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Help with depression

By Elise L. Moore

Millions of people struggle with depression. In fact, more than 40 million new prescriptions were written for antidepressants during the year 2000.¹ Whether it's triggered by holiday stress, lessening of daylight (SAD, Seasonal Affective Disorder), grief, loss, guilt, hopelessness, menstrual cycle, childbirth, or other factors, depression has become so prevalent that it's been called "the common cold of mental illness."² Just as prevalent is the habit of medicating symptoms. Yet as one doctor warns, "Medication will take about 1 month to relieve depression. During that time period, a [person] may experience bothersome side effects from the medication while not receiving relief from the depression."³

Psychologists studying the effect of drugs on depression found that patients improved just as readily with unmedicated pills called placebos. "They [the Food and Drug Administration] should have told the American public about this. The drugs have been touted as much more effective than they are," said Irving Kirsch, a psychologist from the University of Connecticut."⁴

With depression, it may feel impossible to cope or to lift one's head above the waves. No wonder so many reach for a pill that promises relief. But is medication the only answer? In my own life, and in contacts with other people, I've found that turning to God is the most reliable and complete help anyone could want in treating depression, and in all things, really. Some people might feel that God is silent and hasn't helped them, but this is very possibly just a symptom of the depressed thought. God is never silent. He/She is the rescuer, a divine power that lifts someone who is struggling out of the waves and sets him or her safely on the shore.

This divine presence is closer than the air people breathe, and it is always loving, saving, uplifting. Although unseen, its effects are felt tangibly. It is the presence of Love, whispering words of hope. The presence of

Truth, lighting a path that leads out of darkness. The presence of Life, animating everyone and giving strength to persevere. Divine Life, Truth, and Love surround everyone, and will fill you and speak to you specifically. This is the presence of God. No one makes God present. The divine presence simply is. Perhaps that's why God revealed Himself to Moses as the great I AM.⁵ God exists, and His action in each person's life is a law of good that won't be denied. Just as God led more than a half million people out of Egypt and slavery in the Old Testament days, so He can lead someone out of mental or physical enslavement. This is God's grace. It is the divine influence that is always present—saving, healing, enlightening.

God reaches humankind. Wherever a person is, whatever the state of mind or body, Life, Truth, and Love embrace each one and cause him or her to feel the divine influence. As the Psalmist sang, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."⁶

God embraces His/Her creation and comforts as a Mother comforts Her children. This comfort isn't intellectual. It is felt. No matter how this spark of Truth, Life, or Love is felt, the divine reaches the human in tangible ways. This is the Word made flesh, and is the coming of the Christ in each person's life.

Christ heals depression. Christ is the spiritual idea of God shining through mental darkness and leading the one in need to a state of mental health. Christ is the power of God actively communicating God's love to each individual. The power of Christ is fighting for you against mental darkness. It resurrects a sense of self-worth and a desire to live.

Jesus said after his triumphant resurrection, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth, and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."⁷ To me this can mean that Christ has power on earth to heal depression and fear. And Christ will stay with each one of us until these evils are permanently destroyed.

This was the experience of a friend of mine. She battled depression for

over a year. "It started out with guilt feelings. Had I raised my boys right?" she said. "Both of them were on drugs. It kept them away from me. I felt very guilty about what I should have done differently in raising them."

She kept mulling over the whys, what ifs, and negative thoughts until she felt her only escape was suicide. It was then that the thought of God's presence and reality came to her quite suddenly. Then she simply prayed, "God help me." And she said, "God started leading me."

She called a Christian Science practitioner to pray for her. And she prayed to understand more about God. What God is and what God does. She glimpsed something about God's power and goodness. As she told me later, "It's just changing thought to the spiritual" and forgetting about the personal "me." It was the Christ revealing her higher, spiritual selfhood. The depression permanently disappeared within three days.

And her boys? "Since then through prayer," she said, "both my boys are clean as whistles. My one boy was a drug addict and an alcoholic for 30 years. It has just changed them dramatically. I thank God every day."

This woman felt God's presence and healing power, and was healed. But what about people who think God hasn't answered their prayers? What unanswered prayer contributed to the depression? Can God still help if someone believes He's let them down?

This was the case for a woman writing in *Discipleship Journal*.⁸ She and her husband prayed about their decisions. But after a series of events, including job losses and unproductive career changes, she wrote, "I questioned God's purposes for our family. . . . Soon I no longer even wanted to get out of bed in the morning. I had no will to face the day." She felt abandoned by God.

But she eventually overcame depression by considering the experiences of Biblical figures such as Moses, Jonah, and Elijah. She saw how they overcame depression or depressing cares. Like the faithful women at the foot of the cross when Jesus was crucified, she hung on to what she understood of God. Like them, she witnessed a resurrection." . . . the day came when I once again believed God had a purpose for my life. My circumstances had not changed, but identifying my distorted thinking had

made a big difference in my frame of mind."

When God answers prayer and meets human needs, a spiritualization of thought takes place. God turns the focus away from a personal perception of the problem. He helps a person see the good, the presence of the divine, in daily life.

While I was working as a chaplain for a homeless agency, a middleaged African American man asked to see me. My breath caught in my throat as he shook my hand. Every intuition in me said that this man was determined to commit suicide and was seeing me as his version of "last rites." I silently asked God what to say, what to do. As the man talked, I prayed. I began mentally affirming that there is a law of good operating in this man's life. God governed him, and chance or fate did not. Good was going on, because good is the presence of God made evident.

The man spoke of death. His parents had both passed away recently. He had no job, no home, no friends, no family, no hope, no will left to try. As he paused, I told him of the law of good operating in his life. That God was good and good was going on. He became angry and told me what he thought of God—which was not much—and declared that there was no good in his life.

But he'd said something positive about his mother. I repeated it. He stopped. "That *was* good," he said. "I don't know you," I said. "So you're going to have to help me. You mentioned one good thing in your life. Tell me some others."

Silently he stared at me. Finally he spoke. One good thing. Pause. Another good thing. And another. By the time he was done he said if he could just hold out for a few more days, he'd been promised a job. It started Monday. And there was a place to live that would be available in two weeks.

Actually there was a lot of good going on in his life. He just hadn't seen it. He paused again, but this time he gently smiled. "I was going to commit suicide this morning," he told me. "I just came here to pray with someone before I died. Now I see God led me here to save my life."

His whole appearance had changed. His eyes were clear and calm. The

depression had lifted. He told me he felt free. We prayed together aloud and gave gratitude to God for His goodness.

Whether you feel unworthy, afraid, or defeated, God is reaching out to you. God will do the work. Just hold on to every glimmer of God. The risen Christ is with you. And it will lift you up.

¹ IMS Health. "By the millions," *USA Today*, July 8, 2002, ² Center for Disease Control, Clemson Extension. "9 Symptoms of Depression," www.focusondepression.com. ³ Carolyn Janet Crandall. "Women and Depression," www.focusondepression.com. ⁴ Marilyn Elias, *USA Today*, July 8, 2002. ⁵ See Ex. 3:1-15. ⁶ Ps. 139:7-10. ⁷ Matt. 28:18, 20. ⁸ Brenda Poinsett, "Why Am I So Depressed?" *Discipleship Journal*, January/February 2001.