



January 2015
*The Great Cover-Up:
A Man's Heart*

*"The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation."
–Henry David Thoreau
"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart."
–Paul (Romans 9:2)*

Most men are restless and wonder if they will ever "be enough."

There are the unfulfilled dreams from boyhood. We settle into a job that pays the bills and prepares us for retirement but there is this nagging sense of boredom. Is there more?

There are disappointments in relationships. Maybe we won her heart over at one time but feel like we can never be enough in the present. Or we constantly feel like we are messing up our kids, our relationships, or future relationships. It's overwhelming.

There are the successes and failures that define us. Successes would seem like a great thing in a man's life. But with success comes this haunting sense of having to one-up the last accomplishment on the job or with the family. And our failures...oh, how the failures can define us. Our greatest fears seem to stem from a fear of messing up or failing someone.

And what about those sexual frustrations that constantly knock at a man's door? From without, the culture spews constant images at us about what a "real, fit, strong" man looks like...and the woman he captures. From within, the attacks are more complex and deep. Whether it is the urge to act out or to bury desire, we find ourselves wanting, grasping, anxious for more to fulfill our sexual desires.

And where does the church land with all of this? How does the church handle a man's heart, a man's emotions? We lean toward behavioral management...we want men to behave, get in line, and obey God. So, we offer them studies and pile on guilt over the need for accountability. We, in essence, crush a man into a dutiful life of checking boxes and religious to-do lists.

And it is not working. I love the church and am committed to growing as God's bride with God's bride. But we have created a great COVER-UP. And here is what I mean...

Men are struggling in silence and are grasping for answers to their emotional and spiritual lives. Offering a man a formula or "quick-fix" simply cheapens his hurts and his desires. And it leads to a church full of heartless, bored men.

Back to being restless...let me give an example...men and depression.

I begin with confession. I have struggled with depression on and off over the years. I have experienced seasons, sometimes lengthy, of feeling like the cloud of depression will not let up.

My earliest memories of this are of being an outgoing, extroverted teenager who had deep struggles with self-worth and self-image. I realize that all teens struggle with this, but it led me to medicate my loneliness with religion, girls, alcohol, or isolation. And none of those worked. In my adult years, I have had intense battles with depression. Most of you would never know. I keep things going in ministry and life but the internal battles are quite real. I remember going through the darkest time of our marriage, feeling like my chest was going to cave in. I was told by well-intentioned saints that I just needed to “trust God” and “know that He works all things together for my good.” A great verse to quote, but it was coupled with a lack of validation or understanding of my hurt and anguish. I felt like I was suffering alone.

When it comes to things like depression, most men are suffering in silence. To be depressed feels weak and embarrassing. We get the sense that if we just “had it together” in our relationship with God we would never feel depressed or have doubts. And nothing could be farther from the truth.

Here is what I want to provide in this month’s writing. I want to share some observations/truths about depression and a man’s emotional/spiritual life. I have also shared a survey that I would encourage my brothers to take. It is good to do self-assessment. If you want some honest and much needed feedback, I encourage (dare) you to have your wife or a trusted friend take this on your behalf.

A Few Truths about Men and Depression

(These could also be applied generally to a man’s emotional life.):

We must not segregate the spiritual from the emotional. God did not make a mistake when He gave a man his emotions. Like the dashboard on a car, your emotions are those “lights” that come on when something is happening under the hood (in your heart). Sure, our emotions can get us in a world of trouble. But, when channeled the right way, it can bring great freedom.

Depression is real for women AND men. In some ways, our culture has “feminized” depression. Now, hear me out. I do want to validate my sisters and many who do struggle with depression. It is real and our churches are filled with women who feel empty and lonely. But in our attempts to create “real men,” we sometimes lessen a man’s struggles, his grief, or his anger. Most men in church simply do not feel that they can be open or honest about depression.

Depression is not always a sign of spiritual weakness. There are times that depression sets in due to sin or hidden addictions. And there are also times that the stress and weight of life gets a man down. Instead of viewing it as spiritual weakness, it is much healthier to embrace the season you are in and see how God wants to father you in it and through it.

Connect anger and depression. The connection of anger to depression is huge. The lyrics from an old Eagles’ song says that anger is “love disappointed.” Out of the setbacks, disappointments, and hurts of life, anger begins to surface. It is a normal reaction. A man’s anger is vital. We can spew it on others and hurt our relationships. We can bury our anger and suppress it which

equally hurts relationships. Most of our addictions as men are rooted in anger. We must find healthy ways to process and find healing with God for our anger.

God primarily fathers through hardship and allows depression to breed dependency. At the core, God wants to father you, as a son. Scriptures reveal God as father. This is His heart and His character. He sometimes entrusts hardship or allow seasons of depression for the purpose of dependency. He wants to tear down our man-made scaffolding and dependency on ourselves and get us grounded in Him...which is what “humility” actually means. It is where He does his best fathering of us.

Your newfound dependency on God could inform your future ministry to others. A man who has walked through the “valley of depression or doubt or fear” is well attuned to the rhythms of a man’s journey. This is a man who will avoid quick-fixes and formulas. Instead, he will offer a listening ear and a broad shoulder. I can’t help but think about the ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon...one of the greatest preachers/pastors of the last centuries. His ministry is far reaching. Spurgeon was a man, though, who struggled with deep bouts of depression. But his heart and ministry were shaped by and through the depressive seasons. And yours can be too.

Lean on others and journal your emotions. Every man needs brothers. More than a mere accountability group, a man needs men who will battle on the frontlines with him. You need some men who you can lean on and trust with your heart. I would also encourage men to do some type of journaling. It is often hard for us to access our emotions...we simply don’t always know what is happening “under the hood.” Journaling will help you to write out what is happening in your heart.

Explore the Psalms. What a treasure we have in David’s psalm-book. David was a man’s man who felt things deeply. And he understood that we cannot separate the spiritual from the emotional. Spend some time this year in the Psalms and hear the spiritual/emotional outpouring from this man’s heart.

Get help. Lastly, I would encourage men to not fight alone. If you are going through a dark season of depression, doubt, or fear, please reach out. Ask a brother out for coffee. Seek out time with your pastor. Set up an appointment with a counselor. Do something to get help...and please do not walk through it alone.

If you’ve made it this far in this month’s article, let me applaud you. Thanks for taking the time to read and digest. I do pray for an awakening among God’s sons...the men in our churches. I pray for honesty with God and others. And I pray that our Father will do a deep work of healing in our hearts. To Him be the glory as He fathers each of us...

Randy

A Survey for Men and Depression¹

Write a number beside each item.

- 0 Rarely or none of the time
- 1 A little of the time (every few months or so)
- 2 Occasionally (monthly)
- 3 Moderately (every few weeks)
- 4 A lot of the time (weekly or more)
- 5 Most of the time

- I am bothered by things that never used to bother me.
- My sleep is restless.
- I can get angry even if I don't show it.
- I have trouble keeping my mind on what I am doing.
- I seem to be unhappy.
- I feel my life has been a failure.
- I need "things" to help me feel better.
- I am less social than I used to be.
- I get irritable very easily.
- I feel that everything I do takes a lot of effort.
- I become engrossed in my work.
- I just sit around and do nothing.
- I withdraw and find something exciting or thrilling to do.
- I feel that nothing really matters.
- I sulk, pout, or am moody to the point that I can't help it.
- I do not enjoy life.
- I need sex to cheer me up.
- I have trouble getting started in the morning.
- I allow things to distract me from what I should be doing.
- I have outbursts of anger I can't control.

Total: _____

- 0 to 19 You are probably in a non-depressed range.
- 20-34 You may be subject to periodic, mild depression. Keep an eye on it.
- 35-49 Your periods of depression are increasing. Consider sharing with a friend or seeking help.
- 50-69 You are moderately depressed. Definitely seek out some help.
- Over 70 Your depression is severe. Take steps soon for your own heart.

*If you want an accurate assessment, have a spouse or trusted friend take this for you. Their honesty could be quite helpful in your process of growth.

¹ Adapted from Dr. Archibald D. Hart's *Unmasking Male Depression*.