

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

The faces we see in shopping malls and the conversations we engage in with friends can sometimes leave the impression that people in general are serene and happy. But if we could spend a day in the office of a trained counselor or minister, or if we took some time for serious and open discussion with our neighbors, we would get a different impression. We'd conclude that the world is filled with people who are dejected, unhappy, and hurting. Many, in fact, merely go through the motions of living, while masking their true feelings of despondency. In some cases, it's been months or even years since they really enjoyed anything. They take little interest in their work. They're withdrawn. They're restless and irritable. They see themselves as worthless. They vacillate between self-reproach and self-excuse. They talk about their heavy feelings of guilt. They feel tired all the time. They can't sleep. They complain about aches and pains. Sometimes they wish they were dead. And no wonder!

Medical research shows that such people have more heart attacks and a higher rate of cancer and arthritis than the population as a whole. The continual inner tension apparently interferes with the natural functions of the body.

In this lesson we'll consider five important steps in overcoming depression - one of the worst of all human afflictions. They are:

- Acknowledge God's Providence.
- Admit to God's Prerogative.
- Accept God's Pardon.
- Abound in God's Love.
- Appropriate God's Provision.

ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S PROVIDENCE

The first step in overcoming depression is to acknowledge God's providence. You should recognize that God has made you, He has a purpose for your life, and He has your eternal good in mind.

Many people are dissatisfied and complain about their appearance, their temperament, their abilities, and their circumstances. They magnify the negatives and overlook the positives. It's true that some do seem to get more than their share of what the world calls "bad breaks." They're physically deformed. They're lonely. They're chronically ill and destitute. But an acknowledgment of God's providence and the

fact that He has a special place and purpose for each of us can give peace of mind and a joy-filled heart. This can come even when everything seems to be going wrong and we have that "short-changed" feeling. When you're tempted to complain because of circumstances, remember, God knows all about it. He knows what He's doing. He makes no mistakes. And what He does is always right. Referring to the Lord God, Moses declared,

He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He (Deuteronomy 32:4).

Yes, we're in the hands of the One who is "just and right."

ADMIT TO GOD'S PREROGATIVE

The second step to overcome depression is to admit to God's prerogative. You must recognize that God has an absolute and perfect right to do with you as He pleases. The apostle Paul included this interesting and rather arresting truth relating to God's sovereignty:

What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For He saith to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." So, then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth." Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto Me, "Why doth He yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will?" Nay but, O man, Who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, "Why hast thou made me thus?" Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had before prepared unto glory? (Romans 9:14-23).

When you're tempted to complain because of your circumstances, when you're feeling sorry for yourself because everything about you seems wrong, when you're blue because others have it so much better than you, remember Paul's words in Romans 9:20,

Nay but, O man, who are thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, "Why hast thou made me thus?"

God has the right to do with us as He pleases. And we as His creatures should accept whatever He sends. In fact, we should rejoice when He exercises His sovereignty, and be confident that His ways are perfect. When Abraham was interceding with the Lord on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, he said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25). So admit to God's prerogative. Rather than bemoaning your circumstances, rejoice in God's goodness, wisdom, and power. Gladly surrender to His will. As you do, it will make a tremendous difference in your overall outlook.

ACCEPT GOD'S PARDON

The third step to overcome depression is to accept God's pardon. It's vital to the removal of depression. Guilt, whether involving actual, specific sins of the past, or merely a general, sinful feeling, is a basic aspect of the problem. The person plagued with a guilty conscience finds himself in a most distressing situation. He doesn't love himself. He can't love anyone else. He doesn't think they love him. And he sinks deeper and deeper into a state of despondency.

It is therefore imperative to begin the journey out of the darkness of depression by receiving the forgiveness and the real freedom from guilt which God so graciously offers. For the unbeliever, this means an acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. Although there is such a thing as false guilt, this fact in no way minimizes the existence of real guilt. The person who has never been saved must

acknowledge his sin and receive Christ as his Savior. The Lord Jesus, through His perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection, paid the price for our sins. The Bible tells us,

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

To all who believe on Him, Christ's death on the cross brings freedom from the torment of guilt, relief

from the stress of tension, and liberation from that awful feeling of worthlessness and alienation from God. Yes, there are wonderful emotional as well as spiritual blessings awaiting those who trust Christ for salvation and experience the reality of sins forgiven.

Remember, God wants to forgive you. So confess your sins to Him, agree with Him about your failures, and then accept His forgiveness, His cleansing, and the removal of your guilt. It's essential in moving from the darkness of depression into the sunlight of peace and assurance.

ABOUND IN GOD'S LOVE

The fourth step to overcome depression is to abound in God's love. Jesus said,

Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself (Matthew 22:37-39).

Yes, you should abound in God's love. By that I mean you should love the Lord supremely and your neighbor as yourself. When you do that, you become so busy worshiping and serving the Lord and doing things for others that you don't have the time to think about your own problems. And because of the satisfaction you experience with such a life of unselfishness and service, it's easier to accept yourself the way you are. The love of God permeating your life and reaching out to others makes you more attractive and pleasant. Others will enjoy your company, and you will win new friends.

If you've been self-centered, endeavor with God's help to show a genuine interest in others. Look for someone who needs a friend. Go out of your way to be of service.

There's always something you can do. And once you start doing what God wants you to do, and you abound in His love, you'll have taken another important step on the pathway of deliverance from depression.

APPROPRIATE GOD'S PROVISION

The fifth step in overcoming depression is to appropriate God's provision. Having acknowledged His providence, having submitted to His prerogative, having accepted His pardon, and having reached out to others by demonstrating the love of Christ, you must exercise your faith to appropriate the Lord's blessings. But you can never do it in your own strength.

You may ask, "How can I avail myself of God's provision?" Step number one is to think of all He has done for you! Reflect upon your salvation. He has given you new life through the miracle of regeneration. He has placed the Holy Spirit within you. He has given you His righteousness. He has

made you a citizen of Heaven. He has introduced you into His family. He has blessed you with the church and the fellowship of other believers. He promises you His guidance. He assures you that He will supply all of your needs. And He invites you to the throne of grace to find help in time of need.

Recognizing God's abundant provision, you will draw upon His strength and be able to do what's right. You'll start feeling better about yourself. And you'll be delivered from spiritual defeat.

TAKE THE FIVE STEPS

I wonder, have you let depression get the best of you? Are you downhearted? Are you afraid? Are you discouraged because of failures in your Christian life? Then I would encourage you to take the five steps we've been discussing. Here they are again: (1) Acknowledge God's Providence. (2) Admit to God's Prerogative. (3) Accept God's Pardon. (4) Abound in God's Love. (5) Appropriate God's Provision.

When you do these things, you will see how your life will change. Discouragement will be replaced by joy, fearfulness by confidence, and bitterness by love. You'll be more attractive to others and to yourself. And above all, you'll bring honor to

God. Remember, Christian friend, we are destined for eternal glory by our Lord Jesus Christ. The best is yet to come. We ought to say with the apostle Paul,

...though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

The cares and concerns of this life grow dim when we see them in the light of eternity. So keep your eyes fixed upon the eternal and not the temporal. This too can help lift the clouds of depression. I like what the apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6,7).

Before you can experience the peace OF God, you must first of all know the peace WITH God. It comes by placing your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). So admit your sinfulness and need of salvation and receive the Lord Jesus. Then as you walk with the Lord in faith and obedience, you can experience the blessing of both the peace WITH God and the peace OF God.