

Depression Workshop

Andrew Cameron

1. The fourth angle

2. A modern idea?

1730: Colonel Lambert's 'great Depression of Spirit'

3. Old Testament masters of metaphor

- 'ravine' / 'crevasse': Jer. 2:6 (*shuchah*)
- 'swamp': Job 9:31 (*shachat*)
- 'trap': Jeremiah 18:20–22 (*shuchah*)
Psalm 35:7 (*shachat*)
Proverbs 22:14, 23:27 (*shuchah*)
- 'well': Genesis 37 (*bor*)
Psalm 28:1 (*bor*)
Proverbs 1:12 (*bor*)
lifted up: Psalm 30:3 (*bor*) & 30:9 (*shachat*); Psalm **40:2**
(*bor*)

- 'grave': 2 Samuel 18:17 (*pachat*)
2 Kings 10:14 (*pachat*)
Isaiah 14:9 (*bor*); Psalm 49:10 (*shachat*)
- 'panic, pit and snare' Jeremiah 48:43, Isaiah 24:17 (*pachat*)

4. Elihu's unusual associations

The friend worth hearing ...

Job 33:18–30 (Holman version) (*shachat* x4)

- ¹⁸ God spares [a person's] soul from the Pit,
his life from crossing the river of death.
- ¹⁹ A person may be disciplined on his bed with pain
and constant distress in his bones,
- ²⁰ so that he detests bread, and his soul despises his favourite
food.
- ²¹ His flesh wastes away to nothing, and his unseen bones stick
out.
- ²² He draws near to the Pit, and his life to the executioners.
- ²³ If there is an angel on his side, one mediator out of a thousand,
to tell a person what is right for him
- ²⁴ and to be gracious to him and say, 'Spare him from going down
to the Pit; I have found a ransom,'
- ²⁵ then his flesh will be healthier than in his youth,
and he will return to the days of his youthful vigour.
- ²⁶ He will pray to God, and God will delight in him.
That man will see His face with a shout of joy,
and God will restore his righteousness to him.
- ²⁷ He will look at men and say, "I have sinned and perverted
what was right; yet I did not get what I deserved.
- ²⁸ He redeemed my soul from going down to the Pit,
and I will continue to see the light."
- ²⁹ God certainly does all these things two or three times to a man
- ³⁰ in order to turn him back from the Pit,
so he may shine with the light of life.

5. Pressed but not crushed?

⁸ We are pressured in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; ⁹ we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who live are always given over to death because of Jesus, so that Jesus' life may also be revealed in our mortal flesh. (2 Corinthians 4:8–11, Holman)

6. Heman's Well

Psalm 88 (NIV) (*bor x2*)

'A song. A psalm of the Sons of Korah.

For the director of music. According to mahalath leannoth.

A maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.'

¹ LORD, you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you.

² May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry.

³ I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death.

⁴ I am counted among those who go down to the pit;

I am like one without strength.

⁵ I am set apart with the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom you remember no more, who are cut off from your care.

⁶ You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths.

⁷ Your wrath lies heavily on me;

you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.

⁸ You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape;

⁹ my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, LORD, every day;

I spread out my hands to you.

¹⁰ Do you show your wonders to the dead?

Do their spirits rise up and praise you?

¹¹ Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?

¹² Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

¹³ But I cry to you for help, LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you.

¹⁴ Why, LORD, do you reject me and hide your face from me?

¹⁵ From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;

I have borne your terrors and am in despair.

¹⁶ Your wrath has swept over me; your terrors have destroyed me.

¹⁷ All day long they surround me like a flood; they have completely engulfed me.

¹⁸ You have taken from me friend and neighbour— darkness is my closest friend.

'... hardly a spot of light in it ... it may be there is some poor heart here that is very heavy. You cannot proclaim of this great crowd how many sorrowing and burdened spirits there may be among us, but there may be a dozen or two of persons who are driven almost to despair. My dear Friend, if this is your case, I want you to know that somebody else has been just where you are. Remember how the shipwrecked man upon the lonely island all of a sudden came upon the footprints of another human being? So here, on the lone island of despondency, you shall be able to trace the footprints of another who has been there before you.' (Spurgeon, sermon #2433)

7. Suffering with the Messiah

Psalm 69:

- Blurred between 'exogenous' and 'endogenous':

- Moments we relate to:

- Moments that are unique:

- A NT favourite:

2 Cor. 4:11, reprise: the Son who dignifies our suffering
(Andrew Cameron, *Joined-up Life* pp. 105–107)

Job 33:24, reprise: the gracious who says 'Spare him'

Psalm 40 (NIV)

... Of David. A psalm.

I waited patiently for the LORD;

he turned to me and heard my cry.

² He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.

³ He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our
God. Many will see and fear the LORD and put their trust in
him.

⁴ Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
who does not look to the proud,
to those who turn aside to false gods.

⁵ Many, LORD my God, are the wonders you have done,
the things you planned for us.
None can compare with you;
were I to speak and tell of your deeds,
they would be too many to declare.

[vv6 –10: the Messiah who does God's will and proclaims God's acts ...]

¹¹ Do not withhold your mercy from me, LORD;
may your love and faithfulness always protect me.

¹² For troubles without number surround me;
my sins have overtaken me, and I cannot see.
They are more than the hairs of my head,
and my heart fails within me.

¹³ Be pleased to save me, LORD; come quickly, LORD, to
help me. ¹⁴ May all who want to take my life be put to shame
and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace.

¹⁵ May those who say to me, "Aha! Aha!" be appalled
at their own shame.

¹⁶ But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
'The LORD is great!'

¹⁷ But as for me, I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of
me.

You are my help and my deliverer; you are my God, do not
delay.

Appendix: physical, mental, social and spiritual tips.

If depression affects us physically, mentally, socially and spiritually, then it makes sense for someone to have the care of a *doctor*, a *counsellor* or *psychologist*, a *friend* and a *pastor* to travel with you in it. These people become like four legs of a stool beneath us:

physical carer = doctor
mental carer = counsellor or psychologist
social carer = friend
spiritual carer = pastor

- Even two or three are better than one
- No one carer can do everything
- to carers: Mark 9:24: Jesus accepts the man who believes yet doesn't.
- Don't just say 'trust Jesus' or 'have more faith' or 'pray more'
- Do say: 'it's OK that you don't believe right now. Let me trust Jesus for you. He carries you. We'll help carry you too, for a while.'
- So offer to pray for and with them, even when they cannot.

There are good reasons to believe that Scripture teaches 'holism':

- *anthropological dualism* is the view that body and mind (or soul/spirit)
- **Holism** or **monism** is the view that mind/soul/spirit are 'emergent from, and one with, the body.

Therefore it's quite coherent for Christians to engage in any of the following tips.

Depressed people can only raise themselves to some of the following tips.

But if we are embodied minds, then each is worth a go as we are able

...

a) **Physically:**

- (i) aim for good rest (7–8 hrs sleep/day, 1 day off per week, holidays) (but sometimes depression thwarts sleep; it's OK to get up and do other things; it's OK to sleep in 2–3 hour patches.)
- (ii) challenge the unhealthier parts of your diet
- (iii) exercise (even a little helps: e.g. 20–30 min walk a day)
- (iv) allow sun onto skin for 15–20mins / day

- (v) keep challenging your use of alcohol, nicotine, illegal drugs
- (vi) mood can 'attach' to your posture
- (vii) don't oppose anti-depressants 'on principle'
(but no one should make you take them, either)

b) Mentally:

- (i) try tasks of increasing complexity
- (ii) experiment with unfamiliar puzzles (e.g. Words with Friends, Sudoku)
- (iii) consume small amounts of media you enjoy (maybe not dark stuff)
- (iv) practice realistic talk about self and others (i.e. looking for the good, not only the bad)
- (v) question 'mood purism': emotions aren't always set in stone
- (vi) perhaps try 'cognitive behavioural therapy' to address anxious or dark thoughts
- (vii) perhaps ask a counsellor to help you with painful memories
- (viii) if you want to end it all, let people know about that, and let them keep asking you how you're travelling with it. Those thoughts don't need to become taboo.

c) Socially:

- (i) chat to others daily even if you don't want to
- (ii) if they're up for it, tell friends and family how you're feeling
(maybe ask 'if now's a good time')
- (iii) experiment doing things with others that you once found fun
- (iv) experiment with laughing with others and playing games

d) Spiritual:

- (i) ask a pastor to walk with you in depression: he/she will challenge you a little, and that's OK
- (ii) ask a friend to walk with you in depression: he/she might not be very 'deep', but that's OK too
- (iii) if you can, pray and tell God how you are feeling. Maybe just say aloud the words of the a Psalmist or Job.
- (iv) If you can't, let others pray—and even 'believe'—for you (e.g. the pastor and/or friends above?)
- (v) Try reading a little bit of Bible as you are able. Some find it helpful to read some Bible, then talk to God about it in a written journal.
- (vi) Be with other Christians (who aren't a drain) where possible.
- (vii) Jesus: To be 'in Christ' is to be **safe**, even at your non-praying, disbelieving worst. The suffering Jesus allows you to consider your suffering as connected to his. The risen Jesus aims to make your life his own, and one day, to lift you up out of the Pit (Psalm 40:2)

(This list started out as the tips in H. Rienits, *Out of the Depths*, Acorn, 2010, p. 61, but then adapted a lot ...)