

# Beat These 3 Depression Traps Before They Spread

Depression is the second-most-prevalent mental health diagnosis in the United States, affecting an estimated 21.0 million adults. Among those affected are born-again believers, who profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior, who at times struggle to experience the joy mentioned in Romans 15:13.

As a clinical and a pastoral counselor, through the years I've had the privilege of treating many who were feeling like they were living beneath a dark cloud. Others felt like they lacked a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Some just felt flat-out numb, like nothing they did mattered, and proceeded to ask questions such as "What's the point in all of this, anyway?" or "Is this all that there is to life?"

In each of these scenarios, the person's depression looked different. Contrary to popular belief, depression is not a one-size-fits all issue. And in light of Mandisa's tragic recent passing, and in honor of the incredible courage she has shown through the years in sharing her journey through depression, I want to shed light on this topic and give you practical ways to deal with depression in your own life.

I want to clarify that depression is the result of us living in a fallen world. A world where we may encounter conflict, divorce, heartbreak, wars, grief. A world where loss is inevitable, which leads us to the first type of depression we can encounter: situational depression.

## Situational Depression

Situational depression occurs when you experience sadness due to losing someone or something important in your life. This can include losing a friend, job, going through a divorce or

the devastating loss of a parent or child. Mental health professionals call this type of depression “situational” because it is directly related to a specific event that occurred in your life. Your natural inclination in reaction to the loss may be to go into protective mode and isolate yourself. If this is where you are, I’d like to urge you to please fight against this inclination and reach out to people in your community.

The enemy of our souls, Satan, wants you to isolate so he can whisper lies to you in the dark, knowing that you won’t have anyone to process through those lies with. It is common that during weeks and months following a situation that has led to your depressed state (such as loss), the enemy will try to insert lies like “God is mad at you; that’s why this happened to you,” or “You did XYZ, so this is your payback.”

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The Bible warns us to be vigilant (see 1 Pet. 5:8), because as believers we are in an active spiritual war (see Eph. 6:12) with an enemy who seeks to steal, kill and destroy us (see John 10:10).

If you find you’ve encountered a loss of any kind, one effective method to combat isolation is by getting in the habit of calling one friend a week and talk about how you are processing through the loss. So rather than bottling it up and becoming weighed down by it, talking through this loss with a friend or two will help you emotionally digest the loss in a way that you feel supported and cared about.

*Situational Depression Prayer: Lord God, in Jesus’ name, I trust in You to guide me through this season of loss and to return beauty for ashes as You promise in Your Word, amen.*

# Oppression and Seasonal Depression

Sometimes your depression doesn't have much to do with the situation changing in your life, but rather, difficulty getting out of your own head. In other words, you feel oppressed, like you're a prisoner of your own thoughts. My friend, this is demonic oppression. The symptoms of demonic oppression include self-deprecating thoughts like, "I'm stupid," constantly judging yourself and wondering if you said or did the right thing, wondering what people think of you. You may even get to the point where you've convinced yourself that people are talking badly about you. If this sounds familiar, let me assure you that I've heard it over and over in the counseling room. And I want you to be aware that this is a tactic of the enemy of your soul.

First, he tries to isolate you by convincing you that you're not good enough. And if that doesn't work, he'll play scenarios in your mind to convince you that people don't like you. Why does he do this? Because he knows you and I are wired for relationships. It is through relationships that we can edify one another and exhort one another. We can encourage one another and intercede for one another. And your enemy hates that. So, the next time you start feeling like "I'm stupid," or "Nobody likes me," do not accept those words as true. Our enemy is a liar (see Rev. 12:9).

Part of his plan to destroy you (see John 10:10) is his use of self-deprecating thoughts. Self-deprecating thoughts left unchallenged can lead to suicidal ideations. In other words, when we accept and receive what the enemy is whispering long enough, we begin to believe it. Before we know it, we believe people are better off without us; falling right into the enemy's plan. Before your thoughts get to this point, realize when the enemy is attacking. Reach out for counseling. Tell people you're under spiritual attack, and definitely don't act on any self-harming thoughts that come to mind.

Avoiding isolation is also crucial when it comes to seasonal depression, officially recognized as Seasonal Affective Disorder and otherwise known as “winter blues.” This type of depression is known to onset beginning in the fall, peak around the second week of November and last through January. Over the years, many have speculated on the origins of SAD. As winter approaches, our daylight hours get shorter, holidays draw closer, our lists of “to-dos” becomes endless and our stress levels can zoom, combined with the fact that we don’t go outside as much so we’re getting less sunlight. It can also seem as though our community interactions, such as Bible study or fellowship groups we could turn to for support, often take a break during the holidays, adding to the isolation risk.

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*Oppression and Seasonal Depression Prayer: Lord God, in Jesus’ name I trust in You to surround me with Your hedge of protection, to cover me from the enemy’s attack,, and guide me to appreciate and steward the uniqueness of each season as You designed them, that I may be found faithful and holy in Your sight, amen.*

## **Purpose, Meaning and Direction**

Last but certainly not least is depression that deals with your sense of purpose. This type of depression often arises out of frustration when we feel our life lacks meaning. God has placed a sense of purpose in the heart of each one of us (see Eph. 2:10). We all want to feel like we make a difference somehow, somewhere; whether big or small. In our fast-paced culture, even as believers we often fall into the habit-like ritual, asking God: “What do You want me to do?” or, “Where do You want me?” Many times, we get frustrated when we don’t have a sense of direction. So, we become frustrated with God.

Before long, we may even wonder if our prayers hit the ceiling or if God is taking a hiatus from our prayers.

It is during this time that we're tempted to act on our own understanding because God is not "acting fast enough" or not doing things "the way" we would do them. And when God, in His sovereign Fatherly protection, continues to close the door to the opportunity you've been chasing after, you fall into despair or begin to believe the lie that maybe even God is against you.

The reality is, the very reason God often closes certain doors is He knows opening them wouldn't be good for us, no matter how good they seem at the time. It is in these moments that we must press in and exercise every bit of our faith. We can remind ourselves that though we don't understand this "no," in Jesus the Father has given us the best "yes" (see Rom. 8:32). Therefore, His closing this door has nothing to do with our self-worth or our self-esteem; it's that this opportunity is not attached to His plans and purposes for us.

Whatever the Lord God has planned for you is for you, and when the time comes for your door to be open, you will have gone through the necessary preparation He deemed necessary for you to take hold of the role He called you to. In the meantime, we renew our foundation in His Word and live the truth of Galatians 6:9 (MEV), "And let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not give up."

*Purpose, Meaning and Direction Prayer: Lord God, in Jesus' name, I trust in Your mighty plan that You created me for, to guide me through each decision and each moment to glorify You and be Your "good and faithful servant," amen.*

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