

**Question:** I have been diagnosed with major depressive disorder. I am a devout born again Christian. Can I be a real Christian and have mental illness?

**Answer:** I want to answer your question two ways. First, I want to talk about this problem and next month look at a biblical example of someone who suffered from mental illness.

On Sunday morning, we will pray for everything from goiters to hemorrhoids. But when is the last time you heard a church offer prayer for someone with a mental illness. In fact, we often act like those who suffer with mental illness are lepers. I believe the primary reason is that we believe the myth that Christians Don't Have Mental Illnesses.

The question is why do we believe this myth? I believe that there are two reasons. The first is lack of information. We tend to separate the mind from the body. From neck down, we see sickness as part of being fallen creatures. But when it comes to mental illness, we often assume it is because of some sin or a lack of faith. What we need to understand is that many mental illnesses have a biological component. Bipolar Disorder, Schizophrenia, and Alzheimer's disease, for example, are mental illnesses that appear to have a biological component.

The second reason is that we have bought into the false gospel of emotional health. The idea is that if we have repented of our sins, prayed correctly, spent adequate time in God's Word, we will be free from mental problems.

But is it true? Let's look at the most common mental illness, major depressive disorder. According to recent studies, 1 in 20 people suffer from clinical depression at any one time. Everyone has a 1 in 4 chance of experiencing an episode of clinical depression in our lifetime. Christians are not immune from this disorder. I think you would be surprised if you knew how many people in your congregation who meet the criteria for major depressive disorder.

This is not a new problem. Let me give you two examples. The first is Martin Luther. The same man who wrote *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* suffered from depression. Roland Bainton wrote that "Luther was subject to recurrent periods of exaltation and depression of spirit. The content of his depression was always the same, the loss of faith that God is good and that he is good to me."

Another example would be Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers. The man who helped to flame the fires of revival in Great Britain during the 19th century, was absent from the pulpit 2 to 3 months a year due to depression. And the list could go on. You see mental illness is not a new phenomenon. What is new is our awareness and ability to treat it.

Next time we will look at an example of someone in the Bible who suffered from depression and how God helped him recover.