

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 43 – Bipolar Disorder

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Introduction

Today we will look at the bipolar disorder, defining what it is, and how to address to Biblically. To understand bipolar disorder, we must first understand depression. So let's review.

Most of what the medical community calls depression is the result of normal sadness over loss (real or imagined, based on truth or lies). Normal sadness has three characteristics: 1) there is an occurring trigger, 2) the intensity corresponds to the size and duration of loss, and 3) it ends approximately when there is no longer a loss or the loss is adapted to. This accounts for ~90% of people identified as depressed.

❖ **How do you respond to losses in your life?**

Depression then is most often a result of an unbiblical response to normal sadness that continues in a cycle of circumstance/unbiblical response, circumstance/unbiblical response and so on. This results in a debilitating or weakened mood, feeling, or attitude of hopelessness (despair or joylessness) which becomes the reason for not handling the important responsibilities of life. The cycle is reversed by purposing to glorify God; walking in the Spirit and spending time in God's Word; being involved in a local body of maturing believers who can bring care; learning to respond Biblically to the loss circumstances, act righteously (action precedes feeling from Gen 4:7), and controlling thoughts; and remembering God's purposes in the difficulties of life.

❖ **How do you most view yourself (better yet, how do those that know you closest), feeling driven or obedience driven?**

The remaining ~10% of those labeled as depressed suffer from disordered sadness. Disordered sadness, unlike normal sadness, has no apparent trigger of loss or context for the sadness. There is no explanation for the intense feelings and they are prolonged with no apparent end in sight.

Medical (with known pathology or drug related) issues may account for ~5% of those who suffer from disordered sadness. The reason for the sad mood of the remaining ~5% is unknown.

Regardless of the cause, the ~90% with normal sadness, the ~5% with medical issues, or the ~5% with unknown cause can live with hope because of the resources found in a relationship with Christ.

❖ **Do you live with hope regardless of the circumstances?**

Much of today's information was gleaned from Charles Hodges and Ed Welch's internet available material.

Bipolar History

Remember, the prevailing thought in the medical community is that people struggling with behavioral, emotional, or cognitive difficulties are sick; they have a medical condition. This is based on a medical model of these struggles. The problem with this model is that pathology (cellular level abnormalities as the cause of disease) related to psychological disorders does not exist. There are no tests to determine what is wrong in the body. Psychological disorders are diagnosed based on observed behavior. The diagnostic criteria is documented in the "American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders" or DSM, currently on its fifth revision.

In the DSM-5, bipolar disorder has many variations. For our purposes today, we want to look at bipolar I disorder and bipolar II disorder. These are the two main groupings, but there are sub groupings within each related to the frequency and severity of the experiences.

The title “bipolar” is relatively recent. The phrase “manic depression” began in the late 1800s. In the 1950s, “manic-depressive reaction” was used in the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic Manual. Since the DSM-III in 1980, the term “bipolar” has been used as the diagnosis. We will call it “bipolar I or II disorder” to be consistent with what the DSM calls it.

Unfortunately, those with the label of bipolar disorder often do not know what that means (the actual diagnosis). In addition, many people will say, “I’m bipolar” as opposed to “I have bipolar disorder” using the term as an adjective and in the process removing hope from the situation and in the sufferer’s mind may release the them from self-responsibility for their actions. In addition, our society has coined the term “bipolar” to describe any mood swings noticed in personal interactions.

❖ **How do you describe yourself?**

❖ **Where does your identity come from: an adjective/label or your relationship with Christ?**

Bipolar Defined

This information was gleaned from several internet sources (much was often conflicting).

Bipolar I Disorder

Bipolar I disorder is the more severe of the two bipolar disorders and is characterized by extreme mood swings from euphoric highs (mania) to deep lows (depression). There are often periods of normalcy in between.

Manic episodes are distinct periods of at least one week when a person has an elevated or irritable mood, which can take the form of euphoria. Mania is characterized by increased energy, an increase in goal-oriented activities, restlessness, and a significant decrease in the need for sleep; euphoric moods; extreme irritability; racing thoughts, talking very fast and uninterruptable, and jumping from one idea to another or easily distracted; inability to concentrate; and provocative, intrusive, aggressive behavior, or impulsive or high-risk behaviors such as hypersexuality or excessive money spending. Psychosis (break with reality) can also accompany manic episodes in which grandiose or delusional ideas or hallucinations are experienced.

These behaviors impair the individual's ability to socialize or work.

Periods of moderate or mild mania are called hypomania.

A depressive episode is characterized by a sad or empty mood; feelings of hopelessness or pessimism; feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness; a loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed; decreased energy; difficulty concentrating, remembering, and making decisions; either sleeping too much or an inability to sleep; and thoughts of death or suicide. Psychosis can also accompany depressive episodes in which delusions or hallucinations are experienced. There is a high risk inadvertent self-injury and suicide for those with bipolar I.

The onset of a manic or depressive episode is often foreshadowed by sleep disturbances. Mood changes, psychomotor agitation, and appetite changes, and an increase in anxiety can also occur up to three weeks before a manic episode develops.

Manic episodes usually begin abruptly can last several weeks to months. Depressive episodes last a few weeks to months as well. Over a 10-year period, the average person living with bipolar disorder will have about four mood episodes.

It is important to note that those people who are suffering from psychosis (after physiological or pharmacological causes are ruled out) are most likely suffering from a true mental illness where pathology exists, but for which medicine does not yet have the ability to detect. Charles Hodges notes that if a person has had two or more episodes of mania, it is likely to be in their best interest to continue the best and most tolerable medication that controls their symptoms.

Bipolar II Disorder

Bipolar II disorder has similar type features, but do not reach the highs and lows of bipolar I. It is unfortunate that the two experiences have similar names since the extremes of bipolar I make it unique.

Many patients are initially diagnosed and treated as having major depression. Then during the treatment for depression they experience a hypomanic episode. This can be a key for those who are diagnosed with bipolar II disorder since the bipolar II behavior and subsequent diagnosis can be a result of the treatment for depression.

Who or What is Culpable?

Once again, we are brought to the question, if there can be physiological influences to behavior, emotions, or thinking, then are people responsible for the sin they commit? The answer to this question lies in the question, "What is the source of a person's sin?" Sin comes from the heart.

²⁰And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. ²¹"For from within, out **of the heart of men, proceed** the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, ²²deeds of coveting *and* wickedness, *as well as* deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride *and* foolishness. ²³"All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." Mark 7:20-23

The heart, the essence of each person, is corrupted by sin. We are hopelessly lost and not able to do anything by ourselves that can make us right before God. We are not able to choose or do anything that is acceptable to God apart from His grace. The Scriptures describe each person as a sinner (Rom 3:23); having a wicked heart (Jer 17:9); not seeking God (Rom 3:10-12); separated from God (Isa 59:2); a slave of sin (Rom 6:15-23); dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the ways of Satan, a child of wrath (Eph 2:1-3); father is the devil (John 8:44); blinded by Satan (2 Cor 4:3); under the domain (authority; house) of darkness (Col 1:13); under the power of Satan (1 John 5:19); and under the wrath of God (John 3:36).

Remember our axiom: "Never call anything a disease that the Bible calls sin. Never call anything sin the Bible does not clearly identify as sin." Having a physiological condition that influences (tempts) a person to sin does not absolve one of responsibility for the sin since the sin comes from one's own heart. The bipolar experience does not negate personal responsibility for sin. But understanding the bipolar experience does highlight particular struggles and contributing influences.

❖ **Who/what do you blame for your sin?**

❖ **What list of things that you have in your life are you tempted to blame for your sin?**

For example, if a man responds in anger at his wife, that anger is sin and it must be dealt with. If we understand that he was doing physically demanding work over a long period of time and his blood sugar had bottomed out, then we see a contributing influence in addition to the sin nature. It does not negate, at all, his responsibility for his sin, but it does point to additional areas that need to be taken into account when addressing the sin in his own life and when others are ministering to him.

Similarly, if Billy hits Johnny, the behavior is wrong. But if Billy had been previously bullied several times by Johnny, that would be taken into account as an additional influence. We would address Biblical responses to the stressor as well as the pugnaciousness with Billy as he is nurtured and admonished.

A person who struggles with mood swings should become more alert to the particular temptations and more equipped to do battle and live in dependence on Christ in the midst of the behavior fluctuations.

¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, who **because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.** Heb 5:14

¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to **abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.** 1 Pet 2:11-12

- ❖ **What influences toward sin do you see in your life?**
- ❖ **Do you have a plan in place to glorify God when those influences come?**

Bringing Care

It is important to note that those dear souls experiencing bipolar I mania and depression may require medication to moderate their behavior and stem the destructive consequences. They should be under medical care. In the midst of medical care, there is hope found in a growing relationship with Christ.

There is also life wisdom that can help those struggling with mood swings: exercise regularly; eat a healthy diet avoiding caffeine, alcohol and nicotine; maintain a consistent schedule, using time wisely and sleeping regularly and sufficiently; and learn to deal with stress Biblically.

In addition, practical prevention can help like listing out the personal early warning signs of a mood swing and seeking help when an impending mania or depression is observed. Also, safeguards can be put in place like accountability, protection on finances, etc.

¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.
Rom 13:14

Here are some Biblical principles that bring hope to those struggling with mood swings.

1. Purpose to glorify God.

Make a conscience choice to do whatever it takes to glorify God; to show His character in your motives, thoughts, words, and deeds. This must be your greatest desire, your highest purpose, more important than anything.

²⁷“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. **28Father, glorify Your name.**” Then a voice came out of heaven: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” John 12:27-28

³⁶Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to His disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. ³⁸Then He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me.” ³⁹And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; **yet not as I will, but as You will.**” Matt 26:36-39

A person who has God’s glory as their highest purpose, will still, on occasion, choose to sin (Rom 7). However, the result when they come to recognize their sin will be much different than those whose highest purpose is their self.

¹Be gracious to me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; According to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity And cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.

⁴Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge. ... ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. Psa 51:1-4, 17

- ❖ **What is your highest purpose?**
- ❖ **What is your heart attitude when you do not fulfill the believer’s highest purpose?**

2. Walk in the Spirit

¹⁶But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.** ... ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Gal 5:16, 22-23

A believer who is walking in the Spirit will respond with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control to the circumstances of life, including the temptations of mania or depression.

❖ **What is your most prevalent way of walking – flesh or Spirit?**

3. Be actively involved in a local body

This will allow you to receive care (love, edification, encouragement, admonition, comfort, etc.) from those who have the resources to bring care to you.

❖ **Are you actively involved in the body both to give care and receive care?**

Battling Mania

If we take a concordance and search for “bipolar” or “mania” in the bible, we find no references. We may be tempted to think the Bible does not address these moods and thinking. In order to understand mania Biblically, we reduce it down to descriptive terms answering questions like: “What does it look like?”, “What does it do?”, “How does it think?”, “What does it feel like?”.

When looking at the descriptions of mania we can pick out things like:

- Elated mood
- Irritable mood, anger
- Goal oriented activities
- Racing, impractical thoughts
- Absolute certainty in ideas
- Grandiose ideas
- Impulsive behavior
- Reckless behavior

❖ **What other labels might you break down to Biblical language?**

Based on these specific thoughts and behaviors, we can look at sins to put off and righteousness to put on. These are the very things that the Bible addresses clearly:

- Put off pride, put on humility
- Put off recklessness, put on self-control
- Put off anger, put on gentleness
- Put off rebellion, put on humble obedience
- Put off selfishness, put on dying to self/service
- Put off coveting, put on contentment
- Put off lust, put on purity
- Put off sinful speech, put on God honoring words
- Put off relationship strife, put on peace
- Put off stubbornness, put on submission

These things can be addresses when moods are fluctuating, but also worked on significantly while moods are stable. Progressive sanctification during stable moods will help when the temptations/challenges of mood swings come on a person.

❖ **Do you view the small struggles of life as training for the big ones?**

Battling Depression

We looked at the addressing depression last week, but some of the biblical strategies for battling depression are re-listed.

1. Determine the trigger for your sadness

Is the trigger due to a loss that is real? Is it due to an imagined loss? Is the feeling based on sinful thoughts or lies? Answering these questions allows you to determine your course of action. For example, if the sadness comes from sinful thoughts, then repentance is warranted; if the sadness comes from the death of a loved one, then focus on truth about God's comfort.

2. Remember God's purposes for difficult times (see topic 16, "Trials and Suffering"):

- To test the strength of our faith (Ex 16:4; 1 Pet 1:6-8)
- To humble us (2 Cor 12:7)
- To teach us to trust God and not in ourselves (2 Cor 1:8-9)
- To remind us of our future glory (Rom 8:18)
- To develop godly character and strength (2 Cor 12:10)
- To enable us to better help others in their trials (2 Cor 1:3-4)
- To allow us to receive help in time of need (Heb 4:16)
- To cause us to learn more of God's Word (Psa 119:71)
- To give us opportunities for service (Phil 1:12-19)

❖ **What is your heart attitude toward God in the midst of difficult times?**

3. Know that God has given you the resources to choose to respond righteously to sadness.

¹²Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. ¹³No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. 1 Cor 10:12-13

❖ **Do you view the difficulties of life as overwhelming to yourself and God?**

4. Spend time meditating on God's Word.

⁷The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. ⁸The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. ⁹The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.

¹⁰They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward. ¹²Who can discern *his* errors? Acquit me of hidden *faults*. ¹³Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous *sins*; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression. ¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. Psa 19:7-14

❖ **If you tracked all your daily time, would you see God's Word as a priority?**

5. Make choices to act righteously when sad.

People are generally feeling-driven. We do things because we feel like it. We need to change so that our motive for doing things is to glorify God. The problem for sad or depressed people is that they are acting on their feelings. They need to do right regardless of their feelings. God's instruction to Cain is great hope for those struggling with sadness.

³So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground.⁴Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; ⁵but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. ⁶Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ⁷**If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.**" ⁸Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Gen 4:3-8

❖ **Do you "do well"?**

6. Get control of your thoughts.

If the response to sadness is a self-focus, then the thoughts continue to be centered on the emotion of sadness and not on those things which are true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, or worthy of praise. Stop day-dreaming, stop mulling over the sadness in your mind. Change your thinking.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brethren, **whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.** Phil 4:4-8

❖ **On what do your thoughts dwell?**

Concluding Thoughts

Those who experience mood swings can find hope in a growing relationship with Christ. They have been given all the resources needed for life and godliness.

Real Life Scenarios

Yourself #1: You find yourself experiencing mood swings on a regular basis. During these times you are very emotional and treat those around you badly with anger and harsh words. You always just accept that is the way it is and the people around you have to live with that. What truths from today's study are convicting and/or encouraging for you?

Someone Else #1: Your friend calls you one night frantic. Her husband has been up for three days straight and doesn't seem to be tired at all. He is acting strange, talking very fast. He says he has a plan to get rich which will mean emptying your bank accounts and retirement funds. He is compelled to do this because it is a great idea and because God told him to do it. In fact, every so often he stops and "listens" to God. What should you do?

Someone Else #2: You have known your friend from church for many years. You know she is a growing Christian. She has always been someone whose emotions swing from happy to sad. What truths from today's study could you share with her to bring her encouragement? What are some practical ways you could care for her?

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues

Topic 43 – Bipolar

For each of the put-off/put-on pairs related to mania below. Look up passages that deal with the “put-off” being a sin and what is said about the “put-on”.

- Put off pride, put on humility

- Put off recklessness, put on self-control

- Put off anger, put on gentleness

- Put off rebellion, put on humble obedience

- Put off selfishness, put on dying to self/service

- Put off coveting, put on contentment

- Put off lust, put on purity

- Put off sinful speech, put on God honoring words

- Put off relationship strife, put on peace

- Put off stubbornness, put on submission