

What the Bible Says about Depression



Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God.
(Psalm 43:5)

Depression is an emotional response to present troubles, whereas fear and anxiety are emotional responses to the possibility of some future disaster. Depression, fear and anxiety often occur simultaneously.

Troubles may be the consequence of one's sin, such as covetousness, envy, resentment, laziness, or selfishness; or troubles may come upon a person unjustly. Even the innocent victim may fall into depression if he reacts to the persecution in hopelessness, not faith.

Depression is undoubtedly the most common mental health problem because in this world, dreams and expectations are easily dashed – marriages fail; jobs and fortunes are lost; and poor health is inevitable. People find that no matter how hard they try, they can't have what they want. Permanent joy and satisfaction are beyond reach. When a person loses hope, extreme sadness follows. If despair becomes an ingrained way of thinking, the result is clinical depression. The individual spirals downward into a dark abyss.

Depression may be defined as having the wrong emotional reaction to a problem. The solution is two-fold: (1) change the emotional reaction, and (2) fix the very trouble that triggered the depression. For example, it does no good to change one's emotional reaction to poverty, illness, failed relationships, or death unless those problems are actually fixed. To be free of depression, one must receive genuine deliverance from God. Apart from a personal relationship with God, there is every reason to be depressed. Jesus Christ is the only real source of hope, for He is the only one who can solve the impossible.

Many Biblical characters fell into depression for various reasons.

■ **Job** was thrown into depression after the loss of his business, his family, and his health. Depression may result from personal loss or fear of God's abandonment.

Afterward Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. And Job said, "Let the day perish on which I was to be born, and the night which said, 'A boy is conceived.'"

For my groaning comes at the sight of my food, and my cries pour out like water. For what I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet, and I am not at rest, but turmoil comes.
(Job 3:1-3, 24-26)

■ The prophet **Elijah** fell into depression when he realized he could not produce a spiritual revival in Israel.

But he [Elijah] himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree; and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers."
(1 Kings 19:4)

■ **King Solomon** became depressed when he realized that all of his labors on earth were futile. In the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes, Solomon described his quest to find purpose and happiness through wisdom, wealth, wine, and women; but it was all in vain. Like Elijah and Job, Solomon became depressed when he lost his purpose for living. Those who have lived for the wrong purpose, or who have the wrong expectations from this world, are especially prone to depression. When people put their hopes and dreams in the pleasures and things of this world, the inevitable outcome is depression.

Therefore I [Solomon] completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:20)

■ **David** became depressed when he was being hunted down by King Saul. Those who sin against us cause us loss and grief, and unless suffering for righteousness' sake is properly understood, it ends in depression.

For You are the God of my strength; why have You rejected me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? ...Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why are you disturbed within me?
(Psalm 43:2, 5)

■ After **David** became king, he fell into depression over his sin of adultery.

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. (Psalm 32:3-4)

In their depression, all these Biblical characters had one thing in common. They each believed some lie about God, themselves, the purpose of life, or the world. Or, rather, they did not understand or act upon God's truth. A lie will lead you into the bondage of depression; the truth will set you free from depression.

And you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free. (John 8:32)

● **Job** was kept from falling into debilitating depression by trusting God. Despite his outward circumstances, Job assured himself that God had planned a good future for him. A man can endure any trial as long as he has hope – not wishful thinking, but real, God-given promises.

Though He [God] slays me, yet will I trust Him... I know that I will be vindicated.

As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God.
(Job 13:15, 19; 19:25-26)

● God relieved **Elijah's** depression by explaining to him that the work of God is not in the spectacular, but in the gentle, unseen moving of the Spirit of God. Furthermore, God told Elijah that his labors counted. The evil rule of Ahab and Jezebel would be overturned, and there still remained seven thousand true followers of God in Israel. Elijah was encouraged once he correctly judged his life's ministry.

The Lord said to him [Elijah]... "yet I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have

not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19:18)

● In the book of Ecclesiastes, **Solomon** explains that despite the vanity of this world, a man does not need to be in despair. God has ordained that our earthly works have an eternal purpose and reward.

I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God. (Ecclesiastes 3:12-13)

● Although persecuted by Saul, **David** found encouragement by believing that God would someday vindicate him and set all things right. He put his hope in God.

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him, the help of my countenance and my God. (Psalm 42:11)

I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. (Psalm 27:13)

● **David** was freed from despair over his sin once he experienced God’s cleansing. Despite the damage we have done through our sin, God can forgive us and turn the consequences of our sin into something good.

I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. (Psalm 32:5)

Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart. (Psalm 32:10-11)

The man who has a right relationship with God may experience troubles, but there is no reason for despair because troubles work together for his good and God’s glory.

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. (Luke 6:22-23)

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing. (2 Corinthians 4:8)

...so that you will not grieve as do others who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13)

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.” (Jeremiah 29:11)

The entire New Testament is about the hope that we have through the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Christian never has a reason to lose hope.

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. (Ephesians 1:18)

The cure to despair is being in a right relationship with God and then exercising faith in what God says about you and your future, despite your outward circumstances.

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18)

For we walk by faith, not by sight. (2 Corinthians 5:7)

Additional Truths about Depression

* Bear personal responsibility for your depression. You must choose to handle life’s problems God’s way.

* Don’t live by your feelings, but by obedience to God. Do what the Bible commands regardless of how you feel.

* Understand the downward cycle of depression. Personal sinful choices result in problems; problems result in sadness over one’s condition; more sinful choices are made in an attempt to relieve the despair; more problems and more depression follow. The only way to stop the downward spiral is to begin handling your problems according to the commandments of God. For example, start living a morally pure life, stop wasting money foolishly, and start spending time in wholesome places, such as church.

* Depression is often caused by low self-esteem. The only cure for low self-esteem is living for God’s glory, not your own. Stop being self-centered.

* Depression can also be caused by coveting. Stop wanting more things, and be thankful for what you have.

* Some forms of depression are thought to be caused by stress, genetics, or deficiencies in brain chemistry. Medical doctors debate whether a chemical deficiency causes depression, or depression causes the deficiency. Regardless of physiological problems, godly thinking can go a

long way to cure depression. Most depression is within our control because it is dependant upon the choices we make.

* The Bible teaches that those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are securely saved. The Christian is completely forgiven and assured of heaven through faith in Christ’s work on his behalf.

If you believe your eternal salvation depends on your efforts, you will fall into despair; for nobody can measure up to God’s standards. God has determined that a Christian’s standing before God is not based on what he has done or should do, but on what Christ has done for him.

* The Christian can live in constant joy because of his unity and security in Christ. The believer who is depressed has not yet come to appreciate what great things he has been given through Jesus Christ.

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. (John 14:27)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (Philippians 4:4)

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