



APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN

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UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION

Part 2 of 2

Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.), also called the “Wintertime Blues”: As we are in the midst of the winter months, some of you may be experiencing a very common and treatable type of depression. Studies have shown that up to 50% of the population experiences a change in mood during the wintertime. For some people, the change in seasons during the wintertime months from fall to spring is directly related to the onset of depression. In addition, for people already struggling with depression, depressive symptoms may get worse during the winter months. Some of the common complaints of wintertime blues include:

Depression and anxiety: despair, guilt, hopelessness, restlessness

Sleep problems: oversleeping, difficulty getting out of bed, needing to nap often

Overeating: carbohydrate craving that can lead to weight gain

Interpersonal problems: irritability, avoiding social situations

Difficulty concentrating: more forgetful, hard to focus on tasks

Lethargy: fatigue, too tired to do much of anything, everything is an effort

Physical symptoms: lowered immune system, aches and pains

The decrease in the amount of sunlight is the major factor in wintertime blues. Other factors such as decreased activity level, holiday stress, and changes in your regular routine also contribute to the problem. There are a variety of things that can be done to counter the negative effects of decreased sunlight. Research has shown that therapeutic Light boxes are the best treatment for SAD. They are commercially available through stores like Apollo Health (www.apollolight.com). In addition, when you are indoors, let in as much light as possible, especially in the morning. Whenever possible, get outside to enjoy the fresh air and be in the sunlight. Try to surround yourself in an environment that is full of light. Grow some indoor plants and find ways to make your surroundings more colorful.

Tips to Help Ward Off the Wintertime Blues

Spiritual: Your spiritual life should be the core from which all other areas of your life radiate. Maintaining a personal and intimate relationship with Christ is of utmost importance. Sometimes when we most need to be connected with Christ and with a body of believers, we have the most difficulty doing so. Make efforts to immerse yourself in a Christ-centered environment. Look for opportunities that will allow you to encourage others and be encouraged by others. Post encouraging Bible verses on your refrigerator, car dashboard, bathroom mirror, or other places you pass by often. Take time to memorize Scripture verses that can help you during times you feel blue or are facing temptation. Push yourself to get out of the house and go to church so that you can be fed by hearing the Word of God.

Relational: God created us in His image as relational beings. His desire to have a personal relationship with us underscores how important relationships are to God. Overcoming isolation is another key factor in dealing with the wintertime blues and depression, in general. Overcoming isolation involves being around people with whom you can open up, relate, and share. Mothers with young children at home, in particular, need time with

adults away from the children. Couples need to make sure that they make time for meeting both spouses' relational needs. Both husband and wife may need time alone after a stressful day. They also need to have regular times together to connect. Specifically, having at least one "date night" per month is beneficial.

Biological: When striving to resist and ward off the wintertime blues, we must not forget to take care of our bodies. We honor our body because it is the temple of God as stated in *1 Corinthians 3:16* "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Even though it can be especially difficult in the winter months to stay healthy with exercise, rest, and proper nutrition, it is extra important to do so. During the winter, our activities often change. Some of our active outdoor activities are limited. Set aside time from your busy schedule to exercise regularly. Not only will it help you feel better physically, it can also elevate your mood. Don't forget about monitoring what you eat as well. Honor your body by giving it the proper nutrition it needs.

The change in the length of days during the winter can throw off your sleep/wake cycle. Many people oversleep during the winter, which can increase the feeling of fatigue. Keeping a daily routine, getting up at regular times, and having activities planned for your day can help ward off many of the negative effects of the shorter winter days.

Emotional: *Proverbs 23:7* says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." What we think and believe about something determines how we will act and feel. Our thoughts play a key role in our emotions and in battling the wintertime blues. One important belief to cling to is the fact that you can cope with any situation with the help of the Lord and the resources He provides. You can choose to focus on "depression thoughts" or "coping thoughts." A depression thought could be something like, "I'm feeling lonely; I hate this. I have three more long months of winter to go. I'll never make it." The hopelessness in that statement is very apparent. It contrasts with Jesus' statement in *John 10:10*: ". . . I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Jesus' plan for us is hopefulness, not hopelessness.

It is important to be able to identify your emotions and the thoughts that are connected to them. Once identified, you can modify them. A modification of the above Depression thought could be, "I'm feeling lonely and I don't like it. What can I do to connect with someone else? I can make a phone call, write a letter, or visit my neighbor." Coping thoughts deal with reality and acknowledge how you feel about a situation; however, they don't leave you stranded and powerless.

Expressing your thoughts and feelings in a daily journal is one good way to deal with them effectively. In addition, it is very helpful to share them with an accountability partner — someone with whom you can "check in," and who will give you open and honest feedback. *Ecclesiastes 4:9-10* says, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up." Each of us struggles at times, and no one is exempt from being touched by difficulties in life. We can fulfill one of our roles in the Body of Christ by both sharing our own burdens and helping to bear one another's burdens.

Depression is a common and treatable problem. We want to encourage you to reach out for support if you are feeling depressed. You don't have to go through it alone.