

When you want to help a loved one— **Overcoming Depression**

By Dave Batty

A lady recently wrote me, “I’m so depressed I don’t know what to do. Even though I have a wonderful family, I feel so alone. Everyone uses me. I don’t feel like God is even for me because He seems to ignore my prayers and His promises to us in His word. I know I’m wrong to feel this way.”

A husband wrote me, “Teen Challenge has records to prove that Jesus has cured hundreds of alcoholics and drugs addicts. Why can’t He cure those who get depressed?” He went on to state that his wife has been on medication for depression for over 30 years.

If you have lived with someone struggling with depression—the darkness and gloom can feel contagious. The emotional drain can put a heavy strain on the relationship.

Depression comes into our lives when we have not used our

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spiritual and physical resources the way God intended us to use them. With those resources exhausted, the door is open for depression to come into our lives.

Depression is fed by what we think about and how we think. These thoughts often focus on the discouraging circumstances of life—hope is gone—a distant illusion at best.

Many people have slipped into depression as the result of unresolved crises. When a problem comes, the person does not resolve it according to God’s plan. The result is an emotional burden, or worry, or

hurt feelings, which can become a negative frame of reference. This soon consumes their whole world.

The depressed person withdraws into a dark world of gloom and despair. Many feel like Job in the Old Testament who cursed the day he was born.

For some people, depression is the result of a hormone imbalance. They may need medication to stimulate their thinking until the body starts producing the needed hormone.

So how can you help a loved one who is depressed?

Getting your loved one on the path to healing can be a difficult start. Many of those in depression have a flawed perception of their condition. They may deeply resent your evaluation when you tell them, “You have a problem and you need help.”

*The cause of depression can
be very different in one person
compared to another.
The path out of depression
may be very different for
these two people.*

- ❖ **How is your thought life related to overcoming depression?**
- ❖ **Is medication the answer to depression?**
- ❖ **What role does hope have in winning the battle over depression?**
- ❖ **What are the steps to overcoming depression?**

1. Make your thoughts obedient to Christ & His truth

Overcoming depression is not achieved by focusing on depression, but “How can I start living and thinking in a healthy way?” The more I live and think this way, the faster I can overcome depression.

Fighting depression is truly a battle in the mind. Identifying false beliefs and replacing them with the truth is the heart of this battle.

Paul talks about his strategy for winning this battle, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV)

This is not a one time battle accomplished in a single day. This is warfare that often must be fought—not just daily, but sometimes every 5 seconds.

But before this battle can be fought effectively, we must know what is God’s truth. The lady who wrote saying, “I have a wonderful family,” immediately followed this with the comment of “I feel so alone.” Many living with depression would respond, “I agree—I know exactly how you feel!”

But the person who is not depressed would say, “Wait a minute! That sounds to me like a contradiction!” How can you have such a wonderful family and still be feeling all alone?

Elijah was a courageous prophet who faced incredible

problems in his ministry. He brought God’s message to King Ahab that a drought was coming on the land because of his sin. The next three years the country was in the midst of a major famine.

In obedience to God, Elijah arranges for a confrontation between the god of Baal and the true God on the top of Mount Carmel. He and all others present see a great miracle performed by God who miraculously sends down fire to burn the sacrifice Elijah prepared and covered with water. (See 1 Kings 18.)

Within hours Elijah is running for his life, fearful of the death sentence on him from Queen Jezebel. His prayer reveals how deep in despair he has fallen. “I have had enough, Lord,” Elijah prays, “take my life.” (1 Kings 19:4)

When God confronts him, Elijah responds, “I am the only one left who still serves You, God.” Elijah’s false belief is typical for many in depression, “I’m alone—no one understands me.” Only God’s truth can restore balance to one’s perceptions.

God responds to Elijah with the truth—7,000 people are living in Israel who still serve God. (1 Kings 19:18)

How can a godly leader like Elijah so quickly slip into depression after seeing such mighty miracles in his life and ministry? It is a daily battle to live in God’s truth. Yesterday’s victories do not automatically guarantee success today. At any point we can turn down the wrong path and head away from God’s truth.

Best Medications for Depression

The prescription medication for depression which you buy at the pharmacy won’t solve depression. What the medication can do is help stabilize the emotions.

Then you can begin to work through the changes in your patterns of thinking and actions that will move you toward healthy living—free of depression.

The pills cannot fix your thought patterns. Only you can do that. One major key is listed in Philippians 4:8-9, which gives 8 specific steps to guide your thought patterns. Think about:

Whatever is true
 Whatever is noble
 Whatever is right
 Whatever is pure
 Whatever is lovely
 Whatever is admirable
 Whatever is excellent
 Whatever is praiseworthy

Verse 9 gives the next step—don’t just think about these things—“put it into practice!”

The best medicine to cure depression is God’s truth—feed on it, think about it, and then make it the focus of your daily actions.

That's why we must take literally what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

Many of those living in depression feel they are justified to feel the way they do. They look at the tragedies they have faced and feel vindicated, "If you had experienced what I have, you would understand why I feel this way."

These false beliefs feed the depression. The person trapped in depression has some tough decisions to make to experience God's freedom. God's truth must be our focus—not our painful past experiences.

King David went through many dark experiences. What brought him through was focusing his thoughts on God's truth. David said, "Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." (Psalm 119:105 NIV)

So how do we use God's truth to fight depression?

List the promises of God

Look for truths in the Bible that will attack the negative thoughts in your mind. Jesus used this strategy when Satan tempted Him. He didn't just quote any verse from the Bible. He responded with one of God's truth that spoke specifically to the temptation.

For the false thought, "I'm so alone," God says, "I am with you always." (Matthew 28:20 NIV)
"When the Spirit of Truth comes,

He will guide you into all truth."
(John 16:13 NIV)

For the false thought, "*This is too much for me to endure*," God's Word promises us, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." (Philippians 4:13 NIV)

Right before this great promise, Paul makes a profound statement, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." (Philippians 4:12 NIV)

Learning contentment is a key lesson God wants us to learn. Paul also developed very powerful strategies for responding to the

One powerful key to overcoming depression is learning how to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ

difficult problems in his life. See 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 for more details.

The one living with depression will not find a magical solution and "poof"—the depression disappears. But God's truth provides a solid foundation for our thinking, and our decisions.

You must focus on these truths. If you listen to your feelings, you will only get confused and more depressed. You must face reality with God's truth—and learn the lessons God has for you—that's the path to freedom and healing.

2. Rely on God's Power

Depression often brings with it the false belief that life is too hard—we can't change these problems that are taller than Mount Everest.

Paul talked of his discouragements and facing overwhelming problems. "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead." (2 Corinthians 1:8-9 NIV)

Paul saw his trials as part of God's plan—not a divine mistake. He sees these hard times as God's lessons for him. God was saying to Paul through these difficult times, "I want you to learn to rely on Me, not on yourself."

If you are going to overcome depression you must look to a source of power outside yourself. The Bible is filled with promises about God's power which is available to us.

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." (2 Peter 1:3-4 NIV)

God's power is available and needed if a person is to find freedom from depression. We need to use this power to find God's truth in His

Word. We need to use this power to “bring every thought into obedience to Christ.” We need to use this power to take the steps of action and obedience God wants us to take.

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4 NIV). As we rely on God’s power, He will strengthen us for every battle we face.

3. Concentrate on God’s hope

Those living with depression have often lost God’s perspective on hope. Memorizing and meditating on what God says about hope is another key step to overcoming depression.

The Bible is filled with scriptures that talk about hope. Paul talks about the important place of hope in the context of facing life’s problems.

“And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God... We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” (Romans 5:2b-5 NIV).

Facing our problems in obedience to God takes us down a path that results in true hope. Another of God’s great truths on hope says, “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 NIV).

We must place our trust in God no matter how difficult our circumstances. And what is God’s promise if we do trust Him? He will fill us with all joy and peace. That will trigger His hope filling us in such abundance that it will overflow—spill out and get on others—just like knocking over a glass on the dinner

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1. Make your thoughts obedient to Christ and His Truth
2. Rely on God’s power
3. Concentrate on God’s hope
4. You must get involved in action!

table that gets the person next to you wet! How do we get that much hope? By the power of the Holy Spirit!

We’ve got to take these gold nuggets of God’s truth and say—that’s the promise I’m going to stand on. I’m going to hold on to Jesus with all I’ve got to get His joy, His peace, His hope.

There are so many more scriptures which talk about hope. Here are just a few: Romans 12:12, 2 Corinthians 1:10, 2 Corinthians 3:12, Ephesians 1:18, Hebrews 6:19, Hebrews 10:2-3, and 1 Peter 1:13.

Use God’s hope to build walls of protection to guard your heart, your mind, your emotions from the

attacks of the enemy. God won’t tap you on the head with a “fairy wand” and magically transform your life. You must take back every inch of ground as you battle the false beliefs that seek to fill your mind.

4. You must get involved in action

Depression is not defeated simply by sitting in a chair and thinking your way out of the pit. You must get involved in action—and not just any activity—but what God wants you to do.

When Elijah ran into a crisis, he made a decision to run away from Jezebel—not because he heard the voice of God, but he made a decision based on what seemed to him to be the right thing to do. When Elijah finally prayed, God told him what He wanted him to do—specific acts.

The person trapped in depression often says, “I don’t want to do anything. Leave me alone.” Some will even sleep the whole day away.

Part of the freedom from depression comes by getting involved in activities. Look around you—what can you do today?

You may need to start with very simple tasks. For example, “Put your feet on the floor! Get up! Get dressed!” Get the table cleaned off. Do the dishes, sweep the floor. Take out the trash. Read your Bible. Spend some time in prayer.

Look beyond your own circumstances. Get out of the house. Get involved in doing something for other people. Cook a meal for an elderly person or someone in a crisis.

You may be thinking, “I don’t know anyone in need.” Then call your pastor and ask for names of people who need help. Maybe a single mother, or a widow.

If you are not ready for that challenge, then walk down the street and pick up the trash on the sidewalk. Do something that can be a blessing to others! Stop thinking only about yourself all the time.

Pray to God, “Bring people to mind that I can help.” Maybe it is simply to write an encouraging note to someone. Write it! Put it in the envelope and mail it—today!

The path to freedom from depression is not to become an expert on depression. Instead focus on living and thinking in a healthy way. Fill your mind with God’s faith promises. The more you focus each day on God’s truth, the more freedom you will experience—more joy, more peace, more balance.

Make a list of what you can thank God for today. Read that list to yourself several times a day if needed to keep your balance on the inside.

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Watch Your Diet!

People who are diabetic often have to go on a special diet, staying away from certain foods, and following a strict schedule of regular meals. If they ignore those guidelines, their blood sugar gets out of balance and causes more problems.

In a similar way the person seeking to overcome depression must put in place a special “diet” for your thought life. If you go down the path of your old thought patterns, you may find yourself trapped again by depression.

Great discipline is needed to guard your thought life. Paul’s advice in 2 Corinthians 10:5 is one powerful tool. “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” (NIV)

Don’t fill your mind with TV programs or books, or magazines that focus on the negative. Fill your mind with God’s truth and good Christian music. Surround yourself with godly Christian friends. Stay clear of gossip and critical people.

You must be a warrior, guarding your mind. God spoke to many leaders in the Old Testament and told them to be strong and

Don’t Ask Why

Elijah had just gone through one of the greatest spiritual battles of his life and experienced God’s awesome miracles. The prophets of Baal had been defeated by God on the top of Mt. Carmel. God followed this miracle with abundant rain to end a three year drought and famine.

Then Queen Jezebel threatens to kill Elijah, so he runs for his life. He finds safety in the desert, and finally he listens to God. God doesn’t ask, “Why are you here?” which would have given Elijah the perfect opportunity to justify his decision run and hide in fear.

God instead asks, “What are you doing here?” In fact, God asks the same question twice. Each time Elijah offers the same excuse—answering “why he ran” not “what he is doing here.”

If Elijah had been completely honest, he would have said, “God, I was afraid of Jezebel. Instead of turning to You with my problem, I allowed my fear to control my decision. I’m here in the desert, far away from everyone. I’m hiding in fear.”

Just a couple of days earlier he courageously faced King Ahab and all the prophets of Baal with no sign of fear. When Jezebel threatened

him, he could have simply turned to God and said, “Now what do you want me to do, Lord?”

As he is hiding in the desert, he is also living with a false belief—“I’m the only one still serving You, God.” God speaks the truth—7,000 others are still serving Him.

God then tells Elijah what action He wants him to take. “Go back the way you came.” God gave him three specific assignments to do.

Climbing out of the pit of depression is most effectively done when we seek direction from God—“what do You want me to do?” You don’t have to understand all the “whys”—just obey God.

courageous and not to be discouraged.

The same theme is repeated in the New Testament. "Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you" (Galatians 5:1 The Message). Don't put yourself back in slavery to depression.

The real battle for the depressed person is to do battle with thoughts and feelings. If your feelings are allowed to be in control you'll stay stuck in the pit of depression. God promises you freedom. He has unlocked the prison door, but you have to get up and walk out of your prison cell.

The God we serve has a future for us filled with hope—stand on this promise: "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. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:11-13 NIV).

For Further Study

Happiness Is a Choice: The Symptoms, Causes, and Cures of Depression, by Frank Minirth, M.D., and Paul Meier, M.D.

The Freedom from Depression Work-book (Minirth Meier New Life Clinic Series), by Les Carter, PhD and Frank Minirth, M.D.
A 12 step plan to define and identify depression, and develop keys to lasting change.

These can be ordered at your local bookstore or on websites that sell new or used books.

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Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-9a. What have been the situations that have triggered depression in your life, or the life of your loved one?
2. Read 2 Corinthians 1:9-11.
 - A. How did Paul explain God's purpose for the hardships he was experiencing?
 - B. What part of Paul's explanation is hardest for you to relate to in your life and the problems you are facing?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. How can you put into practice the strategy Paul describes here in battling thoughts?
4. Read Romans 5:1-5.
 - A. What is the process Paul describes on how our problems connect us to hope?
 - B. How easy or difficult is it for you to relate to what Paul says here?
 - C. How can you begin to apply this strategy in your life?
5. Read Romans 15:13. How does this speak to the process of experiencing hope in your life?



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