

EVERYONE HAS PROBLEMS

I want to speak on a subject with which I am very familiar - the subject of depression. Or, if you want a second title, "Everyone has problems." If you have never experienced depression, you either don't know what it is or you are extremely young. The Bible teaches that all Christians struggle with depression from time to time. I know many people say that depression is not for Christians, but they ought to read their Bibles more. They ought to be more honest and find out what the Scriptures say.

We have false expectations being presented. I am not saying that we ought to be depressed all the time though David Brainerd, a mighty saint of God, seemed to live in such a state nearly his entire ministry. Some of the greatest saints of God have known what it is to live with heavy depression from time to time. Doctors are spouting their ignorance. Many preachers are spouting a different kind of ignorance. There are many old wives' tales that are just about as ignorant. We need to know what the Bible says on this topic.

Let us look at James 5:17-18 which says, "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain:

and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." Elijah was a praying man. Whatever his condition was, it did not keep him from operating spiritually. He still prayed and he still had results. The phrase I would like to draw your attention to is, "Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are." Those passions have to do with emotions. He had trouble with his emotions just like you and I do. We have trouble with our emotions just like he did.

If you will study the life of Elijah there is one emotion that stands out above all the other emotions in his life and that is depression. See him under the juniper tree. See him by the brook Cherith. See him as he has to rely upon a widow woman to keep him alive. Look as he flees from Jezebel, as he hides in a cave and God calls him to come out of that cave. He went through dark hours again and again, at most points in his life. Sometimes he rose from it and then he seemed to sink right back into it. The passions that he had we have. You can't say, "Elijah was different than I am." God said that he was a man subject to like passions. He went through them just like we go through these things. Lay hold of that text and it will give you a glimmer of light in the dark hours

of your soul.

Elijah could still pray and could still go on for God while going through those deep dark times. Depression is not the issue. Trouble is not the problem. The issue is how we respond to it and how we deal with it. We need to learn how to deal with our problem. The devil knows that he can defeat us if he can push us to an extreme. It is like going down a road. If you are driving in the ice and snow you want to hug the center line. You don't want to see how close to the ditch you can drive. You may say, "I want to avoid the ditch on the left side of the road." But don't go in the one on the right. The devil doesn't care which ditch you go into, as long as he sees you ditched. He will push you to think everything must be joy and happiness until he burns you out emotionally. Or he will have you think that you must be down all of the time and you can never rejoice in the Lord. You must learn that there is balance to the Christian life.

Passion has to do with emotions. According to I Thessalonians 5, God made man a three part being. We are spirit, soul, and body. Emotions operate primarily in the soul. Medicine and drugs operate in the body. You can't treat your emotions with medicines. Otherwise, there would be love potions that worked. You could take a pill and

that spouse that has been growing cool would be fiercely in love because we restored the chemical balance with a pill. You would be able to take pills to keep from ever being afraid. You could give pills to someone so that they would not suffer from jealousy or envy.

The problem is that you cannot deal with what is in the soul by working on the body. All you do is deal with the symptoms. If someone were to have the measles and you were to use some Clearasil to cover all the red bumps before you took them to the doctor so that there would be nothing showing, you would have covered the symptoms but you would not have dealt with the disease. Many times we deal with the symptoms and not with the cause. We need to understand what is going on in the soul and what is in the body. They do relate to each other and affect each other, but we need to understand where the source really is.

People talk about chemical imbalance. I was thinking about that - if I drink too much coffee and get too much caffeine I get a chemical imbalance. If I eat too many sweets and too much sugar I become chemically imbalanced. If I did like one of my brothers did and enjoyed drinking pickle juice I think that I would get a chemical imbalance. That is all in the body though, and I

would know what caused it and what I might try to do to balance it out.

I was told that taking vinegar was good for me. They didn't tell me that I was to mix honey with it. I want you to know that I was imbalanced for a while until I learned to mix it with honey and get some sweet with the bitter.

Problems result when you start defining emotions by chemicals, not really knowing what they are, and just saying they are out of balance. I know there can be a relationship though. For example, when you become afraid, the adrenaline kicks in, - that is chemicals. When you get angry something makes your heart start racing, -that is chemicals. But that doesn't deal with the anger. That only deals with what the anger caused in the body. You can mask the symptoms but if you do just that, the cause gets worse and worse because it is not being dealt with.

If you can understand this concept you are way ahead of some of science that will need to change its mind down the road. Sooner or later they will change and adjust - they always do. If you want to have some fun go find an old science text book 50 or 70 years old. Read what they "knew" was so then. If you know your science today you will laugh. Find an old medical textbook and laugh. Those things are always

changing but God's Word never changes. Elijah was subject to like passions as we are. These are emotions that flow in the soul and they may be affected spiritually. They will affect you physically and may affect you spiritually. This should not be anything to surprise us. After all, Jesus said that they would treat us like they treated Him and that we are in the world but we are not to be of the world. That creates a little stress on you if you live as a Christian should.

Let us look at a few verses and deal with this idea that everything is supposed to be happy and easy when you are saved. I Peter 1:6 says, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness." Some people say that you shouldn't ever be feeling heavy. God indicates that from season to season it is so "through manifold temptations". He didn't say that you sinned. Just being tempted will make you feel heavy and put a weight on your soul, pulling you down.

In I Peter 2:21 we read, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps." In the verse the example is suffering. The steps we should follow involve suffering. So part of the Christian life is suffering. We like the verse, "That I may know Him and the power of

His resurrection.” But we don’t like the last part, “and the fellowship of His sufferings.” There are ups and the downs in the Christian life and they are to be understood, not as being abnormal, but rather, just as being part of Christian living.

I Peter 4:1 says, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.” I know enough about me to know that I have not suffered enough in the flesh. Some of my suffering has helped me see some of my sinning, but evidently I haven’t suffered enough because I have not completely ceased sinning. You think you are going to live as a Christian in victory without any suffering? You think that rejoicing is how you cease from sin? Take a look at what the Bible says. We are talking about Biblical Christianity.

Verse 2 continues, “that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.” You can’t live in the will of God without some sufferings. You can’t get free from the pressure of the flesh in your life without some sufferings. You can’t get victory over sin without some sufferings. Jesus suffered to set an example for us to follow, walking in His footsteps. We are not to be surprised at these things. Happiness and sufferings come as part of

our life.

Verse 12 continues, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange things happened unto you." Some people say, "What is going on? Why do I have to go through this? It is strange that I must go through this." No, it is not strange. Everyone else must endure trials and so must you. It is just part of the Christian life, though you may not have known it was coming. Don't count it strange to have to go through fiery trials. It is part of Christian living and the building of Christian character.

In verse 19 we read, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God" (It is God's will.) "commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." You may go through so much that you will have to commit to the Lord the very keeping of your soul. You will be in such desperation. You say, "I can't handle this. It is beyond me. I just commit it into Your hands to keep my soul through this dark valley. This is bigger than I am." That will teach you some faith and confidence. Don't be surprised if this happens.

I Peter 5:5-7 says, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with

humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." You are going to have some cares that you will need to cast upon the Lord. You will not have a life free of care when you follow Jesus. The cares will come and you will have to roll your burden on the Lord and just leave it there. Don't take it back, but just leave it there. Those cares that come as part of living, -- don't avoid them, don't deny they are there, -- just cast them on the Lord. Some people run around and deny what is happening, though it is very real. That is what these verses are talking about, to prepare us for real Christian living.

II Thessalonians 1:4-7 says, "So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer." What about these people who don't believe in suffering? What do they have to do with the kingdom of God? What about the will of God? How can they claim they know the will of God? How can they claim they are getting victory over sin and know what it is to be

delivered from the power of the flesh when they never suffer? If you listen to them you have to wonder if they even understand how God operates. The passage continues, "Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." The Lord is coming back and He is going to deliver us. We only have to go through this for a while. Maybe a few weeks, months, years, decades, but we have the rest of eternity to rest and to rejoice. The ones who want to be free of this suffering will have to suffer the rest of eternity. They have a false view of God, of Jesus, of the Bible, of salvation and the Christian life. Still, they think that they know everything. I know by experience how this operates.

II Corinthians 1:4 says, "Who comforteth us" (that is the God of all comfort) "in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or

whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.” One of the reasons that you will have to suffer is so that you can help someone else. If you are on top of it all the time you can’t help anyone who is under it. Once you get under it you will have an idea of what kind of help God has and then you can help someone else who is in the midst of trials. That will expand your ministry. To avoid depression is to decrease your usefulness and limit who you can help and under what conditions you can help. When I am going through dark times I don’t want one of these good-time-Charlies coming in whistling and saying everything is wonderful and happy and you never have any problems if you love Jesus, for everything will go well. I would like to ask that they would get twice what I have, but I am not sure they could handle it. Someone who comes in and says, “I know what it is to go through the darkness. I will stand with you and pray for you. The God that helped me can help you.” This is someone who can help me at a time like that.

There is a school of suffering that prepares us to give help to others. Elijah went through that school so that he could help Elisha handle what he had to face. Here was a man subject to like passions as we are. David went through this school. You read the Psalms and tell me that he

never felt "down". Some of the Psalms will make you wonder if you know what "down" is. Jonah went to that school. Jeremiah went to that school. (Read the book of Lamentations, for he was the weeping prophet.) Moses, Nehemiah, Jacob, Eli, and Job all went to that school. The Apostle Paul also went to that school. He mentioned in verse 8 and 9 that he went so far down he thought he was going to die. Look at verse 8 which says, "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength" (this is too big and we did not have enough strength to handle it) "insomuch that we despaired even of life." (We thought that this would literally snuff the life out of us.) "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead." We knew that it would take God to raise us out of the depths that we were in.

Paul knew what depression was as did the Lord Jesus. You can read in Hebrews 2:9-18 how He sorrowed for us and was tempted in all points like as we are. When you are tempted in depression just know this, - that Jesus was also tempted. There is no sin in being tempted. The sin is in yeilding to the temptation. It is how you handle the depression that counts. "If it be

possible Lord let this pass.” -that is the Garden of Gethsemane. “Not my will but thy will be done.” Does that sound like He is on top of everything? “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Have you ever known that kind of darkness? “How often I would but ye would not.” Things often go against what is desired and planned. I am quoting from the Savior Himself. Jesus never sinned. He went through the same things that you and I go through so that He would know how to minister to us. Those sacred statements are to help us understand the darkness. Depression in and of itself is not sin.

The Christian life is like mountains and valleys. Some people live on the flatlands and it is a bit hard to explain the beauty and benefit of hills and hollows amongst the valleys. The Christian life is a life of mountains and valleys. I studied this a bit and mountain peaks are always smaller than valleys. You think about it. The blessings are on the mountains but the areas of helping others are down in the valley. Jesus met Moses and Elijah up on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter wanted to stay there on the mount of blessing, but they had to go down into the valley because there was a demon-possessed boy there that needed help.

We need the time of blessing but we need

the time of service also. The best service is in the valley, not on the mountaintops. If you examine the life of Christ and other passages of Scripture you will see what they teach along this line.

Also know this, that the road to the top of the mountain is always longer than the one down to the valley, - maybe not in inches and feet, but in perspiration and effort. It is harder to climb up than it is to get down. In fact, it doesn't take much to get down. It is a short, easy trip. You can almost fall down but it is a struggle to go up. We also learn this from geography, the higher the mountain the deeper the valley. People want ever higher mountains but they don't want any valleys in between. I am sorry, but to get from one mountain peak to the next you must go through a valley. God doesn't build suspension bridges like the interstates to get you from mountain peak to mountain peak. As a Christian you will have to do it the old fashioned way. If you camp out on one mountain peak you have stopped your progress.

I want you to realize that depression is necessary. You will have to go through the depression. By the way, depression in geography is a word referring to valleys. Those are the depressions as opposed to the mountaintops.

I have studied a little of the geography of Ohio. Most of it is flat lands. I lived a number of

years in a place where you could see several miles in any direction just from the top of a fence post. It was flat, - boring and monotonously flat. Then I had a chance to minister in Southern Ohio. While I was there I looked at a topographical map in an elementary school building. I found out that in the hills and hollows of that part of Ohio and on down into Kentucky the mountain tops were the same elevation as the flat lands in the North part of the state. What had happened was that the flood had drained the water off and as it went through, it carved out those hollows and valleys. In other words, it was the depressions that produced the mountaintops. That is a sobering thought. Otherwise it would have just been flat lands, nothing unusual, just plodding along.

The biggest geographical depression in the United States is one of the most beautiful sites we have, - the Grand Canyon. You travel along where all is flat until all of the sudden you go way, way down. You can see it at different times of the day in the sunshine. You can see it from different places and it is delightful. That depression has brought great beauty. People say that we shouldn't have depression. If that were true we would never have had a Grand Canyon, or the hills and hollows of southern Ohio, and everything would have been flat and boring.

So it would be for many Christians, except God sends some depressions along to create some beauty in their life. They think it is an enemy when really it is a gift from the Lord.

Depression may be the result of financial pressure. It may be the result of pride. It may be the result of infirmities. It may be the result of temptations. It may be the result of physical weakness, or emotional weakness, or mental weakness, or the stress and strain that we live around. It may be the result of demonic attack or persecution or compromise. It may be the result of having this treasure in earthen vessels instead of being as strong and solid as we like to think we are. But depression does come. We don't need to worry. We have that variety prepared for us by the Lord. If we could understand that, we could see some of the delight and victory that has been given to us. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me." He is with me even in the shadow of death and the darkness as I walk through. He is with me in the furnace of fire if that is where I am put. I want you to know that He said He would never leave me nor forsake me, so when depression comes there is someone greater than the depression.

While it is necessary and normal and a

common thing, it is particularly common the more spiritual and useful you become. The great saints of God knew depression. If you read the biography of Martin Luther he was constantly in the depths of depression. John Calvin knew it. Spurgeon knew it. James Stewart knew it, particularly in his last days. David Brainerd, as I said, lived in this. The nature of our work, -struggling against demons, the world, and the flesh, is enough to depress anyone. Living in the last days is enough to depress anyone. The apostasy is enough to depress anyone. The wickedness and sinfulness of men around us in a nation throwing away their spiritual heritage and churches throwing it away and compromising is enough to depress anyone. It is common. The more you have your eyes open the more depressing it looks.

There are fewer and fewer to carry the load and the load is getting heavier. More people are trying to ride on the wagon with less of them willing to pull the wagon. The loneliness of our position in this wicked world is to be expected. The more holy you are the more lonely you will become. You take the effect of intense studying, hard praying, serious struggling against the strong man, and it will strain every fiber of your being. You will begin to understand what depression is. That doesn't mean that it is to be avoided. It just

means that it is to be understood, for when you understand it, it is easier to deal with.

Let me say this also, depression may well be God's blessing to you. I know that will not elicit a positive response from most people. Imagine, depression being a blessing! But I believe that is not hard to prove scripturally. God knows our proud hearts and if He is ever to permit you a great success He must balance it. He may depress you so that you are not so aware of what is happening and you can stay humble. That becomes a blessing for you and for others. Oftentimes before God allows someone to achieve some great things He humbles them. They may have to go through some depression so that they know the good that occurred wasn't really what they did, but what God did. They just were permitted to see it happen. So depression can be a gift.

Depression may be God's way to rest and repair you after long labor to keep you from self-destruction. Depression may protect you so that you don't fully understand if you go through a Judas experience of strife, division, or slander. Depression may be a gift when troubles multiply. When David returned to Ziklag it was terrible and his own men were about to kill him. The Bible says that he comforted himself in the Lord. There wasn't anyone else to help him; even his own men

had turned against him. That depression kept him from realizing the awfulness of the circumstances and he just looked to God and was able to press on.

Depression is not sin. It is not the problem. The issue is how you respond to it and how you handle it. It may well be a gift to your soul. It is normal for Christians. It is common for those who go ahead and can be a blessing - if we know how to respond to it and come out in victory, humbled and ready to help others. I am thinking of a certain preacher who for years didn't seem to know much of "down time" emotionally. Once they asked him to preach after they sang a song. One of the verses of the song goes like this, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love." He got up and said, "I don't know anything of what that song is talking about." But he spent years at the end of his life finding out what that meant.

You will not be able to help those who struggle if you haven't struggled. If you have been there you must not camp there. I remind you, "Though I walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death." You don't build a tabernacle there. You don't camp out. You don't say, "Well, I am just going to settle down and stay here." You walk through it. But you must walk through it. It is

part of the Christian life. James says, "The other disciples and saints throughout the Scripture give ample record and, like you that I am writing to, Elijah was a man subject to like passions." Don't be surprised as though some strange thing has happened. Be prepared. For those that don't yet know what you have learned herein, treasure it and maybe you will be able to help them. At least when the time comes be honest with what happens and be Biblical in how you deal with it.