

Is Depression a Choice?

When life hits me with inescapable sadness or when family or close friends elicit the same, I usually fall into a pit containing little except depression.

Depression doesn't feel good to me, and it's like I'm being punished for something I haven't done. I agree that if I did something or said something that upset you, then I apologize, and I'll do my best never to do that again, but if I did or said something through no fault of my own, then let's talk about it.

Sometimes, a falling-out between people or someone I love seems permanent, and when that happens, it destroys the future I thought we had.

Recently, two of the most important family members left in my life and I parted ways. I understand the dynamics of the separation; my mind understands all of that. It's my heart that's confused and upset and doesn't yet know how to deal with it.

So, is depression a choice? If it is, it's a difficult choice to change. And if it isn't, then it's only a process we must go through.

I grew up watching people cry when someone or something close to them died. I also learned to cry- crying seemed the right thing to do, and crying seemed appropriate. Not crying seemed to equate to not caring, and for others, crying the loudest meant they cared the most.

Depression, being in a low mood, is another emotion I also learned as a child. When my father hurt his back and needed major surgery, the entire family was depressed. My behavior needed to correspond, or I would have been seen as uncaring.

Now, though, decades have passed, and I have seen many deaths and been depressed many times about many things. I have cried for family members that I didn't love, and I have been depressed about things I cared very little for.

As I grew older, my desire and need for people faltered. Most of that was my fault because I traveled so often and so far away, and I came to enjoy the sanity of the peace and quiet of being alone. I found myself living in new places without close friends. I still had people in my life that I cared for and loved to visit with, but because I moved so often, I began to lose contact with them. Family members got old and died, and gradually, the count got down to two: my daughter and son.

I decided to stop doing something I had done for them since they left my home, and that was helping them out of their often dire financial decisions. I didn't make my decision because I couldn't afford it; I decided because they needed to learn to make better decisions or live with the consequences. Little did I know it would cost me their love.

And therein lies my hurting and depression. But there's a part of me that is yelling time-out! I am blaming myself for what? For not doing this sooner? No, that's not a reason to blame and shame myself. I helped them because they needed help, and I changed my choice to do so only when I saw the pattern of their choices. The money was not a factor in this.

With that said, the depression and sadness are that they are my last two family members, and I had hoped to spend time with them in the years ahead. I reluctantly accept their choice to walk away from me. I do this with great sadness but refuse to be this way for long. I refuse to get chronically depressed about their decision. After all, it is their decision.

I have lived a good life. I have rarely asked anyone for anything I couldn't pay for, and I have always hoped for friendships that come without asking. I don't want much from anyone- just the caring and respect that seems so natural to give.

Life doesn't always seem to give us what we want. Sometimes, we need to take it, and sometimes we need to do without. Either way is acceptable. For now, I'll get over learning that these two most important people have chosen not to have me in their lives. I have overcome equally difficult and, occasionally, more tragic experiences, so I know I can prevail.

And to answer the question of whether depression is a choice, I say yes, it is a choice. I think the actual first feeling we experience is shock. The shock that someone died, or the shock that someone left us or was mean to us. And just because we chose to accept depression initially doesn't mean that it's permanent.

I was walking and stepped into a depression, but my next steps took me up and out of it.

Finally, and never to forget, we walk with the grace of our Creator, that knows our path better than we do.

Written by Peter Skeels © 9-19-2024