

# Hope Against Depression



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Psalm 42, 31:10, 39:2–7, 32:1–5, 1 John 1:9, Mic. 7:1–7, Rev. 21:2–4.*

**Memory Text:** “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (*Psalm 34:18, NIV*).

**D**epression, or extreme discouragement to the point of becoming disabled, has been experienced since the inception of sin. A number of Bible characters displayed symptoms that probably would meet today's diagnostic criteria for depression.

Hopelessness is a symptom of depression, and the biblical message of hope can offer us so much in contrast to a world that offers so little. All people, at times, face moments of extreme discouragement for any variety of reasons. No wonder, then, that the Word of God is filled with promises that can give all of us, no matter our situation, reasons to hope for a better future, if not in this world, then certainly in the next.

Of course, when depression is severe, it's important to get professional help when possible. The Lord can work through these people to help those who are in need of special care. After all, regardless of your relationship with God, were you physically ill you would seek the help of a doctor or health professional. It's the same with those who are suffering from severe clinical depression, which often is caused by a genetic predisposition and chemical imbalance in the brain. Thus, even Christians, at times might need the help of professionals.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 12.*

## The Downcast Soul

**Read** Psalm 42. How can you relate to what's being expressed there? What hope is offered?

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David experienced serious mood alterations on many occasions because of unfair persecution (for instance, Saul and Israel's adversaries). In addition, his violation of God's commandments brought about a deep sense of guilt (*Ps. 51:4*), and guilt often is associated with depression.

When one sees oneself negatively ("I am dumb"), looks at the world pessimistically ("life is always unfair"), and contemplates the future hopelessly ("it will never improve"), chances of depression become high. This attitude is called "catastrophic thinking."

Christians may opt for alternative ways to interpret things, a way that incorporates God's plan and messages into the equation.

### Consider the following alternatives:

- *How to look at yourself.* You were created in God's image, to rule over creation (*Gen. 1:26, 27*). God's traits, albeit marred, are still in you. Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice, rescued you from eternal death and granted you privileges—chosen people, royal priesthood, holy nation (*1 Pet. 2:9, NIV*). Before God's eyes you have infinite worth.
- *The world.* It is true that the world is rotten and full of evil. At the same time, there also are many right, noble, and admirable things upon which (*Phil. 4:8*) to ponder. Furthermore, Christians can understand the existence of evil without despair, as they know its origin and ultimate fate.
- *The future.* What a wonderful future is reserved for God's children! The Bible is full of promises with the assurance of salvation (*Ps. 37:39*).

**Sadness is not a sin. After all, look at how often Jesus felt sad. We mustn't feel guilty because of sadness or depression. In some cases we have good reasons to be hurting. How can you use the biblical truths stated above to help you cope with whatever struggles you are facing now?**

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## *The Lesson in Brief*

► **Key Text:** *Psalm 34:18*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Describe the mental and physical symptoms of discouragement and depression experienced by biblical characters, as well as by Christians today.

**Feel:** Experience the power of hope that comes from talking and listening to God and dwelling on what He has done.

**Do:** Focus on the forgiveness, saving mercy, goodness, and provisions of God for our future as an antidote for sadness, discouragement, and depression.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Tears for Food**

**A** What deep sorrow, discouragement, or depression did such people as Elijah, David, and Jesus go through?

**B** What are the mental and physical symptoms that accompany depression?

**C** How does forgiveness and acceptance from God relieve depression?

**II. Feel: Hope**

**A** How can prayer and dwelling on what God does or has done transform feelings of helplessness and negativity?

**B** What is the best source of hope?

**C** How does sharing our pain with others contribute to our healing?

**III. Do: Outward and Upward**

**A** Sharing our pain and sorrow can be helpful, but we also need to look outward and concern ourselves with the needs of others.

**B** What kinds of positive assurances of God's care regarding our self-worth and hope for the future should we dwell on?

► **Summary:** Deep feelings of sorrow, disappointment, and guilt can lead to depression. Sharing these feelings with others and in prayer, and accepting God's provisions of forgiveness and a bright future, free from evil, can aid in healing depression.

## The Consequences of Discouragement

**“I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!”** (Isa. 38:14, NIV).

The biblical description above leaves no doubt about the strong pain manifested by Hezekiah’s crying out loud. There are cultural differences in manifesting emotional distress. People in certain contexts suffer in silence, avoiding any obvious or visible complaint. Others (like Hezekiah) use moaning and wailing when going through sorrow. There also are personal differences; some people are able to approach death with more tranquillity than can others.

Depressive symptoms commonly are found in individuals with a prolonged or terminal disease. Hezekiah was suffering from illness, and its gravity announced death. Thus, he experienced a spell of depression as described in Isaiah 38. Depressive symptoms are so painful that many will attempt suicide to end this horrible experience. In fact, more than 10 percent of clinically depressed patients kill themselves. Clearly, clinical depression is a serious matter and must be treated as such.

### **What** symptoms are expressed in the following texts?

*Ps. 31:10* \_\_\_\_\_

*Ps. 77:4* \_\_\_\_\_

*Ps. 102:4, 5* \_\_\_\_\_

*1 Kings 19:4* \_\_\_\_\_

Depression causes a variety of painful manifestations: (a) a deep sense of sadness (sorrow), (b) a lack of motivation to do anything, even enjoyable activities, (c) a change in appetite and either weight loss or gain, (d) sleep disturbances, sleeping either not enough or too much, (e) feelings of low self-esteem, (f) poor reasoning and memory, and (g) thoughts of death and suicide. Some people experience just one or two symptoms, while others manifest several and suffer for months until the episode ends. In any case, the burden of depression is enormous and must be relieved by medical and spiritual intervention.

**We all suffer sadness and discouragement in one form or another for one reason or another at one time or another. What things bring you down, and why? Recall incidents of God’s past guidance in your life. What hope and encouragement can you draw from remembering the Lord’s leading? Why is it important to keep those memories alive?**

## *Learning Cycle*

### ► **STEP 1—Motivate**

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The vicissitudes of life are such that no human being can long endure them without experiencing a touch of hopelessness, or worse, depression. God has given us a way to stay connected to Him that we might live victoriously, fearlessly, hopefully. That way is found in the disciplines of the spiritual life.

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s study examines the loss of hope that results from depression. Whether one’s depression is the result of some innate chemical imbalance or the toll exacted by some hidden sin or stressor, God cannot fully help us until we understand our utter inability to handle life on our own. Your goal in Step 1 is to get the class thinking about those moments in life when we come to the end of our capacity to improve our situation.

**Opening Activity:** Share and discuss the following story with your class. On October 7, 2008, news outlets reported a grizzly murder-suicide that happened in a posh gated community on the outskirts of Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. Facing a deepening financial crisis, 45-year-old Karthik Rajaram shot six family members as they slept in their beds then turned the gun on himself. Rajaram wrote in his suicide note that, given his situation, he had only two options. He could kill himself, in which case his family would go on suffering because he would not be there to help provide for them. Or he could kill everyone and permanently solve what really was a temporary problem. He chose the latter, believing it to be a more honorable choice.

**Discuss:** Ask your students to share moments in their lives when they felt hopeless. Did they ever have thoughts of harming themselves or others? How did they ultimately pull out of their depressive state? What did they learn about themselves and their capacity to “handle” life during these times?

### ► **STEP 2—Explore**

#### **Bible Commentary**

**Just for Teachers:** The goal of this Explore section is to examine the human condition and God’s plan to help us deal with it. As the lesson points out, God is extremely concerned about us, His special creation.

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## Relief From Depression

**Read** Psalm 39:2–7. What happened when David remained silent? And what was the result of his speaking up?

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Like most emotional disorders, depression necessitates that the sufferer speak about his or her struggles. This act alone can begin to initiate healing. Approaching the Lord in fervent and sincere prayer is a safe way to release tension and psychological pain. Often more is needed, but this can be a good start.

A basic coping strategy for depression consists of talking to a friend (or a therapist) who knows how to listen and, even better, who knows how to help access more intensive resources, if needed. There is a healing effect in verbalizing thoughts and feelings. The church community can provide an excellent context to help the discouraged, but often this is insufficient, especially when professional care is required. Nevertheless, it is important for anyone going through hard times and who feels discouraged or even depressed to have someone trustworthy to whom they can talk. Sometimes merely talking to someone can go a long way toward helping a person feel better.

**Read** Psalm 55:17. What promise is there? Why should this promise mean so much to us?

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The counselor's appointment, if possible at all, may not be available until next week. But like David—who learned how to get help any hour of the day or any day of the week—we, too, can turn to the Lord at any time. David knew that the Lord heard his voice, and that greatly encouraged him.

Even secular psychologists are recommending that clients who believe in prayer pray. All of us, even when not suffering with something such as clinical depression, can experience the impact of how praying to the Lord does help to make us feel better. No matter who we are or how deep our discouragement, having a relationship with God can go a long way in bringing us hope and encouragement and healing.

**Ellen G. White once described prayer as “the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 533. Though prayer doesn't always solve all our problems, how does it help us deal with them?**

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Learning Cycle CONTINUED

**When we hurt, He hurts. When we need help, He arrives on time, and before on time, because He anticipates our need.**

**I. Without and Within** (*Read Luke 21:26 and Romans 7:18–20 with your class.*)

The apostle, in his famous diagnosis of the problem of sin, wrote, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” (*Rom. 7:18–20, NKJV*). The enemy is within, seeking to undermine our ability to do what pleases God. Thought of another way, one might say that our sin problem renders us powerless to live hopeful lives in a hopeless age.

In short, we need help. To live our lives by Protagoras’s credo that “Man is the measure of all things” is to be foolhardy. Fear, sadness, and depression are the results of sin, and until we accept that we have a sin problem, finding the antidote (Jesus) to these ills will prove elusive.

**Consider This:** Adam and Eve were created perfect and placed in a perfect world. Given their perfect environment, why did they still have a need for God? What does their need for God in their sinless state say to us about our own need of Him in our fallen one?


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**II. The Call to Worship** (*Read Psalm 42:1–5 and 1 Peter 5:7 with your class.*)

The psalmist David understood the ups and downs of life. In the rocks and caves that were his bedroom during the years he spent on the run from Saul, David held out hope that he would once again see God’s countenance. The word *countenance* refers to one’s appearance, especially the expression on the face. In his night of struggle, the psalmist still had fixed in his mind the picture of a God whose face is turned toward him and whose expression is one of love and care.

How did he manage to retain such a picture in challenging times? For one, David worshiped. He had grown accustomed to God’s presence in His life because he was intentional about seeking that presence. Psalm 42 was written to God and sung in worship to Him. It was a part of David’s worship regimen, his personal connection with His God.

David used his worship time to praise God, but he also saw it as a way

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## The Need for Forgiveness

**How** did David find relief for his agony? *Ps. 32:1–5*; see also *1 John 1:9*. **How** can we find this same thing for ourselves?

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The guilt produced by unconfessed sins may become extremely painful. The expressions used by David are a clear indication of intense inward pain. Psalm 32 and other passages in Psalms show the severity of David's emotional distress.

When we meet sufferers of depression, we must be extremely careful not to blame them for not having confessed their sins! Nor should we simply conclude that they are wicked people, and that's why they are in distress. It is unfortunate that many people seem to be able to offer concern and understanding to those suffering from an organic malady, true clinical depression, but tend to be quite judgmental in dealing with mental or emotional turmoil brought about by their own wrong actions.

Edgar Allen Poe in his "Tell-Tale Heart" refers to the story of a man who committed murder and hid the victim's body under the floorboards of the room in which the murder had been committed. He hoped to leave his guilt hidden with the body, but a strong sense of remorse grew within him. One day he heard the victim's heartbeat; and the beat grew louder and louder. Later it became clear that the pounding was coming not from the grave below but, rather, from his own heart.

At the same time, too, there are people who, having confessed their sins, still suffer greatly from a sense of guilt. They often feel unworthy of forgiveness and lament the horrible suffering that they have brought through their sins, even though they have confessed and are, by faith, forgiven by God. This, too, can be a great source of emotional distress. In such cases, it's important to focus on God's promises of healing and of acceptance, even for the worst of sins. We can't undo the past; what we can do, by God's grace, is seek to learn from our past mistakes and, to whatever degree possible, make restitution for whatever wrong we have done. After all, all we can do is surrender to God and seek His mercy, grace, and healing.

**Many, having confessed their sins, still struggle with guilt over them. Why is it so important that we acknowledge our sins, take responsibility for them, and learn to move on and get past whatever wrongs we have done?**



Learning Cycle CONTINUED

to unload on God, to cast all his cares upon Him (*1 Pet. 5:7*). Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—God in human flesh—prioritized His devotional life so much that not even exhaustion would prevent Him from rising early and seeking the presence of His Father (*Mark 1:35*).

**Consider This:** Prominent in the first angel’s message of Revelation is the call to worship “ ‘Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*Rev. 14:7, NKJV*). If worship is commanded by God, why do His followers often forego this daily spiritual exercise? How might a lack of personal and corporate worship experiences influence one’s mental well-being and overall outlook on life?

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### III. The Call to Unceasing Prayer (*Read 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and Psalm 39:2–7 with your class.*)

In *Celebration of Discipline*, author Richard Foster writes, “In prayer, real prayer, we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively, we are taught to see things from his point of view.”—(San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), pp. 33, 34. Prayer is the most intimate means by which God shares Himself with humanity.

Tuesday’s lesson highlights the need for the emotionally challenged to speak about their troubles to someone. In Psalm 39 we are told that David suffered deep anguish of soul and inner discomfort when he kept silent, when he tried to deal with his inner turmoil alone.

Perhaps this is why the apostle Paul encourages the Thessalonian believers to “pray without ceasing” (*1 Thess. 5:17*). Our English language does not really capture the true essence of this verse. The literal meaning of this verse is “incessantly pray.” The admonition of the Scripture is never to allow the connection with heaven to be broken by anything or anyone. Through this connection, God speaks peace to our worries, hope to our fears, and joy to our sorrows.

**Consider This:** In Luke 18:1, Jesus spoke a parable to His disciples and said, “Men always ought to pray and not lose heart” (*NKJV*). Did you know that during the time of Christ, it was taught that three times a day was the optimal amount of time to seek God? Anything more than this was thought to weary God. Do we sometimes fall prey to

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## Hope Against Distress

**What** was the prophet’s way out of the surrounding social and interpersonal problems? *Mic. 7:1–7*.

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In just the first six verses, Micah describes a complete smorgasbord of immoral, unethical, and aggressive acts present in his time. Oppression and abuse of various kinds, lack of respect and consideration, corruption, and deceit all have been present since the inception of sin. We all face it even today. Just take today’s newspaper, and you can find a direct correlation with Israel’s misery at that time. This sociological chaos becomes especially hurtful when touching close to home—neighbor, friend, spouse, child, parent (*Mic. 7:5, 6*).

Highly defective interpersonal relationships cause much stress and are associated with depression. Clearly stated by Micah (*vs. 7*), the conclusive ingredient to survival in the middle of a crisis is hope.

Hope is essential to living our lives with a reasonable amount of mental health. Hope must be alive even for the unbeliever—youth in search of employment must hope that they’ll find a job, a lost traveler will hope to find his way, and investors who have lost their money must believe that there will be better times. Living with zero hope leads to meaninglessness and death.

When Italian philosopher and poet Dante Alighieri (A.D. 1265–1321) attempted to describe hell in his *Divine Comedy*, he envisioned a big sign at the entrance saying: “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!” The worst possible punishment is to deprive someone of hope.

The kind of hope presented in the Bible goes beyond positive anticipation. It encompasses an eventual perfect solution and salvation based on redemption through Jesus Christ. The historic “blessed hope” of Seventh-day Adventists must become the focal point of our lives. Hoping for Jesus’ return helps us to gain perspective over the many unpleasant things that surround us and allows us to look in confidence toward eternity.

**Look** at these promises. What hope is offered there for us? *Isa. 65:17, 2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:2–4*. **Why, in one sense, is this the only hope for any of us?**

A vision of faith in the new creation can reassure the suffering soul. In the same way that a woman in childbirth contemplates the final result of her child being born and soon “forgets the anguish” (*John 16:21, NIV*), the troubled soul can, by God’s grace, gain hope with the vision of a caring God who promises us a new world without any of the things that bring us so much sadness in this world.

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

such thinking, such as when taking the same problems to God again and again?

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### ► STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** This week’s apply section examines how staying connected to God helps to keep us emotionally balanced and ready to help lift the burdens of those around us.

#### Thought Questions:

- 1 In John 15:1–8, Jesus gives the disciples the secret to living a fruitful, healthy life: abiding in Christ. What does this mean in practice? How are we to “abide in Christ”?
- 2 What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping us to remain hopeful in the face of life’s trials? What does Romans 15:13 tell us about the connection between the Holy Spirit and our ability to hope in God?
- 3 How does the Holy Spirit affect our inner being? (*Eph. 3:16*).

#### Application Questions:

- 1 Read Isaiah 53:6. In what ways do you typically turn away from God, the Source of your strength? At what times in your life are you most prone to wander?
- 2 Isaiah 53:4 says, “He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (*NKJV*). If Jesus is willing to carry our griefs and sorrows, why do we insist on carrying them ourselves?

### ► STEP 4—Create

**Just for Teachers:** Share the following activity with your students. Begin by distributing to each class member a 3×5 card and a writing utensil if needed. Ask the class members to complete the following statements. If time permits, allow those who wish to share their responses.

#### Activity:

1. I feel stressed when . . .
2. I get depressed when . . .
3. I find hope when . . .
4. I choose to give my stresses to God by . . .

**Further Study:** Read and reflect on Matthew 26:36–43. Jesus was overwhelmed with sorrow “ ‘to the point of death’ ” (*vs.* 38, *NIV*). Visualize the agony of Jesus, with lack of social support and betrayal from His disciples, seeming separation from God, and the load of guilt from humanity. His suffering exceeds any depressive episode experienced by mortals.

“As He neared Gethsemane, He became strangely silent. He had often visited this spot for meditation and prayer; but never with a heart so full of sorrow as upon this night of His last agony. Throughout His life on earth He had walked in the light of God’s presence. When in conflict with men who were inspired by the very spirit of Satan, He could say, ‘He that sent Me is with Me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him.’ John 8:29. But now He seemed to be shut out from the light of God’s sustaining presence. Now He was numbered with the transgressors. The guilt of fallen humanity He must bear. Upon Him who knew no sin must be laid the iniquity of us all. So dreadful does sin appear to Him, so great is the weight of guilt which He must bear, that He is tempted to fear it will shut Him out forever from His Father’s love. Feeling how terrible is the wrath of God against transgression, He exclaims, ‘My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 685.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What great role can your local church community play in helping those who are suffering depression or emotional distress for any reason at all? Whatever your resources are, no matter how limited, what more can be done to help those in need?
- ❷ How can you help someone who prays, who counsels, who loves the Lord and who trusts in Him, and yet still feels overwhelmed with sadness, even if he or she doesn’t understand why? How can you help him or her not give up his or her faith but cling to the hope and promises given in the Word?
- ❸ One of the greatest mistakes people can make is to believe that because they feel so down, so depressed, so hopeless, it means that God has abandoned them. Why is that, first of all, not true? What Bible characters (such as Elijah, Jeremiah in jail, John the Baptist in jail, Jesus in Gethsemane) can you point them to in order to show them that sadness and discouragement do not mean God has forsaken them? How can you help them learn that feelings are not a good barometer of faith?