

DEPRESSION

Care Guide

A practical reference for biblical counselors to use in-session, utilizing a three-part process to examine the struggle, encourage in Scripture and execute through sanctification.

Examine the Struggle

The symptom indicators are useful to assess severity, patterns, and contributing factors. The questions aim to uncover causes, symptoms, distorted narratives, and spiritual needs.

Emotional & Cognitive

- Persistent sadness, heaviness, or emotional numbness
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, guilt, or shame
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or thinking clearly
- Overwhelming fatigue and/or lack of motivation
- Passive or active suicidal thoughts

How would you describe the sadness or heaviness you feel?

What thoughts are most common when the depression feels strongest?

What story are you telling yourself about your worth or your future?

Behavioral & Relational

- Withdrawal from relationships, responsibilities, or previously enjoyed activities
- Changes in sleep: insomnia, early waking, or hypersomnia
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Neglect of daily routines or hygiene
- Increased irritability or agitation

What recent events or transitions have taken the most emotional toll on you?

Who do you feel safest with right now?

When are you most tempted to isolate and withdraw from others?

Spiritual

- Difficulty praying, reading Scripture, or worshiping
- Feelings of abandonment by God ("Where is He?")
- Self-condemnation and inability to receive grace
- Isolation from, and loss of desire to engage in Christian community

What does praying feel like in this season?

What feelings of guilt, failure, or divine displeasure do you struggle with?

What do you believe God thinks about you right now?

Physical & Safety

- Recent illness, chronic pain, hormonal factors, postpartum context
- Thyroid issues, sleep deprivation, chronic stress
- Medication changes
- Substance use or alcohol abuse

(Use your standard suicide-risk protocol if needed.)

Have you had any thoughts of no longer wanting to live?

Have you consulted a medical professional regarding any health-related concerns that are affecting you right now?

Do you feel safe right now?

Encourage in Scripture

Scriptures for Counseling & How to Use Them
(Aim: comfort, reorientation, hope, lament, and gentle redirection)

Psalm 34:18 — *“The LORD is near to the brokenhearted...”*

Use for: Reassurance of God’s presence in emotional pain.

How: Highlight God’s nearness, not as a command to “feel better,” but as a promise that stabilizes them even when they feel nothing spiritually.

Psalm 42 — *“Why are you cast down, O my soul?”*

Use for: Teaching biblical lament and honest self-talk.

How: Show the psalmist wrestling with despair, modeling how to articulate sorrow while preaching hope to himself.

Lamentations 3:19-24 — *“But this I call to mind...”*

Use for: Helping counselee see that hope is recalled, not spontaneous.

How: Draw attention to the shift from despair to remembering God’s steadfast love; use this to introduce daily “remembrance practices.”

Isaiah 40:28-31 — *Strength for the weary*

Use for: Reorienting hope from self-strength to God’s inexhaustible strength.

How: Encourage counselees to let weakness draw them toward God, not into shame.

Matthew 11:28-30 — *“Come to Me... and I will give you rest.”*

Use for: Encouraging identity and relational rest in Christ.

How: Emphasize Christ’s gentleness; helpful when shame and self-criticism dominate.

2 Corinthians 1:8-10 — *Paul despairing of life itself*

Use for: Normalizing the depth of Christian suffering.

How: Show that Scripture does not hide the extremity of despair; God uses it to deepen dependence.

2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 16-18 — *Treasure in jars of clay*

Use for: Explaining weakness, endurance, and hope.

How: Help counselees frame their experience as the place where God displays His sustaining power.

Hebrews 4:14-16 — *Sympathy from our High Priest*

Use for: Accessing comfort in Christ’s empathy.

How: Invite counselees to imagine approaching Christ with their heaviness and receiving mercy rather than criticism.

Romans 8:18-39 — *Groaning, hope, Spirit’s help, inseparable love*

Use for: Long-term reorientation to the big-picture hope of the gospel.

How: Use selected parts depending on need (groaning, Spirit intercession, assurance).

Execute through Sanctification

Biblical Counseling Growth Assignments. These are designed to be practical, gentle, and paced for low-motivation seasons.

Guided Lament Practice (Psalm 13 or Psalm 42)

Assignment:

Write your own lament using the psalm’s movements:

- Honest complaint
- Petition
- Rehearsing truth
- Choosing hope

Daily “But This I Call to Mind” Card (Lam. 3:21)

Assignment:

- Write 1-2 truths to “call to mind” daily.
- Review in the morning and evening (set alarms if needed).
- Keep them short and concrete (e.g., “His mercies are new for me today”).

Gentle Rhythms Routine

Assignment:

Build a small, achievable daily structure:

- 1 relational touchpoint
- 1 Scripture meditation (5-10 minutes)
- 1 physical movement (30 minute walk/stretch)
- 1 purposeful act (small chore/errand)

This combats inertia and restores simple rhythms.

“Compassionate Self-Talk” Reframing

Assignment:

Identify one harsh automatic thought daily and rewrite it as if Jesus were addressing you (Matthew 11:28-30; Hebrews 4:15-16).

For example, if your self-talk says “I am stupid and worthless,” then challenge that thought with, “I am a beloved child of God” (1 John 3:1).

Gratitude & Presence Practice

Assignment:

End each day by listing:

- 1 moment of grace
- 1 sign of God’s presence
- 1 person to pray for

This gently redirects attention without minimizing pain.

Optional Supplement: When to Involve Others

You may need to involve a:

- **Medical doctor** (if physical symptoms dominate)
- **Psychiatrist** (for severe, chronic, or complex depression)
- **Pastor/Elder** (for pastoral care and community support)
- **Trusted friend or spouse** (for encouragement, support, and safety)

You can find expanded resources on this topic in ABC’s membership page at christiancounseling.com.