

## LIFE IN THE FRONT PEW-The Depressed Pastor's Wife- Part One

*If you are struggling with depression, the below are suggestions, not prescriptions. They represent my own battle with this monster. I place them here for information and encouragement so that you can know you are not alone, and that God wants to lead you out of your tunnel, just as he did me.*

“Well, you know, she spent time at Pine Rest back in the sixties.”

“Ooooooooh, well then....”

“Oh, yes....that’s right. Depression.”

I overheard this conversation within my first weeks of becoming a pastor’s wife officially. During a coffee hour between services at our first church, I stood near a conversational circle. The women in the group were discussing possible names for a leadership position in the women’s ministry. When a specific woman’s name was suggested the above conversation occurred. Pine Rest is a wonderful, Christian Mental Health Service in my community. The woman they discussed never did serve in leadership while I was at that church, even though she was a godly woman with strong administrative skills.

I learned fast. If people didn’t want a woman who once struggled with depression many years ago in leadership, they sure as shootin’ didn’t want to know their new pastor’s wife struggled with it periodically.

As pastor’s wives, the struggle between authenticity and privacy is real. But there is still much stigma attached to mental health issues, many of which are caused by imbalances in the body’s chemistry. In our culture it is noble to suffer with arthritis or migraines, for example, but if you’re depressed, what’s the matter with you? Snap out of it. Just take a walk. All sorts of advice flows from those who’ve never struggled with The Cloud. The inference is that you’re a bit of dolt for not just dealing with this quickly and moving on.

My first battle with depression began when I was 13 years old. With the knowledge I’ve gained about myself and my chemistry, I believe the fire started with a chemical imbalance and entering puberty was gasoline on the fire. Instinctively, I felt shame about how awful I felt when I woke up each morning and never told a soul about it until I was in college. I lived in a lovely life in a wonderful family. What did I have to be depressed about? I learned that if I would get up and get going, and eat breakfast, I usually felt fine the rest of the day.

I’ll share more of my own experiences in posts to come but today I want to start to focus on the physical aspects of depression because that is where God started with Elijah. If you read I Kings 19 you will see a clear picture of a depressed man. Why? After a huge showdown between Jehovah and Baal’s prophets, Queen Jezebel swore she’d murder Elijah.

Alone under a broom tree, Elijah asks God to let him die. That's how deep his depression is. What's the first thing God says back to him through an angel? "Arise and eat." (vs.5) Before God spoke to Elijah's spirit and soul, he wanted him to tend to his body's needs.

Depression can originate in the body or mind but once it sets up camp, it affects both. If you've not seen a doctor, specifically for depression, please consider doing that when this COVID mess is over. For me, traditional depression medications were not the solution, but they work for many others. After trial and error, I landed with homeopathic doctors who began supplementing my neurotransmitters naturally. My whole world changed. Many of us are born with missing pieces. My body doesn't want to produce dopamine and melatonin on its own. Without these important, natural chemicals in your body, you will be depressed.

God creates a specific path out of depression for each of us. Pray and ask God to reveal your path. What kind of doctor. Maybe dietary changes. Then follow the peace. If the first doctor you go to gives you a hinky feeling, move on. Ask your husband for leadership in this area also. He's able to be a bit more objective than you.

I'll be posting a series on this, but in the meantime, know that I'm praying for you if you are depressed. I know how challenging it is to be "on" for your congregation when you struggle to get out of bed in the mornings. God WILL make a way out of this for you and then you will reach back and help others find their way too. Hugs-Sharon