

SEVEN BASIC GUIDELINES FOR A JOYFILLED LIFE

The seven basic guidelines in this handout are all based on the great commandment. If any human chooses to live by these seven basic guidelines, we are convinced that he will go through life without ever suffering any of the pains of depression. Of course, he may still have some ups and downs, and still experience normal grief reactions just as all humans do, but he will never suffer from any symptoms of clinical depression.

Without a vital personal relationship with Jesus Christ, no human will have the power within himself to consistently choose these seven basic guidelines. If an individual changes all his can'ts to won'ts, he stops avoiding the truth, quits deceiving himself, and starts living in reality - if he is a Christian. The Bible tells Christians in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." In I Corinthians 10:13, Christians are told that they are never tempted to sin without simultaneously being provided with a way (and the power) to escape that sinful temptation. The Christian who continually fails is without excuse -- he is defeating himself. He is his own worst enemy. The Christian who is depressed is depressed because he is choosing (either out of ignorance of the Word or else on purpose) to be depressed, choosing not to live by God's principles. Living by God's principles results in the fruits of the Spirit, which include love (rather than pent-up anger or bitterness), joy (rather than depression), and peace (rather than anxiety).

Christians who get over their depression and continue to follow our "Seven Basic Guidelines" never get depressed again. The primary step to overcoming depression is to utilize the excellent resource that we have or can have in Christ.

1. Commit your life daily to the purpose of glorifying Jesus Christ. We commit our lives to glorifying Christ the first thing each morning. We wake up and thank God for another day to enjoy life. We pray that God will use us that day to bring glory to Him by benefiting our fellow man (including our wives and children). We pray for self-control (through His strength) to overcome the temptations of the day, and we ask Him to forgive us when we do make mistakes, realizing that all Christians (including ourselves) do make mistakes daily. Committing the day to God also helps us to love ourselves more and not to be so self-critical. It also helps us to love our wives, children, and friends more, as we think of ways we can benefit them for the glory of God.

2. Spend some time each day meditating on God's Word and applying it to your life. Our brains are just like computers, except for the fact that we have a will and computers have no will of their own. Since we are born with a selfish, self-deceiving sinful nature, we tend to automatically do the wrong things much of the time--things that lead to depression and self-destruction. Not only do we do those things, but we also deny that we are doing them. (Jeremiah 17:9) If we choose happiness, we must choose also to reprogram our "computer" brains to God's way of thinking instead of our own crazy way of thinking. We can do this only by frequent meditation on God's Word. Bad programming from the past can affect our present-day attitudes.

- a. It can affect the way we go around talking to ourselves during the day, and thus how we feel.
- b. It can cause us to utilize depression as a means to gain attention.
- c. It can cause us to use depression as a way to manipulate others.

- d. It can cause us to be negative in our thought patterns throughout the day.
- e. It can cause us to worry constantly from moment to moment.
- f. It can cause us to have painful thinking that reinforces a depressed mood.
- g. It can cause us to be filled with self-doubt and criticism.
- h. It can cause us to doubt our personal relationship with the Lord, and it can cause us to question our relationship with and acceptance by other people.

We have very little direct control today over what was programmed years ago, but we can begin to reprogram our computer.

3. Get rid of grudges daily. Ephesians 4:26 advises getting rid of grudges daily. This will prevent clinical depression from ever developing.

4. Spend a little time nearly every day getting more intimate with your mate and children. Parents, brothers, sisters, and other close relatives should also have a high priority. Do all you can to resolve family conflicts. Don't ever get vengeance on family members. Intimacy with your family is more vital to your self-worth and overall mental health than most people imagine. The quantity of time is just as important as the quality of time. As much as we humans hate to admit it, much of our self-worth is based on our parents' love and acceptance of us. The most mature thing we can do is to assume 100 percent of the responsibility for resolving family conflicts, then pray that we can discover creative ways in which to achieve reconciliation.

5. Spend some time each week having fellowship and fun with at least one or two committed Christian friends of the same sex. If you are married, have fun with other married couples. In this way husband and wife can together benefit from intimacy with others. (Proverbs 13:20) Select your friends very carefully, because you will become more and more like your friends whether you intend to or not! Share. (Hebrews 10:24,25)

6. Be involved in a daily routine (including work, play, housework, projects) that brings personal satisfaction to you. Be convinced that this routine is God's will and purpose for your life--your way of glorifying Him.

- a. Set aside time daily for intimacy with God, including prayer and Scripture meditation.
- b. Set aside time for personal mental health, because you won't be of much use to God, family, or others if you don't have good mental health yourself. This includes time to unwind and relax. It includes time to watch football and other athletic events you may find relaxing. It includes dates with your mate and with other couples for fellowship. It also includes some exercise.
- c. Set aside enough time to be continually building a more intimate relationship with your mate. This includes time for fun, fellowship, serious communication, and a good sex life. Your mate should be an even higher priority than your children.
- d. Set aside enough time to adequately train your children. This includes time to play with them, listen to their problems, pray with them, watch them perform at school, and so forth.
- e. Set aside some of your remaining time to earn alliving. The Bible says that if you don't take care of your family's needs, you are worse in God's eyes than an infidel (an atheist). We agree wholeheartedly. If meeting priorities (1) through (4) means earning less money (and it will for many), then so be it. Your family needs you a thousand times more than they need your money.
- f. With whatever time is left over, develop some ways to use your God-given talents to perform some ministry.

7. Do something nice for one special person each week. This kind deed can be physical (helping with a chore, for example), emotional (buying a book or giving counsel), or spiritual (having devotions together).

Ask yourself how many of these "Seven Basic Guidelines" you are already practicing. Then compare the amount of depression you are experiencing with the amount of happiness you are experiencing.