

THE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS SERIES

# DEPRESSION

*Walking from Darkness into the Dawn*



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# INTRODUCTION

Have you ever thought, *I'm so down, I can't get back up?*

Have you been continually criticized, so now you think, *Why try?*

Have you ever felt so helpless you simply give in? *Whatever. Nothing matters anyway.*

Have you felt so totally hopeless, you wanted to give up? *Nothing will ever change. How can I go on?* Your heart feels so heavy, you're losing the will to live. Personally, I know this dark mindset and its emotional power to pull me down.

In my early life, I grew up with a made-up last name. I was “June Wright” (though most everything was wrong). After my father's first wife died, our family of five moved into his house the week I turned 12. Eleven months later, my parents legally married.

My family situation was so bizarre, I couldn't confide in anyone. I knew no one else who had my same situation. In truth, I had no real words . . . no friend to talk to personally . . . no one to share my hurt with privately.

One day, my eighth-grade teacher said, “June, we don't know which name to call you. Your brother is using Hunt, but you're still going by Wright. What should we call you?” Candidly, I didn't know what to say. No one had prepared me. Feeling awkward, I finally eked out, “I guess . . . I'll go by . . . Hunt.”

Then she asked a curious question, “Are you a little happier now?” *Happier?* Again, I didn't know what to say. I didn't know I seemed unhappy, but I couldn't identify with the word happy. So, I couldn't answer the question.

In retrospect, I was emotionally flat—definitely no highs. Often when watching an emotionally touching show, others would have tears, but not me. When asked, “Why don't you ever cry?” . . . I truly didn't know. Eventually, I would try to say something, “Oh, just call me hard-hearted Hunt.” I would smile—laughing on the outside, but not on the inside. I felt so disconnected, so detached, so dead.

Now looking back, I felt deeply depressed over the emotional pain in my life. My father was not only unfaithful to my mother, but was also verbally abusive toward everyone in the family.

He demanded we not talk during dinner, and then after dinner, he mandated we would have no contact with Mother. In no uncertain terms, he said, “You are a bad influence on your mother. You are the cause of all the problems in the family.” So, we were all sent away during the summers—isolated, exiled, banished.

In my high school years, my grades dropped drastically from A’s to C’s and D’s. In the third quarter of my sophomore year I made all F’s and one D. That was when I was sent away to boarding school.

For several decades, different people would pose a question with a similar kind of wording, “What makes you most happy?”

Typically, I would respond, *I can’t identify with the word “happy.” My focus is to cope—just to cope.* Then they would insist, “Of course, you are happy!” And they would try to talk me out of my “coping mentality.” But happiness relates to what’s happening . . . and what was happening in my life was far from happy. Finally, I realized they wouldn’t or couldn’t accept my explanation. So I stopped trying to explain. I realized they simply didn’t understand—they hadn’t “been there.”

Struggling in the darkness of depression, I looked at life through a black filter. I had difficulty seeing any good in my circumstances and certainly couldn’t see anything good in myself. I harbored hatred in my heart, felt helpless in the “here and now,” and hopeless about the future. Sometimes the pain was so intense, I literally wondered if I was going crazy. I wanted to die—if only to stop the pain.

Then came the day I genuinely invited Jesus into my heart and gave Him control of my life. The hurt didn’t go away, but the Lord lifted the excessive heaviness crushing my spirit. Eventually I learned there would be times when my heart would be pressed down (de-pressed), but I could also experience the amazing peace of this biblical passage: *“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed”* (2 Corinthians 4:8–9). Truly, God is a healer of broken hearts. He heals us when we give our hearts to Him. And He gave me the ability not just to cope, but even more so to hope.

I remember reading this quote by Oswald Chambers: *“If we were never depressed, we should not be alive.”* Then he contrasts that statement with this word picture of a cold, hard stone: *“It is the nature of the crystal never to be depressed. A human being is capable of being depressed, otherwise there would be no capacity for exaltation.”\**

In truth, throughout life, we will experience painful losses and abusive people. At these times, our hearts will be pressed down, but there will also be a natural time for restoration because God is a healer of broken hearts.

What about you? Do you feel the weight of the world on your shoulders? Do you feel trapped in a tunnel, with no light of relief? Have you ever said to yourself, “I can’t see any way out . . . or feel any way up?”

If so, let me share the specific verses from God’s Word that had personal, practical meaning for me: *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path”* (Proverbs 3:5–6). From that passage, I needed to take these truths to heart . . .

1. Lord, I trust you with all my heart—I entrust my very life to you.
2. Lord, I will not lean on my own understanding. I don’t have to understand it all—in reality, I can’t understand it all.
3. Lord, I yield my will to your will . . . because I know you will direct my path.

My friend, read this scripture three times a day—first, before you get out of bed, then in the middle of the day, and finally, before you go to sleep. Thank the Lord that His promises are true for you. Indeed, He can lift your darkness of depression and give you hope for *your* heart.

For a number of years after writing a letter, I would end with a scripture deeply endeared to my heart. *“The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit”* (Psalm 34:18).

I feel so close to the Lord because He healed my broken heart. Today, I know this is true . . . and can be also for you.

June Hunt

*Founder, Hope for the Heart*

\* Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishing, 1992), February 17 entry.





# DEPRESSION

## *Walking from Darkness into the Dawn*

Are you constantly restless, chronically fatigued, or completely unmotivated? Do you feel helpless, hopeless, or worthless? Have you lost interest or pleasure in things that you once normally enjoyed? Is your mind clouded with thoughts like: *Life has no meaning. I feel down all the time. I feel like I will never be happy again. I see no way out of this.* If so, you (like millions of people) may be weathering the dark storm of depression.

It's normal to feel sad or down sometimes, but these feelings usually fade away within a few days or weeks depending on the circumstances. However, when intense sadness lasts many days to weeks and keeps you from functioning in life, whether at home, work, or school, it may be something more than sadness—it could be depression.

Depression doesn't discriminate. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, have languished under the black clouds of depression.

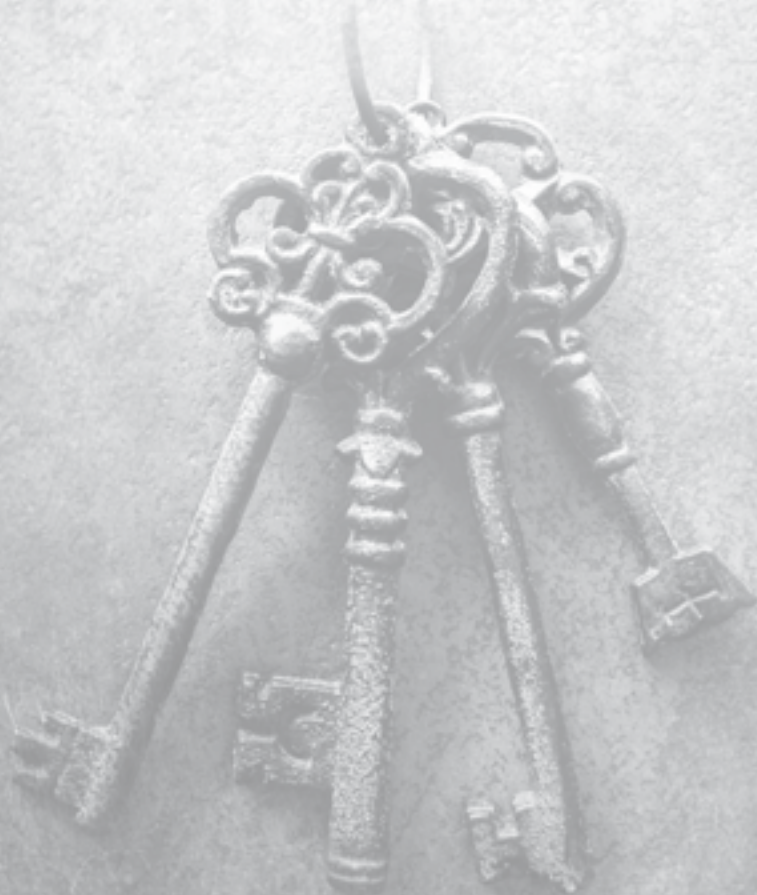
King David—no stranger to depression—learned how to exchange the darkness of despair for the light of hope. Again and again, when David's soul was downcast, he intentionally changed his focus. He fixed his mind on the faithfulness of God. Three times, in three different verses, David asked himself the same question, and each time he followed with the same answer:

*“Why, my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God.”*

(PSALM 42:5)



# DEFINITIONS



---

*“No matter what type  
of depression  
you may experience,  
God knows about  
your suffering and  
cares about your pain.”*



One 18-year-old woman struggling with depression described her life like this: “I’m lost and depressed. I’m so tired. I’m tired of this world. I’m tired of everything. I just want to escape.” Ayrianna is not alone. According to a report published by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), an estimated 17.3 million adults in the United States, ages 18 and older, had a major depressive episode<sup>1</sup> and the numbers worldwide are even more staggering and continue to rise.

Anyone can get depressed. Depression can happen at any age and to any type of person. You may be an introvert or an extrovert, socially active or overtly shy, a college graduate or a high school dropout. Whatever your distinction, you are not beyond depression’s threatening reach.

But here’s the good news: Depression is highly treatable. The prognosis is good. And best of all—you are not alone. When you’re feeling down, while you’re waiting for the dark clouds of depression to finally pass, look up . . . the Lord is with you and can lift your heavy heart.

*“You, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory,  
the One who lifts my head high.”*

(PSALM 3:3)

## What Is Depression?

If you place a heavy metal iron on a heart-shaped foam pillow, the plump pillow becomes pressed down—“de-pressed.” If you remove the iron a day later, the pillow will, in most cases, return to its original form. But if you wait six months to remove the iron, the pillow will most likely *not* return to its original shape. Instead, the pillow remains flat and *depressed*. A pillow, which can sustain temporary pressure, is not designed to hold its shape for a long time under heavy pressure.

The same is true of the human heart. When “pressed down” due to normal pressure from everyday stressful situations, your heart is designed by God to rebound once the pressure is removed. However, if you live under the weight of heavy pressure for long periods of time, you can become depressed.

Realize, Jesus cares about you and knows you are especially vulnerable when you are heavyhearted. He wants to comfort you when you feel this way and invites you to . . .

*“Come to me, all of you who are weary  
and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”*

(MATTHEW 11:28 NLT)

**Depression** is a state of being “pressed down” to a lower position (as in a footprint).<sup>2</sup>

**Depression**—from a clinical perspective—is a mood disorder marked by sadness, inactivity, difficulty thinking and concentrating with changes in appetite and sleep accompanied by feelings of dejection, hopelessness, and sometimes thoughts of suicide.<sup>3</sup>

**Depression** is a mental health condition that impacts the whole person: *body* (physical), *soul* (mind, will, and emotions), and *spirit* (where our deepest inner needs for love, significance, and security reside as well as our need for God). It also affects our relationships.

**Depression** sometimes is a result of an emotional heaviness that weighs down the heart. The apostle Paul used the Greek word *bareo*, which means “pressed or weighed down,” to describe the immense emotional pressure and severe hardships he and Timothy suffered at the hands of those who opposed Christ.<sup>4</sup>

*“We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure,  
and we thought we would never live through it.*

*In fact, we expected to die. But as a result,  
we stopped relying on ourselves  
and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 1:8–9 NLT)

## What Is a Mood Disorder?

Remember the last time you were on a roller coaster ride? The sheer force of speed at which you were traveling may have wreaked havoc with your hair and played topsy turvy with your tummy as you went up and down . . . up and down . . . made a sharp turn to the right . . . then you went up again . . . and down, before making one final turn to the left and eventually coming to a stop.

If you're struggling with a mood disorder yourself, that may well describe the way your life feels. And you may be asking yourself, "How do I get off this emotional roller coaster ride?"

Throughout Scripture, the Lord is described as our Rock. A rock is solid, offers stability and a place of rest. If depression is tossing your world about right now, cling to this truth about God . . .

*"He alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress where I will never be shaken."  
(PSALM 62:2 NLT)*

**Mood disorder**, also referred to as an *affective disorder*, is a broad term used to describe a category of psychiatric conditions that severely impacts one's mood and interferes with one's ability to function.<sup>5</sup>

**Mood disorders** involve our state of mind—the part of our inner person that "colors and drives our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors."<sup>6</sup> They are biologically based, but can be impacted by genetics and environment as well.

**Mood disorders** are generally diagnosed by a psychiatrist or another trained mental health professional. Symptoms vary by individual and can range from mild to severe. Two common types of mood disorders are depression and bipolar disorder.

**Mood disorders**, for most people, can be successfully treated with medication and talk therapy.



When dealing with a mood disorder, it is both necessary and wise to seek counsel from a trained professional while also looking to the Lord for guidance and direction.

*“I will instruct you (says the LORD)  
and guide you along the best pathway for your life;  
I will advise you and watch your progress.”*  
(PSALM 32:9 ESV)

## Sadness vs. Depression

**Question:** “What is the difference between sadness and depression?”

**Answer:** In spite of the fact that so many people today are suffering from depression, this mental health condition remains badly misunderstood and can be confusing to the person experiencing it.

Depression is more than just feeling down or having a bad day. On the surface, there are some notable similarities between those who are sad and those who are depressed:

- They cry often and are prone to withdrawal (from family, friends, the world in general).
- They often complain of feeling listless and alienated.

The distinguishing factor that sets the sad person apart from the depressed person is:

- The sad person knows what he or she is sad about, while the depressed person often doesn't. Someone who's sad might say, “I'm sad that my best friend has moved away. I really miss her.” Or, “I'm sad that the children are all grown and gone. Our house just isn't the same anymore.”

- A depressed person may feel low and be very tearful, but to conclusively put a finger on what’s drained life of meaning for them is still very elusive. A depressed person is more likely to say something like: “Life is empty. . . . meaningless. What’s the use of going on?”

One person made the distinction this way: “Depression is sadness that has forgotten its true causes. It’s forgotten because remembering may generate overwhelming, untenable feelings of pain and loss.”<sup>7</sup>

Another difference between sadness and depression is:

- Sad people are grief-stricken about something out in the world but aren’t necessarily sad about themselves.
- Depressed people will characteristically feel horrible about themselves and are filled with guilt, shame, and self-loathing.

The goal in treating depression is to remove the sufferer from feeling despairing about everything in general to mourning the loss of something in particular. For this to happen, they need a tremendously supportive and patient listener. Their silent scream to family members, friends, or a trained counselor might well be . . .

*“Are you listening to me? Really listening?”*

(MATTHEW 11:15 MSG)

## What Are Two Broad Categories of Depression?

In ancient writings, the earliest reference to what is meant by our word *depression* is the word *melancholia* (literally “black bile”). The assumption was that the melancholy person had an excess of black bile, which resulted in depression.

In the second century AD, the physician Aretaeus referred to his melancholy patients as “sad, dismayed, sleepless. . . . They become thin by their agitation and loss of refreshing sleep. . . . At a more advanced state, they complain of a thousand futilities and desire death.”<sup>8</sup> Even today, *melancholia* is defined as “severe depression characterized especially by profound sadness and despair.”<sup>9</sup>

A common symptom of depression is a sense of hopelessness. Although you may feel hopeless, there *is* hope. God is the “*God of hope*” (Romans 15:13). The Bible says Jesus is “*our hope*” (1 Timothy 1:1).

You can be confident of this:

*“There is surely a future hope for you,  
and your hope will not be cut off.”*

(PROVERBS 23:18)

Depression originates either from “within” or “without” and falls into two broad categories:<sup>10</sup>

**Situational Depression**—is initiated or primarily occurs *externally* (*reactive* from *without*). In this instance, depression stems from psychological, cognitive, environmental, or situational factors and . . .

- Is generally a response to real, imagined, or anticipated loss or trauma and usually lasts for a shorter period of time and is easier to treat.
- Examples: Loved ones die. Marriages end. Jobs change. Children leave home. When life events like these happen, depression often follows. Depression is a normal reaction to a major, stressful change in life.
- Is also known as ***exogenous depression*** (clinically known as *adjustment disorder* with depressed mood).

**Biochemical Depression**—is initiated or primarily occurs *internally* and *autonomously* (*spontaneously* from *within*). In this instance, depression stems from biological, genetic, chemical, and metabolic factors and . . .

- Is often described as intense despair and can be accompanied by self-destructive tendencies.

- Examples: Bipolar depression stems from a chemical imbalance in the brain. A melancholy personality type may be more prone to depression. Dealing with a chronic illness, like cancer, can bring about the onset of depression due to biological and/or hormonal changes within the body. Thyroid imbalance is also a common cause of biochemical depression.
- Is also known as ***endogenous depression***.

All of us inevitably face difficult challenges and changes in our lives. Isn't it good to know that God is our constant companion and that He is ready to help along the way? Indeed . . .

*“God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.”*

(PSALM 46:1)

## What Are Common Types of Depression?

Many different types of depression exist. Life events cause some types of depression, and chemical changes in the body cause others.

Different forms of depression vary in terms of severity, symptoms, duration, and cause. And while there is overlap between the types of depression, treatment for each one may differ. What makes depression especially complex is that symptoms can sometimes go unnoticed, or be denied or avoided.

Despite the differences in depression, the most common symptoms include a sad, depressed, irritable, or empty mood. Depression very often affects daily activities such as work and school, recreation, sleep, eating, and thinking.

No matter what type of depression you may experience, God knows about your suffering and cares about your pain.

*“You have seen my troubles,  
and you care about the anguish of my soul.”*

(PSALM 31:7 NLT)

## Common Types of Depression

Though certainly not exhaustive, the following list includes the more common forms of depression and represents the range of related disorders.<sup>11</sup>

The two most common forms of depression:

**Major Depressive Disorder (MDD).** Also known as *major depression*, *unipolar depression*, or *clinical depression*. This is a serious mental disorder that involves a depressive episode with symptoms occurring most of the day, nearly every day for at least two weeks. There can be a single episode of depression but it more often occurs with multiple depressive episodes. A major depressive episode significantly interferes with normal daily activities (work, sleep, eating, concentration, mood, enjoyment in life).

**Persistent Depressive Disorder (PDD).** Also known as *dysthymia*. This is a chronic, intermittent, low-grade form of depression but does not meet the criteria for major depression. Symptoms typically last for at least two years (in adults) and one year (in children and adolescents). This form of depression can be mixed with other disorders and can range in levels of severity. Under stress, and left untreated, this type of depression can progress to full-blown depression.<sup>12</sup>

There are forms of depression that share some of the same symptoms of MDD or PDD, but are slightly different and develop under unique circumstances. These include:

**Adjustment Disorder** (with depressed mood).<sup>13</sup> Also known as *situational depression*. Symptoms of depression (sadness, anxiety, withdrawal) are triggered within three months of the onset of a specific stressful event or situation (death of a loved one, a divorce or custody battle, unemployment, health issue, etc.). Depression occurs when these feelings start to feel out of proportion to the triggering event and interfere with daily life. It should also be noted that life stressors can be positive (a new job, marriage, a new baby) as well as negative in nature. This is the most common clinical diagnosis for depression.

**Anhedonia** (*an* = without or loss of; *hedone* = pleasure or delight) is the inability to derive pleasure out of the ordinary things of life.<sup>14</sup> Though not technically a *type* of depression, anhedonia is a core symptom of major depressive disorder (MDD) but is also associated with other mental health disorders. Some individuals who experience anhedonia do not have a mental disorder at all.

There are two main types of anhedonia:<sup>15</sup>

- **Social anhedonia.** Not wanting to spend time with other people.
- **Physical anhedonia.** Not enjoying physical sensations. (You feel empty rather than comforted after a hug. Foods you normally enjoy taste bland. Sex has little or no appeal.)

**Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD/PMS).** This type of depression occurs during a woman’s menstrual cycle and can be marked by increased sensitivity, mood swings, irritability, or anxiety. It may also include physical symptoms such as feeling tired and sluggish, bloating, weight gain, and joint pain.

**Perimenopausal/Postmenopausal Depression.** Some women going through menopause experience episodes of depression. Perimenopause begins three to five years before menopause when estrogen levels begin to slowly drop. Postmenopause occurs when a woman’s monthly periods finally end. The change in estrogen levels will often trigger depression in women during this pivotal time in life.

**Perinatal Depression.** Also known as *peripartum* or *postpartum depression*. Some women experience full-blown major depression *during* pregnancy or in the weeks and months after childbirth (*postpartum depression*). This type of depression is *not* simply a case of the “baby blues.” Hormonal changes that happen during pregnancy and childbirth trigger changes in the brain that lead to mood swings. Add to that adjusting to the new responsibilities of motherhood and the lack of sleep when caring for a newborn and you have the formula for major depression. Women who lack support or have had depression before childbirth are at increased risk for perinatal depression. Men can also experience a form of postpartum depression.

**Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).** This is a major depressive disorder that typically occurs during the winter months when the days get shorter with less sunlight. Depressive symptoms usually go away in the spring or summer when the days are longer with more sunshine.

**Substance/Medication-Induced Depressive Disorder.** This occurs when a substance is introduced into the body that brings on depression. The substance could be a toxin, medication, or drugs.

**Depressive Disorder Due to Another Medical Condition.** This occurs in conjunction with an existing disease, illness, injury such as a stroke, traumatic brain injury, or certain neurological diseases.

**Bipolar Disorder.** This mental illness in the past was also known as *manic depression*. It is characterized by severe high and low moods and changes in sleep, energy, thinking, and behavior. People who have bipolar disorder experience periods when they feel overly happy and energized (mania) and other periods when they feel very sad, hopeless, and lethargic (depression). In between those two periods of extremes they generally feel normal. Bipolar (*bi* = two; *polar* = pole) refers to “two opposite ends.” Bipolar disorders fall into the biochemical or endogenous category of depression. Two types of bipolar disorder bear mentioning:

- **Bipolar I Disorder.** This is the more severe form of bipolar disorder. It includes extreme erratic behavior with manic “up” periods lasting at least a week or are so severe the person needs medical care. There are also extreme “down” (depressive) periods that last at least two weeks.<sup>16</sup>
- **Bipolar II Disorder.** This type of bipolar includes three emotional states: depressed, normal, hypomanic. Hypomania typically lasts four to seven days, but atypical hypomanic episodes could last one or two days before a “crash” is experienced.<sup>17</sup>

**Psychotic Depression.** This is a severe type of depression in which there is a break with reality and a person experiences delusions and/or hallucinations in addition to symptoms of major depression.

If you, or someone you know, are experiencing symptoms of any of these types of depression, seek the help of medical professionals. You might feel like you're in darkness, but there is hope and help available. Doctors and counselors are evidence of God's grace and compassion—to help you recover and receive proper treatment.

*"The LORD is gracious and compassionate."*

(PSALM 145:8)

## Masked Depression

**Question:** "Can someone be depressed and not know it?"

**Answer:** Yes. Depression often goes unseen, unrecognized, and undiagnosed. It can take hold gradually, without a person realizing that depressive thoughts and feelings are increasingly dominating their perspectives—and their life.

Someone can be depressed and still be high-functioning. They're able to conceal their depression, often managing their work, family responsibilities, and life in a competent and even optimistic way.

The term "masked depression" was used in the 1970s and 80s to describe someone who complained of physical symptoms (backache, headache, digestive issues) without overtly showing any of the more typical symptoms of depression.

Someone with masked or concealed depression might:<sup>18</sup>

- Appear to be okay and may even seem happy and upbeat
- Use lifestyle habits (music, exercise, hobbies) to divert their attention from "low" or depressive thoughts and feelings
- Make up stories to avoid drawing attention to destructive behaviors (overeating/undereating, not sleeping enough/sleeping too much) in an attempt to hide their depression from others



- Monitor and control their moods through “substances” (e.g., alcohol—a depressant; caffeine and sugar—stimulants)
- Frequently change life direction in an attempt to find purpose, meaning, and true happiness
- Relentlessly seek to find love and acceptance

The familiar adage, “ignorance is bliss” simply is not true for the person who’s depressed and doesn’t know it. The Bible reminds us of the power of truth and the benefit of taking an inward look.

*“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

(JOHN 8:32)

## What Connection Exists between Unconfessed Sin and Depression?

Some have asked, “Does unconfessed sin lead to depression?” This question cannot be answered with a simple *Yes* or *No*. Although some people believe the answer is always *Yes*, the accurate answer is sometimes *Yes* and sometimes *No*.

### **Depression *is not* a result of sin when . . .**

- Your heart grieves over normal losses.

The Bible says, “*There is . . . a time to weep and . . . a time to mourn*” (ECCLESIASTES 3:1, 4).

- Your body chemistry changes and becomes compromised. The body experiences natural decline as it ages.

The Bible says, “*Outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day*” (2 CORINTHIANS 4:16).

### Depression *can be a result of sin when . . .*

- You experience the consequences of your sin but don't attempt to change.  
The Bible says, *"When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long"* (PSALM 32:3 NLT).
- You refuse to take the necessary steps to find healing in your life (seek counseling, search Scripture, read Christian materials by proven experts, get medical help when appropriate).  
The Bible says, *"If anyone . . . knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them"* (JAMES 4:17).
- You hold on to anger, revenge, and bitterness when you've been wronged instead of choosing to forgive.  
The Bible says, *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you"* (EPHESIANS 4:32).
- You use your depression to manipulate others.  
The Bible says, *"We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception"* (2 CORINTHIANS 4:2).
- You continually choose to blame God and others for your unhappiness.  
The Bible says, *"A person's own folly leads to their ruin, yet their heart rages against the LORD"* (PROVERBS 19:3).
- You choose to let others control you instead of choosing to obey Christ and allowing Him to be in control of you.  
The Bible says, *"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people?"* (GALATIANS 1:10).
- You willfully choose to maintain a sinful life.  
The Bible says, *"Anyone who keeps on sinning does not know him or understand who he is"* (1 JOHN 3:6 NLT).

Finally, the Bible reminds us . . .

*"The kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death."*  
(2 CORINTHIANS 7:10 NLT)

## **Jonah's Bout with Depression (Depression as a Result of Sin) Book of Jonah**

Jonah's episode of depression is an example of *situational depression* that occurs as a direct result of sin. Jonah is a man called by God. Yet he ends up angry, sullen, and in the depths of depression. What causes Jonah to become so deeply depressed?

### **Chapter 1: *Disobedience***

Jonah is called by the Lord to preach God's truth to the godless people of Nineveh. But Jonah rebels and boards a ship going in a totally different direction. When Jonah's disobedience brings repercussions to the ship's crew, he is rejected and literally thrown overboard.

### **Chapter 2: *Dread***

Recognizing that the judgment of God is upon him to the point of possibly losing his life (inside the belly of a great fish), Jonah cries out for mercy: "*In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the deep in the realm of the dead I called for help, and you listened to my cry*" (Jonah 2:2). The Lord extends mercy and spares his life.

### **Chapter 3: *Declaration***

Jonah resigns himself to obey God's call. He declares God's truth, and the godless people of Nineveh repent.

### **Chapter 4: *Depression***

Jonah becomes angry with God for extending mercy to those he deems unworthy of God's mercy. Ultimately, he plunges into depression and is consumed with anger, self-pity, bitterness, and despair to the point of wanting to die. Jonah cries out to God in anger, "*Now, LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live*" (Jonah 4:3).

Then, filled with seething anger and self-pity, Jonah makes this brief, poignant statement:

*"I'm so angry I wish I were dead"* (JONAH 4:9).

The book of Jonah concludes with God admonishing the reluctant prophet to be mindful of the Lord's concern for the inhabitants of Nineveh. . . .

*“And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh,  
in which there are more than a hundred  
and twenty thousand people  
who cannot tell their right hand from their left—  
and also many animals?”*  
(JONAH 4:11)

## What Is God's Heart on Depression?

The pressures and stresses of life often weigh us down. When our hearts are heavy and our heads are low, the clouds of depression seem to block out any ray of hope. But even in our depression, God walks with us, carries our burdens, and shines the light of His Word on our despair.

*“The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us.”*  
(PSALM 118:27)

**God is with us** in our depression.

*“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”*  
(ISAIAH 41:10).

**God sees** our pain and suffering.

*“God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand”* (PSALM 10:14).

**God hears** our cries and listens to us in our pain.

*“. . . the LORD has heard my weeping”* (PSALM 6:8).

**God wants** to give us light in our darkness.

*“It is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness”*  
(PSALM 18:28 ESV).

**God wants** to lift us up when we’re feeling down.

*“The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down”* (PSALM 145:14).

**God wants** us to talk to Him when we’re depressed.

*“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge”* (PSALM 62:8).

**God wants** to comfort us.

*“I, yes I, am the one who comforts you”* (ISAIAH 51:12).

**God wants** to give us peace.

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”* (JOHN 14:27).

**God wants** to give us hope.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

**God wants** us to trust Him.

*“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me”* (PSALM 28:7).

**God wants** us to comfort others who are depressed.

*“The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God”* (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).

**God will** one day wipe away all our tears—and there will be no more sorrow or suffering.

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever”* (REVELATION 21:4 NLT).

## **The Painter, the Razor, the Snuffed-Out Candle<sup>19</sup>**

### **The Vincent van Gogh Story<sup>20</sup>**

Taken from: HOW TO HANDLE YOUR EMOTIONS  
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His boyhood dream was to become a pastor—to follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather.<sup>21</sup>

Once describing his life mission as “preaching the gospel to the poor,” he immersed himself in studying the Scriptures. At age 23, the spiritually zealous assistant minister delivered his first sermon. Focusing on the theme “our life is a pilgrim’s progress” . . . he stated on numerous occasions that our lives should be led as an imitation of Christ’s.<sup>22</sup>

Who was this Dutchman born in 1853—the one who hoped to carry on his family’s spiritual legacy? He was the world-renowned artist Vincent van Gogh. Unfortunately, this highly emotional young man lacked self-confidence and experienced major problems during his life.

Following a brief stint as a missionary in a mining district in Belgium, van Gogh’s spiritual fervor spiraled downward into depression. Just six months after his appointment, he was dismissed. Though “poor speaking” was cited as the cause, in actuality he encountered huge disagreements over how to conduct “real” ministry.

Van Gogh had a heart for the impoverished—the materially and spiritually poor to whom he had been assigned. He lived with them and like them—even sleeping on a straw mat night after night. He perceived the religious leaders of his day as distant and removed, caught up in stuffy propriety and protocol, disengaged from the grittiness of real-life ministry.

Following the time he was fired, van Gogh remained in the mining community and began sketching pictures . . . and the course of his life changed forever. He once said, “An artist needn’t be a clergyman or a churchwarden, but he certainly must have a warm heart for his fellow men.”<sup>23</sup>

As van Gogh became immersed in the tumultuous world of artists, his life became more tortuous. Originally fixated on the muddy-colored paintings of the poor, he moved to Paris in 1886 to live with his devoted brother, Theo, an art dealer. At one point, van Gogh advised his brother to take up pipe smoking, calling it “a remedy for the blues, which I happen to have now and then lately.”<sup>24</sup> Theo introduced van Gogh to artists like Gauguin, with whom he had a volatile relationship. Van Gogh delved into more vivid colors in Paris and there acquired the distinctive brushstrokes that now signify his work.

Then after moving to the south of France in 1888, van Gogh incorporated the yellows and hot reds of the Mediterranean into his paintings. This was said to represent his moods. Here he and Gauguin painted together—and argued together. Their deteriorating friendship culminated in van Gogh chasing Gauguin with a razor . . . but that infamous episode ended with van Gogh cutting off part of his own left ear lobe. The very next year, the unstable artist voluntarily committed himself into a mental asylum.

Diagnoses are diverse in regard to what may have caused the eccentric and unstable behavior in this post-Impressionist painter. Psychiatrists report that as an adult, van Gogh suffered two distinct episodes of reactive depression along with “bipolar aspects.” And that the last two years of van Gogh’s life were characterized by recurring psychotic episodes.<sup>25</sup>

The French physicians who attended van Gogh in the asylum diagnosed his condition as epilepsy caused by consuming

absinthe—a liqueur with high alcoholic content and toxic herbs. Well over 150 physicians have since ventured diagnoses, but there is limited information upon which to draw a definitive conclusion.<sup>26</sup>

Van Gogh's life was a continual pattern of suffering and setbacks, and isolation and ill will from those around him. But his brother Theo gave him constant support and encouragement. One day as the two surveyed van Gogh's vast collection of painted canvasses, Theo commented, "When your heart shall cease to beat within your bosom, it will throb in your pictures."<sup>27</sup>

And on July 29, 1890, at the young age of 37, van Gogh's heart did cease beating. He died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Vincent van Gogh died having sold only one of his paintings, for about \$100. (By contrast, in recent years his painting *Irises* sold for \$53.9 million.)

The life of van Gogh does indeed throb in his pictures, but further tragedy rests in the fact that his focus on the Bible—so beloved to him in the first chapter of his life—weakened as he grew older . . . when he so desperately needed spiritual help and healing.

However, one sign of his spiritual heritage did appear in his art near the end of his life. Shortly after his father's death, and four years before his own, van Gogh painted *Still Life with Bible*, which depicts his father's Bible, atop a table, worn and opened.

Van Gogh painted the Bible as sitting in the darkness beside a snuffed-out candle. Had he returned to his former passion—to be an imitator of Christ—and turned to his own Bible, he might have painted a brighter picture of the Lord's life-changing hope amidst the darkness of depression.





# CHARACTERISTICS



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*“God can use  
everything that  
touches your life—  
even depression.”*



Those who struggle in the darkness of depression very often have difficulty seeing good in their lives, especially in themselves. They more often look at life through a “black filter.”

The photographer who uses a black lens takes a picture during the daytime, but the final photograph appears to be a night scene. When someone with depression sees life through their black filter, they tend to feel helpless about their situation, hatred toward themselves, and hopeless regarding their future.

When you find yourself in the darkness of depression and feel alone, remember that God created you and loves you completely. Like David, try to refocus your gaze and redirect your thoughts on the Lord.

*“Look and see, there is no one at my right hand;  
no one is concerned for me.  
I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.  
I cry to you, LORD; I say,  
‘You are my refuge, my portion  
in the land of the living.’”*  
(PSALM 142:4–5)

## What Is the Dialogue of the Depressed?

Words are powerful. They can change minds, hearts, and ultimately lives. What people say about you can influence what you think and feel. What you say to yourself can impact how you feel about yourself.

When you encounter stressful situations, your response makes a difference. If you respond negatively, you may begin a downward spiral. Pessimistic thoughts can lead to emotions such as anger, sadness, or bitterness, which in turn can fuel your negative feelings, leaving you even more upset about the situation. Then, negative emotions can lead to more negative thoughts and the downward cycle continues.

When difficult situations occur in our lives, it is vital to be anchored in truth. The words we tell ourselves and how we interpret the situation can build us up or tear us down. God's Word can help direct our thoughts and ultimately our emotions that lead to joy and peace instead of darkness and despair.

It's a challenge to rise above condemning and critical thoughts when you're feeling down. For every negative thought you have, God's Word counters with loving reminders.

*“One thing God has spoken,  
two things I have heard:  
'Power belongs to you, God,  
and with you, Lord, is unfailing love.'”*

(PSALM 62:11–12)

### **What do you say about yourself?**

- “I'm such a loser.”
- “I can't do anything right!”
- “Nobody likes me.”
- “Everybody hates me.”
- “I hate myself.”
- “I'm useless.”

### **What is the light of truth?**

God's Word says, *“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you* (ISAIAH 54:10).

### **What do you say about your situation?**

- “I deserve this.”
- “I've made such a mess of things.”
- “It's all my fault.”
- “I can't change things.”
- “Things will never get better.”
- “It doesn't matter anyway.”

### **What is the light of truth?**

God's Word says, *"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content . . . I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"* (PHILIPPIANS 4:11, 13 NKJV).

### **What do you say about your future?**

- "Who cares?"
- "Nothing will ever change."
- "No one will ever love me."
- "I'll never be happy."
- "I have nothing to live for."
- "It's hopeless."

### **What is the light of truth?**

God's Word says, *"There is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off"* (PROVERBS 24:14).

If you are walking in darkness, consider what God says . . .

*"I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,  
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;  
I will turn the darkness into light before them  
and make the rough places smooth.  
These are the things I will do;  
I will not forsake them."  
(ISAIAH 42:16)*

## **What Are Telltale Signs of Depression?**

Some storm clouds bring a gentle rain. Others produce thunderous lightning. Still others spawn destructive tornadoes. And some produce storms so huge that weather forecasters actually name them (such as hurricanes, cyclones, and tropical and winter storms).

Similarly, the symptoms of depression can range in severity. Some are manageable. Others can be debilitating, affecting every area of your life. When the storm of depression disrupts your life, pulling you down and leaving you weak, you can know that God is ever near, strengthening your heart and giving shelter in the storm.

*“My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak,  
but God remains the strength of my heart; he is mine forever . . .  
how good it is to be near God!  
I have made the Sovereign LORD my shelter.”*  
(PSALM 73:26, 28 NLT)

## Symptoms of Depression

### Depression in General

The American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (DSM-5) lists nine key symptoms of depression. It says that a person must have at least five of the following symptoms, lasting two weeks or longer, to be considered a major depressive episode.<sup>28</sup> At least one of the five symptoms must be either persistent sadness or loss of interest.

- Persistent feelings of sadness, anxiousness, or “emptiness” most or all of the time
- Complete or near complete loss of interest or pleasure in activities that were once enjoyable
- Significant change in appetite or weight
- Difficulty sleeping most nights or sleeping too much
- Agitated thoughts and movements (i.e., fidgeting, pacing, tapping fingers or feet) or slowed responses (i.e., pausing more when talking; speaking slower, more quietly, or infrequently; moving slowly)
- Chronically fatigued, easily decreased energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or disappointment in oneself
- Lack of concentration, focus, memory retention, or inability to make decisions

- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide or suicide attempts

Instead of diagnosing yourself with depression, first consult a mental health professional (psychiatrist, psychologist, licensed professional counselor) who can give you an educated assessment after conducting a detailed analysis of your situation and symptoms. There is no shame in reaching out for help.

The psalmist, by his own admission, reminds us just how necessary it is to admit our need for help—first to God . . . then also to others.

*“Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;  
heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.  
My soul also is greatly troubled.  
But you, O LORD—how long?  
Turn, O LORD, deliver my life;  
save me for the sake of your steadfast love.”*  
(PSALM 6:2–4 ESV)

### **Depression in Women**<sup>29</sup>

Depression doesn’t look the same in everyone. While men also experience depression, the symptoms women experience can be quite different:

- **Women** tend to experience depression more often than men due to biological, hormonal, and lifecycle factors unique to women.
- **Women** typically experience feelings of sadness, worthlessness, and guilt when depressed.
- **Women** may have physical symptoms such as aches or pains, headaches, cramps, and digestive problems.
- **Women** can experience certain types of depression that are unique to them: premenstrual dysphoric disorder or PMDD; perinatal depression related to pregnancy and childbirth; and perimenopausal depression with the cessation of a menstrual cycle. Mood changes, unhappiness, and exhaustion can all be symptomatic of these types of depression.
- **Women** do not all experience the same symptoms of depression to the same level of severity. Some women experience only a few symptoms. Others have many.



### Depression in Men<sup>30</sup>

Men also experience depression in unique ways:

- **Men** with depression often hide their emotions and may seem angry, irritable, or aggressive rather than sad. Anxiousness, restlessness, and being “on edge” are also common characteristics of male depression.
- **Men** may lose interest in work or activities they once enjoyed (sports, exercise, hobbies).
- **Men** are more likely to see their doctor about physical symptoms (i.e., racing heart, tightening chest, headaches, digestive issues) rather than emotional symptoms.
- **Men** more often turn to drugs or alcohol to cope with emotional symptoms of depression.
- **Men** are less likely to recognize, talk about, and seek treatment for depression.

### Depression in Older Adults<sup>31</sup>

Features of depression in older adults include:

- **Older adults** often endure many life changes in a relatively short period of time—deaths of loved ones, retirement, stressful life events, medical issues—and, thus, are at a higher risk for depression.
- **Older adults** may go undiagnosed or be misdiagnosed because sadness is not the main symptom of their depression.
- **Older adults** often have less obvious symptoms of depression or may not be willing to talk about their feelings.
- **Older adults** who are at a higher risk for developing depression are: females, those with a disability or chronic medical condition (diabetes, heart disease, cancer), those who don’t sleep well, are lonely, or are socially isolated.
- **Older adults** who receive the right treatment for depression can improve their overall health and quality of life.

### Depression in Younger Children<sup>52</sup>

Childhood is generally viewed as a time of life that is carefree and happy. Yet many children experience profound sadness and, at times, the depth of that sadness can spiral down into depression. Some signs of a child exhibiting depression are:

- **Younger children** at risk for depression include those experiencing situational stressors such as: divorce, loss of a parent or relative, a chronic illness in the family, the child’s own illness, abuse of any kind (verbal, physical, emotional, sexual), bullying at school or by a sibling, undiagnosed learning problems, substance abuse by a family member, those genetically predisposed to depression or anxiety.
- **Younger children** exhibit symptoms such as tearfulness or sadness most of the day, decreased interest in normal activities (especially with friends or in school), changes in appetite, sleeping more or less than normal, behavior problems in school, aggressiveness towards others, difficulty concentrating, a lack of energy or inactivity.
- **Younger children** with depression may pretend to be sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent, or worry that a parent may die.
- **Younger children** who are bullied or have learning difficulties or attention disorders more frequently develop depression.
- **Younger children** with unhealthy eating habits (high in carbohydrates and simple sugars) or who are physically inactive (spend excessive amounts of time playing online games or videos) are more prone to develop depression than those for whom good nutrition and physical exercise are a regular part of daily life.

### Depression in Adolescents<sup>53</sup>

The teen years can be tough. Many changes are taking place in your teen’s body and brain that can affect how he or she feels, thinks, and acts. But you might sometimes wonder—*Is this “normal” . . . or could it be something more?* You may need to consider the possibility that your teen is in the grip of depression.

For parents who suspect their adolescent may be dealing with depression:

- **Adolescents** will have normal ups and downs given the rapid hormone changes taking place in their bodies. However, if your teen constantly feels sad, anxious, or feels nothing at all, then you may want to talk to a pediatrician or mental health professional about your concerns.
- **Adolescents** who are clinically depressed may get into trouble at school, sulk, and be irritable. Or they may socially isolate, silently struggle with feelings of worthlessness and low self-esteem, lose interest in their appearance or personal hygiene, have trouble focusing or making decisions, no longer want to be with family or friends, or not care about what happens in the future.
- **Adolescents** with depression may have symptoms of other disorders such as, anxiety, eating disorders, or substance abuse. Or they may self-harm (cutting, burning) or think often about committing suicide.
- **Adolescents**—even when they act distant or seem to reject their parents—need and want their parents to remain involved in their lives.
- **Adolescents** experience grief, loss, and stress in the same way adults do, but adolescents are often unequipped to navigate these turbulent waters alone. Parents must look for and help their teens process the painful times in life.

No matter the age, no matter the stage, rest assured that you never have to pass through despairing times of depression alone. The Lord goes with you and will save you.

*“When you go through deep waters, I will be with you.  
When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown.  
When you walk through the fire of oppression,  
you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.  
For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”*  
(ISAIAH 43:2–3 NLT)

## What Is the Scope of Depression?

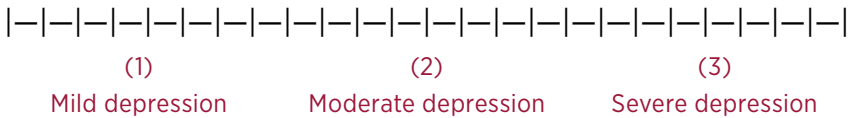
When was the last time you read a newspaper or listened to the news on television or radio and said to yourself, “How depressing!” It’s not unusual to feel low or “blue” after being bombarded by negative news, negative people, or negative events. In fact, it’s actually quite normal. But the word *depression*, with all of its derivatives, is so commonly used in today’s culture that the seriousness of this mental health condition can be quickly ignored or may be vague and abstract to many people.

There are varying degrees of depression, and each can affect your life in different ways. Depression ranges from mild, can increase to moderate, or even escalate to a severe level. Depending on the type of depression you’re dealing with, it can stay at a manageable level or it can reach an intensity so great it interferes with daily life and makes living moment-to-moment a struggle.

We all experience times of depression, but not all of us experience it in the same way, for the same reason, or to the same degree. It can be a friend or foe. However, depression is not to be feared—it can be understood and managed as you trust in the Lord. To the trouble-hearted, Jesus said . . .

*“Do not let your hearts be troubled.  
You believe in God; believe also in me.”*  
(JOHN 14:1)

### Scope of Depression<sup>54</sup>



**Mild depression**—can go on for days and interfere with daily activities. Mild depression . . .

- Is characterized by common symptoms of depression such as: hopelessness, worthlessness, a lack of motivation, irritability or anger, difficulty concentrating, a loss of interest in normal activities, insomnia, fatigue, appetite or weight changes.
- Is the most difficult type of depression to diagnose because the symptoms are easily dismissed or aren't really talked about.
- Is the easiest form of depression to treat. Normally, lifestyle changes and talk therapy will effectively treat mild depression.
- Is not something that always goes away on its own. If left untreated, mild depression can progress to a more severe form of depression.

The Word of God is an excellent source of hope and comfort. When the clouds of depression and despair threaten to keep you in the dark, trust God's Word to guide you back into the light.

*“Let the morning bring me word of your  
unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you.*

*Show me the way I should go,  
for to you I entrust my life.”*

(PSALM 143:8)

**Moderate depression**—shares some of the same symptoms of mild depression but becomes more limiting by causing problems at home, work, or school. Moderate depression . . .

- Is demonstrated by a depressed mood or irritability for most of the day and a lack of interest or pleasure in most activities.
- Is *not* required to have five of the nine symptoms normally present in major depression.
- Is more likely to exhibit symptoms such as: low self-esteem, lack of productivity, feelings of worthlessness, increased sensitivity, or excessive worrying.
- Is sometimes treated using medication (temporarily) to stabilize a person's brain chemistry and mood. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) may also be used in some cases.

While on earth, one of Jesus' directives was to bring healing to the sick—physically, mentally, and spiritually. Doctors are a means through which God can bring about healing and recovery.

*“Jesus answered them,  
‘It is not the healthy who need  
a doctor, but the sick.’”*

(LUKE 5:31)

**Severe depression**—has the primary symptoms of major depression which are more extreme and noticeable to family, friends, and coworkers. Severe (major) depression . . .

- Is a mood disorder that lasts, on average, six months or longer.
- Is a mental health condition that can go away after a while, but is also recurrent for some people.
- Is debilitating and requires immediate medical attention.
- Is sometimes accompanied by severe psychological symptoms such as delusions, hallucinations, or suicidal thoughts or behaviors.

Those suffering from severe depression often feel that life is not worth living. The apostle Paul empathizes while at the same time reassures . . .

*“We also have joy with our troubles, because we know  
that these troubles produce patience.  
And patience produces character,  
and character produces hope.”*

(ROMANS 5:3–4 NCV)

## Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

**Question:** “What is the connection between stress, anxiety, and depression?”

**Answer:** Stress that goes on for too long or becomes chronic can lead to anxiety. Intense anxiety can impact brain (and body) chemistry, which in turn can lead to the onset of depression. Many people with anxiety also develop depression and vice versa.

Each of these mental health conditions manifest in different ways:

- **Stress** is how the brain and body respond to any demand.
  - All different types of stress carry physical and mental health risks.
  - A stressor can be a one-time or short-term occurrence, or it can be an occurrence that keeps happening over a long period of time.
  - Not all stress is bad. Healthy stress can motivate people to prepare or to perform. It becomes unhealthy when the stress response goes beyond physical, mental, and emotional limits resulting in distress, danger, and destruction.
  - Routine stress, called *eustress*, is probably the most difficult to notice. If this type of stress goes from being constant to acute, eventually it will cause the body to no longer get a clear signal to return to normal functioning. This can contribute to serious health problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes, as well as mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.
- **Anxiety** is a reaction to stress and often comes from a place of fear, unease, and worry.
  - While there is a definite overlap between the two, anxiety and stress have different origins. With stress, you know what's worrying you. With anxiety, you tend not to be aware of what is actually making you anxious.
  - The terms anxiety and stress are often used interchangeably, but they're different experiences. Stress is associated with frustration and nervousness, whereas anxiety is more of an emotional reaction that *becomes* a problem.

- Anxiety and stressful situations can produce similar physical and mental symptoms such as stomach problems, muscle tension, rapid breathing, changes in appetite, and trouble sleeping.
  - Anxiety and stress that occur frequently or seem out of proportion to the stressor may be signs of an anxiety disorder and should be evaluated by a doctor.
- **Depression** is a common but serious mood disorder that causes severe symptoms affecting how someone thinks, feels, and handles daily activities.<sup>35</sup>
- Characteristically, someone struggling with depression generally lacks interest in enjoyable activities, experiences an increase or decrease in appetite, has low energy, trouble concentrating, and often feels worthless.
  - To be diagnosed with depression, five or more symptoms must be present for at least two weeks.
  - What distinguishes depression from anxiety is that a person who is depressed tends to move slowly and his or her reactions can seem flattened or dulled, whereas someone with anxiety is more likely to be keyed up and struggles to manage racing thoughts.
  - Many people with depression have a history of anxiety earlier in life. No evidence proves one disorder causes the other, but evidence indicates that many people suffer from both disorders.<sup>36</sup>

A constant reminder we find throughout Scripture is that God is there to rescue those who are discouraged and have given up hope.

*“The LORD is there to rescue all  
who are discouraged  
and have given up hope.”*

(PSALM 34:18 CEV)



## What Is the Personal Stress Inventory?

What would you say are the top four sources of stress today? If you guessed *money, work, family, and health*, you are right . . . at least according to a report released by the American Psychological Association (APA) titled “Stress in America: Paying with Our Health.”<sup>37</sup> In this report, the APA lists *anger, anxiousness, and lack of interest/motivation* as three primary symptoms of stress. And stress is a key contributor to depression . . . which compromises our health physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually.

Many of us prefer to avoid things that are unpleasant. We would much rather physically avoid what we find disturbing or uncomfortable, and not think about issues and situations that cause us distress and unease. But we always pay a price for avoidance—choosing to ignore the signs of stress. And avoided stress morphs into anxiety. Then anxiety leads us down the dark path to depression.

Wisdom nudges us to confront the things in our lives that cause us discomfort. When you need to confront one of life’s stressors, stop and ask the Lord for wisdom. He generously gives it.

*“For the LORD gives wisdom;  
from his mouth come knowledge  
and understanding.”  
(PROVERBS 2:6 ESV)*

### Personal Stress Inventory

Take the time to stop avoiding and start assessing. Thoughtfully examine the possible stressors listed below to determine if any of them may be a trigger for depression in you. Place a check mark (✓) beside those that create significant stress in your life and underline those that have caused you to feel depressed. Addressing the things that make you feel stressed is a first step in holding back the dark clouds of depression.

- Being abandoned or rejected
- Being a police officer or firefighter
- Being a single parent/parenting alone
- Being betrayed by a friend
- Being bullied by a coworker
- Being cheated on by a spouse
- Being in debt
- Being persecuted for what you believe
- Being told you have cancer
- Caring for a disabled child
- Caring for an elderly or sick family member
- Dealing with the IRS
- Dealing with long-term unemployment
- Dealing with debt collectors
- Experiencing a traumatic event (theft, rape, violence against you or a loved one)
- Feeling misunderstood or unaccepted
- Feeling overlooked at work due to age or gender
- Feeling “stuck” in your job
- Feeling under-challenged in your work
- Finding out you have a chronic illness
- Getting divorced
- Going through a breakup
- Grieving the loss of a loved one
- Having a difficult relationship with a parent, sibling, child, or friend
- Having a miscarriage
- Having an operation

- Having difficult neighbors
- Having too much responsibility at work
- Having unclear expectations at work
- Having no health insurance
- Hearing about possible layoffs at work
- Increasing health care costs
- Living in a turbulent, violent society
- Looking for a new job
- Losing a job
- Losing friends to death as you age
- Living in an unsafe neighborhood
- Making a long commute to work
- Not having control over the outcome of a situation
- Retiring
- Running a small business in today's financial climate
- Starting a new job
- Struggling with an addiction
- Watching your retirement savings disappear
- Working long hours
- Working for a manager who's "difficult"

Jesus warns us of the futility of letting our stress stretch into worry:

*"Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?"*

(LUKE 12:25)

## What Are the Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder?

The Paley Center in New York City held a special screening of *Bipolar Rock 'N' Roller*, a documentary about the life of renowned pro wrestling commentator Mauro Ranallo who suffers from bipolar disorder. In this painful but very transparent account, Mauro struggles through the epic highs, the abject lows, and the utter humiliation of hospitalization (he was hospitalized nine different times, his longest stay being three months). But you also witness his extraordinary career success and hear him talk about the victories he's experiencing as he continues to battle this otherwise debilitating illness with all its social stigma.<sup>38</sup>

Bipolar disorder, previously known as *manic depressive disorder*, describes two phenomena: *depressive* episodes and *manic* episodes and is thought to be associated with genes that interfere with the normal functioning of the brain. To be diagnosed with a bipolar manic episode, a person must experience an elevated or irritable mood that impairs functioning and lasts for at least seven days or less if so severe, hospitalization is required.<sup>39</sup> Most often, bipolar disorder develops or starts during late adolescence or early adulthood.

Mauro Ranallo says about bipolar depression, "Mental illness may be a life sentence for many of us, but it doesn't have to be a death sentence."<sup>40</sup> Jesus might see this illness as a thief and say to you . . .

*"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy;  
I have come that they may have life,  
and have it to the full."  
(JOHN 10:10)*

## Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder<sup>41</sup>

### Symptoms of a Manic Episode

Elevated mood—feeling extremely high, irritable, or touchy

Extraordinary bursts of energy; sleeping less than usual but not getting tired

More social than usual, increased creativity productivity

Excessive or rapid speech—thoughts become disjointed

Poor concentration—racing thoughts, impulsive decisions

Impulsive, high-risk behaviors (compulsive shopping, excessive drinking, reckless driving, extreme sexual behaviors)

Inflated ego, exaggerated sense of importance, potential, or talent

### Symptoms of a Depressive Episode

Depressed mood—extreme feelings of sadness or emptiness

Feeling slowed down or restless, sleep problems—trouble falling asleep, waking up too easily, sleeping too much

Socially withdrawn, decreased creativity and productivity

Slowed speech—thinking there is nothing to say, forgetfulness

Trouble concentrating—difficulty making decisions

Profound loss of interest or pleasure in most activities

Feeling hopeless, helpless, worthless, or suicidal

Bipolar is a lifelong but treatable mental disorder. But for those who have put their trust in God and know the Wonderful Counselor personally, there is always hope because they know deep within . . .

*“Surely God is my help; the LORD is  
the one who sustains me.”*

(PSALM 54:4)

## What Is a Biblical Example of Mania and Depression?

God’s Word never shades us from the glaring realities of truth. It warns us . . . instructs us . . . and reveals the truths about our humanity throughout the pages of Scripture. A scrutinizing look into the life of King Saul shows us the menacing nature of mania and depression.

The extreme emotional and behavioral swings of King Saul are similar to many symptoms of those who have a bipolar disorder. At times, Saul appeared to have alternating episodes of mania and depression.<sup>42</sup>

God’s Word serves many purposes in our lives: It provides us with human examples to teach us, helps us see what’s wrong in our lives, and it recalibrates our lives to help us do what’s right.

*“The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God  
and is useful to teach us what is true  
and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives;  
it straightens us out and helps us do what is right.”*  
(2 TIMOTHY 3:16 TLB)

### Examples of Mania and Depression From the Life of King Saul

#### Characteristics of Mania

##### Extreme irritability

Irritated that the prophet Samuel had not arrived to offer the designated sacrifice before battle, Saul became impatient and offered the sacrifice himself. After Samuel arrived, Saul voiced his excuse: *“When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time . . . I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me. . . .’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering”* (1 Samuel 13:11–12). Saul’s decision was in direct disobedience to the clear command of God.

#### King Saul’s Manic Behaviors

##### Disobeying God because of impatience

## **Characteristics of Mania**

### **Poor judgment**

Saul's army was in distress because Saul had bound his troops to "an oath, saying, 'Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!' So none of the troops tasted food" (1 Samuel 14:24). Consequently, the men became weak.

### **Excessive pleasures**

God told Saul to completely destroy both the enemy and their possessions; however, Saul kept some of the forbidden battle spoils. "Saul and the army spared . . . the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. . . . Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: 'I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions'" (1 Samuel 15:9–11).

### **Inflated sense of self**

Although he went early to meet with Saul, Samuel was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor" (1 Samuel 15:12). This was clearly an act of grandiosity.

### **Easily distracted**

When his men were returning from battle, rather than focusing on the victory, Saul was easily distracted by what the women were singing. Although the refrain was meant to honor the troops, "Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. 'They have credited David with tens of thousands,' he thought, 'but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?'" Saul's frequent irritability was obvious, as "from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David" (1 Samuel 18:8–9).

## **King Saul's Manic Behaviors**

### **Forbidding his army to eat in battle**

### **Keeping excessive battle spoils**

### **Erecting a monument to himself**

### **Becoming distracted by the songs of Israeli women**

**Characteristics of Mania****Obsessive focus**

When David first began serving the king, *“Saul liked him [David] very much.”* However, *“When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, Saul . . . remained his enemy the rest of his days.”* Saul made many attempts to take David’s life, *“Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands”* (1 Samuel 16:21; 18:28–29; 23:14).

**King Saul’s Manic Behaviors****Being hyper-focused on the goal of killing David****Racing thoughts**

Pondering why David was absent from the feast, Saul doesn’t speak but his thoughts are repetitive, *“Saul did not say anything that day, for he thought, ‘Something has happened to him. He is not clean; surely he is not clean’”* (1 Samuel 20:26 ESV).

**Having repetitive thoughts about David****Unfounded, euphoric mood**

Saul’s mood was elevated when he learned where David was, believing that God had brought David to him to be killed. *“Saul soon learned that David was at Keilah. ‘Good!’ he exclaimed. ‘We’ve got him now! God has handed him over to me, for he has trapped himself in a walled town!’”* (1 Samuel 23:7 NLT).

**Presuming he had the Lord’s favor****Characteristics of Depression****Debilitating fear and hopelessness**

Although God had delivered Saul in many battles, when his army was challenged by the Philistine giant Goliath, *“Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.”* Clearly God had anointed Saul as king, yet he continued to battle debilitating fear and hopelessness. Later, when Saul was again challenged by the Philistines, *“he was afraid; terror filled his heart”* (1 Samuel 17:11; 28:5).

**King Saul’s Depressed Behaviors****Losing hope in the face of fear**



### **Characteristics of Depression**

### **King Saul's Depressed Behaviors**

#### **Diminished pleasure in usual activities**

#### **Despising David's music playing**

Previously, David soothed Saul's troubled spirit by playing music: *"David would take his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul."* Later: *"While David was playing the lyre, Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall"* (1 Samuel 16:23; 19:9–10).

#### **Increased irritability**

#### **Flying into angry outbursts**

*"He [Saul] was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did."* With no provocation whatsoever and with a spear in his hand, Saul *"hurled it, saying to himself, 'I'll pin David to the wall.' But David eluded him twice"* (1 Samuel 18:10–11).

#### **Unrealistic negative evaluations**

#### **Accusing his men of treason**

In his attempt to find and kill David, Saul made unjust accusations toward his own son and innocent countrymen, *"Will the son of Jesse [David] give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? Is that why you have all conspired against me? No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today"* (1 Samuel 22:7–8).

#### **Exaggerated frustration**

#### **Killing his confronter**

When Saul falsely accused a priest who had innocently helped David, that priest sought to confront Saul. *"Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household?"* But in denial, Saul said to the priest, *"You will surely die . . . you and your whole family"* (1 Samuel 22:14, 16).

**Characteristics of Depression****Sad, discouraged, pessimistic**

Saul learned that David had spared his life. With periodic, overwhelming sadness, Saul expressed his dread of the future, saying, *“I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father’s family”* (1 Samuel 24:20–21).

**Loss of appetite**

Saul was in such a depressed state that *“he refused and said, ‘I will not eat’”* (1 Samuel 28:23).

**Suicidal thoughts or attempts**

Upon receiving a critical wound in battle and being unable to persuade his armor-bearer to kill him, *“Saul took his own sword and fell on it”* (1 Samuel 31:4).

**King Saul’s Depressed Behaviors****Bemoaning his fate and fearing David****Refusing to eat****Taking his own life**

## What Are Warning Signs of and Risk Factors for Suicide?

Severe forms of depression can lead someone to consider or attempt suicide. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that suicide claimed the lives of more than 48,000 people in the U.S.<sup>45</sup> And the numbers keep climbing—especially among young people.

Maybe you’ve never dealt with suicide directly. Or maybe someone you know has attempted or committed suicide. Perhaps *you* have attempted suicide. Whatever your experience with suicide, it’s vitally important to understand the warning signs and risk factors of this tragic, yet all-too-common occurrence.

Every life matters to God. But each person is given the choice between life and death. Out of a heart of pure love, God urges . . .

*“Today I have given you the choice between life and death.  
... Oh, that you would choose life,  
so that you and your descendants might live!”  
(DEUTERONOMY 30:19 NLT)*

### **Warning Signs of Suicide<sup>44</sup>**

The behaviors listed below may be signs that someone is thinking about suicide:

**Suicidal talk:** Talking about wanting to die, having no reason to live, or being a burden to others. Or they may ask questions like: “What do you think about suicide?” or “Have you ever thought about killing yourself?”

**Drug or alcohol abuse:** If someone doesn’t feel connected to anyone, they may turn to drugs and alcohol as a form of escape. They might also use drugs as a way to get enough will power to commit suicide.

**Give away prized possessions:** When someone gives away expensive items or material possessions, they think they will be helping family and friends after their death.

**Social withdrawal:** They often drop existing friends and family members because they don’t feel good enough for them or see socializing as an unimportant thing in their lives.

**Risky behavior:** Suicidal people tend to take more risks, such as driving recklessly or picking fights.

**Self-harm:** This may be a sign of suicidal intent. Examples of this type of behavior include cutting, burning, and poisoning oneself. Self-harmers say that the physical pain helps them escape the emotional pain they’re feeling.

**Strange sleeping patterns:** This sign is often seen in suicidal people. The stress they feel coupled with restless thoughts from personal problems cause them to have trouble sleeping at night.

**Past suicide attempts:** This is the number one and most obvious sign that someone might be suicidal—if they have a history of attempting it in the past.

A single warning sign doesn't necessarily mean that someone is contemplating suicide, but if multiple signs apply to you or someone you know, get help as soon as possible, especially if the behavior is new or has increased recently.

### Risk Factors for Suicide<sup>45</sup>

The main risk factors for suicide include:

- Mental health disorders (depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, personality disorders, schizophrenia)
- Family history of suicide
- Previous suicide attempts
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Local epidemics of suicide (copycat suicides)
- Lack of social support, social isolation
- Having guns or other “weapons” in the home
- Being between ages 15 and 24 or over age 60

Suicide does not discriminate. People of any age, gender, or ethnicity can be at risk. While risk factors are important to keep in mind, someone who displays *warning signs* of suicide may be in more danger and require immediate attention.

Suicide is an enemy of the soul, and those struggling with depression are especially vulnerable. Scripture warns . . .

*“Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil.*

*He prowls around like a roaring lion,  
looking for someone to devour.”*

(1 PETER 5:8 NLT)

## What Purpose Can Depression Serve in Our Lives?

God can use everything that touches your life—even depression. Depression can heighten your awareness of God and increase your dependency on Him. It can open your eyes to His unique design for you before, during, and after your bouts with despondency. Remember, just as storms replenish dry and parched ground and give birth to flowers and new life in the spring, so too the storms in your life can revitalize your relationship with God and give birth to greater fruit of the Spirit in your life as seen through your . . .

*“ . . . love, joy, peace, patience,  
kindness, goodness, faithfulness,  
gentleness, self-control.”*  
(GALATIANS 5:22–23 ESV)

### Discerning God’s Purpose in Depression

God may have allowed you to experience depression to . . .

**Bring you** closer to Him

*“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need”* (HEBREWS 4:16).

**Reveal to you** His grace and strength in your weakness

*“My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness”* (2 CORINTHIANS 12:9 NLT).

**Slow you down** and cause you to reflect inwardly

*“Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (PSALM 139:23–24).

**Warn you** that something is wrong and put you on the right path

*“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word” (PSALM 119:67).*

**Begin** a healing process for damaged emotions

*“Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise” (JEREMIAH 17:14).*

**Cause you** to pour out your heart to Him

*“I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble. When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way” (PSALM 142:1–3).*

**Show you** that He hears you and wants to encourage you

*“You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry” (PSALM 10:17).*

**Develop** your trust in Him

*“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (PSALM 43:5).*

**Confirm** your worth and the value of your life

*“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (LUKE 12:6–7).*

**Teach you** to rely on His resources

*“But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. . . . On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:9–10).*

**Develop** your perseverance and maturity

*“Consider it pure joy . . . whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (JAMES 1:2–4).*

**Increase** your compassion and understanding for others

*“The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).*

## **The Most Miserable Man Living The Abraham Lincoln Story<sup>46</sup>**

Taken from: HOW TO HANDLE YOUR EMOTIONS  
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His was a dominant presence—a somber, statuesque figure—yet clothed from head to toe in sadness and gloom. At the same time, to many thousands, he brought great joy and jubilation. He is believed to be the most beloved politician in American history—heralded as a national hero and credited with uniting a weary, war-torn country.

Through him came freedom from slavery—the hard-fought-for Emancipation Proclamation.

But the sixteenth president of the United States seldom experienced himself the joy that he brought to so many. Instead, Abraham Lincoln’s life was marked by melancholy, darkened by depression.

Like other members of his family, Lincoln struggled with chronic depression. But it was after his great personal loss in 1835 that he emotionally collapsed, some people going so far as to call him crazy.

The untimely death of Anna Rutledge, whom he deeply loved, proved too much to bear. She lost her life most likely to typhoid fever. Afterward came his repeated talk of suicide . . . his rambling through the woods with a deadly gun in hand . . . his broken heart and dreams.

But what pushed Abe Lincoln over the edge was the weather at Anna’s funeral. As the day turned gray, cold, and wet, grief-stricken Lincoln couldn’t face the reality of rain falling on her grave. One observer noted, “As to the condition of Lincoln’s mind after the death of Miss R, after that event he seemed quite changed.”<sup>47</sup>



Lincoln's second emotional breakdown came in the winter of 1840, triggered by a traumatic trio of circumstances. First, he was physically and emotionally exhausted from long periods of intense work. Second, thoughts of his lost love wrenched his soul—he would never be with the one whom he loved. And third, he found himself in a “stretch of bleak weather” that, like the first emotional collapse, was the domino that caused his world to tumble. Back again was the talk of suicide and speaking openly of the hopelessness in his heart.

Imagine—*this* is the same man who—decade after decade—has inspired countless millions. This is the same man who—during that dreary Illinois winter—feared he couldn't recover from the depths of his despair. On January 23, 1841, Lincoln wrote these words in a letter to his law partner John Stuart: “I am now the most miserable man living . . . to remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better.”<sup>48</sup>

Unlike Vincent van Gogh, who less and less turned to the Bible for help, Abraham Lincoln more and more opened the Bible for peace. There he not only found solace, but also a sense of purpose. He once wrote about a Bible given to him: “I doubt not that it is really . . . the best cure for the ‘Blues.’”<sup>49</sup>

What kind of gift was the Bible to Lincoln? “But for this Book we could not know right from wrong. I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man.”<sup>50</sup> To endure the pangs of depression, Abe Lincoln needed a sense of purpose. He needed to know the God of hope would use his pain to make a difference.

“I know the plans I have for you,” the Lord says in Jeremiah 29:11, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Lincoln's life reflects this passage. He acquired a growing understanding of the sovereignty of God, and surrendered to it. His surrender was sweet, because therein he found peace.

His faith refreshed and his hope restored, all was put to the test in the summer of 1863 following the dismal news from the War Department. Things were dark—everywhere.

Elizabeth Keckly, dressmaker for Lincoln's wife, Mary, recalled watching the president "drag himself into the room"<sup>51</sup> where she was fitting the First Lady. "His step was slow and heavy, and his face sad. Like a tired child he threw himself upon a sofa, and shaded his eyes with his hands. He was a complete picture of dejection."<sup>52</sup>

But then Lincoln reached over to a stand near the sofa and pulled out a small Bible. Fifteen minutes passed, and the dressmaker observed a noticeable change in expression. "The dejected look was gone, and the countenance was lighted up with new resolution and hope."<sup>53</sup>

Curious, she peeked over Lincoln's shoulder to see what he was reading—the book of Job, equal to none in reconciling human suffering and the sovereignty of God. Lincoln undoubtedly sensed a kinship with Job, a relationship forged through sharing the fiery trials of life.

In addition to his losses in love and losses in war, Lincoln experienced the painful loss of little Eddie, his three-year-old son, to a lengthy illness in 1850. And more so, his wife, known for her violent temper and mood swings—indicative of manic depression—eventually was committed to an insane asylum.

But the book of Job both comforted Lincoln and strengthened him. One of the many biographies on the life of Lincoln observed, "What distinguished Lincoln was his willingness to cry out to the heavens in pain and despair, and then turn, humbly and determinedly, to the work that lay before him."<sup>54</sup>

As was the case with Vincent van Gogh, Lincoln's life would end from a gunshot wound. But it would not come from his own

hand . . . for unlike the despairing artist, Lincoln's final days were lived with a sense of divine purpose—and fulfillment.

It was Good Friday, the morning of April 14, 1865. After putting on his slippers, Lincoln read a few pages of his Bible. His spirit was cheerful. Following a late-morning meeting, Lincoln enjoyed an afternoon carriage ride and then readied himself for a trip to the theater that evening. *His post-dinner plans had been announced in the morning papers . . .*

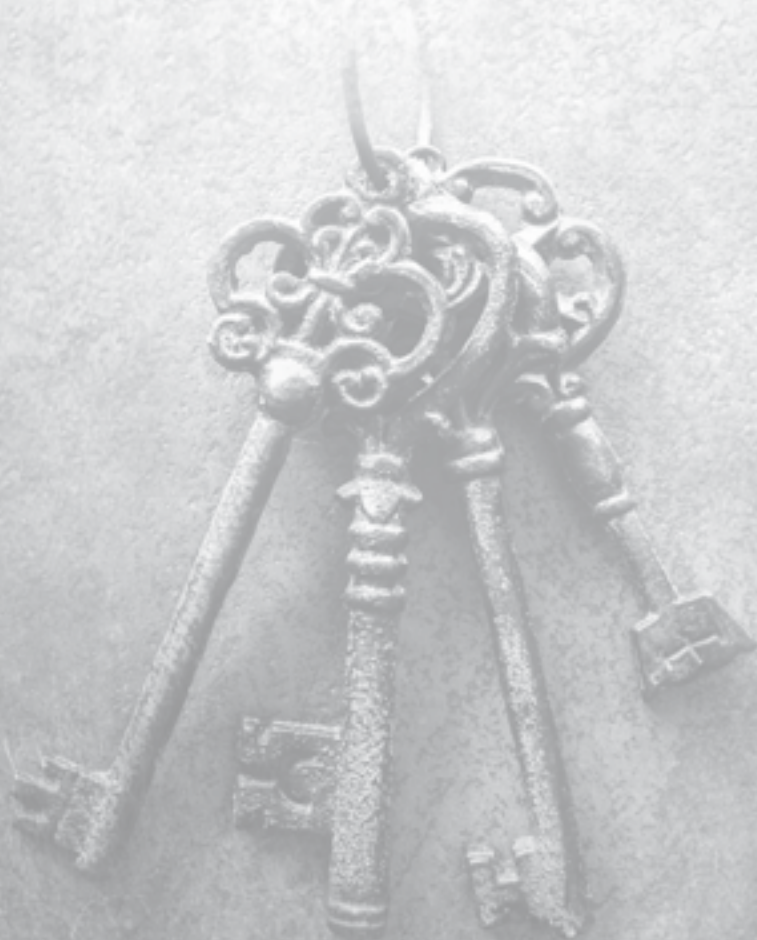
Three days earlier, handsome young actor John Wilkes Booth had been present at a Lincoln speech in which the president expressed support of the right of African-Americans to vote. Booth recoiled at the prospect and declared: "Now, by God, I'll put him through. That is the last speech he will ever make."<sup>55</sup>

And it was. Lincoln had to be carried out of the theater that evening after he was shot. But the final days of the great president were not characterized by the darkness and gloom that governed so much of his life. Secretary of the Interior James Harlan described it this way:

"That indescribable sadness which had previously seemed to be an adamant element of his very being, had been suddenly exchanged for an equally indescribable expression of serene joy as if conscious that the great purpose of his life had been achieved. . . ."<sup>56</sup>



# CAUSES



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*“[Jesus’] compassionate  
comfort extends  
to all those  
who have lost hope.”*



The headline splashed across many sports news and social media outlets reveals that Dallas Cowboys quarterback Dak Prescott has been dealing with depression, starting with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic and the suicide of his older brother, Jace. Dak cites being quarantined from others during the pandemic and sleeplessness as the primary symptoms of depression motivating him to seek help.

Unlike many high-profile professional athletes, Dak talks openly about his depression: “Mental health is a huge issue and a real thing in our world right now . . . where everything is viral and everyone is part of the media.”<sup>57</sup> Many praise the young man for his honesty while others criticize him for it. Unfortunately, the conflict of perspectives about depression often continues to keep this mental health issue “under wraps” in today’s culture.

Depression remains a complex disorder with many causes set in motion by biological, emotional, mental, situational, and spiritual factors. To better deal with and seek effective treatment, it is vital that anyone affected by depression develops an in-depth understanding of it.

*“Wisdom is the most important thing; so get wisdom.  
If it costs everything you have, get understanding.”*

(PROVERBS 4:7 NCV)

## What Physical Factors Contribute to Depression?

Depression affects not only millions of people each year, but also their close relationships. Symptoms can come and go over time in a pattern unique to each person. Because depression is a *mood disorder*, the fluctuations in a person’s thoughts, moods, and actions make it difficult to predict what each day will bring. Knowing how to survive these ups and downs can take a toll not only on the one who’s depressed but also on those trying to love and care for that person.

Given the wide range and diversity of physical contributors to depression, it's important to talk with your doctor if you or a loved one is experiencing any of the physical symptoms of depression. Your doctor (or a mental health professional) can help identify physical sources of depression and discuss appropriate treatment options with you.

*“Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health  
and that all may go well with you,  
even as your soul is getting along well.”*  
(3 JOHN 1:2)

## Physical Contributors to Depression<sup>58</sup>

### Addiction

The word *addict* may be one of the most stigmatized words in the English language. But according to Dr. Gregory Jantz, founder of The Center: A Place of Hope in Edmonds, Washington, about 40 percent of people who are admitted to his mental health clinic seeking help with depression are also concurrently enrolled in an addiction rehab program.

He describes addiction as *the ongoing, compulsive use of a substance or behavior regardless of its harmful consequences*.<sup>59</sup> Anyone can become addicted. Consider these common *substance* addictions: tobacco/nicotine, alcohol, drugs (illicit or prescription), caffeine, sugar, fat. Or these common *behavior* addictions: eating, shopping, gambling, pornography/sex, video games, social media. Few things are harder to recognize in ourselves than addictions.

### Brain chemistry<sup>60</sup>

Some people inherit brain chemical abnormalities or imbalances which can contribute to depression and other mental health issues. To enjoy life regardless of circumstances, our brains need all four of the following chemicals (neurotransmitters) to work in balance:

- *Serotonin*: a natural mood stabilizer that significantly impacts emotions and aids in the regulation of appetite, sleep, memory, sexual desire, and social behavior.

- *Dopamine*: is linked to pleasure and motivation and helps with planning, concentrating, and experiencing joy and satisfaction when goals are reached.
- *GABA* (gamma-amino-butyric-acid): inhibits worries, removes shyness, aids sleep, reduces physical pain, removes drug and alcohol cravings, helps muscles relax, and levels out mood swings.<sup>61</sup>
- *Norepinephrine*: is both a hormone and brain chemical. It makes us more alert while improving focus, memory, and concentration.

### Brain injury<sup>62</sup>

A traumatic brain injury—perhaps as a result of a car accident, fall, fight, work, sports, or other injury—can increase the risk of depression. After a brain injury, many different factors can contribute to depression. For instance: Areas of the brain that control emotions are often affected by a brain injury, causing depression. A brain-injured person may have to adjust to temporary or lasting disability, losses, or role changes which can also bring on depression.

### Chronic illnesses

Medical issues such as a *thyroid deficiency* or even a bout with the flu can cause chemical imbalances in the brain which, in turn, can cause depression. Just think of the emotional toll paid with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic that took the world by storm in 2020. Depression numbers surged as did suicide rates. In addition, patients with life-threatening diseases like cancer, heart disease, and strokes experience depression as do those with chronic illnesses like diabetes and lupus.

### Dehydration<sup>65</sup>

The human body depends on water to function well, including the brain (roughly 75 percent of brain tissue is water). Research links dehydration to depression and anxiety. When dehydrated, brain function slows and ceases to function properly. Dehydration leads to depression in at least three ways: It saps the brain of energy; impedes production of serotonin in the brain; and causes bodily stress. Water is a key nutrient every brain needs.



### Genetic vulnerability<sup>64</sup>

Stanford Medicine research concluded that, in most cases of depression, around 50 percent of the cause is genetic. If someone has a parent or sibling with major depression, that person is two or three times more likely to develop depression compared with the average person. No one simply “inherits” depression from their parents. Each person inherits a unique combination of genes from their mother and father, which can predispose them to depression.

### Hormonal imbalances<sup>65</sup>

Hormones are chemicals produced in the body that “communicate” messages to and from all organs of the body. They connect the function of one organ to another and keep bodies balanced and functioning. Indeed, we cannot live without them. There are two types of hormones: *protein* hormones and *steroid* hormones. Four hormones primarily manage mental wellness:

- *Thyroid*: a small, unnoticeable gland in the neck that releases the thyroid hormone into the body and controls the body’s rate of metabolism. An elevated thyroid (**hyper**thyroidism) can cause nervousness, racing heart, emotional instability, shortness of breath and other symptoms. An underactive thyroid (**hypo**thyroidism) often imitates depression manifesting symptoms such as constant tiredness, feeling cold all the time, weight gain, hair loss, achy muscles and joints, and a depressed mood. Thyroid imbalance is a common cause of depression.
- *Cortisol*: is commonly known as the “stress hormone,” and is made by the adrenal glands. High cortisol levels are thought to cause mood disturbances. When under high stress, the body releases extra cortisol anticipating a need to deal with upcoming distressing events. And over-taxed adrenal glands can lead to depression.
- *Estrogen*: is made by the ovaries in women, and believed to alter the activity of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Estrogen affects mood, sleep, pain, appetite, sex drive, and memory. It is thought to have mood-enhancing properties and may be the strongest mood-modulating hormone in the body. Hormonal changes, especially following childbirth and throughout perimenopause (around menopause), can lead to depression.

- *Testosterone*: has been known to have mood-lifting properties, but too much is harmful. Elevated levels of testosterone can cause irritability, aggression, and hypersexuality. Low testosterone, which is common among older adult men, exhibits symptoms such as chronic fatigue, diminished sexual interest or sexual dysfunction, and decreased muscle mass.

**NOTE:** Hormones regulate bodily functions, including brain chemical production, so hormone irregularities can result in brain chemical abnormalities which can cause depression.

### Improper food, rest, or exercise

An unhealthy diet, sleep problems, and a lack of physical exercise can all contribute to a chronic sense of fatigue, lack of energy, and depression.

- *Unhealthy diet*. In his book *Healing Depression for Life*, doctor and mental health expert Greg Jantz states, “Nutritious, fortifying foods support not only physical health but mental health as well.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, what we put in our mouths each day can affect our mood and mental health directly and dramatically. Foods that contribute to depression are: processed foods, junk foods, and the “three white foods”—white flour, white rice, and refined sugar.<sup>67</sup>
- *Sleep problems*. When we don’t get enough sleep, our bodies, brains, and emotions are all impacted. Studies have shown that sleep and depression are strongly linked. In fact, insomnia is most often the presenting symptom expressed by patients seeking help for depression. When depressed, the sleep cycle is altered, robbing the body of the rest needed to repair and restore those essential hormones and neurotransmitters so critical to emotional and physical health.<sup>68</sup>
- *Lack of exercise*. Physical activity provides a boost to mood and metabolism which can alleviate and even prevent depression. Lack of activity contributes to stiff muscles and joints, weight gain, and low self-esteem. So even low levels of physical activity can reduce or prevent depression in people of all ages. When we exercise, our bodies release the critical chemicals and hormones that positively impact brain health and mood.

## Medication

Certain drugs increase the risk of depression, such as certain birth control medications, steroids, and cardiac medications. Alcohol can also contribute to depression, as it acts as a central nervous system depressant.

## Melancholy temperament

Orderly, gifted, and creative—someone with a melancholy temperament may be more predisposed to depression-like characteristics. They can be moody, overly sensitive, and self-deprecating while also being analytical, critical, and hard to please. Melancholies tend to take life too seriously or too personally and can quickly become depressed over circumstances or the slightest imperfection in themselves or others.

Psalms 139:14 reminds us that we are “*fearfully and wonderfully made.*” So when you think about how many different things can impact your body, mind, and moods, you would do well to remember:

*“ . . . your body is the home of the Holy Spirit  
God gave you, and . . . he lives within you.  
Your own body does not belong to you.  
God has bought you with a great price.  
So use every part of your body to give  
glory back to God because he owns it.”*

(1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20 TLB)

## Why Is Depression Often Not Diagnosed?

When we see someone who seems “down,” we try to find logical, temporary reasons for it: “You’re just tired . . . need more sleep . . . work too hard . . . aren’t eating right . . . need time alone.” While some of these observations may be true, we can miss the real diagnosis because of a lack of awareness.

One area in which this is especially true is with postpartum depression (known today as *perinatal depression* because it can affect women both *during* pregnancy and after childbirth). Every mother of a newborn baby expects to feel joy and excitement over the new birth. But when she doesn't and she initially feels immense guilt and confusion, family and friends might assume: "She's just tired and exhausted." Loved ones simply do not understand the causes of her change in mood and behavior—but they need to be more attentive in order to perceive what she might be experiencing.

*"Be attentive, that you may gain insight."*

(PROVERBS 4:1 ESV)

### Postpartum Depression<sup>69</sup>

The birth of a baby can trigger a confusing mix of powerful emotions, from excitement and joy to fear and anxiety. But it can also result in something far less expected—*depression*.

**The "Baby Blues"**—signs and symptoms normally last only a few days up to a week or two after childbirth and may include some or all of the following:

- Appetite changes
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling worried and unhappy
- Guilt over not bonding with her baby
- Irritability
- Lack of concentration
- Lethargy
- Mood swings
- Trouble sleeping
- Unexplained crying

**Postpartum Depression**—between 10 percent and 20 percent of birth mothers experience postpartum depression. What distinguishes postpartum depression from the “baby blues” is its long duration and the debilitating indifference of the mother toward herself and her children.<sup>70</sup> Postpartum depression usually develops within the first few weeks after giving birth and can last up to a year after the birth. Signs and symptoms include:

- A feeling of being trapped
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Difficulty bonding with her baby
- Emotional numbness, sadness, fatigue
- Excessive concern for the baby (she senses something is wrong with her own feelings about being a mother)
- Feelings of worthlessness, shame, guilt, or inadequacy
- Intense irritability and anger
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Severe mood swings
- Significant weight loss or gain

**Postpartum Psychosis**—the birth mother experiences a life-threatening break with reality related to postpartum depression. It affects one or two of every 1,000 birth mothers<sup>71</sup> and typically develops within the first week after delivery. The signs and symptoms are severe and include:

- Attempts to harm herself or her baby
- Being overly critical of her inability to be a good mother
- Confusion and disorientation
- Disrupted sleep patterns; insomnia
- Excessive energy and agitation
- Feeling angry toward her baby and family
- Hallucinations and delusions
- Loss of touch with reality
- Obsessive thoughts about her baby
- Paranoia

The mother struggling with postpartum psychosis could feel that these words are hers:

*“The cords of death entangle me, the anguish of the grave came over me: I was overcome by distress and sorrow.”*

(PSALM 116:3)

### **Deadly Depression The Andrea Yates Story<sup>72</sup>**

**NOTE:** *The depth of postpartum depression and resulting psychotic break Andrea Yates experienced is by no means normal or typical. However, many women struggle with postpartum depression. And while Andrea’s story is extraordinarily extreme, we share portions of it here to underscore the absolute necessity of getting treatment for depression immediately, consistently, and professionally.*

On June 20, 2001, the nation and the world is stunned by a steady stream of horrific television and radio reports: A woman named Andrea Yates has systematically drowned her children in the bathtub—all five of them, ranging in age from six months to seven years.<sup>73</sup>

In heartrending disbelief, the shocked world asks, “How could a mother commit such an unthinkable act? What could possibly drive her to commit such a heinous crime—*five times?*” In a word—*depression*—not normal depression, but *psychotic depression* causes Andrea to break with reality.<sup>74</sup>

Andrea Yates suffers from depression following the birth of her third baby . . . but even more severe depression after the birth of her fourth child. Her doctor advises her and her husband not to have more children because of the wide hormonal changes in her body after her last delivery. When her fifth baby is born, Andrea’s hormone deficiency causes her to plunge headfirst into postpartum psychosis.

Were Andrea's family and friends aware of the seriousness of her depression?<sup>75</sup> Could this horrible tragedy have been avoided? Had there been clues to the seriousness of Andrea Yates' deadly depression? What steps could loved ones have taken to help Andrea move from the darkness of despair into the light of hope?

After the drownings, the media quickly learns that this rigidly religious family has been dealing with Andrea's severe depression for several years. Twice in one year Andrea attempted suicide.

Once Andrea is placed back on the medication necessary to restore the chemical balance in her brain, she returns to a nonpsychotic state. But then she has to face the horrific fact that she's taken the lives of her five precious children. The harsh reality of her actions and their catastrophic consequences devastate her heart and mind. Yes, her mind can be restored to its right state, but her children can never be restored to life.

Andrea is convicted of capital murder and sentenced to life in prison. On appeal, the verdict is overturned and her case retried. Andrea is found not guilty by reason of insanity and ordered to a mental hospital.<sup>76</sup>

Andrea's struggle through the darkness of depression to the life-giving light of redemption is indescribably difficult. Christians doing prison ministry reach out to her with the reality of God's love and forgiveness and teach her how God is able to comfort and carry her through the all-consuming litany of losses in her life—her five children . . . her marriage . . . her freedom.

As Andrea begins opening her soul and spirit to God and to His healing hand, she begins to experience a new life in Christ

and reaches out to other women in the prison who also need a new life in Him. Never a day goes by that she doesn't think of and long for her children. But now she lives in the strength of the Lord, knowing that one day she will be reunited with them in heaven and . . .

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes.*

*There will be no more death or  
mourning or crying or pain.”*

(REVELATION 21:4)

## What Role Does Medication Play?

Every person on earth has billions of brain cells. These neurons (or nerve cells) both send and receive “chemical messengers” called neurotransmitters, and without them we could neither think nor feel. These neurotransmitters play a major role in terms of happiness, sadness, worry, anxiety, anger, cognitive ability, sleep, memory, thinking, and even facial expression. A deficiency of vital neurotransmitters is often found in depression—such as low levels of serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine, or GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid).

Sometimes low levels of these neurotransmitters are genetic (up to half of the world's population might have this genetic propensity).<sup>77</sup> Other times, the way our brains handle stress leads to abnormalities in the four major brain chemicals needed to prevent depression and anxiety. That is when medication can play an important role. Medications can help our bodies where they are weak—where and when they don't have enough of what they need to keep us in good (mental) health.



## How Antidepressants Work

**Question:** “I’ve been told that antidepressants are addictive and should only be taken when absolutely necessary. Is this true?”

**Answer:** Serotonin is probably the most influential chemical in our bodies. When it is out of balance and too low, it can wreak havoc of all kinds—physically, mentally, and emotionally. God created us in such a way that only the brain can make serotonin. Our brain and nerve cells also have reuptake sites that draw the serotonin back up, to keep serotonin in proper balance.

- When an electrical impulse reaches the part of a neuron where serotonin is stored (called the *pre-receptor site*), this chemical is released from the nerve cell and enters the spaces between the neurons (called the *synapse*).
- The neurotransmitter (serotonin) then travels across the synapse and attaches to a post-receptor site in another neuron.
- Certain medications, such as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) antidepressants, are often prescribed when a serotonin imbalance triggers depression.
- Antidepressants are nonaddicting drugs that block the reuptake (returning to the same neuron from which it left) and lessen the reduction of the depression-related neurotransmitters between synapses.
- This leads to an increase in the amount of neurotransmitters and ultimately alters other chemicals associated with the nerve cell and nervous system.
- The result is a cascade of chemical reactions in the brain, which, in turn, lifts the depressed mood and alters behavior.<sup>78</sup>

Serotonin is one of four key neurotransmitters that work together to regulate behavior. If we have the right amount of serotonin in our brain cell synapses, we have the energy we need during the day, sleep better at night, and our overall disposition will more closely resemble someone described by these words of Scripture . . .

*“Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness,  
humility, gentleness and patience.”*

(COLOSSIANS 3:12)

## Substantiating the Need for Medication

**Question:** “Is there any objective, medical proof to substantiate the need for medication?”

**Answer:** Yes. With the aid of PET scans (positron emission tomography), physicians can see the difference between the function of a normal brain and a depressed brain.<sup>79</sup>

- PET scans map how the brain functions.
- PET scans also display any changes in the brain after antidepressant medication has been taken.
- Antidepressants can provide a temporary or extended neurological advantage by increasing brain functioning and decreasing depression.

How wonderful that the God of creation made the brain with the capacity to respond to appropriate medication in order to alleviate debilitating depression. The Bible says that we are . . .

*“Fearfully and wonderfully made.”*

(PSALM 139:14)

## What Are Emotional and Situational Contributors to Depression?

Emotions are a significant factor to consider when looking at depression—especially when certain emotions are not dealt with properly. When you neglect or repress difficult (toxic) emotions, you can harm both yourself and your relationships. Failure to adequately express your emotions can also contribute to depression.

In today’s upside-down, broken world, numerous situations can lead people to become angry, fearful, guilt-ridden, and stressed, which in turn can send them in to an ever-deepening pit of depression. It’s times like these that you can bring your cares and concerns to the Lord.

*“Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you;  
he will never let the righteous be shaken.”*

(PSALM 55:22)

Four toxic emotions that must be addressed if you want to be set free from the grip of depression are:

### **Repressed ANGER over:**

- Loss of a relationship
- Loss of self-esteem
- Loss of control
- Loss of possessions
- Loss of expectations
- Loss of respect of others
- Loss of health or abilities
- Loss of accomplishments

### **The Bible says . . .**

*“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger,  
brawling and slander,  
along with every form of malice.”*

(EPHESIANS 4:31)

**Suppressed FEAR of:**

- Job loss
- Dying
- Empty nest
- Failure
- Abandonment
- Growing old
- Being alone
- Rejection

**The Bible says . . .**

*“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”*

(ISAIAH 41:10)

**Unresolved GUILT from:**

- Past moral failure(s)
- Poor treatment of others
- Failed expectations
- Habits and addictions
- Unconfessed sin
- Unfaithfulness
- Broken promises
- Harbored secrets

**The Bible says . . .**

*“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*

(ROMANS 8:1)

**Internalized STRESS over:**

- Work difficulties
- Health issues
- Marital problems
- Friendship struggles
- Financial obligations
- Family responsibilities
- Troubled child
- School problems

**The Bible says . . .**

*“Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”*

(1 PETER 5:7)

So what do you do with these stresses and emotions? God repeatedly commands us to get rid of emotions like anger and bitterness (see Ephesians 4:31). But how do you get rid of these emotional contributors to depression?

It doesn't mean you neglect your emotions. Nor does it mean that you express them inappropriately. If you confess the reasons behind these emotions to a trusted, safe person (friend, professional counselor, family member), you will begin to find release from the toxic feelings you've buried far too long. This is a process that takes time and is accomplished with the Lord's help. Go to Him, for He is willing to hear and help you.

God wants you to come to Him with whatever you are feeling. In fact, the psalms repeatedly show people bringing their difficult emotions to the Lord . . .

*"I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.  
I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble."*

(PSALM 142:1-2)

## **What Are Spiritual Contributors to Depression?**

Just as there are physical, emotional, situational, and mental causes for depression, there are also spiritual reasons for a despairing heart. The Bible as a whole, and the psalms in particular, are filled with expressions of people who experienced distress, discouragement, and depression. And yet, a common theme emerges in the pages of Scripture. Over and over, as God's people bring their pain to Him, they find hope and rest.

*"Yes, my soul, find rest in God;  
my hope comes from him."*

(PSALM 62:5)

## Spiritual Contributors<sup>80</sup>

For those stricken by the dark storms of depression, consider how these spiritual factors may be contributing:

### Unconfessed sin

- King David felt physically and emotionally weak when he kept silent about his sin. He wrote, *“When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat”* (Psalm 32:3–4 NLT). After confessing his guilt, God forgave him and he was moved to rejoice in the Lord (Psalm 32:5, 11).
- When depression is related to sin, we need to confess, repent, and receive God’s forgiveness—and move forward with God’s grace.  
*“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’ And you forgave the guilt of my sin”* (PSALM 32:5).

### Longing for God

- Sometimes sin and disobedience are not the issue. Sometimes depression comes about because we intensely long for God’s presence. This experience has been referred to as “spiritual depression” or “the dark night of the soul.”
- In Psalm 42, David writes about his downcast soul. His soul pants and thirsts for God (vv. 1–2). He writes that his *“tears have been my food day and night”* (v. 3). He repeatedly asks himself why he is so downcast (vv. 5, 11). He mourns (v. 9), and even his bones are in agony (v. 10). His experience is not the result of sin or disobedience but actually due to his longing for God (vv. 1–2) and the taunting of others about his faith (vv. 3, 9–10).

When we experience similar feelings, it’s important to do what David did—run *to* God, not *away* from Him.

*“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God”* (PSALM 42:1–2).

### Spiritual attack

- The opposition of the devil and dark spiritual forces can also be a source of depression. Jesus called Satan a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). Elsewhere he is called “*the accuser*” (Revelation 12:10). He is compared to a lion seeking to devour people (1 Peter 5:8). As the enemy of God, he does not want people to delight in God (Psalm 37:4) or experience the full joy of their salvation (Psalm 51:12).
- When we are under spiritual attack, Satan’s lies and accusations must be fought with the Word of God and prayer.

*“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places . . . take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere” (EPHESIANS 6:10–12, 17–18 NLT).*

## Unforgiveness and Depression

**Question:** “I’ve been told that unforgiveness of past hurts and abuse keeps me stuck in my depression. Is that true? To forgive those who’ve hurt and caused me so much pain seems unthinkable, unfair, and impossible.”

**Answer:** Many Christians see forgiveness as primarily a spiritual obligation. And yet, it really is as much practical as it is spiritual in nature because of what it contributes to your lifelong health and well-being. In fact, forgiveness is a source of the very peace you’re looking for when pursuing lasting relief from depression. That’s not just wishful thinking. It’s supported by scientific research.

In an article titled, “Forgiveness: Your Health Depends on It,” researchers at Johns Hopkins University discovered that forgiveness can help lower the risk of heart attacks, improve cholesterol levels and sleep, reduce pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression, and stress.<sup>81</sup>

Forgiveness is a difficult process—especially in cases of abuse. But remember this: The Holy Spirit lives in you, empowers you, and will give you the strength you need to forgive.

*“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”*

(PHILIPPIANS 4:13 ESV)

## Why Do Some People Stay Stuck in Depression?

Depression is often a *relapsing and remitting* illness. This means it can come and go over time. There are those, however, who despite having tried various medications and treatments don’t seem to improve in their depression symptoms or level of functioning. This is known as *treatment-resistant depression*.<sup>82</sup>

Just as there are numerous causes for depression, there are a number of factors that can contribute to someone staying stuck in depression. Therefore, when it comes to depression, it is important to learn how to address the whole person.

*“Instruct the wise and they will be wiser still;  
teach the righteous and they  
will add to their learning.”*

(PROVERBS 9:9)



## Causes of Staying Stuck

**Lack of knowledge/misinformation:** A person simply might not know the signs and symptoms of depression. If depression could be mistakenly viewed as a purely physical issue, underlying emotional and spiritual causes of depression might not be addressed. Another misconception is that depression is “just a season” of difficult circumstances to endure—that it’s purely due to external factors when real internal factors contribute to depression.

**Masked depression:** In masked depression, a person has the symptoms of depression but denies feeling down or avoids discussing it. This can result in not getting proper help.

**Feeling helpless:** When people believe that they have no control over a situation or believe nothing will ever change no matter what is done or no matter how hard they try, they can sink into a deeper depression, feeling more hopeless and helpless about change. This is known as *learned helplessness*.<sup>85</sup>

**Social factors:** A person might not have access to proper health care professionals and counselors to get help. If someone lives in relative isolation and doesn’t have many relationships, they may not be encouraged to seek help from friends and family. Also, depending on their family-of-origin dynamics and culture, there may be a social stigma attached to discussing feelings of depression.

**Finances:** A person may not have adequate funds or insurance to receive proper health care.

**Spiritual factors:** Some mistakenly view depression as a sin, a major sign of weakness, or see it solely as a spiritual issue with no regard to the complex physical, mental, emotional, and social factors that can contribute to depression. Also, some might feel guilt and shame in their depression, which often results in hiding their feelings. This can lead a person to feel isolated and thus not seek help.

**Unsuccessful coping mechanisms:** A person might stay stuck in depression because of unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as using alcohol to numb the pain. They might also stay stuck because they only address one aspect of their life, such as addressing spiritual issues but not getting a physical checkup with a doctor to address physical issues.

**Stopping treatment:** Many times when people begin to feel better, they believe they can stop taking their medication or stop counseling and/or therapy. It's important to see your treatment plan through and not end it prematurely. Ensure that your treatment is complete under the supervision of a physician or professional counselor. Your goal is not a temporary fix but long-term healing.

*“Because of God’s tender mercy,  
the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
and to guide us to the path of peace.”*

(LUKE 1:78–79 NLT)

## What Is the Root Cause of Staying Stuck in Depression?

Whether the cause is physical, emotional, spiritual, or situational, depression can reveal this important truth to us: the things of this world cannot satisfy the deepest longings of our hearts. Everything in your life could be going well—your relationships, your job, your finances—yet depression can still settle in, leaving you feeling stuck in a pit of despair.

The hope needed to move forward is not found in ourselves, in our relationships, or in changing circumstances. It is found in God. He alone can satisfy your deepest needs. He will meet you where you are, lift you up, and help you walk through this time of despair.

*“I waited patiently for the LORD to help me,  
and he turned to me and heard my cry.  
He lifted me out of the pit of despair,  
out of the mud and the mire.  
He set my feet on solid ground  
and steadied me as I walked along.”*  
(PSALM 40:1–2 NLT)

### 3 Inner Needs

We all have three inner needs: the needs for love, significance, and security.<sup>84</sup>

**Love**—to know that someone is unconditionally committed to our best interest

*“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you”* (JOHN 15:12).

**Significance**—to know that our lives have meaning and purpose

*“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills his purpose for me”*  
(PSALM 57:2 ESV).

**Security**—to feel accepted and a sense of belonging

*“Whoever fears the LORD has a secure fortress, and for their children it will be a refuge”* (PROVERBS 14:26).

### The Ultimate Need-Meeter

**What do our inner needs reveal about us and our relationship with God?**

God did not create any person or position or any amount of power or possessions to meet our deepest needs. People fail us and self-effort also fails to meet our deepest needs. If a person or thing could meet all our needs, we wouldn’t need God! Our inner needs draw us into a deeper dependence on Christ and remind us that only God can satisfy

the longings of our hearts. The Lord brings people and circumstances into our lives as an extension of His care, but ultimately only He can satisfy all the needs of our hearts. The Bible says . . .

*“The LORD will guide you always;  
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land  
and will strengthen your frame.  
You will be like a well-watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters never fail.”*  
(ISAIAH 58:11)

All along, the Lord planned to meet our deepest needs for . . .

**Love**—*“I [the Lord] have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness”* (JEREMIAH 31:3).

**Significance**—*“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

**Security**—*“The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged”* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

Our needs for love, significance, and security can be legitimately met in Christ Jesus! Philippians 4:19 makes it plain, *“My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”*

**Wrong Belief:** “I am depressed over the deep hurts and disappointments in my life. They have robbed me of all joy. There’s no hope for my future, and there’s nothing I can do about it.”

**Right Belief:** “I admit I am depressed over the circumstances in my life, but Christ lives in me and gives me lasting hope in spite of my circumstances. I will rely on Him to renew my mind with His truth and renew my heart with His hope.”

*“Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.  
But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves  
but on God, who raises the dead. . . .  
On him we have set our hope  
that he will continue to deliver us.”*  
(2 CORINTHIANS 1:9–10)

## **How Can You Find Hope in the Midst of Depression?**

When you are weary, when it seems life isn’t worth living, when hope seems elusive . . . what do you need to know? You need to know your burden-bearer—you need to know Jesus. He wants to be the shepherd of your soul. His compassionate comfort extends to all those who have lost hope. He says . . .

*“Come to me,  
all you who are weary and burdened,  
and I will give you rest.”*  
(MATTHEW 11:28)

### **4 Points of God’s Plan**

Whether you’re trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you’ve done or what’s been done to you, there is hope. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will receive His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD,  
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*  
(JEREMIAH 29:11)

### 1. God’s Purpose for You: *Salvation*

- What was God’s motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (JOHN 3:16–17).
- What was Jesus’ purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (JOHN 10:10).

### 2. The Problem: *Sin*

- What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God’s standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (ROMANS 7:18–19 NLT).
- What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (ISAIAH 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (ROMANS 6:23).

### 3. God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

- Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (ROMANS 5:8).
- What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (JOHN 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (ACTS 16:31).

### 4. Your Part: *Surrender*

- Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (MATTHEW 16:24–26).
- Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (EPHESIANS 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

“God, I want a real relationship with you.  
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way  
instead of your way.  
Please forgive me for my sins.  
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross  
to pay the penalty for my sins.  
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.  
Change me from the inside out and make me the person  
you created me to be.  
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”

### **What Can You Now Expect?**

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word  
and believes him who sent me  
has eternal life and will not be judged  
but has crossed over from death to life.”*

(JOHN 5:24)



## **Silencing the Shame of Depression<sup>85</sup>**

### **The Sheila Walsh Story**

She's self-assured, smart, and successful . . . even with a dash of spiritual sparkle. In high school, the talented singer gains national notoriety in her native Scotland. Then in college, she sees so-called Christians experimenting with worldly vices but she vows to be different. This young woman dedicates her life to make a difference in the world for God.

Fame, conviction, and a TV interview eventually lead Sheila Walsh to a television career at a prominent Christian ministry in America. With a full work schedule, she wraps up each work week with traveling, speaking, and singing on weekends. The punishing pace between her professional career and personal appearances takes its toll in terms of isolation and loneliness. However, being on the stage makes Sheila feel alive and that she truly is making a difference for God.

Loneliness pushes Sheila to press more and more to reproduce the feeling she has on stage. This feeling quietly, imperceptibly numbs her to reality, turning off the warning lights that pain properly provides. Now she finds herself at a breaking point.

Mentally, she suffers memory lapses. Physically, she looks like a shell of herself . . . with the loss of 20 pounds from her already small frame.

Feeling overwhelmed and hopeless, Sheila takes a vacation to her homeland in Scotland. Time away brings temporary relief as family and friends love her, care for her, and nurse her back to health. However, returning to work resurfaces all her symptoms of stress and soon she's back on the brink of collapse.

Admitting she needs help causes her immense feelings of shame. Questions flood her mind, adding to her distress. Hasn't she been empowering others to put their trust in God? Doesn't

she comfort others by pointing the way to Christ? Does she simply need a prayer of faith for healing? These doubts deepen the darkness all around her.

Sheila concludes she cannot fix herself and finally seeks professional help. Calling a wise Christian counselor she had interviewed weeks earlier, he recommends she check into a Christian psychiatric hospital. Believing to do so would ultimately end her ministry, yet seeing no alternative, she plans to check into the hospital.

Many don't understand. They question her with unwitting accusations. "Don't you know that God will not be able to use you after this? You will never be special again." "Don't you see that you are the weak link that Satan is targeting to attack this ministry?"<sup>86</sup> Like Job's counselors, the words of some harm rather than help, turning deep darkness into the blackest of nights.

The night before Sheila is admitted to the hospital, she considers ending her life. Strolling on the beach, a place of solace in the past, she contemplates continuing walking into the waves, letting them sweep her away. She imagines the ministry would be better off with her dead. She imagines the tragedy could be better explained than her shame.

But the painful memory of her father keeps her from the waves. Sheila remembers how her father suffered a blood clot in his brain. The trauma left him different than before—so angry and impulsive he had to be locked up in a psychiatric hospital. Sadly, after he escaped the hospital, he was found dead outside. Sheila refuses to make her mother walk through such devastation again.

The next day when Sheila arrives at the hospital, the nurse who escorts her to her room begins searching and seizing items from her luggage. Soon she realizes, she is on suicide watch.

A nurse offers apologies, seeing Sheila is in severe pain. Then, left alone in her room for the night, this broken, hurting woman lies in search of God's healing hand.

The following morning, she slowly ventures to the common room. Decaffeinated coffee in hand, Sheila realizes that she's been recognized—the eyes of other patients become fixated on her, recognizing this personality from her international TV show. However, group time provides patients the opportunity to share from their lives—honesty flows and all pretense is stripped away. Openness begets vulnerability as the counselor guides the discussion around the room. Such transparency emboldens Sheila to share about the darkness surrounding her.

The hospital's chief psychiatrist runs a series of medical tests. When the results arrive, Sheila's doctor explains that she exhibits all of the classic signs of clinical depression: insomnia, loss of appetite, overwhelming hopelessness, loss of memory, inability to concentrate, lack of emotional control, acute anxiety, and an enduring, unbearable sadness.

Bloodwork reveals the levels of key neurotransmitters linked to clinical depression are low. Her body needs medication to help replace what has been lost. Initially, Sheila resists the idea of medication. Isn't her problem a lack of faith in the Lord rather than the need for medication? Sheila clearly feels a stigma and guilt about taking medication.

Finally, Sheila relents and submits to the prescribed treatment from the medical professionals. And it doesn't take long. The darkness begins to lift, allowing Sheila to begin to work through the underlying issues. Group sessions continue to bring to light unresolved pain from the past, pain that motivates some of the destructive behaviors that led to her nervous breakdown. Honesty leads to community as Sheila is truly known. Vulnerability leads to a deepening dependence on the Lord and a willingness to obey by faith.

Sheila continues her journey, completing her two-week inpatient program before leaving the hospital and returning for another two weeks of outpatient sessions. Sheila surrenders everything in her life to the Lord and finds that praying a prayer of surrender to God is easy, whereas living out the commitment of daily surrender is not as simple.

Forgiveness is an especially difficult area for Sheila to surrender. She recalls the accusations, attacks, the wounding words, the spiritual abuse against her . . . what cruel people said about her when she sought help in the hospital. Yet God shows her through the parable of the unforgiving servant that she must be merciful, just as she has been shown mercy.

Eventually, Sheila is asked to return to the television program for an interview. The moment is surreal sitting on the opposite side of the interview. She shares with the world the unedited truth about what happened to her, knowing that doing so will forever change how many viewers see her. Afterwards, Sheila feels tremendous relief as she embarks on the next phase of her life's journey: seminary.

In the years that follow, God continues to use Sheila Walsh and her story to encourage countless strugglers to seek help for their depression and anxiety. Through her ministry of music, writing, and speaking she assures them they are not alone. They can find help, healing, and hope just as she did.





# STEPS TO SOLUTION



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*“The negative  
or dark thoughts  
you experience  
do not have  
the final word  
about you or your  
circumstances.”*



Have you ever encountered a violent storm while traveling by car? You are faced with a choice: Should you keep going or pull over to a safe spot and wait it out? The storm clouds of depression leave you with very similar options: Do you battle the brutal storm alone or seek safety and help?

No matter how long the sky has been overcast or how long your soul has been downcast, you can find help and refuge in the Lord.

*“O LORD, [you are] a tower of refuge  
to the needy in distress.  
You are a refuge from the storm.”  
(ISAIAH 25:4 NLT)*

## Key Verse to Memorize

Imagine being in a room that has no windows or doors and the lights are turned off. It's pitch dark. But then a tiny bit of light is brought into that dark room. No matter where in the room you put the light, and no matter how small the light, the darkness cannot hide the light. And with light comes hope.

As you walk through the darkness of depression into the dawn, you can have a hope that does not change with shifting circumstances. Like King David who battled feelings of depression, you can discover true and lasting hope—a hope found in God.

*“Why am I so depressed?  
Why this turmoil within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will still praise Him,  
my Savior and my God.”  
(PSALM 42:5 HCSB)*



## Key Passage to Read

When the prophet Jeremiah wrote the words below, his people and his city had just been attacked and destroyed by an enemy country. The book of Lamentations expresses the profound grief and depression of the people of Israel.

In chapter one, Jeremiah describes Jerusalem as a widow, saying, *“She sobs through the night; tears stream down her cheeks . . . there is no one left to comfort her . . . All she can do is groan and hide her face”* (Lamentations 1:2, 8 NLT). Jeremiah himself feels much the same way when he laments, *“For all these things I weep; tears flow down my cheeks. No one is here to comfort me; any who might encourage me are far away”* (Lamentations 1:16 NLT).

Yet despite the grim circumstances, constant tears, and intense suffering, Jeremiah finds something to give him perspective and keeps moving forward. He shows us that even in the darkest of circumstances, even in the depths of despair, we can turn to the Lord and walk in the light of His hope.

### Lamentations 3:19–26 (NLT)

*“The thought of my suffering . . . is bitter beyond words.*

<sup>20</sup> *I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.*

<sup>21</sup> *Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this:*

<sup>22</sup> *The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease.*

<sup>23</sup> *Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.*

<sup>24</sup> *I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my inheritance;  
therefore, I will hope in him!’*

<sup>25</sup> *The LORD is good to those who depend on him,  
to those who search for him.*

<sup>26</sup> *So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the LORD.”*

## The Hope Needed to Move Forward

Acknowledge your pain and suffering  
to God and others. ....v. 19

Allow yourself time to grieve and process  
your emotions. .... v. 20

Remember that there is always hope. ....v. 21

Realize that God’s love for you never ends. .... v. 22

Rejoice in God’s daily faithfulness and mercy  
toward you. .... v. 23

Speak God’s words of truth and hope to yourself. .... v. 24

Keep relying on and looking to God, who  
is good to you. .... v. 25

Know that salvation, healing, and growth  
come from the Lord. .... v. 26

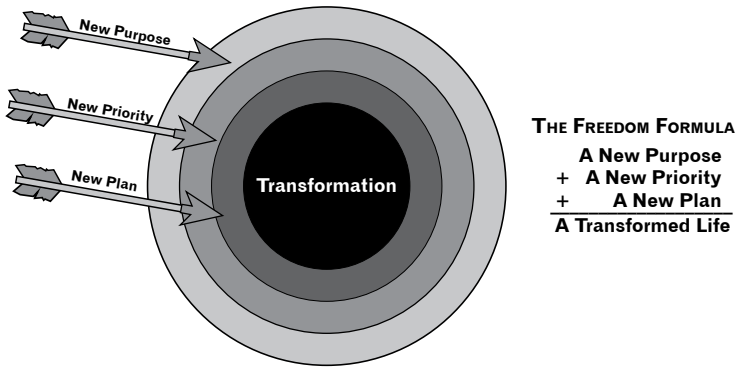
## How to Have a Transformed Life

When depression leaves your heart feeling pressed down, turn to the Lord and find His formula for freedom and how to live a transformed life in Christ.

*“We all . . . are being transformed into his image  
with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord.”*

(2 CORINTHIANS 3:18)

## Reaching the Target: Transformation!



### Target #1—A New Purpose

**God’s purpose for me** is to be conformed to the character of Christ.

*“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (ROMANS 8:29).*

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to be conformed to the character of Christ.”

### Target #2—A New Priority

**God’s priority for me** is to change my thinking.

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (ROMANS 12:2).*

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to line up my thinking with God’s thinking.”

### Target #3—A New Plan

**God’s plan for me** is to rely on Christ’s strength, not my strength, to be all He created me to be.

*“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (PHILIPPIANS 4:13 NKJV).*

— “I’ll do whatever it takes to fulfill His plan in His strength.”

## My Personalized Plan

Depression can hide the light of day from my view and leave me in the darkness of despair. A sense of hopelessness lingers. But amidst the heaviness and dark clouds of depression, God wants to lift my heavy heart and show me there is hope.

*“There is surely a future hope for you,  
and your hope will not be cut off.”*

(PROVERBS 23:18)

Because depression can impact every area of my life, I must address it from multiple angles. As I walk through the darkness of depression into the light of dawn, **I will . . .**

**Recognize** that my depression is real.

- I will acknowledge my feelings of sadness, anger, hopelessness, and other overwhelming emotions.
- I will not live in denial about my depression but will educate myself about depression and seek help to move forward.

*“I am suffering and in pain. Rescue me, O God, by your saving power”*  
(PSALM 69:29 NLT).

**Remember** that my pain is temporary.

- I will put my pain in perspective and acknowledge that God can help me.
- I will remember that God will one day put an end to all pain and suffering.

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever”*  
(REVELATION 21:4 NLT).

**Reaffirm** the importance of caring for my physical needs.

- I will talk with my doctor about my depression and get regular medical checkups.

- I will eat nutritious meals, get adequate sleep each night, and exercise regularly.

*“Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come”*  
(1 TIMOTHY 4:8).

**Restrict** the amount of stress in my life.

- I will identify the environmental or situational factors related to my depression, such as difficult life events, losses I’ve experienced, and the various sources of stress in my life.
- I will seek to adjust to stressful life events and deal with my losses in a healthy, productive manner.

*“Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer”*  
(PSALM 4:1).

**Reveal** my emotional needs.

- I will talk with a trusted friend or family member, counselor, and especially with God about my emotions.
- I will honestly confront my feelings and process them with God’s help.

*“I call to you, LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you”* (PSALM 88:9).

**Restrain** negative thought patterns.

- I will acknowledge negative self-talk and lies I believe about myself or my situation.
- I will replace negative thoughts with God’s truth by meditating on His Word.

*“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things”* (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).

**Renew** my commitment to get my spiritual needs met.

- I will cultivate my relationship with God through reflective prayer and Bible reading.

- I will attend church regularly to receive encouragement from God’s Word and to be with other believers.

*“All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer” (ACTS 2:42 NLT).*

## How to Address Depression Physically

When the “Check Engine” light comes on in your car, it’s important to take a look under the hood to see what’s going on. It may be something obvious like a loose fuel cap, or it could be any number of more serious mechanical issues.

Similarly, depression may be a signal to your body that it needs a checkup. It could be that something physical is contributing to your depression, so talking with a doctor is important. Also, you may need to consider what new habits you want to begin or what old habits you may need to change or stop in order to move forward to a healthier state of well-being.

*“I pray that you may enjoy good health  
and that all may go well with you,  
even as your soul is getting along well.”*

(3 JOHN 2)

### Physical Factors

#### Get a physical checkup

Schedule a medical checkup with your doctor and talk about . . .

- *Symptoms of your depression*—Describe your mood and physical symptoms to your doctor and how long they have been occurring. Be specific.

- *Medications*—Ask your doctor to evaluate all of the medications you are taking to see if any of them might be contributing to your depression. If they are, ask if another medication can be prescribed or if any medications need to be discontinued.
- *Illnesses and injuries*—Talk with your doctor about any illness, disease, or medical condition you have that could be contributing to your depression. Let your physician know about any injuries you may have had, especially head injuries, that could be a contributing factor.
- *Hormones*—(Women) Address any issues related to hormone changes you are experiencing that can lead to depression, such as severe premenstrual pain, postpartum depression (following childbirth), perimenopause (around menopause), or puberty (for adolescents and teens).
- *Drug and alcohol use*—Let your doctor know about any alcohol use or recreational drugs you may be using. These can increase the risk of depression and are potentially dangerous.
- *Diet, sleep, and exercise*—If you are struggling with any of these life activities, ask your primary care physician to refer you to a specialist who can guide you in making needed lifestyle changes.

*“Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also” (PSALM 31:9 ESV).*

### **Eat healthily**<sup>87</sup>

Food (especially junk food) can be used to self-medicate when you’re depressed. A poor diet often contributes to additional health problems, which in turn can make the symptoms of depression worse. What you eat can stress your body, so it’s vital to eat balanced, nutritious meals.

- Limit caffeine and nicotine, which can make you jittery and interfere with sleep
- Limit simple sugars, sweets, alcohol, and fried/processed foods
- Avoid foods you are allergic to (which cause additional stress to your body)
- Drink six to eight glasses of water each day

- Eat three to five servings of fresh fruits and vegetables every day
- Keep your blood sugar stable

*“He gives food to every creature. His love endures forever” (PSALM 136:25).*

### **Exercise**

Exercise can lift your mood as it causes the release of endorphins (a natural mood elevator). Identify exercises you are able to do and enjoy doing, make a plan to exercise regularly, and do your best to stick to it. You may find it helpful to recruit an exercise “buddy”—someone you can encourage but also who you can be encouraged by, set goals with, and hold and be held accountable to. Ask a friend to join you when exercising, even if you’re just going for a walk. Good forms of exercise include . . .

- *Cardio and aerobic exercises* (walking, jogging, running, swimming, biking, hiking, dancing, jumping rope)
- *Strength training and calisthenics* (lifting weights, climbing stairs, doing push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks)
- *Balance and flexibility training* (yoga, stretching)
- *Playing a sport* (basketball, handball, racquetball, tennis, ping-pong, soccer)

*“I discipline my body and keep it under control” (1 CORINTHIANS 9:27 ESV).*

### **Get plenty of rest**

A lack of sleep can contribute to depression, and depression often leads to trouble sleeping. This creates an unhealthy sleep cycle. Set a regular time to go to sleep and to rise. If you find that you are unable to sleep, try reading a book or listening to relaxing music or sounds of nature (waves, waterfalls).

Avoid the use of electronic screens (televisions, smart phones, tablets, computers) in bed. These keep your mind from resting, making it more difficult for you to fall asleep. Also avoid stimulants such as caffeine and nicotine for at least four hours before you go to bed. If insomnia is a persistent problem, talk with your doctor about going to a sleep clinic for an evaluation.

*“God gives rest to his loved ones” (PSALM 127:2 NLT).*



### **Avoid harmful substances**

It is not uncommon for those who battle depression to have a problem with substance abuse. And it is equally true that those who have a substance abuse problem are more likely to be depressed. This can be a dangerous, vicious cycle. Alcohol acts as a depressant to the central nervous system, increasing feelings of fatigue, lethargy, drowsiness, and depression. Drinking alcohol to numb the pain of depression doesn't work; it actually amplifies feelings of depression. Mixing antidepressants with alcohol is a dangerous practice, can impair your health and mental functioning, and can be fatal in some cases.

If you are battling depression and have a problem with substance abuse (drugs or alcohol), talk honestly with your doctor and seek help for both the depression and the substance abuse.<sup>88</sup>

*“You must honor God with your body” (1 CORINTHIANS 6:20 NLT).*

### **Manage stress**

Depression is often the result of over-stress. And stress can worsen the symptoms of depression. Avoid activities that make you overly fatigued. Set aside time for relaxation, meditation, and prayer. Here are a few ideas to help you reduce negative stress in your life:

- *Music*—Listen to music that lifts your mood and gives you hope (e.g., praise or worship music or other inspirational melodies).
- *Journaling*—Write down your honest, unedited thoughts on a regular basis.
- *Massage therapy*—Consider getting a massage when you feel stressed and your muscles are tight.
- *Pets*—Giving and receiving affection from an animal can lower blood pressure, relieve stress, and improve your mood.
- *Laughter*—Read funny stories, play a fun game, watch a funny movie, or talk with a friend or family member who makes you laugh. The Bible reminds us that a *“cheerful heart is good medicine”* (Proverbs 17:22).
- *Hobbies and social activities*—Stay engaged with others. Be actively involved in events away from your home (go to lunch with a friend, schedule a game night). Accept invitations to be with others even if you don't initially feel like it.

- *Sunshine*—Enjoy time outside on a sunny day—it can improve your mood. Without enough sun exposure, your serotonin levels can dip. Spending time in the sun while enjoying God’s beautiful creation provides double the benefit.

“From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the LORD is to be praised” (PSALM 113:3).

## Seasonal Affective Disorder

**Question:** “Recently I moved to a town that has gloomy weather, and now I feel down. Everything else in my life is positive. What can I do? It’s as if the fog outside my window has invaded my mind and muddled my thinking.”

**Answer:** You are likely experiencing *Seasonal Affective Disorder*, or SAD, which is a winter depression associated with deprivation of sunlight. SAD, also called the “winter blues,” typically begins in the fall when the days get shorter and there’s less sunlight, and ends in the spring as the days get longer and there’s more daylight. Symptoms of SAD include excessive sleep, lethargy, overeating, and depression.

SAD is thought to be connected with the body’s production of melatonin, which regulates our sleep cycles. Common treatments for SAD include light therapy (natural sunlight or artificial light), medication, and/or counseling. If you think you might have SAD, check with your doctor about a diagnosis and treatment options.<sup>89</sup>

“Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun.”

(ECCLESIASTES 11:7)

## Medicine vs. Faith

**Question:** “Does taking medicine for depression show a lack of faith?”

**Answer:** No. Some people may be able to manage their depression and overcome it without medication, others might take medication temporarily to relieve severe symptoms, and still others might need to take certain medications long term to make up for a biochemical imbalance.

Unfortunately, many Christians fear being labeled unspiritual if they seek medical help for their depression, yet by doing nothing, they can suffer needlessly. Just as there is no stigma attached to taking medication for a thyroid imbalance or diabetes, neither is there any shame in seeking medical help to correct a biochemical imbalance affecting your mind and moods.

While medication may be needed for a period of time to “level out” fluctuating mood swings, it should not be used to avoid dealing with issues, numb pain, or as an escape or “quick fix.” Medication simply is one more tool God can use to help if you suffer from depression.

When trying to manage depression you can feel like you’re on a boat in the middle of the ocean trying to navigate a turbulent storm. Medication can help calm the storm . . . *but you still need to get to land.* That’s where medication can help.

Besides taking medication, there are other things you can do to further manage depression, such as: seek counseling, adjust negative thoughts and beliefs, process your pain and losses, address emotional and spiritual needs. Striking the right balance of treatment options is unique to each individual and should be explored in conjunction with ongoing counseling and medical supervision.

If you're considering using medication, do some research and talk with your doctor. Be sure to ask how long you will need to take medication and the potential short-term and long-term side effects (as well as any potential interactions) of each drug your doctor might prescribe. You could also talk with others who have used medication to help manage depression and get their feedback.

The decision of whether or not to use medication is one best made with the recommendation of a qualified physician who closely monitors and manages its administration.

Ezekiel 47:12 describes *"leaves for healing."* Medicine is a gracious gift from God to help ease our discomfort and improve our health.

*"Every good and perfect gift is from above,  
coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights."*

(JAMES 1:17)

## Stopping Medication

**Question:** "Although I've struggled for a long time with bipolar, right now, I feel really good. Should I stop taking my medicine?"

**Answer:** No. The reason you feel so good is because your medicine is working. If you stop the medication, the good feeling could soon be replaced with highs and lows that are typical of bipolar. Consult with your doctor about any changes in medication. Ask God for strength to do what is right for your overall well-being.

*"The LORD gives strength to his people;  
the LORD blesses his people with peace."*

(PSALM 29:11)

## **Stalked by Sadness. Freed by Faith.**

### **Michael Gerson's Story<sup>90</sup>**

*Adapted from a sermon Michael Gerson delivered on February 17, 2019, at the Washington National Cathedral and published, in part, the following day by The Washington Post as a Religion/Perspectives column.*

At first, the words on the page seem to contradict the malady of his mind. How could such a seasoned wordsmith and nationally syndicated columnist for *The Washington Post*, possibly struggle with and be hospitalized for depression? Yet as he stands before the congregation, Michael Gerson shares the stunning reality of his recent hospitalization for treatment of what he calls his “insidious, chronic disease”—*depression*.

Like nearly one in 10 Americans, Michael faces his diagnosis of depression caused by a chemical imbalance in his brain that is distorting not only his thought processes, but also his way of life. His depression, like a metastasized tumor, sends him into a downward spiral and a dungeon of despair accompanied by these frightening thoughts: “You are a burden to your friends.” “You have no future.” “No one would miss you.” He knows these thoughts aren’t actually true, but they certainly feel true.

With patience and the right medication, the fog in Michael’s brain begins to thin. And with the help of doctors and nurses and acquaintances who share his same symptoms, he begins to see a glimmer of hope as his once small world begins to grow larger and comes more into focus.

During his hospitalization for depression, Michael rediscovers his faith as he reads his journal entry from May 2, 2002, where he writes:

It has probably been a month since some prompting of God led me to a more disciplined Christian life. One afternoon I was led to the Cathedral, the place I feel most secure in the world. I saw the beautiful sculpture in the Bishop's Garden—the prodigal son melting into his father's arms—and the inscription how he fell on his neck, and kissed him. I felt tears and calm, like something important had happened to me and in me. . . . My goals are pretty clear. I want to stop thinking about myself all the time. I want to be a mature disciple of Jesus, not a casual believer. I want to be God's man.

Although he feels he failed at these goals in a variety of ways, Michael's bout of depression reaffirms his conviction that faith is staking your life on the "rumor of grace." And with faith, ". . . even when strength fails [as it often does in depression], there is perseverance. And when perseverance fails, there is hope. And even when hope fails, there is love. And love never fails."

"[Because] . . . *God is love.*"

(1 JOHN 4:8 ESV)

## How to Confront Situational Depression and Grieve Your Losses

The only thing in life that doesn't change *is* change. It's an irrefutable constant. And there's nothing that requires us to adjust our lives and manage change more than trials, hardships, and unexpected life events. Consider the change needed to adjust to the loss of a loved one, a job change, a broken relationship, or a new season of life such as parenting or retirement. These can be overwhelming and lead to *situational depression* if we don't adjust to them properly.

To adjust to life's changes, you first need to process them by grieving your losses. This can be difficult, but it is what will put you on the path toward healing. The following "Timeline Exercise" will help you process any losses or unresolved grief in your life. Take a few minutes now to complete it.<sup>91</sup>

As you work through this exercise, remember that although things change, God's love for you never does. He is always with you, to help you in times of trouble.

*"God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble."  
(PSALM 46:1)*

### **Timeline Exercise**

**Draw** a long line on a sheet of paper representing your life.

**Divide** the timeline into three sections—childhood, youth, and adulthood.

**Denote** the major changes in your life. Draw short lines extending from the timeline and write short phrases by each line that describe significant life events—both positive and negative—including all major hurts and griefs, such as:

- Birth of siblings
- Change of school
- Lost friendships
- Loss of pet
- Abuse (verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual)

- Graduation
- Broken engagement
- Abortion
- Job loss/new job
- Death of loved ones
- Marriage
- Miscarriage/childlessness/infertility
- New baby
- Legal troubles
- Incarceration (yourself or a loved one)
- Relocation
- “Empty nest” (children leave home)
- Separation/divorce
- Financial loss
- Birth of grandchildren
- Illness/injuries
- Retirement

**Determine** whether there are any sad experiences or significant losses or hurts you have never faced or over which you have never grieved, such as:

- Abandonment
- Abortion
- Divorce of parents
- Failures
- False accusations
- Rejection
- Unjust criticism
- Unrealized dreams or goals

**Discover** the source of your masked pain through sincere and open prayer.



## Prayer for Discovery

“Dear God, I come to you for help.  
Please calm my heart.  
Show me where I need healing.  
Bring to my mind any buried pain.  
Surface any hidden hurt and the  
circumstances that caused it.  
I ask you to help heal my wounded heart.  
I know that you have the power to  
make me whole and set me free.  
In Jesus’s name, Amen.”

**Define** the emotional impact each event has had on you with specific statements, such as:

- “I am grieving over . . .”
- “I was humiliated when . . .”
- “I felt abandoned by . . .”
- “I was really hurt when . . .”
- “I’m determined to never let (circumstance) happen again.”

*“I am weary in my moaning”* (PSALM 6:6 ESV).

**Decide** now to let yourself feel deep, genuine grief over your losses.

*“Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise”* (JEREMIAH 17:14).

**Defuse** the power these events have had over your emotions by sharing your feelings with someone you trust and with God.

*“Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you”* (PSALM 55:22 ESV).

**Deepen** your dependence on the Lord to set you emotionally free.

*“In my distress I prayed to the LORD, and the LORD answered me and set me free”* (PSALM 118:5 NLT).

## Sample Timeline (Woman, age 55)

Life Stages	Age	Events
<b>Childhood</b>		– Birth
	1	– Father abandoned family, parents divorced
	5	– Mother remarried, stepfather abused me
	6	– Started school, brother born
	8	– Moved to new city, new school
	10	– Moved again, new school but no friends
<b>Youth</b>	13	– Started junior high school
	15	– Moved to new house
	17	– Graduated from high school
	17	– Cousin killed in auto accident
	18	– Grandmother died (only person I could count on)
	18	– Started college
<b>Adulthood</b>	19	– Married to leave home, daughter born
	22	– Pregnant, husband left, son born
	23	– Divorced, ran away, new job, new city
	25	– Attempted suicide
	27	– Remarried, father and two uncles died
	31	– Gave life to Christ, became a Christian
	37	– Daughter graduated high school, left for college
	42	– Daughter returned pregnant and unmarried
	43	– Became a grandmother
	45	– Son graduated and moved out, daughter married and moved out, empty nest
	48	– New job, new career
	52	– Husband lost business of 20 years
	52	– Mother moved in with us
	53	– Home foreclosure, more financial problems
	55	– Mother died (my best friend)

## Anniversary Depression

**Question:** “What is anniversary depression?”

**Answer:** Anniversary depression is a yearly, recurring depression related to the anniversary date of a traumatic event. This recurrent depression may sometimes occur more frequently than yearly; it can recur on a day of the month or with the memory of a shared event. Triggered by painful memories, this involuntary, emotional reaction lasts only for a limited period of time. Examples:

- Widowed men and women can have anniversary depression around the date of their mate’s death.
- Many women experience depression each year around the anniversary of the abortion of their child or the anniversary of placing their child into another home for adoption.

### Ways to Deal with Anniversary Depression

**Understand** that your depression is rooted in a real loss from your past and that what you are experiencing is not uncommon.

**Acknowledge** your emotions. Consider writing down all your painful memories and process them with a helpful person you can trust.

**Release** your pain to the Lord through prayer and receive His comfort and healing.

“Lord, you know the pain I’ve felt over  
( specifically list each hurt, each failure,  
and each person associated with the pain ).

I now release all this pain into your hands.

Set me free in my soul and spirit.

Thank you for wanting to heal me and make me whole.

In your precious name I pray. Amen.”

**Anticipate** any upcoming anniversary and plan ahead for ways to counter possible depression. For instance, plan a trip with someone or arrange a social event so you will not be alone and your mind is focused on something other than the past event.

**Turn** your anniversary date into an occasion that produces new, positive memories by serving others in a meaningful way. Remember, the Lord can take our heartaches and use them for good.

*“You have taken away my clothes of mourning  
and clothed me with joy.”*

(PSALM 30:11 NLT)

## How to Handle Unresolved Anger

Anger is a God-given emotion that often surfaces when a need or expectation is not met. Any type of loss, abuse, or tragedy can leave a person angry for years and be directed at others, themselves, at God, or at the world or life in general. Some people bottle up their anger and rarely, if ever, express it. Over time, the pent-up and unresolved anger can turn inward and lead to depression.

Addressing your anger is key to overcoming depression. Your anger may not surface in obvious ways, like yelling or slamming a door, but its presence might permeate your thoughts, emotions, decisions, interactions, and relationships. It may present as irritability, self-condemnation, negative self-talk, or passive-aggressive behavior. If left unaddressed, this buried and unresolved anger will continue to impact your life in negative ways.

With God’s help, you can use your anger to propel you to action—to take steps toward healing, growth, and peace.

“LORD my God, I called to you for help,  
and you healed me.”  
(PSALM 30:2)

## Identify the Source of Your Anger

The first step toward overcoming anger is identifying the source of it. Your anger may be the result of . . .

**Hurt:** Your heart is wounded.<sup>92</sup>

Everyone has an inner need for *unconditional love*.<sup>93</sup> When you experience rejection or emotional pain of any kind, anger can become a protective wall keeping people, pain, and *hurt* away.

“I’ll never forgive him for the pain he caused me.”

**Injustice:** Your right is violated.<sup>94</sup>

Everyone has a sense of right and wrong, fair and unfair, just and unjust. When you perceive that an *injustice* has occurred against you or others (especially those you love), you may feel angry. If you hold on to the offense, the unresolved anger can begin to take root in your heart.

“I felt completely violated, used, and taken advantage of—like I had no control over what happened to me.”

**Fear:** Your future is threatened.<sup>95</sup>

Everyone is created with an inner need for *security*.<sup>96</sup> When you begin to worry, feel threatened, or get angry because of a change in circumstances, you may be responding to *fear*.

“If I lose this job, I have no idea how I’ll get by or how I’ll support my family.”

**Frustration:** Your effort is not accepted.<sup>97</sup>

Everyone has an inner need for *significance*.<sup>98</sup> When your efforts are thwarted or do not meet your own personal expectations, your sense of significance can be threatened. *Frustration* over unmet expectations of yourself or of others is a major source of anger.

“I was always told, directly or indirectly, ‘You’re not good enough. You’ll never be enough. You’ll always be a disappointment and a failure.’”

One way to help you uncover the source of your anger is to write down your thoughts. Take four pieces of paper and label one “Hurt,” one “Injustice,” one “Fear,” and one “Frustration.” Then write down every instance of each that you can remember from your life. Invite the Lord into the process with you. He cares about you and wants to help you overcome your anger.

*“Give all your worries and cares to God,  
for he cares about you.”*

(1 PETER 5:7 NLT)

### **Confront Unresolved Anger**

After uncovering the source of your anger, take the following action steps to dig deeper and release your anger:

**Ask** yourself the following questions the next time anger wells up in your heart:

- What am I feeling: hurt, injustice, fear, or frustration?
- Did I have any of these same feelings when I was a child (or earlier in life)?

**Identify** how your present anger is connected to your unresolved past anger.

- Ask God to reveal buried hurts, injustices, fears, and frustrations from your past.
- Ask Him to reveal the relationship between your past and present anger.

**Talk** with someone to gain clarity about your anger.

- Ask close family members and friends what they think makes you angry and how they know when you are angry.

- Ask them about your history of anger and how they think it has impacted you and others.

**Forgive** and seek forgiveness.

- Forgive and pray for those toward whom you have harbored anger.
- Ask forgiveness from anyone you have offended by your anger.

**Appropriately express** your anger.

- Journal your honest thoughts and feelings or pray openly and honestly to God about your experiences.
- Talk with a trusted friend, family member, counselor, or pastor about your anger. Consider joining an anger management class or group to learn how to process and express your anger.

**Assume** personal responsibility for your present feelings of anger.

- Remember that you have a choice in how you respond to your anger and your circumstances.
- Determine to make changes and decide what habits you need to begin, change, or stop to help you overcome your anger.

**Mediate** on God's Word to find peace when you're angry.

- Study what God's Word says about anger (see Psalm 145:8–9; James 1:19–20; Ephesians 4:26–32; Colossians 3:8).
- Memorize passages that speak of God's love for you (see Jeremiah 31:3; Lamentations 3:21–23; John 3:16; Romans 8:38–39).

**Make** it a practice to release your anger every time you feel it.

- Give yourself a time-out to relax and regain composure when you begin feeling angry.
- Turn to the Lord and pray . . .

“Heavenly Father, thank you for loving me.  
Thank you for caring about me.  
Since you know everything,  
you know the strong sense of  
( hurt, injustice, fear, and/or frustration )  
I have felt about ( name or situation ).  
Thank you for understanding my anger.  
Right now, I release all of my anger to you.  
I trust you with my future.  
In Christ’s name I pray. Amen.”

## Overcoming Depression through Forgiveness

**Question:** “Is forgiveness always right? I was severely hurt by someone I completely trusted and now I find myself depressed.”

**Answer:** The thought of forgiving someone who has wronged you may seem outrageous at first. Forgiving sometimes seems unthinkable, unfair, and impossibly wrong. The pain and damage caused by others can leave long-lasting wounds and lingering consequences. Holding on to bitterness, anger, and other negative thoughts and emotions can make you irritable and lead to depression.

Although forgiveness is difficult and can seem unreasonable, the Bible instructs us: “*Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger . . . forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you*” (Ephesians 4:31–32 NLT).



Choosing to forgive those who hurt you is not about letting them “off the hook” or ignoring the pain and damage that’s been done. Forgiveness is about walking in God’s grace, living in freedom, and moving forward with hope. Forgiveness is a difficult process but God is with you every step of the way to help you and heal you.

*“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.”*

(PSALM 147:3)

### How to Forgive

If you need help forgiving someone, follow these steps to forgiveness:

**Make a list** of all the offenses caused by your offender.

**Imagine** a meat hook curved around your neck and a burlap bag hanging from the hook, laying against your chest. Then picture the pain of those offenses represented as rocks dropped into the burlap bag. Some are small, some are large, but all are heavy. Now you have a bag full of heavy rocks—rocks of resentment, anger, revenge—hanging from the hook around your neck.

**Ask yourself:** “Do I really want to carry the weight of all this pain with me for the rest of my life?”

Are you willing to take the pain from the past and release it into the hands of the Lord? If so, let go of your pain and release it all to Jesus.

**Visualize** taking the one who hurt or offended you off of your emotional “hook” and placing that person onto God’s hook.

**Remember**, the Lord knows how to deal with your offender in His time and in His way. God says, “*It is mine to avenge; I will repay*” (Romans 12:19).

**Release** your offender to God in prayer.

### Prayer to Forgive Your Offender

“Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about  
how much my heart has been hurt.  
You know the pain I have felt because of  
( list every offense ).

Right now I release all that pain into your hands.  
Thank you, Lord, for dying on the cross for me  
and extending your forgiveness to me.  
As an act of my will, I choose to forgive ( name ).

Right now, I move ( name ) off of my  
emotional hook to your hook.  
I refuse all thoughts of revenge.

I trust that in your time and in your way  
you will deal with ( name ) as you see fit.

And, Lord, thank you for giving me your power to forgive  
so that I can be set free.

In your precious name I pray. Amen.”

## How to Change Negative Thoughts

Like Alice falling down the rabbit hole and spiraling helplessly down into “Wonderland,” you may feel like you’ve joined her on her journey as your negative thoughts spin out of control, sucking you into a dark, emotional abyss.

Frequent, negative thoughts can send anyone into a downward spiral. This is especially true for those who are already battling depression. But the negative or dark thoughts you experience do not have the final word about you or your circumstances . . . God does. His Word speaks of His love for you and the hope you have in Christ.

What your mind dwells on can be a key ingredient to overcoming depression. So fill your thinking with God's thinking. Fill your mind with God's perspective and promises. How? Romans 12:2 says you are "*transformed by the renewing of your mind.*"

Healing and transformation begins when you learn to see yourself and your situation through God's eyes, believing what *He* says. Therefore, it is important to identify your negative, dark thoughts and replace them with the light of God's truth.

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*

(PSALM 119:105 ESV)

### **Bring Light into the Darkness**

**Write several scriptures on index cards** and read them at different times throughout the day.

By taking a careful look at what God's Word says, you can discover God's purpose and promises and receive guidance, encouragement, and hope in your suffering.

The Bible says, "*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope*" (Romans 15:4).

**Make a list**—"My Thanksgiving List"—of seven good things in your life and spend time every day thanking God for them specifically.

The Bible says, "*Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

- The next week, add seven more specifics to your list for which you can thank God.
- Keep adding to your list week after week. As your list grows, so will your optimism and hope.

### **Bring light into the darkness.**

As a first line of defense against depression, write out your negative thoughts. Then as a rebuttal, write out what God says about those

negative thoughts and the next time a negative thought comes to mind, replace it with the light of God's truth.

– **Darkness:** “I have no hope.”

**Light:** “The Lord gives me hope.”

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”* (JEREMIAH 29:11).

– **Darkness:** “I can't get through this.”

**Light:** “The Lord will help me through this.”

*“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”* (ISAIAH 41:10).

– **Darkness:** “I can't escape this darkness.”

**Light:** “The Lord will bring light into my darkness.”

*“My God turns my darkness into light”* (PSALM 18:28).

– **Darkness:** “I have no place to go . . . no refuge.”

**Light:** “The Lord will be my refuge.”

*“Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge”* (PSALM 16:1).

– **Darkness:** “I'm in too much trouble, and have no one to help me.”

**Light:** “The Lord is my help in trouble.”

*“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble”* (PSALM 46:1).

– **Darkness:** “I can't help feeling restless.”

**Light:** “God gives me rest.”

*“Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him”* (PSALM 62:1).

– **Darkness:** “I don't know what steps I should take.”

**Light:** “The Lord will direct my path.”

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight”* (PROVERBS 3:5–6).

– **Darkness:** “My burden is too much to bear.”

**Light:** “God will carry my burden.”

*“Praise be to the LORD, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens”* (PSALM 68:19).

— **Darkness:** “I’m afraid to be around people.”

**Light:** “The Lord will give me strength to not be afraid.”

*“The LORD is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?” (PSALM 27:1).*

— **Darkness:** “I am shaken to the core.”

**Light:** “The Lord will keep me from being shaken.”

*“I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken” (PSALM 16:8).*

You may have negative thoughts other than those listed above. Write them down and then look in God’s Word to discover a passage or a truth that speaks directly to that thought. God wants you to *“take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Over time, as you replace the negative, dark thoughts with God’s truth, you will be transformed by His Word.

*“Do not conform to the  
pattern of this world,  
but be transformed by the  
renewing of your mind.  
Then you will be able to test  
and approve what God’s will is—  
his good, pleasing and perfect will.”  
(ROMANS 12:2)*

## How to Overcome Paralysis of the Will

Have you ever decided you wanted to do something . . . you’re determined to do it . . . but then you experience paralysis of the will? People with prolonged depression often feel this way. Jesus captured it perfectly when He said, *“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41).

It's true that life comes with inevitable storms of discouragement, but you can avoid letting your mind become drenched with discouragement. You can choose how to respond to your circumstances through an act of your will. After an initial downpour of discouragement and despair, you can either choose to stay in bed, procrastinate, and rely on yourself for relief, or you can choose to step out and get under God's umbrella of protection and rely on Him. The choice is yours.

So . . . will you choose to trust the Lord and walk in His truth?

*"I have chosen the way of truth;  
I have set Your ordinances before me."  
(PSALM 119:30 HCSB)*

### **Choices You Can Make Even If You Don't Feel Like It**

Sometimes the smallest changes can be the most helpful in overcoming paralysis of the will. You can *choose* to . . .

**Listen** to uplifting and inspirational music.

**Read** a passage of Scripture or an uplifting, helpful book.

**Set** and achieve small, attainable goals each day.

**Make** a nutritious meal.

**Go** for a walk outside or exercise at the gym.

**Keep** your living environment clean, uncluttered, and cheerful.

**Resist** spending long periods of time on your phone or tablet or in front of the TV.

**Refuse** to introduce negative or evil activities into your life.

**Write** notes of appreciation or encouragement to others.

**Look** for something thoughtful and kind to do for someone each day.

*“Encourage one another daily.”*  
(HEBREWS 3:13)

### **Choose to Put God’s Word into Action**

Making good choices will become more automatic as you learn to apply God’s Word to your life.

*“Rejoice always,  
<sup>17</sup> pray continually,  
<sup>18</sup> give thanks in all circumstances;  
for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.  
<sup>19</sup> Do not quench the Spirit.  
<sup>20</sup> Do not treat prophecies with contempt  
<sup>21</sup> but test them all; hold on to what is good,  
<sup>22</sup> reject every kind of evil.  
<sup>23</sup> May God himself, the God of peace,  
sanctify you through and through.  
May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept  
blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
<sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”*  
(1 THESSALONIANS 5:16–24)

**Choose** to write down a list of all the positives in your life and continually focus on them.

–“*Rejoice always,*” .....v. 16

**Choose** to talk to God about everything.

–“*pray continually,*” .....v. 17

**Choose** to thank God for what you are learning right now.

–“*give thanks in all circumstances . . .*” ..... v. 18

**Choose** to change when God’s Spirit convicts you to change.

–“*Do not quench the Spirit.*” .....v. 19

**Choose** to take God’s Word seriously.

– *“Do not treat prophecies with contempt”*..... v. 20

**Choose** to ask, “Is this right in God’s sight?”

– *“but test them all;”*..... v. 21

**Choose** to do right, even when you are tempted to do wrong.

– *“hold on to what is good,”*..... v. 21

**Choose** to turn immediately from temptation.

– *“reject every kind of evil.”* ..... v. 22

**Choose** to see how God has “set you apart” (sanctified you) to be who He intended you to be.

– *“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.”* ..... v. 23

**Choose** to commit your whole being to doing what God created you to do.

– *“May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless. . . .”* ..... v. 23

**Choose** to rely on God’s power to do what you are called to do.

– *“The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”* ..... v. 24

### **Choose to Be Directed by the Holy Spirit**

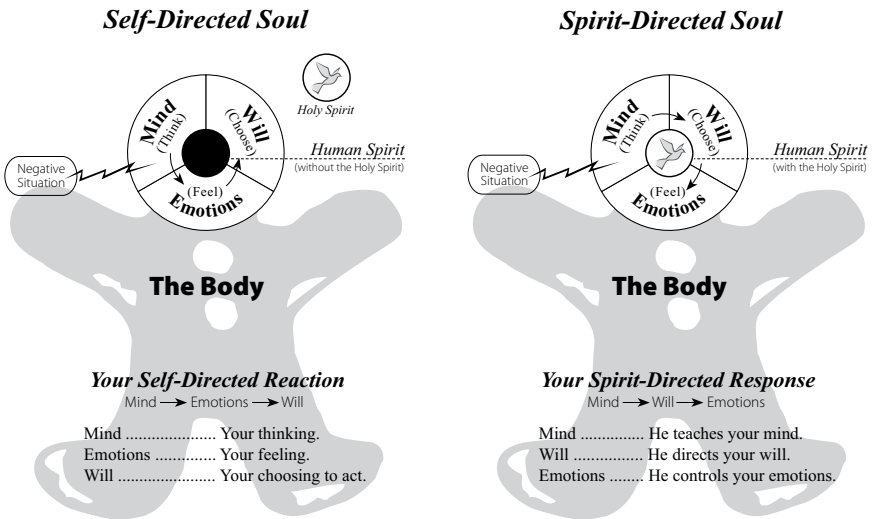
Without the Holy Spirit empowering us from within, it’s easy to let our emotions run our lives. As shown in the “Self-Directed Soul” illustration on the next page, when we encounter a negative situation, our thoughts will influence our emotions, and our emotions will ultimately drive our will—our choices.



The Lord doesn't want us to be ruled by our emotions, He wants us to be controlled by His Spirit. God's plan is for us to *"be transformed by the renewing of [our mind]"* (Romans 12:2). The Bible says, *"Let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes"* (Ephesians 4:23 NLT).

As illustrated in the "Spirit-Directed Soul" graphic, when we encounter a negative situation, the Holy Spirit can help our thoughts influence our will, so that we make godly, healthy choices. As we respond to the Spirit's prompting and follow God's will, our emotions will come into alignment with our thoughts and our will and we won't be consumed and driven by our emotions. Instead, we'll be directed and empowered by the Spirit to make healthy, godly choices.

*"Since we are living by the Spirit,  
let us follow the Spirit's leading  
in every part of our lives."  
(GALATIANS 5:25 NLT)*



*"When the Spirit of truth comes,  
he will guide you into all truth."  
(JOHN 16:13 NLT)*

## How to Battle Depression Spiritually

There are some people who believe that depression is strictly a spiritual issue—it’s the result of harboring hidden sin in your life—and that by getting rid of the sin, you will rid yourself of the depression. Others suggest that not reading the Bible or praying enough is the demon behind depression. Unfortunately, this line of thinking has caused deep hurt and a lot of confusion for those struggling with this mental health issue and has led many to sink even deeper into depression.

The truth is: Depression is a multifaceted mental health condition that affects our mind, will, emotions, body, and spirit. It is not *simply* a spiritual issue. Depression affects our spirit and *can* impact our relationship and walk with Christ. Therefore, in addition to taking steps to address our thoughts and emotions when we’re depressed, we must address our spiritual lives as well.

Remember this: Even when your spirit is pressed down (depressed), the Lord is right there watching over you.

*“When my spirit grows faint within me,  
it is you who watch over my way.”*

(PSALM 142:3)

### Your Spiritual Battle Plan for Depression

#### **See yourself through God’s eyes.**

What comes to mind when you think about God? Do you think of Him as being distant, uncaring, or not in control? If so, then you may not be inclined to talk with Him when you’re feeling depressed. Even worse, you might believe that *you* don’t matter to Him or that He has more important things than your life to be concerned about.

The Bible says, *“The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made”* (Psalm 145:8–9).

- He looks upon you with grace and compassion, not indifference or anger. He cares about how you're feeling and what you're going through.
- He wants you to see His true character, and then to see yourself through His eyes. When you're feeling down, remember your identity as a precious child of God:

*“See what great love the Father has lavished on us,  
that we should be called children of God!  
And that is what we are!”*  
(1 JOHN 3:1)

### **Stay rooted in Christ.**

The way to stay rooted in Christ is to practice the spiritual disciplines. These include: praying, reading and meditating on God's Word, worshiping the Lord, fellowshiping with other believers, serving others, resting, and giving thanks.

The Bible says, *“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness”* (Colossians 2:6–7).

- You may be tempted to withdraw from others and from your normal daily activities when depression strikes. This is when spiritual disciplines can be especially beneficial.
- You will be able to maintain a sense of balance in your life and center your thoughts and emotions on the love, hope, and grace of Jesus Christ if you have already cultivated spiritual disciplines into your life.

*“May the grace of the Lord  
Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the  
Holy Spirit be with you.”*  
(2 CORINTHIANS 13:14)

### **Fight against spiritual attacks.**

While devoted followers of Jesus should not automatically assume that depression is the result of spiritual attack, some depression may be attributed to the devil or demonic forces. The Bible is clear about the devil's work in the world and in our lives: They stand in opposition to who God is and what He does.

Jesus said that the devil is a “*murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies*” (John 8:44). Satan is also called the “*accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night*” (Revelation 12:10).

- Satan speaks lies, accuses you, and seeks to consume you with constant doubt, guilt, and fear. He wants to use your depression to draw you away from God.
- God speaks truth and invites you to live in His love, grace, and peace. He wants you to stand firm in His truth and draw nearer to Him when you are depressed.

*“Submit yourselves therefore to God.  
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.  
Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”*  
(JAMES 4:7–8 ESV)

### **Confess your sin.**

When we sin, we often respond as Adam did in the garden—we run *away from* God in fear of judgment instead of running *to* God for forgiveness. This response to sin creates fear, anxiety, and depression, which increases if we believe that now something bad is going to happen or that God is “out to get” us.

When King David sinned, he wrote about his crushing guilt: “*My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear*” (Psalm 38:4).

- You can be confident that God's grace and forgiveness is able to break through your sin, guilt, and depression.
- You don't have to fear or worry that God will not extend forgiveness to you when you confess your sin. His grace will meet you where you are.

*“O Lord, you are so good,  
so ready to forgive,  
so full of unfailing love for  
all who ask for your help.”*

(PSALM 86:5 NLT)

### **Get rid of guilt.**

Two types of guilt exist: *True* guilt (based on actual wrongdoing for not living according to God’s standards) and *false* guilt (based on self-condemnation for not living up to your own standards or someone else’s, or continuing to hold on to guilt after sin has been confessed and forgiven). Depression is common when you sin because the guilt you feel creates tension in your mind, spirit, and body.

David said this about his experience of sin and guilt: *“There is no health in my body . . . there is no strength in my bones because of my sin . . . I am faint and severely crushed; I groan because of the anguish of my heart . . . My heart races, my strength leaves me”* (Psalm 38:3, 8, 10 HCSB).

Guilt can be paralyzing and intensify feelings of depression. David’s guilt led him to experience anxiety: *“So I confess my guilt; I am anxious because of my sin”* (Psalm 38:18 HCSB).

- If you are experiencing false guilt, memorize Romans 8:1, which says, *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,”* and turn it into a prayer: “Thank you, Father, that you don’t condemn me and that you don’t want me to condemn myself. I reject these feelings of false guilt; they are invalid because I am accepted in Christ.”
- If you are experiencing true guilt, turn to God in confession so He can forgive you and remove your guilt.

The same David who wrote about his burden of guilt also wrote:

*“I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt.  
I said to myself, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.’  
And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.”*

(PSALM 32:5 NLT)

### **Walk in the Spirit.**

The security and strength of every Christian is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Zechariah 4:6 reveals that God’s plan for you is to be an overcomer . . . *“not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit.”* Since the Holy Spirit lives within you, you are to be dependent on Him for everything.

The Bible says, *“The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness . . . the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words”* (Romans 8:26 NLT).

- Even in your depression, God is with you, because His Spirit resides in you.
- Even though you cannot see the Holy Spirit with your physical eyes nor feel Him with your physical touch, you can experience His peace—a peace that *“surpasses all understanding”* (Philippians 4:7 ESV). The Holy Spirit can give you hope for your heart.

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy  
and peace as you trust in him,  
so that you may overflow with hope  
by the power of the Holy Spirit.”*

(ROMANS 15:13)

## **How to Conquer Depression**

When darkness invades your life, you can easily become consumed with the situation that causes the darkness. It’s at times like this that you may have difficulty seeing all God wants you to see. During your dark days, don’t trust in your own perspective. Rather, look to God and ask Him to help you see life from His vantage point. This requires confronting your losses, trusting God, and allowing Him to shine His light in your life.

*“Let the one who walks in the dark, who has no light,  
trust in the name of the LORD and rely on their God.”*

(ISAIAH 50:10)

## **Conquer Depression** (an acrostic for the word CONQUER)

**C—Confront** the losses in your life. Allow yourself to grieve.

*“[There is] a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance” (ECCLESIASTES 3:4).*

**O—Offer** your heart to Christ and give Him control. Pour your heart out to God and trust Him.

*“Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge” (PSALM 62:8).*

**N—Nurture** the thoughts of God’s love for you. Remember: His love will never end.

*“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” (JEREMIAH 31:3).*

**Q—Quit** all negative thinking. Replace negative self-talk by focusing on the positive.

*“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).*

**U—Understand** God’s purpose for allowing pain. God promises to use your heartaches for your ultimate good.

*“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (ROMANS 8:28).*

**E—Exchange** your hurt for thanksgiving. Choose to give thanks even when you don’t feel thankful.

*“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 THESSALONIANS 5:18).*

**R—Remember** God is sovereign over your life. He promises hope for your future.

*“You have been my hope, Sovereign LORD . . . you are my strong refuge . . . I will always have hope” (PSALM 71:5, 7, 14).*

## How to Communicate with Someone Who's Depressed

Do you know someone who's struggling with depression? You want to help, but don't know where to start or what to say. Or maybe you've gone through depression yourself and want to help others walk through it. If you choose to come alongside someone who is depressed, it's important to know what to say and what *not* to say.

Sometimes, well-intentioned people say things that make the situation worse. Equally important is understanding that someone who's depressed may not recognize the severity of their own situation. They may display defense mechanisms, such as denying that anything is wrong, minimizing their pain, or rationalizing their behavior.

Realize, it takes significant courage for a depressed person to speak openly and honestly about their situation and feelings. Respond with love and patience when they do. Be aware of the power of your words. If you express kindness in what you say, you can be God's instrument of hope to help change the disposition of someone who's weighed down by the clouds of depression.

*"Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up."  
(PROVERBS 12:25)*

### The Dos and Don'ts

**Don't say:** "You shouldn't feel that way."

**Do say:** "I care about what you are feeling."

- Ask, "Would you like to tell me how you're feeling?"
- Say, "If you ever want to talk, I'm here to listen."

*"The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out" (PROVERBS 20:5).*



**Don't say:** "You're making a big deal out of nothing."

**Do say:** "I'm sorry you're feeling so down today. Is there anything I can do to help?"

- Remember what they are going through is not just the normal ups and downs of life.
- Even if you believe that happiness is a choice, understand that depression definitely is not.

Remind them . . . *"Surely you have a wonderful future ahead of you. There is hope for you yet"* (PROVERBS 23:18 TLB).

**Don't say:** "It's all in your head."

**Do say:** "Even though I haven't been where you are, I care about you and want to understand and help you in whatever way I can."

- Depression is an easily misunderstood mental health issue. Learn as much as you can about it so you respond to them in the most appropriate way possible.
- Acknowledge their sadness and their pain. People struggling with depression often find it difficult just to get out of bed, eat, sleep, or do anything they once did easily.

*"Help each other in troubles and problems. This is the kind of law Christ asks us to obey"* (GALATIANS 6:2 NLT).

**Don't say:** "I think you would feel better if you just ate something."

**Do say:** "I'm happy to have a meal with you."

- Offer to bring a nutritious meal to their home or take them out to eat.
- Encourage them to eat foods that are healthy for them and help ward off depression.

*"The LORD helps the fallen and lifts those bent beneath their loads . . . you give them their food as they need it"* (PSALM 145:15–16 NLT).

**Don't say:** "You need to quit taking that medication."

**Do say:** "Medication can help, but not all medications work the same for everyone. I'm happy to go to the doctor with you if you would like to have your medication reevaluated."

- Talk to a doctor or psychiatrist who specializes in depression and medication.
- Don't be afraid to get a second opinion.

*"Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed"*  
(PROVERBS 15:22).

**Don't say:** "You just need to pray more."

**Do say:** "I'm praying for you, and I'm going to keep praying."

- Ask if you can pray with them, and let them know you are praying for them.
- Ask specifically, "How can I pray for you today?"

*"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people"*  
(EPHESIANS 6:18).

**Don't say:** "You just need to read the Bible more!"

**Do say:** "There are passages in the Bible that have encouraged me when I was down. May I share a few of them with you?"

- Make a list of Bible passages for them that are encouraging and filled with hope. (See Psalm 23, Psalm 130:5–7; Lamentations 3:19–26; Romans 8:38–39.)
- Discuss with them the benefits of memorizing Scripture—how it calms the heart and mind. (See Psalm 145:8–9; Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 15:13; Philippians 4:6–8, 19.)

*"This is my comfort in my affliction, That Your word has revived me"*  
(PSALM 119:50 NASB).

**Don't say:** "You need to go to church."

**Do say:** "My church has encouraged me and helped me through some tough times. I'd love for you to come with me next Sunday, and maybe we can have lunch together afterwards."

- Invite them to come with you to church, or to meet you at church, if that's more comfortable.
- Encourage them to find a support group. Let them know of any groups at your church set up for those dealing with depression or grief and loss.

*“And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another”* (HEBREWS 10:25 NLT).

**Don’t say:** “Snap out of it! Just get over it!”

**Do say:** “I’m going to stick with you, and we’ll get through this together.”

- Admit, “I don’t have all the answers, but I’m willing to help.”
- Let your attitudes and actions show them that you care.

*“There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother”* (PROVERBS 18:24).

As you seek to help others, remember that the goal is to communicate care and compassion. Be mindful of your limitations both in knowledge as well as in your caregiving capacity. Your role in their life is not to “fix” their depression or have all the answers. Learn what you can about helping others with depression and know that it’s okay to seek additional help from trained counselors and medical professionals when needed. If you are under-equipped or overwhelmed by the situation, refer the person to someone better trained to help and give guidance. The Bible says . . .

*“Where there is no guidance the people fall,  
But in an abundance of counselors there is victory.”*

(PROVERBS 11:14 NASB)

## How to Help a Depressed Loved One

When you have depressed loved ones in your life, you want to do something that will make a difference, but the question is *what?*

First and foremost, *do not avoid them*. Find ways to show them you care, such as planning an activity with them that you think they would enjoy (e.g., having a picnic at the park, taking an art or craft class together, walking or exercising with them). Or you might invite them to an outdoor event or even to run errands with you.

Because of the tendency to withdraw and isolate, help them get involved in activities whenever they are open to doing so. Encourage them to find a new hobby. Realize, you may be their only lifeline of hope, and they need to stay connected. Do what you wish someone would do for you if you were struggling with depression.

*“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”*

(LUKE 6:31)

## 12 Things You Can Do to Help

Here are 12 things you can do to help someone who’s depressed:

### **Learn all you can about depression.**

Read books, watch videos, attend conferences, visit websites such as the National Institute of Mental Health ([www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)).

*“Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge”*  
(PROVERBS 23:12).

### **Be an accountability partner.**

Communicate both with words and actions, “I’m with you in this, and I won’t abandon you.”

*“I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare”*  
(PHILIPPIANS 2:20 NLT).

### **Initiate regular dialogue.**

Send frequent text messages and phone calls. Make intentional contact and encourage them sincerely and often.

*“Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them”* (EPHESIANS 4:29 NLT).

### **Listen to their pain.**

Take time to hear their story and let them share their feelings without fear of judgment. Listening affirms their value and helps them process their emotions and circumstances.

*“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry”*  
(JAMES 1:19).

### **Talk about depression**

Talking about depression helps remove the stigma of it.

*“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver”* (PROVERBS 25:11 ESV).

### **Help them find a support group.**

There is strength in numbers. Inquire at a nearby hospital, local church, or search the web for listings of support groups in the community dealing with depression or mental illness.

*“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help”* (ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10 NLT).

### **Realize the power of touch.**

As appropriate, a hand on the shoulder or a hug can be a great comfort.

*“Greet one another with a kiss of love”* (1 PETER 5:14).

### **Play inspirational music when you’re with them.**

Music is therapeutic and can lift their spirit.

*“. . . speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit”*  
(EPHESIANS 5:19).

### **Bring laughter into their lives.**

Share funny cards, pictures, stories, videos, or movies.

*“A cheerful heart is good medicine”* (PROVERBS 17:22).

### **Work with them to set small, daily goals.**

Encourage them to set and achieve small goals that require minimal effort. Check on their progress regularly.

*“The desires of the diligent are fully satisfied”* (PROVERBS 13:4).

### **Enlist help from other family and friends.**

Be specific about your concerns and engage others in caring for the one depressed.

*“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ”*  
(GALATIANS 6:2).

**Take all threats of suicide seriously.**

If suicide is a concern, ask, “Are you thinking about hurting yourself or taking your life?” While asking this may create some discomfort, awkwardness, or even initial upset, it is worth the risk. Don’t shy away from the hard questions, but always ask them in a kind and gentle way.

*“The tongue has the power of life and death”* (PROVERBS 18:21).

## How to Respond to Suicidal Thoughts or Threats

If you, or a depressed loved one, are having suicidal thoughts or planning to harm yourself, it is important to talk with someone immediately. You will find information for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the Crisis Text Line below. These free and confidential services are available 24/7 to provide emotional support and helpful resources for those facing distress and having suicidal thoughts. When you contact them, you will be connected with a real person who is trained to provide guidance and support. You are *not* alone.

*“Be strong and courageous.  
Do not be afraid or terrified . . .  
for the LORD your God goes with you;  
he will never leave you nor forsake you.”*  
(DEUTERONOMY 31:6)

**NOTE:** If you are ever in imminent danger, call 911 immediately.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

- 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- 1-800-799-4889 (For Deaf + Hard of Hearing)
- Ayuda disponible en Español
- [www.SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](http://www.SuicidePreventionLifeline.org) (Live chat available)

### **Crisis Text Line**

- Text HOME to 741741 (United States)
- Text HOME to 686868 (Canada)
- Text HOME to 85258 (United Kingdom)
- [www.CrisisTextLine.org](http://www.CrisisTextLine.org)

Don't hesitate to call or text these hotlines if you're thinking of harming yourself. Remember, no matter what you're feeling or how bad things seem . . .

*“There is surely a future hope for you.”*

(PROVERBS 23:18)

## **How to Prevent Caregiver Burnout**

Those with depression often have trouble reciprocating in a relationship. If that's the case in your situation, you may find it challenging to keep giving of yourself when you're receiving little in return. This can lead to anger and begin to destroy relationships. Or you might start feeling bad about yourself and begin to doubt your ability to help, or feel helpless and unable to solve your depressed loved one's problems. Some caregivers themselves begin to get depressed.

Dealing with a mood disorder in a family member is a lot to handle. Sometimes the weight of the disorder takes a toll on the family—especially on the caregiver—and leads to burnout. The burned out caregiver gets fatigued, reaches the limits of their endurance and ability to cope . . . and just can't go on. So how do you protect against burnout and keep from losing yourself in your loved one's illness as a caregiver? First, remember what God promises in His Word:

*“Those who trust in the LORD will find new strength.*

*They will soar high on wings like eagles.*

*They will run and not grow weary.*

*They will walk and not faint.”*

(ISAIAH 40:31 NLT)

## 10 Suggestions to Prevent Caregiver Burnout<sup>99</sup>

If you want to be a caregiver who survives the long haul of depression, you have to take good care of yourself. Here are 10 suggestions to help you do that:

**Say to yourself daily:** “Taking care of myself is not an act of selfishness. It gives me the ability to take better care of my loved one.”

**Have** realistic expectations of how you can help.

**Recognize** the limits of your own endurance and strength and ask for help from others when you need it.

**Stay in touch with** your own friends and support people and see them regularly.

**Seek** help from a mental health professional who is experienced in the area of depression.

**Join** a support group for friends and families of those with depression.

**Manage** life’s daily stressors before they become unmanageable problems.

**Prioritize** the demands placed on you and learn to say *No* when necessary.

**Get** sufficient and regular sleep, exercise, and relaxation.

**Take time** to do things that increase your self-esteem and pleasure (hobbies, interests).

*“Keep a close watch on how you live.”*

(1 TIMOTHY 4:16 NLT)



## A Positive Perspective on Depression The Charles Spurgeon Story<sup>100</sup>

Taken from: HOW TO HANDLE YOUR EMOTIONS  
Copyright © 2008 by Hope for the Heart, Inc.  
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The famous English pastor Charles Haddon Spurgeon (often referred to as the greatest preacher of the nineteenth century) openly reflected on his own bouts of depression, and from him we can gain much insight.

The times most favorable to fits of depression, so far as I have experienced, may be summed up in a brief catalogue. First among them I must mention *the hour of a great success*. When at last a long-cherished desire is fulfilled, when God has been glorified greatly by our means, and a great triumph achieved, then we are apt to faint . . .

*Before any great achievement*, some measure of the same depression is very usual. Surveying the difficulties before us, our hearts sink within us . . . This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry . . .

*In the midst of a long stretch of unbroken labor, the same affliction* may be looked for. The bow cannot be always bent without fear of breaking. Repose is as needful to the mind as sleep to the body . . .

*This evil will also come upon us, we know not why*, and then it is all the more difficult to drive it away. Causeless depression is not to be reasoned with . . . If those who laugh at such melancholy did but feel the grief of it for one hour, their laughter would be sobered into compassion . . .

If it be enquired why the Valley of the Shadow of Death must so often be traversed by the servants of King Jesus, the answer is not far to find. All this is promotive of the Lord's mode of working, which is summed up in these words: "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." . . . Heaven shall be all the fuller of bliss because we have been filled with anguish here below, and earth shall be better tilled because of our training in the school of adversity.<sup>101</sup>

When your heart is pressed down to the ground and living life makes you feel depressed, allow your depression to press you closer to the Lord. Let Him lead you into the light. The Bible reveals His promise for the times we feel depressed. . . .

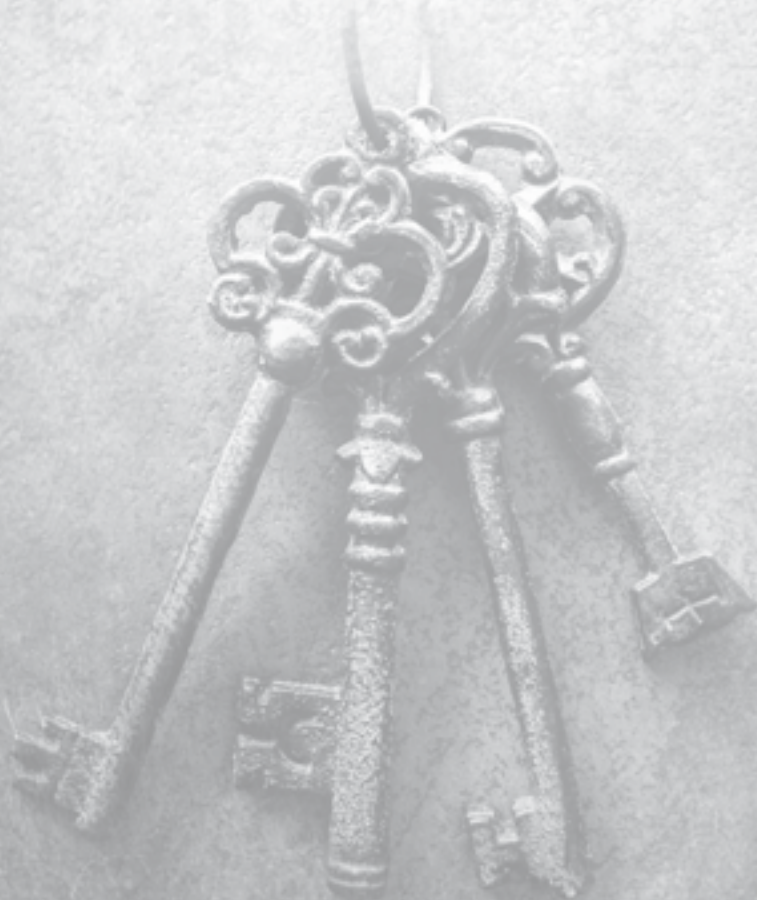
*"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."*

(2 CORINTHIANS 4:8–9)





# SCRIPTURES TO MEMORIZE



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*“First seek the counsel  
of the LORD.”*

(1 KINGS 22:5)



God's Word offers the hope and promise of a changed life. The Lord will renew your mind—transforming the way you think, act, and live—as you saturate yourself in His Word. In the following questions, the bold-faced words serve as prompts to help you more easily memorize the verses related to this topic. May God's truth come alive to you, flourish in you, and flow through you.

When I am depressed, in what can **I put my hope**?

*"I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,  
and in his word **I put my hope.**"*

(PSALM 130:5)

When I feel **downcast** and **my soul** is  
**disturbed within me**, what can I do?

*"Why, **my soul**, are you **downcast**? Why so **disturbed within me**?  
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God."*

(PSALM 42:11)

When I am depressed, **who sustains me**?

*"Surely God is my help; the LORD  
is the one **who sustains me.**"*

(PSALM 54:4)

When I am depressed, why should I  
**get advice and instruction**?

*"**Get** all the **advice and instruction** you can,  
so you will be wise the rest of your life.."*

(PROVERBS 19:20 NLT)

When I am depressed, what **things** should  
I **think about** and dwell on?

*“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right,  
whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—  
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—  
**think about** such **things.**”*  
(PHILIPPIANS 4:8)

When I **pass through the waters** of deep depression,  
what does God say to me?

*“**When** you **pass through the waters**, I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.  
When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned;  
the flames will not set you ablaze.”*  
(ISAIAH 43:2)

When I am depressed, what will **guard** my **heart** and **mind**?

*“. . . in every situation, by prayer and petition,  
with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.  
And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,  
will **guard** your **hearts** and your **minds** in Christ Jesus.”*  
(PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7)

When I feel depressed with **unrelenting pain**,  
can I find any **consolation** or **joy**?

*“I would still have this **consolation**—my **joy** in **unrelenting pain**  
—that I had not denied the words of the Holy One.”*  
(JOB 6:10)

When I feel depressed, what will motivate me  
to **persevere under** this **trial**?

*“Blessed is the one who **perseveres under trial** because,  
having stood the test, that person will receive  
the crown of life that the Lord has promised  
to those who love him.”*

(JAMES 1:12)

When I’ve lost all **hope** for the **future**,  
does **the Lord** still have **plans** for me?

*“‘I know the **plans** I have for you,’ declares **the Lord**,  
‘**plans** to prosper you and not to harm you, **plans**  
to give you **hope** and a **future**.’”*

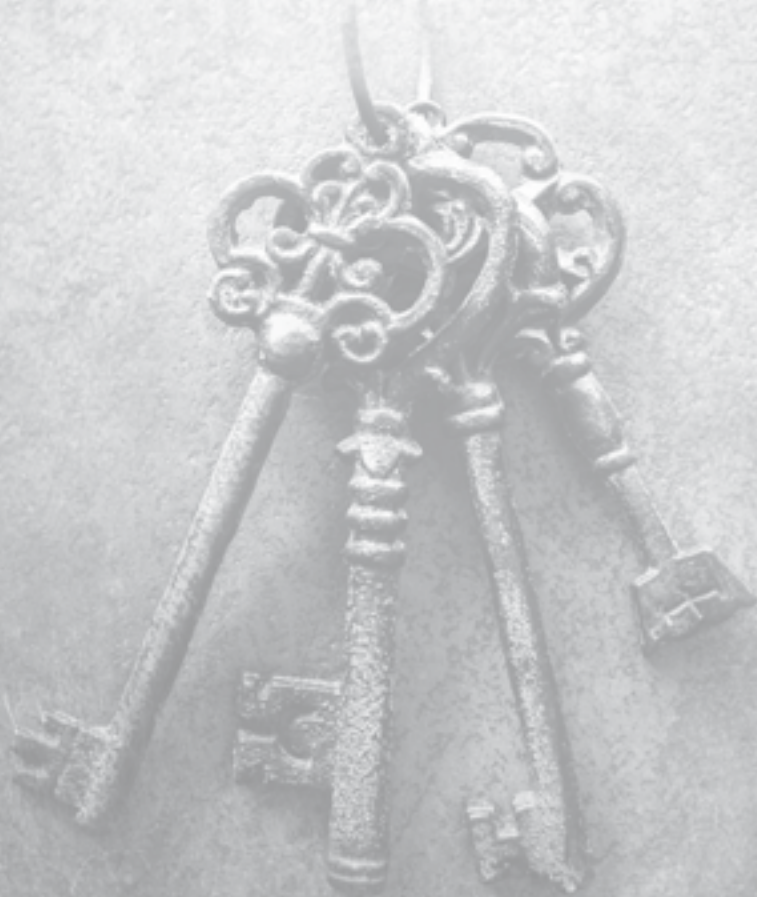
(JEREMIAH 29:11)







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**June Hunt, M.A.**, is the Founder and Chief Servant Officer of Hope for the Heart, a worldwide counseling and caregiving ministry that offers biblical hope and practical help in more than 60 countries and 36 languages. The *Keys for Living Library* provides the foundation for the ministry's award-winning, live, call-in counseling radio program, *Hope in the Night*. Her passion to help others through biblical counsel is fueled by her joy in seeing a life changed through Christ. As an accomplished author, speaker, and musician, June provides God's truth for today's problems. See more at: [www.junehunt.org](http://www.junehunt.org)

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