

charis

A Care and Counseling Initiative



Supporting and Caring for People

Who Are Struggling With Discouragement and Depression



Charis is an Urban Alliance initiative. www.urbanalliance.com

This booklet was prepared by:

Urban Alliance, Inc.

62 Village Street

East Hartford, CT 06108

www.urbanalliance.com

Content prepared by:

Dr. Jessica Sanderson, Ph.D., LMFT, Senior Director of Research & Strategy at Urban Alliance

Through Charis, Urban Alliance works with churches and parachurch organizations to help them communicate about mental health in ways that offer hope and create safe environments where people feel comfortable seeking help.

Many people who are struggling with their relational, emotional and mental health do not receive the support they need. They often do not know where to turn for help, or are embarrassed to acknowledge they are struggling. Additionally, a lack of resources in the community, poverty and stigma are barriers that keep people from receiving help.

Research shows that the church is one of the most common places people go to seek help when they are struggling emotionally. This is why it is so important for pastors and care providers to be equipped to offer care and connect people to appropriate help. Many churches offer support groups, care ministries or pastoral care. And, professional counselors who offer care from a Christian perspective provide services in the community.

Through Charis, Urban Alliance works with churches and parachurch organizations to help them communicate about mental health in ways that offer hope and create safe environments where people feel comfortable seeking help. Urban Alliance also equips care providers to respond sensitively, effectively connect people who are seeking care to appropriate support, and provide care, so they may cope well and heal.

The Charis website is a tool, managed by Urban Alliance, that can be used by individuals and organizations to help connect people in need of support to high-quality professional counselors, support groups and specialized support services offered from a Christian perspective.

These collaborative efforts have helped hundreds of people overcome barriers and more effectively cope, have ongoing support, strengthen their relationships, experience hope, joy and peace, and persevere despite life's challenges.

To learn more about Charis, visit www.urbanalliance.com/charis.

To visit the Charis website, visit www.charisnetworkct.org.



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Discouragement and Depression

Life can be discouraging and disappointing. Discouragement is a loss of courage, confidence or enthusiasm. Often people find that life situations and relationships are not what they hoped they would be and they find themselves struggling with feelings of discouragement or disillusionment. However, when a person’s feelings of discouragement intensify and begin impacting their day-to-day functioning they may be experiencing depression. Depression is a mental health condition that affects how a person feels, thinks and acts.

Discouragement and Depression in the Bible

There are many people in the Bible who expressed extreme discouragement and despair. We do not know if they would have been officially diagnosed with depression according to our modern criteria. However, we do see that they exhibited a number of depression symptoms.

David was troubled in spirit and experienced extreme despair. He pours his emotions into the writing of Psalms and describes feelings of anguish, loneliness, guilt and grief after the loss of his sons.

- “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” (Psalm 42:11)
- “I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. ...I groan because of the turmoil of my heart.” (Psalm 38:6,8)
- “My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear.” (Psalm 38:4)

Elijah was weary, afraid and discouraged to the point of wanting to die. After experiencing great spiritual victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah ran for his life. In the desert, discouraged and emotionally defeated, he prayed that God would take his life.

- “I have had enough Lord, he said. Take my life, I am not better than my ancestors.” (Kings 19:4)

Jeremiah struggled with loneliness and feelings of defeat and insecurity. He was known as the weeping prophet who suffered from constant rejection. He lived alone, was poor and ridiculed, and at times wrestled with despair and feelings of failure.

- “Cursed be the day I was born...why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?” (Jeremiah 20: 14, 18)

We see from these examples that deep discouragement and even depression are not new to our generation. In fact, many of the people from the Bible that are considered great spiritual leaders had times when they felt despair.

Deep discouragement and even depression are not new to our generation. In fact, many of the people from the Bible that are considered great spiritual leaders had times when they felt despair.

What is Major Depression?

When a person's feelings of sadness and disappointment are pervasive and effect their daily functioning, they may be experiencing major depression. Major depression is the most common mood disorder. In a given year, 6.7% of the population over 18 years of age suffers from major depression, and between 20% and 25% of adults may suffer from an episode of major depression at some point during their lifetime. Symptoms of depression include:

- Persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- Irritability
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Moving or talking more slowly
- Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment

In order to be diagnosed with depression, a person must have several persistent symptoms and a low mood that interferes with day-to-day functioning over at least a two-week period. The severity and frequency of symptoms and how long they last will vary.

What Causes Major Depression?

There are a number of factors that can contribute to a person's depression, including:

Genes: Research suggests that for some people, genetics play a significant role in mental health struggles. For example, people with a family history of depression are more at risk than those without a family history. Many find that medications reduce their depression symptoms.

Unhealthy Thinking Patterns: Identifying negative and unhealthy thinking patterns and replacing them with healthy coping strategies and thinking patterns helps improve depression symptoms.

Poor Physical Health: It is important for all people to take care of their physical bodies with proper nutrition, exercise and rest. These practices are linked to improved emotional health and can mitigate symptoms of depression. Additionally, some medical conditions such as an underactive thyroid can cause depression.

What Causes Major Depression?

Life Stress: People with higher levels of stress are at an increased risk for experiencing depression. Stress can be due to not setting healthy boundaries (taking on too much, overworking by choice) or situations out of a person's control (illness, loss of employment, domestic violence, single parenting).

Spiritual: There can be spiritual causes for depression as well. For example, a person's distorted view of God as an angry judge can result in feelings of insecurity and despair. Spiritual warfare or spiritual bondage can also cause a number of emotional struggles, including depression.

In reality, it is nearly impossible to know the exact degree to which a person's depression is a result of one particular cause. It is important for people who struggle with depression to understand their support and treatment options and have referral information for a variety of care and counseling services, such as professional counselors, prayer ministries, pastoral care, support groups and medication management providers.

Helping People Who Are Struggling to Adopt Healthy Ways of Thinking

Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT) was first developed by Dr. Albert Ellis in 1955. While there are some worldview differences between traditional REBT and Christianity, many of the concepts and techniques can be helpful for care providers and counselors supporting a person struggling with depression. According to this model, people's experiences, thoughts and emotions are linked. The events in a person's life result in thought or beliefs about the event, and those thoughts or beliefs result in emotions and actions:

A = Activating event or situation that we experience
B = Beliefs or thoughts about the situation
C = Consequence, or how we think or act based on these experiences

Different people can experience the same activating event and have very different thoughts and emotions about it. For example:

Person 1:

A (Activating situation) = A friend does not return your call
B (Beliefs or thoughts) = I must have done something to upset them; I am such a horrible person
C (Consequence/effect) = Anxious, upset, depressed and avoids friend

Helping People Who Are Struggling to Adopt Healthy Ways of Thinking

Person 2:

A (Activating situation) = A friend does not return your call

B (Beliefs or thoughts) = They're probably just really busy, and haven't had time to get back to me yet

C (Consequence/effect) = Content, neutral

This example shows how two people can experience the same situation and have very different reactions to the event based on how they interpret or evaluate the situation according to their beliefs and thoughts. People who struggle with depression often have a difficult time evaluating situations in a balanced and healthy way. They tend to have negative thoughts and beliefs that further fuel their feelings of depression. Therefore, one way caregivers can help people who are struggling with discouragement or depression is to help them identify irrational beliefs and debate them (D), incorporate more effective beliefs (E), and experience more functional emotions (F).

D = Debating Negative Beliefs

After recognizing a negative or unhelpful thought, the next step is to debate it. Important questions to ask include, "Is this thought helping me or causing trouble?" and "Where is the evidence to support this thought?" Scripture can be used as the final authority and can be used to debate thoughts. The goal of debating thoughts is to help a person determine if they should continue thinking the thought or replace it with a different thought. If a person is depressed and having a difficult time debating their thoughts, they may invite another person to help them.

E = Effective/Helpful Thoughts and Beliefs

Once a person has debated a thought and determined that it needs to be replaced, they are ready to begin identifying a healthier and more helpful thought. When possible, Scripture can be used to replace unhealthy thoughts with new thoughts that more accurately reflect truth.

F = New and More Functional Emotions and Behaviors

Once unhealthy thoughts are replaced with healthy ones, a person will likely start to experience more positive emotions and react to situations in more helpful ways.



Replacing Negative Thoughts Using Scripture

The following Scriptures can be used to help people debate negative thoughts and replace them with more effective and helpful ones. The following Scriptures are organized by a type of thinking pattern they can be used to dispute.

Common Types of Negative Beliefs and Thinking Patterns

- **Self-pity or self-doubt:** Exaggerated thoughts reflecting self-pity, failure, worthlessness (e.g. I am such a failure, I will never be successful)
- **Other-downing or life-downing:** Exaggerated negative beliefs about others or life, overly critical (e.g. she is totally insensitive and useless; life is worthless, there is no hope)
- **Demandingness:** Thought that the person is entitled to a better situation (e.g. you should be different, I must always get an “A”)
- **Low frustration tolerance:** The belief that the situation is too hard or too overwhelming and that they will not be able to endure it (e.g. I can’t stand it)
- **Awfulizing/Catastrophizing:** Negative exaggeration about how terrible a situation is (e.g. this is the worst thing in the world that could happen)

Helping People Who Are Struggling to Adopt Healthy Ways of Thinking

Self-pity or self-doubt => Exaggerated thoughts reflecting self-pity, failure, worthlessness

Accepting and loving oneself because of God's love for them

- *“Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:6-7)*
- *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39)*
- *“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139:14)*

Remembering to be grateful for God's goodness, love, salvation and mercy

- *“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” (1 Chronicles 16:34)*
- *“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” (Philippians 4:11)*

Other-downing or life-downing => Exaggerated negative beliefs about others or life, overly critical

Extending love to others because they are also God's children, and remembering that God calls us to be patient and respond in love.

- *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-5)*
- *“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:12-13)*
- *“Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39)*

Finding hope and encouragement in God rather than life's circumstances

- *“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:57-58)*
- *“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11)*
- *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)*

Demandingness => Thought that the person is entitled to a better situation

Trusting in God's goodness and sovereignty even when His plan is different than ours

- *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)*
- *"For you, Lord, are the Most High over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods." (Psalm 97:9)*
- *"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9)*

Low frustration tolerance => The belief that the situation is too hard or too overwhelming and that they will not be able to endure it

Looking to God for strength and comfort during trials

- *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)*
- *"But he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)*
- *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)*
- *"He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you by his love." (Zephaniah 3:17)*

Awfulizing/Catastrophizing => Negative exaggeration about how terrible a situation is

Finding perspective, hope and comfort in God and His promises

- *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)*
- *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18)*
- *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!" (Ephesians 3:20-21)*
- *"What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived - the things God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)*

Helping People Build a Network of Support



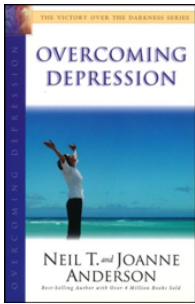
When a person is struggling with depression, it is very important for them to have a network of people that can help them in a variety of ways. Often, when a person is depressed it is difficult for them to find the energy or motivation to identify and engage supportive relationships. A pastor or care provider is often in the best position to help the person assess where there are gaps in their support system. Consider the following types of support and questions you can ask to determine if there is a gap.

| Type of support | Description | Additional support needed? | Places to find the support |
|-----------------|--|--|--|
| Practical | Help with tasks such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, transportation | Is the person struggling to maintain their household? Are they overwhelmed with their children? Are there practical needs that were present prior to the depression? | Members of the church, deacons, care ministry, friends, family |
| Emotional | Emotional support and care, people to listen and encourage | Does the person have someone to talk to? Do they regularly get together with friends? Are there people in their life that know about their situation and offer emotional support? | Pastors, church leaders, care ministry, support group, friends and family |
| Spiritual | Prayer, Bible study, Biblical encouragement | Does the person regularly engage in a faith community? Are there people praying for and with them? Are they grounded in God's hope offered through Scripture? Do they believe God loves them? | Pastor, church leaders, Bible study, prayer ministry, prayer chain, believing friends and family |
| Professional | Professional service that provides treatment for depression | If the symptoms are pervasive and affect their daily functioning, have they met with their primary care physician or a counselor? Are they currently meeting with a professional counselor? Do they know about their medication options? | Primary care physician, professional counselor, support group, psychiatrist |

The Charis website (www.charisnetworkct.org) is also a resource to help people connect to care and counselling services offered from a Christian perspective.

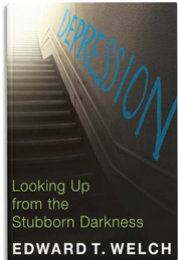
Resources

Below are resources written from a Christian perspective that equip counselors and care providers to support people who are experiencing depression:



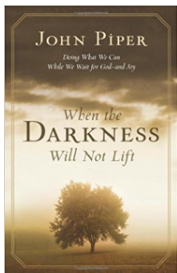
Neil Anderson & Joanne Anderson *Overcoming Depression*

Overcoming Depression will provide healing and freedom for millions of Christians who suffer silently from depression. This Christ-centered road-map to recovery balances spiritual and physical symptoms, leading those with depression and those in the Church who must help them to both a thorough understanding and a comprehensive treatment. Now is the time to get *Overcoming Depression* into the hands of Christians everywhere, helping those who are desperately in need of its powerful and life-changing message.



Edward Welch *Depression: Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness*

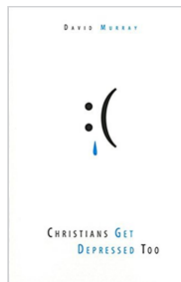
Where is God in the struggle? Looking away from despair towards hope can feel risky. What if God doesn't come through for you? What if you don't feel instantly better? Instead of offering simple platitudes or unrealistic "cure-all" formulas, Edward T. Welch addresses the complex nature of depression with compassion and insight, applying the rich treasures of the gospel, and giving fresh hope to those who struggle.



Jon Piper *When the Darkness Will Not Lift*

Even the most faithful, focused Christians can encounter periods of depression and spiritual darkness when joy seems to stay just out of reach. It can happen because of sin, satanic assault, distressing circumstances, or hereditary and other physical causes. In *When the Darkness Will Not Lift*, John Piper aims to give some comfort and guidance to those experiencing spiritual darkness.

Readers will gain insight into the physical side of depression and spiritual darkness, what it means to wait on the Lord in a time of darkness, how unconfessed sin can clog our joy, and how to minister to others who are living without light. Piper uses real-life examples and sensitive narrative to show readers abundant reason to hope that God will pull them out of the pit of despair and into the light once again.



David Murray *Christians Get Depressed Too*

Many Christians mistakenly believe that true Christians don't get depressed, and this misconception heaps additional pain and guilt onto Christians who are suffering from mental and emotional distress. Author David P. Murray comes to the defense of depressed Christians, asserting that Christians do get depressed! He explains why and how Christians should study depression, what depression is, and the approaches caregivers, pastors, and churches can take to help those who are suffering from it. With clarity and wise biblical insight, Dr. Murray offers help and hope to those suffering from depression, the family members and friends who care for them, and pastors ministering to these wounded members of their flock.

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