The Problem of Depression:

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Finding God’s Joy

in a Sorrowful World

**An Introductory Scenario**

1. **Common Themes in the Experience of Depression**

* **Depression is a form of despair, and it has many expressions.**
  + Numbness – An disturbing absence of feeling. A person finds himself not caring about things he knows he should be caring about. He isn’t particularly sad, nor is he particularly happy. He isn’t mad or worried. Those things have passed. He just exists.
  + Apathy – Closely related to numbness, this can be a lack of care for the things one should care about. Motivation is neutralized—daily tasks seem void of meaning, even if the person continues to perform them.
  + Sadness – This is an actual feeling of low-grade or high-grade sorrow. Usually sadness is more easily traceable than apathy or numbness.
  + Lack of Pleasure – Things that should bring pleasure fail to do so. A person is not moved by things he once was or that he cognitively recognizes should move him.
  + Extreme Fatigue – Hypersomnia and physical exhaustion. Even normal daily tasks are so draining the person feel unable to function physically.
  + Thoughts on the Desirability of Death – Being done with life becomes attractive, though a fanciful longing. This is not the same thing as suicidal thinking.
  + Suicidal Thoughts – A desire for death intensifies into thinking carefully about how one could bring it about, perhaps even thinking of possible scenarios by which it could happen.

**Frequency Spectrum**: Any one of the above can happen on a range of frequency.

Rare Occasional Regular Constant Inescapable

**Intensity Spectrum**: Any one of the above can happen on a range of intensity, usually going in waves.

Low-Grade

Burdensome

Impeding

Disruptive

Overwhelming

Debilitating

* **As a form of despair, depression is an emotional indicator that we perceive our circumstances as hopeless.** 
  + This perception is more than emotional. It involves the full breadth of the soul’s functions. Depression has the tendency to skew the way we see the world.
    - Thoughts – Depression makes us interpret the world negatively. Our thoughts focus on what is wrong with our circumstances rather than on what is right. *Expectations*: the priority of our minds is what fails to meet what we believe life ought to be.
    - Feelings – Depressive feelings shade the way we feel about everything, often robbing us of positive emotions. (We covered this above.)
    - Actions – Depression takes away the motivation to do anything, from basic responsibilities to pleasurable activities.
  + KEY PRINCIPLE: Consistent feelings of depression are a red flag that a person is operating under some failed hope; these feelings are reinforced by a lack of motivation as well as the tendency to interpret life negatively.
* **Depression is a heart response *to* external conditions. Those conditions are important to consider in overcoming depression.**

1. **Relevant Themes in Scripture for the Experience of Depression**

* **The negative feelings associated with depression are part of living in a fallen world, and avoiding them entirely is not possible (Psalm 13, Rom 8:22-23, 2 Cor 1:8-10; 4:7-12, Matt 26:38).**
* **Yet, the negative feelings associated with depression are not the ideal for human life as God intended (Rev 21:4).**
* **To be depressed is to despair; that is, to cling to some failed hope (Psalm 33:16-22).**
* **Joy interrupts, rather than simply replaces, the negative feelings associated with depression. This interruption is powerful enough to alter a person’s perspective of life to no longer be dominated by depression (Psalm 4:6-8, Jas 1:2-4)**

1. **Living by Faith When Experiencing Depression**

The negative feelings of depression are undermined as the hope of Christ is made the interpretive center of one’s perspective and reinforcing action is taken.

* Prayerfully focus on the realities of hope associated with the gospel of Jesus Christ
  + Scripture: Combat a depressed perspective of life with God’s perspective of life, found in his Word.

* + Prayer: Express to God your own perspective, and submit it to him for what it is. Ask him to bring it more closely in line with his perspective.
* Prayerfully consider the rival hopes your heart is drawn toward
  + Thinking/Beliefs – What do I see as what makes life meaningful? How do I interpret my daily experience?
  + Desires/Feelings – What do I most want from life? What do my feelings indicate about whether I’ve attained it or not?
  + Intentions/Dedications – What am I giving myself over to? Are my loyalties primarily to my depressive feelings/rivals hopes?
* Walk in repentance regarding those rival hopes, acknowledging:
  + their drawing power
  + the greater power of God to overcome them
* Take specific actions that deny false hope and reinforce true hope.
  + Kingdom-focused by being Others-focused
  + Dissociate with avoidable situations that reinforce false hopes/hopelessness
  + Key: Responsibility in difficult times
* Seek open and regular accountability regarding depression.
  + Admitting depression is difficult. It feels shameful. But it is only shameful if we do not understand what the gospel says about our own weakness and need for God.

**Concluding Thoughts on How God Uses Depression**

**The Problem of Anger:**

**Seeing God’s Love as Superior to Personal Demands**

**An Introductory Scenario**

1. **Common Themes in the Experience of Anger**

* **Anger is a strong feeling of opposition that rises within and has many forms of expression.** 
  + Anger has many forms of expression:
    - Annoyance – That low-grade *againstness* that stays quietly with us in situations we don’t like, often resulting in irritability.
    - Bitterness (Eph 4:26) – That quiet outrage that in time hardens into relational distance, related closely with unforgiveness.
    - Caustic Stance – That critical, dissatisfied disposition we take in order to express our anger without reverting to outright yelling.
    - Insults (Matt 5:21-22) – Those judgments we pronounce on others that flow from despising them, usually because they hinder us from what we desire.
    - Conflict (2 Cor 2:12) – Those battles we wage in order to attain what we desire—whether physical, verbal, or otherwise manipulative.
    - Outbursts of Anger (Gal 5:20) – Those fits we throw to display how angry we are in an attempt to manipulate others into capitulating to our desires; these can include shouting, threatening, violence, etc.
* **Anger is felt primarily as an emotion, but it is an entire perspective involving also beliefs and commitments.** 
  + Anger involves the full breadth of the soul’s functions. Anger skews a person’s perspective of everything.
    - Thoughts – We believe in the rightness or wrongness of certain events happening around us. We believe certain things about other people and their motives. We believe certain things about ourselves and what we’re entitled to. We believe—or *fail* to believe—certain things about God.
    - Feelings – Anger is felt primarily as a heated emotion, but that feeling is also revealing what we want. Something in is hindering us from a deeply held desire, and we feel motivated to go to war for it. We could be wanting respect or peace and quiet or appreciation. When we don’t get it, we feel anger.
    - Actions – Anger is a great motivator—it provokes us to go against others to get what we want. Sometimes we take on fiery tactics—yelling, threatening, insulting. Sometimes we take on cooler tactics—manipulating, guilting, giving the silent treatment.
  + KEY PRINCIPLE: Anger shows what we believe, what we want, and what we’re most committed to.
* **Anger is closely tied to our sense of justice.**
  + “Our anger is our whole-personed active response of negative moral judgment against perceived evil.” (Robert D. Jones, *Uprooting Anger*)Translated: “Anger is when our heart rises up against something we think is wrong.”

1. **Relevant Themes in Scripture for the Experience of Anger**

* **Anger is related to our concept of righteousness, because we are making moral judgments about situations and people (Jas 1:19-20).**
* **Anger is directly related to the desires that quietly rule the heart (Jas 4:1-4).**
* **Anger contradicts the forgiving character of Christ (Col 3:8-10).**

1. **Living by Faith When Experiencing Anger**

* **We are often characterized by anger and don’t know it. God often has to compel us to see it in ourselves.**
  + Attitudinal Stance Toward Others – The way a person speaks of others will indicate the presence of low-simmering anger within. Listen to the way a person speaks of his boss, his family, his teachers, watching for: a sense of entitlement, a sense of offense, veiled or explicit insults, or bittereness.
  + Interaction with his Family – Even angry people can usually control the expression of that anger in front of the small group. But watch for clues on how a family treats one another.
    - In the case of angry husbands, often you have to listen closely to how a wife talk about the interactions that go on at home. If she is regularly saying things like, “Well, that would get him really upset.” That is a red flag that should take a bit more probing.
    - The reverse is also true, actually. Often men can be intimidated by an angry and dissatisfied wife. In prayer, the men should listen for similar comments, “She just get’s really upset a lot at me.”
  + Occasions of Conflict – When a person is reporting an occasion of conflict, you will hear their side of the story. Listen for the way they represent the other person. You serve the person by helping them see how anger may be glowing hot inside them without his full awareness.
* **Anger will only be undermined when we identify and repent of the desires at war within our own hearts.**

Whenever we are angry, we must ask the foundational question: What is the chief object of desire in my heart that is leading to this anger?

* + Thinking
    - What do you think you were so angry about?
    - At the time, what did you believe would make the situation better? Looking back, what do you now think would have made it better?
    - What does God have to do with this situation?
  + Feelings/Desires
    - What occasions do you feel most annoyed (with a specific person or situation)?
    - When you experience anger, what do you think you’re wanting most?
    - What were you wanting to accomplish in that conflict?
  + Behavior
    - How do you show your anger outwardly? Think about attitudes as well as actions.
    - How regular are these behaviors?
    - Do significant people in your life notice these? What do they say?

Repent: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (James 4:7-10).

* + Repent at the level of *outward expression* – Your anger is an outward sin against others and against God.
  + Repent at the level of *heart desire* – Your anger is merely a sign of a deeper idolatry, a deeper loyalty to self than to God.
* **Anger can only be tamed by believing in God’s love for us despite our giving him every reason to be angry.**
  + Ephesians 4:31-32, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

**Concluding Thoughts on How God Uses Anger**