April 27-28th, 2024

Break the Ice

An article on Cru.org highlighted the common misconceptions and realities of depression, especially among Christians. Discuss these with your group:

- "<u>Misconception</u>: Depression is not real.
  <u>Reality</u>: Depression is a real illness that impacts the brain's ability to function as it should.

- <u>Misconception</u>: Depression is a sin.
  <u>Variation</u>: Being depressed means you are failing to trust God. Being depressed means you are failing to be joyful in all things or to give thanks to God.
  <u>Reality</u>: Depression is an illness, not a sin.

- <u>Misconception</u>: Depression will go away if you pray hard enough or have enough faith.
  <u>Reality</u>: Depression usually needs to be treated with more than prayer.

- <u>Misconception</u>: Depression is a punishment from God.
  <u>Variation</u>: If you feel depressed, it's because you have unconfessed sin.
  <u>Reality</u>: Depression is not the fault of the person who is suffering. It is a difficult trial that can refine someone's faith, but it's not a punishment for sin.

- <u>Misconception</u>: Depression is just an excuse for laziness or not doing your "Christian duty."
  <u>Variation</u>: You are letting God and your church down if you are too depressed to serve or minister.
  <u>Reality</u>: God loves you however much you do to serve Him.

- <u>Misconception</u>: People with depression are unstable and cannot be trusted with church leadership or responsibilities.
  <u>Variation</u>: Depression is an indication of unconfessed sin or weak faith, so people with depression are not fit for leadership.
  <u>Reality</u>: Depression and other mental illnesses do not disqualify people from leadership or church roles. Experiencing depression can give people compassion or perspective in a way that actually makes them excellent leaders.

- <u>Misconception</u>: It's shameful to discuss mental illness openly.

Reality: Church community should be a safe environment for people to discuss mental health without judgment.

- Misconception: You can always tell if someone's depressed by outward appearances of actions.
  Reality: You cannot always tell that someone is depressed from how they look or act.

- Misconception: It's okay to talk about another person's depression or struggles with mental illness as long as they do not know.
  Variation: Sharing someone's struggles with mental illness without their knowledge lets other people know they need to be sensitive.
  Reality: When people share their mental health concerns, those should be respected and kept in confidence. It is gossip to talk about others' mental health behind their backs."

Up

When we experience depression, we often cannot sense God's presence. We feel that He is far away. We cannot sense His nearness. **Read Psalm 34:17-18 and Romans 8:26 out loud**. Ask your group the following:

- Why do we have such a hard time sensing God's nearness during our depression?

- Do you have a time you can share when you felt God's nearness after you had cried out to Him?

In

Ask the group to discuss the following quote from an article at Cru.org:

"Depression plays tricks with your thoughts and emotions. Many Christians are used to having an emotional experience of their faith, such as feeling a 'spiritual high' on a retreat or feeling close to God during a powerful time of worship. When you're depressed, you are probably not going to have those emotional experiences. The good news is that your relationship with God depends upon His unchanging faithfulness and not on your changeable emotions."

Ask if there is anyone willing to share their own story of depression and how it affected(s) them?

Out

When we are depressed the last place we want to be around is people. The problem with this is that you are alone in your thoughts. This is actually one of the most dangerous places you can when you're really depressed. Because you are alone, you can start to believe that no one cares about you and that your life is hopeless. It is a downward spiral that is hard to reverse. As hard as