

D E P R E S S I O N

FINDING  
CHRIST IN THE  
DARKNESS

EDWARD T. WELCH



P U B L I S H I N G  
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# 31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

A Series

DEEPAK REJU

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## How to Nourish Your Soul

*A LITTLE BIT EVERY DAY* can do great good for your soul.

I read the Bible to my kids during breakfast. I don't read a lot. Maybe just a few verses. But I work hard to do it every weekday.

My wife and I pray for one of our children, a different child each night, before we go to bed. We usually take just a few minutes. We don't pray lengthy, expansive prayers. Usually we're brief and to the point. But we try to do this most every night.

What do you see in these examples? Although they don't take long, these practices are edifying, hopeful, and effective.

This devotional is just the same. Each entry is short—just a few tasty morsels of Scripture to nourish your hungry soul. Add it to your daily Bible reading. Read it on the subway or the bus on your way to work. Read it with a friend or a spouse every night at dinner. Make it part of each day for thirty-one days, and it will do you great good.

Why is that?

*We start with Scripture.* God's Word is powerful. Used by the Holy Spirit, it turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

*Our study of Scripture is practical.* Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your struggles. Often, as you read these devotionals, you'll see the word *you* because Ed speaks directly to you, the reader. Each reading contains reflection questions and a practical suggestion. You'll get much more from this experience if you reflect on the texts, answer the questions, and do the practical exercises. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

*Our study of Scripture is worshipful.* Maybe you feel as though you have been plunged into darkness. You are lifeless, hopeless, or apathetic. Words escape you. You just don't know what to say to God or anyone else. The Lord feels distant, and the lies of Satan are very loud. Anxiety, shame, a sense of failure or loss are your companions—not just for a bad day or a week but for months or even years. If you look around, you find signs of depression everywhere in your life. That's why God's Word matters. You're suffering under the weight of hard things. You can't fight this battle on your own. You need a Savior who is merciful, long-suffering, and patient with you and who will lead you to be grateful for him. What should your study of the Word bring you to? Worship of him. Jesus says, "Come to me." Every time you feel trapped by your depression, it should remind you that you can't do this on your own—you need Jesus to help you. You need a Savior who can offer you a compassionate word—not just once but daily. Jesus says, "I can give your weary soul peace and rest." As you study your Bible, you will learn that he has a lot to say about depression, and he will help you to fight it.

If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it in different seasons of your life. It will help remind you of God's goodness and power and promises whenever you have to fight your depression. So, work through it this coming month, and then come back to it a year from now, to remind yourself about what God and the gospel teach us about cultivating a life in Christ.

This devotional starts you on a wonderful journey in which you'll grow in Christ. After you finish reading (and rereading) it, if you want more, you'll see more resources listed at the end of the book. Buy them and make good use of them.

Are you ready? Let's begin.

Deepak Reju

# Welcome

SOMETIMES A WELCOME is more than a mere greeting.

Come, all you who are thirsty,  
    come to the waters;  
and you who have no money,  
    come, buy and eat! . . .  
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,  
    and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.  
Give ear and come to me;  
    hear me, that your soul may live. (Isa. 55:1–3 NIV)

*That* is a welcome, and it is the tone of the thirty-one days ahead because this is how God welcomes you. “Come,” Jesus says. Gently, knowing you fully, with great affection. He repeats it three times, in case you thought he was speaking to someone else.

Depression rejects anything good. But listen to this invitation. It is especially for those who have nothing. That’s what the Lord asks you to bring. He asks you to bring your failures and sins and emptiness of soul. No résumés. Only your accumulation of spiritual debris and pain. He takes the failures and sins from you at the door, then he sets out to satisfy your soul. Jesus himself has picked up the entire cost. Your job? Rest and believe. His words should sound good, even if you’re not quite convinced. If they don’t, they’re probably not his words. They would be depression talking.

What do you think?

That is an actual question. Each reading that follows includes a section called *Reflect*, because that is what God calls you to do. He asks questions. He says something amazing to you, and he asks you to respond. Back and forth. He speaks; you respond. You speak; he responds. Perhaps you are not expecting him to speak *to you*, and you are not prepared to respond to him. Perhaps your mind feels empty. Perhaps it has descended into darkness. Wherever



your mind has gone, Jesus comes to you and asks you to speak honestly, openly. That is what you do in the best of relationships.

Each reading also includes a section called *Act*. In other words, what will you do? How will you respond to what God says? The focus of these responses is not medical treatments—those are certainly worth exploring, and I will assume that you are considering or have acted on some promising leads. Our attention will be on your even deeper spiritual response.

Before you get started, here's an idea: if possible, go through this book with someone else. That would be good for you and the other person.

People can hurt. You have probably experienced comments such as these:

- You need to trust the Lord more.
- You need a vacation.
- Think more about other people.
- Count your blessings.
- You are thinking about yourself too much.
- It's all in your head.
- Snap out of it.
- You have everything—what more could you want?

People are also the most prominent means by which God cares for your soul. I have rarely seen the darkness of depression lift without another person playing a part in it. If that person does not exist, ask God to give you someone.

## DARKNESS INTRUDES

You might remember the day depression seized you. Or perhaps it sneaked up on you—a fog gradually drained your world of color and, later, a thought told you, “Nothing matters.” When darkness comes, you can easily lose your way. The plan is to know where to find light, life, love, and hope, so that *they* intrude.

## DAY 1

### “Melancholy Marked Them”

*“Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger  
shut up his compassion?” (Ps. 77:9)*

“MELANCHOLY MARKED THEM for her own.” With these words, Charles Spurgeon, one of England’s best-known preachers, reminds us that depression is in the church,<sup>1</sup> and even in famous pastors who diligently seek to walk with Jesus. You are, sadly, not alone. Depression is everywhere. Many labor under its weight. It doesn’t give you a pass because of your job, your intelligence, your good deeds, or your godliness. You feel like it chose you, which gives you reason to think you might be cursed.

When depression descends, it is as though all good just got up and walked out. Music, once a pleasure, is discordant and meaningless. Desire dies. People you once passionately loved affect you as much as the dust under your bed. You still love them, but you don’t *feel* that love. You are pithed of all feeling, as if your body—which is technically alive—cannot give you a reason to move off the couch. Suicidal thoughts, of course, are inevitable. You cannot imagine living through another day. Suicide seems to be the only way to stop the pain, even though you already feel dead.

You need a lifeline, now. You will find one among the psalmists.

Many of the psalms are cries of misery that scrub the specifics so that as many people as possible can enter in—so that *you* can enter in. Today’s verse from Psalm 77 is a personal invitation for you to join a kind of spoken-word choir. “Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” Do you feel afflicted and troubled today? Please come. Depression is among your afflictions.

Depression descends on you like a mist, and it is safe to say that you will never understand all the reasons why. A search for what has contributed to your depression is worth the effort, but you do not have to know why you are suffering to find comfort, meaning, and hope. Job never knew the details behind his suffering. He didn't know God's plans or what had happened out of sight. In the end, the voice of God was what Job truly needed. The knowledge that God was both *over* and *in* Job's suffering was enough to settle Job's heart.

You have access to more than Job did because you live on the side of history *after* Jesus came near. Now we know that the psalms are about him as well as *by* him. He is the true author of the questions in Psalm 77.

Jesus also leads you to other words: "I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old" (Ps. 77:11). In his suffering, Jesus remembered God's mighty deliverance of his people from Egypt. You will remember Jesus himself and his mightier deliverance of his people at the cross.

Right now the distance between depression and Christ crucified and raised seems to place them in two different universes. Our task will be to bridge that distance. That comes not so much through a list of explanations and treatments for depression. A list is good; the right person is better.

**Reflect:** What did you hear in today's reading? Take hold of one thing that offers a spark of hope. What questions do you have? God invites your questions.

**Act:** Pray about what you heard. Bring your questions to God.

## DAY 2

### Why Am I Depressed?

*Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. (2 Cor. 4:16–17)*

THE WORLD IS DEPRESSING, life can seem meaningless, and every day is full of trouble. Why *wouldn't* you be depressed? But depression is more than a response to life events. Otherwise, you would be equally affected by good things. There are mysteries in depression. Some people are simply prone to it for reasons that we assume are located in the brain and the body. But depression is not merely physical.

Depression has been with us in every culture and every era of history. The numbers, however, are increasing. Reports of depression increased throughout the 1900s, then surged during the COVID pandemic.

Why? There is a long list of possible accomplices. The sheer amount of screen time in our lives. Fractured families. Loss of community. A future that seems less hopeful. A world that has reneged on its promises of happiness and satisfaction. Nothing bigger than ourselves for which we can live. Past trauma that won't let go. Sexual regrets and confusion. Unchecked anxieties. Anger. Failure. Loss. Alcohol or drug abuse. Disease. Childbirth. Side effects of medication. No doubt there are many more. All these can take a toll on a body that is susceptible to depression.

A medical consultation is usually worth the investment. Here you ask two questions. First, have physical problems or medications incited depression? Second, are there medical treatments that can lessen the pain of depression? On this second question, you are probably familiar with the growing list of available

antidepressants. You may already take them. Other treatments are emerging too. No one medication is helpful for everyone, but you may find one that is helpful for you.

*Depression is a kind of suffering*, and Scripture speaks to that suffering. Listen for words such as *misery, affliction, suffering, trials, and trouble*. Through Scripture, you can attend to matters of the heart—matters only God can touch. Will that loosen the grip of depression? It may. Yet, no matter what, it will be good for your soul.

Consider today's passage from 2 Corinthians. Our outer selves, our bodies, will decline, but our inner selves, our hearts, can grow in the knowledge of Jesus the Christ so that our afflictions hold less power and weight. Jesus can temper the effects of life's afflictions (see 2 Cor. 4:8–9). Your spiritual work is essential.

Here's one other insight you may find interesting. Recent research on depression indicates that our brains can change us and that we can change our brains. You are a unity—soul and body. Changes in your soul can lead to changes in your brain.

**Reflect:** Physical treatments may alleviate some pain today; spiritual treatments have benefit for today and eternity. This is in no way to diminish the potential benefit of physical treatments. It is to say that there is something deeper.

**Reflect:** Try to summarize today's reading and identify one thing that caught your attention.

**Act:** Is there anything here you can act on today?

## SPIRITUAL REALITIES

The coming days will bridge the divide between the prison of depression and God's good words. Although Scripture—his words to you—can seem faint and distant, the plan is to hear good words that speak to you on every page. Let your attention be turned to Jesus so that the Spirit may help you in your weakness (see Rom. 8:26).

## DAY 3

# Life and Death

*“Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death, . . . who rejoice exceedingly and are glad when they find the grave?” (Job 3:20–22)*

YOU PROBABLY REMEMBER when it first happened. A foreign idea inserted itself into your mind: you would be okay with death.

“I know I won’t be able to function like this much longer.” She was twenty-five, but depression had been with her for a lifetime. “No one knows how badly I want to die. My thoughts won’t stop. They keep saying, ‘I want to die.’”

How could you *not* have such thoughts when you don’t know how else to stop the pain and you want relief? Job wished for death. Jonah even prayed for it: “O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4:3). What stood in their way? Only one thing. They knew that *God alone decides life and death*.

You have restrained your thoughts and not acted on them, but you are vulnerable, especially at times when you believe everyone else would be better off without you. In the midst of this mental and spiritual chaos, you need a simple guide: you need to entrust life and death to your Father. Life can be found only “by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3). From that starting point, create a list of reasons to live and strategies to stand against the darkness.

*Distance yourself from any means to take your life.* Erect boundaries. Though the analogy of addicts is inadequate, it makes sense. When their desires are less strong, they throw away their alcohol or drugs. They delete their dealer’s phone number. When



depression gives you a small reprieve, ask someone to take away your pills, your razors, your guns. Put someone on speed dial—a friend, a family member, 988.

*Reject isolation.* Being with people is hard work, but isolation lies on the path of death. Accept that moving toward people is good, no matter what worthy reasons you have for staying away. If other people have pursued you, and if you have avoided them or declined their invitations, thank them for their care and say yes.

An even more difficult but important step? Tell at least one reliable person about your dark thoughts. Tell that person that this devotional is to blame for your openness. Ask the person to pray that you would be pointed toward the Light.

*Embrace grace for the next minute.* Hold on to this essential piece of wisdom: you do *not* have strength from Jesus for next month, for tomorrow, or even for the next hour, but he gives you everything you need for right now. Interrupt the darkness by asking, “What does my Father require of me *now*?” One answer is “That you believe in him whom [God] has sent” (John 6:29). Believe that Jesus knows you, pursues you, and speaks words that are good. If your faith is not up to that, ask for help, then stand up and walk in the right direction . . . toward an unmade bed or the dishes in the sink. Keep a commitment you made. Don’t travel into the future—stay focused on *right now*.

**Reflect:** *God alone decides life and death.* Push this truth into your heart even more. What else is a part of your plan for living?

**Act:** Ask for help with your plan. Include your reasons for living. Write it down.