

# Depression: How to Fight for Joy

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Objective: to offer help and hope from God's Word: 1) for those struggling with depression and, 2) for those striving to love and serve those who are depressed

## I. Purpose vs. Passivity

God has given us a purpose — to glorify and enjoy him (1 Cor. 10:31).

Problem: we often struggle to embrace or even believe our purpose due to a variety of causes (see handout "A Biblical Look at Depression" for Scripture references):

- External circumstances
- Physical illness or exhaustion
- Fear of others
- Fear of failure
- Serious sin
- A sense of the futility of life
- Loss of sense of God's presence

These can sometimes produce the following reactions that vary in their intensity (see handout "A Biblical Look at Depression" for Scripture references):

- Loathing of life and a desire to end it
- Deep sorrow
- Loneliness
- Perplexity
- Despair
- Escapism
- Feeling forsaken by God

Therefore, like the brief example we heard in the beginning, we can struggle at times to see God's purpose through this unrelenting fog. We find ourselves in an understandable, yet miserable, trap of feeling like nothing really matters. There's no enthusiasm for life, and there's no joy.

Problem: One of the marks of the Christian life is joy. It's even one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5). Also, as we discussed earlier, we have a purpose from God to glorify and enjoy him. But when we're stuck in depression we struggle to enjoy anything. Even the things we once loved can now seem completely worthless. So, what are we to do?!

## II. Fight for Joy

God's Word offers help and hope for the person struggling with depression. However, that help and hope involves a willingness to fight for joy.

The first step in our fight for joy.

### A. Believe Before You Feel.

The reality is that we are led and motivated by our feelings more than we like to admit. We DO things because we FEEL like doing them.

FEEL → ACT → BELIEVE

Problems:

- 1) Our hearts (feelings / emotions) often deceive us when they are not informed by truth. (Jer. 17:9, the heart is deceitful above all things)
- 2) If feelings (right or wrong / good or bad) are what generally motivate us, then being depressed, by definition, means that I'm rarely motivated to DO anything because it's difficult to FEEL anything.
- 3) What we already know and have discussed is that God tells us he has a purpose for us—to glorify and enjoy him. Yet, this doesn't FEEL true, or right, or real. There is tension. So, the question becomes "how can I DO anything if I don't FEEL anything?".

The depressed person must learn another way to live by believing before feeling.

BELIEVE → ACT → FEEL

This new way of living must begin with what we believe. Then, we act based on the things we know to be true. This involves FAITH! (Heb. 11:1) Acting on beliefs and convictions and assurances from God who has made us with purpose yields feelings that are informed by truth and produces motivation for change.

### B. Listening to God and His People.

This might sound passive at first... just listening. In James 1:22 we're reminded that we are all prone to "merely listen" to the Word of God and not actually be doers of it. Good listening should always bring action.

Why is this difficult for the depressed person?

Practical ideas to help you listen well:

What will you hear about when you listen to God's Word?

:: Stories of those who struggled greatly and trusted God (see list of examples on handout: "A Biblical Look at Depression")

:: Listening to God's Word will always lead you to Jesus.

## **C. Think Intentionally**

### **1. Mental Guards**

A "freight train" of thought barreling through your mind unchecked will only lead to further depression because it's not founded in truth, but in a false perception of the truth. Thinking intentionally must involve putting up some mental guards that are guided by the truth of Scripture.

Philippians 4:8-9: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

Setting up mental guards will involve many of the same things we've already discussed: prayer, Scripture reading or reciting from memory, asking a friend to remind you of truths you've discussed from Scripture, etc. Something to interrupt the "train of thought" that takes you to the pit of despair.

### **2. Question your depression.**

Consider Jesus' words in the Gospel of Luke 6:45, "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

Our emotions say something about who we are, what we believe, who we trust. The same is true of our depression. It says something about our heart, who we are, what we believe, and who we trust. The question is what is your heart saying?

Jot down some of the examples given that resonate with you or someone you know:

#### **D. Trust and Worship God Alone**

Asking the “why?” question will usually bring you to God where we can find true joy.

#### **E. Confess Sin to Your Father in Heaven**

The act of confessing sin can seem really discouraging initially; however, sensing the need to confess your sin is actually a great reason for hope. Here’s why:

1. Seeing sin is evidence that God is your Father and you are his child. We don’t see our sin unless God reveals it to us.
2. This should be a normal part of every Christian’s routine, depression or not (Mt. 6:9-13).
3. Confessing sin does not hinder our relationship with God, but rather helps it. (1 John 1:9) “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

#### **Resources:**

- “Depression: Looking up from the stubborn darkness” by Ed Welch
- “Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures” by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
- [www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org)