

Conquering Depression

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The psychology instructor had just finished a lecture on mental health and was giving an oral quiz. Speaking specifically about manic depression, she asked, “How would you diagnose a patient who walks back and forth screaming at the top of his lungs one minute, then sits in a chair weeping uncontrollably the next?” A young man in the back of the class raised his hand and answered, “A basketball coach!” We might laugh at this answer but real depression is a serious problem. My introduction to this study is not intended to belittle the problem of depression but capture our attention and prepare us for a journey through the Scriptures on this most important subject.

Do any of these emotions describe you?

- Regularly overcome with emotional heaviness and anxiety.
- Unable to grasp happiness.
- Lacking the energy to face the day.
- Experiencing guilt that threatens to overwhelm you.
- Deeply desiring a more fulfilling life.

If so, you are dealing with depression. Depression is one of the darkest of all the negative emotions one can experience. It is a strong emotional

turbulence that can affect even Christians. If you're depressed, you may feel alone and misunderstood. Perhaps friends or family members have told you to just “cheer up,” “think positive,” or “quit feeling so sorry for yourself.”

Proverbs 25:20 reminds us:

“As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, *and as* vinegar upon nitre (mineral soda), so *is* he that singeth songs to an heavy heart.”

This verse is teaching an important lesson for those of us who seek to help depressed people. Trying to perk up a person by songs who is discouraged or depressed (a heavy heart) is as cruel as stealing his garment in cold weather. It is also like pouring vinegar on soda; it is useless and it causes a violent reaction. In other words, being superficial in your approach to those with depression, or being insensitive and unsympathetic does more harm than good.

After the San Diego City Council denied Tim LaHaye's request for permission to build a new church, a missionary friend heard about it and came over to cheer up Brother LaHaye. With a big ten-dollar smile the would-be comforter slapped Rev. LaHaye on the back and said, “Praise the Lord.” LaHaye remarked, “I already knew that praising the Lord was the right thing to do, but at that moment I needed a tender word of encouragement.”

The last thing a miserable and depressed person needs, who feels like they are trapped in a box, is someone who makes light of their problem, who slaps them on the back and tell them to cheer up. On the other hand (and this may sound rash and harsh), sometimes what a depressed person needs are not songs but what I call a good old-fashioned rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2) to help them break through their emotional state and return to a world of reality. When our depression is not severe, sometimes we just need a reality check in life to straighten us up and get us on the straight and narrow way. We must way out the situation at hand.

When David's son Absalom had been killed, he went into a state of depression that got severe. It was so severe that he could not function as

the King. He became emotionally paralyzed. Joab had to go to David directly and point out that this grief was excessive and had reached a place that defeated him spiritually and kept him from functioning physically. David's meeting with Joab resulted in David pulling himself together and starting to run the kingdom again. I think what Joab did was the old-fashioned but sometimes needful "rebuke" routine! It sometimes works to snap people out of their bout of depression.

2 Samuel 19:1-7 records the event:

"And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. And the victory that day was *turned* into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son. And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!

"And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants (tell them how much you appreciate them): for I swear by the LORD, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now."

Joab confronted David and rebuked him for being overly depressed about his son and expressing no sensitivity toward his officers and people who has protected him. Joab told David that he would have been more satisfied if Absalom had lived and all of the rest of his soldiers had died. In order to salvage what little morale was left, Joab urged David to get out of his depressed stupor and appear before the troops and assure them that he appreciated their selfless service to him.

Of course, this direct routine of boldly denouncing a person's debilitating depression and telling them to get back on their feet again, essentially giving them a good spiritual rebuke, does not always work! Therefore, we need to have an intense spiritual plan to help others overcome debilitating depression so that Christians can get victory over depression from a spiritual angle or perspective. Sometimes when we try to hit someone over the head with a Bible and do not deal with them in patience and gentleness (without being rash or harsh), we will not be able to help them (2 Tim. 2:24). God gives us the spiritual power and tools to win over depression. You can win this battle with God's amazing grace and help.

Longfellow said:

"Some must lead, and some must follow, but all have feet of clay."

This study is designed to look at depression from a Biblical perspective. We want to think about its causes and cures from the standpoint of Scripture. One lady said this about depressed people, "Half the people I know are on Zoloft!" Of course, there are many drugs used to treat people who have depression. However, I'm convinced that many Christians need to return to a Biblical solution on defeating depression instead of using pills and psychotherapy. These things are often used to cover up a spiritual or sin problem that needs to be dealt with which can be the sole cause of depression.

Of course, some people do need medication due to chemical imbalances in their brain and depression that is caused by some malfunction, physical disease, or disorder. Things such as Parkinson's disease, certain cancers, and Alzheimer's disease can cause the physical effects of depression. Also, sleep loss, reactions to medication, a vitamin deficiency, poor diet, diabetes, epilepsy, anemia, or glandular disease (hyperthyroidism). Burn out or physical exhaustion can also lead to the feelings of despair and depression.

Sometimes there is a link between the chemistry of the body and depression. But these are the minority of cases - not the majority of the cases of depression. Most experts will tell you that less than 20% of their patients actually have a disease that contributes to their depression or

down moods. Only in a minority of cases can a depressed mood (depression) be connected to a physical or organic (organ) problem rather than a spiritual one. Furthermore, we need to remember that even the worst cases of depression can be greatly helped when a person has a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and is reading God's Word and relying upon God's power.

Here is my point. Christians need to stop using medication as a crutch and regain their confidence in God's presence, God's Promises, and God's power to help them overcome depression. They need listen to God's Word, act upon it, and let the Holy Spirit apply God's Word and promises to their hearts and change their lives by His power (Gal. 5:25). Instead of turning to drugs we need to turn to Christ, His Word, and promises. The spiritual and physical problems we have with depression are mostly related to our unbiblical responses to the problems of life. We become crushed beneath the cares of this life (Mark 4:19). We lose faith and hope in God and begin to drift away from our dependence upon God and our relationship with Him.

This is why Christians become depressed and sometimes dysfunctional in life. In nearly all cases, depression has a spiritual cause, such as refusing to face our sin or responding Biblically to life's problems. As we will see later in this study, depression is often a disease of the soul caused by moral or spiritual failure in some area of a person's life. Someone has well said that "Counselors are trying to make many people comfortable whom God is trying to make miserable!"

It's unfortunate that psychiatrists wish to reduce all depression to physical or chemical factors. Therefore, they are quick to prescribe drugs to deaden the emotional pain but they do not get to the root cause of depression which many times is a spiritual problem. By way of introduction, I want to remind you that the Bible tells us to be filled with joy and praise (Philippians 4:4; Romans 15:11) and not depression. God does not want His people to live in a state of depression but a state of joy, praise, and fulfillment. He wants us to live on the happy side of life – not the sad and depressed side of life.

Hebrews 13:15 says:

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name.”

Praise continually (not depression continually) is to be our aim and purpose in life. God intends for us all to live joyful lives – not depressed lives. This is not easy for someone suffering from situational depression, but this can be remedied through God's gifts of prayer, Bible study and application, support groups, fellowship among believers, confession, forgiveness, and Biblical counseling. Each one of us as Christians must make the conscious effort to not be absorbed with ourselves, which is the root cause of depression, but to focus on what is pleasing to the Father (John 8:29) and turn our efforts outward and upward by “looking unto Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2).

Looking unto Jesus! This means that we are to be looking at His suffering, life, companionship, and victory, instead of being overcome with our circumstances and problems, which can cause depression. Feelings of depression can often be solved when those suffering with depression move the focus from themselves to Christ and others. This is why Paul said, “For to me to live is Christ” (Phil. 1:21). Living the Christian life is revolving it around Christ – not our problems, circumstances, depressed thoughts, etc. My life should not revolve around myself and depressed feelings but the One who can deliver me, change me, and give me joy!

A song that I first heard while in college has always stuck with me. It speaks of the joy-filled life.

“He gives me joy--joy—joy.
He gives me Peace--peace—peace.
I speak his name and a hundred
Million angels start singing.
He speaks to me and the freedom bells
of my soul start to ringing.
He gives me joy in the morning
And gentle peace in the evening.

I sing his praise and all heaven plays a sweet orchestration.
He speaks to me and my heart strings play a song of jubilation.

He gives me joy in the morning
And gentle peace in the evening.

He gives me joy I never knew.
He's been my friend, He is always true.
He's been my strength, He helps me make it through
He gives me joy.

He gives me joy in the morning,
And gentle Peace in the evening.
He gives me joy,
He gives me peace,
He gives me joy!"

1 Peter 1:8

"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

There are some things that Christians can do who suffer from depression which will help them alleviate their anxiety and depression. We will go over this in more detail later. For now, you should make sure that you are staying in the Word of God, even when you do not feel like it. Emotions and moods can lead us astray, but God's Word stands firm and unchanging. We must maintain strong faith in God and hold even more tightly to Him when we undergo trials and temptations which are related to depression.

The Bible tells us that God will never allow temptations into our lives, including the temptation to be discouraged and depressed, which are too much for us to handle (1 Corinthians 10:13). We are accountable to God for our responses to affliction, which might sometimes include getting the spiritual and also professional help that is needed. Let us always remember that we need God's loving touch, care, and gracious provision in our lives to be delivered from depression.

Depression and God's Loving Care

1 Peter 5:7

"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

Did you know that God wrote this verse just for you? God loves you and cares for you and He wants to deliver you from the dungeon of despair and depression! We must learn to find God's care when our world turns upside down. The secret is to cast your "care" (your anxieties which stem from depression) on the Lord and let Him take them away from you! Yes, you can give Him your anxieties because He really does care about your bout with depression. In turning over your troubles and anxieties to God, you turn over your depression to God, and you can find His loving embrace, healing, and victory over depression. The fact that He cares for us means that He is there for us! He will comfort and relieve us of depression.

J. Sidlow Baxter points out that there are two kinds of care here:

"There is *anxious* care, in the words: 'Casting all your care upon Him'; and there is *affectionate* care, in the words: 'He careth for you.' Over against all our own *anxious* care is our Savior's never-failing *affectionate* care."

David prayed in Psalm 55:22:

"Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

Regardless of your emotional outlook, God always loves us as His children (Jer. 31:3. Rom. 8:38-39) and wants to sustain us spiritually in our journey of life. Yes, God loves us, cares for us unceasingly, and He is on our side! You must remember that God is greater than your depression and wants to release you from it. Depilating depression, when we are taken hostage and paralyzed by our emotions, is the flipside of rejoicing which is the will of God for our life (Phil. 4:4). This means that crippling depression is never God's will for our life. God's Word does not promote the idea that His people should experience life-debilitating depression and wallow in overwhelming grief since it takes us away from what God wants from our lives, which is trusting in His providence and care over our lives (Prov. 3:5-

6), experiencing His peace and joy (Phil. 4:4; 4:7) and inner healing (Ps. 6:2), and developing fruitfulness in our life (Gal. 5:22-23). God has promised us victory over our emotional defeat and misery which may stem from the loss of a loved one, some other life-shattering trial, or even physical imbalances that may trigger depression and grief. In every situation, God has promised to be our portion.

Ephesians 6:10

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

Isaiah 40:29

“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.”

God’s invitation to be healed from discouragement and even depression is found in Hebrews 12:12-13: “Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.” God wants His people to renew their strength (Isa. 40:31) so they can endure the race of life. The expressions of “hands which hang down” (drooping hands) speak metaphorically of defeat and depression. Similarly, the concept of “feeble knees” is a metaphor that suggests weakness and frailty in life. Friends, there are times that we need to be reinvigorated for Christian living and fruitful service. We need to come out of our bout with depression, which is a place and paralyzing position that we have allowed to overtake our lives. God is encouraging us to get a grip on life, get up, get going, and get healed of what many times is only a spiritual malady and not a physical malady. More on the spiritual and physical aspect of depression later.

For now, we must realize that through God’s strengthening and enabling grace we can fight back against false assumptions, self-destructing, and depressive thoughts, so we don’t find ourselves spiraling downward to some dark place in life.

G. H. Lang gives a fine illustration of Hebrews 12:12-13:

“A weary traveler, tired of the road and the buffeting of the tempest, stands dispirited and limp. With shoulders bowed, hands hanging slack, knees bent and shaking, he is ready to give up and sink to the ground. Such can God’s pilgrim become, as pictured by our writer.

“But one comes to him confident of mien (mood), with kindly smile and firm voice, and says, ‘Cheer up, stand erect, brace your limbs, take heart of grace. You have already come far; throw not away your former toils. A noble home is at the end of the journey. See, yonder is the direct road to it; keep straight on; seek from the great Physician healing for your lameness.... Your Forerunner went this same hard road to the palace of God; others before you have won through; others are on the way; you are not alone; only press on! and you too shall reach the goal and win the prize.’”

Here is a prayer you can use as a guideline to help deal with your depression: “Dear Father, I want to thank you for your love and compassion. You know how I struggle with my emotions. Sometimes they get the best of me. In the middle of those difficult times, please help me remember that you are greater than my depression. Help me learn to trust in you no matter what my emotional outlook. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.”

The Definition of Depression

The word depression literally means being "pressed down" to a lower position as a footprint is pressed down in the mud or as our pillow is pressed down when we sleep on it. We could define depression in this way. Depression is an emotional heaviness that weighs down the heart and life of a person which can potentially affect their life both spiritually and physically. Depression’s predominant feature is a disturbance in mood. Your mood is your emotional state. Depression often goes hand in hand with other sins and problems such as anxiety, anger, withdrawal, worthlessness, loneliness, rejection, self-pity, and the general inability to

deal with life. In general, depression is a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness that leads to sadness.

Depression is the psychological term that pertains to the mental, emotional, and behavioral characteristics of a depressed person. Those engulfed in the dark waves of depression feel desperately alone and often blame God for their plight.

Psalm 88:18

“Lover and friend hast thou (God) put far from me, *and* mine acquaintance into darkness.”

Those suffering with depression feel trapped underneath a dark, heavy blanket of sadness, grief, and hopelessness.

Job 5:14

“They meet with darkness in the daytime, and grope in the noonday as in the night.”

Strictly speaking, the definition of depression (emotional heaviness, being pressed down) can sometimes be good and needful when experiencing certain trials of life, such as the loss of a loved one and bearing one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2). Even Jesus wept (John 11:35) and was considered to be the man of sorrows (Isa. 53:2). So, by definition, not all depression should be labeled as sinful and a symbol of spiritual defeat. The term in our society does carry a negative connotation but we can be saddened (pressed down or experience emotional sadness) when we pass through hardships and when our loved ones pass through difficult times.

Normal responses of sadness, discouragements, and disappointments occur in life as we pass through the changes and trials associated with living. These are normal responses and many times necessary responses which are part of our humanity. More on this later. More specifically, depression that turns into a spiritually heavy weight in our heart and life, which begins to consume our life and overtake us, is the type of depression that becomes a sin in our life. This type of depression is a psychological and spiritual state that exists when the heart is pressed

down and unable to experience joy. It's when we live in a constant state of sadness. Those suffering with this type of depression feel trapped underneath a dark, heavy blanket of sadness, grief, and hopelessness.

This reminds me that it's tempting to hide our heads under a pillow when the storms of life come crashing down, but your troubles will be waiting for you when you come out from hiding and many times they will have compounded. Depression is a condition that impacts the whole person: body (the physical), soul (the mind, will, and emotions), and spirit (the source of our deepest inner needs for love, significance, security, and the need for God Himself).

Ecclesiastes 5:17 describes depression in this way:

"All his days also he eateth in darkness, and *he hath* much sorrow (great frustration) and wrath with his sickness."

This verse is placed in the context of accumulating wealth through being a workaholic. This type of lifestyle often produces feelings of emptiness and frustration since the true meaning of life is not sought. Depression is described as "much sorrow" which is a life without satisfying joy, peace, and fulfillment. Depression is a concept that covers dark feelings ranging from down-in-the-dumps, disappointment, to feelings of utter desolation.

Psalm 18:28

"For thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness."

David complains that he is about to lose his vision. He probably means that an oppression like death is about to overcome him. But God kept the lamp of David's life burning by delivering his life from the hands of his enemies. In doing so, David was delivered from a very dark and dreadful experience. Do you need to have your candle lit again? God can light up your life and give you hope to carry on! God can actually light up your days and fill your nights with song! God can give us light during the darkness of depression and bring us out of the blues of defeat and despair. We don't have to live in the darkness! We can live in the light of God's blessed deliverance.

Again, the word “depression” means to be pressed down with heaviness and sadness. Although it’s natural to sometimes possess a heavy heart, if one is not careful, sadness can develop into a prolonged mood swing which is often accompanied with many side effects such as anxiety and other physical side effects. Often physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain also accompany severe depression.

Joshua Wolf Shenk records of Abraham Lincoln’s bouts with depression. “When Abraham Lincoln came to the stage of the 1860 state Republican convention in Decatur, Illinois, the crowd roared in approval. Men threw hats and canes into the air, shaking the hall so much that the awning over the stage collapsed; according to an early account, ‘the roof was literally cheered off the building.’ Fifty-one years old, Lincoln was at the peak of his political career, with momentum that would soon sweep him to the nomination of the national party and then to the White House. Yet to the convention audience Lincoln didn't seem euphoric, or triumphant, or even pleased. On the contrary, said a man named Johnson, observing from the convention floor, ‘I then thought him one of the most diffident and worst plagued men I ever saw.’

The next day the convention closed. The crowds dispersed, leaving behind cigar stubs and handbills and the smells of sweat and whiskey. Later the lieutenant governor of Illinois, William J. Bross, walked the floor. He saw Lincoln sitting alone at the end of the hall, his head bowed, his gangly arms bent at the elbows, his hands pressed to his face. As Bross approached, Lincoln noticed him and said, ‘I'm not very well.’ Lincoln's look at that moment—the classic image of gloom—was familiar to everyone who knew him well.

Such spells were just one thread in a curious fabric of behavior and thought that his friends called his ‘melancholy.’ He often wept in public and recited maudlin poetry. He told jokes and stories at odd times—he needed the laughs, he said, for his survival. As a young man he talked more than once of suicide, and as he grew older he said he saw the world as hard and grim, full of misery, made that way by fate and the forces of God. ‘No element of Mr. Lincoln's character,’ declared his colleague Henry Whitney, ‘was so marked, obvious and ingrained as his mysterious and profound

melancholy.’ His law partner William Herndon said, ‘His melancholy dripped from him as he walked.’

The apostle Paul used the expression “pressed out of measure, above strength, inasmuch that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor. 1:8). The phrase “pressed out of measure” literally means that Paul was “pressed or weighed down.” He was describing the immense emotional pressure or heaviness and severe hardships he was experiencing in life. It was far beyond his human ability to endure. Certainly the Christian life is not always a bed of roses! Someone paraphrased Paul’s experience like this: “At that time we were completely overwhelmed; the burden was more than we could bear; in fact, we told ourselves that this was the end.”

Was Paul depressed at this point in his life? It certainly sounds like he was experiencing heaviness, sadness, and despair as he passed through the physical trials of persecution. It was temporary but it was real. We can be sure that through this severe persecution his emotional tank went dry and he needed God’s grace to help him pull through. It’s not wrong to admit that you are heavy-hearted and filled with despair in life for it is during these times that God’s grace overwhelms our life and restores us to a place of spiritual vibrancy and victory over our emotions and spiritual struggles we face in life.

Paul admitted something similar in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9:

“We are troubled (afflicted) on every side (everywhere he looked there is trouble), yet not distressed (not overcome with debilitating and life-altering distress); we are perplexed (to be at loss mentally – to have no way out), but not in despair (to be utterly at loss, despondent). Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down (weighed down, heavy, or burdened), but not destroyed.”

There were times in life that Paul was knocked down but he never was knocked out! Yes, he fought depression as a normal battle within the Christian life but he did not allow it to overcome him where he became dysfunctional and where it would override and control his life. He fought through emotional stress, heaviness, and sadness, but he did not allow it to destroy his spiritual life and service for the Lord. You might be saying, “I

can't think straight. I can't feel anything. I can't even will myself out of the blues!" If this is your case, then perhaps you are weathering the storm clouds of depression.

The Causes of Depression

It's time for us to consider the underlying causes of depression.

1. Physical and spiritual causes

I've noticed that many will label depression as "disorders" (brain disorders) which is designed to get the emphasis off of the spiritual and put it only on the physical. If depression is always and only a physical problem, only physical answers should be sought to overcome depression, instead of dealing with the spiritual problems in an individual's life. The danger today in the psychological world is to always identify depression as a disorder and disease and therefore treat it as a disease, instead of getting to the root problem, which is really a spiritual problem occurring in the lives of people.

Of course, as we mentioned previously, there can be physical causes outside the realm of spiritual problems, which can trigger depression, such as a lack of sleep, bad nutrition, imbalanced hormones, chemical imbalances in the brain, anemia (low red cell count and lack of oxygen-rich blood) and organ diseases which are changes in some organ within the body which can cause depression. Depression may be due to psychological and physiological causes. We're complex creatures. Our emotions are not separate from our bodies. The personality of some people is more negative, gloomy, and pessimistic. Some people are more prone to depression due to their physical makeup (glands, hormones, etc.).

Many women struggle with depression related to their menstrual cycle, to having a baby, or to menopause. Certain changes in the aging process can make us prone to depression. Perhaps we've pushed too hard or have been under unusual stress and we're just exhausted and need some rest and a change of pace. Burnout can cause depression and also cause a person to freeze in life. They cannot physically focus and do the normal routine of living. However, even during these physical imbalances and the

stress related symptoms that are occurring in the body, depression can become hijacked by Satan and the sin nature and escalate into a spiritual problem as well.

It equally true that a SPIRITUAL problem can digress into depression which can result in various PHYSICAL problems, such as anxiety attacks, heart palpitations, increased aches and pains, chronic fatigue, decreased appetite, and insomnia. Sometimes the underlying cause of these physical problems is really a spiritual problem. In fact, many times people are treating spiritual problems with physical therapies and medications instead of seeking for spiritual answers for depression.

God has set forth Biblical guidelines for the Christian to follow. The believer who follows these guidelines can expect a fulfilling and wonderful life (John 10:10). But any Christian who fails to respect God's guidelines, who develops faulty living patterns, who engages in disobedience and sinful practices, should expect a violated conscience and subsequent guilt.

The other week my wife went down in the basement and discovered that there was two inches of water all over the basement. The culprit was a faulty sub pump. It stopped. Apparently the bearings went bad. Faulty bearings in a pump can produce a lot of frustration and problems. In a similar way, faulty living patterns can definitely produce depression. Sins such as anger, resentment, unforgiveness and many others, when left unchecked, can result in mood swings or depression. The reaping of our sowing and wayward can produce depression (Gal. 6:8).

Sigmund Freud, the father of conventional psychiatry, believed that guilt is a product of man's overly strict conscience – not the result of sin against God. Freud theorized that the conscience was made overly sensitive and termed an awakened conscience as "false guilt." Since the guilt was not real, Freud taught that a person could resolve the internal conflict of one's conscience by lowering his internal value system. He then theorized a person could function better.

Today Freudian psychiatrists still counsel that guilt is the result of an overly strict or sensitized conscience. They seek to "chop away" at the client's

value system in hopes of removing their guilt. The problem with this approach is that it does not work unless a person develops a totally defiled and desensitized conscience (Titus 1:15). The conscience is an agent of God so long as it is guided and adjusted by the final authority of God's truth. But the conscience is there to prosecute one who offends God's standard. We are to live in such a way to possess a "conscience void of offence toward God" (Acts 24:16). This should be the goal of the Christian life. We should want to have our heart, conscience, and spiritual life right before God so we might escape the hand of God's chastening and deep conviction.

By in large, most Christian counselors who are truly Bible-centered and spiritually-minded will tell you that the vast majority of their counseling cases of depression stem from purely a spiritual problem that needs to be dealt with from a spiritual perspective. Sometimes there is a dual thing going on, both physical and spiritual, but often Christians need to apply spiritual answers for their problems and depression which means they must learn to trust God more, rely on His promises, stay in the Word, and depend upon His presence and power for victory. Again, we must remember that even the worst cases of depression which might be triggered by a physical problem is also accompanied by a spiritual problem and need.

2. The sin nature and Satan

We must also remember that sometimes Satan and the sin nature can be the source of our depression. The old nature and the devil can defeat us from a spiritual perspective and be the cause of our depression. Satan wants to defeat his saints with depression and keep them bound to their emotions instead of relying on Christ as their great Victor. Also, if we are suffering from some physical form of depression, Satan has a way of making a bad situation worse. If there are physical aspects related to one's depression, the devil and our own sin nature can use our physical imbalance to gain greater inroads into our life.

2 Corinthians 2:11

"Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices."

The context is talking about not expressing forgiveness toward someone else. One of Satan's devices is to allow bitterness to control our heart. But one of the phrases I want you to see is that Satan tries to "get an advantage of us" which means he attempts to make a gain in our spiritual lives, take a greater portion and more territory in our heart which Christ is to fully control. The devil can use many different situations and trials, including a physically-related problem like depression, as a way to take advantage of us or take a greater portion of our spiritual life away from us. He may use a physical trial and turn it into a spiritual trial.

The other phrase is to be "ignorant of his devices" or his evil purposes – the way the devil thinks and works in connection with our lives. This means we should not be ignorant how the devil tries to overreach and overstep in our lives by his devilish ways. Even a physically-related bout of depression, caused by things one cannot control, can become a breeding ground for Satan to work. Satan can take a bad situation and try to make it worse by taking spiritual advantage over our lives.

Ephesians 6:11 also warns us:

"Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

The word "schemes" speaks of the methods in which the devil uses to deceive us and yes, even depress us. They are the devil's tricks, schemes or crafty techniques that he brings before us to defeat our lives spiritually. Satan can certainly use depression as a scheme to defeat our spiritual life. In fact, Satan can take a physically-depressed mood and hijack it in order to gain a great advantage over our lives and defeat us spiritually. Satan never misses an opportunity to do his evil work in our hearts and lives. I can assure you of one thing: You cannot defeat the devil by taking a pill! You must rely on the Lord's power, the armor of God, and the new nature to transform your life and help you to live a life without debilitating depression.

I have counseled people with different types of depression and some depressed people were suffering the effects of a physical problem. But one

man shared with me that even his secular psychologist told him that if you think that taking medication is the only answer, you are fooling yourself.

3. Sinful living

As we have discovered, sin is definitely a source of depression. Sins of anger, bitterness, jealousy, an unforgiving heart, and anxiety can produce the byproduct of depression. When we sow the flesh we can very easily reap depression (Gal. 6:8). The effects of a sinful life can very easily lead to depression. Why? It's because sin does not truly satisfy (Heb. 11:25). It can only breed spiritual problems, one of them being depression. The "wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23) and sin brings death to our spiritual living, our joy and gladness, and everything that is good for our lives. We will discover later that David was depressed because of his sin with Bathsheba. You must break the vicious cycle of sin in your life if you want to be released from depression. It's as simple as this.

4. Negative thoughts and faulty thinking patterns

When we live in our own little world of negative thinking, toward ourselves, God, and the events of life in general, we often will come depressed. Negativism, self-pity, and complaining is one sure way to set ourselves up for depression. Self-pity is a common cause of depression. Whatever is fed into our minds is what comes out. You have heard the expression, "Garbage in and garbage out?" Right data in our minds means right thoughts and actions out. Wrong data in our minds means depression out. Instead of living in the world of negativism we must learn to be spiritually minded by reflecting on how God wants us to live a victorious life, by thinking correctly about God and His acts of providence in the world and over our personal lives (Prov. 3:5-6). We need to regain a proper God-perspective in life. In doing this, we will renovate our depressed thinking and replace it with right thinking which is called "the renewing of the mind" (Rom. 12:2).

How do we reprogram a wayward, negative, and depressed mind? Let me briefly share four ways to conquer negative and depressed thinking.

a. We must rejoice and pray Biblically – Phil. 4:4

Philippians 4:4

“Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, Rejoice.”

We must make rejoicing and thanksgiving a habitual way of life. It is difficult to be thankful and pessimistic at the same time! Replace the habit of depression and pessimism with the habit of thanksgiving and rejoicing. The key is to “rejoice in the Lord” – not our circumstances – but our relationship with Him and finding our fulfillment and joy through Him. Rejoicing in the lord has a double benefit. It keeps us from becoming depressed and lifts us out of depression. We will talk about this again.

Philippians 4:6

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

Have you every prayed like this? “Dear Lord, I don’t mean to complain, but I don’t understand why You let so many things work against me. And I wonder why I seem to fail so often.” Listen to yourself the next time you address your Heavenly Father. Praying Biblically includes thanksgiving. Instead of majoring on negative things all the time, in your prayer life, start thanking God! This will spice up your prayer life and keep you away from constantly living in a negative world.

b. We must think Biblically

Proverbs 23:7 says, “For as he thinketh in his heart, so *is* he.”

How should we think?

Philippians 4:8 says:

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.”

Thinking Biblical means to reflect on spiritual truth, God’s promises, the life and inspiration of Jesus, and spiritual things in general, which will deliver us

from the world of depression. Reflecting on pure and wholesome things will go a long way to deliver you from the type of depression that is keeping you down in life.

c. We must think positively

As a general way of living, we must think positively and reflect on positive things, instead of living in a dark world of gloom. If we live in the world of negativism we will become negative and eventually depressed.

Philippians 4:13 is a positive verse:

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

People like Fanny Crosby or Helen Keller had handicaps but this did not stop them from living for the Lord and doing great things for God. They relied on the all-sufficient God and remained positive in life, instead of living in the land of boohoo!

5. The chastening of God

Sometimes Christians end up seeing a psychiatrist for their depression and get antidepressants which have been prescribed to them. However, sometimes antidepressants reduce us to a body walking around without a soul and we are simply numb to the pain and torment that has become part of our daily life. Here is the point, if sin is the source of our depression, no pill will fix this. In fact, when we have a broken fellowship with God, we drive God to use depression on us as a chastening tool so that we come back into the place of spiritual blessing.

Hebrews 12:6

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

You say, “God would never chasten His children with depression.” How do you know this? When we are convicted about sin and become irritable and depressed, God certainly is using depression to get our attention. There is a godly sorrow that brings a person low (call it the conviction of depression)

that leads to repentance and transformation of living and God many times produces this sorrow in our hearts to get our attention about our sin and waywardness.

2 Corinthians 7:10

“For godly sorrow (grief that comes after we sin) worketh repentance to salvation (deliverance) not to be repented of (not to be regretted) – one won’t look back and say – “I wish I would not have done this”): but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

The Corinthians were already saved. But here salvation is used to describe deliverance from any type of sin, bondage, or spiritual affliction in a person’s life. Through the Spirit’s inner conviction, we can experience the pricking of our conscience, the depression related to sin and conviction, and only repentance can deliver us from this type of depression. Let us remember that the way a Christian cleans up his conscience is by confessing sin (1 John 1:9; Ps. 28:13). There are no quack remedies that can take away our guilt and sin.

In 1835 a man visited a doctor in Florence, Italy. He was filled with anxiety and exhausted from lack of sleep. He couldn't eat, and he avoided his friends. The doctor examined him and found that he was in prime physical condition. Concluding that his patient needed to have a good time, the physician told him about a circus in town and its star performer, a clown named Grimaldi. Night after night he had the people rolling in the aisles. "You must go and see him," the doctor advised. "Grimaldi is the world's funniest clown. He'll make you laugh and cure your sadness." "No," replied the despairing man, "he can't help me. You see, I am Grimaldi!"

Types of Depression

As previously mentioned, depression means to experience an emotional heaviness, being pressed down. This is what the word actually means. Depression is the term that pertains to the mental, emotional, and behavioral characteristics of a person who is experiencing a mood change. Just as there are different kinds of clouds, there are also different types of depression. There are a variety of emotional responses which include

feelings of sadness, sorrow, heavy-heartedness, discouragement, humiliation, dejection, gloom, disillusionment, disappointment demoralization, despondency, despair, or even just “case of the blues” as we often say. The old saying goes like this: “Rainy days and Mondays always get me down!

I. A General Perspective on Depression

From a general perspective, there are three types of depression.

A. Mild Depression (level one depression)

The first type of depression is mild depression. This is better understood as sadness, discouragement. or disappointment. Everyone experiences a “case of the blues” from time to time. As mentioned above, Jesus experienced sorrow for others for He was the “man of sorrows” (Isa. 53:3-4). Jesus experienced emotional heaviness as he would bear the burdens of others. We are called upon to “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Certainly Jesus was not being defeated spiritually and committing sin in his heart simply because He experienced a change in His mood, which by definition, is what depression means.

So, we can define mild depression, whether you call it discouragement, disappointment, or sorrow, as the normal human responses that we have toward sad events that take place in our lives and in connection with the lives of others. Paul the apostle said in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 that we “sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” He did not say that we do not experience sorrow over the loss of a loved one, but we don’t experience sorrow like the unsaved who have no real understanding about the afterlife and which have no hope of seeing their loves ones again. The Scriptures teach that as long as we have hope, there is nothing wrong with feeling the emotional down when we experience sad and difficult events in our lives. In fact, the Bible reminds us that we can have joy in the midst of our sorrow and afflictions (1 Thess. 1:6).

1 Peter 1:6

“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.”

The Bible informs that I can be a rejoicing Christian even while I might be experiencing some sadness in my life that is related to persecution, difficulty, and hard times.

I know some Christians who seem to think that it's always wrong for believers to be disappointed or sad. According to them, "Christians should always be smiling." This is not what Paul taught in Philippians 4:4 when he said, "Rejoice in the Lord always." Rejoicing in the Lord does not mean that we are always going around with a phony smile on our face. It means we are experiencing joy because of our fulfilling and inner relationship we have with the Lord. A case of mild depression, whether we term it as sadness, which can be reflected in a person's concern and downcast soul for others is one thing. However, we need to be careful that our mild depression, which is the normal response to life's demands, can turn into moderate or severe depression, which in return adversely affects our spiritual life as a Christian.

B. Moderate Depression (level two depression)

The second type of depression is moderate depression. We have seen that the experience of mild depression (sorrow, heaviness, discouragement, or disappointment) is experienced in the lives of God's children. It is a normal response to life's difficulties and tragedies. However, the nature of our response to life's experiences is what determines the outcome of our spiritual lives. If we are not careful, a case of mild depression can turn into a moderate form of depression. Moderate depression can be defined as sporadic bouts of depression that seek to overtake and control one's life due to life's trials and God's chastening hand.

There are two basic responses to depression.

- The Wrong Response: acknowledgement and submission to our feelings.
- The Right Response: acknowledgement but not submission to our feelings.

When experiencing mild depression, we acknowledge the reality of our feelings and that they are a normal part of our present circumstance in life. However, at the same time we refuse to allow these feelings to take control of our life, consume us, and defeat us spiritually. On the other hand, if we allow our feelings of sadness to begin to overtake and consume our lives, we have begun to experience the next stage of depression, moderate depression, which is a deepening gloom and doom outlook on life. In obedience to God's Word, we must choose to "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). This means we keep our eyes and minds focused on Christ who is in Heaven, His virtues, the value that His life has to us, His character traits that He wants us to experience, His promises to us, and our relationship with Him.

If we keep a focus on our circumstances and the feelings generated from them, rather than on God and His Word, we begin to lose our spiritual edge in life. We begin to crack, cry a lot, experience longer bouts with sadness, have difficulty performing normal tasks and activities in life. Why? It's because we have set our mind on earthly things instead of heavenly things! This means that we have set our attention and focus on the negative aspect of life (earthly things) instead of keeping our focus on spiritual things above which refers to Christ's life and more specifically to His presence, promises, and power which He gives to us.

Christians who are badly depressed are feeling-oriented. They live by subjective feelings instead of walking by faith in God's Word and power. In other words, their emotions rule their lives and overtake them. They are usually convinced that no other person has experienced what they have experienced nor can they understand the depths of their trouble.

"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen
Nobody knows my sorrow."

Let's revisit Philippians 4:8. This Bible verse commands us to meditate on the "things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things." This is how I fight off thoughts of depression and defeat. In other words, our mind, life, and inner person

are not to be absorbed, overtaken, and ruled by our circumstances and emotions, causing us to live in a state of depression that consumes our life. Instead, we allow our mind and life to meditate on the spiritual things related to God's Word and promises and find our comfort, spiritual strength, and sanctification from God.

We are not to focus on our circumstances and feelings, we are to focus on God and His Word. Feelings of depression are magnified by the attention they receive and they begin to dominate our thoughts and actions. Feelings can be natural but they can become all-consuming, overpowering, ruling our lives, controlling us, and keeping us from joy. We can be ruled or controlled by our feelings and neglect our Biblical responsibilities, lose hope, and find that we get less and less satisfaction from spiritual things. Beware of this. Feelings of depression have a way of moving us away from the spiritual and heavenly outlook on life. Furthermore, not all of our feelings can be trusted. The sin nature has way of warping our feelings when they are not rooted in truth.

Martin Luther wrote:
"Feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving;
My warrant is the Word of God--
Naught else is worth believing.

Though all my heart should feel condemned
For want of some sweet token,
There is One greater than my heart
Whose Word cannot be broken.

I'll trust in God's unchanging Word
Till soul and body sever,
For, though all things shall pass away,
HIS WORD SHALL STAND FOREVER!"

Hebrews 3:13 reminds us of the "deceitfulness of sin." Sin can overtake or hijack our feelings and we can be deceived into thinking that God's Word, power, and presence is not enough to get us through in life. Furthermore, our feelings of distrust in God, dismay, and disorientation in life are rooted

in the deceitfulness of sin. The kind of depression that overcomes us and defeats our spiritual lives is rooted in “the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13) because we are not trusting God but allowing our feelings to run our life.

Today’s world of psychology does not call overcoming and life-depilating depression a sin. Instead, they call it a disease or disorder that needs therapy. Herein lies the problem. If a person cannot identify the primary source of depression, they cannot be cured from it. And most often the source of one’s depression is the sin of unbelief – not trusting in God’s sufficiency and power to get you through life. When we base our living on our feelings, and keep the focus of our life on our self, we are headed toward moderate and even severe depression, which is a type of depression that takes away our joy and peace and which overtakes our life. What started as mild depression may become moderate depression.

Hebrews 12:2 identifies unbelief as the “the sin that doth so easily beset us.” In contrast to the faith evidenced in Hebrews chapter eleven, we can live in the defeat of unbelief in chapter 12. It is unbelief in God’s promises and power that kept Israel out of the Promised Land and it is unbelief that hinders us from experiencing our spiritual inheritance and riches in Christ (Heb. 3:12, 19; 4:6, 11; Eph. 1:3). We often live a defeated and depressed life because we lack faith in God’s promise and provision for victory. The sin of unbelief keeps us from living for God as we should and we no longer depend upon God for victory and claim His victory over depression.

Faith is still the victory! If we will kick unbelief out of our hearts and lives we will get back to a walk of faith and this is what Hebrews chapter eleven is all about!! We need to understand that a lack of belief in Christ’s liberating power, presence, and promises is the root cause and reason why depression rules our lives. Depression overtakes our feelings which are not rooted in faith and God’s truth. Instead of trusting in God, we are allowing our circumstances to dictate our life and control us. We are allowing the earthly outlook to choke out our heavenly outlook on life (Col. 3:2).

Many depressed Christians need to stop looking to psychology and secularized therapy for answers and start “looking unto Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2) as the source of their inspiration, power, and motivation in life. As a

Christian, our eyes must be fixed upon Jesus! The secret of spiritual victory and persistence is in this phrase, "looking unto Jesus." Like all good runners, we must look away from all the distractions. We must not look backwards and we should not look within us as psychology says to find the answer to life. We need to "look up" where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God (Col. 3:1). The word "looking" means to consider attentively. It means to turn our eyes away from other things and fix them on something. In this case, it's Jesus! Jesus is our inspiration and motivation to go on and live the Christian life! It's His life and testimony that will inspire us to live above depression and go on. Jesus is still the answer! Jesus! Jesus! There's just something about that name!

"Turn you eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace."

There are three ways to keep looking unto Jesus.

- a. We must look at Christ's personal example of faith ("he is the author and finisher of faith")

Christ's tremendous faith inspires us to live above our circumstances, depression, and go on possessing emotional victory. The word "author" means "one who takes a lead and gives an example" just as a captain of a ship would take the lead. The word can also suggest a pioneer or trailblazer since they are people who take the lead and open up new pathways of exploration. In one sense, Jesus pioneered the path of faith that Christians should follow. Jesus was the greatest example of One who walked and lived by faith, according to God's will, and He alone is our prime example that we must look to or think about daily, hourly, and moment-by-moment!

He also was the "finisher of faith." This means that Jesus "perfected" or consummated the way of faith (how to live by faith) since He reached the end of the race successfully. His entire life from start to finish was lived by faith. He followed the Father's will by dying on the cross (Luke 22:42) and then rose again from the dead demonstrating to each one of us how to live

by faith and be victorious. We will have victory over depression if we keep looking at the example of Jesus' enduring faith. His faith inspires us to walk by faith and live above our circumstances, trials, and depressive thoughts.

- b. We must look at His passion upon the cross ("endured the cross" – vs. 2 and "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners – vs. 3).

The cross speaks of His passion and suffering on our behalf. If we will see Jesus dying on the cross for us in agony and in great pain, with the crown of thorns upon His head, with his face so marred more than any other man (Isa. 52:14), taking the judgment of our own sins, we will get back in the race! We will also have victory over depression. His example of endurance inspires us to live above our circumstances, trials, our own suffering, and the thoughts of depression. What was it that enabled our Lord to endure the cross? It was Christ's faith that enabled Him to endure. He kept the eye of faith on "the joy that was set before Him" which was to once again to be in the Father's presence, sitting beside Him in the throne room of Heaven. Jesus died for me! He sets the example for me and inspires me to live by faith and endure the hardships of life victoriously. We can endure our cross victoriously instead of being overcome with depression.

"As at the cross I humbly bow
And gaze upon Thy thorn-crowned brow,
And view the precious bleeding form
By cruel nails so bruised and torn,
Knowing Thy suffering was for me,
In grief I cry, "How can it be?"

The cross will change everything! It will take us away from depression into the land of victory! I need to see only one thing, Jesus dying for me, Jesus enduring the cross, and Jesus living victoriously above life's hardships. His example inspires me to live above my own hardships and emotional defeat.

- d. We must look at His position at God's right hand - ("set down at the right hand of the throne of God").

This is Christ's place and position of victorious exaltation (Heb. 1:3; 8:1). Jesus is the Victor who defeated sin, death, hell, and grave and is today seated at the right hand of God. As the great Victor sitting at the Father's right hand in the throne room of Heaven, Jesus inspires me to live an emotional and spiritual victorious life. Jesus' victorious, risen and ascended life at the Father's right hand reminds us that we too can possess victory and that we too will one day experience reward after the race is finished. His example as the victorious Lord gives us the reassurance that we too can possess victory in our lives over depilating depression.

If we have a right view of Jesus we will have a right view on Christian living! Our Lord's death for us is an awesome and ultimate motivational force to keep us faithful, victorious, and in the Christian race.

Galatians 2:20

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

We must keep our eyes on Jesus – His faithfulness, cross, resurrected and ascended victory at God's right hand, and the example He gives to us of passing through our time of suffering in victory. We must keep looking unto Jesus to overcome our depression and emotional responses to life's pressures. He inspired us, motivates us, and drives away depression and discouragement from our heart and lives.

Jesus said in Luke 9:23:

"If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

Jesus taught that we must deny ourselves of anything (including depression) that keeps us from being the kind of follower and disciple that is totally committed to Him. Feelings of depression trap us and keep us from living a fruitful and victorious Christian life as one of Christ's followers. This means that we must learn to manage our emotions. Ultimately, we must learn to take the emphasis off of ourselves and put it on Christ and reaching out to others. Remember that we can choose to

allow our feelings to control us and choose to act in unbiblical ways, or we can choose to glorify and obey God regardless of how we feel. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15). Who will you serve today? Your feelings of depression or God? There is a way out. You don't have to live in the blues. You don't have to live in the darkness.

One of England's finest preachers was C.H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) experienced depression. It comes as a surprise to many that Charles Spurgeon had a lifelong battle with depression. His reputation as a famed and powerful preacher might lead us to imagine there could never be a weakness in his Victorian Englishman's armor. It shouldn't be a surprise that being full of life in a fallen world must mean distress, and Spurgeon's life was indeed full of physical and mental pain.

At the age of twenty-two, as pastor of a large church and with twin babies at home to look after, he was preaching to thousands in the Surrey Gardens Music Hall when pranksters yelled "fire," starting a panic to exit the building which killed seven and left twenty-eight severely injured. His mind was never the same again. His wife, Susannah, wrote, "My beloved's anguish was so deep and violent, that reason seemed to totter in her throne, and we sometimes feared that he would never preach again."

Then, from the age of thirty-three, physical pain became a large and constant feature of life for him. He suffered from a burning kidney inflammation called Bright's Disease, as well as gout, rheumatism, and neuritis. The pain was such that it soon kept him from preaching for one-third of the time. Added to that, overwork, stress, and guilt about the stress began to take their toll. And all this was in the public eye and was jumped on by his many critics, not making it easier to bear. The suffering, they argued rather predictably, was a judgment from God.

The pain, the politics, the opposition, and the overwork (as well as bereavements, like that of his young grandson) all affected him deeply and in waves of emotional stress. The depression could hit him so intensely that, he once said, "I could say with Job, 'My soul chooseth strangling rather than life' [Job 7:15]. I could readily enough have laid violent hands upon myself, to escape from my misery of spirit."

In a biography of the "prince of preachers", Arnold Dallimore wrote, "What he suffered in those times of darkness we may not know...even his desperate calling on God brought no relief. 'There are dungeons', he said, 'beneath the castles of despair.'" In all his suffering, Spurgeon believed that God had a good purpose, and because of it felt he had become a better prepared and more compassionate pastor. It enabled him to deliver a striking and most unusual lecture to his students titled "The Minister's Fainting Fits," in which he said: "Knowing by most painful experience what deep depression of spirit means, being visited therewith at seasons by no means few or far between, I thought it might be consolatory to some of my brethren if I gave my thoughts thereon, that younger men might not fancy that some strange thing had happened to them when they became for a season possessed by melancholy; and that sadder men might know that one upon whom the sun has shone right joyously did not always walk in the light."

Before seeking relief from such melancholy (the older word used for depression), Spurgeon sought to understand God's purposes in these things that he might actually profit from the experience. Spurgeon saw that our heavenly Father ordains suffering for believers. It is quite clear from Scripture that through believers' suffering, God refines them like gold in a furnace (1 Pet. 1:6–7). Yet, Spurgeon wrote, "when the gold knows why and wherefore it is in the fire . . . [it] will thank the Refiner for putting it into the crucible, and will find a sweet satisfaction even in the flames."

I'd like to share with you some Biblical examples of those who experienced what seems to be the moderate form of depression. These particular saints eventually fought through their depression with the reality of God's presence and power operating in their lives. They did not allow their depression to totally overtake their relationship with God and spiritual life even though they did struggle with depressive thought patterns. Each one of these saints eventually found that God's mercies, goodness, and promises were enough to help them through their depressive moods which were seeking to overrun and rule their lives.

1. The example of Asaph

Asaph described what was happening in his life in a way which would indicate he was depressed. He became discouraged because he thought the wicked were too prosperous (Psalm 73:12). He could not understand why God would allow wicked people to continue to prosper in their wrongdoing. The more Asaph pondered the unfairness of this, the more negative and depressed he became. The more he made unfair comparisons the more depressed he became. Right away we hear his hopelessness. Asaph draws pictures with words that depict desperation.

Psalm 73:2-3

“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

Asaph is saying that he almost slipped off the pathway of following God or Yahweh. The reason was because he envied the wealth and prosperity of others who were unsaved. Asaph did not slip so far as to make him forget his responsibilities as a leader of God’s people. But he had a real inner struggle going on in his life. He did not abandon God but was dealing with spiritual issues in his life that depressed him.

In Psalm 73:13-14, Asaph goes on to say:

“Verily I have cleansed my heart *in* vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.”

It seems almost in vain for Asaph to be pure in his heart and to have clean hands before God. In other words, he was questioning the value of living a holy life. He felt that his life was sometimes more difficult than an unsaved person because He was being plagued by God and chastened by God for his inner thoughts and feelings which were not right.

Psalm 73:21-22

“Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins (inner being – heart). So foolish *was* I, and ignorant: I was *as* a beast before thee.”

Asaph was convicted about his sin and confessed his sin before going into the House of God. He felt foolish that he had forgotten the obvious truths

of eternity and God's justice as it relates to the lives of people. God will have the last say! Asaph rightly observed that animals seem to have no concept of spiritual things and eternity. They live their life for momentary pleasures, satisfying their natural urges. So, Asaph admitted that when he forgot about eternity and God's justice being meted out on the unsaved that he was truly living like a beast or animal before God.

Here is a man who is dealing with spiritual issues in his life, and who by his own words, evidences depression. The words of Asaph indicate that he was very depressed. He admitted that he was envious of others – their prosperity. He got his eyes on the “earthly things” and forgot about God and spiritual things. As a result, he became discouraged and resentful, troubled, perplexed, full of self-pity, and miserable. Asaph was thinking, feeling, and acting in a wrong and foolish manner. This was not a simple case of mild depression (the blues) but was a more moderate and advanced case of depression which had overtaken the spiritual life of Asaph to some extent. Asaph did not totally lose all control over his life (“my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped” – vs. 2) but he certainly was plagued by bouts of covetousness and depression.

The lesson is rather simple. When we get our eyes off the Lord and on to other things or people, when we allow our feelings to reign in our life, we are setting ourselves up for depression and a certain amount of spiritual defeat. Asaph could have avoided depression if He would have kept his spiritual life in tune with God, His providence over his life, and not allow his feelings to override his heart. Chip Ingram reminds all of us our own vulnerability to depression when he wrote: “The company of the depressed is a very noble company. And whether we will admit it or not, all of us have been numbered among them. One writer calls depression ‘the common cold of emotional disorders.’”

Pastor Lloyd Stilley adds:

“All of our lips at one time or another have spoken the words of discouragement and depression. All of our hearts have felt it. Every one of us has known, at one time or another, the slap of setback, the grief of loss, or the disheartening effects of stress. To be human is to feel that numbing, exhausting, de-motivating fog of depression.”

Asaph certainly experienced depression and it can happen to us as well. Take heed! My friend, let the example of Asaph remind you that we need to be honest with God about our depression. We should not be ashamed to admit our inner turmoil, thinking that voicing your questions will offend God. God really wants to hear from us, straight up. In fact, the Bible promises that “The LORD *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite (crushed) spirit. (Ps. 34:18) Pour out your heart to God. He's waiting to hear from you!

Asaph's recovery from depression is important. We see this in parts of Psalm 73 and 77. First, he sent out an SOS to God admitting his depression (Psalm 73:1-3, 7-9). We have seen this already. Second, he chose to redirect his thoughts and focus his thoughts on those past times when God seemed very near and he could push back the darkness with a song (Psalm 77:6, 10-12). This is an extremely important step when you feel locked down by depression. You need to regain a spiritual perspective once again on life and your fellowship with God!

Chip Ingram even suggests doing what he calls "the napkin exercise." "Whenever you feel yourself starting to go downhill, put a ballpoint pen in your pocket, go to a restaurant, get a soda, and pull out a napkin. Begin to list all the specific blessings that happened that day . . . that week...that month . . . that year. These are facts, not feelings. Write down what God has done for you. List the top ten answers to prayer in your life. List five people who love you. Write down the best things that have happened in your life." When you mark out God's faithfulness in the past, you condition your weary heart with hope for tomorrow. Send out an SOS to God. Choose to redirect your thoughts toward God in order to stir up your hope for the future.

Third, we see the importance of magnifying God in worship to diminish our problems. This is what Asaph did (Psalm 73:17, 23-38; 77:13-20).

Psalm 73:17

“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *then* understood I their end.”

Psalm 77:13:

“Thy way, O God, *is* in the sanctuary: who *is* so great a God as *our* God?”

“Great God of wonders! all thy ways
are matchless, godlike and divine;
but the fair glories of thy grace
more godlike and unrivaled shine,
more godlike and unrivaled shine.
Who is a pard'ning God like thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?
Or who has grace so rich and free?”

Next, he extols the miracle-working power of God:

Psalm 77:14

“Thou *art* the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people.”

Asaph concentrates on the benefits that come from God Himself in these verses. At this point, he proclaims the greatness of God in his worship. This does not sound like the old depressed Asaph but the new victorious Asaph that is freed from his emotional bondage and depression. This is what worship does for our soul. In these verses we see Asaph recounting the past wonders of God! He cites the example of God's deliverance of Israel from the Egyptian army through the Red Sea and their redemption (vv. 15, 19-20). Asaph turns his eyes heavenward and determines to reflect on God's past interventions for His people when they were in tight spots. This leads him to worship the God who is holy, perfect, righteous, and good and realize that He can deliver him from his difficulties and depressed state.

There is something about worship that recalibrates the soul. It reminds us of God's delivering power. Of course, worship is not the natural instinct of the depressed person. When gloom closes in all around us and those things which once were part of our life fade, we tend to want to pull the blanket over our head and bail out on God and everyone else. But Asaph willed himself to come to worship. This reminds us that there are tremendous and helpful benefits that we receive when we gather together with God's people, worshipping with them, and also developing daily worship habits (Heb. 10:25).

Kathryn Greene-McCreight, in her book “Darkness is My Only Companion” describes her tortured journey through ten years of extreme depression and bipolar disorder and how gathering with God's church helped her. She says, “It is so important to worship in community - to ask your brothers and sisters in Christ to pray for you . . . Sometimes you literally cannot make it on your own, and you need to borrow from the faith of those around you. Companionship in the Lord Jesus is powerful.”

Asaph began with a huge problem and a little God, but he kept sending up his SOS to God. He forced himself to rehearse the past blessings of God's faithfulness, which strengthened him and brought hope for the future. And he worshipped God. For Asaph, God was now big and his problems were small. At the beginning of this Psalm, Asaph was a likely prospect for a psychiatric clinic or shrink. At the end he is calm and serene. And so the Psalm is an illustration of the well-known saying:

- Occupation with self brings distress;
- Occupation with others brings discouragement;
- Occupation with God brings delight.

2. The example of Jeremiah

Jeremiah, the cranky old weeping prophet, also experienced what seems to be a moderate form of depression. In the book of Lamentations, he used metaphorical speech to describe his emotional experience of depression. Lamentations 3:1-20 is spoken in view of God's wrath, which was meted out upon the nation in their time of captivities. Jeremiah mentions himself and his people as being depressed because of God's chastening hand and how he shared these depressive thoughts with the people during this time. “*I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath (God's wrath – His chastening hand). He hath led me, and brought me into darkness (of God's judgment), but not into light (the light of His presence). Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day (a complaint of exceptional suffering). My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones (physical descriptions are used to illustrate the condition of his spiritual life). He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail (description of Jeremiah's bitter trials). He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old (He felt like a buried dead person*

with no life left in Himself – buried somewhere in a dark place). He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out (he felt like he was trapped in a maze): he hath made my chain heavy (*God allowed Jeremiah to experience hardship like slavery or being chained in some dungeon*). Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer (*God would not hear His praying*). He hath inclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked.

“He (*God*) was unto me *as* a bear lying in wait, *and as* a lion in secret places. He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate. He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins (so strong and intense was the pain Jeremiah felt that it was as if he had been pierced by God's arrows). I was a derision to all my people; *and* their song all the day (*mocking laughter, made a laughingstock*). He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood (*Jeremiah's bitter spirit toward God*). He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes (*Jeremiah felt like his face was being pushed into the dust or ground*). And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace (*Jeremiah had lost God's peace*): I forgot prosperity. And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD: Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall (*description of Jeremiah's bitter affliction and perhaps his own bitterness of heart*). My soul hath *them* still in remembrance (*Jeremiah was looking back and remembering his pathetic condition at one point in his life*), and is humbled in me” (*literally – “to sink down” (which is an expression that was used of depression - his soul is downcast)*).

As we observe Jeremiah's description of his afflictions and condition, we can determine that this was clearly not a case of mild depression. This was more advanced and the depression in some measure effected Jeremiah's spiritual life as he contemplated God's chastening hand. I think Jeremiah at this point in his life was experiencing serious, emotional turmoil and darkness within his soul. However, in all of this depressed state, he never totally lost sight of God, His greatness, and His promises. He never lost all hope for He came back to God and His abundant spiritual supply for His life. Jeremiah knew there was a spiritual answer to help him cope with his depression. This is because he transitions from his thoughts of affliction to

that of hope and healing that can only come from God. He brings this out in the next verses.

Lamentations 3:21-24 is spoken in view of Israel's captivity and gives us an antidote for dealing with depression: "This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. *It is of the LORD'S mercies (acts of loving-kindness and goodness, pity, sympathy) that we are not consumed, because his compassions (God's emotional response toward His people – sympathy, love, and tenderness extended toward them) fail not (God is always there for us!). They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.*"

Even in His wrath, God remembers to be merciful! Like Asaph, Jeremiah came to a point where He remembered that God was still his hope and that every day His loving mercies were new so that he would not be "consumed" or overcome with total defeat, dismay, discouragement, and depression. His depression only went so far. This is because he was dealing with it every morning and day with the freshness of God's loving mercies! This is how we work through depression and eventually get passed it. We need God's loving mercies and compassions which He faithfully wants to shower upon our lives every day. We need to open up our heart and life to God's loving embrace and receive of His tender care, love, and spiritual provision.

We may struggle with depression, as Asaph and Jeremiah evidently did, but we don't have to allow it totally consume away our life and control us. God's mercies are the antidote that keep us from being totally overcome with debilitating depression which steals away all of our joy, hope, and true satisfaction in life. In fact, God's loving mercies and compassions will bring us out of the darkness of depression. There is always a ray of light in the darkness! Find the light and the darkness will not overcome you.

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm."

William Cowper (pronounced Cooper), who wrote this hymn, was born in England on this day, November 26, 1731. His life was full of personal anguish. At five, his mother died, and Cowper, a timid and sensitive child, was treated with great cruelty by an older boy. Other school experiences were also painful. At eighteen William began to study law, and fell in love with his cousin Theodora Cowper, but her father did not approve of the match. Neither of them ever married.

After completing law studies he made little exertion in the field. Later he was offered a government position for which he would have to be examined. William was so terrified of having to answer questions that he worked himself into a fit of madness. At one point, he became so despondent that he attempted suicide. He wrote: "There is no encouragement in the Scripture so comprehensive as to include my case, not any consolation so effectual as to reach it." After time in a private asylum, he recovered his reason. Cowper moved to the country town of Olney, where John Newton, the ex-slaver, was pastor. Soon they were close friends.

In 1771, Newton, became concerned with Cowper's increasing melancholy. Hoping to lift his spirits by keeping him busy, Newton suggested that he and Cowper co-author a book of hymns. Newton himself often wrote hymns to illustrate his Sunday sermons. "Amazing Grace" is one of the 280 hymns he wrote for the Olney Hymns. Cowper wrote 68 of the hymns, including "Oh for a closer walk with God," "God moves in a mysterious way," and "There is a fountain filled with blood."

Here was a godly man who struggled with depression, a man who wrote some of our most beloved hymns. It sounds like some of his depression was physically related. Nevertheless, we must come to realize that none of us are immune from depression. We must keep up our guard and keep our lives from being overcome by emotion despair and defeat.

3. The example of David

We cannot be absolutely sure who wrote this Psalm, but many believe it was a Psalm of David. The voice of David is heard in the Psalms below as he wandered in exile during the rebellion of his own son, Absalom.

Psalm 42:3

“My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, *Where is thy God?*”

In Psalm 42:4 he states:

“When I remember these *things*, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.”

His inability to lead God’s people in worship as he formerly had also brought a sense of sorrow in his heart.

Psalm 42:6

“O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar.

At this point, the constancy and serious nature of his trials overwhelmed him for David went on to say in Psalm 42:7 “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.” This is a poetic way to express his troubles which were compared to waves cascading down on him, as if he were standing under a waterfall or in a culvert with water streaming through it.

Psalm 42:9-10

“I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? *As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?*”

David seems to question God in these Psalms which is an indication of a depressed condition. He seems to be sorrowing over a lost sense of the presence of God in his life for he cries out in Psalm 42:1-2, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” Apparently David wanted to regain a closer walk with God at this point in his life. He realized that living in a depressed state kept him from depending on God and fellowshiping with Him. David appears to be

distraught by the mocking and oppression of his enemies (“why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” – Ps. 42:10).

A missionary in India lay burning with the fever of malaria. As the disease sapped her strength, a feeling of depression dragged her into the depths of despair. She felt so overwhelmed that she asked God to take her to Heaven. But one day, while enclosed in this cocoon of discouragement, the sounds of music drifted into her room from another part of the house. A group of Indian young people were having a worship service. She heard them sing in their dialect. "I have decided to follow Jesus; no turning back, no turning back." The song touched her heart and she began praying. Soon prayer graduated to praise, and God lifted her discouragement. Not long afterward, her health returned. Now, many years later, she continues effectively in the task of world missions.

Can you relate to her experience? Have you known the kind of discouragement that can make you want to give up? Have you felt such a burden of depression that you have raised David's question, "Why are thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted (roaring – troubled and filled with anxiety) within me?" (Ps. 42:11). This was a particular time when David was struggling with moderate depression, but he did not give up entirely. This is because David still possessed faith and hope in God for he wrote in the latter part of Psalm 42:11, “Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, *who is* the health of my countenance, and my God.”

In other words, David eventually found comfort and hope in God’s Word and believed that God would deliver him. At this point, he was not totally overcome in his spiritual life and relationship with God. David realized that God was the answer to his overwhelming grief and depression. He needed to keep looking to God for help, deliverance, and strength. This reminds us that if we don’t maintain some kind of spiritual outlook during our difficult times in life, when we are sad and depressed, we can lose all hope. No matter what, we need to continue to “Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, *who is* the health of my countenance, and my God.”

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his book, “Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure,” comments: “Have you not realized that most of your unhappiness in

life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday, etc. Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man's treatment was this; instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself....

“The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: ‘Why art thou cast down’--what business have you to be disquieted? You must turn on yourself, upbraid yourself, condemn yourself, exhort yourself, and say to yourself: ‘Hope thou in God’--instead of muttering in this depressed, unhappy way.

“And then you must go on to remind yourself of God, Who God is, and what God is and what God has done, and what God has pledged Himself to do. Then having done that, end on this great note: defy yourself, and defy other people, and defy the devil and the whole world, and say with this man: “I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance, who is also the health of my countenance and my God”.

This reminds us that our need is not relief from our pain - our need is God! We are to thirst after God! We are to rouse our self to seek Him as our only source of hope and help, no matter how despairing our circumstances. Hope in God results in praise and this helps us to deal with depression. More on this later.

Psalm 55:2, 4-8 is similar in tone:

"My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught.... My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. I said, 'Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm."

This is a heart-rending catalogue of personal grief and desperate need. We sometimes want to fly away from all of our troubles, far away from the storms of life. David, in the midst of these depressive thoughts knew that his real shelter from the storms of life was in God's presence and healing power.

I see several steps in the psalms for dealing with depression. They are taken from those Psalms where people were depressed and in need of deliverance.

1. Seek God's verdict of yourself.

When you're depressed, recognize it and begin to confront yourself as to why you're depressed. The first step to conquering depression is to admit it. The psalmist readily admits, both to himself and to God, that he is in despair (Ps. 42:5, Ps 42:6, Ps 42:11; Ps 43:5). If you don't recognize your emotional condition, either because you don't know the symptoms or you don't want to appear unspiritual or whatever, you can't deal with it.

There are a number of causes of depression. Once you recognize the symptoms, you've got to do as the psalmist does here and begin to confront yourself as to why you're depressed (Ps 42:5, Ps 42:11; Ps 43:5). Remember that depression can hit when we come down from a spiritually enriching experience. Perhaps the excitement of the early days of our faith wears off or is dulled by our trials. The psalmist here recalls the earlier times when he enjoyed going to God's house in procession with other believers (Ps 42:4).

2. Seek the personal presence of God.

When you're depressed, your main need is to seek God Himself, not just relief. When we're in emotional pain, we should see it as an opportunity to seek God and grow in Him, not just "try God" for quick relief. Though the psalmist was in pain, he realized that his real need was God (Ps 42:1-2, Ps 42:5-6, Ps 42:11; Ps 43:4-5). In fact, he begins Psalm 42 by recognizing that above all else, his need was for God and God alone.

The psalmist knew God personally before this trial hit. Note how he calls God “my God” (Ps 42:6, Ps 42:11; Ps 43:4, Ps 43:5); “the God of my life” (Ps 42:8); “my rock” (Ps 42:9); “the God of my strength” (Ps 43:2); “God my exceeding joy” (Ps 43:4). This tells us that those who have a relationship with God can feel depressed. But it also tells us that the time to prepare for crises is before they hit. He had spent time with God before and knew God as his true source of life. Therefore, he had a refuge, a familiar relationship to turn to in his time of despair.

3. Seek the praise of God (Ps 42:8; Ps 43:4).

When you’re depressed, the last thing you feel like doing is praising the Lord. But, praise is a command, not a feeling. If we obey we often feel better. The song of praise drives the darkness away. To praise God is to focus on His attributes and actions. As we deliberately direct our thoughts to God’s saving grace toward us in Christ, that He, by His mercy, drew us out of a horrible pit, our spirits will be lifted.

4. Seek the precepts of God.

God’s light and truth from His Word will show us the way back. Again, even if you don’t feel like it when you’re depressed, read God’s Word and ask His Holy Spirit to shine His light into your darkened heart. God’s light and truth are threatening to the person who does not want to confront his own sin and self-focus, but it’s God’s truth that will lead you to His dwelling place where you will find God Himself to be your exceeding great joy (Ps 43:3-4).

5. Seek the people of God.

The psalmist seems isolated in his depression, which is often the case. But he realizes that the place of joy, where the need of his soul would be met, is in corporate worship with God’s people (Ps 42:4; Ps 43:3-4). As mentioned previously, it’s amazing how many depressed people stay away from church! When you’re depressed, you often want to avoid people, especially gathering with God’s people. But being with God’s people is exactly what you need. Go against your feelings and force yourself to

gather with God's people and seek His face in church. There is something about corporate worship that cannot be experienced in individual worship.

We discover from Asaph, Jeremiah, and David's bouts with moderate depression, that we do not have to allow depressive thoughts to shipwreck our spiritual lives completely. Each one of them knew that they had to deal with their depression from a spiritual perspective by receiving God's mercies and remaining filled with hope in God's Word and promises. This means that in the midst of our sorrows and woes we can look to God's presence and promises to enable us to go on in life. As we struggle with moderate depressive thoughts, we need to come to our spiritual senses and maintain a sense of spiritual reality that God is still the answer to our problems and depression and find our help and hope in Him.

“When I think I'm going under, part the waters, Lord.
When I feel the waves around me, calm the sea.
When I cry for help, oh, hear me
Lord and hold out Your hand.
Touch my life
Still the raging storm in me.”

C. Severe Depression (level three depression)

The next level of depression is what we might label as severe depression. This is the type of depression which completely overtakes our spiritual lives, keeps us in bondage to our feelings, circumstances, depressive thoughts and moods. Severe depression is distinguished from moderate depression by the presence of utter hopelessness. A person who experiences moderate depression is definitely down, but a severely depressed person is down and out and is totally defeated from a spiritual standpoint. It is not only *difficult* for this person to keep going, the severely depressed person thinks it is *impossible* to keep going. Severe depression is a permanent spirit of heaviness or gloom that affects, controls, and dominates every area of a person's life.

Let's look at four examples of those who experienced severe depression.

a. Disciples

John 16:6

“But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. “

I believe that Jesus described the experience of a severely depressed group of people when He states how “sorrow hath filled your heart.” The word “filled’ indicates that there was room for nothing else, just as a cup had filled up to the brim with water. When a person is severely depressed, their depression fills every aspect and facet of their life. This is what happened to the disciples after Christ’s death. Their response was to completely give up. They ran to the upper room, locked the doors, and stayed there, not knowing what to do. Sorrow had indeed filled and overcome their hearts and caused them to shirk their responsibilities and shut out the rest of the world for a time. The disciples became severely depressed, since they allowed their fears and disappointments to overpower and defeat them, and since they were ruled by their feelings.

b. David

At one point in his life, David seemed to lapse into the deepest form of depression.

William MacDonald describes David’s experience in this way:

“David switches to a minor key. After he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and plotted the death of Uriah, he steadfastly refused to confess his sin. He tried to sweep it all under the rug. Perhaps he rationalized that “time heals all things.” But in his stubborn refusal to break, he was fighting against God and against his own best interests. He became a physical wreck.”

In this instance, David’s depression was caused by his sin with Bathsheba. David’s words in Psalm 32 are a good illustration of what happens to a severely depressed person who is experiencing great emotional and physical distress that was due to his own sinful decisions in life.

Psalm 32:3-4

“When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.”

David’s description of “my bones waxed old” speaks of his body wasting away. David was experiencing physical pain and physical weakness as a result of his depression. Emotional depression can result in physical symptoms. At this point, David may have stopped eating due to his depression and he had become physically weak. The loss of appetite is one sign of severe depression. His “roaring” or groaning all day long speaks of his severe emotional depression. Of course, we all have emotional ups and downs in a normal week and what we might consider a “bad day.” However, we can keep functioning with our normal activities and the gloom eventually disappears. However, those who are severely depressed, like David at this point in his life, apparently woke up in severe depression and could not properly function in life. During this type of depression, the seemingly small and easy tasks in life seem impossible and require far more energy to complete.

David realized that God’s hand was heavy upon him (“For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me” – vs. 4) bringing conviction and in many ways blocking him, thwarting him, frustrating him at every turn. Nothing worked for him anymore. The gears of his life were no longer synchronized. He continued by sharing that his “moisture is turned into the drought of summer” (vs. 4) which likely means that his vitality for life and living in general were drained away as a person’s strength is drained away in the summer heat. A severely depressed person feels fatigue, the kind of fatigue that one feels after an exhausting day of physical labor. David was “running on empty” and at this point even the small tasks in life seemed insurmountable to him. The weight of their emotional burden renders a severely depressed person too physically wasted to do anything, such as attending church, fellowshiping with God in prayer and Bible study, and performing routine tasks

A similar description of David’s depression is seen in Psalm 38.

Psalm 38:3

“There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.”

Again, his words indicate that he was experiencing some amount of physical pain and weakness because of his depression which was caused by his sin. There are various physical ramifications that can be caused or generated by depression. The idea of “no rest in my bones” connotes a physical condition. Bones denotes a person’s entire physical structure. Therefore, to say that one’s bones are in agony is to say emphatically that his body is wracked with pain.

WebMD says this:

“Depression Causes Physical Symptoms. Depression affects much more than moods. These are a few of the most common physical symptoms of depression:

- Increased aches and pains, which occur in about two out of three people with depression
- Chronic fatigue
- Decreased appetite
- Insomnia, lack of deep sleep, or oversleeping.”

Psalm 38:6-8 goes on to say:

“I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness (roaring) of my heart.”

David once again uses the images of a great burden, a crushing weight, misery, groaning, and physical pain that plagued him because of his depression. His statement of “mourning all the day long” speaks of a severely depressed person who finds himself weeping uncontrollably over seemingly small things and sometimes for long periods of time. David was under deep emotional torment at this particular time in his life because of the depression that his sin had caused in his life.

There is an important lesson. Not only can depression be a sin, it can also be the result of sin. There is nothing good about depression. Of course, the best way to rid yourself of severe depression is to begin at God's confessional booth. This is what David did (Psalm 51:1-12). Getting rid of our sin is the beginning step to getting rid of our depression since sin is often the cause of our sin, whether it's the sin of anxiety, worry, or other fleshly sins that have overcome our hearts and lives. Get rid of your sin and you will get rid of your depression.

c. Elijah

Elijah fits into the category of severe depression. Elijah was a godly man and was used greatly of the Lord and yet he suffered from severe depression at one point in his life and ministry. Imagine this! The spiritual giant of Elijah suffered from a heavy, emotional burden that caused him to want to take his life. There was an extended period in his life when he suffered from what we might call severe depression. Elijah had learned that Queen Jezebel had sworn a vow to her gods to kill him. This is what triggers Elijah's depression.

1 Kings 19:3-10

And when he saw *that*, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which *belongeth* to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I *am* not better than my fathers. And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise *and* eat. And he looked, and, behold, *there was* a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise *and* eat; because the journey *is* too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken

thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.”

We have often called this the “Elijah syndrome.” Elijah went into a bout of severe depression at this point in his life. His life was on the line and he began to be overcome emotionally with fear and discouragement.

F. W. Krummacher commented on these verses:

“In this instance Elijah’s faith appears to have failed him. The very words of the sacred narrative seem to give us a significant hint respecting the state of his mind at this period.”

Krummacher went on to note that Elijah’s focus was not on ‘God’s promises, aid, power, and faithfulness’ at this point in his life, but rather on circumstances. He was obsessed with the thoughts of Jezebel coming after him. Eventually, he came to the place of ultimate depression in that he wanted to die. ‘It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life.’ In other words, Elijah said, ‘God, I’ve had it up to here. I’m ready to throw in the towel. Kill me, if you really love me.’”

It’s interesting that in the midst of Elijah’s depression, God made a provision for Him to pick up his inner spirit (1 Kings 19:5). God came to Elijah’s aid and encourage him. Once again, we see how God is the answer to our depression.

What is interesting to observe is that Elijah’s depression came after a time of great victory. When did Elijah pray, and say, “God, kill me”? It was in chapter 19. What happened in chapter 18? There was a mountaintop revival on Mt. Carmel. The prophets of Baal were defeated and God demonstrated He was with the people when fire came down from Heaven and consumed the burnt offering (1 Kings 19:38). The people fell on their faces, and they said, “The LORD, he *is* the God; the LORD, he *is* the God” (1 Kings 18:39). So, we can observe that sometimes depression can follow on the heels of a revival! We should not think that because we are living on a spiritual high that we are beyond depression. Depression can slip in the back door and quickly overtake our heart and life. This was the case with Elijah. He went from the showdown (1 Kings 18) to the shutdown or let

down (1 Kings 19), from the mountaintop to the valley, standing before 450 prophets of Baal, and now, running from one woman.

It's amazing that right on the heels of a great spiritual experience that this godly man was experiencing severe depression. We should take heed of this example and never think that we are above anxiety and depression. The same thing occurred in Jonah's life. He had seen the city of Nineveh turn to the Lord but soon after this he was so depressed that he said, "Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:3). I don't think any of these men literally, actually, wanted to die, but we see them wallowing in self-pity and depression.

Elijah carried an unbelievable burden. There was a warrant out for his head! He sat down in a cave, wrapped himself up in self-pity, and bewailed his fate. Over the years many weary saints have carried burdens and they have allowed their burdens to overcome their life and create depression. Pastors are susceptible to depression because of the weight they must sometimes carry. An unknown author wrote these words:

"Mary had a little lamb.
It grew to be a sheep.
It then became a pastor,
And died from lack of sleep."

Elijah's depression wasn't bound up in any one cause. Rather, it probably stemmed from a number of things. The first is fear (1 Kings 19:2-3). Elijah, frightened by the threats of Jezebel, started running for his life. Fear is almost always a factor in depression. Many times, like Elijah, we become afraid of failure, of loneliness, of not getting a job completed, of not making it through school, or not having our marriage go the way we'd like. Fears can overtake our heart and this can result in depression.

Second, there is the matter of failure (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah held a negative opinion about himself. He felt he was no more successful in checking the nation's apostasy like the prophets who had gone before him. It's easy to

think: “I’m no good. I’m incompetent. God made a mistake when He made me.”

Third, there is fatigue (1 Kings 19:5). Elijah was emotionally drained and physically exhausted. Mountaintop experiences can leave us drained. He needed rest and relaxation. Depression is always related to or reflected in our physical condition. We are exhausted from life’s pressures and pace.

Fourth, there is futility (1 Kings 19:10). Elijah said, “I am the only one left and now they are out to get me.” He feels alone, hopeless and has only negative expectations about the future. Elijah at this point is paranoid. He thinks everybody is out to get him – even the good humor ice-cream man!

Someone said:

“Elijah was looking at life through dark-colored glasses. He saw no way out.”

Have you ever felt like Elijah? Perhaps you are feeling like him right now: afraid, alone, exhausted, burned-out, and hopeless. Maybe you are singing the blues. If so, you are a good candidate for a juniper tree. I want you to see what helped Elijah climb out of the valley of despair and go on to a lifetime of useful service. Through the experience of Elijah, God gives us some divine principles for dealing with depression.

➤ **Take time off**

God allowed Elijah to get rest and sought to give him physical strength by feeding him in his time off (1 Kings 19:5-7). God gave him “Angel Food Cake!” The first thing that helped Elijah was to take time off so he could get physically and emotionally rejuvenated. He had been so busy taking care of the needs of the nation that he had neglected his own needs. Sometimes we need to allow our soul to catch up with our body! When we use up our physical energy we become exhausted. When we use all of our emotional energy, we become depressed. So there was a physical cause connected with Elijah’s depression. What he needed was some sleep, good food, and a new vision of the greatness of God. Friend, we must find some way

periodically to replace the emotional and physical energy that life and work drain from us. If we do not, we will experience burn-out and depression.

Elijah needed rest, food, and relaxation. He needed to get away from the people and pressures that were getting to him. So do we occasionally. A poem says it best:

“If you put your nose to the grindstone rough
And hold it there long enough,
For you there will be no such thing
As a bubbling brook or birds that sing.
These three things will your life compose,
Just you, the stone, and a ground-down nose.”

No one can run full throttle all the time. We all need to slow down to an idle occasionally. Some people say it is better to burn out than to rust out. I always thought that this was spiritual nonsense. It is better to live out your life in victory than to get depression or become a rusty and defeated Christian. Getting away helped Elijah. It will help you also.

Paul W. Powell said:

“There is often a close relationship between our physical and emotional state. Our body and our soul live so close to one another that they tend to catch each other’s diseases. If we are down emotionally, it affects the way we feel physically. If we get sick physically, it affects our emotions. Keeping healthy in general — getting enough of the right kind of food, enough sleep, and sufficient exercise — while no guarantee against depression, may help to prevent it and will certainly keep the body in a better state to deal with it.”

We all need to live balanced lives. We need a rhythm between work and rest. If we don’t find it, someone said that we will become either a basket case or a casket case.

➤ Let it all out

Second, we discover that Elijah talked through his frustrations. While he sat in a cave feeling sorry for himself, God asked, “What doest thou here,

Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:13). Have you noticed in Scripture that God is always asking questions for which He already knows the answers? He asked Adam, “Adam, where art thou?” God knew where Adam was. He asked Cain, “Where is thy brother Abel?” God knew that Abel was already dead. He asked Moses, “Moses, what is that in your hand?” God knew that Moses had a staff in his hand. Here he asks, “Elijah, what doest thou here?” God knew what Elijah was doing there. Why did God ask Elijah this question? It’s because God wanted to give him an opportunity to talk, to unload, to vent his frustrations to Him. We do this today through prayer. We see that at this particular time in Elijah’s life, God listened non-judgmentally, as Elijah poured out his feelings of anger, bitterness and self-pity (“I only am left” - 1 Kings 19:10).

We all have similar, negative feelings at times and unless we rid ourselves of them they will poison us emotionally. There are some health-giving emotions like love, faith, and hope. But there are also some destructive emotions. Fear, anger, worry, bitterness, hatred, jealousy, and self-pity are slow killers. We must find some way to rid ourselves of these destructive feelings through repentance and restoration to God (James 4:7-8). Talking to God in prayer is perhaps the most effective way to rid ourselves of harmful emotions. When we talk it is like pulling the plug out of the bathtub. All sorts of bad feelings are drained from us.

God will listen to His people non-judgmentally. He deals patiently and tenderly with His depressed child. He will do this with each one of us. God didn’t say, “Elijah, prophets shouldn’t talk like that.” He didn’t make him feel guilty for his feelings. He accepted him and listened to him. Pour your heart out to God. He can take it. He will not be judgmental as you pour out the hurts of life to Him. Of course, you can also share your burdens with others (Galatians 6:2). Everyone needs someone in whom he can confide without fear of condemnation.

The head of the medical school at the University of Oregon said that “There is probably more good is done between two friends at ten o’clock in the morning over a cup of coffee than in the doctor’s office all day long.” Talking to a friend can help to bring life back into perspective and enable us to solve our problems. If we had more friends we would need fewer

psychiatrists. Find a non-judgmental listener and pour your soul out to them. But there is a word of caution. Be careful about talking about your problem too much. The person who goes around pitying himself bores others with repeated stories of his troubles; the result is he is left more and more to himself.

➤ Get life back in perspective

The third thing that helped Elijah was to get life back in perspective. Elijah lost perspective on God and what was happening to his life. He felt that God had forsaken him at this point and that he alone remained faithful to the Lord. His reasoning went something like this: "Here I am, doing my best to serve the Lord and look what happened. God has forsaken me. I alone am left (1 Kings 19:10, 14). It's me against the world." Depressed people often feel like this. They have problems because they pay more attention to their negative events than to positive ones, they think everything and everyone is against them, they are overly hard on themselves, and in general reward themselves too little and punish themselves too much.

Elijah had arrived at the wrong conclusions. So at this point, the Lord chose to reveal just how warped and distorted his view of things had become. God may listen patiently to us and not club us over the head when we pour out our depressive thoughts to Him. However, because He loves us, we can be sure that sooner or later He will reveal to us the right path to take. This is important to understand. Ultimately all depression can be traced back to some distorted view of life. In Elijah's case, he had a distorted view of himself and a distorted view of God. He needed to regain perspective and know that God was there and that there were others who had not bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:18).

We discover that God reveals Himself to Elijah in a new and fresh way to help him regain perspective on God and his own condition. He sent a tremendous wind, a cyclone, that ripped through the mountain (1 Kings 19:11-12). But God was not in the wind. Then God sent an earthquake that shook the whole mountain; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, He sent fire and lightning, but God was not in the fire. Then there came a still small voice through which God spoke to Elijah. The

Hebrew expression “still small voice” literally means “a voice of low whispers, a sound of gentle stillness.”

I have a sign in my home which says:

“Let us be silent that we may hear the whisper of God.”

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, wind and lightning and earthquakes are often associated with God and His presence. They are ways that He manifested Himself to His people of old. But here God speaks to Elijah in a voice of low whispers. God is the God of wonders but He is also the God of whispers! Elijah not only needed a new perspective of God, he needed a new perspective of himself. He thought he was the only one who was still faithful to God (1 Kings 19:10). God had to remind him that He had seven thousand prophets who had not yet bowed their knee to Baal. Elijah thought he was more important than he really was. He thought everything depended on him. We sometimes feel the same way. Listen, if God’s work depends solely on you and me, God and His work is in serious trouble!

One preacher said this:

“If I become overly impressed with my own importance, I remember what I read recently: ‘If all the preachers and all the garbage collectors quit at once, which would you miss first?’”

Keep your life in perspective. Sometimes we can take ourselves too seriously. None of us are indispensable. The workmen die but the work goes on. Elijah's emotions had so narrowed his focus that he could no longer see beyond himself. Elijah was looking through the eyes of hopelessness instead of the eyes of faith. Remember: you are not alone; God is with you. Keep your eyes on God, not on the circumstances surrounding you. God's power can change the situation when He thinks it's time. Your heavenly Father will take care of you—no matter what!

➤ Get back in the mainstream

Fourth, Elijah got back into the mainstream of life and went to work again. God allowed Elijah to sit in the dark cave of self-pity just so long. Then He told him to get up and get busy again. There was a new king of Israel and a

new prophet to be anointed (Elisha). The time for complaints and self-pity were over. Elijah now needed to get back to work (1 Kings 19:15-17, 20-21). With us, as with Elijah, the best way to quit feeling sorry for ourselves is to start feeling compassion for somebody else. God showed him that there were people he needed to connect with and serve.

The psychiatrist Dr. Karl Menninger was once asked by a Tucson, Arizona newspaper reporter, "Suppose you think you're heading for a nervous breakdown. What should you do?" Most of us would have expected the great psychiatrist to say, "See a psychiatrist." But he didn't. Instead, his reply was, "Go straight to the front door, turn the knob, cross the tracks and find somebody who needs you." In other words, stop sitting around in isolation. Don't get all wrapped up in yourself. Don't have your own pity party for too long. Get up and get back in the mainstream of life working for God and His purpose. In helping others, we help ourselves.

By these means Elijah whipped his severe depression and went on to a lifetime of useful service. In fact, he ultimately closed out his ministry in a blaze of glory as God swept down on him and carried him into heaven in a whirlwind and a chariot of fire. Thank God we can do the same! We don't have to remain in the doldrums of life and in a depressed state. We can win the battle over depression. Despair, discouragement, and depression do not have to keep you bound in the doldrums of life. Instead of the doldrums, we should have a doxology of praise expressed toward God for His power, sufficiency, greatness, and blessings that He has showered upon our lives.

Mark A. Sutton remarked:

"God helped his prophet through that dark time, and he will help you as well. Widen your focus to see beyond yourself and your problems. Look at your life and this world through the eyes of faith. Open your heart to the possibility of God's beginning a great work in you and giving you blessing after blessing."

d. Job

Job is another example of a Bible character that suffered from severe depression. Many have called this passage – “Job’s Unhappy Birthday.” Let’s read it and see his depressive mindset.

Job 3:1-11 records these words in a poetic and dramatic fashion, describing himself as a baby that should have never been born, a child that should have been miscarried in the womb of his mother and never saw the light of the day. The Bible text reveals: “After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day. And Job spake, and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night *in which* it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. *As for* that night, let darkness seize upon it; let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein. Let them curse it that curse the day, who are ready to raise up their mourning. Let the stars of the twilight thereof be dark; let it look for light, but *have* none; neither let it see the dawning of the day: Because it shut not up the doors of my *mother’s* womb, nor hid sorrow from mine eyes. Why died I not from the womb? *why* did I *not* give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?”

We have read about the “Elijah syndrome” but here is the “Job syndrome.” This chapter has been well titled Job’s “Unhappy Birthday” because in it Job curses the day of his birth, highlights the blessings of death, and complains that he cannot die! He assigns total darkness (instead of light) to the day he was conceived and born into the world. Yes, he actually argued that he should have died at his birth. He wanted to be a miscarried baby who never came into the light of this world. This sounds like a man who was severely depressed. We can see that although Job seemed to have initial victory over the calamities that came into his life (Job 1:22-23), he eventually broke down and suffered from depression. Of course, in the end, Job was revived and brought out of his depressive state.

Job 13:15

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.”

It's interesting that although Job cursed the day of his birthday he did not actually curse God at his wife told him to do. Job's story reminds us that depression can hit us, even when we think we have a spiritual edge on life. We must guard our minds and hearts from overcoming depression by allowing God's peace to calm our hearts and cure our inward anxieties.

Philippians 4:7

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

As stated earlier, depression is a feeling of helplessness and hopelessness that leads to sadness. I think this is a good definition. A person who is depressed has problems, real or imagined, and he doesn't seem to be able to get a handle on them. There's no help available and there doesn't seem to be any help on the horizon. It's helplessness plus hopelessness that leads to this deep despondency, this sadness, or depression.

We have seen in these examples of depression, that this plaguing emotional handicap can impact a person's life in many ways, not only emotionally but also physically. Depression impacts our emotions, our physical well-being, our behavior, intellect, theology and spiritual life. Severe depression is all-consuming.

Depression is *emotional* because it disrupts our emotional well-being by causing us to experience feelings of disappointment, sadness, discouragement, frustration, loneliness, emptiness, disillusionment, dejection, and despair. A severely depressed person considers their emotions to be accurate and valid above all else. Their emotions become excuses for not fulfilling their God-given spiritual responsibilities and living in obedience to God's commands.

Depression is also *physical* because it causes things like fatigue, insomnia, and loss of appetite. It can shut down one's metabolism. Other physical symptoms such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain accompany severe depression.

Depression is also *behavioral* in that it leads to inactivity, rejecting spiritual and everyday responsibilities, and also leads to sinful actions and reactions. Depressed people commit sins of omissions (not doing what they should be doing) and also sins of commission (doing what they should not do) as the individual is being overcome by their depression. Depression often keeps people from interacting socially, causing them to withdraw from spiritual counsel. They place blame on others and become self-centered in life.

Depression is also *intellectual* in that people lose sight of God's purposes, goodness, wisdom, love, victory, and power in delivering them. The perceived enormity and hopelessness of their problems dominate the thinking and entire life of those depressed. We have seen this in the examples above.

Depression also *theological* in that it distorts one's view of God so that a person no longer sees God as sufficient to meet their emotional needs in life, even when the Bible repeatedly states that God can meet your every need in life ("Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved" - Psalm 55:22).

Some have also viewed depression as *historical* in the sense that it is that which progresses from something that stems from the past (a past event), but which can end up causing depression in our present lives (Phil. 3:13). Remember that severe depression is often the result of a snowball effect. It begins with mild depression which can become perpetual and develop into moderate depression. Furthermore, when the person who has moderate depression does not do a spiritual life check and claim God's presence and promises, it can eventually end up as severe depression.

The fictitious story is told that the devil was once informed by an angel that God was going to take away from him all but one of the temptations with which he tempted men. "Which one is God going to leave with me?" asked Satan. "Depression," said the angel. At that Satan laughed and said, "Good! In this one gift I have secured all."

II. A Comprehensive Perspective of Depression

We have dealt with depression from three general perspectives (mild, moderate, severe). Next, I want to briefly mention the subject of depression from a specific perspective. Over the years, various types of depression have been identified. This study is not designed to promote the theories of finite and fallible men on the subject of depression. I do not agree with the so-called secular “experts” on how to deal with depression, by avoiding Biblical and spiritual advice. On the other hand, I think we can learn some basic things from others on how depression manifests itself in people’s lives. I will deal with these in a moment. But let me reconfirm something at this point.

We must remember that we need God’s solutions to our problems, not man’s solutions, since man’s conclusions are flawed, designed to cover-up the underlying problem of depression, and since they are ultimately doomed to fail. This is why I approach the problem of depression from the perspective of God’s Word. It’s because we must believe that the Scriptures contain everything that we need to live a godly, fruitful, satisfying, joyful, and productive life.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 speaks to the sufficiency of Scripture: TURN

“All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

By rooting yourself in the Word of God, you will begin empowering yourself spiritually to deal with each day. Think of a Bible verse as a dose of antibiotic helping you to ward off the infection of depression. We need God’s Word to keep us on an accurate course in life. If we have lapsed into depression, we need “doctrine” (WHAT IS RIGHT – how to view and deal with depression). We also sometimes need the “reproof” (WHAT IS NOT RIGHT - conviction and correction of our depressed condition that comes from the Bible). As we read the Bible, it speaks to us about those things in our lives that are not right and need correction, such as overwhelming depression, which defeats us spiritually and which is not pleasing to God. We also need “instruction in righteousness” (HOW TO STAY RIGHT –

discovering how God wants us to live instead of remaining in a state of depression). The Bible tells us how to live a righteous life that honors God.

When we are overcome and defeated by depression we are not heeding God's truth regarding living a righteous and rewarding life. The Scriptures provide us with spiritual guidance for every situation that we are dealing with in life, including depression, so that we might be "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (THE RESULT OF LIVING RIGHT) which means to be fully equipped to live a victorious and spiritually productive life. We might be equipped with academic degrees but God wants us to be equipped to live the Christian life effectively and victoriously by His power and promises.

2 Peter 1:3 also talks about the sufficiency of God's power:

"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."

The Christian needs to return to the sufficiency of Scripture and God's power to live a righteous, victorious, and fulfilling life. So, while recognizing the different types of depression, as outlined by many today, I am by no means giving my approval of the human answers to the problem of depression. Human answers fall dreadfully short of God's answers and ways. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Again, the intent of this study is to present a Biblical perspective on the nature, causes, and solution to the problem of depression. However, throughout the years, various types of depression have been observed and the attempt has been made to classify depression. I'd like to mention some of these observations while recognizing that there are definitely spiritual but also some physical and mental problems associated with depression. The different types of depression have often been associated with what are termed "disorders" indicating a state of confusion that is associated with a health-related or physical cause. However, as is often the case, many today have forgotten that depression can be a mixture of both a physical disorder and spiritual disorder of the soul. In fact, in many cases it

is more of a spiritual problem than anything else. Sadly, many have tried to overcome what might be a physical problem without overcoming the spiritual aspect of one's depression.

Let us remember that depression is the ascendancy and tyranny of our emotions controlling our lives.

Proverbs 15:13

“A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.”

Often an initiating discouragement leads to sadness, which leads to prolonged grief, and then into a downhill spiral to depression. Depression is a universal problem. Some suggest that Biblical characters did not have what we call depression and it would be more appropriate to say they suffered emotionally. However, since depression affects us spiritually, emotionally and physically, we can conclude that Bible characters were not superhuman and that they too suffered from depression. We have seen this in different verses of the Bible.

Now let's consider some of the research done on depression. Behind the research we can see the physical disorders associated with depression, but when looking deeper, we can also see the spiritual disorders (sinful choices) which can also be associated with depression. Researchers have identified and termed one type of depression as Clinical Depression (Major depressive Disorder – MDD). Major depressive disorder is a mood swing characterized by a number of key features:

- Depressed mood
- Lack of interest in activities normally enjoyed
- Changes in weight
- Changes in sleep
- Fatigue
- Feelings of worthlessness and guilt
- Difficulty concentrating
- Thoughts of death and suicide.

If a person experiences the majority of these symptoms for longer than a two-week period, they will often be diagnosed with MDD. Clinical Depression seems to overlap with what has been called Neurotic Depression which is a minor, mental and emotional depressive disorder. A person with a neurotic depression has a disorder which means that normal activities of daily living are impaired. There is a prolonged state of sadness that lasts longer than the normal time frame expected for emotional recovery and it is based on "stressors" such as a loss of an endeared relationship, a financial or work crisis, or retirement. Symptoms interfere with normal work and social functioning. Many times the cause can usually be traced to an identifiable and specific event.

Psalm 13:2, among many others, reflect the pain of prolonged sorrow: "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, *having* sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?"

There is also Persistent Depressive Disorder. This refers to a type of chronic depression that is experienced for the majority of days throughout a period of at least two years. It can be mild, moderate, or severe. There is also a Bipolar Disorder also known as manic depression. This is the most severe type and state of depression. Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder characterized by periods of abnormally elevated mood known as mania and then episodes of major depression. It's going from a high to a low and then back to a high again. This disorder may become severe enough that it might require hospitalization or affect a person's sense of reality. In addition to depressed mood and markedly diminished interest in activities, people with bipolar depression often have a range of physical and emotional symptoms which may include:

- Fatigue, insomnia, and lethargy
- Unexplained aches, pains, and psychomotor agitation
- Hopelessness and loss of self-esteem
- Irritability and anxiety
- Indecision and disorganization
- Exaggerated sense of well-being and self-confidence (euphoria)
- Decreased need for sleep
- Unusual talkativeness

- Racing thoughts
- Poor decision-making — for example, going on buying sprees, taking sexual risks or making foolish investments
- The risk of suicide in bipolar illness is 15 times greater than in the general population. Psychosis (including hallucinations and delusions) can also occur in more extreme cases.

Psychotic Depression is similar to the previous physical disorder and involves a person losing touch with reality. Psychosis is a mental state characterized by disorganized thinking or behavior; false beliefs, known as delusions; or false sights or sounds, known as hallucinations. This doesn't typically get associated with depression but according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, about 20 percent of people with depression have episodes so severe that they develop psychotic symptoms. As mentioned, psychosis depression is sometimes accompanied by hallucinations or delusions, making those who are psychotic a potential danger to themselves or others.

Those afflicted with a psychotic depression can at least identify with the terror, despair, and skewed perspective of life described in Psalm 102.

Psalm 102:3-4

“For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth. My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.”

Psalm 102:7

“I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.”

Psalm 102:9

“For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.”

Psalm 102:11

“My days *are* like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass.”

There is also Postpartum Depression. Pregnancy can bring about significant hormonal shifts that can often affect a woman's moods. Depression can have its onset during pregnancy or following the birth of a child. Postpartum depression is more than that just the "baby blues." It can range

from a persistent lethargy and sadness that requires medical treatment all the way up to postpartum psychosis, a condition in which the mood episode is accompanied by confusion, hallucinations or delusions.

Then there is Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD). This effects women specifically. Among the most common symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) are irritability, fatigue, anxiety, moodiness, bloating, increased appetite, food cravings, along with aches and areas of tenderness. Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) produces similar symptoms as Postpartum Depression, but those related to mood are more pronounced. They may include:

- Extreme fatigue
- Feeling sad, hopeless, or self-critical
- Severe feelings of stress or anxiety
- Mood swings, often with bouts of crying
- Irritability
- Inability to concentrate
- Food cravings or binging.

Psalm 31:9 applies best to this type of depression:

“Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble: mine eye is consumed with grief, *yea*, my soul and my belly.”

There is also Atypical Depression. Despite its name, this may be one of the most common types of known depression. Unlike major and normal depression, a common sign of atypical depression is a sense of heaviness in the arms and legs, almost like a form of paralysis. Also oversleeping and overeating are the two most important symptoms for this depression. People with this depression type may also gain weight, be irritable, and have relationship problems. Other features of atypical depression include low mood reactivity (inability to feel better when something good happens). They may also have a long-standing pattern of being extra sensitive to interpersonal rejection.

There is also Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). This is a person who experiences depression, sleepiness, and weight gain during the winter

months but feel perfectly fine in spring, you may experience seasonal affective disorder which is linked to the seasonal pattern. SAD is believed to be triggered by a disturbance in the normal biological rhythm of the body. Light entering through the eyes influences this rhythm, and any seasonal variation in night/day pattern can cause a disruption leading to depression. SAD is more common in far northern or far southern regions of the planet and can often be treated with light therapy to offset the seasonal loss the daylight.

When the heart is distressed due to depression, it should be natural for a Christian to cry out to God for help as the psalmist did.

In Psalm 38:8 David cried:

“I am feeble and sore broken (utterly crushed): I have roared (moaned) by reason of the disquietness (anguish or groaning) of my heart.”

As previously seen, there was a time in David’s life when intense physical and mental distress were admittedly connected to the sin he had committed. This produced a state of ongoing depression in his life.

There is also a Substance-induced Mood Disorder. Using or abusing sedating drugs can change your mood. Symptoms, such as depression, anxiety, and loss of interest in pleasurable activities, typically appear shortly after taking or abusing a substance or during withdrawal. Be sure that feelings of depression can be the direct result from legal or illegal drug’s having a direct effect on the brain. Substances that can lead to this type of depression include excessive alcohol drinking, opioid painkillers, and other meds which effect the central nervous system.

Some have also identified what has been termed as Masked Depression. This is hidden depression that comes from suppressed memories of physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse. It’s a state of enduring sadness based on unresolved, buried conflict. Painful feelings are denied or covered up. Relief from emotional pain is unconsciously found in excessive busyness, activities, addictions, or other alternatives. The Bible describes how hidden hurts still result in heartache.

Proverbs 14:13 is descriptive of a depressed individual:

“Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth *is* heaviness.”

A person may reap this type of life based upon their sowing or how they live. This seems to be what the context is teaching. However, this description certainly does describe how one can be depressed in life. By laughter a person may give the impression that he is enjoying life when actually in his heart he is hurting emotionally. The words of mirth or joy ending in grief refer either to the fluctuating nature of human emotions, or to the idea that joy is seldom pure, untainted by any grief.

Of course, the Biblical pattern to be released from the masked depression of the past is to follow Paul’s guidance and instruction which says, “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Phil. 3:13; 1 Cor. 15:10). You don’t revisit the past and re-invite dark memories to find healing as so many promote today in therapy sessions. Scriptural therapy is to practice release from the past through the transforming work of God’s grace (2 Pet. 3:18) and no longer allowing the past to control us any longer (1 Timothy 1:12-13). Rehearsing and rehashing the past with all of its problems lead only to sins and discouragement - not solutions.

There is also Situational or Reactive Depression. This name tells the whole story. A person allows life to get them down. Based upon changing situations which cause adverse effects and emotional stress, one can become depressed. This is sometimes called normal depression, if there is such a thing. Symptoms of situational depression may include excessive sadness, worry, or nervousness. Situational depression is a short-term form of depression that can occur in the aftermath of various traumatic changes in your normal life, including divorce, retirement, loss of a job and the death of a relative or close friend. This is sometimes called Adjustment Disorder.

This is the most common form of depression which many Christians experience when they do not deal with their changing situations in life from a Biblical and spiritual perspective. Normal problems of life such as

rejection, failure, or illness, press down the heart for a short period of time. Transitional stages of life such as adolescence, empty nest, midlife crisis, major moves, menopause, or retirement often press down the heart. Remember that when severe troubles fell upon God's servant Job (the death of all his children, the destruction of all his possessions), one of his friends observed Job's understandable depression and said in Job 4:5: "But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled." This is situational depression.

Whether mild or severe, depression affects more people in our culture than any other emotional problem. An estimated 30-40 million Americans, twice as many women as men, will experience depressive systems at least once. Depression has been called "the common cold of mental and emotional illness."

Depression and Sin

One severely depressed Christian woman described her personal experience in this way: "Depression is your own private little problem, unknown to everyone but you and the Lord. It is very painful – the most devastating thing I've gone through. It makes one feel helpless and hopeless. The hurt at times is unbelievable, and apart from the grace of God, unbearable. Depression is very tiring, and almost everything that you do takes a tremendous amount of effort- even just getting out of bed some days.

"Depression robs you of your energy, your affections, your happiness, contentment, reasoning, etc. It leaves you bewildered, confused, and, angry sometimes resentful, sometimes tearful, anxious and nervous, with your stomach in knots. It affects you physically. I lost 18 pounds. It affects you mentally, you think of nothing except how badly you feel and what waste your life is. It affects you spiritually, sometimes I've almost lost my assurance of salvation. I have felt forgotten and forsaken by God. It is difficult to pray, and when praying, it seems sometimes as if the prayer can't get past the ceiling.

“In depression, one sad thought leads to another, and in a very short period of time you are in the depths of despair. Crying is a commonplace experience for me. Oh, God, I hurt so badly. I’ve heard of people dying of a broken heart, but this worse. I’m living with a broken heart. I am so alone—please God, please let me die. My heart is heavy almost all the time and I forget what it feels like to be happy and content. I know we’re not to ask “why,” but I wish I had died 20 years ago when I had a serious medical problem. The last 20 years in between were not worth the last three years of suffering.”

At this point in our study, we need to ask this general question about depression. Is depression a disease or sin? I’ve already mentioned that depression most certainly can be a sin. However, each specific case of depression must be examined to determine whether or not there might be some physical cause related to one’s depression. Although some people believe the answer is always yes (depression is always a disease or it’s always a sin) the accurate answer is sometimes yes and sometimes no. Sometimes it is a combination of both the physical and spiritual occurring in relation to a person’s life. Let me explain.

Depression can have a *physical* cause or basis. At the simplest level, we know that lack of sleep, insufficient exercise, the side effects of drugs, physical illnesses, burnout (where the mind goes into neutral and we freeze mentally) or improper diet can all create depression. Other physical influences, like neurochemical malfunctioning, brain tumors, or glandular disorders can create more complicated forms of depression. There are times when medication can be a direct cause of depression and this must be addressed. Certain phases in a woman’s life can also be a cause of depression. In general, there can be physical related reasons for depression. Of course, many times the lack of spiritual discipline and devotion to God can also add to the cause of depression in one’s life.

There is also a *psychological* cause related to depression. Some people seem to have a personality that is naturally gloomy and pessimistic. Instead of trying to change this, they give in to it, and gradually they develop a pattern of defeat and depression. Of course, there are cases of mental disorders which enter into the realm of the psychological. The brain is a

very complicated organ, one that we have barely started learning about. With such a complicated organ there is a lot that can go wrong, and it sometimes does. This includes mental disorders such as manic depression, which is a condition that has continued to be studied to this day. However, it should be understood that most people do not have a mental disorder. They have a spiritual disorder. Most depression has its roots in a *spiritual* cause. Depression is often nothing more than a sin, a sin which centers upon selfishness. Most of the time when we are depressed, it's because we focus on our self and all of our problems, instead of on Christ and His sufficiency. We withdraw ourselves (self-protection), pamper ourselves (self-pity), and then inflict ourselves (self-punishment), and sometimes all of this leads to harming ourselves (self-destruction).

2 Corinthians 3:5

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God.”

This means that God makes us adequate servants and victorious Christians. Our service and Christian life is really God working in us and through us. We have nothing to do with it. Let's summarize this part of our study.

➤ Depression is NOT sinful when your heart grieves over normal losses.

The Bible says "There is...a time to weep and... a time to mourn..." (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4). The process of grieving is sometimes natural, needful and therefore not sinful. This depression is simply a mild and temporary pressed down state that we might pass through. As we've already mentioned, Jesus was called "the man of sorrows" (Isa. 53:3). He also experienced deep sorrow when he hung on the cross as He was separated from the Father (Psalm 22). Although Jesus grieved over the effects of sin in the lives of others and in the world, He never allowed Himself to be controlled and overtaken by these feelings, adversely effecting His spiritual life (Heb. 7:26). Our sorrow should never bring us to the point where we begin to think that life no longer has meaning and that God and His Word are not sufficient to meet our needs.

- Depression is NOT sinful when your body experiences natural deterioration due to the passing of years and your body chemistry changes which can compromise you mentally.

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 4:16:

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.”

Contrary to what some in the Christian community believe, certain types of depression are not always caused by sin. Depression can sometimes be caused by a physical problem that needs to be treated with medication and/or counseling. Of course, God is able to cure any disease or physical malady. However, in some cases, seeing a doctor for depression is no different than seeing a doctor for an injury.

- Depression IS sinful when you experience the consequences of your sin but don't attempt to change (Gal. 6:8).
- Depression IS sinful when you don't take the necessary steps for healing (walking close to God, seeking Biblical counseling, memorizing Scriptures, reading Christian materials – James 4:7-8).
- Depression IS sinful when you hold on to self-pity, anger, and bitterness after you have been wronged instead of choosing to forgive (Eph. 4:31-32).

James 4:17 says:

“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.”

- Depression IS sinful when you use your depression to manipulate others.
- Depression IS sinful when you continually choose to blame God and others for your unhappiness (Gen. 3:12).
- Depression IS sinful when you choose to let others control you instead of choosing to obey Christ and allow Him to be in control of your life (1 Cor. 7:23).
- Depression IS sinful when you are willfully choosing to maintain a sinful life.

The Bible says in 2 Corinthians 7:1

“For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.”

We have mentioned this verse previously in our study. The “salvation” being spoken of in this verse is a deliverance related to the Christian life. What we often need in our Christian life is some good “old fashioned” and “Biblical fashioned” sorrow, which leads to repentance, so that sin stops ruling our life. Most people who are counseled today are told that their wrong actions are the result of sickness and not sin. Of course, this is not the case. Most depression is directly related to sin, whether it’s sins of anger, sexual promiscuity, unforgiveness, broken fellowship with God, or anxiety and grief that has overtaken one’s life. We know that doctors can deal with sickness but they have nothing to offer for sin! Only Jesus can deal with a person’s sin, providing forgiveness (Eph. 1:7) and a new way of life (John 10:10). Through salvation a person can be healed of their sin malady in that they can be forgiven immediately and forever.

A Christian can also find forgiveness that is related to restored fellowship with God (1 John 1:9). However, it must be noted that the healing effects from sin take time. The Bible likens this to progressive sanctification in the Christian life (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10; Phil. 3:12). Most people need to understand that life-altering depression is a sin – not a disease. They need to understand how to find forgiveness and get their life right before God through repentance and salvation, or either confession, as it relates to the Christian life.

John MacArthur said this in his book called the Vanishing Conscience: “You don’t hear much about sin from the pulpit anymore. Recognizing and identifying it; wrestling with the guilt of it; repenting of it, or for that matter, dealing with it at all—those ideas are passé in most churches today. But assume for the moment that the problem is sin rather than sickness. The only true remedy involves humble repentance, confession, restitution, forgiveness, and growth through the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, communion with God, fellowship with other believers, and dependence on Christ. In other words, if the problem is in fact spiritual, labeling it a clinical issue will only exacerbate the problem and

will offer no real deliverance from the sin. That is precisely what we see happening everywhere.

“The sad truth is that disease model treatment is counterproductive. By casting the sinner in the role of a victim, it ignores or minimizes the personal guilt inherent in the misbehavior. ‘I am sick’ is much easier to say than, ‘I have sinned.’ But it doesn't deal with the fact that one’s transgression is a serious offense against a holy, omniscient, omnipotent God. . .

“These days, when sinners seek help from churches and other Christian agencies, they are likely to be told that their problem is some emotional disorder or psychological syndrome. They might be encouraged to forgive themselves and told they ought to have more self-love and self-esteem. They are not as likely to hear that they must repent and humbly seek God's forgiveness in Christ.

“Today people are trained to ignore their guilt and yet their drowning in it. Our culture has declared war on guilt. The very concept is considered medieval, obsolete, unproductive. People who trouble themselves with feelings of personal guilt are usually referred to therapists, whose task it is to boost their self-image. No one, after all, is supposed to feel guilty. Guilt is not conducive to dignity and self-esteem. Society encourages sin, but it will not tolerate the guilt sin produces.”

So is depression physical or spiritual? Many times it is entirely of a spiritual nature. As already mentioned, sometimes it’s a combination of both the physical and spiritual. We must remember that Satan knows how to take a physical problem and add a spiritual twist or spin to it. Satan can take an already bad situation and make it worse (James 1:12-13). For instance, those who have a depressive bipolar problem may at times spill out vulgarities and obscenities. They not only have a physical problem but also a spiritual problem because obscenities come from the sin nature. Many times the physical is hijacked by the sin nature and even Satan. In other words, the physical can also be spiritual in nature. Satan and the sin nature can sometimes take a physical problem and turn it into a spiritual problem and many times this is the case. More on this in our next point.

The Causes of Depression

We need to deal with the causes of depression in a separate section of this study. It's important to understand what triggers depression in our minds and hearts?

I. The general causes of depression.

When scanning the Scriptures, we discover that there are some general causes that can trigger depression in our minds and hearts. Let's consider them for a few moments.

There are four general causes of depression.

a. Satan

The Bible concludes that life's trials can sometimes be related to temptation which comes from the devil. Satan is the tempter and he is a key cause and player that is behind depression. He wants to drown us in depression and emotional distress.

James 1:2

"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into (encounter) divers temptations."

The believer who expects his Christian life to be easy is in for a shock! There are many temptations or trials which can take us down or build us up. It just depends how we respond to them. The word "temptations" in this context speaks of tests of stamina which come into our life, both outwardly and inwardly, which might challenge us to depart from the will of God and misdirect our lives. Later on in this same chapter, James confirms that many of our trials are caused by Satan and we can choose to give in to them and become defeated in our Christian life. They are trials related to Satan's temptations and attempts to overcome our lives. Satan is normally a player in relation to our depression and emotional defeat.

James 1:13-14 declares:

“Let no man say when he is tempted (solicited to do evil and wrong), I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.”

The Greek word used for “temptations” in James can refer to "trials" in a general sense that are not related to Satan but also "temptations" in the sense of solicitation to evil, the way it is used here in James 1:13. What the two have in common, trials not related to Satan and trials or temptations that stem from Satan is the common temptation to not trust God during our test. The Bible makes it clear that trails, such as depression, can come from Satan, as is suggested in James 1:13, and that we choose to follow these temptations (“drawn away of his own lust”). In other words, we take the bait and run away with it, similar to a bluegill that hits your worm on the hook and swims away with the hook and worm in its mouth! We follow Satan’s temptation and become defeated. Satan fans the flame of the old nature with his temptation but it’s our own choice to follow his temptation.

There are several possible attitudes we can take toward these tests or trials of life. First, we can adopt a spirit of boasting that we will battle through to victory on the basis of our own power. Second, we can lose heart or give up under the pressure. This is nothing but fatalism. It leads to questioning the Lord’s care and provision for us. Third, we can grumble and complain about our troubles. This is what Paul warns against in 1 Corinthians 10:10 when he states: “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.” Fourth, we can indulge in self-pity, thinking of no one but ourselves, believing that no one else has ever known the trouble we have experienced. Fifth, we can be victorious over these trials of difficulties and perplexities in life which are caused by Satan. We can say, in effect, “God has allowed this trial to come to me. He has some good purpose in it for me. I don’t know what that purpose is, but I’ll try to find out. I want His purposes to be worked out in my life.” In doing this, we surrender to Romans 8:28 and God’s sovereign control over temptation and that He wants to experience growth through the fiery trial. This is what James advocates.

James 1:3

“Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”

In other words, James is saying, “Don’t rebel! Don’t faint! Rejoice and grow through them!” Of course, James is not telling us to rejoice when we are tempted to do evil, but rejoice when we realize how we can grow through every temptation in life. Our trials which are related to Satan’s workings should not destroy us but enable us to develop Christian character. Troubles and difficulties are a tool that refines and purifies our faith, producing patience and endurance. As we are tested and tempted, we should pass through these temptations victorious, and in so doing, we develop patience and many other Christian virtues. This in return becomes a cause for rejoicing! As we grow through trials, we can rejoice through the trials (“count it all joy” - James 1:2).

Someone said:

“Consider it pure joy when dark clouds gather above your head; they will give you showers of blessings. These showers cause your life of faith to develop and grow.”

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9:

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory (rejoice) in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

God gives us strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow! If you will give your depression to God and allow him to use you, your own weaknesses and all that you pass through, He will begin to show how his strength is made perfect in your time of weakness. Your depression might be the best tool that God is going to use to help you depend more on Him and develop spiritual characteristics and sensitivities that will enable you to help others. Here is the point of James and Paul. The more we rejoice in our trials, the more we realize that they are not liabilities but privileges, which

are ultimately beneficial for us. When we face trials with this kind of attitude, we discover that the greatest part of the joy is our spiritual growth through our trials, which in the epistle of James is outlined as developing endurance and patience in life (James 1:3). Your depression can really be a blessing in disguise! Ultimately, God wants us to learn more of Him and His ways, and to rely completely upon Him. We can triumph with God's help.

Someone said:

"We don't have to like our depression. Paul didn't want his thorn in the flesh. But if we can ever get to the point where we quit giving up and feeling sorry for ourselves, we place our lives on an entirely different path. And if we can give our depression to God and ask him to use it for his glory, something wonderful happens, both to others and to ourselves. Ask yourself this question: Why has God chosen to let me suffer from depression? Believe me, it's not to make you feel guilty but to help you do good."

There is great joy ("therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities") that comes from spiritual growth which can only happen through trials! We can add to this that trials of suffering also help us to draw closer to the Lord by becoming more sensitive to His presence, His goodness, His love, His grace. As we face trials, our prayer life should also increase, as well as our interest in and study of the Word of God (Eph. 6:10-18). These things will also will increase our joy as we pass through various trials. At one point, we must decide to believe God's Word more than trust our emotions. As I continue to pray and read my Bible, God can strengthen my heart, bring me out of depression, and even use me to help others who are going through depression (2 Cor. 1:3). In essence, we can use our prior weaknesses to help others who have not yet discovered that God loves them and wants, through Jesus Christ, to give them a wonderful life.

Remember that all of Satan's attacks on Job were designed in Satan's twisted mind to tempt Job to curse God. At the same time, God was testing His beloved servant and refining him (Job 23:10). Trials like depression should cause us to become a better Christian – not a bitter Christian. Remember also that our own outlook during our trials determines the outcome (good or bad), and our attitude toward these trials determines

our action, we will walk in defeat or victory. Trials, even those that come from the Evil One, are *permitted* by a wise and loving heavenly Father, who is too caring to be unkind and too wise to make any mistakes.

1 Corinthians 10:13

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*.”

We must remember that Satan was not allowed to touch Job at any time or in any way apart from God's express permission (Job 1:12). Each time Satan obtained permission to attack God's beloved servant, God drew the line in the sand which Satan could not go beyond. This is comforting to realize and means that when we are tempted with the kind of depression that defeats our spiritual lives, we can know that God places limits on Satan's pressures upon our lives. There is a line he cannot cross.

During times of suffering, including suffering with depressive thoughts, spiritual warfare is virtually guaranteed. There is often a knock-down and drag-out spiritual warfare associated with depression. Satan knows how to come and defeat us when we start struggling with depressive thoughts. Satan likes to seize golden opportunities to weaken us as He did with Jesus in the wilderness (Matt. 4). When we are in a weakened, vulnerable state, physically or emotionally, Satan can try and take us down. The Bible depicts Satan as a lion, lurking in the tall grass, patiently waiting to devour those who are weak and susceptible (1 Peter 5:8). Someone said that when you are housing depressive thoughts that “you couldn't be a more obvious spiritual target if you painted a bull's-eye on your chest.”

How does Satan take us down with debilitating depression, the kind that defeats our spiritual life? The way He does this is by lying to us. First, his lies are designed to lead us away from the truth of God's Word (Gen. 3:4-5). Satan wants us to sidestep the truth. He says, “Your sins are too great to be forgiven? You have a right to be angry at a particular person. God does not love you anymore. You have no reason to live. You are worthless. Your feelings are justified. Your relationship with God does not matter and is

unrelated to your depression. You are a spiritual misfit in the island of misfit Christians.”

Satan tries to sell us a bill of goods with his lying strategies. Think about politicians for a moment. They are expected to lie. There are many variations in what is called lying. They misspoke, it was only a white lie, exaggeration, minimizing, self-justifying, and changing the subject are all ways that people lie. But we must remember that behind lying is Satan for he is the father of lies (John 8:44).

Second, Satan’s lies revolve around God. He asks us, “Is God really good if He allows you to suffer like this? Is God holding out on you? Are you sure that God is really enough?”

Genesis 3:1

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?”

In asking this question, Satan was trying to get Eve to doubt God’s goodness. Satan knows how to lie to us about God – His goodness, faithfulness, and love that He has toward us.

Third, Satan’s lies revolve around self-sufficiency (“ye shall be as gods” – Gen. 3:5). In other words, Satan will sometimes sow the seed thoughts in our minds that we are in charge and can get through life on our own power. We can get through life without God. We can run our own life. This is one way he tempted Eve. However, the godlike status that Satan promised (self-sufficiency) is always doomed to fail.

How you respond to the temptation and trial that you are facing, including depression, will determine whether or not you will be overcome by it or grow through it. Depression tries to cast a shadow upon everything, even our faith in God. But we need to walk by faith in God’s providence, power, and provision if we are going to move out of our state of depression.

Here is a good question to ask yourself. Do you want to change? As bizarre and strange as it might sound, depression can come to feel like a friend to those who are struggling with it. You would never choose depression as a friend if you had a choice, but now that you have depression, it can become comfortable and predictable to you. Don't deceive yourself. Don't say that you have tried to rid yourself of depression when you really have not. Perhaps you have just been going through the motions but are still entrenched in your hopelessness. Remember that your feelings can be lying to you. But faith in God is not a feeling, but an active choice to believe in God's delivering power and sufficiency to begin a delivering and healing process from depression.

Ephesians 6:16

"Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

Abraham Lincoln struggled with depression and said: "I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would be not one cheerful face on earth. Whether I shall ever be better, I cannot tell. I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible. I must die or be better it appears to me."

But later he encourages everyone to persevere through their depression. Some years later he wrote this in another letter: "The year that is drawing toward the close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. These bounties are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come."

We are reminded once again that as Christians we do not have to remain in the blues. Half of Americans in a recent poll said they or their family members have suffered from depression, 46% considered it a health problem, and 43% saw it as a "sign of personal or emotional weakness," according to the National Mental Health Association. The question was asked, "Where should a person go for help?" Three choices were allowed. 45% suggested a medical doctor, 60% a mental health professional, but only 20% suggested a church or minister, and just 14% suggested a spouse, relative, or friend.

The trend of our present day is to move away from the church and the truth (Biblical counseling) in order to find answers to resolve depression. And yet the Bible says in 1 Timothy 3:15 that “the church of the living God” is “the pillar and ground of the truth.” If you are seeking for answers outside God’s truth, then you are walking down a rabbit trail.

b. The sin nature

Although Satan will often directly tempt us with depressive thoughts and tries to overtake our lives when we are harboring depressive thoughts, it must also be remembered that there are other causes of depression.

Romans 7:18 says that our sin nature is alive and well: “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not.”

Paul was speaking in this chapter about his struggle with the sin nature. He recognized that there was still the principle of indwelling sin in his heart. It was like a caged lion waiting to be released from its confinement. Our sin nature is a close equal to Satan’s temptations. Our sin nature can also be a cause of depression. We can allow the sin nature to control our feelings and haunt us with depression. Sometimes it is not Satan tempting us from *without* but the sin nature tempting us from *within* to become emotionally defeated and live in spiritual bondage with depressed feelings.

Many times it is a combination of Satan and the sin nature. We should note that although we know Satan caused Job’s suffering, Job did not know this. This means that we cannot possibly know what is occurring behind the veil or curtain in the spirit world (Eph. 6:12). This being the case, we must understand that it is not our responsibility to figure out whether our depression originates from Satan or the sin nature. We must merely deal with it from a spiritual perspective and find God’s victory over it.

Here is the bottom line. We cannot always know the source of our depression. Since the Fall, we have a tendency to sin because of our indwelling, Adamic sin nature, which can adversely affect us and bring about depression, without Satan’s intervention and assistance. After all,

James says we are ultimately drawn away because of our own lust or evil passions which stem from the sin nature (James 1:7). Sin comes from within us, from our old, evil, fallen, rotten, unregenerate nature. Jesus said, “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt. 15:19). This means there is really no way for us to know the precise percentages of what or who contributes to our depression. We need to be careful and not conclude that “Satan did it.” It may be our own sin nature and desire to own depression that is the source or cause.

c. The sovereign God

How is God related to our depression? As we have seen, God in His overall sovereignty permits His children to suffer trials to ultimately build up their Christian life and bring out the best in them. This includes the trial of depression. Although God does not want us to be overcome with debilitating depression, He does allow and use every trial to ultimately draw us close to Him and become more dependent upon Him.

1 Samuel 2:6-7 says:

“The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.”

In other words, God is somehow behind the events associated with our lives, even the trials that we pass through, including the trial of depression. We see God moving behind the scenes bringing about His way and purpose in relation to our own personal lives.

In Isaiah 45:7, God said:

“I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these *things*.”

Of course, God does not directly create moral evil for His is absolutely impeccable and holy (Hab. 1:13). What this verse is teaching is that what God permits, He is often said to create. God creates evil only in the sense that He permits evil to run its intended course in a fallen world, as He has

ordained, and keeps His providential hand over all evil actions and events in the world (2 Thess. 2:7). God oversees and superintends the evil that is already present in the world. In doing this, God allows certain calamities, disasters, and wars to come upon nations, in order to get their attention and fulfill His sovereign purposes (“shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?” - Amos 3:6).

In other words, God turns the hearts of evil kings (Prov. 21:1; 2 Chron. 36:22) and indirectly works with wicked people and godless nations, allowing them to fulfill His purposes in a fallen world of sin (Rev. 16:16). God is not directly creating evil, but neither is He ignoring it. God in His providence causes bad or evil things, as well as good things, to happen to people, for His own reasons, but He does not directly cause people to make morally evil decisions (James 1:13).

What is Isaiah teaching and how does all of this relate to depression? The Bible teaches that ultimately God Himself is the cause of all suffering, whether directly or indirectly. In His providence, He allows us to pass through trials to get our attention and change our lives. We should never forget this. An old preacher said, “God sometimes puts His children in the dark.” We would say that God in His providence allows suffering to happen to us. As the one, true, Creator and sovereign Lord, nothing happens apart from His sovereign oversight, including our suffering, which can include experiencing depression.

We must recognize the sovereignty of God over our temptations, trials, and sufferings. If we lost sight of God’s sovereignty and providence in allowing suffering, even depression, we will not be ready to trust in God and receive victory over it (Prov. 3:5-6). The God who allowed us to pass through our specific trial can certainly bring us out of our trial victoriously and make us better for passing through it, for “when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

d. The side effect of the Genesis curse

Prior to the Fall and entrance of sin into the world, there was nothing that could cause depression in the hearts and minds of Adam and Eve. But

things have changed since Adam fell into sin! By virtue of identification with Adam the human race was plunged into sin. As a result of sin, depression and every other sinful digression and physical malady was introduced into the human race in seed form. We must remember that the ultimate, underlying source for depression is the Genesis curse which was placed on the entire world, including mankind.

Genesis 3:19 declares:

“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

Our bodies are deteriorating. They are in physical decline because of the death sentence God placed upon our human bodies. They are weakening as they head back to the dust. Sometimes the weakening process results in physical causes that can trigger depression. We can suffer chemical imbalances and other common physical ailments of aging which can become a breeding ground for depression. So, the result of the breakdown of our human bodies because of the curse is certainly another underlying cause of depression. Because things go wrong with our bodies we can become emotionally unstable if we do not cling to the Lord and His promises. How wonderful it will be when we get to Heaven. In Heaven, there will be no more depression of any kind or even the possibility of depression. All of the factors that create depression on earth will be totally removed in eternity (Revelation 7:15-17; 21:4-5).

We have seen that our suffering can come from a number of different causes and sources. So don't jump to conclusion too quickly. We might uncover some of the reasons for our suffering but we might never find them all. There is certain mystery connected with all suffering, including our bouts of depression, that we must leave in the hands of an all-knowing and wise God. So how do we respond to the sources that might be the underlying cause of our depression? Rather than trying to identify all the causes of suffering or the possible triggers of our depression (the sin nature, Satan, demonic harassment, the sins of other people, ourselves, fear, anger, selfish desires, our culture, our weakened bodies and the

Genesis curse), the Bible directs us to the God who knows all things and is fully trustworthy.

Psalm 62:8

“Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God *is* a refuge for us. Selah.”

Although it can be important to try and identify what the source of some of our struggles with depression might be, we must come to the point where we will say, “God, I don’t know what you are doing, but You do, and that is enough.” Somehow turning to God and trusting Him with the mysteries of suffering, including depression, is the answer to the problem of all our suffering. The answer is so simple we often miss it! We are to walk by faith in God’s sovereign purpose and provision for our life. We must ask, “Whom will I trust during my suffering and Whom will I worship? I can trust in God and worship Him during my suffering, as Job did (Job 1:20), or I can trust in secular psychotherapy and man’s answers to suffering which says, “You are a victim, go back in your past, you are not a sinner, you need to love yourself more, etc.”

The age-old questions are still being raised today about suffering. How could God allow such a painful, life-draining event in your life? How could such a God really care? How could He be good? When we start asking these questions, we have lost a vibrant faith in God and we will not be able to find the spiritual solution to being delivered from depression. Always remember that God is good – not stingy. He is not holding out on you.

Psalm 81:10

“I *am* the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.”

Where I live, there is a place called “Shady Maple Smorgasbord.” I saw a sign not long ago where “Shady Maple” claims to be the largest smorgasbord on planet earth! It is amazing when you walk through the lines and see the endless food. Like all smorgasbords, everything is there for you to eat, it’s at your fingertips. All you must do is be hungry! In a similar way, God invites each one of His people to a lavish spiritual banquet

in life (Ps. 23:5) and all He requires from us is that we be hungry and bring nothing along (Isa. 55:1-3). Don't be a fair-weather person who trusts God during the good times but becomes more suspicious in the hard times. Our faith needs to be ambidextrous. It needs to be strong in both the pleasurable times and times of affliction.

Adrian Rogers once said:

"A faith that hasn't been tested can't be trusted."

II. The personal causes of depression.

I want to now focus on how we can bring on depression. We are many times directly responsible for causing depression in our own lives. Many times Satan (demonic temptation) and the sin nature react to the wrong decisions and paths that we take in life, which can trigger our depression. What are some personal causes of depression?

a. Refusing to deal with sin and guilt.

Sin not only robs us of fellowship with God, it introduces many problematic results into our lives. Depression can be one of them. David took the road to depression when he had sinned. His sin of adultery with Bathsheba resulted in a clear case of depression.

Psalm 32:3

"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring (groaning) all the day long."

During this time of guilt and cover-up of his sin, without confessing his sin to God, David experienced anguish, despair and depression. Until he confessed his sin, he could not be released from his depressive thoughts and life (Psalm 51). Depression can be the direct result of sin and guilt which plagues our conscience (Romans 2:14-15). Continuing to think about our sin and ignoring the appeals of our conscience and the Holy Spirit to deal properly with it results in depression. Many Christians are angry with someone, they possess an unforgiving spirit, or they have been sexually promiscuous. These types of sin can cause depression. Then there is the sin

of worry and anxiety which also can create depression in our hearts and minds.

One pastor was counseling a younger couple. The depressed wife was diagnosed by a secular psychologist as a “catatonic schizophrenic.” And had attempted suicide a few times. As the three of them talked together, he discovered that this woman had been very sexually promiscuous as a young girl and continued to be as a young, married woman. Her husband dismissed her actions as simply a result of her “sickness” saying that she was not responsible for what she had done. The pastor said that he eventually challenged her with the fact that the Bible called her actions sin, not sickness. Through questioning her, the pastor discovered that the woman felt she was responsible for her own sin and confessed it, asking for forgiveness. He then said that this particular day was the beginning of her transformation. Yes, sin is often a cause for individual depression. Get rid of the sin and you can get rid of the depression.

Romans 4:7 declares:

“Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.”

If you want to be freed from depression and find God’s spiritual blessing and happiness, then get rid of the sin in your life. If we’re aware of disobedience to the Lord, we need to confess it, turn from it, and appropriate His cleansing and forgiveness.

b. Mishandling difficult circumstances.

Depression may also be the result of mishandling a hard or unpleasant situation. We have identified this earlier as “situational depression.” When problems and disappointments confront us, we allow ourselves to focus on the unpleasant things, replaying them over and over again in our minds. The Bible gives several examples of depression that arose from unbiblical responses to difficult circumstances. We have seen already how Elijah responded wrongly to his difficult situation and became depressed (2 Kings 19). Moses is another example.

Numbers 11:14-15

“I am not able to bear all this people alone, because *it is* too heavy for me. And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.”

At this point, Moses was distressed and experienced depression. Moses had experienced constant criticism from the Israelites. He responded to the difficult situation by becoming greatly distressed and depressed. Here is the point. How we respond to the circumstances that might be occurring within us and without us will determine the level of our spiritual health and life. If our depression stems from life’s overwhelming circumstances, we need to think biblically about our circumstances. This means that we need to remember that God has an unfailing purpose connected with every trial that we pass through in life (Romans 8:28; Eph. 1:11; Acts 4:27-28). Our trials do not happen by chance - they come into our lives by divine appointment. We must interpret them as part of God’s providential plan for our life.

Learning to respond biblically to trials or difficult situations in life is one of the most crucial lessons you can learn as a Christian. God has given us the resources to be overwhelming conquerors in even the most desperate situations, including torture and martyrdom (Romans 8:35-37). Living by faith means choosing to believe in God’s sovereignty, claiming the promises of His Word, and experiencing His power, rather than being overcome by my circumstances.

The 1980 issue of “Our Daily Bread” spoke of how a Christian providentially escaped death. An unexpected delay in New York kept him from catching Flight 191 in Chicago, which crashed with all 254 aboard. This particular article brought this response from a reader: “I just had to let you know about one of God’s great saints who ran to make Flight 191—and made it!” His name was Edwards E. Elliott, beloved pastor of the Garden Grove Orthodox Presbyterian Church in California. His plane from Pennsylvania was late, and a friend who had accompanied him to Chicago said he last saw him “dashing forward” in the terminal to make his connection.

The individual who wrote the Daily Bread article responded in this way. “As I read about Pastor Elliott’s fruitful ministry, the question I raised in that June devotional challenged me with new urgency: ‘Was Divine providence operating only in New York and not in Chicago?’ Immediately the words of my correspondent came alive to me and I realized that according God’s sovereign plan, Reverend Elliott didn’t know he was indeed running to Heaven. And I can say that Mrs. Elliott and her four married children comforted the entire church. Their Christian faith and testimony in sorrow was most extraordinary.”

It’s easy to doubt or forget about God’s sovereignty and sufficiency when we are overwhelmed by a trial. So we have to reaffirm God’s sovereignty and sufficient power in the midst of our trial and not mishandle a difficult situation by reacting without faith, without hope, and without God’s help. Mishandling difficult circumstances can result in depression invading our life. We must reaffirm that trials come from the Lord and they are for our benefit (Ps. 66:10-12; Ro 5:3-5; Heb. 12:1-13; James 1:2-4). We must respond correctly to trials and changes in our life (the death of a loved one, a terminal illness, a significant change of some kind, a bus accident, a divorce, a disappointment, difficult responsibilities and situations, etc.) We react properly to disappointments by embracing God’s loving embrace, purpose, power, and His Word which will enable us to cope with every trial and go on in life without debilitating depression.

It’s one thing to quote Bible verses but it’s another thing to really believe them. This is why we must let the Bible richly dwell within us (Colossians 3:16). When we don’t believe and embrace by faith what the Bible says about God’s sovereignty and sufficiency, and claim the promise of God’s Word, applying them to the situations that we face in life, then we will experience depression. Responding properly to life’s trials is the key to overcoming depression. Mishandling them can result in depression. The good news is that we must always remember that depression is not an inevitable and unavoidable result of difficult circumstances or events that we face in life. It’s how we react to them that results in the development of depression.

One man shared this:

“My parents had a very strong and committed marriage, but when my father died, my mother became a much stronger woman than she had been before because she learned to do things she had always relied on him to do. After his death, my mother devoted herself to good works (1 Timothy 5:10) and found opportunities to minister in ways she had not been able to before. At the age of sixty-five, she became more active in the church and continued to welcome visitors into her home and remained active in church nursery.”

Here is a woman who sorrowed but did not allow her sorrow to overcome her life and keep her from living for the Lord. Many women who have lost their husbands and become depressed would say their depression was the result of their husband’s death, but this is not really correct. In reality, they are depressed because of the unbiblical way in which they interpreted and responded to this event. How we view and respond to life’s changes is a key factor that can either take us into deep depression or release us from it.

c. Having an unbiblical value system.

Many Christians share the world’s values. In other words, instead of just being “in” the world they are also “of” the world system, imbibing its cultural contamination and carnality (Romans 12:2). We have studied about Asaph in Psalm 73 and how his depression and self-pity was the result of his jealousy and envy of others who were prospering in the world (Ps. 73:1-3). Of course, jealousy is a form of worldliness or carnality (James 4:1-5). Asaph’s story reminds us how worldliness or having an unbiblical value system can result in depression. When I adopt a worldly outlook on life, wanting to advance like other people, always seeking for the approval of others, wanting to get my own selfish way, I am setting myself up for depression. This is because the pleasures of sin are only for a season (Heb. 11:25). In other words, worldliness does not bring true fulfillment, it can actually result in depressive thoughts and living.

According to 1 John 2:15, worldliness is centered upon the lust of the flesh (our inward desire), lust of the eyes (our initial response to temptation), and the pride of life (our inflated ego). When someone is motivated by the

flesh, it means they seek happiness and fulfillment from physical pleasure, comfort, and security. When someone is motivated by the lust of the eyes, it means they have been captivated by the visual instead of the spiritual. In other words, they seek happiness and fulfillment by desiring material goods, good looks, possessions or by impressing other people. They want to live their life around the visual things which they think make them happy. Lastly, when someone is motivated by the pride of life, it means they seek happiness and fulfillment from power, prestige, control, success, popularity, and man's approval. You have often heard people say, "I'm proud of my accomplishments."

When people have adopted an unbiblical value system that is rooted in the world system, and if they are unable to get these things or anyone stands in their way of satisfying these desires, they can become angry, anxious, or even depressed. Asaph is a prime example of this. Adopting the world's way of thinking is an easy road to depression, but keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus is a sure way out of worldliness and depression (Hebrews 12:2).

d. Experiencing God's chastening hand of discipline.

"We shrink from the purging and pruning,
Forgetting the Gardener who knows:
The deeper the cutting and paring
The richer the cluster that grows."

God uses setbacks to move us forward. Sometimes these setbacks call for His discipline upon our lives. But through all of His pruning work (John 15:1-3), we can become more fruitful and mature in our Christian life.

The depressed Asaph said in Psalm 73:14:

"For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning."

When we allow worldliness to overtake our lives, God will chasten His children with conviction and seek to bring them back to a place of spiritual living and blessing. Asaph was in one sense chastened by his trials, afflictions and sufferings every day but in reality these things were the

chastening hand of God upon his heart and life, designed to rebuke him and ultimately restore his life before God.

Hebrews 12:11

“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

On the one hand, God’s chastening hand brings conviction and can result in feelings of depression (“no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous”). On the other hand, it can result in spiritual blessing and vitality (“afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness”). If we identify that the cause of our depression is God’s chastening hand upon our lives, then we can respond to it (“unto them which are exercised thereby”) and find release from this cause of depression. In other words, Christians must allow God’s discipline to have its full effect and be trained by it. Only then can we be delivered from the depression that comes from sin and God’s chastening hand. Remember that God’s hand of discipline is a hand of love (“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” - Hebrews 12:6).

Someone said:

“Depression made my world so small, when I saw that God was on the move, I began to have hope.”

Yes, there is always hope when we somehow realize that God is involved and working in our lives, even when He is disciplining us.

“For all the heartaches and the tears,
For gloomy days and fruitless years
I do give thanks, for now I know
These were the things that helped me grow.”

Sometimes God may have to break us in order to make us into what He wants us to be. Christian educator and author Howard Hendricks cautions parents not to bribe or threaten their children to get them to obey. What they need is firm, loving, and at times painful discipline. Hendricks recalls being in a home where a bright-eyed grade-schooler sat across the table from him. "Sally, eat your potatoes," said her mother in a proper parental

tone. "Sally, if you don't eat your potatoes, you won't get any dessert!" Sally actually winked at Hendricks. Sure enough, mother removed the potatoes and brought Sally some ice cream. Hendricks saw this as a case of parents obeying their children rather than "Children, obey your parents" (Ephesians 6:1). Many parents are afraid to do what they know is best for their youngsters. They're afraid their children will turn against them and think they don't love them.

Hendricks says:

"Your primary concern is not what they think of you now, but what they will think 20 years from now."

Even our loving heavenly Father's correction is painful, yet afterward (perhaps years later) it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness in those who have been trained by discipline (Hebrews 12:11). The surest way to make life hard for our children is to make it too soft for them. God does not always make our path soft and easy, He sometimes disciplines us in order to teach us valuable lessons. This is what parents should do as they follow the example of the heavenly Father, who disciplines His own children in order to make them into what they ought to be.

This is an important section of our study on depression. Many times depression is the result of experiencing a combination of the four factors related to depression. For example, we might encounter a difficult circumstance and fail to respond to it in a Biblical way. We forget that God is working everything together for good (Rom. 8:28-29), that He never allows us to be tempted above what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13), and that trials are a way for believers to develop perseverance (James 1:2-4). We also forget about the need for His discipline in our lives to bring about change in us. Because we are thinking unbiblically, we become depressed and then add fuel on the fire by doing or saying sinful things. In failing to repent of our sin we can then experience the chastening of the Lord. Elijah, Moses, Cain, and David are examples of this.

It is important we understand these major causes of depression because this is the key to overcoming the problem of depression. We must also remember that depression is often blamed on the circumstances that are

happening outside of us but the truth is that these outer things are powerless to affect our hearts unless we allow them to. In most cases, unbiblical responses to life's trials is the underlying cause of depression which leads to further causes related to depression.

The Cure for Depression

In the Pacific Northwest, where it's overcast most days, lots of people suffer from light deprivation, which results in mood swings and depression. There's even a scientific name for this problem: "Seasonal Affective Disorder," or S.A.D. People suffering from S.A.D. have to set up special light panels in their homes and get heavy doses of illumination in order to be happy campers. This reminds me that we need light as Christians. It's not just physical light but spiritual light so that we can overcome our mood of depression. We can't survive without spiritual light which comes from the truth of God's Word and the liberating hope we have through the Gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Walt Croom said:

"What the depressed person needs is not just a change in life. What he really needs is a new life. Give that depressed person a pill and he may calm down for a day or two. But introduce him to the One who said, 'come unto me all ye that are weak and heaven laden, and I will give you rest,' and he will find what he needs for life."

The most important question we could ask is this. Where does a person turn for help and healing? What does the Bible say about overcoming depression? What are some important steps to consider when seeking emotional healing from our depressed state? This is what we want to study next. We need to remember that depression is like the red warning lights on the dashboard of our car. These lights tell us that there's a problem under the hood. If we keep driving and ignore the warning light, we could cause a lot of damage to our engine. So we had better pull over and figure out what's wrong and find the cure.

This brings us to an important place in our study. How do we actually overcome depression? We have already revealed some ideas on how to

deal with depression in other headings in this study. But let's give a very clear outline on how we can deal with depression as it seeks to invade our minds, hearts, and emotions. How do we get out of the blues? What is the cure for depression?

1. Realize that your hope is in God.

The depressed person feels as if he is in a box and can't get out. Many times he feels as if all hope is gone. To the depressed person life has become meaningless. We must remember that as Christians, who possess a relationship with God, there is always a flickering light in the distance! There is always hope. As Christians, we receive hope to go on in life from the promises of God's Word and from His presence. Hope is what depressed people are looking for and true Biblical hope is centered in the eternal promises of God's Word and His unfailing presence and help.

One Biblical counselor said:

"Recently I counseled one client who was extremely depressed. As we closed our discussion, I promised to pray for her. On her next visit she confessed that during the past week she had contemplated suicide. Then she added that the only thing that kept her from it was the memory of my saying, 'I'm praying for you.'"

Praying and sharing with depressed people is important. We can share with others how the Lord saved us and delivered us from a life of meaningless and despair and how He brought us out of depression. In doing this, we toss out hope to people like you would a life raft to a drowning man.

The depressed Psalmist said in Psalm 42:11:

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted (roaring – troubled and filled with anxiety) within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

It takes the psalmist a while to get on top of his depression. There seem to be three cycles of lament and hope in Psalm 42.

- Ps. 42:1-4 with Ps. 42:5
- Ps. 42:6-7 with Ps. 42:8
- Ps. 42:9-10 with Ps. 42:11

Psalm 42:5 once again asks:

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.”

There is a way out of the blues! Though at times we will *feel* helpless, we must again remember that our feelings are deceptive and must not be believed when they run counter to the truth of God’s Word. There is always hope with God when we remember His presence, power, and promises that He gives to us on a daily basis. David realized that God was his hope and that He was there to deliver him from his emotional depression and bring him emotional healing. However, we must realize that it may take a few cycles of up and down before we pull out of our depression. But the crucial and most important thing is that we are aggressively dealing with our depression and not just drifting with the circumstances. Even if we feel depressed, we are responsible to please the Lord by living in obedience to His Word.

We need to be very careful at this point! We live in a feeling-oriented culture. We hear that “feelings aren’t right or wrong, they just are” and that “we need to get in touch with and accept our feelings.” But this is not true. What we need to do is develop a Biblical theology of emotions. Many believers are defeated by depression and other negative emotions because they have not sought a Biblical approach to dealing with these problems. One way we deal with depression from a Biblical perspective is to realize that the Bible repeatedly tells us that we can possess hope in God’s presence and promises which enable us to pass through our trials, including the darkness of depression.

Psalm 31:24

“Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.”

Psalm 71:14

“But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more.”

Romans 15:13

"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost".

What is important is that we pass on the hope that we possess in our hearts and remind others that they too can possess hope as they struggle with depression.

Four times William Cowper was committed to insane asylums. He attempted suicide over and over again. Then during his darkest and most lonely hours, he found refuge in the home of John Newton. That great man of God took Cowper under his wing and gave him encouragement and hope. Today William Cowper is remembered as a Christian songwriter who wrote 67 of the great hymns. Among these great hymns was, "There is a Fountain." This reminds us that we must pass on the message of hope that people can have through Jesus Christ's saving and transforming work in their hearts. We need to share the hope that God's people can possess on a daily basis through their relationship with God.

One Christian wrote:

"While attending college, I visited a psychiatric institution with a group of students to observe various types of mental illness. I remember one man who was called "No Hope Carter." His was a tragic case. A victim of venereal disease, he was going through the final stages when the brain is affected. Before he began to lose his mind, this man was told by the doctors that there was no known cure for him. He begged for one ray of light in his darkness, some hope he could cling to, but he had been told that the disease would run its inevitable course and end in death.

Sadly, no person shared with him the hope he could have through Jesus Christ. Gradually his brain deteriorated and he became more and more despondent. When I saw him in his small, barred room about 2 weeks before he died, he was pacing up and down in mental agony. His eyes stared blankly, and his face was drawn and ashen. Over and over he muttered these two forlorn and fateful words: 'No hope! No hope!'"

I'm so thankful that we as Christians can always possess hope! We need not be overcome with life-debilitating depression. Our hope is found in God's love, mercy, and promises which He gives to us every day (Lam. 3:22-23). As we speak with those who may be lost (unsaved) and depressed, we can remind them of the hope of an everlasting and fulfilling life they can receive

through the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:23). We can talk to them about possessing a meaningful life through being born again (John 3:3) and developing a relationship with God. Yes, God's people can have hope, the hope of God's staying power, the hope of God's intervention and emotional healing, and above all else, the hope of Heaven! When we believe the lie that all hope is lost, then we have bought into the devil's life. With God there is plenty of hope to go around!

2. Remember to keep praying to God.

Depressed Christians need to keep praying. This is seen in Psalm 130 and many other Psalms. God's people must keep praying for God's help, strength, and staying power.

Psalm 130:1-8

"Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

Someone has said:

"The best prayer comes from a strong, inward necessity. In pleasant, prosperous times of life, meaningful prayer is often the first casualty. But when we are being tossed around by the storms of life, then we really know how to touch the throne of grace in fervent, insistent pleading."

Here the Psalmist says that he cried to the LORD "out of the depths" (the depths of human sorrow and suffering which may very well include depression). This indicates that he was in a desperate situation, possibly facing death itself. He was discouraged and saw no way out. What could he do and where could he go? He could only go to the Lord in prayer and remember that he was forgiven of all his sin which provided

encouragement to his soul. He also realized that He could wait on the Lord for His provision and that ultimately he could put his hope in the Lord as we have seen in the last point. In fact, we find hope in the reality that we are forgiven, that God loves us, and that He will never fail us.

We must remember to go from the depths to the very throne room of Heaven! We can do this as we pray and address God as our merciful God of all comfort and hope (2 Cor. 1:3). Yes, we must remember to keep praying to God continually, believingly, and confidently when we are in the depths of sorrow and depression. Sometimes we need to force-feed ourselves. This means we need to force ourselves to pray and find our remedy in God's sufficiency.

“Living below, in this old sinful world
Hardly a comfort can afford
Striving alone, to face temptation's sword
Where could I go but to the Lord?
Where could I go, oh where could I go?
Seeking a refuge for my soul
Needing a friend, to help me in the end
Where could I go, but to the Lord?”

3. Reflect on God's purpose.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?”

Solomon discovered that when we live for self and try to make life all about ourselves, that it does not satisfy. In fact, he discovered that his life was miserable and full of depression. He said in essence, “Everything is worthless and empty when it comes to living for self instead of God.” He found only emptiness and frustration when life revolved around his own selfish interests. As someone said, “Soap bubbles, soap bubbles, all is soap bubbles.” In other words, life is meaningless and Biblical happiness cannot be gained or maintained through selfish and sinful living. When we put self on the throne life become a big nothing!

God's purpose is stated clearly in Ecclesiastes 12:3:

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

This is God purpose for our lives which we need to reflect on as we face depression and find ourselves centering our life upon ourselves. We should not be put off by the word "fear" in "fear God" since it is a more expansive word in Scripture that relates to God. It does not mean to fear God because of potential condemnation but it includes the idea of awe, wonder, honor, reverence, and worship toward God. It also speaks of possessing a wholesome desire to honor God and please Him with our lives and not invoke His displeasure.

We live in an era and time when it is stylish to soften the character of God, but fearing God is a wonderful antidote to facing and overcoming depression. Fearing God and keeping His commandments (doing what we know is right to do based upon Scripture) brings a certain simplicity to life. He is the Creator and we are His creatures and we find great blessing in Him and His provision. We are to come before God and say, "And how do You want me to live today?" And we are to do this in a delightful manner – not kicking and screaming when we do it!

Psalm 119:71 says:

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."

Can you honestly say this today? Can you say that it was good for you to pass through a certain trial so in the end you can refocus on God's unfailing purpose for your life which is to follow His statutes, to embrace the truth of His Word, and live by it, grow in it, and find fulfillment as a result of it. Our purpose in life should be to live for His purposes! If life's trials drive us to this place of greater obedience and growth, we should be grateful (2 Pet. 3:18). God's purpose is not superficial, stale, "pie in the sky religion" or too easy or simplistic to make a difference in our lives. It's the only thing that can change us and bring us out of the depths of despair. Know God and obey Him! This will bring you out of depression and into new heights in your Christian life.

4. Reclaim God's precious promises.

We often say, "Tarry at a promise and God will meet you there." This is very true. God's promises which are found in Scripture are designed to help us endure, go on in life, and live victoriously through life in spite of setbacks and pitfalls that might come in our path. We don't have to take the path of depression; instead, we can take the path that leads to victory and blessing.

1 Corinthians 10:13

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."

We have addressed this verse already in our study. What a joy to know and believe that God will never allow us to be tested above what we are able to bear but will always provide a way of escape for us through His amazing, enduring, and strengthening grace.

Psalms 23:1-6 speaks of the same thing:

"The LORD is my shepherd (God **shepherds** my life with His care); I shall not want (God **satisfies** my life). He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters (God **stills** my life with His peace and rest). He restoreth my soul: (God **spiritually refreshes** my life) he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake (God **shows** the path for my life). Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me (God **sovereignly** protects my life); thy rod and thy staff they comfort me (God **sustains** my life). Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: (God **strengthens** my life) thou anointest my head with oil (God **soothes** my life); my cup runneth over (God **supplies** my life). Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: (God **stays** with me to the end of my life) and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (God **surrounds** me in the next life).

Let's briefly reflect upon this beloved Psalm.

a. God shepherds my life - "The LORD is my shepherd"

As our shepherd, we sense His presence and constant guidance, care, and provision over our daily lives! He is the Great Shepherd of our soul (1 Pet. 2:25).

b. God satisfies my life – "I shall not want."

In supplying our every spiritual need, we can honestly say that we are satisfied in our Christian life. We want nothing else but Him!

c. God stills my life – "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

The green pastures and still waters speak of God's provision and rest (His stillness – Ps. 46:10) which results in experiencing peace and tranquility in our hearts and lives. If you want to be spiritually sustained in life, then enter into God's green pastures and still waters.

"In God's green pastures feeding,
By his cool waters lie;
Soft in the evening walk my Lord and I.
All the sheep of his pasture
Fare so wondrously fine,
His sheep am I.
Waters cool (on the mountain),
Pastures green (in the valley),
In the evening walk my Lord and I.
Dark the night (on the mountain),
Rough the way (in the valley),
Step by step, my Lord and I."

d. God spiritually refreshes my life – "He restoreth my soul."

When you are depressed and have lost your way, God is the only One who can ultimately restore you. He can bring you back to a place of spiritual vitality and refreshment once again. We can face life with a new song and joy in our step.

- e. God shows the path for my life - “he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”

When we have allowed some sin to overcome us, take away our joy, and bring us to a place of depression, we need God's redirection so that we might once again get on the path marked right. God wants to redirect our wayward life in His righteous path so that we can be released from the ill-effects of our sin and once again glory God with our lives. This is what the text means when it states “for his name's sake.” It means that we want to glorify or express “who God is” with our lives by taking the righteous and holy path, instead of allowing anxiety and many other sins to wreck our spiritual life and keep us bound in a state of despondency and depression.

When we think of glory, we think of something that is obviously big and beautiful like the Grand Canyon. We say, “What a glorious sunset this evening!” To glorify God means to make Him obvious and beautiful to others by the kind of life we are living. We want God to be beautiful and famous (not ourselves). We want to draw attention to Him (not ourselves) by representing His character of holiness, love, forgiveness, and mercy toward others.

Think about this. A consistently depressed Christian is a lousy advertisement for the Lord and His salvation. In other words, God does not get the glory, we don't advertise who God is when we live in a state of depression. Instead of living in depression, we are to live to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14) by reflecting God's life and character in our own life, which results in making God stand out and beautiful to others. Being led in the righteous path results in God's glory!

- f. God sovereignly protects my life – “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;

As we face the valley of trials, even the final trial of death, which is the greatest valley to walk through, we can be sure that God will safely protect His children. Remember that a shadow cannot harm us!

g. God sustains my life – “thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

Instead of facing the valley (trial) with overcoming fear and anxiety, or depression, we can find the blessing of God’s comfort and spiritual strength and be spiritually invigorated to go on in life, and if need be, to come to the end of our lives being totally overcome by God’s consolation and comfort.

h. God strengthens my life – “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies”

God gives me the spiritual strength I need to go on in life (His table of spiritual food) when facing those who are against me. His table of provision in the wilderness, when we feel all alone, is something that can lift us up, give us spiritual sustenance and strength to maintain our spiritual life and live above the onslaughts of the enemy (Phil. 4:13). God has a banquet of spiritual blessings waiting for us, all we must do is come to the table and enjoy it!

i. God soothes my life – “thou anointest my head with oil”

God’s oil soothes His weary child and heals his spiritual wounds (Ps. 147:3). It brings healing and refreshment to His children so they can continue on in life and find their way. God’s spiritual ointment is free and we need to allow Him to rub us down so that we might receive the healing touch of God upon our lives.

l. God supplies my life - “my cup runneth over”

God gives me more than enough! He is the God of plenty. The spiritual supply of God’s joy, peace, strength, and many other spiritual blessings that He brings our way is more than enough to meet our needs in life (Phil. 4:19).

J. God stays with me to the end of my life – “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life”

K. God surrounds me in the next life – “and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

Yes, God’s promise is that He will never leave me as His child, both in this life and the next. His goodness and mercies (like two watchdogs) will be on my trail for my entire life on earth. This is because God is always good to His children and He expresses loving-kindness and mercies toward them every day (Lam. 3:22-23). He will remain by my side and help me to pass through every trial that I might face, including the trial of depression. He will be with me to the end of my days. This is His promise! His presence means that He will calm our heart in the valley, provide for us in the valley by meeting every one of our needs, and then take us home to Heaven where we can live with Him forever.

I looked at the mountain.

"It is too hard, Lord," I said;

"I cannot climb."

"Take My hand," He whispered;

"I will be your strength."

I saw the road.

"It is too long, Lord," I said;

"So rough and long."

"Take My love," He answered;

"I will guard your feet."

I looked at the sky.

"The sun is gone," I said;

"Already the way grows dark."

"Take the lantern of My Word," He whispered;

"That will be light enough."

We climbed.

The road was narrow and steep,

But the way was bright.

And when the thorns reached out,

They found His hand before they touched my own.

And when my path grew rough,
I knew it was His love
That kept my feet from stumbling.
Then I grew very tired.
"I can go no farther, Lord," I said.
He answered, "Night is gone.
Look up, My child."
I looked and it was dawn.
Green valleys stretched below.

"I can go on alone now," I said,
And then I saw the marks.
"Lord, Thou art wounded.
Thy hands are bleeding.
Thy feet are bruised. Was it for me?"
He whispered, "I did it gladly."

Then I fell at His feet.
"Lord, lead me on," I cried.
"No road too long, no valley too deep,
If Thou art with me."
We walk together now and shall forever!

As Pastor Philip Doddridge was walking along the street one day, he was feeling depressed and desolate, for something had happened to burden his heart. Passing a small cottage, he heard through the open door the voice of a child reading the words found in Deuteronomy 33:25, "as thy days, so shall thy strength be." The Holy Spirit used that truth to bolster his sinking morale. He was encouraged not to look too far ahead, but just to go on living for the Lord from moment to moment in the consciousness that God would care for him. This brings a favorite hymn to my mind.

"Be not dismayed whate'er betide,
God will take care of you;
Beneath His wings of love abide,
God will take care of you.
God will take care of you,
Through every day, o'er all the way;

He will take care of you,
God will take care of you.”

God does promise to take care of His own children. What we must do is claim His presence and promises for our lives and find our sufficiency in Him.

- Assurance: God on my side. This is why I can win the battle against depression.
- Remember: God is greater than my depression.
- Believe: God loves me, regardless of my emotional outlook!

We have been studying the cure for depression. How do we get out of the blues? What is the battle plan for depression? There is a way out. Our present point is that we must reclaim God’s precious promises. There are many other promises that we can claim as we face depression and want to be released from its strongholds on our life. Many of them are reflected in the previous Psalm 23. Although these promises were given to Israel, the unchanging principles behind these promises can be claimed by all of God’s redeemed saints.

Psalm 84:11

“For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

As the sun, God provides us with light or illumination through the dark times that we face in life. He will guide our steps. As a shield, God provides us with protection from the scorching heat of fiery trials along the pathway of life. As a result of these provisions, we receive grace and glory (glorious provision of His gracious blessings) and discover that God will never shortchange us. Instead, He will lavishly provide good things for us. Here is God’s promise: If it’s good for us, He won’t withhold it; if He withholds it, it isn’t good. We must believe this and walk by faith through the trial of depression knowing that God is good and will give us His spiritual blessings of grace to get us through and teach us the lesson we need to learn.

Psalm 121:1

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.”

Psalm 121:6-7

“The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.”

The words “lift up mine eyes” (Ps. 121:1) dramatically pictures a traveler approaching the city of Jerusalem. On first sight of the city walls and the temple, the singer asks rhetorically where help is to be found. The answer is the strong affirmation: Help comes from the Lord. Jerusalem was seen upon the hills and this is where God manifested His presence in this day. Therefore, when the Jews looked toward Jerusalem, they were looking toward the hills and acknowledge God’s help in their lives.

On the long journey to Jerusalem the pilgrim people would have to stop and sleep, yet they would still be cared for by God. The language of confidence in this psalm indicates the psalmist’s trust in the living Lord, his Protector. The phrase “nor the moon by night” (Ps. 121:7) indicates that at no time is God “off duty.” The Keeper of Israel is always present and by extension and application so is the Keeper for His Church today. God will provide us with the sufficient spiritual blessings that we need for our journey and give us the spiritual protection we need as we pass through them.

Isaiah 40:31

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.”

Renewed strength during our depression is a promise given to us by God. This renewed strength is explained or likened to soaring above life’s trials and not allowing them to touch us and harm our spiritual life. God promises to give us “eagles wings” so that we can live the above life, not allowing our trials to conquer us. He will also give us spiritual stamina (“run and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint”).

I was watching the horses running and jumping in the events of the Kentucky Derby. Put aside the gambling, the horse reminds us of an animal that has great stamina. The riders must hold back the horses for they have

the desire to run and jump on their own. They have what seems to be endless energy.

Philippians 4:7 brings us to New Testament ground:

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:19 adds:

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Do we really believe this today? Do we believe that God can and will supply every spiritual need that we have in life? Have we been living in light of this promise as we face depression? God promises to supply our every spiritual need when facing discouragement and depression.

Hebrews 13:5 gives us this promise:

“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

This is really the New Testament summary of the Old Testament promises that we have looked at already.

2 Peter 1:3 is a wonderful promise of God’s unfailing power:

“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.”

God has given us the power to win over depression. Is God’s power enough to release us from depression and keep us from being bound to emotional defeat and misery? Yes! The Bible says that His power is absolutely sufficient to sustain us in life and get us through anything that we might face (“all things that pertain unto life and godliness”). Is depression included in the “all things” mentioned here? It most certainly is. Cannot the mighty God who made the physical light shine out of the darkness (2 Cor. 4:6) in a similar way bring spiritual light back into your soul and life? He most certainly can.

Someone said:

“God hasn't given us the option of giving up, growing bitter, or deciding, in our short frame of reference, what is fair.”

In other words, instead of moping around and trying to question God, we need to look at our own attitude. Sometimes we need to take a moment to examine our own attitude. We need to forget our emotional outlook. If we are depressed at this moment, we need to try to “climb outside ourselves” for a minute and look at our life. You need to ask yourself: Have I given up? Have I grown bitter? Have I become a habitual victim to circumstance and depression? If this is your attitude, you need confess to God that your attitude has been wrong (1 John 1:9). You need to ask him to forgive you and begin changing your attitude, and thank him in advance, for giving you the power to do it.

But there is even more to grasp and act upon for our Christian life!

2 Peter 1:4

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

It does not end with just the promise of God's power. There is also mention of all the promises that God has given to us which enables us to overcome depression. His promises found in Scripture are an anchor to our souls which can keep us stable and strong during the storms of life. I come to the problem of depression from the perspective of God's Word. I believe it contains everything that we need to face life and live a godly and spiritually prosperous life. We have the promise of God's power and all of His promises to help us endure and go on in life. The question is this, have we been enduring?

“Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift or firm remain?
We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Stedfast and sure while the billows roll,

Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love."

A Christian gave this interesting testimony about his depression: "Since the age of seventeen I have suffered from high blood pressure. Even though I was a teenager, I still required daily doses of medication. During the early months of my struggle with the worst depression of my life, I realized I could only overcome the disease with daily doses of mental 'medication.' What form would this preventive medication take?

"I realized the process of depression involved the realm of the mind. Knowledge is the most powerful tool in overcoming the lies that the depressed mind conjures. One phrase I recalled from my counseling was, 'What is the lie?' What falsehood had I bought into that made me so depressed? If I could ask myself that question every time I felt depressed, perhaps I could seek the answer—the knowledge that would lead me out of the darkness. Choosing the Word of God, I designed a simple card with a series of thought-provoking questions on one side and a scriptural answer on the other. I would choose a different card every day, and when I felt the wearying weight of depression fold its dark wings about me, I would take out the card and ask the questions.

"After identifying the 'lie,' I could then turn my attention to the truth of God's Word. Thus, the Life Filter was born: a process of filtering my thoughts and emotions through a series of questions until the lies were removed and only the truth remained. The truth of God's Word. God's promise. God's knowledge. God's healing."

Indeed, God's Word and promises are the Life Filter through which we must address and conquer our depression.

We now come to our next cure for overcoming depression.

5. Remember the importance of persevering with God's help.

Some may think this is crazy, but actually depression can be used as a gift from God to help us learn of His life-transforming grace, hope, patience, and so we can develop a closer walk with Him.

2 Corinthians 12:9

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

God’s amazing, persevering *grace*, His strengthening and enabling grace, allows us to live victoriously and not allow depression and discouragement to bring us down. Perseverance is when we dig into the trenches and claim God’s power and promises. Persevering in *faith* is also needed as we face depression so we do not allow ourselves to be overcome with depression and live in constant emotional and spiritual defeat.

1 John 5:4

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith.”

We need to have faith that God loves us even when we don’t feel loved. We need to have faith that God will bring us through our depression and enable us to live on the victory side of life. Faith is the victory!

We can also persevere in *hope*. As we have already seen, the Psalmist was discouraged and depressed but sought to pull himself out of the depths as he persevered in God’s hope (Ps. 42:5, 11; 43:5).

Psalm 42:5

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him *for* the help of his countenance.”

Psalm 42:11

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, *who is* the health of my countenance, and my God.”

Psalm 43:5

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, *who is* the health of my countenance, and my God.”

There is also the need to persevere in *patience* while passing through a dark season of depression.

James 5:10-11 also speaks about persevering in patience:

“Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

In the book, “Conquering Depression: A 30-day Plan to Finding Happiness,” the authors give this advice: “Let's try an experiment. Perhaps, when you feel that horrible negative emotion coming on, you usually say something like: ‘Oh no, here it comes again. I'm in for a horrible time.’ Next time, however, say this instead: ‘Heavenly Father, here is an opportunity for me to show great faith and grow in you. May I be faithful to you during this time.’ It might not stop the depression, but it can surely transform what it does to your life! And it can help you remain true to God even in the midst of emotional storms.”

Perseverance in grace, faith, hope and patience is often the key to overcoming depression. Moderate or severe depression is not overcome in one day, a week, and sometimes not even in a month. It may require endurance through a lengthy period of time.

John Bunyan depicted the truth of perseverance in Christian's encounter with Despair. After languishing in the dungeon for some time, Christian reached into his pocket and was surprised to find a key. All the time he and Hopeful had been suffering in the dungeon of the Giant Despair. Christian had forgotten about that key. The key, of course, represents the promises of God that Christian knew, but neglected to remember and mediate on. Using the key, Christian was able to open the dungeon door and go through it.

But depression and despair is never so easily or quickly overcome, as Bunyan wisely knew. No sooner had Christian left the inner room of that dungeon when he found another locked door. Again, the key opened it. Bit

by bit he struggled forward, relapsed into depression, and forced himself onward again. God's promises always worked, but Christian had to reclaim and believe them again and again along the way. In the same way, we must be prepared to patiently continue to challenge ourselves and others with the truths of God's Word because our minds tend to forget. A mind that has been deeply rooted in that which is negative and which has focused on the lies of Satan will not usually become infused with God's truth overnight. Struggles, relapses, and temporary failure are all part of overcoming depression. But if we recognize and expect this, we can teach ourselves and others not to take these set-backs so seriously.

The important thing is that we keep persevering in God's grace, faith, hope, and patience as we seek our victory through God's power and promises.

Dr. Kenneth Cooper, the renowned Christian physician who developed aerobic exercise, has proven the importance of exercise for a healthy heart. It seems like a paradox. Your heart must undergo stress in order to grow stronger. As much as you may want to avoid depression, you must recognize that its stress can produce positive, spiritual growth in your life – growing in grace, hope, faith, patience, and many other Christian virtues.

1 Peter 5:10 reminds us what comes out of perseverance:

“But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*.”

Mark Sutton gives this advice:

“When you feel depression beginning to take hold of your life, try to do the following:

- Make sure you're still reading the Bible and praying. You have the power, in Christ, to do what God wills.
- Thank God for loving you and bringing you through the bout of depression. God's Word, not your present emotional outlook, is your authority.
- Try not to make a major decision while in a depressed frame of mind.

- Thank God for taking care of you and loving you even when you can't feel it or see it. This exercises your faith and strengthens you. If that's not a biblical definition of faith, then I don't know what is! If, when depressed, you can trust God to take care of you and bring you through your bout safely, then you're exercising faith. If you can believe he loves you even when you don't feel loved, that's faith. In fact, perhaps the person fighting depression who trusts in God has the greatest faith of all!”

Perseverance is a powerful weapon. The weapon of perseverance can deliver a mortal blow to your enemy which is depression.

One counselor shared these thoughts:

“You simply tell depression: ‘I'm never giving up or giving in to you. You may continue to plague me, but I'll fight you with everything I've got. My emotions don't belong to you, and I refuse to let them be held hostage without a fight. You may knock me down, but I've decided to keep on getting up. And I'll fight you every time.’

He goes on to say:

“What does this type of attitude accomplish?”

- It breaks your usual cycle. You no longer simply give up when depression hits you.
- The process of deciding to fight depression, *even when you don't feel like doing so*, begins to give you more control over your emotions and helps you no longer feel like a victim.
- As you decide to fight depression every time it appears, you build confidence in yourself. In many cases this shortens the amount of time depression stays with you.
- Using the weapon of perseverance on a regular basis builds powerful habits in your behavior. Use it long enough and eventually you begin fighting depression when it appears without even realizing it!

“Let me give you a word of encouragement. Even a little effort on your part each time is helpful. Even if you can't successfully fight off depression this time, but begin trying to do so, you have made progress. Making the

decision to do what you can each time will make you stronger. Perseverance pays off.”

6. Renovate your thinking process.

There are times when we must clean out the garage, basement, or attic. These are normally trying times. We want to hang on to certain things that we have not used for ten years. We somehow think that some of these things might be usable in the future or that we must save them for the grandchildren. What do you throw out, what do you take to Good Will, and what do you keep? After about two hours of sorting and getting rid of things, you have had enough! This kind of cleaning experience is similar to what we must do with our minds or thinking habits. Our next point in the cure for depression relates to cleaning out the attic of our mind. If we want to dispose of depression and depressive thoughts, we must learn the lesson of renovating our thinking process.

Have you ever wondered why you become depressed? I would like to give you a little test to help you analyze yourself.

The Thought-Analyzer Test

- When I am happy, I have been thinking _____ thoughts.
- When I am sad, I have been thinking _____ thoughts.
- When I am angry, I have been thinking _____ thoughts.
- When I am depressed, I have been thinking _____ thoughts.

The answers are:

- Happy
- Sad
- Angry
- Depressing.

How do we overcome depression? It is so profoundly simple that it is simply profound. We must change the way we think! The way we think will

affect the moods we are in and the kind of life we are living. Feelings follow thoughts like a caboose follows a locomotive. If the locomotive goes into the valley, then the caboose will follow it down into the valley. But if the locomotive goes up a mountain, the caboose will also go up the mountain. If my thoughts go down, my emotions go down. If my thoughts go up, my emotions go up. So, if our emotions are to be turned around, then we've got to change the way we think. Instead of thinking depressing thoughts, we choose to think differently.

Philippians 4:4 says:

"Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, Rejoice."

Sometimes we must actually choose to reflect or think joyful thoughts. At first we may not feel like rejoicing, but thinking joyful thoughts eventually makes us joyful. This is especially true when our focus is on the Lord or as we rejoice in the Lord (His presence, power, and promises).

Depression is the polar opposite of joy. A person must cry out to God for restored joy because depression robs them of inner joy. Depression in the life of the child of God zaps the Christian of all his true joy. Depression and joy cannot coexist in the same inner life. When we seek transformation and cleansing, we can kick out depression and bring back the springtime of God's joy and inner healing.

In his book "Depression, What It Is and What to Do About It," Roger Barrett describes this condition as "a miserable, wretched experience that leaves you exhausted, uninvolved, and in deep, hopeless despair. There seems to be absolutely nowhere to turn and not one single thing you can do to escape these horrible feelings. You feel doomed, trapped, and at the end of your rope....It's awful!" Yes, this is depression but we don't have to allow depression to overcome and defeat our lives. Sin and depression keeps us from living the joyful life and takes us down into the dumps of life!

In the same setting, determining to rejoice in the Lord, God instructs us to think good and wholesome thoughts, not depressing thoughts.

Philippians 4:8 goes on to say:

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure,

whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things” (let your mind dwell on these things).

The “things” that Paul is talking about are things such as God’s character, God’s Word and God’s promises. All of these “things” are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. You will notice that depression is not in the list mentioned above! The kind of depression that wrecks our spiritual life does not fall under the category of something that is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. The fact that we must let our mind dwell on the spiritual and lovely things means that this is a continual day-by-by process. We must discipline our minds to reflect on those things that will lift us up and not keep us bound to emotional defeat.

Think on these things! How novel. The way we think is the way we live! If you find yourself surrounded by a suffocating, ever-thickening swamp of negative and depressing thinking, then you must “think on these things.” As a Christian, we must choose to ultimately think or meditate upon God’s Word knowing that it must be our ultimate source of authority and healing. Meditation on God’s Word (the absolute standard of truth) allows us to personalize the promises of God in the Bible and experience inner healing from depression. It is listening for God to speak to us and strengthen us through His Word.

As we think on these things (the truths in God’s Word), we begin using the tool of meditation to pry ourselves loose from the tyranny of our emotions. Left to yourself, your emotions while depressed will give you a false impression of life, your circumstances, your relationships with others, and God’s love for you. Only as you allow God’s Word to become the authority for every area of your life, especially when you are depressed, will you begin to correct what is a dark and negative view of life. When you meditate on the truths and promises of the Bible, you begin concentrating on the world outside your depression. When you meditate on the Scriptures, you allow God’s medicine to flow into your depressed emotions, sending healing and peace.

Joshua 1:8

“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”

The battle over depression takes place in our mind. For the most part depression is a spiritual problem – not a physical problem. Yes, certain physical conditions can aid in the depression process (not enough nutrients - chemical or hormonal imbalance), but a lack of applying spiritual truth and living out truth normally, allows depression to overtake and consume a person’s life.

Spiritual warfare involves a battle for the mind. We must protect our minds from depression and the enemy’s onslaughts because all sin and defeat begins as a thought, a suggestion, or a tempting possibility in the realm or our mind. Satan brings his own thoughts into our minds so that we will follow his plan, agenda and suggestions. The believer must learn to replace Satan’s thoughts with God’s thoughts and truth. This is a key part in winning the battle over our mind and depression, which is caused by wrong thinking.

Romans 12:2

“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

Sometimes we need to take the garage out of our minds. It’s not a fun experience but it is necessary to maintain spiritual order and functionality. We must clean and renovate our minds of depressive and destructive thought patterns. There is a worldly, false system that is against God and truth that is trying to squeeze us into it mold. This is why we need to renew our mind. To renew our mind means to renovate our thinking and get rid of the thoughts of depression (or any worldly thoughts) that keep us under bondage. We can take control of our thought patterns and not allow them to overcome our lives. We can also learn to set our minds on God’s truth so

that we will not be overcome by destructive and spiritually debilitating thought patterns of depression.

A mind in tune with God and His thoughts and which is under His control is a renewed mind (Rom. 12:2). A renewed mind will result in a “sound mind” or healthy and wholesome mind that is dominated by the truth and which thinks correctly (2 Tim. 1:7). There is great danger of an open and empty mind, which is devoid of truth. This is the type of mind that can be affected in an adverse way (Matt. 12:45).

1 Peter 1:13

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

This is a figure of speech that pictures a person in the ancient world tucking the end of his flowing garment into his waistband so he will be free for action. Today we would say, “Roll up your sleeves and get to work.” We must put our minds, not into neutral, but into gear, and be ready to ward off the attacks of Satan. A girded mind is a mind that is composed, strong, cool and ready for action. We can’t just sit still without a battle plan. We must be ready to do battle with Satan. Our state of emotions can paralyze our decision-making ability in life. Therefore, we need to have a plan to come to every time we sense depression is overtaking us. The plan is this. We need to renew our mind.

So how do we renew our mind and gird up the loins of our mind?

a. We must be devoted to Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:3

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

The word “simplicity” means single-hearted devotions to Christ, a life that is free from all hypocrisy and deceit (mental honesty). What we need is a devoted mind to Christ and His ways! When we are devoted to the Lord

Jesus alone, we will not allow our hearts' affections to be drawn away from Him by other things. This means we must keep our lives clean and unspotted from the world (James 1:27) and remain in fellowship with the Lord (1 John 1:7—9) while living in a world that is trying to pull us away from Him. A divided and disloyal heart leads to a defiled life and a destroyed relationship and walk with Jesus Christ.

Living a devoted life to Christ is best experienced by having a daily devotional life in God's Word and prayer which is a key to maintaining spiritual stability, victory, and devotion to Christ in our lives (Eph. 6:17). We must remain devoted and obedient to Christ's truth and ways and keep a spiritual connection with Him if we are going to overcome depression (Phil. 3:10). If our minds are not focused upon Christ (His words, truth, joy, peace, fellowship, partnership, sufferings, power) then we are going to have our minds corrupted (morally defiled) with many other things that will adversely affect our spiritual lives. Someone wrote these lovely words:

“If I could find the right words to say
To tell you just what Christ means to me.
I'd say He is more than I could show
And more than you'll ever know.

If you could have seen me just yesterday
You'd know why He's life and He's breath to me.
You'd know why He's more than I could show
And more than you'll ever know.

Christ means more to me than you'll ever know
Christ means more to me than I could possibly show
More, more, so much more, He's more than you'll ever know.”

One Christian man said:

“People who see me driving down the road think I am insane. When I am alone in my car, I constantly talk to God. I imagine that Jesus is sitting in the passenger seat, and I carry on a conversation with him.”

We must remain devoted to Jesus Christ today or else our lives and emotions will become tangled in a web of confusion and dismay.

b. We must know where our thoughts are coming from.

Where do our thoughts come from? We might have certain thoughts that are generated from a previously flawed belief system, a difficult family life, wrong education, peers, and even bad musical choices (1 Cor. 15:33). These thought patterns are programmed into our minds and we can think them over and over again even though they are not necessarily right. Of course, Satan can generate thoughts in our minds to confuse us, burden us down and keep us in sin and depression. As we have seen, the devil wants to corrupt our thinking patterns and keep us from thinking correctly about God and ourselves (2 Cor. 11:3). He wants to trick us with his “wiles” or cunning methods, deceits, and trickery (Eph. 6:11) with the goal of preventing us from understanding the Word of God and applying it to our daily lives (Mark 4:15).

The devil with his seductive spirits (Eph. 6:12) lead our minds away from the truth to lies (1 Tim. 4:1) because the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). We must test or examine the depressive messages that are being transmitted into our minds and see where they are coming from (1 John 4:1; 1 Thess. 5:21) and engage our mind to cooperate with the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth (John 16:13).

c. We must refuse wrong and depressive thoughts.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

The idea behind “casing down imaginations” (thinking that goes against the truth and what is right) speaks of imploding or destroying those thoughts (including thoughts of depression) that destroy our spiritual lives by surrendering them to the obedience or lordship of Jesus Christ. Obedience to Christ is saying the same thing as being devoted to Christ (simplicity in Christ – 2 Cor. 11:3). Many believers today do not realize that the church is

involved in spiritual warfare and those who do understand the seriousness of the Christian battle do not always know how to fight the battle. We must win the battle over our mind. There needs to be constant vigilance over our thought life which can keep us bound to depression.

Ephesians 6:17

“And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

The helmet of salvation (deliverance) refers to the mind that is delivered from wrong thoughts and which is living under the authority of God’s truth. Through Christ’s power we can refuse to allow thoughts of depression to overcome our lives (Eph. 6:10). When we get an intruding thought of depression from the enemy we must counteract it with truth and then get rid of it. The believer must suppress unholy thoughts that are in rebellion against spiritual truth or knowledge. By saturating our mind with Biblical truth we must think as Christ would think and act as Christ would act and obey as Christ would obey. When this occurs we are bringing our thoughts into submission to Christ. Our thinking must never be in defiance to the Lord. We must think in a manner that is in obedience to Christ, adhering only to the things He said and teaches, which results in “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Jesus must be lord of our minds if He is going to be lord over all!

The believer does not have to be dominated by a wrong way of thinking. Your depressive and deceptive thoughts do not have to be authoritative over your life. Negative and depressive thoughts do not have to overcome your life. We can surrender them to the lordship of Jesus Christ and allow Him to be our Master, instead of negative and dark thoughts. Remember that the presence of a thought in your mind does not mean you must obey it. If you think something, it does not mean that you must carry it out. Having a wrong thought or depressive thought does not make you sinful or guilty. If it did, Jesus would be sinful, since He received wrong thoughts from Satan in the temptation in the wilderness (Matt. 4). The key is this, Jesus did not act upon those thoughts. He cast them out of His mind. He said, “it is written” (Matt. 4:4, 8). We must do the same thing.

The enemy can plant wrong thoughts in our mind but he cannot force us to think about them and be overtaken by them. We do not have to yield to the temptation and depressive thoughts that are being thrown into our minds.

“Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin;
Each vict’ry will help you some other to win;
Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue;
Look ever to Jesus, He’ll carry you through.
Ask the Savior to help you,
Comfort, strengthen, and keep you;
He is willing to aid you,
He will carry you through.”

Yes, we can yield to Satan’s temptations, think upon them, and allow them to overcome our life. James 1:14-15 reminds us that we cannot feed and nourish a wrong thought for when we do it will “conceive” or generate lust in our hearts. We must learn to say, “I give no consent to this wrong thought.” When we do this it will not turn into lust or other thoughts like depression. So the spiritual battle takes place in the mind. We used to play a trumpet trio that was called “I Am On the Battlefield for My Lord.”

“I am on the battlefield for my Lord,
I’m on the battlefield for my Lord;
And I promised him that I would serve him till I die.
I am on the battlefield for my Lord.”

It is true. We are in a battle!

d. We must memorize God’s Word.

As I just mentioned, Jesus kept coming back to the Word of God when the devil tempted Him by repeatedly declaring, “It is written” (Matt. 4:1-11). We need to do the same thing. We must keep returning to the written and infallible Word of God to have victory over depression. We must learn to replace wrong thoughts with right thoughts. There is incredible value and importance in Scripture memory and application. The Scripture is an infallible source of right thoughts. We must accept God’s Word (“the word

of truth” – 2 Tim. 2:15) as the final authority over our feelings. Are you going to hold on to your wrong belief and subjective feelings about yourself or are you going to believe God’s objective truth, the written truth that you are a victor and overcomer in Christ (1 John 5:4)?

Psalm 119:11

“Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.”

Colossians 3:16

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

Remember that we are what we think (Prov. 23:7). My wife and I have a little sign in the kitchen that says, “Eat well, feel well.” Well, the same is true regarding our thinking. “Think well, live well.” We should act in accordance with what we believe. So our challenge is to refocus and reprogram our minds, to replace wrong thoughts with thoughts that are true and which honor God and His Word. Daily discipline in Scripture memory and praying through Scripture verses has a positive and freeing affect upon our lives. Here are some you can use against depression. You can write them out on note cards and pray through them and put them on your refrigerator and keep them in your purse so you have the ammunition ready.

- Psalm 18:2; 61:3; 144:2; Prov. 18:10
- Psalm 17:8
- Psalm 46:1, 10
- Psalm 42:5-6
- Neh. 8:10; Phil. 4:4
- 2 Cor. 4:8-9

7. Reenter spiritual warfare.

Here is another way to possess victory over depression. Do you remember the old story about the new Baptist minister in town? He was invited by the Methodist preacher and the Catholic priest to go fishing with them.

Wanting to show his spirit of cooperation, and having a great love of fishing, he accepted.

When the three got to the local lake, they rowed to its center and began fishing. A few moments later the priest said, "I forgot my favorite lure." Then, to the astonishment of the Baptist pastor, he got out of the boat and began walking across the water! All the way to the bank and back to the boat, the Baptist saw this Catholic priest doing what he had only read about in the Bible.

About an hour later the Methodist preacher said, "I'm hungry. Think I'll go back to the car and get a couple of sandwiches for us." And following the priest's example, he also stepped out of the boat in the middle of the lake and walked across the water to the car and then back again. By this time the Baptist's eyes were as big as saucers. He was thinking to himself, I've got as much faith as these guys. If they can walk on water, so can I.

He worked on his courage for a while and finally said casually, "Listen, guys, I forgot something. I'll be right back." And, stepping out of the boat, he went straight to the bottom! As he sputtered and coughed his way back to the boat, the priest looked at the Methodist and said, "Do you think we should show him where the stones are in the water?"

It's important to know where the stones are in your life. This means we must remember where the foundation of victory lies which is in God's armor. If we get away from the stones, we are going to sink! We need to keep stepping on the stones to stay above the water. We must step on the stones of victory that God has provided for us and press on.

We have covered this already. However, without trying to be redundant, each Christian who suffers with depression must realize that there is a spiritual warfare going on in their personal lives. They must engage in the battle. This calls for wearing God's spiritual armor and claiming God's victory over depression. The armor that we must use in the battle is mentioned in Ephesians chapter 6.

Ephesians 6:10-18

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

A man shares this story with us:

“Pulling into the fast-food restaurant, I saw something unusual. Five telephone repair trucks dotted the parking lot. Either Hardee's was experiencing major telephone difficulties, or the drivers had decided to take a coffee break together. But what caught my attention were the bright orange cones—the kind usually seen at highway construction sites—sitting behind each truck. The men could not have backed out without crushing them.

“Inside the restaurant the men were sitting around a small table, talking and laughing. I ordered my food. Then, on the way past their table, curiosity finally got the best of me. ‘Excuse me,’ I said, stopping beside them. ‘Would you tell me why the cones are behind your trucks?’ One of the men laughed and said, ‘Cause we'd get fired if we didn't. It's the rule.’ Then he added, ‘Seriously, we can't see very well behind these trucks. Putting the cone directly in our path every time we park forces us to look before we back out.’

“Another repairman broke in. ‘Several weeks ago one of our men was driving a truck that carries the big buckets. He had stopped for lunch and put out one of the cones. When it was time to leave, he walked to the back

to pick it up. Right beside the cone, under the left rear wheel, was a small boy who had gotten away from his mother just a few seconds before.' The man shook his head. 'If that guy hadn't had a cone behind his truck...' The men finished their coffee, waved to the waitresses, and returned to their trucks. Each went to the rear of his vehicle, looked underneath it, and picked up the orange cone. They remind us that we must always be safe."

Safety always! The question you must bring before yourself today is this. Where are the orange cones in your life? We definitely need these "safety checks" in our lives. Why? It's because God wants to keep you from running over that which is sensitive and vulnerable in your heart and soul. He does not want us to trample down our spiritual life in any way. This is why we need safety cones. Many times we decide to take matters into our own hands and begin moving, or even taking away, God's safety barriers. When this occurs, our direction in life, our relationships, and our priorities slip out of control. God has given to us the safety barriers of His Word and more specifically the armor which He has provided for us. If we begin to move any of these safety cones, we begin to lose the protective barrier that God wants us to keep in place.

Ephesians 6:13

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."

The way we continue to stand in victory (a defensive stand against the enemy), so we are not overcome with debilitating depression, is to mentally, prayerfully, effectively, and daily place God's armor upon us. God blesses us every time we might get knocked down by depression and then choose to get up, still trusting God and still willing to live for him. Look at depression this way, we can conclude that depression does not make us an ultimate failure. Instead, it can make us into a strong Christian and a winner in God's eyes, as we learn to overcome it and live in the light of God's victory.

Even if depression keeps knocking you down, make the decision today to keep getting up. In other words, get up and keep standing ("and having done all, to stand"). In other words, live in victory and don't be overcome

by depression and the attacks of the enemy. And even if you do fail and fall, get up and start standing once again. If we don't stand in the victory of the armor, we will never have victory.

God's armor consists of seven life-changing truths.

a. Sincerity – “The belt of truth” (Eph. 6:14a).

The “loins girt about with truth” speak of a belt. The belt was a very important part of the Roman soldier's uniform since it held the armor together. What does the belt of truth represent? It certainly could represent God's absolute standard of what is right which is diametrically opposed to what is wrong. Truth frees us from depression (John 8:32) but sin and wrong thinking keeps us in depression. Without knowing the truth regarding our sin and the way of victory, we will be overcome by sin and depression.

Certainly knowing and following the objective truth of Scripture, not our personal feelings, lustful desires, and wrong thinking patterns that run counter to the truth is important. But I'm convinced that coupled with the absolute standard of truth, there must also be a sincere or truthful desire to possess victory. This is a primary part of what “the belt of truth” means. In other words, we must not only know and observe objective truth, we must also be truthful, honest, or sincere in wanting victory. We should possess a deep desire, commitment, and longing to live victoriously. To state it simply, we must be honest with ourselves, filled with integrity, and sincerely or truthfully want to live victoriously in life. Daniel purposed in his heart to not defile himself (Dan. 1:8).

We will live in defeat if we do not possess a sincere or truthful desire for victory. We must be true, genuine, determined, committed, and not a fake! We must earnestly desire victory and have no seed thoughts or second thoughts in the back of our mind about sinning against God. We must be truthful about wanting victory and be totally committed to it (“thou desirest truth in the inward parts” – Ps. 51:6).

Do you really want victory over depression? Do you really want to win the battle? If you don't want it, then you won't have it! But if you truly want it, you will have it. Putting on the belt of truth would not only mean to follow God's objective standard (truth as found in Scripture) but it would mean that we must be committed to being honest and truthful in possessing victory. We must say:

"All to Jesus I surrender,
Humbly at His feet I bow;
Worldly pleasures all forsaken,
Take me, Jesus, take me now.
I surrender all,
I surrender all;
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,
I surrender all."

When I am tempted, I must in a very practical way, pray on the victorious belt of truth, not only KNOWING about God's standard of truth, but SURRENDERING to it, being truthful, sincere, and honest in wanting to possess victory over our sins and Satan's temptations.

Depression, when properly understood, can be controlled and even overcome! King David, author of many of the psalms, probably struggled with some degree of depression at various points in his life. Listen to what he says in one of his songs to God:

Psalm 13:2

"How long shall I take counsel in my soul, *having* sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?"

Can you identify with David? Everything must have looked bleak and hopeless. David's depression was threatening to overwhelm him. But this is not the end of David's story. Listen to what this great man of God says at the end.

Psalm 13:5

"But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation."

What was good for King David is also good for you and me. Don't give up! Don't for one more minute swallow the lie that nothing can be done about your emotional state. God has given you the victory through truth, which means we must know it, surrender to it, and honestly desire to possess victory through obeying it.

One Christian shares this:

“Each of us has been afraid of something at one point in our life. When I was a small child, my bedroom contained unknown terrors at night. The closets that held my clothes and toys in the daytime became, with the setting sun, caverns where dwelled... Something Horrible. I didn't know what it was. I never saw it, but my imagination told me that if I ever closed my eyes, It would pounce on me! With the passing of years, my bedroom no longer holds those unknown terrors. Now I'm the one trying to comfort the fears of young ones in the bedroom down the hall. But the principle of the unknown still holds true for all of us: That which we cannot see and do not understand holds the power to terrorize us.”

Certainly this is true about depression. We cannot see it or fully understand it but it can certainly scare us and control our lives. This is why we need to win the spiritual battle over it.

b. Spirituality - “breastplate of righteousness” (Eph. 6:14b).

Ephesians 6:14 goes on to say “having on the breastplate of righteousness.” Of course, the breastplate on the Roman soldier, kept the upper part of his chest and torso protected. The spiritual analogy is easy to see. We need this spiritual protection in order to keep our hearts and personal lives protected from Satan’s attacks. I believe this breastplate primarily speaks of living a righteous life. I know that the Bible speaks of our positional righteousness before God but Paul will deal with this later in the “Gospel and peace.” Here he seems to be specifically addressing our practically daily righteousness in this verse, as elsewhere in Ephesians.

Ephesians 4:24

“And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”

God has called us to righteousness or spiritual living that honors the Lord which is the result of the new birth. Here is the point, as we seek to live a righteous and active spiritual life, one that reflects righteousness, this will keep us from being overcome by the attacks of the enemy. Revelation 22:11 reminds us of this same important truth when saying "... he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." In our Christian life, we need to work on living a righteous life that honors God and we will be less likely to fall into the trap of temptation. Satan always gets an advantage over our life when we harbor certain sins in our heart (2 Cor. 2:10-12) and fail to live a righteous life. Living a righteous life keeps us from developing "spiritual hardening of the arteries" which slowly kills our spiritual life and affects our day-to-day power and victory that we can experience.

Philippians 1:11 speaks about the "fruits of righteousness." Fruit speaks of the Christian acts of righteousness and spiritual acts of living (spiritual fruit of righteous living and actions). Staying right will keep us from falling into the traps of the devil. Staying right keeps us from straying in the time of temptation! We need to keep a spiritual edge. This is an important part of God's armor that will help us to live victoriously. If we maintain spirituality, we won't become accessible to Satan's schemes. Stay righteous and stay victorious! Get lazy and get defeated! When I am tempted, I must in a very practical way, pray on the breastplate of righteousness and commit myself to living a righteous and spiritual life that honors God.

General Sedgwick who commanded troops for the North in the Civil War is known today chiefly because of his last words. His forces were waging a fierce battle with one of the Southern armies. Bullets and cannonballs began to fly, some of them dangerously close to the general. Unperturbed, he continued to sit atop his horse, surveying the battle scene before him. When several aids advised him it would be prudent for him to move back a bit, the general made history. Snorting derisively at the suggestion, he said, "Why, those gunners couldn't hit an elephant at this distance."

Here is the point, the enemy cannot hit us and take us down when we are prayerfully and mentally applying God's armor to our life.

c. Serenity - (“gospel of peace”).

Ephesians 6:15

“And your feet shod (bound – putting on shoes) with the preparation of the gospel of peace.”

Paul is not referring to practical peace in our Christian life but positional peace or acceptance before God’s throne in Heaven through the Gospel. The Gospel message declares that we have peace (a peaceful standing) before God. God accepts me in His presence at all times. This means that I am always loved by God, accepted by God, and justified in the presence of God. God is not angry with me – even when I fail! God has not given up on me!

Romans 5:1

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

How does this truth about the Gospel of peace apply to our victory? How does it prepare me for victory in the Christian life? Some suggest the “preparation” revolves around being evangelistic and seeking to lead others to Christ. However, it seems better to understand this preparation as revolving around the believer preparing to stand against Satan by remembering his peaceful standing of acceptance before God. The word “preparation” may be understood as the believer preparing himself to stand against Satan’s temptations by acknowledging His position of justification and acceptance or this peaceful standing he has before God. This is the likely understanding of this Gospel of peace.

In other words, what the message of peace declares (our acceptance that we have before God) reminds us that God is not against His people but for them. God is fighting for us – He is not trying to destroy us.

Romans 8:38-39

“For I am persuaded (live with absolute confidence), that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

As a Christian, if you feel so emotionally weak and feeble (depressed) that you cannot walk another step in life, rest in the assurance that God is carrying you close to his heart right now.

Isaiah 40:11 reminds us:

“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry *them* in his bosom, *and* shall gently lead those that are with young.”

God’s people were assured of His presence, His relationship, His help, and His sustaining power in what must be one of the loveliest verses in Isaiah! Jumping from Israel to the Church and the present dispensation, we know that God constantly loves and cares for us, since the Bible teaches that we have a positional peace before Him and loving acceptance. This means that God always loves us unconditionally and is not out to put us down but to build us up. What does it mean when God loves you unconditionally? It means that in spite of what we do, God always accepts us as His sons.

We have peace before God’s presence and therefore God always loves us in spite of our failures. This means that we should not allow Satan to batter our brains or thought process by telling us that God hates us and won’t accept us because of our sin and continual bout with depression. God always will accept us and He wants our fellowship (1 John 1:9). God lovingly accepts us as His children and if we want fellowship with Him we can have it. Don’t let the devil fool you!

The Evil One makes us feel guilty and condemned before God when we sin against Him and have been defeated with depression. When we fail the devil tries to bring the guilt trip upon our hearts so that he can keep us in spiritual depression, defeat, bondage, and rebellion. He tries to feed us the lies that God no longer accepts us or that God has given up on us and that we will never amount to anything. He reminds us of both our present sins and then brings up our past sins, which we have committed, in order to make us think and feel that God has abandoned us and no longer loves or accepts us. In addition, the devil also accuses us by whispering in our ear words like this: “Admit it. You are a loser. You are no good. God will never

forgive you for what you have done. You have sinned away God's grace and lost God's love and favor."

This is where the Gospel of Peace comes in. We must claim our positional acceptance before God's throne, through the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:9) and not allow Satan to ground us down. Once we start to listen to Satan's lies we become defenseless. But when we remember that we stand in the perfect righteousness of Christ and have peace before God, Satan's accusations against us cannot defeat us. We can remember that God always loves and accepts us unconditionally in His holy presence because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ and the peaceful standing I have before God through the Gospel. We can claim God's promise that His precious blood will cleans us from our sins and restore our fellowship with Himself (1 John 1:7-9). This is because of our unchanging position or standing that we have before God.

When I am tempted, I must in a very practical and prayerful way, prepare my heart for battle. I do this by acknowledging my position of justification, acceptance and the peaceful standing that I have in God's presence through the Gospel. I then confess my sin if necessary, regain my fellowship with a God who is always ready to receive me and take me back into fellowship, and commit myself to the way of victory through His power. I can do this knowing that God always accepts me, loves me, and has not given up on me.

d. Shield – "shield of faith" (Eph. 6:16).

It takes faith to overcome depression. It takes a lot of faith! When I was at John Hopkins Hospital, I remember looking intently for the "exit signs" so I could find my way through the twists and turns of that giant hospital. I needed the exit signs to lead me back to the ground floor and to my car. This is also true regarding depression. If you want some "exit signs" that lead you out of depression, God's armor is one exit sign that you must follow. The shield was a very important part of the armor. It was a giant shield that covered his entire body and protected the soldier against fiery arrows which were designed to kill and defeat the soldier. The shield of faith provides us with the protection we need against the "fiery darts of the

wicked” (illustrative of Satan’s temptations). Satan’s temptations are viewed or personified as flaming arrows which are trying to ignite the passions inside of our heart.

Our faith acts as a shield to ward off Satan’s temptations and put out the fire that is trying to be ignited in our souls. What is the content of our faith? We must have confidence or faith in God’s promises, providence, provision, and power (Eph. 6:10). We must believe that God in His providence will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13) and that the promises of His Word and the spiritual provision of His power is available to us on a constant basis.

“Faith is the victory, Faith is the victory,
Oh glorious victory,
That overcomes the world.”

1 John 5:4

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

To trust is to experience triumph. Faith believes that God can provide the Christian with victory over any sin. Faith says, “No matter what happens God will give the victory.” We must have faith and believe that “nothing is impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). When we pray in doubt we do without (James 1:6-7). Faith is utter dependence on God’s presence, promise, power, providence, and provision. Faith puts God between the believer and the enemy. A believer is a world-conqueror by means of his faith in Christ.

Spiritual erosion occurs in our life, when our confidence or faith is shifted to our own resources and abilities, instead of toward God. It takes faith in the Lord to live the Christian life (Prov. 3:5-6).

“Strong to meet the foe,
Marching on we go,
While our cause we know
Must prevail;
Shield and banner bright

Gleaming in the light,
Battling for the right,
Me ne'er can fail."

We need to possess faith in God's power and plan for victory. We need to place faith in the armor that it will protect us and give us victory. God's plan for victory works! Our faith is what puts God's victorious plan into operation and makes it become alive and real in our daily lives. Faith is still the victory that overcomes the world. When I am tempted, I must in a very practical way, pray on the shield of faith and believe that I have victory through God's promises, power, and provision.

e. Salvation – "helmet of salvation" (deliverance – Eph. 6:17a)

Our salvation spreads into every nook and cranny of our being since Paul likens our salvation to the spiritual deliverance we receive over Satan and temptation. What did the helmet protect? It protected the head on the Roman soldier. The spiritual truth behind the "helmet of salvation" refers to the mind being saved or delivered from evil, lustful, and devilish thoughts. The word "salvation" speaks of deliverance from Satan's lies and temptations that he sends our way. We must keep our minds centered upon truth so we can be delivered from Satan's thoughts and attempts to lead us astray. In addition, our thoughts of defeat must be replaced with thoughts and promises of victory.

2 Corinthians 10:5 once again reminds us:

"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Thoughts of lust, pride, gossip, discouragement, despair, divisiveness, and depression must be replaced with truthful thoughts that rest upon the foundation of God's Word. We must think right to live right! Satan brings thoughts into your mind like, "Go ahead and do it. It won't hurt you. After all, everyone else is doing it." He says, "You can't do anything right. You will never amount to anything for God. There is no hope for you. Give up." He says, "You don't have to go to church today. Skip prayer meeting and devotions." These kinds of thoughts do not originate from our own

thinking, as the devil would want us to believe, but from Satan's own book of thoughts. The believer must learn to take inventory of his thought life and possess a solid- rock commitment to truth (John 8:32; 17:17). Let us remember that intellectual deception and defiance is the reason we live in defeat.

When I was a boy, I used to love driving past old junk yards that were filled with old vehicles – mostly Fords! I would look at all the wrecked vehicles in the junkyards and think how they got there and I tried to count them as I went by. As I reflect upon the junk yards, I am reminded that our minds can become a spiritual junkyard that needs to be emptied and replaced by new, righteous, and victorious thoughts. Ephesians 4:23 says you should “be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” The believer must learn to demolish the satanic thoughts and not allow them to control his mind and keep guard over his mind. 1 Peter 1:13 says you must “gird up the loins of your mind.” The helmet of salvation means that we need a delivered or liberated mind – not a manipulated mind filled with the junk of depression and other demonic thinking. When I am tempted, I must in a very practical and prayerful way, place on the helmet of salvation. This is done by facing the truth of God's Word, thinking right, and then claiming the victory.

f. Sword – “sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17b).

The way we keep wearing the “helmet of salvation” (deliverance) is by applying “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” to our minds and hearts. The “word of God” is called “the sword of the Spirit” because it's God's Spirit who gave us the Scriptures (2 Pet. 1:21) and God's Spirit that brings the truth of God's Word to our minds (John 14:26), so we can do battle with the devil and demons during the time of temptation. God's Word (truth) is comparable to a sword; however, it's a spiritual sword that we use to battle Satan. It's the only thing that can defeat him and counter his lies.

God's word (the absolute standard) reminds us of the promise of victory through Christ and also how to live right. It exposes what is sinful and reveals what is right. It cuts through the culture, compromised Christianity, Satan's lies, demonic deception, self-deception, and lays the truth before

us. It rebukes us, confronts us, clears out the cobwebs in our thinking, and drives the skeletons out of our closet. God's Word also provides us with many verses that promise us victory which also counter the lies of Satan. We must embrace the truth of God's Word for our own personal lives and hold up the truth before Satan if we are going to have victory over his temptations. Again, when Jesus was tempted by the devil He repeatedly said: "It is written" (Matt. 4:4-7).

Victory is a truth encounter. It's not some kind of emotional display where we fall backward and talk in some kind of gibberish. You can't outshout Satan but you can out-truth Satan! The Bible (truth) needs to become the center of our existence – not our emotions, feelings, and circumstances. We do not have to be victims of our feelings and circumstances and allow depression to run our life. We must remember that our moods cannot form the basis of our decisions. Truth must be the basis of all our decisions.

The purpose of every believer should be to prayerfully meditate on God's Word, memorize God's Word, and even speak forth the truth of God's Word so that the Spirit of God will enable our minds to be transformed through the Word of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 says:

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received *it* not *as* the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe."

The emphasis on the "word (rhema) of God" in Ephesians 6:17 means "utterances or sayings of the Scriptures." The emphasis may also be on the outspoken word and would suggest that believers must learn the secret of quoting and claiming specific portions of the Bible that will help them in the specific battles which they are facing. It's one thing to know the truth to counteract Satan's lies, but it's another thing to actually apply specific portions of Scripture by speaking forth and claiming truth in the time of battle. When I am tempted, I must in a very practical and prayerful way, use the truth and Holy Spirit's ministry to redirect my mind and counter the lies and deception of the devil.

Someone wrote:

“God expects us to use our God-given senses, led by the Spirit, so that we detect Satan when he is beginning to work.”

Once again, “If we think right, we will live right.”

“O may I love Thy precious Word,
May I explore the mine,
May I its fragrant flowers glean,
May light upon me shine!
O may I find my armor there!
Thy Word my trusty sword,
I’ll learn to fight with every foe
The battle of the Lord.”

A recent survey of “Discipleship Journal” ranked areas of spiritual challenge to Christians:

1. Materialism.
2. Pride.
3. Self-centeredness.
4. Laziness.
5. (Tie) Anger/Bitterness.
5. (Tie) Sexual lust.
7. Envy.
8. Gluttony.
9. Lying.

The survey respondents noted temptations were more potent when they had neglected their time with God (81 percent) and when they were physically tired (57 percent). Resisting temptation was accomplished by prayer (84 percent), avoiding compromising situations (76 percent), Bible study (66 percent), and being accountable to someone (52 percent). This is a very interesting survey and it sounds really true and accurate to me. It certainly applies to our personal and daily lives. We have been looking at the spiritual armor that we need to prayerfully and mentally put on to

maintain spiritual victory. There is a final point that I want to share in our outline.

g. Supplication - “praying always ... supplication” (Eph. 6:18).

Some conclude that this is not part of the actual armor. It’s true that prayer does not parallel with any of the Roman armor. But Paul follows up this entire section with the importance of prayer since this is how we apply God’s armor to our lives. In fact, it is probable that this prayer is linked to the last points which dealt with the “sword of the Spirit” and the “word of God.” This is because our victory comes to us through applying prayer to what we know the Bible (the sword) says regarding victory.

If we are not praying through God’s Word and His promises, and applying His Word to our lives, then we will not have victory. The way we do battle with the Word of God is using it in our time of meditation and prayer. Prayer is what makes the armor effective. It is the glue that makes everything stick and work together.

“Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Stand in his strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you,
Ye dare not trust your own.
Put on the gospel armor,
Each piece put on with prayer;
Where duty calls or danger,
Be never wanting there.”

The word “supplication” is when we petition God. It’s only when we pray to God, claiming our own victory in Christ, while at the same time crying out to God on the behalf of others, that victory will be experienced in the lives of God’s saints. It takes earnest and heartfelt prayer. At times, it takes some tears, some real heart pounding prayer before God. Prayer is the battle plan that we must engage in if we are going to experience victory and see others live victorious. We can’t sit idle and not engage in the battle plan. We must apply the power of God, the armor, and experience victory through persistence praying.

Matthew 26:41

“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Jesus found His disciples sleeping at this point when they should have been praying. We must take precaution against temptation and this is what Jesus is teaching here. We should be careful in condemning the disciples at this point because when we think of our own prayer lives, we sometimes sleep better than we pray, and our minds wander when they should be watching. Jesus found His disciples sleeping and turned the whole episode into a spiritual lesson.

It was F.B. Meyer, I believe, who once said that when we see a brother or sister in sin, there are two things we do not know: First, we do not know how hard he or she tried not to sin. And second, we do not know the power of the forces that assailed him or her. We also do not know what we would have done in the same circumstances.”

We are quick to condemn the disciples but we need to look at our own lives and realize we are just as vulnerable if we do not maintain spiritual alertness and vigilance.

In this verse we see:

a. The prayer that maintain victory – “Watch and pray”

Jesus highlights the importance of being spiritually alert (“Watch”) and couples this with the importance of prayer (“pray”). The Greek present imperative indicates that they were to “continually keep watching” and this is what we need to be doing in relation to our spiritual lives. We need to stay spiritually alert (remain awake from a spiritual standpoint) and the way we do this is keep praying and depending upon the Lord’s power and provision for our lives, since we will be tempted and tested by the Evil One to go another way, a way contrary to God’s will and path for our lives. If we do not remain spiritually alert and coming before the throne of grace to find help in the time of need (Heb. 4:16), then we are going to be more vulnerable to depression and spiritual defeat.

b. The protection we need – “that ye enter not into temptation”

Staying spiritual alert to Satan’s temptations and maintaining a vigilant prayer life is important so we are not caught off guard when the time of temptation comes. I think this is the meaning of “that ye enter not into temptation.” Temptation will come just as sure as the sparks fly upward but we need to remain spiritual alert and keep praying for the Lord’s strength and power, so that we are not caught in a spiritual slump and find ourselves not ready to face Satan’s temptation. When we lose our watchfulness and prayerfulness we will end up following the way of depression, doubt, and dirty living. Vigilant prayer will not necessarily keep us from temptation but it will keep us from being caught off guard and being overcome by it. This seems to be what Jesus was teaching His disciples and you and me.

c. The problem is stated (“the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”)

Man’s regenerated human “spirit” may have good intentions (the spirit is where God’s life and nature reside). The “flesh” sometimes has reference to the unredeemed part of our humanity (the sin nature) but here Jesus may be using the term “flesh” as a reference the human body in view of the disciples falling asleep and not maintaining vigilance for one hour. The analogy is important. The human spirit that houses God’s life and nature is always ready to grant us with the right determination and drive to possess victory (Phil. 2:13), but the spirit must control our flesh or body, so that we do not become defeated by temptation and to gain spiritual victory. The spirit must always rule our body – the body should never overrule our spirit. Jesus is teaching that there is a spiritual side to our nature that has been born again which must be in charge of our life. If we put our bodies first – look out! If we put our spirit first (God’s life and nature) we will remain vigilant, keep praying, and maintain victory.

Charles Spurgeon put it best:

"Learn to say no. It will be of more use to you than to be able to read Latin."

“Leave no unguarded place,
No weakness of the soul
Take every virtue, every grace,
And fortify the whole.”

When I’m tempted, I must begin to pray and put on the armor of God. Prayer is the key to God’s battle plan for victory. We apply the armor to our lives, mentally and verbally, through prayer. We pray on the armor, pray through Scripture, claim the victory we have in Christ, and counter the lies of Satan. It takes prayer to be victorious.

Somebody said:

“The devil is no far away when you are too busy to pray.”

Someone else added:

“And Satan trembles when he sees, the weakest saint upon their knees.”

Romans 8:37 says:

“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”

Mark Twain wrote:

“There are several good protections against temptation, but the surest is cowardice.”

God wants you to be a victorious Christian. Have you been living like a victor or a victim? Have you been winning the war over depression or some other sin that may be the root cause of your depression? Take some time, sit down with God’s Word, open it up, and let the Holy Spirit really speak to your heart again.

“Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armor on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through His eternal Son;
Strong in the Lord of hosts,
And in His mighty power,
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
Is more than conqueror.”

Remember Goliath? He was big and he was a bully (1 Samuel 17:4-51). David was small and it seemed there was no hope for victory. But God gave David victory over this giant man. The same is true regarding our temptations. We don't have to be overcome by depression and live in a spiritually defeated state. God can and will give you victory over this Goliath in your life. Depression does seem like a giant but God is greater than the giant temptations that we face in life.

Since everything that was written in the Old Testament was written for our learning and profit (Rom. 15:4), we should apply the spiritual lessons of the past to our lives, even those of us who live in dispensation of the grace of God. Although the Old Testament is not written TO the Church, the practical spiritual lessons are FOR the church. In other words, we should learn and apply these lessons to our lives and incorporate them in to the context of grace living for today.

Now think about this important lesson. David was small and the enemy laughed at him. But when the smoke cleared, the giant bully was dead on the ground, and David was still on his feet! What made the difference for David? He trusted in God and he had the right weapons. Our spiritual weapons to fight depression are found in God's armor. We should want to shrink depression in our eyes until it is no longer a giant bully pushing us around any way it wants.

A little outline might help and encourage you at this point.

I've entitled this section of Scripture, "When Giants Invade Our lives" (1 Samuel 17:4-51)

There are three, practical, victory lessons we can apply to our lives.

1. The future giants that invade our lives – 4-9

It's not a matter "if" a giant problem invades our life, it's "when" it is going to take place. As we peer into the future, there are giant problems (physical, spiritual, material, emotional) that can overtake our lives. Perhaps you are facing a giant trial right now. Maybe you have been

experiencing depression in your heart and life and it has become like a giant mountain which you cannot climb over. This is what this section of Scripture is talking about.

“And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height *was* six cubits and a span. And *he had* an helmet of brass upon his head, and he *was* armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat *was* five thousand shekels of brass. And *he had* greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear *was* like a weaver's beam; and his spear's head *weighed* six hundred shekels of iron: and one bearing a shield went before him. And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set *your* battle in array? *am* not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me.”

Is there another man today that will stand in the gap and live a victorious life and be example to his family and His Lord? Are you that man today? Men, we need to be challenged to live for God! We need to have the faith and fortitude to move out for God today for there is a cause! The cause is to see our families thriving, our church growing, possessing victory in our daily lives, and being on fire for Jesus Christ!

“If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: (depression must become our servant – we should not become the slave to depression) but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us (many Christians today are serving depression – their lives are being run by depression instead of the Holy Spirit). And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together.”

Comments: Depression is like a giant. It can overwhelm our lives and sit on us like a great weight. The wonderful thing is that we don't have to become a slave to depression. This portion of Scripture reminds us of this.

2. The fears that overtake our hearts – 11-25

“When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid. Now David *was* the son of that Ephrathite of Bethlehemjudah, whose name *was* Jesse; and he had eight sons: and the man went among men *for* an old man in the days of Saul. And the three eldest sons of Jesse went *and* followed Saul to the battle: and the names of his three sons that went to the battle *were* Eliab the firstborn, and next unto him Abinadab, and the third Shammah. And David *was* the youngest: and the three eldest followed Saul. But David went and returned from Saul to feed his father's sheep at Bethlehem. And the Philistine drew near morning and evening, and presented himself forty days. And Jesse said unto David his son, Take now for thy brethren an ephah of this parched *corn*, and these ten loaves, and run to the camp to thy brethren; And carry these ten cheeses unto the captain of *their* thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge. Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, *were* in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines.

“And David rose up early in the morning, and left the sheep with a keeper, and took, and went, as Jesse had commanded him; and he came to the trench, as the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle. For Israel and the Philistines had put the battle in array, army against army. And David left his carriage in the hand of the keeper of the carriage, and ran into the army (we must enter the fight if we are going to win), and came and saluted his brethren. And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard *them*.

“And all the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him, and were sore afraid. And the men of Israel said, Have ye seen this man that is come up? surely to defy Israel is he come up: and it shall be, *that* the man who killeth him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel.”

Depression can be something that we fear. We try to run from it but we cannot get away from it. We sometimes wonder if we can ever overcome this plaguing giant within our mind and heart. It can bring dismay and discouragement into our lives. But there is a way out! The way is faith!

3. The faith we need during the battle – 26-51

I want to share a few points about faith from this passage.

There are seven expressions of faith.

a. We must engage in the battle – 26-28

“And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who *is* this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? And the people answered him after this manner, saying, So shall it be done to the man that killeth him. And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.”

Friend, in spite of what others might think or say, we need to engage in the battle if we are ever going to win it! Let bygones be bygones and do what is right. We see here that faith is the victory! David was ready to engage and walked by faith, believing he could win the battle with the Philistine. We must walk by faith, like David, be willing to defy all the odds, and know that God can grant us victory over life-depilating depression.

b. We understand there is a cause – 29-33

“And David said, What have I now done? *Is there* not a cause? And he turned from him toward another, and spake after the same manner: and the people answered him again after the former manner. And when the words were heard which David spake, they rehearsed *them* before Saul: and he sent for him. And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.”

There is a cause to fight for! Are we willing to fight for it? And what cause is it? For the children of Israel, the cause was to claim their right to the land that God had promised them. Generally speaking, for us today, it's to claim the spiritual territory that God has given to us. It's to take back the territory that Satan might have stolen from us (Eph. 4:27). It's to claim our riches and victories in Christ. More specifically, it's the cause to stand up for the truth, righteousness, and claim our victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. The cause involves living a victorious life, seeing our family thriving spiritually, and being committed to Christ's church and ministry. If you are not willing to fight – then you are a chicken and a loser! But when we are ready to get in the battle, by putting on the armor, we are ready to win! Do you really want to beat depression? Today is a new opportunity to get in the battle and start winning!

c. We remember our past victories – 33-37

The coach of the football team said to his men, before they went on the field, "Remember men, we did not come here to lose, we came to win!"

"And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou *art but* a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered *it* out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught *him* by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the LORD be with thee."

We should not depend upon our past victories for our present0day victory (Matt. 6:34), but neither should we forget them. Past victories energize us and enable us to believe God for the present victories. Looking back, we see God's delivering hand, and looking forward we can see His delivering hand once again! If God can give us victory over other fearful trials (the lions and

bears), then He certainly can give us victory over depression! Whatever God has delivered you from in the past can give you the reassurance that He can also deliver you in the present. He can and will grant our victory over depression and any sin that might be triggering this depression.

d. We prepare for the battle – 38-40

“And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved *it*. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved *them*. And David put them off him. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling *was* in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine.”

David could not go into battle looking and walking like a tin man! No, he wanted to move freely and use the weapons he was used to – stones and a sling! He went back to the simple things. It's the simple things that seem unimportant to many Christians today, but they are the things which worked in the past and what will also work today. David used stones and sling. For our spiritual battle, we use the Scriptures and prayer and we go to battle using the tried and true tools that God has given to us. This is how we prepare for the spiritual battle that we are facing today!

Remember that when God sent out His original band of disciples, He did not give them computers, cell phones, email accounts, Facebook, Instagram, or any of manmade technologies. He gave them His Word and His Spirit! We sometimes think we are powerless without technology. Let me tell you something today, we are often bound and defeated by technology, when what we really need to do is just go in the Holy Spirit's power and claim God's promises. If you want to win the battle over depression, you need to center your attention on God's Word, God's Spirit, God's power, and God's prescription of prayer.

Pastor Steven Motes once said:

“If our faith is in programs and schedules, then we will become discouraged, but if through prayer our faith rests in God’s power and work, then we will be encouraged.”

e. We face the enemy – 41-45

“And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield *went* before him. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was *but* a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, *Am* I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.”

Be assured, the taunting of the world will come when we want to do what is right. We see this here in the language of the Philistine. But in the face of the world, the flesh, and the devil, we must boldly and confidently say as David did, that we are coming to win the victory “in the name of the LORD of hosts.” When we face the enemy, even the enemy of depression, we must do so in the full name and authority of God, who alone can grant us the victory. There is no hope outside God. Everything outside God is a band aid and false hope. Our hope is in the Lord and His assistance!

One little girl said that when Satan rings her doorbell to tempt her, she sends Jesus to answer the door! Folks, our hope for victory is in the Lord’s presence and power.

f. We claim the victory – 46-51

Notice:

1. There is the assurance of victory – 46-47

“This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle *is* the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands.”

Now this is assurance! This is faith! Do you have this kind of faith as you face depression? By the way, depression is not your battle, it's the LORD'S! Turn it over to Him and let Him give you the victory! The victory is already won!

2. There is the action of victory – 48-51

“And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang *it*, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.”

“So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone (little is much when God is in it – a little Scripture, a little prayer, a little faith), and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but *there was* no sword in the hand of David (But more importantly, David was in the hand of God!). Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.”

If you want depression to begin to flee or exit your heart and mind, if you want to cut the head off of depression and kill it, then you must have the assurance that God can give you total victory and take action. You must go with the “sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17) and finish the job! Be assured, step out in faith, and take action! Sitting in a corner, having a pity party, and trying to hide yourself from God's people and God's House, will not give you the victory. You need to take action and prevail in God's power and might to lift yourself out of depression and

place your feet on higher ground and place your life in higher hands – God’s hands!

John W Peterson wrote this lovely song:

“Though it seems I’m oft unnoticed
And lost in time and space
God above is watching o’er me
Though I cannot see His face.

O how sweet to know He hears me
When I go to Him in prayer
And I tell Him all my troubles
When my heart is bowed with care.”

There’s a great eternal purpose
In the life of everyone
And someday, we’ll know it’s meaning
When our days on earth are done.

All my times are in His keeping
He has numbered me my years
And someday He’ll take me yonder
Where there’ll be no pain or tears.

So I face an unknown future
Full of faith and unafraid
And the peace I have thru’ trusting
For the world I would not trade.

Higher hands are leading me
Higher hands are leading me
I am not alone, I know
As I walk this world below
For higher hands are leading me.”

Researchers at the University of Michigan did a study on laughter. It’s amazing what kind of studies are done today. We probably paid for this study! Anyway, they discovered that while the average child laughs 150 times a day, the average adult laughs only 15 times. Why is this? It’s

probably because of the cares of life such as worry, anxiety, and depression can overtake us as we become older. It's because we become too attached to the things of this world and the weights of this world, which can weigh us down and keep us from laughter.

We are still studying about the cure for depression.

8. Redose on the medicine of laughter.

One of the characteristics of many depressed people is that they are what I term "emotionally dead." They don't want to be touched or held. No smiles nor frowns cross their face. Their eyes look dull and lifeless. As one woman put it, "In my depression I can't feel anything." Except sadness, of course. This is where laughter can come to our aid and rescue. The Bible has been telling us this for more than two thousand years!

Proverbs 17:22

"A merry heart doeth good *like* a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones."

Laughter is a powerful medicine. You've heard that just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down. Well, just a spoonful of laughter can make the depression go out of your life. We learn that a person's mental outlook has a lot to do with recovery from sickness or accident. A cheerful disposition is a powerful aid to healing – not only physical healing but spiritual healing from emotional wounds, sorrows, and depression. A cheerful disposition is a powerful aid to healing a broken spirit that is crushed by sin and depression. This reminds us that emotions can make us ill – not only physically but also spiritually. The Bible is teaching here that when a person feels gloomy, their whole body hurts, their whole life seems as lifeless as a pile of old dried bones. However, when joy and laughter invades the heart of man, it refreshes the whole person – inwardly, physically, and spiritually.

In *The Anatomy of an Illness, as Perceived by the Patient*, Norman Cousins tells of being hospitalized with a rare, crippling disease. When he was diagnosed as incurable, Cousins checked out of the hospital. Aware of the harmful effects that negative emotions can have on the body, Cousins

reasoned the reverse was true. So he borrowed a movie projector and prescribed his own treatment, consisting of Marx Brothers films and old "Candid Camera" reruns. It didn't take long for him to discover that 10 minutes of laughter provided two hours of pain-free sleep. Amazingly, his debilitating disease was eventually reversed. After the account of his victory appeared in the New England Journal of Medicine, Cousins received more than 3000 letters from appreciative physicians throughout the world.

God gives us a true prescription for happiness: "A merry (cheerful) heart doeth good *like* a medicine." So, please take your medicine! Redose on laughter. Remember, you might not be able to choose when or where depression is going to hit you, but you can choose how to respond to it. Don't fear it; fight it! And, yes, you can fight it with laughter and a cheerful spirit.

Proverbs 15:15

"All the days of the afflicted are evil (wretched, miserable, distressed - unhappy): but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast."

This means that we can choose to live miserably or to live life cheerfully. Have you been living on the happy side of life? Don't allow yourself to be sad and wretched the rest of your life.

Someone said:

"Decide to feast cheerfully on what life gives you, instead of letting it feast on you!"

Laughter is a good gift that comes from God.

Ecclesiastes 3:4 reminds us that there is:

"A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance."

Psalms 126:2

"Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them."

In returning from their time of captivity, the people experienced much laughter and happiness. This was a holy laughter and it was pleasing to the Lord. Fun and laughter should be a common occurrence in our Christians homes and lives. Remember that you have a choice. If you are currently depressed, you might feel as if there is no hope for you. But this is not true at all. You always have a choice. Take a moment to bow your head and pray to your heavenly Father. Ask him for the strength to stand up to your emotions and begin trying to bring some cheer into your life. Then, watch some old Pink Panther cartoons and laugh at them as well! We need to take our medicine regularly and keep smiling! Folks, sometimes we need to laugh again!

Someone remarked:

“Remember, a giggle a day keeps the doctor away. But it also allows the Great Physician to make house calls!”

Be joyful because God loves you. Smile at five people and let God's joy flow through you. Whatever you do, laugh again!

9. Repent of wrong attitudes and follow God’s plan for confession.

Opposite of laughter, we sometimes must mourn when we have allowed sin to overtake our hearts. We have said several times throughout this study that when we think differently, it’s only then that we can live differently. Depression can be caused by sin that we have allowed to control us. Therefore, the cure for a sin-produced depression is to repent of your worry, your sinful departures, whatever they might be, and get your life on solid, spiritual ground once again.

Revelation 2:5

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.”

James 4:9 speaks of signs of a repentance heart:

“Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness.”

Proverbs 28:13

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

Repentance that leads to remorse, confession of sin (1 John 1:9), and the forsaking of sin (“but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” - Prov. 28:13). This is necessary when our depression is linked to our sinful lifestyle. When we are overcome with worry and anxiety, we need to confess these sins to the Lord. After repentance and confession, we can rid ourselves of the depression that stems from these so-called sanctified sins. Of course, once we have properly dealt with our sins, we no longer need to be weighed down by guilt. We can accept the fact by faith that “God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). To live on with sin’s guilt is to disbelieve and deny God’s forgiveness for our sins.

Let’s think through this a bit more.

a. We need to base our understanding about sin on God’s Word.

Psalm 119:128

“Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things to be* right; *and* I hate every false way.”

We cannot begin to think properly about our sin, understand our own need for repentance and confession, unless we are basing our thinking on God’s Word. We must understand that God’s Word is the supreme authority in all matters related to what is sin (Isa. 8:20) and we must remember that sin is lawlessness before God (1 John 3:4). We must learn to hate sin as God hates sin. “I hate every false way” (Ps. 110:104. 128).

b. We need to understand the seriousness of our sins.

Psalm 51:4

“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest.”

Don't try and get yourself off the hook. We must see that our sins have offended God's holiness and allow our sins to drive us to repentance and confession – "I was wrong and You are right Lord."

c. We must confess our sins to others whom we've hurt.

This is a necessary part of confession when our sins have adversely influenced and directly hurt someone.

James 5:16

"Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed (emotionally). The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

This man's sin had adversely effected the testimony of the local church and its people. For this reason, there was a need for open confession. Sometimes confession precedes our emotional healing from depression. We must get things right with others, those that we have sinned against and offended. This can lead to inner, emotional healing and get us back on the right track.

d. We must replace our sinful habits with godly habits.

Ephesians 4:28-29

"Let him that stole steal no more (stop sinning): but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth (replacing the sin with godly living). Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth (stopping the sin), but that which is good to the use of edifying (replacing the sin with godly habits), that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

Forsaking our sins is important but it's equally important to replace our sins with right living that honors God. Getting rid of the bad should always be followed with getting things right in our life.

e. We must make plans to not sin again.

Bad habits can be hard to break, but grace working in our hearts and lives can break them! If we are not prepared with a plan on how to avoid and overcome temptation, we may find ourselves entangled in our old sinful problems once again. It is difficult to say “no” to something that we have been saying “yes” to for a long time. It is very vital and important that we take strategic steps to confront temptation so that we are able to overcome it. Those steps are putting on God’s armor (Eph. 6), not setting ourselves up to sin (Rom. 13:14), and relying on God’s conquering and victorious grace in the time of temptation.

1 Corinthians 10:13

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*.”

The way of escape is the way of God’s strengthening and enabling grace. There is always a way out of temptation if we want it. We cannot give the excuse, “My sin was too strong, I could not overcome it, God did not come through for me.” No, “God is faithful” in that He controls the level of our temptations and conquers our temptations by providing us with what I call the “grace escape” during the time of temptation. The escape is God’s enabling and sustaining grace. We need to tap in to the “grace escape” if we want to have victory over the sins that create depression and over depression itself.

2 Corinthians 12:9

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

There is another cure for depression.

10. Rid yourself of the past and let God heal you.

Depression can often stem from the past – past sins, past abuse, past traumas. What do we do with the past? We are to not dwell on it, create

reruns of the past, and allow the past to haunt us, defeat us, and depress us again.

Philippians 3:13-14

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended (laid hold on perfection): but *this* one thing *I do* (single purpose of heart), forgetting those things which are behind (severing ourselves from the past), and reaching forth unto those things which are before (spiritual adventures in the future), I press toward the mark (spiritual goal of Christlikeness – the marker at the end of the race on which runners fix their eyes) for the prize (reward – 2 Tim. 4:8) of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Paul found no time to relax because found Someone worth living for! Everything else was a waste of time and energy. Please note that Paul did not deny his past (Phil. 3:4-8), but he did not live in the past. He did not allow the past to haunt and defeat him in his present life. He found total release from the past when he buried it under the blood of Jesus Christ! Forgiveness and release was very real to him. It can be real to you as well.

In dealing with the past, we must sometimes face our sins and failures of the past, as Paul did, and we must understand what happened and why it happened. But then we must learn the Biblical way to be released from the past by claiming God’s victorious promises and living in obedience to His Word. Returning and reliving the past is not a Biblical approach to getting victory over the past. Once our sin or difficult situation that we faced in the past has been properly dealt with before the Lord and with others, we must leave it behind and set our minds on what God wants from us today and each day forward. Rewinding the past and rethinking about the past will bring sure defeat. Instead of looking back, we must look ahead. We must in one sense, get past the past if we are going to free ourselves from depression and the power of old sins.

God wants us to live our lives in the present tense!

“I’m pressing on the upward way,
New heights I’m gaining every day;
Still praying as I onward bound,
“Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

Lord, lift me up, and let me stand
By faith on Canaan's tableland;
A higher plane than I have found,
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

11. Recall God's unfailing love for you.

When we were at the graveside service of my wife's father, the young grandchildren were watching the casket being lowered into the ground. It would have been a unique picture. After a bit, the youngest one, Lucas, came walking toward the opening and he was getting a bit too close to the edge. His daddy was following right behind him. Well, before the casket was lowered, mom asked me to lead everyone in a song. Only one song came to my mind – "Jesus Loves Me." So, we all sang together this song and it was reassuring and comforting to all of us. Because of God's love for us, we find reassurance and hope that He will be there for us and never leave us. Nothing will separate us from the love of God – not even depression (Romans 8:38-39). We can bank on this and must believe this if we are going to deal with our depression.

1 John 3:1

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

Behold! This is an interjection designed to produce wonder and amazement. John wants us to pause and reflect on God's love and allow it to have a healing effect upon our emotional lives and every part of our inner being. Someone who loves you as deeply as God does, cannot and will not let you down. He will be there for you and enable you to face your trials, including depression, and overcome it. God always loves you, even when you are facing the dark storm of depression. God's love is reassuring, revitalizing, and it can release us from the depths of sorrow and emotional woe. Someone wrote:

“Unfailing love flows from his heart and heals my soul,
In spite of who I am, He loves and makes me whole.
I almost can't believe it's true,
Unfailing love and yet I know
He gave his life to give to me unfailing love.”

As a boy, I recall a sign that I would always look at when I went into my old doctor's office. It was the sign “RELAX.” I can still visualize that sign today which is hanging in his office. Of course, in those days, they would give you shots and they would hurt! So, when he went into his little room to get the shot and medicine, I would keep looking at that sign, “RELAX.” I tried to relax even though I knew what was coming! As we look at our next point in the cure of depression, God has called us to relax in life and place our confidence in His sovereign purpose for our lives as we pass through trials, even the trial of depression.

12. Relax in God's sovereign and providential ways over your life.

Psalm 46:10

“Be still (relax), and know that I *am* God (know experientially that He is the only true God): I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”

Prophetically this verse is saying, “Be still and just relax in who I am, the true and only living God, and watch what great works I am going to perform throughout the earth.” Practically it's saying to our lives today, “Be still and just relax in who I am, your personal God, and rest in what I am doing in and through your life right now.” How do we get over depression? By being still and know that He is God, who every day is working out His own purpose in connection with our lives. God is calling us to relax in His sovereign purpose and providential way over our life. We are put our confidence in Him and His purpose that He is bringing to pass in our lives even when we face depression (Rom. 8:28-29). What God allows to come to pass in our lives is His business and we must learn to accept it, work through it, and bow our knee before His purpose that is being accomplished in our lives.

It is good for us to just to stand still and watch the mighty hand of God work in our situation, even when it might involve passing through depression. We must allow Him to teach us the lessons that He wants us to learn, heal us emotionally, and help us to become more Christlike through all of our suffering.

“Be still, my soul; thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the winds and waves still know
His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.”

God is in control. All is well!

Psalm 115:3

“But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”

Are you being still in what God has allowed to occur in your life? God sometimes brings certain difficult times (tests) upon His children by His *direct* hand or touch (Ps. 119:75), so that we might be strengthen in our faith and enhance our spiritual growth (1 Pet. 5:10). At other times, He will by His *indirect* providence allow His children’s lives to pass through certain events (2 Cor. 12:7) to help them become more like Jesus Christ. This verse reminds us that God is in control and His purpose for our lives will come to pass. What we must know is that He is God and that He is bringing His purpose to pass in the way He wants to and that His goal is ultimately to make us more like His Son, Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:28-29 teaches this very thing:

“And we know (The CERTAINTY of God’s providence - we need to know this not only academically but experientially in life) that all things (The SCOPE of God’s providence) work together (the CONTINUITY of God’s providence) for good (the RESULT of God’s providence) to them that love God, to them who are the called (the RECIPIENTS of God’s providence – all of God’s children) according to *his* purpose (the GOAL of God’s providence = God’s sovereign

and saving purpose of making us like Christ as explained in vs. 29). For (the reason everything works together for our good) whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son (to be like Jesus Christ morally and spiritually), that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

The Bible teaches that the present sufferings associated with our lives, which is what Paul had been talking about (vv. 18-25) are directly connected to God’s overall purpose, which He ordained in eternity past – our Christlikeness or glorification (vs. 29-30). In summary, Paul links “God’s purpose” (Christlikeness) with the present (Rom. 8:28) but realizes its origin is in the past (Rom. 8:29-30) to remind the saints that what is occurring in their lives today is a journey that has already been planned by God. But he also connects the present-day status of God’s purpose (Christlikeness) with the future, to remind God’s saints that what is happening in their present lives is preparing them in some small way for the future, when we will actually be glorified and be perfectly like Christ (Rom. 8:23, 30).

Paul reminds us that God is preparing us today to be more like Christ in view of what He purposed in eternity past and when this will happen at the Rapture, when we get a new body and finally meet Jesus (1 John 3:2). If in eternity past God prearranged and predestinated us to perfect Christlikeness, then He will certainly bring this to pass. This means that what is occurring in our lives today (the “all things” related to suffering and by extension everything that happens to us and in our lives, including depression) is used by God to bring about our gradual change and transformation into Christ’s moral likeness and beauty.

When it comes depression, God in His providential workings may allow this emotional darkness to visit our lives in order to bring about His overall goal and purpose, which is to make us more like His Son and cause us to grow in our Christian faith and walk with Him. We must remember that everything has a purpose in our lives (Rom. 8:28) because all the events of our lives are allowed by the hand of a sovereign God who is causing everything to work together for our ultimate good - Christlikeness. That God has a plan for you is vitally important. If God doesn’t have a plan, then life has no

meaning and purpose. Escape through depression sometimes seems like the easy way but it actually is the hard way (Prov. 13:15).

How can all things be “good” (Rom. 8:28)? Depression by itself with all of its negative effects is not good. This is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible does not say everything is good but that everything works together for good. It teaches that God can use depression and weave it together for good as His life-transforming purpose comes to pass in our lives, which is to cause us to be more like His son in our character and conduct. Our part is to learn and grow as we pass through life’s challenging experiences. And we must remember that God is never early or late! He makes everything beautiful in his time (Ecc. 3:11). This means that we must trust in His providential work and way that is occurring in our lives. Nothing happens to us by chance.

“What tho’ the way be lonely,
And dark the shadows fall;
I know where’er it leadeth,
My Father planned it all.
The sun may shine tomorrow,
The shadows break and flee;
‘Twill be the way He chooses,
The Father’s plan for me.”

It takes faith to believe that God has allowed depression to come into your life to bring you into greater conformity to His Son, Jesus Christ. But this is exactly what the Bible teaches. Everything, include suffering with depression, is something that God allows us to pass through. All of our sufferings in our present lives serve as a constant reminder of His great and unfailing purpose to brings us into greater conformity to Christ. We must learn to bow the knee to God’s providential workings in connection with our lives and get on board with His eternal purpose (Christlikeness).

13. Readjust your life to God’s will and purpose.

The last point on God’s general purpose for our lives (Christlikeness) is a natural progression into this point about suffering.

1 Peter 4:19

“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls *to him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

Whether it is persecution for Christ or by extension and application the pain and suffering related to depression, we must remember that we can “suffer according to the will of God” by accepting our trial, learning the lessons that God wants to teach us, and by being sustained by God’s keeping hand during our time of affliction. God has a course for us to follow and His purpose will stand! The promise of hardship relates to all kinds of trials that we pass through. God never promises an easy path.

“God hath not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.

God hath not promised we shall not know
Toil and temptation, trouble and woe;
He hath not told us we shall not bear
Many a burden, many a care.

God hath not promised smooth roads and wide,
Swift, easy travel, needing no guide;
Never a mountain, rocky and steep,
Never a river, turbid and deep.

But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.”

God knows what He is doing! We should therefore commit ourselves to His “well doing” which means that God will do what is right – He knows what He is doing and what is best for our lives. This is possessing faith in God’s providential purpose over our lives. If God allows suffering to come into your life, even depression, then see it as part of His greater purpose to

make you more like His Son (Rom. 8:28). Our suffering is not accident with God. What we need to do is accept it and go on in life.

The word "commit" is in a command form which means "to set something before someone; to deposit, to entrust." This was the technical word for depositing money with a trusted friend. In the ancient days there were no banks and few really safe places in which to deposit money. So, before a man went on a journey, he often left his money in the safe-keeping of a friend. Such a trust was regarded as one of the most sacred things in life. The friend was absolutely bound by all honor to return the money intact.

Peter commands us to place our lives in the Lord's hands, in His keeping and care, as we submit to His will and purpose for our live, whatever that might be, even when are experiencing a bout with depression. This commitment is not a single action but a constant attitude. "Be constantly committing" is the force of the admonition. It takes faith, more faith, and consistent faith to trust the Lord. We are to keep trusting the Lord, forever committing ourselves to Him, His purpose, His power and His help as we pass through suffering.

"I just keep trusting my Lord as I walk a long
I just keep trusting my Lord and He gives a song
Though the storm clouds darken the sky o'er the heav'nly trail
I just keep trusting my Lord, He will never fail
He's a faithful friend, such a faithful friend
I can count on Him to the very end
Though the storm clouds darken the sky o'er the heav'nly trail
I just keep trusting my Lord, He will never fail."

Why can we continually commit our life and even our trials to God? Why can we commit our depression to God? It's because He is a faithful Creator that will take care of us! God not only has created us, but He also sustains us on a moment-by-moment basis. He will never fail us! He will never leave us! He is always there for us to give us the grace we need to go on in life.

“Moment by moment I’m kept in His love;
Moment by moment I’ve life from above;
Looking to Jesus till glory doth shine;
Moment by moment, O Lord, I am Thine.”

1 Corinthians 1:9 promises:

“God *is* faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Thank God He is a faithful Creator to provide for our needs in our times of suffering and stress.

Philippians 4:19 also gives this wonderful promise:

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Like many Christians, Carolina learned that when pain and tragedy strike, God may use that experience to deepen our faith. Carolina Sandell Berg was Swedish and born in 1832. She loved her dad dearly. As she grew older, she often ministered alongside him. When she was only twenty-six, her father died. They were traveling together by ship and were standing together on the deck, reveling in the beauty of creation. For some reason, the ship lurched unsteadily, and her father fell overboard. He drowned before her eyes. The one she cherished was gone. That's when Carolina dug deep within for help from God and found it. That is when she wrote these words:

“Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment,
I’ve no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what he deems best--
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.”

God is our faithful Creator! Don't doubt Him. Rely on Him day by day. He is there for you. He will sustain you, fill you, give you peace, and keep your soul content, so that your life does not have to be overcome by life-debilitating depression.

Ephesians 5:17 says:

"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

We must submit to God's will and purpose for our lives so that we might develop more Christlikeness in our hearts and lives (2 Cor. 3:18). Our part is to respond to trials correctly and readjust to God's purpose for our lives and then ride out the storm. God will give us the life preserver to rescue us and get us to shore as we "commit the keeping of their (our) souls *to him*."

1 Thessalonians 5:18

"In every thing (in the suffering and experience that you are passing though) give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

whatever befalls us in life, including suffering with depression, that we can be sure God has a grand purpose coming to pass, which is to make us more like His Son. Yes, we can actually say:

"I thank you, Lord,
For the trials that come my way.
In that way I can grow each day
As I let you lead,
And thank you, Lord,
For the patience those trials bring.
In that process of growing,
I can learn to care."

This is how we should respond to trials!

14. Reconfirm your faith in God's plan for your life as you face trials.

Again, this naturally follows out of the previous point and might be an extension of it. We must walk through the trial of depression, and any trial that we face, with faith and confidence in God's purpose and provision for our lives.

Proverbs 3:5-6 is a favorite verse of many Christians:

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart (the intensity of faith); and lean not unto thine own understanding (the interruption of faith). In all thy ways acknowledge him (the instruction of faith), and he shall direct thy paths" (the result of faith).

Someone said:

"Sometimes I've gotten depressed when I suffered a disappointment that I didn't process mentally before the Lord. I had hoped and prayed for something, but it didn't happen. If I don't consciously submit my disappointments to the Lord, I can end up feeling depressed, but not knowing exactly why until I think it through. Self-pity is another common cause of depression."

Instead of submitting to depression, we must submit to God's way and purpose over our lives and accept what He allows to come into our lives for His glory ("In all thy ways acknowledge him"). We must acknowledge God's sovereign plan and purpose over our lives, which sometimes involves pain and suffering, to bring about His greater purposes.

Mark 11:22

"And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God."

I Peter 1:6-7

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season (the season of trials), if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations (the test of trials): That the trial of your faith (the focus of trials), being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (the reward of trials).

Yes, our faith is tested, but a faith that is not tested cannot be trusted! We need to be growing in faith in relation to God's plan, purpose, and provision for our lives. This is the only way to overcome depression. By faith, we must acknowledge God's sovereign right to allow depression to occur in our life, so that we might grow in our faith, pass through the season, and come out on the other side stronger in our Christian life.

15. Remain faithful to God.

Depressed people often separate themselves from God's people and service. This is exactly what the devil wants us to do when we become depressed. He wants us to cut off the lifeline to Church, God's people, and serving the Lord.

1 Corinthians 4:2 reminds us:

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

1 Corinthians 15:58 adds these words:

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Jesus said in Matthew 6:33:

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Life's Greatest Priority is found in Matthew 6:33.

- ✓ It begins with a consistent desire – "seek ye first"
- ✓ It involves clear direction – "the kingdom of God and his righteousness"
- ✓ It ends with countless dividends – "and all these things shall be added unto you"

If we remain faithful and put God first place in our lives, we will then be in the right place to overcome depression and any other type of suffering that we are encountering "for all these things shall be added unto you." If we

have put God in the backseat, then guess what, we won't be able to find a spiritual edge on depression. Don't cave to your depression and become lost in the woodwork. God rewards faithfulness (2 Cor. 9:7-8). Remain faithful to God by attending church, staying in the Scriptures devotionally, serving the Lord, and walking close to Him. As we remain active and faithful to the Lord, He will enable you to deal with your depression, and you will eventually pass through it.

Tennessee Titans' center, Kevin Long, who played under Coach Bobby Bowden at Florida State University, said his college coach inspired the team with parables. Kevin recounted a favorite story: Bowden was playing college baseball, and he had never hit a home run. Finally, he hit one down the right-field line, into the corner. He rounded first and looked to the third-base coach. He turned at second, was halfway to third and the coach was still waving him on to home plate where he arrived safely. He had his first home run. He was so excited and everybody was slapping him with high fives. Then the pitcher took the ball, threw it to the first baseman, and the umpire called him out. Coach Bowden said, "If you don't take care of first base, it doesn't matter what you do."

In a similar way, if you don't honor the Lord and put Him first in your life (Matt. 6:33), it doesn't matter what else you do. In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus stresses to us the importance of stepping on first base before you attempt to step on the other bases. In other words, He is dealing with the issue of our priorities and the focus of our lives by dealing with what we treasure in our hearts and place first in our lives. Something or someone is always going to be first in your life. God's challenge in this section is to put Him first and invest in heavenly treasures.

A.W. Tozer has rightly said:

"As God is exalted to the right place in our lives, a thousand problems are solved all at once."

This is very true. When we are obedient to God, do what is right, and keep our eyes on Him, it's then that we can expect to resolve life's problems and pass through trials victoriously. There is no replacement for faithfulness,

obedience, and putting God first in your life. When all else fails, continue to remain obedient to God and do what you know is right. It will pay off!

16. Read God's Word for guidance and direction.

Gipsy Smith told of a man who said he had received no inspiration from the Bible although he had "gone through it several times." "Let it go through you once," replied Smith, "Then you will tell a different story!"

R. A. Torrey said:

"You may talk about power; but, if you neglect the one Book that God has given you as the one instrument through which He imparts and exercises His power, you will not have it. You may read many books and go to many conventions and you may have your all-night prayer meetings to pray for the power of the Holy Ghost; but unless you keep in constant and close association with the one Book, the Bible, you will not have power. And if you ever had power, you will not maintain it except by the daily, earnest, intense study of that Book. Ninety-nine Christians in every hundred are merely playing at Bible study; and therefore ninety-nine Christians in every hundred are mere weaklings, when they might be giants, both in their Christian life and in their service."

We must always remember the spiritual value of meditating on God's Word during our battle with depression.

2 Timothy 3:16 reminds us of the sanctifying effect of God's word:

"All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine (teaching), for reproof (conviction), for correction (changing), for instruction in righteousness" (holiness). That the man of God may be perfect (maturity), throughly furnished (fully equipped) unto all good works.

Yes, the Bible "Is profitable for doctrine." Scripture is good "for doctrine" which means teaching. The teachings of the Bible, including the doctrinal and devotional aspects of God's Word, enable us to know the truth and live by it no matter what we might be facing in life. God's Word is very profitable to us if we are passing through depression. It's profitable in that

it provides us with God's precious promises and points us in the right direction.

It is also good "for reproof," which means conviction. Studying the Bible should bring conviction to us. In fact, this is the way you can test whether the Word of God is working in your life. If you read the Bible like any other book, then the Spirit of God is not moving in your heart. But if the Bible convicts you, then you know the Holy Spirit is at work within you. Sometimes we need to be convicted about our depressed state and realize that this is not what God has purposed for our life. God's Word gives us some much-needed reproof at certain times in our life because we need to be convicted to change.

The Bible is also good "for correction" which means that it is constantly setting things right in your life. It corrects our error, our wrong thinking, and sins, and redirects our path away from depression and other bad habits. It gets us spiritually refocused and reoriented once again.

Ultimately, the Scriptures are "for instruction in righteousness, (teaching that results in righteous or God-honoring living) that the man of God might be perfect (to be complete or mature), thoroughly furnished (fully equipped) unto all good works." This means that God's Word instructs us, matures us in our Christian life and equips or prepares us to live the Christian life, according to God's righteous standards, so we can face life and live it to the fullest. The grace of God teaches us to live godly lives (Titus 2:12). The Word of God traces out in detail the things which make up a godly life and which enables us to excel spiritually. The words of Scripture reach down into the nooks and crannies of our lives and meet every need in our lives, even those spiritual needs that we face during depression.

What do we learn from this verse? We discover that the unchanging and powerful truths and promises of Scripture can lift us out of depression and once again restore and equip us for the future. The Word of God will get the job done! We must allow it to grab hold of our hearts and lives so that we might become all that God wants us to be and be rescued from the doldrums of the depressed life.

Martin Luther once said:

“The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me.”

Psalm 119:105 gives this promise:

“Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet (daily guidance), and a light unto my path (future guidance).”

We need the lamp and light of God’s Word today moving in our hearts and lives and ultimately guiding us in the right way. There are many false lights in the world today. We can be sure that all the promises and guidance that we receive from God’s eternal Word will serve us well during our time of depression. God’s Word comforts us, directs us, refreshes us, sustains us, and reshapes us as we pass through trials.

Most Christian counseling approaches today take the Bible out of the first counseling session. The claim is made by the so-called experts that using the Bible the first time may take advantage of someone in a vulnerable position. However, this approach relegates God and the Bible to a subordinate position. It is completely unbiblical and means God is simply a supplement to the other “more relevant” techniques and therapies that are used according to man’s wisdom.

My granddaughter Natalie was sitting in her chair eating chicken fingers. I don’t know why they call them chicken fingers because I didn’t think chickens had fingers! Anyway, as we were coaxing her to eat her organic, maple chicken fingers, she began singing these words:

“The B-I-B-L-E
Yes, that's the book for me,
I stand alone on the Word of God
The B-I-B-L-E.”

It’s still true!

17. Refocus your eyes on God’s sacrifice of His Son.

Hebrews 12:1-2

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses (*the past warriors of faith*), let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us (the personal requirements for victory), and let us run with patience the race that is set before us (*perseverance in our Christian life*), Looking unto Jesus (*our present focus in life*) the author and finisher of *our* faith (*our perfect hero*); who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame (*the passion of Christ*), and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (*the position of Christ*).

This reminds us as Christians to keep our focus and eyes on Jesus, who provides for us the greatest example of living by faith, when He followed the Father’s will and died on Calvary’s cross for our sins. Let me put it this way. At the cross, Christ has taken your story of misery upon Himself and He has given you His story of redemption and hope! Christ’s sacrifice and His victory at the Father’s right hand helps us to refocus in life. When we keep our eyes on Jesus, what He has done for us to give us a new way of life, we should not want to remain spiritually dormant and depressed in life. We should want to stay in the race and live for Jesus Christ.

Looking unto Jesus, His gracious work on the cross for us, should keep us living by faith as Christ did and should provide us with great incentive to keep moving forward in our Christian life. Living in the defeat of depression is not living by faith, as Jesus did. Allowing depression to defeat our lives is not living by faith as Jesus did. Also, when depression gets the better part of us, we have forgotten that Jesus died to free us from this type of hopelessness and despair. Friends, we need to remember His great love and passion for us, so we can be inspired to stay in the race, by getting rid of the spiritual weight and sin in our lives. Depression can be a real heavyweight and become a sin in our life when we allow it to defeat our spiritual life.

Hebrews 12:1-2 is reminding us to put aside the distractions of life, including depression, ignore the worries that sap us of our energy and time and focus instead on Jesus! The antidote or cure for depression is to keep looking unto Jesus! His faith inspires us to go on in victory. His death on the

cross reminds us that He died to give us victory and a new way of life. In fact, His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father reminds us of the great victory He won for us over every sin and ever barrier that keeps us from living victoriously. We cannot control when the pain will come in our life, but we can decide how long that pain will continue. If we keep looking to Jesus, we can be inspired to live by faith instead of being overcome by depression and emotional defeat.

Hebrews 2:9

“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”

“Open our eyes, Lord
We want to see Jesus,
To reach out and touch Him,
And say that we love Him.
Open our ears, Lord, and help us to listen
Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus.”

18. Retrace God’s past works and wonders in your life.

Psalm 77:11-12

“I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings.”

Psalm 44:1-2

“We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, *what* work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. *How* thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; *how* thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out.”

As we pass through the dark days of depression, we can look back and remember that God has always helped us in the past and met our needs! This helps us to realize that He can and will do the same for us today. I don’t want to drop a bomb on anyone today. But I can’t meet your needs! The psychologist cannot meet your needs. Only God can meet your needs.

You must be dependent upon God. When has God ever let you down? Looking back causes us to remember God's past provisions and victories. It reminds us that if God was faithful in the past, He will certainly be faithful today and in the future.

Psalm 37:28

"For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off."

God will never forsake His saints! What are these verses teaching us? Sometimes we must go back before we go forward. Of course, we should not live in the past. If we live in the past, then we will become stagnate in the present! But we can remember what God has done for us and how He has blessed our lives and has never failed us ("I will remember thy wonders of old" – Ps. 77:11). We must remember how God has saved us and how He began to shape our lives and change our lives and how He was always there for us – even when we did not know it initially. Listen, if we forget the blessings of the past, then we will forget the blessings and provisions of the Lord and how He can deliver us today from depression and any heavy trial that we are facing. Yes, we need to remember the good old days of God's marvelous blessings! We must remember that the same God who has blessed in the past is still blessing us today! "Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou has declared thy strength among the people" (Ps. 77:14).

The past blessings of God can become a foundation for which we can keep living victoriously in the present. The past blessings of God will inspire us to go on in the present! Since God has always met my needs in the past, then He will continue to meet my truest needs today and in the future. We should not become stuck in the past but at the same time we must remember God's work and blessings in our hearts and lives in the past. These past blessings provide us with hope and deliverance for the present.

"Roll back the curtain of memory now and then;
Show me where You brought me from,
And where I could have been.
Just remember, I'm human and humans forget,
So remind me, remind me, dear Lord!"

19. Restart every day in God's presence and fellowship with Him.

Psalm 5:3

"My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up."

Looking up to God in the morning, through prayer and meditation, is our spiritual coffee that gets us going. When we don't drink our coffee, we can become sluggish. The same is true when we don't have our spiritual coffee in the morning. We can begin to lose our spiritual edge in life.

Mark 1:35 reveals the practice of Jesus:

"And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed."

We might call this the morning manna from Heaven! We spend time with the Heavenly Father in prayer and draw upon His strength and grace for another day. When we are battling with depression, we need the morning manna. We need to remain connected with the Heavenly Father through prayer and meditation. Jesus took time for daily prayer. People at the house were waiting to be healed. The crowds were gathering and eagerly anticipating a glimpse of Him so they could speak to Him. But Jesus didn't let the agenda of others determine what He knew was right. He took time to pray.

Jesus knew the importance of spiritual refreshment. Regular, uninterrupted time with God was so important to Him that He put everything else aside. Jesus knew that helping others was no substitute for doing God's will in His own life. Jesus refused to let other things take the place of what He knew was right for Himself. Prayer was very important to the Son of God and it should be important to us as well. As we face life's demands, or if we are suffering with depression, we must take more time to pray and remain "prayed up" for this gives us spiritual strength and stability in life.

"Whisper a prayer in the morning
Whisper a prayer at noon
Whisper a prayer in the evening,
To keep your heart in tune.

God answers prayer in the morning
God answers prayer at noon
God answers prayer in the evening
So keep your heart in tune.”

Perhaps the words of David express how you sometimes feel.

Psalm 55:1-2

“Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise” (to murmur and be distraught).

David was saying that his thoughts troubled him and he was very distraught. Do you feel like this sometimes? Evidently, you're not alone. David was Israel's greatest king and the composer of more psalms than any other person, but even he had times of emotional difficulty. As the psalm suggests, however, David did not stay isolated. Instead, he poured out his heart to God in prayer. In doing so, he learned an important lesson and he has passed it on for us today.

Psalm 62:8

“Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God *is* a refuge for us. Selah.”

We see that many who were depressed, like David, recommitted themselves to God’s fellowship.

Psalm 42:1-2

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?”

James 4:8 reminds us to:

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, ye sinners; and purify *your* hearts, ye double minded.”

Fellowship with God, openness with God, walking close to the Lord is vitally important as we face depression and seek to be released from this

stubborn darkness. When we are depressed, we need to possess open and honest communication with God and fellowship with Him. We need to practice the presence of God!

“There is a place of quiet rest,
Near to the heart of God,
A place where sin cannot molest,
Near to the heart of God.
O Jesus, blest Redeemer,
sent from the heart of God,
hold us, who wait before thee,
near to the heart of God.”

God is your refuge (Ps. 46:10). He wants to listen to you and fellowship with you. When we are depressed, we need to keep communicating with Him and stay close to Him. As we do, we will find our depression diluted, our mood lifted, and our emotions strengthened.

20. Review God’s new opportunities and ministries for your life.

When we are down and experience emotional trauma, sometimes the way out is to look for new open doors to walk through.

Revelation 3:7 gives this promise:

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.”

From a practical standpoint, we need to remember the open doors of service and opportunities that God wants to give to us. Instead of living in the dungeon of despair, we need to make a point to step through some doors of service that He has opened for us. These opportunities will get us off the cycle of drowning in our self-pity and sorrows and enable us to do something for God and others.

1 Corinthians 16:9

“For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.”

When you are facing depression, resubmit yourself to God's cause and finish well! Don't live in the dungeon and allow depression to overtake your life and keep you bound in chains. Instead, make small steps to serve God and recommit yourself to slowly get back to spiritual commitments.

2 Timothy 4:7-8

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

If anyone had the right to be overtaken and defeated by depression, it was Paul (2 Cor. 11:23-28). Paul speaks about suffering with much credibility. But he realized that living under the power of emotional defeat would not allow him to finish his Christian life victoriously and receive the reward that God wants to give him.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal."

This is what we need when depression is seeking to overtake our lives. We need God's daily renewal. It is there for us every day and every moment.

"Ev'ry day the Lord himself is near me
with a special mercy for each hour;
all my cares he fain would bear, and cheer me,
he whose name is Counselor and Pow'r.
The protection of his child and treasure
is a charge that on himself he laid;
"As your days, your strength shall be in measure,"
this the pledge to me he made."

When we are bound to depression, we must make the choice to stop living in a bubble and remember the new spiritual adventures and opportunities that God has for our life. When we are battling through depression, as hard as it might be, we must keep vision in our heart and life. Don't become a musty, dusty, grumpy Christian! Depression has a way of putting us on a spiritual shelf where we are no longer usable to God. We must remember that God always has new and exciting, spiritual opportunities for us to experience. We must seek to engage ourselves in God's service – not remain engaged in depression and emotional defeat. When we are excited about God's work and stay focused on new spiritual opportunities, it can keep us from living in defeat and depression.

21. Reconnect with God's people.

We have mentioned the importance of this on several occasions already in this study. Let me say again, it's amazing how depressed people stay away from church.

Psalm 84:10

"For a day in thy courts *is* better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

Hebrews 10:24-25

"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

Martin Luther said:

"Isolation is poison for the depressed person, for through this the devil attempts to keep him in his power."

When you are depressed, there is a great temptation to pull yourself into a shell and stay away from everyone. This means to stop attending church and associating with God's saints. David, who experienced depression, realized that he needed the fellowship of God's people. Depressed David

in Psalm 42:4 is seen attending God's House: "When I remember these *things*, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday."

Knox gives this rendering of David's memories:

"Memories come back to me yet, melting the heart; how once I would join with the throng, leading the way to God's house, amid cries of joy and thanksgiving, and all the bustle of holiday."

The psalmist was consumed with thoughts of the worship of God that he had experienced at the temple in Jerusalem among throngs of joyful believers (Ps. 100). Generally, the focus of worship in the Book of Psalms is on the community worshipping together which is also seen in the New Testament (Acts 2:40–47).

Hebrews 13:15-16

"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

God's House with God's people is where we sing God's praise. Giving joy and praise together is a strengthening point in our lives. It brings spiritual joy into our hearts. It lifts us out of the gloom and doom and takes us to another level of spiritual victory. Praise with God's people delivers us from depression.

"With a voice of singing declare ye this, and let it be heard, Alleluia!
Utter it even unto the ends of the earth.
The Lord hath delivered His people, Alleluia!
O be joyful in God, all ye lands.
O sing praises to the honor of His name,
Make His praise to be glorious.
With a voice of singing, declare ye this,
And let it be heard, Alleluia!"

Praising God in worship with other Christians is a great help to overcoming discouragement and depression. We need the fellowship of God's saints. Worshipping with saints and maintaining contact with the saints is vitally important as you face depression. In general, we need each other to be encouraged, to receive guidance, and remind us of our victory through Christ.

Proverbs 11:14 declares:

"Where no counsel *is*, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors *there is safety.*"

Proverbs 24:6 adds:

"For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors *there is safety.*"

Someone wrote:

"Communication, of course, is a two-way street. Both the act of sharing and the act of listening help you gain perspective. Reaching out to someone else forces you out of your hole of isolation. Airing your fears robs them of much of their power. Exposing them to the light of day makes them pale and less significant."

We need to keep open lines of communication through meaningful dialogue with God's saints, receive Biblical counseling where necessary, and remain connected as we pass through the trial of depression. This means that we must make the decision to communicate with God's people in God's House and wherever we can receive encouragement and counsel. Don't shortchange yourself as depression seeks to override your life. We need to refrain from pity parties and promote God's Word and praise. Praise changes things!

Psalms 119:172

"My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments *are* righteousness."

Psalms 145:21

"My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever."

John Wesley's Journal, April 21, 1764, records this:

“I visited one who was ill in bed; and, after having buried seven of her family in six months, had just heard that the eighth, her beloved husband, was cast away at sea. I asked, ‘Do not you fret at any of those things?’ She said, with a lovely smile upon her pale cheek, ‘O, no! How can I fret at anything which is the will of God? Let Him take all besides: He has given me Himself. I love, I praise Him every moment.’”

Praise delivers us from depression! Let us never forget this! It’s important to know yourself. If your depression is just a minor mood swing, like a pilot flying in a minor turbulence, you make a slight adjustment and don’t get too concerned. But if you’re in a nosedive, you need to take some drastic action to avoid a crash. Prolonged depression comes when we allow our feelings to control us. Destruction outside of us leads to destruction inside of us. If you sense you are emotionally paralyzed, the cures stated above may be of great help to you. Talk to the saints, worship with them, and seek out good Biblical counsel. The Bible says that we must discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.

1 Timothy 4:7

“But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself *rather* unto godliness.”

Discipline, by definition, means going against my feelings. I may not feel like exercising, but if I’m disciplined, I do it anyway. I may feel like spending money impulsively, but if I’m disciplined, I go against my feelings because I have decided to live by a budget. Discipline means that we must confront our depression and bring it under the control of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:18, 22-25). The Lord wants us to take steps to get out of our troubles and trials. Meditation on scripture (especially the Psalms), prayer, and other spiritual disciplines often can make available what the Bible calls “the balm of Gilead” that heals the sin-sick soul (Jeremiah 8:22).

Remember that depression often is not just something we have; it is something we do. We must act on the truth and God’s provision to counter depression. Those who are depressed and seek help must first accept the challenge to live in faithful obedience to God, even though they

do not feel like it and are skeptical that anything will make a difference. It's important to have faith. Also, you must remember that progress out of the horrible pit of depression (Ps. 40:2) is step-by-step, bit-by-bit. Small, practical, consistent faith-based change occurs in the details of life.

Here are some of the signs of depression:

- Gloom and pessimism (Ps. 32:3)
- Apathy and fatigue (Ps. 32:4)
- Hopelessness (Ps. 38:2-4 and 10)
- Physical problems — backaches, headaches, etc. (Ps. 38:5-8)
- Withdrawal — often blaming others (Ps. 38:11; 55:6-8)
- Feelings and knowledge of guilt (Ps 51:3).
- Sleeplessness — or restless sleep (Ps 42:2, 3)
- Loss of productivity (I Kings 19:3-5)
- Thoughts of death or suicide (I Kings 19:4).

You must look at your lifestyle problems, such as overworking, lack of exercise, sleep difficulties, procrastination, unresolved stressors, and the absence of spiritual disciplines. Resolve these conflicts. Deal with troubled relationships, past or present. Get to work. Perform acts of service for the benefit of others. Helping others can provide a new perspective on life and take your eyes off of yourself (John 13:5; Gal. 5:13). Stop drowning in self-pity which often surfaces from those who are resentful and guilty. You may think that you have a right to feel depressed, but unless you give up this right and yield to God for victory (Rom. 6:13), your depression will never leave.

Make a list of the Biblical principles on how to overcome depression. Ask other people to pray for you. Make a “think and do” list, or profitable things you can think about and how to respond when you are tempted to be depressed. Make a list of 50 or 75 blessings that God has bestowed on your life. Make a conscious effort to remember the goodness of the Lord (Ps. 103:2). By faith and with thanksgiving give praise to God for what He wants to do in your life and is doing. Make a list of your spiritual responsibilities. Write down everything the Bible says regarding His purposes for hardships (Job 23:10; Romans 5:1-4; 8:14-29; James 1:2-4,

Philippians 1:12-19| Psalm 23:1-4; 76:10; Isaiah 50:10; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Hebrews 12:1-15; Proverbs 15:13, 15; 119:67, 71, Job 5:17-18; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11, 1 Peter 1:6-7).

Look for the meaning in your suffering. Ask God to show you how you can grow as a person from your suffering, and how you can use what you've learned to help others who are suffering in similar ways (2 Cor. 1:3). Ask yourself: "How do I feel about what is happening to me?" "How can I get some help?" "How can I learn from this?" "How can I make positive changes in my situation?" "How can I change my attitude?"

Depression doesn't tell you the truth. It says that you are all alone, that no one loves you, that God doesn't care, that you will never feel any different, and you cannot go on another day. Even your spouse and children don't seem like a reason to stay alive when depression is at its worst. Your mind tells you, everyone will be better off without me. But this is a lie—they will not be better off without you. If you're thinking about committing suicide, talk with someone you trust right away and get those thoughts out of your mind. Realize that, if you were to commit suicide, it would cause great harm to everyone who loves you. Know that God offers you real hope. Turn to Him and trust that your life will get better.

Confess your sins to God. Tap into the power of God's forgiveness. Establish a regular time of Bible study and devotional time of prayer with God. Draw strength from Scripture. Reclaim your mind from negative thoughts by replacing them with Biblical thoughts. Whenever a negative thought enters your mind, shock yourself into stopping it. Then replace each negative thought with the truth. Your main objective in life should be to glorify God, and this will only happen as you become more Biblical in your living and thinking.

The following summary of Scriptures will aid the process:

- I can do everything because Christ gives me strength (Phil. 4:13).
- God is able to make all grace abound to me (2 Cor. 9:8).
- I am accepted and loved by God (Rom. 5:1-2; 8:38-39).

- I hunger and thirst after righteousness so I can find fulfillment in life (Matt. 5:6).
- The anointing from God remains in me (1 John 2:27).
- I am a child of the heavenly Father (Gal. 4:5–7).
- I am an heir of God and a co-heir with Christ (Gal. 3:29; Rom. 8:17).
- I can experience the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).
- I belong to God (1 Pet. 2:9).
- I have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:9).
- I am blessed with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3).
- Christ is my life (Col. 3:4).
- I am free (Rom. 8:2).
- I am a friend of God (John 15:14–15).
- I am precious in God's sight (Isa. 43:4).
- I lack no wisdom (James 1:5).
- I can have power, love, and a sound mind (2 Tim. 1:7).
- I am not condemned (Rom. 8:1).
- I can have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16).
- I am favored by God (Ps. 5:12).
- I am God's handiwork (Eph. 2:10; 2 Cor. 5:17).
- God will never forsake me (Heb. 13:5).
- I have victory through Jesus (1 Cor. 15:57).

Identify what the triggers of your depression are and then get help and begin to work through them in a Biblical way. Remember that bumps are what you climb on! Reject the guilt, embrace the cure, and bask in God's forgiveness. Understand that depression sometimes can come because of false guilt. If there has been incest in the family, a child often experiences depression later in life. The unresolved feelings of guilt may lead to hostility and depression. Whether it's guilt from sin or a false guilt, God can gradually erase these emotional feelings that lead to depression. Let go of what you can't change, and change what you can.

One anonymous young woman writes this: "Hello I'm normally an optimistic person and full of life. But lately it has been such a struggle to even want to get out of bed in the mornings. I'm a student at a Christian

college, and I am very grateful for all the lessons God is teaching me here, but I dread going to class. This is so discouraging because I moved many miles so that I could come to this school. Deep down I don't doubt God still wants me here, but I don't think he wants me to have this attitude about life.

"Is this depression? I have almost no motivation for anything. I have been praying, and I will keep praying for God to be my strength but how do you fight when you don't feel like fighting? Each morning brings with it a desire to stay in bed for days so I don't have to face life. I truly hate feeling this way because I feel I have lost my joy in God's will for me. I feel oppressed by the powers of this dark world, and I don't see an escape."

Have you been emotionally handicapped? It is tempting to hide your head under a pillow when the storms come crashing down, but your troubles will be waiting for you when you come out from hiding, and your responsibilities will have compounded. Irresponsibility leads to greater depression. Refuse to pull down the shade of self-pity and do not withdraw from others. Fulfill your God-given responsibilities to take care of your family and maintain a job. Don't stay in bed and lounge around. God promised Israel fear and sorrow if they would not obey Him (Deut. 28:65). When we begin to function and stop pampering ourselves, our depression recedes. God honors obedience. Develop a life of praise! Satan hates praise and he is defeated when we praise God.

What if your depression continues? Will you always struggle with depression? That is like asking, "Will suffering ever be over?" Although we will have hardships in this world, depression rarely keeps a permanent grip on anyone. When we add to that the hope, purpose, power, and comfort we find in Christ, depressed people can usually anticipate a ray of hope or a lifting of their spirits. If your depression has not ceased, recall that God may be teaching you to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). And remember that your emotional trauma does not separate you from God's love (Rom. 8:38-39). God is still with you and slowly and eventually you will be delivered from your emotional defeat. And remember, one victory does not win the entire war. The Christian life is a series of victories and new beginnings (Gal. 5:16, 25).

A woman who experienced two full years of depression asked, “Why didn’t somebody tell me it would get better someday?” Then she added, “I would have been able to cope more easily.” Through following a Biblical cure of depression, we can find relief from living in the blues. Remember that God wants to turn your night to day!

Psalm 139:11-12

“If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light *are* both alike *to thee.*”

What feels like darkness to you is not darkness to God. He’s lives in the light (1 John 1:7), and He knows how to take care of you by bringing light and meaningfulness into your life.

Isaiah 43:2-3

“When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.”

Shortly before Super Bowl XXXIII, Dan Reeves, the coach of the Atlanta Falcons, underwent bypass surgery for coronary artery disease. Publically, he credited Jesus Christ with his recovery. He said God had sent him “angels in white coats” to heal him. As you prepare to be the victor over your depression, please realize that God can use doctors and nurses and counselors as his instruments of healing. Don't try to do it on your own. Listen to the wisdom of the Holy Spirit and seek out a godly pastor, a friend, or a health-care professional that God has raised up to help take care of you. Maybe you need to see a physician to rule out physical causes related to your depression.

Getting rid of depression is not a one-way agreement. In order for Jesus Christ to accomplish all these things, you must agree to give Him total control and allegiance of your life. You must allow Him direct your life—your habits, decisions, and relationships. Your prayer should be this: “I will

give Jesus Christ all my fears, all my guilt, all my sins, and all my mistakes.” As depression seeks to gain hold on your mind and heart, you must fine-tune your emotional, psychological, and spiritual life. Rather than ignoring the anxiety and depression you feel, face your feelings and ask: “What’s going on?” and “How do I feel about it?” and “Do I want to change?” For those afflicted with depression, please understand you are not alone in your feelings, you are not going out of your mind, confusion is common, and the dark black cloud can be lifted.

Here is good advice. Today, relax and reach out to a waiting God who wants to touch the darkness and clouds within your mind and bring new life and new order to your soul. You can find God’s grace (Heb. 4:16) when your world turns upside down!

A little boy was leading his sister up a mountain path and the way was not too easy. “Why, this isn’t a path at all,” the little girl complained. “It’s all rock and bumpy.” And her brother replied, “Sure, the bumps are what you climb on.” Friend, this is much more than just philosophy. It actually is good advice that relates to how we overcome depression. We must claim our victory in Christ and climb over our troubles and get above them (Isa. 40:31). In fact, we can use the bumps of life as stepping-stones to climb higher in our spiritual living. Don’t remain under depression, step on it, get above it, and get over it with God’s grace. He will see you through!

The secret to climbing higher is to look away from yourself and your difficulties, and keep “looking unto Jesus” (Heb. 12:2) for inspirational faith, deliverance, and victory (Heb. 12:2). We are not to look at ourselves, our circumstances, our troubles, or the bumps in the road, but keep looking unto Jesus! In Christ we find our healing and comfort.

Psalm 91:1

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

“When shadows fall and the night covers all
There are things that my eyes cannot see.
I never fear, for the Saviour is near.
My LORD abides with me!

When I'm alone and I face the unknown
And I fear what the future may be,
I can depend on the strength of my Friend!
He walks along with me.

How can I fear? Jesus is near!
He ever watches over me!
Worries all cease; He gives me peace.
How can I fear with Jesus?"