

Pastoral Care For The Chronically Discouraged And Depressed

Pastoral Counselors are often called upon to provide solutions to specific or situational needs, but many times, sadness or discouragement or depression is longer-term and defies even our best solutions. As we work with chronically discouraged and depressed people, Pastoral Counselors surely need to be wise counselors, but also faithful friends to those with longer-term grief, pain, or other suffering. This session will provide a helpful paradigm on how to understand, seek to help, and be a faithful witness to truth while waiting for God to provide the help that only comes from Him.

Jay Mosser has served in pastoral roles for 42 years – about 20 years in various assistant pastor capacities and the rest as senior pastor. Through those years he has served in three churches ranging from smaller (less than 50) to larger (about 1,000). He has worked with children, teens, worship ministry, pastoral care, preaching and leadership. Jay has an M.Div. from Western (Conservative Baptist) Seminary and a D.Min. from Corban University in Oregon, where his doctoral thesis was titled “How a Pastor’s Theology of Shepherding Affects the Health & Growth of a Church.” He is married to Kathy and has three daughters and five grandchildren. In his spare time, he loves to read, hike, travel, watch sports, and spend time with his family.

Getting Started:

- A walk with Jesus: Have you ever listened closely to the questions Jesus asked people?

Why do you think Jesus asked these questions?

- Matthew 20:32 “What do you want me to do for you?”
 - John 5:6 “Do you want to be healed?”
- A visit with a chronically depressed person: A biographical sketch of William Cowper.
 - His life experiences
 - His personality type
 - His descent into depression
 - His attempts to escape
 - His journey with faith
 - His pastor and true friend

Let’s Talk!

- What did you just hear that you resonated with?
- Who are the William Cowpers in your life?

Four Considerations In Providing Pastoral Care For The Chronically Discouraged & Depressed:

1. Presence (Psalm 73; Matthew 28:20)

Depending on the situation, your presence might involve regular meetings for counseling or mentoring, phone calls, emails, or other touch points. In a more acute season (such as self-harming behaviors), more care may be called for, including clinical or other emergency involvement. Over time, less-frequent contact might be sufficient. The message, though, remains the same: “I am with you, and I am praying for you in your suffering.”

2. Boundaries (John 16:7-13)

Just as people who are physically drowning sometimes drown their rescuers, so chronically depressed and discouraged people can “drown” their counselors. Please know your limits. You are not Jesus. Though there may be seasons of crisis when you need to be highly available, that season of crisis cannot continue for long. Be careful that you do not reenforce “needy” behaviors.

3. Goals (Isaiah 40:11)

Develop reasonable goals. While you may provide help and encouragement to chronically discouraged or depressed people, you are unlikely to fix them. This is a harsh reality for those who like things to be neat and tidy. Some pastoral counseling involves addressing crisis situations (a disagreement with a spouse, challenges with a teenager, facing impending death); other pastoral counseling is simply longer term, and that does not mean something is wrong with you or with them or with your approach.

4. Patience (Galatians 4:19; Colossians 1:28-29)

Know how God has wired you as a counselor! Some counselors work best with short term challenges. Others have learned the longer, slower walk that is necessary for longer term problems. Some words of wise counsel from one writer on this topic:

“Never cease to sing the gospel to the deaf...Don’t make your mercy to the downcast contingent on quick results...True saints enter dark seasons, and should they die in the midst of one, it is no sure sign that they were not born again, nor that they were not sustained in their darkness by the sovereign hand of God.”

Discussion Groups!

- In your experience how is short term counseling different from longer term counseling?
- What have you *learned* from taking the longer, slower walk with chronically discouraged and depressed people? How have you seen Jesus meet them in their suffering?

Suggested Reading

- *If I'm A Christian, WHY Am I Depressed* by Robert Somerville
- *Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness* by Edward Welch
- *The Hidden Smile of God* by John Piper
- *Untangling Emotions* by J. Alasdair Groves & Winston T. Smith
- *When the Darkness Will Not Lift* by John Piper