

Life Issues

A series that investigates and offers insights regarding challenging life issues

Mountain of God

*Even though the journey's long
And I know the road is hard
You're the One who's gone before me
You will help me carry on*

*And after all I've been through
Now I realize the truth
That I must go through the valley
To stand upon the Mountain of God*

Brown Bannister, Mac Powell • ©2002

Most of us can relate to the sentiment of these lyrics. Life can be just plain hard at times. Sometimes the “valleys” we go through can impact us mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. If you’ve ever experienced bouts of depression during those times, you’re not alone. Yes, even Christians battle depression periodically. And yet, as the lyrics suggest, we often find that God can powerfully use difficult experiences to draw us closer to Him.

The state of depression cannot be fully “explained” or remedied in an article like this. Its origins and the responses it provokes can be as varied as the people it touches. There are no easy answers, but one basic truth is that depression can impact any one of us. The good news is that there are real and effective means of addressing and even alleviating it.

One of the most devastating effects of depression is the sense of aloneness it produces—a separated feeling from people and sometimes from God. You may wonder what in the world God is up to. Yet, it appears that drawing close to God often requires some time in this type of “desert” experience. Perhaps being alone and led to wrestle with hard questions can have important purposes.

Jesus’ Example

In Matthew 4, we learn that even Jesus was led into the desert—not by the enemy, but by God’s own Spirit. This was a time of aloneness and temptation for Christ. In the end, however, it seems that this experience was an important step before He began His three-year ministry on earth.

We can learn a lot from Jesus’ example. He found strength and perseverance through Scripture, and stood confidently in who God is and the mission He had been given. This is also a sobering picture of how the enemy attempts to capitalize upon the times we feel most alone. While Christ is a great model to teach us about facing temptations and difficult times, it doesn’t eliminate the fact that it’s a difficult journey. Learning to understand who we are and what our purpose is in life is a life-long process. That’s why we especially need help and strength from the Lord and one another during those difficult seasons.

Short-lived, occasional times of feeling down is the most typical type of depression. On the other hand, a considerable percentage of people become seriously depressed at some time during their lives.¹ This kind of depression requires more than shrugging off the blues or just waiting it out. If you or a loved one frequently or continually suffer from severe depression, help is available and

we gently encourage you to seek counsel. Regardless of how you feel, healing really is possible. Note how the following scenarios can trigger or cause depression.

Situational or Reactive Depression

- Recently experienced a severe trauma or loss of a loved one, friendship, marriage, job, pet, opportunity, health or freedom.
- Lives with a great deal of demands, criticism and/or stress with little support.

Depression Due to Unhealthy Thought Patterns²

- Dwells on self-talk like: “No one really loves me.” “I’m unlovable, ugly, stupid or weak.” These statements repeated over and over can become more and more real to the person.
- Has unrealistic expectations of how the world, other people or they themselves should be. They may fear getting hurt or entering situations in which they they could make mistakes.
- Is pessimistic, often creating a negative, self-fulfilling prophecy. Focuses mainly on the difficult in situations.

Common Symptoms of Depression³

- Persistent sadness, anxiety, or an “empty” mood.
- Hopelessness, pessimism, restlessness and irritability.
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness.
- Outbursts of crying for the slightest reason.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities including sex.
- Insomnia, early morning waking or oversleeping.
- Eating disturbances (weight loss or gain).
- Decreased energy or fatigue, or feeling slowed down.
- Thoughts of death or suicide and even suicide attempts.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering and making decisions.
- Reclusive behavior, withdraws from people and activities.
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive disorders and chronic pain. Depression can cause physical ailments and, in reverse, physical problems can also lead to depression.

Seeking Help

Now that we’ve talked about what depression looks like, the natural question is, “What can be done about it?” Just as depression is different for each one who experiences it, its treatments also vary. Try a few of the following suggestions. If you continue to struggle, contact Care Ministries for additional direction.

- Eat a balanced diet and lower your caffeine and sugar intake.
- Build open and honest relationships. Bouncing your feelings off a friend who is a good listener can help. If you struggle to let people into your life, consider addressing this in counseling.
- Search out truths about God and yourself in His Word. The Psalms are a great place to start.
- Exercise can be a great help in relieving depression.
- Get a complete medical exam.

“Depression,” continued on reverse side...

- Get enough sleep. Poor sleeping habits compound irritability, loss of concentration and the ability to recognize the truth.
- Even though you may not initially feel like it, find a humorous movie to watch. There really is healing power in laughter.
- Frequently give your spouse, your child, or a godly friend lots of hugs. Healthy touch is powerful in any healing process.
- Prayer, in and of itself, may or may not remove depression, but it's important to make it an integral part of your healing because it keeps you connected to God, the Ultimate Healer.
- Listen to worship music and display encouraging Scripture.
- Select just one or two tasks you want to accomplish each day.
- Write out your thoughts, feelings and prayers in a journal.
- Check out some fiction you've wanted to read or books about depression or Christian living, or biographies about people who suffered from depression, but still did well with their lives (like Winston Churchill, Martin Luther and Charles Spurgeon).
- Don't make life decisions such as quitting your job or ending a marriage. The negative thinking that accompanies depression may lead to horribly poor decisions. Remember you're not seeing yourself, the world or the future in an objective way.
- Sometimes depression is brought on by circumstances we have no control over. Other times it is due to a chemical imbalance that requires medication. We must also consider the possibility that our depression can be due to unrepented sin. The Lord loves us too much to leave us content with continued sinful patterns. Pray about whether or not this is the case. This is not meant to produce guilt, but to appropriately address areas that need attention so that we can live full, satisfying lives for Christ.

Addressing the Core Issues

Emotional or physical pain can be a warning signal that something is wrong. A good doctor looks for physical pain, but doesn't just

"I write this with all reverence: God Himself cannot deliver a person who is not in trouble. Therefore, it is to some advantage to be in distress, because God can then deliver you. Even Jesus Christ, the Healer of me, cannot heal a person who is not sick. Therefore, sickness is not an adversity for us, but rather an advantageous opportunity for Christ to heal us. The point is, my reader, your adversity may prove your advantage by offering occasion for the display of divine grace."—Charles Spurgeon, "Spurgeon on Prayer and Spiritual Warfare"

treat the symptoms. He gets to the root cause. God also puts our emotional pain to good use. Whether He authored the pain or just allowed it to occur, examine the possibility that God wants you to face something that has gone amiss in your life or relationships. He may be giving you the opportunity to grow and find healthy satisfaction in life! The excep-

tion to this can be the natural grief associated with a significant loss, but even then there may be lessons to learn amidst the pain.

While the above list of suggestions can help get us through the effects of the depression, we must understand that the root of depression often forms out of unresolved, traumatic childhood

experiences. The "desert" we're facing today, may be God's way of leading us to address those experiences and let Him heal whatever lies may have embedded within our hearts from them.

Dr. Ed M. Smith, founder of Theophostic ministry, is a tremendous advocate of actively seeking the Lord to deeply minister to the difficulties in life. "Too often people are counseled in developing new habits and skills before ever addressing their root issues. Most all of us could use some improvement of the skills we need to better relate. But if we do not attend to our original woundedness, the pain in the wound will override the skill level and we will find ourselves back in trouble."⁴ The staff and ministry teams in Care Ministries have witnessed how the Lord amazingly manifests His healing power into people's painful memories so that the lies which grew out of them no longer have the power to control or deceive. To find healing in such cases of unresolved emotional issues, consider Theophostic ministry. Contact Care Ministries to learn more about this incredible avenue of healing from the Lord.

A Few Suggestions to Encourage a Loved One in Depression

- Depression is often seen as a failure. An unrealistic expectation of perfection is especially prevalent in Christian circles. Weakness may even be punished at times. Give yourself and your loved ones a break when encountering periods of difficulty. What is often needed is a firm, yet loving offer to walk alongside a friend experiencing a painful season.
- Don't try to solve your loved one's problems, but let them express their hurts and disappointments even if the feelings don't make sense or neatly fit into your theology. If he or she asks for advice, prayerfully make suggestions.
- Offer to pray for and with your friend. Ask the Lord to direct him or her to the source of the depression and bring healing to those areas. Your friend may need prayer often during this season.
- A depressed person isn't inclined to ask for help—you may need to initiate communication. Don't let your own fears suggest that it's best to leave a depressed person alone since that's what their behavior indicates. Don't "push" for communication, but "gentle nudgings" may be appropriate. Speak the truth in love.
- Jesus can cure any ailment, but we must submit to His methods and timing. Quoting a verse may only heap guilt on your loved one. Sensitive share from God's Word only under His leading.
- Don't go out of your way to accommodate your loved one's mood swings or depressed behaviors. Keep "normal" family patterns intact as much as possible.
- When appropriate, offer a hand to hold or a meaningful hug.

We offer confidential support to you and your family as you work through a season of depression. Brochures on the ministries below are available in the CEFC Information Centers. Contact Katherine Bentley, Care Ministries, at **763-971-5123**.

- Assessment and Referral Counseling
- Freedom Ministry (freedom from strongholds)
- Transforming Prayer Ministry (mind renewal; Romans 12:1-2)
- Support Groups

¹*Counseling Insights: Depression—Insight for Living*; ©1988; pg. 2.

²*Counseling Insights: Depression—Insight for Living*; ©1988; pg. 3.

³Based on "Counseling Insights—Depression;" *Insight for Living*; ©1988; pg. 3.

⁴*Beyond Tolerable Recovery*; Family Care Publishing; ©2000; pgs. 14, 15.