

believing there is another way

TESSA VAN OLST

## **Depression Disarmed**

Believing there is another way

## Depression disarmed (e-book)

Believing there is another way

Tessa van Olst

Autobiography and self-help

Copyright © Tessa van Olst Author: Tessa van Olst Editor: Erica Kramer

Translation: Thomas Fiege

Cover design: Marjoke Knoop – zijdiezijn Interior design: Marjoke Knoop – zijdiezijn E-book design: Eva Fiege - HEIM.studio

Publisher: Tessa van Olst

ISBN: 9789083398013

NUR: 770

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## DEPRESSION



believing there is another way

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Endorsements	7
Preface	10
Introduction	13
Part I: My story	16
God called	17
I didn't want to feel the pain	19
On the verge	24
God intervened	26
Recurring battle	29
Fight or flight?	33
Choosing life	38
Transformation	41
Part II: Believing there is another way	46
Overcoming depression	47
Tell yourself the right story	50
Fight the right fight	55
Consciously break out of your victim mentality	58
Stop feeding your depression	61
Step out of depression the way you've stepped into it	63
Stand up and keep standing	65
Plant seeds of faith	68
Part III: Learning to think differently	71
Renew your mind	72
Chase after God's truth	75
Stop suppressing	77
Choose health	70

Take part. Connect!	82
See the punches for what they are	85
Learn boxing and become resilient	88
Stop sedating	92
Persevere and choose discipline	95
You're never back to square one	98
In conclusion	100
Where to go from here?	101
Attachment: Bible verses and Biblical affirmations	106
Acknowledgements	119
Endnotes	121
References	122
About the author	125
Partnership and donations	126

Endorgements

The book you are holding is extraordinary. I was already moved by one of the first lines that were written straight from Tessa's heart, but that in fact originated in the heart of God. It said: 'It is my desire to help you and others to win the fight and to experience hope again.' The Bible reveals the true way to lasting freedom and peace. In John 8:20-32, Jesus teaches us:, `"You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." The battle is won, you are free in Jesus. There's nothing the enemy could ever do about that. The only way he can keep us imprisoned, is through lies in our thinking. It's time to break down those lies using God's truth and Tessa's practical tips, knowledge, and experiences. You see, there is no lie that can stand against the knowledge of the truth about who Jesus Christ is, what He has done for you, and who you are in Him because of that. With this book, Tessa takes you by the hand and leads you by this truth, and her own journey, to the freedom you were made for. Having suffered burnout, I know from experience how hard it can be not just to become free but also to stay free in your thinking. Take Gods Word in one hand, and this book in the other, rise up, and walk in the truth Jesus has set you free with!

Robbie van Veen – Speaker, teacher & connector - Royal Mission

onest, wise, and hopeful. It is so special to read how much of a difference God can make when we dare to see things through His eyes.

Minella van Bergeijk – CEO Tearfund

■ n this book, Tessa open-heartedly tells the story of her depression and how it knocked her over time after time. Year after year. This story is raw, but at the same time incredibly hopeful. Because depression doesn't have the final say! This book is one big testimony of how God's love overcame the darkness in her life. It's a strong encouragement to not wallow in defeat, but to get up and focus on Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, regardless of how challenging this may be or how much your feelings might be opposed to it. I've read this book in one breath. And I think it was written in a very loving and balanced way. Tessa knows what she's talking about, which in particular makes her message so wise, powerful and hopeful. Do you feel hopeless and powerless? Are your feelings of depression seemingly controlling you completely? Tessa shows there's hope and perspective. That faith is stronger than feelings. That you can also choose life. So, just do it. Read this book and give it a try. You've got nothing to lose and everything to gain!

Tineke Wuister – Applied psychologist & author

n one word: wow! Reading Tessa's book impacted me deeply and produced an even greater desire in me to let God's light shine on every part of my being. Tessa writes in a way that is honest, down-to-earth, raw, and confronting. Moreover, she makes everything so practical that anyone could get to work with the tools she provides. Long story short: Depression Disarmed is a must-read for anyone who wants to discover more of an abundant life with God!

Marije van den Berg – Speaker, author & coach

Tessa has written a book that could bring about a full-blown breakthrough in the lives of people who suffer from depression. Through her personal story she shows how she has overcome depression by the power of God. Using powerful truths about who you are in God's eyes, she untangles the clew of convictions that can nestle in your thinking. In addition, she provides practical steps you can take towards your breakthrough. I am convinced that this book will be a blessing to many people.

Bart van den Belt – Speaker, author, trainer, and business consultant

Preface

It's March 2019, and I am watching a documentary on depression broadcasted by a Dutch TV network. It shows how British journalist Alastair Campbell is investigating whether recent development in medicine and treatment methods could positively affect or even cure his own depression.

e interviews several experts, as well as fellow sufferers who are also looking for solutions. One of those fellow sufferers is Kevin. And at some point, Kevin makes a statement that really blows me away. He says: 'Depression is a liar. She tells you all kinds of terrible things about yourself and makes you believe they are true.' With these words he perfectly articulated the deep truth God used to set me free ten years earlier. I am instantly reminded of John 10:10, where Jesus says: 'The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.' The devil is a thief and a liar. He is always trying to steal everything that is giving life, everything that brings us closer to Jesus. And one of the ways he does that is by influencing our thoughts and making us believe his lies, ultimately entangling us in them.

And this is exactly what this man is talking about in the documentary. He shares for example how his thoughts and emotions, at times in the form of panic attacks, often try to take over his day. But, he has realized that he doesn't have to listen to his thoughts, causing him to experience a lot more freedom in his daily life. He does no longer think: I am what I feel and think. This enables him to recognize the lies within his own thoughts and emotions, and by evaluating them in this manner, he can easily distance himself from them and choose whether he wants to listen to them or not. He admits that he still regularly has

to deal with destructive thoughts and emotions. He doesn't fight them or try to suppress them, but instead he acknowledges them, which gives him the opportunity to evaluate them and to decide whether he wants to give them the right to speak into his life or not. He doesn't deny his thoughts and emotions, however, he no longer allows them to determine the course of his life.

Upon hearing this, I jump up from my couch, barely able to suppress the urge to yell amen at the TV screen. This is such a liberating insight! Instantly, I recognize my own experience and God's liberating truth in Kevin's story, and I'm thinking to myself: If this is true for Kevin, how much more should this be true for us as Christians! We may embrace this God-given and Biblical truth and experience true freedom in Christ. He is offering us all freedom through His death and resurrection...

This thought takes me right back to 2009, and to the words God spoke to me then. Words that brought about change in my life, words because of which I experienced deliverance. Because what God shared with me in that moment so utterly transformed my soul, that I could only pray: 'Lord, shouldn't this be available for everyone? Why did I not know this?' Just use me to share this with others, so that they may experience the same freedom. For You do not show favoritism. The things You have for me, You have for everyone!' The memory of that moment encouraged me to actually start writing this book you are now reading. This is my testimony about overcoming depression. I will be sharing how I see God's truth, redemption, love, hope, healing, deliverance, power and salvation in my life. And when you are reading about how God took my mess, completely transformed it, and even used it for good, my deepest desire is that it will spark faith in you, and that you will experience for yourself what God can do for you.

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

**JOHN 10:10** 

Introduction

Nearly twelve years ago, I found my way out of depression. At first, there seemed to be no reason at all for me to have developed this condition. And yet I did. So, for a long time while suffering from it, I was clueless about what was wrong with me.

But worse than that: the longer these feelings of depression lingered, the more I lost hope of ever recovering. I had no idea how to deal with this 'thing'. And the more I started fighting it, the deeper I seemed to sink into feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and exhaustion. Not only did this affect me negatively, but I also noticed how the people around me slowly started to lose hope as time went by. Light and life were slipping through my fingers. You see, depression can be like a deadly parasite. It drains you completely and seems to eradicate all hope of solutions. Depression wants to rob you of all hope and life.

It took me eleven years to finally overcome depression, and in this book I would like to share with you how I did this. As I am seeing more and more people fighting depression, feelings of depression or symptoms of a burnout, I believe telling my story was never more important than it is now. If someone would have given me insight, practical tools and direction inspired by God's truth back in the day, it would probably have been a lot easier for me (and the people around me) to rise above my condition. And that is why I am writing this book. It is my desire to help you and others to win the fight and to experience hope again.

But before I share my story with you, I think it is good to define what

depression really is. The term 'depression' is often used to describe a variety of mental states characterized by sadness (ranging from a temporary low mood to severe despondency) or a significant loss of pleasure and interest in life. Not every low, sad or even depressed mood is a depression. In the Netherlands you are only diagnosed with clinical depression when certain criteria are met.<sup>1</sup>

I will not go into detail about the diagnosis or treatment of clinical depression in this book. If you have questions about these things, I strongly advise you to consult your doctor. He or she can assist you and, if needed, refer you to a medical specialist or a mental health expert. In any case, I think it's good to realize that depression and feelings of sadness can take on various forms. Therefore, individual cases cannot easily be compared. They develop in many ways and under the influence of a vast array of factors. Nonetheless, I am convinced that my experience is representative of what most people who struggle with depression, feelings of sadness, or a burnout are experiencing. This goes specifically for those who have experienced or are experiencing all their energy and attention being consumed by a dramatic event, by personality disorders or by low self-esteem over an extended period of time. And for those whose (intense) stress or fear has finally managed to get its hooks into them,

after having haunted them relentlessly. I can tell from experience that these things can alternate your inner being in such a way that it becomes harder and harder to get out of the downward spiral you are trapped in.

There are forms of depression that seem to develop apart from any of the factors I just mentioned. These may be the result of an illness or a chemical imbalance in the brain. I am not a doctor, psychiatrist or psychologist, so I cannot make any statements about such complex conditions on a professional

DEPRESSION

WANTS TO ROB YOU OF

level. All I know is that medication can be very helpful in some cases. I have also been taking antidepressants for a while. If you are under treatment and if you are taking medication, I advise you to always speak to your doctor or psychiatrist and to follow his or her advice before taking any drastic decisions during your process. Medication is not necessarily wrong, and in some cases, it is simply (temporarily) crucial to one's recovery. However, I believe that we should look beyond medication alone to truly find a way out of depression's snare. Even when the cause of your depression is an underlying illness or a chemical imbalance in your brain. Because once depression has found its way into your life, it will try to gain and maintain control over it by latching onto fears and lies in your thinking and by feeding them. But these fears and lies can effectively be combatted with God's love and truth, with or without medication (John 8:31-32). I have personally experienced how powerful using this truth as a weapon is.

So, whether you carry a label and are on medication or not, and whether medical causes play a part or not, I believe that what helped me to climb out of depression can help you as well. Or, at least, that my experience can bring relief and testify of hope in the midst of the battle you are in.



1 God called

Growing up, my family and I never went to church. We didn't have any close relatives or friends who actively confessed or shared their Christian faith.

spent my primary school years at a secular school. The high school I went to afterwards was a Christian school, however, I never felt like the Christian faith and a relationship with Jesus were key factors in the school's approach. My teachers did start almost every day with prayer and with reading a short devotion from a Christian quarterly magazine, but that was about it. Even the subject Religious Education taught at this school wasn't aimed at deepening roots in the Christian faith or the Christian identity. It was nothing more than a general introduction to common worldviews, opinions, philosophies, and religious backgrounds. Of course I heard about Jesus, in particular around Christmas and Easter. But because of the way I was introduced to them, to me these stories seemed like the story of Santa Claus. An interesting story. Not more than that. Nothing and no one pointed me towards God, towards His love for us, or towards Jesus' redemptive work. In retrospect, I think this is such a shame and a missed opportunity, and I am hoping it will be different for future generations.

And yet, despite my parents not raising me as a Christian, I have known God for as long as I can remember. This knowing Him ran deeper than simply knowing of His existence or having heard about Him once or twice; head knowledge without really knowing Him personally. Somehow, I had a very personal relationship with God. I talked to Him all the time, and I was always aware of my Father in heaven and of Jesus as my friend. As far as I know, there was no sudden event or experience that had caused this. He was just there, very real, and almost tangibly

close. Later on, my parents told me how special they thought it was that I was so outspoken about my faith and so actively involved with God and Jesus already at such a young age. It did cause some struggles, of course, mainly because the choices I made left them puzzled at times. But in the end, the testimony of God's power working in my life has touched them and my younger sister in such a way, that they have also made a conscious decision to follow Jesus, although much later than I did.

In my teenage years, I did experience a moment in which God asked me to make a conscious decision to follow Him. I still remember it very well. Together with some friends, I walked along the shores of

**BUT I KNEW IT** 

**WAS GOD** 

the pond where we used to go for a swim in summertime, when all of a sudden I heard a voice from

heaven, saying: 'Jump into the water, and I will baptize you with My Holy Spirit and fire'. It is hard to describe wat I experienced in that moment as a fifteen-year-old. But I knew it was God. And I knew that by obeying His voice I would be making a conscious decision for Him to be my God. So, I ran onto a nearby pier and jumped right into the water.

When I tried to explain to my friends what had happened, I was met with dubious looks, and I decided not to expand on my experience. Their response instantly made me feel like it was a bit crazy indeed, which is why I've kept quiet about this story of my jump into the water and the audible voice from heaven for a long time. Nevertheless, my life has changed completely from that moment on. And, thankfully, I can now boldly testify that it was God Himself who called me that day. Moreover, God revealing Himself to me – a carefree teen – as the Most High, Him calling me in this way, is one of the things I am most grateful for in my life. Because, as it turned out, I would need Him more than ever during the years that followed.

A Ididn't want to feel the pain

I can't precisely pinpoint when I started to get depressed. To me, there seems to be no clear cause. Both me and my younger sister were raised in a stable, loving environment. My parents had always encouraged us to follow our hearts. With our upbringing, they had laid a beautiful and strong foundation for us to develop a positive self-image and a healthy identity. Moreover, they had helped us to discover and develop our talents. I was a free-spirited child, always lively and cheerful. I was venturous, a doer, and I loved to romp around. Indoors, I enjoyed playing with Lego. Building huts and climbing trees were some of my favorite outdoor activities. I enjoyed playing alongside others, and I remember my childhood as being carefree...

But everything changed when I started high school. Fear and small thinking increasingly infiltrated my thinking. As time went by, I developed a major inferiority complex. In addition, I had a hard time accepting big changes within my social environment. And despite the loving relationship with my parents and sister and the fun friendships I had, feelings of dissociation grew substantially. From the age of seventeen, I developed more and more feelings of depression. The sessions I had with a psychologist at the time, did shed some light on a few of the factors that had played a part in developing a depressive disorder. One of the things that came up for example, was what I call a 'sexual incident' (abuse) that had occurred at a very young age. At the time, I was a very sensitive and deeply introspective girl with an overwhelming

sense of responsibility. I had perfectionistic tendencies, and I naturally took on all sorts of burdens I wasn't meant to carry. Being able to process and work on these issues, and learning how to cope, has been a good first step for me towards recovery during my depressive episode. And I think it is always a good thing to gain insight into how and why depression has come about in your life, so that you can start working on these underlying causes. But I also believe that in most cases there is more to it than just negative emotions or experiences. In my case, I think the spiritual world also played a big part. I was always very sensitive and open to the spiritual world, and I still am. It is part of who I am, and part of the way God has meant, created and called me to be.

But, as a teenager, I lacked resilience. I felt extremely vulnerable, unable to withstand the intense feelings and emotions I was engulfed

by in response to the world around me and the things that took place. I was so overwhelmed by them, that I started developing the belief that I couldn't continue living. As it grew, suicidal thoughts started flooding my mind. I had allowed my whole life to be controlled by a lie, and this lie had now embedded itself so deeply in my heart and mind, that it lowered the threshold for acting on destructive thoughts of suicide considerably.

I HAD ALLOWED My whole life to be controlled by a lie

Thankfully, I can now say that I have developed a healthy resilience out of an identity founded on the truth and love of God. And because of that, the way I respond to my circumstances now is completely different from the way I did when I was a teenager.

I know now that, as the Bible says, we are not fighting against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:12), and that this was the battle that raged on in my life at the time with great intensity. The devil is a master of deception, of influencing our thinking

deceitfully. He does that by using lies and convictions that have arisen from broken and dysfunctional patterns.

I believe that, during this dark period in my life, demonic forces were aggressively trying to undermine my thinking before launching a full-scale attack on the life God had given me. They could do so because God's love and truth were not sufficiently rooted in my life yet. If they would have been, the lies of the enemy could never have gained such a strong foothold in my mind. My identity would have been firmly established on God's Word and His truth, enabling it to stand strong despite all the fiery darts being shot at it by the devil and his helpers.

The forces of darkness are out to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). And they are specifically bent on disrupting or even ruining your Godgiven destiny. Therefore, in order to grow a harvest of misery and destruction, the enemy is trying to sow lies in us already at a young age, and especially at times when we are most vulnerable.

One night, in December 1997, I finally reached a point where I was so overwhelmed by destructive thoughts and emotions, that I made a split-second decision to end my life. I was seventeen years old, and in my despair I could see no other way out. A pitch-black cloud seemed to roll into my mind, blocking out all the light. I was overcome with a deep dark feeling. I remember how, amidst my racing thoughts, there was some sort of buzzing sound in my mind and a voice that kept saying that it was for the better if I would just put an end to my life. It was overwhelming and it paralyzed my thinking and my body. Nevertheless, I started praying to God desperately. He was already my beacon and anchor then. But it didn't bring me clarity, and I simply couldn't distinguish between good and evil in my thinking. A part of me knew these thoughts weren't good thoughts. I suppose every right-minded person, Christian or not, would know deep down inside. At its core, suicide is something totally unnatural after all. Still, I was convinced that my life on earth would bring nothing but suffering, and so to me it seemed best to say goodbye to my earthly life and go to my

Father in heaven. There was a hunting knife in my room that my father once gave me, and I figured I could carry out my plan with it. Quietly I slipped away to my room to actually do it.

I am tired, I am at the end of my rope.
I am giving up, o God.
I have given all I could and all I had to give.
My body cries out, my hart is silent.
My head chooses the lies over truth.

TRANSLATED LYRICS FROM: DE GROOTSTE REST by JOCELYNN
from the album NA REGEN KOMT SCHIJN

3 On the verge

In that intense moment, the moment I wanted to take my own life, I sought God. I ran to Him the way a child who is in pain would run to their earthly father or mother to find protection, love and comfort. God's goodness became my refuge, and I looked for answers in Him. I thought death would liberate me from the pain I was feeling on earth. It may seem odd, but knowing God and His love was the very reason for making the decision to give up on life in my moment of pain.

But God is a God of life, not death. He is a God of love, power and victory, not of fear, powerlessness and defeat. This is a solid, unshakable, absolute truth. So, if I knew God, and if I was completely convinced of His love for me, why was I making this decision at the age of seventeen? Why couldn't I rise above my situation, see how great and loving He is and realize this wasn't the solution? God and His plans are always bigger than our circumstances or the devil's destructive plan. And even though we are living in a broken world, in which ugliness and suffering will inevitably come our way, in Jesus there always is victory. Why couldn't I just see this then? Why did I move towards such an irrational decision when I had Christ as my Redeemer? There is only one answer to these questions: I simply didn't know.

In that respect, my situation showed similarities to the situation of God's people, the people of Israel, when God said: 'My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.' (Hosea 4:6) I will explain what I mean by that. I did know God's love for me already because of my relationship with Him and because of the Holy Spirit, who by then surely lived inside of me.

But I was insufficiently aware of the complete Biblical truth. No one had ever taught me from the Word. Because of that, I didn't know anything about the power of faith, the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2), or the spiritual world. I didn't even know enough about the finished work of Jesus Christ to understand what that meant. I believed in my eventual salvation, but basically I wasn't familiar with the power of the Gospel for my life, for the here and now. Which is why I lacked knowledge about the true identity of the devil and about how to arm myself against the spiritual forces and rulers of darkness.

Surely, I had heard about the devil once or twice as being a character in the Bible and God's opponent, but for some reason I had no idea of the reality of him and of his influence in this world, let alone of his influence in my life. Not knowing who he truly is, blinded me to him and his plan for destruction; I couldn't recognize or discern it. Another thing I was oblivious of, was the ability to tear down strongholds and false arguments (II Corinthians 10:4-5), and so to actually do something about my situation. I held to the crippling belief that I was one with my thoughts, that I was inseparably linked to them. Especially when

depression tightened its grip on me, this subconscious conviction repeatedly made me a victim of my own thoughts and emotions and firmly kept me in this position. It wasn't long before I fully identified with my depression.

If I was having good thoughts, I would be doing fine. If I was having bad thoughts, I would not be doing well. I felt depressed, so I was depressed. I didn't realize at the time that God's truth enables me to stand up against this stronghold of devastating thoughts in my head.

I SUBCONSCIOUSLY
IDENTIFIED WITH MY
DEPRESSION

4 God intervened

But God didn't leave me hanging. He intervened on that day in December 1997, the day on which I had decided to end my life. The moment I wanted to carry out my plan, turned out to be the moment I clearly heard God's voice for the second time in my life. His presence filled my room, my thinking and my soul, and it forcefully pushed all darkness aside.

couldn't continue with my plan any longer because of it. God told me that this wasn't the plan He had for my life. I remember being highly aware of His love in that moment, but even more so of his holiness. A strong realization of God truly being God left me awestruck. A deep sense of peace rolled over me in waves, and I was filled with profound reverence for the Creator of this world.

'This is not the solution to what you are feeling', He told me loud and clear. 'I don't want you here with Me yet.' Then He revealed some things to me that would help me to know and acknowledge that He is God and that it was Him speaking to me. He also strongly urged me to never attempt suicide again, no matter how hard life would be. I couldn't let the thought of it take me hostage any longer. Death could no longer be my imaginary escape, my way out of the toughness of life. Somehow, there was so much love reverberating in God's stern instructions! He gave me a responsibility He knew I could carry. He revealed Himself and His Word to me, so that I would be armed for the battles that were still to come.

I am aware that all of this might raise questions for you. I also had a lot of questions after this experience. Did it really happen? Wasn't it just all imaginary? Why had I experienced God stepping in, while sadly so many others lose their lives to suicide? After all, I didn't have any

proof that my experience had been real. It was a personal experience, nothing more than that. And yet I dare to share about this experience with you, I am eager to. Because the truth is: I live because of Him, because of that impressive moment with Him and His explicit prohibition of killing myself. This divine intervention marked a turning point in my life. Death was no longer an escape or an emergency exit that I always kept open. God had told me unambiguously that I had no permission to come to Him this way.

It was God's way of preventing me from harming myself anyway later in life. He knew what was still to come. When I view my experience in the light of Scripture, I have all the reason to believe that what I have experienced is in line with who God is. It befits God, a personal,

loving God, to interact with me in this way. I was

given a chance, and He had – and to this day still has – a special purpose with that chance. To the praise and glory of His name.

DEATH WAS NO Longer an escape or an emergency exit

Now that I have touched on the heavy topic of suicide, I would like to clarify something right away. My personal experience is no basis for a general doctrine of it. I am convinced that suicide is not the path God would ever

want us to walk down. At the same time.

I don't believe that people who commit suicide in utter despair will inherently be lost, that they could not be forgiven or embraced by God. I know that in some Christian circles suicide is viewed as an unforgiveable sin, but I see no Biblical basis for that. The only unforgiveable sin the Bible describes is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31-32; Luke 12:10). This has nothing to do with suicide. But don't get me wrong, I am not suggesting in any way that God approves of it. On the

contrary. It goes directly against His will and His love for us. People who contemplate suicide often don't really want to die, they are just looking for a way to silence their unimaginable amount of pain. The idea that death could bring liberation is a lie of the devil. God is righteous and full of love. And therefore, I believe that He will have compassion on those who have been driven to this act of desperation. There is no way for us to know what has happened between God and such people in those crucial moments. God is greater than death, and His love doesn't end when people make such decisions from a place of intense pain. Neither can we say with certainty that God always calls to Himself the ones who commit suicide. All we can say based on the Word of God is that there is hope. Romans 8:38-39 tells us that neither death nor life shall be able to separate us from the love of God. Us Christians may realize that death doesn't have the final say. Through Jesus' resurrection. God has dealt with death. Death is an enemy, but a defeated one. In Christ we have the hope of eternal life. The Author of Life never intended for us to take our own life. He doesn't want us to harm ourselves.

A story we find in Acts 16 paints a striking picture of God's desire for us to live. The apostle Paul is locked up in prison when a great earthquake causes all the prison doors to swing open. The guard, thinking all the prisoners have escaped, decides to kill himself. But then Paul shouts: 'Don't harm yourself! We are all here!' He tries to change the guard's mind. He shows him that there is a reason to live, and not much later he is able to lead the guard and his entire family to Christ.

Let's take on the same attitude Paul had. Let's make sure that people who have suicidal thoughts feel free to talk about it and to share their story with us. And let's make sure that we don't leave those who have lost a loved one to suicide to themselves with all their questions and sorrow. Let's tell people with our words and actions that they are loved, and that there is hope and power in the truth and love of God.

5 Recurring battle

My life remained challenging after God's intervention. The destructive thoughts and the depression I was having didn't simply disappear overnight. I would be depressed for eleven more years. With ups and downs. Every now and then I hear stories of people who were instantly healed from depression, in a way similar to how God intervened when I wanted to commit suicide. But somehow this didn't happen in my life; my depression wasn't over just like that. I didn't understand. Why did I have to fight so much? Why had God not taken this depression away from me instantaneously? It felt as if He had not only taken away my escape route but had also locked me up together with a monster.

But slowly things would start to shift. Shortly after God had stepped into my situation, I met some people who were also followers of Jesus. Through them, I got involved with a house church. This church taught on topics like the spiritual world in a way true to the Biblical description, and its tight-knit community felt like home to me straight way. I learned more about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, but also about the reality of the powers and principalities of the realm of darkness that are out to steal, kill, and destroy under satan's command. I was also taught that Christians have been given a spiritual armor (Ephesians 6) along with the authority to stand up against the powers of darkness in Jesus' name. Because of this, I could see the spiritual world I had experienced all my life in a whole new light. Also, my attitude towards depression changed. No longer did I feel powerless against that diabolic monster. Instead, I felt continuously protected by the armor of God.

I always compare my situation then to David's situation when he was facing the giant Goliath, armed with just a few little stones and a sling. With God all things are possible!. Knowledge of the spiritual world and our authority as Christians is very good and effective, as long as it is applied in a right (Biblical) way. At that time, I still had to learn how to do so.

To this day, I am convinced that acknowledging and discerning the spiritual world is a very important step in the fight against depression. I believe this is also Biblical. However, there is also a danger to this approach. When we start labeling every battle or difficulty in life as a mere spiritual attack, we may be at risk of a spiritual burnout eventually. Over-spiritualizing challenges we face is not an entirely Biblical approach to warfare and suffering, nor to depression. But it has been my way of dealing with it for a long time. I simply didn't know any better. Besides, it already was a giant leap forward for me. No longer was I the helpless, powerless victim. I was able to make a stand against depression, able to fight it.

Unfortunately, this fight turned out to be an uphill battle that left me spiritually exhausted without bringing about deep changes in my life. I was fighting, but somehow I couldn't break free. Worse still, over time depression would drag me down deeper and deeper into its abyss. I started to feel like a victim of depression all over again, and I grew increasingly weary of fighting. For a long time, I couldn't understand why I just seemed to be muddling along. The people around me also didn't seem to know how to break the cycle. Time after time, my situation made me and those around me feel frustrated and desperate. But somewhere down the line, based on the Word of God and my own experiences and process, I came to the conclusion that this explanation of spiritual warfare I had been given wasn't going to cut it. It offered way too narrow a view of how to engage enemies like depression the way God intends us to. Because, despite everything that had happened, despite all of the sessions I had with God, the countless prayers I prayed or battles I fought, I regularly relapsed into depressive thoughts, emotions and patterns. Blaming the devil for my ugly thoughts and feelings didn't have the desired effect. In fact, I think doing this oftentimes gave the devil the opportunity to draw attention to himself, so that I couldn't focus on God in peace to embrace His love and truth. I couldn't seem to find a way to escape. Depression had my life, thinking and emotions in a chokehold. Something had to change. But what?

When life is tough on me, the storm blows me over.

And the hottesr fire seems to consume me at times.

When the river washes over me and I am too tired to move that mountain.

TRANSLATED LYRICS FROM: DE GROOTSTE REST by JOCELYNN

from the album NA REGEN KOMT SCHIJN

6 Fight or flight!

For years I fought my way through life. There were good times and bad times. The good times gave me a breather, a chance to recharge. They always sparked hope in me. Was I finally out of the woods? But sooner or later depression would come back. I was always so disappointed when that happened, mostly in myself.

wasted no time in taking up the fight against my depression, thoughts and feelings. Every fight I gave it my all. Time after time. I tried to force myself to start feeling differently. All the while I seemed desperate for other people's affirmation. But even though I was often affirmed and encouraged with loving and positive words, these words were no match for the endless flow of negative words I released over myself. My negative self-image made me a bottomless pit. Positive words, no matter how many, couldn't change anything about that, and my problems remained unchanged.

Spiritually, a crisis always went hand in hand with a combative attitude towards the rulers and powers of darkness. Because I truly experienced such setbacks in my thoughts and emotions as spiritual attacks. Based on the Bible and what I had learned up to that point, I had become fully convinced satan had to leave me alone, simply because I was a child of God. Fights I picked with my spiritual enemies often resulted in desperate shouting, telling satan he had to go, while clinging to the name of Jesus as my only hope and beacon. Sometimes this worked. But depression would always come back. In those moments, when the fighting never seemed to cease, I always ran to God. I begged Him to take this awful feeling away from me. And in my despair and

powerlessness I often got mad at Him. After all, He was the Almighty, so why didn't He just fix this for me? Why would the Father, who was supposed to want what was best for me, let me struggle like this? He didn't want me to end my life, that much was clear. But why wasn't I doing any better?

Although I hurled my questions and accusations at Him from time to time, God never abandoned me. Never. I always felt love when I came to Him. Always. His presence never failed to bring me peace. But despite of it, despite the love of God and the intimacy with Him I had experienced, the very next day would usually drag me back into the same battle as the day before. Apparently, I was fighting this battle the wrong way. I just didn't know how to do it the right way.

In the summer of 2008, my depression got so severe that I could hardly muster the strength to go to work. At the time I was working as physiotherapist at a primary care practice, while studying for a master's degree in Orthopedic Manual Therapy on the side. For weeks I had been considering calling in sick. But my sense of responsibility proved to be stronger than this thought time after time. Moreover, what was I supposed to do? My work seemed to keep me going. I really don't know how I've managed to function during this time. To be honest, I don't think I was functioning to the best of my abilities. I could barely hide my mental state for the people around me. When I arrived at work in the morning, I usually didn't say anything to my colleagues for the first two hours, unless it was necessary. By all means, I tried to avoid contact with them, although I really liked my colleagues. The battle raging in my mind had gotten so intense, that it almost literally made me feel sick. And I was afraid that the dams would break if I would speak to one of them. My colleagues knew I wasn't doing well, but I never shared my deepest struggles with them. Somehow, I was able to maintain a professional attitude towards my patients. As soon as I was about to receive my first patient of the day, I flipped the switch. But over time, keeping up appearances became harder and harder, and I realized I couldn't hold out much longer. While driving to work one day in August 2008, I got so overwhelmed by ugly thoughts and emotions that I wanted to slam my car into the guardrail. I didn't do it, thankfully, but I did pull over in the emergency lane right next to it. I think I have never yelled at God as loud as I did then. Hitting the wheel as hard as I could, I screamed uncontrollably at the top of my lungs until I couldn't scream any longer. Once I got quiet again, it seemed as if the whole world around me had become quiet. It was the same kind of peaceful silence I had experienced when I wanted to commit suicide as a seventeen-year-old and God intervened. And again, while sitting in my car in the emergency lane along highway A15, I heard His voice. He said: 'Tessa, if you don't seem to be afraid of death, what makes you so afraid of life?'

This question caught me off guard, and I had no answer to it. No one had ever asked me that question, nor had I ever asked myself. God continued, saying: 'If you're not afraid of death anyway, why don't you use that as your motivation to live life to the fullest? Not being afraid of death means you've got nothing to lose, so what is it that you're really afraid of?' These questions hit me like a ton of bricks. I started crying, and although I didn't have the answers to them right away, I decided to keep pondering them. In an instant, God's direct questions allowed me to see my fears in a different light.

The same day, one of my colleagues asked me if I would be interested in living and working on the island of Curaçao for a while. Well aware of my struggle, she wondered if I might want to leave the Netherlands for some time, so that I could break away from the battle I was fighting. She had come across a job opportunity at a rehabilitation center and thought of me because she knew how much I missed working in a setting like that. I knew an opportunity to start over with a clean slate had presented itself to me, and I decided to take it. Within a week after sending the rehabilitation center an email, I had a job interview. Six weeks later I was on a plane. With the help of some friends, I had arranged everything. I had quit my job and my

master's program in Manual Therapy, and I had found myself a place to live on Curaçao. At the beginning of October 2008, I left with just one suitcase. No longer afraid of life... so it seemed.

## I will never forsake you.

**- GOD** 

7 Choosing life

The first few weeks on Curaçao were tough. Everything was new and thus scary. Just like in every other scary situation, my first response was to run. This flight response had become so deeply ingrained into my life, that it was automatically and inevitably triggered the minute I experienced fear or anxiety.

I know now that our brain is simply wired this way, to default to a certain pattern in challenging situations. So, it makes complete sense that all I wanted was to go back home as soon as possible the minute I was overwhelmed by all sorts of strong emotions because of my new situation. We humans tend to think that we are capable of rational decision-making most of the times, but I have come to realize that this is often not the case. Emotions are extremely powerful, and they arise in direct (subconscious) response to what we truly believe deep down. This is also why God wants to fill our heart. Because our heart is the place where we make decisions, but also the place where our beliefs and fears reside. The more God can fill our 'control room' with His love and truth, the less fear can rule and direct our emotions. But I wasn't aware of this at the time. My only anchor was what God had asked me before I left for Curação, the questions that had made me go there in the first place. Everything inside of me seemed to scream with fear, but with His questions God had also caused something quite new to take root in my life: faith! I now believed that I had nothing to lose, and that I could give myself and life a chance by no longer allowing myself to be led by fear, but by choosing to let God lead me instead. So, despite making a frantic call to my parents shortly after my arrival, telling them I wanted to return

home right away, I gave it a chance. My parents had encouraged me and told me they were proud of me anyway, even if I would go back home. 'But you're there now anyway,' they had said, 'so what have you got to lose?'

I chose not to obey fear. I didn't deny it, but I braved it time after time and started doing what I had come for. I got to know the island, met the people there, got trained at my new workplace, made new friends, and day by day I found out more about the way of life on the island.

Fear was obtrusively present with everything I did during my first few weeks on Curaçao. Even the smallest tasks can be a challenge when your brain and your body are screaming at you (that is what it felt like) and you feel everything but the courage to push through. However, something had changed. I now made my decisions based on faith, based on God's faith in me, based on the questions He had asked me. Moreover, I knew I had a home front of family members and friends who supported me and who would take care of me if I really couldn't make it work. As time went by, my body and mind calmed down.

I CHOSE NOT

TO OBEY FEAR

My work became 'normal', life became 'normal', and I actually started to enjoy conquering my fears again and again. And every time I did, it proved to me that exactly the opposite of what my fears wanted me to believe was true. As a result, they became less and less prominent in my thinking.

I had been able to let go of everything in the Netherlands, and it seemed as if I had started to flourish in my new environment. In fact, I was able to function very well, even without taking antidepressants. Curaçao seemed to have wiped away my depression step by step. Or had it slowly vanished because of my decision to not let myself be tossed back and forth by my fear of life and the unknown any longer, or the

decision to develop new habits and patterns that had a much more positive effect on the way I was feeling?

Maybe it was a combination of these things. Either way, I was doing well. I enjoyed the people around me, the relaxed atmosphere, the culture and the things I did together with friends. And even when circumstances gave me a hard time, I could still enjoy life and the things I did. Eventually these circumstances forced me to return to the Netherlands earlier than planned, in April 2009. Leaving Curaçao made me feel sad, and I noticed I was having a hard time saying goodbye to this beautiful island and ending the wonderful time I had been having there, probably because I had been feeling so good. I always look back on this time in my life with great joy.

After moving back to the Netherlands, I really had to readjust. I could get my old job back, and having a job right away was a huge blessing to me. My parents, sister and some dear friends lovingly welcomed and supported me, and they were all very happy that I had returned. But I relapsed into my old depressive patterns, thoughts and emotions just as quickly as I had started doing really well on Curação. In no time, I found myself in a hopeless place again. And in a matter of weeks, I had a doctor's appointment, started seeing a psychologist, and was told to start taking antidepressants again. I was back to square one. At least, that was what it felt like. During one of my conversations with my doctor, he asked me if I could figure out why I didn't seem to suffer from depression on Curação. It could be the simplest things like the warm climate and the relaxed culture, anything that could help me find keys that might help me in my struggle with depression. He knew that I didn't want to be dependent on medication for the rest of my life. But he also impressed on me that I shouldn't make a continuous fight out of that, and that I had to learn to see medication as a temporary aid in the process.

8 Transformation

For weeks on end, I resisted the idea of having to be in the Netherlands without even knowing it. I was grieving, but I wasn't aware of that. I missed Curaçao and the wonderful feeling I had there, but at the same time I knew that going back wouldn't solve anything. The first time I left for Curaçao, I did so to break through fear and choose life. But if I would go back now, I would only do so to run from my fear and unpleasant feeling. I was well aware that it wouldn't bring me the solution to my depression problem. Therefore, I took my seemingly hopeless situation to God once more. I was tired of running, but also so tired of fighting. So I asked God: 'What now, Lord? What should I do for heaven's sake?'.

As time went by, something changed inside of me because I remained stuck in resisting and fighting my emotions, making it harder and harder to feel good. This threw the door wide open for depression once more. When we look at the way the brain works and brain plasticity, a relapse like this perhaps isn't really surprising. The cells in our brains, the neurons, communicate with each other through neural pathways, and they adjust in response to our thoughts, emotions and behaviors. New behavior causes new neural pathways to be formed. Repetition of this behavior will eventually cause these paths to become deeper and deeper ingrained into our mind. Emotions play a very decisive role in this process. They can be quite intense, and they actually reinforce the ingraining of certain patterns. The more, the longer and the more intense a certain emotion occurs, the deeper the patterns linked to it will become ingrained. They become

automatisms. The deeper these automatisms are ingrained, the more you will (subconsciously) identify with them, and the harder it will be to break certain thought patterns and quit certain behaviors.

Therefore, wanting to break through (depressive) patterns can quickly start feeling like a fight with yourself. As you find yourself stuck in patterns of depression for an extended period of time, it becomes increasingly difficult to truly believe that there is another way. And yet, precisely this is the key. Through it all, we must truly start believing again that there is another way, consciously detach our identity from negative and destructive patterns, and become deeply rooted in God's truth and love.

And that was exactly what God wanted to teach me. I clearly remember how I stepped into the hallway of the practice where I worked one day at the end of summer, 2009, the day God would lead me to deeper insight. For weeks I had been in a bad mood every morning. I used to feel like there was a mammoth on top of my head, or as if the ground could swallow me any moment.

Usually, I would quietly sneak into my room, while staring at the floor on my way there to avoid eye contact. Besides not feeling well, I was dealing with severe procrastination which affected not only my work, but also my punctuality; I could barely still make it to work on time. Procrastination and a morning mood reinforce each other because they both stem from avoidance as a coping mechanism. This cocktail of negativity guaranteed a dramatically bad start of the day.

This morning I came in two minutes early at most. But instead of keeping my eyes glued to the floor, my attention was immediately drawn to a little note on the wall over by the elevators. I will never

forget it. It was a green note, and on it was written in red: 'A joyful heart brings healing and a bitter heart causes illness.' It was a loose interpretation of Proverbs 17:22, which says: 'A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.' I have no idea who had placed this note there, but God used it instantly. It seemed as if I had been having a twenty-minute conversation with Him during the two minutes (at most) I had been standing there.

God asked me: 'Tessa, are you aware that being grumpy is a sin?' I wished the ground would swallow me up... Was He being serious? He continued: 'Are you also aware that your attitude keeps you imprisoned in your situation, and that it stems from bitterness?' In my experience, God's questions were always meant to make me aware of something and never to make me feel guilty. For me this has become the touchstone for every word He speaks, because I see the same principal in the Bible. God doesn't shy away from confronting us with our behavior and with matters of the heart that are not in line with His will. He desires to always bring us into a relationship with Himself, and through this relationship He wants to lead us to freedom. He wants to free us from the yoke of sin, because sin brings death instead of life. This is exactly why Jesus died on the cross for us: so that we may live! The devil, on the other hand, wants to knock us down and make us drown in feelings of guilt, shame and condemnation with no way out. It is the enemy who keeps reminding us of our mistakes and keeps accusing us, even when we have already gone to God and have received His forgiveness. But with God, love is always palpable, also when He corrects. Repentance leads to conversion and conversion leads to freedom and life.

Because of the way He confronted me, I could see things for what they really were and repent of the thoughts and patterns in my life that kept me hostage. After this moment I had with God, I stepped into my treatment room as a brand-new person. Something had fundamentally changed inside of me, and in the weeks that followed I started experiencing more and more deliverance and victory in my life. I had

never experienced anything like this. But if you're thinking that this was some kind of magical moment in which God suddenly and supernaturally threw depression off of me before ending the fairytale with a 'happy ever after', I might have to disappoint you. Because for the transformation that occurred, I also had to do my part. God had given me insights and even practical assignments to do so. I will share these with you in the second part of this book, but I can already tell you that they have changed my life. God planted His Word in my heart and it started to bear fruit. But that didn't happen without me choosing to obey Him and to do what He told me to do, despite everything I was feeling. His Word will never return to Him void, but it will accomplish what He pleases (Isaiah 55:11). And that is exactly what it did! But I had to be willing to pay the right price for this fruit in my life. That is why I'm not only sharing my story with you, but also will be taking you through the things God taught me. I believe that the things I learned can also help you to realize what depression is and does. And I believe that you can learn to disarm depression daily with the tools God has given us besides prayer and professional help. It all starts with living from God's truth and love for us. The insights I have received through my process of healing and in the years that followed (even up to this day) can be very helpful for people who struggle with depression themselves, but also for their loved ones and the (Christian) professionals around them. My testimony shows how God's Word can bear fruit in one's life, and it is my desire that it will do just that in the lives of many. Proverbs 17:22 became my personal motto. And it served as the Biblical foundation for my deep transformation, an experience I would love to share about with you! I hope and pray that God will touch you and transform you through my story and testimony. And that the practical lessons I have learned may prove to be helpful tools for you as well on your journey towards hope and victory.

# A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.

- PROVERBS 17:22



1 Overcoming depression

We have now come to the practical part of my story. In this, I will share with you the insights that have helped me and explain how they can help you too. I do this because I strongly believe in the power of testimonies. If you would daily be surrounded by testimonies of people who have conquered something in their life, chances are that you will start believing that there is victory for you too! Seeing and hearing stir up faith!

Ctudies have even shown that books that incite awareness and Self-activation are effective in helping to fight mild to severe forms of depression, because they help to recognize unhelpful and destructive habits and patterns and break them for good. And that is also what I hope to achieve with writing this book. Sometimes we can be stuck in the idea that something is impossible, simply because we have never experienced, heard or seen that it definitely is possible. Until someone all of a sudden just does it. We then want to know exactly how that person did it, because we sense that there are important keys hidden in his or her story. He or she did something different, discovered something that has helped to advance. We can share such keys with one another, and so pull each other along on the path of victory. Faith spurs us on. It gets us moving. And the keys from the testimonies of others will give our faith a practical application. They help us to open specific doors in our life. With that being said, don't expect quick fixes or one-size-fits-all methods. My testimony, or any other testimony, can never be copy-pasted into someone else's process, including yours. But at the same time, that shouldn't be a reason for you to keep telling yourself that there are no keys available to you to help you advance. Your story is never too complicated, too difficult or too insurmountable to receive what God wants to give you through the testimonies of others. Keys offer opportunities and solutions, and, with that, they are opening different doors to freedom. But in order to get to this freedom, you must have to be willing to actually start using these keys and to start opening doors with God's help. No

one else can do that for you. You simply can't live from someone else's faith. But others can plant seeds of faith and fan confidence in you, and you can certainly use their story to raise yourself up. In the same way, I'm hoping my story will help raise you up and reach higher grounds. But again, in the end, faith has to be anchored deeply in your own heart for you to truly experience transformation

YOU CAN'T LIVE FROM SOMEONE ELSE'S FAITH

If that doesn't happen, your faith can be robbed, because it hasn't been able to grow deep roots (Matthew 13:20-21). For something to take root, we must really let it sink in and live it out. We must chew on it, wrestle with it. You must go through it entirely. I also had to work my way through the process of rooting, of internalization. Therefore, this message isn't just some empty words. God made me aware of what was happening. He taught me when to take action based on what is good and true, even though this was often contrary to everything I was feeling. He taught me to stop fighting the lies in my thinking in my own strength, and to answer them with faith instead. He has never asked me to drown out my emotions or to push them aside. All He did was simply asking me to put them in the right position in regard to His love and truth.

In this process, the following two Bible verses proved to be crucial, and I kept internalizing them:

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Romans 12:2)

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, 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. (II Corinthians 10:4-5)

Eventually, God taught me to think and live from a place of victory more and more. Thus, I discovered for myself: 'Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.' (Romans 8:37) He also showed me how to tell myself the right story, a story that wasn't based on my own understanding, but on His truth. But in order to be able to tell yourself the right story, you will have to become familiar with it and start believing it first. You will have to be willing to accept it as the truth for your life.

For me, the way of faith wasn't always easy. It was a battle. It meant choosing trust, perseverance and discipline while I felt defeated. But God showed me along the way that, with Him, anything is possible for him who believes, also when it didn't feel like that. It was a journey of sanctification and of character development that wasn't always pleasant, but o so crucial. Time after time, God showed me that He is bigger than my hopeless feelings. And by doing so, He led me to strength, transformation and victory.

I can't fill you, or touch and transform you, but God can by His love and truth. It is my prayer therefore, that God will touch you through my story, and that He will do His work in you so that you may experience healing, restoration and victory. That keys will be handed to you, just like keys have been handed to me. That, together with Him, you may discover how these keys fit the right locks in faith and open doors to freedom for you. And that you will not only start believing, but also start experiencing that there is another way.

10 Tell yourself the right story

I am not my depression. That insight, that 'story' has been tremendously helpful to me. At the same time, I have also learned that I don't have to suppress or drown out my emotions. On the contrary, by acknowledging them you can actually do something with them. A life of victory over depression doesn't necessarily mean that you will never again be weighed down by negative thoughts or emotions.

A life of victory means that you will start telling yourself the right story based on God's truth, despite your situation, thoughts and emotions.

What's more, the Bible doesn't teach us to deny our emotions. In fact, God invites us to come to Him with all our sorrows and difficulties. So, emotions do have a place, but God doesn't want us to be ruled by them any longer. He wants us to learn to rule them.

Jesus is inviting us, saying: 'Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.' (Matthew 11:28-29)

His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He wants you to trade *your* yoke for *His* yoke, *your* story for *His* story. So that His story can lead you out of defeat and onto the path of victory. The first step you can take in this process is choosing to no longer identify with depression. You are not your depression. You are so much more than that!

The correct story is this: you are extremely valuable to God! Crucial to receiving this truth is that you realize that your value does not depend on your achievements, mistakes or good deeds. Neither does your value depend on what other people think of you, or on the times you felt acknowledged or rejected. By no means! God loves you, and He has already known about your imperfections for a long time. After all, He is the one who created you and who knew you already before you were born. See for yourself: 'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.' (Psalm 139:13-14. NIV)

God is more than ready to take a chance on you and me with all our problems, mistakes and shortcomings. His love doesn't depend on these things. Sometimes you might have to remind yourself of this, especially when your heart has been poisoned by lies. The Book of Proverbs says: 'Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.' (Proverbs 4:23, NIV)

If you don't experience God's love, you may start telling yourself that God doesn't love you. Consequently, the mind will become entangled in lies and strongholds of false arguments. This mind needs God's new truth. It is very important to instruct your soul in what God has to say. You must make clear to yourself that you shouldn't listen to satan's lies about God and His love for you any longer. If you keep telling yourself the wrong story, chances are that you will bombard yourself or will let yourself be bombarded with accusations after every mistake you make, that you will develop low self-esteem, and, ultimately, deny yourself access to love, forgiveness and growth. Allow God to renew your thinking by planting His truth inside of you, so that you will start telling yourself the right story concerning His love for you.

Maybe you already know very well that God loves you and strongly experience it as well, but somehow you still struggle with low self-esteem or feelings of inferiority. I have been struggling with these

issues for a long time, probably because I didn't derive my sense of self-worth from God's love, but from the recognition and affirmation of others. Somewhere in my mind I had made a wrong connection. This caused me to partially be trapped in a lie, even though I absolutely knew and felt God's love for me. My self-confidence wasn't built on the words God spoke over me, but on the things people said about or to me.

If I was praised for things I did well, I would start to feel more confident. But if I wasn't recognized for the things I did or for who I was, or even was rejected, it would severely impact my self-confidence and sense of self-worth negatively. When added to the equation, rejection always seemed to carry a lot more weight than affirmation. Negative words often affect us much deeper than positive and edifying words. I have spent a lot of time trying to figure out why, and I think the answer isn't all that complicated. It's simply much easier for us to accept something we already believe deep down.

Perhaps this sounds familiar: ten people can tell you you're valuable, but you still listen to that one voice in your head that tells you you're not... Among all the voices you hear, your own is usually the one you're most familiar with and most trusting of, whether this voice is speaking to you in your mind or audibly through your own mouth. Therefore, your voice has to come in agreement with God's voice. Your mind needs to become filled with His thoughts, and the words that come out of your mouth must be consistent with His truth based on the faith in your heart. First and foremost, you must receive faith in your heart, and this faith will start bearing fruit in your life through your actions. Because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. In other words: it's very difficult to think or speak other words than the ones you truly believe deep in your heart. So, start with your heart and accept God's truth for your life there, even if everything still feels far removed from this truth.

Telling yourself the correct story based on God's truth is just as important as choosing to no longer identify with depression. But you can only start doing that once you know what that truth for you is. Therefore, giving your undivided attention to God's Word is extremely important. Immerse yourself in Biblical truth, so that your heart and mind can fill themselves with faith.

The words God once spoke to the people of Israel also apply to you and me because God hasn't changed. He has our best interest at heart, He means no harm. He wants to give us a hopeful future (Jeremiah 29:11). I think Jeremiah verse 13 also contains a wonderful promise of God. Here He says: 'You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.' (NIV) God will let us find Him as soon as we give our search of Him our all. He is willing to give Himself to us completely, it's what He loves doing most. He wants to make His will known to us. He wants to unite His heart with ours. He wants to pour out His truth in us. He wants to touch our life and transform it with His love.

#### YOU ARE NOT YOUR DEPRESSION

11 Fight the right fight

The minute you realize that you are not your depression, that God loves you, and you recognize that depression behaves like an enemy in your life, you can stand up to depression.

Three powerful Bible verses that can help you with that are: James 4:7, 2 Corinthians 10:5 and Ephesians 6:11-18.

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5, ESV)

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer

and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:11-18)

For a long time, I thought I had to scream loudly at depression to make 'it' go away.

lapproached it as being a spiritual power (a demon) that I had to rebuke in Jesus' name every time it appeared. But then I learned that it works differently, and this new insight has proven to be extremely

THE TRUTH

helpful. The three verses mentioned above became important keys within my new approach, but I still had to learn how to use them in the right way. These verses teach us that we shouldn't scream, but that we can resist the devil – and. **WILL SET YOU FREE** with that, also depression - by submitting to God and focusing on Him. They take our eyes off of our own strength and the enemy and help us fix our gaze on God and His strength.

It is God's truth that sets us free (John 8:31-32), not our own strength or screaming. I'm not saying that we can't use our words and our authority in Christ to remind the devil of the truth. On the contrary. Ephesians 6:18 teaches us that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. So, when we speak the Word of God, the words we speak function as a sword with which we can take the enemy down. This is because these words carry God's authority and power.

But screaming, like I did many times, didn't spring from that Godgiven authority, but from powerlessness, frustration or fear. Because of that, I might have been screaming things that were true, but in those moments they were not supported by faith and confidence in God, often causing the words to be hollow and powerless. I basically engaged in a direct power struggle with the devil and tried to prove myself to him, and I thought I had to scream louder and louder to make him listen. But thankfully, that isn't the case.

Although God has always supported me in those moments of desperate fighting, this constant struggle wasn't His ultimate goal for my life. His goal for my life and yours is that we become His mature sons and daughters. Being mature also means that we are no longer ignorant but have learned how to function independently by His will, power and delegated authority. In the Book of Psalms, we can already read about this. Psalm 84:5 says: 'Blessed is the man whose strength is in You.' A Dutch translation I use every now and then says: Blessed are those who know and experience Your power.

I had to learn to use the spiritual armor the right way. That also meant that I allowed God to train me and teach me to fight the right fight, and that I quit exhausting myself while fighting the wrong battle. Screaming out of powerlessness, frustration and anger is precisely that: fighting the wrong battle. It is a trap, getting us stuck in the position the devil wants us to be in. This way, he can make sure that we are completely focused on him. He aims to keep us occupied and powerless, because as long as he succeeds in doing so, he can keep filling our mind with lies and ultimately keep us stuck in a victim mentality.

The Consciously break out of your victim mentality

When you're stuck in a victim mentality, you believe that most things in life just happen to you without you being able to influence these events in any way. An almost automatic consequence of that is that you feel like you have no control over the thoughts and emotions that are triggered in response to your circumstances.

You think: My feelings are a direct consequence of what has happened to me, so I can't help feeling this way. Such thoughts will quickly get you stuck in a feeling of defeat, and before you know it, you can't believe there is a solution for you. It is a negative spiral that robs you of all hope, and all perspective of a better future. You might even start to believe that the hope and victory mentioned in the stories of other people are just not in the cards for you.

Let me start by saying that no one deliberately chooses to feel depressed. But that shouldn't keep you from breaking out of a victim mentality as soon as you notice you have one.

Consciously choosing to do so is crucial. However, doing that doesn't mean you can never suffer from depression again. I just hope that you will start to realize that you are capable of making decisions that will rob depression of the chance, basis and authority to keep controlling your life.

Nevertheless, depression isn't going to give up just like that, but it will keep trying to force itself upon you. Especially when it has become a strong pattern or stronghold in your life. If this is the case, don't

feel guilty about it. The exhortations of this book to act and to make good decisions were not meant to bring you guilt and condemnation. Instead, their purpose is to move you in the direction of freedom. Jesus didn't come to condemn. He came to set us free by proclaiming the truth, so that we could receive it and start renewing our mind with it. With a renewed mind, we can rid ourselves of the lies that keep us trapped in depression, shame, guilt and feelings of failure.

## YOU DON'T HAVE TO REMAIN A VICTIM OF DEPRESSION

13 Stop feeding your depression

Depression devours everything it can to feed itself. That's why you have to starve your depression in a sense. You have to stop fighting it, because fighting depression is a trap. It will steal all of your attention and make you feel more and more exhausted. Depression will devour your thoughts, emotions and eventually your entire identity, all the while keeping you trapped in a power struggle. The harder you fight it, the more you will become entangled in it.

clearly remember how my fighting only pulled me deeper and deeper into a feeling of defeat and hopelessness, until I ended up being utterly desperate and exhausted. I felt totally lost. And that is depression's ultimate goal, to make you completely lose touch with yourself. Depression is a liar. It will tell you terrible things about yourself in such a way that you will start believing them. It steals away truth and destroys the life in you.

Don't let depression claim and take possession of your emotions any longer. Don't hide away your feelings, but place them under God's transforming truth and love time after time. I believe God wants you to bring your feelings before Him so that He can step into your pain with His love, and comfort you and bind up your wounds. He doesn't want the lie to have the chance to ruin your life any longer. That is why He teaches us to take authority over it and to tear down strongholds made of lies together with Him. We can put an end to depression, while

bringing our emotions to God and processing emotions in healthy way.

But whatever you do, stop fighting depression directly, and don't give it the attention it illegally claims any longer. You see, depression wants to build a stronghold in your life. As long as you focus on it, you can't feed yourself with faith. Depression knows that. It won't surrender without a fight, and it will offer resistance in every aspect, from your emotions to what you are physically experiencing.

Je zult merken dat depressie, zodra je deze stap gaat zetten, alleen maar harder om je aandacht zal gaan schreeuwen. Ze weet dat ze het niet kan winnen van geloof. Ze vecht dus om jouw aandacht. Kies ervoor je aandacht in plaats daarvan op God en zijn Woord te richten.



14 Step out of depression the way you've stepped into it

In most cases, people can make their way out of a depression the same way they got caught up in it. Let me explain. When something has had your undivided attention for an extended period of time, a fundamental change occurs in your mind. For example, if you tend to worry day in day out, your worries become deeply embedded in your heart and mind. And eventually, they will start ruling over you.

Leverything you pay attention to grows, and it's no different with depression. It will often nestle in your mind and in your heart because it has been able to feed on unprocessed worries, pain, sorrow, fears, losses, or traumas for weeks, months or even years.

Neuroscientists have discovered that prolonged exposure of the mind to negative thoughts can damage the brain and even the body. It literally harms our physiology. The more we think a certain thought, the deeper it will become ingrained in the neural network of our brain with terrible consequences. This shows that depression doesn't only originate from certain diseases or a disruption of the chemical processes within the brain. Also severe, long-term stress, fear, worries or negativity can be at the root of it. Depression is a stronghold that firmly establishes itself not only mentally, but also physically, possibly resulting in a wide variety of physical problems.

So, if you have given worries, a certain tragedy, (emotional) trauma, loss, or certain fears your undivided attention for weeks or months,

chances are that something has actually changed in your brain and in your body. And over time, it will become harder and harder to shift your focus. The only way to break out of this negative spiral, is to start doing the opposite by giving God's truth and love your undivided attention.

That is what God taught me, when He showed me that little green note with red letters back in 2009. The note that referred to Proverbs 17:22, which says: 'A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.' At the time, I was severely depressed. I felt very bad, but I didn't know why. As far as I knew, my depression

**GIVE GOD'S TRUTH** 

had no direct cause. Therefore, I also had no idea how to come out of it. I had done everything I could think of, but my condition only seemed to grow worse.

But with this note, God in His love showed me that my depression was sustained by my own behavior and by bitterness in my heart.

I had developed strong depressive patterns, and because of that, it had become a stronghold in my life. It no longer needed any reason to well up. Depression largely sustained itself automatically. I wasn't aware of this at all, and so it could fester. Only when God revealed this to me, all of a sudden I realized what was going on.

And with this key, God opened a door for me, allowing me to take back control. First and foremost, by repenting of my bitterness and subsequently renewing my thinking and aligning it with His truth.

God calls all of us to renew our thinking. The Bible says: 'And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God' (Romans 12:2).

Being confronted with your own role in depression can be painful, especially when God points out certain sins in your life. However, He will never leave you in that pain. Instead, He will always lovingly bring you onto the path of repentance, forgiveness and, with that, victory.

15 Stand up and keep standing

Make a decision today. Decide: depression is not going to have the final say. Not now, not ever. This is about your life. So, never give up! This choice will bring about a radical change, and it will help you to keep standing tall when all hell seems to break loose. Hold on to this decision and don't let depression provoke you any longer to fight the wrong fight. Be careful not to let anything rob you of this powerful decision. Focus on God and His Word, and learn to fill yourself with faith, so that God's voice inside your mind will be louder than the voice of depression.

There is a reason the Bible tells us that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). God's Word is alive, and it was meant for active use. In other words: read it, study it, speak it out loud, sing it, ponder it, and pray about it to God. Because this will edify the life inside of you. It's all the more powerful when you use your own voice to speak words of life from God's Word over yourself out loud. It directly opposes the depression, that, after all, wants to produce a fruit of death in your life.

In all circumstances, choose to let God's truth also be yours. I realize and know like no other how hard this can be, but it is crucial to disarming depression. When depression is raging against you in your mind, keep standing in this firm decision to not let it have the final say, and keep focusing on the voice of God again and again. The Bible promises

you: 'Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.' (James 4:7)

# LET GOD'S VOICE BE LOUDER THAN THE VOICE OF DEPRESSION!

16 Plant seeds of faith

When everything around you seems to be shrouded in darkness and everything you do apparently makes matters worse, you better stop fighting and start planting seeds of faith instead. These seeds of faith are words or verses full of truth that you fully focus on. You want those seeds to be planted in your heart and sprout.

y accepting God's Word as truth, in a sense you are cultiva-Dting the ground in your heart in which these seeds can sprout. By constantly directing your attention to them, you water and fertilize the soil. Actively reading the Bible, writing down verses for yourself and meditating on them (thinking and praying about them), will allow the seeds of faith to sprout, take root and grow. Eventually, they will start bearing fruit. That fruit will make our faith visible and tangible. We will start experiencing the reality of it more and more, causing our feelings to change over time as well. But this process isn't always easy: even though we know that it will help us eventually, it doesn't always feel like that right away. Just like growing any other crop, growing a harvest of faith takes time. Consequently, it requires a lot of patience and perseverance, especially at the beginning of the process, when nothing seems to be happening. But it is then, when the seed is still invisible, hidden away in the soil, that probably the most important processes take place. When the seed of faith is planted, we must step out of the patterns we are familiar with, and this might make us feel very uncomfortable at times. Because no matter how destructive these patterns can be, we have become used to them and we might even have befriended them. Choosing to start doing things differently

requires courage. But it is exactly what we should do when we get stuck and are about to lose all hope. It is important to always keep this truth before you when you are taking steps towards overcoming depression. You will have to start making decisions that don't always feel comfortable right away but are necessary to start moving in the right direction. That is what you are doing when you choose to believe. The author of the letter to the Hebrews says the following about this: 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' (Hebrews 11:1)

Planting seeds of faith might go against your feelings, and you probably won't notice any difference right away. But when you water and nourish them long enough, they will spring up and fill your heart with life

Water and nourish the seed even when it feels like your head is filled with dark clouds and perhaps you don't even understand what you're reading in God's Word. I have experienced that it helps, even in those situations. Hold on! Pray that the Spirit of God will reveal to you what the Word says.

God's Word will always accomplish that which God has sent it for. 'For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.' (Isaiah 55:10-11)

John Kennedy Vaughan, an American pastor who has struggled with depression as well, beautifully describes this in one of his videos I saw on Instagram. He says something along the lines of: When there is darkness all around you, you just clear one little spot at your feet, and you plant a seed of faith there. No longer look at the darkness around you, but give one hundred percent of your undivided attention to that seed. Let it spring up by speaking God's Word over yourself and by focusing on it. Keep doing this until you notice a shift taking place

and don't stop there! Start with one verse and then start planting more seeds, more verses, step by step.

For a long time, it will probably feel like it doesn't make any difference. And at some point, you might be tempted to give up. But that is precisely the moment when your seed of faith will start to take root and begin to sprout. Therefore, it is good to keep the following verse in mind to help you push through, especially at the start of your process of growing faith: 'For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for *pulling down strongholds*, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, *bringing every thought into captivity* to the obedience of

LET THE TRUTH

FIGHT FOR YOU

Christ.' (2 Corinthians 10:4-5) These Bible verses will help you to place your mind under God's protection the minute depression tries to get a foothold.

Don't give up! God's truth and love will grow in your life. Starting from your heart, they will transform your thinking bit by bit and tear down lies of depression. Stay focused on the truth, and don't fight depression single-handedly, but let the truth fight for you.

At the end of this book, I have listed some Bible verses and Biblical affirmations (see appendices) you can use as seeds of faith. Memorize them, write them down somewhere you see them often, or put them in your phone. Either way, make sure to read them and to speak them over yourself daily.



17 Penew your mind

By planting seeds of faith, you enable yourself to take the next step: renewing your mind. The term 'renewing your mind' comes from Romans 12:2. Nowadays, a lot is being written about the learning capabilities and the neuroplasticity of our brain. This has added a more neurobiological explanation to the already existing spiritual one.

think the main purpose of Romans 12:2 is not providing a tool for self-help or personal development. However, when we renew our mind by embracing God's truth for our life, this will prove to be a blessing for our spirit, soul and body. After all, the Bible also ascribes mental and physical health to walking with God and knowing and following His principles. Proverbs 3:1-8 is one of those passages that emphasize this idea.

My son, do not forget my law,
But let your heart keep my commands;
For length of days and long life
And peace they will add to you.
Let not mercy and truth forsake you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart,
And so find favor and high esteem
In the sight of God and man.
Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,

And He shall direct your paths.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.
It will be health to your flesh,
And strength to your bones.

Although our brain has the ability to adjust and shape itself in response to what we think, research has also proven that a crash course in positive thinking isn't going to help you truly renew your mind and change your life.

It's true that you can improve the quality of your thoughts by consciously starting to think differently and more positively. This has to do with the neuroplasticity of your brain, which I mentioned earlier in chapter 8. The more you think positive and helpful thoughts, the more these thoughts will become embedded in the neural network of your brain. This way, you train your brain to respond to events with positive and helpful thoughts more and more automatically and subconsciously, instead of responding with negative, obstructive, or even destructive thoughts. You want the path your brain chooses to go via positive and helpful thoughts. And you help create and reinforce these paths by consciously training your brain in new thinking patterns. Changing the way you think in this way makes a difference. But the change will only last when you truly believe what you think, when you have accepted it as ultimate truth. Again, this has to do with the dominant character of your emotions. You can think positively and still feel terrible. And when your faith is based on what you're feeling, your brain will eventually go along with these feelings and emotions. So, your brain needs something that goes deeper than knowing or feeling. It needs faith. That is why renewing your mind has to start within your heart. Because everything you think, do, say and feel is ultimately connected to the things that live inside of it. The Bible confirms this. It highly values the (spiritual) position and condition of the heart. For example, Proverbs 4:23 says: 'Keep your heart with all diligence, for out

of it spring the issues of life.'

Our heart is the place where our faith, our convictions and our values reside. It is the foundation of life. It is the place where you have accepted things to be true or not. And it is the place where God wants to connect with us, where He wants to speak words of life to us. The place where He wants to bestow His love, truth and wisdom upon us. Unfortunately, it is also the place where brokenness has often managed to deeply entrench itself. And when our heart has consequently laid the wrong foundations, we get stuck in life.

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**WE LIVE FROM OUR** 

HEART

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We live from our heart, and I believe that is the way we were meant to live, the way God created us to be. Even if you don't believe in God, you still live from the core beliefs in your heart. People always believe in 'something'. Every person has core values and convictions. Every person stands for something. The things that have been firmly established in your heart either activate (passion) or paralyze you (fear). It is not head knowledge that has the power to change your life, it is whatever comes to life in your heart that does. Of course, we have been given a brain to make good decisions, but we can't do so without working on the things that live inside our heart.

18 Chase after God's truth

You can't think your way out of depression just like that. Most of us probably know that all too well. I just hope by now you understand that you can't think yourself into a more joyful or happy state instantly. Chasing after positive emotions simply doesn't work. Chasing happiness or happy feelings doesn't actually make you a happier person. As I said before, what you believe deep down in your heart is many times more important than all the positive thoughts and words you impose on yourself.

Your heart forms the foundation for your 'house' of emotions, your state of mind. This is the accumulation of thoughts and emotions you experience over an extended period of time. Depression doesn't simply consist of a certain thought you choose to think or a feeling you choose to feel. It is a state of mind, a place where you dwell in a sense. Trying to think yourself into a happier state of mind is like trying to replace the roof of your house of emotions without having made crucial repairs to the foundation and walls first. A good roof on a house that collapses is worth nothing after all. Without truth, positive words and thoughts won't last, and it will only be a matter of time before the whole thing collapses.

There is a reason why the Bible tells us that transformation comes from the inside, and that the truth first needs to be established in our heart. Only then we can start to actively align the way we think, speak and feel with that truth. This requires a proactive attitude from us. We must chase after the knowledge of the truth for our life. We must be completely focused on finding God's heart and truth. Because if we

don't know His heart and truth, how will we adjust the way we think, speak and feel accordingly?

At times, we may find it hard to actually accept God's truth as the truth. This is not surprising, since we often feel so far removed from what He is saying to us through His word and promises, simply because we feel so bad. There is a reason why we often say: 'Seeing is believing.' It is hard for us to accept something as truth when we can't see or feel it. And that is why God is teaching us to live by faith and not by sight. I know how tough this can be, but still I want to encourage you to accept that His love and truth are able to transform your life from the inside out. This will require trust and faith in who He is. You will need to let go of trusting in your own knowledge, abilities and experience, and trade it for what He says is true.

YOU CAN'T CHOOSE YOUR Emotions. You can choose what you believe.

So, what you should actually do, is training your state of mind in the knowledge of the truth. If you do this, you'll notice that you start feeling differently over time. It will improve the quality of your life because it improves your state of mind.

19 Stop suppressing

Improving the quality of your emotions doesn't mean suppressing your sorrow and pain. Emotions may fully be, but you may learn how to respond to them out of the love and truth of God.

od's intention with our emotions is that we would invite Him **┙** into our pain and brokenness. Giving room to your emotions will also make it easier for you to recognize when certain emotions could become unhealthy patterns in your life. I have experienced that it can be hard to process emotions in the right way when we keep labeling them as positive or negative based on our own paradigm. I think this is also an underlying issue for people who try to help themselves by thinking positively to no avail. Because within this paradigm, there is no room for negativity. It is not allowed to be. So, when we label certain emotions as being negative, we will quickly be tempted to drown them out, suppress them or brush them aside.

That's why we need God's framework to evaluate our emotions. God doesn't rate our emotions as being positive or negative. He teaches us that our soul finds peace and joy in the truth and not in our emotions. And He teaches us to lead our emotions based on the truth. What has helped me in this respect, was to categorize my emotions as functional and dysfunctional, or as helpful or

Fear can be functional and very helpful

unhelpful.

**EMOTIONS MAY BE.** EVEN WHEN THEY DON'T FEEL NICE

when there's an actual danger. For example, when you're standing in the middle of the road and a car is racing towards you, fear will hopefully make you run and get yourself to safety as quick as possible. But fear can also become totally dysfunctional, for instance when it makes you too afraid to live life and go about your business.

Sorrow and mourning have their place. They are very healthy and helpful in dealing with loss or trauma. But they become dysfunctional when they cause you to no longer connect with people because of the fear of losing them.

A feeling of guilt you carry, because you have done things that are not in line with God's will, is functional as long as it leads you to the path of contrition and repentance, and as long as you can ask for forgiveness and know that God always grants it. A feeling of guilt that keeps expressing itself in shame and self-condemnation despite God's forgiveness is completely dysfunctional, and it will keep you from walking in God's loving forgiveness and truth. The truth sets you free (John 8:32), it doesn't pin you down.

Only when emotions start festering, causing outbursts of jealousy, bitterness, envy, competition, self-pity and such, they can imprison us. Both cherishing our emotions and suppressing them can cause them to start festering inside of us. If you notice festering emotions in your life, know and acknowledge that you can do something about it, that there is a way out.

20 Choose health

The quality of our state of mind isn't only influenced by what we believe and the way we deal with our emotions. It also depends on our physical health. When we don't take good care of ourselves, we will soon experience the effects in our thinking and our emotions.

Enough sunlight, healthy food, a good physical condition, and sufficient sleep have a scientifically proven positive effect on our hormone levels and neurotransmitters. They stimulate the production of dopamine and serotonin, hormones that contribute to a feeling of joy and happiness, and that help reduce symptoms of depression. Besides that, they reduce stress because they slow down the production of the stress hormone cortisol.

So, taking good care of yourself really pays off. Not only does it strengthen your physical health and immune system, it also instantly gives your emotions and general state of mind a positive boost.

When you are going through a rough patch emotionally and are not taking good care of your physical health on top of that, you'll probably crash much harder than people who are taking good care of themselves. I am not saying you can always prevent or change things we usually have no control over, such as (hereditary or psychological) diseases or conditions. But despite these conditions you can still choose to take good care of yourself. You will end up feeling better physically and mentally when you do. This is a fact, a great number of scientific researches have proven it. Let that be an encouragement to you.

So, if you want to improve your state of mind, you shouldn't just examine the convictions in your heart, but you should also question whether you are taking good care of yourself or not. How do you treat your body? Are you getting enough fresh air? Are you getting enough exercise? Are you taking adequate rest? Long-term stress and depressive feelings don't just make us feel bad mentally. They also negatively affect our body, resulting in a wide variety of physical symptoms. For example, (chronic) stress and depression can cause unrest and tension in your body, (chronic) fatigue, intestinal problems, pain in the neck and shoulders, and headaches. When you learn to recognize and read your physical conditions, it will become easier to do something about them. You shouldn't ignore them, just like you shouldn't ignore your emotions. Instead, you should learn to see them as signals. Your body wants to tell you something. And by listening to it, and by training your body in good, healthy patterns, you can push back the

CHOOSE TO TAKE

**GOOD CARE OF** 

YOURSELF

effects of stress and depression and start working on your recovery.

Having said that, I think it's important not to blindly ascribe all physical symptoms to stress or depression. When in doubt, always seek medical help and care from a doctor or therapist and let a professional thoroughly investigate the matter. At the same time, quit denying the possibility of stress or depression being key factors in your physical condition, and take your responsibility when you need to.

Choose not to be negligent in this. As a physiotherapist, I must say that I'm perplexed at times by the degree to which some people neglect their body. Some people take better care of their car than they do of their own body. And yet, they often hate it when their body subsequently indicates through physical symptoms that it needs care. When I explain to people that the greatest health benefit can be achieved by

taking good care of their body, my advice is often met with little enthusiasm. They realize it is going to take time, effort and energy and are not willing to pay that price for a better health. Some people simply prefer a quick fix, like taking a pill. Or they place the full responsibility for their health in the hands of doctors, therapists, or counselors, hoping that they will provide a cure. What they are actually doing, is robbing themselves of the chance of a better health.

Make sure to never rob yourself of this chance. You can't have a strong and healthy body when you don't grant it good nutrition, sufficient exercise and time to recover, and enough rest. Neither can you expect someone else to solve your health problems when you don't do these things. Professionals can help you to start moving in the right direction, but you will have to start doing what is necessary yourself. Taking a closer look at your physical wellbeing can be confronting, and feeling the need to do something about it can place extra pressure on you. If that is the case with you, don't be afraid of the pressure you experience. Instead, resist this feeling a little bit by taking small steps that help you improve your health.

I have noticed that people who suffer from depression often don't take good care of themselves. Not because they don't want to, but often because they simply don't have the energy to do it. If you are in a depression, having to think about exercise, food and general health can be a huge challenge. However, these areas of life contain a vital key. That is why I will provide you with some small, practical tips at the end of this book that can help you take the first steps in them. These tips will enable you to do something about the quality of your life right away, without making you feel overwhelmed. You'll find them in the chapter titled: 'What to do next?'

Il Take part. Connect!

When you train yourself in the truth, you become resilient and able to bounce back more and more easily. Overcoming your depression doesn't imply that you will never experience difficulties again, but that you can offer enough resistance when you are going through a hard time.

In the end, you want to be able to take a beating. You want to be able to fully live, even when life is not a bed of roses. You want to be able to take part in life, so that you can enjoy, laugh, and feel happiness and love, despite life's ups and downs.

If you want to experience connection with others, you will have to take part in life. You'll quickly lose this connection if you don't. As soon as you lose the connection with the people around you, you will also lose the ability to truly feel. And that ability to feel is precisely what allows life to deeply affect us positively, as well as negatively. Because of connection we can feel passion, joy and love. Connection also enables us to enjoy life intensely. But that same connection can also cause us pain, sorrow and hurt.

Many people who struggle with depression feel cut off from life; empty, bland, disengaged. In their attempts to protect themselves from negative feelings, they have lost the connection with themselves, with life, and sometimes also with God and the people around them. Fear continues to widen the gap between them and their environment, which often impairs or even annihilates their ability to feel and experience the good things in life.

In my experience, losing the connection completely isn't something that happens instantly. Often, it's a gradual process that takes

places almost unnoticeably. Until you wake up one day and don't know how you actually got to the point you're at. This makes it also harder to find your way back to being connected. You haven't stepped into a state of being disconnected overnight (although in some cases it might feel like that), which means you also can't step out of it like that. The only way to break out of isolation is by connecting again. Connecting with God, with the truth, with yourself, with your feelings and, consequently, with your pain as well. Deep down you don't want to keep avoiding life by running away from your pain. It's through pain that you can actually experience the fullness of life. Challenge yourself therefore to work on connection. Learn how to deal with pain and grow as a person without losing your ability to feel, enjoy and fully live. A life that is lived in a state of total defeat, passivity and avoidance is no life at all. So, choose life! That also means to quit running from painful feelings and to start allowing them in.

Happiness isn't found in the absence of difficult moments, but in the ability to connect, to enjoy and to be grateful, despite your circumstances.

# DARE TO CONNECT. ALSO WITH YOUR PAIN.

It See the punches for what they are

The reason why I wanted to end my life when I was seventeen wasn't that I didn't want to live anymore. I didn't really want to die, but I had become convinced that I couldn't handle the punches life throws. Not feeling resilient at all, I just wanted to run, causing me to regularly relapse into my depression, flight behavior, and into thinking suicidal thoughts.

Because of the story I kept telling myself, the story of not being strong enough to roll with the punches, I constantly wanted to run to a place where I would no longer be confronted with setbacks and my unpleasant feelings of fear. This became a pattern in my life.

**B** ut despite my tremendous fear, deep inside of me a strong desire to live remained. However, every time I tried to start living that life, new storms seemed to confirm that I wasn't up to the task.

I believe that many people who will eventually commit suicide deep down don't really want to die, but that they have become convinced that they just aren't able to withstand the punches life throws. Once you believe this narrative, it isn't hard to find confirmations of it in difficult situations you face. This creates a vicious circle, in which your feelings repeatedly tempt you to run, and this flight behavior subsequently imprisons you in the false narrative you keep telling yourself. This will lead to more fear, to feeling overwhelmed and to a sense of powerlessness, which in turn will lead to an increase in flight behavior.

That is why it's so important to not use (and keep using) our own truth and experience as indicators for the things we believe, but to use God's truth instead. I had to realize that my experiences and feelings, and the confirmations I thought life's punches were giving me time after time, were incorrect. My experiences confirmed a lie again and again, causing it to become ever deeper ingrained into my thinking. I believed that lie. It was too painful and scary to accept the fact that I was telling myself the wrong narrative, so

I remained trapped in it. That story was my justification for remaining stuck in what I was feeling.

Accepting that you're stuck in a lie can be painful. When someone confronts you with it, you might even feel very misunderstood and attacked. That's because it may seem as if your pain is being denied, as if it has no right to exist. That hurts and feels highly unfair. And yet, this is your way out.

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also scary because you can now so well. You will have to let go th. The familiar is a false sense.

**ACCEPTING THAT** 

YOU'RE STUCK IN A LIE

CAN BE PAINFUL

Besides the fact that it hurts, it is also scary because you can no longer hold on to the narrative you know so well. You will have to let go of what's familiar and take a leap of faith. The familiar is a false sense of security that we sometimes prefer over the fear of the unknown. It doesn't lead us into the freedom God eagerly wants to give us.

God made me aware of this when He asked me why I didn't seem to be afraid of death but did seem to be very much afraid of life. With this question, He taught me there's only one way to escape from this vicious circle. I had to start realizing that I could and had to become resilient, that I should stop running from life's blows. And that I should start telling myself the right narrative, based on His truth. Because the keys to happiness, to being able to truly enjoy life, and to experiencing a sense of purpose again lay hidden in these things. You can't live life

without learning to roll with the punches.

You can't learn to walk without falling and getting back up again. It's possible to enjoy and to be dealing with difficult circumstances at the same time.

You can keep training yourself in flight behavior and in holding on to the wrong narrative. Or you can start training yourself in resilience using the correct and true story. God's story! It's up to you.

23 learn boxing and become regilient

Becoming resilient doesn't mean that you'll never take a beating again. It means that you learn how to roll with the punches and to fend them off. That is exactly what a boxer is taught. During a fight, he can never let his guard down. If he does, he will make himself a vulnerable target for his opponent. The punches he takes should make him watchful and remind him that he has to defend himself.

Being resilient doesn't just mean having the strength to defend oneself, it also means having the strength to bounce back from difficult situations. Resilience helps you to not stay on the floor after being knocked down. It makes you choose to get back up again, even though it hurts really bad. I realized that, while I was in a depression, I often stayed on the floor and gave up. Usually, I would have been throwing punches aimlessly as hard as I could, before becoming exhausted eventually and lowering my guard. Looking back on it, it's clear to me that I have stepped into the ring unprotected; in my own strength and without being trained in God's truth.

Resilience doesn't enable you to control every situation in life. It doesn't enable you to avoid all problems. Neither does it imply the absence of fear. But developing this virtue will teach you to trust God and to build your life on the foundation of His truth and love. In the fight you learn to hear God's loving voice and to heed His guidance. He is your trainer. So, when you end up in a fight again, you know who to listen to and how to use His weapons and techniques, because you have

already practiced with Him. You don't have to enter the ring unprepared and unprotected. Especially when you grow weary, and you start living on autopilot, having mastered the right defensive and offensive techniques is vital. If you have, you will use the right techniques in critical moments without even thinking about it. Because in those moments, when it's under pressure, your brain wants to save energy by taking the route it is most familiar with. After all, thinking costs a lot of energy. The more you have trained certain response pattern, the easier your brain will switch to it automatically.

Often, we train unhelpful patterns instead, like watching Netflix when we should be working out, or ordering some unhealthy takeout when we had actually decided to cook a healthy meal. And in general, we're quick to come up with all sorts of 'good' reasons and excuses to choose patterns like these in crucial moments. We're tired after a long day of work, we feel drained after having had a nerve-racking conversation,

YOU DON'T HAVE TO
ENTER THE RING UNPREPARED
AND UNPRETECTED.

or we're experiencing stress and simply want to relax. We want to avoid feeling more pressure than we already do and try to find relief by doing something we don't have to think about.

Amen or ouch? I have had to say amen and ouch in response to such examples many times. And still, I regularly catch myself following unhelpful patterns. Evaluating the choices I make in those moments does give me valuable insights that help me choose differently in the future. I hope the same goes for you.

You see, you and I are quickly tempted by easy options, because these are most appealing to us in difficult situations. They feel good. In fact, we're looking for comfort in the numbing of our pain. We don't want to feel the pain and we don't want to be confronted with it, and

so, our brain starts looking for distraction. What we don't always realize, is that this is one of the tactics our enemy often uses to make us lower our guard. Unnoticeably. Remember? The boxer in the ring? It is one of his ways to destroy us, slowly but surely. Because in the long run, we will become stuck in destructive patterns that don't bring us comfort or relief at all, but a lot of sorrow and misery instead.

Another consequence of evasiveness is that we become increasingly disappointed with ourselves and start longing for more sedation in response, so that we don't have to feel the pain of failure. In situations like these, the challenge is to embrace your failure and to keep viewing yourself through the lens of God's love no matter what. Dare to question yourself and to keep examining evasive patterns in your life. This will enable you to break out of them, supported by God's love, counsel and wisdom. You don't have to do this on your own. You have God's Spirit within you.

Embracing your failures is not the same thing as cherishing your pain after a defeat, or as wrapping yourself in self-pity in response to failing. Embracing failure is redirecting your attention from trusting in yourself to trusting in God and the power of His truth in your life. Acknowledge your defeat and your pain and bind up your wounds. But get back up again! Learn! Receive training. Look for the areas of tension, of resistance, regularly and deliberately, meaning the discomfort you experience when you're doing something that is really good for you, but takes a lot of effort. By pressing on when you are met with resistance, you become stronger and more resilient, just like a boxer who trains for a match. Remember: there is nothing wrong with falling down. You just got to get back up.

You become resilient when you choose to always emerge stronger from the fight and learn to also embrace the moments when you fail; when through it all you realize God loves you and doesn't reject you because of what you call 'failed attempts'. God never sees your attempts as failed attempts, but as learning experiences that can help you move on to the next point. He will never reject you. He wants to

make you grow, so that you won't keep entering into battle untrained.

The Bible beautifully explains how the battle works: 'Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8:37-39)

I love how Eline Hoogenboom writes about this in one of her posts on Instagram: 'Traumas that could have easily crippled me have become wellsprings of hope and mercy instead. In my weakness, God is strong.'

Resilience is developed when you look for resistance. Not when you avoid it. A boxer knows that he shouldn't step into the ring untrained. That is why he purposively trains while seeking to stretch himself by discomfort and resistance. This helps him to become stronger and quicker, and it enables him to thoughtlessly rely on what he has learned during a real fight. I am reminded of what Paul says in I Corinthians 9:26 'Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air'.

The same goes for us. We may learn to no longer step into the ring untrained, but to carefully choose our battles and to base our training on God's truth.

24 Stop sedating

Don't get me wrong: occasionally watching Netflix, eating fries, or hanging loose can be very good for you. Such things can even be a very healthy way to come out of your doing mode and out of the rat race of life and to connect with God and yourself again. But make sure to not give in to such things all the time, especially not when you know you should be taking your responsibility.

Not everything that feels good actually is good for you. And there is a huge difference between consciously allowing yourself to indulge in these things as a form of self-care and relaxation every now and then and indulging a little too often so that it becomes some sort of self-sabotage. If you're able to distinguish between the two, you

know when you need a kick in the pants and when you shouldn't be too hard on yourself.

Are you pushing away and suppressing your emotions? Bring yourself to a standstill and go to God. Seek His presence and rest. Invite Him into your pain and sorrow. Allow yourself to feel, take care of yourself. Way too often, we try to sedate our pain instead of learning to take care of it. For a little while, you might feel like you are relaxing when you are endlessly scrolling through social media, when you're watching Netflix every spare minute or when you stay in bed for days, but it doesn't help. It won't make you feel any better. In fact, over time these things will only make you feel more languid, tired and depressed.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SELF-CARE AND **SELF-SABOTAGE** 

On the other hand, constantly throwing yourself into the business of life is also unhealthy. In the long run, this will make you end up in a burnout. Both approaches are unhealthy ways of avoiding, with numbing the pain as ultimate goal. They won't get you anywhere but stuck.

If there is one thing I have had to acknowledge and realize, it would be that my urge to avoid and my procrastination had firmly kept me in depression's grip. Procrastination can form a strong pattern, because it stems from avoiding uncomfortable feelings. It's a pattern that is strongly connected to emotions. And you can only break this pattern using the underlying story that you keep telling yourself based on your emotions and general state of mind. In my case, consciously and repeatedly dealing with the victim mentality I had taken on was necessary. Not easy, but crucial.

In order to definitively deal with procrastination, I had to quit shying away from the resistance and fear I felt with every step I had to take, whether it be big or small. I had to finally start keeping the promises I made to myself.

It's important we all do, because our feeling of failure is greatly amplified when we fail to keep to the agreements with ourselves on a regular basis. This, in turn, gives us a lot of stress. Procrastination ultimately leads to ever rising levels of stress and to feeling like a complete failure. We become increasingly disappointed with ourselves because we don't do the things we intended to do, nor what's good for us. Knowingly or unknowingly, we are very well aware of this, and because of that, procrastination also amplifies depressive feelings. I know that this is true better than anyone.

You learn to keep to agreements by taking small steps; steps that you can manage, while being challenging enough for you to feel some resistance. In pushing back this resistance, you become more resilient little by little. When you are struggling with depression, a new step can quickly seem too big for you to take. But this feeling could be deceiving you. Start working on yourself lovingly and in all honesty. This has often been very challenging for me, but I can also tell you that the hard

work is well worth it. You may have to start very small, but all that matters is that you really do. You must let the right habits get embedded in the neural pathways of your brain, so that, eventually, your brain will bring up less and less feelings of discomfort, resistance, or fear when you are taking new steps and are getting familiar with patterns that are actually helpful.

Taking one little step may be the only thing you're working on in a while, but you will see that faith will start to grow along the way, and that this will fuel the effort of taking the next step. And step by step, fear will make way for the love of God. As the Bible puts it into words so beautifully: 'There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, ...' (I John 4:18)

We often tend to wait for a moment in which we feel better, because we think it will be easier then to put ideas into action and to start taking steps. But during extended periods of stress, mental fatigue, or depression, clear moments like these are rare. Do you remember me writing that depression is a state of mind you can't step out of instantly? You can wait and hope for the opportune moment, but by doing so, you would just be fooling yourself. Changing your behavior is what will help make you feel better. So, don't wait for a better moment or a better feeling. Take action, and choose to do the right things, even when this might go against your grain.

You may have to acknowledge that you are in the ring untrained right now. If that's the case, leave the ring and get trained (think of the boxer).

In short: resilience is developed by definitively dealing with procrastination, by daring to learn from your mistakes, and by reflecting on and drawing positive lessons from the things you are going through. But also by picking your battles wisely, and by getting trained the right way.

25 Persevere and choose discipline

You don't have to be scared of trying new things. You don't have to despair when it doesn't work out once or twice. To persevere means to keep going, even when you fail every now and then. In most cases, you won't succeed in doing something when it's your first time trying. All new things take time and require attention and practice to fully master eventually. Only when you have been doing something for an extended period of time, when you have learned from your mistakes and pratfalls, you can begin to master the techniques. And only when you reach a certain level of mastery, things will really become easier.

There can be moments in which you may rest in the fact that God is working on your behalf inside of you. But at the same time, there can be moments that require you to learn to push through and not give up. Moments in which you shouldn't just sit back quietly, waiting for God to take action. Therefore, dare to let the fruits of perseverance and self-control grow inside of you. As Joyce Meyer often says: 'You can have Jesus in your spirit, but an outrageous mess in your soul.' Not having developed something yet doesn't mean that you don't own it. God calls you to develop self-control and perseverance, which means that the basics must already be there (II Peter 1:5-8). According to this passage, you have to become fruitful yourself. Just compare it to training your body. Your muscles will become bigger and stronger when you work out. You already have the

muscles, but they will only become more powerful when you train them correctly. Training incorrectly will cause injuries, overstraining and imbalance. As a result of negative experiences like these, people often give up, or they start thinking that training just isn't for them, although nothing could be further from the truth.

The same principles apply more or less to the fruit of the Spirit inside of you! It is placed inside of you as a seed. You were destined to become like Jesus. By feeding yourself spiritually with God's truth, you automatically 'train' the fruit of the Spirit and make it grow. By practicing perseverance and self-control, you'll make these fruits become part of who you are more and more. And so, the more and longer you train, the easier practicing these things will become. At first, it might cost you a lot of energy and require a certain degree of commitment. But it will bring you a lot!

## A failed attempt is no proof that it can't be done. It is the invitation to try again.

- TESSA

26 You're never back to Square one

I often hear people say: 'I have relapsed and now I'm back to square one. See? I can't do it!' And then they sink into feelings of guilt and defeat. Whenever this happens, I explain to people that they are never back to square one, simply because they have already made a certain journey, and the progress this has led to is never lost. I tell them: You haven't walked all the way back to the starting point of your journey to deliberately relapse into old patterns there. You simply ran into new challenges on the road you have taken, and these challenges have tripped you up right where you encountered them. So, that doesn't mean that you have fallen beyond recovery, leaving you no other option than to start all over again. No, you just stumbled and fell. And you can get up and start walking again from that same spot, knowing that no progress was lost.

You shouldn't keep dwelling on feelings of guilt. However, when you fall, it's good to take a moment to realize that you have a choice and that you carry the responsibility for the steps you're going to take next. The Bible teaches us that with God we can get up time after time and fend off calamity (Proverbs 24:16). You've got what it takes. First and foremost, you have God! Secondly, your backpack is filled with keys you have been given. Thirdly, you have been trained. You have overcome all hurdles and obstacles because you have used those keys. Now it's up to you to use those keys again to find new ways, or even new keys, to overcome new challenges. Time after time, an athlete goes all out with

the things he or she has learned in training in order to win, and you and I must have the same attitude in our daily battles. No training or competition is the same. You must be steadfast and persistent in focusing on your goal, and you will have to trust in the things God has given you. Every training and competition will teach you new things. And so does every fall. Dare to see it that way.

And yes, when you fall, you will encounter thoughts and feelings you recognize as being from the past. That's because they are trigge-

red by something in your current situation that reminds you of it. Emotions are powerful. And because they give such strong impulses to the brain and body, they can quickly make you believe that you haven't grown. Your soul tends to believe what your emotions and physical experiences are causing

you to feel. In a sense, you can feel the past through your emotions. But you are no longer your past. As soon as you realize this, you can make a strong decision.

YOU ARE NO LONGER

**YOUR PAST** 

Will you go back to your starting point of defeat and giving up after your fall, and will you let your thoughts and emotions guide you? Or will you get back on your feet to start walking again, despite the (sometimes ugly) battle in your mind and emotions?

The Bible encourages you: 'This is my command – be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.' (Joshua 1:9, NLT)

You don't have to deny your emotions. They are good indicators for what's going on and what you should do. But don't let them dominate your life. Choose. Choose life and victory! Choose for your future and not for your past. Know that God is on your side and that you'll never have to fight on your own. God has your back!



Where to go from here?

I hope that my book has touched and inspired you. That it has kindled a fire in you, and that you now dare to believe that there is another way. That it has given you keys that are actually helpful. But above all, I hope that it has brought or will bring you into a more intimate relationship with God. That you will go to Him for answers, and that you believe that He wants to do for you what He has done for me. That you will allow yourself to rest in His grace, while simultaneously learning to apply His truth to your life.

can imagine that this book may have stirred enthusiasm with you, but that it might feel overwhelming at the same time; that it may seem like a little too much to start practicing everything you've learned all at once. That is why I'm going to provide you with nine focal points. Nine small, practical assignments that will help you to take action in a relaxed way and so to take the first steps towards changing your life.

#### Daily ask yourself these two questions

If you want to improve your state of mind, you can start by asking yourself two questions. 1: Are the convictions in my heart in line with God's truth? And 2: Am I taking good care of myself?

When you ask yourself these questions and notice that there's room for improvement, you can start to bring about change in your situation day by day and step by step. First of all, by becoming aware of areas in your life that need improvement. And second, by thinking up and working out ways to link small, practical changes to these areas. Come up with a detailed plan, and make sure the changes you come up with can easily be sustained on a daily basis.

## Plant one seed of faith every day

In the back of this book, you'll find a list of Bible verses and Biblical affirmations that you can use to plant seeds of faith. Every Bible verse is one little seed. Start small, but do give it your full attention. Speak the Bible verse over yourself daily and try to start planting more seeds like this over time. Sometimes, a Bible verse may really hit you or stir something inside of you. Such verses can serve as personal mottos during a certain period of time. Allow God to speak to your heart this way.

## Do one thing every day to improve your health

It's good to make sure you get enough sleep, rest, sunlight and good nutrition daily. You can find plenty of information about this online. If you need help in the area of food, you can seek assistance from a dietitian or a nutritionist. When it comes to exercise, research has shown that cardio exercise (such as running) and strength training have a very positive effect on reducing symptoms of depression. If starting to seriously work out is too big a step for you now, just start by exercising for one minute every morning. Do ten sit-ups or fifteen squats for example. Stretch your workouts by adding small amounts of time or repetitions. Challenge yourself, but make sure that you can keep up.

## Persevere

In the face of adversity, we often tend to stall. But stagnation means decline. So, whatever you do, keep moving! Is going for a ten-minute walk not working out today? Then you might be able to walk for one minute. Or just do one sit-up instead. This isn't about time or amounts. What matters is having the right attitude and mindset. By doing what you can, you prove to yourself that you can overcome your feelings, even if it is just a tiny act. It will motivate you to keep going, and it will make it easier to build endurance (again). So, don't give up when you fail sometimes, but say to yourself: 'I didn't succeed today, but tomorrow I'll just continue with my plan.' With that, keep in mind what I

wrote in chapter 26, about how it may feel as if you're back to square one once you've failed, but that such feelings are incorrect. You can simply continue where you've left off. That means you can relapse into old patterns and choose to not give in at the same time. After every fall, consciously choose to stick to your new, good habits.

## Daily write down one thing you're grateful for

Consciously expressing gratitude drastically reduces stress. Apparently, the amount of cortisol (stress hormone) in our blood can decrease by up to 23% in response to practicing gratitude. Some other proven benefits of practicing gratitude are: an improved quality of sleep, feeling more relaxed, having less negative emotions, increased resilience, higher self-confidence and a more positive self-image. Especially when you're dealing with depression, these are very pleasant side effects that make pursuing a lifestyle of gratitude very helpful. But apart from these benefits, gratitude is simply Biblical. God asks us to be grateful in all things (I Thessalonians 5:18). It's not a trick. Gratefulness only 'works' when it's part of your lifestyle. That means you'll have to train yourself in it. And you can start doing that in a very simple way by writing down one thing you're grateful for every day and by thanking God for it.

## Keep it small

You can't change your whole lifestyle at once. Therefore, start small and focus primarily on maintaining that first change you've made, that first small step you've taken. Once that's going well, you can take the next step... And the next... And the next. Give new habits the time to become ingrained. Don't rush it. It's better to do one thing well than ten things in part. It has been proven that small changes take about three to four weeks to become firmly ingrained into your thinking. Think of making it a habit to drink a glass of water every morning for example. When it comes to big changes, such as the implementation of a diet and exercise plan when you want to lose weight, depending on the level of change that is desired it can take at least three months,

and in some cases even nine months, for them to become firmly ingrained patterns. So, start small and realize that with each small change you make, you will eventually bring about big changes in your life.

## Seek assistance

Seek (professional) help and don't try to do it on your own. Find a good counselor when you're getting stuck in your head and in your heart. Work out with a good trainer when you want to get in shape but don't know where to start. Step into each (new) process with an open heart and an open attitude. Be eager to learn. For example, find good sermons, books or podcasts that can help you grow when you're ready for it. Or find like-minded people to spend time with. People who understand you, people you can talk to and who you can grow with. Be careful with people who want to slow you down and who don't want to point you to God's truth.

## Never lose sight of Jesus

Never lose sight of who Jesus Christ wants to be in your situation. His name is the name above all names (Philippians 2:9), and 'In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace...' (Ephesians 1:7) He is our Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and by His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). 'He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.' (Psalm 147:3) Through Him, we receive the Spirit of God, so that we don't have to do it on our own. Healing, recovery and victory are in the name of Jesus.

His love carries us. And every time we fall, we may receive as a moment in which He will lead us into deeper intimacy with Him, and as a moment in which He cares for us and trains and prepares us for what's to come. The goal is that, by speaking the truth in love, we would grow up in all things into Him who is the head; Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

He doesn't leave us powerless. '...those who hope in the LORD will

renew their strength.' (Isaiah 40:31, NIV) Jesus empowers us with His spirit and life (John 6:63).

#### You may pray the following prayer time after time:

Lord, You are my rock, my fortress and my deliverer (Psalms 18:2-3). You are good, a refuge in times of trouble. You care for those who trust in You (Nahum 1:7). There is no fear in Your love, but Your perfect love casts out fear (I John 4:18). You are my protector, You are the shade at my right hand and You will keep me from all harm (Psalms 121:5, 7). When I am overwhelmed by worries and anxiety, Your comfort brings me joy (Psalm 94:19). Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me (Psalms 23:4). I won't look around anxiously, because You are my God. You strengthen me, You help me and You uphold me with your righteous right hand (Isaiah 41:10). With You I will dwell safely and be secure, without fear of evil (Proverbs 1:33). I won't be anxious about anything, but by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, I will make known my desires to You. I receive Your peace, which transcends all understanding, as a protection for my heart and mind in Christ Jesus. I will feed my mind with whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy. And I will put into practice what I have received, learned and heard from You and Your Word. The God of peace is with me (Philippians 4:6-9)!

Attachment: Bible verses and Biblical affirmations

The Bible is filled with powerful verses that describe our identity in Christ. This is how God sees you. And this is the way you may learn to see yourself.

But sometimes, seeing ourselves the way God does seems easier said than done. Especially when we feel down or insecure. Deep down I know very well how God sees me, but still, I don't always experience this truth. Just recently, while writing this book, I have been struggling with feeling downcast. And it made me realize once more that, even though I have won the battle in the past, I can be called back onto the battlefield at any time to win the victory again. When that happens, the question is: am I prepared for it? Am I wearing the full armor of God? And: Will I revert to what I've learned in previous battles? Will I stand firm in God's truth and in the victory He has already given me?

In moments like these, it helps me to listen to worship or a good sermon, or to read the Bible. When I do this, I notice how I'm bringing my soul to peace while drenching it with God's truth and love. I'm allowing God to speak to my heart, and this helps me to grow closer to Him with every battle. Little by little, this makes it easier to stand and keep standing in His truth.

The Bible brims with powerful truths that can lift our spirits up when we need encouragement. They help us to renew our thinking and to establish faith in us. That is why I have listed a number of encouraging and faith-edifying affirmations and Bible verses for you. You can use them to tear down lies in your thinking and to (continuously) remind yourself of God's words for your life. They are seeds of faith.

#### **BIBLICAL AFFIRMATIONS**

#### Who we are in God's eyes

I am a child of the Father (Eph. 1:5, 1 John 3:1)

I have access to the Father (Eph. 2:18)

I was chosen to belong to God (1 Thess. 1:4)

I am called to live for God (2 Tim. 1:9)

I was made by God to do good works (Eph. 2:10)

I am a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17)

I have been reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18)

I have been justified through faith (Rom. 5:1)

I am sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13)

I am a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19)

I have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7)

I was bought at a price (1 Cor. 6:20)

I died with Christ (Col. 2:20, Gal. 2:20)

I am co-heir with Christ (Rom. 8:17, Eph. 1:14)

I have been redeemed from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13)

I have been set free by the truth (John 8:32)

I am strong in the Lord's power (Phil. 4:13, Eph. 6:10)

By His wounds I have been healed (1 Pet. 2:24)

I am more than a conqueror (Rom. 8:37)

I am blessed by God (Gal. 3:9)

I am a friend of Jesus (John 15:15)

I was chosen to bear fruit (John 15:16)

I am not the great I AM, but by the grace of God I am what I am (1 Cor. 15:10)

I am a temple/dwelling place of God; His Spirit and life abide in me (1 Cor. 3:16)

I am chosen by God, holy and dearly loved (Col. 3:12)

#### 6 SPECIFIC BIBLE VERSES FOR (SPIRITUAL) BATTLE

The following Bible verses have been very helpful to me in fighting the spiritual battle that can come with depression. A battle that we can't turn a blind eye to. That's why I am sharing these verses here with you specifically, so that when you experience the pressure and battle, you may feel protected. God is protecting you!

#### **Ephesians 6:11-18**

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

#### 1 Peter 5:8-9

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast

*in the faith*, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

#### Romans 12:21

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

#### **James 4:7**

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

### 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NIV)

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

## Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

#### 60+ ENCOURAGING AND FAITH-EDIFYING BIBLE VERSES

I also want to share a few verses with you that are encouraging and particularly helpful in building faith. These verses remind you of God's grace when you're going through a hard time. They give you confidence when you're experiencing doubt, or just that little extra push to help you get through a bad day. Whatever your reason for needing encouragement today may be, these verses will reduce your anxieties and remind you of who's in control.

## 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 (NLT)

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope, comfort you and strengthen you in every good thing you do and say.

## Romans 15:5 (NLT)

May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus.

### 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

## Ephesians 6:16

...above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

## Isaiah 40:31 (NLT)

But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles.

They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

## Psalms 91:4 (NIV)

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

# Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

## 2 Corinthians 12:9

And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

## Daniel 10:19

And he said, "O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!"

So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, "Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me."

#### **Romans 8:28**

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

#### Isaiah 43:1

But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.

#### Joshua 1:9

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

#### Psalms 31:23-24

Oh, love the Lord, all you His saints! For the Lord preserves the faithful, And fully repays the proud person. Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart, All you who hope in the Lord.

#### Luke 12:7

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

## John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

## Romans 8:37-39

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who

loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### Psalms 46:1-2 (NIV)

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.

#### John 14:27

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

#### **Psalm 16:8**

I have set the Lord always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.

### Matthew 11:28-30

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

## Psalms 121:1-2 (NIV)

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

## **Psalms 121:7 (NIV)**

The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life.

# 2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power,

love, and self-discipline.

## 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

### Psalm 55:23

Cast your burden on the Lord, And He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.

### 1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

### Proverbs 16:3 (NIV)

Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.

## Matthew 6:27

Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

## Matthew 6:31-33

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

### **Romans 10:17**

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

#### Romans 12:2

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the

renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

#### Luke 17:6

So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.

### Mark 9:23

Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

#### John 8:31-32

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

### John 12:46

I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.

## 2 Samuel 7:28 (CEV)

Lord All-Powerful, you are God. You have promised me some very good things, and you can be trusted to do what you promise.

## Psalms 56:3-4 (NIV)

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise—in God I trust and am not afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?

# Psalms 9:9 (NIV)

The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

### Psalms 20:6 (NIV)

Now this I know: The Lord gives victory to his anointed. He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand

### Psalms 28:7 (NIV)

The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.

#### Psalms 37:4-6 (NIV)

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

### Psalms 31:15 (NIV)

But I trust in you, Lord; I say, "You are my God."

## Psalms 84:11 (NIV)

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

# Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

## Proverbs 28:26 (NLT)

Those who trust their own insight are foolish, but anyone who walks in wisdom is safe.

## John 14:1 (NLT)

Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me.

### Romans 15:13 (NIV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### Isaiah 41:10

Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.

## Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

### Psalm 30:3

O Lord my God, I cried out to You, And You healed me.

#### Psalm 23:2-3

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

## Proverbs 17:22 (NIV)

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

# Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

"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."

### Psalms 4:9 (NIV)

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

## 2 Corinthians 4:17

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

#### Psalm 23:4

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

### Psalms 34:19 (NIV)

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

## Psalms 107:20 (NIV)

He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.

### Psalm 41:3

The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth: You will not deliver him to the will of his enemies.

## Psalm 147:3

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

#### Isaiah 53:4-5

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions,

He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.

#### Proverbs 13:12

Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.

#### Proverbs 4:20-22

My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; for they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.

#### 1 Peter 2:24

...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

#### Psalm 103:2-4

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies.

Acknowledgements

First off, I would like to thank God for who He is in my life, for His love and His guidance. Thank You, God, for Your power! Every day, You further integrate me into Your world and I love You so much...

I also want to give special thanks to my parents and my sister for their love. They have always carried the pain and sorrow with me. They have witnessed God's hand upon my life, as well as my life's lows. My pain was your pain. But my joy became your joy just as well. Thank you for never leaving my side. I love you.

To my dear friends: thanks for your love and for letting me be myself around you. We can laugh, cry, fool around, have deep conversations and enjoy life together, and I feel extremely blessed to have you in my life. Thank you for believing in this process. You guys are worth more than gold!

To the team behind Tessa van Olst Ministries: a heartfelt thank you for your friendship. Your boundless confidence in me and in this project has often touched and encouraged me.

Thanks for your support and for all the moments you have helped me.

Thanks to all (mental) health care professionals, who have aided me with their knowledge and know-how during my depression. Your work is extremely valuable, and I am grateful for all the things I have been able to learn and receive from you.

Thanks to all the proofreaders who have struggled through the first drafts of this book. In addition to your friendship, your words and feedback have been very helpful and precious during the process of writing.

Thanks to those who have stood beside me, who have prayed for me and have expressed their faith in me; those who have demonstrated an unshakable type of faith and have kept speaking God's words for edification and encouragement.

Thanks to all partners and donors. Your confidence and financial support have been decisive factors in the process of creating and publishing this book.

Special thanks also to Erica Kramer, the chief editor and writing coach who has embarked on this writing journey with me and, together with a team of professionals, has helped me to actually get this book published.

And finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to everyone who has repeatedly encouraged me in recent years to write this book. Your words have kept spurring me on and here is the result!



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#### **Online Resources**

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About the author

Tessa van Olst is a speaker, writer and podcaster, also known as *Godfluencer*. She is the founder of Tessa van Olst Ministries, a non-profit organization aiming to familiarize people with the power of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in their everyday lives.

More than ten years ago, the incredibly great power of God's love and truth liberated her from the lies in her thinking and gave her the victory over depression in an extraordinary way.

And now, amid the brokenness and the 'usual', daily battle of life, she believes in the practical answer of the Gospel to the questions and challenges of life.

Tessa encountered God, the spiritual world and spirituality already at a very young age. Because of that, she has always looked for the answers to her life's questions near God's heart and within His truth. Through the years, this made her develop a passion for God's Word. It is her desire to help people by making God's heart and love known to them, and she does so in various ways. Already for a few years now, she has been heeding God's call to communicate her message and mission through (social) media channels, so as to reach many people with the power of the Gospel and the love of God. The education she has received, and the experience she has gained as a physiotherapist and coach, enable her to combine this in a practical way with her knowledge about health, lifestyle, and the functioning of the brain. With her podcast called Godfluencer Podcast, she is already reaching thousands of people throughout The Netherlands and beyond.

Do you want to know more and stay up to date on the latest content? Subscribe to the newsletter through Tessa's website and start following her on social media:

**Website:** tessavanolst.com **Instagram:** @tessavanolst

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# Partnership and donations

In obedience to God's call, the NGO Tessa van Olst Ministries was founded in 2020. This organization aspires to keep expanding its platform in order to reach as many people as possible through it, and to equip them with the practical knowledge and wisdom the Gospel has to offer.

Maybe you already are a partner of – or a donor to – Tessa van Olst Ministries. If that's the case, we would like to thank you for cooperating with us in the Kingdom of God. Without our partners and donors, living out our mission and vision in the way we do would not be possible. Handing out this book for free, for example, has largely been made possible by your generosity, for which we are deeply grateful. We hope to be able to give away even more in the future and to keep enriching various (social) media platforms with free content.

If you are not partnering with us yet, and if reading this book has sparked enthusiasm for our ministry and its teachings, we would like to invite you to become a partner of Tessa van Olst Ministries and work together with us in the Kingdom of God. Take a look on our website and enlist there: tessavanolst.com/word-partner.

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