

HELP!

I'M DEPRESSED



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CONTENTS

Introduction: "Lord, I'm Drowning in Sorrow"	5
1 The Ministry of Sorrow	9
2 Why So Much Sorrow?	15
3 Our Response to Sorrow	28
4 Our Hope in Sorrow	44
Conclusion: God, My Exceeding Joy	51
Personal Application Projects	57
Where Can I Get More Help?	62

INTRODUCTION:
"LORD, I'M DROWNING IN SORROW"

Troubling thoughts flood my mind. I lie in bed alone, beseeching God on behalf of my three children. The tears spill down my cheeks as I wonder why the Lord seems so far away and why my prayers remain unanswered. Earlier, my daughter had shared what one of her recently married friends posted to another friend on Facebook: "You are going to love marriage." I find myself feeling frustrated, even jealous, as I think about my failed marriage. I remember my wedding day and how excited I was. Never did I imagine my husband would fail morally and end his life after eight short years together.

My thoughts turn to my children and their struggles: to my two daughters, who distrust men and fear marriage, thinking their future husbands might one day be unfaithful to them as well. And

then I think about my son, about the bitterness and anguish he has faced and the wrong choices that have deeply scarred his life.

If all this isn't bad enough, I begin the comparison game. Several families come to mind, couples who have strong, happy marriages and children who are doing well. Their success plunges me further into depression. Looking at my own life, I perceive myself as having received an F in both Marriage 101 and Parenting 101. I know I made wrong choices early in my marriage, but later I asked for forgiveness and I have endeavored to walk in obedience to the Lord for many years since. Yet I feel that life has only gone from bad to worse.

Life seems so unfair. Why is it so hard? “Lord, where are you, and why are you not answering my prayers regarding my children?”

At this point I am in the “depths of despair” (as Anne Shirley says in the movie *Anne of Green Gables*). I know I have a choice to make. Am I going to allow these feelings to destroy me or not?

Thankfully, God's Word is deeply embedded in my heart. I know I must choose to meditate on truth, or I will be in deep trouble. The Lord brings several passages to mind:

Great peace have those who love Your law,
And nothing causes them to stumble.

(Psalm 119:165)

You will keep him in perfect peace,
Whose mind is stayed on You,
Because he trusts in You.

(Isaiah 26:3)

For I know the thoughts that I think toward
you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and
not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

(Jeremiah 29:11)

As I meditate on these Scriptures, I recognize that my depression is due to wrong thinking. I have been dwelling on my own reasoning and perception. I have been living with the "But I thought ..." focus. This is the way I *think* things in life should work out, and because they are not going that way, I'm depressed.

By God's grace, I choose to embrace truth and stop dwelling on my foolish understanding. Of course, I'm still hurting (sin always brings heartache), but my focus has changed. I pray to the Lord and express my trust in him. At this point I fall asleep.

I wish I could say that that was my last battle with depression, but such is not the case. This daily struggle has driven me deep into God's Word in search of answers and hope. If you are in the "depths of despair," take heart—you are not alone. Let's walk together through God's Word, and by the end of this journey, may we echo the words of the psalmist:

*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 43:5)*

1

The Ministry of Sorrow

What would life be like without emotions? Wouldn't it be nice if a switch enabled us to turn our emotions on or off? When things are going well (at least according to our definition of "well"), we could keep the switch on. But when life is falling apart, we could turn the emotion switch off. As a young girl growing up in the 1960s, I remember watching the original *Star Trek*. The character Spock's ability to live by pure logic minus emotions intrigued me. Of course, occasionally the show's writers added a dramatic spin by writing emotion into his character, but for the most part Spock was predictable and logical. Thankfully, God did not make us this way.

Because God made us in his image (Genesis 1:26), emotions are part of his creative work in us. God himself displays a variety of emotions. He is loving,

compassionate, and merciful, but he can also be grieved, jealous, and angry (1 John 4:7–8; Psalm 145:8; Genesis 6:6; Nahum 1:2). These emotions, and many more, are part of God’s character. Since God is perfect, all emotions within his character are displayed in holiness and perfection. It is hard for us to understand how jealousy or anger can be positive, but that is because we are sinful human beings. Yet for the child of God, emotions serve a vital purpose in God’s plan. The challenge we face is learning how to manage them in a way that pleases the Lord.

For the sake of this booklet, let’s consider the emotion of depression, the feeling of deep sadness or sorrow. We can describe the effects of depression in the following ways:

- ▶ To make sad or gloomy; lower in spirits; deject; dispirit
- ▶ To lower in force, vigor, activity; weaken; make dull
- ▶ To lower in amount or value¹

That definition doesn’t sound very positive, does it? In fact, it sounds terrible. How can we make sense

¹ “Depressed,” at Dictionary.com, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/depressed>; accessed June 3, 2011.

of this emotion? Is there any hope, or will this feeling haunt us indefinitely? How can we honor God in the midst of such sadness?

Overwhelmed by Sadness

This feeling of sadness has plagued me often and been particularly debilitating. Many nights I have trouble sleeping. Throughout the day, times of deep discouragement overwhelm my heart. I find myself questioning the Lord, asking why problems seem only to get worse, wondering if circumstances will ever change, and succumbing to the comparison game.

When I began writing this booklet, I received devastating news about one of my children. I had just completed major surgery and was in the recuperation process, so I was already physically weak. When I heard the news, my emotions plummeted. Many precious sisters in Christ came over to comfort me, to listen, and to lend a helping hand, but the anguish in my heart would not go away. I knew people were praying, and by faith I knew my Lord was in control and working, but the news hurt so deeply. How could anything that hurt so much ever turn out for good? “This makes no sense whatsoever,” I thought. My youngest daughter

asked me if I was doing all right. I looked at her and said, “No.”

I know this feeling well as a widow. When my husband, Jeff, confessed to immorality and later took his life, the emotional pain was beyond description. Shortly after Jeff’s death, I was with my parents for the holidays. My father, a World War II veteran, often watched war movies, and one evening we watched *Sink the Bismarck!* In the movie the director of operations was considered a very cold person, but as the plot unfolded I began to understand why this man was so hardened. His wife had been killed in a bombing raid, and he had just received the news that his son was missing. As he spoke to the officer assisting him, he said, “When my wife was killed, I never thought it was possible to feel such pain. I decided then and there that I would never become emotionally attached to a person again.” This man’s coldness was his defense. He’d hurt so deeply for so long that his answer (albeit a wrong one) was to fence himself off from people and emotions. But his attempt to handle the depression his way brought about only greater pain.

If we are God’s children we cannot try to handle our pain in this manner. We cannot become hardened or cold toward God or others. Such a response is an

easy trap to fall into because instinctively we don't want to hurt, and in our minds that desire often translates into keeping people at a distance. But that is selfish. God would rather that we surrender to his purpose through the sorrow so we can help others in the midst of their pain.

Perplexed but Not in Despair

As I slumped on my couch, still cringing from the news about my child, the Lord reminded me of his faithfulness. Had I forgotten God's mighty works these past seventeen years? He had continually provided for me and my children and answered countless prayers. He had shown his tender care over and over, and now I was once again questioning his love and goodness. How could my faith be so weak? Hadn't I learned anything over the years?

The Lord brought to my mind 2 Corinthians 4, one of my favorite chapters of Scripture. Twice this passage exhorts us not to lose heart (vv. 1, 16), and my eyes were drawn to verses 8–11:

We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken;

struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

These verses encouraged my heart. I was truly perplexed and deeply saddened by the news, but I did not need to despair. This was another opportunity for God to manifest the life of Jesus in and through my life. God was teaching me the ministry of sorrow, a ministry of helping the hurting through the comfort I receive from the Lord Jesus Christ.