

HOLIDAY DEPRESSION

Some time ago I was in Athens with university students visiting the Acropolis and its magnificent structures. While maneuvering for a prize photo of the Parthenon, I became privy to a conversation between two ladies probably in their early 30's. Thinking English a safe shelter in this Greek speaking country, one of them said, "Seeing all of these couples here makes me so lonely, that I can hardly stand it." The intensity of feeling in her voice, and her sad expression convinced me she was experiencing an attack of depression.

Depression often strikes on holidays and other special occasions. A recent survey showed 25% of adults admitting they sometimes felt depressed at Christmas. With about one in ten adults suffering some form of depression, an increase in suicidal thoughts and attempts has been noted in our nation on important dates such as anniversaries, the death of a loved one, on birthdays, and at other times of significance to the individual.

Persons especially at risk include those who have lost a person dear to them, and those who, for whatever reason, feel cut off from others. This later category includes singles who are separated from their own families. In fact, it is recognized that persons living alone who lack a support network, are high risk for depression. Also included are new families to the area, individuals from dysfunctional families, and persons either separated from others by illness, or by a variety of social causes.

Since the cause of most depression is situational rather than biological, there is a lot the individual can do to overcome it. First of all, remember that God holds the depressed in special consideration! Paul states that "God comforts the depressed" (2 Cor. 7:6). In addition, a recent article in Psychology Today draws from the work of Martin Seligman, and lists preventive techniques that can decrease susceptibility to depression: develop your personal interests and talents, guard physical health and create a positive focus, look for the humor in situations, seek to serve others, and realize that one has the power to choose the most appropriate response to adversity in order to make it a positive rather than a negative (May/June 2000, pp. 31-37).

As a spiritual family, we can be very helpful to depression prone people of the categories listed above, particularly at holidays. There is increasing evidence that human love and comfort can do a great deal to aid depressed persons. In many instances, a good conversation with a compassionate person may be more beneficial than medication. We must, therefore, include them in our circles of friendship, and work to

eliminate their "outsider" feeling. This means we must get to know them well enough to be available on those special dates that are important to their history. Finally, on national holidays, particularly those of family significance, we must see that no one in our congregations feels left out.

Carl Mitchell