



## Parkway Fellowship

Elephants in the Church • Depression • Mark 2:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:17; John 13:34 •  
3/1/2020

### Main Point

Remembering the truths about God, who we are in Him, and who He has given us in Christian community help those who feel stuck in depression find healing.

### Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What thoughts or images come to mind when you hear the word “depression”?  
Explain.**

**Do you think Christians can be depressed? Why or why not?**

**How does the church typically address depression and/or people who suffer from depression?**

About 20 million people in the United States suffer from depression. Depression is one of the most misdiagnosed and misunderstood struggles in America. Its treatment is hard to tackle. Unlike the flu where a shot is given and you can physically track your recovery, depression is more difficult to treat because its symptoms exist primarily in the mind. Depression is an internal battle between mind, body, and spirit. Its symptoms manifest themselves in a loss of interest in daily activities, decreased overall mood, fluctuating appetite, mood swings, practices of self-harm, or thoughts of suicide. The seriousness of depression begs a call to action on the church. As the body of Christ, we should know what depression is, how to help those who struggle with it, and how to be present for those who have no hope. Because, after all, we're all one body of believers.

# Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Ask a volunteer to read Mark 2:1-5.

**There was no room left at the door. Why do you think the crowd wouldn't make way for the paralyzed man?**

The crowd was blocking the paralyzed man and his friends from getting to Jesus. We can get so caught up in what is happening around us that we forget about other people. We can be excited about what we can get but not about bringing others. Faith is about far more than just showing up. Faith is concerned about getting people who are hurting to Jesus.

**How can the attitude of our hearts block people from seeing Jesus, much like the crowd in Mark 2? What do we need to do to make room in our hearts for the kind of faith that looks to bring people to Jesus?**

**What types of obstacles keep you from bringing hurting friends to Jesus?**

**Contrast the "faith" of the crowd with the faith of the four friends of the paralytic.**

The crowd was complacent. The group of four friends was persistent. They had one purpose, and that was to get their friend to the feet of Jesus. They didn't let anything keep them from carrying out that purpose. True faith does not say it believes Jesus saved us and not feel a sense of urgency about telling other people. The paralytic's friends underscore for us the vital necessity of investing eternally in the lives of others by putting our faith to work in concrete ways. The intersection of our faith in the power of Christ and our concern for people must prompt us to do something tangible that helps them. .

**What is our purpose as believers today? Are you persistent in carrying out that purpose? Explain.**

**Once the guys got their friend to Jesus, what do you think the crowd was hoping to see? Why? What did Jesus do?**

**How does this story speak to you about Jesus' power over depression?**

| Ask a volunteer to read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

**What verb tenses does Paul use in verse 17? Why is it significant that you are (present tense) a new creation? In what sense are you a new creation?**

When a person enters into a relationship with Christ, they are changed. They are made new at a heart level, complete with new desires, new thoughts, and new feelings. When Paul calls the Christian a “saint” he has this permanent identity-level change in mind.

**If the old things have passed away and the new things have come, why do you think we still struggle with depression?**

Though this change in identity happens once and completely in a moment, we spend the rest of our lives growing into the people God has already made us to be. Though we have been set free from our old selves, sin, and pattern of living, we still struggle to take hold of what God has done in us.

**How does it change your perspective of joy and sadness to know that you already are a new creation in Christ?**

**If you don't understand that you are a new creation, how will it change your approach to life when you experience times of depression?**

| Ask a volunteer to read John 13:34.

**Does it surprise you that love is something Jesus had to command? Why or why not?**

**Who is our “one another”? How do our love for God and our love for one another go hand in hand?**

The biblical command to love our neighbors as ourselves is not a new commandment (Leviticus 19:18). By the time Jesus spoke John 13:34-35, He had already cited love for neighbors as one of the two greatest commandments (Matthew 22:34-40). Jesus even taught us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). So what was new about the command in John 13:34? The answer is in Jesus' words: “just as I have loved you.” The disciples were to love one another according to Jesus' model. But little did they know the depth of love Jesus was about to demonstrate.

**In the context of today's topic on depression, what would it look like to love one another in the same way Jesus loves us?**

## Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**In this week's message, we learned: When someone is paralyzed by depression, grab a corner. What I suffer from does not define who I am. All of us should help all of us. Which of the three statements stands out to you the most personally? Why?**

**How has your identity in Christ and position as a member of His body sustained and empowered you through a difficult time in the past?**

**What are some reasons believers might struggle to talk openly about the things that we otherwise wrestle privately with in our minds? Why is it important that we do?**

**How can we, as a group, be a source of encouragement, comfort, and peace as people in our group struggle through tough times?**

## Prayer

Pray that God would care and comfort the people who are currently struggling with discouragement or depression. Pray that God would show them His love and grace. Pray that people would trust in God even in the difficult times. Ask that God would use you to lead people who are hurting down the path of healing.

## Commentary

| Mark 2:1-5

Jesus performed many miracles in Galilee, the region where He grew to adulthood and where much of His earthly ministry occurred. His healing miracles attracted large crowds, but His central focus was always His preaching. Citizens of Capernaum previously had gathered around Jesus to be healed. Learning that Jesus had returned to town, so many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door. Jesus taught long and intensely—until He was interrupted by some determined men.

All Mark recorded about the four men appears in 2:3-5. They were determined to get their sick friend to Jesus because they believed Jesus would heal him. They had more than one obstacle to overcome. The first barrier they faced was their friend's immobility. The friends' unswerving determination to get him to Jesus may imply that his need was desperate, so they the paralytic stretcher-style on a mat to the house where Jesus was teaching. The second challenge the friends faced was the crowd who refused to make way. The four were so confident that Jesus would heal their friend that they climbed the outside stairway and made an opening in the roof

above Jesus. The friends obviously let nothing hinder their determination to bring the paralytic to Jesus.

Everything the men and their paralytic friend had done is summed up in the words, Jesus saw their faith. By their actions both the paralyzed man and his friends had clearly declared their faith. The sick man expressed faith in Jesus by allowing his friends to carry him to Jesus and to lower him into the room. The friends showed faith by their determination and bold actions. As the Son of God, Jesus knew that faith was in these men's hearts.

Jesus apparently said nothing about the damaged roof or the incredibly rude interruption. His first word was unexpectedly kind. Son (literally "child," a term used to express affection regardless of age) shows that Jesus viewed the paralytic with warmth and respect. Most people probably had ignored or looked down on him because of his apparent long-term disability.

Jesus' next words, "your sins are forgiven," were perhaps not the words the man wanted most to hear. Yet Jesus knew that forgiveness was what he needed most. He knows that having spiritual needs met (forgiveness and a new relationship with God) is far more significant than having temporal needs met.

How did Jesus recognize that the paralytic needed forgiveness of sins? Jesus, of course, knew the man's heart. All people have sinned and stand in need of God's forgiveness. Each individual's primary need is to experience God's forgiveness and to enter into a personal relationship with Him.

| 2 Corinthians 5:17

The words "in Christ" refer to being in union with Him. Genuine conversion begins life transformation, but not by reforming the old nature. The indwelling Spirit creates divine life in believers (Rom. 8:8-10), enabling a life of new things. Other New Testament passages communicate this truth by using language such as "born again" or "regeneration" (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:23). Those who were enemies of God have now become friends by being reconciled to Him. God's wrath against sin was satisfied in the death of His Son. Sinners—who formerly put self-interest above God's glory (Rom. 1:21; 3:23)—have been brought to cherish God as their highest treasure (2 Cor. 4:6). The ministry of reconciliation—being an agent of this good news—was Paul's special responsibility, but the task belongs to all who have received this ministry.

| John 13:34

Jesus invited His followers to embrace His love and to express His love through their interactions with each other. His commandment to them was not new in the sense that it was different in substance. Rather, it was new in application—one's neighbor was anybody. It also was new in its model—Jesus' self-sacrificing love, especially displayed later on the cross. In an encounter with a scribe, Jesus summarized the commandments in the Mosaic law (Mark 12:28-31). Stated in two Old Testament passages (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:4-5), the Mosaic commandments directed believers to love God wholeheartedly and to love one's neighbor as one's self.

As Jesus prepared His disciples for their future in His body, the church, He yearned for them to experience the new commandment in their relationships. He had corrected their earlier ambitions over position and greatness by His own humble service of washing their feet. As Judas left the Passover supper the disciples were eating with Jesus, He focused attention on their covenant commitments to one another. Three times in two verses, Jesus repeated the essence of His teaching. To love one another was the supreme means of identification for His disciples.

The kind of love Jesus commanded the disciples to give was not merely the brotherly love of human fellowship. Even unbelievers related to others on that level of love. Jesus wanted His followers to experience and to express God's love. Each of the four occurrences of the Greek word translated "love" and "loved" in John 13:34-35 uses a Greek word meaning God's kind of love. This love seeks the good of another rather than benefit for self. It sacrifices without condition and serves without motive of personal gain.

The source of such love is the Lord Himself. Jesus knew human nature does not love sacrificially and unconditionally as God loves. He reminded the eleven disciples of the way He loved them. The words Just as meant they were to love one another in the same way and to the same degree He loved them. Their only hope for success in loving this way lay in their relationship with Him. As they were channels, receiving and passing on Christ's love, they could fulfill His intention for their lives.

The object of the disciples' love was one another. Jesus certainly was not excusing the disciples from loving other people who were not His disciples. He was not suggesting they form an exclusive club in which they loved each other but not those outside their group. Rather, Jesus was setting a new standard for love among believers. The disciples' purpose in showing godly love was to witness for Jesus. According to Him, only the disciples' love for one another showed the world they were His disciples. Only by love would they endure together and impact their world.

Jesus calls Christians to love one another, as He said, "Just as I have loved you." We who have received Christ's sacrificial love are to extend that same love to others. His love transforms our

hearts so we cannot help but love. If we fail to love, we should examine ourselves to see if His love truly resides in our lives (1 John 4:7-8). Love among believers provides the foundational testimony to the lost. Unbelievers may criticize Christians, but many do have high expectations of those who claim Christ's name. They look for holy lifestyles among believers and love in their relationships with one another. Weak love among believers results in weak witness to nonbelievers. Worse, when Christians argue and fight with one another, lost people use their bickering as an excuse to reject Christ. The world judges our love for God by the love we have for one another. Christians should love one another to glorify God. Just as children's behavior reflects on parents' character, even so our love paints a portrait of our Heavenly Father. Just as you are glad when people comment on the good behavior and loving attitudes of your children, so our Heavenly Father rejoices to see His children living in harmony and love.