

## Suffering with Depression, Part 2

Tammy: Hello, Carol. How is your friend Rose? The teacher from school who has been so sad and depressed? Is she any better than she was last week?

Carol: Thank you for asking, Tammy. Yes, I think she is a bit better. We had a good talk and we prayed to God together, and that encouraged her...

But I also think she felt better because I went to her house and helped her clean and tidy. Sometimes some practical help can do more good than lots of advice!

Tammy: I agree... Do you want to come to my house next?

Hello, and welcome to Women of Hope. It is always good to have your company. Has it been a good week for you? I hope so.

We have talked before about the illness of Depression, and how it can be caused by many different things. I wonder which of them stuck in your mind? There were physical things like hormones... or illnesses... and chemical changes in the brain.

Carol: Or trying to cope with big problems, especially relationship difficulties.

Tammy: Then we talked about patterns of thinking about life that can make you depressed. Like thinking that you are no good at doing things, or feeling anxious about things when there is no real danger.

Carol: We learned that depression affects your whole body... your thoughts... your feelings... and your behavior.

So to help me remember, I do this: I point to my chest (for my whole body)... my head (for my thoughts)... my heart (for my feelings)... and I open my arms wide (for the world around me). Today we'll be talking about the ways of helping someone with depression – so I expect they will also pay attention to the body, the head, the heart and the world of events and relationships around us.

Carol: Fran, our friend who is a counselor, has come back today to give us some ideas of what we can do ourselves about depression... Or how we can help someone else when they are suffering from depression.

Welcome, Fran. I remember something important that you said last time, not to give advice, or tell a depressed person what to do. You said the best thing to do is listen to them and give them love and support. This will give them hope.

Fran: That's right Carol, those are the most valuable things a friend can do. Never tell your friend to 'snap out of it' or 'get over it'. It's not so easy! But there are many things a person can do to help themselves to recover from depression.

Carol: I would not know where to start!

Fran: Well, we need to pay attention to all those things that cause depression. As Tammy said – body... head... heart... and the world around you.

Let's start with the body. If you are suffering from depression, you need to look after yourself as well as you would care for a sick child or friend. If the cause is physical illness, you need to get rest and treatment for the sickness. You need to eat properly... a healthy balanced diet, with fresh fruit, vegetables and meat if you can...not just what is quick and easy, like bread and jam. You need to go to bed and get up at regular times... Try not to sleep during the day, because then you won't sleep at night.

One of the most important ways to treat depression is to have regular exercise. It has been shown that daily exercise is as good as many anti-depressant tablets.

Tammy: How much exercise do you need?

Fran: Generally you need to start off with gentle exercise - maybe a short walk each day. Then try to go further and walk faster each day, up to an hour a day. Swimming is another good exercise... or dancing... or playing a sport. Try to do something you enjoy. Lifting weights of

increasing size is particularly good. It should be quite energetic... enough to make you puff or sweat a bit.

Tammy: That's amazing... how can exercise possibly help your mood?

Fran: Mental health workers have a saying: 'exercise makes happy hormones'. These are known as endorphins. It's the way God designed our bodies, to correct the chemical imbalance of depression. It also makes you feel better about yourself, when you are doing something active to treat your problem.

Tammy: Well, that sounds easy enough, and it is safe - and free! I would certainly try that method.

Fran: Of course, when you are depressed, it's not easy! You don't want to exercise, even if you know it would be good for you. You just want to stay in bed! This is where a good friend can be a great help. Perhaps you could offer to exercise together at a regular time. Help give the person a reason to get out of bed.

Carol: That's a good idea. I know I should exercise more, and it is much easier to do it with a friend. How about joining me, Tammy? And perhaps we could ask Rose as well.

Tammy: That sounds great Carol. It would also give us some nice time together.

Fran: And that is another thing depressed people need... company and friendship. They often draw away from their friends and family, and become very isolated and lonely. Rose needs friends; people who understand how awful she feels, but keep offering to do things together. Your friendship could give her hope and help her to value herself a bit more.

Carol: Since Rose has been depressed, she seems to have lost interest in everything around her.

Fran: When you are depressed, the world seems very dark and dull. If you are depressed, try to make it a habit to pay attention to something nice each day. We've talked about the body - now this is a head thing... Paying attention keeps you in this moment instead of thinking about the

past or worrying about the future. What has given you joy and fun in the past? You could look at a plant growing, smell a flower, or feel the sun on your face. You could watch a child or an animal playing, or listen to music that lifts your mood.

You can use these small moments of pleasure to give thanks to God for the everyday blessings and beauties of life. Gratitude, being grateful for what you do have, is a very healthy attitude!

Carol: Yes - this is a head treatment...it's about how you think.

Fran: Yes, and it's a choice.

Carol: Now what about the heart? We've talked about the body, the head, and now the heart...how you feel...

Fran: Yes – taking care of your feelings makes a difference. Some people just give up hope; others try to fight it. A good heart treatment is to accept that this is the way you feel right now; don't fight it... don't look for someone to blame, but don't give up hope either. An attitude of trusting, hopeful acceptance will protect you from despair, and from anger.

Tammy: I notice you said before – feel the sun on your face – is it good to be in the sun?

Fran: Yes... having some time in the sun each day is good for depression.

Tammy: Really? I thought it was not good to be out in the sun...and that you should cover yourself up.

Fran: Yes – it's important not to get burnt in the sun, so we suggest you wear a hat, and spend short times in the sun quite often. And it's best not to be out in the middle of the day... so maybe before 10 in the morning and after 4 in the afternoon.

If you live in a cool climate it feels really good to be out in the sun for a little while. If you live in a hot climate, you might like to walk early in the morning before the sun gets too hot. Or walk when there is a breeze to help keep you cool.

Tammy: All these things sound like common sense.

Fran: You are so right... these are things that help anyone enjoy life, and they can help to prevent depression too. If your friend Rose is not doing these things, you can help her by reminding her. Or better still, do them with her.

Tammy: I will.

Carol: You're listening to Women of Hope and we've just been talking to our counselor, Fran about many sensible ways that we can help ourselves, or someone else, with depression.

Fran, you said depression is an illness. Are there medical treatments for it too?

Fran: Yes, there are many different kinds of medical treatments for depression. A doctor might prescribe some tablets that can be very helpful. They often take a few weeks to work, and sometimes you need to try different ones before you and the doctor find the one that suits you best. Tablets certainly are useful, especially for severe depression.

Another medical treatment is sometimes called shock treatment. It uses a very small electric shock to the brain while the patient is asleep under an anesthetic. Usually this is used in a really serious case and when tablets are not working. It is a good, safe treatment for some patients and I have seen it save many lives. But of course you have to be in hospital to have it, so it is not available to everyone.

Tammy: I know you are a counselor Fran. Does counseling help?

Fran: Do you feel better after you have shared your feelings with a friend?

Tammy: That's a good question Fran – yes of course I do. So that would have to be good for someone with depression.

Fran: Often it does you good to talk things over. Worries can feel too big to handle, and talking can help you see things a bit differently. It is a relief to say the things that are on your mind and feel that the person has understood what you are feeling.

Do you remember we talked about depression that comes because of the way we are thinking? Like holding onto anger... or always expecting the worst things to happen... or thinking people are trying to harm you.

A good counselor can help us work out what is right thinking, and help us to let go of some of those things. We need to be reminded of the truth, not the mixed-up ideas that fill our minds when we are depressed.

Tammy: That's good, but does it really change anything?

Fran: A counselor is trained to ask the right questions. You can look together for ways to change the world around you... the situations and relationships that are causing problems. Remember the last step – the world around you? They can give you information, and discuss some choices about what you can do next. It's good to talk together about how to solve the problems that are making you unhappy.

Carol: What makes a good counselor?

Fran: I know you can't always find, or afford to pay a highly trained counselor. Look for a wise person who you trust, who will not gossip about what you say. ...Someone who will really listen to you... Someone to help you think more clearly, when those negative thoughts swirl around in your head.

It is best if you can find someone who knows God and his ways. They will be able to pray for you and encourage you.

Don't lose hope that things can change. And be prepared to work at it... and to ask for help to make the changes you need.

Carol: Let's listen to this lovely song. We said listening to happy music is good for depression. Don't go away – we'll be back after this to hear some words of encouragement from the Bible that might be very helpful. In fact they might be just what you need to hear today.

Fran: The Bible, God's word, has encouragement for people who are sad, depressed and in trouble. God tells us 'Call out to me when trouble comes: I will save you, and you will praise me' (Ps 50:15) Can you call out to God today?

God's word also tells us to confess our wrong thoughts and actions and receive God's forgiveness. (1 John 1:9) Isn't it such a relief when we know we are forgiven? It is like putting down a big burden. We also need to get things right with anyone who we are fighting with, so we can have peace. Do you need to say sorry to God, or to someone else?

We are told it is God's will that we should give thanks in every situation (1Thess 5:18) - not for the sadness or the bad things, but for what is good, and for the fact that God is with us. That is hard to do when you are down, but it helps you see that everything is not bad.

The Bible also tells us to comfort and help each other. It says, 'Bear one another's burdens...' (Gal 6:2). So, do you need to help someone who is depressed? Or perhaps you need to let someone help you? We need each other!

Depression makes us doubt what we usually believe. We need to hold on tightly to the truths we know, even though we can't 'see' them in the hard times. True things like these: that God is in control... that he loves us... that he will bring good out of our suffering. Psalms 42 in the Bible is a poem full of sadness and complaints, and the writer even wonders if God has forgotten him. Do you ever feel like that? He keeps asking himself, 'Why am I so sad, why am I so troubled? I will put my hope in God, and once again I will praise him, my Savior and my God.' (Ps 42 and 43) That is a great thing to say to yourself, over and over again... "Why am I so sad? I will put my hope in God'. Let's say that together now. 'Why am I so sad? I will put my hope in God'. I will put my hope in God. That's the way, women of hope!!

Tammy: Here, on Women of Hope, is a folk story, a kind of fable that has a lesson for us.

An old man was walking home at the end of the day. He had been working in the fields, and he was carrying a big bag of vegetables, and tools, and some wood he had picked up for the fire. He was very tired, and he stopped from time to time to rest.

The sun was setting when a farmer drove by with his donkey and cart. Imagine how pleased he was when the farmer asked 'Uncle, would you like to ride in the cart?' The old man climbed in, and sat down, with his heavy bag on his back.

After a while the farmer said "Uncle, why don't you put down the bag and have a rest?" But the old man said, "Oh no, it is very kind of you to carry me, I could not ask you to carry my burden as well". [And the donkey thought to himself, I'm already pulling you and your bag, so you might as well put it down.]

You know, I can be like that old man sometimes. I am thankful to God for forgiving my sins, for giving me everlasting life, and a new life as a follower of Jesus. But then I often feel I have to carry all my worries and burdens myself, almost as though I should not bother God with them! But of course he knows them already. He knows everything and he wants to help me with them. He carries me, like a mother carries a child, and if he is carrying me, he is already carrying my burdens and caring about them. Aren't I silly not to go to him in prayer and give him my burdens? God's word invites us, 'Leave all your worries with him, because he cares for you' (1Peter 5:9)

This is a beautiful old song that reminds us that God wants us to pray and leave our burdens with him. What a privilege!

Carol: We are Women of Hope because we can trust in our good God. I would like to pray for you, my friend.

Our God, thank you that you are good. Thank you that you love my friend and will never abandon her. I ask you to help her with whatever troubles her today. Help her, whether her problems are in her body, her head, her heart or her world. May she learn to praise you. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Tammy: It's been good to share together today. I hope some of these ideas have helped you to understand depression better, and be able to help yourself and other people. If you would like to share your needs or ask questions about our topic, you can write to Women of Hope.

Goodbye now, and let's be real women of 'hope' this week. Come again, won't you?

Carol: Goodbye

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