

# Depression

## Transforming Truths

### Article - 5



# Depression

## *Lift Your Drooping Hands*

*"Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees."  
—Hebrews 12:12 (RSV)*

To some it may seem odd that a Christian magazine would need to devote space in its pages to the subject of depression. After all, should not those who believe that Jesus Christ has purchased for them eternal salvation from sin and its penalty—death—be among the most joyous people in the world? Should not an upbeat attitude and frame of mind characterize those who believe that "if God is for us, who is against us?"

Yes, Christians should be joyous and upbeat. But like all "shoulds," this is not always the case. As members of the human race, believers in Jesus Christ, and the salvation he obtained through his sacrificial death, are subject to all the maladies of the human race. Despite their special position with the heavenly Father, Christians experience the same weaknesses as the rest of mankind. The scriptures testify of this: "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man" (1 Cor. 10:13). While this apparent lack of protection from sickness, sorrow, and pain may seem odd to some, scriptures indicate that God has a purpose in allowing his people to experience these things—that they may develop sympathy with those around them and be prepared through personal experience to assist Jesus in cleansing sin and sickness from the world during his Messianic kingdom.

### DEPRESSION WIDESPREAD

Depressive illness, or depression, is a relatively widespread affliction of the human race and Christians experience it too. About 8 percent of American men and 15 percent of American women will suffer from depression at some point in their lives. If a person experiences an episode of depression once, there is a 50 percent chance of their being depressed again. If depression recurs, there is about a 75 percent chance it will return for a third bout. Another form of depression is not episodic but long-lasting and chronic. (This is one of the experiences that the Lord has permitted me to have, and now I count it all joy—most of the time.) Depression can be very serious. At the very least, depression will rob a person of any continuing sense of joy in life. At its worst, depression results in the loss of life itself through suicide.

### CHARACTERISTICS OF DEPRESSION

Depression is characterized by feelings of sadness, worthlessness, and the utter hopelessness that things will ever improve. It is also characterized by inactivity, because the depressed person believes he or she has no control over the circumstances of his or her life. Other symptoms which may accompany and indicate depression include poor appetite or overeating, insomnia or oversleeping, low energy or fatigue, low self-esteem, poor concentration or difficulty making decisions, and recurrent thoughts of death.

The number of people suffering from depression seems to be increasing. Partly this is because there is a growing awareness of it, better diagnosis by professionals, and a lessening of the stigma once associated with having mental and emotional problems. Another part may be the fact that social and economic realities, such as the breakdown of the family, the decline of spiritual values in the face of growing materialism, and the intense competition in the job market have created an atmosphere that increasingly breeds negative, depressive responses in our lives.

Have you ever experienced depression? Are you now suffering from depression, or think you may be? If so, have you found a way to effectively cope with your experience of depression or do you just endure it, regarding it simply as your "lot" in life? There are ways to help one cope with, or treat, depression, although only about 30 percent of those who experience depression seek treatment.

## **TREATING DEPRESSION**

The two major forms of treatment used today relate to the two prevalent beliefs about the causes of depression:

1) Depression is a result of bad, unsound, or irrational patterns of thinking. The interpretations and conclusions a person makes about himself and his situations in relation to others and the world around him become distorted. Distortion results from not taking into account all of the facts or looking honestly at the facts. This type of thinking over a period of time can become habitual and ingrained in their personality; it can be very hard to break or change.

A person can unconsciously pick up, or assimilate, such patterns from people with whom they live or work. In Proverbs 22:24-25 we read: "Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways, and find a snare for yourself."

Treatment used for correcting this possible cause is called cognitive therapy, or therapy for the way we think. It helps the depressed person explore the patterns of thinking that lead to the interpretations and conclusions and the accompanying feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness. This can be accomplished through diligent personal efforts ("self-help") or through professional counseling (talk therapy).

2) Depression may also be due to a chemical deficiency or imbalance in the brain that results in some type of interference with the thinking process. The analysis of information and other stimuli is in some way inhibited and irrational interpretations and conclusions are the outcome. Treatment based on this theory or cause consists of medication to affect the level, or available level, of chemical neurotransmitters in the brain, particularly serotonin. These medications are known collectively as anti-depressants.

## **SCRIPTURAL COUNSEL**

The first method of treatment—paying close attention to our patterns of thinking about ourselves, others, and the circumstances and events around us—is clearly supported scripturally: "For as he thinks within himself, so he is" (Prov. 23:7 NAS). "A doubleminded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8). "Finally, brethren, whatever is true . . . honorable . . . right . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8). "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith" (Rom. 12:2, 3).

In understanding this last scripture, we need to realize that the renewing of our minds involves not just inserting new spiritual thought patterns but also removing and discarding old thoughts and thought patterns—those that are of the old human nature and do not serve the interests of the spirit-begotten new creature.

One method to help determine if we are thinking properly is to test our interpretations by imagining and examining alternative interpretations and conclusions. This can help us break out of unsound thought patterns, but it takes work and practice. With work, you will find that in any circumstance there are actually many possible or plausible interpretations of an event or situation. Which one best fits the facts? When we train ourselves to routinely examine several alternatives, our mind is not so likely to jump at and embrace the first interpretation that comes, especially one influenced by past thinking patterns.

## UN SOUND THINKING PATTERNS

Professional counselors identify about ten categories of unsound thinking patterns that may be involved in producing depression. Here are a few of the major ones:

**(1) All-or-Nothing Thinking**—This is the tendency to evaluate personal qualities or interpret events in extreme, black-or-white terms. All-or-nothing thinking forms the basis for perfectionism. It causes us to fear any mistake or imperfection; we will then see ourselves as complete failures, and we will feel inadequate and worthless. This way of evaluating things is unrealistic, because life is rarely completely one way or the other. For example, no one is absolutely brilliant or totally stupid.

**Example:** Because of timidity, you fail to speak in a situation where you believe a Christian viewpoint is needed. You later say to yourself, "I am a total failure as a Christian."

**(2) Over-generalization**—In this pattern, a person concludes that an unpleasant thing that happened once will occur over and over again. The pain of rejection is generated almost entirely from over-generalization. Usually words like "never" or "always" occur in overgeneralizations. When we use them or hear them, take note!

**Example:** You learn that Bro. and Sr. Hospitality have invited several other brethren to their home for dinner and fellowship next Sunday evening. Disappointed that you have not been invited, you conclude: "Nobody likes me. I never get invited to other brethren's homes." Depression sets in. Is the "never" statement true? In all likelihood it is not.

**(3) Mental Filter**—Pick out a negative detail in any situation and dwell on it exclusively. Soon we will perceive the whole situation as negative. It is as if we are wearing a pair of eyeglasses with special lenses that filter out anything positive. All that we allow to enter our conscious mind is negative. It is a habit that can cause much needless anguish.

**Example:** You're at a convention and very much want to fellowship with a particular brother or sister. At every intermission and mealtime, by the time you find that person, he/she is already deeply involved in a conversation with someone else. Bitterly disappointed you conclude, "This is a depressing convention. I wish I had not come."

**Scriptural example:** Israel's loss of faith when they saw Pharaoh's army approaching them near the Red Sea. They focused on the negative, ignoring all the positive things the Lord had done for them (Exod. 14:9- 14).

**(4) Discounting the Positive**—This is our tendency to transform neutral or even positive experiences into negative ones. We do not just ignore positive experiences; we cleverly and swiftly turn them into the opposite. An everyday example of this is the way most of us handle compliments. We have been conditioned to automatically tell ourselves, "They are just being nice." With one swift thought we mentally discount the compliment. We do the same thing when we say, "Oh, it was really nothing." We may actually insult the person who gave the compliment because we are implying that they are incorrect—what they were complimenting us for really did not deserve a compliment.

Discounting the positive is a very destructive pattern of thinking—we search like scientists to find evidence to prove our hypothesis that we are second-rate, inferior. Whenever we have an experience that we interpret as negative, we dwell on it and conclude, "That proves what I've known about myself all along." Whenever we interpret an experience as positive, we tell ourselves, "That was a fluke; it doesn't count." The price we pay for this pattern of thinking is intense misery and an inability to appreciate the good things that happen, the good in ourselves, and the good in others.

**(5) Jumping to Conclusions**—We arbitrarily jump to a negative conclusion that is not justified by the facts of the situation.

**Example:** Your spouse is unresponsive to your attempts at conversation one evening. Your heart sinks because of the way you interpret the silence: "He/she must be mad at me for something I did or didn't do." In the best of relationships this is sometimes true, but in this case you are unaware that he/she was severely criticized at work and is too upset to want to talk about it or anything else.

**Example:** You are convinced that you will not have a blessed experience attending a certain convention because not one of the speakers is among your favorites. In fact, you have not even heard of two of the speakers before. Unfortunately, this is a situation in which you can predict a negative outcome and be in a good position to ensure that the outcome is indeed negative (self-fulfilling prophecy).

**(6) "Should" Statements**—We try to motivate ourselves by saying, "I should do this." These statements to ourselves cause us to feel pressured and resentful. Paradoxically, we end up feeling apathetic and unmotivated. "Should" statements generate a lot of emotional turmoil in our daily lives. When the reality of our own behavior falls short of our standards, our "shoulds" and "should nots" create self-loathing, shame, and excessive guilt. When the performance of other people falls short of our expectations, we will feel bitter and self-righteous. We will either have to change our expectations to approximate reality, or always feel let down by human behavior.

**Examples:** "I should be on time for meeting." "He should have been able to answer that basic question."

**(7) Labeling and Mislabeled**—Personal labeling means creating a completely negative image based on our or another person's errors. It is an extreme form of generalization. There is a good chance we are involved in personal labeling whenever we describe our mistakes with sentences beginning with "I am a . . .", or describe others' mistakes with sentences beginning with "He/She is a . . ." Labeling ourselves or others is not only self-defeating or disrespectful, it is irrational. We and others cannot be equated with any one thing we/they do. When we label ourselves or others based on perceived inadequacies, we create a lot of personal pain or hostility toward others. In mislabeling, we often use words that are inaccurate and emotionally loaded.

**Examples:** "She's a subscriber to The Herald." "He attends a Dawn class."

**Scriptural example:** "And Nathanael said to him, 'Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see'" (John 1:46).

**(8) Personalization**—We assume responsibility for a negative event or situation even when there is no basis for doing so. We conclude that what happened was our fault. Personalization causes us to feel crippling guilt.

**Scriptural example:** Jesus took no responsibility for the failure of the Jews to respond to his preaching and recognize him as Messiah.

Working to undo unsound, negative thinking patterns will help one find more joy in life, especially the Christian life. We will discover an ability to more deeply appreciate ourselves and others around us, especially our spiritual family. It really is a matter of attitude. One time I believe God spoke to me through a fortune cookie at a critical point in my life. (It was the only worthwhile "fortune" I have ever found in a cookie.) It said, "Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be."

## **PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING**

Sometimes our best personal efforts to "renew our minds"—to make these adjustments in our thinking—yield little progress. In that case, consideration might be given to utilizing the assistance of a professional counselor. No professional counselor or therapist worthy of their title will try to undermine your foundation values in trying to help you find solutions. Even so, always remember who is in charge of the treatment—you. Be firm in explaining your values and perspectives to the counselor if a comment or suggestion seems to be in some way contrary to those.

Sometimes cognitive therapy alone, even with a professional counselor, does not bring significant improvement to or relief from the depression. (That has been my personal experience.) In that case the counselor may suggest a trial period of anti-depressant medication to see if additional benefits can be obtained. This, again, is your personal decision. No one can or should make it for you. Realize, however, a person may need trials with several anti-depressants before the right match is found.

## **TRUTH DEMOLISHES DEPRESSION**

Those disposed toward telling themselves "I am not worthy" might do well to train a voice within them to automatically talk back by saying, "Of course you're not worthy [based on your own merit], but Christ made you worthy through his sacrifice! He has covered your unworthiness with his righteousness." Moreover, because Christ has redeemed you and you have given your heart to him, the truth of the matter is that you are a special treasure to God. Reminding yourself of this is not pride; it is fact.

The feeling of unworthiness can manifest itself as a consuming fear, a fear that we are unlovable, a fear of doing anything lest we fall short of the expectations of God or others. A fearful mental paralysis can overcome us.

"'The spirit of fear' is ... simply a mental influence natural to every fallen human being of humble mind. It is begotten of the realization of personal imperfection and unworthiness of divine favors. The antidote for this spirit of fear is the holy spirit of Truth, and its instructions accepted and held in full assurance of faith. The Spirit of Truth tells us that there were good reasons for our entertainment of the spirit of fear; but that those reasons no longer exist since we have come into Christ as new creatures. It points us away from our unintentional weakness to the great Atonement accomplished by our Lord Jesus."—*Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. 5, pp. 196, 197.

The apostle Paul counsels us to always speak truthfully: "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body" (Ephesians 4:25, *NIV*). Surely in emphasizing the importance of speaking truthfully to others, Paul did not embrace a lesser standard in regard to messages we speak to ourselves. He wrote: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true ... think on these things" (Philippians 4:8). We need to keep a diligent watch on ourselves to ensure that the contemplations of our hearts and minds are based upon what is true and what is real.

The power of truth smashes the subtle seductions of unsound thinking; it eliminates the maze of thinking that leads to depression. Whenever we feel unworthy, unlovable, hopeless, etc., we should ask ourselves, “What do I know that is true, really true?” Focusing on those things will often lift the clouds from our hearts and minds.

## **HELP FROM OTHERS**

It would oversimplify the subject of treating depression to suggest that it is easily overcome by focusing on the truth of every situation. In most cases, those who are suffering from depression need to seek the assistance of someone they can trust to help them sort out the realities with which they are struggling — a close friend, a pastor/elder, a doctor, or a counselor. A trained professional can often provide the mental tools, and perhaps medication, that will enable the suffering ones to begin the work of controlling and relieving their depression.

Individuals who are depressed tend to self-focus and struggle to find any evidence that they have value. But the irrational thinking patterns constantly defeat their efforts. Others may see them as selfish or self-absorbed. Focusing on others and their needs is a healthy shift away from self-centered thinking. Psychologists will tell depressed patients to start counting their blessings. When we see how many blessings we have received from the Heavenly Father, it is harder to continue to focus on negative things and feel down. But this will require us to stop “discounting the positives” in our life and look at things truthfully.

Some people are so paralyzed by their depression that they can hardly make daily decisions or accomplish anything. It can be extremely difficult to get a depressed person to follow through on tasks, appointments, etc. In those cases, a family member or another individual needs to “hold their hand,” i.e., make appointments for them (a challenge in view of “privacy” laws), take them to the appointment, take them to the pharmacy to get medication, be on the phone with them to help explain the type of assistance they need.

People with severe depression invent many excuses for not doing the things that need to be done. The person helping them has to cut through those excuses and help the depressed person do those things, because if not done, the failure to do them feeds the feelings of worthlessness.

We can attest to all of these observations and recommendations based on many years of personal experience with this illness. If you want to overcome depression, pray for and seek help in renewing your mind. Changing your thinking patterns is hard work. Consider seeking professional help. If you are trying to help someone experiencing depression, seek a source of support for yourself in the experience, either from a professional counselor or another family member or friend that has the ability to provide you the support you need.

God is pleased to offer his children a life filled with joy. Joy is one of the fruits of having God’s Spirit dwelling in us. If we are lacking this joy, there is no shame in admitting that we are experiencing the fallen human condition of depression, or in seeking help from others, including medical professionals.

## **HELPING OURSELVES**

There are things we can do that can help. One of the most powerful things we can do is accept the forgiveness God has offered us through his son, and then forgive ourselves for not always being the kind of person we would like to be. Accepting God’s forgiveness without forgiving ourselves indicates we are looking at forgiveness as a doctrine, a theological concept, a belief, but that it is not really penetrating our heart to affect how we view ourselves. Releasing the load of guilt we feel over past sins or present inadequacies is important to overcoming depression: “If we confess

our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

We also need to forgive others if we are carrying a load of anger or resentment toward those who have offended us. If we have not forgiven them, it may be likely we are engaging in unsound thinking regarding them, like labeling and mislabeling: “Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you” (Colossians 3:13, *TEV*).

Other important things we can do include meeting with fellow Christians. There is a strong tendency among those who are depressed to withdraw from relationships. If you are depressed, resist the desire to withdraw with all the strength within you; you need the encouragement that comes through Christian fellowship: “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25, *NIV*).

We must be especially careful to not withdraw from our relationship with the heavenly Father through prayer. There is no being in the universe more approachable, more willing to hear the depths of our experiences than Jehovah.

### **COPING WITH A FAMILY MEMBER WHO IS DEPRESSED**

Coping with personal depression can be an overwhelming experience. Coping with depression in a spouse or another family member can be all-consuming. One must carry not only one’s personal load of emotions, but also give huge amounts of emotional support to the depressed person and the family. If the depression manifests itself through withdrawal from relationships, one may have to bear the experience of emotional abandonment. If the depression manifests itself through mental paralysis, jobs and income may be lost.

Do not try to manage deep depression by yourself. Try to get the depressed person some professional help. Do not let the “stigma” of a mental health diagnosis within your family deter you from this. Above all, seek a source of support for yourself in the experience, either from a professional counselor or another family member or friend that can provide the support you need.

- Br. Thomas Gilbert  
*THE HERALD/ 1997 JAN*  
*(2007/2016)*

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### **NEVER ALONE**

*"Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."*  
- John 16:32.

It need *not* be said that to carry our conviction into action, is a costly sacrifice. It may make necessary, renunciations which leave one to feel a strange sense both of deprivation and loneliness. But he who will fly, as an eagle does, into the higher levels where cloudless day abides, and live in the sunshine of God, must, be content to live a comparatively lonely life.



No bird is so solitary as the eagle. Eagles never fly in flocks; one, or at the most two, ever being seen together at once. But the life that is lived unto God, however it forfeits human companionships, knows *divine fellowship*.

God seeks eagle men. No man ever comes into a realization of the best things of God, who does not upon the Godward side of his life, learn to walk alone with God. We find Abraham alone in Horeb upon the heights, but Lot, dwelling in Sodom. Moses, skilled in all the wisdom of Egypt, must go forty years into the desert alone with God. Paul, who was filled with Greek learning and had also sat at the feet of Gamaliel, must go into Arabia and learn the desert life with God. Let God isolate us. I do not mean the isolation of a monastery: In this isolating experience he develops an independence of faith and life so that the soul needs no longer the constant help, prayer, faith, or attention of his neighbor.

Such assistance and inspiration from other members are necessary and have their places in the Christian's development, but there comes a time when they act as a direct hindrance to the individual's faith and welfare. God knows how, to change the circumstances in order to give us an isolating experience. We yield to God and he takes us through something, and when it is all over those about us, who are no less loved than before, are no longer depended upon. We realize that he has wrought, some things in us, and that the, wings of our souls have learned to beat the upper air.

We must dare to be alone. Jacob must be left alone if the angel of God- is to whisper in his ear the mystic name of Shiloh; Daniel must be left alone if he is to see celestial visions; John must be banished to Patmos if he is deeply to take and firmly to keep the "Print of Heaven."

"He trod the winepress alone." Are we prepared for a "Splendid isolation" rather than fail Him?

"Burden bearers are we, all,  
Great and small.

Burden sharers be ye all,  
Great and small!

Where another shares the load,  
Two draw nearer God.

Yet there are burdens we can share with none  
Save God;

And paths remote where we must walk alone  
With God;

For lonely burden and for path apart –  
Thank God!

If these but serve to bring the burdened hear  
To God."

- *Anonymous.*  
(THE HERALD 1949 DEC)

## ALONE

It is human to stand with the crowd; it is divine to stand alone.  
It is man-like to follow people, to drift with the tide.  
It is God-like to follow a principle, to stem the tide.

It is natural to compromise conscience and follow social and religious fashions for the sake of gain or pleasure.  
It is divine to sacrifice both on the altar of truth and duty.

“No man stood with me, but all men forsook me,” wrote the battle-scarred Apostle in describing his first appearance before Nero to answer for his life, for believing and teaching contrary to the Roman world.

Noah built and voyaged alone.  
His neighbors laughed at his strangeness but perished in style.  
Abraham wandered and worshiped alone.  
The Sodomites smiled at the simple shepherd,  
followed the fashion and fed the flames.

Daniel dined and prayed alone.  
Elijah sacrificed and witnessed alone.  
Jeremiah prophesied and wept alone.  
Jesus loved and died alone.

And of the lonely way his disciples should walk,  
Jesus said, “strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life,  
and few there be that find it.”  
Of their treatment of the many who walked in the broad way, he said:  
“If ye were of the world, the world would love its own,  
but ye are not of the world, therefore, the world hateth you.”

Israel in the wilderness praised Abraham, and persecuted Moses.  
Israel and the kings praised Moses, and persecuted the prophets.  
The synagogue under Caiaphas praised the prophets,  
and persecuted Jesus.  
The church of the popes praised the Savior,  
and persecuted the saints.  
The multitudes now, both in the church and the world, applaud the courage  
and fortitude of the patriarchs and prophets and apostles and martyrs,  
but condemn as stubbornness or foolishness  
like faithfulness to truth today.

— Author Unknown  
[BIBLE STUDENT ARCHIVES  
-INSPIRATION-]

## A SOLITARY WAY

THERE is a mystery in human hearts,  
And though we be encircled by a host  
Of those who love us well, and are beloved,  
To every one of us, from time to time,  
There comes a sense of utter loneliness.  
Our dearest friend is "stranger" to our joy,  
And cannot realize our bitterness.

"There is not one who really understands,  
Not one to enter into all I feel;"  
Such is the cry of each of us in turn.  
We wander in a "solitary way,"  
No matter what or where our lot may be,  
Each heart, mysterious even to itself,  
Must live its inner life of solitude.

And would you know the reason why this is?  
It is because the Lord desires our love.  
In every heart He wishes to be first.  
He therefore keeps the secret-key Himself,  
To open all its chambers, and to bless  
With perfect sympathy and holy peace  
Each solitary soul which come to Him.  
So when we feel this loneliness, it is  
The voice of Jesus saying, "Come to Me;"  
And every time we are "not understood,"  
It is a call to us to come again;  
For Christ alone can satisfy the soul,  
And those who walk with Him from day to day  
Can never have "a solitary way."

And when beneath some heavy cross you faint,  
And say, "I cannot bear this load alone,"  
You say the truth. Christ made it purposely  
So heavy that you must return to Him.  
The bitter grief, which "no one understands,"  
Conveys a secret message from the King,  
Entreating you to come to Him again.  
The Man of Sorrows understands it well.

- POEMS OF THE DAWN pp. 48-50

Amen !!

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# **Transforming Truths**

*[Tamil Publications]*

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