

Letters to Young People - 'When Things Look Bad'

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Today at 12:27pm

Everybody has times when they are feeling down. Things happen to us that can be pretty tough to handle: we might lose a friend, we might have money trouble, we might be feeling betrayed, misunderstood or lonely. Or all of the above. It can be particularly tough when we don't feel that we have anyone that can understand us, or that is willing to listen to us because then we don't talk about whatever our problem is, and instead we tend to dwell on it. Sometimes, rather than something big, it's an accumulation of little things – but they can still get to us, and bring us down.

One of the most alarming trends in the modern world is that of teenage suicide. It stuns me that someone with all of their life to live can decide to end it, and how someone could get to feeling that they just don't want to go on. Yet, it happens. Every day. Depression is in fact one of the most debilitating and dangerous things in our society, yet often it goes unnoticed until it's too late. What can we do about it? How can we help our friends if they are feeling depressed? How can we help make sure that they don't get so isolated, so despairing of any solution that they want to take their own life? On the other hand, if we are feeling isolated and depressed ourselves, how can we get the help and support we need – because we all DO need help and support so many times in our lives!

If you have a friend who is struggling in this way, you CAN help them! The first thing you need to do is simply be there for them... be willing to listen, let them know that you are there and that you care. They mightn't spill everything to you, but you can at least let them know that you love them and that you want to help them. You're not a professional counsellor or a psychologist, and no-one expects you to be. You can't treat clinical depression or anything like that, but you CAN help them to take the step of going to the doctor or to a counsellor to get help. Often people won't take that step unless they have friends that help them to do it, and that is where you can make a HUGE difference. Go with them. Step up, be a real friend and make a difference. You can't do it all on your own, and neither can they. But you CAN help them to make that journey back to the light, and you can hold their hand while they're doing it.

If you and /or your friend are a Christian, we also need to be careful of thinking things like "Get over it! Christians aren't SUPPOSED to get depressed!", and dismiss their problems. That isn't helpful in the least. Christians have problems too, and they have struggles too... what they SHOULD be able to rely on is the compassion, love and support of their fellow Christians. Maybe in an ideal world Christians wouldn't get depressed, but when is the world ever ideal? We need to remember what Paul said:

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Galatians 6: 2)

He didn't say there were no burdens, he said we should help one another with them. Let's do that.

Finally, if you yourself are struggling with depression and loneliness, it isn't going to just 'go away'. Reach out for help, and you will find it is there. You have people that love you and care about you, but they may not know or understand what is going on in your life. Take that first step, and you will find that there are people who are willing to help you make the rest of the journey. You may feel that there is no-one who cares, or understands, but you will find that there are. You aren't alone. You have people that care. You have someone who sent you this.

It might not necessarily be the first person you try too – it would be nice to think that everyone would help, but it's not necessarily so. But there WILL be someone: just keep trying, and you will find the one, or ones, who can help you.

Most of all, you need to know that God loves you. I know it sounds like a bit of a cliché, but it happens to be true.

Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you (I Peter 5: 7).

He does care for you, and so do a lot of others. You have people who love you, and who will help you. Reach out to them, and let them help you make the journey back.