

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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5 Biblical Encouragements for Depressed Believers

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Experiencing depression can be devastating and disorienting. You feel terrible, and you don't know why. Or maybe you do know why, but no matter what you do or how hard you try, you can't overcome your grief and despair.

In these situations, it's good to reach out to a pastor, doctor, or counsellor. And while the Bible isn't a substitute for necessary medical help, it does speak to these problems, and suffering people can benefit from its wisdom.

Here are five biblical truths to focus on during difficult times.

1. Look

Pay attention to the people around you who are trying to help. Don't underestimate the Lord's providence through those he puts in your life at the time of your depression. Consider the following Proverbs:

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a difficult time." (Proverbs 17:17)

"Do not forsake your friend and your father's friend, and do not go to your brother's house in the day of your calamity. Better is a neighbour who is near than a brother who is far away." (Proverbs 27:10)

Here, we see the value of having family and friends who are both loyal and close at hand. So ask yourself:

- Who is consistently checking in on me?
- Who seems to keep making themselves available to talk and hang out?
- Who continues to go out of their way to make me feel important and loved?

Whoever that is, don't overlook or underestimate God's provision for you through them.

2. Limit

Discover your present physical, social, and emotional limitations – and accept them humbly under God's sovereign control.

It's not uncommon for tasks people once found simple to become difficult when they're depressed. It can be hard to eat well, to exercise, or to get good sleep. It can be helpful, then, to make some lifestyle adjustments in order to face each day. You could cut back on additional responsibilities at work or say "not now" to new commitments.

Even one of Paul's active ministry and traveling companions, Trophimus, faced an illness that required him to be sidelined from ministry travels for a season (2 Timothy 4:20). Going part-time, switching career paths, or taking a vacation or sabbatical can all be reasonable steps toward recovery.

3. Lament

It is okay to cry, grieve, and mourn. Some feel guilty for feeling sad. Yet sadness or grief aren't feelings we should suppress. Sorrow is one of the clearest expressions of our humanity. In fact, many of us don't grieve and lament *enough* about the things God expects us to. Things like:

- our own sin against God and others (Psalm 31:9-10; Lamentations 1; Ezra 10:1; Matthew 26:75; 2 Corinthians 2:5-7; 7:10-11; Ephesians 4:30; James 4:9).
- seeing people rebel against God's Word (Psalm 119:136).

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- longing for sinners to turn to Christ for salvation (Luke 19:41-42; Romans 9:1-3).
- being separated from close friends (Acts 20:36-38; Philippians 2:26; 2 Timothy 1:4).
- experiencing the death of loved ones (Numbers 20:29; Deuteronomy 34:8; John 11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13).
- longing for younger believers to be made like Christ (Galatians 4:19).

And sometimes, we feel depressed for reasons we can't understand, which can be extremely frustrating. No matter what the reason, when you're experiencing a cloud of depression, bring your grief and cries for help to God in prayer (Psalms 42; 88).

He sees everything you're going through (Psalm 139), and he knows your weak frame (Psalm 103:14). Whatever the cause of your melancholy, know that the Lord is compassionate toward your cry. He is "near to the broken-hearted" (Psalm 34:18).

4. Laugh

Take note of anything that brings you joy and lightens your mood.

Depression is nothing to laugh about, and those ministering to downcast spirits should never make light of it. Even singing joyful songs at the wrong time can worsen a discouraged soul (Proverbs 25:20).

And yet one of the most practical and beneficial ways God can lift a weary soul is through the fellowship of people you enjoy being around. As Proverbs 17:22 says, "A joyful heart is good medicine." Wherever possible, enjoying good gifts from God's hands with the company of dear friends can cheer our spirits and bring God glory in the process (Ecclesiastes 2:24-26; James 1:17; 1 Timothy 4:4-5; 6:17).

5. Love

God's love reaches into your darkness and meets you where you are.

Some of the hardest words to accept and believe in a season of depression are "God loves you." Your thoughts seem to be telling you otherwise.

Thoughts like:

- "God has abandoned me."

- "God loves me but probably doesn't like me."
- "God can't use me now for gospel advancement and kingdom good."

Beloved, if that's you, there is no other place you can go for true, lasting joy and hope outside of the gospel of Jesus Christ! The gospel is the good news of God entering our darkness by taking on human flesh and dwelling among us. It's about how the eternal Son of God came to reveal himself as the life and light of the world (John 1:4-5, 9; 8:12; 9:5; 14:6).

Jesus is the Great Physician in whom sinners can find healing and rest, first and foremost for their souls (Matthew 9:12; 11:28-30; 1 Peter 2:24-25).

So study the gospel. Meditate on it. Preach it to your soul. And know that even in the depths of your depression, God's love abides.

"Helpful Grip"

Charles Spurgeon once reflected, "Hundreds of times I have been able to give a helpful grip to brethren and sisters who have come into that same condition, which grip I could never have given if I had not known their deep despondency."

Spurgeon and countless believers throughout history have seen God use their vicious struggles with depression to minister to others under that same dark cloud. Depression has a peculiar way of making people feel alone, fearful, useless, and, oftentimes, hopeless. But if you look to Christ and listen to the

promises of God, your faith and hope will be strengthened as you wait on him. And if you lean on the love and care of others who are trying to help, the Lord will work his sovereign plan for his glory and your good – even through the perplexing trial of depression.

Depression makes us feel the feebleness of our human frame, but it does not diminish God's power. And as a fellow struggler, you can be a channel of unique blessing to those along the same pilgrim way.

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