

THINK 21

HOPE AND HELP FOR THE DEPRESSED



COLLEGE PARK CHURCH

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BOOKS

- *Christians Get Depressed Too*
- *How Sermons Work*
- *Jesus on Every Page*
- *The Happy Christian*
- *Reset* (for men)
- *Refresh* (for women, co-authored Shona Murray)
- *Exploring the Bible: A Bible Reading Plan for Kids*
- *Why am I feeling like this?* (for teens)
- *Why is my teen feeling like this?* (for parents of teens)
- *Meeting with Jesus: A Bible Reading Plan for Kids*
- *Exploring the Bible Together: A 52-week Family Worship Plan*

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1. CHRIST THERAPY



DAVID'S STORY

I didn't know it at the time, but looking back I believe I was depressed in my teens and early twenties. I was living a life of rebellion against God. Many Sunday nights, I would struggle to sleep because I had heard a sermon that had reminded me of my terrible spiritual state and where I was going if I died. I wanted to be a Christian...but later. I was taking a terrible risk and my dark mind and mood reflected that. I knew that I was doomed if I died. I was living a very worldly life, and trying to find happiness in sinful pleasures which only made me sadder. My life was a mess and so were my emotions. But, by God's grace, in my early twenties, the Lord Jesus broke through my rebellion and powerfully saved me from my sins. I experienced peace and joy in an unforgettable way.

I want to tell you what Jesus Christ did for me, with the hope that you will want to experience this too by faith. In some cases, faith in Christ is the cure for depression.

Christ gives forgiveness instead of guilt

Much of my depression and anxiety was caused by unforgiven sin. I had done wrong, I knew I deserved to be punished by God, and I knew it was coming. Consequently, I suffered the stomach-churning fear of guilt and shame, sometimes as I sinned, and always after it. But, by trusting in Christ's death on the cross, where he suffered the punishment I deserved, my sins were fully, freely, and forever forgiven. Christ forgives ALL sin, even when our feelings tell us we have done something unforgiveable.

Christ gives perfection instead of failure

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Christ gives purpose instead of aimlessness

In my teen years, when I was far away from God, I was very ambitious. However my ambitions kept changing. I was all over the place with no settled sense of purpose or aim in life. But when I became a Christian, I immediately sensed a clear life-purpose – following and glorifying Christ in everything. This aim was so clarifying. No longer was my life all about self-promotion, but about Christ-promotion.

Christ gives contentment instead of greed

No matter how much I earned, I always wanted more. I was always striving for more money, a better car, a bigger apartment, better vacations. No matter how much I possessed, I was always restless. I never had enough. But Christ changed all that. When I got Christ, I got everything. It therefore doesn't matter if I lose money or experience poverty. I have Christ, the most valuable possession in the world. If you have Christ, you too can enjoy that joyful contentment instead of stressful coveting (Philippians 4:12).

Christ gives power instead of weakness

My life was lawless inside and outside. I knew that, but I couldn't stop it, no matter how hard I tried at times. But when Jesus saved me, he not only forgave my sins, he gave me his powerful Holy Spirit, enabling me to change, replacing lawless chaos with peace and order, inside and out.

I've been a Christian now for 32 years. Although there have been ups and downs, Christ's peace has remained the foundation of my life. I've come close to dying twice with life-threatening illness. But even in these moments, Christ's peace was more powerful than my fears. I knew I was going to heaven even if the worst happened. Perhaps your depression also has a spiritual cause. If so, seek a spiritual cure in Jesus Christ alone.

SIN IS DEPRESSING BUT
SALVATION IS UPLIFTING



What if my depression is more in my thoughts and feelings than in my soul.
Can the Bible help with that?



2. ELEPHANT THERAPY



DAN'S STORY

I was a fairly happy kid until middle school. I was always a bit shy and cautious, but, in middle school, worry and fear took over my life. Every time I got sick, I imagined I had cancer. I didn't play sports because I was afraid of messing up or getting an injury.

My Dad started drinking a lot. I hate going to school, because I get bullied a lot. When I'm home I spend hours locked in my bedroom. When I'm not playing video-games, I just lie on my bed, hoodie over my head, thinking how life sucks. I don't know why God is doing this to me.

Think of your emotions as an elephant. Like an elephant, our feelings can be very strong and damaging if we let them loose in our lives. That's why we need a rider on the elephant to take the reins of our feelings and keep them under control. That's where Psalm 77 comes in. It's so helpful for understanding how our thoughts and feelings are connected, and for doing some elephant training.

In the first nine verses, we see that Asaph's emotions were controlling him, causing him terrible trouble. The elephant of his feelings were on the rampage. But, by the end of the Psalm, we see him at peace. So what happened? Let's follow the Psalm.

Trouble > Feelings > Thoughts (1-9)

Time of Trouble: Asaph is facing a time of trouble in his life (v. 2).

Forceful Feelings: The result of the trouble is that Asaph's feelings are all over the place. In verses 1-9, he describes feelings of helplessness, depression, distress, overwhelm, and anxiety. He feels inconsolable, unloved, and forgotten. Although it's healthy to verbalize our emotions, these out-of-control feelings are now controlling him and his thinking.

Terrible Thoughts: With such feelings in control, it's no surprise that his thoughts are distorted., especially his thoughts about God. God is bad (v. 3), the past was great but the future is bleak (vv. 5-7), God has abandoned me (v. 7), God's character has changed (vv. 6-7), God has broken his promises (v. 8), God has no mercy left (v. 9). Asaph's emotions are poisoning his thoughts about himself and God? His feelings are determining the truth. The elephant is winning!

Big Pause: But, at the end of verse nine, he pauses and takes a deep breath. As he does this, his frantic feelings begin to subside, and his thoughts become clearer. He looks back on the previous nine verses as mistaken thinking because based upon his emotions.



Trouble > Thoughts > Feelings (10-20)

Remaining Trouble: As far as we know, Asaph is still facing trouble. But his response to the trouble has changed in verses 10-20. And the key is that biblical reasoning is now on the saddle and taking the reins of his feelings. Instead of **Trouble > Feelings > Thoughts**, the sequence now is **Trouble > Thoughts > Feelings**.

Biblical Thoughts: Whereas feeling verbs were prominent in verses 1-9, thinking verbs are prominent in verses 10-13. "I will remember, I will think, I will meditate," and so on. Reason is asserting itself and emotions are being dethroned. He decides he's going to think thoughts about God rather than focus on his feelings. As he begins to meditate on God's character, God's works, and God's Word, "I, me, and myself" are receding" and God is in the foreground.

Changed Feelings: Although Asaph's trouble has not changed, his thinking has changed, and, therefore, we notice a change in his feelings. He actually doesn't mention his feelings explicitly in verses 10-20, which is an indicator of them not being so prominent in his life. But they are implied by the tone and content of the remainder of the Psalm. There we see confidence instead of doubt, optimism instead of pessimism, security instead of fear, comfort instead of distress, clarity instead off confusion, peace instead of anxiety, and joy instead of depression.

Reason, biblically. informed and believing reason, is now in control, and he is at rest. He has modeled how to move from emotional thinking to biblical reasoning, from feelings-based thinking to truth-based reasoning. He has used God's word to train and tame the elephant of his emotions.

There are still tough things going on in Dan's life. He still gets bullied, I still get bullied, his Dad still gets drunk. But, like Asaph, he's discovered he can have peace and even some happiness inside despite what's going on outside. When the elephant of his emotions starts stirring he turns to Psalm 77 and says, "Don't let the elephant loose in your life!" He can't control his circumstances but he can adjust his response to them by using God's Word to tame his emotions.

BIBLICAL REASON TAMES
ELEPHANT EMOTIONS



What about medication?
Is using meds a lack of faith?



3. MEDICAL THERAPY



JULIE'S STORY

I'm a Christian but I've been feeling really down the past few years. I eventually went to the doctor because my Mom told me that her side of the family had a lot of depression in it. The doctor was very sympathetic and asked me a lot of questions about my diet, sleep, fitness, friendships, any major life events or losses, etc. After assuring him that my diet, sleep, and fitness was fine, and that I didn't have anything major going on in my life, he asked about my family history. Eventually he said he thought I would benefit from taking a course of anti-depressants and he also encouraged me to visit a Christian counselor.

Julie was reluctant to accept she was depressed because she thought Christians shouldn't get depressed. She was even more reluctant to take medication because she thought that more faith and prayer should make her better.

She also knew that her pastor was sympathetic to Christians who had depression, often praying for them and applying the Gospel to them. She went to see him and he chatted with her about her spiritual life. From what she told him, it was clear that Julie had not backslidden and therefore he suggested that the next step should be an appointment with a medical professional who could assess her and help her decide whether medication could be helpful to her. But before she left, he asked her to consider how God related to medication in four ways.

God's Gift

Just as God graciously provides the gift of faith to heal our spiritual problems, God has also graciously provided the gift of medications to heal physical problems. We thank God that he has helped scientists and doctors to discover these remedies. Lots of people in the past had these problems, but there were no meds to help.

God's Package

Usually meds should not be our first resort and rarely will meds alone solve the problem. Meds work best when used together with the other keys in this book. They are best as part of a package of holistic care that addresses the whole person.

God's Blessing

Ask God for the humility to accept the need for meds, the patience to wait for results and to put up with any side-effects, for the doctor to select the right one, and for God's blessing on the meds and on all the other means of healing he has provided.



God's Prevention

Recent research from by Dr Gold (Harvard, NIH) and published a Library of Congress Symposium found that depression is a disorder of the human stress response (see the previous address on anxiety).

But more significantly, they found that depression is a disease which involves brain tissue loss and damage. While there is chemical imbalance in depression, the primary cause is a loss of brain tissue in key areas (and abnormal increase of brain tissue in one key area).

In fact, "there's more loss of tissue in depression than there is in Parkinson's disease!" Dr Gold warned. "Depression is a full-blown disease," he warned, "a systemic full body disorder with neurodegenerative aspects and is a progressive disease, much more serious than we had previously appreciated." This is why medication must be considered as part of God's way to prevent worse damage down the road. Dr Gold found that anti-depressants work by increasing the growth of brain cells and the connections between them and in doing so prevents damage to the rest of the body.

DEPRESSION DAMAGES
THE BRAIN AND THE BODY

SUMMARY

