



THE VALLEY OF DEPRESSION

MICHAEL R. LYLES

(Psalm 130)



At times, everybody feels sad, down, and blue. Solomon wrote of "a time to weep" and "a time to mourn" (Eccl. 3:4). The writer of Hebrews assured believers they would have times of need in their lives (Heb. 4:16).

Depression, however, is a deeper level of emotional turmoil and can affect many people in many ways. According to research, nearly one person in five will experience significant and persistent levels of depression. Significant and persistent depression causes people to miss more work than diabetes and heart disease, as well as being a major risk factor after heart attacks and strokes. Depression affects individuals, families, coworkers, and others who are in regular contact with the depressed person. Clearly, depression is a serious concern for many people.

CAUSES OF DEPRESSION

Depression can be caused by a variety of factors, including stress, fear, loneliness, guilt, and anger. David wrote of his depression caused by unconfessed sin, leading to a groaning in his soul and a loss of strength (Ps. 38). God used depression as a signal to get Nehemiah's attention to do His work (Neh. 1; 2). Job experienced financial, personal, and relational losses that led him to curse the day he was born (Job 1-3). Elijah was so depressed after a great victory that he wanted to die (1 Kin. 19:4). Many other Bible characters shared the lonely path of depression.

Although environmental issues such as work, stress, family, and other relationships can add to depression, actually a number of medical factors are involved, including thyroid abnormalities, female hormone fluctuations, and diabetes. Nutritional shortages leading to B-12 or iron deficiencies can cause sadness. Patients

with a recent history of stroke or heart attack are at high risk for depression. Common prescription drugs such as anti-hypertensives or oral contraceptives, and recreational drugs such as alcohol and cocaine, can cause significant levels of depression. Abnormalities in the brain's management of hormones such as serotonin and norepinephrine can also bring on overwhelming feelings of doom and gloom. Understanding the physical components that can cause depression can help to put this disorder in context and give an idea of how widespread it is.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Psalm 102 provides a virtual checklist of symptoms that King David experienced during a particularly stressful period in his life. "Let my cry come to You. Do not hide Your face from me in the day of my trouble" (102:1, 2). He wrote of feeling stricken physically and described losing meaning and purpose in his life: "My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned like a hearth. My heart is stricken and withered like grass" (102:3, 4). He lost his appetite: "I forget to eat my bread" (102:4). He felt isolated and rejected: "I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert" (102:6). He couldn't sleep: "I lie awake" (102:7). He had frequent crying spells: "I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping" (102:9).

Serious depression can present itself in a number of ways. When the above symptoms are experienced in a dramatic, dis-

abling fashion for weeks or months at a time, it is called "major depression." When these symptoms are low-grade and chronic, it is called "dysthymic disorder." Depression can also alternate in a pattern of mood swings—with a person feeling irritable and then euphoric, having insomnia, or being agitated. This is called "bipolar disorder" or "manic depressive illness."

RESPONDING TO DEPRESSION

Elijah demonstrated both healthy and unhealthy responses to depression (1 Kin. 19). After the great victory on Mount Carmel, his life was threatened and he became afraid. He focused on the situation instead of on God. During a sequence of events, he sank deeper and deeper into a depressed state. His fear became so intense that he eventually ran away, isolated himself, and prayed that he would die (1 Kin. 19:4).

A summary of his behavior can be described as the HALT syndrome—a very vulnerable place for a person to be. At his most depressed state he was:

Hungry—He stopped eating.

Angry—He was mad at God for not caring about him.

Lonely—He left his servant and traveled alone.

Tired—He collapsed into sleep.

Any time a person experiences an intense combination of these characteristics, he or she is becoming vulnerable to developing some form of depression.

RECOVERING HOPE

God counteracted the HALT syndrome in Elijah's life at every level. He responded by providing food for Elijah. An angel touched Elijah, reminding him that he was not alone. Two times God encouraged Elijah to regain his strength by eating, drinking, and resting. God brought him out of the HALT syndrome, which enabled Elijah to listen and obey (1 Kin. 19:5–18).

The story of Elijah reminds us of the importance of having a real and personal relationship with God. When we are depressed, we may often feel like running away from our problems like Elijah. We must avoid isolating ourselves, as tempting as that might be. We may need to be accountable to a friend, pastor, family member, or Christian therapist who can help us through the difficult times. Depressed people must be careful to stay clear of addictive behaviors, unhealthy relationships, or socially avoidant behaviors, for these will only deepen a depressed state.

Though he felt hopeless, Elijah accepted God's help. He recognized God's voice and was strengthened and encouraged. He was then able to return to his life with a new ability to cope and a new hope for the future.

FURTHER MEDITATION:

Other passages to study about the issue of depression include:

- > Psalms 27; 34; 40:1–3; 42; 43; 88; 143; 147:3
- > Isaiah 41:10; 43:2
- > Romans 8:18–39
- > 2 Corinthians 1:8–11

Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on depression at 1 Kings 19:1–18 on page 463. See also the personality profile of Elijah on page 464.

down to the Brook Kishon and executed them there.

THE DROUGHT ENDS

⁴¹Then Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink; for *there is* the sound of abundance of rain." ⁴²So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; then he bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees, ⁴³and said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea."

So he went up and looked, and said, "*There is* nothing." And seven times he said, "Go again."

⁴⁴Then it came to pass the seventh time, that he said, "There is a cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea!" So he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot, and go down before the rain stops you.'"

⁴⁵Now it happened in the meantime that the sky became black with clouds and wind, and there was a heavy rain. So Ahab rode away and went to Jezreel. ⁴⁶Then the hand of the LORD came upon Elijah; and he girded up his loins and ran ahead of Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel.

ELIJAH ESCAPES FROM JEZEBEL

19 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, also how he had executed all the prophets with the sword. ²Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make

your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." ³And when he saw *that*, he arose and ran for his life, and went to Beer-sheba, which *belongs* to Judah, and left his servant there.

⁴But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I *am* no better than my fathers!"

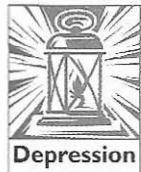
⁵Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel^a touched him, and said to him, "Arise *and* eat." ⁶Then he looked, and there by his head *was* a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷And the angel^a of the LORD came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise *and* eat, because the journey is too great for you." ⁸So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God.

⁹And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and He said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

¹⁰So 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

19:5 ^aOr Angel 19:7 ^aOr Angel

KEY PASSAGE



Depression

FINDING A WAY THROUGH THE DARKNESS

(19:1-18)

Exhausted by his confrontation with the prophets of Baal and fearing for his own life, Elijah fled into the wilderness. There, all alone, he prayed that he might die (19:4). Elijah had just seen God accomplish a great miracle at his hand and spark a revival among the people. Yet, alone and afraid, Elijah couldn't take it anymore.

Life has highs and lows, and as in a mountain range, the lows often come right after the highs. We may scale the heights of spiritual victory only to soon find ourselves in the dark valley of depression. While certain forms of clinical depression should be professionally treated, many depressed feelings are part of life's ups and downs. It helps to keep our perspective so as not to be surprised by the down times. Like Elijah, we should listen for God's "still small voice" (19:12) to comfort us.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about depression on pages 780, 781. See also the personality profile of Elijah on page 464.

sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life."

GOD'S REVELATION TO ELIJAH

¹¹Then He said, "Go out, and stand on the mountain before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the LORD, *but* the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, *but* the LORD was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.

¹³So it was, when Elijah heard *it*, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice *came* to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

¹⁴And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because 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."

¹⁵Then the LORD said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over



Depression

PERSONALITY PROFILE

ELIJAH AND THE DARKNESS OF DEPRESSION

(1 KINGS 19:1-18)

Depression has an insidious way of draining energy, twisting values, and assailing faith. And depression can affect anyone, even a great prophet of God. Elijah stands out as one of Israel's greatest prophets. He exuded great courage in the face of evil, fearlessly confronting King Ahab and the false prophets of Baal (1 Kin. 18:17-40). Yet when Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him, Elijah ran for his life and lapsed into a deep depression.

Elijah prayed to God to let him die. He lost his appetite; his thinking was disturbed; he withdrew from everyone. During this dark period, he curled up under a tree, wanting to die. Elijah's painful experience teaches that even the most courageous and spiritually mature believer can struggle with depression.

Elijah acted courageously, but when Jezebel threatened him, he reacted in fear. Fear is prevalent in many kinds of depression—*anxiety and depression coexist in 70 percent of those diagnosed with depression.* As Proverbs 12:25 reveals: "Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad."

God responded mercifully. He did not castigate or condemn Elijah for his condition—something that many depressed Christians expect from God. Instead, God provided rest and food and then encouraged Elijah to "go" and continue his ministry. This reveals the best principles for helping a person who is depressed:

- encourage the person to take care of himself or herself physically;
- encourage action but keep it simple;
- encourage the person to be goal-directed and then support every accomplishment.

God also addressed Elijah's distorted thinking. In his isolation, Elijah missed the fact that he was not the only faithful one left in Israel—God told him that 7,000 others had not bowed to Baal. Next, God sent Elijah to train Elisha for his future work in Israel (1 Kin. 19:19-21). The call to help others is a common antidote to the disabling self-absorption and social withdrawal of depression.

Through all of this, Elijah learned that God would never forsake him. Even in the depths of depression God shows loving concern and a way out.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about depression on pages 780, 781. See also the key passage note at 1 Kings 19:1-18 on page 463.

- ³ My tears have been my food day and night,
While they continually say to me,
"Where is your God?"
- ⁴ When I remember these *things*,
I pour out my soul within me.
For I used to go with the multitude;
I went with them to the house of God,
With the voice of joy and praise,
With a multitude that kept a pilgrim
feast.
- ⁵ Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And *why* are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance.^a
- ⁶ O my God,^a my soul is cast down within
me;
Therefore I will remember You from the
land of the Jordan,
And from the heights of Hermon,
From the Hill Mizar.
- ⁷ Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your
waterfalls;
All Your waves and billows have gone
over me.
- ⁸ The LORD will command His
lovingkindness in the daytime,
And in the night His song *shall be* with
me—
A prayer to the God of my life.
- ⁹ I will say to God my Rock,
"Why have You forgotten me?
Why do I go mourning because of the
oppression of the enemy?"
- ¹⁰ As with a breaking of my bones,
My enemies reproach me,

While they say to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"

- ¹¹ Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God;
For I shall yet praise Him,
The help of my countenance and my God.

PSALM 43

PRAYER TO GOD IN TIME OF TROUBLE

- ¹ Vindicate me, O God,
And plead my cause against an ungodly
nation;
Oh, deliver me from the deceitful and
unjust man!
For You *are* the God of my strength;
Why do You cast me off?
Why do I go mourning because of the
oppression of the enemy?
- ² Oh, send out Your light and Your truth!
Let them lead me;
Let them bring me to Your holy hill
And to Your tabernacle.
- ³ Then I will go to the altar of God,
To God my exceeding joy;
And on the harp I will praise You,
O God, my God.
- ⁴ Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?

42:5 ^aFollowing Masoretic Text and Targum; a few Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate read *The help of my countenance, my God.*
42:6 ^aFollowing Masoretic Text and Targum; a few Hebrew manuscripts, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate put *my God* at the end of verse 5.

SOUL NOTE



Hope in God (42:5-11) David was discouraged because he had been exiled by a jealous king and so was unable to worship in the tabernacle. His soul was "cast down" and "disquieted." Such depressed feelings cause some people to turn away from God. Others like David, however, allow those disquieted, depressed feelings to make them "hope in God," remembering His goodness. During such times, living by faith takes on new meaning. Depressed people must learn to trust what they cannot feel or see, knowing that "the LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with" them (42:8). **Topic: Depression**

To eat the bread of sorrows;
For so He gives His beloved sleep.

- 3 Behold, children *are* a heritage from the
LORD,
The fruit of the womb *is* a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,
So *are* the children of one's youth.
Happy *is* the man who has his quiver
full of them;
They shall not be ashamed,
But shall speak with their enemies in the
gate.

PSALM 128

BLESSINGS OF THOSE WHO FEAR THE LORD

A Song of Ascents.

- 1 Blessed *is* every one who fears the
LORD,
Who walks in His ways.
- 2 When you eat the labor of your
hands,
You *shall be* happy, and *it shall be* well
with you.
- 3 Your wife *shall be* like a fruitful vine
In the very heart of your house,
Your children like olive plants
All around your table.
- 4 Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
Who fears the LORD.
- 5 The LORD bless you out of Zion,
And may you see the good of
Jerusalem
All the days of your life.
- 6 Yes, may you see your children's
children.

Peace *be* upon Israel!

PSALM 129

SONG OF VICTORY OVER ZION'S ENEMIES

A Song of Ascents.

- 1 "Many a time they have afflicted me from
my youth,"
Let Israel now say—
- 2 "Many a time they have afflicted me from
my youth;
Yet they have not prevailed against me.
3 The plowers plowed on my back;
They made their furrows long."
4 The LORD *is* righteous;
He has cut in pieces the cords of the
wicked.
- 5 Let all those who hate Zion
Be put to shame and turned back
- 6 Let them be as the grass *on* the
housetops,
Which withers before it grows up,
7 With which the reaper does not fill his
hand,
Nor he who binds sheaves, his arms.
- 8 Neither let those who pass by them say,
"The blessing of the LORD *be* upon you;
We bless you in the name of the LORD!"

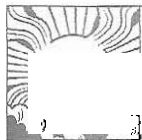
PSALM 130

WAITING FOR THE REDEMPTION OF THE LORD

A Song of Ascents.

- 1 Out of the depths I have cried to You,
O LORD;
Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive
To the voice of my supplications.
- 3 If You, LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

SOUL NOTE



Light in the Darkness (*ch. 130*) From the depths, the psalmist cried out to God. The writer recognized that people need God most when they are most depressed. Feelings of sadness can overwhelm a person, like impenetrable darkness. The psalmist called out to God, remembering His care (130:2), forgiveness (130:4), and redemption (130:7). Then, like a light shining in the darkness, he was willing to wait for the Lord and hope in Him (130:5-7). When life seems to be nothing but darkness, we must call out to God, trust Him, and never lose hope. **Topic: Depression**

And a small one a strong nation.
I, the LORD, will hasten it in its time.”

THE GOOD NEWS OF SALVATION

61 “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me,
Because the LORD has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the
brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to *those
who are bound*;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the
LORD,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
To console those who mourn in
Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of
heaviness;
That they may be called trees of
righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may
be glorified.”

And they shall rebuild the old ruins,
They shall raise up the former
desolations,
And they shall repair the ruined cities,
The desolations of many generations.
Strangers shall stand and feed your
flocks,
And the sons of the foreigner
Shall be your plowmen and your
vinedressers.
But *you* shall be named the priests of
the LORD,
They shall call you the servants of our
God.
You shall eat the riches of the
Gentiles,
And in their glory you shall boast.
Instead of your shame *you shall have*
double *honor*,
And *instead of* confusion they shall
rejoice in their portion.
Therefore in their land they shall possess
double;
Everlasting joy shall be theirs.

“For I, the LORD, love justice;
I hate robbery for burnt offering;
I will direct their work in truth.



Compassion (61:1, 2) Isaiah predicted that the Messiah would heal those with broken hearts and liberate spiritual captives and prisoners. God's chosen One would announce His grace to a desperate humanity as an expression of His compassion. From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus said that His purpose was to seek out lost sinners and restore them to a relationship with the Father (Luke 4:16-21). Jesus quoted Isaiah 61 to substantiate His claim to being the Messiah and to restate the purpose of His life and ministry. Jesus came to heal, teach, minister, and serve. His compassion reveals the character of God. **Topic: Compassion**

SOUL NOTE



Oil of Joy (61:3) God's love and understanding reach out to those who are depressed and discouraged. He promises to give consolation, beauty in place of ashes, oil of joy in place of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of heaviness. The Bible recognizes the heaviness of depression. God's Word brings hope and encouragement to those who are weighed down, and God's people stand with those who struggle, to bring relief and restoration. God promises that He will bring restoration “that He may be glorified.” **Topic: Depression**