

Finding meaning through depression

An event need not be welcome in order to offer new paths. Given a situation – good, bad, or indifferent – what could you learn from it? Are there positives to be found in negatives? Opportunity in loss? Hope in chaos? What if you were to treat the implosion of your career as a chance to explore other paths? What if you took abandonment as an opportunity to come to terms with solitude or self-reliance? What if a loss of faith became a time of exploration, of deepening, or renewal?

To take this perspective you need not become Pollyanna. *“Oh good! Isn’t it wonderful that things have fallen apart – I’ll learn so much!”* There is a time for grief, for mourning, and for acknowledgement of the value of what you have lost. But there may also be a time to examine your trials for what they offer as well.

We’ve all met people who have led very fortunate lives. They’ve never had a death in the family, never suffered unrequited love, never had a relationship sour, never had to struggle financially, never had a mood problem. We envy them – to an extent. But we may also become aware of a certain lack of depth, a lack of insight, even a lack of strength. Steel is tempered by fire to make it stronger and more resilient. Perhaps humans require adversity for our own tempering.

Even in the most painful of human experiences, such as depression, people find meaning, purpose, and value. Once safely out of depression it is not uncommon for a person to say *“I would never have chosen to become depressed, and I wouldn’t choose it again. But I learned some profoundly valuable things about myself and my life in the process, and I would not willingly give those up.”* Some people discover the value of their relationships. Some discover that their life has been on the wrong path. Some learn to care for themselves. Some learn to care for others. Some learn to live in the moment. Some learn to plan ahead more effectively.

Can you think of a negative event or circumstance in your life from which you learned something valuable? What was the event, and what did you learn?

Depression is so painful, so unwelcome, that it's often hard to acknowledge that you might learn something from it. Can you feel this reluctance in yourself?

There's no rush to learn from your depression, and little point in trying to make it "a good thing" that it happened to you. But has the experience of depression taught you anything worthwhile? Are there insights you'd like to keep after the depression has faded? What are they?

Sometimes we learn the most when we are tested to the fullest. Depression tests us to the limits of our endurance. You will probably never be glad that this happened to you. But depression has a high price; it would be a shame to get nothing in return. Keep looking for the valuable insights that your survival of this test can offer you.