

Question: What does the Bible say about being bipolar / manic depression?

Answer from GotQuestions.org: The terms "bipolar" or "manic depression" refer to a condition described as "a brain disorder that causes unusual shifts in a person's mood, energy, and ability to function. Different from the normal ups and downs that everyone goes through, the symptoms of bipolar disorder are severe. It is diagnosed based upon particular characteristics. The Bible does not address the issue of medical treatment for this condition. However, the Bible does provide accounts of those individuals that exhibited bipolar characteristics. The Bible also provides instructions for dealing with many of the characteristics. Typical characteristics associated with bipolar are considered either manic or depressive.

Signs of Mania or a Manic Episode:

The following are symptoms typical of a bipolar individual in the manic phase: inflated self-importance; in some, delusions or hallucinations; feeling all-powerful, invincible, and destined for greatness; feeling "high," excessively optimistic, better than ever before; feeling irritable or angry; behavior that is aggressive, provocative, or intrusive; feeling rested after just a few hours of sleep; extremely talkative and sociable; pressure to keep talking; flight of ideas; can't keep up with their own ideas and thoughts; inability to concentrate, distracted, restless; extremely energetic; increased productivity; a feeling of high intelligence and creativity; excessive involvement in pleasurable or high risk activities, such as sex, drug or alcohol use, gambling, or spending sprees; reckless, impulsive, unpredictable; no perception that the mood and behaviors are abnormal.

The Bible records individuals with inflated self-importance such as Goliath, Samson, King Herod, Nebuchadnezzar, and Pharaoh. The Bible typified this as a result of pride. Lucifer was an angel who was filled with too much pride. The Bible warns against pride, as well as anger, in several of the Proverbs (16:18; 21:19; 22:24; 29:22,23). It seems that many of the warriors were extreme risk takers (David, Jonathan etc). Many of the religious leaders were obsessed with destroying Jesus. King Saul was obsessed with destroying David. These seem to be descriptions of individuals who could qualify as those experiencing "manic episodes."

Signs of Depression or a Depressive Episode:

Feeling hopeless, sad, discouraged, or empty; inability to experience pleasure. Nothing seems to be of interest anymore, including former hobbies, social activities, and sex; significant weight loss or weight gain—a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month; insomnia or oversleeping (also known as hypersomnia); being "keyed up," unable to sit still, anxious, restless or sluggish, slow speech and body movements, lack of responsiveness; feeling physically drained, even small tasks are exhausting; can't do things as quickly as before; strong feelings of worthlessness or guilt; harsh criticism of perceived faults and mistakes; inability to focus; difficulty making decisions; can't "think straight;" memory problems.

Worry and despondency is a regular theme in the Bible. Matthew 6, Philippians 4, and 1 Peter 5 are examples of Scriptures that warn against worry. Elijah in 1 Kings 19 provides

an example of someone who expressed a "depressive episode." He desired to give up and die. This episode actually took place after he was victorious over 450 prophets of Baal in a contest on Mount Carmel. And he expended an extreme amount of energy running faster than chariots and covering dozens of miles. Others who showed highs and lows include the following: David (Psalms); King Saul (episodes of usurping the authority of the prophet " 1 Samuel 13 and 15 then deep depression in chapter 16); Peter, as he was willing to step out on the water at one time, then act irrationally with fear at the trial of Jesus.

Comparing biblical terms with today's observations:

Some biblical words that might be identified with some of the above characteristics are as follows: anger; fear; bitterness; worry; anxiety; doubt; laziness; pride; hopelessness, foolishness; lust; lack of self-control; greed.

Summary:

It seems that the depressive aspect of the bipolar diagnosis is its most damaging element. The anxiety and worry that cripples individuals is of great concern. The Bible is not silent on this issue of anxiety and worry. Matthew 6:25-34 provides instruction for those tempted to worry by providing a context for hope. If an individual is focused on the kingdom of God, then those things that tend to beat a person down have less impact. Philippians 4:6-9 deals with the contrast of anxiety and peace. The instruction in this case refers to the decisions of the mind. In each of these passages it is clear that the believer has a responsibility for personal mind control. This is a different attitude than that of being a victim of the mind.

Psychology considers bipolar to be a disorder of the brain. Without debating the accuracy of that statement, one should still conclude that regardless of the affliction that might be upon the physical brain, there are certain responsibilities placed upon an individual to choose what things will be the focus of attention. Therefore, a believer should be concerned about the expectations and instructions that God has about depressive responses. Bringing the mind into obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), renewing thinking (Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23; Colossians 3:15), meditating on proper things (Philippians 4:8), and adjusting the focus of thoughts (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1) are God's gift to overcoming depressive episodes.