

## DEPRESSION

### Is it wrong for a Christian to be depressed?

#### Question: "Is it wrong for a Christian to be depressed?"

**Answer:** [Depression](#) is somewhat of a charged issue among Christians. Some flatly declare it to be a sin. The thinking is that depression reveals a lack of faith in God's promises, God's judgment on sinful behavior, or just laziness. We know that God is good and loving and that we are secure in Him, so what is there to be depressed about? Others flatly declare depression to be a medical issue. The thinking is that all depression is a result of chemical imbalances in the brain, so depression is no more wrong than having the flu. And then there are those in the middle who aren't really sure what the ugly beast of depression is. Faith seems somewhat related, but so do brain chemicals. Of course, there are also the depressed Christians, left to feel guilty, defensive, confused, lost, or simply too depressed to even care what the church thinks. So is it wrong for a Christian to be depressed?

The term *depressed* is a fairly loose one. It can refer to a diagnosable medical condition (clinical depression), but it can also refer to a temporary feeling of sadness or apathy or to a nebulous, lingering malaise. This article will attempt to briefly consider several of these meanings of *depression*.

For some people a chemical or hormonal imbalance triggers a depressed state. This is most typical for women experiencing post-partum depression or people on certain medications. Other times, depression is situational, caused by adverse circumstances, life changes, a spiritual crisis, etc. Our emotional response to those crises can in turn trigger a chemical imbalance. Truly, humans are "fearfully and wonderfully made" ([Psalm 139:14](#)), and it should come as no surprise that our biology interacts with our emotions and vice-versa. Once a person is depressed, the cycle of hormonal imbalance and negative emotions can be difficult to break.

Whether the emotions cause the biology to change or the biology causes the emotions to change, the resulting symptoms are the same.

Having a medical condition is not a sin. However, what brings a person to that condition could be rooted in sin. For instance, it is not wrong to have diabetes, but it is wrong to be a glutton (and the two are *sometimes* related). Also, how a person responds to a genuine medical condition could also be sinful. For example, it would be sinful for a person with diabetes to use his disease to manipulate others or to adopt a “victim” mentality or an attitude of entitlement.

Yet, often, we hold those with diabetes or other medical conditions less culpable than we do people with depression. For some reason, mental illnesses—especially depression—are associated more often with sinful causes than are physical ailments. Depression is not *exclusively* a medical issue, and it is not *exclusively* an emotional or spiritual issue.

Depression is often viewed as a persistent feeling of sadness. Of course, it is okay to be sad. We live in a world of pain ([Genesis 3:14–19](#); [Romans 8:20–22](#)), and Jesus wept over the death of Lazarus ([John 11:35](#)). There is no need to always put on a happy face and pretend that things are okay when they are not.

There are many biblical examples of men of God struggling with sadness, even to the point of depression. David wrote, “Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll—are they not in your record?” ([Psalm 56:8](#)). David, a “man after [God’s] own heart” ([Acts 13:22](#)), did not gloss over his sadness; he expressed it to God. Both Moses ([Numbers 11:15](#)) and Elijah ([1 Kings 19:3–5](#)), two heroes of the faith, confessed to God that they preferred to die than live in their current reality. Neither was rebuked by God for his feelings; rather, both were met with God’s love and provision. The Bible is not shy about admitting the realities of human emotion. Sadness is part of life, and it is not condemned.

As believers, we are exhorted to see the greater reality of God’s plan even in the midst of our sadness and depression. Yes, this world is fallen and often painful. It

can be depressing. But God is far greater. He is at work, victoriously. Moses and Elijah received God's provision and experienced His refreshing. Shortly after pouring out his sadness, David praised God. Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Christians are permitted to call trouble for what it is. At the same time, we take heart in God's care. Taking heart does *not* mean pasting on a smile or ignoring the feeling of emptiness that depression brings. It does *not* mean neglecting to treat depression through counseling or medication. It does *not* mean ignoring the relational hurts or the misperceptions that have led to depression (Satan's lies, if we believe them, will lead us to despair). It does *not* mean denying the fact that depression could be a lifelong struggle.

What taking heart *does* mean is bringing all our pain to God. It *does* mean continuing to trust in Him. It *does* mean believing that what He says about Himself and about us is true, even when we don't feel like it is. It *does* mean getting the help we need, battling depression rather than giving in to it. We acknowledge the depravity of the world, but we also acknowledge the sufficiency of God.

It is not wrong to be depressed. But it is wrong—and not especially helpful in overcoming a depressed state—to give up on God when we are depressed. "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" ([Psalm 43:5](#)).

