

How to Overcome Depression

She slowly shuffled into the room, shoulders hunched, head hung low. She sat in a chair, eyes downcast, seemingly unaware of my presence. As we began to talk, time stretched out for eternity, each answer painstakingly slow.

Mai-Lin* (name changed to protect client privacy) was deeply depressed and had been for over a decade. She had left her abusive husband years ago and was raising their daughter as a single parent. She had no job, little education and saw herself as worthless, powerless, and with no hope for the future.

Sometimes depression comes as a result of circumstances: a broken marriage, a serious illness, the loss of a job. Sometimes, it comes seemingly out of the blue. Everything looks fine on the surface and yet, the tears seem to come at random, your body feels so heavy that you can't get out of bed some days or you're completely exhausted and yet you can't sleep a wink. You can't focus at work or find any source of joy in your life.

So, what can you do when depression hits? Start by recognizing that it's not your fault. It's not a consequence of sin or a sign that your faith is weak. Prayer is vital, and combining it with other forms of stewardship can make a real difference.

First, Go Back To The Basics. Ask Yourself:

- **Am I eating regular, nutritious meals?** Depression impacts appetite. You may find you've either gone all day without eating anything substantial or you can find yourself munching out on sugary, high carb foods that can temporarily improve your mood, but then lead to a sugar crash.
- **Am I getting the right amount of sleep?** Am I exercising? Make those natural chemicals in your brain work for you. Exercise gets your endorphins flowing and leads to more pleasurable feelings.
- **Have I had a recent medical exam?** Get checked out by your doctor to see if there are any physical changes impacting your mood.

The Bible tells us of how God cared for Elijah when he went through a dark time. Elijah was so low that he was pleading with God to take his life. How did God respond? By providing food for Elijah and giving him rest (1 Kings 19:1-9). Because God created us, He knows that for our emotions and spirit to be healthy, our bodies need to be taken care of.

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Next, Plan Some Pleasurable Events

Find one enjoyable thing to plan for each week and make sure it gets done! When depressed, it's hard to find the initiative to do the things you enjoy. Don't wait to feel better to plan that picnic or call that friend. Do it now! Don't let the depression isolate you – isolation leads to focusing on the depression.

Ecclesiastes 4:10, 12 – *“If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! ... Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”*

Examine Your Thinking.

Experts agree one thing that maintains depression is negativity – or black-and-white thinking. Instead of accepting the negative thinking, challenge those thoughts!

- Does your child misbehaving really mean that you're a terrible mother?
- Does a friend disappointing you mean that you really can't trust anyone?

When you find yourself feeling down, see if you can identify what your thoughts are at that moment and if they are negative ask: Is there another way to look at this? When feeling depressed you are more likely to blame yourself for things that aren't your fault. You are more apt to take an external event and see it as the result of a character defect within. Instead, practice giving yourself grace in these situations.

Phil 4:6-8 – *“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 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.”*

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Finally, If Your Depression Was Brought On By A Recent Loss, Allow Yourself Time To Grieve.

Sometimes we have good reason to be sad and we need to allow ourselves time to heal. If there is no triggering event though, or the depressed feelings have dragged on, don't stay stuck any longer. Try the steps above and call one of our counselors for help. You may have been stuck for years but there is no reason to stay there.

Is this a time for you to experience joy again?

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4 - *“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance...”*

As for Mai-Lin, it was a road with ups and downs, but over time her head rose in our counseling sessions and her eyes began to meet mine. I saw her smile. I heard her laugh. I observed her going back to school, finding work and finally leaving counseling with a sense of her worth and a hope for her future

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