

Scriptural Keys for Overcoming Depression

By Steve Trautmann

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My Jesus, it is all for Him. Treat Him with respect so you don't have to repent before Him. He loves you. I hope you are blessed and set free in what you read.

Unless otherwise noted, scripture references are from the *New King James Version* of the Bible.

Introduction

When considering the topic of depression, I believe we should receive the help that Christ gives us. The help Christ Jesus gives comes alive to us through the scriptures. Being such a common ailment, surely, the Lord has given us some help in His Word. The Bible has in fact many words that were written by those in depression or that describe individuals suffering from depression. As we study this subject together, you will discover that the servants of the Lord were not exempt from dark times, but what they shared with us should be a strength to us in overcoming or at least standing in our own times of depression.

A Low Place

Consider that depression in our English language and in the Bible carries the connotation of lowness. Words or phrases we use for depression include: feeling down, feeling low, in the dumps, depressed, in the valley, or in a low state of mind. We never would say that someone who is depressed was on a mountain top or feeling up. Depression is a down state of mind. Expressions of weight or burden often are used when speaking of depression. The burden we carry is what weighs us down. We might say that someone is “weighed down with a load of cares,” or that “he fell under the weight of his burden for it was too heavy to bear.”

My Testimony

I can truly relate to many of the principals shared in the study that will follow. I can also relate to depression and will state that the darkness of depression is darker than any state of mind that I have known. I have known the severe agony of grief, but with depression often comes hopelessness, despair, or even suicidal thoughts. This darkness is so severe and debilitating that it requires medicine just as much as a life threatening disease. Though part of my problem may have been chemical imbalances due to age or nutritional influence, the depression I experience was not cured by eating right and taking vitamins or by prescription drugs. I did find a medicine that ended the severe darkness that I knew of depression. Do I still get discouraged or become anxious, downhearted, or experience sadness? Yes I do, but I no longer experience the dark destructive states of mind that leave one paralyzed in remorse and without hope.

The medicine I found came with three prescriptions. The first was an encounter with the Holy Lord. I became a Christian at about 11, but I was very disappointed with who I was and what people thought of me. I did not see any value in who I was as a person. I agonized in my spirit because I was not what others were and did not fit in at all with what was admired at school. I prayed before the Lord and would cry out to God asking, “Why did you make me like this?” My situation looked hopeless and dark to me. I could not see a way to change me and I was not very valuable in my own eyes. The Lord met me and spoke to me in a way that I could understand one evening as I wept in my hopelessness and despair. He said simply, “Don’t ask those questions.” I came to realize that some questions were not to be asked. The words of the question may seem innocent but they were borne out of bitterness and self-pity. I was not accepting what God was saying concerning my value or the fact that it was the Good Lord who made me. I had to begin to trust the Lord for who I was and focus my life on Him. This heart change was the beginning of the release from hopelessness and despair. When you trust your heart to Jesus, you will not experience despair. Despair comes from fear, disbelief in God’s care, and self-pity. Trusting our future to a good Lord will change our outlook on life.

The second thing that brought an amazing and almost un-comprehensible change in my life is that I committed my life to spend an hour a day in prayer and reading of the Bible. The effect of this commitment was almost immediate. The Word of God and prayer are stability to your life that will strengthen your spirit. Never underestimate the power of the Word and consistent devotion. **GOD’S WORD WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE!!!**

The last thing that I will mention of my testimony is that thankfulness will strengthen your faith and weaken a critical and negative spirit. I practice thankfulness to the Lord. As I have done so, the Lord is more real to me every day and has transformed my heart with joy. Leave your skepticism, criticism, and pessimism. Replace these with thankfulness and you will be, as I have been, transformed with joy.

Depression Described in the Bible

Consider for a moment different types of depression that the Bible describes. I would for this discussion, list three. The first is pictured by Jesus’ suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane. The suffering he endured is described by the Greek word, *agonia* (Luke 22:44), from which we get our English word, *agony*. Jesus agony of mind was so severe that he sweat drops of blood. This type of depression is the severe trauma caused by an outside event of an intense nature. This could include the agony or grief of a lost loved one or other serious event. The events may not have to do with any type of sin in your life at all, but come because of sadness, grief, pain, or loss. This type of severe hardship can not be easily thrown off, but must be walked through with Jesus. The Word of God and the Holy Spirit’s comfort will be with

us, and we don't have to be hopeless, but we at times must go through the valley of the shadow of death described in Psalm 23. In Psalm 23, David relates that God is with him in that place of darkness. If we know Jesus, we can be assured that He will be always there to go through dark times with us if we are willing to receive His comfort. The second type is a depression that is demonically induced. The Bible describes Saul in 1 Sam. 16:14 as having a "distressing spirit from the Lord," and that David would bring relief to Saul with music whenever "the spirit from God was upon Saul" (v. 23). This type of depression is severe and devil induced often causing a person to become destructive, murderous, or suicidal. It has the nature of not always being there, but of coming and going with the spirit. Many of the mass killings and suicides we see today are influenced by the type of spirit that was on Saul. Saul when under the influence of the spirit was not in his right mind, he was a murderous and unreasoned. Certain types of depression must be dealt with aggressively and opposed because they are demonically produced. We must seek wisdom from the Lord and help from Spirit-filled leadership to receive ministry and healing if we are facing depression that "takes control." The third type of depression that I will address the most in the following scriptures come from discouraging circumstances, constant battles, strife, fear, and worry. We lay down our defenses in defeat and mental unrest. This depression comes from yielding to thoughts and voices that aligned not with what the Word says about us or our circumstances, but rather with the lies of the enemy and of our own unbelief. Whatever the cause of our depression, there are many examples and keys found in the scriptures that can help us to overcome and become the victor with Jesus. In the following pages, I will let the scriptures speak. You don't have to remain depressed, open your eyes and ears, and listen to the Word in the scriptures presented. The Lord will lift your heart out of discouragement, fear, and hurt. We all need the encouragement of the Word of God. Here are some keys.

Seven Keys to Victory over Depression

Key 1: Strengthen Your Heart in the Sanctuary (Read Ps 73:1-28)

Asaph was one of David's music leaders and you can bet that he was both a good musician and one having the ability of leadership. Yet Asaph describes in Psalm 73 a time when he "almost slipped". Depression can cause a falling away from the Lord because of anger. Depression is very dangerous not only to our physical life and livelihood, but can also cause us to turn from the Lord. In verse 3, Asaph states that the root cause of his depression was envy. When he saw the prosperity of the rich and heard their boasting, he was envious. As this depression progressed in Asaph's life, his envy turned to self-pity. We see others and wish that we had what they have and hate ourselves or blame God or others. The root of this type of depression is the sin of envy and even idolatry (worshipping an image other than God). We do not look like someone else; we are not pretty; we are not strong are not athletic; we are too fat; we have a poor home life; we have a disability. When we look at ourselves comparing ourselves to others, we stumble. Paul tells us that comparing ourselves to others is not wise (2 Cor. 10:12). James says that we are tempted when we are drawn aside by our own lust (James 1:13-14). In the depressed state of mind there can seem to be no hope of anything good. We must repent of self pity or envy and turn our worship to Jesus.

In verse 17, we see that Asaph found an answer "in the sanctuary." Depression remained as long as he was separated from God and His voice. When he returned to the Lord and heard His voice there was rest for his troubled mind. There is no substitute for time with the Lord to relieve depression. If you are a new believer and have not established a time of meeting God, do so. In verse 22, Asaph describes himself as having been foolish and ignorant like a beast. What made Asaph ignorant like a beast? He had forgotten who God was and what the Lord was to him. The Lord had words of comfort for him, but he had to choose to hear God's voice and turn from his sin. Verses 23-28 show that God and His counsel strengthened Asaph's heart when he came into the sanctuary with the Lord. Asaph renounced his envy and received God's wisdom and was free. Psalm 42 describes a heart thirsting for God in His sanctuary. Have you allowed your need and thirst for God to cause you to look for the "sanctuary" of the Lord? Do you long for the presence of the Lord and choose to be near Him? Have you allowed your heart to be softened in rejecting the things of this world so that you can walk daily in His presence? Only when you discover the sanctuary will you discover peace. Peace is in Jesus. Discovering communion with Him is discovering the sanctuary.

Key 2: Stand Up (Read Joshua 7:4-13)

Joshua reacts to the defeat at Ai. He had sent 5000 soldiers to fight against Ai and they were defeated against the men of Ai. In their panic, they turned their backs on the enemy and 36 of them died. Joshua tore his clothes and lay before the ark of the Lord until the evening and cried, "Alas, Lord GOD, why have You brought this people over Jordan at all -- to deliver us in the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? Oh, that we had been content, and dwelt on the other side of the Jordan. O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turns its back

before its enemies?” The Bible also records that, “the hearts of the people melted and became like water.”

Consider for a moment Joshua’s response and the circumstances. Remember first that the Lord has destroyed a whole generation before him in the desert. Joshua has been the one to stand up and declare to that generation that they were “well able” to take the country. He and Caleb were the only ones that remained of that generation. Consider also, how small a loss 36 men is in comparison to the vast army of Israel, 600,000 men strong. The loss was indeed tragic, but Joshua’s response was disproportionate to the circumstance. He was right in inquiring before the Lord, but how could he declare that they should have stayed on the other side of the Jordan or that they were going to be swallowed by their enemies. Joshua saw the defeat as the end, the loss as the death of all, and the set back as reason to have never come. Depression had enlarged the size of the defeat and extinguished the vision.

Consider also Joshua’s posture. He was lying on his face. There are times when this is appropriate and other times when it is not. He was not lying before the Lord in worship. He was lying before the Lord in hopelessness, fear, and faithlessness. God told him to “Stand up.” The posture of depression is lying down. The posture of the well armored soldier is standing up. Remember depression is a low place. Depression lies down in defeat, but we stand up to fight clad in the armor of God.

This passage demonstrates how depression can come from the hopelessness of circumstances that have been enlarged beyond reality. We must see our giants, but without fear, knowing that God is greater. See Judges 6:11-16 and II Kings 6:15-17. There are more with us than with the enemy. “If God be for us who can be against us.” We must stand up in the face of depression, not lie down and listen to the voices of the enemy. Energy is required to defeat depression. Depression is affected by a lazy state of mind. Instead of lazy mind we must have disciplined mind transformed by the Word of God (Rom 12:2; II Tim. 1:7; II Pet 3:1; Phil 2:5). Ephesians 6: 17-18 encourages us: “And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints....” Paul is not describing a lazy relaxed mind, but one full of the Word and prayer. We must STAND UP as Joshua was told to do. Notice this scripture mentions supplication (asking for help) and being watchful (on our guard). Don’t let the devil walk all over you. Be on your guard. Fill your mind with the Word of God and prayer.

Key 3 - Rise up (Read Isaiah 40:31)

Many questions arise in our hearts that become battle grounds. Questions like, “Why did you make me like this, God?”; “Will my situation ever change?”; “Why don’t people appreciate me?” rise up in our hearts. Sometimes the questions can not be answered with what God has revealed to us and we must “Wait on the Lord.” When a storm arises the eagle is not forced to weather the storm like other birds, but will spread its wings catch the updrafts, and rise high above the storm’s fury. So often we feel like the questions we have must be addressed. These questions are like a storm for us, they are too big for us to stop and to violent for us to overcome. But there is a way to keep from being “cast down” by the storm, it is to rise above it. We must focus our trust on the Lord, knowing that He is intimately involved with every aspect of our lives and wait on His presence. When we begin to focus on the Lord in worship and remembering His love, we begin to rise above the storm. The storm still remains, but we have risen above it. RISE UP. It is a great key to overcoming depression and also to coming to knowledge of the Lord.

Several keys I have found in rising up are as follows: Speak the scriptures out loud. Scriptures as Psalms 23, 91, 121, and 103, are important scriptures for overcoming fear. There are many powerful scriptures. Eph. 1, Rom. 8, Joel 2 and Isa. 54 speak of our heritage in Christ. Also, focus on the Lord by thanking the Lord. Thank Him for His blood, His salvation, and His love. Thank Him for His past acts, what He will do, and for who you are in Christ. Remember that no weapon formed against you will prosper, that you are the head and not the tail, that Jesus has set His love upon you, and that you are more than a conqueror through Jesus. Also, singing to the Lord can help you to rise up. There are many power praise and worship songs available on CD or for download. After your focus is on the Lord (you are above the storm), speak to the storm. Jesus said to speak to the mountain and it would be removed. Also, pray for wisdom and guidance. Jesus will help you. Also, after you have entered that secret place of fellowship above the storm, don’t leave! Stay there with the Lord a while.

Key 4 - Return to the Lord (Jeremiah 15:15-21)

Asaph was envious because others did not have to go through what he was going through. Jeremiah was also suffering at the hands of others. The Lord gave him words to deliver to the people of Israel, but they were not listening to him. Not only did they not want to listen to him, but they were threatening him. At one point in his life Jeremiah was thrown in a well full of mud. Another time, he was jailed. His life could not be described as pleasant, and he was in a low a depressed state of mind. In this state of mind he complained to the Lord: "I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, Nor did I rejoice; I sat alone because of Your hand, For You have filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual And my wound incurable. Which refuses to be healed? Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream, As waters that fail?" Jeremiah is saying in effect that he had done what he was supposed to and that God had abandoned him. This is not Jeremiah's only bout with depression. Jeremiah's writings often describe low places in his life. The Lord's response to Jeremiah is important and we should take note as we too will find ourselves in times of hardship in this life. The Lord replies, "If you return, Then I will bring you back; You shall stand before Me; If you take the precious from the vile, You shall be as My mouth." Jeremiah was accusing God of abandoning him, while God made it plain that Jeremiah was in need of returning to Him. God does not abandon us, but we can abandon him. God did not tell Jeremiah that his circumstances would get better, but he did tell him that he would be a representative of the Lord Most High if he was willing to repent and turn to the Lord. Even in the worst of situations, God loves His children and has a beautiful plan for them. In times of depression we must make sure that we have not left the Lord. If we will yield our offended hearts to the Lord and return to Him, we shall again know the joy of His presence.

Key 5 -Remember the Lord (Read I Samuel 30:1-8)

The event that David and his men experienced here could probably be described as an "Agony" or "Trauma" experience as I described above. The men "lifted up their voices and wept until they had no more power to weep," and the men considered stoning David because of the loss of their families to the Amalekites. This situation though was not a trauma experience that had to be borne with no hope of deliverance. The Lord had deliverance in mind for their situation if they would lift up their eyes to the Lord. David in this case responded differently than Joshua. David did not go to the Lord at first as Joshua had, but only wept with his men. The Bible says that "...David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." The question arises: how did David strengthen himself in the Lord. I believe he remembered the victory against Goliath, the lion and the bear that he slew. I believe he renewed his mind in remembering that the Lord had promised him the throne and a sure house. I believe he remembered his time of sweet fellowship with the Lord, and remembered the character of the Lord and His love. HE REMEMBERED THE LORD HIS GOD. Then, he considered that he must go to Him and find out what to do since the Lord had protected, loved, and kept him through all his trials. We must stir our faith by remembering (Ps. 77:10-13; II Tim 1:3-7). David's answer came when he remembered the Lord and inquired for an answer. The Lord was faithful to speak. David's question is telling: "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?" David remembered the Lord and his faithfulness. He all ready had some ideas of what to do since the Lord was with him in many other battles. David recovered all and the spoils of war because he remembered the Lord his God.

Key 6 - Speak often of the Lord (Mal 3:13-18), but in thankfulness!

The people of Malachi's day were saying that it was, "useless to serve the Lord" and "... we have walked as mourners." This is contrasted with, "... those who feared the LORD spoke one to another, And the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD and meditate on His name." The Lord says of these, "They shall be mine." The first group went about moaning and complaining, mourning and whining, sorrowing and sulking. They were wearied and in a depressed state of mind, blind to the goodness of the Lord. The second group was speaking of the goodness of the Lord all day long and enjoying serving Him. What was the difference, why was ones service a weariness and the others a joy. Part of the answer, I believe can be found in Psa 77:1-12. In this passage (verse 3) the writer complained and his spirit was overwhelmed. He, like the people of Malachi, did not consider the Lord to be very fair to him and slipped into a spirit of complaining and ungratefulness that overwhelmed him. Unthankfulness to the Lord will produce depression. In verses 10-12, the writer, Asaph, began to recall and rehearse in His mind all that the Lord had done. He spoke, "...But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the LORD; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds. Your way O God, is in the sanctuary." As Asaph began to recall the works of the Lord and his good to himself and Israel, his outlook was elevated to excitement, peace, and gratitude (key 5). Building on his remembering, he spoke of the goodness of the Lord

in thankfulness and just as in the time of Malachi. The Lord remembered his words, and they are recorded in the Bible. The Lord loves His children and blesses them with joy and a place with him (called the sanctuary in Psalm 77).

Key 7 - You must be set free from fear by Jesus, through faith in His blood and care

Hebrews 2:14-15 says that Jesus released us from bondage of the fear of death, by his death for us. The root fear of all fears is the fear of death. Many of us are under condemnation, because we somehow feel that we have not pleased God and are under judgment. Dear one, please consider that Jesus Christ is our “Advocate with the Father” (1 John 2:1), that He “ever lives to make intercession for us” (Heb 7:25), that the one who comes to Him he will “by no means cast out” (John 6:37), that “Whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame” (Rom 10:11), that “God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17), that “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). Dear one, fortify your spirit with the Word of God. No one can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus for you (Rom. 8:37-39). You don’t have to win over Jesus as He is all ready on your side. Remember the angels said to the shepherds, “Peace, good will toward men.” When the Bible says we have an advocate with Father. The word advocate speaks of a defense attorney in the original language. How foolish would it be if we had to try to convince our lawyer in front of the judge that he (the lawyer) should accept us? He is our advocate before the judge. We don’t have to win Jesus over. He died for us to save us. It is what the Bible calls grace (Eph 2:4-10). Believe on Jesus and you have peace with God. Follow him and love him and you will know His salvation in all things.

Thoughts on Fellowship with the Lord

I’ve given some of my own testimony and listed several keys from the scriptures in overcoming depression. I want to as I close give you some suggestions on having a devotion time with the Lord. These are things that have worked for me while other ways of approaching the Lord have not. These suggestions are not LAW, but I hope that you will consider them as they have come out of 35 years of serving the Lord.

1. Morning is the best. Set aside a time in the morning to approach the Lord. Evening is for sleep and that is what you will find your body needing when you go to pray in the evening. I always spend a little time before bed with the Lord, but my main devotion time is in the morning.
2. I don’t always start with prayer in the morning. Why? I find that my mind tends to wander and that I often have to direct it toward the Lord. It is not always so as some mornings I will wake up filled with the Spirit or song. But often, if I start with prayer, I will see my mind drift into unproductive thinking or even worse. I start by speaking the Word. I read Bible portions out loud and quote memorized texts. If you will speak the scriptures every morning, returning to meaningful passages the scriptures will begin to speak to you and become a part of you. After I have done this for a bit, I am more able to hear the Lord.
3. Speak in tongues. Jude instructs us to build up our faith through praying in the Spirit. This is another way to enter into an attitude of prayer and hearing from the Lord. Worship and intercession will flow out as you enter in to His presence using this gift.
4. I read the Bible, meditating on meaningful sections, but also reading larger sections in a more consistent pattern. Booklets that schedule reading through the Bible in a year can be helpful.
5. I use prayers from prayer journals and the Bible. Rev. Michael Peterson (available through Maranatha Fellowship, 9636 W. Hepton Rd., Nappanee, IN. 46550 or email: warrior4him247365@hotmail.com) has put together a booklet that guides you to prayer using Bible prayers. Rev. Richard and Helen Shipp (www.workingwithjesus.org) also have an excellent prayer pack with prayers and scriptures that will help you in your devotion time.
6. I find that praying out loud is much more effective than silent prayer. Silent prayers tend to be less focused and drift into random thoughts especially when you are tired. We all need rest, but there are times that we must press through in prayer when our body is tired. If you are depressed or disturbed, sitting in chair sulking is not the best activity. You must use energy to focus your heart to the Lord. See Key 3 on rising up.
7. Spend time in just fellowshiping with the Lord. Start with thanksgiving and allow this to take you into

worship and praise. Waiting on the Lord is part of this fellowship time and should be entered into when your mind and spirit have entered into communion with Jesus. You can begin with waiting on God and God will honor this too, but be ready to do battle in your mind. Don't let your mind wander all over the place. It is my belief that it is better to start waiting on the Lord after you all ready have your heart and mind focused on Jesus.

8. Make singing and music a part of your devotions.

9. Always invite the Holy Spirit to be with you, work with you, speak to you, and guide you. He is a person and without Him your life and devotions will be unfruitful.

10. When the Lord and His presence show up. Don't leave; invite Him to spend the day with you. If you can spend time in fellowship, do so. The Lord will continue to come if we desire Him and seek after Him.

Final Thoughts

YOU CAN EXPERIENCE PEACE IN YOUR LIFE. You can have a mind that is at rest and free. You can experience a walk of gladness and hope. If you are not experiencing these, you should also purge your life of darkening influences. If you go to a church where people are not experiencing salvation and deliverance, get out!!! If you're reading this because you are depressed, do you think that you will help them? Get in an atmosphere where people are actively seeking and experiencing the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and where the Word of God is preached. Also stop mixing your life with the world. If you spend too much time watching the news, browsing the internet, or reading the news paper, what will your heart express? If you view filthy magazines or internet pornography, listen to music that does not glorify Jesus, watch movies that do not build you up, or spend your mornings in gossip with the "bad news coffee club," REPENT. No wonder you are depressed if you do any of these things. Stop sinning and live your life for Jesus. You'll experience happiness when you do.

As I have written this, I did not intend to discount the physical affects that bodily disorders, poor nutrition, women's monthly cycles, or hormonal imbalances. I encourage you to use wisdom and seek the Lord concerning how best to best take care of your body also, though I have not addressed these issues directly.

Jesus has given many tools for us to be transformed into joyous Christians. Jesus has the "oil of gladness" (Heb 1:9), gates of thanksgiving (Ps. 100:4), and praise to the Lord instead of sadness (Isa. 61:1-3). Salvation, healing, deliverance, peace, and blessing are all in Jesus. Seek Him! I love you. Be blessed.