

8 Negative Emotions

And How to Deal with Them

Emotions affect everyone - it's a normal part of being human. Though you may not be able to control an emotional reaction, you can decide what happens next.

When negative emotions are left unchecked and allowed to fester, they can become harmful to yourself and the people around you. Negative emotions have the power to rob your life of joy, hold you captive, destroy your relationships, and hinder your connection to God.

But you don't have to go through these negative emotions on your own. The Bible is full of examples of people who have dealt with these emotions and offer valuable insight on how to manage and remove them.

In this devotional series, we will be covering the negative emotions of:

- Shame (pg 1)
- Sorrow (pg 4)
- Depression (pg 6)
- Anxiety (pg 8)
- Fear (pg 10)
- Anger (pg 12)
- Jealousy (pg 14)
- Bitterness (pg 16)

Working through your emotions is not an easy process, but acknowledging that you have them and taking the first steps to dealing with them is a significant accomplishment. We hope you find healing in this devotional series and we will be praying for you along your journey.

SHAME

Shame is a feeling of humiliation that can come from many things. Sometimes it's a result of guilt - when you know you've done something bad. Sometimes it may come from failure or feeling like you're not enough. Or it may be the result of something you have no control over, such as the actions of your family.

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What do you feel ashamed of, or what has caused you shame in the past?
- Who or where did that feeling of shame come from?

Whether shame comes from other people or from within, we know that there is one source of all shame:

The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray... For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

- Revelation 12:9-10

He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

- John 8:44

Even though you know that shame is a lie that comes from the devil, it is still painful and hard to get rid of:

Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. Your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down on me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; there is no soundness in my bones because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.

My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart.

All my longings lie open before you, Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes. My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away.

- Psalm 38:1-11

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- David describes how he is feeling when he is overwhelmed with shame. Can you identify with any of these statements?
- How does shame make you feel emotionally, physically, and spiritually?
- When you feel shame, how do you act around other people? What is your default response to God?

When Adam and Eve ate from the tree that God forbid them to, they immediately experienced shame. When God asked where they were, this was their response:

He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." - Genesis 3:10

They hid from God. That's true of us today. We create distance from God and hide from Him. But God has a completely different response He wants:

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

- Hebrews 10:22

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- Why is it sometimes hard to go to God with our shame?
- What does it mean to draw near to God? When in your life have you been closest to God?

We sometimes fear approaching God because we think He is angry with us and will punish us. But look at what God says He will actually do:

Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.

- Isaiah 50:7-9

This passage reminds us that God is for us. As a result, it completely changes our attitude and outlook.

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- When we go to God with our shame, how does He change the way we feel?
- Are there any statements in this passage that resonate with you and how you want to feel?
- How will you respond to the shame you feel? What steps can you take to approach God with your shame? Do you believe He will heal you and stand for you?

Additional Reading

- [When Shame is Wrong](#)

SORROW

Sorrow and grief are extremely painful emotions to face. Sorrow comes from a loss of something. It may be the death of a loved one or a broken relationship. It might be circumstantial, like losing a job or having to move. It can even be over material possessions. Sorrow can usually be identified with a specific cause. No matter how big or small, the grief can feel like your world is over:

Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.

- Psalm 31:9-10

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What has recently caused sorrow in your life?
- How did you feel in your sorrow? Can you relate to any of statements in the passage above?

One of the misconceptions about sorrow is that it is wrong. As a Christian, you might feel guilty about grieving, because you've been told that you should be filled with joy. But sorrow is perfectly normal. Jesus felt sorrow. And the Psalms are filled with honest expressions of grief:

How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

- Psalm 13:1-2

It's ok to be sad, and it's normal to feel pain and to grieve. But of course in the midst of sorrow, you just want it to be over. Like the verse above, it can feel like God has abandoned you. Here's what God says about it:

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

- Psalm 34:18

Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. Lord my God, I will praise you forever.

- Psalm 30:5,11-12

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- From the verses above, where is God in your sorrow?
- What will give you hope and comfort during your sorrow?

Though sorrow is painful, it is only temporary and will eventually be gone. As much as you want it to be over, seek God in the sorrow and take hope in knowing that God will restore your joy. There is also a purpose for you in that sorrow:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- In the past, how have you received comfort in your sorrow?
- Do you know someone in your life that is experiencing grief? What can you do to give them comfort?

Additional Reading

- [When the Worst Happens](#)
- [Comfort for the Troubled Heart](#)

DEPRESSION

Depression is similar to sorrow, but with some key differences. Sometimes it can be tied to a specific event or circumstances, but often times there isn't a clear reason. Everything in life could be wonderful and you might still be depressed. And unlike sorrow, depression can last a long time - weeks, months, even years.

When you go through depression, you may experience this tension of wondering why you feel so sad all the time, and why you can't just be happy:

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

- Psalm 43:5

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- When was the last time you experienced depression, or are you depressed right now?
- Can you identify things that caused your depression, or did it seem unreasonable?

One of the greatest dangers of depression is that if neglected, it could lead to suicide. When life feels unbearable, death can seem like a better option. During his missionary travels, Paul experienced difficulties to the point of hating life:

We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.

- 2 Corinthians 1:8-9

If you know about Paul's travels, you know that he always faced difficulties. If anyone had reason to be depressed, it was Paul. But in those times, when he felt like he could not go on any longer, this was his response:

But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.

- 2 Corinthians 1:9-10

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What did Paul remember about God in his time of despair?
- Can you remember a time when you came out of depression, even if it was briefly? How did that happen?

Depression can come and go in cycles. Just like Paul remembered the times that God rescued him, you can also remind yourself of when God brought you out of depression to pull you through the next wave. It's not easy suffering from depression, but God has a promise in it:

I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.

- Psalm 40:1-3

Experiencing depression can feel a lot like being stuck in a slimy pit, longing to just get your feet on firm ground. Though it may not be a quick recovery, God promises to give you something to sing about.

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- When you're experiencing depression, in what ways can you remember God and cry out to Him?
- Depression isn't something you have to face alone. Who can you talk to on a regular basis about what you're going through?

Additional Reading

- [When Depression Knocks](#)
- [Stages of Depression](#)
- [Depression and Faith](#)

ANXIETY

Anxiety is worrying about the future. In today's busy world, being anxious is very common. From work to family to social obligations, you might worry about what you need to do and what is going to happen. Even events that are supposed to be fun can be stressful.

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- Looking ahead at your week, what things do you have anxiety or stress about?
- How does being worried have an effect on your mental, physical, and spiritual health?

Worrying is not a new thing though. Jesus addressed anxiety because it was common in His time also:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?... So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

- Matthew 6:25-27, 31-34

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What are the reasons Jesus gives for not worrying?
- Why do you think you get anxious about things in life?
- When you have anxiety, how does that shape your view of God's power and God's goodness?

No matter how big or small, the concerns that we have do matter to God:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

- 1 Peter 5:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 4:6-7

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- When you are anxious, what should you do?
- What does God promise to do for you? What do you need to believe about God?

Anxiety can creep up on anyone. It may seem harmless, even normal, to stress out about things. But it's not the life that God intended for you. When you do get anxious though, you can be confident in who is there for you:

When I said, "My foot is slipping," your unfailing love, Lord, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy.

- Psalm 94:18-19

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What are you anxious about this week that you can release to God?
- What would your life look like if you went through it with peace instead of anxiety?

Additional Reading

- [Your Body and Stress](#)
- [Anxiety: A Better Way](#)

FEAR

Fear is the anticipation that something dangerous is going to harm you. This threat might be legitimate, or it can something you create, but its effects are the same. Fear can paralyze you or cause you to make poor decisions.

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What things are you afraid of, or have caused you fear in the past?
- Fear can often be masked in anger. What things are you angry about that might actually result from being afraid?

Before David was king, he faced many threats and was often fearful for his life. He records some of those feelings in this Psalm:

Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught because of what my enemy is saying, because of the threats of the wicked; for they bring down suffering on me and assail me in their anger. My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm."

- Psalm 55:1-8

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- Can you relate with any of David's feelings of fear?
- How has fear affected your own life or how you interact with people?

God tells us that we do not need to fear. It's one of the most common phrases in the Bible, and there's no way to fit all of them in here. Here is just one of the times that God says to not be afraid, and gives the reasons why:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

- Isaiah 43:1-2

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What reasons does God give for not being afraid?
- Can you recall times when God was with you and protected you from harmful things?

Fear is not only about trying to avoid threats. Fear can actually prevent you from doing what God wants you to do:

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

- 1 John 4:18

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

- 1 Timothy 1:6-7

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- In the verses above, what are the opposites of fear?
- What is fear preventing you from doing in your life right now?
- This week, in what ways can you practice driving out the fear in your life?

Additional Reading

- [The Fearless Life](#)

ANGER

Anger is an emotion that's not always bad. Being angry is having a strong dislike or disapproval of something. Jesus was often angry, and there are evils and injustices that you should be angry about. But there are also times when anger can be sinful, such as being angry at the wrong things or when it produces harmful thoughts or actions.

In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

- Ephesians 4:26-27

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What things are you angry about, or have been angry about recently? Are they justified, or wrong?
- In what ways can anger lead to sin?
- Why does God warn us against staying angry after the day is over?

It's easy to justify being angry from this passage, or from the examples of Jesus being angry. But the reality is that most of the time, people aren't very good at managing anger.

Mockers stir up a city, but the wise turn away anger... Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end... An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins.

- Proverbs 29:8,11,22

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What do these verses say about people who get angry?
- Have you ever acted foolishly or harmfully as a result of your anger?

But God does provide practical ways for managing anger in a healthy way:

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

- James 1:19-20

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

- Ephesians 4:31-32

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- From these verses, how does anger show itself, and how can you get rid of it?
- This week, what is something you can be less angry about? What are better ways of responding to that situation?

Additional Reading

- [Anger - One of Man's Greatest Enemies](#)

JEALOUSY

A desire for something you don't have, especially if someone else has it, is such a destructive emotion that it's listed in the Ten Commandments. Jealousy or envy can occur over material possessions, relationships, social status, achievements, almost anything that our hearts could desire.

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What do you find yourself jealous of in other people?
- How does jealousy affect your overall mood, or your attitude towards other people?

Jealousy can be subtle and overlooked. It a very blurry line between admiring what someone has and being envious for it. But the Bible has some very stern warnings of what happens when jealousy grows in your hearts:

But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

- James 3:14-16

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

- James 4:1-3

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- From the verses above, what are the results of jealousy?
- Has jealousy led to other destructive actions in your life, or have you seen it in others?

When you are jealous, you are focused on the thing that you do not have, and become blind to what God is trying to give to you:

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

- 1 Corinthians 3:2-3

There is much more that God wants to give you, much more that He is calling you to. But you are not ready for it because you are jealous.

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- In what areas of your life could jealousy be holding you back from what God wants to give you?

If jealousy desires what other people have and motivates you to elevate yourself above others, then the opposite of jealousy is humility - to seek and celebrate the success of others:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

- Philippians 2:3-4

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- Is there something you are jealous of that you could celebrate instead?
- This week, how can you remove jealousy by seeking the interests and well-being of others?

Additional Reading

- [Overcoming Jealousy](#)

BITTERNESS

When anger and jealousy go unchecked, it can result in bitterness. Unforgiveness can have the same effect. Bitterness is resentful and unforgiving attitude towards someone. It may be someone who has hurt you. It may be a situation that seems unfair. You place blame on someone else, or even God, for your troubles.

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- Is there any bitterness in your life right now?
- What makes you hold onto bitterness and not let it go?

Though bitterness is something you harbor inside, it leaks out without you noticing and affects the people around you:

Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.

- Proverbs 14:10

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- What areas of your life has bitterness the joy from?
- Can you identify how being bitter has had a negative impact on the people around you?

Bitterness is something that can bring down people around you, even if they have no connection to whatever it is you are bitter about. It's a toxic attitude that seeps out of your life and infects your community. See how how bitterness is described here:

See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

- Hebrews 12:15

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- Have you ever seen a bitter individual cause trouble and make everyone around them bitter? Have you ever been that person?
- Why do you think bitterness is so easy to spread?

Bitter is something that can be eliminated, but it requires active effort:

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

- Ephesians 4:31-32

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

- Colossians 3:13

Discussion / Reflection Questions

- From the verses above, what are the different ways to get rid of bitterness?
- What can you do this week to remove bitterness from an area of your life?

Additional Reading

- [Imprisoned by Bitterness](#)

Congratulations on completing this devotional series. We know that there may have been some difficult sections to work through, but we're glad you stuck with it. Of course, it doesn't mean that all your emotions are now resolved - they will come up again and it's a lifelong process. But hopefully now you have the tools to manage them effectively.

We would love to hear how this devotional series went for you. If it has impacted your life, please share with us by emailing info@guidelines.org

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