

Facing depression together

Trusting in the
dark

Some dos and
don'ts for
dealing with the
downcast

**Includes
discussion
guide**



MiniZines

Start the conversation



The less we know God, the less we truly know ourselves.

It is hardly a surprise, then, that as our culture has drifted further and further from God, the idea of 'sin' has also largely disappeared. People these days 'make mistakes' or 'do something stupid' or 'have a brain explosion', but they don't 'sin'.

As Christians, we can't help being affected by this cultural drift. We don't like talking about sin. It sounds so negative and life-denying. We would

rather concentrate on the positive aspects of the Christian message. But as the great Puritan John Owen said, Christians who don't understand the sin that still dwells within them are foolish and self-deceived. "They live and walk as though they intended to go to heaven hoodwinked and asleep, as though they had no enemy to deal with."

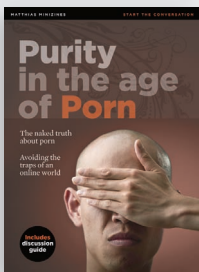
The articles in this MiniZine will help you get to know your enemy better.



Do you love your church?

We don't mean: do you love the music, or the quality of the preaching, or the architecture of the building? Rather: do you love the people God has given you to meet with each week? And how do you show that love?

The three articles in this MiniZine not only challenge us to think about our attitudes to church life, but also provide lots of practical ideas for becoming more loving, caring and welcoming to those around us.



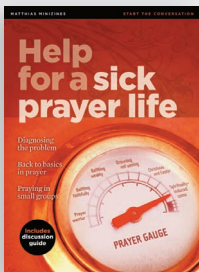
How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word" (Ps 119:9).

We can only wonder what the psalmist would have made of our sex-saturated culture—where roadside billboards advertise technology for better sex, where yesterday's soft-porn movies are today's normal prime-time television, and where more than 80 per cent of teenage boys admit to viewing pornography.

The psalmist may not have known about the

internet, but the real problem is the same today as it was then: our sinful, straying hearts. The solution is also the same: guarding our hearts with the truth and wisdom of God's word.

The three articles in this MiniZine bring the truth of God's word to bear on the problem of pornography. They urge us to treat God's good gift of sexuality with respect, and to be honest and open with each other as we strive to honour the Lord Jesus with all of our heart, mind and body.

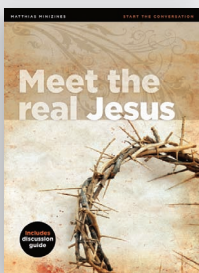


Paul's noble friend Epaphras was always "struggling" on behalf of the Colossians in his prayers (Col 4:12).

Most Christians know what that struggle is like. Prayer is deceptively natural and easy—a child can do it. And yet persevering in prayer is agonizingly hard. All long-term Christians will testify to the many and various ways in which they fail in the

struggle, and drift into prayerlessness.

The three articles in this MiniZine will not suddenly solve the problem, or eliminate the struggle. But, God willing, they will provide you with weapons, armour and a renewed courage for the battle.



Will the real Jesus please stand up?

Every year, someone releases a new book that promises to peel back the veil of history and uncover the 'authentic' Jesus. But after a while, you realize it's yet another personal spin on one of the most intriguing and significant people in the history

of the world.

This MiniZine will help you to see that the biblical accounts of Jesus' life are the only place to access the real information about him. It will challenge you to cut through the rubbish by reading about Jesus for yourself.

All MiniZines are 16 pages of full-colour engaging content.

From the editor

DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, THE BLACK DOG, DYSTHYMIA, the blues, despair ... it's not a particularly happy list, but your response to it says something about you. As a friend of mine says, there are two kinds of people in the world: those who immediately 'get it', and those who wish the melancholics in the corner would get a life.

As much as some of us would like to take a magic pill that would make it all go away, while others wonder what all the fuss is about, the sad fact is that depression and anxiety are a big part of life for God's people living in God's family.

That's why we've produced this MiniZine on the topic of depression. As with the other MiniZines in the series, our aim is start a discussion that gets you thinking biblically with others in your church about how to tackle an important issue together. In God's grace, this is an area of life where being part of God's family can make a real difference.

'Trusting in the dark' is about what the gospel says particularly to those who struggle with depression and anxiety, but the truths apply to us all. Mark Baddeley's article contains wisdom about how to encourage those who struggle with depression, written by someone who has been through the experience on both sides of the fence. And finally, Jean Williams encourages us to find the biblical wisdom of another age by introducing us to Martyn Lloyd-Jones's *Spiritual Depression*.

We want to stress that this MiniZine isn't the sole solution to the problem, nor is it a diagnostic manual. Our aim is to get onto the table a topic that is so often hidden away, so that those who suffer can voice some of what they experience, and so that those who don't can learn a little about how to love their brothers and sisters who do.

PAUL GRIMMOND

The first and third articles in this MiniZine were first published in *The Briefing*, Matthias Media's monthly magazine. For more info, articles and subscription details go to www.thebriefing.com.au. The second article was first published on www.solapanel.org, a blog by some friends of *The Briefing*.



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Trusting in the dark

SOME BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS ON DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

AUTHOR  PAUL GRIMMOND

Ever since my early 20s, I've struggled on and off with anxiety and depression. In the last few years, the struggle has become particularly acute. I often wake early, pretending that it's just the call of my bladder, but I know it isn't. I know as soon as I wake, I won't go to sleep again. My body feels tired—like I've been running all night—and my brain whirs away like the hard drive on my computer.

I wake up with a thousand questions in my head—none of which seem solvable—and, at times, I've been so exhausted, I've just curled up in a ball on the floor and cried, wondering if the emptiness will go away soon. I have suffered mainly from anxiety, with periods of very low mood thrown in for good measure.

From talking to others, I know that my experience is both common and unique. It's unique in that the symptoms of depression and anxiety vary from person to person—some sleep too much, rather than too little; some stop eating; some eat too much; some become suicidal, and some don't. And yet I know my experience is common because the statistics say that the general incidence of depression and anxiety (D&A) has grown out of control in our society over the last 50 years or so.¹

The question God's people need to ask is “What do the Scriptures have to say to those who are depressed and anxious?” It's an important question—both for those who struggle with D&A and for those who wish to



love their brothers and sisters who struggle. My aim in this article is to explore what the Bible has to say to those who have D&A. But before I do, I want to acknowledge some of the complexities involved.

COMPLEXITIES

Talking about D&A raises the complex issue of the interrelationship between our psychology and physiology. We know that the way we think directly affects our biochemistry, and our biochemistry has an impact on the way we think. But because our biochemistry is changed by exercise, sleep and diet, these will also have some impact on our mood.

So the debate continues to rage about how much D&A are illnesses (hormonal/chemical imbalances that lead to distorted thinking

and feeling) and how much our thinking and feeling lead to the hormonal/chemical imbalance that marks D&A. The reality is that our biochemistry and psychology affect each other in complex but profound ways. For this reason, it is vitally important that if you are someone struggling with D&A, you seek medical help. This article is no substitute for a professional diagnosis.

However, I think that it is equally important to point out that D&A can't be sealed off in a medical compartment from which God is absent. God's word applies just as much to those who are depressed and anxious as to those who are 'healthy'. What follows is not a complete biblical or theological study of the problem, but a set of scripturally informed reflections on being depressed and anxious in light of my own experience. I'm not saying anything here about the importance of diet, sleep and exercise—all of which I have found important in controlling my tendencies towards anxiety and depression. My concern here is to talk about some of the fundamental issues of D&A and how they relate to living the Christian life. I pray that they will be useful to you.

THE SAME GOSPEL FOR ALL

Our starting point must be that the gospel applies to the depressed and anxious person the same way it applies to the emotionally healthy person. We are all sinners in need of forgiveness who find our only hope in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. True life for all is found through repentance and faith in Jesus (cf. Acts 20:21; Rom 10:9-10).

If God's word is sufficient for us to know him and live as his people in this world, then we must trust that the gospel contains the resources required by those who are wrestling to honour God in the midst of their D&A. Acknowledging this will help us to be thoughtful and wise in our approach to dealing with the problem and it will help us to keep directing the depressed and anxious person back to the gospel of God's truth.

This is important because it will help us to help those with depression. Take this common scenario. The depressed and anxious

person has just listened to a sermon on Romans 13:8, "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law". As a result they feel profoundly guilty because of their lack of love. Their friend, desiring to be helpful, responds with "Oh, that doesn't really apply to you in your current condition". Unfortunately, the solution hasn't dealt with the problem.

What is required is either the acknowledgement that they do need to repent and seek forgiveness in Christ, which is just as possible for the depressed and anxious person as for other people, or to see, from God's word, why their expectations of themselves are not God's expectations.

This approach helps us in two ways. Firstly, it permits the healthy acknowledgement that our depressed and anxious brothers and sisters also sin. They need to keep hearing about the fullness of the forgiveness available in Christ. Secondly, it forces us all to go back to the Bible. Finding good biblical reasons that challenge the way they apply particular parts of the Bible is vital for their Christian growth and it will always be a much better solution than asking them to accept your wisdom that this passage doesn't apply to them right now. Even if they take your word for it and feel a little better, you have established an unhealthy way of dealing with their problem. The more you become their comforter and biblical interpreter, the worse it will be for them in the long run. False dealing with sin and guilt in any form is not what makes for Christian growth.

Let me explain what this might look like in practice. A friend of mine suffered from bipolar disorder. In his worst moments, he would say and do completely socially unacceptable things. Those around him understood that he wasn't entirely in his right mind, and they made allowances. For example, they didn't take everything he said seriously. But they didn't just let him do whatever he wanted to do; they challenged him to control his behaviour, and asked him to do what was

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