



What Do You Do About Depression? Do You Know Anyone Battling Depression?

In college one of my closest friends committed suicide. None of us knew why and we were not sure exactly how he did it. His mother and father kept it a secret from all of us. As we talked, we each admitted that we had experienced times when we felt discouraged and even depressed but it was tough for us to grasp how someone so close could reach the point of deciding to commit suicide. Yet it happens all the time and literally billions experience deep bouts with depression. Several years ago I was really struggling, dealing with my work as a pastor. I was having a tough time of it with someone in the church and I felt disillusioned and isolated. Our family was heading toward a beautiful national park where we were going to spend a couple weeks camping and as we were driving, I told Mary Jo that I just wanted to go and go and never return home. Have you ever felt that way? You just wished you could drop out of life because it felt too oppressive, too depressing?

There are a number of great heroes of the faith in the Bible who battled depression. David wrote, **Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me?** (Psalm 42: 11b NIV) Also he confessed, **I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning...I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.** (Psalm 38: 6, 8 NIV) Depression is not a respecter of persons. It does not avoid those who have highly developed skills or are popular, creative, or super bright. Even kings can fight despair. Naomi, the widow who was also the mother-in-law of Ruth may have had a "good reason" for becoming depressed but that does not mean she embraced it. She said to her friends, **"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.** (Ruth 1: 20 NIV) Circumstances do not determine whether you slide into depression or not. In this case, her daughter-in-law Ruth suffered an identical loss. One could argue hers was worse. Like Naomi, her husband had died but she was also in a new land without friends or family to support her. Something though kept her optimistic and upbeat when her more spiritually developed (or so it would seem) mother-in-law apparently lost hope of ever having a happy life again. Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet for good reason. Despite the dynamic communion he had with God and the monumental prophecies he shared with the Jews, he fell apart psychologically. **Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.** (Jeremiah 9: 1 NIV)

One could argue that all three of these people had good reason to be depressed. Their circumstances were painful and sad. That does not mean any of them wanted to continue being depressed for even another day, let alone a lifetime. When the people of Israel who had returned to Jerusalem following their exile heard for the first time the book of the Law of God, they wept loudly because of their depression over how badly they had failed God and each other. Nehemiah the governor gave this profound bit of counsel. **Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.**" (Nehemiah 8:10d NIV) At the time, Nehemiah was encouraging them to accept the joy the Lord had to offer them. "Let God supernaturally transform your emotional response to what you face", he was directing them. Now, some might argue that such a take on depression is unreasonable. Yet consider this if you have put your hope in Jesus Christ for eternal life, or as Jesus put it, you have been "born again". You literally have Jesus Christ living in you and a part of your new personality. That means that all His strengths of character and personality are available to you.

Think of it this way. Suppose a friend told you she had a garden you could go to whenever you wished and pick some of the fruit there. You would be free to take whatever you wanted whenever you wished. That is exactly how it is with your life having Christ a part of you. Jesus said this of Him and you. **Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.** (John 15: 4 NIV) Jesus tells you squarely that He is part of you and as such you bear fruit. What fruit are we considering? You have the fruit of freedom from depression as a result of the joy of the Lord being yours. Paul reiterated the statement Jesus made that He is in you. **Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test?** (2 Corinthians 13:5 NIV) The warning is that many are not yet in the faith...have never put their hope in Jesus Christ for salvation. For those who have, Jesus Christ is in them! What a great discovery. Eternal life and the forgiveness of sin brings Christ to your soul, transforms you into a brand new personality, Christ and you together. You thus have access to what Christ has as a person. You have His personality traits too. But how can you access His joy? Read your Bible and connect with Him there. Pray. Think about Jesus often, really often. Be around Christian people who exhibit the characteristics of Christ as much as possible. The more you connect with Jesus any way you can, the more His joy will take apart whatever despair or depression you may be experiencing.

Let me share some practical ways to let the joy of Jesus take over for you. 1. Eliminate the “shoulds”. I should succeed. I should be loved by him or her. My life should be easier. People should treat me better. I should be free of physical problems or any problems for that matter. Did Jesus succeed as defined by those who lived at the time or as many see it since? No. Was Jesus loved by all those He loved? No. Did Jesus get treated well? Of course not. Did Jesus get to avoid pain and suffering? Do you remember the Cross? Jesus had joy despite all the bad things He faced and so can you. Should determinations only get in the way of possessing the joy of Jesus and bring you down. 2. Do something kind or generous for someone else anonymously. Anonymously so you won't be tempted by a should thought. Generosity without a should lifts your spirit and brings you into Jesus behavior and thinking. 3. Do something you enjoy each day. Plan for it so it is set in your schedule. I love how Jesus never rushed about, never hurried. He lived each moment fully and embraced every relationship He had. He clearly liked people and set aside time to be with strangers as well as friends. 4. Practice smiling. Out of all that Charlie Chaplin got wrong, this one he got right. Smile more and see if something good happens inside you. 5. Set two goals and begin to tackle them. Be ready to face opposition though, either from within yourself, due to the normal roadblocks that come along or from those who don't see things as you do. Be certain your goals are worth pursuing and they align with Jesus. They might not be “super spiritual” but that does not mean they aren't great goals worthy of your life with God.

After His good friend Lazarus died and Jesus came to see his sisters Martha and Mary, He was met outside the house by Martha. She confronted Him. **“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”** (John 11: 21-22 NIV). Although Martha clearly was distraught, there was a limit to her despair. Jesus can get from the Father whatever He asks. **Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”** (John 11: 23-26 NIV) Martha knew Jesus could keep Lazarus from dying but never thought of Jesus raising him from the dead. In fact she didn't grasp what He was telling her. Martha's response indicated she wasn't ready to buy Jesus' assertion. She had faith in Him, just not that much faith. **“Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”** (John 11: 27 NIV) Martha left and then Mary came, and she was weeping profusely. Jesus let her weep but went to the tomb. He commanded the stone be rolled away but Martha protested. “But Lord, by this time the body is rotting and it will stink.” Depression works just like that. It freezes you in your past. Faith opens the way to the dead coming to life, to the coming of dawn and hope arising in your heart.. Faith in Christ takes the sting out of depression and makes a good new day a reality.