



Smiling Depression: When Life is Not Okay

Text: Job 3

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Ever since sin entered the world in Genesis 3, life in this broken and fallen world has been extremely difficult at times. Though we feel pressured to put on a smile and always say, “I’m good,” in reality, all of us have bad days. For some of us, we experience moments, days, and seasons of intense darkness, sometimes for no discernable reason at all. And for some of us, those dark thoughts and feelings leave us believing that the only way out is taking our own life. So what do we do when we find ourselves anywhere along the spectrum from having a bad day to wanting to end our lives?

1. Read Job 3. What is your initial reaction to seeing a Bible character share such raw emotion?
2. The first step when we find ourselves feeling down, depressed, or suicidal is to “Choose to **tell**.” However, most of us are conditioned to pretend everything is ok and that we are strong. What makes it difficult for us to be open and honest, sharing our pains and burdens in this life? What is the result of us holding our struggles and burdens to ourselves?
3. How can we begin to break down those walls? How can we work up the courage to tell someone? How can we create safe places for others to be honest with us, both individually and within your Grow Group?
4. Another step for when we find ourselves feeling down, depressed, or suicidal is to “Choose to **go**.” What are signs someone might have a physiological struggle, and not just a spiritual one? If you have any personal experience in this area that could be a source of encouragement and wisdom to your group members, would you please share what your experience has been?
5. For those of us with the greatest intensity of feeling down, depressed, or suicidal we must to “Choose to **live**.” God wants you to live! And so do the people who know and love you! Perhaps the most important thing you can do as a group right now is to speak words of love and encouragement to one another. Go around the circle in your group. As you get to each group member, have the other group members look that person in the eye and speak directly to that person about how much they mean to them and how they see God has gifted and used that person.

Challenge: Choose to **fight!** T.A. shared several ideas: pray daily for strength. read a Psalm a day, set aside time each day to journal what you are thinking and feeling, thank God each day for 3-5 things, get enough sleep, develop healthy eating habits, and simplify your life. See the Study Deeper for additional ideas. Commit to one to implement this week.

Prayer: Partner up with someone else of the same gender in your Grow Group. Use this opportunity to Choose to Tell and to Choose to Fight by praying for each other. What burdens are on your heart right now? How are you experiencing feeling down, depressed, or even suicidal? Encourage one another as you courageous let the walls down. And pray for peace, strength, and restoration in each of those situations.

STUDY DEEPER
How to Fight for Faith in the Dark
Three Lessons for Depression

I've often said that depression is like wearing tinted glasses. Everywhere you look, things look dark. Bleak. Black. Hopeless. Helpless. The waiting room for depression says, "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

Depression is both a physical and spiritual affliction. Neurons and synapses fail to fire properly, leading to chemical imbalances in the brain. These imbalances cause the depressed person to feel awful, like their entire world is a raw catastrophe hovering over the depths of despair. When everything is a catastrophe, it's easy for faith to falter and stumble.

Normally, the prescription for faith is somewhat straightforward. We read the promises of God, let them diffuse throughout our hearts, and then embrace them fully. As we embrace these promises, our faith rises. When we have more faith, there is often a physical feeling of encouragement and hope.

But with clinical depression (and most other forms of mental illness), things don't work quite that way. Depression usually causes a person to feel only gloom and despair, no matter what they're thinking. Filling your mind with God's promises is necessary, but it doesn't usually alter the way you feel. It's like having a migraine. Believing God's word is essential, but it won't take away the migraine (usually).

From Gloom Toward Gladness

When all you feel is gloom, it becomes very hard to have hope, no matter what you read in Scripture. As someone who labored under a lot of depression and anxiety throughout my life, I know that it usually doesn't help a depressed person to say, "Just believe God's word more!"

So if you're depressed, how can you fight for faith? How can you believe while also stumbling through the dark? Here are some things that have helped me.

1. Distinguish between fact and feeling.

The most important thing I've learned is that 90% of the time in the midst of my depression, my feelings have zero connection to reality. This is key when you're in the morass of mental illness.

I feel bad because something is seriously wrong with my body. Because my brain is rebelling – not because everything is really going to pieces. Reality is outside of my broken brain. It is defined by God's word. It's solid. Objective. Unchangeable. If I try to process my life or circumstances through the dark lens of depression, I will be terrified.

If you're depressed, it can be dangerous to evaluate anything in your life. Don't scrutinize your circumstances or friendships or prospects for marriage. I can assure you that you will misinterpret reality.

Instead, simply say, "I'm leaving that to God for now. I'll think about it later and trust him to handle it." God is good. He is faithful. He loves you even though you don't feel it. He can handle your life even when you can't.

Remember, faith is not a feeling. Faith is simply believing that God will do what he said, even when it doesn't feel like it. I can guarantee that when you're depressed, it won't feel like God is faithful. But that feeling simply is not true. Don't believe it.

John Calvin, a pastor acutely sensitive to the imperfect feeling of our faith, says that true faith "clings so fast to the inmost parts that, however it seems to be shaken or to bend this way or that, its light is never so extinguished or snuffed out that it does not at least lurk as it were beneath the ashes" (Institutes). Like David prays in Psalm 139:11–12, our faith may often slip away from our sight, but it does not slip away from God who gave it in the first place.

Separate your feelings from the truth.

2. Find a friend to remind you of the truth.

Depression gets you stuck inside your head. Your brain becomes a swirling mass of half-truths and distorted perceptions. Up seems down; truth seems stranger than fiction. It's impossible to think straight. It's like looking upside down in a hall of darkened mirrors.

During these times, I need someone to tell me the truth. Not in a corrective way or as an exhortation, but simply as an anchor. I need someone to say, "Listen, here's what's true. I know it doesn't feel true, but it's true. Right now, you feel like you are doomed. But God is with you. He loves you and won't let you go."

If you're depressed, one of your greatest temptations is to shut people out. And I get that. It's really hard to let people into the cage of your life. But you need someone to gently remind you of what's real; a faithful friend to walk through the valley of depression with you.

When your friend speaks the truth to you, it gives you something to grab onto. In the moments of darkness, don't believe what your mind is telling you. Believe the words of your faithful friend.

3. Give sunshine to the soul.

There is an intimate connection between the body and soul. The body often charts the way forward and the soul follows in the wake. When your body is deeply sick, it pulls your soul downward, like a weight tied around the ankle.

I've found that one of the most effective methods for increasing my faith begins with my body. When I exercise or go for a walk or sit in the sunshine, my body feels better. Blood and oxygen pump through my body, refreshing and nurturing it. When I feel better, I think more clearly and see things more accurately.

When I think more clearly, I can more easily process and embrace God's promises.

When I embrace God's promises, my faith surges.

Charles Spurgeon, who often fought depression, said,

A day's breathing of fresh air upon the hills, or a few hours' ramble in the beech woods' umbrageous calm, would sweep the cobwebs out of the brain of scores of our toiling ministers who are now but half alive. A

mouthful of sea air, or a stiff walk in the wind's face, would not give grace to the soul, but it would yield oxygen to the body, which is the next best.

If you're depressed, embrace the sunshine. Go for a walk or a jog. Sit on your porch and feel the warmth on your face. Drink your coffee and watch the sun rise.

You won't feel like it. You'll want to hole up in the darkness of your room or stay in bed. But just twenty minutes in the sun can do wonders for the darkened brain and the sunken soul.

A Grip Stronger Than Your Own

Ultimately, your hope in depression hinges on Jesus. He's holding onto you even when it feels like you're free falling. You may be in the dark, but your Shepherd is walking right beside you. He knows what it's like to be overwhelmed by grief and swallowed by bleakness.

Your grip on life may falter, but his grip on you won't.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-to-fight-for-faith-in-the-dark>