

HOPELESSNESS

A Further Understanding of Discouragement and Depression

What is Hopelessness?

Assess the Situation

1. _____ Hopelessness
2. _____ the _____ of hopelessness.

Develop a Plan

1. _____ the resources available.
2. Find the _____
3. Pursue _____

Biblical Examples

The First Step

1. The Need = _____
2. The Source = _____

* Matthew 14:22-33

Researchers believe that nearly 20 million Americans suffer from some form of depression. Unfortunately, only about half the individuals experiencing depression get any kind of treatment or counsel to help them deal with their problems. Since every aspect of depression cannot be adequately dealt with in one sermon, we've provided this article to explain additional issues related to hopelessness.

To battle depression without support is dangerous since 10% or more of those struggling with depression end up committing suicide. Christians shouldn't have to deal with this issue alone. First, we know the Source of Hope, Jesus Christ. Second, we in the Body of Christ should be sensitive to the needs of others and be ministers of hope and encouragement to those who are struggling.

Types and Causes of Depression

Under the umbrella term of "depression" you may have heard a variety of types or of extreme situations. Very minor depression may include the "blue" feelings we all get when disappointed or dealing with a discouragement in life. Depressed feelings may become chronic (*dysthymic disorder*), but not disrupt everyday living. *Clinical depression* or *major depression* can affect our ability to function in daily tasks and relationships. *Involutional depression* can be triggered by physical changes in the body, especially during midlife changes. Physical body changes can also trigger *postpartum depression* or *seasonal affective disorder (SAD)*. *Bipolar disorder* (the experience of extreme highs and lows) appears to have genetic links and can often be controlled medically. There are many other designations along this spectrum of depression.

There is no single cause for depression. It can be triggered by a life change (loss of a relationship, move, divorce, retirement, job change, etc.), conflict, grief, abuse (physical, emotional or sexual), illness, substance abuse and so on. Depression can have a physiological cause possibly due to chemical changes in the body or changes in

midlife. Since depression seems to run in some families, it's possible they may one day discover genetic causes.

Diagnosis

Unfortunately, there is no blood test that checks for depression. There is no diagnostic machine that a mental health expert can hook you up to and show you are depressed. Instead, a doctor or counselor will ask you about the "symptoms" of depression. These might include, but not limited to, sadness, loss of energy, feelings of hopelessness or unworthiness, change in appetite, insomnia or excessive sleep, inability to make decisions or concentrate, thoughts of suicide. After a diagnosis of depression, many people will want to pursue a medical exam to check for any physiological changes that may be causing these feelings of depression.

Treatment

Treatment can come through a variety of professionals. Psychiatrists deal with the physiological causes and can prescribe medications. Psychologists deal with changing behavior and thinking. They cannot prescribe medication. Physicians do not provide therapy, but can deal with physiological causes. Social workers and licensed counselors practice in many different settings and provide psychotherapy. Pastoral counselors provide therapy related primarily in the context of one's spiritual life.

Christians have the additional assistance of fellow believers. Although it's often difficult for those struggling with depression to express their need, they'll find themselves surrounded by people who have (or are currently) struggling with the same feelings. By joining with other believers for encouragement and accountability the discouraged individual should discover an extra layer of support not available to the general "secular" population.

People suffering from severe depression will often need the assistance of several of the individuals listed above. It's important these individuals work together as a team creating the unified support network most likely to help the hurting person begin the move toward healing. For this reason it's good to seek referrals you can trust for

direction and treatment that agrees with your Christian worldview.

Medication

We've already stated that our physical body can sometimes be the trigger for our depression. Additionally, our bodies can be impacted by depression that is occurring for other reasons. Thus, there are times when medication is appropriate to help the depressed individual through feelings of crisis and back to feelings of normalcy. However, medications only treat the physiological causes and symptoms, they don't deal with the emotional causes that may be the root of the hopelessness. Therefore, it's important to seek counseling through this period to allow a complete healing process.

Stress, adrenaline and other factors affect the neurotransmitters in the brain (norepinephrine, serotonin, and dopamine). Different medications help regulate these biochemical reactions allowing the person suffering with depression to avoid the extreme feelings of hopelessness. Great advances are continuing in medications in this field. Physical condition (diet and exercise) has been shown to have a huge impact, especially in conjunction with the proper medications.

Since there are no accurate tests to determine the proper medication for patients suffering with depression, one must be patient and allow time for the doctor to adjust medications before the best possible results will occur. Medications can also take 3 days to 3 months to develop effectiveness. Medications should be used to regulate body physiology, giving the sufferer the time and energy to deal with the root causes of the depression when appropriate. Long-term use of medications should be used only under the supervision of a trusted team of medical professionals and counselors.

Sources:

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Grayson, Charlotte E., M.D., ed. *WebMD*. The Cleveland Clinic Department of Psychiatry and Psychology. 2000-2009.

Focus on the Family Health Resources. (www.fotf.org)

National Mental Health Association (www.depressionscreening.org)