

In the Garden with Christ

Depression & the Dark Night of the Soul

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Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go yonder and pray.” And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed. “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

— *Matthew 26:36*

I always read this story when I get depressed because it describes how I feel. Of course, I realize that the reasons I am depressed do not compare to the reasons Christ was “sorrowful,” but if you have ever suffered from severe, clinical depression you understand the comparison.

Depression has been around a long time and we still don’t understand it fully. The scientists say it is a physiological disorder and refer to it as clinical depression. For more about this, read *The Noonday Demon* by Andrew Solomon. The author discusses medication as a solution. Those who dismiss this say the problem is rooted in a stressful, traumatic childhood. The answer is talk-therapy with a licensed, psychotherapist. Those who are prejudiced (afraid of depression) say, “It is all in your head. Stop feeling sorry for yourself.”

I believe that depressed people should explore both talk therapy and medication (with the help of professionals) and also diminish any self-pity they might have with positive thinking. (For more about this approach read *Feeling Good* by David Burns.) However, I also believe that Christians have another obligation when it comes to treating depression—surrendering it to God as Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane.

What does surrendering our depression actually mean? Well let’s look at what Christ did. His first act was to go to a quiet place to pray. But he did not go alone. He took his best friends. I too call upon my friends when I first get depressed, and they do bring me some solace. However, like Christ, I often find them useless when the depression is really bad, because they really don’t know how to help me. When that happens I just go to bed.

In bed, I begin bargaining with God just as Christ did. “Take this cup from me,” I pray. “I am tired of being depressed. It has been going on too long. I feel like the weight of the world is on my shoulders. I do not understand why I am depressed. I don’t want to be depressed. Why is this happening to me?” Eventually the self-pity wanes and I go to sleep with a prayer of surrender and acceptance on my lips—“Thy will be done,” I say. “I love you. Give me strength.”

When I wake up the next day, getting out of bed feels like being whisked off to Caiaphas—although I am actually just going off to work. But off I go. I get out of bed. I fix myself breakfast. I get in the car and drive to work. I know if I can just get through the next few hours the heavy blanket of depression will be lifted to some degree.

Why do I tell you all of this? I want everyone out there who suffers from depression to know that you are not alone. Our numbers are legion. And there is hope. For years I was suicidally depressed. Today, I am a high-functioning, sometimes-depressed person. And while I do not know if my depression is manageable because I see a therapist once a week or take medication, I do know the strength to face my depression, and bear it, is a direct result of my personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He has filled my heart with his love for me and his endless sympathy for my condition.

Most of all, he has helped me understand that I must courageously bear my sorrow, just as he did in the garden. I must turn my “eyes upon Jesus” and “look full in His wonderful face.” And when I do, “the things of earth . . . grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.” (Words and music by Helen H. Lemmel)