

Excerpted from the Book
Getting Over the Blues
A Woman's Guide to Fighting Depression
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Puffy red blotches covered Mary's creamy porcelain skin. As she spoke, tears ran down her nose. Embarrassed, she quickly brushed them away. "I don't know what is wrong with me! I'm not myself. I used to be a capable person, but I can't seem to do the simplest things anymore. I cry at the drop of a hat. I can't sleep. I don't even enjoy my kids."

I asked Mary how long she had been feeling this way. She told me that over the past few months she had noticed a gradual change in herself. At first she felt sad, then empty and sort of lost, and finally she grew more and more numb. She wasn't sure why. "I don't care about anything anymore. Am I going crazy? I'm so scared. I want to feel like my old self again."

"No, Mary, you're not crazy," I responded. "I think you're depressed. I'm glad you've come for help."

What Is Depression?

Depression is a physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional response to something that is wrong. The million-dollar question is, "What is wrong?"—and sometimes there are no simple answers. We will tackle this question of *what is wrong* and the causes and triggers of depression more thoroughly in chapter 2. For now, understand that most often what is wrong is multifaceted. One thing is certain, though. Whatever the cause, depression can be

devastating and impacts our whole person, as well as those we love.

Once Mary understands that the symptoms she experiences have a name—major depression—it is crucial that she also takes the time to decipher what her depression is telling her. If she doesn't give her symptoms the attention they deserve, she will not be able to identify the underlying problem(s), learn the skills, or make the changes she needs to make that will allow her to be less vulnerable to depressive episodes in the future.

First, let's look at the symptoms of depression.

How Do I Know I Am Depressed?

For many women, depression is a generic word we use to describe how we feel when we're down in the dumps, stressed-out, overwhelmed, hurt, or sad. Many of us have had bad days or even a bad couple of days, but then we start to feel better and our *depressed mood* passes. Those who lean toward a melancholy temperament or struggle with bouts of depressed feelings for a few days will benefit greatly from reading this book and practicing the exercises in it. Doing so can help you prevent your symptoms from becoming more severe or lasting longer.

Unfortunately, there are no blood tests to determine if you are depressed. Below is a general checklist of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual manifestations of depression that most physicians and mental health professionals would use to determine if a person was clinically depressed. As you read through all the symptoms below, place a check mark next to the symptoms that describe you. If you are averse to writing directly in your book, make a photocopy of this page and the next page to mark.

Physical Symptoms of Depression:

- Chronic aches and pains that are not explained by other medical conditions
- Sleep disturbances (waking early, insomnia, extreme fatigue)
- Not taking care of your appearance like you used to
- Eating disturbances (excessive overeating, loss of appetite and weight)
- Loss of sexual interest
- Low energy, feeling of heaviness, lethargy, slowed speech

Emotional Symptoms of Depression

- Feeling guilty
- Feeling worthless and undeserving of anything good
- Feeling disappointed in oneself
- Feeling sad for no apparent reason, excessive crying
- Feeling numb, like the plug has been pulled out and there is no "life" in you
- Loss of interest in things previously enjoyed
- Feeling hopeless or pessimistic about the future
- Irritability, restlessness, agitation
- Anxiety, possibly with panic symptoms

Mental Symptoms of Depression

- Inability to concentrate
- Can't make decisions like you used to
- Recurrent thoughts of death and/or suicide
- Difficulty thinking and remembering
- Negative view of self, others, and life
- Attitude of "it doesn't matter" and "I don't matter"

Spiritual Symptoms of Depression

- Morbid pre-occupation with faults, failures
- Excessive guilt, with no relief through prayer and forgiveness
- Hopelessness
- Feeling abandoned or rejected by God
- Lack of meaning or purpose in life; sense of emptiness
- Loss of interest in spiritual things that were once meaningful (prayer, Bible reading, church, worship, and/or Christian music)

Relational Symptoms of Depression

- Withdrawal from friends, church, work colleagues, and family

Now that you have checked all the symptoms that apply to you, go back over your check marks and evaluate whether you experience each checked symptom in a mild, moderate, or severe way. Write your answer down next to your check mark. As you do this, also note about how long you have had each symptom. Has it been a few days? Weeks? Months? Years?

Here's an example:

- Withdrawal from friends, church, work colleagues, and family
Feeling worthless and undeserving of anything good—*moderate intensity, felt this way all my life*

After you have finished, step back and take a big picture perspective. Look at how many symptoms you checked, how severe your symptoms are, and how long they have lasted. Are your check marks more densely clustered in one category over another? Evaluating your symptoms and answering these questions are important keys that can begin to unlock the mystery of your depression. Your unique responses begin to give you some clues as to what might be wrong.

Every symptom will not apply to everyone, even if you are seriously depressed. You may only have a few of these symptoms and still be depressed, especially if your symptoms have persisted longer than two weeks and are moderate to severe. If you answered yes to some of the questions and your symptoms have lasted longer than two weeks, I highly recommend that you make an appointment to see a Christian counselor for a professional opinion. You may also want to take a confidential depression screening test online through The National

Mental Health Association. You will find them at www.nmha.org.

Professionals consider many factors when making the diagnosis of clinical depression. Sometimes it isn't easy to diagnose because there are other problems that can coexist with depression. For example, some women are depressed but don't realize it because they also struggle with an anxiety disorder, drug or alcohol abuse, marital problems, or a physical illness that can mask a coexisting depression. Some of the signs professionals look for to ascertain whether someone is depressed or not are how long the symptoms have persisted, how severe they are, and whether the person is having trouble functioning at home or at work. The presence of suicidal and/or self-destructive thoughts is a clear indicator of depression.

If you realize that you are experiencing depression, please consult with your doctor and/or mental health professional.