

# Depression: The North American Epidemic

by Richard Siple

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*Depression can be overcome through obedience to God's will and responding to life experiences in a biblical way.*

**Duration:** 39:11

**Scripture:** Psalm 39:1

**Topics:** "Mental Health", "Faith Healing"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the topic of depression and how it can be caused by the normal problems of life. He emphasizes that even as believers, we can experience depression and feelings of sadness. The preacher references biblical passages, such as Psalm 38 and Psalm 39, to illustrate the experiences of depression and the cries for help from individuals in the Bible. He also highlights the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel, where he demonstrates the power of God and the importance of obedience in overcoming depression. Overall, the sermon encourages listeners to turn to God and trust in His plan, even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

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## Transcript

The angel said, Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. Joy. We sing, and did sing, joy to the world, the Lord has come.

But Christmas in the Western world is the time of the most deep depression, and suicides are higher at Christmas time in North America than any other time. That seems very strange, doesn't it? Why should that be? There's something about the longing in the human heart that Christmas brings out in a special way because it is speaking about the Savior, the Lord of all, who came to bring us eternal hope and joy and salvation, and somehow many have not found it. And many even who profess the name of Christ suffer extreme depression at Christmas time.

I want to begin this morning by reading to you from Psalm 38, the words of a child of God in deep depression, a child of God in deep depression. Psalm 38, I'm going to read verses 3 and 4, 6 and 8, and 10 and 18. Listen to these words.

There is no health in my body. My bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.

I am bowed down and brought very low. All day long I go about mourning. I am feeble and utterly crushed. I groan in anguish of heart. All my longings lie open before you, O Lord. My sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds. My strength fails me. Even the light has gone from my eyes.

I confess my iniquity. I am troubled by my sin. Almost a clinical definition of deep depression.

Fascinating, isn't it? A child of God. Then just a few verses from Psalm 39, verses 1 to 3 and verse 12. I said I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin.

I will put a muzzle on my mouth. That is, I'm not going to say anything. I'm just going to retreat into my depression.

But when I was silent and still, not even saying anything good, my anguish increased. My heart grew hot within me. Hear my prayer, O Lord.

Listen to my cry for help. Be not deaf to my weeping. And then I have to read three verses from Psalm 40.

And I've made it easy for you to follow in your Bible, right? Verse 3. I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire.

He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.

What causes depression? Listen carefully. Most of the time, not all the time, but most of the time, depression is caused directly or indirectly by spiritual problems in the life of the disturbed person. And I must say it very carefully and very gently because it is not said to bring condemnation, but to open up the possibility of deliverance.

Often, even without knowing, spiritual problems, I mean unbiblical responses to life experiences. We have life experiences. We respond to them continually.

How do we respond? If we respond in an unbiblical way, and often without even knowing it, it can lead eventually to depression. And in our Western world, depression is epidemic. Thousands of hospital beds are given to it, and it costs taxpayers millions of dollars each year.

So what causes depression? I'm going to four basic causes quickly. Number one, the normal burdens of life. Friends, we live in a fallen world.

Do you know that? I think sometimes people who live in the Western world have so much that they forget that they live in a fallen world. We live in a world that is messed up. Now, if you haven't noticed it, you haven't lived very long.

Just be patient. You'll see it eventually. The world is not the way it's supposed to be, right? I mean, it's crashed, and it's full of suffering, and heartache, and sin, and evil, and pain, and tears, and death.

It really truly is. And so, the normal problems of life can make us feel depressed. And I thought when I began this message, I should have had everybody raise their hand who's ever been depressed.

I didn't, but I will. If you've ever been depressed at all, I don't mean clinically so in the hospital, but if you've ever been depressed, raise your hand. And the rest of you just don't know what I'm talking about.

Oh my, the burdens of life. Have you had any sorrows yet? You're very young if you haven't. Have you had any losses? Have you lost anyone that you love through death? Loneliness? You ever been lonely? Any tragedies? Any financial problems? Any family problems? Well, life is not like God fully intended to be when he created the world.

We live in a fallen world. You know, I think sometimes we in the Western world are so affluent, and so protected, and so fed, and so clothed, and so taken care of that we forget that, and we expect life to just be without any problems. But it isn't, is it? No, it isn't.

So there are times when many of us feel discouraged and blue, but if handled properly, these emotional down times are temporary. Another cause of depression are physical problems. And I will not take a great deal of time, but I think we need to deal with it shortly.

Brain damage, infections, hormonal disorders, disease, a thyroid gland not functioning properly can cause outbursts of weeping, unreasonable anger, and deep depression. Did you know that? In fact, sometimes when I send people to a doctor for a complete physical, I have to specify they check their thyroid because, I don't know, they don't seem to think it's important, but it is. I remember having a call on my phone from a lady in the church, and she said, I'm having a terrible time.

Can I come and see you? And so we set up an appointment. She came in, sat down, and burst into tears. And she cried, and she cried.

I gave her some Kleenex, and I was trying to get her to stop crying so that I could hear what the problem was, and she couldn't stop crying. And she cried and cried. And finally, I got her stopped enough to ask her what the problem was, and she said, I don't know.

I'm just crying. And then everything was wrong that she could think of. And I said, how long since you've had a physical? And she told me, and I said, did he check your thyroid? And she said, I don't know.

So we called the doctor. No, he hadn't. We sent her back to the doctor.

He checked her thyroid. She had a thyroid problem, and she was smiling again in a few days, but she was in a deep depression. So sometimes there are physical problems that cause depression.

In a church that I pastored, we had an elder, Carlos Stewart. He wouldn't mind me using his name. Wonderful guy.

He preached occasionally for us. Great, big, powerful man. And he was a man that said he wished he lived in Old Testament times so that he could have carried on his faith for God like they did with a sword.

But he was really a wonderful guy and a very godly man. And his wife called me one night late and said, something terrible has happened to Carlos. He's gone crazy.

I don't know what the problem is. Can you come over? So I hopped in the car and went over there, and he was really wild. He was in his pajamas, and I was standing there in the middle of the living room.

He come roaring down the stairs, fell down at my feet, grabbed me around the feet, and said, praise the Lord, pastor, praise the Lord. And I said, yeah, praise the Lord. And then he let go and went tearing up the stairs again, running through the house, shouting and carrying on.

And I thought, well, I'm glad that he likes me. Because he was, he was powerful and he was out of it. And he knew who I was.

And so he'd come roaring back, you know. And I said, she said, what shall I do? And I said, go into the kitchen and call his doctor and see if he'll come over here. So she went and called the doctor.

He came over and he looked at him a little bit and he loaded up a huge syringe and he said, see if you can get him out in the kitchen. And he got him turned around. He was in his pajamas, so it wasn't too hard to do.

I can't help but laugh just thinking about it. And he said, that ought to help. I gave him enough to kill a horse.

Well, he did quiet down and he sat down on the sofa beside me and I talked to him and I said, you know, will you do something for me, Carlos? And he got quiet enough. And he said, sure, anything. And I said, well, there's some gentlemen coming by and I want you to go to the hospital and have a checkup.

He said, why? And I said, just do it for me. Okay. And the police car pulled up and they came in and they, and he went out with them like a lamb and went to the hospital.

But by the time I got to the hospital, he was in an examining room, throwing five interns all over the place and they strapped him to a table and they wheeled him out as he went by me. He said, praise the Lord, pastor. Yeah.

So, you know, you say, what was his problem? Well, it's very interesting. He was sick and he went to a doctor who, and most doctors wouldn't make this mistake, but he gave a poor diagnosis, thought that he needed insulin and gave him an insulin shot. And it turned out he had an infection in his blood and it went to his brain and he was crazy.

But by the next day he was doing fine. Okay. So I'm just, you say, why did you tell that? Just because I want us to see that, you know, sometimes when we are deeply depressed, we need to have physical checkup.

And if it's physical, get it taken care of. And of course, God can heal us too. Amen.

Amen. So sometimes depression is caused by demonic problems. And I haven't time to really deal with that this morning, because that would be a subject all by itself, but that which appears to be physical or mental illness and may cause deep depression or other forms of manifestation may be demonic bondage in some form.

For instance, King Saul of Israel, 1 Samuel 15, 23 and 16, 14, for rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. See, he rebelled, he was stubborn. He disobeyed God.

And it says the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and evil spirit from the Lord troubled him. I don't think that scripture is saying the Holy spirit left his life completely, but the anointing of the Holy spirit was lifted from Saul. He no longer had the anointing of God and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.

And he became so depressed. He tried to kill David, the man who had the Legion and was totally insane and lived in the tombs and cut himself and cried and broke the chains. Mark five, uh, that was a demon problem.

The epileptic boy who threw himself into the water and the fire in Mark nine, that was a demonic problem. So it can be a demonic problem. Now, finally, we'd come to the fourth cause of depression.

And that's what I want to talk about this morning. And that is spiritual problems. And unbiblical response to life experiences is the most common cause of depression, handling an experience in life differently than the way God wants us to handle it.

You ever do that? Now I'm feeling lonely. You don't ever do that. You know, I'm so glad that I married an honest woman for a wife because it's a great help.

And sometimes she says, you're not handling that the way you say to handle it when you're preaching. Hey, that's really helpful. That's good.

There are all kinds of experiences in life and they're not all pleasant ones, but we have a tendency to react to experiences the way other people do or the way we grew up or the way we were taught or what we've always believed or what our culture accepts. And so we react to life experiences in many ways, but we don't always react to them the way God wants us to react to them. And to help you understand this, you say, well, how does that work? I'm going to make an equation.

Listen to it. It goes like this. Here's my equation, a life experience plus an unbiblical response times an emotional reaction equals depression.

Some of you should write that down. Yeah, I will say it again. Here goes a life experience plus an unbiblical response.

We don't handle the experience the way God would have us to times an emotional reaction, because when we handle that life experience differently than God would have us to do, it affects our emotions. So there's an emotional response reaction, and that will lead us to depression. For instance, someone injures us in some way, or we may feel or believe they have injured us in some way, and this makes us resentful or angry.

And then we develop bitterness and self-pity and eventually fall into depression. What I want to do to really illustrate this in the best way I know is to give you some Bible illustrations, all right? First Cain, the first person in the Bible who suffered depression, as far as we know, Genesis 4. Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 4. I'm going to begin reading with verse 1. Now the man Adam had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, I have gotten a man-child with the help of the Lord. And again she gave birth to his brother Abel, and Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

You have the picture, the first family. Here are the two boys. They've grown up, they're men.

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground, and Abel on his part also brought the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. In other words, Cain brought some of the agricultural products that he had grown as an offering to the Lord for his sin, and Abel brought some of the members of his flock, sheep or cattle, whatever they were, and made a blood

sacrifice offering for his sin as God had commanded. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering, not because it was Abel, but because he offered the blood sacrifice God required.

You have the picture? But for Cain and his offering, he had no regard. So Cain's offering was rejected by God. No forgiveness, no peace, nothing.

So Cain became very angry, and his countenance fell. So he's depressed. Then the Lord said to Cain, why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door, and his desire is for you, but you must master it.

And Cain told Abel his brother. Jesus said Abel was the first prophet. So I don't know what he did.

He may have tried to counsel Cain to go God's way. I don't know. They had a conversation.

The counselor got killed. And it came about when they were in the field that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, where is Abel your brother? And he said, I do not know.

Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, what have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood. Here's the equation.

A life experience. Cain is a sinner, the same as all men. He needs atonement for his sins.

He needs to bring an offering to the Lord. So he does. But the problem is that he reacts to this life situation in a unbiblical way, in a non-godly way.

What did God require for sin? A blood sacrifice. Are you listening? There's only one way to come to God, and that's through the blood of Jesus, right? And before Christ came, the lamb was to be offered as a blood atonement for sin. It pointed forward to Christ.

So his life situation was that he was a sinner. He needed cleansing. He needed reconciliation to God.

But he responded to that experience of life contrary to what God had commanded. And he brought the fruit of the ground unto God. So he has an unbiblical response.

And what happens? God rejects it. What is his emotional reaction? He's angry, a sense of injury, and anger, and depression. And God says, why are you angry? Why is your face fallen? Why are you so depressed? He says, if you do the right thing, your face will be lifted up.

Huh? Is anybody listening? If you do the right thing, God said, if you do right, your face will be lifted up. If not, sin is like a wild beast crouching at the door ready to devour you. There's a process of obedience to God that will help to bring us out of the normal kind of depression.

The first step of obedience, the next step of obedience, responding to our life experience according to the will of God. Well, let me give you another one. Moses, Numbers 11.

I'm going to begin by reading verses 4 to 6, and 10 to 17, and I may get 17 to 23. We'll see. Now they're out there in the desert.

And the rabble with them began to crave other food. And again, the Israelites started wailing and said, if only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost.

Also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. Now, did they have something to eat? Yes, they did. God gave them something to eat.

They were hungry, but they had something good and healthy to eat. But in this life situation, this life experience, they're responding in an ungodly way. They're complaining.

Now you can point the finger because you never complain. Yes. They complained and they grumbled and they started wailing and said, if we only had meat to eat, remember all that wonderful stuff we had in Egypt.

But now we've lost our appetite. We never see anything but this manna. And Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent.

The Lord became exceedingly angry and Moses was troubled. He asked the Lord, why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to deserve this? You've never been there. What have I done to deserve this? Why are you so displeased with me that you put the burden of all these people on me? Yes, Lord, I've been there.

Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them into my arms as a nurse carries an infant to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, give us meat to eat. I cannot carry all these people by myself. The burden is too heavy for me.

If this is how you're going to treat me, put me to death right now. If I have found favor in your eyes, do not let me see my own ruin. Well, of course, you know what the Lord did and I'm not going to read all that scripture.

He said, well, we'll get 70 elders of Israel and we'll take the Holy Spirit that's on you in anointing and we'll anoint them so they can help you carry the load. And that was wonderful. I mean, that solved that part of the problem.

Then God said, so you want meat, do you? God has a great sense of humor, you know that? Don't wail to God, don't grumble and complain to God. He has a sense of humor and you may be sorry. He said, you want meat? I'll give you meat.

I'm going to give it to you until it runs out of your nose. I'm sorry. That's what it says in the scripture.

God isn't always nice as I am. So, you know, all right, all right. He said, yes.

He said, not one day, not four days, not 10 days, not two weeks. I'm going to give it to you for 30 days. Oh my.

And so he did. And they had meat until it, until they vomited it up, frankly. Now it's very interesting.

I'm not going to deal with all the people, but just with Moses. Moses' life experience was the burdens of leadership and the injury of criticism from the people he was leading. And every pastor has gone through it.

Every man on the staff or woman or whatever. I'm not mad. I'm not fussing.

I'm just telling you everyone has gone through it, right? Has any pastor on the staff of this church ever done anything you didn't agree with? And did you go and talk to that pastor in the sweet, gracious love of Jesus about it? Oh, now you're feeling really bad. No, you didn't. You're one of two things.

You either did go to him and told him off or you talked to somebody else about it, right? God is listening. He may give you what you want till you wish you didn't have it. But here is Moses, the burdens of leadership, the injury of criticism.

He is depressed to the point where he wants to die. Now this is serious depression. He says, Lord, just kill me.

Get it over with. Can't take it anymore. Kill me.

Well, that's an unbiblical response, isn't it? What have I done? You don't love me. I feel sorry for myself. How did I get into this mess? Why did you tell me to do this? I can't carry all these people.

Well, I speak to pastor's conferences and I find it everywhere, but it isn't just there, is it? His emotional reaction, of course, is anger and depression and wanting to die. Aren't you glad though that God loves us? And God says, okay, Moses, okay. And so he takes care of the leadership problem, right? Because God loves us.

God has solutions for our problems, ways of handling our life problems that will eventually bring us peace of heart, joy deep in our spirit, and freedom from depression. Absolutely. If we go God's way.

Well, I have to mention one more man. Can I mention one more man? Yeah. Okay.

He's one of my favorites, the prophet Elijah. 1 Kings 19. You remember, he had a great time.

What a great time. I've had some great times, never as great as that one. I mean, that was a big day.

And he got all of Israel out there on the mountain on Mount Carmel. I like to call it showdown at Mount Carmel pass. Here he is.

And here are all the prophets of Baal and the prophets of the groves, a hundred and eight hundred and 50 of them all together. And they build the two altars and he lets them pray to Baal all day long and cut themselves and do the horrible things they did. And nothing happens.

Everything's silent because of course, Baal is not a God. And then he rebuilds the altar of the Lord and he covers it with water and cuts the sacrifice. And then he prays and the fire falls from heaven.

What a day. The fire came down and burned up the sacrifice and the water and the stones and everything. And the people cry out, the Lord, he is God.

The Lord, he is God. And then of course he had prayed and hadn't rained for three and a half years. And now he says to the King, get in your chair and ride.

The rain's coming. Then he goes up on the mountain and prays and he prays seven times until he sees a cloud the size of a man's hand. And then he says, run for it.

And the rain comes. What a day. But Ahab goes home and tells wicked Jezebel what he has done.

And she says, sends a note to him and says, by this time tomorrow, you will be like one of those prophets dead. I'll get you for this. I think one of the most humorous things in the Bible is Elijah being threatened by death by Jezebel running for 40 days to get away from her.

And then the first thing he says to God is, let me die. We really do funny things, don't we? Man. Oh yeah, dude, just stay home.

If you wanted to die, she'd have taken care of it quick. A sword thrust through the heart and been all over. Well, I go out and run for 40 days, you know? Oh, we're a sorry lot.

Aren't you glad God loves us? Huh? Aren't you glad he loves us? I'm glad he loves me because I'm a mess sometime. I'm so glad he loves me. So he's out there and God comes and reveals himself to Elijah.

His life experience, a great spiritual experience in victory, tremendous expenditure of emotional and physical energy resulting in total exhaustion, then rejection by powerful leaders in the threat of death. And he does an unbiblical response. He runs and he's full of fear and anger at God's people, self-pity.

He says, I am no better than my father's. I'm not fit to live. I'm the only one left.

Oh, not quite. In fact, I get a kick out of that because the last thing God says to him before he goes back to do what he's supposed to do is, by the way, Elijah, I have 7,000 that haven't bowed the knee to Baal. You're not the only one left.

Huh? I'm the only one who knows what's right. And I'm the only one that's doing what God wants done. You know? No, no, no, no, never, never.

Great Elijah. My, what a wonderful man. But he had a time of depression.

It can come to any of us. What did he need? Food, physical rest, a new revelation of God, and a new work to do for God. That's all he needed.

Now quickly, what's the way of healing? See, I need an hour for this, but I haven't got it. So sit tight. Number one, with God's help, try to go back and discover the life experience or set of circumstances that triggered the problem.

When did this all begin? When did I start going into this depression? What happened in my life? What was the circumstance? What was the situation in my life that started to trigger the events that finally put me in this place of depression? Number two, assess any unbiblical response to that situation. Try to see, with God's help, if there's any way that I responded to that circumstance contrary to the way God wanted me to respond to it. Anything contrary to the word of God, to biblical teaching, to what I know in my heart is the way God wanted me to handle that situation.

Then confess each disobedience thoroughly, including any sins that resulted from my wrong response. Forgive others, make restitution where necessary, and be cleansed of whatever sin and failure are involved. Finally, number four, begin to obey God's word and continue to do so until the depression is gone.

Recently, I was feeling bad about something, and I was feeling quite bad about it. I don't know if I would say it was being depressed, but I was feeling very down about it. And I was talking to God about it, and I said, Lord, where did this start? You know, it's amazing how ready God is to speak to us.

I said, where does this start? And God said, right there. Oh, like God put his finger on the place that started so quick that I almost wasn't sure that he had answered me. Now I had to go back and say, now wait a minute, is that you? Yes, that's me.

And that's where it started. That's where it started. So you want me to obey you at that, on that issue? Yes, I do.

Okay. I give up. I have sinned.

Forgive me. I will obey you about that. Whoa, things started to change very quickly.

Not totally, but they started to change, right? I'm not saying that if you go back and deal with this, you'll be immediately free of your depression. What I am saying is that there is a process of letting the Holy Spirit examine your heart and life and dealing with the circumstances of life according to God's word, step by step by step. You don't get into depression.

Suddenly you go down into it like this. And God says, take the first step to come back out. Then the next step, then the next step, then the next step, then the next step.

It may take a while, but the way of obedience and faith is the way out of most of our depression. Amen? Associated Press reporter, Christopher Burns, wrote an article entitled, War's Lethal Leftovers Threaten Europeans. He said, the bombs of World War II are still killing in Europe.

They turn up and sometimes blow up at construction sites and fishing nets or on beaches 50 years after the guns fell silent. Hundreds of tons of explosives are recovered every year in France alone. 13 old bombs exploded in France in 1993, killing 12 people and wounding 11.

Unexploded bombs become more dangerous with time. With the corrosion inside, the weapons become more unstable and the detonator can be exposed. So it is with hurting, damaged, sinful human beings.

These potentially explosive experiences need to be carefully dug up and defused by forgiveness, cleansing, careful obedience to the word of God. And may God help us to do it. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we thank you that you love us so much. You do not love us any less when we sin. You do not love us any less when we are depressed.

If anything, you express your love to us even more in our deepest needs. Thank you for your tender love for us. I pray Lord that you will take these words and use them to bring deliverance to some of your children.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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