

Dealing with Depression

by Beverly Littau

Susan has just married off her daughter at a wonderful wedding that the two of them worked on tirelessly for months. Jill has been dealing with an angry teenage son for several months. Mark has just been passed over once more for a promotion he believes he deserved. Lucy lost her mom after a five year battle with cancer. Bob has been divorced for ten years and has had relationship, anger, financial, and employment issues ever since. He sometimes feels hopeless and suicidal.

All of these people have one thing in common. They are all experiencing varying degrees of depression.

Depression is part of the human experience. Symptoms of depression can range from mild to moderate to severe. Many Christians experiencing depression often feel guilty and judged because they believe that depression is a sin.

There are many examples in scripture of people who experienced depression. Some were depressed as a result of their own sin (David). Some were depressed because of life circumstances (Job, Elijah).

For the Christian, what we learn from this is that depression can be normal. It can be very instructive. Depression is a symptom that tells us the condition of our heart or our emotional reaction to our circumstances. It leads us to repentance, forgiveness, spiritual growth, a change of heart, a new perspective, or simply a new awareness of God's presence in a difficult circumstance. God does not cause depression, but He allows it and uses it to bring about good in our lives.

So how do we deal with depression? I suggest thinking of it in terms of severity and longevity. I would further suggest four levels of treatment that correlate with those factors.

The first level of treatment is what I like to call "**Home Remedies**." Think of Home Remedies as those things that are "pick me ups" when you feel tired or "blah." In the case of Susan, she is experiencing a normal "down" after the "high" of her daughter's wedding. Home Remedies that may lift her spirits might include such things as rest, prayer, meditation on scripture, thinking about positive things, giving herself some time away to refresh and reflect, and doing an enjoyable activity. Other home remedies include dressing up, having lunch with a friend, going for a walk, etc. The idea of a Home Remedy is to do something enjoyable that will lift you out of a sagging spirit. These remedies may help keep you from sinking into deeper depression.

We have a responsibility to work on our thoughts that sustain depression and cause it to deepen. The Bible tells us to take our thoughts captive (II Cor. 10:5) and if we learn to do that, we will not give the enemy room to work on our emotions.

A second level of treatment is **Counseling**. If you have tried the Home Remedies and find that your symptoms of depression are not lessening or are, perhaps, becoming deeper, it may be time to find a good counselor. A counselor can be a pastor or a professional Christian therapist who can help you process through the things that trouble you.

As you talk with your counselor, you may find answers to what troubles you, but perhaps even more importantly you will have an opportunity to explore your feelings and receive feedback in a safe environment. Jill may get some help on parenting while she explores the effect her son's anger has on her life. Mark may learn to tell himself the truth about his loss so he can feel good about himself in spite of others' opinion of his merit.

A Christian therapist can help you to focus on positive thoughts and rid yourself of the false beliefs that drive depression. The therapist may be able to help you to identify the “roots” of the false beliefs you have.

Sometimes people diligently applied all the Home Remedies and sought counseling and yet they continue to battle depression. When this is the case, there may be a need for **Medication**. Medication can be very helpful when there is a chemical issue that causes or worsens depression, in the same way that insulin helps a diabetic or penicillin fights an infection. Only a medical doctor can determine if medication is called for.

When medication is taken, we still need to diligently apply the Home Remedies (work on thoughts, pray, read scripture, etc.) and probably need to continue counseling. The medication may simply “lift the fog” of the blackness we’re in so that we can focus and process with a counselor. Once we’ve learned what we need to in counseling, medication may no longer be needed. Some people need medication long-term, but that is a decision you and your doctor will need to make together.

The final level of treatment is called for in a small percentage of cases. When Home Remedies, Counseling, and Medication are not reducing the depression and the depressed person is becoming a danger to self or others, then a **Hospital Evaluation** and/or admission may become necessary. In most cases, if the depression has been addressed at the first three levels, this fourth level is never reached.

God is interested in our emotional well-being, and He is interested in helping us learn and grow when we experience painful negative feelings. With the support of friends, mentors, therapists, pastors, and sometimes the help of medication, we can learn to live in truth and not be plagued by chronic, painful symptoms of depression.