

PRACTICAL INSIGHTS ON BATTLING DEPRESSION

The following lists were compiled from people who went through times of depression, sought counseling, and began to emerge out of the stubborn darkness and experience victory.

“I felt like things began to change when...”

1. I began to talk to myself rather than listen to myself. I began to speak different Scriptures to myself rather than listen to my own voices of hopelessness.
2. I stopped saying, “It doesn’t work.” I was always looking for *the* answer. I would pray, look at my own heart, or briefly try some other seemingly spiritual activity. When they didn’t work, I would quit. I felt justified in quitting. Now I believe that it does “work.” There is contentment and even joy in long-term, small steps of faith and obedience.
3. I had a pastor who kept the bigger picture of God’s kingdom in front of me. Depression made my world so small; when I saw that God was on the move, I began to have hope.
4. My daughter became very sick. It forced me to see outside my own world.
5. A friend didn’t give up on me. She was always loving me and pointing me to the truth.
6. A friend let me “borrow” her faith. My faith was so weak, but I always knew that she was confident of God’s presence and love, for the church and even for me.
7. I forgave my father.
8. I heard many stories of sorrow and victory from friends.
9. I saw that it was 90 percent pride. I felt like I deserved certain things from certain people. My focus had been all about me.
10. A friend who knew me well told me I was being a martyr. It shocked me at first, but I knew she loved me, and I knew she was right.
11. I began to believe that I was in a battle and realized that I had to fight.
12. I saw that I was doing things rather than just having things done to me. For example, I was *doing* anger; I was *doing* big time complaining. In my heart, I was doing what I wanted.
13. Medication.
14. A friend who helped me to move from the “tyranny of the should” to living out of the gospel of grace.
15. I realized that my interpretations were fallible. I had huge misunderstandings and made many false accusations.
16. I began to force myself to read Scripture and listen to it.
17. I began to understand God’s grace. I began to see that my wallowing in guilt was a form of works righteousness, not godly sorrow.
18. I began to honestly see my own sin and to repent (change my mind) over it.
19. I decided that I no longer wanted depression to dictate my life.
20. I don’t really know what God used. It was lots of little things.

“It was not helpful when...”

1. I looked for superficial sins in my life. I was focused on specific external sins rather than looking at the root sins that drove my deeper sense of need.
2. I was angry, and no one tried to understand what my anger was saying about my relationship with God. They just said I needed to do the right thing.
3. I was angry and people told me that I had a right to be angry.
4. I was told to love myself more.
5. I was told to lower my expectations for myself.
6. People gave answers before they tried to listen. It seemed like everyone had a “remedy.”
7. People talked too much without listening and trying to understand.
8. Friends didn’t say some of the things that they needed to say for my benefit. They were afraid to speak honestly because they thought I was too fragile to hear it.

Specific Strategies to Try

1. Take one biblical story or one psalm, read it every day, and write down ten or more observations and applications of it. Make the story or psalm your own.
2. Find ten positive qualities in a friend. Write them down and send the list to them.
3. Write out your purpose for living. Allow it to be revised by others. Then memorize it.
4. Listen to God’s Word. Use music that points you to Christ, or ask someone to read to you or teach you what he is learning. Be able to summarize what you heard. Practice listening.
5. Start exercising or doing what you can to stay active. Start walking with a friend.
6. Start journaling. Write down three things that you are thankful for each day.
7. Find a ministry in your local church or volunteer with a charity in your community.
8. Keep a sharp eye out for grumbling and complaining. When you catch yourself, seek out their ugly roots. What are you really saying behind your grumbling and complaining?
9. Become an expert in what God says to those who suffer. Consider starting with Hebrews 10-12. Also consider Psalm 119:67, 71; Romans 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 1:8-10; Heb. 5:8; James 1:2-4.
10. Get help. Seek counseling. Talk to a doctor. Ask a few people to pray for you and speak truth to you. When you ask for prayer, ask for more than just the alleviation of depression. Use the opportunity to pray big prayers. Pray that you would know the immense love of Christ (Eph. 3); pray that you would look more like Jesus (Rom. 8:29); pray that you would love others (Phil. 1:9); pray that you would know what it means to bring glory to God.
11. You can’t always change the way you feel, but you can change the way you think. What are you saying to yourself in your depression? What thoughts have to change? Start saying an emphatic “STOP!” whenever you notice them.
12. Ask, “What am I getting out of my depression?” You might not like the answers, and the question might not be relevant to you, but it is a reminder that we can do more than we realize to stay in our depression.