

OVERCOME DEPRESSION

Strategies from Science & Scripture

Sample Chapter 1

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First Things First:

Christians and Depression

“ For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” 2 Timothy 1:7

C*hurch is not a museum for perfect saints — it's a first aid station for sinners who keep trying.* I can't recall the name of the pastor, who delivered that line, but his message resonated with me then and it still does today. I want to contribute to First-Aid supplies

God says He is for us, and we are loved. We can trust, and we must believe His Word. But, it can be hard to reconcile faith with depression, anxiety or other mental health issues. If you have struggled with this – you're not alone. Right from the start, you need to know you are loved. We're in this together.

Doubts and fears can seed questions such as:

“What's happening?”

“Why?”

“Now what?”

If you ask these questions, be assured God hears the cry of your heart. By His grace, we will explore answers together. Yes, there are answers. Yes, there is hope and help that you can use – right where you are, starting now.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

There has been a revolution in the study of the brain (neuroscience). We've started to understand brain-works, and can now answer the first of our opening questions: "What's happening?" With today's technology and new imaging systems we can see the brain in action as thoughts, and new learning, form physical links, creating neural patterns and pathways within the brain.

The glory of God is revealed as we discover more of His divine design, and watch new scientific findings align with the old wisdom of God's word for mankind. Proverbs 23:7 says: "For as he thinks in his heart, so he is." We have learned that what we *think* helps to form who, and what we are. We can use this knowledge to build recovery skills.

This book is a resource for faith-based self-help. It is not intended to replace professional treatment, but to offer more information and coping skills for independent use. It is not psychotherapy. It *is* skill building. The skills presented here do not present a 'cure' for depression – only God can offer healing. They *will* help light pathways to recovery.

In this text you will find brain science, powerful and practical recovery strategies, evidence-based therapies, and scriptures you can use to ease the grip of depression and anxiety. Mood disorders affect the whole person. We will build recovery skills in four major areas including Biological, Psychological, Social, and Spiritual dimensions. Information is based on current research, clinical practice, and personal experience.

Study of brain science might seem far removed from the practical strategies we are eager to explore, but it's important, and it will pay off. Reaching any goal requires commitment. If you want to win the Daytona 500, you must first learn to operate your vehicle, and then drive, baby, drive!

WHY I WANT TO SHARE WITH YOU

I'm a believer, a writer, a speech-language pathologist, and an education specialist. I have more than 30 years of experience, working with patients who have had to deal with some of the same issues that may be plaguing you. I've studied applications from neuroscience, psychology, direct clinical practice, and other training. I believe we are blessed – so that we can *be* a blessing to others. That's what this work is all about.

My work has included collaborative curriculum development and the teaching of various mental health recovery skills. My students were patients/residents in a secured, state mental hospital. Most found themselves in trouble with the law for actions taken while in the grip of mental illnesses. All were seeking, or were already on, a path to recovery. Many walked that path right through the high, razor-wired security gates, to rejoin their families and society.

I've been blessed to share their stories, to walk with them through some of their struggles, and to celebrate with many, as they stepped out of despair into the light of hope. We tried hands-on, practical strategies for coping with depression, anxiety and other symptoms of mental illnesses. We discovered; Failure isn't fatal — it's educational.

I'm not a psychiatrist or psychologist. I don't diagnose or treat illnesses, or prescribe medications. Thank God that professional counsel, therapeutic treatment, and medications are available. I hope those in need don't hesitate to seek them. And, by God's grace, there is much that individuals can do for themselves, with powerful, evidence-based self-help tools.

At the hospital, I could not share matters of faith, because of constraints governing presentations within a state-run facility. This text is not so limited. We will take full advantage of the truth offered in 2nd. Timothy 3:16 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable" All Bible references will be from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless noted otherwise.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT CONTENT:

When I'm learning a new skill, I ask ... "How does a thing like that work?" It helps me to "get it" when I understand the reasoning behind a skill set. It also boosts my confidence, and my motivation, to know there actually *are* reasons.

How about you? After absorbing new information, I also ask, "So what?" "How can I use this?" and "What's the cost or benefit?" We will seek answers together.

FIRST THINGS FIRST:

One of the first things we must do is to get rid of judgment. Depression, Anxiety, or mental illnesses are not crimes or sins. Yes, at times sin, (even crime) might be part of the picture — before, during, or after a struggle with this calamity. But the problems, themselves, are not. Too often we waste our strength and energy on thoughts like these:

"If I had real faith, I could beat this thing."

"If God is for me — why do I feel like such a loser?"

"What kind of sin have I committed to deserve this?"

"What's the matter with me? I'm so ashamed."

Does any of that sound familiar? It's sad that we say such things to ourselves. And, we fear that others are thinking these same, and even worse, things about us. Maybe some are. But if they are, it shows their own lack of understanding, not proof of our guilt or failure. Fear of what others are thinking or saying is one of the major hurdles we must overcome. We can't afford to let shame stop us, or anyone else, from asking for, and receiving help.

Jesus spent most of His time and energy with those who were in trouble. I love His response when He was questioned about people He associated with ...'when Jesus heard that, He said to them: *Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick*' (Matthew 9:12).

As for judging ourselves — it is written: “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1)

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, and volumes of research, says that depression is one of the most successfully treated conditions (80% relief). Yet the majority who experience depression and anxiety don't seek help. Why? If lack of knowledge is the reason, we need to learn together. If it's because of fear, or embarrassment, we need to encourage each other to boldly seek the help we need.

If a friend with Cancer did not seek treatment (with traditional or alternative medicines, diet, surgery or some other therapy), we'd think they should try *something*. We'd argue against waiting for the Cancer to run its course, out of fear that to seek treatment would admit to being weak in faith. We'd be upset knowing such an approach to Cancer is dangerous and could be fatal. Left untreated, depression and anxiety can be equally dangerous. Sadly, many slip into thinking of suicide as their only option.

Suicide is a terrible loss for us all. It happens far too often because someone felt alone, lost hope or couldn't imagine any other solution to a problem or a way to end the pain. And we weren't given (or didn't recognize); the opportunity to share some of our own hope, or to remind them they are not alone, and that there are other options.

WHAT CHOICES DO WE HAVE?

No one chooses to feel bad, right? Right. There is no 'blame' here. Life is choice. Love is choice. Recovery depends, in large measure, on choice. We have free will. Our God said we must 'choose' the way we will go. But, what if we don't know which choice to make, or even what choices are possible?

Courage! There are options. The problem is how easily we lose sight of them. We may even doubt the very existence of light as we stand in depression's shadow. We can hardly imagine choosing to search for it.

Even in the darkest depression -- light exists. Believe it!

If you can't find that faith in yourself right now, hang on to the word of God, (He, Himself, *is* light), and be encouraged. When you're feeling lost and very far from God, and you fear you can't find Him, be assured that He knows right where you are.

LIFE IN THE SHADOWLANDS:

Major depression can feel like falling into a dark emotional pit. The moment of falling — right then — is when we need to forcefully declare, "If there are shadows, there must be light." Hang on to that truth. Say it out loud. Let it reassure you.

Only light can cast shadows. Since that's a provable fact, then as sad/bad as they appear, shadows are proof that light exists, even if we can't, immediately, see the source of it. John 8:12 says; "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, *I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.*"

If you doubt that you have enough faith to believe, please know, you don't have to believe in the strength or power of your own faith. It's Jesus we must believe in. We can trust Him, even when we doubt, even when we're afraid, and even if we don't feel faithful. As scripture records: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). We may fail, but He cannot deny His own character.

We may feel isolated, as if we were alone at the end of the world, but the world keeps right on spinning, and we are still part of it (even if we're reeling). We can only see shadows when we look away from the light. This is a beautiful, but double-edged, truth. It offers hope we can hold on to, but it can also cut to

the heart if used to blame the person who is depressed. Please don't blame yourself, or others. Refocus.

Like Peter, walking on water, we instantly sink when we look away from our Lord to focus on our storms or shadows. Such distraction is completely human. Also, like Peter, we will feel the Lord's saving grasp when we cry for help. See Matthew 14:28-31.

PLAYING THE BLAME GAME:

Blame is a distraction. We cast blame on ourselves with hurtful thinking when we think or say things like: "If I had enough faith this wouldn't happen." Or, "I should be stronger ... blah, blah, blah."

Don't surrender to this way of thinking. Stop it, and take corrective action. Believe it or not, we can often command this internal voice to be still, by shouting, "Stop!" Try it. Shout out loud, or even inside your own head. Then remind yourself the God of heaven created you. Ask for His help. He loves you beyond measure.

Our God doesn't make junk. He says you are His special treasure. Use your favorite Gospel Bible verses to affirm these truths. Try repeating them, out loud. God's word, in your voice, can drown doubt, and silence hurtful self-talk.

Sometimes blame is accidentally dished out by well-meaning friends or loved ones who want to help 'fix' the problem. It can come with sentiments that sound a lot like the beatings we just gave ourselves, such as "It can't be that bad," "Get a grip," "Cheer- up," "Count your blessings," "You'll be fine," and "Where is your faith?"

Friends and family usually don't mean to minimize our pain or to cause injury. These things may be said with the best of intentions. Repeat after me: There are NO winners in the blame game (whether blaming ourselves or others). Counting our blessings is always a good idea, and we may need added support too.

SPACE -- THE FINAL FRONTIER:

In a cosmic analogy, depression shares characteristics of a black hole. Black holes exist in deep space. This invisible 'dark matter' may be approached without notice, but with great risk. Straying too close leads to entrapment. The movie *Interstellar* introduced us to the concept of an "event horizon." It's the point of no return. Science has proposed the gravity of a black hole is so strong that not even light can escape.

In the past, we theorized that anything falling into a black hole was doomed to stay forever. But one of our greatest scientific minds (Steven Hawking) has disputed that idea. Explaining "Hawking Radiation", he suggested that black holes could shrink and die, with loss of trapped matter. These emissions (small energy fluctuations, near the event horizon in space) form the 'radiation' he wrote of.

Hawking concluded: "The message of this lecture is, that black holes ain't as black as they are painted. They are not the eternal prisons they were once thought. Things can get out of a black hole, both to the outside and, possibly, to another universe." Any escaping particles would be profoundly changed by the experience.

Depression can also be approached without much notice. Moods can shift in small stages until we slip too close and fall into a black hole. In the grip of this disastrous emotion, we too may feel there is no escape. We can't afford to give in to this unproven fear. We are better advised to recall Steven Hawking's conclusion about the physical universe and apply it to our own experience. He said, "So, if you feel you are in a black hole, don't give up. There's a way out."

We will explore some ways of escape together, and we too may be profoundly changed by the experience.

While outer-space exploration claims the headlines, inner space (within our own minds) offers the greatest frontier for life-changing discovery. God's creative genius and His generosity are on full display in the majesty of His creation. Knowledge is power, and we're about to turn it on. All set for space exploration?

Get ready to launch!