

Live Free of Depression

It was a cold Sunday night on January 6th 2019. Excitement filled the air as people prepared for the big event that day. Walking around I had my head held high because I had all the confidence in the world on how this day would go. I went to church in the morning, had a great afternoon and was excited as the evening set in. I proceeded over to friends' houses as we prepared for little did I know was going to be one of my most devastating events. The Eagles vs Bears game was a great one. Started off close and by the end of the game was only a 1 point game. What football fan could ask for more? Our second year QB who is still growing led a game winning drive down the field making big throw after big throw. My excitement grew as they got closer to the field goal line knowing that's all we needed to win. I looked at all the Eagles fans around me as they grew more and more tense terrified at what our QB Trubisky was about to do to them. Finally he makes one big throw to Allen Robinson and puts us in perfect position to win the game. The Bears line up for the field, snap, and kick the field goal is good!! But, there was a time out called by good old Doug Peterson. But its ok, we made it once we can totally do it again. Our team lines up again, snap, the kick is up. The entire room falls silent... DOINK. The ball hits the left upright and all of a sudden DOINK. The ball hits the bottom upright and falls. No one knows whether it went in or out until the referees walk out waving no good. I fall to my knees in disbelief as all the Eagles fans present begin to do what I can only describe as an ancient tribal victory dance around my corpse. Then in that moment, the sports depression begins to sink in. This moment went on to be dubbed the double doink and as a sports fan, was probably one of the hardest losses I have ever endured, but we all know that's not what depression actually is.

Depression is a serious condition that brings people down. Makes them feel unworthy of anything or anyone. Tries to tear them away from the truth that God says about them as it clogs their minds. It can also drive them into doing terrible things and in the worst cases, hurting themselves or even others. Take Dave Duerson for example. He was a safety for the Chicago Bears from 1983 - 1989 and was part of the 85 Chicago Bears team that won their only Super Bowl in franchise history. Dave Duerson suffered from major depression due to all the concussions that he had received playing football and he ended his own life when he was 50 years old because of it. Everyone was so surprised because they never saw it coming, which can happen when facing an ailment like this. Many questions flood the mind when it comes to depression and what it looks like to be a Christian who suffers or faces depression. Maybe the biggest question might be is where is God during my depression?

Depression is a word that has become fairly common in our society and culture these days. We need to define exactly what depression is before we can move on with what God says about it. The dictionary defines depression as "feelings of severe despondency and dejection." For me personally, when I have dealt with it, it was extreme sadness and I had a hard time thinking clearly as the thoughts would really block out my personality. There are also different kinds of depression, such as Major Depression, Persistent Depressive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Seasonal Affective Disorder, Psychotic Depression, Postpartum Depression, Situational Depression, and more. Many people here today have probably faced one or more of these in their lives or in others around them that they are close to. Studies say that 14.8 million Americans above the age of 18 face this every year. That is as many as one in 33 children and 1 in every 8

teenagers who have a form of depression. That depression is the cause of over two-thirds of the reported 30,000 suicides in the U.S. each year. This is something millions of people face and it is so sad how many people are affected by this.

Life can be very difficult at times. We might get very low and have a lot of sadness enter our lives. We are taught to cling to God during these times which is a great thing to do, but that doesn't always make the depression disappear. Many well-meaning Christians say things which are insensitive, untrue, and hurtful. A spiritual leader in my life told me he wasn't sure if I truly was a Christian because I was battling depression. I obviously didn't trust God enough or else I wouldn't be depressed. For anyone who has been told that, I want you to know that is completely untrue. You can be a Christian and deal with depression. In fact, this is when we need to cling to God the most to help us. Whether you are facing depression for a season in your life. or it is something you deal with regularly, God loves and cares about you. Don't let those lies creep in.

We can look at Psalm 42:5 where it says "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God." Here the Psalmist is dealing with depression. Yet, he is choosing to put his hope in God and praise Him even through the difficult times. Through Psalm 42 and 43, these exact words are repeated 3 separate times. This shows that just saying you are putting your hope in God and trying to cling to Him isn't going to change things over night. This is a process. This is something that takes time, and you may continue to battle as you go through the hardships and the depression. But when you put your hope in God, He will see you through. He has a great plan and joy waiting for you on the other side. You can be a Christian when facing depression. God will be there for you.

Psalm 42:8 says "By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me - a prayer to the God of my life." Even in the darkest moments of depression, even on your saddest days, even when all hope seems lost, God is with you every step of the way and will help you move towards Him. He is there in the day to pour love and grace over you as you deal with the pain. When the nights are long and it's hard to fall asleep, God is singing a song of His love to you. He will never leave your side. When the mountains seem biggest and you wonder where God has gone, He is still standing there right in front of you with arms open wide. All you need to do is figure out how to walk forward into His arms.

There are a couple things you can do:

1. **Pray.** Pray that God will show you the path to healing. Let Him be the loudest voice in your head. Not the depression, the sadness, the hardships but His soft loving soothing voice. Philippians 4:6 says "Do not be anxious about anything, but by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." So many things in this world will try to drown out God. These barriers try to block the love He pours over us. Bring your prayers to Him. He will heal you from the inside out.

2. **Listen.** We can pray all we want, but if we don't quiet our minds and allow Him to speak, we may miss the truth He is bringing to us. John 10:27-28 states "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish,

and no one will snatch them out of my hand.” This is such a refreshing truth for everyone who is dealing with this pain. No matter how deep the pain and hurt gets, we can still hear God’s voice. He knows us. He knows every strand of hair on your head. He gives you eternal life. Nothing can take you from His hands. No situation, no pain, no hurt, no darkness, nothing. Give yourself to Him and listen for His loving voice.

3. **Talk to someone.** Find someone you trust, a friend, a parent, a pastor, or a counselor. Bring your darkness into God’s light. Sometimes you need to do it verbally just to know you aren’t in this alone. To have someone in this battle with you can mean the world and God doesn’t ask us to do this life alone. Galatians 6:2 says “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” He gives us fellowship so that we can build up one another and lean on them for strength. Find someone safe who will listen to your hardships and pain without judgement. Look for a person you trust, someone who will love you through your hurt and pain.

There was a period of my life around my high schooler years when I was defined by depression. Whether it was my feelings about being adopted or other situations that were happening in my life that were out of my control, I had a hard time getting out of bed. I looked for the answer in all the wrong places. I thought being popular in high school would solve my problems, well it didn’t. I thought going to all these awesome parties I kept hearing about would solve my problems. Well it didn’t. I thought dating girls and having them give me lots of attention and affection would solve these problems. Well it didn’t. I finally came to a place where the only thing left to try was God. I am sure glad I tried. Depression in its more serious forms can drive you to alcoholism, drugs, sexual impurities, and even to death. God tells us in the Bible that life is hard, that it won’t be easy and we will face many trials along the way. God also promises to be with us every step of the way, to raise us up, to give our lives meaning and purpose. Church, that is what I am asking today. If you are dealing with, or have dealt with depression, first, give it to God through prayer and surrender. Let Him help you through it. Then, listen to what He has to say to you. Receive the love He has for you. Next, confide in a friend or family member you truly trust. Life’s battles become less daunting when there is someone in the battle with you. Lastly, seek professional help. One of the best things I ever did for myself was go and see a counselor. She did such an amazing job of helping me talk through my depressed feelings. Use this game plan to combat it. When you pray, God does hear you and will see you through even the darkest of depressions. He loves you all so much and wants nothing more than to see all your lives filled with joy and success. God has never left your side. He is there with you through all the pains ready to love you and build you up. Let’s pray.