

A Biblical Look at Depression

Synopsis

A deep sense of despondency, discouragement and sadness, often linked with a sense of personal powerlessness and a loss of meaning in and enthusiasm for life. Many biblical characters show evidence of such behavior which originates in a number of different ways.

I. Some causes of depression

a. External circumstances

2 Corinthians 1:8 (ESV) — 8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.

See also 1 Ki 19:3–4; Job 9:23 ; Ps 42:1–11 ; Ps 88:1–18 ; Joel 1:11

b. Physical illness or exhaustion

1 Kings 19:5–8 (ESV) — 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” **6** And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. **7** And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” **8** And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.

See also Ge 21:15–16 ; Ps 6:1–7 ; Ps 22:14–17 ; Ps 31:9–12 ; Is 38:1–2 ; Jonah 1:5

c. Fear of others

1 Kings 19:1–3 (ESV) — 1 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. **2** Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” **3** Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

d. Fear of failure

1 Kings 19:4 (ESV) — 4 But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.”

See also Ex 4:1 ; Nu 11:11–15

e. Serious sin

Matthew 27:3–4 (ESV) — 3 Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, **4** saying, “I

have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.”

See *also* Ps 25:16–18 ; Je 14:2–3 ; Je 14:7 ; Je 16:9–10 ; Eze 4:16–17 ; Eze 7:26–27 ; Eze 12:19 ; Re 16:10–11

f. A sense of the futility of life

Ecclesiastes 2:17–20 (ESV) — 17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind. **18** I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, **19** and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. **20** So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun,

g. Loss of sense of God’s presence

Psalms 22:1–2 (ESV) — 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? **2** O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

See *also* Mt 27:46 ; Mk 15:34

II. Symptoms of depression

a. A loathing of life and a desire to end it

Numbers 11:15 (ESV) — 15 If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness.”

See *also* 1 Ki 19:4 ; Job 10:1 ; Ec 2:17 ; Je 20:15–18 ; Jon 4:8

b. Deep sorrow

Genesis 21:16 (ESV) — 16 Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Let me not look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.

See *also* Jdg 21:2 ; 1 Sa 1:10 ; 1 Sa 1:16 ; Ps 42:3 ; Ne 1:4 ; Ne 2:2 ; Es 4:1–3 ; Job 16:16 ; La 2:11

c. Loneliness

1 Kings 19:10 (ESV) — 10 He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”

See *also* Nu 11:14 ; 1 Ki 19:14

d. Perplexity

Psalm 42:5 (ESV) — 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation

See also Hab 1:2 ; Lk 24:17 ; Jn 16:6

e. Despair

Job 17:1 (ESV) — 1 “My spirit is broken; my days are extinct; the graveyard is ready for me.

See also Ps 88:3–9 ; 2 Co 1:8–9

f. Escapism

Psalm 55:6–8 (ESV) — 6 And I say, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; **7** yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; Selah **8** I would hurry to find a shelter from the raging wind and tempest.”

See also 1 Ki 19:1–3 ; Je 8:22

g. Feeling forsaken by God

Psalm 22:1 (ESV) — 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

See also Ps 27:9 ; Ps 38:21 ; Is 49:14 ; Je 15:18 ; La 3:1–20

III. Examples of spiritual depression

(Gideon) Jdg 6:13; (Elijah) 1 Ki 19:9–18; (Psalmist/Jesus) Ps 22:1–2 & 6–8; (Psalmist) Ps 42:1–7 & 9–11; Ps 43:1–5

Psalm 43:1–5 (ESV) — 1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! **2** For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? **3** Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling! **4** Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God. **5** Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

IV. Remedies for depression

a. Renewed vision of God and being centered upon him

1 Kings 19:11 (ESV) — 11 And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

Isaiah 26:3 (ESV) — 3 You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.

See also Je 17:7–8 ; Ro 8:6

b. Hope and trust in God

Psalm 42:11 (ESV) — 11 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.

See *also* Ps 22:9–11 ; Ps 22:22–31 ; Hab 3:16–18

c. Praise

Psalm 30:1 (ESV) — 1 I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me.

See *also* Ps 42:5 ; Ps 107:1–43 ; Is 61:1–3 ; 2 Co 4:8–12

d. Reviewing what God has done

Psalm 77:11–12 (ESV) — 11 I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. **12** I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.

See *also* Ps 42:6 ; Ps 143:5 ; La 3:19–26 ; 2 Co 7:6

e. Prayer

Philippians 4:6–7 (ESV) — 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **7** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

See *also* Ps 139:23

Psalm 139:23 (ESV) — 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!