

Depression

It seems that I had depression all my life

“...For though I fall, I will rise again! When I sit in the darkness, the Lord will be my light” (Micah 7:8)

“The number one disabling illness in Australia today is neither cancer nor heart disease. It's depression. Depression is a major risk for suicide. Becoming isolated by withdrawing from social activities and being embarrassed about feeling down are common behaviour patterns... Depression is often not recognised or treated”, says www.beyondblue.org.au.

It seems that I had depression all my life. I remember that even in preschool I used to get awfully upset which seemed unreasonable to all other people around. But I found out about my depression only a few years ago. Few times I wished I could suicide, and because it was that serious I went to a GP to get some suggestions if something could be done. He referred me to a psychologist (free visits). She was not very useful, in some ways I felt worse. So I went to my GP (who was extremely nice and tried his best to help me), and I asked for a re-referral to a different psychologist who was recommended to me. I had 6 free visits from her. Then I wanted to see her more and I got a new referral to see her (for free) 6 more times. By then I was much better and felt like I didn't need her help anymore. I met a sister who used to have postnatal depression, talking and emailing her was my next step in getting better. It's easier to fight it now, when I learnt how it effects people, and when I have my 'weapons' (tips for being happy described further) to fight it.

The reason I write is to possibly help others who live through depression, to support them, to encourage people to support each other. And I have a “selfish” reason – to be useful.

Who do I write for? I guess there are 3 main steps of depression: 1 step - person denies or not sure that he has depression, 2 step – person finds out how serious his condition is, and tries to find ways to help his situation, 3 step – getting stronger and stronger in a battle (or dealing) with depression. (Everyone who suffers from depression is different, totally different are the set of circumstances in their lives and in their personalities that could have lead to their depression.)

Depression is a medical illness, it's not a weakness, it's not a punishment for wrongs, it's not a flaw in your character. Being depressed is not a sin, depressed people are not responsible for having an illness, but person is responsible for how he reacts to his affliction, how he tries to overcome it, including getting the professional help he needs. Nothing is impossible for God. God loves you and wants you to get better. He will use some people to help you. Do not turn away from them. When you feel upset or hopeless tell close people (or people who have been through depression) how you feel. That's the most important thing you can do for your depression – GET HELP. Some people won't be able to help much, because your depression is a mystery to them, they don't know what's happening to you or how they can help. But encourage them to read about depression. And if you are looking for help, you WILL meet other people, who can and want to help you. They would rather share your 'burden' for months (or even years), than for you to be unhappy or loose you.

But first I will address people WITHOUT depression. Before you condemn a depressed person for being careless, lazy, selfish, jealous and what not, before you give them advice, before you try to help in any way, with a prayer, with a humble attitude (which Jesus taught us to have while judging/rebuking others) try to find more information about how depression effects people. Can you get rid of your headache, hot flushes or cancer if someone tells you to snap out of it? People, who say that depressed person needs to just pull himself together, may mean well, but their lack of understanding can make things worse. Depression is an illness, a chemical imbalance in the brain.

The symptoms of depression

(Presence of 2 or more symptoms can indicate depression)

- Depressed (low) mood most of the day
- Loss of interest and pleasure
- Sleeping difficulties
- Tiredness or loss of energy
- Feeling worthless
- Difficulty concentrating
- Thoughts of death
- Increased irritability and frustration
- More sensitivity to minor personal criticisms
- Increased physical health complaints like fatigue or pain
- Avoiding friends and family

Ways to fight depression (what worked for me)

Some of the following suggestions can seem almost impossible to follow, when you are depressed. Well, we can only try, and when we don't have strength to go on, just have to hope on God's help.

There's nothing more important in your life than God and His Word. He can help even if nobody else can. He is with you, when you are by yourself. Your brain doesn't work well when you are depressed, but when you have a bad time, try to remember about God. He gives us depression for a reason, it's a horrible experience to go through, but later when it's not so bad, you can see His reasons. Keep on reading the Bible even if it's just the chapters you like best. Some people with depression find it very difficult to pray.

1. When you are stressed, go for a walk. Simply being in the fresh air already helps. (May issue of CSS Newsletter has more self-help strategies.) Exercise is a must, best not to use it as "think time" - get a MP3 player and listen to music or a talk instead. Some people find yoga is very helpful.
2. Keep in touch with people. Talking to people who experienced depression was one of the most helpful things for me. Keeping in touch with people who didn't have that experience, can be painful, but it still helps. If you're feeling depressed, don't bottle it up. Find someone to talk to or write a diary. (If possible find projects where you can help others. You might be surprised how much it helps you to reach out to others in need.)
3. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Depression is a serious illness and requires treatment. Talk to your GP, ask him for a referral to see a psychologist. If you are not happy with one psychologist (or service you are using), do not despair, look for somebody who's more satisfactory, it may take time.
4. Catch and stop negative thinking. Strive to be positive. It can help if you try to stop negative thoughts as though they are sinful thoughts (I don't say they are sinful). Because when one thinks something sinful, he should stop it straight away, otherwise it will get worse. If every attempt to be positive crashes into negative thoughts about the past or the future events, try to stop thinking about serious things, just be, do things, distract yourself (e.g. have a cuppa, read, listen to music, sing, watch a movie, have a shower, a bath or go to sleep).
5. Try your best not to compare yourself to others. Do what you can in your own pace. Set little goals, praise yourself when you succeed. When things don't go right, it is a learning experience. God has reasons for everything, however annoying and devastating things seem to us. It is natural for a depressed person to be muddle headed and not to function as well as other people. So try not to feel guilty for your sickness. That's just what is given you. We can't argue with God,

just have to live with it and try our best. You will get better with time.

6. When you think that others criticize you, remember most people have no idea what depression is. You can share your thoughts and feelings with somebody else or you can write them down. Then try to concentrate on positive thinking. Or find some positive activity, which will distract you from negative thoughts.
7. Try to read about depression. There are some great books on the subject, self-help books, or stories of overcoming depression, which you can get from your local library. Search for ways to get better.
8. Find things, which you like doing or something you always wanted to do. Make a list of them. Plan them into your week. They are your reward for every little bit of work you are doing. Reading books with humour was extremely helpful for me. Creative activities help a lot. At first you might not find them as enjoyable as you normally would, but if you persist, the enjoyment will eventually return.
9. Look after your appearance.
10. Reduce stress when possible.
11. Be patient. Good days, enjoyment of life will come back. Fight for your happiness. You'll get stronger and stronger, but it takes time.

How can you help the person with depression?

“Being with a person who is depressed is exhausting. People who are depressed find it hard to communicate and are very sensitive to criticism. The sun may be shining and everything may seem fine to you, but a depressed person will see nothing but gloom and disaster. They are very irritable, and young people may be hostile and aggressive,” from the awesome book ‘Stress and Depression’ written by Sarah Lennard-Brown for teenagers, but excellent for any age (available in libraries).

Even if a depressed person wants help, he might have no idea how others can help him, because it is very difficult for him to think, to concentrate, to make decisions.

- Make extra efforts to stay in contact. Spend time with them. Take the time to talk about what's going on. Be patient. “You may have to hear the same tale of woe again and again. This is part of a natural healing of the mind and can be very helpful for the sufferer,” from ‘Stress and Depression’ by Sarah Lennard-Brown.
- Find out all you can about depression. People who are suffering from depression can find it very difficult to concentrate and remember new information.
- Make sure that they are eating properly.
- Encourage the individual to keep going with at least part of their normal routine. Be gently positive with them, about their achievements.
- Gently try to include the person in social and pleasant events.
- If they talk of suicide, take it seriously and make sure they keep their doctor informed. Help them to accept help and treatment.
- Look after yourself. Talk to a health professional yourself if you are worried. You will need support too. Keep in touch with friends, so that you yourself don't feel isolated.