

# Bluer Than Blue



## *The Truth About Depression*

*by Shannon Warden*

**"Just get over it." "You've got to get on with your life."**

The 100 million depressed people worldwide regularly receive this unreasonable advice from well-meaning friends and family, and they sometimes falsely believe that they should be able to simply overcome their depression. This common misconception must be corrected if the complex causes and cures of depression are to be clearly understood and addressed.

To understand depression, it is first necessary to distinguish it from the normal human experience of temporarily feeling "down" or "blue." Depression plagues an estimated 20 - 25% of women and 7 - 12% of men during the course of a lifetime. And, as a syndrome with lingering and stressful effects, it is more disruptive to daily functioning than normal sadness.

Among depression's symptoms are hopelessness, worry, pessimism, inability to concentrate, fear of dying, lack of confidence, irritability, restlessness, fatigue, change in

appetite, unexplained crying spells, headaches, withdrawal from people, and disinterest in enjoyable activities. In its most critical stage, depression can lead to suicide.

While the symptoms are fairly identifiable, the causes of depression are not always as obvious. Among possible causes are genetic predisposition, loss and grief, physical illness (especially circulatory-related), hormonal changes, anxiety, little or no support system, and low self-esteem. Imbalances in the brain's mood-stabilizing chemical substances, which are called "neurotransmitters," can be at the root of depression *in conjunction with or in the absence of* emotional or social problems. Responses to any of these factors vary and can result in levels of depression ranging from a consistently sad mood to one or more lifetime episodes of "lows."

Considering depression's impact on a person's life, you may think it would be difficult to hide. However, many depressed people bear their burden alone, never sharing it with loved ones or seeking professional help. Others are

so obviously and painfully effected that they require close monitoring and/or hospitalization.

If you believe someone you know is depressed, consider these suggestions for how you can be supportive:

**Pray** that the person will not lose sight of God's promises and presence. Also pray for how you might befriend and minister to the person.

**Share scripture.** This reminds people that God gives them hope and a future (Jeremiah 29:11).

**Be sensitive.** Understand that no one chooses to be depressed and that no one thing you can say will "undo" their depression. Practice being a better listener than talker.

**Be present.** Depressed people do not always feel like talking about their burdens, but it is important that we are present in their lives when they need our friendship the most.

**Know your limitations.** You are not your friend's counselor. You can listen, encourage, and pray with him or her, but he or

she may need more professional, objective help than you can offer.

**Encourage** your friend to seek professional help. He or she may benefit immensely from visiting with a Christian counselor or medical doctor.

If you believe you are depressed, consider the following suggestions:

**Be honest with yourself.** Denial and shame only add to your burden.

**Pray.** Tell God how you feel. Ask Him to restore your health and to help you stay focused on Him while you pass through this storm.

**Seek God's refuge.** Depressed people commonly feel abandoned by God or may lack spiritual motivation. However, your most important survival resource is your relationship with God. Remind yourself of this lifeline. Stay connected to God through prayer, Bible study, and church attendance.

**Seek counseling.** Depression requires an evaluation of your physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Visiting with a

Christian counselor can provide insight and direction that you might not otherwise have on your own. This is especially important if you are suicidal.

**Visit your doctor.** He or she may recommend a trial dosage of medication that can positively impact your depression.

**Read.** Educate yourself on the causes and cures of depression.

**Exercise.** Although, you may not feel as energetic as usual, do not neglect your body's need for physical exertion. Exercise can potentially increase your energy level.

**Eat nutritiously.** You may not be hungry or you may crave "junk food," but do not neglect your body's nutritional needs.

**Share your burden.** People don't often broadcast "I'm depressed," yet sharing your struggle with a close friend or family member, a support group, a Bible study group, or a counselor can be comforting. Don't allow yourself to fall prey to shameful feelings or false thinking that keep you believing you are alone.

Just as Isaiah 43:2-3 reminds us, God promises that He will be with us when tough times overwhelm us. This encouragement to the Israelites of Isaiah's time is applicable to each of us today when we feel hopeless and in crisis. Isaiah 40:31 says it best: "...but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

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