

# Managing My Depression

From the darkness to the light

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. They are printed and given "as is." All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Over the years I've had great men and women of God come to me and say, "Pastor, I have Christ in my heart. I pray, read God's Word, worship with other believers, and I'm involved in ministry officially and unofficially. I love Jesus. I pray regularly. Yet, I struggle with discouragement and depression. Is there something wrong with me? I don't know any other Christians who struggle with discouragement as much as I do. Things can be going great and yet I still am depressed."

That may be you today. You may be struggling with depression even while things are going great or you may be in a difficult time in your life and you feel overwhelmed with discouragement. You are not alone. There is an answer. There is hope. There is light for your darkness.

God is keenly aware that His people struggle with depression. Throughout His Word He has given us numerous examples and insights regarding how to handle depression. Today I want us to take a look at some of the wonderful truths that God gives us.

To help us understand depression as a Christian we will look at a definition of depression, several demonstrations of depression in great Biblical characters of the Bible, and end with how to defend ourselves against it.

## A Definition of Depression

Let's begin with a **definition of depression**. **Depression simply stated is an emotional heaviness that weighs down the heart**. If you place a heavy object on a heart-shaped pillow filled with foam rubber, the pillow will become pressed down – "de-pressed." If you remove the heavy object, the pillow will pop back up to its original form. The same is

true for the human heart. When “pressed down” due to pressure from situations, your heart is designed by God to rebound once the pressure is removed.

Listen carefully, Jesus cares about your heart and the heaviness that is on it more than you do. Jesus knows that you are very vulnerable when you are heavyhearted. That’s why Jesus says in **Luke 21:34**, “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.” Sometimes your heart is heavy with depression because of your own bad choices, that is what Jesus is referring to with “dissipation” and “drunkenness” and then there are the times the things you have no control over (“anxieties of life”) that will weigh your heart down. The bottom line is Jesus cares about your heart so He says “be careful.” Jesus does not want you to live your life in a constant state of emotional heaviness. He does not want your heart to be weighed down all the time. You are going to have those times of a heavy heart, but it should not be the norm.

## **Degrees of Depression**

We are talking about depression being a state of emotional heaviness that weighs down the heart. *Depression* is an umbrella term that covers feelings ranging from mild discouragement to intense despair.

**One degree of depression is called normal depression.** This is sometimes called *situational depression* or *reactive depression*. This happens when normal problems press down the heart for a short period of time. People experience normal depression from rejection, failure, loss, or illness. This normal depression also happens in transitional stages like adolescence, empty nest, midlife crisis, major moves, menopause, and retirement.

When severe troubles fell upon God’s servant Job (the death of his children, the destruction of his possessions), one of Job’s friends made this observation in **Job 4:5** he says, “Now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed.” *Normal depression* is a normal reaction to the trouble and difficult times that come into your life. Job’s reaction and feelings were normal.

**Another degree of depression is masked depression.** *Masked depression* is hidden depression. For example, repressed memories of physical, sexual, verbal, or emotional abuse can be hidden behind masked depression. It is a state of enduring sadness based on unresolved, buried conflict. This is where painful feelings are denied or covered up; therefore, recovery takes longer because of failure to work through the pain. Relief from masked depression is unconsciously found in excessive busyness, activities, addictions, or other alternatives.

The Bible describes how hidden hurts still result in heartache. **Proverbs 14:13** says, “Even in laughter the heart may ache, and joy may end in grief.” Our heart’s can be very heavy even while we are laughing. We mask the hurt behind the smile.

**A third degree of depression is neurotic depression.** This is a minor mental and emotional depressive disorder. The depression results from failure to adjust to a distressing situation. This depression in some way affects the normal activities of daily living. They are staying in bed longer, they seem to be disconnected and distant at times, they have loss concern about what they use to care about. The person who really wanted their house clean, doesn’t seem to care about it anymore. Loss of energy. This type of depression is prolonged depression. It last longer than what is expected. **Psalms 13:2** reflects this when it says, “How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?”

**A fourth degree of depression is psychotic depression.** This is the most severe type of depression. This level of depression causes people to lose contact with reality. They become a potential danger to themselves and to others. Those afflicted with this level of depression can identify with the terror, despair, and perspective described in **Psalms 102**, “My days vanish like smoke... My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food... I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof... I eat ashes as my food and mingle my drink with tears... I wither away like grass” (Psalm 102:3-4,7,9,11).

No matter what the degree of emotional darkness, the Lord wants us to rely on Him to provide light. **Psalms 18:28** says, “You, O Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.” God wants to lead you out of the darkness of depression and into the light of His life. There is hope for you today.

## A Demonstration of Depression

Depression is an emotional heaviness that weighs down the heart. If you struggle with depression at any level you are not alone. God gives us examples and demonstrations of godly men and women who wrestled with depression. Let me show you some of them.

**Let's start with Elijah.** We find his story in **1 Kings 18-19**. In chapter 18 Elijah experienced great victory. He saw several miraculous things happen: a fierce fire from heaven consumed a burnt offering; Israel turned back to God; justice fell on the prophets of Baal; and a long drought ended. How glorious this experience must have been. He walked by faith in God. He was bold. He was courageous. But as you move into chapter 19, you will notice a change in Elijah's mood. He received a death threat from Queen Jezebel – one wicked woman – and Elijah knew she meant every word she spoke. So what did this great servant of the Lord do in the face of the threat? **Verse 3** says, "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life." **Verse 4** says, "He went a day's journey into the desert... sat down under a tree and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said. 'Take my life; I am not better than my ancestors.'" Elijah really felt hopeless and like a failure. Have you ever felt like a failure? It hurts deeply to feel you have disappointed yourself, another person, or God. Elijah struggled with depression.

**Let's take a look at Paul.** Did he ever struggle with depression or discouragement? Yes he did. Look at how he describes himself and Timothy when they were ministering in the province of Asia. **2 Corinthians 1:8** says, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life (9) Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death." You would think that if anyone was going to be immune to depression it would be Paul. The man God used to write half of the New Testament. Here's what this tells me, it doesn't matter who you are or how spiritual you are you are never immune to the attack of depression.

Even **Moses** fought with depression. Because of the pressures of his responsibilities and the complaining people he was leading, Moses became heavy hearted. His heart was weighed down so much that He goes to God and prays for God to kill him. **Numbers 11:14** says, "I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.

(15) If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now....” This is the man that God used to deliver thousands, maybe even millions of Israelites from the Egyptians. This is the man God used to bring about 10 miraculous plagues. This is the man that God used to stand in front of the Red Sea and command it to divide and it did. Here he is coming to God and praying, “I cannot carry this burden anymore, put me to death.”

You can find other people in the Bible struggling with depression. **Jonah** prayed in **Jonah 4:3**, “Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.” **Hannah** was so discouraged and depressed in 1 Samuel that she cried and could not eat. Her husband asked her, “Why are you down hearted?” (1 Sam. 1:8). There are other people in the Bible who struggled with discouragement and depression. Here’s the point: you are not alone. Great men and women of God have struggled with depression and discouragement. You are not alone.

### **A Defense against Depression**

God gives us a lot of Biblical examples regarding depression and discouragement. He gives us many Scriptures that deal with a heavy heart, discouragement, being down cast, and depressed. Obviously we can’t look at all of them today, but let’s look at Elijah’s time of discouragement and see how God helped Elijah get through his discouragement. How did God help Elijah get out of this dark valley of depression? God did several things for Elijah which give us insight on how to face depression in our own life as well. How do we defend or get ourselves through depression? These answers are not going to sound very spiritual, but they are God’s divine answers.

**First, allow God to provide you rest.** Sometimes the best thing we can do when we are discouraged is to take some time off and away from the pressure. Get some rest. In **1 Kings 19:4** Elijah was so discouraged that he prayed that he would die. But look what happened after he prayed to die in **verse 5**, “Then he lay down under the tree and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat.’ (6) He looked around and there by his head was a cake of bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. (7) The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, ‘Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you.’ (8) So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty

nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.” Notice what happened here. Elijah is so depressed he cries out to God wanting to die. God does not answer Elijah immediately. He lets Elijah become so worn out that he lies down under a tree and falls asleep. God sends an angel to give him some kind of superhuman and supernatural power... no. The angel wakes Elijah up and gives him something to eat and lets him rest some more. After Elijah had rested some more the angel comes back and feeds him again. Notice carefully what God’s Word says strengthened Elijah. **Verse 8** says, “strengthened by that food” Elijah was then able to travel on. Here is what I think happened. I think Elijah was so discouraged about Jezebel that he didn’t eat or drink anything. Emotionally, physically, and spiritually he became worn out and depressed. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do in fighting depression is get plenty of rest and eat right. I know that does not sound spiritual enough for some of you, but that’s the truth and reality of God’s Word. God knows your body and He knows what it needs.

**Secondly, expect God to renew His fellowship with you.** Elijah is now rested and fed, then God begins to speak to Elijah. In **verse 11** we read, “The Lord said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.’” God is talking to Elijah and He is about to do another work in and through Elijah. Even though Elijah ran in fear and ended in a place of dark depression God has brought him out and is still talking to Elijah.

Just because you struggle with depression does not mean God does not love you nor does it mean He doesn’t want to talk to you. He knows how discouraged and lonely you feel. He knows how depressed and dark it is in your life. But He wants to talk to you. Listen to Him. Allow God to talk to you. He may be talking to you right now through this message. Are you listening?

**Third, allow God to continue to use you.** Get back to work. Get back to life. Notice what God told Elijah in **verse 15**, “The Lord said to him, ‘Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. (16) Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholoah to succeed you as prophet.” God is saying, “Elijah, get busy. You’ve had your rest. You’ve had your food. You’ve had your time with Me. You were not meant for this valley. You were not meant for this cave. You were meant for ministry. Your purpose in

life is not over, I have many more things for you to do. Elijah you are still under my protection and you are still useful. Your depression is not the end of your life.” God told him to get back to doing things he should be doing.

Elijah was suppose to get up and go anoint this person, anoint that person, and anoint this person. You know what God is saying? Elijah, go bless somebody. When you are discouraged and depressed get up and go bless someone. Get that rest, spend some time with God in His Word, and then go bless someone. Don't stay in that dark house, get out of that room, and find someone to bless in the name of Jesus. Get back to work. Get back to ministry. Get back to life.

**Fourth, allow God to bless you through others.** At the end of **verse 21** the Bible says that Elisha began to follow Elijah and “became his attendant.” There is a discipleship and mentor element here. There is also a prophet ministry element happening here. But it is to close to miss that God placed Elisha in Elijah's life right on the heels of his depression. When you are depressed God will place somebody in your life to minister to you, bless you, encourage you, and help you carry whatever burden you may be carrying. Sometimes they show up as a parent, a brother, a friend, or someone completely new or a combination of all the above. When they arrive in your life to bless you, let them bless you and let them attend to you.

## **Conclusion**

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is when Jesus said in **John 14:1**, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me.” You don't have to live in that dark place of depression all your life. You can find hope and you can find healing. Sometimes God will use a miracle in your life, sometimes God may lead you to medical help, sometimes God will lead you to make some adjustments in your life. No matter what God leads you to do you can trust Him. Your heart does not have to be troubled today. Place your faith in God to get you through this time. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

If you are not a Christian would you like to receive Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life?  
[Explain salvation]