

God's Way Of Dealing With Depression And Mental Illness

'Put on the whole armour of God so that you may be able to stand against all the wiles of the devil; for we are not wrestling with flesh and blood but against the powers of darkness in heavenly places. Therefore put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore; having tightened the Girdle of Truth around your loins and having put on the Breastplate of Righteousness; and having shod your feet in the preparation of the Gospel of Peace. Lift up over all the Shield of Faith upon which you can quench all the flaming missiles of the wicked one; and take the Helmet of Salvation and the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God' (Ephesians 6:11 to 17).

'We belong to the day; therefore, let us be sober and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation' (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

'The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me (Jesus), because the Lord has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the meek (humble), the poor and afflicted; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives (physical, spiritual, emotional and mental), and to open the prison of those who are bound (by sickness or mental illness) ... To give them a garland of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a spirit of heaviness (depression) that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified' (Isaiah 61:1 & 3).

'Arise from the depression which circumstances have kept you. Shine, for your light has come and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you' (Isaiah 60:1).

'Why are you downcast (in despair, depressed), O my soul? Why should you be disturbed? Hope in God, wait for Him, for I shall yet praise Him, my Help and my God ... for I shall yet praise Him Who is the help of my countenance, and He is my God' (Psalm 42:5 & 11).

'It is the Lord Who goes before you; He will walk with you; He will not fail you or forsake you; fear not, neither become broken in spirit or depressed' (Deuteronomy 31:8).

'Go your way ... be not grieved or depressed, for the joy of the Lord is your strength' (Nehemiah 8:10).

'God Who comforts the depressed, cheered us by the arrival of Titus' (2 Corinthians 7:6).

Dealing with depression God's way. There are two distinct types of depression; situational and what doctors call a 'chemical imbalance'. Situational depression will lift once the situation changes but the person may need to work on overcoming it. The depression classed as a 'chemical imbalance' is caused by an evil spirit. The scripture says it is a spirit that causes the heaviness/depression. If the scriptures say it is a spirit, then it is a spirit and needs to be dealt with spiritually, and since the Lord would never cause depression, then logically, it is an evil spirit. Evil spirits can be overcome by using the resources the Lord has given us. God has shown us very clearly how to deal with depression. We need to make something very clear: Depression is not sin. Many pastors teach that depression is a state of mind, an attitude, rebellion or self-will. It is none of those things. Sometimes though, depression can be a massive dose of self-pity, selfishness and attention seeking. There are people who seem to wallow in it and are not content unless they are miserable, but we still cannot minimise the devastating effects of depression. Depression is real and can be extremely debilitating. It can start as a small event that ends up being so big the sufferer has terrible trouble coping with the sadness. A loss of a job; poverty; a death of a loved one; marriage difficulties; prolonged illness; shock; war; childbirth; stress or any number of events can trigger depression. It may start as an event, but as we grieve or become broken in spirit, the devil takes advantage of that situation and brings an overwhelming spirit of heaviness that the sufferer cannot easily shake off, but the good news is, the Lord has shown us how to overcome it. Remember; we are not battling with flesh and blood, but an evil force in heavenly places that watches, observes and influences the mind of the sufferer until depression takes hold.

Depression often gives the sufferer a sense of hopelessness, however, we see in the above verses, that having the helmet of salvation which is the helmet of hope, is a spiritual weapon given to us to cover our minds against the hopelessness that often goes with depression. The helmet of salvation means simply to give our lives to Jesus. Once we have done that, the Lord can cheer us out of the depression. He gives us joy, He walks with us, He has given us hope of eternal life, which is the biggest hope of all. A helmet is the part of the armour that covers our heads and our heads are where our minds are. When we put on the helmet of salvation and hope, we are covering our minds from the attacks of the enemy. One area where the

enemy likes to attack is our minds, but the 'helmet' can protect us. Once we bring our mind into subjection to the mind of Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:16), mental illness will have no power over us.

Moses, Joseph, David, Job, Jonah and Jesus all suffered from depression for short periods of time due to their circumstances, but they all overcame it with the help of the Lord. Moses: 'If this is the way You deal with me, kill me, I pray You, at once, and grant me a favour' (Numbers 11:15). Joseph: 'His feet they hurt with fetters; he neck was locked in chains of iron and his soul entered into the iron' (Psalm 105:18). David: 'My soul is in great anguish' (Psalm 6:3). Job: 'Why was I not stillborn? Why did I not give up the spirit when my mother bore me? Why was I not a miscarriage, hidden as infants who never saw light?' (Job 3:11 & 16). Jonah: 'Therefore O Lord, I beg You, take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live (Jonah 4:3). Jesus: 'Taking with Him Peter, James and John, He began to show sorrow and was deeply depressed. He said to them, "My soul is deeply sorrowful, so that I am almost dying of sorrow"' (Matthew 26:37 & 38). When we read the Book of Jeremiah, we can see that Jeremiah spent most of his ministry in a state of deep depression.

The Lord has already given us the garment of praise to counter the spirit of heaviness. The garment of praise means simply to praise and worship the Lord with sincerity of heart and mind. A spirit of heaviness is known in our day as depression and it cannot stay around if we are determined to fight it by praising and thanking the Lord for extended periods of time. The heaviness will lift off our head and if we do battle every day, eventually the evil spirit that causes the depression will leave entirely. Doing battle to overcome depression is an act of our will and choice. It is our will to choose whether or not to use the 'armour' God has given us. We can give in to depression or we can fight it. It is hard, but if we persevere, we will be set free. But first we need to subject ourselves to God; that is to give ourselves over to God the Father, through His Son Jesus; then we will have the power and authority to resist the devil. 'Be subject to God. Resist the devil – stand firm against him – and he will flee from you' (James 4:7). He will flee from us. This is not a maybe, a perhaps or might if we are lucky. The scripture says that the devil will leave. At the name of Jesus, demons will flee. At the name of Jesus, depression will flee. If we are subject to God, and therefore born of God, then we can claim the victory over depression. 'Whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world: your faith' (1 John 5:4). We can overcome the devil because we believers have been given authority over all the power the enemy has. Jesus said, "Behold! I have given you authority and power to trample upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power that the enemy has" (Luke 10:19). The disciples were astonished at the power they had. 'They returned with joy saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!"' (Luke 10:17). 'Jesus appointed His twelve disciples to preach and gave them power and authority over unclean spirits, to drive them out, and to cure all kinds of diseases' (Matthew 10:1; Mark 3:14 & 15; Mark 6:7). If we lay hold of the power and authority we have in Jesus, we can overcome.

In the above verses, after we have put on the helmet of salvation and hope, and after we have put on the garment of praise, we can see God is saying to us to arise out of the depression that circumstances have kept us; we ask ourselves why we are downcast, why we should moan when God will lift our countenance if we praise Him. He tells us He is walking with us so we need not feel depressed or experience a broken spirit. He tells us not to be aggrieved or depressed because if we allow Him to give us His joy, that will be our strength. Joy will give us enough strength to overcome the feelings of depression. He has already given us the oil of joy for mourning. Oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, so once we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will have joy, and joy comes with praise and worship. The Lord has promised to give us hope. He comforts, encourages and cheers us. To work on depression and to overcome the devil so that the depression leaves, takes courage, commitment, faith, determination, prayer and sometimes fasting. We need to make ourselves praise the Lord when we feel 'heavy' and do not feel like it. That takes self-discipline. He calls it a sacrifice when we praise Him, when we really do not feel like it. 'Through Him, therefore, let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of lips that glorify His name' (Hebrews 13:15). When we overcome huge obstacles like depression, it gives Him glory.

There are eternal rewards for those who overcome something as big as depression. Jesus said to those who overcome: "I will grant to eat of the fruit of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God" ... "They shall in no way be injured by the second death (the lake of fire)" ... "I will give to eat of the manna that is hidden, and I will give him a white stone with a new name engraved on the stone, which no one knows except he who receives it" ... "I will give him power and authority over the nations" ... "I will make him a pillar in the sanctuary of My God; he shall never go out of it, and I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which descends from My God out of heaven, and My own new

name" ... "I will grant him to sit beside Me on My throne, as I Myself overcame and sat down beside My Father on His throne" (Revelation 2:7; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 3:12 & 3:21).

To help us on the journey of overcoming depression, we must change the way we think. The scriptures say, 'For the rest, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any virtue, if there is anything worthy of praise, think on these things, fill your minds with them. Practice what you have learned, received, heard and seen. Do these things, and the God of peace and well-being will be with you' (Philippians 4:8 & 9). To change the way we think about things takes a lot of self-discipline, self-control and action. We need to find something to praise and thank the Lord for, and the biggest thank-you we can offer to the Lord is gratitude for our salvation. If we have nothing else, if we have lost our home, job, family or finance, if we have our salvation and a relationship with our Lord and Saviour, then we have everything we need. We must alter our thinking by learning to appreciate the numerous things the Lord has given us to enjoy. For example, He has given us the beauty in flowers that even the Lord Jesus appreciated. 'Consider the lilies of the field and learn how they grow' (Matthew 6:28). That is the garland of beauty instead of ashes. Instead of thinking, "Oh, not another day" or, "I'm glad day is over" we can learn to enjoy the sunrise and sunset. Instead of thinking, "I wish those birds would shut up" we can learn to appreciate the various songs of praise birds sing out every day. Instead of feeling tired of having to do ironing for our family, we should be thankful we have a family. If we feel tired of having to go to work, we should be thankful we have a job to go to. The simple act of smiling at a baby and receiving an innocent smile in return is enough to lift our countenance. When we learn to help ourselves by changing the way we think, changing the way we respond, purposefully and consciously looking at situations in a different light, it will go a long way to overcoming unwanted heaviness and it will change the way we feel and act. Those are the pure, lovely things that are worthy of praise that the Lord wants us to fill our minds with and practice. There is always something to be thankful for, always something to make us smile in our hearts, no matter how miserable we feel. If it is raining, thank God there is no drought. If the sun is shining, thank God He created the sun to give us warmth. If we fill our minds with positive thoughts, negative thoughts do not have the ability to influence us. If people have a disposition to feeling depressed, then they need to help themselves by deliberately not watching television shows or movies or computer games that are filled with negative things like violence, stressful or fearful situations, terror, carnage, murder, witchcraft or anything that would feed the depression. There is a lot of self-control needed to control negative thoughts and actions. Many people do not want the burden of using self-control but instead blame their 'depression' for doing stupid things, instead of considering the fact that what they are doing, will have consequences. When we are alone, if we consistently pray, read the Bible, sing songs of praise, then go out and have fellowship with other believers, and deliberately rebuke negative thoughts that come into our minds, then we have come a long way in beating the depression. It can be done. Non-believers, especially those involved in the medical field will say it is impossible without medication and self-control is beyond our ability, but believers have the 'secret' weapon non-believers do not have ... we have the Word of God. If all that fails and someone is still plagued by depression, then having the evil spirit cast out may be what is needed.

If someone who feels depressed is not on anti-depressants, it is safer not to start. Anti-depressants are mind altering – thought changing drugs and are highly addictive. They give a false feeling of wellbeing, and many people are unable to cope with the artificial 'high' they give, especially when they realise it is artificial and very short lived, forcing them to keep taking the drugs, increasing the dosage. There are many people who cannot function without them and deeply regret ever starting them. Many health care professionals insist on people taking anti-depressants – but it is in their financial best interests to have their patients swallow pills. The drug companies make millions of dollars manufacturing drugs. They do not do that to benefit people – they do it to make money and lots of it. If someone with depression is on medication, it is not wise to suddenly toss it away believing they are healed. It is safer to see a doctor and ask for guidance to withdraw from the medication gradually, or the reaction to the sudden withdrawal could be catastrophic. Remember, medications for depression are mind-altering drugs. That is how they work and that is why they are so addictive. If a doctor refuses to help someone get off the drugs, it is okay to go elsewhere. It is much easier and cheaper to seek the Lord for help with depression, rather than putting trust in man and his man-made drugs.

Dealing with mental illness God's way. Although depression is categorised as a mental illness, it is different to other mental illnesses, in that it has a trigger and with help and self-discipline, can usually be overcome, whereas other illnesses such as schizophrenia, extreme violence, manic highs and lows, children with uncontrollably bad behaviour and other behavioural difficulties are usually caused by evil spirits that have to be cast out of the person. The evil spirits are usually too powerful to be overcome by the individual alone. We need to understand one very important thing; God does not excuse the bad behaviour of a

person. When he judges people, He looks at the heart or the attitude of a person, but He also looks at their mind. 'O Lord of hosts, Who judges justly, Who tests the heart and the mind, let me see Your vengeance on the wicked, for to You I have revealed my cause' (Jeremiah 11:20). Someone under the influence of an evil spirit will not be excused for wicked behaviour on Judgement Day by saying, "But God, the devil made me do it," because Jesus said, "You are of your father the devil, and it is your will to gratify the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks lies, he speaks what is natural to him, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

Jesus never treated mental illness like a sickness like we do today. He never pandered to it like the mental health professionals do today, He treated it like the evil thing it is and God's way to deal with mental illness is to take authority over it and cast it out. There are always exceptions of course, but according to the Bible, we should be prepared to cast an evil spirit out of the mentally ill. Jesus cast the evil spirit that caused the mental illness out of the person every time, and He gave all believers the commission to cast out evil spirits (Matthew 10:8). Jesus exercised total control over evil spirits and they knew exactly Who He was. 'He (Jesus) cured many who were afflicted with various diseases; and He drove out many demons but would not allow the demons to talk because they knew Him' (Mark 1:34). 'The unclean spirits, as often as they saw Him, fell down before Him and kept screaming out, "You are the Son of God!"' (Mark 3:11). 'In the synagogue there was a man who was possessed by the foul spirit of a demon; and he cried out with a loud, terrible cry, "Ah, leave us alone! What have You to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know Who You are – the Holy One of God!" But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet and come out of him!" And the unclean spirit, throwing the man into convulsions and screeching with a loud voice, came out of him but did not injure him in any way' (Luke 4:33 to 36; Mark 1:26).

The people who self-harm are under the power of evil spirits. They can be supernaturally strong, but the strength comes from the devil. Jesus always rebuked the evil spirits out of these people. We read the story of the demon possessed man who was clearly insane, supernaturally strong, constantly harming himself, he was naked and out of control. Once Jesus had cast the evil spirits out of the man, he was completely normal. Matthew's version of this story is slightly different from Mark and Luke's versions but the outcome was the same – the man was healed and in his right mind after Jesus had rebuked the evil spirits. 'When He (Jesus) arrived at the other side in the country of the Gadarenes, two men under the control of demons went to meet Him coming out of the tombs, so savage that no one was able to pass that way. Behold, they shrieked, "What have You to do with us Jesus Son of God? Have You come to torment us before the appointed time?"' (Matthew 8:28 & 29). 'There met Him out of the tombs in Gerasenes, a man under the power of an unclean spirit; a man possessed by demons. This man lived among the tombs and no one could subdue him any more, even with a chain; for he had been bound often with shackles for the feet and handcuffs and held under guard, but the handcuffs of chains he wrenched apart, and the shackles he ground together and broke in pieces; and no one had strength enough to restrain him and he would be driven by the demon into the desert. For a long time he had worn no clothes, and he lived not in a house but in the tombs. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always screaming, beating, bruising and cutting himself with stones. Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" The possessed man replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." And crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have You to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You by God, do not torment me!" They begged Jesus not to command them to depart into the Abyss, for Jesus was already commanding the unclean spirits to come out of the man, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" ... And they came to Jesus and looked intently at the man who had been a demoniac, sitting there at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind, the same man who had had the legion of demons. Those who had seen it told them how he who had been possessed with demons was restored to health, and they were struck with fear' (Mark 5:2 to 15 together with Luke 8:27 to 36). In all three of these accounts, Jesus commanded the demons to enter into some pigs that were grazing nearby, and all the pigs leapt into a lake and drowned themselves.

Epilepsy is often, although not always, caused by evil spirits. Tourette's Syndrome is another illness caused by evil spirits. That is evident because the person cannot control it – the illness controls the sufferer. More likely it is the evil spirit that controls the sufferer, the same as it does with epilepsy. An evil spirit can also cause the people to harm themselves like the boy in the following story that includes the rebuke Jesus gave the disciples for not believing. 'A man from the crowd shouted out, and came up to Jesus, kneeling before Him and saying, "Lord, Teacher, Master, I brought my son to You, for he has a spirit. I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only child. Have mercy on my son, for he has epilepsy and he suffers terribly. Whenever it lays hold of him (takes over his mind), it dashes him down and convulses him, and he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth. He is left unconscious and is wasting away. A spirit seizes him and suddenly he cries out; it convulses him and he is sorely shattered, and it will scarcely leave him. Frequently he falls into the fire

and many times into the water. I brought him to Your disciples but they were not able to heal him.” Jesus answered, “O you unbelieving perverse generation! How long am I to remain with you and bear with you? Bring your son here to Me.” So they brought the boy to Jesus and when the spirit saw Him, at once it convulsed the boy and he fell to the ground and kept rolling about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked his father, “How long has he had this?” And the father answered, “From the time he was a little boy. It has often thrown him both into fire and into water, intending to kill him. But if You can do anything, do have pity on us and help us.” Jesus said, “All things are possible to him who believes!” At once the father of the boy cried with tears, and he said, “Lord, I believe!” When Jesus noticed that a crowd came together, He rebuked the unclean spirit saying to it, “You dumb and deaf spirit, I charge you to come out of him and never go into him again.” After giving a fear-stricken shriek of anguish and convulsing him terribly, it came out; and the boy lay still so that many of them said, “He is dead.” But Jesus took a grip of the boy’s hand and lifted him up and he stood, and the boy was instantly healed and the child was restored to his father. When Jesus had gone indoors, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not drive it out?” Jesus replied to them, “Because of your unbelief. This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17:14 to 20 and Mark 9:17 to 29 together with Luke 9:38 to 42).

Once we are filled with the Holy Spirit, all evil spirits are subject to us and we have power and authority over them. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, we have already won the victory in this battle and all we need to do is lay hold of that fact and apply it to our lives.

Amen and God bless you.

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