

# A Pastor's "Heart Talk" To Those Who Suffer From Depression

To my silently suffering friends.....

Pastors sometimes seem like the last person on earth who could understand how you feel on the inside. I want you to know that I feel a deeper understanding and feelings than you might suspect for people who suffer in quiet inward ways. Depression, and some other forms of mental and emotional difficulty, come knocking at the door of more people than you might know.

For a period of a few years in late college, and seminary years, I descended into a private darkness of depression. I tried to fight it solo, unable to confess it to others, or seek help. But I knew its power to drain my energy, interfere with concentration, and to drain away the enjoyment of life and relationships. All the while, I kept up the outward veneer of being a high honor pre-ministerial student. I'm not aiming to burden you with my story, nor to say that I can perfectly understand your situation. I'm only aiming to say that I have more understanding than you might

suspect. And understanding is something that I'm confident you long for.

It is so easy for us to feel wretchedly alone when fighting depression .... like .... "why did I get messed up, when everybody else seems to

go about their business free of this drain and drag on their emotions?" We wonder, "Does anybody understand? Could anyone even care if I shared my burden with them? Am I going crazy? Will I fall apart mentally?"

Feeling unsure about answers to these questions, we shove our feelings inside our private mental closet, and don't share them. We see the anxious concern and care of our family, and don't know how to ease their anxiety. We want quick fixes, instant solutions, ..... ANY solution that can ease the crushing weight of our feelings. We want hope that we can reach some brighter tomorrow. We feel we need to fight our way toward positive solutions. Yet the ability to exercise initiative, and to sustain any enduring fight to improve, is hampered by the de-energizing power of our

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*LifeConcerns*  
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depression. So we feel caught in the vice grip of emotional conflict.

Our emotional life withdraws from vividly connecting to the daily real world, and we constantly introspect, and evaluate how our internal emotions are functioning. Our world view collapses away from vividly connecting to outward reality, and we begin to focus on our own emotional condition, and how we are feeling and doing.

When we wake up in the morning, we treasure brief wakening moments hoping that the nightmare of depression will be a mere bad dream... Then, as we awaken further, the familiar burden reasserts itself, and the day begins in difficulty as usual.

Hopefully, the painful prospect of continuing in this condition can be a motivating force to motivate us to seek solutions. One reason people change is when they hurt so much they have to.

## *Positive Affirmations For Facing Depression*

Now, moving from the point of communicating some understanding the dilemma, to pointing our way toward the distant solutions, let me suggest the following helpful attitudes that you can affirm for yourself.



♥ I accept the fact that I am depressed.... No pretense, no denial. I have a problem. This problem defies easy solution, and I need help for it. It is OK to have a problem bigger than I can solve by myself. It is OK to seek help and assistance.

♥ I accept the efforts of people who wish they could help me. They may not understand, and may not know that solution. They may even say things that hurt me inside. But I accept that they do care about me, and I appreciate their efforts to help. It is good to know that people care, even if their caring is imperfectly expressed.

♥ Though I prefer not to suffer discomfort, I know I am willing to fight my way forward by faith. I accept my current condition as my current reality, but I do not surrender to that condition as my ultimate or final reality. I am too special, and too precious to make my depression become the defining center of my whole life.

♥ I admit that I am a person whose nature is mental, emotional, spiritual, physical, biological and chemical - all these together. I will seek mental, spiritual and emotional help. I will also seek professional medical help, to see if there are medicinal remedies that can help me fight the causes/effects of this depression. I will also seek to remedy any discernible spiritual, mental, emotional and lifestyle problems that may be significant contributors to my situation.

♥ I will live by faith ..... trusting that I need to function in ways that may not come easily. Though I may not feel energized, I will step forward by faith, one moment at a time, one day at a time, one week at a time, to engage my limited energies in positive attempts to live a meaningful life. The negative feelings, which I seem unable to fully control, have NO RIGHT to determine the ultimate direction and outcome of my life. I choose to exercise my limited powers of free choice, and my limited emotional strength, to hope, trust, pray and seek for positive improvement, however long it may take, and however difficult it may be.

♥ If fighting my depression seems unsuccessful in the near term, I will not use my limited energies to wage war on the unchanging feelings. I will redirect my limited energies to doing positive things for myself and for others that are healthy to do. I will use my energies to serve others. I will use my energies to do healthy things for myself. I will exercise, eat healthily, and keep in contact with the world around me. I will praise God for those times, however brief they may be, when I am able to forget my own troubles, and enjoy things around me. I will be grateful for every moment that I may feel clear in thinking, unburdened in emotions, unclouded with feelings of depression. If depression returns, I will not let its return haunt me, or depress me further. I will not spiral downward, getting depressed even more deeply about the fact that I'm depressed. I accept my

core level of depression for right now, but will use every available energy to adopt healthy attitudes, healthy habits, and positive activities.

♥ I will find someone (counselor, parent, sibling, friend, etc.), who is willing to listen to me when I'm at my lowest moments, so that I do not feel so alone in facing my problems.

♥ I will try to trust God for help. When problems persist beyond my patience level to deal with them, I will still trust God has a better way and a better plan for me, even if it does not come on my timetable. I will not waste time blaming God, denying God, or cursing God for my current situation. I will simply seek God's help for facing the present moment with hope.

♥ If thoughts of self-destruction come into my mind, I will not let those thoughts capture or terrorize me. I know that such thoughts may occur to people facing depression. I will not deny the thoughts, pretending they didn't occur. But neither will I permit those thoughts to seize the center of my being. I will confess my feelings to a trusted counselor, parent or friend. If I find myself planning steps of self-destruction, I will seek help and support at once. I recognize that depressed people sometimes have unpleasant self-destructive thoughts. Depressed people are tempted to think that death is an easy way out. Instead, I confess that I am created and made for LIFE, and for pursuit of good goals that God can bless. If life is a race, I may get to the finish line with difficulty, and may have a few scars, and may even limp across the finish line. But I will not surrender to negative forces. I will go forward. I will not surrender to the forces of death, depression or defeat that seem to want to seize me. I choose life! Battered and buffeted ... yes! But I still choose LIFE. It may not be everything I want. It may fall short of what I'd hoped for.. But I still CHOOSE LIFE, and HOPE!

♥ I will have confidence in my worth and value because of the knowledge that I am loved by God. My value is not based on my beauty, brains, body, bucks, or brawn. My value is based on the fact that I am a loved creation of God. I know my faults and failures, my difficulties and problems all too well. But I choose to unlock and unbind my self-worth from being dependent on outward and surface traits. I am still

loved by God, even as a person struggling with depression.

(Jeremiah 29:11 NIV) *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

*This brochure was first written in February 2002 in honor of a special young friend who experienced a significant loss while already suffering from depression.*

If you are facing significant depression, you should seek help from professionals in the medical and Christian counseling field to assist you in discovering the root causes, and appropriate treatments.

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