

Depression: Finding Hope & Meaning In Life's Darkest Shadow
by Don Baker and Emery Nester;
Multnomah Press, Portland, Oregon; Hardcover, 197pp.

Would you be embarrassed if others learned that you needed counseling? Is it a sin to be depressed? Will increased Bible reading, more time spent in prayer and deeper devotion to Christ cure emotional illness? Is there any relationship between mental illness and demon possession? Mental stress and emotional illness have often been misunderstood by the Christian community. Even today many Christians, who suffer from depression or are emotionally troubled, find it hard to admit their need for professional help. Some types of Christians still believe that true Christians shouldn't have any problems.

The Path of Experience

In the first section of the book, Rev. Don Baker, a Baptist pastor, relates his traumatic experiences with deep depression. He tells his story with painstaking honesty, his hospitalization, counseling, his longing for a God who seems absent, his fellow sufferers, his family and his church. He felt himself living in a black hole.

What are the causes of depression? For years Rev. Don Baker had been a workaholic. He was over ambitious. Through thorough counselling, medical attention, family support and the grace of God he became healed. Is depression a sin? Some Christians blame depression on sin. It is not a sin in itself though it is often caused by sin. Depression is a common ailment. Moses, Elijah and David were all plagued with symptoms of depression. What causes depression? Rev. Baker writes, "I do not know... To attribute it all to Satan gives him more credit than he's due. To blame it all on the physical, discounts all the confused notions and feelings that were a very real part of me. To blame it on pride, ambition, self-glory, seems reasonable but still incomplete. It was probably all of these-and possibly even more."

In the second section, *The Road to Understanding*, Dr. Emery Nester, Associate Professor of Psychology at Western Conservative Baptist Seminar, uses Rev. Baker's story and other illustrations to look at the nature of depression and how to deal with it. Such sensitive issues as suicide and hang-ups of Christians are considered.

There is hope for the depressed. People can change. For some kinds of depression, medication can make the difference between a person's continuing to function or becoming totally disabled. Not every attack of depression is demonic. It can be caused by biochemical irregularities, environmental factors, internal personal dynamics. Even suicide can be free from Satan's influence. I appreciate the excellent case made for Christian counselors; ".A therapist who lacks a biblical understanding of guilt, as opposed to feelings of guilt would never be able to walk with a person lacking assurance of salvation ... Psychology without an adequate theology will be as ineffective

as theology without an adequate psychology. Both are needs for a therapist who is to be effective in the life of a Christian."

We live in a tension filled, anxiety ridden age. Even many Christians have not been able to escape today's pressures. Regrettably, there are still some evangelical and charismatic authors who give the impression that true Christians cannot suffer from depression. Others have offered simple cures for complex emotional disturbances. This book is different. Its honesty, excellent analysis of the issues, down-to-earth suggestions and Christian perspective makes it good reading.

Johan D. Tangelder