

## Depression, Lincoln's Melancholy, Our Brains and the Bible

Depression is a complex experience of varying depth and causation. It varies from "feeling blue" to the awful interior pain of "clinical depression." We will look at the many factors that contribute to its onset: biological, psychological, sociological and spiritual, using examples from the life of Abraham Lincoln. We will examine the relationship between abnormal brain function, our thoughts and feelings and Biblical teaching about sin—the fall and our responsibility. We will discuss ways to reduce our vulnerability to depression.

**Richard Winter** is currently Professor of Practical Theology and Director of Covenant Seminary's counseling program in St Louis, MO, USA, where he trains church leaders and professional counselors. Richard is British and before going to Covenant, served as staff and director of the English L'Abri Fellowship for 14 years. He is a qualified medical doctor with a specialty in psychiatry. He has served in a variety of pastoral and teaching leadership roles in the church. His new book, *When Life Goes Dark: Finding Hope in the midst of Depression*, will be published in 2012 by IVP. He is the author of *Perfecting Ourselves to Death: The Pursuit of Excellence and the Perils of Perfectionism*, IVP, April 2005; *Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment: Rediscovering Passion and Wonder*, IVP, 2002; *Choose Life, A study of abortion and other reproductive technologies (Out of Print)*, and professional journal articles. He is married, with four children and seven grandchildren.

### ***Sickness or Sin?***

#### ***A spectrum of mood***

- Blues...mild depression... discouragement, despair... "major" depression

#### ***"Clinical" Depression***

- Depressed mood and/or Loss of Pleasure for at least 2 weeks and almost every day + 4 of the following:
  - Appetite disturbance
  - Sleep disturbance
  - Fatigue/loss of energy/lethargy/slow movements
  - Agitation/restlessness/anxiety/irritability
  - Worthlessness/inappropriate guilt
  - Slow thinking/loss of concentration/indecisiveness
  - Suicidal ideas

Sometimes delusions, paranoia and hallucinations

- + Prayer useless, Bible meaningless
- + God far away

### **Why do women seem to get depressed twice as often as men?**

#### ***Polarity of Moods***

## ***Bipolar Disorder***

Mania.....Normal Range.....Depression

## **Biblical experience**

*He has made me walk in darkness...my soul is downcast within me.*

Lamentations 3

*My God, why have you forsaken me?* Psalm 22

*The darkness is my closest friend* Psalm 88

Job (3) Elijah (1 Kings 19) Moses (Numbers 11) Jonah (4:3)  
Luther, Cowper, Spurgeon, Churchill,

## **Abraham Lincoln**

## ***Melancholy and Overmuch Sorrow***

Richard Baxter (1650)

John Colquhoun (1814)

## ***Biblical Categories***

### ***“The World”***

- A Fallen World
  - Adam and Eve’s sin
  - No fault of your own
  - Disease, accidents...
- A Sinful World
  - Other’s sin
  - Our own sin
  - Our sinful reaction to other’s sin

### ***“The Flesh”***

- Sinful nature
  - Selfishness
  - Pride, Control
  - Fear, lack of trust, idolatry...
- Fallen Body
  - Brain chemistry/structure
  - Hormones...

### ***The Devil***

- Liar and accuser (John 8:44, Rev 12:10) Enraged with the church (Rev 12:17)
- Flaming arrows (Eph 6:16) Footholds where we are weak (Eph 4:27)



- increase neurotrophic factor - activity and connections
- Exercise and environmental enrichment (animal studies)

### ***Antidepressants***

- ECT
- Postpartum depression
- SAD (Light therapy)
- Physical illness: Thyroid, Stroke, Medications...

### ***Reducing Vulnerability***

- Talk to...
- Learning to live with normal full range of human emotion
- Acceptance of feelings of grief and sorrow
- Examine expectations, longings, reactions to other's sin...
  - Distorted thinking, Perfectionism, Pessimism, Lies believed, Idolatry
- Face and deal with anger, guilt, shame, envy, bitterness, perfectionism, control, relationship problems, ways we try to dull the pain, disappointment with God...
- Repentance
- Resist the devil
  - Don't give him a foothold (Eph 4:27)
  - Put on the full armor of God (Eph 6:11)
  - Counter the liar and accuser with truth (Rev 12:10)
- Marriage/Family/Community/Social networks
- Exercise, nutrition, fish oil...
- Medication if necessary
  - Finding right antidepressant and dose
  - Realism about time on medication
    - Meditation, prayer and care for others

### ***Big picture perspective***

- Patience, hope...perspective on suffering
- Learning to "groan" well
- Confidence that God is for us and not against us (Ruth 1:21, 2:20...)

- “Sorrowful yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:10)

© Richard Winter May 2013