

Does the Bible Offer Hope for Depression?

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Note: This article considers the spiritual side of a serious topic. Please note that depression sometimes necessitates medical intervention.

Depression is perhaps the most common emotional problem that we face today. Experts suggest as many as one in five Americans experiences severe depression sometime during their lives, and depression may be the most common health problem for women. Symptoms of depression include apathy, insomnia, difficulty in concentrating, and a general loss of interest in life. Severely depressed people may become suicidal, violent, or completely withdrawn. Depression has always been a problem for mankind. Bible characters such as King Saul, Elijah the prophet, Job, and others experienced depression.

Sources of depression may be physical, psychological, or spiritual. Fatigue, chemical imbalances, and other physical problems may cause it. After his defeat of the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, Elijah was physically exhausted. When Jezebel threatened his life, he fled into the wilderness and was ready to die. The angel of the Lord comforted him and strengthened him with food, telling him, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you" (1 Kings 19:7). He still felt overwhelmed and alone, however. He said, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life" (1 Kings 19:10). He repeated. "I alone am left; and they seek to take my life" (1 Kings 19:14). The Lord encouraged him by letting him know that there were still seven thousand faithful persons in Israel, and by

sending Elisha to help him.

Loss is a common psychological cause of depression. Job lost his possessions, family, health, and even his reputation. He cried, "The thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest, for trouble comes" (Job 3:25–26). Later he learned that God continued to control the universe: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You" (42:2). Unfulfilled hopes and dreams and feelings of worthlessness or helplessness brought on by stress also cause depression. These feelings often come because one has lost proper perspective. Disappointments may be opportunities in disguise—times to rearrange priorities, making them in line with God's will. We can overcome feelings of helplessness and worthlessness by understanding that God is still in control. He demonstrated His love for us in the cross (Romans 5:8).

Sin has spiritual consequences, which often include depression. Obeying God is the key. "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love" (John 15:10). God does not intend for us to be depressed, and He is eager to forgive and comfort. —Bob Prichard