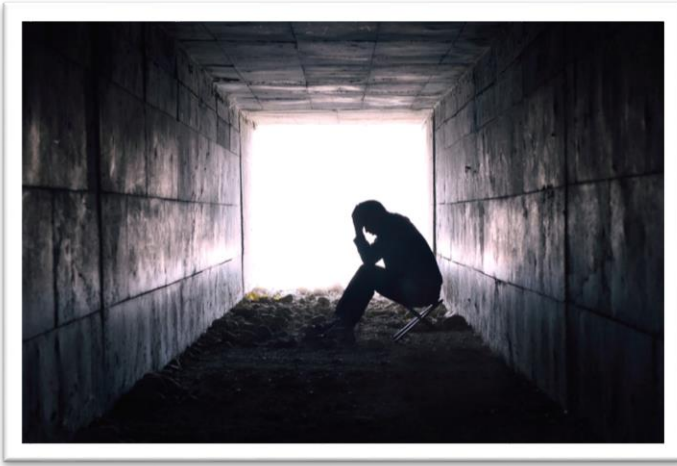


Help for Depression



As a Presbyterian minister who has actively served congregations for over 30 years, I have also dealt with depression – probably as far back as high school. At times it has painful just to think, or to take the next breath.

Depression is NOT just feeling sad. Everyone feels sad at times. Depression is a whole other manifestation. For me, at least, it feels like a nausea of my soul. Thankfully, what I experience from time to time is helped through faith, a life of prayer, medicine, vigorous exercise, and close friendships. My heart goes out to those who suffer with the really bad depression. I just can't imagine.

Some Christians believe that a person of strong faith should not have depression. Well, I am known as a person of strong faith, but yes, at times, I still experience depression. I've done all the things one should do to combat it – and have come to the conclusion that for whatever reason, my brain just doesn't produce enough serotonin on its own. So I thank God for appropriate medicine!

The following are thoughts I know will prove helpful.

WHEN YOU ARE REALLY HURTING. Do you feel like you're not going to make it? The pain you are going through will not last forever. Of course you are agonizing over "How long?" But it will not be helpful to calculate when the pain might end. Instead you must live with the pain in this present moment. Breathe in now. Breathe out now. Inhale. Exhale. Take the next breath. Then the next. Then the next.

Projecting your pain into the future will only make it harder to bear. You simply don't know how long the suffering will last. It might end this afternoon. But the anticipation of days or weeks with this pain will only overwhelm you. So don't

let your thoughts go there. As the Bible says, “You do not know what a day will bring forth.” Jesus said, “Do not be anxious about tomorrow. Today has enough trouble of its own.”

Live this moment now. Then the next moment. Then the next. Your mind may be screaming, “I don’t know how I am going to survive this day.” But you will survive it, if you stay in this moment. And then the next. And then the next. Like counting beads, hold the present bead (moment). Let that one go and then take the next bead. You got through that last moment. You are surviving this present moment. You will survive the next. And the next. Breathe in, breathe out. Relief will come. It always does. But you must live in the “now,” inhaling, exhaling, staying with the present moment, then the next, then the next. Before you know it, this day will have passed. You will have survived.

Everyone suffers in this life. Whether it is personal failure, the loss of loved ones, the death of pets, infidelity of a spouse, divorce of parents, incarcerated children, public humiliation, or the usual multitude of slights, injuries, and rejections – to be human is to suffer. Thankfully we do not suffer without end, though sometimes it may feel that way. The Bible promises to those who trust Jesus, “After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Pt 5:10).

TELL A TRUSTED AND COMPASSIONATE FRIEND. There is pain in isolation. Not everyone can be trusted with your personal pain, but God will bring someone into your life with whom you can share. This will be a person who is not judgmental and not impatient and one who can keep what you share in confidence.

CRY OUT TO GOD FOR MERCY. Even if you don’t believe in God, cry out to him for help. The prayer always answered is, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The prayer never answered is, “God, you owe me!” It is a sad irony that people feel they cannot be frank with God. You can be angry with God, provided that you go to him with your anger. He can handle it. What will ruin you though is choosing to hate God for what has come your way. God is not the cause of your suffering. It may be your own doing, or the doing of other people, or the devil’s doing, or simply because of this fallen world. But a sincere cry for mercy will be answered.

FORGIVE THE ONE WHO HAS CAUSED THE PAIN. THAT MIGHT BE YOU! To forgive is not to excuse or minimize. It is not to say something is okay that was clearly not okay. But it is a choice of your will to let go of someone who has injured you. I recommend that you say out loud, as many times as the remembrance of that person’s offense occurs, “I forgive _____ for what he did and I let him go.”

Some people with perfectionist tendencies hold an unrealistic view of themselves. Faced with personal failure, such persons simply cannot accept what they have done. The perfectionist may believe Jesus forgives him but will not

forgive himself. If God forgives you, you must forgive yourself. Are you better than God? Are your standards higher than His?

GET VIGOROUS EXERCISE EVERY DAY. OUTSIDE IS BEST. Probably the last thing you feel like doing is to go for a walk, or run, or lift weights at the gym. But it is essential. Your body will produce the necessary serotonin (a chemical in the brain that creates positive feelings) in response to vigorous exercise as well as exposure to bright sunlight. If you are at all physically able to do so, make exercise a priority every day! And if outside, even better.

KEEP AWAY FROM DRUGS AND ALCOHOL. It is true that drugs and alcohol give a temporary feeling of help – but it will not last and will only make things worse. You know that already, I’m sure. Relief will not be found there!

EXPOSE YOUR MIND TO HELPFUL MEDIA ONLY. A perverse part of ourselves seeks distraction in things that brings us down. Instead, turn the radio to Christian music, take a break from the news, and watch uplifting movies rather than dark ones.

BEGIN TO READ IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS. The Psalms are one of the great treasures of literature and will be a great help to the one suffering. Just start at Psalm 1 and read one Psalm each day. You will find much hope and encouragement as you read.

FIND SOMEONE YOU TRUST TO EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS. When you are hurting, you can’t think straight. It is not that you are weak – it is that you are in pain. Find a trusted, WISE friend, or a professional counselor to give you objective advice. Suffering has a way of narrowing your focus so you can’t see alternatives that others can easily see. Don’t let pride get in the way of asking for help!

MAKE AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR DOCTOR TO CONSIDER WHETHER MEDICINE WILL HELP. Depression is nothing to be ashamed of but it needs to be treated. No one gets over depression by “toughing it out.” There are a number of excellent medicines available to help with anxiety and depression. You need to talk with your doctor sooner than later though. These medicines generally take about a month to become fully effective. These medicines are not “happy pills” but chemical aids to supplement what your brain would normally produce.

SUICIDE CANNOT BE YOUR OPTION. It may seem that death is the only thing that will bring relief. That is a lie of the devil. Your help might come tomorrow! Suicide will cripple your family and friends forever. That is not what you want. Call 911 if you are spiraling out of control.

DAILY PRAY THE LORD’S PRAYER, SLOWLY AND MEDITATIVELY. I recommend doing this even if you are not a believer. It is the most important prayer known to human beings and is well worth turning over in your mind in a meditative fashion. Take one phrase at a time and say it slowly out loud.

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen!”

THANK GOD FOR THE LITTLE BLESSINGS OF EACH MOMENT. Depression has a terrible way of focusing your attention on your misery. At times it is all you can think about. But in your pain, make yourself notice the good things around you. Thank God, out loud, for every little thing that occurs to you. It may be the sunshine in your room. It may be the air conditioning. It may be your bed. A safe home. The food you had this morning. The fact that your pain is not worse than it is. Friends. Family. Clean water. And so on. These little things we take for granted are not owed us. They are gifts from God.

FIND A PRAYER PARTNER. You may not even believe in God, much less believe in prayer. But take the risk and find someone who does believe in God to pray for you. You may feel foolish asking this when you don’t believe in it yourself, but do it anyway. What do you have to lose?

USE THE SUFFERING TO DRAW CLOSE TO GOD. God is aware of what you are going through. He is poised to help. Don’t waste this experience by giving way to bitterness and despair. Draw close to God and he will draw close to you. Even in the midst of your pain, you will find an unseen Presence supporting you. “But you, O Lord are a gracious and compassionate God; slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Psalm 86:15).

MAKE YOUR SUFFERING SOMETHING GOD WILL TURN INTO GOOD. Long ago I came to the realization that everyone suffers. So if I was going to suffer anyway, I decided to let my suffering have a point to it and work for my good. Here is how this can happen for you. Entrust yourself to Jesus. You will then have God at work in your life. Even if it is your own fault you are in pain, by confessing and trusting Jesus to forgive you, by making restitution with others where possible, and by entrusting yourself to God, your suffering will be redeemed. The Bible says, “All things work together for good for those who love God.”

WHAT ELSE WILL HELP? As time goes by and you find yourself gaining strength, add to this list finding a loving church, establishing a healthy diet, pursuing therapy, or joining a recovery group.

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