

Anxiety and Depression: Understanding and Responding Compassionately

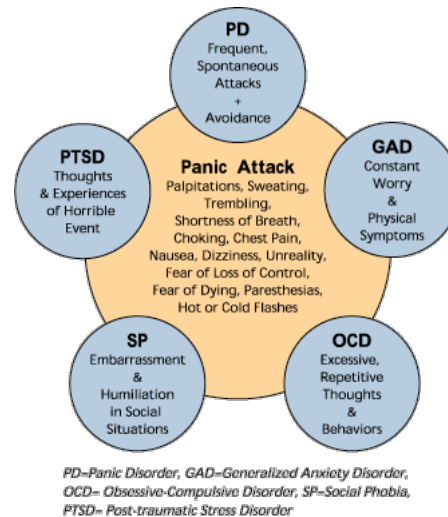
I. Some Interesting Facts:

Let's imagine for a moment that you attend a church of 500 people. In a church that size, there would be, on average, 140 people suffering from clinical anxiety and/or depression. Though some of these statistical numbers might include the same person experiencing both anxiety and depression, the point is that these numbers are staggering.” -Relevant Magazine

Major Depressive Disorder: according to the DSM-IV:

1. Depressed mood.
2. Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all or almost all activities.
3. Significant (>5% body weight) weight loss or gain, or increase or decrease in appetite.
4. Insomnia or hypersomnia.
5. Psychomotor agitation or retardation.
6. Fatigue or loss of energy.
7. Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt.
8. Diminished concentration or indecisiveness.
9. Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.

Anxiety:



- II. Case Study: Read the following case study silently to yourself. In groups, discuss what you would tell Katie. List five important questions to ask her.

Katie is a young adult at your church. She asks you to meet her for coffee to talk through what has been happening in her life during the last 6 months. Upon meeting, she explains the following: It all started about 6 months ago when I noticed that a cloud of sadness seemed to follow me everywhere. Despite my every attempt to be happy, I still cannot seem to shake it. I have lost interest in almost all the activities which I used to enjoy. Sleeping has become difficult, and I have a lack of appetite. Despite all my efforts, God feels distant and unloving and tasks like reading scripture, praying, and worship have become difficult. No matter how many times I pray for God's help, there is no answer. Shouldn't I be joyful and shouldn't scripture reading and prayer help? Maybe I am not really saved, or I don't believe, or I just don't know the Lord!"

III. Personal Testimonies: As you listen to Bethany and Jerell's testimonies, write down anything that strikes you as relevant information for your case study.

IV. Four Key Components to Depression/Anxiety: In groups, consider the elements of each category. Discuss and write down examples of potential causes or problems specific to each category.

Physical/Chemical	Spiritual
Emotional	Environmental

IV. Help from a theological perspective: Use the information gained from these four categories: As a group, fill out the chart below with what you believe are helpful and harmful ways to encourage someone struggling with these disorders?

Helpful	Unhelpful

Questions to Consider:

1. As Christians, to what extent should we seek to escape from pain in our lives? What theological significance does suffering have within our spiritual formation?
2. If we are called to suffer-with one another as believers (com-passion), to what extent does God suffer with us in our pain?

“Knowing by most painful experience what deep depression of spirit means, being visited therewith at seasons by no means few or far between, I thought it might be consolatory to some of my brethren if I gave my thoughts thereon, that younger men might not fancy that some strange thing had happened to them when they became for a season possessed by melancholy; and that sadder men might know that one upon whom the sun has shone right joyously did not always walk in the light.”

- Charles Spurgeon

Historian David Steinmetz describes the terror which Luther experienced at these times as a fear that “God had turned his back on him once and for all,” abandoning him “to suffer the pains of hell.” Feeling “alone in the universe,” Luther “doubted his own faith, his own mission, and the goodness of God—doubts which, because they verged on blasphemy, drove him deeper and deeper” into despair. His prayers met a “wall of indifferent silence.” He experienced heart palpitations, crying spells and profuse sweating. He was convinced that he would die soon and go straight to hell. “For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost. I was shaken by desperation and blasphemy of God.” His faith was as if it had never been. He “despised himself and murmured against God.” Indeed, his friend Philip Melancthon said that the terrors afflicting Luther became so severe that he almost died.

- Martin Luther

“It is important for us to make a distinction between the spiritual fruit of joy and the cultural concept of happiness. A Christian can have joy in his heart while there is still spiritual depression in his head. The joy that we have sustains us through these dark nights and is not quenched by spiritual depression. The joy of the Christian is one that survives all downturns in life.”

- R.C. Sproul

Source: The Dark Night of the Soul, Tabletalk, March 2008,

The Scriptures do grant clearly by their teaching that it is possible for a Christian to be depressed. Not that they justify this, but they do recognize the fact.

- Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Source: Spiritual Depression - Its Causes and its Cures, 1965, p. 107