

## MY JOURNEY WITH GOD THROUGH DEPRESSION

“In my anguish I cried to the LORD, and He answered by setting me free.” Psalm 118: v8

Statistically 70% of all people on the planet have suffered, are suffering from or will suffer from depression to a greater or lesser degree at some time in their lives, some more than others. And while I am speaking specifically about depression here, I believe that what God has taught me over the past six months is equally applicable to any form of trouble that you may be experiencing right now. As Eliphaz, one of Job’s friends, says to him (in Job 5:7), “Man is born to trouble as sure as sparks fly upwards”, and this principle colours our existence.

The further I progress along my walk with Almighty God the more I come to realise that everything that happens to me happens for a reason, and that God is in total control – that He permits it and then uses it for His purposes for good; though this is sometimes pretty hard to see, especially when one is in ‘the darkest valley’ described in Psalm 23. Incidentally, I found the Psalms a huge solace during this time, especially Psalm 23; I would read it and re-read it, sometimes in floods of tears.

So my starting point was that God was not punishing me for anything – the Blood of Jesus had taken care of all that stuff when I accepted Him as my Lord and Saviour – He was teaching me something. But what? Like David I raged and struggled with God, crying out, “What are You teaching me God? Why can’t I see it? Show me what it is for cryin’ out loud so I can write my final exam and move on out of this ghastly place!”

But in spite of being in that painful place I chose to trust in His faithfulness, and as difficult as it was – reading the Bible, normally my favourite book, was like chewing straw – I made a point of spending time with Him each day, even if it was only 5 minutes. And what I found was that on the really bad days when I could barely move or think and just wanted to stay hidden in my little garden cottage, if I sat quietly and *tried* to pray, just *tried* to invoke a Biblical picture of God or Jesus in my imagination to talk to, some sort of peace would come upon me. Because God is faithful and will never push us beyond what we can handle at the time.

There is a wonderful picture in Malachi 3: verses 2 to 4 of God refining us like ‘gold and silver’ which I found particularly comforting. In these days we don’t normally know about this stuff (I learned it from a friend), but in biblical times they did because the different craftsmen worked cheek by jowl with each other and the community. You see, the silver smith places the container of ore into the hottest part of the flame in order to achieve the heating required to refine it, and then he watches it closely every second because if he doesn’t and leaves it in the flame for even a few seconds too long, the batch of ore will be ruined (a bit like cooking fish, only worse!). And here is the best part: he knows the purification process is complete when he can see his face reflected in the surface of the molten pool of silver! Isn’t this just an awesome picture of God’s love and caring for us as He gradually purifies and refines us and transforms us into His image? And although, like the silver, we don’t enjoy the heat, we can rest totally secure in the knowledge that Abba is totally in control and is watching the process every second.

So here is my story:

For six months my depression had been getting slowly but steadily worse. On Barry’s advice (he was the Pastor of the church to which I belonged at that time) I saw my doctor and started on ‘the muti’ and was kind of coasting along in an “a-mtional” state (the muti knocks off the lows, but it also flattens out the highs so you’re in a kind of an emotional limbo), when after about 6 weeks on the muti I had two really bad days. I literally couldn’t get myself out of bed - even cleaning my teeth was a bridge way too far.

So I decided that this time I would not fight it but would try ‘rolling with the punches’, as it were. At the same time I decided I would fast for a day or two, just drinking water and not eating anything at all (which was no hardship because I didn’t much feel like eating anyway!) and - as much as I was able - praying.

After two days I managed to get myself going again and the next Sunday (about 4 days later), at the evening service, Barry spoke about the power of prayer and fasting - and I suddenly realised I had been totally healed! I had forgotten to take the muti for about 4 days and was feeling better than I had done for months! It was mid-June 2005 when Barry caused the penny to drop, I haven’t taken the muti once since and I feel great! (But this is not for a second to suggest that you should throw away your ‘muti’ if that is where you are at; it has it’s place

and may still be, even remain, a part of God's healing plan for you. Just as your situation is unique, so God has a unique plan for your situation - He does not have a photostat machine in His office!)

There is of course something else really important that I haven't yet mentioned – the love and prayers of my Cell Group and friends who sustained and supported me in prayer during this time.

So what did God teach me?

*The first is:* surrender yourself totally to God, and the way to do this is to share absolutely EVERYTHING with Him, as David does in the psalms. Because it is only when we *consciously* share the deepest secrets of our hearts, the good, the bad and the ugly, with someone that we are fully open and vulnerable to them, or to put it another way, totally surrendered to them.

This is what God yearns for, even begs for (and as I write these words I suddenly find I have tears in my eyes as I am overwhelmed by His caring and love for me - for all of us - and the lengths to which He went, giving us Jesus; and continues to go every day of our lives to enable us to approach Him like this). He wants me – and you - to share every aspect of my life, no matter how small, with Him, to invite Him into every situation, every second of my life, **not to abdicate my responsibility for living my life** but TO SHARE ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING I DO WITH HIM! He wants to be there! He LONGS to be there! He created me for EXACTLY that purpose!

*And the second thing He taught me flows from the first:* In Matthew 5 verse 17 Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them”. This statement had always puzzled me; how *does* Jesus “fulfill the Law and the Prophets”?

As we surrender ourselves to Him, invite Him into our lives, so His Holy Spirit indwells us and *empowers us* to “fulfill the Law”! *Now* the Commandment, “You shall not steal” becomes a *Promise*, “You won't steal, because I will empower you not to”, in much the same way that a father would say to a small child in his arms, “You will not fall, because I will take care of you and make sure you don't”.

But as Ol' Blue-eyes sang in 'Love and Marriage', “You cain't have one without the other...”; without our total surrender, Jesus cannot fulfill the Law in us. And part of the fulfillment is the pain of His refining process, be it depression, hard times or whatever.

To be honest, I'm not sure whether it was the prayer and fasting or my total surrender to Him that resulted in my being healed – perhaps it was both. But I have now learned to trust God and His promises. Surrender yourself totally to Him and share everything with Him, including – in fact especially! - giving Him a major rev if that's where you are at. Just as God loves us totally and unconditionally, so He wants us to be totally open and real with Him, sharing the bad as well as the good. Only then can He work with us and in us to deal with 'the stuff' that is the root of our problem.

As Eliphaz said, “Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. For he wounds, but he also binds up; he injures, but his hands also heal.” (Job 5: 17-18)

Thus when the heat is on and the pain is high, don't ask, “Why me Lord?” Ask, “What are you teaching me through this, Lord?” Because this will move you from being a victim of circumstance through to being a Victor in Christ.