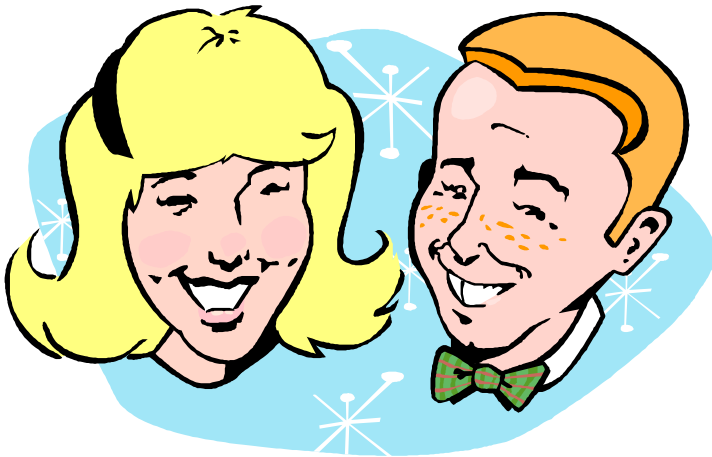


**Booklet 3**

# Helps for Young People



**Depression: A Special Report**

# Depression: A Special Report

*According to a recent survey, many Campus Life readers struggle with depression. Here's a look at the problem and its symptoms—and how to find hope and healing.*

by Mark Moring

*Dear Campus Life,  
I'm going to be checked for depression. In the last few years, God has been the only one keeping me alive, but now, suicide is the only thing I can think of to solve my problems. What should I do? Please help.  
Angel*

We often get letters like Angel's. And she's hardly alone. According to the National Mental Health Association (NMHA), one in 12 teenagers suffers from depression.

We wanted to know how *Campus Life* readers are doing, so we did a survey. Fifty-two percent of you say you struggle with depression, while forty-four percent say a friend struggles with it.

Clearly, many of you deal with emotional pain, whether it's sadness, anger, guilt or whatever. Some of you deal with it daily, sometimes with no end in sight. As one reader said, "Depression can be a long, hard, painful journey." For others, that pain comes and goes, or they've experienced it in the past.

That's a lot of heartache that, sometimes, feels like outright hopelessness. Many of you hide your pain. Some of you tell others. And some of you are getting the professional help you need.

Let's take a closer look at depression, first by defining it.

## **What Is It?**

We'll start by saying there's more than one way to define

"depressed." The American Heritage Dictionary begins with these two definitions:

*1. Low in spirits; dejected. 2. Suffering from psychological depression.*

Almost everyone experiences the first definition at some time. We all get sad or have "the blues" on occasion. Whether you're bummed about your favourite NFL team losing last Sunday, or bombing on a test, or a rift in a relationship, it might help to know that most people have those feelings at some time or another.

If you're experiencing that type of depression, take comfort in knowing that it will likely pass in a relatively short time. In the meantime, keep going to church, praying and reading your Bible (the Psalms can be especially helpful). Do fun things with friends and family; don't spend too much time brooding alone in your bedroom. And talk to someone you trust—a parent, a teacher, a coach, a youth leader, a pastor.

But what if you're experiencing "psychological depression," the second definition? Certainly, you should be doing the things recommended in the last paragraph. But if you have psychological depression—also known as "clinical depression"—you should see a professional, because this type of depression is a very real illness, just as real as cancer or the common cold.

As you continue reading this article, that's our working definition of "depression." We're referring to psychological or clinical depression.

Clinical depression is often caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. It's not "just in your mind."

Depression is usually treatable with a combination of medicine and counselling. Unfortunately, less than half of depressed people actually seek treatment. According to the NMHA, people resist treatment "because they believe depression isn't serious,

that they can treat it themselves, or that it is a personal weakness rather than a serious medical illness."

How can you know if you have clinical depression? Only a mental health professional can diagnose it. But the next section will help you know what to look for.

## **What's It Look Like?**

Now that we've defined depression, what are its symptoms? According to the NMHA, they include:

- Persistent sad or anxious mood
- Anger, restlessness, irritability
- Sleeplessness, or not enough sleep
- Reduced appetite and weight loss, or increased appetite and weight gain
- Loss of pleasure and interest in things once enjoyed
- Persistent physical symptoms that don't respond to treatment (such as chronic pain or digestive disorders)
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feeling guilty, hopeless or worthless
- Thoughts of suicide or death

If you (or a friend or family member) have any of these symptoms lasting two weeks or more, you may be looking at clinical depression. If so, talk to a trusted adult—a parent, a pastor, a youth leader, a coach, a teacher—or see a doctor.

If you think your depression is severe, see a mental health professional. If your family doctor or someone at church can't recommend one, see "[Where to Find Help](#)."

Finally, if you're considering suicide, *seek help immediately*. The teen suicide rate has tripled in the last 40 years. Don't become a statistic. Help is available. There is hope.

## Common Causes

Any one or a combination of things can trigger depression, including:

- Death or serious illness of a friend or family member
- Loss of love or attention from a friend or family member
- Break-up of a romantic relationship
- Family problems, especially parents' divorce
- Isolation/loneliness
- Rejection or teasing
- Physical, verbal, and/or sexual abuse
- Genetic vulnerability, particularly if a parent is/was depressed
- Chemical imbalance
- Hormonal changes, including PMS
- Substance abuse
- Hospitalization, especially for a chronic illness

Some people are more likely to get depressed than others, because of a chemical imbalance or other factors. Meanwhile, others may never get clinically depressed. The bottom line: The chances of getting depressed vary significantly from person to person.

## A Christian Perspective

For Christians, depression can carry extra baggage—in the form of guilt or shame. Since Jesus promises abundant life, Christians often assume there's a spiritual problem if they're depressed. Other well-meaning believers don't necessarily help by saying things like, "Have you completely submitted to God?" or "Do you have any unconfessed sin?"

One *Campus Life* reader wrote, "The worst was well-meaning people who told me to 'just get over it' or 'rejoice for this is the day the Lord has made.' This made me feel ashamed of my depression because I felt that I was dishonouring God, but I could not just shake it off. Its grip on my life was strong."

While spiritual problems—like habitual or unconfessed sin, lack of faith, or, in rare cases, demonic attack—certainly *can* trigger

depression, those things are often the *result* of depression, not the cause. Depressed Christians certainly should continue praying, reading the Bible, confessing sin and pursuing holiness, but unless God or a *professional* Christian counsellor says otherwise, don't assume the depression is caused by a spiritual problem. That type of thinking can keep a depressed Christian from seeking the professional help—counselling, medication, or both—they need.

Again, we want to say that while spiritual issues *can* contribute to depression, they're usually a result, not a cause. If you think your depression or emotional struggles have spiritual roots, talk to your pastor, youth pastor or a Christian counsellor.

### **What's the Bible Say?**

Despite our warnings about "over-spiritualizing" depression, it's vital to know that God cares very much for those who are depressed. That's evident throughout his Word.>

Job was depressed. He lost everything, then cursed the day he was born: "Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?. ... I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil" (Job 3).

David was depressed: "Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am faint; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?. ... I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears" (Psalm 6:2-3, 6).

There are other examples throughout Scripture. The good news is that God hears these cries, and answers. He doubly blessed Job for the rest of his life (Job 42:12-17). And he comforted David, prompting him to say, "Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23).

If you're a Christian, you will dwell in God's house forever, even if you struggle with depression now. Cling to that promise, and don't let go.

If you're depressed, lean on God for sure. But also get the professional help you need. Together, those sources can bring you the peace and comfort you seek.

## **Diagnosed?**

Of the 52 percent of *Campus Life* readers who say they struggle with depression, only 16 percent have been diagnosed with the illness by a doctor or counsellor.

And of those who have been professionally diagnosed, 63 percent were depressed for one to six months, including 25 percent who said "I currently feel depressed and it's not over yet."

## **What causes depression?**

When asked what causes depression, the top three answers from *Campus Life* readers were:

- Death of a friend/family member (84%)
- Loneliness (79%)
- Stress (77%)

For those readers currently struggling with depression, the top three answers were:

- Loneliness (79%)
- Stress (69%)
- Family problems (63%)

## **What will help?**

When asked what would help a person deal with depression, the top three answers from *Campus Life* readers were:

- Bible study/prayer (89%)
- Receive counsel from pastor/youth leader (80%)

- Professional counseling/therapy (67%)

For those readers currently struggling with depression, the top three answers were:

- Hang out with friends (58%)
- Listen to music (46%)
- Receive counsel from pastor/youth leader (46%)

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