

SE022408  
PROZAC NATION  
4. Depression

Winter is everyone's least favorite season. As a Canadian, we had to learn to enjoy winter, or else we'd be depressed 8 months of the year. So we learned to experience winter a bit differently than you Americans. Here's a **Canadian Temperature Conversion Chart to give you an idea:**

50 Fahrenheit is (10 C)

- Washingtonians start to turn on the heat
- Canadians plant their gardens.

35 Fahrenheit (1.6 C)

- Italian Cars won't start
- Canadians drive with the windows down

32 Fahrenheit (0 C)

- Distilled water freezes
- Canadian water gets thicker.

0 Fahrenheit (-17.9 C)

- New York City slumlords finally turn on the heat.
- Canadians have the last cookout of the season.

-40 Fahrenheit (-40 C)

- Hollywood disintegrates.
- Canadian Girl Scouts sell cookies door-to-door.

-174 Fahrenheit (-114 C)

- Ethyl alcohol freezes.
- Canadians get frustrated because the Molson runs like molasses.

-459.4 Fahrenheit (-273 C)

- Absolute zero; all atomic motion stops.
- Canadians start saying to each other "pretty cold, eh? "

-500 Fahrenheit (-295 C)

- Hell freezes over.
- Canada cancels Stanley Cup
  - o (\*and the Sonics stay in Seattle)

Winter is going to be my metaphor today for that emotional or spiritual winter that many, many wrestle with: **depression**. Truth is, people can relocate to Florida to avoid cold weather, but there is no place on earth where you escape spiritual winter.

Everyone of us will go through it at some point. I'd like you all to hear from someone who's been there, who went through he own dark winter many years ago.

PAT TALLMADGE. To hear Pat please download the mp3 at  
<http://www.ac3.org/Audio/Connection20080224-ProzacNation-Depression.mp3>

You notice how much God's Words in the Bible played a key in Pat's coming out of her winter? Something that may be enlightening to many of you is to know that the Bible is totally comfortable talking about depression. It's something we avoid in church, because we make it sound at times like people need to be happy, happy, happy ALL the time.

But people in the Bible – big name, highly spiritual, faith filled writers of Holy Scripture – get depressed. We talked about a key one of those two weeks ago: Elijah. He gets so down he wants to die. He sounds suicidal.

And the man who wrote most of the Psalms, King DAVID is a guy who lets it all hang out to God when he's depressed:

- Ps 38:6-8
- I am bent over and racked with pain.
- My days are filled with grief.
- I am exhausted and completely crushed.
- My groans come from an anguished heart.

Another Psalmist says it like this Ps 88:13-14

- LORD, I cry out to you.
- I will keep on pleading day by day.
- O LORD, why do you reject me?
- Why do you turn your face away from me?

Ever feel that way? Imagine a parent who hears their child crying in the night and does not move, doesn't comfort, offers no touch, no help, no soothing words. Now, imagine being that child. It's a striking thing to me that God, who inspired the Bible, chooses to have part of it's Word express this pain of feeling God's rejection.

Ever been through this winter, where God seems so far away? It's not just that there is pain. It's when it seems God has hidden his face from you... no touch, no help, no soothing words even. That's depression.

And that leads me to the first of 3 observations about depression that I want to make.

### **1. IT'S UNAVOIDABLE**

Sometimes I think we get this wrong in two ways. One is that we think that the only people that get depressed are people with clinical depression. We think, as long as I'm not nuts, or as long as I'm not chemically imbalanced then I'm safe. I shouldn't get depressed.

But the truth is MOST depression is circumstantial. A lot of people have me pegged as a guy who never gets depressed. But I used to wrestle with depression a lot in high school. I remember like Pat described, a colorless world, where everything was bleak, nothing was hopeful, and I wondered what good I was to this world – and like many teens, I thot a lot about what this world would be like without me.

Now, I got into those depressions for a reason. Something went wrong.

- Something wasn't going right at home.
- I wasn't realizing my potential.
- My expectations weren't being met.
- Or I was experiencing some loss.

Now, how many of us can avoid those kinds of circumstances our whole lives? We can't. And so we're going to get depressed. In fact, sometimes, if you go through certain circumstances in life, and don't get depressed or at least sad, there's something wrong with you.

Recently a man told me the story of a terrible betrayal in his life. I mean, think of the worst back-stabbing you can imagine, the worse sort of treachery and disloyalty, the most hurtful kind, from a person closest to you... that's what he was going through. And he said, the first thing he did was go on anti-depressants because he was just so down.

I said to him:

Friend, there are some feelings you were meant to feel. This is one of them. You feel crappy, you SHOULD feel crappy. You can't cover this up. You can try, but you'll just feel it later. It's like mourning. You have to feel it, and experience it, as awful as it is.

Christians have their own, non-medical, spiritual version of this depression avoidance. They develop elaborate theologies about how Christians should never get sick or never suffer or never get down. If you do, you just don't have enough faith, or you must be sinning or you're not praying hard enough or not trusting God enough. If you did all those things, it would be endless summer!

But where is that written? I've already read for you the voice of Scripture validating the sadness we feel when grief or loss or pain or despair or disappointment comes on us. In fact, Jesus himself said,

"In this world you will have trouble" – count on it, write in your Outlook, it's going to happen.

Remember those Psalms that talk about feeling like God is turning his face? Jesus himself once said to his Father,

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus felt the Father turn his face, when he faced his hardest moment, the moment of crucifixion for the sin of the world. Jesus, Son of God, showed us that some moments call for us to be sad. Depression is fully appropriate for some seasons in life when it seems that God has hidden his face.

And as painful and sad as that season is, we learn something important every time that winter comes: we learn that our intelligence, our good looks, our money, our faith even

cannot put us in control. We are a breath of air, the Bible says. We're so small, so frail, so dependant, so needy. This is good to remember.

Now, this leads me to my second observation about depression:

## **2. IT IS UNAVOIDABLE, BUT IT IS TREATABLE.**

Someone very close to me went through a bout of depression that lasted for years. Like most of us, the depression was set in motion by circumstances that could not be avoided.

He had a bad accident where a beam he was working on hit him between the eyes. His heart stopped several times on the way to the hospital, each time he was revived. But he experienced severe brain trauma. He couldn't work as he could before. He lost 3 jobs in a row as his brain and body took time to heal. About that time, they had a home fire and several important possessions were lost in the blaze.

He grew very depressed.

That was all normal. But then I observed something... the circumstances changed, but the depression did not. He recovered, got a good job, many other blessings were coming in. But he couldn't see them. Depression, like we learned about anger last week, became self reinforcing. He found it was easier to stay locked in depression than to try and fight his way out. Self pity took over. It was his constant companion. He nursed it and fed it. (Same with me)

Now some of you will, I'm sure, point out to me that many cases of depression are biological and chemical, like Pat's. There can be no doubt that our brains are organs just like our hearts or livers – organs that can malfunction, with chemical imbalances that can be addressed by science and drugs and diet.

But today there are many fascinating studies with DNA which are showing that our environment is connected to our chemistry which drives our mood. One doctor said:

***Other studies at the molecular level reveal how the chemistry of DNA can be changed by experience in ways that affect the expression of our genes – including the expression of chemical processes in the brain.***

In other words a person may have a dopamine deficiency which affects depression, but if they have anxiety producing experiences that may actually alter their chemistry **creating** a dopamine deficiency. Which comes first? We're finding out that we can't separate the two.

Which is why drugs are never the whole answer. I've got many friends, who show how it can be very useful to use medicine to get your head above water and begin to think rationally again to get out from under a mountain of sadness. But too many people will use this as their only way to address the problem.

And as we know, the drugs are not miracle pills. Christians believe that only God performs lasting transformation inside. Notice the labels do not read, “take as directed and be healed of all your sadness, depression and fears.” You can get Prince Albert in a can, but you can’t get the Holy Spirit in a can! You know this by just reading the possible side effects:

- Nausea
- Dry mouth
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Lack of Sexual drive
- Problems sleeping
- Weight gains

It doesn’t fix you. It covers a problem for a little while. In fact, it may make the problem worse for children. It’s now an established fact that anti-depressants can INCREASE the risk of suicidal thinking and behavior in children, adolescents, and young adults.

Please don’t misunderstand me. Modern science I believe is a gift from God. After all, it comes from sharp human minds which come ultimately from God. It can be a great way to treat some symptoms. Some of us with chronic depression should at least look into that.

But the human animal is also more than a biological machine. We are holistic beings, spirit and body combined.

Science and Scripture bear this out: Our behaviors affect our chemistry which affects our behaviors...

Doesn’t it make sense then that we ought to bring a holistic solution to chronic depression? When sad circumstances hit, it’s time just to be sad. It’s OK. Sadness is a God given emotion. David experienced, so can you. But sometimes, self pity or even a doctor or a pill can make you feel like there’s nothing you can do. You just have to accept it forever. And that’s not true.

Speaking of treating depression: a third observation:

### **3. DON’T ISOLATE YOURSELF**

When you’re depressed, you’ll be tempted to go into a kind of hibernation. Don’t do it. Because in depression you’ll probably never desire community less, and you will never need community more.

There’s some interesting research on this. Did you know there’s a group in the U.S. that experiences significantly less depression than any other. Guess which one.

- Left handed people,
- vegetarians,
- blondes?

Here it is: the Amish.

Now, I'm not making this up... when they did this study, they tried to see how many Amish were manic depressive... experiencing extreme highs and lows. It wasn't easy. They had to diagnose the manic phase by things like when Amish people start driving their buggies too fast – could be a sign. Or when they start giving gifts that are too expensive at holidays. It's like:

“Obadiah's got the horses all lathered up again. Get the Lithium out. This is going to be bad.”

But when it comes to just regular depression the Amish are the only group that experience less depression than all others. Why? I think the best explanation given is that people who live with a real strong sense of community are less vulnerable to depression.

The rest of us live in such a strongly individualistic and self-oriented society which is why depression is growing into a national epidemic. Suicide is not the leading cause of death amount students. Suicide! Now, I'm not suggesting we all withdraw to a commune, but the truth is, we were MADE for community. And when you experience depression – and you will – you will never want community less, but you will never need it more.

So, if you're not in community now, take a step. Get known. I'm totally serious. Call someone. Call the church office. Say, I want to join a small group. Be proactive in developing friendships. Don't make that someone else's job. The time to get into community is before depression strikes so you're ready when it comes.

Because it will come.

Prepare. Have you noticed, every fall animals start getting ready for winter?

- Squirrels start gathering nuts,
- bears eat more to hibernate,
- birds with any brains at all head towards Mexico.

What's the one species that does not prepare for winter? Human beings! You watch. Every year, a windstorm blows through here and some news show will interview department stores that are being sold out flash lights or generators or candles. It's as if people say to themselves,

“Dang! It's December and winter came! I'm mean, who would have thought that was going to happen?”

Friend, winter **will** come. And you will need community like the church was meant to be: Rom 12:5 “And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others.” The time to prepare is now.

If you or someone you know is suffering from the signs of depression

- a persistent lack of energy,
- decreased appetite for life,

- eating and sleeping habits are affected
- continued sadness day after day

... I'm asking one thing. Don't isolate yourself and don't give up. Everyone goes through winter, but it can become truly tragic only if you stop, lie down and give in to self pity and despair. You can be depressed and still fight, like Pat did. You can:

- seek out a good Christian counselor
- make a decision to get known
- open your ears and heart to others
- commit that you will not do this alone.

### **Last observation:**

#### **4. CLING TO HOPE**

I say this because people in winter are often prone to wonder, will winter ever end? Will it ever be finished?

How many of you are ready for winter to be over? Winter is the only season of the four that we're so anxious to get rid of that we have a national semi-holiday for a rodent to predict our meteorological future. We don't do that for summer or spring.

So we need hope. We must cling tenaciously to hope. Hope is the idea that there is something to look forward to. You may not see it now, but it is there. The Bible says: "Sorrow may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning."

People in depression need to hope... for two things:

- One of them is you need to hope that God will one day bring something good out of your winter.

I think one of the reasons God allows us to go through winter is that he's doing something underneath all that snow. Pat is one of the most compassionate people I know for people struggling. She's not a particularly gregarious people person\* but God has built such empathy in her for people who are sad.

She doesn't try to fix them like I do. The Bible says, "mourn with those who mourn." Don't fix those who mourn. Don't lecture those who mourn. Mourn with them. Pat can do this so well. Where did she get that grace? Her long dark winter is where. And now because God brought her to out of her winter, she is able to bring hope to others stuck in their own dark days.

So first we must hope that God is able to do something in me, even when I'm sad. Just because I'm sad doesn't mean I'm not changing. In fact, seismic changes may be under way, even though all I feel is numb today.

**Second**, we hope that something better is coming. I read a story about a woman who diagnosed with terminal cancer. So she contacted the pastor of her church and

arranged her own funeral service. Among her requests, favorite hymns, poems, scripture, was this:

I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand.”

She explained,

“In all my years, whenever food was involved my favorite part came when whoever was cleaning the dishes off the table of the main course would lean over to me and say, ‘You can keep your fork.’ It was my favorite part because I knew it meant something great was coming.

So when people ask, ‘What’s with the fork?’ Tell them,

‘She knew that something better is coming.’”

Sure enough, within a year she died. And at the funeral, with the open casket the curious people were told about the mystery of the fork:

***For anyone who follows and trust’s Christ, this is not a day of defeat. Something better is always ahead. Keep your fork.***