



A wee conference  
about a big problem

# God and Depression

## SESSION 1

Understanding  
depression as  
Christians

## SESSION 2

Responding to  
Depression  
as a Church

# Outline



## SESSION 1

### Understanding depression as Christians

1. What is depression?
2. Does God understand depression?
3. What about suicide?

# Outline



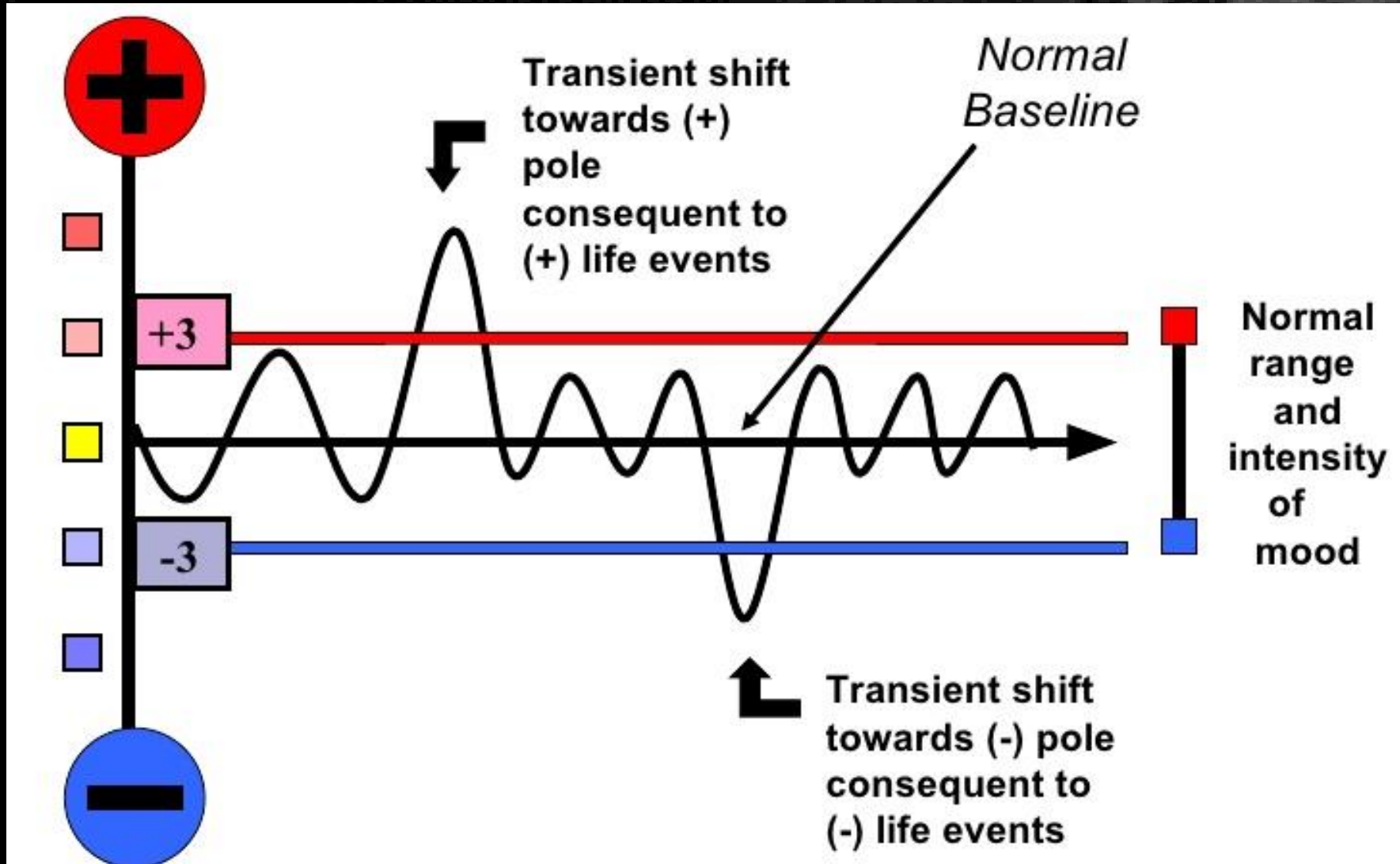


What is “depression”?

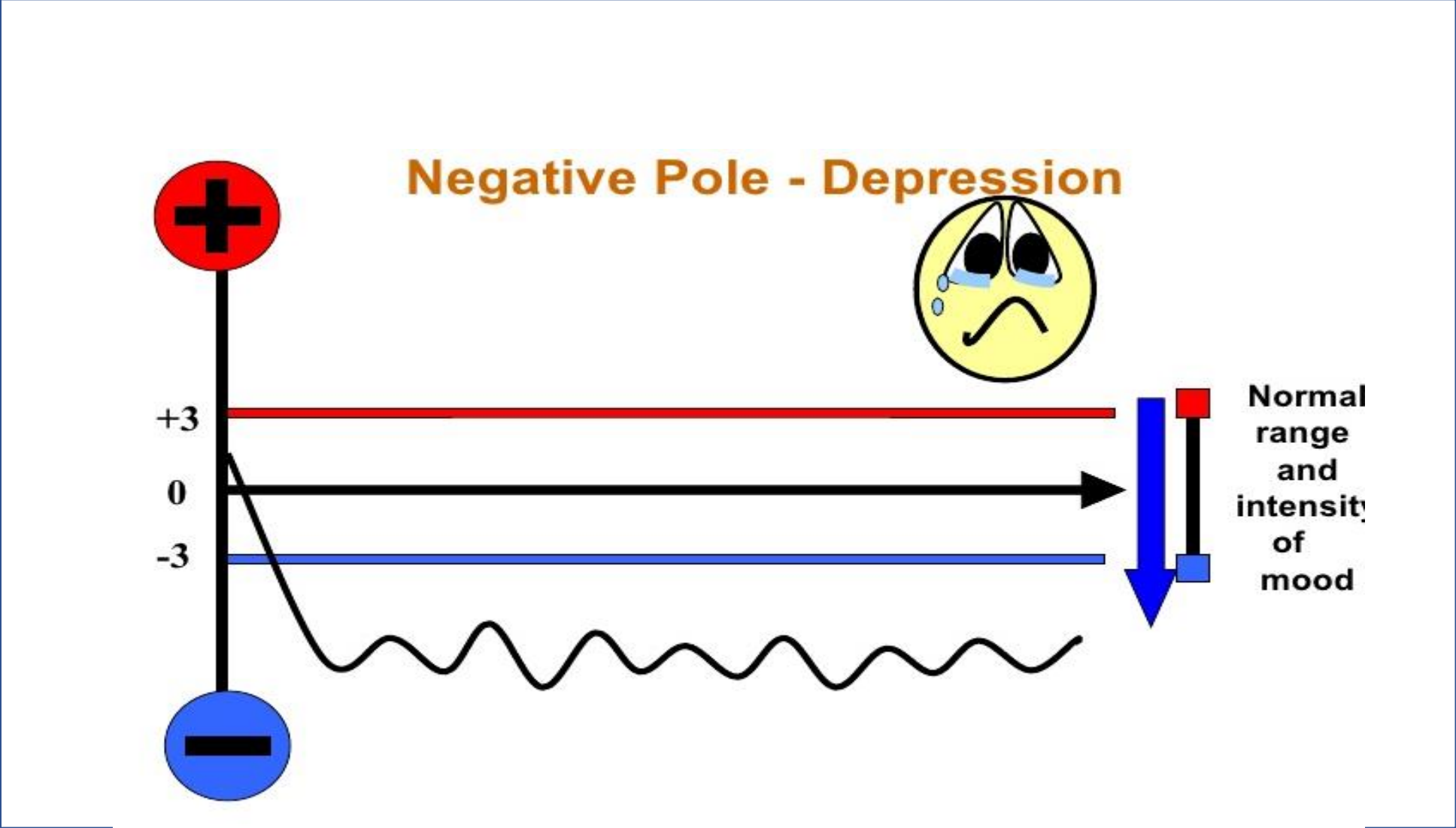
Some common features:

- Low Mood
- Reduced Energy
- Lack of enjoyment
- Pessimistic thinking

# Normal mood chart



# Depression mood chart





# Depression takes many forms...

- Clare... profound depressive episodes, seemingly unrelated to circumstances, arising all her entire adult life
- David... sudden, new and catastrophic depression arising very directly in response to issues at work...
- Esther... mild, low-grade depression, little fluctuation, little relief
- Frank... plunged into depression following a criminal act, prominent OCD symptoms





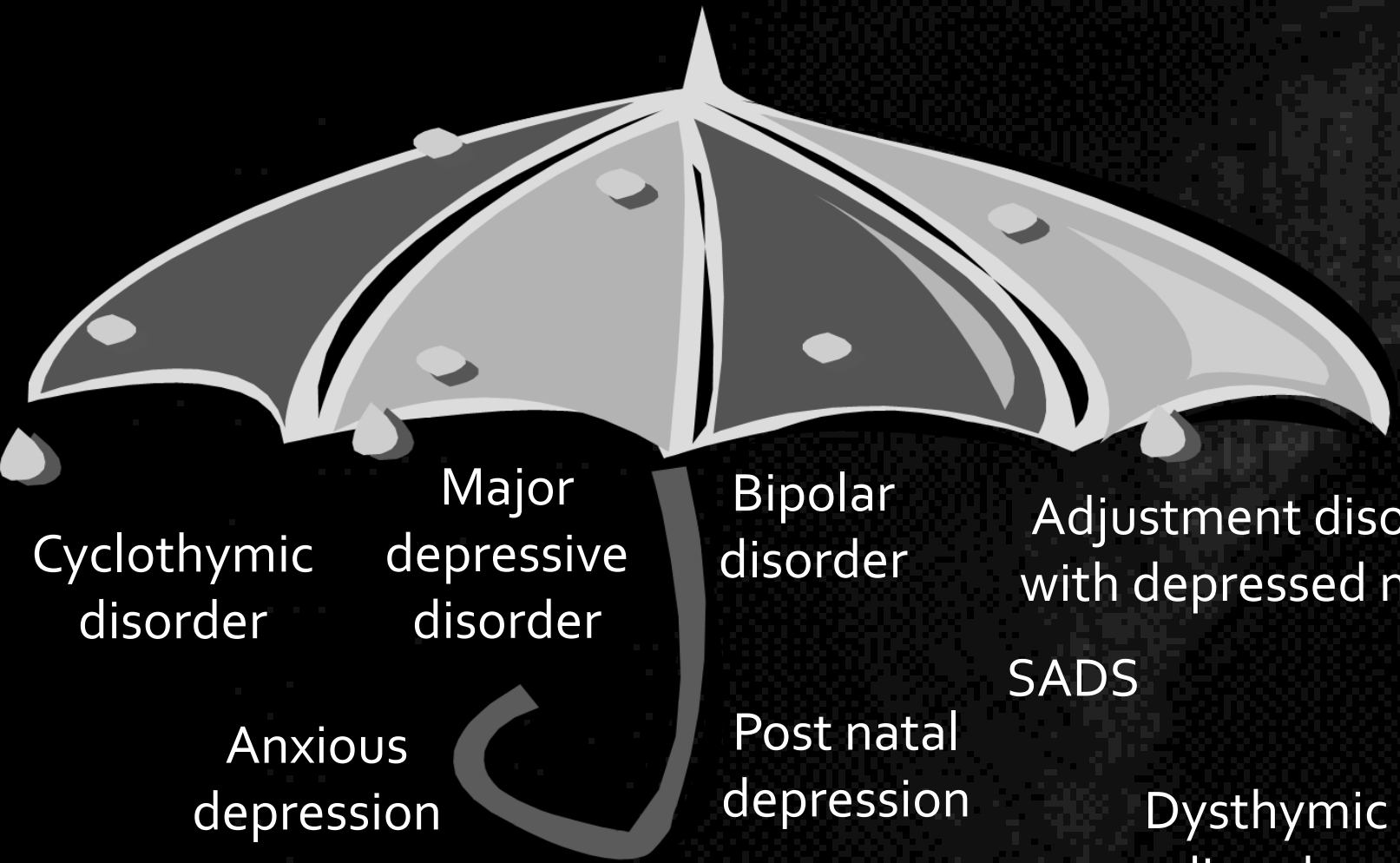
# The shape of depression myriad forms...

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- Psychotic depression (like being dead inside)
- Post natal depression
- Seasonal Affective Disorder (SADS)
- Anxious depression



# Depression an umbrella term



Cyclothymic  
disorder

Major  
depressive  
disorder

Bipolar  
disorder

Adjustment disorder  
with depressed mood

Anxious  
depression

Post natal  
depression

SADS

Dysthymic  
disorder



## How common?

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- Lifetime risk 10-20 %
- Twice as many women as men
- WHO estimates #2 cause of disability worldwide by 2030 (#4 currently)
- Third of all visits to GP
- £8 billion lost productivity annually in UK

## Historical figures

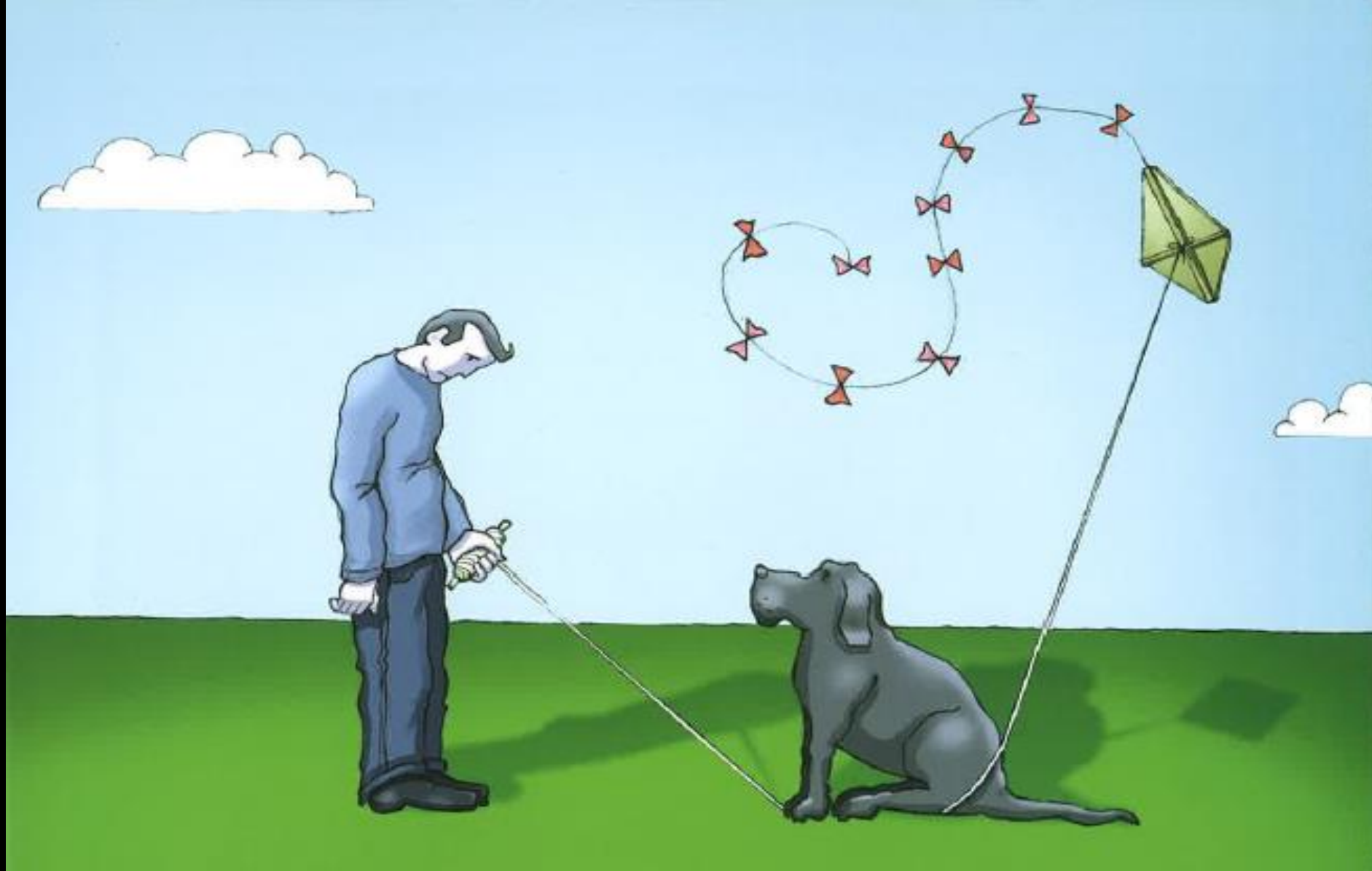
- Winston Churchill
- Abraham Lincoln
- Charles Spurgeon
- William Cowper

## Comedians

- Spike Milligan
- Robin Williams
- Stephen Fry
- Tony Hancock

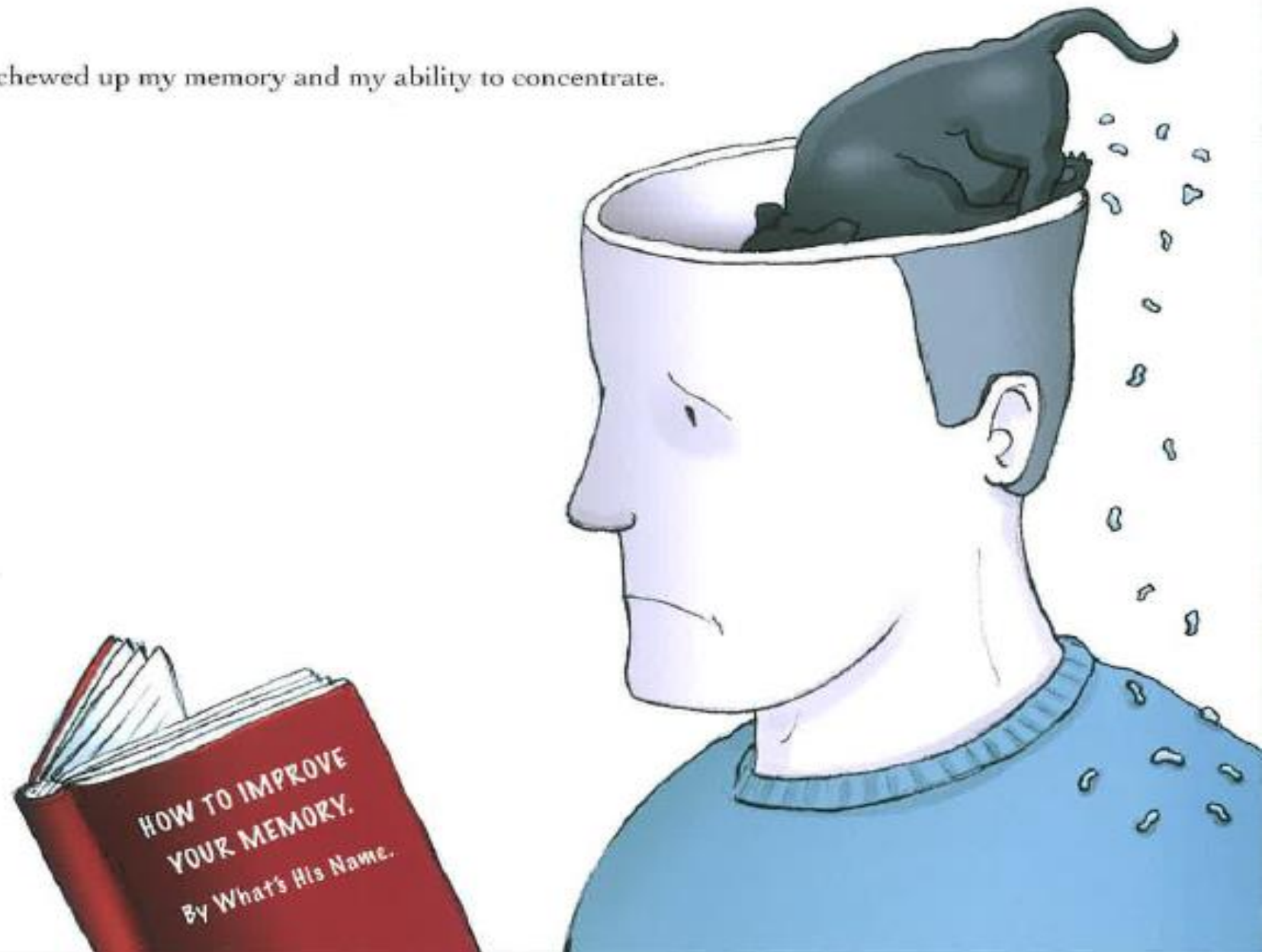
## Sports

- Marcus Trescothick
- Brian Moore
- Gary Speed
- Michael Phelps



Activities that usually brought me pleasure suddenly ceased to.

He chewed up my memory and my ability to concentrate.





He liked to wake me up with very repetitive, negative thinking.





# Descriptions of despair

- *If there is a hell on earth, it is to be found in a melancholy heart*
- *Hellish torments* (JB Phillips)
- *A veritable howling tempest in the brain*
- *I could weep by the hour like a child, and yet I knew not what I wept for* (Spurgeon)



*Depression involves a complete absence: absence of affect, absence of feeling, absence of response, absence of interest... for all intents and purposes, the deeply depressed are just the walking, waking dead.*

Elizabeth Wurtzel  
*Prozac Nation*





*Abraham Lincoln*

*I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth."*

As heard on BBC Radio 4

# Sunbathing in the Rain

A cheerful book about depression

GWYNETH LEWIS

'Undoubtedly the best book I have ever  
read about one person's experience of depression'

*Dorothy Rowe*

A poet describes  
her depression...



# *When Darkness ..., Mark Meynell*

A volcano – lava flow – despair as all of life destroyed

A cave – loneliness - cut off from people who don't understand how you feel, which is almost everyone

A weight – guilt – constant drag of feeling wrong, doing wrong to others and being told you're wrong

An invisibility cloak – shame – sense of self as wretched- who I am, things others have done to me

A closing – death – in great pain, no sense of purpose, embracing darkness



Does God  
understand  
depression?



# HARD

isolating - avoidance

variation  
'how are you?' - "fine!"  
cotton wool

social events - if you go - acting

guilt - burden  
- time limit  
- cancelling

Lack of information - self others  
overhead  
selective  
managing - gutting off

overwhelming

# HARD AS X

love is harder  
joy - where is it?

guilt - it's my fault  
assurance - am I in  
suicide sinful

church is for sorted people  
- preaching

God is the answer? - prosperity theology  
triteness

Quick fix  
We don't know each other  
Words/music mismatch

## *When Darkness ..., Mark Meynell*

But, at the darkest moment, the *sole* reason why I felt I could still do business with God in my bewilderment was what he allowed to be included in the Bible...

*My tears have been my food day and night (Ps 42:3)*

*...your terrors have destroyed me.*

*All day long they surround me like a flood;  
they have completely engulfed me.*

*You have taken from me friend and neighbour  
darkness is my closest friend.(Ps 88:16-18)*



# *Psalm 88*

Staggering depth (v3-5)

Shocking source (v6-8)

Desperate loneliness (v14, 18)

Complete hopelessness

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→ **God fully understands**

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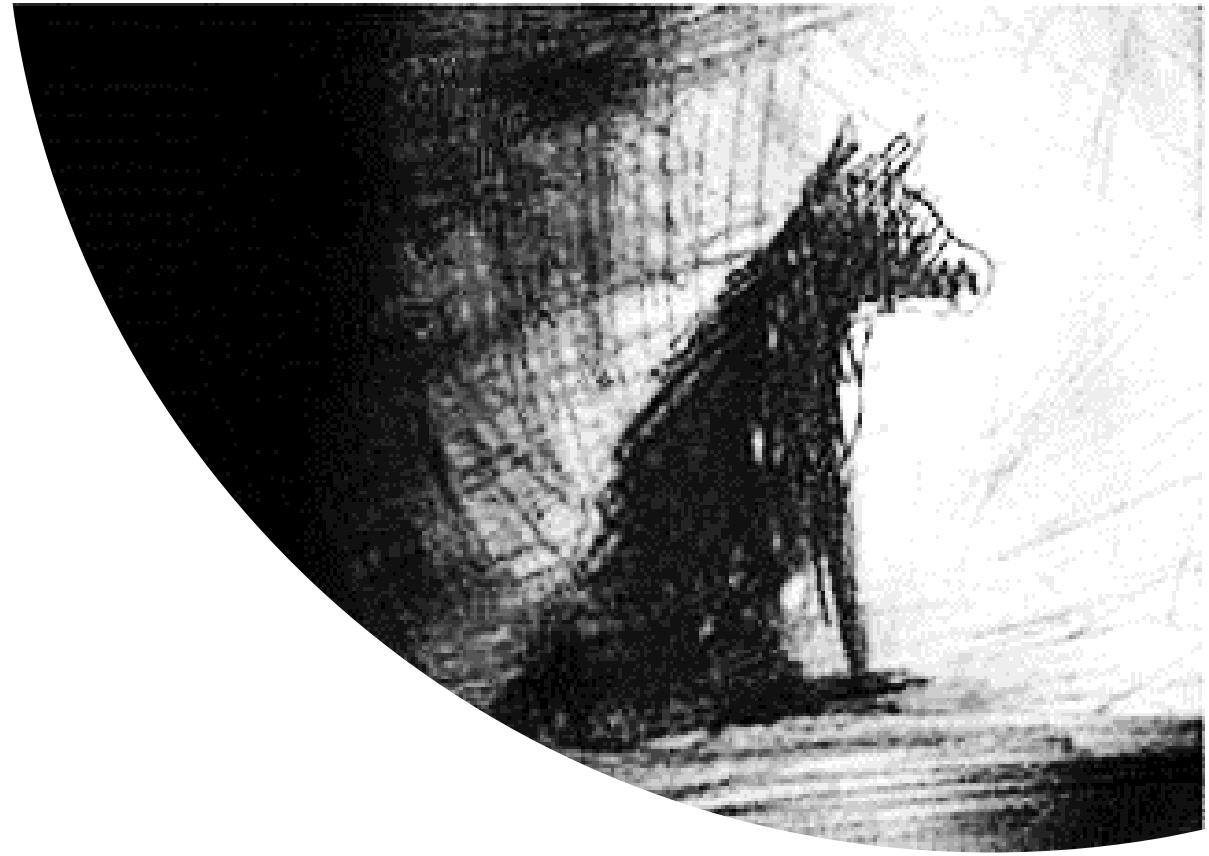
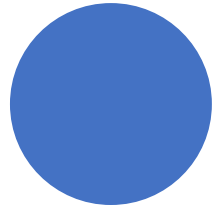
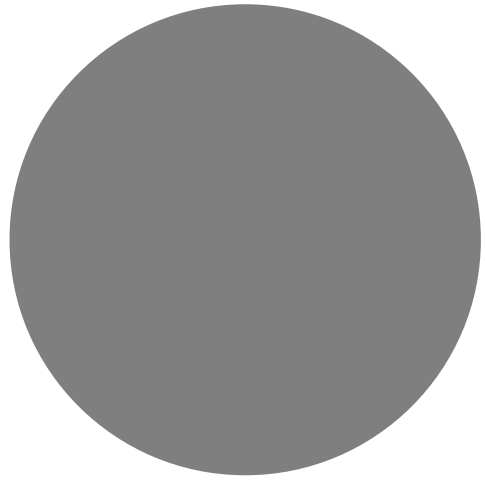
Shocking source (v6-8)

Desperate loneliness (v14, 18)

Complete hopelessness

→ **God fully understands**

→ **This person also belongs**



Questions...

*What about  
suicide?*

# *Matthew 26:36-38*

“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death”

- Jesus Christ

## *John 6:37-39*

“All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven ... to the will of the one who sent me ... that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.”

- Jesus Christ

## SESSION 1

Understanding  
depression as  
Christians

## SESSION 2

Responding to  
Depression  
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# Outline





## SESSION 2

### Responding to Depression as Church

1. How does a person get depression?
2. How does a person get help with depression?

# Outline





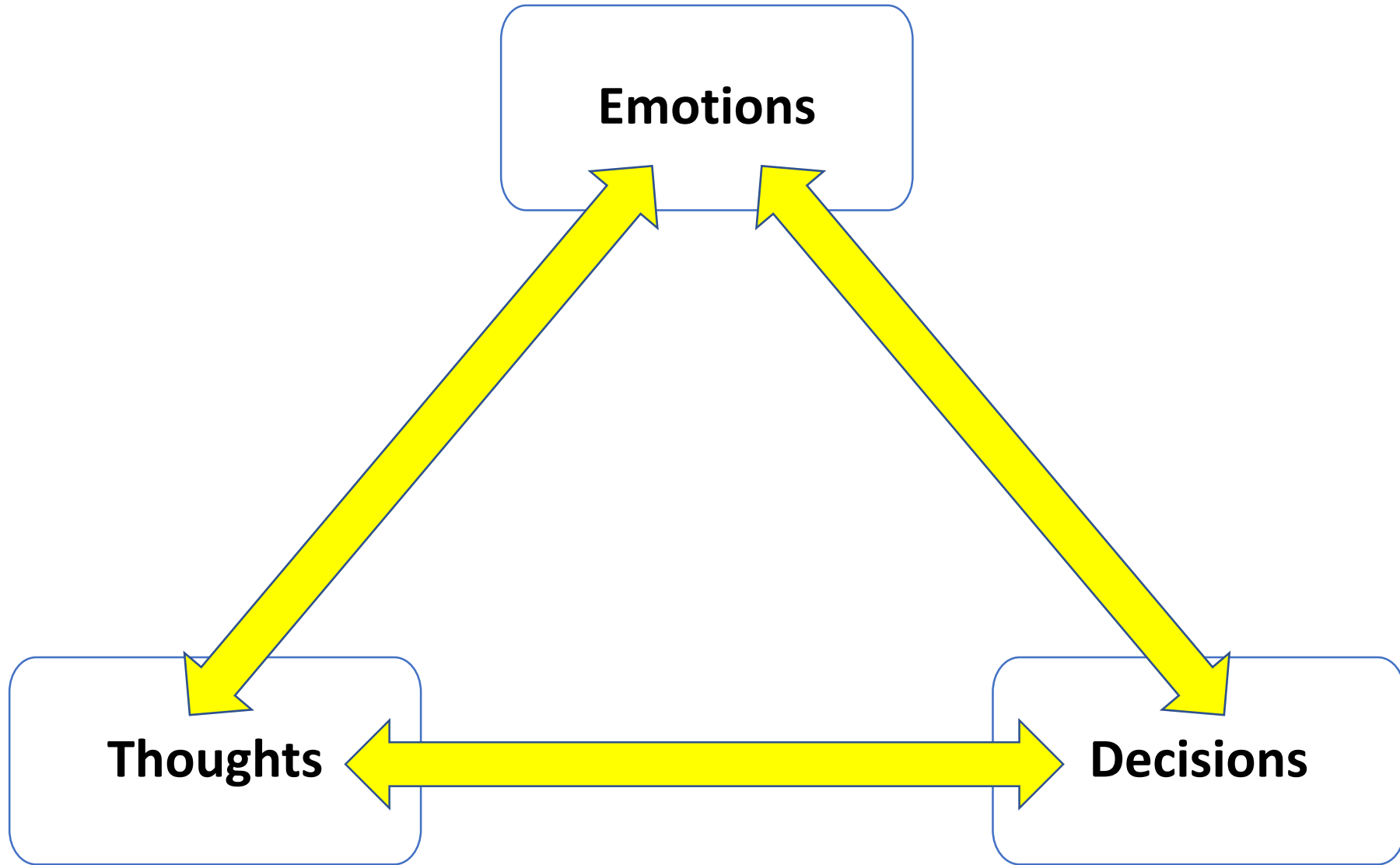
# Avoid simplistic explanations

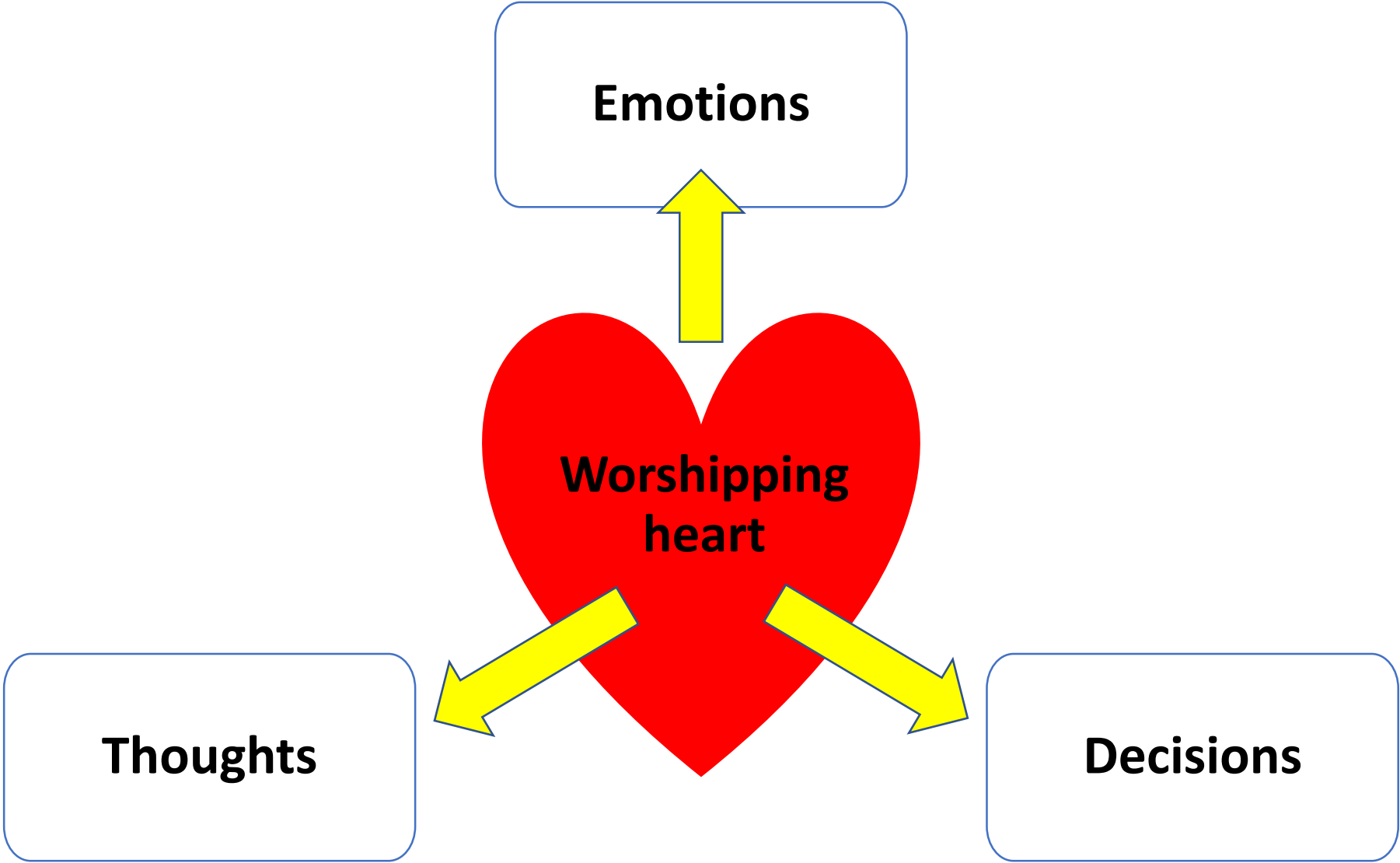
It's *just* unbalanced neurochemistry

- *If only you'd take these drugs*

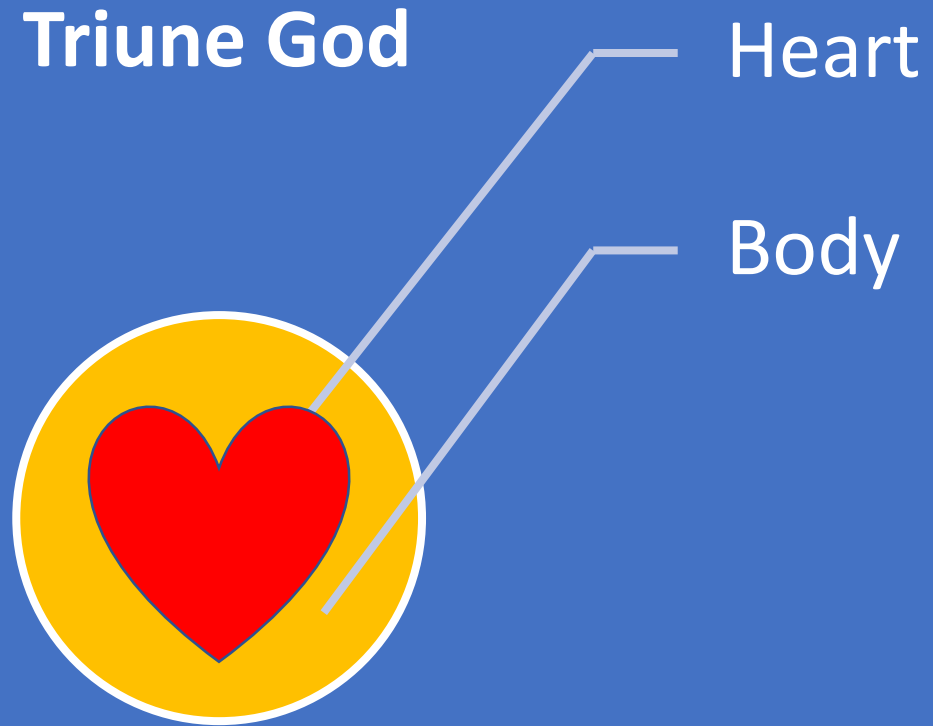
It's *just* spiritual failings

- *If only you'd repent and believe*

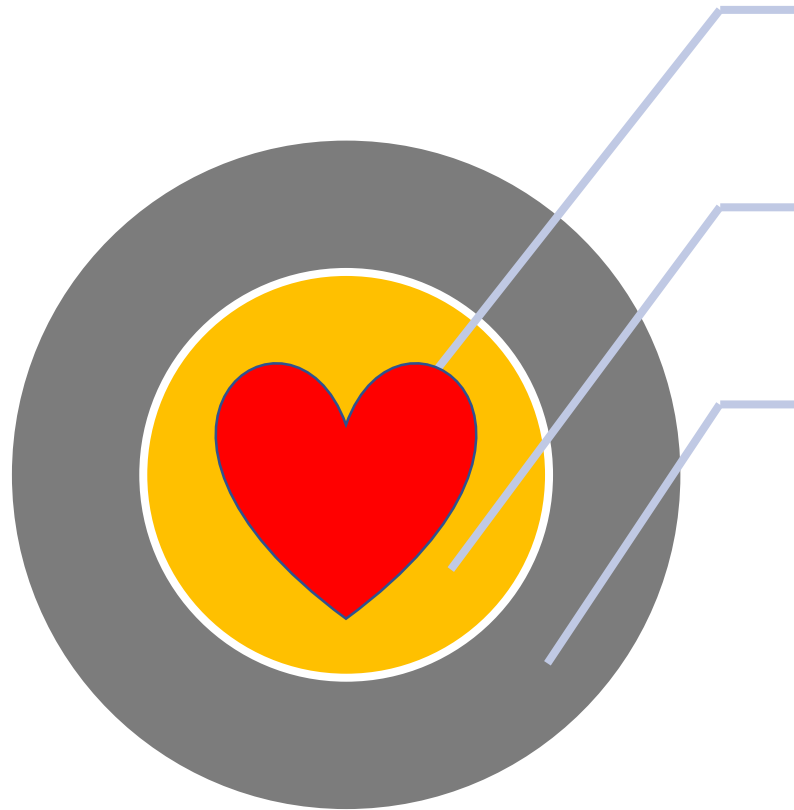




# Embodied



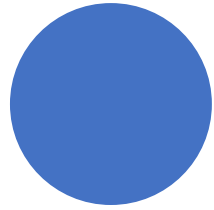
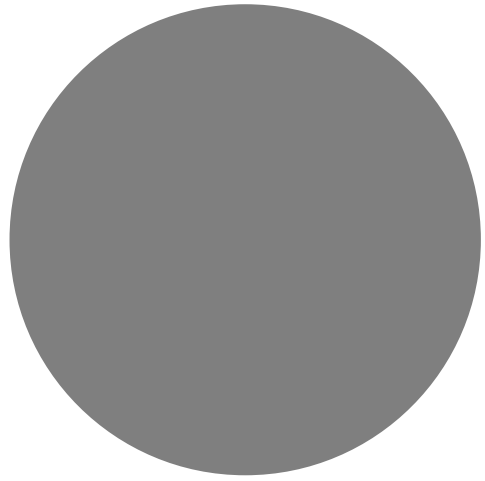
# Embodied and embedded





How does a person get help with depression?



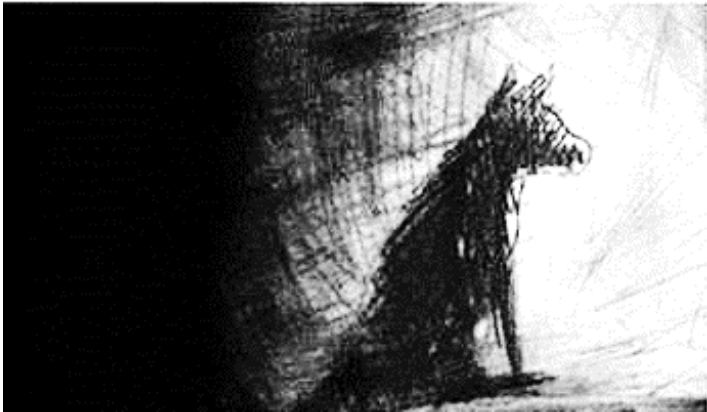


Questions...

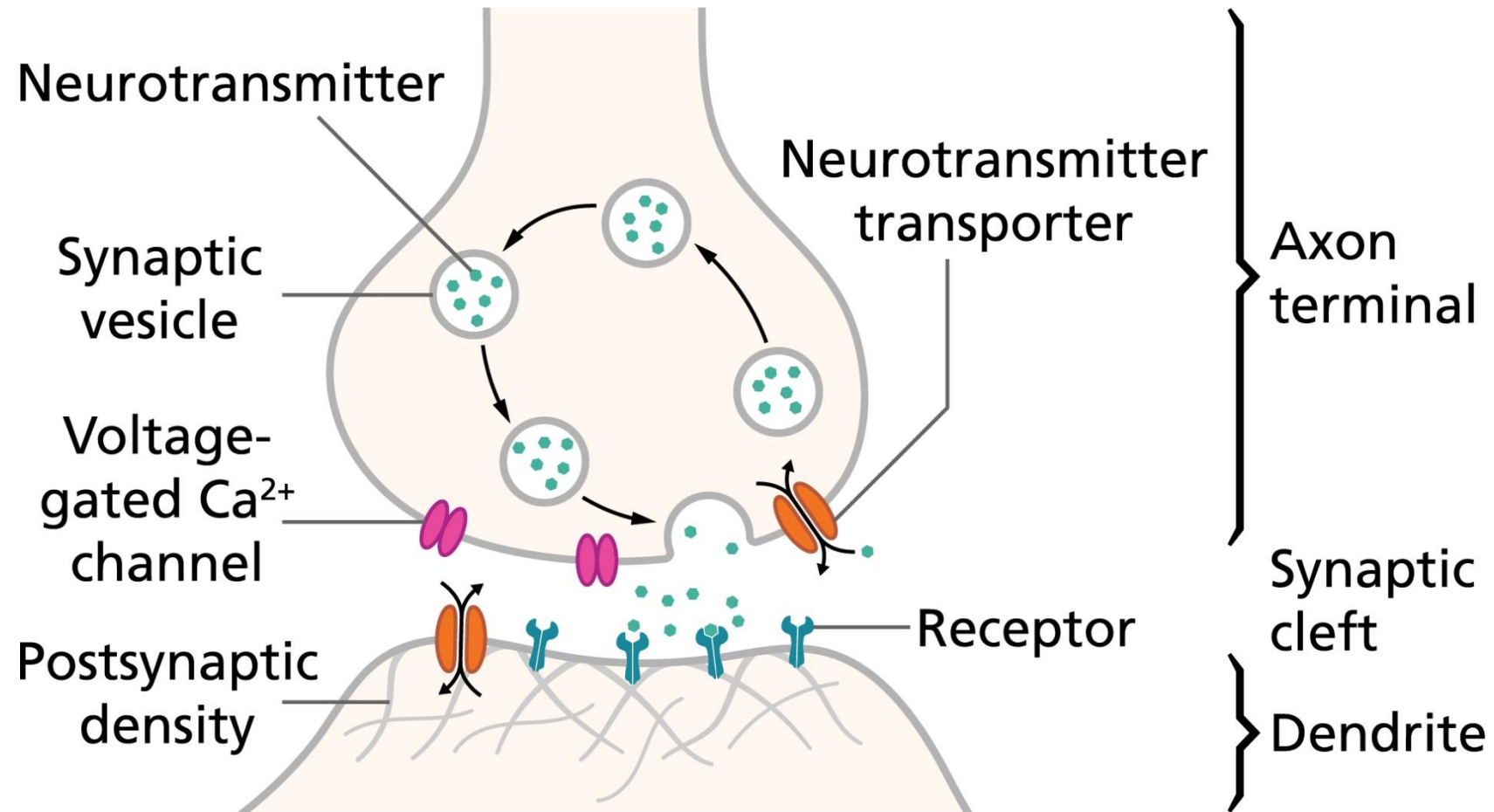
*What about  
medication?*

# Chemical imbalances?

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# A crash course in neuro-biology!



A neuro-  
physiologist

*“The complexity of the central nervous system and the relative lack of specificity of our drugs means our efforts to treat people with psychotropic drugs is a bit like trying to mend the engine of a car using only a hammer”*

# The complexity of the brain

- 86 billion neurones
- 100+ neurotransmitters
- 7 families of 5HT receptors with some 14 subtypes and counting....



Is it true that anti-depressants treat a chemical imbalance?

Not at all simple to answer....

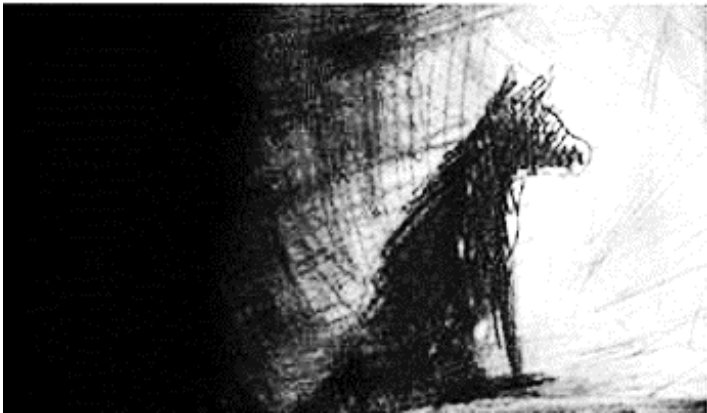
- Certainly not able to say it's a deficiency like diabetes
  - Can't measure neuro-chemicals in the way we can measure insulin in the blood stream
- There is also a philosophical question here
  - Does my neurochemistry define me?
  - Or do I define my neurochemistry?

# Use of anti-depressants

- Increasing use
  - 1991 nine million anti-depressant prescriptions
  - 2001 24.3 million
  - 2011 46.7 million (9% rise on the previous year)
- Currently 25% of all NHS prescriptions are for mental health problems



# Anti-depressant use



## Two analogies

- The calming of the seas
- The provision of a walking aid



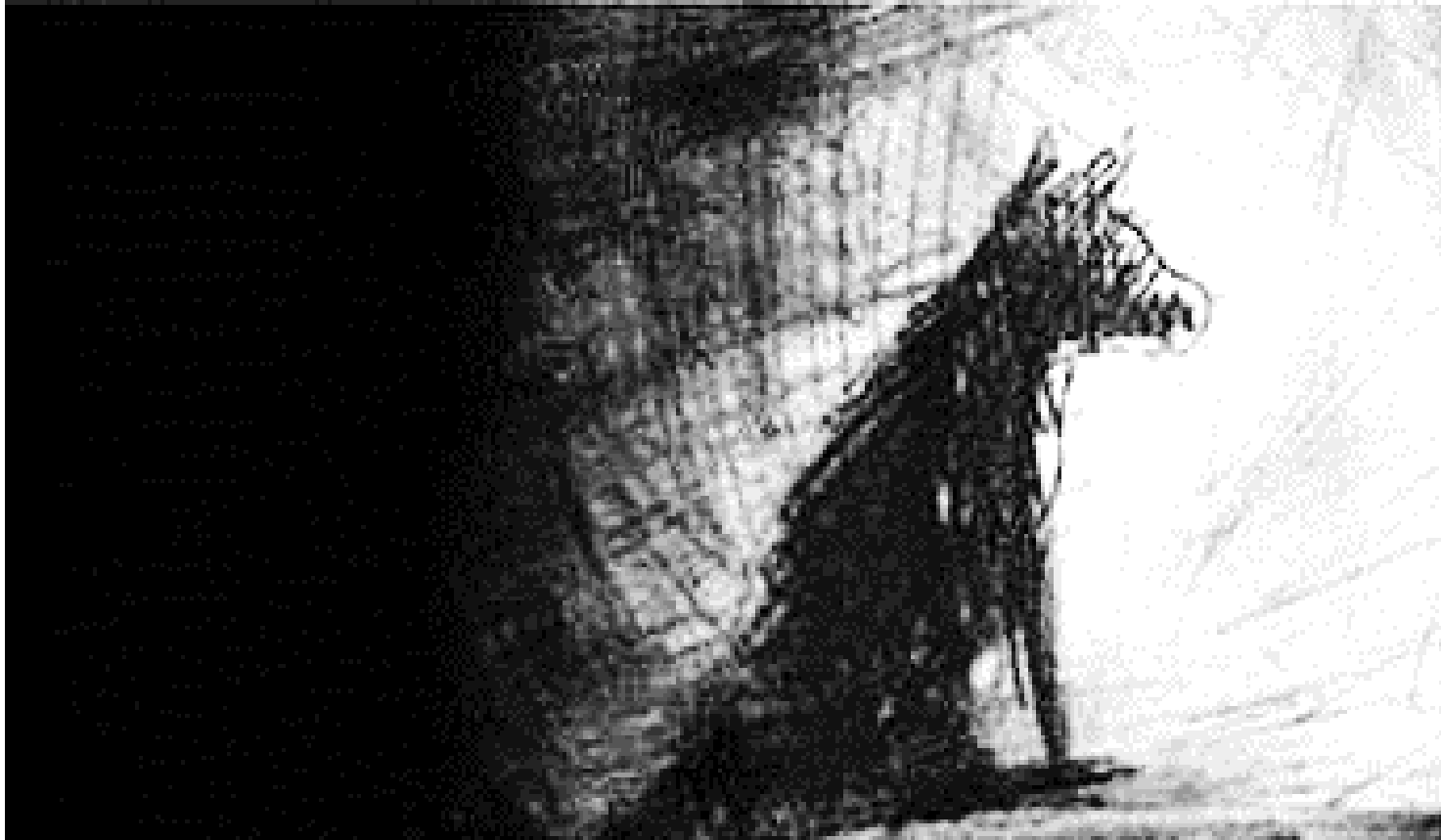
## Leg injuries and crutches....

- Sometimes when we injure our leg we need a crutch...
- Sometimes we don't
- Sometimes the crutch gets in the way
- Sometimes we go on using the crutch for too long
  - And throwing it away is hard, and walking hurts for a bit, but doing so is finally good for us
- Sometimes the injury is so bad we need the crutch for life
- But we still know the best way to walk is without one...



How can a person with depression be helped by the church?

1. The Church must know Jesus
  - He knows our struggles
  - He speaks into our struggles
  - He uses our struggles



Our disordered world...

*What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.*

(Ecclesiastes 2:22-23)

# Psalm 102

My days vanish like smoke;  
my bones burn like glowing embers.  
My heart is blighted and withered like  
grass;  
I forget to eat my food.  
In my distress I groan aloud  
and am reduced to skin and bones.  
I am like a desert owl,  
like an owl among the ruins.  
I lie awake; I have become  
like a bird alone on a roof.





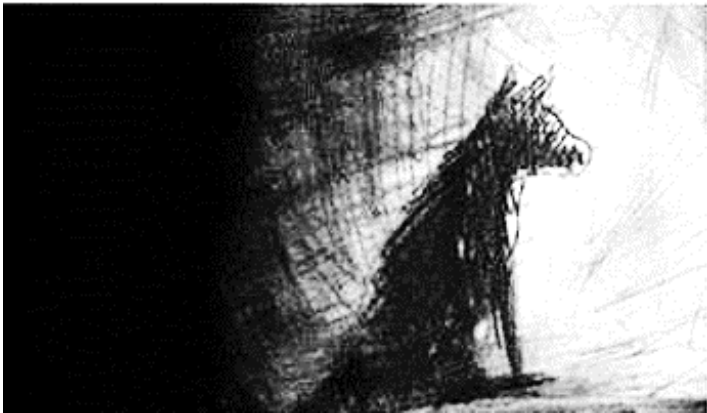
# Christ speaks into our struggles

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- Despair, Christ brings hope
- Shame, Christ accepts
- Guilt, Christ forgives
- Lies, Christ is the truth

# Christ uses our struggles

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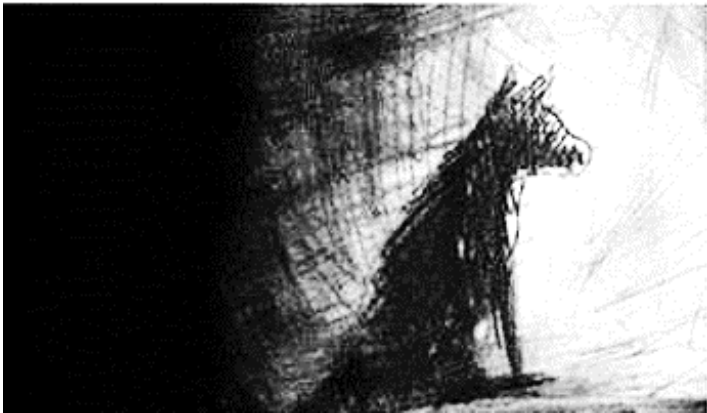


*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

James 1:2-4

Christ uses our struggles

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*But beware Job and  
his friends!*





How can a person with depression be helped by the church?

2. The Church must care for the weak



How can a person with depression be helped by the church?

2. The Church must care for the weak, being with them, no more than two steps ahead.

## *Down Not Out, Chris Cippolone*

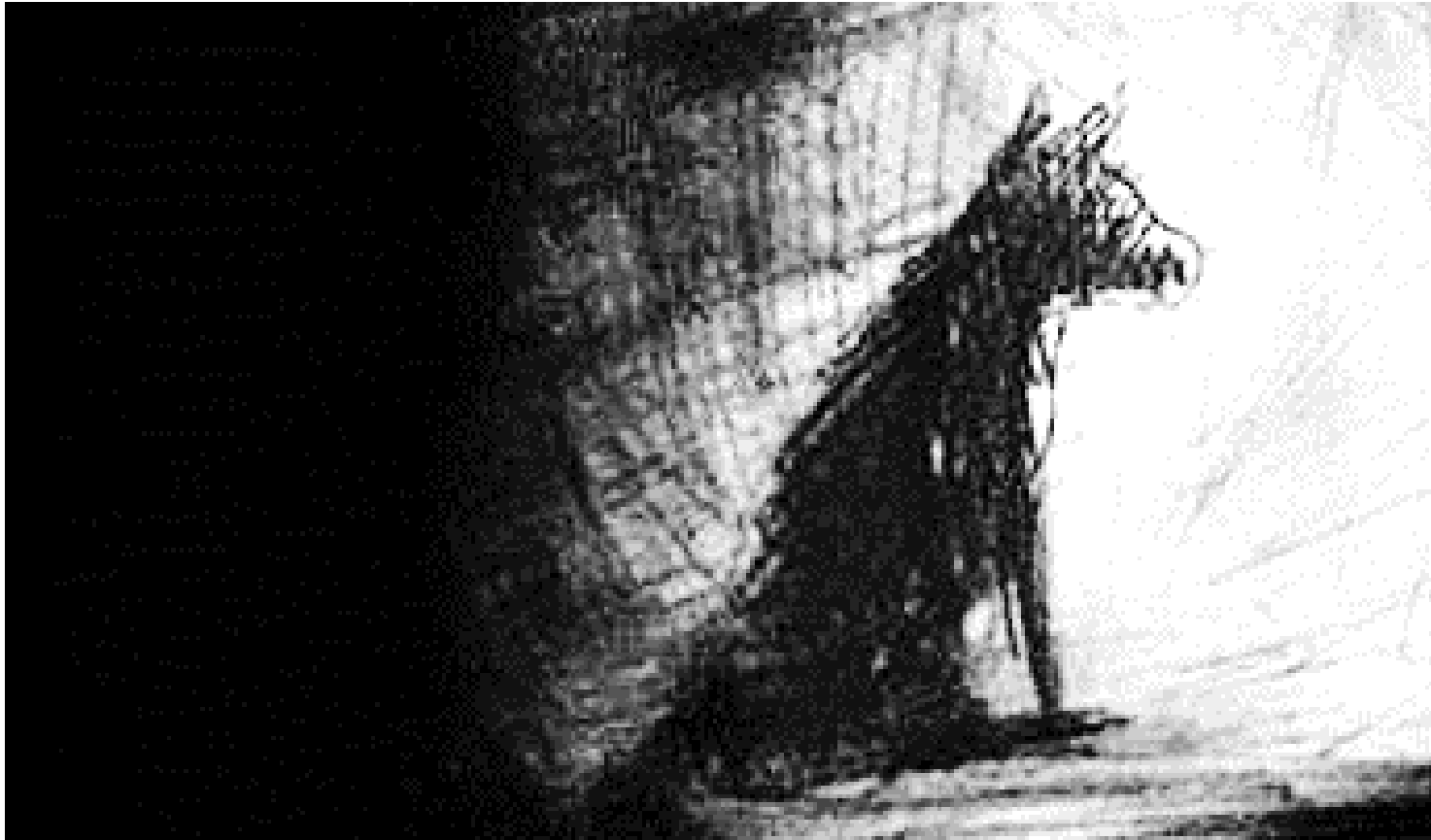
“I should warn you that it’s likely there will be times when your offers of help will not be wanted or appreciated. You will probably do or say the wrong thing. Please rest in God’s grace and keep loving that person, whoever they may be.”



*What, practically, can church do?*

Surround the person with love -  
**culture**

- Grow understanding: Provide seminars on depression
- Stay involved: know and be known
- Help recruit help



*What, practically, can church do?*

Value care of the  
**body**

Lifestyle

Diet, exercise, time  
management

Engagement with  
GP



*What, practically, can church do?*

Practice excellent  
**soul care**

Matched to their  
capacity

Listen

Speak

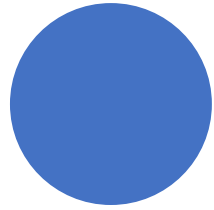
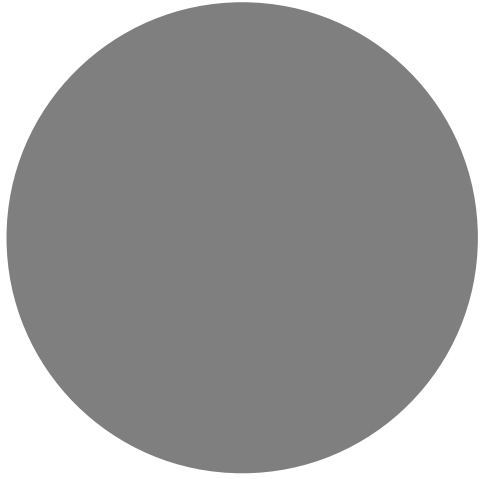
Pray



*What, practically, can church do?*

And do the same  
for the carers





Questions... | ?