

Causes of Spiritual Depression

Sermon Text: Psalm 42-43

Sermon Recap: The main idea of this week's sermon is: Spiritual depression results from forgetting the LORD, focusing on our circumstances and listening to ourselves and others. Take time before your growth group to review the key points you noted from today's sermon.

Lesson Plan

Lesson Goal: To consider some of the causes of spiritual depression while evaluating our own hearts and lives to see if these things are present within us.

Opening Question: Pastor Jeff defined spiritual depression as, "...the result of unbelief evidenced by either dejection, discontentment, bondage, and/or the lack of joy."

Point 1 - Causes of Spiritual Depression

We need to maintain the distinction between spiritual depression and clinical depression. Clinical depression is an ongoing, progressively increasing state of major depression with multiple symptoms requiring medical treatment. We are dealing only with spiritual depression.

A time of Prayer: As you move to consider these various causes of spiritual depression, pause to pray. Ask God to help you see where these things may be present in your life and to work through them with His help.

Unbelief: To believe, or to have faith in God is to be persuaded of His truth; it is to place our confidence in Him, or to trust Him fully; it signifies relying totally upon Him. Unbelief, then, is the opposite. It means that we are not trusting God; unbelief signifies disobedience to God and His Word. We must search our heart to know whether any form of disbelief lurks within us. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once stated, "The ultimate cause of all spiritual depression is unbelief."¹

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression, Its Causes and Cure*, 20.

Disregard: Spiritual depression comes about when we know the clear teaching of God's Word and choose sin instead. When we willfully neglect God's Word, we are choosing to not believe Him; we are choosing unbelief.

Biblical Ignorance: Spiritual depression can come when we unknowingly act in unbelief. This is why we must be people of the Bible; we must keep ourselves in God's Word, hide it in our hearts, and shape our lives by. Charles Spurgeon once said that we should "live in the Bible." On the other hand, we can sometimes willingly ignore the Bible. We do not want to know what the Bible says about an issue in our lives for fear that we might need to change or be confronted. We choose ignorance; we choose unbelief.

Discontentment: To be content is "to be satisfied and full." Discontentment, then, is to be unsatisfied. The discontent (spiritually depressed) Christian, as Lloyd-Jones states, "...is a contradiction of terms, and he is a very poor recommendation for the gospel."² To be spiritually discontent is to not believe the gospel.

Envy: Envy can be defined as, "the feeling of displeasure produced by witnessing or hearing of the prosperity of others." It means anger or discontentment over wanting something we do not have. In these moments/seasons of envy, we are stating by our actions that God is doing something wrong in not giving us what we want. This is idolatry.

Bad Influences: We all know what bad influences are, and we each know where particular influences plague us. Spiritual depression occurs when we willingly give ourselves to these influences. Perhaps it is a person, a particular place or practice, perhaps it is a waste of time, social media (which can also be envy). Whatever the case, we must evaluate how we are being influenced and ask, "Is this influencing me toward loving God more?"

False Sense of Reality: Spiritual depression can occur when we have a false sense of reality or hold to unrealistic expectations. The prosperity gospel lives here, for false teachers present God and His Word through the lens of a false reality. When we choose to let things other than God's Word inform our understanding, we will be led astray.

Unrealistic Expectations: When we have a false sense of reality, we naturally hold unrealistic expectations. This manifests itself in statements like, "God will never give you more than you can handle," "God helps those who help themselves," or "A good God would never let bad things happen." When we expect God to act in ways contrary to His Word, we are inviting spiritual depression into our lives.

² Ibid., 11.

Unhealthy Lifestyle: God intends for us to live unto Him in all ways; we should live our lives as an act of worship in all ways.

- Too busy: When we will fill up lives with activities (even good activities) and leave no room for God, we invite spiritual depression.
- Bad health: Our physical health affects our spiritual health, for we are body and soul. Again, Lloyd-Jones notes, “You cannot isolate the spiritual from the physical for we are body, mind, and spirit.”³ Caring for our physical health has spiritual value and vice versa.
- Bad habits: We must how the nature of our time and habits contributes or detracts from our holiness and enjoyment of God. Are my hobbies and habits God-honoring, or merely self-gratifying. The two are not mutually opposed, but some habits we have allowed into our lives can lead us from God.
- Bad company: People influence us. We must be careful to ask what influenced people are having on us and how that affects our spiritual life.

Fear: Fear plagues us all. We must take our fears to God through His Word or our fears will become controlling to the point of depression.

- Fear of Man: “Why do we fear others’ disapproval so much? We all experience this fear, and most of us don’t want to admit how serious its tyranny can be. The Bible calls this the “fear of man,” and it can weave a web of ambiguity around issues that are biblically clear. The fear of man can immobilize us when we should take action, and gag us into silence when we should speak. It feels powerful, but its power is deceptive. That’s why the Bible tells us, “*The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe*” (Proverbs 29:25).”⁴
- Fear of God: This often comes as a result of unbelief and biblical ignorance (among others). When we fear God instead of trusting in His lovingkindness, we come to think of Him as distant, uninterested, raw power, wrathful, etc. We lose sight of His fullness because we focus only on distorted parts.

³ Ibid., 19.

⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lay-aside-the-fear-of-man>

Sin and Satan: It should come as no surprise to the Christian that sin and Satan can cause spiritual depression in our Christian life.

- Sin: We know that Jesus died on the cross for our sin. He put our sin to death in His body on the cross so that we might be free from it. Paul says in Galatians 5:1, “*For freedom Christ has set you free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.*” When we willingly entertain sin in our lives, we invite spiritual coldness and depression.
- Satan: Satan is the adversary of God; he loves sin; he comes only to steal, kill and destroy. James tells us to, “*resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.*” When we willingly entertain sin, we entertain the adversary of God.

The Big Picture - Praying for Joy

A sample prayer...

Lord God, I confess that I am a sinner in need of your endless grace. I have struggled, like David and the Israelites, with spiritual depression and I lack joy. I recognize the issue(s) in my life to steal my joy; they are _____. Lord help to overcome these things, to put them aside, and to walk in the joy and freedom of the gospel of Your Son. Lord Jesus, help to love Your Word, to pattern my life after it, and to hide it in my heart. Use my growth group to help me with these things. Lord, as I look towards the cross and the resurrection, remind my heart that you have secured my eternal joy through the death, burial, and resurrection of Your Son, and that I do not have to walk in spiritual depression. Save me from it, God. Amen.