Hope Against Depression | February 12, 2011 | Order Info

Scripture: Psalm 42, 31:10; 34:18; 39:2-7; 32:1-5; 1 John 1:9; Micah 7:1-7; Revelation 21:2-4.

His mission is to change people’s misunderstandings about depression. Jonathan Rottenberg is an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of South Florida. In addition to his work there, he’s currently writing a book to help our society better understand depression.

He warns that those facing depression must be prepared for at least two long journeys. The first journey is facing the symptoms of depression—despondency, lethargy, nightly insomnia, and an inability to concentrate. These can be painful to experience and difficult to manage. But the second journey may be even more difficult—other people’s misunderstanding of depression. This can lead to insults, confusion and thwarted efforts to get symptoms under control.

Rottenberg says that most often, the depressed person is told that his or her symptoms reflect a defect or disease. He writes, “I am struck that, just about anywhere a depressed patient turns in contemporary society, the answer remains much the same: Your symptoms signal a deficiency. That deficiency may lie in the person's childhood (says the psychoanalyst), in the person's soul or relationship with god (says the priest, pastor, or rabbi), or in the person's relationships with significant others (says the marital or family therapist).”

He believes that these experts all mean well, and that their contributions to society are important ones. Although each may capture a factor that can lead to depression, these are incomplete understandings at best. Rottenberg believes that there is an “untold story” that experts miss when they “overreach.”

There are many misunderstanding about depression. It's often something feared and not discussed—something to be embarrassed about and ashamed of. Perhaps it would help us to realize that depression is an illness of the brain, and that many prominent people have either overcome or are presently managing their depression. To mention a few:

News journalist Mike Wallace was diagnosed with depression in 1984 after being sued for libel. He conquered his episodes with therapy and the right kind of medication.

Actress Brooke Shields suffered from postpartum depression after the birth of her son. She received treatment and is now enjoying motherhood.

Former quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers, Terry Bradshaw, was diagnosed with clinical depression in the late 1900's. He also suffered from panic attacks after games. He sought out a treatment plan.

Tipper Gore, former wife of Vice President Al Gore, dealt with depression back in 1989 after her son's near fatal car accident. Diagnosed with clinical depression after struggling with symptoms for two years, she fully recovered with medication and therapy.

Art Buchwald, who is best known for his column in The Washington Post, was hospitalized for depression in 1963. He now talks openly about his journey and the importance of getting treatment, as well as decreasing the stigma.

This week’s lesson makes it clear that when symptoms of depression are severe, it’s important to receive professional help. This is nothing to be ashamed of. If any other part of our bodies were ill, we’d go to a doctor for advice and treatment.

Whether people need counseling, therapy, medication, or all three, they can find comfort in knowing they’re not alone. King David, who himself struggled with depression, said in Psalm 34:18, “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

People who are depressed have lost hope. But there is hope if you face this illness. There’s hope in therapy and medication, if that’s what is needed. There’s hope in taking care of your health with diet, exercise and sleep, which can greatly diminish symptoms. There’s hope in surrounding yourself with trusted friends and family who understand and support you. There’s hope in Jesus. The hope that He will guide you in your treatment options and show you the right course to take. And there’s hope because He is preparing a place for you where depression
will be an illness far in the past.

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1. Psychology Today

2. Depression

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