

Hope Against Depression¹ (Sadness)



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 5

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 42; Psalm 31:10; Psalm 39:2–7; Psalm 32:1–5; 1 John 1:9; Micah 7:1–7; Revelation 21:2–4.

MEMORY VERSE: “The Lord is close to those whose hearts have been broken. He saves those whose spirits have been crushed” (Psalm 34:18, NIV).

SINCE SIN BEGAN, MANY PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCED DEPRESSION, even to the point of becoming disabled. Depressed people often feel hopeless. Many Bible characters² showed signs that probably would be called depression today.

Losing hope is a sign of depression. This is why the Bible message of hope can offer us so much. It is very different from a world that offers so little. All people face moments of great discouragement for many different reasons. So, it is no surprise that the Word of God is filled with promises that can give all of us good reasons to hope for a better future. If there is no hope in this world, then there is certainly hope in the next.

Of course, when depression is serious, it is important to get professional help, when possible. The Lord can work through these professionals to help those who are in need of special care. After all, no matter what your relationship with God is, you would try to get the help of a doctor or health professional if you were physically ill. It is the same with those who suffer from severe clinical³ depression. Clinical depression is often caused by our genes⁴ and chemical imbalances in the brain. So, even with the help of God, Christians still may need the help of professionals.

1. depression—a serious medical condition where a person feels very sad, hopeless, and unimportant and often is unable to live a happy and healthy life.

2. characters—people who appear in a story.

3. clinical—requiring treatment as a medical problem.

4. genes—the parts of cells that control or influence the appearance, growth, and so forth of a living thing.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 6**THE DOWNCAST (DISCOURAGED)
SOUL (Psalm 42)**

Can you feel any connection with the message of Psalm 42? What hope is offered?

David experienced serious mood swings or changes. He experienced them because of unfair attacks against him from Saul and from the enemies of Israel. In addition, David also broke God's commandments, which brought about a deep sense of guilt (Psalm 51:4). Guilt often is connected with depression.

Suppose someone thinks of himself or herself negatively ("I am dumb"), lives in the world without hope for the future ("life is always unfair"), and believes nothing good will happen in life ("it will never get better"). Then the chances of depression become high. This attitude (feeling) is called "catastrophic thinking."⁵

Consider the following positive ways of thinking instead:

- *How to look at yourself.* You were created in God's image, to rule over creation (Genesis 1:26, 27). God's traits⁶ are still in you, even if they are stained by sin. Jesus Christ, through His sacrifice (death on the cross), rescued you from eternal (lasting

forever) death. He gave you special rights—the rights to be His chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9, NIV). In the eyes of God, you are very valuable.

- *The world.* It is true that the world is rotten and full of evil. At the same time, there are also many right, noble, and admirable things (Philippians 4:8) to think about. Christians can understand evil without losing hope. This is because they know how evil began and how it will end.

- *The future.* What a wonderful future is ahead for God's children! The Bible is full of promises of salvation⁷ (Psalm 37:39).

Sadness is not a sin. After all, Jesus often felt sad. We must not feel guilty because of sadness or depression. After all, in some cases we have good reasons to be hurting. How can you use the Bible truths in this lesson to help you handle any struggles you are facing now?

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 7**THE RESULTS OF
DISCOURAGEMENT
(Isaiah 38:14)**

Isaiah 38:14 leaves no doubt that Hezekiah⁸ experienced strong pain. Everyone expresses (shows) pain differently. Some people suffer in silence. Others (like Hezekiah) moan and wail. There are also personal dif-

5. catastrophic thinking—the kind of thinking that leads a person to believe that something very terrible will happen.

6. traits—qualities that make one person or thing different from another.

7. salvation—God's plan of saving us from sin or evil.

8. Hezekiah—one of Judah's good kings, who ruled later in its history.

ferences in the way people express sorrow. Some people are able to face death more peacefully than others.

Depression is common among people with a prolonged (lasting longer than usual) or terminal⁹ disease. Hezekiah was suffering from a serious illness that could lead to death. So, Hezekiah also felt depressed, as described in Isaiah 38. Sometimes depression can be so painful that some may try to end their own lives to stop 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 that way.

What signs of depression are shown in Psalm 31:10; Psalm 77:4; Psalm 102:4, 5; and 1 Kings 19:4?

Depression can show itself in many different painful signs (a) a deep sense of sadness (sorrow); (b) no energy to do anything, not even enjoyable activities; (c) a change in appetite and either weight loss or gain; (d) sleeping problems, sleeping either not enough or too much; (e) feelings of low self-worth; (f) poor reasoning and memory; and (g) thoughts of death and suicide (killing oneself). Some people experience just one or two signs, while others show several and suffer for months until the depression ends. In any case, depression is very serious and must be helped by professionals such as doctors or pastors.

9. terminal—leading finally to death.

10. emotional—of or relating to a strong feeling, such as love, anger, joy, hate, or fear.

11. psychological—of or relating to the mind.

12. therapist—someone who helps people recover from illness.

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? Remember past examples of how God guided you in your life. What hope and encouragement can you receive by remembering the Lord's leading? Why is it important to keep those memories alive?

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 8

RELIEF FROM (HELP FOR) DEPRESSION (Psalm 39:2–7)

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

Just like anyone else suffering from emotional¹⁰ problems, a person who is depressed needs to speak about his or her struggles. This act alone can help to start healing. Reaching out to the Lord in serious and sincere prayer is a safe way to let go of tension (mental strain) and psychological¹¹ pain. Often more healing is needed, but prayer can be a good start.

One of the most effective (good) ways of dealing with depression is talking to a friend (or a therapist)¹² who knows how to listen and who also knows how to find more qualified help, if needed. We can heal by talking about our thoughts and feelings.

The church community can also help those who are discouraged. But when this is not enough, professional care is required. It is important for anyone going through hard times and who feels discouraged or even depressed to talk to someone he or she trusts. Sometimes just talking to someone can go a long way in helping a person feel better.



The church community can also help those who are discouraged.

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

David learned how to get help at any hour of the day on any day of the week. In the same way, we can turn to the Lord at any time. David knew that the Lord heard his voice, and that belief greatly encouraged him.

Even non-Christian psychologists recommend that patients who believe in prayer should pray. All of us can experience how praying to the Lord helps make us feel better. It does

not matter who we are or how discouraged we feel. Having a good relationship with God can help a lot in bringing hope and encouragement and healing to us all.

Ellen G. White once described prayer as “the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.”—*Testimonies for the Church*, volume 4, page 533. Prayer does not always solve all our problems, but how does it help us deal with them?



Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend.

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 9

THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS (Psalm 32:1–5)

According to Psalm 32:1–5, how did David find relief for his suffering? Read also 1 John 1:9. How can we find this same thing for ourselves?

The guilt from unconfessed sins can become very painful. The inward pain David felt is shown by his complaints. Psalm 32 and other verses

in Psalms show how great David's emotional suffering is.

When we meet people who are suffering from depression, we must be very careful not to blame them for not having confessed their sins! And we should not judge them to be wicked people because they are suffering depression.

Edgar Allan Poe in his "The Tell-Tale Heart" story tells of a man who murdered someone and hid the body of his victim under the floorboards of the room. The murderer hoped to leave his guilt hidden with the body. But a strong conscience (sense of right and wrong) 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 from his own heart.

At the same time, there are some people who still suffer from feelings of guilt even after they confess their sins. They often feel so bad about the suffering caused by their sins that they feel they are not worthy of forgiveness. They fail to understand that when they confess their sins, they are, by faith, forgiven by God. In such cases, it is important to focus on God's promises of healing and of acceptance, even for the worst of sins. We cannot change the past. But what we can do, by God's grace,¹³ is try to learn from our past mistakes and make up for what we have done wrong. After all, all we can do is surrender (give ourselves)

to God and ask for His mercy, grace, and healing.

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



Some people have confessed their sins but still suffer from guilt.

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 10

HOPE AGAINST DISTRESS¹⁴ (Micah 7:1–7)

According to Micah 7:1–7, what was the prophet Micah's way out of the problems that surrounded him?

In just the first six verses, Micah describes different problems and sins present in his time. Many of them are the same problems and sins

13. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness that is not deserved) that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

14. distress—unhappiness or pain; suffering that affects the mind or body.

that we all face today. This social mess becomes very hurtful when it hits close to home—neighbor, friend, spouse (husband or wife), child, parent (Micah 7:5, 6).

Having negative relationships with those closest to us can cause much stress. These kinds of relationships are often connected with depression. As Micah clearly shows (Micah 7:7), the positive way to get through the middle of a crisis (trouble) is hope.

Hope is important to good mental health. Hope must be alive even for the unbeliever. For example, youth in search of work must hope that they will find a job. A lost traveler must hope to find his way. And investors¹⁵ who have lost their money must believe that there will be better times. Living with no hope leads to a life that is meaningless and to death.

When Italian philosopher and poet Dante Alighieri (A.D. 1265–1321) tried to describe hell in his long poem, the *Divine Comedy*, he pictured a big sign at the entrance saying, “Abandon [drop] all hope, ye who enter here!” The worst possible punishment is to remove hope from someone.

The kind of hope presented in the Bible gives us more than a positive feeling that something good will happen. That is because it is based on Jesus Christ’s sacrifice for our sins. The historic (having great or lasting importance) “blessed hope” of Seventh-day Adventists must become the guide for our lives. Hoping for the return of Jesus helps us to “overlook”

many unpleasant things around us. It also helps us to look toward eternity (time without end) without any fear or worry.

What hope is offered for us in Isaiah 65:17; 2 Peter 3:13; and Revelation 21:2–4? Why, in one sense, is this the only hope for any of us?

Faith in the world made new can bring comfort to the suffering soul. For example, a woman in childbirth looks forward to the final result of her child being born and soon “forgets the pain” (John 16:21, NIV). In the same way, the troubled soul can, by God’s grace, gain hope from God’s promise of a new world that will not have any of the things that bring so much sadness to us in this one.



Faith and hope in the world made new can bring comfort to the suffering soul.

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 11

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read and think about Matthew 26:36–43. Jesus was

15. investors—people who use money to earn money; those who buy stock in a company, property, and so forth.

filled with sorrow “ ‘to the point of death’ ” (verse 38, NIV). Imagine the painful suffering of Jesus. He did not have friends to support Him through this dark time. His followers had betrayed Him or fled from Him. Worse, Jesus felt that He was separated from God. And He had the full load of the guilt for our sins upon Him. His suffering went beyond any experience of depression any of us has ever felt.

“As Jesus neared Gethsemane, He became strangely silent. He had often visited this spot for meditation [deep thinking] and prayer. But He had never come to this place with a heart so full of sorrow as upon this night. Throughout His life on earth, Jesus had walked in the light of God’s presence. When He struggled with men who were inspired by the very spirit of Satan, He could say, ‘ “The One [the Father] who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, because I always do what pleases Him” ’ (John 8:29, NIV). But now Jesus seemed to be shut out from the light of God’s presence. Now He was numbered [counted] with the lawbreakers. He carried the guilt of fallen humanity [men, women, and children]. Jesus, who knew no sin, must accept all of our sins. He fears He will be separated forever from His Father’s love. Jesus feels the wrath [anger] of God so terribly that He says, ‘ “My soul

is very sad. I feel close to death” ’ (Matthew 26:38, NIV).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 685.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① How can your local church group help those who are suffering depression or emotional suffering for any reason at all? Your ability to help may be limited, but what more can be done to help those in need?
- ② 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? How can you help him or her not to give up faith but to hold on to the hope and promises given in the Word (Bible)?
- ③ One of the greatest mistakes a person can make is to believe that, because he or she feels so down, so depressed, so hopeless, it means that God has forgotten or left him or her. Why is that not true? What Bible characters (such as Elijah, Jeremiah in jail, John the Baptist in jail, Jesus in Gethsemane) can you point to in order to show this person that sadness and discouragement do not mean God has left him or her? How can you help this person learn that feelings are not a good way to judge one’s faith?