



## Close to Home Study Guide

### Dealing with Depression

#### 1. Opening (1 minute)\*

Acknowledge that depression is a difficult topic—yet the Scriptures do not shy away from it. Invite a group member to read Psalm 22:1-6, 14-16. The feelings in this Psalm may be uncomfortable, but they reflect well the despair many feel when experiencing depression.

#### 2. Story-telling (8 minutes)

Summarize Gary's story, especially noticing what led to his depression and how he found hope and healing. Alternatively, if someone in the group has experienced depression and is willing to share, invite them to tell their story.

#### 3. Review of pamphlet (6 minutes)

Review the description, symptoms, and types of depression given on pages 4-6. Discuss how depression is similar to and different from sadness or unhappiness.

Look at the Facts and figures on page 4:

- Explore why depression is more common among women. One helpful resource is from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) at: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression/complete-index.shtml#pub5>. Note especially the connection to experiences of trauma and assault.
- Also highlight the last point. Why do so few people seek treatment?

#### 4. Reading of Scripture text (15 minutes)

Divide the group into pairs or small groups to discuss one of the situations below. What stands out to them in the passage? How did this person relate to God and others? How did God respond to them? How might this story help those struggling with depression?

- Hagar—in Genesis 21:9-21.
- Moses—in Numbers 11:10-18.
- David—in Psalm 6 and/or Psalm 38.
- Elijah—in 1 Kings 19:1-18.
- Jonah—in Jonah 4.
- Martha and Mary—in John 11:17-44.

Draw attention to the statement at the bottom of page 7, that including these voices in the Bible “. . . gives us permission to express our feelings.” Many of these laments are honest, even blaming God for one's troubles or expressing hatred toward one's enemies. Is it okay to express these feelings to God? Do group members feel free to speak this frankly with God? Why or why not?

Ezekiel 37:1-14 is a beautiful story of God's desire to bring us life and wholeness. What other Scriptures or Bible stories (e.g. Isaiah 40 and Micah 4:1-4) remind us of this truth? As a group, try to name as many as possible.

\*The suggested time frames are for a 45-minute session. With more discussion and storytelling, you will need to adjust upward, and possibly extend to a second session.

## 5. Steps toward healing (14 minutes)

- Provide information on local resources, therapists, and support groups which assist in dealing with depression.
- There are several helpful articles in the January 2009 issue of *Christian Leader*, available at <http://www.usmb.org/cl-month-by-month>, especially “A Journey through the Dark” and “The Great Depression.” If appropriate, make copies of these articles to share with the class.
- “A Journey through the Dark” mentions that some Christians believe depression signifies a moral or spiritual failure, and taking medication shows a lack of faith. How does the group respond to these beliefs?
- Look at the suggestions in the box on page 8. Are there any questions or additional suggestions?
- Also, review the *Steps toward wholeness* on page 9. Again, are there any questions or suggestions? Which steps are the most difficult? What can the church do to assist people in taking these steps?
- Brainstorm ways the congregation can welcome and support those who are struggling with depression or have family members who are dealing with this.
- Who in the congregation pays attention to those who may be at risk for depression? Who would notice if someone seems especially sad or stopped coming to church?
- Pray together for all those struggling with depression, as well as their family members and friends, that all would find hope and healing.

## 6. Closing (1 minute)

*Dear God: We want to believe that you are always with us, but sometimes it's hard to feel your presence and your love. Still we cling to you. We want to affirm with Paul “. . . that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us . . .” from your love. (Romans 8:38-39). Help us to remember this even when we cannot see the way, even when we cannot feel your hand beneath us. Help us to rest in your love. Amen*



This study guide is written by Linda Gehman Peachey, Director for Women's Advocacy in the Peace and Justice Ministries section of Mennonite Central Committee US. It is one of a series of free downloadable study guides for the Close to Home pamphlets, which can be ordered from the Mennonite Publishing Network of the Mennonite Church (see [www.mpn.net/closetohome](http://www.mpn.net/closetohome)) or the Mennonite Brethren Kindred Productions ([www.kindredproductions.com/closetohome](http://www.kindredproductions.com/closetohome)).