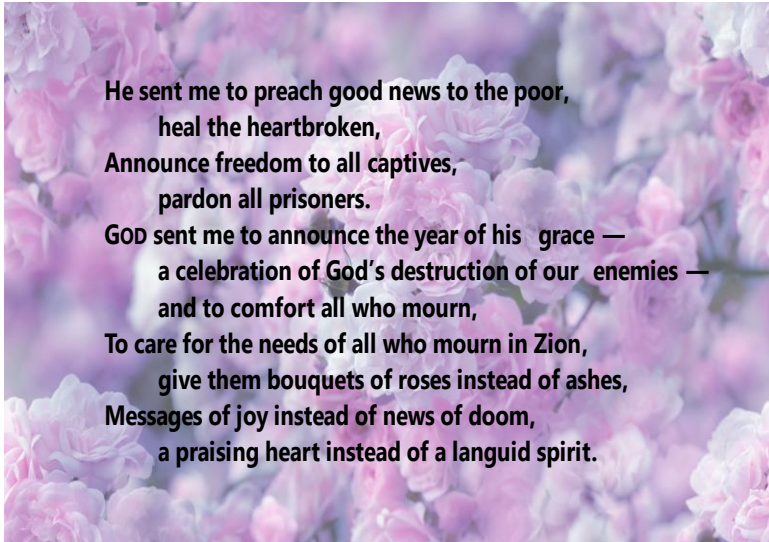


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## Spirituality and Depression



### Headings

What is spirituality? What is depression?  
If I have depression, what does it feel like?

If someone has depression, what does it look like to others?

Self Care

If I have depression, how does it affect my spiritual life?

Bible verses for depression support

How can I help someone with depression?

Resources

### 1. What is Spirituality?

Spirituality is the part of being human that expresses meaning and purpose – how we experience connection to self, to others, to nature, creativity and with ‘something bigger’. For some people, connecting with these domains may be through religion.

For our purpose I want to talk about how our mental health - specifically depression - impacts our relationship with God and Jesus. In other words: how does a medical condition impact a person’s spiritual life? How do they feel? What is helpful for them? What can I do to help in anyway?

### 2. What is depression?

We all feel sad, moody or low from time to time, but some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time (weeks, months or even years) and sometimes without any apparent reason. Depression is more than just a low mood – it’s a serious condition that has an impact on both physical and mental health. It affects how people think, feel and act and makes managing day-to-day life difficult. It also interferes with study, work and relationships and people can lose interest or pleasure in most of their usual activities.

I have tended to think that because one of the fruits of the Spirit is JOY, that suffering with depression means I am not exhibiting this fruit of the Spirit, which means I feel even more of a failure and sad. It’s important to remember that depression is not a sign of personal weakness, failure, or ‘all in the mind’. Each of us is unique and will respond differently when exposed to environmental, social or psychological triggers.

- **Depression is a common** mental disorder.
  - **More women are affected** by depression than men. (An estimated 3.8% of the population experience depression, including 5% of adults (4% among men and 6% among women), and 5.7% of adults older than 60 years. World Health Organisation.)
  - **The dictionary says it’s melancholy**, misery, sadness, or unhappiness, the opposite of cheerful. It is a constant feeling of sadness and loss of interest, which stops you doing your normal activities.
  - **Different types of depression exist**, with symptoms ranging from relatively minor to severe.
  - **Generally, depression does not result from a single event**, but from a mix of events and factors.
  - **Depression can lead to suicide**, so getting support early can help stop symptoms becoming worse. There is effective treatment for mild, moderate and severe depression.
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**3. Causes of depression** - We know that a range of contributing factors can lead to clinical depression, including:

- **genetics** (family history)
- **biochemical factors** (brain chemistry) and/or strong medications which impact the brain.
- **Chronic illness or chronic pain**
- **can occur** during pregnancy and the postnatal period.
- **personality style**
- **ageing**
- long-term pressures such as abusive relationships, bullying and work stress
- stressful or traumatic events, eg: continuing difficulties, such as long-term unemployment, living in an abusive or uncaring relationship, long-term isolation or loneliness or prolonged exposure to stress at work can increase the risk of depression. Significant adverse life events, such as losing a job, going through a separation or divorce, loss of loved one, sexual and/or physical abuse – the list of horrible life events is endless . . .
- **Drug and alcohol abuse** - can both lead to and result from depression

While the exact cause of depression isn't known, a number of things can be associated with its development. Generally, depression does not result from a single event, but from a combination of biological, psychological, social and lifestyle factors.

**If I have depression, what does it feel like? And  
If someone has depression, what does it look like to others?**

Everyone experiences some of these symptoms from time to time and it may not necessarily mean a person is depressed. Equally, not every person who is experiencing depression will have all of these symptoms. Depression is often not recognised and can go on for months or even years if left untreated.

<p><b>Feelings</b></p> <p>A person with depression may feel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sad</li> <li>• miserable</li> <li>• unhappy</li> <li>• irritable</li> <li>• overwhelmed</li> <li>• guilty</li> <li>• frustrated</li> <li>• lacking in confidence or motivation</li> <li>• indecisive</li> <li>• unable to concentrate</li> <li>• disappointed.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Thoughts</b></p> <p>A person with depression may have thoughts such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'I'm a failure.'</li> <li>• 'It's my fault.'</li> <li>• 'Nothing good ever happens to me.'</li> <li>• 'I'm worthless.'</li> <li>• 'There is nothing good in my life.'</li> <li>• 'Things will never change.'</li> <li>• 'Life's not worth living.'</li> <li>• 'People would be better off without me.'</li> </ul>
<p><b>Behavioural symptoms</b></p> <p>A person with depression may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• withdraw from close family and friends</li> <li>• stop going out</li> <li>• stop their usual enjoyable activities</li> <li>• not get things done at work or school</li> <li>• rely on alcohol and sedatives.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Physical symptoms</b></p> <p>A person with depression may experience:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being tired all the time</li> <li>• feeling sick and lacking in energy</li> <li>• frequent headaches, stomach or muscle pains</li> <li>• a churning gut</li> <li>• sleep problems</li> <li>• loss or change of appetite</li> <li>• significant weight loss or gain.</li> </ul>

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## 4 Self-care

Self-care can play an important role in managing symptoms of depression and promoting overall well-being.

- **try** to keep doing activities you used to enjoy
- **stay connected** to friends and family
- **exercise regularly**, even if it's just a short walk
- **stick to regular eating** and sleeping habits as much as possible
- **avoid or cut down on alcohol** and don't use illicit drugs, which can make depression worse
- **talk to someone you trust** about your feelings
- **seek help** from a healthcare provider.

If you have thoughts of suicide:

- **remember you are not alone**, and that many people have gone through what you're experiencing and found help
- **talk to someone you trust** about how you feel
- **talk to a health worker**, such as a doctor or counsellor
- **join a support group**.

If you think you are in immediate danger of harming yourself, contact any available emergency services or a crisis line. (see resources below).

## 5. If I have depression, how does it affect my spiritual life?

I'm sure the impact of depression on one's spiritual life is different for everyone, so I can only tell you how it was for me. I felt:

**Worthless** - why would God want me anyway? Nobody wants or needs me.

**Unloved** – by God and man

**Unlovely**

**Hopeless**

**Life is not worth living** and the thought of living forever was absolutely the worst punishment possible.

**A terrible lethargy** - even praying was difficult. Crying was easiest.

**Hugely anti-social**: fellowship was immensely difficult and totally exhausting.

**Singing in church** – far too much effort and too happy.

**The blackness** and peace of death was very appealing.

**No perception or realisation of the impact** of my condition on myself or others.

Altogether a very unappealing, unspiritual condition – the opposite of all the hope and joy that Christ came into this world to bring.

**Could I pray the depression away?** Could I attend enough church services to convince God to heal me? Could I increase my faith to the point where I was so filled with Jesus that I could transcend my suffering? No. No. And... no.

That's not to say I don't bring my depression to God in prayer or beg God for healing in my moments of pain. **I do!** I tell Him how much I hate being so far away from Him and **beg** Him to hold onto to me when I don't have the strength to hold onto Him. I beg Him to never leave me nor forsake me as He has promised.

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What I don't do is ignore the resources that God — the Ultimate Healer — has provided for healing. I've been to therapy. Since it's appropriate, I take medication. I allow people I love to hear me, to love me, and to normalize my pain.

I identified with Solomon in Ecclesiastes who expresses such misery with his "Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!" in chapters 1-4.

For example: Chapter 2: *I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*

Ecclesiastes 4: *I declared that the dead, are happier than the living.*

And David in many Psalms:

PS 41: *Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope on God!*

Ps 109: *For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. . . . Help me, LORD my God; save me according to your unfailing love.*

Ps 6: *I am worn out from my groaning. All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow.*

**I hung onto Isaiah 61**

*The LORD has anointed Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Jesus to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.*

I was poor and broken-hearted, captive and in darkness, mourning, grieving, in ashes and had a spirit of despair. The world was dark and miserable, but God had sent Jesus for me, and I was precious to Him.

**I hung on desperately to 2 Cor 1: 3-4:** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles.*

#### **6. Bible Verses for depression support:**

"When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit." (Psalm 34:17-18)

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

"Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged." (Deut 31:8)

"But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. (Ps 3:3)

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

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“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8: 38-39)

- **How can I help someone with depression?**

- **Pray with them** because sometimes they find it really hard to pray for themselves and are feeling so worthless.
- **Pray for them** and tell them you continue to remember them in your prayers.
- **Spend quality time** with them.
- **Encourage them to seek help.** There is no one proven way that people recover from depression. However, there is a range of effective treatments and health professionals who can help people on the road to recovery.
- **Take them to appointments** with medical professionals.
- **Be patient** with them.
- **There are also many things** that people with depression can do for themselves to help them recover and stay well. The important thing is to find the right treatment and the right health professional for a person’s needs.

## 7. Resources

- GOD and PRAYER
- Loved ones
- GP – referral to Psychologist and/or Psychiatrist
- NZ: The Depression Helpline – 0800 111 757 or free text 4202 (to talk to a trained counsellor about how you are feeling or to ask any questions). Youthline – 0800 376 633, free text 234
- Black Dog Institute – <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>

## 8. Emergency support

If your life is in danger call emergency services:

- Emergency Australia – 000
- Emergency New Zealand – 111

## 9. Counselling (24/7)

If you need support call one of the following numbers

- [Lifeline Australia](#) | 13 11 14
  - [Lifeline New Zealand](#) | 0800 543 354
  - [Kids Helpline](#) | 1800 55 1800
  - [MensLine Australia](#) | 1300 78 99 78
  - [Suicide Call Back Service](#) | 1300 659 467
  - [Beyond Blue](#) | 1300 22 4636
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