

Men and Their Emotions: Sadness

This series about a man's emotions continues with the emotion of Sadness. The last two posts about Anger and Fear were preceded the "Why", the "How", and the "What" of managing our emotions to become more godly men. In this post, I'll dive into the emotion of sadness, which became personal for me several years ago.

Sadness Defined

There are multiple levels of sadness, each with varying degrees and physiological states requiring deeper levels of care.



Disney/Pixar's *Inside Out*

Dictionary.com defines Sadness as the quality or state of being sad or an instance of sorrow. According to Psychology Today, sadness is a normal human emotion usually triggered by a difficult, hurtful, challenging, or disappointing event, experience, or situation.

In other words, we feel sad **about something or some situation.**

In many cases, feelings of sadness will go away quickly and you can go about your daily life.

Another word for sadness is Melancholy, which is a gloomy state of mind about a situation that can lead to depression; the most serious aspect of sadness.

Psychology Today defines Depression as an *abnormal* emotional state and mental illness that affects our thinking, emotions, perceptions, and behaviors in pervasive and chronic ways.

Depression is when ***we feel sad about everything***; not necessarily just a difficult event or situation, a loss, or a change of circumstance.

Depression is an intense feeling of sadness that lasts for a long time, sometimes weeks, months, or even years. It often occurs without any triggers and can interfere with your day-to-day life, wellbeing, and physical health.

People talk about sadness as “feeling low”, “feeling down”, or “feeling blue” from time-to-time and many will say they’re feeling “depressed”. However, if the feeling goes away on its own and doesn’t impact life in a big way, it probably isn’t depression but sadness that is normal.

Most importantly, depression is treatable. The sooner you recognize its symptoms, the sooner you can recover. If you are feeling extremely sad or suicidal, speak with a professional counselor or doctor. You do not want your sadness to develop into depression

Environmental and Physiological Reaction to Sadness

Increased access to brain imaging technology now allows neuroscientists and hospital clinicians to view the brain and measure serotonin levels caused by chronic stress, which is a contributing factor to sadness and depression. Serotonin, “the

happy neurotransmitter”, is a chemical messenger that acts on or blood vessels and pain control pathways in the brain. Serotonin production is responsible for controlling our mood, attention, sleep, and pain.

When serotonin levels are low, people can be diagnosed with the appropriately-named Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). A lack of sunlight keeps serotonin levels low, which is why the winter or seasons of heavy cloudiness and rain often lead to increases in sadness and depression.

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD is a form of depression that comes on in the late fall or winter time and improves in the spring and summer.

SAD STATISTICS

- 5%** In a given year, about 5 percent of the U.S. population experiences seasonal depression.
- 10 MILLION** Seasonal affective disorder is estimated to affect 10 million Americans. Another 10 percent to 20 percent may have mild SAD.
- 18-30 YRS. OLD** Four out of five people who have seasonal depression are women. The most common age for SAD is between 18-30.

SYMPTOMS OF SAD

CLASSIC SYMPTOMS

- Oversleeping
- Daytime Fatigue
- Carbohydrate Craving
- Weight Gain

OTHER SYMPTOMS

- Decreased Sexual Desire
- Lethargy
- Hopelessness
- Suicidal Thoughts
- Lack of Interest in Normal Activities and Social Interactions

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Alcohol and drugs also cause serotonin levels which have a negative impact on a person’s mood. People who experience a ‘comedown’ after drinking alcohol or taking drugs, often report feeling sad and depressed due to the sudden reduction in serotonin.

Sadness and depression are routinely positioned as a woman’s disease. However, studies show though that the lower occurrences of depression in men might actually be due to our tendencies to deny illness, self-monitor and self-treat symptoms, and to avoid professional health care to enact and preserve our masculinity. Even if men do acknowledge the symptoms, we’re reluctant to talk about our sadness or seek

help out of fear that it's perceived as a sign of weakness.

What the Bible says about Sadness

The Bible has much to say about sadness.

Psalms

The book of Psalms, the songbook of the ancient Israelites, is the "go-to" book for many people today since it contains the full gamut of human emotions. From rage, fear, peace, joy, and especially sadness, the psalmist cries out to God in the middle of his hardships.

Out of all the 150 Psalms, none is sadder than Psalm 88. Its opening line is the only positive statement in the whole prayer: *"O LORD, God of my salvation."* Everything that follows is a flood of darkness, death, and despair, ending with *"You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me: my companions have become darkness"* (Psalm. 88:16).

Psalms often start with feelings of deep darkness and despair as if God is hiding as the psalmist wrestles with his own thoughts. This is the same as those wrestling with sadness and depression. It feels never-ending, and we feel forgotten. While the psalmist is burdened and in trouble, they ultimately reach a turning point of hope and peace after prayer and reflection.

Psalms 23, 37, and 103 also reveal how faithful God is to those who have faith in Him. God doesn't want you to remain in a state of sadness but to find joy for the "joy of the Lord is your strength" (Psalm 28:7).

You might also check out this interesting interview between Bono and Eugene Peterson, writer of *The Message*, about their mutual love of the Psalms.

Lamentations

There is another entire book of the Bible on sadness called Lamentations. In it, the prophet Jeremiah wrote these verses: *“I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.”* (Lamentations 3:19-23)

Job

The book of Job is about a man who experienced great sorrow and sadness, through no fault of his own. God revealed to Job and his friends that the circumstances that cause sorrow and sadness in our lives are for holy purposes and that, sometimes, God doesn’t even explain His reasons for those circumstances (Job 38–42).

All of these men trusted that God cared enough for them to not leave their circumstances as they were. That kind of hope can help keep our sadness in perspective and remind us that God will set all things right.

Jesus, the “Man of Sorrows”

Lastly, our ultimate role model, Jesus Christ was known as “a man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3) since His life on earth was characterized by difficult circumstances.

Deep in sadness over his friend Lazarus’ death, *“Jesus wept”* (John 11:35), which is famously known as the shortest verse in the Bible.



Jesus Wept (Jésus pleura)

James Tissot – Online Collection of Brooklyn Museum

Even near the time of His death, Jesus was extremely full of sorrow, knowing the fate ahead of Him on the Cross when He would cry out *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46).

How God Buddies Respond to Sadness

Like Jesus, men should be honest with God about the feelings and ask Him to intervene through our prayers.

We cannot and should not pretend that we aren't sad when we are. Pretending means we're hiding behind another of the masks men wear to cover our weaknesses. It can also diminish the experiencing of situations that make us better men able to endure life's hardships.

In some earlier posts, I described my Work-Life “Un-balance”

which led to the doctor becoming concerned about depression. It is one of the reasons that led to this blog and why I strongly believe men need close, authentic friendships.

Fortunately, I sought help and now have close friends with whom I can be honest. Today, when I feel sad, I read my Bible a bit more often, get outside for some sunshine, get enough sleep, and go for a bike ride or golf with my God Buddies.

So when you are feeling down, go for a walk outside with your God Buddy to talk about any circumstances that are using your sadness.

You can read the Psalms, Lamentations, or any book in the Bible that points you back to God's promise about hope for a better life.

You may recall a prior post that I like to listen to music to fill my mind with positive thoughts when I am feeling a bit down. Check out this video of Bono and U2, who end their North American concerts with a song called "40", based on Psalm 40.



Click on image to play the song

The next post is about the emotion of Happiness.