

Depression

Depression can affect anybody, including Christians. Medical skill, an active faith and a supportive community can make a real difference.

What is depression?

Each individual will have different causes and symptoms – try not to make assumptions. Depression causes mental and physical changes. There will be low mood, loss of enjoyment and low energy. It's difficult to think positively about the future. It can affect sleep as well as weight and appetite. These symptoms are there most of the day, for most days, for at least two weeks – some are affected much longer. Depression isn't just 'feeling a bit low'.

What causes depression?

It can be triggered by a one-off event or by long-term unhelpful thought patterns. Others may have a physical illness. Occasionally, depression may have a spiritual cause, such as struggling to accept forgiveness. Many people may never know what caused it. If two people have depression, it's unlikely the cause is the same.

Can it be treated?

Depression doesn't go away by just 'pulling yourself together', but requires a **combination of approaches**. **Talking treatments** can help change negative thought patterns. **Antidepressants** increase the 'feel-good' chemicals in the brain. **Christian community** can help with isolation and loneliness.

What about faith?

God has always helped people whose mood was low, even if the word 'depression' is not used. We can stand alongside those who are suffering and hold out Jesus as the source of hope. Matthew 5:5 says: 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.' Ask yourself why this is 'blessed' and what 'comfort' might look like.

Depression can cause negative thoughts, including feeling guilty, helpless or hopeless. The Bible and Christianity offer alternatives: forgiveness, love and hope. But remember, depression can make it hard to believe this. If others blame past sin or a weak faith for the depression, this can make things much worse and lead to a negative spiral.

Being part of a community like a church is very helpful. It can be hard to attend regularly or meet people, but in church everyone should feel valued, no matter what. Phone calls and simple support mean a lot. You don't need to be an expert to help.

The promise of healing is also difficult. We should always pray, but sometimes God doesn't heal, just as with physical illness. If healing doesn't occur, it's never the fault of the individual for not having 'enough faith'. God uses many different ways to heal, including miracles, counselling and antidepressants.