

# Christian Living

In this period of Advent, Darren Sylvester views Depression from a Christian perspective.

## Introduction

Depression may be described as mood of hopelessness, helplessness and sadness. It is often apparent when feelings of inadequacy and futility arise within an individual. Everyone is bound to experience some degree of depression at one or more points in their lives, indeed, the first Book of Kings illustrates this point with reference to Elijah:

*' .... and went a day's journey into the desert, until he came to a broom tree and sat beneath it. He prayed for death: "This is enough, O Lord! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers".'* (1 Kings 19:4)

## What causes Depression and should Christians get depressed

It is contended that some causes of depression are down to negative thinking about yourself, the life, the world; disappointment and feelings of failure; a sense of guilt (whether justified or unjustified); major life changes or losses – for example, marriage, childbirth, divorce, redundancy, bereavement, a house move; a loss of the sense of God's presence.

Whatever the cause of the depression, depression is a part of life and Christians are exposed to it as anyone else. However we feel, we must never forget that God is always with us. However distant, impractical and unreal our problems may appear, there is always real reason for hope. Only too often is it the case, when one pauses from their busy schedules, can they ascertain and visually see how God has been present with them. Psalm 139 emphasizes God's omniscience; informing us that there is no escape from the all-seeing eye of God, and that the divine Creator of man is also the author of his destiny:

*'... Where can I go from your spirit? from your presence where can I flee? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I sink to the nether world, you are present there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall guide me, and your right hand hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall hide me, and night shall be my light" – for your darkness itself is not dark, and the night shines as the day. [Darkness and light are the same]'. (Psalm 139:7-12)*

## Depression at Christmas

I happened to be in a queue in a London bookstore recently when I overheard a conversation from two ladies (both of whom, in my estimation, had passed middle age, but were not quite of senior citizen age) whereby one said to the other, [Lady 1] *"Well, get this month over with and Christmas is just around the corner, isn't it?"* The reply went along the following lines, [Lady 2] *"Yeah, I*

*feel as though Christmas is going to be for everyone else this year. I'll just be standing by watching it happen for them".*

From overhearing this conversation, my observation of Lady 2 was that she would feel isolated and cut off from the happiness which is inevitably going to surround the persons to whom she was referring. Having discerned her demeanour when replying, it is submitted that this lady was depressed even at the thought of Christmas. In view of this scenario, it must be advocated that we, who are fortunate to be filled with peaceful hope at this joyful time of year, will not be unmindful of those many persons within our own parish, family and neighbourhood who may feel/express themselves in a similar fashion as Lady 2 did.

It is opined that people are overcome with a sense of guilt when they see they are not the *'happy family around the crib'*. Christmas is a time for many where isolation and loneliness set in; this feeling being exacerbated by what can only be described as the frenetic spending and gaiety which takes place around them. Such persons may even call into question their own self worth – but, such a situation may not be all that different from the circumstances which Mary and Joseph found themselves in: they were homeless, rejected and whilst the new life within Mary gave hope, it is contended that there must have been fears and extreme worries of raising a child in an environment which had limited resources and a bleak and uncertain future.

### **What is the Good News of Christmas**

The Good News of Christmas is not that God became a member of an impossibly perfect family, but that he shares all the feelings and fears, sadness and hopes that we all experience. He is not far away, but is always near; hence the name Emmanuel, meaning **God is with us**.

It is for each of us during this period (in whatever way possible) to be closer to others as God is to us. If our belief in God is to mean anything then we will not only remember, but may, for example, pay a visit to families of deceased relatives; the lonely; the sick and those without faith or hope in the future, as it is advocated that such persons can only know God as Emmanuel, if *we are with them*.

It is my firm view that the message of Christmas must be about offering presence as well as presents to each other. If we can be truly present by a mutual, sensitive presence, then these acts demonstrate our shared humanity: in short, the more human we are in our presence with one another, the more **God is with us**.

***May the peace of Christ be with you and all those you love, now and always.***

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