

St Helen's Student Supper

Ros Furlong - 2.6.2013

Being a Christian Who Struggles With Depression and Anxiety

Introduction

Should we have to struggle with emotional disorders ?

Why do we?

1. We're still human – 'groaning' along with the rest of creation according to Paul (Rom 8: 22,23)
2. Both these conditions are common to mankind:
 - 1 in 5 affected by depression
 - 1 in 10 with anxiety
3. Christians have never been immune –
 - BC - Elijah, Jeremiah, Job and King David, (see references in handout)
 - AD - Charles Spurgeon, William CowperThese days: well-respected preachers and teachers both sides of Atlantic

Q: What does this teach us

A: We need to know about and have some understanding of depression and anxiety

Forewarned is forearmed!

What do we mean by 'depression' and 'anxiety'?

How define 'abnormal'? Depression – low mood; Anxiety – 'fear spread thin'

Emotional changes that are **distorted**: out of proportion in:-

- **duration** (2 weeks +)
- **degree** that's **disabling**, interfering with normal life

Imbalance of mood messenger chemicals (amines) – 'pathological' or 'clinical'

Both anxiety and depression respond to antidepressants

Affects body, mind and spirit

- Physically – too tired or
- Mentally – can't concentrate to work properly
- Spiritually – struggle with faith, Bible reading and prayer

Exercise: What would hold you back from seeking medical help?

'Good' reasons:-

'Bad' reasons:-

What are the symptoms?

Anxiety and depression – separately or mixed

x

Anxiety

x

x

x

Depression

Emotional:

1. Tearfulness, despair, lack of hope, lack of feelings (including lack of love for friends & family as well as God; emptiness (includes absence of ‘depression’ in some – more common for men)
2. Lack of interest or pleasure in all or most activities,
3. Anxious, nervous, agitated, restless, irritable,
4. Fearful - of the future and of people, withdrawing from them,
5. Guilt and feeling worthless, self-preoccupied
6. Over-sensitivity – paranoid tendency

Mental:

1. Poor concentration and ability to make decisions (useful check what length article can read/take in)
2. Slowed up thinking
3. Detachment – depersonalization, derealisation
4. Obsessive thoughts
5. Phobias
6. Recurrent thoughts of death &/or suicidal ideas

Physical:

1. Sleep disturbance, Insomnia or hypersomnia (especially early morning waking, dreading the day ahead & often improved mood later in day)
2. Appetite change, 3 Kg + weight gain or loss
3. Low energy, persistent tiredness, or slowed up movement,
4. Various aches and pains, feeling dizzy or faint, disturbed bodily functions and sensations

Spiritual impact: for a Christian,

1. Loss of sense of believing in God or his love, presence, purpose for life or forgiveness (unshakable guilt feelings),
2. Prayer difficult and less meaningful – loss of sense of God’s presence - need to cry out to God using Psalms
3. Bible-reading impaired by poor concentration – less solace from scripture-reading – need to read with a friend

Extreme of depression: psychotic with beliefs that are distorted to extent that out of touch with reality

Extreme of anxiety: self-harm, as reduces anxiety level and re-establishes contact with reality

NB No two people will be identical, but common core of familiar symptoms)

What causes depression and anxiety

Some things generally outside our control:

Nature – (genes)

- personality – bouncy, optimistic c/f reflective, pessimistic
- biochemical make-up – prone to recurrent depression or Bipolar Disorder – extreme mood swinging (high and low)

Nurture – (or lack of it!)

- early separation, parental deprivation: ‘learned helplessness’,
- abuse (emotional, physical or sexual),
- parental attitudes e.g. unrealistic expectations (‘failing’)

Physiological change

- glands e.g. thyroid, , post-viral
- hormone swings e.g. adolescence, post-natal, menopausal
- exhaustion e.g. from sleep loss (or can cause high mood swing, then low)
- post-viral, M.E. (myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome)
- Seasonal Affective Disorder in (SADS)

Some things our response can change through how we regard them:

Stressful life situation or events even pleasant ones eg marriage!

- Exams, transition periods, uncertainty over future
- Loss e.g. of peer group, bereavement, loss or lack of pregnancy, unemployment, retirement
- Ongoing loneliness & isolation– including cut off by deafness etc.
- Awareness of futility in life, reality of ‘down-hill path’ with age
- Suppressed guilt or anger, resentment, disappointment

Christian faith helps through

- Realistic expectations – hope not fulfilled in this world
- God’s trustworthy promises
- God’s undeserved love and grace

BUT can make life **harder** through

- Realistic aspect to guilt as feel ungrateful and unloving
- Raised expectations particularly from ‘triumphalist’ preaching
- Guilt at ‘letting the side down’ by poor witness
- Caring for those who are resisting the gospel
- Satan’s buffeting

And can be **aggravated** by

- inexperience of managing stress
- recognizing warning signs

Exercise:

Think of the last time something ‘got you down’ – what were your thoughts?

Positive:

Negative:

How do we tackle depression and anxiety?

- 1) What's led up to it – humanly and spiritually?
 - pray from God's word eg Psalm 139: v23,24, for an open heart and mind
 - pray for grace to keep going & submission to God's will
 - 2) General practical things
 - Sleep improvement / relaxation time / more company
 - Exercise / fitness / regular food
 - 3) Tackle specific stresses
 - Smallest step first / make a realistic plan that extends beyond depressed state
 - 4) Consider immediate 'heart problems' & attitudes e.g.
 - Hurts not forgiven, anger/resentment
 - Guilt repented but not released (Psalm 103:12)
 - 'expectations' 'entitlement' pride

– need to repent, accept God's will and loving nature, despite suffering experienced
 - 5) Above all don't go it alone:
 - Talk to someone else – group leader, friend, GP
 - Cry out to Jesus when in pain, using Psalms.
 - 6) Accept any help on offer - antidepressants, psychological help or other therapy, alongside Christian counseling and fellowship
 - 7) Once recovering, protection through learning about at a deeper level:
 - God's character - *his love, grace towards us and personal care: He loves us!*¹
 - Self-esteem/Pride issues – *who are we serving and why are we doing it?*²
 - God's sovereignty – *confidence in his awesome power: He is in control!*^{3 4}
- and fourthly,
- Get to grips with a Biblical view of suffering – start by listening again to Charlie's sermon of a fortnight ago & Andrew Sach's series on Job

How can we help others?

- 'A trouble shared is a trouble halved' - just expressing feelings helps
- Especially true if shared with someone showing the fruits of the spirit
- **Listen sympathetically, read the Bible & pray**

Conclusion

What are we aiming for?

Not a struggle-free life - can promise you will never have that as a Christian!

But - growing security, lived out fully in strong assurance that, whatever the future holds, as a very old hymn puts it,

'It is well with my soul' :

- 1 'When peace like a river attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea-billows roll;
whatever my lot You have taught me to say,
'It is well, it is well with my soul'. Horatio G Spafford(1828-88)

We are safe for eternity – and nothing can matter in comparison!
Heb 12:11

¹ Book: 'What's So Amazing About Grace': Philip Yancey

² Book: 'The Freedom Of Self-Forgetfulness': Timothy Keller

³ Book: 'Spiritual Depression: It's Causes And Cure': Martyn Lloyd-Jones
chs 7,10,11,18

⁴Book: 'Out Of The Storm' (Job) : Christopher Ash