm currently finishing my next book with the working title, *HELP! I'm Addicted*, which will be available as a free download for those struggling in this area. Keep an eye out for it at or . {eoa}