

Depression: Its Causes and Cure

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The Facts About Your Feelings Series

Philippians 4

I have been doing a series over the last several weeks that I have called “The Facts About Your Feelings.” During this series, what I have been attempting to do is to show the relevance of the Bible to speak to this area of life called the emotions, which in modern America have been almost completely handed off to secular therapists. Virtually anyone who goes through college has taken one, or two, or more psych classes and no where in those psych classes is there any discussion about what the Bible teaches about our emotions or how our emotions were designed by God to work. People very quickly begin to adopt an attitude which says, “I would not necessarily turn to the Bible for information about my emotions anymore than I’d turn to the Bible for information about atomic physics or car repair.”

And now, with the huge market of self-help books and an assorted mix of spirituality – which is generally defined as almost anything you do to nurture a sense of well being, getting a massage is considered spiritual, so is inhaling certain fragrances, so is using candles instead of electric light – with the growth of the self-help book industry, many people in America have adopted the perspective that the Bible isn’t necessary to successfully deal with issues like anxiety, depression, or rage.

And then, along side of the complete neglect of Bible in psychology classes and the complete neglect of Bible in self-help books and spirituality and wellness manuals, the church has done a pretty fine job of shooting itself in the foot by providing almost no helpful counsel to true sufferers. We have the situation in some churches where if you have an emotional difficulty, if you go through a bad patch, if you struggle in an area of your emotional life, the counsel you might get is “Hey, grow up. Snap out of it. We will give you one week to fix it. But there is a big job to do in expanding the Kingdom and we don’t have the time or inclination to help you cope with your particular problem.” Churches that have this mind set, that we are going to take the world for Christ, but we are not going to heal the wounded along the way, remind me of armies that don’t set up medical or surgical units out on the field. Part of the job of expanding the kingdom of God involves healing the wounded along the way. But sadly, many churches invest very little resource in healing the wounded and occasionally will take the wounded out back and shoot them.

No church, including this one, is guiltless. We pastors are finite and sinful. We are not Jesus. We don’t have infinite wisdom, infinite sensitivity, and infinite patience. But any church worthy of being considered a biblical church ought to devote a serious portion of its energy toward healing broken people. And any church that wants to be considered biblical ought to be constantly demonstrating the relevance of the scripture to the whole of life, including the emotions. See,

one of my main jobs here as pastor of the church, is to continually make this church into a biblical church. To build up your confidence in God's Word, not in Rich, not in the Vineyard, but in God's Word. That you become increasingly convinced that this book has the answers for a successful and happy life. That if you meditate on the words in this book, that if you apply what you are reading in this book, that you put into practice the counsel that is given in this book, you will live well and be blessed by God.

Today, I want to talk about depression as part of this series on the emotions. I want to demonstrate the relevance of the scriptures concerning a problem, that depending on the statistic you read affects somewhere between 2 and 10% of the American public at any given time. In other words, somewhere between 5,000,000 and 25,000,000 Americans at any given time are going to be suffering from depression. And psychologists estimate that about a quarter of people at some point in their life are going to suffer from severe depression. Depression is a major public health problem in the US right now, especially among the young. And if you don't suffer from depression, someone you love will. What will you say to them? How will you help?

There is a lot of discussion as America ages concerning depression in the elderly. But actually the rates of depression for people born after the second World War are far higher than the rates of depression for those born before the second World War. And many people don't realize that there is an epidemic level of adolescent depression and depression in young adults. In fact, teenage suicide and the suicide of college students is the second leading cause of death among college students, after accidents.

Let me give you some preliminary definitions regarding what it is we are talking about today by depression. There is a lot of complexity in this area. We are not primarily talking today about bereavement or grief that is suffered as a result of the loss of a loved one, where a person for a period of time can manifest some of the symptoms of depression –weight loss, insomnia, poor appetite. I am talking about the feelings that someone has when they haven't suffered a recent loss. The feelings would be generally a prolonged feeling of sadness or emptiness. Depression is not always feeling blue, although very often a person who says the local blues station is always playing their song might be tipped off that something is going on in their life that is not right. Still, depression could also be experienced as a numb or empty feeling. A depressed person is a person who experiences a loss in their ability to feel pleasure about anything. Life loses its fizz. Often, depressed people are not motivated to accomplish tasks. Doing is no longer a priority. It just takes too much energy to do even simple tasks like choosing a restaurant or deciding on a movie. It feels to a depressed person that it is just not worth the effort. And so decreased motivation is a symptom. Often, a person who is depressed suffers from very low self-esteem where everyone else seems more successful, happier, prettier, luckier, stronger, smarter, more desirable. A person who is depressed can begin to feel that they are at the bottom of the pecking order and passed over for blessings from God.

There could be physical symptoms along with depression. The chronic sleep disturbance where you can't sleep or feel like you always want to sleep. You have trouble falling asleep or wake up in the middle of the night and can't go back to sleep. Doctors tell us that other physical symptoms would include excessive weight loss or excessive weight gain, low energy, diminished sex drive, chronic headaches. Depressed people often feel hopeless, stuck. "I can't change this situation." Frequently, that is the dominant feeling. I am stuck in a situation that I can't change. That feeling of helplessness and hopelessness drives a person deeper and deeper into depression. Depressed people often will increasingly cut themselves off from social activity. They feel lonely and isolated. Their relationships go to the skids. Their love life becomes a shambles. They are fatigued. They find it difficult to concentrate and be productive.

It is not a really pretty picture. It is no wonder that people consider depression to be one of the most debilitating problems a person can suffer from. Think about it, to feel mentally dull, to have a hard time concentrating, to want to withdraw, decreased motivation, a loss of sex drive, sleep problems, weight and appetite going haywire, self-esteem bottoming out, continual feelings of hopelessness. It is a horrible place to live.

Just for your information, so that you might be able to assist your children, occasionally depression in children is characterized by different kinds of behaviors. Parents can miss some of the warning signs of depression. But often children become very hostile or irritable. They find themselves sitting in the principal's office a lot, staring at the floor, when they are going through a long-term depression.

okay, well those are some of the symptoms of depression. Let me quickly say something about medication. Right now, anti-depressants are somewhere around a seven billion dollar industry. There has been an evolution of anti-depressant drugs since the 1950's. The most popular ones right now are Prozac, Paxil and Zoloft. Scientists are not exactly sure how they work. They strongly suspect that these drugs affect the nerve endings in your brain where these different chemicals like serotonin help to transmit the brain's message from one nerve to another. A lot of people are confused about the use of medication for emotional problems like depression. I feel some responsibility as a pastor to give you at least some guidance regarding the use of medication in dealing with an emotional problem. I think there is a real balancing act to be maintained here in terms of our attitudes as Christians toward taking medication ourselves or allowing our children to be placed on medication. There is a real balancing act.

On the negative side, I think we ought to be very concerned about simplistic, superficial diagnoses where a prescription is written by a doctor after a 10-15 minute visit without a very thorough investigation concerning the roots and long-term history of you as an adult or one of your children. If the prescription pad comes out too early, I think all kinds of red flags ought to go up in your mind, Christian. Wait a minute. How careful is this person in giving me or one of my children a very strong mood-altering drug? How selective is this person in making sure that all the other bases are covered before they start putting chemicals in my body? And unfortunately there is virtually no research on the

effects of antidepressants on kids or adolescents. It's just too easy to pull out a pad and write a prescription or hand someone a pill.

A second thing you ought to be concerned about is masking real problems. Is the therapist going after some of the root causes of depression? Are they biblical in their approaches? Or is this just a masking, a covering up, of some very deeply rooted difficulties in your life or the life of a child?

The truth is that medication generally does not provide any lasting kinds of solutions. Psychology Today recently published a study showing that when dealing with depressions, drugs usually outstripped therapy alone in the first month. In the second month the benefits start evening out. In the third month therapy just goes way beyond drug treatment.

But on the other hand, there are some times, friends, when you as a person can be so severely depleted, so rung out, so exhausted physically and emotionally, that without some medication, a competent and Biblical counselor might not be able to get to some of the root problems that I am going to talk about today. I am speaking to the rare person here. I want to caution you against the physician who has his prescription pad out right away. I say run for the hills if that is the case. But if you are a believer, and you, or someone you love, are simply not coping with basic life activities, if you simply are not sleeping or sleeping all day long, you can't get up to go to work, your appetite is totally off and you just don't have the capacity or energy to deeply delve into what is at the root of your problems, it might be a time to go to a competent Christian and be open to the need for some temporary medication.

The fact is, the studies seem to be indicating that long-term depression can affect your brain so that you can't kick out of it. It does concern me that church can create an environment in which a person believes that any use, even temporary short-term use in very severe cases, of medication is out of bounds and that people just have to tough it out while spiraling farther and farther down a hole. I believe in certain limited cases, God in his mercy has provided us with helpful medications. But it is a balancing act, friends, and that is why I have tried to point you throughout this series to competent Christian counselors who take the Word of God seriously. The kind of person who is not rushing to medication as a first step, but as a last step. I just want you to know from your pastor that if you have touched the bases and have been to a competent Christian counselor and you just can't kick out of it, that you are not failing God and not a failure as a Christian. I just want to really remove that weight of guilt that a few of you would labor under while you are endeavoring to be healed and made whole. Today, my message is going to be titled, "Depression: Its Causes and Cure." Let's pray.

We are going to look in the scriptures at Philippians 4 where the apostle Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice." The tense of the verb that Paul is using is a present imperative. What that means is that he is issuing a continuing habitual command, a command that you are to do all the time, hour by hour. Rejoice in the Lord.

Now, before we look at the exact content of what it means to rejoice in the Lord, hour by hour, it is quite apparent that this verse and in fact much of the Bible, addresses us as people who have choices. One of the major roots of

depression is passivity – the attitude that says I have no choice about how I feel. I am pressed upon by circumstance, by the awful situation that I am in, or by my awful past. I have no real choice regarding this feeling of despondency, this pessimism, or the temptation to constantly withdraw. Friends, one of the fundamental issues in understanding depression and overcoming it, is to begin to believe that you have a choice regarding your mental attitude and you have a choice regarding your behavior.

Victor Frankel was a Jewish psychiatrist and a prisoner at a concentration camp under the Nazis. As a concentration camp inmate, he lived in the most abominable conditions. Conditions that no one of us could imagine enduring for even a day. Burying friends. Watching brutal beatings. Seeing people herded off into gas chambers, along with the continual fatigue of laboring on too little food and too little sleep, rats, lice, and brutal guards. In such a place with such horrible circumstances Victor Frankel began to explore whether it was possible to hold onto his humanity. Were the Germans capable not only of imprisoning him physically, but were they capable of taking away his humanity? Here is what Frankel came up with in his classic book called “Man’s Search for Meaning.”

He said, “Man can preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, an independent mind, even under terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress. In the middle of the concentration camp I can remember men walking through huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. There may have been just a few of these men, but they offered proof to me that everything can be taken away from a man but one thing – I call it the last of the human freedoms, the freedom to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances. To choose one’s own way.”

Every hour, he says, there were choices to make. Choices about whether to be irritable or not. Choices about whether to comfort another person or not. Choices to share food or not. He says even though conditions such as a lack of sleep, insufficient food, and various mental stresses may suggest that the inmates were bound to react in certain ways, in the final analysis it became clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, a man can even under such stressful circumstances, decide what shall become of him. The last of the human freedoms – the freedom to choose.

Now what Victor Frankel is saying is so fundamentally biblical, that I want to apply this principle. If you trace back in a depressed person’s past, very often there will be a significant history of abuse or abusive relationships, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse. As part of the pain of the abuse, a person will often feel what I described at the front end – great despondency, feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, feelings of emptiness. These kinds of powerful negative feelings are often linked to a history of abuse.

Now at some point, a victim of abuse comes upon Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always. And, again, I say rejoice.” And that abuse victim who has suffered a particularly miserable past might say to themselves, “Does this mean that I am to rejoice in the fact that I was continually struck for no reason at all? Or molested as a child? Or screamed at or put down?” Of course, the apostle

Paul is not saying that at all. He is not saying, "Rejoice in victimization. Rejoice in injustice. Rejoice in things that are shameful and should never be done." Does this mean, Rich, that I am supposed to put a syrupy, saccharine coating over the past and pretend that it doesn't hurt? That what I went through didn't wound?

Paul is not advocating that we play pretend and that we wear a fake smile or bury our histories of abuse and not let anyone know about it. Just hold those painful feelings inside and smile on the outside. Rejoicing in the Lord when you have an abused past involves two choices. Two choices of your will. And I speak especially to those of you who have had some kind of traumatic history. There are two choices of your will that this command addresses. The first choice of your will is openness with someone who is trustworthy about what you have been through. You can't rejoice while there is bitterness or shame or terror buried deeply within. That stuff needs to be cleared out. There is a choice of openness, not with everyone, but we pick those with whom we are going to be open with wisely. We use discretion. But choice #1 is "I am going to tell someone about my past."

Choice #2, and here is where we get into rejoicing in the Lord, is "I am not going to let my past victimization define my life forever. My fundamental identity is in the Lord. Because I am attached to the Lord, I am not going to allow this abuser and their perversion, their alcoholism, their confusion, their rage – I am not going to allow them to shape my life forever and label me. My fundamental identity as a Christian is that I am a son or daughter of God."

To rejoice in the Lord is to hear God's divine "nevertheless" and believe it. Yes, I was abused, nevertheless, God can change me. God is healing me.

Yes, all of that was true about me. I was filled with shame and terror and fear. Nevertheless, in Jesus Christ, God has given me freedom. Step by step those numb feelings can go away. Step by step, I can choose to trust again. Rejoicing in the Lord is a divine nevertheless. You will not be labeled or stamped forever. You don't have to have the word "victim" tattooed on your forehead. That was true. But now in Jesus Christ there is a new stronger truth. God is at work in my life. God can set me free.

I received a letter recently from a woman in this congregation. She said, "Rich, I wanted to let you know that you are welcome to use any of my experiences that you are aware of or that I have shared with you as examples or illustrations in your upcoming teaching on emotions. Not to be self-congratulatory, but it does seem that my experience with depression and other mental health issues and the growth and victory that I have seen in these areas does fit well with the teaching you are planning. I have suffered my entire life from depression..."

Clinicians would label her with a temperament type that has the tendency to being despondent. She had three episodes of major depression on top of this tendency to be depressed resulting in a double depression. She writes, "I was hospitalized on two occasions for the major depression. I was diagnosed for depression and paranoid psychosis." She says in her letter, "I grew up with a negative legacy. That verse in Exodus 34:7 which says, 'God visits the iniquity of

fathers on children and on grandchildren to the third and fourth generations' really applies to my family. Every male in my family back several generations has been touched by substance abuse, addiction. Every female in my family has been touched by hopelessness, depression. We have legacies of suicide, abuse, violence."

Here is her next line, "But our God is a God of choice and freedom. I have had to learn to choose, to battle continually with my despondency. I have had to admit that I have a problem and to get the help that I needed to overcome my problem. I have to watch what I do, what I eat and drink, when I take medication. I have to continually turn my mind constantly every hour toward the Lord. I choose to turn away from certain thoughts and turn my heart to praise and thanksgiving. And the result of worship for me is dramatic. It really works. In my particular case, God uses music to lift up my spirit. I choose to name what is going on in my life and then give it to God. I choose to be active doing things with my hands and that works remarkably well. The bottom line [and this letter is so remarkable] is that God has given me freedom, step by step, to choose in his strength to be better."

Has it been a long arduous journey? It has.

Is she 100% healed now? No she is not.

She says this battle may be life long.

Choosing to rejoice in the Lord not only applies to past abuse, but it applies to all the ways that depressed people can allow their moods to be dictated by their present circumstances. This issue of choosing your attitude and behavior verses passively responding to your present situation. Let me ask you a personal question. Do you allow other people to determine how you feel? Do you allow circumstances to determine how you feel?

You say, "My spouse has no desire to hear about, much less to understand, my emotions." Perhaps that is true. But must your spouse have such godlike power over your life that they determine whether you are going to sink into depression because they are emotionally insensitive? Or can you instead choose to rejoice in the Lord and say, "Nevertheless, Jesus Christ is my God and reigns; it is not my husband." See you can't control what your husband does or doesn't do, but you can choose your response to your husband's insensitivity.

Your mother never understands why you make the decisions that you do. Every time you share one of your decisions she criticizes you. She throws up into your face the bad decisions you have made in the past. Must your mother have godlike power to dictate whether you are going to be emotionally healthy or sink into depression? Perhaps it is the case that your mother will never understand why you handle your decisions the way you do. You can't control what your mother does or doesn't do but you can say, "Nevertheless, after getting off the phone with my negative mom, I am going to choose to rejoice in the Lord, that he, Jesus Christ, is my God. That he understands me. That I don't live under constant criticism from the one who really is God. He accepts me and loves me. And I am going to spend time right now worshipping him."

Let me spin this in a different way. Does your joy ultimately come from external circumstances or does your joy come from the Lord? See, and I say this

with all kindness, applying it even to myself, many of us publicly confess ourselves to be God-believing, Christ-saved Christians. But when push comes to shove, when we are denied something, we really end up saying our joy does not come from God. I can't be joyful unless this particular circumstance changes. I know I claim that Jesus is my Savior, but often the truth is that we put such heavy requirements on something other than Christ to fill us with joy. That Christianity, for all practical purposes, has lost its power to produce. If my husband or my wife doesn't change in such and such a way, I cannot be joyful. Again, I say this tenderly, but is Jesus Christ really your Savior if you put so much weight on the way your husband or wife relates? Is he really your Savior then? If he can't comfort you even while you live with a much less satisfying marriage or if the only way you're going to find joy is if you get married, how can anyone expect you to be happy and filled with joy while you are so lonely? Is it the case that our outer world must conform to our demands in order for us to have a joy-filled, comforting relationship with God? I think of Lamentations 3.

Friends, the truth is that all of us are going to experience circumstances that will be painful. Without denying the pain, we can choose to worship God, to be loving and encouraging to others, to not complain, to act compassionately and kindly toward folks who have had similar experiences. The major cause of depression: Passivity – living as a reactor instead of an actor and an initiator, allowing present circumstances or a negative past to determine the way we feel right now and what we do. The major cure: Recognizing that in Jesus Christ, if you have really turned to him for salvation, he has set you free to choose, not easily, not without great struggle, not without 3 steps forward and 2 steps back, but he has set you free to choose to rejoice in him. To have his divine “nevertheless” spoken over your life. These circumstances may be true, but nevertheless, my God still reigns. My past may have been painful, but nevertheless, my God is good and in him I am going to rejoice. I can choose my attitude toward life. I can choose how I am going to respond in this moment, in this situation.

Paul goes on in Philippians 4 and says, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if there is anything excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.”

Here is a major cure for depression. Determine to monitor your thoughts and turn your mind continually toward what is true, what is right, what is noble, what is excellent. This word for “think” literally means to ponder, to dwell upon, and to reflect on. Our minds literally can be reprogrammed as we choose to meditate on and think on the Word of God. If you want to know what is true and noble and pure and lovely, the stuff in this book is. The Word of God is. Talk about a cure for depression. How about if we who are struggling with depression begin to write down passages that comfort us, that challenge us, and carry them around and put them on our refrigerator and in our purse and shirt pocket. We post them in the office. Verses like Psalm 1: “Blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree to be planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does, he prospers.”

Talk about mental health. Here is a person who is drawing his life or her life from God’s Word like a tree planted by a river. I am filling my mind with good things. If you don’t like to read, one of the best sources of combating depression is to get a set of Bible tapes and just play them over and over and over instead of watching TV. And instead of the lethargy that comes over you when you watch TV, instead of filling your mind with negativity, fill yourself with God’s Word.

Jeremiah 15:16 talks about the effect of putting God’s Word into our hearts. He says, “When your words came I ate them. They were my joy and my heart’s delight for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty.”

Let me spin this idea of thinking about what is true in a slightly different direction, again, applying this task of thinking to the issue of depression. Along with passivity, a second fundamental cause of depression is the unwillingness to accept reality, to accept the world the way the world presents itself to us. Underlying much depression is the continual disappointment, the continual disillusionment with the way things are. It is a very hard truth, but life is unfair. There are weaknesses and sins, and patches of ugliness that each one of us must make room for in our view of the world. And when we continue to protest and say I cannot accept this pain, this ugliness, this sin, this blind spot, this insensitivity, the net results in our lives is depression.

Let me apply this. Some people believe that if they just try hard enough and are good enough and they pray enough and are faithful enough that they should not have to go through great pain. If I do the right things, I should not be sick. Thinking about what is true communicates a very different message. The truth is in this sinful world that we live in, this fallen world, pain is a part of reality. It doesn’t matter how good you are as a parent, your kids will fight with each other. It doesn’t matter how good you are as a spouse, you may still have a husband or wife who is insensitive or who doesn’t meet your emotional needs. Some folks can’t accept that, what I call the negative side of life, the ugly side of life. I am doing everything, why am I not trouble free? The Bible says that trials just come in all different varieties. They aren’t necessarily there because you have messed up. It is not because you have done something wrong. It is just the way life is. So, you can say all day long it is unfair that I have health problems or that I had to grow up in the home that I grew up in, but life in a sinful, fallen world is not fair.

Now many people cannot accept that life is sometimes unfair. The right to happiness seems to be the most basic of American rights. I frequently meet Christians who are contemplating a divorce or separation without any biblical grounds because their marriages are miserable. Christians have no right to sin; we have no right to violate our vows. May I ask you a personal question? Is Jesus your Lord only when he says yes to what you want or also when he says no? See, if Jesus is Lord only when he says yes, he is not really your Lord at all. He’s just agreeing with you. The test of whether Christ is your Lord is when he says no to you and you still obey him.

Friends, I really believe that this gap between our illusion of what we want the world to be and what it is can frequently create in us great depression. Pain is

not the worst thing. It is far worse to be depressed trying to create a world that will never be. Insisting on a view of reality that just isn't. Pain is not the worst thing. It is worse to be depressed.

Are you saying that I shouldn't hurt after what I have been through with my mother? Or the death of a loved one? The financial disaster that we have gone through? Or my miserable loveless marriage?

I am not saying that you should be stoical or pretend that pain and loss doesn't hurt. What I am saying is that part of thinking about what is true is that pain and loss are an inevitable part of life in this world. Sometimes pain and loss are not doled out equally. It is not fair that you have had all the setbacks that you have had. I agree. It may be the worst possible time for you to go through what you are going through. But I can tell you that if you insist on your view of reality, which involves less pain than what you have experienced, or less loss than what you have experienced, you will stay stuck in depression. A step toward healing always involves, "God, I can't imagine why this happened the way it did. I can't even imagine how you can work good out of this. And I don't pretend to like it. But this is the way life is in this fallen world and I choose to believe that whatever I am experiencing right now is not going to be permanent. I choose to believe that you can bring a measure of healing in my life in this life and in the world to come completely alter things." ...so that babies don't die...and parents don't suffer loss...and I will not be lonely...and I will have all my needs met and nothing will be unfair. Remember part of reality is that Christ is coming back to wipe away every tear and to put every enemy under his feet.

Cure #2 – adjust to reality. God does not promise painlessness. One day, when Christ returns, we will be pain free, but not now. Choose to stop insisting that people must be other than they are; that circumstances must change.

Habakkuk, the Hebrew prophet, complained about the unfairness of life. God didn't tell him, "No, no Habakkuk, it is much better than what you have expressed." Everything is okay, just be Pollyanna, put on a happy face. God did remind Habakkuk of his past activity, that God had been great in the past and that Habakkuk should meditate on God's past deeds. God also reminded Habakkuk that one day the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. But Habakkuk came to the place of stating that despite the unfairness, despite the ugliness, God was still good and that he was going to rejoice in the Lord no matter what. Here is what Habakkuk says, "Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails, and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls..." In other words, though life is unfair and doesn't conform to what I want... "yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He enables me to go on the heights."

Let me talk about a third and final source of depression. Next week I am going to talk about anger – that is frequently a source of depression. My talk will be on overcoming anger. Let me talk about a third and final source of depression and that is guilt. In Psalm 32 David writes, "Blessed is he whose transgressions

are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.”

Transgression means rebellion against God. When we are rebellious against God, it is like a burden, a weight on us. To be forgiven means to have that weight carried off of us, carried away. There is a burden on people because of the guilt of their sins – a crushing burden sometimes that needs to be carried away, rolled off of us. And in Jesus Christ, God has provided a sin bearer to take off of us the load of guilt. David says that not only were his transgressions forgiven, but his sins were covered. Sin means missing the mark. We have failed God’s standard and what he does is cover our sin by the sacrifice of Christ. Christ stands between our offense and God’s holiness. And Christ covers our offense.

Verse 2 says, “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord doesn’t count against him.” Literally, it says his iniquity. It means straying from the straight path. When we turn, when we repent, God doesn’t view us as straying any longer. In fact, when we accept the forgiveness offered in Christ, God not only doesn’t count our sin against us, but he counts his own righteousness in our favor. Having burdens rolled away, having pasts covered, having God not keep score, keep tabs, but instead reckon his righteousness to us, this is really liberating in terms of depressed feelings.

David says, “When I kept silent my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.”

I am convinced that a major cause of depression is sin and the guilt resulting from our sin. See, I don’t believe a Christian can sin without experiencing some guilt. If you can sin and feel no guilt, you need to question whether you really are a Christian. A true Christian cannot sin without feeling guilt. And if you continually sin, what you are doing is rubbing your life against the grain of the universe and you can’t run your life against the grain of the universe without picking up splinters. You will feel bad. You don’t tranquilize guilt away. You don’t wish it away. You don’t busy away guilt. The way guilt is dealt with in the Bible is to confess it.

David says that he was depressed until he came clean with God. There was an infection in David’s body that was just eating away at him. It wouldn’t go away all day long, he says, I felt bad. Only by coming clean, by turning to Christ, by acknowledging openly to him what you have done will you ever find real lasting relief.

Many folks are depressed because they have minimized their sins. Many folks are depressed because they have blamed others for their sins. Many folks are depressed because they haven’t taken responsibility for their own choices, no matter what the circumstances. But if you come clean, if you confess, God will cut the roots of guilt that feed the weed of depression and eventually that weed will just die.

Well, certainly, some people feel guilty about what they shouldn’t. Sometimes consciences need to be reformed. False guilt can also be a source of depression. But I am convinced that in many, many Christians’ lives, it is true

guilt, the fact that we really have sinned and not found real forgiveness, that weighs down our hearts.

You say, "I want to start over." You have the power in Christ to choose to rejoice in the Lord whatever your circumstances. You have the power in Christ to choose to fill your mind with God's word and to accept life with all its unpleasant reality. You have the power in Christ to confess your sins and receive cleansing.