

HOPE FOR THE DEPRESSED & ANXIOUS HEART

Lecture One: Condition, Causes and Complexity

LECTURE ONE

I. The Condition

- Anxiety: The word is often translated worry...but it means to shatter into pieces. Disquieting thoughts. Anxiety is a divided mind.
- Anxiety is a pre-occupation with a problem. When we are confronted with circumstances in life that pose any kind of a threat to us; anxiety is the result of our minds fixating and obsessing over those circumstances, in an attempt to figure it out or to fix it! Anxiety is essentially living life in fear, whether low grade or high grade!
- Depression: To bow down. Most familiar OT usage is Ps. 42 & 43 where the language is "cast down". Ps. 42:5, "*Why are you cast down my soul and disquieted within me?*" Depression is a kind of debilitating mood. Hopelessness! Meaninglessness! The ancients called this "melancholy": black bile!
- Proverbs 12:25, "*Anxiety in a mans heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.*" NKJ translates Proverbs 12:25 as depression. "*Anxiety in a man's heart depresses him.*" Anxiety and depression are often so closely related.
- Anxiety and depression is a very common condition. According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America it is reported that 1 in every 5 people experience depression at some level, and 1 in 10 experience an anxiety attack at one point or another in their life. Women are twice as likely to experience panic attacks than men. And according to the National Institute of Mental Health about 30% of teenage girls and 20% of teenage boys 'experience anxiety and depression.
- John Lockley, in his book "*A practical workbook for the depressed Christian*", says, "*Being depressed is bad enough in itself, but being a depressed Christian is worse! And being a depressed Christian in a church full of people who do not understand depression is like a little taste of hell.*"

II. The Causes

- *Considering the causes under 3 Main heads...*

1st is physical/biological

- The late Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones (MLJ) in the opening chapter of his classic work *"Spiritual Depression"*, says *"There are certain physical ailments that tend to promote depression. There are certain people who constitutionally, almost in a physical sense, are prone to this condition."*
- Our brain is the most complex organ in our body. So if we have chemical deficiencies, like low serotonin for example; that can affect our moods and feelings greatly.
- Being physically weak, overworked, or a physical illness can make us susceptible to anxiety and depression from a pure physical/biological standpoint.

2nd is psychological/temperament

- When we say psychological we mean one's temperament. We are talking about a person's mental or behavioral characteristics. We are talking about someone's habitual inclinations. It concerns the "thinking" and how someone "thinks/processes" information. We may say that psychology and temperament is addressing how a person is internally wired or constituted.
- The two main categories into which people fall psychologically...the Extrovert and the Introvert.
- The extrovert is someone who is usually a very outgoing person. They're friendly, talkative, expressive, enthusiastic.
- The introvert on the other hand is someone who lives on the inside of himself/herself. This is a person who is always analyzing himself, analyzing everything he does; and worrying about the effects of his/her decisions.
- MLJ, *"These people are not always careful to draw the line of demarcation between self-examination and introspection."*
- These tend to be very serious minded Christians; sensitive souls with sensitive consciences. They are usually prone to forms of perfectionism! They tend to be people who obsess about being in control.

- Obsessive Compulsive Disorders (OCD) is where the person engages in repetitive behaviors or mental acts in an attempt to prevent the anxiety.

3rd is spiritual

- *Five areas as causes for anxiety and depression...*
- 1st is wrong thinking. Wrong thoughts about God, wrong thoughts about the nature of the gospel; wrong thoughts/expectations about the Christian life will inevitably produce anxiety and depression.
- MLJ, *"Oh the havoc that is wrought and the tragedy, the misery and the wretchedness that are to be found in the world simple because people do not know how to handle their own feelings."*
- The 2nd area is sin. Persistent patterns of sin can be one very real root cause for depression. With habitual high handed sin comes guilt, condemnation and usually anxiety and/or depression.
- Psalm 32:3-4, *"For 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 dried up as by the heat of summer."* Psalm 51:12, *"Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit."*
- Depression and anxiety can be, and often is, the result of the inward subtle sins of idolatry and unbelief.
- Depression and anxiety reveals our hearts. It reveals what we love and what we want. It can reveal what we are truly worshipping.
- Anxiety and depression can, and often painfully does, reveal that I am absorbed in self.
- 3rd area is bad/imprecise theology. Confusing justification and sanctification.
- Where there are wrong views on the Christian life and the reality of remaining sin in sanctification, there will be problems.
- 4th there is the devil. We have a powerful adversary who knows our weaknesses. And he will take advantage of our temperaments. He knows which darts to craft specifically for us.

- 5th there is God's Sovereignty: Dr. David Murray in his book *"Christians get depressed too"*, says, *"Hard though it may be to accept, the ultimate cause [for our anxiety/depression] may be, it pleased God."*
- What he is saying is that since God is sovereign and is providentially orchestrating all the events in our life, then all that we experience, the trials, suffering and losses are all ultimately coming to us from God's hand.
- All the natural "stimulants" that trigger anxiety and depression in us such as loss of job, loss of a loved one, sickness and disease, financial loss, an unsaved spouse, wayward kids, divorce, division, wars, strife, terrorism...are all a direct result of God's Sovereign and Providential Hand.
- We must avoid being reductionistic/simplistic! We must take a *holistic* approach in assessing the "causes" for anxiety and depression when caring for someone!

III. The Complexity

- Dr. Murray, *"Unraveling the sequence of what went wrong in a depressed person's brain, soul or thoughts is often a humanly impossible task."*
- We must beware of a "default" position of immediately attributing anxiety/depression to sin! And the danger in many counseling approaches can often be the mistake of immediately attributing depression and anxiety to the sin/idol that triggered it.
- Steve and Robyn Bloem, in *"Broken Minds"* say, *"David and other psalmists often found themselves deeply depressed for various reasons. They did not, however, apologize for what they were feeling, nor did they confess it as sin. It was a legitimate part of their relationship with God. They interacted with God through the context of their depression."*
- We need humility and balance. We must have these other categories in our thinking if we're going to properly care for someone who is depressed or anxious.
- If our only category in dealing with depressed and anxious people is to isolate it to the realm of unbelief and sin...then we will be compounding their problem!

- Many depressed people are already interpreting their depression as evidence that God is punishing them or that He has abandoned them or that they are no Christian at all...since...real Christians don't get depressed.
- Any approach that does not see and appreciate the complexity involved will **not only not** be sensitive but it will compound a person's guilt and battle all the more.

"It is all very well for those who are in robust health and full of spirits to blame those whose lives are sicklied or covered with the pale cast of melancholy, but the malady is as real as a gaping wound, and all the more hard to bear because it lies so much in the region of the soul that to the inexperienced it appears to be a mere matter of fancy and diseased imagination. Reader, never ridicule the nervous or hypochondriac, their pain is real; though much of the malady lies in the imagination, it is not imaginary."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon