

Life in the Front Pew- The Depressed Pastor's Wife-Part Two

When you lay in bed trying to come up with honorable ways of dying, to spare your family shame, you are severely depressed. Two years after my daughter's birth, that's what was happening inside me. My husband never knew, at that time, how dark my thoughts became but he knew I struggled severely. One day he said in a strained voice, "I don't know how to help you but I'm positive we need to get you some help." I knew he was right.

I booked myself at a nearby Christian counseling center with low expectations. By now I'd been battling depression for almost 20 years. I didn't believe I could change. Change requires hope. Hope that there can be better days with work. I had neither hope nor the energy to do more work. Simply being a mother, senior pastor's wife, and a minister of music, used up all my hope and energy. None left for my own mental health.

As I shared in Part One, although the roots of my depression were primarily physiological imbalances, my mind and soul were part of the mix. I'll come back to more details about physical causes but today I feel led to share the mind and soul component. Depression is a complex issue that must be dealt with mind, body and soul for true healing to occur. If only one aspect is treated, you will fight the same battles on different fronts.

I liked my counselor, "Hank," immediately. His peaceful demeanor and respectful attitude resonated with me. He didn't treat me or speak to me like a broken doll. When you go to a professional for help, be certain you connect with them. If you don't, subconsciously you will reject their advice, probably not do the homework, and most likely drop out of counseling before you should.

In my first appointment, Hank asked me many questions. Now, many years later, one remains in my mind as the most important for me. "Are you angry with anyone?" Turns out I had a pretty long list. I'm an Enneagram One, and an immature one at that time. My world then was all blacks and whites, no grays. Anyone that strayed into my black zone or tried to convince me of a gray became a problem for me.

All the normal church congregational quirks that any pastor deals with became magnified in my mind. If you criticized me or my husband, you landed on my B list. Gossip? B list. Generally contentious or difficult to work with? B list. You get the idea.

Hank expressed no surprise at the length of my B list. He asked another question. "Sharon, did you know that a lot of depression is anger turned inward?" No. No, I didn't know that. As a lifelong believer, pk myself, and a pastor's wife, I knew I couldn't simply launch on everyone that criticized us or treated us poorly. I knew the sin of that, but I didn't possess the inner spiritual structures that could behave like 1Corinthians 13 when people came at me.

Instead, I appeared peaceable and forgiving on the outside while stuffing down a load of anger inside. Ladies, emotions aren't right or wrong. They just are. It's what you do with them and how you act on them that makes you either Christlike or carnal.

Hank taught me how to pour out genuine emotions in safe ways. I adopted that protocol then and still live by it now. This is what I do now when something is very upsetting or stressful or someone seriously ticks me off.

1. I do something physical asap to process the “fight or flight chemicals” released from stress, fear or anger. This is critically important if you want to stay in step with the Spirit. God gave us those chemicals for action purposes so we can run from danger. Left to just fester in your body, they cause weight gain and a host of health issues. I usually jump on my bike, take a brisk walk, dance to praise music.
2. While exercising, I pray. I tell God the truth about what I’m feeling and thinking, no matter how ugly it is. This is good for two reasons. First, I recognize what is in my heart by what comes out my mouth. Second, it starts to deal with the genuine hurt life can bring. Read the Psalms. David did this all the time.
3. I get quiet before God and ask him to forgive me for unrighteous anger and ugly attitudes. Then we talk awhile so that I know, from him, whether I need to go speak truth with grace to someone or just forgive and move on.

Once I started making this a habit, I did feel some of my depression lifting. Certainly not all of it, because my chemical component hadn’t been discovered yet, but enough that I didn’t want to disappear from earth anymore. So my question for you is, “Are you angry?”