

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Hand me a pill; my syndrome is bugging me!

I can easily remember the days when I had never heard of a manic-depressive (now commonly known as bipolar). My extended family (grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and close cousins) was numerous. But none of these, to my knowledge, was ever on “nerve medication.” They arose early, worked hard, provided for their families, and recreated according to the outlets of the day. They were not immune to the problems common to humankind. I had a grandfather and an uncle who had drinking problems—which eventually each overcame. Our family struggled, wept, and grieved when we lost a loved one; but we went on with productive lives.

My folks lived through the “Great Depression,” when times were exceedingly tough. A meal might consist solely of beans, or greens, and biscuits. “Sweets” were almost an unknown delicacy. A small candy cane was a rare treat. Children died in infancy and family members were lost to tragedy. A cousin was decapitated in a car wreck; another kinsman also died in an auto crash. Somehow we survived, thrived, and lived life vigorously—and without psychiatrists and constant pill-popping. Today, if one doesn’t have a “syndrome” or a “mania,” he is the abnormal one!

Over the past several decades things have changed dramatically. As a minister who has labored with the same church for more than forty-six years, I think I've seen about every "abnormality" in the book. At times I have thought I was on the staff of the "Institute of the Very, Very Nervous." Many of the cases I've observed have been the result of **spiritual** problems. Not a few have been rationalized under the guise of some "neurosis," thus providing an escape to avoid moral responsibility. I do not profess to be a "discerner" of any person's heart, but some situations are too obvious for psychological camouflage.

A responsible businessman who was a respected church member became infatuated with a female co-worker. He left his wife and moved in with his adulterous partner. When rebuked by the local church leadership, his defense was: "I'm bipolar." Far too many have some "mental" aberration that supposedly justifies his or her inability to operate as a normal person, not to mention a spiritual person!

This is not to say that there are not genuine mental problems—genetic, hormonal, biological, environmental, or self-inflicted debilitating maladies. Some have become genuinely unbalanced due to long-time sinful indulgences. Wickedness does exact a huge toll. But the undeniable truth is, many people have appropriated "syndromes" in defense of inappropriate conduct.

Depression Redefined

John Cloud, a journalist with *TIME* magazine, recently reviewed a new book by Allan Horwitz and Jerome Wakefield titled, *The Loss of Sadness: How Psychiatry Transformed Normal Sorrow into Depressive Disorder* [Cloud, John. 2007. When Sadness Is a Good Thing. *TIME*, August 27, p. 56.] Horwitz is dean of social and behavioral sciences at Rutgers University and Wakefield is an expert on mental-illness diagnosis at New York University.

The authors insist that America now has a "legal drug culture," because we have come to believe that "sadness" is a form of "mental illness."

(To this we might add laziness, inattentiveness, super-sensitivity, self-centeredness, over-indulgence, etc.)

Over the past twenty years outpatient medication for “depressed” people has skyrocketed a staggering three hundred percent. Today some seven percent of all Americans are on some kind of antidepressant—and the drug companies are getting rich because of it. Some doctors, with more patients than they can handle effectively, quickly dispense “nerve” drugs as a quick “fix” for problems that do not nearly rise to the level of a bona fide neurotic condition. One does not need a drug just because he is tired, lonely, frustrated, or aggravated about some irritant.

These professionals do not deny that mental health disorders can result from “biological roots,” but they contend that every normal person experiences periods of sadness. It’s just a part of human existence and such need not be characterized as a “mental illness” that necessitates medication. Being “blue” because of a job loss, the break-up of a marriage, conflict with a neighbor, or “I don’t have a steady sweetheart,” is not a “syndrome.” Such common problems do not require antidepressants. In fact, these professors contend that sadness is not necessarily bad for a person. It even may be healthy!

The reviewer points out that in 1980, the American Psychiatric Association radically changed the definition of “depressive neurosis.” Up until then, the expression signified “an excessive reaction of depression due to an internal conflict or to an identifiable event such as the loss of a love object.” A new definition was crafted omitting “excessive,” and requiring certain symptoms, e.g., a mood change, fatigue, insomnia, weight gain, and indecisiveness—which traits are sustained for at least two weeks. **Two weeks** to go from normal to neurotic!

While the loss of a loved one is considered an exception, other crises (e.g., a divorce, a severe financial loss, or a life-threatening illness) should not generate a “neurosis”! This is why some physicians will

prescribe anti-depressants at the snap of a finger; many people are expected to “flip” within two weeks of a crisis!

Are we that fragile? What has happened—especially among Christians—to faith, prayer, encouragement, courage, and fortitude? Whatever happened to a good old self pat-on-the-back wherein one says: “You are better than this. You can get over this. Pull out. Shape up. Don’t become self-centered. Help someone else.”

The author concludes his article by making this surprising confession. Sadness is a natural feature of the human makeup. He says it appears “we are sometimes **meant to suffer emotional pain** so that we will make better choices” (emphasis added). He attributes the “meant to suffer” to the blind forces of evolution, but the phrase itself clearly implies a benevolent purpose.

The Christian should say: “God has allowed suffering to follow in the wake of human sin—as a disciplinary tool to educate us in making ‘better choices’ so that we will be better people.” Even Jesus suffered that he might learn obedience to his heavenly Father (Hebrews 5:8-9).

- Wayne Jackson

Down On Self?

Professional people tell us that low self-esteem is a serious and wide spread problem affecting just about every strata and age level of our society. I believe it. Failure, unattractiveness, obesity, lack of formal education, feeling of not being needed, lack of confidence and the like are the culprits robbing many of a sense of worth. They produce feelings

of inferiority and self-pity that can be detrimental to both sinner and saint — especially if the saint happens to be weak in faith.

Of all people, God's people ought to have a lofty, yet humble sense of worth. In the first place, every man is a kinsman and offspring of the almighty God (Acts 17:29). That makes every individual special in a way that deserves appreciation. The "inward man" (2 Cor. 4:16) is fashioned after God's own image (Gen. 1:27). As we have "fathers of our flesh," we also have a "Father of spirits" (Heb. 12:9). There is within every man that which does not and cannot come from fleshly parents but only from our spiritual Father. What consolation to remember that this spirit shall one day "return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). We should say, with the little boy pictured on a poster, "I know I'm SOMEBODY, 'cause God don't make no junk!"

But, not only am I the offspring of God, I am the continual object of his love and concern. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon Him, **because he careth for you**" (1 Pet. 5:6,7) Yes, "God so loved the world..." but that means He loves YOU! Paul viewed it in personal terms when he says of Christ that He "loved me, and gave himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). So should we. And here's something else God's people need to remember. Since God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), He sees you and me as His children and objects of His love as much as Paul, Timothy, Peter or any Old Testament worthy. As the popular writer, Francis Schaeffer put it, "With God there are no little people." The question is not whether I am a great apostle, elder, preacher, or teacher, **but whether I am glorifying God in my life, where I am, with what I have, now?** 1 Pet. 4:11 Many deceive themselves into thinking that they could do more for the Lord in some other place and at some future time if they only had more resources or talents. Being down on self causes one to think of "what might have been" and hinders possibilities of rewarding service now.

No person is worthless and viewing self as such is deceiving and hurtful. We have been redeemed at the greatest cost ever paid for anything, "with precious blood ... even the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:19). We have a soul appraised by the Lord as being of inestimable worth (Matt. 16:26). In Christ we have been made truly rich (2 Cor. 6:10). DO WE REALLY BELIEVE IT?

To walk by faith is to recognize that apart from the Lord we are and can be nothing. But in Him, thanks be to God, we have a greatness that we need to remember, appreciate, and reflect in our daily living!

- Dan S. Shipley

> "We would worry less about what people think of us, if we realized how seldom they do."

> "If you neglect another day, you have a day more to repent of, and a day less to repent in."

> "No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave."

> "What you do for self will be soon forgotten, but what you do for others will be long remembered."

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"Mass Media: Attitudes Toward the Body and Physical Beauty!"* (text: Gen. 6:1-2); Sunday evening: *"Isaiah: The Messianic Prophet!"*

SCHEDULE: Our Gospel Meeting will be July 28 – Aug. 2, Sun. regularly scheduled times, M-F at 7:00 p.m., with Tanner Campbell, of Piggott, AR.