

A Pastor with Depression

Rev. Todd Peperkorn

*"My flesh and my heart may fail
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Psalm 73:26).*

What does a pastor do when he can't get up in the morning? Where does he go when he can't face the everyday tasks of the preacher like shut-in calls, funerals, weddings, or even Sunday morning? When the thought of standing in front of a Bible class or shaking people's hands after church fills the pastor with dread, then he is in trouble.

Welcome to the pastor and depression.

Depression strikes one in every ten people in America and is particularly common among service fields like social workers, nurses, doctors, teachers, pastors, and others. Those who give of themselves every day by taking on the trials and difficulties in the lives of others often find themselves overwhelmed by the weight put upon them. This weight or yoke of the office can become a real, physical burden that has an effect upon the body. Depression is one of the common outcomes of this weight.

Depression is not simply feeling sad for a while, even if it may last for a few weeks or more. Depression is a medical condition that involves prolonged feelings of sadness or melancholy, the inability to function on a day-to-day basis (at various levels), and usually manifests itself in physical symptoms like insomnia, irregular eating patterns, decreased libido, and other problems. Medical manuals will use the lovely phrase "neurovegetative" signs. What this means in English is that the patient may simply cease to function in normal settings because of the changes in the nervous system. The causes can be genetic (hereditary), but it can also be caused by a series of situations or triggers, such as stressful situations in the congregation or at home, chronic problems with individuals in the parish (antagonists), or others.

But there is hope. Although depression is serious, it is also treatable. Medical advances have made the treatment of depression much more patient oriented and

specific than they were even ten years ago. Between medication, counseling, a supportive family, and the ministry of a faithful pastor, healing is possible, and the pastor may come out as a better pastor at the end of the journey.

Why does it take all of these people? First of all, the pastor has to get over himself and the thought that he can face all problems alone, or that depression is simply a part of the Office. Second, depression is a medical condition, not simply an emotional state of mind. If you broke your leg, you would go to a doctor. If your mind is not working as it ought, then go to a doctor to figure out what the problem is! A faithful pastor can help you work your way through all of these things, offer the comfort of the Word of God, pray with you and for you, and minister to you with the forgiveness of sins in private confession and absolution. A counselor will help you work through the situational problems each patient faces, and help to order the healing, and help the patient to make decisions that they may be unable to make themselves.

Depression is real, and it is a challenge for pastors. Our knowledge of this disease grows every day, but more importantly, our Lord suffers with us in all of our trials. He promises health and healing to all who call upon Him, whether it be in this life or finally in the life to come.

Finally, in terms of the Ministry, it is always important to realize that it is Christ's Ministry, not yours. Our heavenly Father will use your weaknesses as His strengths, and will bring all things together for the good of His Church (Ephesians 1). It does not all sit on your shoulders. You are never alone.

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