



DEPRESSION STOPPER #1: KNOW WHO YOU ARE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12

Whenever I talk about the subject of depression, I never cease to be amazed at the number of people who respond by saying, "Yes, that's a picture of me. I don't know why I'm depressed but I am." And more times than not the letter or e-mail message will have some kind of a postscript saying something like, "By the way, I am a Christian and I know that I shouldn't be depressed, but I am, and then feel guilty because of it."

Analyzing some of those cries which come from way down deep, I can't help but feel that some of our dark moments could be avoided by understanding exactly what our relationship is with our heavenly Father, and how important we are to Him. One gentleman wrote saying that he had struggled with bouts of depression for thirty years, but then he found Christ as his

personal Savior, which gave him new hope and helped him to overcome depression. That's how it should be. Knowing who you are can help you overcome depression. That's **depression stopper #1: Knowing who you are--in relationship to your heavenly Father.** Here's the foundation of that truth.

Do you remember the statement of John 1:12 that says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"? Here John says that your relationship with your heavenly Father is that of child with his paternal father. It is the picture of an orphan who has been adopted into a family and then becomes the heir of all the father possesses. Understanding the concept of adoption under Roman law helps even more, for under Roman law the adopted son had equal rights of inheritance with the children who had come into the family by natural birth.

Furthermore, under Roman law the past of the adopted individual was legally wiped out. If he had committed crimes, those crimes were absolved. When he received the name of his adopting father, he literally became a new person, with the past forever forgotten. Understanding that your past is forgiven and forgotten should help you deal with depression. When God forgives you, the past is wiped out forever. "As far as the east is from the west," wrote the Psalmist, "so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). The east and the west never meet, so why allow yourself to become depressed over deeds which God has forgiven and thus will never be held against you?

Paul in Galatians 4 further developed the concept of adoption. Here he says God sent Christ, "to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons," says Paul, "God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who cries out, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir"(Galatians 4:6-7). The word *Abba* doesn't mean much to us today, but it does take on great significance when you understand that this Aramaic word was a term of great affection. Perhaps the closest equivalent is the expression, "daddy" or "papa." Nobody goes around calling just anyone "papa" or "daddy," yet this is the warmth and closeness of a relationship that can exist when we have become God's children.

As the adopted children of God, our heavenly Father wants us to grow and mature, yet when we fall, He will forgive us and help us up, just as our earthly fathers did when we were learning to walk. Friend, knowing who you are and what your relationship to your heavenly Father really is can be a great depression-stopper. It's the first step towards healing and peace of mind and heart.

Resource reading: Galatians 4:1-11.

DEPRESSION STOPPER #2: REALIZE GOD IS IN CONTROL

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:5-6

When you are depressed, statistics are meaningless. Talking about causes of depression is also nearly worthless, but knowing what to do to climb out of the pit is like a breath of fresh air in a dungeon. Without fail when I do a commentary on depression, our mail response skyrockets.

The first great truth that turns depression to flight is that we, as God's children, have been adopted into the family of God and, therefore, are heirs of the Father's wealth. This experience is the result of personally accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. "As many as received him," says John 1:12, KJV, "to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

Depression stopper #2 is that God is in control of planet Earth and our lives personally, so there is no need to fear or worry. Do you believe that? "Well," you may say, "I wish it were that simple. I'd like to believe it, but every time I pick up the paper it gives me cold chills...." You believe what you read in the newspaper, in spite of the fact that even the best-intentioned reporter may have his facts incorrect. So why not believe what you read in a time-proven book called the Bible? For 2,000 years men have been proving the validity of the statements contained in Scripture.

The New Testament clearly says that He has a will and a purpose for you as His child, and that He will keep you in the midst of the storm because you belong to Him. Underline Romans 8:28 and memorize it, along with Ephesians 1:11, which says God "works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will."

I am indebted to one of our listeners for the following story, which illustrates this truth. "A...traveler in Norway visited a great electric power plant in one of the country's deep mountain valleys. After seeing the immense turbines in the plant, he was invited to inspect the reservoirs that controlled the flow of water to the giant turbines. These reservoirs were caverns cut into the mountain side some eight hundred feet above the power plant, and were reached by means of a small cable car drawn up the side of the mountain. The car itself was a tiny 'flat top,' perhaps four by six feet, with a plain seat at the lower end.

"As the visitor seated himself, for what to him seemed a rather precarious trip up the steep mountain side, a little girl with a small basket on her arm and a happy smile on her face stepped up and sat down beside him. The signal was given and the little car moved upward. It was not without apprehension that the visitor in the course of the trip looked down from the dizzy heights. Then turning to the child beside him, he asked solicitously, 'Have you gone up here before?' 'Sure, I go here every day. This is the way I go to school,' was her cheerful answer. 'But aren't you afraid to go up and down this steep mountain all alone?' continued the visitor. 'Oh no,' was her confident reply, 'it is not dangerous; Father is up there. He runs the machinery.'"

The knowledge that your heavenly Father is running the machinery, and that life is not simply the result of fate and chance, helps you to eliminate fear as to what might happen in the world tomorrow. When Father is at the helm of planet earth, there is no need to worry or be afraid because He has promised so beautifully, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6).

Resource reading: Hebrews 13:1-8.

DEPRESSION STOPPER #3: PRAYER CAN TURN DESPAIR TO JOY

This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. 1 John 5:14

"I have been deeply depressed," wrote a young woman in her mid-twenties, as she scrawled a letter on the back of a place mat in a restaurant. "My father committed suicide and I'm very unhappily married. I really don't know what to do." Scores of people are like that. Possibly you, too.

For various reasons--troubled marriages, guilt, anxiety over the future, feelings of insecurity, frustration, inadequacies, and what-have-you--we are succumbing to a vicious cycle of concern, anxiety, self-pity, and then depression. "Snap out of it, friend"--more nonsensical or foolish advice could never be given, but neither is it necessary to have psychotherapy or the services of a psychiatrist to overcome your depression.

In this series, I've been giving you some "depression stoppers"--truths from Scripture that will help you stop depression. The first is to come to grips with your identity as a believer in Jesus Christ. "Who are you?" You have been adopted into the family of God as His own son or daughter when you became a Christian. This means that you are important to God--not simply a number, or a faceless individual lost among the masses of people on earth, a non-entity who has only what he or she can grab. Read the fourth chapter of Galatians along with Romans 8 to have a greater understanding of your importance to our heavenly Father.

The second important truth that stops depression is the understanding that God--not fate or chance--controls the ultimate destiny of our world. When it comes to the future and the issues which tend to depress us, our response must not be worry, rather it should be to accept by faith the promises of the Word stating that God will not leave us nor forsake us in the storm (see Hebrews 13:5). Laying hold of God in prayer links us to the assurance that God is still in charge of the world and our lives as well.

Recently, a high-ranking government official spoke to a nucleus of individuals about the state of world affairs, which, believe me, is pretty grim. But then concluding his remarks this very knowledgeable individual said, "And what should our response be as believers who know the Word of God?" It should be that of joy, for Jesus said, "When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28). Joy--not depression!

Few people who can accept the fact that God is in control ever become depressed, and no people who are depressed have any real joy in their lives. Much of our depression centers around concern for self--what will happen to us, how we look, why we aren't as beautiful or as successful as someone else--yet in the family of God there is no competition.

At least three times we are told in Scripture, "There is no respect of persons with God." He will accept you and forgive you just as you are, and then He will give you His Holy Spirit to help you to become the person He wants you to be. Depression seems to rule out the possibility of God's personal intervention. It ignores truths that you really know to be important, that God does hear and answer prayer, that He can change the circumstances that depress you.

Depression stopper #3 then, is that we, as God's children, can bring our needs to Him and pour out our hearts before Him, asking His intervention. "Have we trials and temptations?" asked Joseph Scrivens, "Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged, Take it to the Lord in prayer." "This is the assurance we have in approaching God:" wrote John, "that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14). Appropriating this great truth is a certain "depression stopper."

Resource reading: Luke 7:18-25.

DEPRESSION STOPPER #4: FINDING GOD'S FORGIVENESS AND FORGIVING YOURSELF

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 NKJV

"I know that God has forgiven me but I just can't forgive myself, and the more that I think about what I have done, the more I get depressed." Whenever I deal with the subject of depression, our mail response jumps, and the theme of many letters is the opening sentence or two which relates depression to something that happened, which the writer just can't seem to get out of his or her mind. In most cases the writer mentions that he or she is a believer, that he or she has personally made a decision to receive Christ, but the depression is still there. That memory or failure haunts an individual and drives him or her to the despair of depression.

Let's analyze it for a moment and make it personal. If depression is related to guilt, you have to determine whether your guilt is actual (whether something is still unforgiven) or if you are actually being depressed by guilt feelings or a troubled conscience. There is a big difference.

I am thinking of a woman who was confident that God was punishing her children for what she had done years before. She was not only depressed but at the point of complete despair. Repeatedly she had asked God's forgiveness, and I am confident that she was sincere. On the basis of what God says in His Word, I believe God had long since forgiven her, but she could not accept His forgiveness and forgive herself. The resulting trauma left her constantly depressed.

Are you like that? Are you depressed because you came to the foot of the old rugged cross and said, "God, wash away this sin"? No, forgiveness never leaves you in a state of depression! Question: Did God forgive you? Do you remember the promise of 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"? All right. Did God mean it? Then did you confess your wrongdoing? If you did, then God forgave you once and for all.

The Bible clearly promises forgiveness to those who will ask for it. If you have done this, realize your depression is not from God, but from the enemy of your soul who defeats you spiritually by hanging a cloud of depression over your head. "For God" wrote Paul to Timothy, "has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7, NKJV). If, of course, you have never come to the fount drawn from Immanuel's veins, your depression may be linked to something you need to confess to God, and will dissipate only by coming to Him and receiving His forgiveness.

The second step in the process of applying this "depression stopper" to your life is to forgive yourself. Ask yourself, "*What right have I not to forgive myself when my Heavenly Father has forgiven me? Am I greater than God?*" Your answer points out the foolishness of allowing yourself to live in a state of depression, which is the very opposite of the kind of a life God intends. Read Galatians 5, and notice how the cluster of characteristics or qualities relating to the Spirit-filled life are the very opposite of depression.

With the forgiveness of our Heavenly Father, there can be the strength of the Holy Spirit to live above the carnal plane that drove you down initially. Depression is contrary to God's plan and purpose for your life, so realize that when God has forgiven you, you must also forgive yourself. He has provided for a victorious life, so apply the truth of His Word and begin to live and walk in His power and strength.

Only the grace of God can turn despair and depression to joy, but God's grace is there, and it does just that. Believe it, and see the change take place in your life.

Resource reading: Psalm 1.

DEPRESSION STOPPER #5: GETTING BACK ON THE RIGHT PATH

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:2, NKJV

The late Professor Jessie Bernard of Penn State University contended that depression is twice as common among women as men. She believed that wives give their husbands far more emotional support than husbands give to their wives, which may result in periods of depression. But there is more to it than that. As one psychologist put it, "Men and women are put together with a different set of nuts and bolts." We came from the drawing board of heaven with those differences. It's the way God made us.

There are emotional differences stemming from biological factors that create different levels of emotions. But no matter whether you are a male or a female, when depression strikes, you are debilitated and, for all practical purposes, cease to be a productive individual. You feel that God doesn't care, and often that no one else does either.

The despair of depression can be stopped. The "depression stoppers" I recommend are not prescribed by a doctor. They are principles of truths from Scripture--the oldest and best-loved textbook on living. In this series I've mentioned discovering your spiritual identity, resting in the assurance that God is still in control, discovering that prayer can break through depression, and learning how to find forgiveness and forgive yourself. Now I'd like to go one step further.

This "depression stopper" may not be new. I may simply underline or enforce a truth that you've heard before but haven't applied. Here it is--**Depression Stopper #5: You can stop depression by realizing that, in spite of the perplexity of life and the circumstances, God can still direct your life into His perfect will.** "Dr. Sala, you don't know the mess that I've made of my life," you may say. And those words may be followed by these: "If God had a will for my life, I have so much messed things up that there is just not hope...." And feeling discouraged and abandoned, you have allowed the self-incriminations you've hurled in the mirror to bring depression and discouragement.

In fairness to God, let's not attempt to blame Him for your failures. If you blew things, then admit it; but at the same time you've got to realize that forgiveness includes restoration and healing. In a real sense, God's forgiveness creates a whole new ball game and enables God to continue to work in your life, perfecting His plan and purpose for you. "Do you mean God can still do something with my life?" Absolutely. "Though we deny Him," Paul wrote to Timothy, "yet He abides faithful. He cannot deny Himself." Where there is life, there is yet hope.

May I share three guidelines about God's will in relation to depression? **Guideline #1: God's will brings peace to your heart, which eliminates depression.** He's no cosmic kill-joy who delights in your misery. His will and your getting back into it will bring peace to your mind and joy to your soul and drive depression away. **Guideline #2: God's will--His plan for your life--will result in your personal happiness and security.** His will is described as being "good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2, NKJV). You will never be more secure than when you allow your Heavenly Father to put His hand on yours and guide each step.

Guideline #3: God's will is the only way to be the fulfilled person you can be. "Thou hast made us for thyself, O God," wrote Augustine many years ago, "and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee." You can find and follow God's will, and doing it will break the shackles of depression every time. It's God's answer to a terrible sickness.

Resource reading: Luke 7:36-39.

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