

# Christian Mental Health Professional: Exposing Satan's Full-Frontal Attack on the Church Today

*Editor's Note: This is part one of a two-part series. Stay tuned for part two!*

Young Christian pastors and church leaders are disposing of their faith—take Josh Harris and Marty Sampson for example. We're seeing tragic young pastoral suicides like Jarrod Wilson of Harvest Christian Fellowship and Andrew Stoecklein, former lead pastor of Inland Hills Church. These events are terrible, confusing and even alarming. And do you know what? They should be, because there's a full-frontal attack by Satan on the church today, and this time, he's ambushing our emotional stability—and, I might add, with some real success. In my 23 years as a former senior pastor and 24 years as a licensed mental health professional, I've not seen such an onslaught of emotional dysfunction within church leadership as I have today—in particular, within younger church leaders.

Look, the days of theologically naive notions of not mixing mental wellness with your Christian faith-walk are over. As sure as there's the "peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7b), there's also the "walk[ing] through the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4b). If you've never experienced that yet, stay tuned. You will.

Martin Luther, the great Reformer himself, suffered from depression, perhaps a major mood disorder and was possibly even bipolar. Luther described his feelings as: "melancholy, heaviness, depression, dejection of spirit; downcast, sad and downhearted." He struggled with these issues much of his life

and often spoke about them in his writings. The poor guy agonized so often that he ended up self-medicating on way more beer and wine than he ever should have! Listen to his declaration of emotional pain:

“I spent more than a week in death and hell. My entire body was in pain, and I still tremble. Completely abandoned by Christ, I labored under the vacillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against God.”

Here was a gigantic man of God, the “founder” of the entire Protestant movement, crying out in an emotionally painful and honest proclamation. It was as though he were saying, “I’m hurting here! Can you hear me? I both love God, and at the same time, the enemy is bombarding my mind with lie after lie that seems to be driving me mad!”

Yes, Luther, the great Reformation designer, struggled with depression. It was real in his life, and plagued him throughout his ministry.

Let’s take another man of God, King David. Listen to him as he emotionally laments and cries out to God in desperation:

“Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my throat. I sink in deep mire; there is no standing place; I have come into the watery depths, and a stream overflows me. I am weary of my crying; my throat is parched; my eyes fail while I wait for my God” (Ps. 69:1-3).

“How long, O Lord? Will You forget me for good? How long will you hide Your face from me? How long will I harbor cares in my soul and sorrow in my heart by day? How long will my enemy loom over me?” (Ps. 13:1-2).

At times when listening to David in Scripture, you would think that he was a candidate for Prozac (fluoxetine). Well, in my opinion, if Prozac had been available back then, he should have been on 50 milligrams a day at the least. I mean the guy

was clearly depressed, and yes, perhaps even suffered with bipolar 1 (elevated moods with high energy, accompanied by abnormal behavior that disrupts life with episodes of depression).

Let me just say here that sadness is a very normal emotion that every one of us experiences from time to time. It could be the loss of a job, the end of a relationship or the death of a loved one. Where sadness is usually caused by a specific situation, person or event, depression on the other hand doesn't necessarily have to be triggered by any of those things. A person suffering from depression feels sad or hopeless about almost everything. This person may have every reason in the world to be happy and yet they lose the ability to experience joy or pleasure.

Listen, whether you're a follower of Jesus or not, depression is real in 3D form throughout society, and it can make you feel emotionally despairing, debilitating and even hopeless. If you have "major depressive disorder," like Jarrod Wilson and Andrew Stoecklein had, then this type of disorder has a high mortality rate—yes, like suicide.

We in the church, and particularly we in the ministry, have to start pulling our heads out of the sand and realize that mental health disorders exist everywhere—and that means in *the church* as well!

What we're not seeing here and we need to see is that depression can be both situational (just lost my job, my car broke down, they shut my electric off and my dog died) and genetic (mom has depression, so does my brother, granddad, Aunt Lucy and Uncle Bill). The former will get you out of depression as your situation gets better, but the latter won't change your mood even if things get better for you in life.

When it comes to someone experiencing genetic depression, you need to be aware of "symptom/cause." The symptoms are anxiety,

apathy, general discontent, guilt, hopelessness, loss of interest or pleasure, mood swings, irritability, isolation, insomnia, fatigue, loss of appetite and possibly thoughts of suicide. The cause is clinical depression brought on by a genetic chemical imbalance in the brain. This kind of depression can also be exacerbated by a number of other factors, like painful family issues growing up, low self-esteem, being bullied, physical/emotional or sexual trauma and so forth.

We need to wrap our heads around the fact that when Adam fell, it was a very hard fall for all of us. The epicenter of the fall happened in Genesis 3:7a: "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked." In that precise moment in history, man fell in six ways: psychologically, physiologically, emotionally, neurologically, relationally and spiritually. The fall was both catastrophic and systemic to the human race. In other words, it was like a scud missile hitting us and blowing us apart in every self-absorbent direction while affecting humanity generationally until the coming of Christ.

However, God has provided an escape hatch for us through the redemption of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross that provides all that's required to minimize the reaction of Adam's passed-down sin. This beautiful and powerful redemption supplies help and hope to be able to forge ahead through this storm called life.  
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