



Breaking Depression

A BIBLE STUDY WITH
BRANDON BLUE

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WEEK 1

LOSS OF HOPE

The Beginnings of
Depression

I cried out to God with my voice— To God with my voice;
And He gave ear to me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord;
My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; My soul
refused to be comforted. I remembered God, and was troubled;
I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.

PSALM 77:1-3

Kevin, a client whose identity and information have been changed for confidentiality, was a businessman and thriving entrepreneur. However, he found himself sitting in my office with his head in his hands considering whether or not to end it all. You see, Kevin had lost all hope. He was successful and had climbed the corporate ladder, had a loving wife, children, and a large house in the suburbs. Yet, he no longer found joy spending time with his family, he resented his job and became almost physically ill at the idea of going to his house. He was living the American dream, and was completely unfulfilled at the same time. This begs the question; What had brought such a vibrant man so low?

During our first session, Kevin sat there on my couch defiantly quiet. This defiance seemed to be the only emotion that he could summon. As he began to open up he hesitantly admitted, “I don’t know what to do anymore, I’ve tried everything. It feels like no one hears me, not even God.” His words came crashing down on him as he came to the realization that he no longer had hope. He was crying for help like we see the psalmist Asaph doing in Psalm 77.

Asaph was a talented musician and worship pastor who was known to prophesy through the playing of his music. However, when we first get a peek into his personal life it is a cry for help. Like Kevin he was successful outwardly, but on the inside, he felt as if he were screaming into the void. Asaph’s and Kevin’s stories intersect as they call out emotionally and felt unheard and isolated.

As Kevin shared more of his story with me, he described how he would lay awake at night and ruminate. “I can’t turn my mind off at night,” he said. “I just lie there thinking about losing everything!” His sleepless nights were indicative of the deeper emotional unrest that was brewing inside of him. Likewise, Asaph’s waking nights are a mirror image of this experience – a time when the soul cannot find peace, and the mind is overshadowed by a despairing sense of hopelessness.

As I asked Kevin to tell me how he felt about the future, and he echoed the words with which he opened our session, “I don’t know... I just don’t know anymore.” It was clear in this moment that his emotions had overwhelmed him and he was at a loss for words. His complaints had invaded his soul, and like the palmist it rendered him speechless.

We find ourselves judging how strong we are as believers by the amount of joy that we feel...

As believers, depression is a taboo topic because it seems to go against everything that we believe. We find ourselves judging how strong we are as believers by the amount of joy that we feel only to fulfill the self-fulfilling prophesy of despair. As you hear Kevin’s story an emotional chord may have been struck and you find that you haven’t been able to sleep at night or perhaps you are sleeping more than half of the day and still waking up exhausted.

Maybe if you were the one to step into my office and I asked you how you were doing, you would be unable to find the words to express the hopelessness that you feel. You may have even started to entertain thoughts such as, “what if I wasn’t around anymore,” or “would I even be missed if I just disappeared.” Isolation is what we see Kevin and Asaph going through at this moment. The goal of depression is to isolate in order to weaken your resolve. However, this does not have to be your fate, and the book of Romans gives us the first truth that those of you struggling with depression need to hear.

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Romans 8:26

The truth is not always pretty. The truth may be that you can't even pray about what your feeling because you have lost your words. The truth may be that you have had friends, mentors, and leaders rebuke the spirit of depression and you are still feeling crushed, and the guilt that depression is still clinging to you is suffocating you. If these truths, or similar ones, resonate with you; I want to speak a better truth over you.

The better truth is that you are not without words, because the Holy Spirit is speaking them for you before the throne of Heaven. The first step to defeating overwhelming depression is to cry for help. Crying for help may be you laying on the floor of your bedroom, hugging your knees with lights off and curtains drawn, and crying to God with an open and wounded heart! Hopefully you can take the step of talking to someone and tell them the truth of where you are at, but if you cannot, know this, the Holy Spirit has taken your pain upon Himself and has borne your heartache, self-loathing, and suicidal thoughts and is putting words to your pain.

THE BETTER TRUTH IS THAT YOU ARE NOT WITHOUT WORDS, BECAUSE THE HOLY SPIRIT IS SPEAKING THEM FOR YOU BEFORE THE THRONE OF HEAVEN.

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Have you found yourself awake at night with overwhelming thoughts? Can you pinpoint where these thoughts come from? _____

Are you able to identify with the man in this story? How? _____

“The cry for help,” When have you experienced this in your life? Do you find yourself there now? _____



WEEK 2



**REFUSING
TO BE
COMFORTED**

In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; **My soul refused to be comforted.** I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

PSALM 77:2-4

I want you to close your eyes and imagine yourself as a sailor on a Coast Guard cutter, you and your crew are responding to a, “Man Overboard” call. The weather is dark, oppressive, and dangerous. The winds are gusting, waves are swelling, and rain is pelting the deck. You have been combing the waters for hours without any signs of life and your captain is about to call it, when you spot a flash of color in the dark currents and you point it out. Sure enough! It is the person you have been searching for to rescue. As the diver prepares his gear, you throw a life preserver to the drifting person and they let it bounce off of them and they stare at as the waters sweep it away from them. The terrifying realization hits you that the person you are trying to save has given up and is completely despondent. They don't want to be saved anymore.

I give up!! This is where we find Kevin a few weeks into therapy. He has been drifting aimlessly through sessions and nothing has changed for the better. In fact, where we find him today is worse than the last session. He is despondent. When I challenged him on this, he stated, “What is even the point of getting better. I will just mess it up again and it is easier if I don't try.” Kevin is giving up. Anytime Kevin was asked about the future he would hang his head and tell himself and me that if the past was any indicator, the future was bleak.

As we add verse four to the passage that we read from last week, we see the depth of despair that Asaph is in. He is so troubled that he cannot speak. The interesting thing that we see here is that Asaph has the ear of the Lord but has refused to be comforted. We find

the Psalmist making a common mistake that people who struggle with depression make. Rather than allowing himself to find solace in the presence of a listening God, he rejects that comfort because he is unable to reconcile his past joy with his present pain.

Kevin seems to be trapped in his struggles. Even though he is doing the outward things to get better, he has pushed away the help of others. Why would someone who is drowning in a ferocious sea or in the depths of despair reject the help of others?

The answer to this question may be eluding you as you are drifting deeper into the darkness that is surrounding your mind. It seems like you have been treading water for far too long and you just want to give in and give up.

When an emotional experience becomes too overwhelming, it changes the way that we think.

Perhaps as last week's session wrapped up, you felt guilty because of all of the times that you have been prayed for, cried, and then immediately rejected that comfort and slipped back into the thought process of depression. Depression creates what is called a cognitive distortion. Cognitive distortions are states of mind that have been warped by emotional experiences. Typically, the brain will separate cognitive thoughts (thoughts that you can control and interact with) and emotional thoughts (thoughts that happen unbidden). However, when an emotional experience becomes too overwhelming, it changes the way that we think.

You may be aware that you are rejecting the comfort that is available to you. Whether that comfort is hug from a parent, counseling, or a beautiful time of prayer, you just can't seem to hold on to it. So, what is the point of this lesson? What is the truth that I can hold on to if my mind is simply going to distort it. The truth is this, if you are struggling with depression, stop struggling.

Matthew 11:28-30, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Let me clarify that stopping the struggle is not giving in to despair. It is the exact opposite. By not struggling with it you accept the truth that you are in over your head and that you need help.

The second step to being rescued from depression is acceptance. Acceptance of the fact that you are depressed and struggling. And acceptance of the comfort that is proffered. Asaph, the psalmist, and Kevin can both find rest and relief if they both come to terms with their depression and the dark situation that they find themselves in. Come to God with your burdens. Jesus’ invitation to those who are weary should assure you that you do not have to carry the weight of your depression alone.

**COME TO GOD WITH YOUR BURDENS.
JESUS’ INVITATION TO THOSE WHO ARE WEARY SHOULD
ASSURE YOU THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO CARRY THE
WEIGHT OF YOUR DEPRESSION ALONE.**

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Do thoughts or plans of the future overwhelm you? Why or why not? _____

Have you ever felt that you were, "in over your head?" What steps did you take to overcome this feeling? _____



WEEK 3

A dramatic landscape photograph of the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland. The image shows a high, dark, layered cliff face dropping steeply to a dark sea with white-capped waves. The top of the cliff is covered in green grass and features a small stone tower. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a clear day. The overall mood is majestic and historical.

PROJECTION AND LIVING IN THE PAST

You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
I have considered the days of old, The years of ancient times.
I call to remembrance my song in the night; I meditate within my heart,
And my spirit makes diligent search. Will the Lord cast off forever?
And will He be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever?
Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?

PSALM 77:4-9

There is a common trope in movies and stories that deal with the topic of time travel. In the most iconic time travel movie “Back To The Future,” this motif is found all throughout the story. That trope is this, if you change something in the past, it could have devastating effects on the future. Depression is a form of time travel. It will draw us back into the past and subtly begin to change things which in return will change how we view the present. One way that depression changes the present is through projection, and projection has two manifestations.

The manifestations of projection are a worse version of yourself, or a worse version of others. In order to reconcile the negative feelings of depression you create a worse version of yourself to justify the negative, even suicidal thoughts. Or you create a worse version of other people to filter all of your negative thoughts through so that you can feel good about feeling so bad.

Depression will draw us back into the past and subtly begin to change things which in return will change how we view the present.

Let’s check back in on Kevin. Kevin does not seem to be making much progress. When I asked him how he has been doing since our last session, he blows right past the question and begins to tell me about all of the trauma that he went through as a child. As a therapist

this piqued my interest, because sometimes knowing the cause of the thought processes can help to start unraveling what is happening in a client's mind.

However, something darker was happening with Kevin. He seemed embittered by this session and started talking about how everyone in his life hates him and thinks that he is a failure and an idiot. "Not even my wife believes that I can do better, just like my mom!!" He stated. He was living in the past and projecting his negative thoughts about himself through the things that his wife was saying.

We find Asaph doing the same thing. In his pain, Asaph begins to believe that God is the one who is purposefully causing all of his problems. He even blames his wakefulness on God, "holding his eyelids open." In reality, depression will distort our situations, whether positive or neutral or negative. Kevin, like the psalmist, projected his struggles onto his relationships by assuming that they were judging and abandoning him, when they were simply concerned about him.

When in depression, your view of reality will become severely distorted. To illustrate this fact, look again at the words that Asaph is using. He is so consumed by his pain that he begins to believe lies about God. He begins to ask himself if God has abandoned him, just as Kevin believes that his family will eventually abandon him. What happens when you live in this distortion is that you will isolate yourself and blame it on others.

The danger of projection is that you will push yourself further into isolation. The psalmist's distorted reality has led him to believe that he is alone in his suffering and that God has abandoned him. Even though God was still present in his life.

However, the third step to overcoming depression is found within the projected thoughts that Asaph shares with the reader. Asaph asks, "Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He

be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?”

The third step is thought challenging. Thought challenging is the process of asking questions without filters. Asking the tough question, and then challenging the thoughts that come up with that question. So how do I do this? First, you should follow the advice the Apostle James in James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” The distortions of depression will cause you to lack wisdom, and it can feel like there is a better way to think, but if you take those thoughts to the Lord and with an open and raw heart, He will answer. We can be afraid to ask God hard questions like Asaph did. However, it is the only way to get those thoughts out in the open for us to challenge.

As you read through the questions that Asaph cries out, the advice of the Apostle Paul may come to mind. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 10:5, “Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” It may feel as if these thoughts are overwhelming and if you give into them, they may take over. However, the good news is that God invites us to shout out the dark thoughts and questions to him. We need not worry about the dark thoughts taking over, because God has given us the ability to arrest those thoughts. When you bring those thoughts, distortions, and arguments racing through your mind, take them captive and cast them down. Taking them captive will bring you out of the past and stop the projections.

**WE NEED NOT WORRY ABOUT THE DARK THOUGHTS
TAKING OVER, BECAUSE GOD HAS GIVEN US THE
ABILITY TO ARREST THOSE THOUGHTS.**

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Do you find yourself reflecting on the past and being overcome with negative thoughts? What do you do with those thoughts? _____

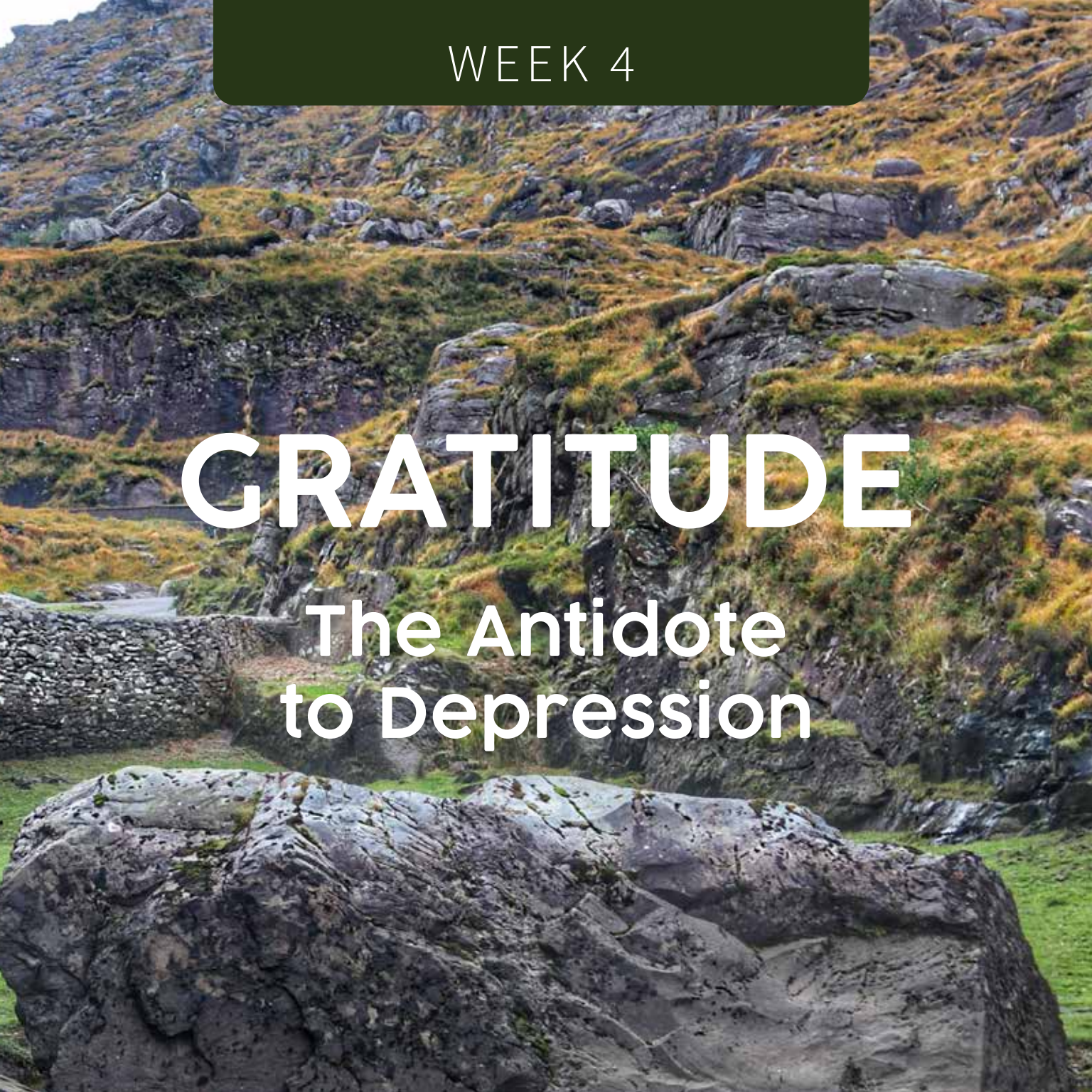
Has there been a time in your life that you have asked the Lord for wisdom? What happened? _____



WEEK 4

GRATITUDE

The Antidote
to Depression



And I said, “This is my anguish; **But I will remember the years** of the right hand of the Most High.” I will remember the works of the Lord; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, And talk of Your deeds. Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; Who is so great a God as our God? You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples. You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, The sons of Jacob and Joseph.

PSALM 77:10-15

There was a man who had struggled most of his life to find his own identity. He worked in ministry until he even lost his identity there. He became embittered and walked away from it all. He wandered aimlessly from job to job trying to find purpose but failed as he struggled through the frustrations of the jobs that he qualified for. This man decided to do something more drastic to get his life back on track and joined the military. A few years into his career this man felt the tug of the Holy Spirit on his beleaguered soul. He did not want to get back into ministry but felt the pull become stronger and stronger until one day he gave up all of his compunctions. The Lord had something different for this man, now in his thirties, and he went back to school planning for the day that his contract with the military would be up. He left the military where he had re-forged his identity and stepped back into a similar role that had beaten him down before and immediately fell into a deep depression. This depression took the man more than 8 months to even admit what was going on, during which he had lost his identity and purpose yet again.

This man finally broke down on the sidelines of a basketball court with a group of his peers after a particularly suicidal day and confessed before them and the Lord what he was going through. It was that day that things began to turn around. That man was me. That day weeping on the sidelines was the first step in getting out of my depression. I had

to work through letting go of my struggle and accepting my depression, and then I moved through thought challenging. However, the final thing that brought me out was practicing gratitude. The Bible tells us to be thankful in all things and hundreds of other verses in-

Gratitude does not erase the pain, it re-frames it helping you to refocus on what is still good and true.

struct us in gratitude. But what about the times when things are going poorly? What about the times when you don't feel like life is worth living anymore? What I found is that gratitude does not erase the pain, it re-frames it helping you to refocus on what is still good and true.

It was our last session together and Kevin had made a lot of progress. He described our time together as bittersweet. Bitter because of the nature of what he was going through and sweet because of what he had learned over our time together. A typical question that I will ask one of my clients during an exit interview is, "What is the most meaningful thing that you have taken away from our time together?" Kevin responded to the inquiry, telling me that it was our gratitude work that really pushed him over the edge. He was back to having a positive mindset and was now able to go home without an overwhelming sense of dread. He smiled as he thought about his wife and children and all of the blessings that he had. We see our psalmist walking a similar path.

In our previous lesson we have seen Asaph complaining, living in the past, projecting, and refusing to be comforted. In this session we see him shift his focus. As he questioned God, he started to challenge his thoughts and moves from lamenting his circumstances and begins to recall the good things of God. As his focus shifts toward the majesty and faithfulness of God we see the posture of his soul change. Just as Kevin began to take his focus off of his despair and set boundaries, aligning his values, Asaph turns outward and transforms his pain into purpose.

We see the psalmist begin to declare the past glories and victories that God had wrought. He and Kevin both found that there is power in remembering. The cognitive distortions of depression cast darkness, overshadowing all of the good things that have happened. However, when Asaph calls to memory the good things it was like turning on a flashlight in a darkened room. It did not illuminate everything, but it shone on a way out of the darkness. The more he remembered the brighter it got.

Gratitude is not the denial of bad things. It is the acknowledgment of what is good despite all of the pain. Acknowledging this good brings emotional balance and breaks the cycles of negative thinking. You can see Asaph's depression lifting the more he writes this psalm. He is letting go of his negative thought patterns and choosing to think on beautiful things.

If you have been struggling with depression, the first thing that I want you to know is that you are not alone. Depression will make you feel that way as it accentuates all of the worst beliefs that you have about yourself. Pastor Joe Parker once told me that, "Isolation is getting alone with yourself, and solitude is when you get alone with God." Don't let your depression pull you further into isolation, rather get alone with the Lord.

Second, is that it is alright to be raw before the Almighty. Let your hurts out because He wants to care for them and take them. But He won't take them if you won't let go. Shout your questions at God and let go of all of the pretense of how to pray and be real with Him. Depression drives us to be dishonest with ourselves and with God.

The next thing that you need to know is that you have permission to challenge the thoughts you are experiencing. They do not have the right to rule you because you belong to Someone greater than your negative thoughts.

Last of all, practice gratitude. This will change your life drastically. There are many ways

to practice gratitude, but the primary way that you can incorporate this into your life is to write down the things that you are grateful for each day in a journal. I know that it may feel fake and cheesy at first, but the more that you practice it, you will feel the healing taking place in your mind.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” The truth is that gratitude is not easy and does not just happen. Gratitude is a choice that you have to make every single day. Most importantly once you have practiced writing it down or saying it out loud, take a moment to sit down, close your eyes, and meditate on the good things that God has given you.

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Are you able to look upon your life and have gratitude? Why or why not? _____

Make of list of 5 things you are grateful for. After completing the list, how do you feel? _____



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