

me, DEPRESSED?

by Florence MacKenzie

Alice was a lovely elderly lady, always bright and joyful, a shining light in our church. I loved regularly sharing afternoon tea with her. On one of these visits, she placed her teacup and saucer firmly on the table in front of her and said, to my great surprise, “I don’t know how any Christian can be depressed – we have so much going for us!” I found myself struggling momentarily to know how to respond. Depression had obviously never touched Alice’s life or, if it had, she wasn’t going to admit it!



Sadly, Alice’s view of depression is all too common in some Christian circles. As a result, many Christians battle depression alone and in secret, fearful of admitting they are depressed and, therefore, being reluctant to seek help. But the reality is that being a Christian is no safeguard against depression.

Anyone who has experienced the darkness of depression will know it defies comments like, “Pull yourself together!” or “Get over it!” As a powerful force, depression has the capacity to paralyze our will by preventing us from making rational decisions and taking appropriate action. It can also mess with our mind by distorting the way we think. This is evident in ‘the triad of depression’ where we have negative views of ourselves, the world, and the future.

But where does depression come from? It appears that its origins can be internal, external, or perhaps a combination of both. Internal causes of depression might be physical or biochemical in origin and medical help is available in such cases. For some people, this will provide the relief they so desperately need. A major external cause of depression is loss, for example, the loss of a person through death, geographical relocation, or a broken relationship; a job loss as a result of injury or redundancy; or loss of hope because events didn’t turn out as expected. Depression

can also have a spiritual root. If we’re living at a distance from God, consistently neglecting Bible reading and prayer or withdrawing from fellowship, depression can be a warning sign that all is not well in our Christian lives. The many and varied origins of depression mean that, as far as solutions are concerned, one size *does not* fit all. Nevertheless, there are general principles we can put into practice when facing depression. Even in the darkness there is **H-O-P-E**...

Hold on to the truth that, as a follower of Jesus Christ, nothing (and that includes depression) can separate you from the love of God (Rom. 8:38-39). Even if your feelings tell you otherwise, He has not abandoned you but He continues to love and care for you because you are precious to Him.

Openly acknowledge your depression, first of all to yourself, and then to a trusted friend or counsellor who is willing to walk with you through the darkness. Don’t suffer in silence – reach out and get help.

Praise God regularly. This might seem strange when you’re depressed because praise is reserved for the good times, right? I’ve discovered that praise really comes into its own in the bad times! Despite the changes, many of them negative, that take place in our lives, God never changes! His goodness, kindness, mercy, and compassion continue in the bad times as well as the good times. He is always worthy of our praise, even when we don’t feel like praising Him.

Encourage yourself through excellent resources that are available, some of them written by people who have experienced the darkness of depression. An author in this category is Mary Southerland and her book is titled *Hope in the Midst of Depression: How to Embrace Life Again* (Harvest House Publishers, 2007). Mary, a pastor’s wife and women’s ministry director, describes her journey out of depression and offers practical steps for you to take on board.

Perhaps you’re not the one experiencing depression, but a friend or family member might be. If so, are you prepared to be a safe place for them to admit their depression and explore possible solutions? We owe it to all those who come up against an “Alice perspective” of depression.
