

A Letter to a Sister Near Despair

Dear Sister in Christ,

I am so sorry that you feel overwhelmed. I'd venture to say that most believing women have experienced days in which we have to use all our will power just to get out of bed. I know from personal experience how



prolonged depression drains all the joy from life, but there is hope. I'm sending along the following suggestions from my own experience with discouragement. You may be doing some of them already.

Try not to give in to it. It's easier just to lie down in bleakness than to fight against it, but that's where the rub comes in. It's like physical exercise—if you don't keep working at it, you'll lose the progress

you've made and become weaker and weaker.

Working hard to stay in the same place may not seem worth it, but sometimes just not sinking further is all you can do. Remember that your despair isn't only hurting you. It impacts your family and all the other people who love you. It's worth the fight.

Spend time in prayer and the Psalms. Psalmists were no strangers to dark days. They cried out to God in honest, gut-wrenching bleakness and He answered their cries. He couldn't answer unless they cried— it is a necessary prerequisite (Psalm 107:13). Read their prayers, and when you do, pray what they pray if their words express your own emotions.

Ask God to show you the next right thing to do. Try to live in moment-by-moment trust in God. Depend on God completely and obey what He seems to bring to your mind to do (as long as it agrees with the Bible). I often do this when I start to feel overwhelmed. I say, "God, what's one right thing I can do now—one small step I can manage to serve you, my family, or my church?" It may be as simple as putting away a load of laundry or writing an encouraging note to someone else, but it helps me focus on something outside myself (Phil. 2:4). Looking at a whole day may be overwhelming, but you can do the next right thing, 5 minutes at a time.

Try to be grateful. Force yourself to thank God for blessings in your life over and over again during the day. Maybe you'll want to thank Him for providing for your family every time you go into the kitchen or for your salvation every time you see your Bible. If you spend your day in tears,

thank God for His promise to wipe them all away in Heaven. Build thankfulness into your daily routine and it will help change your perspective (1 Thess. 5:18).

Turn your thoughts toward Christ. Instead of allowing your mind to circle the drain of depression or to focus on trivial things, think about God. This is tough, and will call for some real discipline when it's so much easier to give in to thinking black, despairing thoughts. Every time your mind thinks "worthless" choose to think instead of the One Who is worthy. When you think "I don't care," remember the One Who has tender care for your soul. It might help to make up a few cards with encouraging or Christ-exalting Scriptures to scatter around the house (Heb. 12:2-3).

Show up. Make yourself get out of the house. Don't skip fellowship opportunities or church meetings (Heb. 10:25), even if you end up crying all the way through them. Real fellowship with other believers means sharing burdens (Gal. 6:2). Isolating yourself will make things worse.

Don't forget that your body and mind are connected. Walk around a little. Go to bed at night. Brush your teeth, take showers and wash your hair. Don't forget to eat real meals (1Cor. 6:19-20).

I know this letter will make you feel like someone is asking you to do more impossible things, but stick with me. Remember that the goal is not just to feel better, but that you will be shown to be an obedient servant and Christ will be exalted.

Love,

Susan

Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart. Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!

Psalm 107:13-15

Copyright ©2011 Susan Verstraete.

Permission granted for reproduction in exact form. All other uses require written permission.

Find more free articles at www.BulletinInserts.org, a ministry of Christian Communicators

Worldwide: www.CCWtoday.org