

Philothea Youth Corner
ARE YOU DEPRESSED?

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Everyone feels down sometimes. But some people have a more serious difficulty to deal with. Here are some ways to help.

Imagine this scenario: Your friend hasn't been herself lately. Usually she's upbeat and fun, but now she doesn't want to do things that she used to have fun doing. You were surprised when she decided to stay home rather than go for a movie last Saturday. Every time you see her now she seems sad, withdrawn, and irritable. And this has been going on for a while.

As you think about it, you realize your friend was always a good student, but last week she didn't turn in her assignment paper for the third time in a row. It's like she's lost her motivation. She says she feels tired all the time but can't fall asleep at night and mentions how she always feels sad. She's been this way for a while, and you're worried she might be depressed.

Sadness versus Depression

There's a difference between feeling sad and experiencing depression. For example, you can feel sad after failing a test or discouraged because your team is on a losing streak. Sadness and discouragement are normal reactions to life's challenges and disappointments. So how can you tell if you or someone you know is depressed or just experiencing life's ups and downs?

To start, depression is more than just sadness. Depression is a medical condition that affects millions of people of all ages and situations. It negatively affects how a person thinks, feels, and acts. Some of the symptoms of depression include persistent sadness, lack of energy, and feelings of despair and hopelessness that last weeks, months, or longer. Those with depression might not enjoy many of the things they used to and can find it difficult to handle daily activities.

There's no one cause for depression, but causes include genetics, chemical imbalance, certain patterns of thinking, and stressful life events. Fortunately, there is help.

Helping a Friend

It can be hard to know what to say or do when a friend is depressed. But you can start by offering support and encouragement. Here are other ways to help:

Pray. Ask our Heavenly Father how you can best help your friend. Pay attention to promptings you get. It might just be something simple and good you feel you should do.

Listen. You don't have to fix anything; you just need to be a good listener. Really listen to what your friend is saying and let your friend know you'll always be there.

Guide. Simply suggest, "Have you thought about getting help?" You can help your friend reach out to a parent, Church leader, or other trusted adult. This can guide your friend to the right resources to get better. If your friend doesn't accept your invitations to talk to someone and you're still concerned, you may need to confide in an adult who can get help.

Invite. Those with depression tend to withdraw and isolate themselves. Help your friend get out. Include your friend in Church activities. Be direct, but don't take it personally if your friend doesn't respond. Interacting with others lessens feelings of isolation and depression, but it can be a difficult step for people to take.

Show Patience and Charity

People with depression can't just wave a magic wand and cheer up, snap out of it, or forget about it on their own; it will take patience and love on your part to help them. The beginning and end of the solution is charity, the pure love of Christ. Your support, encouragement, and love can play an important role in getting your friend the much needed help.

If you're struggling with depression, realize that it isn't a sign of weakness or something to be embarrassed about or to hide. Unfortunately, depression and other mental conditions can carry a stigma. This often leaves those who struggle with depression feeling stereotyped and alienated, which can keep them from getting help. The truth is, no one would look down on you for going to the doctor for a broken leg or heart trouble. Getting help for depression is just as important.

Help and Hope

Negative thoughts and feelings of hopelessness are symptoms of a depression condition, not the reality of your situation. Help and hope are available. Here are things you can do:

Talk to someone such as a parent or Church leader. It can be hard to open up and share how you're feeling, but it will help. A strong support system is key to overcoming depression, so reach out!

How we treat our bodies affects our minds and spirits. A healthy diet, regular exercise, and sufficient sleep really help our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Journaling can be a great way to safely unload negative thoughts and feelings and work through problems. As you write, make a commitment to focus on healthy and positive thinking.

Turn to things that bring the Spirit into your life. Depression can affect you spiritually as well as physically and emotionally. The Spirit brings feelings of peace and calm, which can be hard to feel when you're depressed. But it's important to pray to our Heavenly Father and tell Him how you're feeling. Remember your blessings, and read scriptures that bring peace, hope, and strength. Live with faith, and do your best each day. And then if you still feel like you can't feel the Spirit anymore, keep pressing forward; eventually the light will come.

Your depression may need to be treated with medication and therapy from a professional. There's nothing wrong with seeking professional help; in fact, it can be a really good thing. Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has explained: "If you had appendicitis, God would expect you to seek a priesthood blessing and get the best medical care available. So too with emotional disorders. Our Father in Heaven expects us to use all the marvellous gifts He has provided in this glorious dispensation.

From Darkness to Light

Jesus Christ came to dispel all darkness. He is the light and life of the world and a light that shines in a dark place. He wants to help you. The Saviour said, "Come unto me, all you that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Depression may be a continual struggle, but Christ's promises are real: "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18). He perfectly understands because He took upon Himself the pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind for every living creature, both men, women, and children Jesus Christ knows what depression feels like, and He knows what your depression or your friend's depression feels like. With the Saviour's help, you can come out of the darkness of depression and see more of the good that is around.

PRAYING WITH CONFIDENCE!

Prayer should be an important part of the life of every Christian, but that doesn't mean it's always easy!

Some Christians struggle to trust that God will hear them when they pray or are concerned that prayer isn't actually working. So how can you pray with confidence that God is listening and will respond?

Let's dig into that topic!

What does the Bible say about praying with confidence?

God listens

God is always listening to his children. How do we know this? That's what the Bible promises! Here are some verses that tell us this:

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know." (Jeremiah 33:3)

"In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help from his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears." (Psalm 18:6)

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." (James 5:16)

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." (1 John 5:14)

God keeps his promises

So God promises to answer our prayers. How do we know he'll keep that promise?

Throughout the Bible, God consistently keeps his promises.

- He promised that the Israelites would enter Canaan and make their home there - and it happened.
- He promised that Abraham's wife Sarah would have a son even though she was too old - and it happened.
- He promised to send Jesus - and He did.

God has proved that he keeps his promises, so we can trust when we pray he will keep his promise to listen.

God answers prayer

Even if we know that God keeps his promise to listen, sometimes it can seem like our prayers aren't that important to God - he's so big and busy and can feel so far away! When he hears our prayers, is he doing something about them? Or are they just sitting in the inbox of his computer?

No matter what, God answers our prayers. The Psalmist expresses in Psalm 17:6, *"I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer."* Notice what he says: not *"you MIGHT answer me"*, but *"you WILL answer me"*!

However, we need to be careful to recognize that sometimes God's answer is not what we wanted. Sometimes we might ask for something and God will say no, or wait. Sometimes we'll pray consistently for something for years and it won't happen.

In those moments, God isn't ignoring our prayers. He is simply answering them in a way that aligns with his greater will for the world. Perhaps it isn't part of his overall plan to say yes to your prayer.

But don't let this discourage you too much. We can trust that when God says no, or wait, he has a good reason. We may not understand that reason this side of the new creation, but God always keeps his promises and he promises to do what's best for his children.

Let's get practical

So the Bible assures us that God does listen to our prayers – so how can we practically pray with confidence, knowing that? How can we foster deeper faith that God is listening? Here are some ideas:

Try a prayer diary

A prayer diary is a great way to help foster confidence in God's response to prayer! A prayer journal will help you keep track of how God is answering your prayers. I don't know about you, but often if I pray for something, a week later I've forgotten about that thing! Using a prayer journal ensures that you won't forget, and you'll be able to see when God answers your prayers. This can be really encouraging for those who struggle to pray because it feels like God isn't listening."

Pray small prayers regularly

It's hard to feel confident that God is listening to our prayers when we're struggling to actually pray! We can feel like if God doesn't actually care, it's useless to bring the everyday matters of our lives before him.

Maybe you're finding it hard to talk to God about big issues, but talking to him about everyday little things – like a lack of motivation to finish an assignment, or a headache – can help reignite your prayer life.

God is involved and attentive to our daily lives already; he invites us to cast all our cares upon him as we face small and large concerns in daily life.

The privilege we have to talk to God about everything that is going on with us is staggering. To consider it rationally just seems crazy—the Master of the Universe is more attentive and available to me than anyone else in my life. He gives his direct attention to me whenever I turn to him!

Pray with others

Sometimes, if you're struggling to talk to God with confidence, it can be helpful to spend some time praying with others. Get together a small group of Christian friends to pray, and listen to the way that they express their dependence on God. You might find their faith lifts you up at a time when you're struggling too with faith yourself.

Pray!

Ironically, one of the best ways to increase your faith and trust in God when you're worried about whether he's listening to you is to ask him for help! As we've already established, God is listening, and that's a fact whether you believe it or not, so ask him for help and he will!

Questions to think about

1. Do you ever struggle to pray with confidence?
2. Does it reassure you to know that God is always listening and keeps his promises?
3. What steps can you take to help you pray with more confidence?
4. Now is probably a good time to pray!

HOW CAN I HELP A HURTING FRIEND?

It is so hard when people we love are struggling. It is even harder when they do not want us to be with them or to try and help them.

We love them and want to come alongside them to help ease their burden. So how do we lovingly and gently support them when they seem intent on keeping us at arm's length? It is a delicate situation because we want to help but we also want to be respectful of our friend.

Remember their pain

The first thing I want to offer is for you to remember that your friend is in a lot of pain. Do you know what happens when someone tries to help an injured dog? It bites. Perhaps your friend is hurting so much that they "bite" — even the people they care about. Now, that doesn't excuse their behavior, but hopefully, it makes their behavior more understandable, and promotes compassion for them. Hopefully, it also makes it easier to be with them. Their hurtful behavior is a reaction to the pain they are feeling; it is not necessarily about you.

Self-protection

I wonder if your friend is struggling with feeling like they are too much, like they are just too hard to love. They pushing you away could be a self-protective measure. If they make you leave, then they won't be abandoned, which would be less painful for them than if you leave on your own. If you leave on your own, it would confirm one of their worst possible fears — that they are just too much and not lovable. That is potentially why they are so harsh and distant with you. They don't want their fear to be confirmed.

The sad thing is that even though this distancing is a self-protective measure, it actually is a self-fulfilling prophecy because they will end up alone and feeling unlovable. Ironically, if you communicate to them that you really care about them as a friend and that you aren't going to leave them, their behavior might soften. They might begin to treat you more kindly because they won't have to fight the fear that you will leave and that their worst fear will be confirmed. Hopefully, understanding this will also help you have more compassion for them and make it be gentle and respectful easier for you to be with them

When people are struggling with anxiety and depression, that is when they need others the most. Let your friends know that you care for them, that you want to be respectful of them and that you want to be there for them. Be available and ask them to talk with you about how they are doing. Respectfully and gently nudge them to get some help, preferably professional, if needed. Let them know that you really value them and you don't want them to go through this hard journey alone. We all need others to walk with us through difficult times. Let them know that you want to be respectful of them, but you also aren't going to leave them. If you feel like you are able, offer to go with them to talk with someone.

Look after yourself

It is also important for you to get support as well. There is such a thing as "compassion fatigue!" Being there and caring for your friend can be hard, not because you don't care enough, but because it can take a lot of emotional energy. Make sure you are being supported and cared for by others as well so that you will have the emotional energy to be there for your friend.

Pray!

Most importantly, pray for your friend! Do they know Jesus? Whether they do or don't, let them know that Jesus KNOWS them and LOVES them completely, and that HE never gives up on them. Their pain is not too much for HIM. "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). Pray for them if they are not able to pray for themselves.

It can be so hard when someone we love is hurting, especially when they push us away in their pain. Hopefully, by demonstrating to your friend you are there and that you care, by supporting them in getting some help with their pain so that they can begin to feel better, and by getting the support you need as well, you can bring some help and hope to the situation and to your friend as well.