

HELPING YOUR DEPRESSED FRIEND

WHAT TO KNOW

- **Depression is not a result of a lack of knowledge or belief in the gospel.** (The greatest theologians have experienced extended periods of debilitating despair.)
- **Depression is like a wave.** There are moments of clarity followed by periods of extended despair.
- **This experience can vary in duration** from one week or one month to one year, one decade or one life.
- **At its worst, depression is paralyzing.** It is like a **scream of the soul!** (Ps. 69:15, Psalm 88:3-5) The one in its grip has lost the **emotional energy** to get out of bed or to drive.
- **Individuals feel alienated** by God and others. They alienate themselves (Psalm 88:18) and experience **unexplainable despair, doubt, and loneliness.** Logic is rarely a part of thoughts and actions.
- **They are blind,** not able to see the loving actions of others. Or, they are myopically looking for specific loving actions. (Psalm 88:8)
- **Hurting people will hurt people!** Those closest will bear greater blows. Suffering individuals are at very high risk of **hurting themselves** and others (both physically and emotionally).
- **There is nothing that you can do** or say to *take away* their persistent pains.

WHAT TO DO

- **Be present!** The ministry of presence and simply being a listening ear is by far the most helpful ministry you can offer. Empathize, summarize and encourage them through prayer. (Isa. 9:1)
- **Stay humble!** Don't try to fix them. Admit your limitations on the illness and seek out advice. Only God can change them in His timing.
- **Encourage them to seek a physician and a counselor.** Support and provide loving accountability for the use of medication and their desire to uncover the source of pain.
- **Don't take it personally!** They are mentally ill and not always in control of their words or actions.
- **Selflessly carry one another's burdens.** Be committed for the long-haul. Self-sacrifices will be required.
- **Incarnate the presence of Christ!** When their faith is so weak, that they can't experience the presence of Christ, your presence says: "I'm not going anywhere." "I'm here for you, just as our Lord is."
- **Individual time is better than group time.** Groups sap their energy and are emotionally painful.
- **We are more alike than different!** Seek to find the commonality between the sufferer and yourself. We all experience groaning of this broken world. (Rom. 8:22-23)
- **Choose words wisely!** Weigh the cost of your words and commitments. Speak carefully. Do not make commitments you might be unable to keep. "Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda." (Prov. 25:20)

- **Engage in caring conversations!** Avoid group settings and rushed timing. Say things like “I’ve been praying for you...How are you today?” Listen. Ask clarifying questions like “What have you been learning in your counseling?” and “How you can I pray for you?”
- **Share this load!** It takes a committed group (four or five individuals or couples) working together and communicating often, to coordinate care.
- **Be aware of signs of suicidal thoughts!** Watch for destructive turns in thoughts or actions. Call the emergency pastoral care line immediately if you hear them saying things like: “I’m just a burden to you,” “I have no reason to live” or “I’m trapped,” or if you notice reckless behaviors, increased drug/alcohol use, isolating from family/friends, or giving away prized possessions.

WHEN THE DEPRESSED PERSON HAS A PERIOD OF CLARITY

- **Speak the truth in love!** Affirm and push back.
- **Challenge** the person’s depressed perspective.
- **Encourage** them with the healing clarity that they currently have. “God is on the move!” (1 Cor. 10:12, 2 Pt. 1:3)
- **Address physical needs** like sleep, exercise, eating, sunlight, etc. (1 Kings 17:1-6)
- **Encourage ‘Thought Journals.’** Write down self-talk, and what the Bible says about who they are in Christ.
- **Encourage Creating a ‘Do’ List.** Write down daily tasks and seek small ways to serve others.
- **Warmly reintroduce the person to the group, and as a group, reaffirm your love and support for them with more than mere words.** Ideally, the group (all parties) enters into a time of repentance, fasting and prayer (then repeat).

SUPPORT FROM THE SOUL CARETEAM

Contact: soulcare@doxa.church

RECOMMENDED COUNSELING CENTERS

Doxa Biblical Counseling: [INTAKE](#)

FieldstoneCounseling: Christ-centered, clinically informed biblical counseling center. [INTAKE](#)

RESOURCES

[Depression & Anxiety: How Can Churches Help?](#) - David Powlison talk

[Words of Hope for Those Who Struggle with Depression - Journal of Biblical Counseling](#) - Edward T. Welch

[Spurgeon’s Sorrows - Realistic Hope for Those Who Suffer from Depression](#) - Zack Eswine

