

10 Ways to Overcome the Blues

There are all kinds of things you can do to keep yourself busy. This are 10 ways to keep yourself busy, turn off the negative monitor, and do something good for others!

1. Keep a gratitude list!

At the end of the day, when all is said and done, make a list of all the things you were grateful for that day. It could be as little as being thankful for the orange you ate at lunch time or it could be as big as someone gave you a hug! Whatever it is, you should write it down.

When I started the gratitude list years ago, Ann Voskamp's first book, **1000 Gifts**, had come out. She recommended starting with three things that you were grateful for. It did not take my long before I was at ten. And it really did help. I refocused my brain to think about all the good things in life, not the bad. There is a biblical basis for this one, but even if you are not a Christian, I'm sure you can appreciate this. Start the list and keep all that good stuff in mind.

2. Go out and take pictures!

Photography is a gentle way to pay attention to what was going on around me, look at things with a creative eye, and chronicle it. For six months, I took one picture a day of someone or something that I thought was particularly striking or beautiful. It was over the spring and summer months, and I ended up with many shots of trees, shrubs, flowers, and, of course, my children.



This would be a great one year project that could be shared in Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter. What have you seen that day that brought a smile or a giggle? Go ahead and take that shot!

3. Write something!

Writing really is a cheap form of therapy. It costs close to nothing and you can easily start a blog. I have a couple of them. One is related to my job, teaching English. (Chroniclesofhopekorea.wordpress.com) The other is obviously one you are familiar with! (liliesfromheaven.com).

For me, writing is kind of therapy where I can process things. This has been a great blessing in my life, but it is very time consuming. I have used paper-based diaries (yes, hand-writing is not completely obsolete yet!) on and off for years as well as blog posts. And yes, I started those diaries with the gratitude lists!

4. Read children and young adult books!

I started reading children's books when my eldest was quite young. I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the artwork in picture books and simple texts that tell great stories. Many children's books express the wonder of childhood where someone is learning and exploring the world around them. Young adult books offer great stories of young people on journeys that define them as adults. *The Giver* and its companion books are quite amazing as well as anything by Kate DiCamillo.

I should mention that this has not been expensive as there is a great library about a five-minute drive from our apartment. The English section continues to grow and it is something that has brought joy into my home on so many levels. My two younger sons enjoy the picture books that I have brought home, and Aidan (my fourth grader) is starting to show interest in chapter books.

I would like to say that there are many children's books that tell stories healing. *The Heart and the Bottle* by Oliver Jeffers and *South* by Patrick McDonnell are two that come to mind. I would encourage you to explore this. Healing and redemption on paper can provide the mirror we need to move into our own healing.

5. Draw or color something!

I have a few adult **coloring** books that I have used on and off. These were, of course, drawings of flowers and mandalas that I thought were pretty. It was fun to get lost in the intricate designs for a few hours! This is actually good for you! It is relaxing to just sit and be involved in the colors of something.

I **draw**. I have a sketchbook that is full of my amateurish pencil drawings. I am not particularly good at **sketching**, but it does fuel my other creative activities. My recommendation is to find something creative that you will enjoy.

6. Have a conversation with someone who does something else!

Sometimes, someone can say something that simply gives you a different perspective that can completely reduce that stress point that you have been dealing with at work. So, go ahead and and talk to someone else!

I am part of a writers' support group, Hope Writers, that does this for me. I joined the group because I was interested in self-publishing. I have been blessed by much more than the information and resources it has provided: support, generous encouragement, beautiful words to ponder over, and much, much more.

For the record, the two best support groups I have ever encountered have been teaching support groups (KOTESOL being the main one) and writing support groups.

7. Share a meal with someone!

I have had so many blessed conversations with people at the table. Over holidays, I have invited people to my home to cook and bake together. Homemade chili, banana bread, Christmas cookies, and other holiday treats led to some very meaningful conversations where I was able to support someone else!

If cooking isn't your thing, invite someone whose company you enjoy out for a meal! There is more than one way to have fellowship time!

8. Take care of something!

I have a garden that brings me great joy. I brought home my first plant quite a few years ago after moving to Korea. I killed a few herbs along the way, but I have learned to take care of the greenery just as it takes care of me. At this time, there are a number of plants on my verandah. It is my little garden, and I love it.

One of the women I work with now has three dogs. She has rescued each and every one of them. I have nothing but admiration for her. Her daily care of her dogs is nothing compared to my caring for plants, but we are both taking care of something.

9. Teach something else!

Years ago, I started teaching Sunday School. It started out simply enough. A number of concerned parents wanted to do something for their children. They wanted to their children to know the stories and learn biblical truths. I stepped in along with quite a few others. We managed to put together a great program on Sunday. We did worship, a story, a Bible verse, and a game or a craft.

I thoroughly enjoyed teaching a group of Korean students who would stare at me dumbly until they got used to the routine. I would smile a lot! It was a different group from the usual and this is the point I want you to focus on. This group with their

smiles and laughter would energize me. I loved that they would come every week and I loved that they were full of energy.

Teaching a different group on a different topic really did make a difference! I loved their energy and I loved the energy I received from the volunteers as they taught.

10. Pray for Someone or Something!

I know many of you do not believe in a higher power, but it is good to talk to God!

My family prays together on Sunday night. Can you imagine three boys sitting still and praying for anything? Well they do! And I do too! It's quite a lovely picture to see them thinking of things to say thank you to God (Yes, you can use your gratitude list for this!) for and to pray for friends and family.

If there is a thread running through this, it is that a change in focus can move you away from stress and depression and move you into a better state of mind. This is not to say that I don't have days where I feel blue. We all feel it from time to time. What do you do to move away from depression and bring yourself joy? What is one thing you do to help yourself move through the blues?