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problems people face  
**Discouragement  
& Depression**

Egerton Long is an ordained Baptist Minister and has served in churches in both USA & Australia. He and his wife Betty also served among the Indigenous people in Australia for over 25 years. Other booklets are available in this series as well as Daily Devotional material.

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If you would like more information please write to:

**Egerton C. Long**

Christian Literature Ministry Inc.  
P.O.Box 386 Round Corner 2158  
NSW Australia  
Email: [info@clm.org.au](mailto:info@clm.org.au)

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problems people face  
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& Depression**

**Egerton C. Long**

## PROBLEMS PEOPLE FACE

### DISCOURAGEMENT AND DEPRESSION

A carelessly dressed teenage girl came into my study and almost threw herself into my chair. Her face was strained as she said, "Pastor, what's the matter with me?" I feel so down all the time and I never want to do anything. Mother tells me to snap out of it but I can't. I don't know why I feel like this. I don't seem to have as many friends as I had before. I don't know what to do. What's the matter with me Pastor?"

An older man's story was different but his cry for help was the same. "Pastor I can't get over this terrible feeling of guilt. I can't believe God can forgive me. I know I've sinned. It's like a load on my mind all the time. Can you help me Pastor?"

Pastors and counsellors have heard similar stories many times. The real problem lies behind the questions for such questions are only symptoms of something deeper. We call it discouragement or mild depression. Those two people and others like them may be on the way to serious depression if they don't receive help soon. Probably every one of us has experienced strong feelings of discouragement and despair at some period in our lives. These occasions are part of life but if they are not dealt with there can be continuing tragic results.

Let's start with this problem of discouragement

If you have made this decision today then sign your name here and tell someone else what you have done. Join a church where you can hear God's Word preached and have fellowship with other believers.

I acknowledge myself to be a sinner in God's sight.

I accept Jesus Christ now as my Saviour.

I thank Him for saving me.

Sign your name here

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Date \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

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4. Trying to get them engaged in some new activity and to think of others.
5. Don't give up – it could be a long process. Pray for yourself and involve others in praying for you and your friend. But don't betray secrets. Keep what your friend says in strictest confidence. Seek help for yourself and keep close to the Lord in your daily life. God will bless your efforts. Remember God wants your friend to be 100% well even more than you do. He will help you. You can count on Him and His promises.

## **HOW TO RECEIVE CHRIST AS YOUR SAVIOUR**

If God has been speaking to you as you have read this booklet and if you are willing now to take Jesus Christ as your Saviour, here is what you should do:

1. **Confess** – tell God in your own simple words that you are a sinner needing a Saviour (Read Romans 3:23) Tell God you are sorry for your sin – the Bible Word is 'repent'.
2. **Accept** – tell God that you see Jesus Christ as your only Saviour and that you accept him now (Read Romans 6:23).
3. **Believe** – that Jesus Christ has saved you because you asked him to do so (Read Romans 10:13). His Word is the assurance that God has done what you asked Him to do.

first of all. We need to recognise that discouragement can come from many different sources. For example, a person may not have been promoted as they had confidentially expected. Maybe they failed an exam or did not reach a certain goal. Such things can cause a loss of self-esteem and discouragement can set in. When we see a huge gap between what we want to be and what we are, discouragement can easily overwhelm us.

Any disappointment or personal failure can trigger discouragement. If we build ourselves up emotionally in anticipation of a big event such as a football match or birthday party only to find the event cancelled or it was not what we expected, the consequent reactions can have significant even devastating effects. The bigger the event or failure, the bigger the let down. Prolonged stress or tension can also play a major part in bringing us down.

Continued disappointment can, if unaddressed, lead us through feeling depressed into clinical depression. That can be a major problem and needs trained counsellors and/or medical help to deal with it. One writer said "The pressures of modern society have triggered an enormous increase in every type of depression."

Depression may be a feeling of being unduly sad, dejected, melancholic, a sense of worthlessness or guilt or being apprehensive. Depression may be preceded by unrealistic grief. Extreme

anxiety is often triggered by unrealistic fear. Depression is extreme discouragement. We say to ourselves: “There’s no hope! All is lost! I may as well give up.” It can lead to complete apathy or withdrawal from normal life. Even mild depression can mean we are unable to concentrate and we become restless, bored, tossing and turning in our sleep. We have little or no interest in eating or for life in general. Long lasting feelings such as these, sad to say, can lead to suicide which is one of the commonest causes of death among teenagers today.

### **WHEN WE ARE DEPRESSED WE CAN ...**

We can seek out others who can help. Friends and family can help. Counsellors, pastors and medical doctors can all help. Right now there are many waiting to help. A good place to start is to look for the causes of depression and try to classify them. We can say that there are at least three areas in our personalities through which depression can attack us. They are:

1. Physical – fatigue, exhaustion, stress
2. Emotional – a family or life event, a breakdown in relationships or the death of a loved one.
3. Spiritual – a lack of purpose in life. Maybe a continuing sense of guilt that even blames God for the present situation.

But first it’s always good to get a medical check to make sure there is no physical cause for the depression.

stress. Sometimes depression can be ‘frozen rage’. Read Ephesians 4: 31-32. “Be kind and compassionate with one another, forgiving one another just as God through Christ forgave you.”

7. If the problem persists or becomes worse, we must seek professional advice immediately. A minister, counsellor, medical doctor or psychiatrist can help. Don’t delay.

### **HOW CAN WE HELP A DISCOURAGED OR DEPRESSED FRIEND?**

Remember: Depressed or discouraged people need help now, frequently, consistently.

You can help by:

1. Regularly praying for them and where possible with them. God’s promise remains true – Psalm 91:15, “He shall call upon me and I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble. I will deliver him and honour him.”
2. Being present when he/she needs you. Be ready to listen and listen and listen.
3. Being encouraging but not ‘preachy’. For example, give them a Bible promise to read. Maybe you could print it out on a card. Nothing can lift a person’s spirits like an appropriate verse from the Word of God. A very helpful verse is 1 Corinthians 10:13. Someone gave a paraphrase of that verse: “God carefully monitors my anxiety level and will not allow it to overflow.”

2. If **guilt** is one of our persistent problems, we must ask God for forgiveness. Read 1 John 1:9. Then **believe** God's word – He has forgiven us if we have truly confessed our sin, whatever it is. We must also constantly remind ourselves that when God forgives, He chooses to no longer remember our wrongdoing.
3. If we know Jesus Christ as our personal Saviour, then the Holy Spirit is living within us. We need to ask Him daily to live His life through us each day.
4. Develop strong relationships with other people. Look for opportunities to serve others. In helping others we indirectly help ourselves. Read Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10 and Philipians 2:4
5. Try to look on the brighter side and be positive rather than negative in our thinking. Paul said this in Philipians 4:8, “You'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things that are true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious, the best, not the worst.” (from The Message) Or read a book you really enjoy, do a crossword puzzle, anything to take our minds off ourselves.
6. Is there anyone against whom we are holding a grudge or with whom we are angry for some reason? This can bring negative reactions in our body and mind and cause emotional

Besides the three areas mentioned above, we could include “personality reasons”. For example, a person with an intense driven personality may feel low if they suddenly slow down. Another type of person very prone to depression is the perfectionist who, having set unrealistic goals, has failed to achieve his or her goal or is constantly dissatisfied with his or her work. Discouragement or depression can hit any age group. In his book “How to win over depression”, Tim La Haye has outlined the effects of depression for every decade of life from the first ten years to the age group in their nineties. It can touch anyone, anytime, anywhere.

### **WHICH AREA IS THE CAUSE OF OUR PROBLEM?**

The first question always with depression is – where is it coming from? When the areas it has come from are identified, then we can deal with it. But serious depression (usually called clinical depression) must be handled by professional counsellors and/or medical personnel. If our depression has continued for more than, say, one month and if it has reduced our daily level of normal functioning then we need to take some action. Don't delay. See a counsellor, a psychiatrist, a minister or a doctor immediately. Help awaits us only if we will reach out. The trouble is we are slow to ask for it when help is as near as our phone. Discouragement and depression can be dealt with once the causes behind the emotion are identified.

## **GOD CAN HELP THE DEPRESSED.**

God can help us through reading his Word and through Christian friends. Christian fellowship can be a most important factor in restoring us when we are discouraged or depressed.

But we must allow our friends to help us and stand with us. "A friend is always loyal and a brother is born to help in time of need." Proverbs 17:17 NLVGB

Let's look at the story of Elijah in the Old Testament and see how low he went into depression but how God graciously restored him. It is a most remarkable example of depression being dealt with and also gives us an account of the life-changing results. How did it happen and how did God deal with him? James 5:17 says Elijah was a man just like us, The New Living Bible says, "Elijah was as human as we are." There is much we can learn from his story.

Rev. Francis Dixon wrote: "Here is a man of deep devotion, daring faith, unquestioning obedience to God, with true humility. Yet there is one chapter in his story which tells of a complete breakdown and of humiliating defeat."

As we follow the story of Elijah, maybe we can identify with his circumstances and the depth of his feelings of discouragement and depression. If we are in touch with someone who is suffering from depression, maybe we can see ways in which we could help that person. One of the

Overall God was saying to Elijah "Your life is not finished. You may want to end it, but I still have a ministry for you. I've forgiven you. I'm sending you back." We can take heart from the fact that history is filled with the lives of people who have failed and then started again. God brought Elijah through and He can still do the same today. Psalm 37:24 reminds us that though a good man may stumble he will not fall for the Lord holds him by the hand.

The result? Restored Elijah went back and served God among the people for possibly another 15 years before the Lord took him to heaven in a chariot of fire. Failure need never be final. Can you see how God handled Elijah when he was really down? Can we do something similar in helping others who may have failed?

## **HOW WE CAN HELP OURSELVES WHEN DEPRESSED?**

- 1. Self acceptance** can be a good starting point. We must learn to accept ourselves for who and what we are. God has made us and we can trust him to work in our lives, making us what He wants us to be. Remember we have all failed at one time or another. We are not the only ones who have done so. To be depressed over what we don't have is to waste what we do have.

lesson is there for our days of discouragement. God helped Elijah physically. Often a favourite meal can make us feel a little better. Sometimes we can treat a discouraged friend to a meal in pleasant surroundings. It all helps.

Second, God helped Elijah emotionally. He gently asked him to face up to his situation. “What are you doing here Elijah? You can’t run away forever. What is the problem? Can we look at it together? Let’s talk it out.” Often when discouraged we need to do just that. We need to look at our problems and, if at all possible, talk them out with a good listener who will give us time to express how we feel.

Third, God helped him spiritually, by giving him a tremendous vision of His power. (Read 1 Kings 19:11-12). There was the wind, the earthquake, the fire. What was God saying? “Now Elijah you’ve seen what I can do, why can’t you trust Me?” It’s like the words of Psalms 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God.” How beautifully God reassured His servant.

Then God did more – He gave Elijah something to do and He gave him a friend, Elisha. Notice the recommissioning in verse 15-16. “Go back and anoint three different people for the work I have given them to do.” And God gave him the wonderful gift of a friend who remained with him for the rest of his life. Very often that is what a discouraged and depressed person needs most of all.

most urgent needs of a discouraged person is to have a friend who will walk with them through their experience.

## **THE BACKGROUND OF ELIJAH’S DEPRESSION**

It can be summed up in one or two words – reaction and fear. It all started the day after the tremendous scene on Mt Carmel when Elijah stood alone against King Ahab and all the false prophets. Elijah prayed and God sent fire from Heaven to prove His power and later sent rain after three years of severe drought. Read the story again in 1 Kings 18 and 19.

That night King Ahab went back to his palace after his humiliating defeat. His wife Jezebel was waiting to hear what had happened that day. When Ahab told her, she asked, “Who did all this?” The answer was “Elijah.”

“I’ll kill him” Jezebel said, “Where is he?” A few minutes later she called servant. “Take this letter to Elijah.” Elijah read it and immediately a severe reaction set in. Fear overtook him. Tired after the long and stressful day, he called his servant and they both headed south day after day until they reached Beersheba about 160kms away. He left his servant there and turned east. Finally, when he could go no further, he flung himself down and prayed the most pathetic prayer “I’ve had enough Lord. I just want to die.”

Look again at those three areas we need to watch as we see them illustrated in the life of Elijah. Can we compare them with ourselves or with the friend we are trying to help? What was his condition?

**1. Physically worn out.** Prior to this Elijah had walked an enormous distance and was completely exhausted when depression overtook him. It can be the same for us. When we are absolutely tired and worn out we see life from a totally different angle.

Our inner life is greatly influenced by our outer circumstances. Like Elijah we can find ourselves running from circumstances we should be facing. Students have run from school, adults from business, young people from parents and parents have run from their families.

**2. Emotionally drained.** Three tremendously stressful years lay behind this sad scene, Elijah had lived for twelve months alone beside a brook watching it dry up. Then he spent two years in a widow's home in a foreign country with all that happened there. Next came the traumatic events on Mt Carmel and the emotional reaction.

Victory always makes us vulnerable. Someone said, "We are never closer to defeat than in our moments of greatest victory."

Remember discouragement can have different effects on different people. Some want to be left alone (although this is not often good for them). For others, being alone makes them more discouraged.

**3. Spiritually defeated.** Elijah took his eyes off God. He believed the words of Jezebel and feared for his life. He forgot how God specially cared for him for the past three years. He forgot how God had miraculously answered prayer. Again, it can be the same for us. When we forget what God has done, when we turn away from His word, we lay ourselves open to discouragement and defeat.

### **NOTICE HOW GOD DEALT WITH HIS DISCOURAGED SERVANT - PHYSICALLY, EMOTIONALLY, SPIRITUALLY**

God's methods of dealing with Elijah are a strong reminder to us that while we may get out of God's pathway for us, we can never run away from His loving concern. In all of this episode it is as if God is saying, "I am here Elijah, I love you and I am going to stay with you."

First God attended to his physical needs, sleep, food and drink. Elijah woke up to the smell of fresh bread on the hot coals (doesn't that sound inviting?) and a jar of water waiting for him. Often when we are discouraged we say, "I don't feel like eating." God knew best and this