

## **Depression** *and how to defeat it in a world of difficulty*

The burdens and trials of life can become overwhelming. These trials are not eliminated for believers. The apostle Paul's life gives us a great example of a life full of difficulties. Paul's desire was not to cover them up with a fake smile and a superficial response. Rather, he faced the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain honestly and purposefully so as to prevent it from destroying him. Let us be encouraged by his example of facing discouragement without falling into depression (despair).

The apostle Paul experienced the burden of being rejected and even physically attacked by others. Paul reveals to us part of this difficulty as he lists the suffering he experienced at the hand of others when in II Corinthians 11:23-27 he says, "... in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Paul continues to add to his list of burdens when he says, "Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." (11:28). Paul's burdens were not limited to his personal well-being. He also bore the concerns of the churches and their members. He recognized that some of life's most difficult emotional burdens include the burden we have that our loved ones would live for God and not fall into disobedience.

What was Paul's response to such burdens? Was he overwhelmed with the weight? Did he collapse

under the pressure? No! His response is made clear when he says, "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities" (11:29-30). Paul was not broken or bitter. Paul had a focus of life which he clearly displayed. "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:12-13). Paul did not use these verses as a good luck charm, but rather as a focus for life. In every circumstance in which he found himself, he looked to his Lord and Savior to see him through.

The apostle Paul experienced the reality of poor physical health. Paul told us of a particular health problem which was a great burden and hindrance. Because of his great spiritual maturity, he says, "there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (12:7). It is believed by many that this infirmity was poor eyesight. Perhaps it was the physical result of the abuse his body endured while under persecution. The actual "thorn in the flesh" is not what is important. What we must see is his response. Paul focused his attention on God. He says, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me" (12:8) He did not only depend upon God through prayer, but he also trusted God to be all-wise as he received God's response. God said, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (12:9). Often, when prayers are made to God about a health concern, it is automatically assumed that the best response is healing. For this reason, it is common for depression to begin when healing is not found. Paul did not fall into this trap of despair. As God said "no" to Paul's request for healing, Paul depended on the wisdom of God and declared, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then

am I strong" (12:9-10).

Throughout all of Paul's ministry he faced great difficulties. In II Corinthians 4:8-9 he described his mental, emotional, and physical condition during one of these times of trial: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." Paul described the outward attacks upon his mental, emotional and even physical health in words such as: troubled, perplexed, persecuted, and cast down. In our day, according to the world's philosophy, each of these words would provide an adequate reason for depression. But Paul was not living according to the world's philosophy. He was not looking for a diagnosis, sympathy, or a method by which he could forget the painful realities of his life. Rather, Paul gave four statements to indicate that he was not depressed when he said, "not distressed ... not in despair ... not forsaken ... not destroyed." Paul had the victory. Paul was "not" overcome with his circumstances. He overcame each of them. But how did he do it? What was his prescription? The answer is simple. Paul says, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" (4:7, 10). Paul made the same statement in Galatians 2:20 when he said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Paul's answer to life's difficulties was to forget himself and depend upon Someone Who is all-powerful: Jesus Christ. He, by faith and trust in the Saviour, declared once again with his actions, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

The question must then be asked, "What about when I am at the end of my rope and my life hangs in the balance?" Paul faced this level of difficulty as well. II Corinthians 1:8-9 says, "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure,

above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves ...” Paul was under so much persecution and pressures that he faced the subject of death. He did not know if he would make it through the circumstance of life. Yet he closed his statement with these words, “that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us” (1:9-10) Jesus Christ died on the cross to save Paul from the spiritual death caused by sin. Paul personally accepted that “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Based upon this expression of love by God through His gift of Jesus Christ, Paul knew that God would not permit anything to enter into his life which was not in his best interest. Paul’s focus had to be removed from himself and the circumstances of his life and placed on Jesus Christ. The question is clear, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romanos 8:35). Equally clear is the answer, “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:37-39).

If you have not accepted God’s gift of love through Jesus Christ’s death on the cross for your sins, this is the first step you must take in order to find true peace and calmness of spirit. The Bible says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (Romans 6:23) Will you accept God’s gift of love by believing on Jesus Christ alone to pay for your debt of sin and your destiny of spiritual death in hell so that you may have the security of everlasting life in heaven?

If you have trusted Jesus Christ to solve your problem of sin and provide you with eternal life by faith in His death on the cross, why not by faith trust

Him with the difficulties you are facing now? The prescription is simple, but the application of the medication is your choice. Just as a doctor can provide a prescription to his patient, but cannot force him to take it correctly, so we are faced spiritually with the solution to depression. The prescription is that you must become Christ-focused instead of self-focused and world-focused. Now you, as the spiritual patient, must by faith permit the pharmacist (the Holy Spirit) to fill your prescription by personally studying God’s Word. The Bible says, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17) By faith you must patiently and daily apply the medication with expectant patience that the Doctor is all-wise and the prescription of God’s Word is the only solution for your difficulty.

Will you trust God with your life? Will you depend upon Him so that you do not fall into the depths of despair and depression? He is awaiting your faith!

#### II Corinthians 1:3-4

3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

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# DEPRESSION

## And How to Defeat it In a World of Difficulty



The search for the causes and practical solutions to the problems of our day, based upon the Bible.