

Question: I suffer from depression brought on by abuse from my father when I was a child. Some friends at church have said that since the abuse was in the past I ought to get over it. They think that to keep feeling this way is sinful. What would Jesus say?

This sounds like a new twist on the old idea that suffering is evidence of sin in the life of the sufferer. While intending to be helpful, Job's friends argued that his suffering was God's punishment for some great sin he had committed (Job 4:7-9). In a similar way, well-meaning friends have added to your problems by making you somehow responsible for your depression although it was brought on by what someone else did to you. Job's friends were wrong, and your friends are also wrong. While personal sin can be a cause of one's suffering, Jesus made it clear that not all suffering is a sign of sin (Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-3).

For example, the reasons for the pain of depression are not as simple as some would have us believe. It is not something a person can "just get over." Telling a depressed person that her depression is a sin only gives more reason to be depressed. Sometimes depression is brought on by a physical health problem causing a chemical imbalance in our bodies. Also, unresolved guilt or guilt-feelings often feed depression. In your case, depression is the painful consequence of another's actions toward you. The advice of your friends seems to place the blame on you for your wounds, broken-heartedness and depression.

In contrast, Jesus came to heal our wounds, bind up the broken hearts, and bring release for the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). Nowhere does the Bible tell us to confront the wounded. Instead, our role is to love and bless them. Admonition is reserved for the unruly and rebellious. However, it is not healthy for you to deny the reality of your pain. That is not what Jesus would have you do. Your Christian friends need to mourn with you, provide emotional support and offer hope (1 Corinthians 12:25-26). Instead of blaming you for your depression, your friends should help you deal with the anger, grief, and unnecessary guilt feelings that often go with depression. Job said, "For the despairing man there should be kindness from his friends; lest he forsake the fear of the Almighty" (Job 6:14 NASB). Nowhere does the Bible teach that the pain resulting from an act against you is a sin.

Finally, the fact that your depression is not a sin does not mean that you cannot accept some responsibility for what you do now. Among other things, I suspect that you need to deal with unnecessary guilt-feelings and unresolved resentment over what happened to you. You need the help of a competent Christian counselor. The causes and cures for depression are many and must be dealt with on an individual basis. We cannot deal with all of this information in a short article. Just know that help is available. If I can help you find a counselor, please let me know. Also, remember that there is no problem so great that the Lord cannot help you to overcome (Matthew 17:20).

[Send questions or comments to University Church of Christ, 801 N. 12th, Murray, KY 42071 or phone 270-753-1881.] 2011/07/08 repub from 2006/10