I painted this watercolour picture in 1990. It was a subconscious attempt to express how I felt. I felt imprisoned in a dark cave - a cave I could not escape. High in the cave was a small opening through which I could see sunlight, which was mockingly beyond my reach. Yet when I showed the painting to my mother, she smiled and said, “See, there is light at the end of the tunnel. You will get out of this, you will recover.” And she was right - in time I did get out of that hopeless, dark pit.

This booklet is a collection of articles from my blog, where I share my recovery from depression from a Christian perspective. I discuss all the things that helped me such as relying upon the strength of Jesus instead of my own, counseling, medication, putting Biblical principles into practice, retraining my thought processes, learning how to deal with the fear cycle, etc.
2 Corinthians 12:9-10  
But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (NIV)

My blog’s address:  
www.cornerstonethefoundation.blogspot.com

How to Contact Me:  
If you would like to contact me, you will find my contact details through my blog, if you click on ‘view my complete profile.’

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1. Depression, the Silent Epidemic

Depression is a common mental health problem said to afflict one in four or five people at some stage in their life. It can be caused by biological, mental, and social factors, or a combination of all three.

Although the word ‘depressed’ is commonly used to describe the temporary emotion of feeling low or downcast, the medical term ‘depression’ refers to an illness, also known as clinical depression or major depressive disorder. As opposed to temporarily feeling down, depression is a condition that pervades every part of a person’s life, and symptoms include loss of interest in life, overwhelming sorrow, obsessive fearful thoughts, fear that it will never end, having no hope for the future, and many other disturbing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual symptoms.

Depression is called the silent epidemic because unlike other diseases, it is not easy to recognise when someone is afflicted by it. The depression sufferers themselves also tend not to reveal or express what they are going through.

This could be because they do not know what is wrong with them or what could have caused such a wide variety of disturbing symptoms. The depression sufferer also may not want to talk about issues they find too embarrassing or painful due to concern that others will think less of them. There is also pressure, especially amongst Christian circles, to give the impression that we have got our act together. It is a difficult step for a Christian to admit that they are being swamped by fear, anxiety, guilt, and doubt. “What will others think of me if they knew I was like this?”

And unfortunately, in not knowing who to turn to for help, when a depressed person does attempt to share what they are going through, others, also lacking knowledge about depression, may tell them to get their life together or pull themselves out of it, or in Christian circles, “you just need more faith” or “you just need to rebuke the enemy.”

Many Christians focus obsessively upon the spiritual symptoms and therefore make the mistake of concluding that depression has a spiritual cause only. Therefore, instead of seeking the help they need, they try to escape from depression by reverting to spiritual solutions only.

I spent the first four months of my depression hiding from the world as far as was possible, not knowing what was wrong with me, reluctant to share what I was going through, and hesitant to seek help.

From my diary, 12th April ’90 –

What is this storm that rages within me?
Why won’t it abate, why won’t it subside?
It comes in like a storm, and devours me.
And it won’t go away. It’s nearly four months now.
Four months of doing nothing, just hiding and hiding and waiting.

It is the lack of knowledge of depression and the way it operates that gives it so much power. The prophet Hosea warned us of the dangers associated with a lack of knowledge in Hosea 4:6. “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.”

If during my teenage years I had been taught about the fear-adrenaline-fear cycle, panic attacks, and practical coping techniques for dealing with fear and anxiety, my descent into depression in 1989 would not have been so severe or long-lasting.

Unfortunately, although I had attended thirteen years of school, teachers’ college with child psychology, and Bible College with a counselling component, none of the courses taught me specific details about depression or provided practical coping strategies.

Hence, when I slipped into severe depression at the end of 1989, I had no idea what was wrong with me. I spent hours recording my woes and symptoms in my diary in a futile attempt to work out what was going on. Here is an early entry:

31st Jan ’90 – I feel like the Melbourne weather. I regularly get extremely angry, very angry, even with God. And then, half an hour later, I want to cry, in despair and loneliness… I feel extremely sad for some reason. I even feel extreme momentary excitement every now and then. What has happened to me?

As the days turned to weeks and then to months, I feared I would never be able to escape the ‘thing’ that had overcome and crippled me. This diary entry from July ’90 aptly summarises the bewilderment I was experiencing.

A Difficult Road
How should I view my current condition?
This constant state of being ill at ease.
Is it an emotional condition causing physical stress?
Or a physical condition causing emotional stress?
I cannot work it out.
There are so many physical side effects that it could be physical.
Sometimes my shoulder muscles ache to abandon,
The aching pain in my jaw drives me crazy.
My face and arms get a burning, prickling sensation.
My stomach feels trapped, as though it needs to burst, or simply feels disturbed.
My chest feels like its going to explode,
And like my stomach, often feels ill at ease.
I’ve also suffered from flu symptoms since April.
These physical problems alone would be enough to cause emotional stress.

And as there are physical problems, so there are emotional ones.
I feel uncomfortable all the time, most notably while at work.
Frustration, irritation, anger and uncontrollable depression are ever present.
Words are inadequate to explain the emotional effects that afflict me.
They vary from a feeling that something big and dark will consume me,
To endless mental churnings that only makes me worse,
To those times where it is so faint that I can only just detect it.
These emotional problems alone would be enough to cause physical stress.
I wish I had a word to describe this ‘illness’ that assails me. Is it ‘depression’? I really don’t know.

I was eventually diagnosed with depression, but it was not explained to me in sufficient detail. What a relief it would have been to know that all of the symptoms I wrote in the diary entry above, as well as many others, were all caused by depression and anxiety.

In late July 1990 I read a very detailed description of depression and its symptoms. It was so liberating to learn what was wrong with me, how the fear-flight cycle was responsible for creating the disturbing symptoms, and that by changing how I reacted to those symptoms they would eventually cease. It encouraged me to learn that I was suffering from a common affliction, that I was not a freak.

Knowledge had replaced my ignorance, understanding had chased away my despair, and my hope had returned.

Here is an example of how truth and knowledge can set us free from fear. When my son was born at 1.30am, he was placed in a humidicrib because he could barely breathe. The nightshift nurses gave me little information regarding his ailment and I was greatly distressed. The following morning, however, another nurse explained to me that my son’s lungs had filled with fluid during the caesarean operation, a normal occurrence, and would drain naturally within three days. My fears abated and relief flooded through me, and sure enough, fifteen hours later his lungs had cleared and he able to leave the humidicrib.

It is my desire that all may be able to recognise depression’s symptoms in themselves or others, and know practical coping strategies to cope with and recover from it.

And then depression will no longer be a silent epidemic.

2. What Causes Depression?

Depression was the most confusing and bewildering experience of my life. I spent countless hours trying to work out what was wrong with me and what it was that caused me to get into such a state.

From my diary, 8th February 1990 –

I think and think,
and try to work out
what has happened to me and why,
and what I should be doing.
But it is a worthless exercise,
I am allergic to my own thoughts.

Months later I learned that I was suffering from depression, and that the illness can be caused by biological, mental/emotional, and social factors, and more commonly, a combination of all three.

Biological Causes

Without going into the technical details, it is sufficient to say that as with any part of the human body, there are a great many things that can go wrong with the human brain and mind. More complex causes of depression can include chemical/genetic imbalances in the brain and glandular disorders. A lack of sleep such as chronic insomnia and a poor diet (including undiagnosed food intolerances) can also cause depression. And “there is some evidence to show that severe depression runs in families. This has led to the conclusion that some people innately may be more prone to depression than others…” (1)

I suffered from chronic insomnia in 1989, the year that preceded my descent into severe depression. This had started in my late teens and had grown progressively worse, the result I believe of having undiagnosed complex partial epilepsy. I have only been able to sleep naturally after being placed on anti-seizure meds in my mid-thirties. That year I also made the mistake of eating poorly and skipping exercise. Both of my parents have also suffered from depression.

Social Causes

One thing that I have learned is that our past, and especially what transpired during our childhood years, typically catches up with us once we reach adulthood. Any form of child abuse, whether physical, mental or emotional, and even rejection, can either cause depression or make a depressive episode much worse than it would have been otherwise. Over disciplining a child, or setting unattainable goals or unrealistic standards for them, can also play a factor.

The Christian counselor I saw when I was depressed spent hours helping me to face and deal with issues from my childhood - issues that during depression had grown out of proportion to become insurmountable stumbling blocks.

Mental/Emotional Causes

‘It is well known that the stresses of life stimulate depression, especially when these stresses involve a loss. Loss of an opportunity, a job, status, health, freedom...possessions...can each lead to depression. Then there is the loss of people. Divorce, death, or prolonged separations are painful and known to be among the most effective depression-producing events of life.’ (2) In November 1989, I suffered a major shock that caused me great stress.

The feeling of being trapped by situations such as those listed above - situations over which we have no control, also contributes to depression, as does a habit of thinking negatively on every aspect of life, including having a negative self-concept.

Another cause of depression is anger turned inward, in other words, towards ourselves. If we are deeply hurt but have no outlet for expressing the ensuing anger, this can lead to frustration, resentment, and deeper anger, which can cause depression. (3)

Guilt, in response to failure or wrong doing, can also cause depression.

One thing I would like to share in closing is that it is common for Christians to suspect that our depression has spiritual causes, since we typically feel so far from God when depressed. I also remember fearing that it was God who was inflicting the depression upon me. When I shared this with my counselor, she said, “We make the mistake in thinking that because our spiritual life is affected by depression, the cause must be spiritual. But this is incorrect;
Depression touches every part of us, so why do we think that it will not touch us spiritually?” My counselor reassured me of the truth, that God does not afflict depression upon anyone. God is a loving God who delights in giving us good and perfect gifts, as well as comforting us in our times of trouble.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

James 1:17

3. Depression & Counseling/Therapy

In order to identify, face and work through the root causes of depression and its associated issues, it is important that someone suffering from depression sees a trained Christian counselor or professional therapist.

I struggled daily with many overwhelming, destructive fears when I was severely depressed. I was reluctant to share these fears with anyone I knew because I was embarrassed by them, was worried what my family or friends would think of me, and I also feared that if I shared those fears with them, the fears would destroy their lives as well.

Painfully aware that my life was a complete mess, I finally admitted that I needed help from a trained counselor, someone impartial with whom I could share what I was going through and confide in without fearing they would judge me or be adversely affected by the things I feared. They would also be able to give me practical counsel and help in determining what was wrong with me and assist in my recovery.

So when I was ten weeks into severe depression I went to see a local minister to receive counseling. Although I truly appreciate the time he gave me, he saw me just the once and sent me on my way. Though he gave good advice, this brief visit provided only minimal comfort and did not effectively address the traumas that haunted me. This is what I wrote in my diary that day. 13th March 1990 – Well, the day finally came where I saw the pastor. I was hoping for some huge touch from God, such as healing, or deliverance from oppression or possession, but no received such easy answer. As we can see, I was still under the mistaken impression that I could find an ‘instant’ solution to depression.

That the pastor saw me only once brings me to my next point – that we need wisdom in choosing the right counselor/therapist, as some counselors lack the knowledge and experience necessary to help someone suffering from depression. Some ministers think a one-off counseling or prayer session is sufficient, they do not realize that counseling needs to be continued for several months if not years, and on a regular basis. Some counselors make the error of using shock tactics in a futile attempt to try to force someone to pull themselves out of depression, which only places the depressed person under more pressure and fear.

If the counselor we are seeing is not able to help us, it may be necessary to seek another more experienced one. And that is exactly what I did. Two weeks later I went to see another counselor, a very compassionate lady and trained counselor who had experienced depression herself when incapacitated by a near-terminal illness. On 19th March 1990 I wrote – I’m a complete emotional and spiritual mess and I need help, dear Jesus, so I’ll be seeing the counselor in ten days, but I feel really guilty for taking up her time. I don’t want to impose on her. It is normal to be reluctant about seeing a counselor, but we must not let this deter us.

The counselor counseled me once a month for several months. She sympathised with what I was going through, offered practical advice, and through prayer, God’s Word, and her own experiences, helped me to face and deal with several deep emotional wounds and flawed thought processes.

Below are some excerpts from my diary about those counseling sessions.

The counselor said that depression is the worse ailment that we can have, because it affects all areas of our lives: mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. We make the mistake of thinking that because our spiritual life is affected, the cause must be spiritual. But this is incorrect. Depression touches every part of us, which means it touches us spiritually too.

The counselor listed the symptoms of depression, which described my condition perfectly. These included having no hope, being unable to see the future, you cannot ever see yourself getting beyond this current stage, you look at everyone else and wish you were any one of them instead of yourself.

She said that I should be on anti-depressants to help me, and that they will start to work after about ten days.

When I found the courage to share some of my irrational fears with the counselor, she gently helped me to see those fearful thoughts from another perspective – the true perspective.

As a result of her counseling, I was eventually set free from one of the greatest bondage of my life. For much of my life my inner peace had disappeared when about to make a major life decision, and only returned when I gave up all plans to make that change. Because of this, and due to the fact that as a child I had been taught that God would take away His peace to guide me or test me, I had reached the mistaken conclusion that God was actually removing my peace to guide me. The truth was that I had been suffering from panic attacks that were triggered by the stress of making those decisions. It was these panic attacks that had been robbing me of my inner peace, not God at all.

The counselor taught me that God gives us peace. Jesus said “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Do not let your hearts be troubled.” John 14:27 It does not say “My lack of peace I give to guide you.” We need to make our decisions prayerfully with wisdom based on God’s
Word – and do so while dwelling in His peace. She reminded me that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6.

It was so ingrained in my thinking that panic attacks were God guiding me that I felt guilty and disobedient for no longer listening to them or doing what they demanded, even though I now knew that they were not from God. To deal with this irrational fear the counselor taught me to pray, “What ever Your will is for my life, Lord, please bring it about - even without my obedience or cooperation. You are God; You are greater than me or the circumstances, so You are able to bring about Your will regardless.”

In another session, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the counselor discerned spirits of fear and terror at work in my life. She took authority over these and broke them in the name of Jesus. ‘The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.’ 2 Corinthians 10:4. Note that this was only the beginning of being set free from fear and terror - I still needed to retrain my thought processes away from the habit of fearful thinking. Changing our thinking until it is in line with God’s Word is a slow but very necessary process. ‘We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.’ 2 Corinthians 10:5.

During our counseling sessions, the counselor also took me back to some of my childhood traumas. We invited Jesus to join us as we recalled those events. This is what I wrote in my diary after one of these sessions:

8th August 1990 - It was really beautiful to see how Jesus healed me of my past hurts. On that occasion when I was seven, and hated and hit myself, the counselor took me back to that time, and told me to look to Jesus and see how He responded. Jesus told me that He accepted me as I was, and gave me a great big hug, and told me that He loved me, and that I did not need to react that way and punish myself, and that He understood. Jesus’ touch brought deep inner healing. Now when I remember that event, I see Jesus standing there, reaching out to and comforting me, instead of the deep pain that had previously been associated with it.

In August 1990 I read the book “Self Help for Your Nerves” by Dr Claire Weekes. From there, recovery from depression was so rapid that at the end of October, the counselor said I no longer required counseling. Although I was still suffering from many of depression’s side effects, she said it was time to get back into things, and encouraged me to join a home group and to return to active service in the church.

This is what I wrote in my diary following that final counseling session.

21/10/90 –

The counselor said I am to pray every morning:

“Lord, this is the day that you have made,
You have put me where I am in it,
therefore fulfill your created purpose for me in this day.”

Every night I am to pray:

“I thank you Lord, I don’t understand - but I believe.”

The counselor said that to be in deep surrender to God means to never look back
with regret upon the past,
nor forward to what I want to be in the future –
comparing ourselves to what we used to be,
or what we want to be,
is a hindrance for resting in God’s will.
Each day I am to say:

“I am content to be who You made me to be, today.
I’m content to be where You put me today,
and I’m content to be how You made me to be today.”

4. Depression, Christians, and Anti-Depressant Medication

Along with Christian counselling or professional therapy to deal with the traumas associated with or causing depression, another crucial step in recovering from clinical depression is a consultation with a good doctor. (Note that by depression, I am referring to an illness, the symptoms of which generally include loss of interest in life, overwhelming sadness, obsessive fearful thoughts, fear that this bleak, distressing phase will never end, no hope for the future, and many other disturbing physical, emotional, mental and spiritual symptoms.)

During the consultation we need to tell the doctor exactly what we are going through, we must not play down the symptoms. We also need to tell the doctor if we have been plagued by any suicidal thoughts or urges. Many doctors have a special checklist of questions regarding depression that they go through in order to ascertain our condition.

The doctor should also investigate whether there are any health issues that could be causing the depression, such as food intolerances, and so on.

Should the doctor recommend anti-depressant medication, we should seriously consider following the recommendation, and if we do, we must remain under the doctor’s supervision by having regular checkups and always following the doctor’s advice. If we notice any unpleasant or disturbing side effects caused by the medication we need to consult with the doctor immediately.

We also need to ignore the stigmas and negative attitudes that are often associated with anti-depressants such as, “Anti-depressants are a cop-out,” or, “You say you trust in God yet you rely on anti-depressants?” or, “How can you say God is all you need when you need pills to cope with life?” One reason anti-depressants are criticized in Christian
circles is because they are taken by people who are not depressed in order to cope with problems instead of facing and dealing with them. Many also fear they will become addicted to anti-depressants.

We should never feel guilty or inadequate for taking medication for depression, as clinical depression is an actual illness, and as an illness, needs to be treated. For example, I have complex partial epilepsy. If I do not take anti-seizure medication I suffer quite horrific seizures, cannot sleep, and am not permitted to drive. The medication I take stops the seizures, allows me to sleep, and I can drive. No one has ever criticized me or questioned the depth of my faith for my dependence on the medication.

Before I went onto anti-depressants, my diary entries were completely devoid of hope, full of pain, despair, anger, guilt, and confusion. I was not sleeping, and my mind had lost all flexibility.

25th March 1990 –
I feel like I’m in a room with invisible walls,
But it’s so black in the room
that I can’t see through the walls.
And I am in the centre of the room.
Where I go, the room goes, I can’t get out.

The Christian counselor I was seeing told me during our first session that I should be on anti-depressants to help me cope with the illness. Here is the diary entry I wrote just before seeing the family doctor in 1990. We can see how my view of anti-depressants was dictated by fear and the stigmas attached to them by society.

I’m not coping with life at all. I don’t think I can cope with this lack of peace any longer. Tomorrow I’m going to see the doctor and get some pills that will give me peace. Tomorrow I’m going to take pills to help me cope with life, and it’s really hard. I feel like saying, “What happened to Your Word, Jesus, where You said You would comfort me?”
But I know you are faithful and true, although I don’t understand, I must trust in you and fix my eyes on You through this storm.

The doctor gave me an anti-depressant medication that included a mild tranquilizer, and my counselor gave me practical advice on how to take them. She explained that the pills would knock me out for the first week, so for that week I should take them earlier, until my body got used to them. She said that they would start to take effect in around two weeks. (I understand that some anti-depressants may take from three to six weeks.) This is what I wrote after the medication began to take effect.

29th April 1990 –
A faint glimmer of hope,
It’s amazing, absolutely amazing.
It’s now been almost two weeks since I’ve wanted to end it.
The temptation is to deny ever feeling like that,
To say, ‘I can’t believe I felt like that.’
But it was true, very true, far too real.
All I wanted to do was die, or get away from the pain.
So I guess these tablets must be working.
I’ve been taking them for four weeks now.
I was told it would take two weeks before they would start to take effect.
And it did.

As we can see, the anti-depressants greatly reduced the effects of depression. They dulled the pain and enabled me to sleep, an important part of the healing process.

One point I would like to make very clear is that anti-depressants do not heal depression nor completely stop the pain. This was something I quickly realized:

13th May 1990 –
It is so hard,
The deep pain has gone, but I’m still a mess.

However, with the deep pain gone and the symptoms dulled, I was able to concentrate on the task of recovery. I was able to listen to the counselor and slowly change my perspective on the things that I feared, and also put into practice the techniques recommended by Doctor Claire Weekes in ‘Self Help for Your Nerves.’ I do not believe I would have been able to accomplish this without the medication.

Not including those individuals who need to remain on anti-depressants due to significant biological or mental disorders, when going onto anti-depressants we may need to remind ourselves that we do not take them to help us cope with life, but in order to concentrate on our goal of recovering from depression.

It may help to consider anti-depressants as a step in a race, with the prize being recovery from depression so we can achieve wholeness in Christ. ‘Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.’ 1 Corinthians 9:24 Jesus wants us to be whole. ‘I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.’ John 10:10. So let us press on towards recovery, never giving up. ‘I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.’ Philippians 3:14

We must not fear that we will become addicted to or dependent upon the anti-depressants. If recovery from depression is our goal, and we address the causes of depression through counseling or therapy, that will never be an issue. If we find ourselves wanting to remain indefinitely on anti-depressants, more counseling or professional help is needed.

In ‘Self Help for Your Nerves,’ Doctor Claire Weekes writes, “Usually, when cured, the last thing these people want to see is one of those wretched capsules or a dose of that pink mixture.” (1)

When we feel we have recovered sufficiently to get off the anti-depressants, this must be done with the doctor’s supervision, as getting off the medication too quickly causes problems.

I reduced the dosage of my medication slowly over several weeks, under my doctor’s supervision, and I remember clearly the day I walked into a pharmacy and handed the pharmacist the box of remaining anti-depressants and said, “I don’t need these anymore.” I was smiling when I walked out.

5. Symptoms of Depression & How it Causes Them

One of the worst aspects of depression is the mind numbing confusion and bewilderment that accompanies it. Like many suffering from depression, I had no idea what was causing the multitude of troubling physical, mental, emotional and spiritual symptoms. My diary is filled with entries where I tried to work out what was causing them.

2nd Jan ’90 – I often wished Jesus had given me a book, a manual, all on me. It’s so hard - we go through these things that we’ve never gone through before, and we don’t know what’s happening and don’t know what to do.

28th Feb ’90 –
Every day is a nightmare…I just want to hide.
It relents for a day, then it’s back in full force.
Feeling disturbed, pain, anger, distress and grief soon follow.
It feels like there are little knives inside my chest and jaw, and they cut, cut, cut...
I can’t believe this is happening to me.
I wake disturbed, I go to work disturbed, all day, everyday, disturbed.
What has happened to me?
Where has it come from?

Although I was eventually diagnosed with depression, I was only told about some of its symptoms and was given little information as to how it was causing those symptoms. Confusion continued to reign, and when I examined my life and all that was wrong with me, I concluded that I was an aberration - a freak - and I despised myself.

The first time I saw a comprehensive list of symptoms caused by anxiety and depression was in late July 1990, when I started reading ‘Self Help for Your Nerves’ by Dr Claire Weekes. This is the diary entry I made that night – relief is shining through every word:

28th July 1990 –
This book, ‘Self Help for Your Nerves,’ goes on to…describe EVERY single thing I have been suffering from for the past eight months, and even back for the five or so months prior to that. I had no idea all of the strange things in my mind, body, and emotions, were ALL interlinked and caused by the same thing! And it even says how I’ve been sitting and wondering what happened to me, and wondering if I’ll ever be the same again? The book explains everything, right down to obsessive thoughts, and that people who’ve developed this thing have probably been stuck with it for weeks, months, and one guy even had it for ten years.

Understanding Depression Brings Relief

When someone who is suffering from depression realizes that their symptoms are a normal and common reaction to a malfunctioning nervous system, it brings a great sense of relief. Understanding how their malfunctioning nervous system causes those symptoms brings further relief. Suddenly, we no longer view ourselves as a freak. Doctor Claire Weekes writes in ‘Self Help for Your Nerves’,

‘These symptoms are not peculiar to you, but are well known to many like you.’ (1)

Learning this is one of the first steps towards recovery.

We can understand depression when we learn:
- what symptoms depression can cause, and
- how depression causes those symptoms.

Symptoms Depression Can Cause

This is a list of some of depression’s symptoms. I suffered from most of these while depressed.

Physical
- Aching jaw
- Aching shoulders
- Difficulty in breathing
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Heart-burn
- Insomnia
- Loss of appetite
- Missed heart beats
- Nausea
- Palpitating heart
- Prickling sensation in the limbs (feels like something crawling or biting beneath the skin)
- Racing heart
- Self-harm
- Sharp chest pains
- Stomach tension

Mental
- Fearful thoughts
- Mental churning
- Obsessive fearful thoughts
- Sluggish thinking

Emotional
- Anger
- Bewilderment
- Crying fits
- Fear of the symptoms outstrips the fear of depression’s original cause/s
- Feel depressed
- Feeling alone
- Irritability
- Loss of interest in life
- Low self esteem
- Panic attacks
- Self-hatred
- Suicidal Thoughts
- Transitory elation
- Withdrawal from relationships

Spiritual
- Anger towards God
- Anger towards Satan
- Compulsive repentance
- Feeling abandoned by God
- Guilt
- Unable to feel God’s presence
How Depression Causes those Symptoms

When someone is depressed, their nervous system malfunctions and becomes over sensitive. A fearful thought that would have dismissed out of hand by a healthy mind, can become an obsessive fearful thought. Fears become larger than life – I remember being unable to differentiate between what I feared and what was real. Dr Weekes wrote, ‘A sudden or prolonged state of stress may sensitize adrenalin-releasing nerves to produce the symptoms of stress in an exaggerated, alarming way.’ (2)

As the first symptoms of anxiety or depression start plaguing us, we unwittingly become our own worst enemy by reacting in one of the following ways:

1) we fear the symptom. And even after a symptom fades away, we are so afraid that it will return that any minor trigger is all that is necessary to bring it back.
2) we try to flee the symptom. We become afraid of the symptom and try to get away from it. However, the harder we run from it, the more we fear it, and the more powerful it becomes.
3) we fight the symptom. Although this reaction feels more positive that fear or flight, it also makes the symptoms worse.

Why does fearing, fleeing, or fighting the symptoms make them worse?

Doctor Weekes calls it a ‘fear-adrenalin-fear cycle.’ Quite simply, all three reactions cause too much adrenalin to flow, and it is the adrenalin that causes the symptoms. It is a vicious cycle. The more we fear, flee or fight, the more adrenalin is released, and the worse we become, as the additional adrenalin prolongs symptoms and produces new, even more alarming ones. Soon we become terrified, thinking, “What else is going to happen to me?”

The good news is that the cycle can be stopped.

The first step is to recognize that the disturbing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual sensations we are experiencing are caused by the cycle. Understanding this brings a huge sense of relief, a significant step in the journey of recovering from depression, as we can see from my diary entry below:

28th July 1990 –
...for the last 8 months, as always, I've reacted to what was wrong with me in the same way. I have been scared of it, and feared all the many side effects and things that were going wrong with my mind, body, and emotions. And my other reaction has been to fight it. (I've even literally said that I wished this "thing" had a physical body, so I could beat the daylights out of it.) And now I learn from this book that these two reactions are the wrong reactions, because they both only make it worse. Basically, my nerves have fallen apart, and have been manufacturing too much adrenalin. When the symptoms come, I have feared and fought, and these have produced more adrenalin, which made me fear or fight more, and it just got worse and worse. It's a Catch-22 situation, a merry go round...Thank you Jesus for being faithful, for hearing and answering my prayers, and for showing me what's wrong with me.

‘Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.’ Psalm 119:34


6. Facing Distressing Symptoms Instead of Dreading Them

Depression, along with chronic illnesses and disabilities, can afflict us with disturbing symptoms so distressing that we believe we cannot possibly live with them. Here is my story on how I learnt to cope with one such distressing symptom.

When I was in my late thirties, the deep rumbling sound in my ears that had began in my late teens, had become rather severe. I was suffering from tinnitus, a condition that produces noises in the ears that are not caused by external sounds. (I have otosclerosis, an inherited disease that causes the calcification of the bones of the middle ear.) Along with the deep rumbling I could also ‘hear’ a loud waterfall, a birdcage full of screeching budgerigars, hissing white noise, and an endless deep monotone humming.

Things came to a head one night in the latter part of 2003, at 3.00am in the morning. A new tinnitus sound, which had initially come and gone intermittently, was threatening to become a permanent fixture. It sounded like someone pushing a very, very heavy wooden desk across a rough timber floor, and buzzed with an irregular rhythm with a one or two second gap between each buzz.

It was so loud and unsettling that I lay in bed for hours, dreading each subsequent buzz, hoping and praying that it would stop and go away, as it had each time during the past week.

I used every argument in the book in the prayers I lifted heavenward. “I can’t live like this, Lord! Haven’t I suffered enough, do I have to have this too? Please Lord, make it stop! The rest of the ear noises are bad enough but this one is unbearable!”

Receiving no discernable response from God, I staggered to the kitchen, hoping to find something to help me sleep, yet by the time I got there, I was consumed by rage at the injustice of this situation. I could not live with a deafeningly loud buzzing sound tearing apart my concentration and setting my nerves on edge, destroying my sleep and ability to relax.

Yet as I looked out the kitchen window into the darkness, I recalled that this was not the first time I had been afflicted with unwanted disturbing symptoms that I believed I could not live with.

Years earlier, I had been afflicted by dozens of unwanted mental, physical, emotional and spiritual symptoms while suffering from severe depression. Desperate to escape those symptoms, I had reacted by fighting or fearing them, which not only made those symptoms worse but also caused new ones to appear.

The most distressing symptom of depression for me was the lack of peace, where I felt disturbed and ill at
ease all the time. I thought that if I could regain that inner peace I would be able to cope with life again.

From my diary, 7th July ’90 –
I just wish this sensation of being disturbed all the time would go away.
And know it will never come back.
I am not coping, and I know that.
I keep saying, "If I had inner peace, then I would cope."

Other symptoms I believed I could not cope with included:

From my diary, 20th July ’90 –
Sometimes my shoulder muscles ache to abandon,
the aching pain in my jaw drives me crazy.
My face and arms get a burning, prickling sensation.
My stomach feels trapped, as though it needs to burst,
my chest feels like it’s going to explode.
And as there are physical problems, so there are emotional ones.
They vary from a feeling that something big and dark will consume me,
to endless mental churnings that only makes me worse.

And now back to 2003. There I was at 3.00am in the morning, reacting to this new tinnitus noise in the same way as I had reacted to depression’s symptoms - trying to flee from or fight it.

So waiting on Jesus, I cast my mind back to remember how I had dealt with depression’s symptoms. Dr Claire Weekes book, “Self Help for Your Nerves,” had taught me to face the disturbing, unwanted symptoms caused by anxiety. She wrote, ‘I have no doubt that you are tensely shrinking from the feelings within you and yet, are ready to “listen in” in apprehension?...Now examine and do not shrink from the sensations that have been upsetting you. I want you to examine each carefully, to analyse and describe it to yourself...Do not tensely flinch from it. Go with it. Relax and analyse it...Now that you have faced and examined it, is it so terrible?’ (1)

So I took those same techniques and applied them to my current situation. Instead of dreading the disturbing new tinnitus noise and listening to it apprehensively, I faced it. Yes, it was bad, and I most certainly did not want it, but as I stood there listening to it, was it really so unbearable? Was it so bad that I could not think, function, or live?

No! Although bad, I could still think, function and live. I recognised that the worst aspect of this situation was my reaction to it – fearing and fighting it and convincing myself that I could not live with it. So I acknowledged there was nothing I could do to make the tinnitus go away and I accepted it instead of fighting and fearing it. I even thanked God for allowing this trial to come my way and asked Him to use it for good. After all, God is in control and there was no need for my heart to be troubled.

Instead of saying, “I can’t live like this!” I decided that I would learn to live with it and let it buzz, roar, and rumble away as though background music to my day. Instead of fearfully dreading the arrival of each new BUZZ, I let them come. If I had to live like this for the rest of my life, then so be it. Paul said that he had learned to be content whatever his circumstances, and by Christ’s strength, I would follow his example.

Comforted by God’s peace, I climbed back into bed, and although the hideous sound continued to buzz in my head, I was soon asleep.

And the good news is that by responding to depression’s symptoms in this way - by facing, accepting, learning to live with them as though background music to our day, and letting time pass, it breaks the fear-adrenalin-fear cycle, causing those symptoms to gradually reduce in severity and frequency, until they fade away completely. (More detail on this in the next article.)

‘I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.’ Philippians 4:12-13

p.s. - By God’s grace, an operation in 2005 that restored about 70% mid-range hearing to my left ear also reduced the tinnitus to about half what it was – that horrific buzzing sound is gone.


7. Breaking the Fear Cycle

In the previous article, I discussed the importance of facing depression’s distressing symptoms rather than fearfully shrinking from them, as explained by Dr Weekes, ‘I have no doubt that you are tensely shrinking from the feelings within you and yet, are ready to “listen in” in apprehension?...Now examine and do not shrink from the sensations that have been upsetting you. I want you to examine each carefully, to analyse and describe it to yourself...Do not tensely flinch from it. Go with it. Relax and analyse it...Now that you have faced and examined it, is it so terrible?’ (1) That is, although we are initially convinced that we cannot possibly live or function while these symptoms rage within us, the fact is that after we have faced them, we realise that we can still live and function with them.

Once we have faced those symptoms and robbed them of their power, the next step is to put into practise a technique that will break depression’s ‘fear-adrenalin-fear cycle,’ as Doctor Weekes calls it.

The Fear-Adrenalin-Fear Cycle

The cycle works like this: we react to depression by fearing, fleeing or fighting it. These reactions cause too much adrenalin to flow, and it is this adrenalin that causes depression’s symptoms. We are so desperate to get away from these symptoms that we fear, flee and fight even more, which in turn produces even more adrenalin, which prolongs symptoms and produces new, even more alarming ones, which we fear, flee, and fight, and the cycle continues.

It is crucial that we recognize that it is this cycle that causes depression’s disturbing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual sensations/symptoms, and that by breaking that cycle, we can eventually be free of them.

Below I outline a system that can slow and eventually stop that excessive flow of adrenalin. The system is simple and presented quite clearly in God’s word, yet it is so ‘unnatural’ that it does not occur to us when lost
in a state of anxiety. (The natural reaction to depression is to fear, flee or fight the symptoms.)

**How to Break the Fear, Flight, and Fight Cycle:**

1. Accept each of depression’s symptoms as being part of our life, instead of fearing, fighting or fleeing them
2. Learn to live with the symptoms as part of our life as if they were background music
3. Let time pass while trusting that God is in control

Our first reaction to these steps could be, “But I don’t WANT to learn to live with these disturbing sensations - I want them to go away!”

And there lies the irony of it all. It is only when we accept those sensations, learn to live with them, and let time pass, that the flow of adrenaline begins to diminish, as it the very reaction of desperately wanting them to go away that makes them worse. And as the flow of adrenaline diminishes, the symptoms lose their intensity, shorten in duration, and slowly begin to disappear. Accepting them instead of fearing or fighting them is the way to make them go away.

The Bible teaches us time and again that we should not be anxious, and it is not just because anxiety is the opposite of peace and trusting in God, but because God knows just how much fear and anxiety harms us. Here are scriptures that illustrate this technique of breaking the fear cycle by accepting, being content, and letting time pass.

**Verses for Acceptance:**

**Verses for Acceptance:**

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. James 1:2-3

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Philippians 4:6

**Verse for Learning to Live with the Symptoms:**

“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” Philippians 4:12-13

**Verses for Letting Time Pass while Trusting that God is in Control:**

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” John 14:1

**Verses for Letting Time Pass while Trusting that God is in Control:**

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear...Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?” Matthew 6:25-27

**Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.** Proverbs 3:5

While I was depressed, although I knew the Bible said I should not fear, should be content, and should rejoice in the midst of my sufferings, trying to put this into practice through sheer will power alone did not work. However, once I understood that putting those Bible verses into practice would break the fear-adrenalin-fear cycle, those verses suddenly came alive to me, causing hope to spring forth like spring rains after a drought.

**It Takes Time for a Nervous System to Heal**

Note that breaking the flow of adrenaline does not happen overnight, it is a gradual process that occurs over time. However, my life is a testimony to the fact that it does happen. Dr Claire Weekes says, “Accept it [the symptom] as something that will be with you for some time yet – in fact while you recover – but something that will eventually leave you if you are prepared to let time pass and not anxiously watch the churning during its passing. But do not make the mistake of thinking that it will go as soon as you cease to fear it. Your nervous system is still tired and will take time to heal, just as a broken leg takes time.” (3)

It is important that we keep ourselves busy as we let time pass while our nervous system slowly starts to heal. We need to go out of our way to find engaging, constructive activities and hobbies that interest us. Physical exercise, such as swimming, aerobics, circuit, walking or jogging, can also be of great help.

Within two months of reading “Self Help for Your Nerves,” a significant number of my symptoms, especially the physical ones, had greatly reduced in severity or ceased altogether. Over the next six months, I joined a new church, became a musician in a home group, started teaching Sunday School, and engaged in normal social activities again. Some symptoms took longer to fade away than others, but by reacting to them in the correct way, they no longer had the same power or intensity as I no longer feared them. Some symptoms, especially the mental ones such as panic attacks, lasted longer, but in time, they too faded away.

Counselling was a crucial step in helping to deal with these by helping me to retain my thought processes and gain new Biblical perspectives on the things I feared.

While stuck in depression, we think we have no future and no hope, but that is a lie from the kingdom of Satan, for in Christ we always have hope and a future. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.” 1 Corinthians 2:9.

Hope enters our lives again when we know it is only a matter of time, whether weeks or months, or in the case of some symptoms, years, for our nervous system to recover from this cycle. After reading “Self Help for Your Nerves,” my diary entries went from being bleak and full of despair, to containing hope, like this entry:

28th July 1990 –

This book has taught me how to react so that the merry go round will be stopped. And it’s teaching me how to react whenever it strikes again in the future.

**The Importance of Surrender**

To recover from depression we need to surrender every aspect of our life, including our desires and will, to Jesus. Romans 8:28 assures us that God is trustworthy and can bring good out of any situation. ‘And we know that in all
And there lies an important lesson for those suffering from depression and anxiety. When fearful thoughts come flooding in, the worse thing we can do is to sit or lie down and examine, consider and debate those thoughts. Our mind, already fatigued, becomes even more sluggish, and the fears get blown further and further out of proportion. Adrenalin flows excessively, causing disturbing sensations to abound and we spiral ever downwards.

In contrast, we can see that constructive activity was the best thing my daughter could do.

On one occasion back in 1990, when I lay curled on my bed churning over the fears that haunted me, I somehow managed to fix my eyes upon Jesus and He said, “Come on Peter, you don't need to do this. Come with Me - I have lots of constructive things for us to do together.” So I got off the bed, sat at my desk and painted some models. As this distracted me from focusing upon the fearful thoughts, they began to lose their intensity and slowly faded into the background.

Now that I have recovered from depression, I find it much easier to fix my eyes upon Jesus when assaulted by fears. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Hebrews 12:2. I reflect on John 14:1: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” And as I trust in Him I am able to shrug off those fears.

However, a mind exhausted by depression’s endless cycle of obsessive fearful thoughts loses its flexibility and resilience, and is therefore unable to shrug off fears or focus upon Jesus by choice alone. I know this because I tried with all of my strength and failed. I became so exasperated by my inability to break free from those fearful thoughts that I said to my counsellor, “I can’t stop thinking these obsessive fearful thoughts - I try and try, but I just can’t stop!”

Her answer was to run me through a practical exercise that illustrated why force of will was insufficient to stop thinking fearful thoughts for someone who is depressed. I will now share that exercise below.

I would like to ask you, the reader, to do something right now - please think of an elephant. Picture it in your mind - think of its huge, floppy ears, that long curling trunk, those twin ivory tusks, the powerful legs.

Now stop thinking about the elephant.

You failed, yes? You are still thinking about the elephant.

Now let us try that again. Please think of an elephant. Picture it in your mind - think of its huge, floppy ears, that long curling trunk, those twin ivory tusks.

Now, please picture in your mind the cover of your favourite novel. What colour is the title text? What image is on the cover? Does this image accurately represent the story in the novel? Did the book’s cover influence your decision to read or buy the book? Should a book be judged by its cover?

Now, have you noticed that you are no longer thinking of an elephant?

When suffering from depression we cannot break out of the cycle of fearful thoughts by will power alone. However, by concentrating on a constructive activity we distract ourselves from focusing on them. The fears lose their intensity and slowly fade away.

Constructive activity could include going for a walk, jogging, washing the car, gardening, and especially hobbies. Activity weakens fear’s grip on our mind by
giving us something else to focus on, and therefore brings relief.

It may be very hard at first to put steps like this into practice. There will be good days and bad days. We must not let the bad days discourage us. We need to be mindful that as we keep at it and rely upon Christ’s strength (2 Corinthians 12:9-10) and let time pass, while staying constructively busy, we will gradually improve. As we retrain our mind we will break the habit of focusing upon fearful thoughts, and will eventually be able to dismiss them with ease. We will be able to keep our eyes fixed firmly upon Jesus and trust in Him.

Some practical steps in dealing with fearful thoughts:

1. Recognise it is a fearful thought and remind ourselves that:
   a. it is just a fearful thought
   b. it has no real power and no significance
   c. I do not even believe what it is saying!
   d. I do not need to debate it, consider it, or listen to it.

2. Then while trusting in God and His Word, busy ourselves in a constructive activity, leaving the fearful thought at the back of our mind, like background music, where it will soon fade away.

3. If the fears clamour for our attention and we are secretly terrified of what they are insinuating, we need to remind ourselves that they are only a trick, a deception.

The Bible says, “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.” 1 Peter 5:8-9. Of special significance is that the Bible says Satan is only like a roaring lion – he relies upon trickery and deception.

The Bible also says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James 4:7. That is a great promise to stand upon.

Let us remember: For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice, of craven and cringing and fawning fear), but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control. 2 Timothy 1:7 AMP

9. Learning Not to Fear our Own Thoughts

I called my mind a ‘mindfield’ while suffering from depression, since so many unwanted, appalling thoughts would pop without warning into my mind and ‘BOOM’ - the thought, its implications, and my ensuing reaction would tear me apart, just as if I had stepped upon a landmine. These appalling thoughts, which often triggered panic attacks, came to terrorise me to the extent that I tried to ‘tip-toe’ around in my mind, sometimes scared to think anything at all.

From my diary, 1/4/93 –
I think of my mind as a never ending mindfield
I walk along inside my mind, forgetting not to yield
to those fearful thoughts and doubts that cling like dust.

I take a mental step and plant my foot right on a mine, and boom!
There blows another one.
At first I look at the mine and ponder,
Before I realise that it's just another doubt
and send it yonder.
"Just let it go," I tell myself.
"Don't give in to the fear, don't let it influence you."
And I remove it with a mental shear.
It is such a struggle at times.
Most have to watch where they walk,
But I have to watch where I think.

Here is an example of an alarming/appalling thought, also known as an obsessive fearful thought.

A strong Christian told me recently that a thought popped into her mind while she was praying, saying, “Satan is lord.” Her response was to freak out. Where did the thought come from? Did it come from her? If it did come from her, did that mean she really believed it? And if that was the case, there must be something seriously wrong with her!

Although such a thought could pop into anyone’s mind, a person with a healthy mind would dismiss the thought as utter nonsense, and pay it no heed. However, for someone with a sensitive mind or a mind that is over sensitized or exhausted by depression, such a thought can cause a shock the first time it occurs.

When similar alarming/appalling thoughts began to afflict me in my early twenties, (I had already suffered one mild depressive episode,) I reacted in the same way. I was greatly alarmed to find such thoughts flying through my mind and feared some part of me actually believed them. On each occasion I began a fearful, introspective examination of my heart and mind, digging deeper and deeper. “But what if I do believe this thought, what does it mean about me?” The more I examined the thought, the more I feared that I actually believed it or was guilty of what it was accusing. After these frantic sessions of fearful soul searching came repentance as I desperately asked God to forgive me for having the thought or attitude in the first place.

Not only did I fear these alarming/appalling thoughts; I lived in fear that more might come. And of course, more did come. Fearing them made me more sensitive to them, which of course made them occur more frequently. Panic attacks became more and more commonplace as well.

Now let us pop back to the discussion I had with the young woman who encountered one of these thoughts during her prayer time. Understandably, she was bewildered, afraid, feared where the thought came from, and scared that perhaps she did believe part of it.

I said to her, “All sorts of thoughts fly through our minds every day - some of these are whispered into our mind by Satan, while others are simply things we are afraid of. It does not matter where these fearful thoughts come from. All we need to know is that they are not from us and they are not what we believe - they are simply something we are afraid of. Now, answer me this, what do you believe about Satan?”

She answered that she believed he was a fallen angel, the devil, and that Jesus had defeated him through His work on the cross.
I said, “Now compare what you have just told me, which is not only what you believe, but what you know you believe, with the first fearful thought that popped into your mind.”

Her face lit up with comprehension and relief. The result was black and white. The first thought, “Satan is lord,” was suddenly shown up for what it was - a lie, a deception. It was not something this young woman believed, it was only something she feared she might believe. 

Suddenly, the fearful thought had no power as the truth of God’s word revealed it to be a lie. I encouraged her not to fear such thoughts, and if they happened again, to do as below:

1. Do not be afraid if an alarming/appalling thought pops into our mind.
2. Do not worry where the thought came from, whether from the enemy, or something we fear, it is not significant.
3. STOP, and ask our self, what do we believe or know about that topic? (Base our answer upon God’s Word if possible.)
4. COMPARE the original alarming/appalling thought with what we know we believe, and then keep the liberating truth in mind.
5. Then move on and let time pass, leaving the episode behind. (Do not be concerned if the fear lingers for a while, remember the truth of what we believe, and the thought will soon fade away.)

The young woman was no longer worried but comforted and relieved. She also knew how to deal with any such thoughts that came at her in the future. I assured her, “Soon you will be able to dismiss such thoughts by simply thinking at them, ‘Oh, you’re one of those thoughts are you? Bye-bye!’ And eventually, you won’t even need to do that.”

The truth is that these thoughts are not actually something we are afraid we might do or believe - because we would never do or believe such things. The truth is that we are afraid of the thoughts themselves.

I remember the release I received upon learning I had been tricked into being afraid of my own (or the enemy’s) thoughts. It was so comforting to know that I no longer needed to dig feverishly through my heart and mind searching for attitudes or beliefs that were not even there in the first place. I am indebted to the Lord for setting me free from that trap.

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:32

So let us rely upon the truths of God’s word to set us free from fearful thoughts as we remind ourselves of what we know we believe.

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:5

(A small postscript, due to very severe depression or mental illness, there are situations where people not only have bad thoughts but actually desire or attempt to carry them out. In these cases, they need to seek professional help immediately, such as from a doctor or Christian therapist.)

10. It is not Good for Man to be Alone

My descent into depression accelerated towards the end of 1989. Exhausted by chronic insomnia and frequent panic attacks, a massive shock finally pushed me over the edge. My mind unraveled to the extent that for the next several days, I did little else but lay on my bed, rocking from side to side as I tried in vain to pull myself out of the terrifying panic attacks that had taken over my mind.

I described that week, and an earlier similar one, in my diary, 28th Feb 1990—

What’s happened to me?
Where has it come from?
What did those two weeks mean,
One after Thailand, one at the year’s end.
I fell apart emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually.
I could barely think a complete thought.
I could not find peace whatever course of action I considered.
All day long, during those two weeks, I lay curled up into a ball.
And I could not get away - it would not stop.

It is significant to note that my parents were absent during this week, having gone to attend an annual Christian convention. Fortunately, my brother was there, as he made sure I kept eating and tried to help and support me.

My parents returned a week later. When my mother found me laying on my bed in that terrible condition, she sprang into action. She bundled me off the bed, encouraged me with kind words, and in no time sent me outside to wash my car, which was very hard to do considering the state of my mind. Yet even so, I could not help but notice that the activity of washing the car lessened the inner pain slightly. She and my brother also prayed over me, and my mother continued to give me menial tasks to do every day such as watering the garden, serving dinner, and also encouraged me to watch TV with the family every evening. Although the fears assaulting my mind continued to scream at me while doing these things, I noticed that their intensity was less during these times than when I was inactive. The activities my mother gave me were a good distraction.

So it was because of my mother that I was able to get off that sickbed. Most of the time she was simply there for me, never telling me to “snap out of it.” This non-demanding, supportive human contact helped to pull me out of that blackest, unable-to-move phase of depression.

The Bible tells us that when God created Adam, He looked at him and said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” Genesis 2:18.

Although it is a normal reaction when depressed to want to hide from any human contact, this reaction is harmful. It is not good for someone who is depressed to be alone. We need to be with close family members or close friends who will simply be there for us, providing emotional support. We do not need to tell them what we are going through in detail - they probably would not understand.
Not everyone has close family members they can turn to, and for those who are ill, disabled or living in the country, even finding friends can be difficult. In which case, here is some wonderful advice from my friend Sherry Castelluccio. “Are you lonely? Call that friend you haven’t spoken to in months. You will both be glad you did.” Another option is to join a supportive Christian forum, such as The Cypress Times, a Christian social networking site, or the Faithwriters forum, where any Christian who dabbles in writing is welcome to socialize.

Another very important source of human contact is available through a local church. Gary R. Collins, Ph.D. shares, “The church, and other social institutions, can become therapeutic communities where people feel welcome and accepted. A concerned group of people who have learned to be caring can do much to soften the trauma of crises and provide strength and help in times of need. Aware that they are not alone, people in crises are able to cope better and thus avoid severe depression.” Christian Counseling, Word Publishing, 1980.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

Please note that while small churches can provide caring, family-like atmospheres, this is noticeably absent from larger churches. If attending a larger church, it is imperative to join at least one of that church’s small groups, such as a women’s or men’s fellowship, home group (cell group), youth group, prayer group, and so on.

Around ten months after my descent into severe depression, when I had finally regained hope for the future, the Christian counselor I was seeing encouraged me to stop hiding behind Jesus, join a home group, and get back into ministry, such as playing the piano in the home group I was to join.

I took her advice and joined a midweek home group run by a couple in my church. Having been lonely for so long because of depression, this midweek meeting soon became one of the highlights of my week. I played the piano for the group and made some good friends. It was wonderful to simply be with other believers and enjoy their company as we fellowshiped and worshipped God together. I did not tell anyone in the group that I was recovering from depression, but it may have been a good idea to share briefly what I was going through with the home group’s leader in order to receive prayer and pastoral care.

In conclusion, although depression seeks to isolate us, we must not allow it to do so. We need to spend time with close family or friends, and join a caring Christian small group as soon as we are able to do so. It is through the church, Christ’s body, that we can receive encouragement, support and strength.

1 Corinthians 14:26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

11. Depression & Being Constructively Active

In the previous article I explained that we must not let depression isolate us. We need to spend time with close family or friends and join a caring Christian community.

In this article I discuss something else that played a significant role in helping me to cope with and recover from depression. The diary entry below reveals something that helped dull depression’s intensity:

28th Feb 1990 –
But those two weeks haunt me.
They do not make sense.
The first one ended after eight days,
But I knew it was the eye of the storm.
Sure enough, two weeks later – blam!
And this second week lasted six intense days,
And it never finished.
It is still going, nine weeks later.
But it is not as bad as it was then.
But that’s probably because I’m busy at work.
As soon as I start to look, I start to sink and say,
“What’s happened to me.
I can’t believe what’s happened to me.”

As mentioned previously, severe depression had left be bedridden for six days as terrifying fears immobilized me – a phase that only ended when my parents returned from a week’s holiday. My mother had bundling me off that bed and busied me with menial chores around the home, as well as providing me with much needed support.

Two days later I had to return to work. My mind was still lost in a miry pit of churning fearful thoughts and I did not want to work, nevertheless, I refused to shirk my responsibilities and risk losing my job. So off to work I went, and as you can see from the diary entry above, being busy at work dulled depression’s intensity.

That is an important aspect of coping with and recovering from depression – keeping ourselves gainfully engaged in constructive activities. This could be a full time, part time or casual job. If this is not possible, we could volunteer to help a charity, such as the Salvation Army or an opportunity shop. We could even volunteer to work in the church office a couple of days a week, or help a family member who runs a business.

Regular work gives us purpose, a routine and keeps our mind busy on things other than the fearful thoughts that demand our attention whenever our mind is idle.

I know that this can be hard to do, but Jesus is there to help us take this step.

‘I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.’ Philippians 4:13 KJV.

My wife and I used to visit Chika Honda, a Japanese lady, in the Deer Park Metropolitan Women’s Correctional Centre. In October 2000, the government took over management of the prison. While this transfer of management was being implemented, the inmates were placed in a state of lockdown where they could not leave their self-contained units. Chika asked our church to pray that the lockdown would be ended as soon as possible so
that she could go back to work in the prison’s workshops. Being stuck all day in a unit with other inmates with nothing to do was unbearable, whereas the job gave her a sense of purpose and achievement.

A special note here - we must be careful not use such activities to run from the causes of our depression. It is imperative to seek help from a Christian counselor or therapist to deal with the issues and fears that caused or are associated with depression.

Let us now read Luke 19:13, where Jesus is seen giving gifts to His servants.

So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas. “Put this money to work,” he said, “until I come back.” Luke 19:13

This ‘money’ represents the gifts which God has given us. Putting these gifts into action is another activity that assists with the recovery of depression. To focus on God, and on the needs of others, is a healing balm all of its own.

Acts 20:35 “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Before depression destroyed my life, I had been an assistant pastor and a church musician. Ten months after my descent into depression, when it was clear I was on the road to recovery, my counselor pushed me back into ministry. At her advice, I started with something small — playing the piano in a home group. A few months later I started teaching Sunday School too. After I recovered from depression, I became even more involved using my spiritual gifts in serving the Lord.


Along with spiritual gifts, God has also given us natural talents, in areas such as sport, music, writing, painting, gardening, and so on. When God created us in His image, He also placed in us the desire to be creative. So let us also develop and pursue the talents and hobbies that God has given us – they are a gift from Him.

One of the greatest pieces of advice that helped me in the early days of severe depression came from a friend who had been down that same route. He said, “Find anything that you enjoy, and pursue it. Just try to have fun.”

“Have fun, when I’m like this?” I thought to myself, yet I pressed on and embraced his advice. I bought a computer, played engrossing computer games, and over the next five years wrote three novels and pursued other hobbies too. I also joined a gym. These hobbies helped to keep my mind productively occupied and were a significant factor in breaking my mind’s habit of thinking fearful thoughts.

My friend Sherry Castelluccio, who suffered from severe post-partum depression after the birth of her daughter, offers this advice – “Are you bored at home? Pick up that hobby you put down. Are you lonely? Call that friend you haven’t spoken to in months. You will both be glad you did. Is your body physically sick? Go sit outside in the sun for a few minutes. Find the one thing that makes you smile and drink it up. Surround yourself with children, rent a comedy, finger paint. You are here because God put you here with a purpose. Find out what it is, make it your ambition to find out what you can do to bless others. I have found that the fastest way to bust Satan in the teeth is to do something for someone else. It puts a stop to the feelings of sadness and makes you feel alive and full of purpose, all at the same time. Make yourself laugh. It’s the simplest, most inexpensive cure there is and the most readily available. It changes your whole outlook.”

I have always loved the way which the King James Version translates Luke 19:13 And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, “Occupy till I come.”

What wonderful advice - keep ourselves productively occupied until He comes. So let us work as we are able, serve God with the spiritual gifts He has given us, and pursue engaging hobbies. Keeping occupied with such productive activities can be of great assistance in helping us to recover from depression by taking our focus off depression’s fears and symptoms that try so hard to immobilize us.

(All verses from the NIV unless stated otherwise.)

12. Depression & Regular Exercise

Learning karate in my late teens was not one of the smartest things I have ever done, primarily because it was subtly intertwined with eastern religious principles and philosophies. When I finally realized this, I quit karate before I did my black belt grading, as that required that I participate in a Buddhist/Shinto Senjo ceremony, and as a Christian, I could not do that.

However, doing karate for two years had good points as well, the main one being that through it I achieved a very high level of physical fitness, and this had very positive effects upon every area of my life. During those two years my energy levels peaked, my mind became more flexible and alert, my immune system became stronger than ever before, and if I did get sick, I recovered very quickly. I also became more confident.

Now although I knew that karate’s regular workouts had brought about these amazing changes in my life, after I quit karate I made one of the biggest mistakes of my life. Instead of searching for another avenue of physical exercise without an eastern religious component, I stopped exercising altogether.

As to be expected, over the next four years my health steadily returned to what it had been previously. I caught every sickness I encountered, they hit me hard, my mind lost some flexibility, my energy reserves ran out and it was a struggle to make it through each day. Admittedly, after I graduated from Bible College I did far too much, working fulltime as well as being an assistant pastor, yet that was compounded by my lack of health due to partaking in no regular physical exercise.

In 1990, while stuck in the depths of depression, I realized my mistake and started getting back into regular exercise. Initially I went jogging and did (lots!) of sit-ups, and then in 1991, when I was well on the road to recovery from depression, I joined a gym. At first I did weights and circuit. Circuit was fun, very energetic and a great cardiovascular workout. On the other hand, since my mind had nothing to do while pumping iron, doing weights saw me struggling with fearful churning thoughts. Yet all the
same, I noticed that my quality of life was slowly improving on all levels.

In 1992, I changed from doing weights and circuit to doing aerobics three times a week. Aerobics proved to be a fantastic workout for the entire body, and even helped with my mental problems. I recall going to an aerobics class while in the midst of a panic attack on several occasions, only to be pleasantly surprised when the brisk exercise to music drove the attack away.

Having learnt my lesson, twenty years later I am still doing aerobics, as well as light hand weights at home several days a week. Being physically fit helps all areas of our lives. It can boost our immune system, reduces the effects of illnesses upon us, strengthens our bodies and helps prevent injuries, makes our minds more flexible and alert, boosts our confidence, lifts our emotions, and even improves our spiritual condition.

I encourage everyone to partake in regular physical exercise. A word of caution, though - if you are out of shape, take it slowly, one-step at a time. Start by going on three or four gentle 45-minute walks a week. After a few weeks of this, change this to brisk walks. Consider joining a pilates class and improve your flexibility. In addition, depending upon your age and level of fitness, consider embracing more energetic forms of exercise such as swimming, aerobics, bike riding, or jogging. Joining a gym can be very helpful as the classes they run provide motivation for those who find it hard to motivate themselves. Gymnasiums also have exercise bikes, treadmills, steppers, rowing machines, and weights.

Another word of caution - depending upon our age and level of fitness, it is worthwhile getting a check-up with a doctor before determining a suitable form of regular physical exercise. Doing too much exercise or unsuitable exercise could cause injuries. If joining a gym, book yourself in for a physical assessment before joining any classes or doing any weights, and the instructor will design a program especially suited for you.

Bearing in mind the comments I made about karate and its eastern religious content, please avoid yoga as its roots and purposes are inseparably bound with eastern religious philosophies as well.

Another important aspect of maintaining our physical health is a good diet, eating plenty of vegetables and fruit and drinking about eight cups of water a day. (If our health deteriorates upon such a diet, see a doctor immediately. Some people are fructose or gluten intolerant, and a healthy diet can cause depression in such a case. )

Gary R. Collins, Ph.D. shares the following advice for preventing depression, “Encourage physical fitness. Since poor diet and lack of exercise can make people depression-prone, people should always be encouraged – by word and example – to take care of their bodies. A healthy body is less susceptible to mental as well as to physical illness.” Christian Counselling, Word Publishing, 1980.

‘Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.’ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

13. Good Days and Bad Days

Many if not most places in the world have fairly predictable weather. My wife is from Japan. A rainy season of twenty to thirty days of rain occurs every June, and every summer has a withering string of at least forty hot, humid days.

When someone who is used to consistent weather patterns migrates to the city of Melbourne (where I live) they are in for a bit of a shock.

We Melburnians patiently endure the cold days of winter while eagerly anticipating the arrival of spring and warmer weather. Spring finally arrives and with it comes a string of warmer, sunny days.

New comers rejoice, thinking that winter is finally over and that warmer weather has arrived!

But then without warning the warm spell vanishes, replaced by a cold snap akin to a typical winter day. Those new to Melbourne are caught unawares by this sudden return to the cold. Dressed in thin summer clothes, they shiver and often contract colds or worse. By rights, November, the month proceeding summer, should be nice and warm. Yet my grandmother, who migrated to Melbourne from Queensland, termed September to November the ‘pneumonia months,’ since these unexpected cold snaps caused so many illnesses.

In contrast to newcomers to Melbourne, the locals expect these abrupt changes in the weather. Throughout spring and even during December, we keep a jacket handy. If the weather turns suddenly cold, rather than be surprised and caught out, we don the jacket and stay warm.

Recovering from depression can be very much like Melbourne’s weather. Depression begins with a frigid, cold winter of despair and black hopelessness. Then as we begin to recover, it is similar to entering spring, and finally summer, or complete recovery.

Speaking from my own experience, once we start to feel better and realize we are improving, we may entertain thoughts such as, “that's it, I'm on the road to recovery, only clear sailing from here on it.”

Unfortunately, if we think this way we set ourselves up for a fall. Because like Melbourne’s spring weather, even when we begin to feel better, depression still has those cold snaps, those bad days, which can catch us completely by surprise – unless we are expecting them.

That is the theme of this article – even when on the road to recovery we need to maintain realistic expectations and expect bad days or periods to afflict us from time to time. Otherwise when they come, we may become shocked, disappointed, downcast, and even fear we are regressing rather than improving. Such reactions of course do make us temporarily worse.

Yet if we know in advance that there will be these bad patches such as panic attacks, mental churning or the return of familiar disturbing sensations, then we can react calmly and head off a negative reaction that would intensify those symptoms. These bad patches are not significant, just a normal part of the healing process. It helps us a lot if we can accept these bad days without fearing or fighting, and simply wait for tomorrow, or the next day. We need to remind ourselves, “It’s just one of those days, but it will end. More good times are ahead.” Sometimes it is a case of four steps forward, three back, two forwards, one back, but...
upon reflection we will see that we are actually moving forward.

This was something I learnt the hard way, as you can see from my diary.

16th May 1990 –
Two weeks ago I felt almost normal again, 
But was I too hopeful?  
The last two or three days have been almost as bad as before, 
And it has caught me off guard. 
A familiar disturbed sensation once again flooded my chest and emotions, 
And it was too much for me today.

I have several diary entries to this effect, but eventually, I became accustomed to the cycle of occasional bad days mixed with good ones, and I no longer bothered to record them in my diary. Instead, aware that I needed to let time pass, I concentrated on keeping my eyes fixed upon Jesus, pursuing hobbies, serving in the church, exercising, and so on.

So let us persevere and run the race Jesus has set before us, and keep our eyes fixed firmly upon Him, for He is our portion, our inheritance.

Hebrews 12:1 ‘Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.’

Hebrews 12:2 ‘Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.’

Psalm 142:5 I cry to you, O LORD: I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.”

14. Depression, Momentary Elation, & Setting Realistic Expectations

Depression is one of the most confusing ailments that can afflict us. Not only are we stricken by despair, loss of hope, anxiety, panic attacks, and dozens of other unpleasant physical, emotion and mental symptoms, but we may also experience moments of giddy elation.

From my diary, several weeks after the onset of severe depression:

31st Jan '90 – I feel like the Melbourne weather. I regularly get extremely angry, very angry...even with God. And then, half an hour later, I want to cry, in despair and loneliness, or just cry because I feel extremely sad for some reason. And I even feel extreme momentary excitement every now and then. What has happened to me?

At the time I could not fathom why I was feeling so bad all the time, and the existence of these moments of elation just added to the confusion.

I did not realize that my nervous system had become exhausted to the point of collapse and no longer functioned within normal parameters. As well as releasing endless streams of negative adrenalin into my body, it also occasionally misfired in the opposite direction, causing a wave of unexplainable excitement. For a few seconds I felt so good, as though on top of the world, only to crash back to the miry black pit of woe immediately afterwards. Once I understood that this was just another symptom of depression, I was no longer confused by these episodes.

(Please note that the moments of elation I experienced rarely lasted for more than a few seconds. Hypomania or mania - characteristics of bipolar depression - are somewhat different. These episodes can last for several days, and along with euphoria may include periods of increased activity, poor judgement, and restlessness. I have not experienced bipolar depression, so I am only going by what I have read about it.)

Setting Realistic Expectations

I also noticed during depression’s initial stages that I sometimes felt tempted to embark on a grand new venture that would send my life in an entirely new direction.

For example, in November 1989, prior to my becoming depressed, I received an offer to join another church planting team. This offer was later shelved due to a change in plans. When I became severely depressed, and before I knew what was wrong with me, I tried to carry on with ‘life as usual,’ even contemplating going out to plant a new church by myself. Although my mind at this time was so exhausted by never ending panic attacks, I still somehow considered starting new ventures such as this. My perspective of my own condition and abilities was completely distorted.

I never acted on the compulsion to plant a new church, which was good as I would not have been able to carry it through. And had I attempted to do so and failed, I would have felt even worse. Fortunately, I soon realized that I was in no condition to start any major new projects and formed a more realistic expectation of my abilities based on my current condition. Instead, I worked at keeping myself constructively occupied, but I was careful not to commit to anything that I could not cope with.

So my advice to anyone who is suffering from depression and who is considering embarking on a major new venture is to give the idea to God and let Him carry it, and then shelve the idea, resist submitting to it, and it will mostly likely fade away. If the idea does not fade away, I recommend getting a second opinion from someone such as a pastor/counselor or wise friend, and trust their judgment over our own.

We do not need to stop living while recovering from depression, but need to be mindful that we are in a recovery phase and need plenty of rest. We need to set realistic goals for ourselves, and to maintain realistic expectations. Recovering from depression is like recovering from any other illness, it takes time, and we need to go easy on ourselves during that time.

Psalm 23:1-3
The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures, 
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he restores my soul.  
He guides me in paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.
15. Depression & Anger: Sherry’s Testimony

Everyone who suffers from depression struggles with anger to some degree. It may be focused or unfocused, or be primarily directed at depression’s symptoms as well as towards our own mind and body for ruining our life by never ceasing to manufacture those symptoms month after month. Focused anger can be towards whatever or whoever caused the depression, towards God for allowing this thing to befall us, or even towards the enemy.

My sister in Christ, Sherry Castellucio, has kindly granted me permission to reprint here an article she wrote called, ‘Fighting Depression.’ She shares her testimony of her life long battle with depression and its accompanying anger.

FIGHTING DEPRESSION, by Sherry Castellucio

The best way I’ve heard depression described is “anger turned inward”. It can be a real vicious anger, depending on the week. It’s a debilitating, mean-spirited, cruel monster with little regard for the rest of the world. It doesn’t matter if you’re a stay at home mom or if you’re a teenager just trying to survive. You could be an old lady, living at home by yourself with all of your family away in other parts of the country, or you could be a widower who just lost the love of your life. It’s no respecter of persons and doesn’t care about age, race, or religion. If you are human, you are susceptible. If you’ve had it before you’re even more of a target.

Over the years, I’ve found the simplest way to fight it is just to accept it. Yes, I have depression but no, I’m not going to allow it to rule my life. The biggest help I’ve ever given myself was to figure out what parts of it I can control and what parts I need help with. I can’t control the fact that it’s genetic and sometimes appears, regardless of how hard I fight to contain it. After the birth of my child, it buried me. Suddenly I was enmeshed in things I had no control over and my body literally shut down like a computer hard drive. There was simply too much information to process.

I remember feeling so incredibly angry but had not the foggiest idea why. Surrounded by in-laws, an intrusive mother, and a newborn became too much to handle all at once. I had to learn how to function as a person and learn how to keep the voices at bay, and eventually disappear. I had to accept that for a while the only elixir was medication.

The parts I can control are a bit trickier. I know what I have to do to make this better, but I have to decide what I’m going to do about it. I have to choose within myself how I’m going to live today, being bitter and angry or choosing to come out of it, albeit ever so slowly. I have to know what makes me feel good and even if I have no desire to participate in those things, I know I must if I am to make it out alive and able to be the person my family needs me to be. It’s much easier to admit I can’t live this way when there are people at home that need me.

Still, there are those days when I would much rather curl myself up into the foetal position and sleep the day away, forgetting everything and everyone in my life. Shirking my responsibilities and ignoring my needs are tempting, but not realistic. It’s my responsibility to make this home run smoothly and raise my child the best way I know how. It’s impossible to be productive when I’m zonked out in bed.

The Lord has been so faithful in pulling me out. He never fails to reveal himself in those dark times when I feel so empty, so lifeless. He is there reminding me that if I just give a little bit, try just a tiny fraction, He’ll bless me for it. It is work but I give in to Him because I know that He is right. It isn’t worth it to indulge in myself because I get nothing out of it. Giving in to myself is the last great mistake.

What words of comfort can I give to someone who struggles as I do? Remember that the devil is a liar, you are loved and it is possible to go on today. Recognize your anger for what it is and do something constructive about it.

Are you bored at home? Pick up that hobby you put down. Are you lonely? Call that friend you haven’t spoken to in months. You will both be glad you did. Is your body physically sick? Go sit outside in the sun for a few minutes. Find the one thing that makes you smile and drink it up.

Surround yourself with children, rent a comedy, finger paint. You are here because God put you here with a purpose. Find out what it is, make it your ambition to find out what you can do to bless others. I have found that the fastest way to bust Satan in the teeth is to do something for someone else. It puts a stop to the feelings of sadness and makes you feel alive and full of purpose, all at the same time. Make yourself laugh. It’s the simplest, most inexpensive cure there is and the most readily available. It changes your whole outlook.

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.” Psalm 139:14 Allow this truth to embrace you and accept you. You are His child and he loves you as if you were the only one on this earth.

I have suffered from depression my whole life but I refuse to allow it to consume me and to dictate how I will live. My master is my Saviour Jesus Christ. I submit to his laws, not the laws of depression. There are some days that I am happy simply because I am alive and loved. There are other days when I must decide that I’m going to be happy, regardless of what my body or mind is telling me. It’s those days, when I have to make the most effort to really choose to smile that I know God is with me. Those are the days when I know I’m winning.

Fighting depression is no easy thing. Half the battle is won when you can stand back and decide that your life is good, even if Satan is trying to convince you otherwise. And in the end, the joke’s on him. He can’t be happy because he can’t be in the presence of the Lord. Now that is a depressing thought.

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16. Depression and that Disgusting Morning Feeling

Many people suffering from depression have discovered that they usually feel worse in the morning, a symptom usually associated with severe depression. This was my case as well, as we can see from the following diary entry:

28th Feb 1990
In the mornings, I always feel disgusting
Not bad, not guilty, not unclean, but disgusting, unsettled, disturbed.
And the degree to which I feel disturbed varies throughout each day.

This was written two months into severe depression. The worst phase of depression, where I did nothing but lay on my bed and churn over obsessive fearful thoughts, had passed. But this next phase was not that much of an improvement, and was still accompanied by this disgusting morning feeling.

I would wake from a fitful, sometimes nightmare filled sleep, only to be disappointed to find that I felt worse than I did the night before. This is a strange and unsettling experience, as you would expect to feel better after a night’s sleep, but with depression, that is typically not the case. Anxiety levels may be elevated when we wake, and we may even wake with fearful thoughts already churning through our mind. In fact, I often found myself debating my fears in my dreams, and waking merely brought those fears into conscious thought.

Even when we are well on the road to recovery, have regained hope, and are beginning to have good days, it is still common to wake in the morning and feel so bad that we wonder if we really are improving at all.

In ‘Self Help for Your Nerves’, Doctor Claire Weekes has a whole chapter devoted to this issue, called ‘That Dreaded Morning Feeling.’ She shares, ‘It is strange how the morning has this disconcerting habit of apparently paying little regard to the improvement of the day before. People are disappointed and bewildered when, after going to bed fairly cheerful, they wake the next morning to find the same old heart of lead, the same depression, the same churning stomach, the same difficulty in facing the day...’


17. Dealing with Self-hate

This is what I wrote in my diary, on the 13th March 1990, three months into depression: I feel inadequate - I hate myself. It feels like God hates me (even though I know He loves me) but I can’t stand myself.

Only three months earlier, my life had been full of purpose. I was serving as an assistant pastor in a local church, involved in pastoral care, discipleship, the music team, and preaching. I was also working towards serving as a missionary in Asia. I fully expected 1990 to be one of the best years of my life.

Yet due to undiagnosed complex partial epilepsy, chronic insomnia, overworking through the whole year, suffering a massive shock, and worsening panic attacks, my life fell apart at the end of 1989. Shock, bewilderment, confusion, denial, fear and anger raged through me as a multitude of depression’s symptoms tore my life to pieces. In the first week of 1990 I had become so despondent that I abandoned my life dream of becoming a pastor and a missionary and left the ministry. I soon found myself unable to face people and lost contact with almost everyone I knew.

15th May 1990 –
Self-hate keeps descending upon me like a swarm of angry hornets.I look at myself and find nothing but co

6th July 1990 –
My reaction to this lack of peace is to hate myself, to think that I’m useless, and to wonder why my emotions continue to stuff me around like this. Can’t my emotions tell that they have ruined me, and are ruining me?

It is easy to see how such suffering and negative changes in our life can destroy our self-concept and lead to self-hate, taking depression to deeper depths.

The purpose of this article is to encourage those experiencing self-hate, by showing that although these feelings seem to be justified, they are in fact a lie, and have no place in our lives.
We cannot throw off such feelings overnight, but we can re-train our underlying thought processes and conform them to God’s Word, bringing wholeness and relief.

We Need to Be Patient with Ourselves

The first thing we need to do is to recognise that we are ill. Depression is an illness, just as is diabetes, or deafness. In late 2004 I was admitted to hospital to receive major surgery on my left ear, which was deaf. The bones of my middle ear were replaced by a titanium prosthesis. I spent three days in hospital after the operation followed by two weeks at home. For the next three months I was not permitted to partake in any strenuous exercise.

No one would look at me in that situation and criticise me for ‘taking it easy.’ Nor did I hate myself for ceasing so many of life’s normal activities for three months. This is the attitude we need to take towards depression. Recognise it is an illness, be patient with ourselves and allow ample time for recovery, even if it takes months or years. We must be careful to recognise our limitations and not have unrealistic goals or expectations. This does not mean that we should hide from the world, only that we do not expect too much of ourselves.

Do Not Look Back

One of the biggest pitfalls of depression is to look back wistfully at what we used to be like, and lament over how low we have fallen — we would give anything to be like that again. I spent hours and hours ruminating over the past and wishing I could go back there or be like that again. This process is counter-productive - it only makes us worse.

The Christian counselor I saw taught me this - to be in deep surrender to God really means to never look back with regret upon the past, nor forward to any wish of what we want to be like in the future. Comparing ourselves to what we used to be, or what we want to be like, is a hindrance to resting in God’s will. We must be content to be who He made us to be today, to be content to be where He put us today, and to be content to be how He made us to be today.

Let us again consider Philippians 4:12-13 ‘I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.’

How Does God View Us?

While suffering from depression we cannot trust our own opinion of ourselves. A friend who had experienced depression told me, “We can’t see properly in times like this. Our feelings completely distort our world view and vision.”

So let us look at how God views us, and then view ourselves through Jesus’ eyes.

Genesis 1:26 says, Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." We are not the chance result of millions of years of evolution, but created in God’s very image.

The Bible says that although we are sinners, we still have great significance and value. Psalm 8:4-5 says, ‘What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour.’

Even in our fallen, sinful condition, the Bible shows us just how much God loves us. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8. God did not wait for us to become perfect before He loved us; He loved us so much that He sent Jesus to die in our place so that our relationship with God can be restored.

Hebrews 12:2 says Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. What was that joy set before Jesus that motivated Him to die for us? It tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake (on earth) or asleep (in heaven), we may live together with him. Jesus treasures us so greatly that He wants us to share our whole life with Him.

John 1:12-13 tells us that ‘to all who received Jesus, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.’ Those who believe in Christ are God’s very own children!

Psalm 17:8 tells us that we are God’s treasure. Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings. It always encourages me when I think of Jesus looking at me as His treasure.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says, God made Jesus, who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Jesus we might become the righteousness of God. This means that when God looks at us, He does not see our old, sinful nature, or our problems. He sees the purity and righteousness of Jesus in us instead.

Romans 8:1 reinforces that. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. This is a very important lesson for us to learn. Do not let guilt and condemnation trip our feet. Jesus has forgiven us and cast our sins into the deepest sea!

God comes to live in our hearts if we ask Him. John 14:23 says, Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. We are God’s temple - what an honour!” Zephaniah 3:17 is one of my favourite verses in the Bible, because it shows exactly how God thinks of His children. "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.”

18. Feelings of Inadequacy

Just as waves batter the cliffs, depression frequently buffets its victims with feelings of inadequacy. When I was depressed I often lamented over what I used to be like, when I felt free and filled with purpose. When I had been serving as an assistant pastor, I felt of value to the Lord and that I was achieving something with my life.
More than anything I wanted to be normal again but instead was afflicted by disturbing mental, physical and emotional discomfort, all day, every day. I was certain that my mind and body were plotting and raging against me in spite. I remember looking at other people, whether in the flesh or on TV, and wishing that I could trade places with any one of them. I considered myself useless, of no value, unable to do anything, the most worthless of all His children, while those others lived fulfilling lives.

I wrote down how I felt about myself in my diary.

8th Feb 1990 –
Oh Jesus, I’m so inadequate, so helpless,
I’m so full of fears.
I know they are there,
But how do I get rid of them?

28th Feb 1990 –
Oh Jesus, please don’t tarry any longer - help me!
How do You look at me now?
Are you angry with me for blaming You?
And for getting angry with You?
Or do you understand?
And love me all the more?

A few days later, Sunday 4th March, 1990, the Lord spoke directly to my heart through a prophetic word the pastor shared from the pulpit. I recorded the amazing, encouraging words in my diary a few days later.

7th March 1990 –
Sunday morning at church was good, and one prophecy must have been from Jesus to me only. The prophecy was, “God has heard how you’ve said you are useless, hopeless, the worst of His servants - useless to Him, and that He must be disappointed in you. How can He possibly love you? Yet He wants you to know that He loves you, that He sees all this as the stumblings of a child learning how to walk. He does not consider you useless.”

This prophetic word encouraged me greatly in the ‘here and now,’ that God was not disappointed in me, still loved me, and saw me as His precious child. The word also described how what I was going through would benefit me in the future. Depression felt like the end of the world at the time, but it was in fact me stumbling through life as part of the learning process: learning to rely upon Him instead of on my feelings; learning to be content whatever my circumstances instead of fighting and fearing them. And going through the difficult process of unlearning erroneous thought processes and allowing my thoughts to become captive to the mind of Christ.

On the topic of God viewing us as His children, I am reminded of another time several years ago when I was thinking of my son, a baby at that time. I thought of his innocence, his trusting nature – virtually unsullied by sin, and the spontaneous, innocent way in which he laughed and explored his surroundings. I thought of myself, and in comparison, I felt unworthy and unclean. I looked to Jesus and said, “Oh Lord, I wish you saw me as someone innocent and pure, like I see my son.” To my surprise, He answered immediately, saying with affection, “I do.” And then I remembered that I am His precious child, and more - a new creation made innocent and pure by His atoning work on the Cross.

So let us be encouraged, and rejoice in the love that the Lord has for us. Our lives may seem to be messed up, we may feel useless and worthless, but that is not how He sees us. He treasures us and loves us and does not consider us useless. He understands what we are going through.

Hebrews 4:14-16 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

If we are feeling inadequate or worthless, let us rejoice that even so, we are still beautiful in His eyes, because He makes all things beautiful in His time - yes, even us. “He hath made every thing beautiful in his time.” Ecclesiastes 3:11 (KJV)

Here are the lyrics of one of the most beautiful songs I have heard, based on that very passage.

In His time, in His time,
He makes all things beautiful in His time.
Lord, my life to You I bring,
May each song I have to sing,
Be to You a lovely thing, in Your time.

In Your time, in Your time,
You make all things beautiful in Your time.
Lord, my life to You I bring,
May each song I have to sing,
Be to You a lovely thing, in Your time.

19. Depression Distorts our Perspective

I have read that some Christians find certain Psalms disturbing, so much so that those Psalms have been dubbed the “uncomfortable Psalms.” In these Psalms, we see the writers lamenting over grievances and apparent injustices, describing the pits of despair and anguish, and even crying out to God and questioning His decisions, actions or apparent lack or action. I think many find these Psalms uncomfortable because they cannot accept that all people will go through periods of suffering.

Having had a difficult, sickly childhood, and later suffering from depression, otosclerosis and epilepsy, I have found great comfort from the uncomfortable Psalms.

Psalm 77, written by Asaph, is one of those Psalms. Asaph is so disturbed that he cannot sleep and spends the night crying out to God. Even so, he cannot find any comfort and only grows weaker. Smitten by chronic insomnia during the early days of depression, I too spent many a night begging God to hear my plea to end my suffering.
Psalm 77:1-3

I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out unripping hands and my soul refused to be comforted. I remembered you, O God, and I groaned; I mused, and my spirit grew faint. Selah

The weight of Asaph’s troubles is so great that he can no longer see God as a loving God who shows favour to His children. Asaph thinks of better times when He could feel God’s presence and love, and he begins to direct accusing questions towards God. “Will you reject me forever? Will you never show your favour to me again? Has your love for me disappeared forever too? What of your mercy and compassion – are you angry with me?” These are all common reactions for someone suffering from depression.

The fact is that acute suffering such as depression destroys our worldview - we look at everything through depression-coloured glasses. Everything, including our perception of God, looks bleak.

Psalm 77:4-9

You kept my eyes from closing; I was too troubled to speak. I thought about the former days, the years of long ago; I remembered my songs in the night. My heart mused and my spirit inquired: "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"

Selah

But Asaph does not stop there, and neither should we. Well aware that he cannot feel God’s favour, love, mercy and compassion because of the severity of his sufferings, Asaph responds by reminding himself of God’s past faithfulness. He starts to recall and meditate on the miracles God did in setting Israel free from slavery when He brought them out of Egypt. That is something that we can do too. We can think back to when we placed our faith in Christ, of the times God provided for our needs, when we found comfort in His Word, when we basked in the knowledge of His love and presence. We can also reflect upon the miracles of God’s provision recorded in the Bible, of the way in which Jesus ministered to and cared for the lost and hurting when He came to the world. We can remember Christ’s death and resurrection, and what this means to us personally.

Psalm 77:10-15

Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years of the right hand of the Most High." I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. Your ways, O God, are holy. What god is so great as our God?

You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeem your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah

And as we remind ourselves of God’s past faithfulness, we need to remind ourselves that He has not changed - the only thing that has changed is our perception of Him. God is the same God today as He was before we suffered from depression, and will be the same God when we have recovered. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8.

So let our reflections upon His past faithfulness and the knowledge that He has not changed, not only encourage us in the here and now, but also give us hope for the future. Jesus will never let go of us, He will never abandon us, and although we cannot see His footprints, He is there leading us by the hand.

Psalm 77:16-20

The waters saw you, O God, the waters saw you and wretched; the very depths were convulsed. The clouds poured down water, the skies resounded with thunder; your arrows flashed back and forth. Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind, your lightning lit up the world; the earth trembled and quaked. Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen. You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” John 10:27-29

20. Getting a New Perspective on Depression’s Fearful Thoughts

If suffering from depression, it is common to be troubled by persistent irrational fearful thoughts that come back time and again until they become a mental obsession. When these obsessive fears confront us, a mental battle of epic proportions ensues as we examine, debate and work through them in a vain attempt to find relief and release. This process can take hours, days, or longer.

This is not surprising, as our mind is so exhausted that it has lost the flexibility of a healthy mind, which would have dismissed such irrational fears out of hand. Try as we might, we cannot shake free of these fears and in the end, we can no longer see them from any other perspective. We lose the ability to differentiate between what we fear, and what is real, and come to believe that the fearful perspective is the only perspective.

I finally found the courage to share some of my irrational fears with the Christian lady who was counselling
me, and she gently helped me to see such fearful thoughts from another perspective – the true perspective.

At first, I could not feel the truth of a new perspective, but I accepted it, and kept it in my mind. And when those fears returned, instead of going through the exhausting process of trying to work through them again, I recalled the new perspective given me by my counsellor, and accepted it and believed it. I then learned to live with the fearful thoughts simmering away at the back of my mind, without fearing or fighting them, while continually reminding myself of the new perspective. And as I let time pass, the new perspective, the truth, finally won out.

Sometimes we can embrace the new perspective quickly, but if severely depressed, it can be some time before the truth sinks in, and when it does, we receive relief and freedom. “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32

In the book “Self Help for your Nerves,” Dr Weekes explains the importance of finding someone suitable to help us find “the other point of view.” “Let it be your wisest and not just your nearest friend…If you have no such friend, find a suitable minister, priest or doctor.” p68.

A Christian professional therapist/health care worker is of course another possibility. The lady who counselled me had experienced and overcome depression, and understood what I was going through.

To help me with this process of learning to see and embrace new perspectives, I wrote each new perspective on the back of a business card or scrap of paper, which I kept in my pocket or wallet. And when that fear reared its ugly head again, I pulled out the card and read it.

As I continued to recover from depression, I was able to work through such fears and find the new perspective myself, with the assistance of prayer and God’s Word. In many of these cases, I continued to write the new perspectives on flashcards. This saved me a lot of mental anguish of trying to work through things again that I had already worked through in the past.

Here is an example of finding a new perspective regarding a very powerful fear. I had the misfortune of having a car crash while recovering from depression. My exhausted mind, already struggling with anxiety, was swamped by fears that assured me I was going to have heaps of car crashes, starting with the loan car, and then in every car I got in for the next two weeks, regardless of whose car it was. These fears were so fresh and powerful that they felt real.

Remembering what I had learned, I sought the new, correct perspective to have towards this irrational fear, and this was:

1. These thoughts that say I am going to have lots of car crashes are not real.
2. These thoughts are not what is going to happen, they are only what I am afraid is going to happen.
3. Jesus said to let not my heart be troubled, but trust in God and in Him. John 14:1
4. Therefore I will get in these cars and trust Him to keep me safe. Psalm 18:2

And regarding the fears that I was going to suffer many car crashes over those two weeks, this is what I wrote in my diary afterwards: “Nothing happened.”

21. Has God Abandoned Me?

“Has God abandoned me?” is a desperate cry from the heart of many, whether stuck in the depths of severe depression or struggling to deal with a major crisis such as a personal tragedy, chronic health problems, even the destruction of lifelong goals.

After floundering in the depths of severe depression for over three months, I wrote this in my diary:

10th April 1990 –
I see others who live and prosper,
And yet here am I, stuck in this dark prison cell.
Jesus, where are You? Please see my circumstances,
Please hear my prayer.
Please set in motion Your answer, Your solution.
Why have You abandoned me?
Why do You remain silent?
I’ve waited and waited, yet I am met with silence.

Someone suffering from depression typically loses interest in life, experiences a sense of overwhelming dread, has terrifying obsessive fearful thoughts, and also panic attacks, insomnia, guilt, confusion, anger, and a dozens of other disturbing symptoms. A depressed Christian also tends to lose the ability to feel God’s presence, cannot take comfort from His Word, and can no longer feel His love.

If struggling with severe depression or a major life crisis, we may also look at our dire circumstances and jump to the conclusion that these terrible things have happened because God has abandoned us. We cannot comprehend how God could still be with us and yet allow us to undergo such suffering.

Here is another entry from my diary:
28th Feb 1990 –
Dear Jesus, I continually get angry with You,
Why have You allowed this? Where are You?
How long will You remain silent? Why won’t You heal me?
I know what You are capable of, yet You do nothing – why?

We may become frustrated, worried and angry when it feels like God’s Word no longer seems to be working, and when He does not seem to be honoring His promises. We wonder if God has left us to fend for ourselves. We cannot understand why He will not answer our desperate prayers – can’t He see what we are going through? Doesn’t He care?
My diary, 14th June 1990 –
The Heavens remain silent, and this both angers and disappoints me.
I thought I felt Jesus say that He is carrying me through this.
But how can I be sure?
And if He is, why won’t He let me feel His presence?
Why won’t He help me?
Where is His Word? Where are His promises?

Another common reaction is to fear that we have let God down in some major way, wondering if we have stepped outside His will by disobeying Him, or have committed an unforgivable sin. We wonder if this was sufficient cause for God to turn His back on us and abandon us. And if we get angry with God for letting us go through this inexplicable suffering, devastating guilt may follow these bouts of anger. We may even think that we have lost our salvation and are no longer a Christian.

From my diary, 20th July 1990:
Experiences like the past eight months almost make you wonder, it makes me wonder if I am one of His children.

Some Christians suffering from depression or a major crisis say: “It feels like God has abandoned me! I can’t feel God’s presence anymore.” Or, “Why has God abandoned me?”

There are two common threads weaving through what I have written above:
1. We may look at our circumstances and leap to the conclusion that God has abandoned us, and/or
2. We can look at our feelings, and because we cannot feel that God is with us, we conclude that He has abandoned us.

So what can we do when we feel or fear that God has abandoned us? What can help us get through this phase?

Recognise Our Feelings are Deceiving Us

When stuck in the midst of severe suffering, we need to recognise what a friend once told me, “We can’t see properly in times like this. Our feelings completely distort our world view and vision.” It is as though we are wearing extremely dark glasses all of the time. Although light surrounds us, we cannot see it because of the dark glasses.

We Must Not Trust Our Feelings

Bearing in mind that our feelings have become distorted, we must remind ourselves daily that we cannot trust our feelings nor pay them any heed – they are tricking and misleading us. This is hard, I know, because throughout our lives we have learned to listen to our feelings and let them guide us to some degree or another. But what may work for a healthy person does not apply to someone suffering from depression. We need to learn not to place any significance on what we are feeling, and recognise that we may remain in this condition for a while. But be encouraged, this phase does not last forever. When our exhausted mind and nervous system heal, whether this takes months or years, our feelings will return to normal. We will feel God’s presence and love again, and we will take comfort from His word again.

We must not use our Circumstances as a Basis to Conclude that God has Abandoned us

We need to realise that our circumstances are not an indication of whether God is with us or not. We Christians sometimes fall into the error of thinking that while things are going well, God must be with us, but when our world falls apart, it means that God has abandoned us.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Firstly, the Bible assures us that God will never leave us nor forsake us. Secondly, it tells us that we will face trials, and that God will use these for good in our lives, and that He will comfort us in and through them. ‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.’ James 1:2-4

‘And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.’ Romans 8:28

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7

We Need to Keep Things in Perspective

We need to remind ourselves that this world and its troubles are only temporary. We who trust in and cling to Jesus have a wondrous hope – one day we shall spend eternity in heaven and see the face of God and Jesus everyday - a perfect place filled with love, joy and peace. We will also have a brand new body that is perfect in every way.

When I consider the unimaginable, eternal riches that await us in heaven, the temporary trials I endure on the earth fade into insignificance.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.’ Romans 8:17-18

Trust in What We Know, Not in What We Feel

So if we cannot rely upon our feelings nor upon the way in which we interpret our circumstances, what can we rely upon? We can rely upon what we know and believe.

We know and believe that God is with us (although we can’t feel it), we know and believe that He loves us (although we can’t feel it), and we know and believe His word is all powerful (although we can’t feel it and things seem to be out of control). We know these things because the Bible tells us, and because the Holy Spirit in us testifies to that fact. For now, it is enough to know God is with us, to know that Jesus loves us, and to know that His Word is all-powerful. It does not matter than we cannot feel these things while depressed or our world view has been distorted by suffering.

In reading through my diary entries, it is interesting to see that although I lamented that I felt abandoned by God, in those very same entries, I also concluded that I knew He was still there and still cared for
me. I was learning to rely upon His Word instead of upon my feelings.

13th May 1990 – The Bible says to consider it joy to endure trials, I must say that there has been no joy in this trial. It defies any previous experience known to me. But I’ve been forced to trust God when it seems like He has abandoned me. I have been forced to come to a place where I have trusted Him without feeling like doing so. All I want to do is cry out that He had abandoned me, that He is not faithful. But He is faithful. And I know that. He is faithful and true. He is Jesus.

14th June 1990 – I feel so like Job. “Curse God and die!” my thoughts yell at me. “Look at this suffering! How can He be faithful, when He’s apparently done nothing for six whole months now - curse Him and die!”

But God is faithful, and I know that – it is His name – Faithful and True.

Bible Verses that we can Rely Upon

Feelings can change like the wind and are colored by our circumstances, and circumstances can also come and go. However, God’s Word remains constant, it never changes. Let us look at some of those Bible verses now – verses we know are true and can be relied upon.

God’s Promises to Never Leave Us

Deuteronomy 31:8 “The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

Joshua 1:9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Matthew 28:20 “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

John 10:27 “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”

God’s Promises that He Loves Us

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?... For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Galatians 2:20 The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

God Never Changes

God never changes, He is the one constant in an ever-changing world. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8

Assurance of Salvation

If it feels like we think we have lost our salvation, here are a few verses to reassure us of the gift of eternal life that we receive from God when we believe in, cling to and rely upon Jesus.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23.

That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9 And “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16.

It does not matter if we cannot feel that we are saved if suffering from depression or going through a major life crisis, what matters is that we believe. (More on this topic in following article.)

Relying on God’s Word, not our Feelings

One last thought before I sign off. When we have learned to cope with or passed out of difficult times such as depression, we will be able to look back upon the phase where we thought God had abandoned us, and we will recognise very clearly that He was with us and holding us safely in His hands the whole time.

We will also realise that it was during this time that we learnt to rely upon and stand on God’s Word, instead of relying on our feelings.

Luke 6:47–48 “I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.”

22. Addressing the Fear that we have lost our Salvation

Depression is a brutal illness that affects us physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Many Christians who suffer from depression are particularly distressed by the effect depression has upon the spiritual part of their lives. This may include feelings of guilt and condemnation, an inability to feel God’s presence or love, and an inability to take lasting comfort from reading God’s Word or prayer.

Dr Weekes even mentions this in her book, “Self Help for Your Nerves.” Some nervously sick religious
people complain of being unable to contact [connect with] their religion, like the mother who could not contact [connect with] her family. This is an added worry, especially when they find no solace in prayer. When they understand that they feel this way simply because their emotions are exhausted, they are greatly relieved. (1)

One issue that some Christians suffering from depression struggle with is the fear that they have lost their salvation. Some also have obsessive fearful thoughts that they will go to hell. This is what I wrote in my diary on 20th July 1990:

Experiences like the past eight months almost make you wonder, it makes me wonder if I am one of His children.

Wayne Thomas Batson, a Christian author of five fantasy/adventure novels, shares: When I was in the midst of it, I didn't know what was going on. As a matter of fact, off and on for seven years prior to my worst experience, I'd had a series of “heart events.” After every single cardio test out there: tilt table, EKG, Halter monitor, stress test, nuclear stress test, etc, nothing heart related came up.

Stress, they told me. Little did I know that all along, it was anxiety attacks.

And what you said about the enemy prowling around and then pouncing on us...that was so true. I remember laying in a hospital bed after the worst racing heart/anxiety attack, I was terrified I was going to hell. I just couldn't get the thought out of my mind. It was like all those stories you hear of old saints on their deathbed, just peacefully passing on, saying something wonderful like, "I'm going to be with my Jesus now." Except for me, there was no comfort at all. I thought it was all over...even in an eternal sense.

Thing is, the word says neither angels nor demons, nor death or life, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God through Christ.

Christians suffering from depression should not be surprised or worried by such fears, as the suffering and exhaustion caused by depression destroys our worldview - we look at everything through depression-coloured glasses. Everything looks bleak, including our perception of God and the things of His Kingdom.

It is to obtain a fresh perspective on the things we fear. Therefore, I share below scriptures we can use to help us see the new perspective regarding the fear that we are no longer one of God’s children. Meditate on these scriptures, write them down, and reflect on them when the fears come flooding in.

Salvation, or eternal life, is a free gift we receive from God when we believe in Jesus. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23.

We need to remind ourselves that when we have repented of our sins and turned to God, God wipes them out of existence. 'Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,' Acts 3:19.

The Bible assures us of our salvation when we believe in Jesus, (which means we trust in, cling to, and rely upon Him), and believe He died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose from the dead three days later. That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. Romans 10:9 And "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16.

When we believe in Jesus like this, we are born again, this time into God’s family. Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” John 3:3. Yet to all who received him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. John 1:12-13.

Here is more assurance of our salvation. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5:11-13

And as Wayne Thomas Batson shared above, nothing can separate us from Christ’s love. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38-39

Nothing can snatch us from Christ’s almighty hands. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. John 10:27-29

It does not matter if for the time being we cannot feel these truths if we are suffering from depression, what matters is that we believe them and stand on them.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." Matthew 7:24


23. Is God Good?

Many Christians suffering from severe depression have found themselves beginning to question if God is actually good. We may wonder how a loving, gracious God could allow such unrivalled suffering, and not end it instantly by His power.
During the blackest phase of depression, I kept reminding myself that God was faithful, but as the days dragged into weeks and months with no improvement in sight, I despaired and wrote diary entries like this:

27th March 1990 – How will I ever trust You again? I’ll have great confidence that every time I go through a major crisis, You’ll do nothing and You’ll say nothing...

I know You are Faithful and True, I know You can do anything You want. I know it’s Your will to heal all who are sick or under Satan’s power. I know You love us and want to help us...and I know that You will help me out of this nightmare one day...But why oh why do You tarry so long…what DO YOU WANT FROM ME!”

One problem is our modern mindset - we have forgotten what it means to wait. We have become impatient, expecting instant service, instant dinners, fast food restaurants, fast internet connection, motorised transport, and so on. We apply this same thinking to our sufferings, forgetting that God works according to His timetable, not ours. When we do not get want we want from God as quickly as we desire it, typical reactions may be to question, doubt, grumble or complain.

Some who are suffering from depression accuse God of treating humanity like a science experiment. They compare us to ants, struggling to overcome obstacles and sufferings placed deliberately in our way by an impersonal, uncaring God as He conducts experiments upon us.

When I was younger, I used to study ants for hours. Once I bought an ant farm and placed a pregnant ant queen in it. Within two years, I had a thriving ant colony on my hands. I fed them, gave them water, and cared for them as treasured pets.

One day a savage summer heat-wave caused every ant in the little colony to die of dehydration. Their passing saddened me, but as they were just ants, I put the matter behind me and got on with my life.

Now is that what God did with us? When Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden, resulting in the death of their spirits, did He put the matter behind Him and say, “Oh, that’s too bad, but they’re only something I created. I’ll forget about them and do something else now.”

No, that was not God’s reaction at all. In fact, the Bible tells us that God loves us so much, that even before He created the Earth, Jesus had already been chosen to save us from the curse of sin and death.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. 1 Peter 1:18-21

Although I had cared for my ants and did not want them to suffer and die, I would never have considered becoming one of them, taking their sufferings upon myself, and dying in their place so that they could live.

Yet that is what God did for us. God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, upon seeing our plight (which we brought upon ourselves through deliberate disobedience) left heaven, become human, suffered and died in our place so that we could be restored to Him. How much more proof do we need that God is good and truly loves us! Here are some Bible verses where God demonstrates His love for us through the atoning death of Jesus.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Philippians 2:6-8

I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 1 Thessalonians 5:10

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16

That God is not good, faithful and trustworthy is an age-old attack that Satan has been throwing at humans since the dawn of creation. This is the very attack-strategy he used against Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ ” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ ”

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:1-5

Satan tried to convince Eve that God was holding back on her, that He could not be trusted. Eve decided to listen to Satan, the great deceiver, instead of holding to God’s Word and trusting that He was telling the truth.

“The doubt concerning God’s goodness, as Oswald Chambers so trenchantly put it, is the real root of sin. Embedded like splintered glass at the core of our souls is the suspicion that God does not have our best interests at heart. Unless that issue is exposed and dealt with, our hearts will never be truly pure.” Every Day with Jesus, Jul/Aug 2000, Fri 4 Aug, by Selwyn Hughes, CWR.

Let us be mindful that Satan deliberately attacks Christians when they are down – he targets those suffering with depression and whispers lies into their minds, trying to convince them that God is not good, that He is not faithful and trustworthy.
All of these lies were thrown at me while depressed, but this is the conclusion I reached:

20th July 90 –
I hate being so irritable and frustrated, so disturbed.
All day, every day.
And it never ends.
Oh Lord, where are You?
I feel like getting so angry with You.
I guess it all boils down to this:
Are You trustworthy or not?
I know the answer is yes.

In time, I did make a complete recovery from depression, and the Lord blessed me with a fulfilling and fruitful life. During my recovery from depression, He drew me closer to Him, showed me how to rely upon His strength, and set me free from bondages and fears that had ensnared me for decades.

Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Psalm 34:8

Now I am the first to acknowledge that circumstances do not always turn out as we expect, but we need to keep things in perspective. We Christians are travelers passing through this world on our way to heaven. The sufferings we endure here pale into insignificance compared to the glories and blessings that await us in heaven. Most of all, they pale into grey when compared to the riches of having an eternal relationship with our loving God and Creator.

You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.
Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
Psalm 73:24-25

24. Panic Attacks

What is a Panic Attack?

A panic attack (also known as an anxiety attack) is relatively brief episode of intense fear that comes on suddenly, where the person is both terrified of the physical symptoms that are afflicting them as well as by the associated fears that either triggered or accompanied the attack.

A panic attack typically lasts for at least ten minutes but can stretch on for much longer, even hours or days if cyclic in nature. Cyclic panic attacks are where a person is subject to a continuous cycle of attack after attack, with a new attack triggering even as the previous one is fading away.

The fears associated with a panic attack are strongest when the attack begins. These fears demand our attention, yet the more attention we give them – the more we fear them - the greater they become. Fighting, arguing with, fearing or trying to flee the panic attack and its disturbing symptoms causes negative adrenalin to flood our being. This in turn causes even greater anxiety and even more disturbing sensations to afflict us during the attack.

In my case, a typical panic attack included an increased heart rate, flushed face, increased temperature, shortness of breath, chest feeling constricted, a complete lack of peace, and an intense churning/discomfort in the stomach. These physical symptoms were accompanied by a terrifying fear that was so vivid and threatening that I would often ‘scream’ in my mind. (Many sufferers wail or scream quite loudly during an attack.)

What triggers panic attacks?

A panic attack can be triggered by an extremely stressful or fearful situation, or even by an exceptionally terrifying fearful thought. Subsequent exposure to the same situation or fearful thought could trigger further attacks. Being afraid that another attack may come increases the likelihood of them striking again.

The stress of trying to make an important life decision can also trigger a panic attack. (See below for how this can affect Christians in particular.)

Panic attacks can even trigger without a cause, however, in these cases, the mind typically searches for a reason for the attack, and may latch onto a fear which then becomes the associated fear for that attack. It is typical for the mind to latch onto a fear that has terrified the person in the past.

A mind prone to anxiety is the perfect seedbed in which a panic attack can take root and flourish. Some people by nature have a sensitive nervous system, which can be due to past or recent traumas or even due to genetic inheritance. However, those suffering from depression are especially susceptible to panic attacks as their minds are locked in a state of constant anxiety.

1 Peter 5:8 is a perfect description of how panic attacks operate. 'Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.’ Although Satan has been defeated by Christ’s victory on the cross, he masquerades as a roaring lion and tricks people into believing that panic attacks have real power and can devour them, when in fact they have no power at all.

Dealing with Panic Attacks

In late July, 1990, I read ‘Self Help for Your Nerves,’ by Dr Claire Weekes, which taught me all about the ‘fear-adrenalin-fear cycle,’ (1) and how the more we fear, flee or fight panic attacks, the worse we become as the additional adrenalin produced prolongs symptoms and produces more disturbing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual sensations. It is a very vicious cycle.

To recover from panic attacks we need to break this cycle.

This is how I learnt to break the panic attack cycle:

1. do not fear panic attacks – let them come,
2. when an attack comes, do not fight or fear it, nor debate or argue with its associated fears, instead, just accept it for the time being,
3. let time pass while reminding ourselves that the panic attack’s intensity will fade as we do so. (2) (3)
After I read ‘Self Help for Your Nerves,’ whenever a panic attack hit me, I said to myself: “Peter, you’re having a panic attack. Don’t fight it or fear it, just accept it, and learn to live with it, don’t debate it and argue with it, and let time pass, and it will fade.”

To my amazement, the above technique worked, as it broke the fear-adrenalin-fear cycle. First the intensity of the attacks reduced, then their frequency grew less, and finally I found that in most cases, I was able to nip the attack in the bud before it could take off.

Another thing that can help when afflicted by an annoying re-occurring panic attack is to share the panic attack topic or fear with a wise Christian friend, so that we can get a fresh, healthier perspective on the issue. Although a fearful thought may seem larger than life to us, our friend will see right through it. In this case, trust their perspective, not our own fearful one. (A word of caution, it is not wise to continually run these fears past our friends, as this will not only drive them crazy, but in time we need to learn how to find a fresh perspective ourselves from prayer and Bible study.)

Another small note: if you suffer from panic attacks and you simply cannot put into practice the steps I have outlined above, I recommend seeing a doctor. If the doctor recommends anti-depressants and professional counselling, consider the advice carefully. Anti-depressants dull the effects of depression and panic attacks and this is a huge help in overcoming them. (See my entry, Depression, Christians, and Anti-Depressant Medication.)

2 Timothy 1:7 ‘For God did not give us a spirit of timidity (of cowardice, of craven and cringing and craven fear), but [He has given us a spirit] of power and of love and of calm and well-balanced mind and discipline and self-control.’ (Amplified Bible)

Panic Attacks and Christians

Unfortunately, for some Christians, a panic attack caused by the fear of making the wrong life choice has another insidious dimension to it. Since they cannot control it or make it stop, and because it is accompanied by a distinct lack of peace, they erroneously misinterpret the panic attack as God guiding them. A common expression not found in the Bible is, “Let the peace of God guide you.” It embarrasses me to admit that for many years I thought panic attacks were God guiding me.

Mistaking panic attacks as being God’s guidance actually makes the panic attacks worse, as such Christians in their eagerness to obey God are (unfortunately) terrified of disobeying Him. A verse which used to torment me when I resisted and fought against a panic attack was 1 Samuel 15:22 “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD. To obey is better than sacrifice.” As I drew closer to depression as 1989 wore on, I had an attack and lost my peace every time I was faced with a major decision. Every time I tried to take a step forward, an attack (which I misinterpreted as God’s guidance) would send me reeling two steps backwards. In the end, I was too scared to make decisions any more. 18/2/1990 – ‘I’m scared to commit to anything, such as joining a new church, getting a girlfriend, buying a computer, etc. in case He says no. It’s got to the point that I won’t do anything in case God says no.’

Can you imagine the relief I felt when I discovered that panic attacks were not God’s guidance, and that ignoring them was not disobeying Him?

The most bewildering aspect of mistaking panic attacks as God guiding us is trying to work out exactly what God is trying to say (since He is not actually saying anything). When severely depressed I was frequently afflicted by cyclic panic attacks over a period of months. These were associated with a large range of fears, most telling me that I was supposed to be doing this or that. Here is a diary entry showing the exasperation I felt at that time.

15/3/1990 – ‘I feel like saying, “What sort of God are You to do this to someone, and why don’t You speak clearly? All You have to do is speak to me or give me a vision, etc, and I’ll obey, but what is this ‘Guess what I’m saying with the hit and miss affair [when I take away your peace to guide you].’ ”

Before I became depressed, one thing that reinforced my belief that losing my peace due to a panic attack was God’s voice, was that every time I gave into the panic attack fear, the attack ended and my peace returned immediately. For example, once I was about to leave my job, enter part time ministry and look for a part time job. The massive panic attack which followed ceased as soon as I decided to turn down the offer for part time ministry and remain at my job.

However, when I became clinically depressed, giving into a panic attack and doing what it appeared to be ‘saying’ no longer stopped the attack. The attack just kept coming back, normally by switching immediately to another fearful thought, or topic. This was because while suffering from depression, we are in a state of constant anxiety. This was when I got my first real clue that the attacks and the lack of peace were not God’s attempt to guide me, but something else. Being convinced of this was another matter entirely.

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32

Finally in April 1990 I saw a Christian counsellor. She told me that I was suffering from depression, and assured me that the panic attacks and lack of peace were NOT God attempting to guide me. She said that I had been placing my trust in following a lack of peace as guidance – “It’s always worked before” – instead of in Him. Through her counselling, prayer and Bible study, the Lord taught me the following truths, which set me free from the erroneous belief that panic attacks were God guiding me.

Isaiah 9:6 ‘For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’ Jesus is the Prince of Peace, not the Prince of a lack of peace.

John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” It does not say “My lack of peace I give to guide you.”

John 14:1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.”
So if the Bible does not say, “Let the peace of God guide you,” what then does it say should guide us?

Psalm 119:105  ‘Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.’

Proverbs 3:6  ‘in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.’

James 1:5  ‘If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.’

In conclusion, we need to make our life decisions prayerfully, with wisdom based on God’s Word, and we need to do so while dwelling in His peace with an untroubled heart.

A small footnote here. Our heart can of course be troubled without suffering a panic attack – our heart can be troubled by a great number of things. For example we may have agreed to take on one too many jobs, causing such stress that we cannot relax or sleep properly. To reduce our workload here would be the wise choice. This is a case of noting the warning signs of our mind and body and taking appropriate action.

If we are feeling pressured, rushed, or stressed out by any circumstances, we need to step back, meditate upon God’s Word, pray and seek His guidance. In such times, we need to wait upon Jesus to receive His rest for our soul. Matthew 11:28. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

Now although I was relieved to know that the panic attacks were not God guiding me, the attacks continued relentlessly and with almost as much power. My nervous system was still exhausted, and I was still reacting to the attacks in the wrong way - by fighting and fearing them. Freedom from the panic attacks came when I read “Self Help for Your Nerves,” as I mentioned above.

(2) These steps inspired by ‘Self Help for Your Nerves,’ Doctor Claire Weekes, Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1989, pp19,33-34
(3) These steps are a practical application of Bible verses Philippians 4:12-13, John 14:1, James 1:2-3.

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20. Letting Go of the Past

Past emotional, mental or physical abuse, or being deeply hurt or mistreated by a friend or an enemy, are common causes of depression. I have had my share of such experiences. Bitterness, anger and unforgiveness are typical responses to such injustices suffered, but as these reactions hinder our walk with Christ, the Bible gives us ample instructions on how to overcome them.

Let me also mention here that in many of the above cases, especially where abuse is involved, getting help from a trained Christian counsellor or a professional therapist is very highly recommended if not absolutely necessary.

Keep No Record of Wrongs

Isaiah 43:18-19  "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."

This passage provides a vivid description of a life damaged by past hurts – a life that has become a wasteland, a desert. Dwelling upon a record of wrongs weighs us down and heavily burdens us. But the Lord’s instructions to forget those former things and not dwell on them, comes with a beautiful promise. Letting them go releases streams of living water into our life and enables God to do a new work in us.

One of the greatest new works Christ does in our lives is to bring us to a place where we can forgive those who have hurt us. This is such an important aspect of our daily Christian walk that Jesus included it as part of the Lord’s prayer. Luke 11:4 “Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.”

Instead of dwelling on past hurts, we can let go of those memories and forgive the person that hurt us. Although we cannot make ourselves forget the memories, if we stop clinging to them the painful associations will fade significantly.

1 Corinthians 13: 4-5  ‘Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.’

I would like to share something practical that helped me to forget such former things. I had been hurt so deeply by someone very dear to me that for a long time I was unable to let go of the pain and associated anger. Then one day I wrote onto a piece of paper a list of the things that they had done to hurt me. Then I folded the paper in two (restricting my access to it) and put it in my diary. Once I had that written memoir of those wrongs, I no longer felt a need to keep a mental record of them. I let that folded page carry those memories instead of my mind. After a while the anger faded away and I was able to forgive that person, and as time passed those memories became a shadow of their former selves, devoid of associated pain.

“But it is Part of Who I am…”

One reason I had trouble letting go of past hurts was because they had become part of my identity. “I am this way because of how that person mistreated me,” was an excuse I believed. I feared that if I let go of the anger and record of wrongs and forgive the person who hurt me, I would lose a part of myself, part of my very individuality.

However, Jesus taught me that such fears were unfounded, that I did not have to hold onto past hurts in order to maintain my identity. He showed me that there was another option - to allow His love and forgiveness to flow from me towards the person who hurt me. And when I did this, instead of anger and the record of past wrongs being part of who I was, Christ’s love and forgiveness became part of my identity.
If someone were to meet me and hear my testimony now, they would not hear me say, “I am this way because of how that person mistreated me.” Instead, they would see that I have forgiven the person who wounded me, and in fact love them dearly with the love of Christ. If they were to ask me how this could be so, I would answer, “I am this way because of Christ’s work of love and forgiveness in my life.”

When we let Christ’s love and forgiveness become part of who we are, we change and become more like Christ. And is that not our goal, to become more like Him? ‘It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep.’ Luke 7:59-60

What a wonderful testimony this is to the power of God’s love. When others see us forgive - even love - those who have hurt us, they see the power of God’s kingdom in action, and their lives are changed too. I have heard of many cases of abusive prison wardens in Soviet countries coming to Christ after witnessing the unconditional love and forgiveness of their captives.

Harbouring Unforgiveness Hurts Ourselves

If we have been deeply hurt by someone in the past, we earnestly desire to flee that pain and be set free from the wounds. A thought that I would like us to bear in mind is that by consciously or unconsciously harbouring anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness towards that person, we unwittingly participate in keeping those wounds fresh and unable to heal. That is one reason that Jesus spoke so often of the importance of forgiving those who have wronged us. By not forgiving them, we hurt ourselves even further.

To Forgive Others, Reflect On How Much God Has Forgiven Us

The most liberating Biblical truth that helps us to forgive those who have treated us unjustly is to recognise the depths to which God has forgiven us.

Why does the Bible say, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” Matthew 6:14? It is because for us to refuse to forgive others after God has forgiven our massive debts towards Him, shows a lack of appreciation of how much God has forgiven us.

We all know of the parable in Matthew 18:21-35, where a servant who owed millions of dollars to a king, had that debt cancelled when he asked for mercy. The servant then went on to throw a fellow servant that owed him a few dollars into prison, because he had not paused to reflect on the mercy the king had extended towards him.

This is the key to forgiving others, as Selwyn Hughes writes: ‘I would not judge you or condemn you if you said: “I can never forgive that person for what he (or she) did to me.” But what I would say to you is this: the more you reflect on the wonder of how much you have been forgiven the easier it will be to forgive even the worst sins that have been committed against you.’ (1)

So, regardless of how much we have been hurt by others, let us forgive them. If God forgives us of our numerous sins towards Him, we can forgive others of their (comparatively) lesser sins towards us.

And then we will be sons and daughters of God, revealing His nature to a hurting world, as it shows us in Luke 6:35-36 “But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High...Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

(1) Every Day with Jesus, Monday 18th Feb, Selwyn Hughes, CWR, Jan/Feb 2002.

21. Verdict: Not Guilty

In ‘Self Help for Your Nerves,’ Dr Claire Weekes writes, Guilt can be a nightmare to some people suffering with nervous breakdown, particularly to those trying to set a high standard for themselves, such as religious people who lead a dedicated life. (1) (Note that clinical depression is called a nervous breakdown merely because during depression, our nervous system has broken down.)

While suffering from depression I suffered terribly from guilt, in fact, I found it one of depression’s most disturbing aspects. But from counselling, prayer, God’s Word, and through the liberating work of Jesus, I was eventually set free from it. In this post, I will examine several aspects of guilt during depression.

Ruminating Over Past Sins

When suffering from depression it is quite common to develop a habit of casting our gaze back to painful memories of recent or past sins and failures.

And since our mind is in an oversensitive, anxious state, we relive those memories with painful intensity. As guilt rises up to consume us, our face becomes hot, we lament and grieve over the past event, and wish we could go back in time and relive that part of our life and do it properly this time. These extremely discouraging episodes can last for hours.

However, there is good news for those who believe in Jesus and follow Him as Lord - we have assurance that our sins will be forgiven when we confess them. So if we recall a past or recent sin, we can confess that sin to God and receive His complete forgiveness.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Note that while we only need to confess a sin to God once, it is typical while depressed to keep confessing the same sin again and again, because the feeling of guilt remains. If this happens, we just need to keep reminding ourselves that we have already confessed the sin, it is forgiven, and we do not need to look at it, confess it, or feel guilty over it any
longer. If the feelings of guilt remain, it is nothing to be alarmed about - our nervous system is exhausted and needs time to recover.

Here are more Bible verses that assure us of the forgiveness of our sins.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. Jesus’ blood, which He shed on the cross, does not just cover our sins - it cleanses us of them completely.

What is God’s attitude to our sins, once they have been forgiven? Does He keep tabs on them? No, this is what He does with them: You will hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:19 Jeremiah 31:34 goes on to tell us, “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

So if God Himself chooses to forget our sins, who are we to keep dragging them up time and time again?

Satan will try to convince us that we are still guilty, but Romans 8:1 tells us the truth. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Another verse which comforted me greatly is 2 Corinthians 5:21 God made Jesus, who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Jesus we might become the righteousness of God. This means that when God looks at us, He does not see our old, sinful nature and problems. Instead, He sees the purity and righteousness of Jesus clothing us instead.

While digging through my diary yesterday, I found an entry that I wrote during the ‘recovering from depression’ phase of my life.

24/6/92 - When I sin I often feel really unworthy, although I always say sorry to God. I feel guilty and unworthy to go before Jesus, as though He is displeased with me. But yesterday He showed me that He wants to have a relationship with me above all else, and He wants that relationship to be in harmony at all times. When I sin and say sorry, that’s all He expects. He wants me to say sorry so that the harmony can be restored to our relationship. That’s why He died on the cross, so that mankind could again fellowship with Him and the Father and Holy Spirit, like when Adam and Eve fellowshipped with Him in the Garden of Eden before they sinned. Jesus has atoned for my sins so that I can have a harmonious relationship with Him at all times.

(A tiny postscript here. If there is an issue of habitual sin in your life, and you are having trouble stopping it, please see a pastor or counsellor and get the sin dealt with. This may require counselling, inner healing, or spiritual warfare, but needs to centre on the cross of Christ.)

I’m Not Doing Enough for God

Another common cause for feeling guilty while depressed is when we look back at what we used to be like - zealously serving the Lord - and feel guilty that we are not serving God to that degree now. I recall how painful it could be going to church while I was in this phase. The pastor often gave stirring, convicting sermons on the importance of using our gifts to serve God. These sermons were actually aimed at healthy Christians in the church that warmed a pew on Sunday, but took no further steps in using their gifts to serve God. So, although the pastor was not talking to me, in my anxious I feared the sermons were aimed squarely at me and felt so guilty for my lack of current activity.

One day that same pastor asked me how I was going. When I told him briefly my condition, he surprised me by telling me to rest and recover - which was exactly what I needed to do. I needed to have realistic expectations, recognise that I was ill, and as with all illnesses, needed time to recover from it. This does not mean that we cannot serve God while depressed. During the initial phase of depression, I was such a mess that I honestly could not do anything much at all. However, once I had been placed on anti-depressants, received counselling, and read ‘Self Help for Your Nerves,’ I soon improved sufficiently to start serving God again. But I started slowly. First I joined a home group and played the piano. A few months later I taught Sunday school – and this is all I did for around four years. Finally, when I recovered completely, I was able to become more involved in serving God. So we have to be patient with ourselves. God knows we are ill, and He does not expect us to do more than we are able.

From my diary, 28/9/91 - It’s funny, here I am, trying to live a normal life, yet I am suffering from a mental illness - me, the guy that nothing ever happened to, or never would happen to. And I feel kind of guilty, or ashamed, that I am this way. But it is not my fault - and there’s nothing I can do about it. So I should not feel guilty or a failure - it is just one more thing for me to overcome through Jesus, one more victory to win.

Note that we do not have to run around looking for ways to serve God - we only have to do what He gives us to do. Ephesians 2:10 For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. How do we know which works God has prepared for us to do, rather than burning ourselves out running around trying to meet the needs of all people everywhere? We keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, be sensitive to the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit, pray, and be aware of what is going on around us. He will show us what to do.

I’ve Stepped Outside of God’s Will

While suffering from depression I was petrified that I had stepped outside of God’s will and that His response was to punish my by taking away my peace. In other words, I feared that He had caused the depression in order to punish me, which of course resulted in deep-seated guilt.

My counsellor taught me that I could not not step outside God’s will, for He is greater than my ability to do such a thing. She taught me to pray, “What ever Your will is for my life, Lord, please bring it about - even without my obedience or cooperation. You are God; You are greater than me or the circumstances, so You are able to bring about Your will regardless.” The following verse was crucial in setting me free from the deceitful fear that God was punishing me. 1 John 4:18 ‘There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.’

I wrote a diary entry when God drove this truth home into my heart. I learned a couple of weeks ago about 1 John 4:18 where it says the love of God has no fear - it
says that there is no fear of punishment from God. So all of my fears that God was about to smash me over the head with a brick for stepping out of line were rubbish.

Getting Angry with God

The below diary entry shows common reactions we can have towards God during the initial stages of depression, when everything seems hopeless and black. Knowing that we should trust Him and not blaming Him results in more feelings of guilt.

8/2/90 –
I grow tired of repenting.
I tried to praise You in and through and for it,
I tried not to grumble, not to get bitter.
But I failed.
I’ve lost my temper with You,
I’ve blamed You.
How could You let this happen to me?
I feel so dirty, so unclean, because of the anger I have towards You.

The article, Has God Abandoned Me? deals with this issue in more detail.

Spiritual Warfare

A small postscript, if I may. If the feelings of guilt do not diminish over time, I recommend seeing a pastor or a Christian counsellor, as there may be a work of the enemy involved such as an unclean spirit of guilt. If such a thing is revealed by the Holy Spirit, the pastor or counsellor can take authority over that work of the enemy, break its grip on our life, and cast it away from us.

Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Matthew 16:19 “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Heaven in this passage refers to the spiritual realm where the enemy lives.)

The Judge’s Verdict

For those who are in Christ Jesus, the Judge in heaven has issued His verdict over our lives – and that verdict is: not guilty.


22. Insomnia, an Exercise in Frustration

Insomnia, or being unable to sleep at night, is one of the most frustrating things I have had to deal with.

Overwhelmed by fatigue and so sleepy that I could barely keep my eyes open, I would crawl into bed at a good hour, looking forward to a good night’s sleep. My mind was at peace, content, even empty of thought - yet I would lie there, awake, hour after hour. Sleep simply would not come.

As this continued, I began to crawl into bed in an anxious state of mind. I knew I desperately needed sleep but was worried it would not come. This tension made sleep even more evasive. My heart raced, my mind developed a habit of glancing about fearfully, which often triggered panic attacks.

As insomnia became more frequent, I tried to wait patiently for sleep to come. Yet as the hours continued to tick by I became more and more frustrated. My body was telling me that I needed sleep. I was so tired that I could not keep my eyes open, so why was I lying awake hour after hour? I would pray, beg, and plead with the Lord to give me sleep, quoting scriptures at Him, trying to convince Him to stretch out His hand or speak a word over me to put me to sleep. Then, after lying awake for five or six hours, frustration would blossom into rage. I lost count of how many times I shook my fist at the ceiling and said, “Jesus, why do you just sit there! Can’t you see that I need sleep? Why don’t you act? Don’t you care?”

As well as getting angry with God, I became enraged with my mind and body. What was wrong with them, couldn’t they see what they were doing to me? I was so tired and sleepy yet my useless, stupid mind simply would not shut off!

As well as getting angry with God, I became enraged with my mind and body. What was wrong with them, couldn’t they see what they were doing to me? I was so tired and sleepy yet my useless, stupid mind simply would not shut off! It was as though my body conspired against me, and I hated it, I wrote in my diary.

Following these sessions of rage against God and myself, came anguish, repentence and guilt. I knew I should not react like this, but I needed sleep!

Eventually the insomnia became so bad that for five days I would fall asleep when the sun came up, and on the sixth, sleep would not come at all. On those days I felt robbed, cheated, betrayed. When I rose, I felt dirty and unclean. Then the cycle started again.

Finally, due to a number of factors, I fell into strong depression towards the end of 1989. Panic attacks afflicted me 24 hours a day, my mind never ceased to churn through terrifying fearful thoughts, and insomnia continued to afflict me.

Attitudes We Cannot Afford to Have Towards Insomnia
As you can see from what I have shared above, the ways I reacted to insomnia made it worse. These negative reactions of fearing or fighting it released negative adrenalin in my system, elevated my anxiety levels and made it harder to sleep. What a vicious cycle – insomnia begets tension and fatigue, which in turn makes insomnia worse, which causes further tension and fatigue.

Here are some reactions we cannot afford to have towards insomnia:
1. going to bed fearful that we may not sleep
2. becoming frustrated when we cannot sleep
3. worrying how this lack of sleep will affect us tomorrow
4. letting the frustration boil over into rage

**Helpful Attitudes Towards Insomnia**

Here is a list of what reactions we need to have towards insomnia.

1. when we go to bed, be prepared to stay awake all night
2. be content to stay awake all night instead of getting frustrated or angry
3. recognize that resting contentedly all night in bed, even without sleeping, is still beneficial
4. if we don’t sleep tonight, there is always tomorrow night.

**Some Things that May Help with Mild Insomnia**

In my dealings with insomnia over the decades, I have learned a few tricks that can help alleviate mild insomnia.

1. a glass of hot milk, or a bowl of hot cereal, taken immediately before bed, can be helpful
2. if still awake two to three hours later, have another glass of hot milk or cereal
3. regular exercise is crucial. This may be going on brisk 30-45 minute walks three times a week, or doing aerobics, swimming, jogging, etc. Working out with light hand weights several days a week also helps. (Small note - avoid the above types of exercise near bedtime!)
4. eat a good, balanced diet, with lots of fruit. Drink plenty of water
5. if you must have a nap during the day, make it a 15 minute power nap, no longer. Set an alarm.
6. listening to soothing or relaxing music immediately before going to bed can also be helpful.

Another point I would like to make is that we humans have a tendency to take on too many responsibilities and get involved with too many activities. Sometimes it is good to take a step back, sit at Christ’s feet and wait on Him, and then prayerfully examine our life. Are we doing too much? Are there some aspects of our life that are placing us under pressure unnecessarily? Are there some things that we can quit or that can be put off until next year? Frantic, stressful lifestyles can cause insomnia or make it worse. I learned this lesson the hard way. (Twice…)

**Severe Insomnia**

If insomnia has become so bad that we cannot sleep night after night, (this is typical for those suffering from depression), seek medical assistance - we must not struggle through it by ourselves. A doctor can help determine insomnia’s causes (there are many different causes) and recommend medical treatment. For someone suffering from strong depression, sleep is a necessary part of the healing process. I am so glad that after three to four months of trying to cope with depression and insomnia on my own, I finally saw a doctor and went onto anti-depressant medication that included a mild tranquilizer. The combination of the medication and being able to sleep again were important factors in dulling depression’s effects, which helped me to concentrate on the task of recovery.

It was not until seventeen years after insomnia began to plague me that I discovered that I was suffering from complex partial epilepsy. This typically begins to become apparent in one’s late teens, and I believe this was the primary cause of the insomnia. (However, the way I reacted to it during the first few years made it much worse.)

I no longer take anti-depressant medication, only epilepsy anti-seizure meds. On most nights, I fall asleep easily, but several times a year I still have those sleepless nights. Instead of getting frustrated or angry, this is what I say to myself when it happens, “If I stay awake all night - that’s fine. I’ll make myself comfortable and snuggle up in the blankets. If I fall asleep eventually - great! If not, that’s fine too. Resting all night in bed is still beneficial.” I submit my mind to Christ, dwell in His peace and take refuge in His presence. I have learned to be content, whatever my circumstances, including those sleepless nights.

**Philippians 4:12-13** ‘I know what it is to have need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether I was hungry or full, whether I was in need or plenty, or whether I was in health or illness. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to be in plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.’

**Colossians 3:15** ‘Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.’

**Philippians 4:6-7** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Special thanks to a reader for reminding where to find this verse!)

**23. Depression & Racing/Palpitating Heart**

Depression causes many alarming symptoms. An oversensitive nervous system, flooded with negative adrenalin, can cause missed heart beats, palpitating or racing heart, even sharp chest pains. The first time we experience one of these symptoms can be a truly terrifying experience. We may fear we are having a heart attack. The symptoms are so disturbing that we live in fear of their return, and of course, they do return, and return more frequently the more we fear them.

A ‘missed heart beat’ is alarming. It feels as though your heart stops, followed a pregnant pause, then comes a thunderous thump when the next heart beat comes. Sharp chest pains can feel like a knife in the chest. Heart palpitations such as irregular, banging or accelerated heart
beats may become our daily companion, while episodes of ‘racing heart’ where the pulse suddenly accelerates beyond the norm, often accompanied by an inability to breath, are frightening as well.

Because of these symptoms, many sufferers of depression live in terror that they are going to die from a heart attack.

It is crucial if suffering from depression to see a doctor. A doctor’s medical examination will be able to ascertain if there is indeed anything wrong with our heart, or, as is normally the case for someone suffering from depression, they will confirm that these symptoms are merely the result of anxiety/depression.

However, due to our heightened state of anxiety, our fears that we will have a heart attack may not abate.

When I read “Self Help for your Nerves” by Dr Claire Weekes, I was so surprised to see all of these symptoms listed, and encouraged by her assurances that these symptoms were nothing to fear once a doctor had confirmed I was physically healthy.

I put into practise her strategy of facing the symptoms, accepting them instead of fearing or fighting them, and I learning to live with them. Amazingly, after putting these techniques into practice, over time these symptoms faded in intensity and frequency, and eventually stopped.

I recall one particular incident when I was learning to live with these symptoms. (I was still recovering from depression.) My boss had arranged for the men of our company to play a game of paintball with the staff of another company. Note that paintball is not my idea of fun - being pelted by ‘supposedly’ soft plastic balls filled with paint is extremely painful and leaves rather nasty bruises.

Nevertheless, I went to play the game and I remember doing my ‘ninja-thing’ where I infiltrated the enemy lines and used stealth to hunt down the opposing players. I was walking through a rocky area overgrown with tall grass when an episode of racing heart afflicted me. My heart rate accelerated through the roof and I found myself unable to breath. Previously, these experiences had unsettled me greatly, but now that I understood that this was just a symptom of depression that would soon pass, I knelt down and waited patiently. Within moments my heart rate returned to normal and I was able to breathe again. I stood up and went back to hunting the opposing team as though nothing had happened.

These symptoms are typical of depression, trying to trick us into believing we are on the verge of dying, when it is merely an over sensitised nervous system causing these reactions.

Let us place our complete and utter trust in God, that He is in control of our lives and that there is no need for us to fear any of depression’s symptoms.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” John 14:1 (NIV)

24. Depression & Loss of Appetite

The anxiety that accompanies depression can be so over powering that we may lose our appetite. In Psalm 102 we can see that the Psalmist is so depressed by the terrible trial he is enduring, that he feels like withered grass, he forgets to eat, and is so given to lamenting that he has become little more than skin and bones.

Psalm 102:1-7
Hear my prayer, O LORD; let my cry for help come to you. Do not hide your face from me when I am in distress. Turn your ear to me; when I call, answer me quickly. For my days vanish like smoke; my bones burn like glowing embers. My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. Because of my loud groaning I am reduced to skin and bones. I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins. I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof.

The words the Psalmist shares here could have been lifted from my diary. During the blackest phase of depression, I too skipped meals and when I did eat, I ate poorly. Although I am 178cm tall, my weight plummeted to 50kg, ie, 8 stone.

I should have gone to see a doctor and a counsellor/professional therapist, and sought practical advice to help me through that phase, even if it included taking medication. Unfortunately, I did not do so and made the mistake of soldiering on.

Eating poorly did not cause my depression, but it certainly made it worse by further weakening my exhausted nervous system, mind and body.

Due to a number of factors, including support from my family, engaging in constructive activities such as going back to work, and exercise, I was able to move on from that phase. The next phase, which lasted several months, was still very difficult, and characterized by lack of hope, constant panic attacks, and dozens of other disturbing symptoms.

Eating during this phase was still difficult. I had little motivation to eat, food seemed almost tasteless, and I often retched while I ate. The anti-depressants I was taking also tended to give me a dry mouth, making it harder to swallow.

However, a few practical things helped me to eat.

I found sipping fluids such as water or soup while eating removed the dry-mouth problem, made it easier to swallow, and even reduced the retching.

I also found that if I distracted myself while I ate, I did not notice my lack of appetite. Things that proved effective in distracting me at mealtimes were eating with my family as opposed to eating alone, eating while watching TV or eating while reading a gripping novel. I have read that health food shops may even be able to recommend natural appetite stimulants. Eating frequent small meals rather than three large ones can also help.

An important part of recovering from depression is changing our mental attitude towards the illness. Instead of making excuses why not to eat, we need to remind ourselves that as our goal is to recover, a healthy, balanced nutritious diet is crucial. A healthy diet cannot cure depression, but it does play a part in helping our exhausted nervous system, mind and body to recover.
25. Depression & Night Terrors

I had my first night terror not long after the onset of severe depression. It was a horrific experience that reminded me of when I had been delirious as a child while running a very high fever. The difference here was that it occurred as I was falling asleep, and I was not sick.

A night terror is an extremely unpleasant form of nightmare, differing greatly in intensity. Night terrors either develop from a nightmare during deep sleep, or trigger while falling asleep.

From my experiences, night terrors differ from nightmares in two areas. Firstly, a night terror would continue even after I woke up. Somehow, although I was completely conscious and able to talk, my subconscious mind continued dreaming, overlaying the horror of the dream upon consciousness, like two overhead transparencies, one laid upon the other, distorting both.

But the worst aspect of night terrors was the terror aspect itself. The night terror would establish a set of rational, logical rules, and would then break them completely, so that would could not be, was; so that what could not happen, happened. And the rational, logical part of my mind completely rebelled in horror as the rational and logical rules of the dream world were warped and twisted into something impossible, inconceivable - that defied all reason.

I suffered a few night terrors during depression, never knowing what they were. As I slowly recovered from depression, their frequency reduced until they ceased almost altogether. I did notice that times of extreme stress were a common trigger.

Here is an example of a night terror. While still recovering from depression, I had to go to the USA by myself to attend a trade fair. I arrived at the hotel late at night, only to find that my friend who was supposed to meet me was not there, and had left no message. Going to the arranged hotel room, I found that all of my friend's co-workers were asleep. There was a makeshift bed was in the middle of the room, so I got in and went to sleep.

Due to that stressful environment, a night terror hit me that night. I dreamed that upon checking out of the hotel, I had to pay $10,000 instead of $300. My mind completely rebelled at this impossible scenario, and though I tore myself awake, the night terror simply kept on going...

After I got married, my wife witnessed me having a night terror in the middle of the night, and seeing the dream continue after I woke up, she wondered if it was related to my complex partial epilepsy. So the next time I saw my neurologist, I told him about them, fearing I was having seizures again, although on medication. But the neurologist just laughed, and said, 'Oh, you were having a night terror.' And he proceeded to explain that they were just really bad nightmares, and nothing to worry about at all.

That knowledge brought relief, and the truth that they were nothing to fear set me free from worrying about them. I also found some techniques to deal with them. As they often trigger while drifting off to sleep, I learned how to recognise when one was developing, and how to immediately force my dream into an entirely different direction, stopping it becoming a night terror. Waking myself at that stage was another way of stopping them developing.

If a night terror triggered during deep sleep, I would wake myself up, and although the night terror continued while I was conscious, I would turn on my bedlamp, stare at it, sit up for a while, and then I would turn the light off and lay back down to sleep. Even though the night terror was still going, I would press into the Lord and take refuge in Him, and reassure myself that it was nothing to fear and would stop soon. Before long, it would stop and I would fall back asleep.

Psalm 91:1-6 (NIV)
He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."
Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,
or the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
or the plague that destroys at midday.

26. Shattered Dreams

It can be very difficult to cope with the destruction of our plans and dreams for the future, especially if we believed those plans had come from God in the first place. Shock, denial, confusion, anger, and even descent into depression are common reactions.

On the other hand, the onset of depression can also destroy our plans for the future, which in turn makes depression worse.

Some Christians blame God for allowing those plans and dreams to be shattered. Others, doubting God’s goodness, accuse Him of destroying those plans deliberately.

I stand amongst those whose plans for the future were destroyed by depression. When I was nineteen, I felt a strong burden for the Asian peoples and spent the next five years preparing to go to Thailand as a pastor and missionary. I went to Bible College, helped plant a local church, and went to Thailand on a missionary orientation course. The plan for 1990 was additional Bible college studies and more church planting experience.

It was at that point in my life that depression overwhelmed me. As the days turned to weeks and then months, with no sign of the unbelievably intense suffering abating, I had no choice but to quit the ministry and abandon my plans for the future.

Yet having been convinced that God had called me to be a missionary in Asia, forsaking that dream left me terribly confused and wracked with guilt. I remember wondering during those dark months how Jesus viewed me, was He displeased and disappointed in me for making that decision? As I pondered this and my horrific condition, I began to get angry with Him, as you can see from this diary entry.
8th February 1990 – ‘Jesus cannot blame me for throwing in all thoughts of the ministry. He would have known that I would give up after going through all this - so He can’t blame me for pulling out. Also, I would have been heading for Thailand, doing Bible college etc right now, if all this stuff had not happened. So if Jesus wanted me to be a missionary, then He would not have or (should not have) let all this happen to me. But the truth is, all this has happened to me, but why? Where has it come from? ’

Due to counselling and prayer, I eventually realised that I had made the mistake of placing my faith and trust in obediently following the path I believed God had set for me. In fact, I became terrified of making a wrong step in the erroneous belief that this would destroy His plans for my life.

Such faulty thought processes had placed me in a fearful bondage. We are not to place our faith in the path we believe God has called us to follow - we are to place our faith and trust in God Himself. As to fearing I could destroy God’s plans for my life, God tells us to follow His precepts as presented in His word, and that He will never leave or forsake us. “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:20.

Let us have a look at Proverbs 3:5. ‘Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.’

I learnt that we must not place our hope in our understanding of how our future will turn out. For if we do, when things do not turn out as we expect them to, this may shake our life’s foundations. We are to build our lives upon Christ, the Cornerstone, the sure foundation – we must not build our lives upon our own understandings of what the future will be.

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. Proverbs 16:9

There is a saying in the military. “No battle plan survives contact with the enemy.” There is a great lesson to learn here – not only do plans encounter resistance, but calculated or random events alter their course too. We must expect this and be flexible. When things do not turn out as we were expecting, trust in God instead of fearing, doubting, or blaming Him. God is in control, and uses all things for good for those who love Him.

Romans 8:28 says, ‘And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.’

Now it turns out that God did indeed give me a burden for the Asian peoples. But His plan for my life was not to be a missionary in Thailand planting churches. Instead, He led me to marry a Japanese girl and serve Him in a Japanese Christian church in my city. I had made plans, but God determined my steps. Letting go of the fears that depression had destroyed God’s plan for my life, I acknowledged Him with each step I took and He led me down a straight path.

In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Proverbs 3:6

(On a side note, for those situations where sin, backsliding, waywardness or rebellion against God appears to have destroyed our future, there is still cause for hope. We need to return to God, confess our sins to Him, and turn our back upon those sins. God will forgive us and restore our relationship with Him. Although consequences of our prior actions may send our life in an undesired or unexpected direction, God is still with us. Please read about the prodigal son returning to God in Luke 15:11-32.)

We must place our faith, hope and trust in God our Father and in Christ our Lord, for ‘He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.’ Psalm 23:3 And then whatever path He leads us down, what ever storm He leads us through, even if our dreams for the future are shattered in the process, we will respond by clinging to, relying on, and trusting in Him, instead of responding with shock, confusion and anger.

John 14:1 “Let not your hearts be troubled, trust in God, trust also in Me.”

27. Depression and Self-harm

Some depression sufferers resort to what is known as ‘self-harm.’ This may involve the person hitting or otherwise deliberately injuring themselves. While suffering from depression back in 1990, I too struggled with this issue.

The purpose of this post is to encourage anyone struggling with this issue that they can be set free from it, as I was.

‘It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.’ Galatians 5:1

Why do some people suffering from depression resort to hurting themselves? My diary entries from 1990 reveal some of the common reasons, which can be summarised as follows:

Reasons for Self-harm:

Stemming from despair, hopeless and unbearable frustration:
1. Self-harm can be an attempt to fight depression’s symptoms and make them go away.
2. Self-harm may be an attempt to punish our body & mind for seemingly ruining our lives and refusing to recover.
3. Self-harm can be a cry for help.
4. Self-harm can be an attempt to use the physical pain to distract us from unbearable inner pain.

Self-harm is typically accompanied with crushing waves of guilt and sorrow, in the aftermath of seeing the injuries we may have inflicted upon ourselves.

Changing our Attitude Towards Self-harm:

In order to break the habit of harming ourselves, we need to change our attitude towards it.

1. Self-harm may feel like a relevant outlet for our rage and anger – a way to fight depression’s symptoms in an attempt
to make them go away. Self-harm may seem to give us some form of temporary relief, however, we must remind ourselves that this is a lie, another of Satan’s deceptions. The fact is that if we self-harm, the anger, injuries, pain and guilt make the fear-adrenalin-fear cycle worse by causing more fear-related adrenalin to flow. This makes depression’s symptoms worse.

2. As self-harm stems from bewilderment, despair, hopeless and unbearable frustration, it is imperative that we understand what depression is and how the fear-adrenalin-fear cycle works. We need to let knowledge replace the confusion. Once we learn the technique on how to break that cycle, hope replaces hopelessness and the frustration fades away.

3. We need to teach ourselves to hesitate if about to self-harm. If we raise our hand or reach for something with which to harm ourselves, we need to pause and remind ourselves that this will make depression worse by causing more negative adrenalin to flow. Ask Jesus for the strength to resist the urge and then let time pass - the urge will lose its urgency and fade away.

4. As a Christian, we need to remind ourselves that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit – God lives in us. We need to be responsible and look after and respect God’s temple, rather than harming it. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

5. One thing that helps people to stop hurting themselves is to reflect upon the effect such behaviour has on their family and friends. Caring family members and friends grieve if they see us hurting ourselves. We need to change our focus from ourselves and focus on our desire to stop hurting them through our actions.

6. One thing that helped me immensely was this: if I felt tempted to hurt myself, I would picture Jesus standing before me, telling me that He accepted and loved me, that He wanted to take me into His arms and comfort me (He being rooted and established in love, he will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.) Zephaniah 3:17

If We Fail:

Keeping the above things in mind can help us break the self-harm habit, but we may still fail on the odd occasion. If we do, we must not let guilt have its way with us. Go to God, confess the sin, thank Him for His forgiveness and ask Him to help us resist the urge to self-harm next time, and then put the lapse behind us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

However, if we find that the issue is not improving or getting worse, please see a doctor and/or a Christian therapist or counsellor, and get professional help. Do not struggle alone.

Other Things that may help:

Other things that may help us overcome a self-harm habit include keeping ourselves occupied with constructive activities, regular exercise, and spending as much time as possible with others who care for us, especially family or close friends.

We must not listen to the negative thoughts and voices (and memories of others) telling us that we are pathetic, useless and worthless. We must not hate our body for ‘putting us through this,’ as our body is not responsible, but the fear-adrenalin-fear cycle. We must ignore any feelings of self-hatred and loathing.

Instead, we need to fix our eyes upon Jesus, and upon the love that He has for us.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge— that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:17-19.

Regardless of how we may view ourselves, Jesus does not reject us or despise us - He loves us so much that while we were still sinners He died for us so we can be restored to fellowship with God. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:37-40

Jesus treasures each of us so dearly that He wants us to share our lives with Him for all eternity. He died for us so that, whether we are awake (on earth) or asleep (in heaven), we may live together with him. 1 Thessalonians 5:10

Only by focusing upon God’s Word will we see our true worth - we are precious in His sight!

"The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." Zephaniah 3:17

28. What Stopped me from Ending it?

The extract below is from my diary, written while stuck in the miry pit of severe depression. I had virtually no hope, could see no future, and feared depression would never end.

29th April 1990 –
How many other people are out there like me?
I wish I could help them, comfort them,
But I wouldn’t know how.
I don’t even know how to survive myself.
What was it that stopped me from ending it all?
Why did I persist?
Jesus was some of the reason, sure.
But even my spiritual life was in a complete shambles.

The one main thing that stopped me from ending it was my mother.
I had to keep going for her,
And for the others who cared for me.
How could they cope if I had killed myself?
I saw the devastating effects a suicide could have on a family,
And there’s no way I could put others through such an ordeal.

A common reaction if experiencing unbearable suffering such as depression, is to want to die or kill ourselves. Unable to see an end to the suffering, and not knowing how to be free from it, suicide or wanting to die may seem like the only escape route available.

This is a lie from Satan. Capitalising upon our fears and feelings of hopelessness, Satan tries to convince suffering people that death is the only way out. He tries to hide the truth from us because he wants to destroy us. We must not give into Satan; we must not give him the victory.

John 8:44 “the devil...was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

Another extract from my diary, 14th June 1990 –
I keep asking myself, why am I still here?
Why am I still even trying?
Why don’t I just give up and end it?
I mean, is this all there is to human life?
Suffering?
Is this it?

But regardless of how hard it gets,
I can’t end it, for my mother could not handle it.
I’ve seen the effects suicide can have on a family,
And I would not willingly do that to anyone.
I feel so like Job. “Curse God and die!” my thoughts yell at me.

“Look at this suffering!
How can He be faithful,
When He’s apparently done nothing for six whole months now –
Curse Him and die!”

But God is faithful, and I know that –
It is His name – Faithful and True.

The main thing that stopped me from ending it was that I had witnessed the effects suicide has upon a person’s family, and I loved my family too much to destroy their lives by ending my own. They loved me, cared for me, and were supporting me the best they could, as were my friends. If I had taken my own life, it would have destroyed their lives by causing them to enter a depression worse than what I was experiencing. I refused to put them through that.

And as to the fear that depression would never end – that was a lie as well. I did recover. The fact is, if I had succumbed to Satan’s lies that death was the only way out of depression, I would have been robbed of all the wonderful blessings that God was yet to give me.

1 Corinthians 2:9
However, as it is written:
"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

Once I came to understand how depression worked and how to recover, hope re-entered my life. During the next four years, while I slowly healed, I learnt to live with it and got on with my life. I made a lot of new friends, took up new hobbies such as writing and computer games, and joined a new church where I played the piano and taught Sunday school.

And then, when I recovered from depression, God continued to pour His blessings upon me. I bought a house, married a wonderful lady and had two beautiful (busy!) children.

Quality of life after depression was also much better than it had been before depression. Why? Because it was through depression that had I finally learnt how to deal with anxiety and panic attacks – I was finally free of them for the first time in my life! And best of all, I came to receive a much deeper understanding of God’s love for me, I learnt how to trust Him during difficult times, and I came so much closer to Jesus.

Another thing that helped me to press on, where the memories of my relationship with Jesus before I became depressed. I often reflected upon the times He had comforted me, the times I had felt His wonderful presence, and upon Bible passages that offered encouragement. Most of all, I remembered when Jesus so clearly revealed His love for me - a love so deep and touching that I had wept for joy afterwards. I focused on the fact that God is faithful and true, irrespective of my circumstances.

Ephesians 3:17-19 ‘And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.’

One thought that helped me persevere was the joy of reaching heaven and hearing Jesus say, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!” Matthew 25:23. How could Jesus say that if I had taken my own life? That is not being a good and faithful servant, making the most of the life and gifts He had given me – that is giving up!

I also kept in mind that God rewards the overcomers, those who persevere in times of trouble. The book of Revelation lists several wonderful rewards that Christ gives to the overcomers. If you have a moment, please check them out. Revelation 2:7, 2:11, 2:17, 3:5, 3:12

In conclusion, if plagued by thoughts that suicide is the only way out of depression, remember that this is a lie - there is a way out, we can recover, and we can enjoy the richness of life again.

And some advice - we need to talk to those who are supporting and caring for us, and tell them if we are having suicidal thoughts. When I confided to my mother that I felt...
like ending it all, she immediately arranged for me to see her doctor. The anti-depressants the doctor gave me were very effective in reducing the severity of depression’s symptoms, which made life much more bearable. So if having such thoughts, please see a good doctor and follow his or her advice.

As well as seeing a doctor, we need to get help from a professional therapist or counsellor and deal with the underlying issues that are causing the depression. I also recommend reading “Self Help for Your Nerves” by Dr Claire Weekes. It was after reading this book that hope returned to my life.

And most of all, we need to cling to, rely upon, and trust in Jesus. He will not abandon us if we turn to Him.

If no one is available and you need to talk about suicidal thoughts, please talk to someone at a suicide helpline or ring emergency services.

29. Will this Nightmare ever End?

One of the worst aspects of depression is the fear that it will never end. I often wrote of that fear in my diary.

25th March 1990 –
Will this nightmare ever end?

12th April '90 –
What is this storm that rages within me?
Why won’t it abate, why won’t it subside?
It comes in like a storm, and devours me.
And it won’t go away. It’s near four months now.
Four months of doing nothing, just hiding, hiding, and waiting.

3rd July 1990 –
I just want to get on with my life.
Will I ever be me again?

20th July 90 –
I hate being so irritable and frustrated, so disturbed,
All day, every day
And it never ends.
Oh Lord, where are You?
I feel like getting so angry with You.
I guess it all boils down to this: Is He trustworthy or not?
I know the answer is yes.
But why does He make me wait so long.

Yet at the same time, I had a faint hope that the nightmare would end one day, that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

15th May 90 –
But each day comes to an end eventually,
And so will this emotional turmoil.

18th May 90 –
How I long to be normal again,
As I believe this will all end one day.
The recovery will be slow, I think.
It needs to be, I couldn’t cope with anything quick.
I’m beginning to see some hope for the future,
Which is good I guess.

I took her advice, sat down, and without any goal in mind, painted this painting. I guess it was a subconscious attempt to show how I was feeling, that I was stuck in a dark cave. High in the cave was a small opening through which I could see sunlight, which was mockingly beyond my reach. Yet when I showed the painting to my mother, she smiled and said, “See, there is light at the end of the tunnel. You will get out of this, you will recover.”

And she was right. I did get out of the hopeless, dark pit. I learnt how to cope with depression and live a fulfilling life while letting depression and its symptoms churn away in the background like background music - background music that slowly faded away over time as I slowly healed. And I eventually recovered from depression completely.

The purpose of this article is just to encourage anyone stuck in the miry pit of depression that there is light at the end of the tunnel - the nightmare does end.

However, we must not wait passively for this to happen. Depression is an illness, and like any other illness, needs to be treated. So we need to seek sound medical advice and seriously consider taking medication if recommended, see a Christian therapist or counsellor on a regular basis so that the underlying issues that causes the depression can be treated.

We also need to understand the fear-adrenalin-fear cycle and learn the steps we can take to break that cycle.

And of course, we need to be patient and give our exhausted nervous system and mind the time they need to heal.

Most of all, we need to place unwavering trust in God, recognising that He is with us and is in control, instead of letting our hearts be troubled. We need to rely upon Christ’s strength in our weakness, rather than stagger along with what little remains of our own strength.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 1 Peter 5:10

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I
am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10

30. From Hopelessness to Hope

I thought I would do something a little different for this post. Below are two entries from my diary. I wrote This is so Hard in July 1990 while still in the pits of depression – a time when I had no hope. I could see no future, everything was bleak, desolate, and there was no end in sight.

I wrote A Special Place in January 1992, while recovering from depression. This was after I had been shown the route to recovery, a time when hope had re-entered my life. I had already made significant leaps and bounds in my recovery, but was still afflicted by panic attacks, episodes of endless mental churning, extreme exhaustion, and so on.

This is so Hard 3rd July 1990
Sometimes, it seems that being a Christian hinders more than it helps.
My understanding of God was then when someone was going through a hard time,
He would strengthen them,
That He would help and heal them.
Yet, I find that for much of the time,
I try to forget about Him, because when I think of Him,
I see Someone who could heal me simply by speaking two words,
"Be healed."

I know what He can do, and I've seen what He can do.
I know it is in His character to heal all people of all sicknesses.
Yet, I am still here.
I keep going around in circles.
Why am I in such a mess? Jesus can heal me.
But regardless of how I've sought Him so far
There's been nothing tangible,
So, I get angry and bitter.
And then I repent of my anger and bitterness,
And ask Him to help me to wait faithfully and patiently for Him.
It's just like when I suffered from insomnia.
He could have stepped in and stopped it, but He did not,
So I got angry - angry at Him, and angry at my body.

But I eventually learnt not to get angry,
So again here, step by step, I am learning to be patient,
But it is so hard, so hard.

I just want to get on with my life.
Will I ever be me again?
I just wish this sensation of being disturbed all the time
would go away.
And know it will never come back.
I am not coping, and I know that.
I keep saying, "If I had inner peace, then I would cope."
But I know the Bible says that He is enough.
That Jesus is all we need.
That is easy to say,

But how can I say it,
When I can't see or hear Him doing anything to help?
Yet I'm sure He is helping, that He is carrying me,
But I just wish He would comfort me,
And let me see that He is comforting me.
It would help so much.

As I mentioned in previous posts, at this time I still adhered to the false assumption that God would not allow us to undergo such sufferings. See my previous entry, The Storms of Life. At this time, I also sought a miracle healing from depression. And although Jesus could have healed me instantly, I am so, so glad that He did not do so. Why?
The answer lies in the words I wrote above, "I just wish this sensation of being disturbed all the time would go away. And know it will never come back."

If Jesus had healed my depression by a miracle, I would have learnt nothing from the ordeal, and would have slipped back into depression when the next major trial came along. If I had received a miracle healing, I would not have changed the faulty underlying thought processes that had contributed to my descent into depression in the first place.

I am so thankful that the Lord taught me how to recover, and in doing so, taught me how to avoid succumbing to depression again.

Below is what I wrote just over a year after This is so Hard. Jesus had taken my despair and hopelessness and given me "a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” Isaiah 61:3.

A Special Place 10/1/92
There is a special place I love to go,
A place where I meet with a Real Person,
A place in which I can never spend enough time,
A place I never want to come back from,
A place that builds me up, and makes me content.
A place in which I can meet with the most Wonderful Person,
Who waits for me to come, to enjoy my company and friendship?
It is a place to which I can bring all my fears and worries,
And have them taken away from me, and be comforted in them.
It is where I can bring all my delights and joys,
It is a place of fellowship and companionship.
A place where I can find my true worth,
As I see myself reflected in eyes that truly love me.

Where is this place?
It is at the feet of my Lord Jesus, at the foot of His throne.
There is always a place for me there in heaven.
Jesus tells me that He always keeps it available for me,
That at any time, whether morning or night, dusk or dawn,
When I lay down to sleep, when I rise in the morning
Whether at work or play, He keeps this place for me.
I can come and sit on my knees at the feet of my Lord.
He is seated upon His glorious throne, ruling all creation.
All of the heavenly hosts are gathered around Him.
I stare up at His Wonderful face,
A face that I have dreamt about seeing countless times,
To see His gentle, loving, glorious nature revealed there,
To see Him smile at me, driving away all my inhibitions,
His smile eclipses the light of the sun and moon.
And fills my heart with such delight that I can barely contain it.

I look into His eyes, and my heart is moved beyond words. And those eyes look at me, and He smiles through them. I see eternity, compassion, love, and kindness.

I see myself reflected in His eyes, and then I know how much I really mean to Him. He really loves me. And I hear His voice, that voice which made all things, forming the fabric of the universe simply by speaking. The voice which sustains all creation, holding all things together.

His voice is soothing and comforting, I can hide in it. And He speaks to me, telling me that He appreciates me, that He waits for me to come and be with Him, to love Him.

He builds me up, tells me I'm special, that I am His. He says that nothing can ever snatch me from His hands. And I delight in every word He speaks and has spoken.

Not one of His eternal words will ever pass away.

And as I sit at the feet of Jesus, I can feel His Presence. Of all the pleasant sensations I've ever known, None even begin to compare to His wondrous Presence. As I worship and praise Him, He pours His Presence out on me. His Presence satisfies me completely, making me content. It is a comforting river, into which I can dive headlong, to feel it swirling all around me, gratifying my thirst. I could remain there forever, enjoying His company. And it delights my heart to know that when I am finally with Him, Sitting at His feet for all eternity, His Presence will never fade.

And while I sit at His feet, staring lovingly at Him, He reaches out to me with comforting hands. Comforting hands which have healed me of sickness, Which hold me tightly, never letting go - they are my refuge. His hands guide me along the paths of righteousness, They are the book of life, and my name is written upon them. He reaches out and gently picks me up, to place me on His lap.

As the Creator to one of His little creatures, As a Father to his son, He embraces me. I snuggle up against His strong chest, afraid of nothing. I curl up in His lap and fall asleep. And these hands, which formed the heavens and earth, Are a shield around me. I am safe

These are the reasons why I delight to visit this special place. The place where I sit at the feet of my Lord.

Let us rejoice in our Lord, our Saviour, who indeed rescues us from the miry pit and gives us an eternal hope that does not fade.

Isaiah 40:30-31

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

31. Depression, the Invisible Handicap

One of the hardest things about depression is that it is not readily evident when someone is afflicted by it. Depression sufferers also tend to hide what they are going through from others, one reason being that many do not understand how it affects us.

For example, in my early days of suffering from severe depression, when everything seemed bleak and hopeless, I went to see my family doctor to get a repeat prescription for anti-depressants. (The doctor who had initially treated me had left.) He gave me the prescription, but his attitude was very condescending. He pointed out that his previous appointment was with a family with two mentally challenged children. He said that this family had real problems and then left the sentence hanging – his unspoken point was that there was comparatively nothing wrong with me.

The fact is that depression is real and one of the most crippling illnesses that can afflict us. That it cannot be observed by others only makes it harder to bear. Whenever I saw someone with a visible injury, disease or handicap, I often wished I could switch places with them so that others could see what was wrong with me.

I penned these thoughts into my diary, as below:

15th Sept 1990 – The Invisible Handicap

I have a handicap - but no one can see it. I am not like someone who is crippled, whose handicap everyone can see. I am not like my friend, who was born with his fingers deformed. But like them, I do have a major handicap. My nervous system is over-sensitive, and has been so all my life.

For the past nine months, it has developed a nervous habit, Of over manufacturing fear related adrenalin, Causing physical and emotional side effects. But no one knows, no one can see it - only the couple of people I have told. Sometimes I wish I had a visible handicap, and then people would know – Know what I feel like and what I'm suffering from.

I have managed to pinpoint the main area of conflict, That manages to cause so many problems in me. The conflict lies between what I think I can do, And what I really can do. Because I have a capable and analytical mind, Which can visualize me doing many things, Yet only now I have finally learnt, That my emotional system is mega-sensitive – Over-sensitive, in fact. It bruises and bleeds so easily, and affects me in so many ways. I never realised that all “these” things that happen to me,
Have all been caused by this one thing. 
I did not realise anything was wrong, and kept going. 
The other problem is my lack of physical energy, 
My mind never considers it when pondering what to do.

Note that since recovering from depression, my nervous system, though still sensitive, is no longer hypersensitive as it used to be. In the process of recovering from depression I learned coping techniques that helped me to overcome anxiety before it took a deep hold of me. I learnt to rely upon Christ and His strength instead of fighting and fearing what I was going through. John 14:1 became the theme verse of my life. “Let not your heart be troubled, trust in God, trust also in Me.”

Prayer and Biblical counseling also set me free from past traumas that had previously tripped me up time and again.

The above diary entry also shows when I finally learnt the difference between what I thought I could do, and what I could do. Since that time, I have been careful to pace myself.

In closing, although many do not understand depression and how it affects us, I praise our loving Heavenly Father for giving us a High Priest who can sympathise with us and comfort us in such difficult times.

Hebrews 4:14-16 ‘Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.’

32. Stay on Target

Recovering from depression can at times be a daunting prospect. Although there are good days, some of the ‘bad’ days are so bad that we just want to climb into a hole and pull a lid over the top.

16th May 1990 – Two weeks ago I felt almost normal again, But was I too hopeful? 
The last two or three days have been almost as bad as before, And it has caught me off guard. 
A familiar disturbed sensation once again flooded my chest and emotions, And it was too much for me today.

We fear that we are not actually improving at all, and that we will never actually reach our goal of complete recovery. And then there are those issues that pop up during counselling or therapy. Some issues or experiences from our past that surface are so painful that we can barely face them, let alone deal with them.

It was during a counselling session that the Lord showed me I needed to step out of a comfort zone that was taking His place in my life. In that session I was also encouraged to face one of my greatest, irrational fears. This is what I wrote in my diary after that session.

Man this hurts - my reaction all day was to be in pain. Because of this, and also because of confronting my fears...What a mess! Today I have felt like a larger mess, in so much inner pain, so much worse. But I guess this is necessary.

And it was necessary. Once I had worked through this issue with Christ’s guidance and my pastor’s counsel backed up by the Word of God, I stepped out of that comfort zone, overcame that fear, and received wholeness and freedom in Christ that allowed my life to go in an entirely new direction.

Counselling during depression also revealed that I had faulty theology and thought patterns that needed to be aligned with God’s Word. These not only contributed to depression but were also hindering the recovery process. Dealing with these was also painful and in some cases, took perseverance over several weeks or months before my thinking and beliefs lined up with God’s Word.

The purpose of this post is to share something that helped me to persevere when my life encountered such difficult times.

My last year of senior high school, year twelve, was so stressful and demanding that I fell ill many times as the year progressed. Time and again I wanted to quit, leave school, give up my dream of going to university and be content with second best.

However, one thing that helped me persevere was a scene in the movie Star Wars.

Towards the end of the film, we see the Rebel fighter pilots launching a near suicidal attack upon the evil Death Star space station. In one scene, three Rebel Y-Wings are rocketing down a trench during a torpedo attack run on the Death Star’s reactor. Imperial Tie Fighters were on their tail, trying to destroy them. One pilot kept panicking that they weren’t going to make it, that they were going to die. But the leader, older, and more mature, just kept answering calmly, “Stay on target.”

So throughout year twelve, whenever I felt like throwing in the towel and giving up, I would say to myself, “Stay on target.”

The Bible tells us to persevere, to be an overcomer, to let nothing stop us from following Jesus and completing the race He has set before us. The Bible tells us to “Stay on target.”

Blessed are those who persevere under trial, because when they have stood the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Hebrews 12:1

So if we are having one of those bad days and we lament, “It’s too hard, I can’t do this - I want to get off this planet!” we can fix our eyes upon Jesus rely upon His strength and say, “Stay on target.” The goal is an abundant life in Christ – both now and for eternity, and of course, learning to deal with and recover from depression.
The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

When faced with the memory of a past trauma and we say, “No, it’s too painful, I can’t face it, I can’t work through it,” let us instead remember Jesus was there when it happened, and is with us right now, helping to set us free from it. We can say to ourselves, “Stay on target - I will not settle for second best.”

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:14

When we have to unlearn faulty thought processes and belief systems, and retrain our mind so that it is aligned with God’s word, and we say, “But I’ve always done it that way, I’ve always believed that was the case, why do I need to change?” We can press into Jesus and ask Him to help renew our mind so that we can live in the freedom He has purchased for us on the cross, and we can say to ourselves, “Stay on target.”

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Romans 12:2

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4:16

33. Rediscovering our Significance

Depression tends to leave a trail of destruction in its wake. One of its victims is a positive self-concept - our sense of significance and self-worth. We look at sorry state of our lives, and compare ourselves to what we used to be like and what we want to be like, and often feel worthless.

Part of the process of recovering from depression is rediscovering our worth and learning to have a positive self-concept again.

I remember going through this process back in 1992. The worst phase of depression was behind me, and I was living close to a normal life, although still afflicted by strong fatigue and panic attacks. When I examine my diary entries from 1992, I can see that Jesus was teaching me once again how much I meant to Him, that I was His treasure, His beloved. Only when we understand our significance to God, and how He views us, can we really understand our true worth.

This is something I wrote in my diary after I had gone on a prayer walk one night on 7th August 1992.

Who Am I?
I love to walk alone at night,
And gaze up at all the heavens,
Bright stars twinkling in the night sky,
While a gentle, cold breeze refreshes my soul.
And while I look up at the great expanse above me,
I wonder, “Who am I, Lord, that You care for me?”
I am so tiny, so little, such a tiny part of Your creation,
I am dwarfed to insignificance compared to the heavens.
Yet You care for me. You tell me that You treasure me.

You hold me in Your hands and delight in me - even tiny little me
I am precious to You, the Great God who created all.
You who fills this wondrous night sky,
Have fixed Your attention on me.
And You love me so much
That You died for me.
Jesus, I love You.

We see King David, who shared his experiences with depression in the Psalms, reflecting on the very same topic – his value in God’s sight.

Psalm 8
O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.
O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

If recovering from depression, let us sit at Jesus’ feet and wait upon Him, and reflect and meditate upon the amazing way in which our loving God thinks of us. Although we appear to be insignificant when compared to the grandeur of God’s creation, let us join with David in rejoicing that God has crowned us with glory and honor - He created us in His image. Moreover, when we placed our faith in Christ, He clothed us with Christ’s robes of righteousness and gave us the right to become children of God. We are special, we are significant, we have value.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. John 1:12-13

34. Keeping our Eyes Fixed on Jesus

It was world news that Victoria, Australia, has been ravaged by bushfires since Saturday 7th of February, 2009, a day which Victoria saw record temperatures. Country towns have been destroyed, thousands of hectares of bush lands burnt down, and close to two hundred lives lost. To
add insult to injury, it is believed that some or many of these fires were lit deliberately.

One of the most beautiful tourist attractions in Victoria was a small town with a population of about 500, nestled in the foothills of the mountains. Marysville abounded with native Australian animals such as parrots, kookaburras and wallabies, as well as dozens of wild which ducks lived in the town’s small lake and Steavenson River.

On Saturday 7 February 2009, Marysville was devastated by bushfires. They say only one building is left standing in the town itself. Most of the residents were evacuated safely to the local sports ground, Gallipoli Park. It is not yet known how many were not so fortunate.

In last September, only four months ago, my family vacationed in Marysville, staying in a house that over looked that very same sports ground. We even played tennis there. My wife, two children, and I considered it one of the most idealic and relaxing holidays we have had. We fed the wild ducks every day, went on bush walks, and visited Steavenson Falls.

I took a number of photos of Marysville when there, and in fact, the title photo of this blog is a photo we took of Steavenson Falls. To think that this beautiful place has been devastated is heartbreaking. If you have a moment, please lift a prayer for the people who have lost their loved ones and homes due to these bushfires.

While in Marysville, my family and I witnessed a scene so moving, that when I returned home and was waiting upon the Lord, He showed me something that over looked that very same sports ground. We even played tennis there. My wife, two children, and I considered it one of the most idealic and relaxing holidays we have had. We fed the wild ducks every day, went on bush walks, and visited Steavenson Falls.

I took a number of photos of Marysville when there, and in fact, the title photo of this blog is a photo we took of Steavenson Falls. To think that this beautiful place has been devastated is heartbreaking. If you have a moment, please lift a prayer for the people who have lost their loved ones and homes due to these bushfires.

While in Marysville, my family and I witnessed a scene so moving, that when I returned home and was waiting upon the Lord, He showed me something that motivated me to pen it into a devotional, which I placed waiting upon the Lord, He showed me something that motivated me to pen it into a devotional, which I placed on my lap, 'Self Help for Your Nerves' by Dr. Claire Weekes, He lead me down the road to recovery, and soon restored me to the knowledge of His presence.

Returning to the present, I saw that the scene before me had not run its full course. What of the eight ducklings left behind by their mother as she raced off to rescue the lost pair? Imagine then, my surprise to see those ducklings snuggled against her small dam formed by rocks and a fallen branch. Safe now, guided them away from the middle of the stream and into a small dam formed by rocks and a fallen branch. Safe now, the two ducklings snuggled against her—relieved that she had seen their plight and rescued them.

Casting my mind back, I recalled how Jesus had also come after me when I had been swept into that desolate, black place of depression and hopelessness. “I will never leave you nor forsake you,” He assured me through His Word in Joshua 1:5. With loving patience, His Word, and practical advice through a book that He dropped on my lap, ‘Self Help for Your Nerves’ by Dr. Claire Weekes, He lead me down the road to recovery, and soon restored me to the knowledge of His presence.

Returning to the present, I saw that the scene before me had not run its full course. What of the eight ducklings left behind by their mother as she raced off to rescue the lost pair? Imagine then, my surprise to see those ducklings—fixed firmly upon their mother, race into the midst of the stream and follow her into the safety of the small dam. Now mother and ten ducklings were reunited.

Right there was the answer, God’s blueprint to avoid being swept away by life’s troubles and storms. I had made the same mistake as Peter when he stepped out of the boat to walk on water to reach Jesus. Like him I took my eyes off the Lord and cast my gaze upon surrounding troubles, doubts and fears. Like Peter I sank. How eloquently those ducklings illustrated Hebrews 12:2, ‘Let us fix our eyes on Jesus.’ Had I done that, and clung to His words in John 14:1, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me,” I could have been spared much anguish!

Yet all the same, my heart is comforted by the knowledge that when my gaze strays from Him and I am swept away by life’s troubles, that He will come after me and restore me to Himself. He will never leave nor forsake me.

35. Depression & Being Thankful

Depression can swamp us with such an overwhelming array of disturbing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual symptoms that it is only natural for us to focus obsessively on all the negative aspects of our life. Trivial annoyances become major irritations while more major inconveniences can cause our temper to explode out of control.

Here is an excerpt from my diary, where I lamented over the seemingly never ending suffering of depression.

14th June 1990 –
What is suffering?
It must be the human inheritance,
It never ends.
It just goes on and on and on.
And I’ve had enough, but whom do I tell?
How do I get off this merry-go-round?
...
I keep asking myself, why am I still here?
Why am I still even trying?
Why don’t I just give up and end it?
I mean, is this all there is to human life?
Suffering?
Is this it?

Recognising my tendency to dwell on the negative while severely depressed, I took steps to counter it. One such step was to pause before each meal and think of ten things to thank God for. Another was to sing praise songs to God, even if I did not feel like it. Doing so changed my focus ever so slightly, adding a touch of colour to my bleak, hopeless day, by reminding me that although my life was an absolute mess, there were still plenty of things to be thankful for should I but search for them.

Here’s another excerpt from my diary, written only five days after the above diary entry.

19th June 1990 –
*My life at the moment is not much of a life,
But I guess I should still be thankful,
So I still praise Him for all He has given me.*

In her diary, *One Liter of Tears*, young Aya Kito, who was suffering from incurable spinocerebellar degeneration disease, wrote this: (1)

*I put my hand on my chest.
I can feel my heart beating.
My heart is working.
I’m pleased. I’m still alive!*

Thanking God for His blessings while in the midst of chronic suffering also reminds us that He is our provider, that He knows what we need, and that we have nothing to fear.

*The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song.* Psalm 28:7

In time, I thanked God for all the things He was doing in and through my life because of depression, and much later, I also thanked Him for allowing me to go through depression itself.

*Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18


3x. Worshipping God in the Midst of Life’s Trials

One of the most delightful aspects of following Christ is the joy and honour of being able to worship God. The spiritual act of worshipping God is a way of life, where we offer our entire life to Him by living in a holy manner that is pleasing to Him. There are also many outward expressions of worship available to us.

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.* Romans 12:1

**Worship is:**
- recognising
- acknowledging
- declaring
- delighting in

**God’s:**
- goodness
- holiness
- faithfulness
- love

**Outwardly Expressed though:**
- spending time with Him while sitting at His feet
- thanking and praising Him
- delighting our heart in Him
- adoring Him with songs of praise and worship
- writing, praying, reading and meditating on His Word.
- living holy lives that are pleasing to God

*Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.* Psalm 95:6-7

*Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.* Psalm 99:5

*Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.* Psalm 100:2

*In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”* Revelation 5:12

It can be difficult to worship God when our lives are beset with troubles. There have been times in my life when I said sadly, “I don’t feel like worshipping God right now.” However, to surrender ourselves to the act of worshipping God, even during our trials, is a liberating experience as by doing so, we are recognising God’s sovereignty over all things. And more, it is fulfilling our created function - He created us to worship Him. Selwyn Hughes wrote, “Nothing is more important that the worship of the One who holds my life in His hands. Because He is God then I know that no matter how things might look to the contrary, all will be well. Thus my heart delights to worship Him.”

Below is a worship poem that I wrote while still recovering from depression. Although I had struggled to consistently worship God during depression’s blackest phase, when He restored hope to my life, I once again abandoned myself to the pursuit of adoring and worshipping Him with every fiber of my being.


*At whose feet do I sit,
while gazing adoringly into His face,
as He sits upon His throne?*
At whose feet I throw myself, so delighted to meet Him face to face? Who is He who fellowships with me as I enter into His Presence? His Name is Jesus.

He is the desire of my heart. In Him do I truly delight. Earth has nothing that I desire besides Him, And who do I have in heaven but Him, the One who made all things. He made me for Himself. I am His, and He is mine. He made me to fellowship with Him for all eternity. And this is my deepest joy - to be with Him. He is my obsession, my soul desire, my life and inspiration.

And as I lift my voice in praise, He meets me, for He is enthroned on the praises of His people. And His love for me is unconditional. He sees all of my inadequacies, failings, fears and inhibitions, And yet He loves me still. He sees my mistakes, sin, weaknesses and imperfections, And yet He loves me still. His Name is indeed Wonderful, for He is Wonderful beyond words. And regardless of how weak I am, He never tires of me, for His love is eternal. He is the Eternal Father of love.

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. Psalm 73:25

36. Why Won’t God End my Suffering?

Everyone suffers, Christian and non-Christian. Job 5:7 ‘Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.’

However, us Christians often respond to suffering in one of two ways:

a) we know that God has the power to end the suffering and set us free, but when He does not do so quickly, we are frustrated and tormented by this knowledge. This is what I wrote in my diary on 14th June 1990, ‘Why won’t Jesus help me - His Name is Saviour, so why am I failing so helplessly. All He needs to do is speak to my inner storm and say, “Peace, be still!” And then I will be whole again.’ I spent several months in this phase, knowing He could miraculously end the depression, then getting angry with Him because He did not do so. Overwhelming guilt for getting angry with Him instead of trusting Him followed this.

b) another common reaction is to think the trial is the result of concealed sin in our life. We begin a soul-searching witch-hunt trying to find that sin. I spent hours praying, searching my heart and mind, tearing myself to pieces as I tried to uncover concealed sins – all to no avail.

James 1:2-4 teaches us what reaction we should have, but it is a very difficult verse to learn to put into practice. ‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.’

This teaches us that trials:
a) are going to come our way and will do so for a reason.

At first I struggled (and failed) to put James 1:2-4 into practice while depressed. Romans 8:28 says, ‘And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.’ Yet we may well say, “What good could ever possibly come into my life through this?!”

It was only after I accepted that depression was part of my life and stopped fighting and fearing it, that I was able to put James 1:2-4 into practice. At that time I thanked and praised God for what He was doing in me through the depression, and for the depression as well. I recognised His sovereignty - that He was in control - and was using it for good, and would use it for good. Recovery from depression begins in earnest when we reach this place - it also releases the power of God’s grace into our lives.

This then is the first reason God allows trials to come our way – He uses them to develop our faith and maturity and to fashion us into the image of Christ. This can be very painful, but is well worth it in the end.

(A small post script here too. Note that James says ‘face trials of many kinds.’ He does not say ‘all kinds.’ We can avoid some trials by simply walking away from them. Others are spiritual attacks that can be torn down with the spiritual weapons we have in Jesus. And in other cases, God does free us from them miraculously. But we need God’s wisdom to recognise what kind of trial we are experiencing. Too often people think depression is a spiritual attack that can be stopped instantly, or an illness that should be healed on the spot.)

There is a second reason God allows us to undergo trials. It is during these times that we learn to rely upon Christ’s strength, rather than upon our own. We come to realise that Christ’s grace and provision is truly all we need to persevere.

Paul learnt this lesson through his own sufferings, as revealed in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10. ‘Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it [a thorn in my flesh] away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

To surrender control of our life to Jesus, and to accept the suffering instead of fighting and pleading for it to end, is a difficult lesson to learn. But we can rest assured that Jesus will never put us through something that we cannot overcome with His assistance. Philippians 4:12-13 ‘I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.’
The other day, while reading the diary I kept while depressed, I was amazed to find this entry from March 1990.

March already. To think that I was expecting this year to be the best I have had yet. It’s a nightmare, and the worst I can remember. In light of all this, I have been thinking of marriage in two ways. On one hand, I’m in favour of never getting married. If I’m going to go through things like this again and again, then I do not want to burden any poor woman with me. On the other hand, I will not mind going through things such as this, if my wife will go through such things too. In which case, at that time I will understand what she is going through, and I will simply support her, accept her, place no pressure on her, and I will give her as long as she needs to come out of it.

I had no idea how prophetic that entry was. My wife did indeed suffer from depression, and because I had been there previously, I was able to support her through it.

This then is a third reason God allows us to suffer. These trials equip us to comfort and encourage others who face the same trials. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 describes the process perfectly. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Our Lord and Saviour Jesus endured trials on Earth, for that very same purpose. Because He went through them, He is able to comfort and support us.

Hebrews 4:14-16 ‘Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.’

In Isaiah 9:6 we read that one of Jesus’ names is Counsellor, or Comforter. ‘For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.’

So be encouraged that Jesus is able to comfort us because He experienced trials too, and be further encouraged that we go through trials such as depression so that we can later comfort and support others who are going through it. I like to think of myself as a signpost that shows others suffering from depression the way to learn to live with it, and then overcome it.

37. The Wilderness

We are all familiar with the story of Moses and the Israelites, enslaved by the Egyptians for three hundred years. God heard His people’s cries for help, and by a series of divine interventions, set them free from slavery and led them out of Egypt and into the wilderness, a desert.

However, the wilderness was not the Israelites’ destination, it was a place God was taking them through on the way to the land God had promised to give them, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey,’ Exodus 3:5.

The Bible frequently uses the Old Testament nation of Israel as a type or symbol of our own lives. We Christians were all slaves too – slaves to sin and death. God heard our cries for help, and through Christ’s atoning death and resurrection, set us free from slavery and led us out. And just like God lead Israel through a wilderness on the way to their Promised Land, there are times that He leads us through wildernesses on our way to heaven.

Why did God take Israel through the wilderness instead of taking them straight to the Promised Land? He did so to help them grow and mature. ‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.’ James 1:2-4.

To say it in another way, although God had taken Israel out of Egypt, He wanted to take Egypt out of Israel. Likewise, although God has taken us out of the world and sin, He wants to take the world and our old self-centred sinful nature out of us. God used my time in the wilderness to purge so much of my sinful nature. He taught me to rely upon Him instead of on myself, to rest in His peace instead of trusting in my feelings, to trust that He was in control of my life, and that I have nothing to fear.

How long we tarry in the wilderness while on the way to our Promised Land depends largely on how we react to the wilderness experience. How did the Israelites respond to their journey through the wilderness?

Although they had just witnessed the awesome power of God in Egypt, what did they say when Pharaoh’s army trapped them against the shores of the Red Sea? “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!” Exodus 14:11-12.

And when they ran out of food? “If only we had died by the LORD’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” Exodus 16:3.

And when there was no water to be found? But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?” Exodus 17:3.

What about when faced with the powerful nations that occupied Canaan? All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” Numbers 14:2-3.

In all these cases, instead of turning to God and asking for His help, they complained and grumbled against God. Because of this, they ended up spending forty years in the wilderness instead of a few months.

Perhaps while in the wilderness we have had the same reaction - grumbling against God and wishing we
were back in the world. “Life was better before I became a Christian, things were easier when I was in the world.” But we know that is not true. Firstly, unbelievers experience trials too, but without the comforting strength of Christ to sustain and help them. And secondly, even if life as an unbeliever had been easier, it was an illusion, a lie, as that life leads to hell. “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Matthew 7:13-14.

A wilderness experience may seem unbearable to those who are in it, but we can be confident that God will not lead us through something that we cannot overcome through His strength. For example, did you know that God could have lead the Israelites to Canaan via a shorter route, but that this dangerous route was too hard for them? Exodus 13:17-18 When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea.

So we can be confident that whatever we are going through today can be overcome if we rely upon Him.

Not all trials become a wilderness experience, although many have the potential of becoming one. The fact is that we can skip the wilderness aspect of suffering altogether by responding differently to the trial. See below a wilderness experience contrasted against suffering that skips the wilderness.

**Suffering Leading to A Wilderness Experience**

* We go through a trial
* We respond by complaining and grumbling against God
* We become bitter
* We enter an extended time in a spiritual wilderness
* Internal suffering becomes acute, almost unbearable
* We cry out to the Lord for help, and repent of our grumbling
* The Lord answers and leads us out of the wilderness
* The Lord continues to lead us along the road that leads to life

**Suffering that Skips the Wilderness Experience**

* We go through a trial
* We respond by thanking God for it
* We acknowledge that God is in control of every aspect of our life, even this one
* We rest in God’s peace, content to be in this place at this time
* The suffering does not become internal, but remains outside us as we take refuge in the Lord
* We reverently pour our heart out to the Lord, and wait patiently for His strength and provision
* The Lord continues to lead us along the road that leads to life

I have been through both of the above. Trials I experienced in late 1989 lead to one of the worst wilderness experiences possible, depression. While in this wilderness I went from pouring my heart out to God and reminding myself that He was faithful, to grumbling and complaining. I went from one extreme to the other, with the grumbling hindering my Christian walk and recovery.

If only the Israelites in the desert had praised God whenever they encountered difficulties, and waited patiently for Him to provide for their needs. Psalm 37:7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him. They had seen His works, His miracles, they saw the cloud and the pillar of fire – they knew He was with them. Had they done this instead of grumbling and complaining, they would have left the wilderness much sooner.

When the Lord taught me to stop grumbling, fearing and fighting what I was going through, that I needed to wait patiently for Him to lead me to full recovery, the inner suffering become noticeably less. As I waited to recover I praised Him, accepted that this was where He had lead me, and acknowledged that He was in control of my life, regardless of how things seemed. This was when my trek out of that wilderness began in earnest. And lead me out of that wilderness He did, and I continued my journey along the road that leads to life.

When I was afflicted by hundreds of complex partial epileptic seizures from 1996 to 2002/3, and then by deafness accompanied by almost unbearable tinnitus from 2002-2003, by applying the lessons I had learnt while recovering from depression, I was able to skip the wilderness aspect of those trials. Eventually the Lord led me through those trials as well. The epilepsy is now controlled by medication, and an operation restored 70% hearing to my deaf ear, removing much of the tinnitus as well. I am still partially deaf, but that’s a huge improvement over being deaf.

Let us learn from Israel’s example of what to do and what not to do, and guard our hearts from grumbling against God and our circumstances. Let us praise Him, acknowledge His lordship, and learn to be content whatever our circumstances. Then we can cut short time spent in the wilderness, and in the process learn how to skip the wilderness experience aspect of future trials.

38. The Storms of Life

We have probably all heard at least one stirring message entitled, “Come to Jesus and He will calm your raging storms,” based on Mark 4:35-41, as below:

Mark 4:35-41 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

This is such an encouraging and powerful passage of Scripture, yet on each occasion I have heard a sermon based on it, a significant aspect of the passage has been glossed over or omitted. Let us look at verse 35. That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, “Let us go over to
the other side." Jesus, fully aware the storm was imminent, could have spared the disciples a great deal of distress and anguish had He said, “Look, there’s a really big storm coming, so let’s remain on land until it passes.”

But Jesus did not do that. Rather, he deliberately led the disciples through that storm. It is also important to note that the storm itself was not their destination – it was the other side of the lake. Bearing in mind that God uses all things for good for those who love Him; Jesus obviously had His divine purposes in mind when He took the disciples through that storm rather than avoiding it.

We can learn so much from this passage in Mark. It shows that our hope of being able to avoid the storms of life in an unrealistic expectation. I remember writing an essay in year twelve where I shared that I believed God would never allow me to go through any significant trials. Unrealistic expectations like this set us up for a fall. When those storms come, we are surprised, bewildered, and shocked.

Depression, the greatest trial I have endured, took me completely by surprise.

12th April ’90 –

What is this storm that rages within me?
Why won’t it abate, why won’t it subside?
It comes in like a storm, and devours me.
And it won’t go away. It’s near four months now.
Four months of doing nothing, just hiding, hiding, and waiting.
I have no future, how can there be one when I’m like this?
I can’t face anyone except those I must.
I wait and wait, I pray and pray.
But there’s nothing I can do, or else I’d have done it.
Every day means another day wasted,
I had such high hopes for this year,
But one third’s almost gone, and I’ve been in hell.
Oh Jesus, if I’d only known this was coming,
Then maybe I could have spent hours on my knees,
Begging You to avert it from me.

We can see by my conclusion in the above diary entry that I still had the false notion that we could avoid the storms of life. Although I had read Bible passages that tell us we will suffer, I subconsciously hoped that they would not happen to me. Hence when depression came, the shock brought me crashing to the ground. "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed." (I Peter 4:12-13)

Let us also consider the words of Jesus when He faced with the greatest trial a man has ever faced - His atoning death on the cross. Matthew 26:42 He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

Another lesson to be gained from this passage in Mark is the disciples’ reaction to the storm. They feared there was no escape and that they would perish in it. That was my reaction to depression as well. I was terrified that it would never end and that there was no way out. I had completely forgotten that painful trials are part of our Christian walk towards growth and maturity, just as the disciples had forgotten Jesus words, "Let us go over to the other side." They already knew Jesus said they were crossing the lake, so why did they fear they would perish on the way?

Eventually, the disciples remembered the Lord and ran to Him for help. Yet instead of asking Him to lead them safely through the storm because they had faith in Him, they panicked, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"

Before going onto anti-depressant meds, depression afflicted me with chronic insomnia. Although some nights I managed to lie there all night without grumbling or complaining, after several nights of this torture I would snap. I remember shaking my fist at the ceiling and saying, “Jesus, why do you just sit there! Can’t you see that I need sleep? Why don’t you act? Don’t you care?”

The answer Jesus gave to the disciples in response to their fear has ministered so much to me. "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" I can imagine Jesus thinking the following as He gently admonished them. "Hey, why are you so afraid? Haven’t you figured it out yet? Don’t you know who I am? It’s Me, the One who brought your forefathers out of Egypt, the One who provided them with mana and quail, the One who lead them through the wilderness and into the promised land. Now if I did all that for them, why are you so afraid?"

And now comes the good bit, now we see why Jesus took the disciples through this storm, we see how He used this trial for good in their lives. Consider the disciples’ reaction when they glimpsed Christ’s divine power and glory as He stilled the raging storm. They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" At long last, they began to understand that this Jesus was no ordinary prophet but God Almighty incarnated into human flesh, a God who was not impersonal and distant, but right there with them - Immanuel, God with us.

The disciples marvelled at the love and care Christ demonstrated for them, not only for stopping a raging storm just for them, but also for guiding them successfully to the other side. Did you know that a Psalm written centuries earlier shows us the disciples’ reaction to this very storm?

Psalm 107:23-31

Others went out on the sea in ships;
they were merchants on the mighty waters.
They saw the works of the LORD,
his wonderful deeds in the deep.
For he spoke and stirred up a tempest
that lifted high the waves
They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths;
in their peril their courage melted away.
They reeled and staggered like drunken men;
tHEY were at their wits' end.
Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble,
and he brought them out of their distress.
He stilled the storm to a whisper;
the waves of the sea were hushed.
They were glad when it grew calm,
and he guided them to their desired haven.
Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for men.

My experiences with depression were the same. To this day I praise and thank Christ for leading me through that storm.
and to the other side. I marvel at the power and loving care He demonstrated as He gently lead me back to full health. The result was that I drew much, much closer to Him, and learnt to rely upon Him to the extent that subsequent trials did not become wilderness experiences.

Philippians 3:8-11. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

39. My Grace is Sufficient for You

For years I viewed God’s grace as being when God grants unmerited favour to those who do not deserve it, or specifically, when God grants the gift of salvation to undeserving sinners.

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

Below are the lyrics of a song that I sang to the Lord countless times during my private praise and worship times:

Your grace is sufficient for me, and I’m loving You, more and more. Your face is all I want to see, and I’m loving You, more and more. When I behold You in the word, I learn to walk in victory, I know that when I’m weak You’ll make me strong. If I’m about to fall, I know your hands are always there. Jesus, I love You more and more.

By Ps Tom Rawls, Gary Houston, 1986?

When I went on an eight-day missionary orientation trip to Thailand in late 1989, one of my fondest memories was of playing this song on the piano in a Bangkok Bible college.

The song is inspired by 2 Cor 12:8-9 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

When I became severely depressed at the end of 1989, I found that when I sang this song, my exhausted, nervously ill mind completely misunderstood what 2 Cor 12:8-10 teaches. Unable to reason, I thought that this verse was God saying to me, “My unmerited favour, specifically your salvation, is all you need to get through this.” To this I responded disappointedly, “No, it is not enough! This suffering I am going through defies comprehension. I need more than that to get through this living nightmare! I need Your help, Your strength, Your healing!” But I truly feared that these things were not coming. (Little did I realise at the time that He had been strengthening me throughout the ordeal.)

However, I eventually learnt that God’s grace is far more than granting the gift of salvation to undeserving sinners. Let us have a look at the rest of 2 Cor 12:8-10 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Now in reading this, perhaps we are wondering, what has Christ’s power, or strength, got to do with grace? The answer is that it has everything to do with God’s grace. Let us take a journey through God’s word, and we will see what God’s grace actually gives us. I was surprised when I learnt this.

It is from His grace that God pours His blessings upon us. John 1:16 From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.

It is through His grace that Christ gives us His divine power and strength to deal with any trial, and His strength is SO much better than our own! This is how the Amplified Bible presents 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 But He said to me, My grace (My favor and loving-kindness and mercy) is enough for you [sufficient against any danger and enables you to bear the trouble manfully]; for My strength and power are made perfect [fulfilled and completed] and show themselves most effective in [your] weakness. Therefore, I will all the more gladly glory in my weaknesses and infirmities, that the strength and power of Christ (the Messiah) may rest (yes, may pitch a tent over and dwell) upon me!

So for the sake of Christ, I am well pleased and take pleasure in infirmities, insults, hardships, persecutions, perplexities and distresses; for when I am weak [in human strength], then am I [truly] strong (able, powerful in divine strength).

Also, grace is not something we receive just the once when we receive His gift of salvation, it is available in abundance! Romans 5:17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

More proof of the boundless abundance of God’s grace is seen in Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. Also in 1 Timothy 1:14 The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

We receive Christ’s eternal riches from His grace. 2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

In fact, everything we need to succeed in our walk with Christ and do good works comes from God’s grace. 2 Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Now I understood why Jesus told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you.” Because Christ’s grace is the vehicle by which He gives us whatever we need to get through that trial, to resist a temptation, to overcome an obstacle. When we are weak, He gives us His power, when we are poor He
gives us riches. ‘You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.’ 2 Timothy 2:1. Through His grace He also gives us salvation, favour, loving-kindness, mercy and all of His blessings.

While in the pits of depression, we fear the suffering will never end.

From my diary, 12th April 1990 –
I keep seeing this going on forever, I can see two years gone by, and I’ve still go no peace, It is like insomnia. When the sun comes up, And you’re still awake, you realise you’ve been robbed.

But I was wrong - my fears were unfounded - I did recover from depression. God’s word is true when it says in 1 Peter 5:10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

All verses from NIV unless noted otherwise.

40. Do Not Worry About Tomorrow

There are certain hardships that we cannot avoid, hardships that we dread going through again. These could be trips to the dentist, hospital, public speaking engagements, a recurring injury or illness, and so on.

We may watch the approach of the hardship (eg, the date of the dentist’s appointment), with fear and trepidation, desperate to avoid it yet knowing we cannot. We wonder how we can get through the ordeal when we cannot even bare to think of it.

I had a very sickly childhood, often coming down with tonsillitis, bronchitis, bronchilitis, and very painful middle ear infections. When I came down with one of these illnesses again, I knew from my previous experiences what I was about to go through. A burning throat would lead to a high fever, sometimes exceeding 40°C and often accompanied by deliriousness. Complications typically followed such as infected sinuses, a chest infection, or a middle ear infection. If I contemplated what I was about to go through, it was too heavy for me.

Instead, once the sickness took hold of me, I would say to myself, “In a few days, I will be better, this will all be over, and life will go back to normal. I will walk outside into a sky full of sunshine, with this sickness behind me.” This hope greatly comforted me and helped me to endure the trial.

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12

As well as keeping my gaze fixed on being well again instead of worrying about the suffering yet to come, I prayed to Jesus throughout each day that I lay sick in bed, asking Him to help me through each moment. He was my refuge in the midst of these storms.

He gives power to those who are tired and worn out; He offers strength to the weak. Isaiah 40:29

I concentrated on living one hour at a time, without worrying about what would come next. The hours added up and the day would pass. Then I concentrated on living one day at a time without worrying about the next day’s sufferings. The days added up and finally the sickness was gone. Then I would walk outside into a sunny day, and rejoice in the Lord.

What did Jesus say regarding worrying about the future?

Matthew 6:25 – 34 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

I dealt with trips to the dentist in the same way. (I really do not like going to the dentist.) Instead of brooding fearfully about the approaching dentist’s appointment, I took each preceding day one day at a time. And when I finally I sat in the dentist’s chair I would tell myself, “In thirty minutes or so this will all be over. Then I will walk out of the dentist’s smiling with joy because it’s over.” Focusing on the sense of relief and elation that would come when it was over helped me to get through the procedure, rather than focusing on the procedure itself.

The Lord’s wonderful advice sets us free from worrying about the future. “Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Matthew 6:35

This is a very effective strategy for coping with depression as well. Take it one day at a time, trusting in Jesus to strengthen us and help us through that day, rather than constantly fearing what the future may hold.

We do not need to carry tomorrow’s burdens today. When we get to ‘tomorrow,’ Jesus will be there, ready to help us deal with them.

41. Recession Blues

We need only read the paper, watch TV, or see internet news updates, and we will be bombarded with doom and gloom predications that “Recession is coming!” or, “Recession is here!” and of course, “World heading for global depression!”
The fact is that some countries are already suffering the effects of recession, with rising inflation, higher unemployment, and an increase in the number of the homeless. My wife has shared with me the troubles that many families are experiencing in Japan now. Since company provided housing is often part of the job package, when a father is retrenched, they lose not only their income but their home as well.

Many fear that the world is in danger of slipping into another depression akin to the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Many factors that brought about the Great Depression are at work in today’s global economy, such as distress selling, banks in serious financial straights, falling asset prices, low profits, falling interest rates, soaring unemployment, and so on.

What attitude should we take towards the threat of national/global recession and depression? Should we live in fear of their arrival, dreading how recession or depression will affect us personally? Should we allow fears of what may come tomorrow destroy our ability to live today?

Jesus told us not to worry.

“...do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.” Matthew 6:31 – 34.

So we should live today with the strength that God gives us today. Worrying about tomorrow not only destroys our ability to enjoy and cope with today, but it doubts God’s ability to look after our future.

And when 'tomorrow' comes, should it arrive hand in hand with calamity, what should our attitude be? What if national or global recession/depression deprives us of jobs, shares, investments, even our homes and possessions?

The answer is that we must seek first the kingdom of God and then trust Him to meet all of our needs.

One of God’s names is Jehovah Jireh, which means, the ‘Lord will provide.’ So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided." Genesis 22:14.

I am convinced that as we put God first and present our requests to Him, we will be astounded by the miracles of His wondrous provision.

Philippians 4:19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

God knows what we need - we have nothing to fear.

Matthew 6:25 – 34 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”

There is a running joke in my family. If we receive a tax bonus or a cash windfall for a certain amount, we often get a bill the next day for that same amount.

It is my personal opinion that one of the primary ways God will provide for the needs of His children during recession/depression is through the body of Christ. These trials are an opportunity for Christians to watch out for each other’s needs, so that those with plenty can help those in need, just as in the early church. Let us each be mindful of the needs of our Christian family, especially those of our local church.

Acts 4:32-35 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

Please note that there is a difference between God supplying all of our needs and God maintaining our wealth or current/previous life style. Our riches are those things we have stored in heaven – our relationship with God, our salvation, each soul we have lead to Christ, every good work we have done for God.

What attitudes should we have if such trials as recession/depression destroy our previous lifestyle? Let examine the life of the Apostle Paul, who set us a great example through the many trials he endured.

2 Corinthians 11:23-27 I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without food; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

How did Paul respond to these trials? Did he worry, grumble, or blame God?

No, he relied upon Christ’s strength instead of upon his own. 2 Corinthians 12:9 Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

He learned to be content whatever his circumstances.

Philippians 4:12-13 ‘I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.’

In fact, he went further than being content. In the Book of Acts, we even find him singing and praising God while in prison!
Acts 16:24-25 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.

How was Paul able to respond like this? It was because his hope was securely and firmly in Christ, not in this world or its riches, material possessions, stock markets, job, or house.

1 Thessalonians 1:3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul also fixed his hope upon the riches he would receive in Christ when he died and went to heaven.

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Further more, Paul considered the unimaginable, eternal riches that await us in heaven, and compared to these, the temporary trials endure on the earth faded into insignificance.

Romans 8:17-18 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

I think of my ill health in the same way. Hearing impaired, bad tinnitus, epilepsy, slipped spinal discs, difficulty swallowing – when examined in their own light, these troubles could weigh me down. And yes, I know God can and does heal, and I have sought such healings. However, if He never heals me of these ailments, I am not troubled. Why?

Because my hope is in Christ - I know that my time in this world is temporary. I am only passing through on my way to heaven to be with Christ, my Lord and Saviour. And when I get to heaven, I will receive a brand-new, resurrection body – perfect in every way, just like Christ’s resurrected body. I will have this new body for eternity.

If you are reading this article and you have not accepted Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Saviour, let me encourage you to take that step now. Pop over to my blog’s right-hand side bar, scroll down and you will see a heading “Becoming Part of God’s family.” Follow the instructions given by these Bible verses and you will begin your new life as a born-again Christian.

Our life in this world is temporary, and without God, has no meaning, as the Bible shows us in Ecclesiastes 1:2.

"Meaningless! Meaningless!"
says the Teacher.
"Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless."

But for those with faith in Christ, our lives have meaning, significance and purpose.

Those who belong to God’s family have a wondrous hope – that one day we shall spend eternity in heaven, where we can see the face of God and Jesus everyday, a perfect place filled with love, joy and peace.

So if recession/depression deprives us of our job, shares, investments, home or possessions, let us remember to keep things in perspective. This is temporary, Christ is our hope, and glory awaits us. And our God shall supply all of our needs.

42. Learning to Live with a Disability

Learning to live with the unexpected onset of a disability or chronic illness is a challenge.

I lost all hearing in my left ear at the beginning of 2005. Combined with the thunderously loud tinnitus, I felt as though my head was submerged in deep water. I was forced to rely upon my right ear, my ‘bad ear.’

My left ear felt like a lump of dead flesh on the side of my head, a sensation exaggerated by the fact that I could no longer hear any sound when I rubbed my hand against the ear. One of the worst aspects of the disability was that I became extremely self conscious, always aware that something was out of kilter. I was disturbed by the fact that so many of my thoughts gravitated around me and my situation, instead of upon Jesus and those around me.

Being the master procrastinator that I am, I delayed making another appointment with the ear specialist and spent the new few months learning how to live with the disability.

Social gatherings became almost impossible, but my church friends made special allowances for me. I remember going to a home group meeting, and as the church was a Japanese language Christian church, the minister was speaking in Japanese. One of the other Australian guys, who spoke Japanese, came over to translate what the minister was saying for me. “Which is your good ear?” he asked kindly, and then stood at my right side.

Being unable to function as part of a team, I resigned as the church pianist, a step I had been loath to take as I been a church pianist for a long time. I also stopped listening to music, since hearing music in one ear instead of in stereo was unbearable. I think this was one of the hardest things to get used to, as music has always been one of my greatest passions.

I kept trying to talk to people at church, but felt like a freak because I had to turn my head sideways so my right ear could hear them. Who wants to talk to someone’s ear?

One thing that helped me greatly was something I had learned while recovering from depression back in the early ‘90s. My counselor had taught me that to be in deep surrender to God really meant to never look back with regret upon the past, nor forward to any wish in the future - comparing ourselves to what we used to be, or what we wanted to be, was a hindrance for resting in God’s will. Each day I was to pray: “I’m content to be who You made me to be, today. I’m content to be where You put me today, and I’m content to be how You made me to be today.”
These past few weeks I have been reading ‘One Liter of Tears, A Young Girl’s Fight for Life,’ the diary of Aya Kito, published by FA Publishing Co. From the age of fourteen years, Aya began exhibiting the symptoms of incurable degenerative disease, spinocerebellar degeneration. The disease acts as a prison, as the person retains full mental capacity although they progressively lose all physical control.

I was moved to see Aya’s mother give that same advice to her.

My mom and I talked about my future. According to my mom, “Unlike people who cannot see or are handicapped, the things you were able to do before never leaves your mind. You think hard about why you can't do it anymore, and you become emotional. So it always starts with the struggle in your mind. Even if others may view it merely as a machine-like radio exercise, it is actually a struggle in your mind, it’s training. Aya, I think that as long as you live every day to its fullest, you'll have a future. Aya, you cry alot, and when I see you cry, I feel so sorry. But looking at reality, you have to understand where you are right now and make your life full, or else you'll never live with your feet on the ground.”

And it is the same advice that Paul gave us, one of the theme verses of my life:

'I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.' Philippians 4:12-13 (NIV)

p.s. - An operation in Sept 2005 restored about 70% midrange hearing to my left ear, and reduced the tinnitus. At the moment, I can just get by, though I really need to get myself some hearing aids (long story...). My right ear, however, is slowly getting worse. Will it last until my sixties, or suddenly go deaf like my left did? I do not know, but I will not spend today worrying about what might or might not happen tomorrow. And should trouble strike in the future, Jesus will be there, reading and able to help me cope with it at that time.

43. Not my Children

My son’s start to life was not an easy one. Born by emergency caesarean section at 1.00am, he could barely breathe due to fluid filling his lungs. He spent the first sixteen hours of his life puffing and grunting as he laboured to take each breath. By the grace of God, the fluid drained naturally from his lungs and he was finally united with his very relieved parents sixteen hours later.

For the next two years, my son was plagued by an endless parade of colds and viruses. Every third week he seemed to contract another one.

The last straw came not long after he turned two. A vicious viral infection spread into his sinuses and then infected both of his ears. I remember despairing as I held his gaunt, feverish and sickly body in my arms as he whimpered in pain. He had not eaten for two days.

That night I turned to the Lord in frustration, “It's one thing for me to suffer - I’m a reasoning adult and I can handle it. But Lord, please, not my children! Please, spare them such sufferings!” As my son’s sickness raged on, my inner peace was driven away as I allowed anguish, anxiety and grief to invade my inner person.

As hard as it is to endure severe suffering ourselves, to helplessly sit by and watch a loved one be stricken by such hardships is agonisingly painful, very much like being hit by a double-barrelled shotgun. Not only is our family member suffering, but we suffer alongside them as we let the weight of their troubles pull us down too.

Yet as I waited upon the Lord in prayer that night, He reminded me of what I had learnt through my own sufferings.

I had been assailed by deafness, epilepsy, and an agonising injury, but I came to realise that in spite of all these things, Jesus was still Lord and remained in control of my life, which He held safely within His hands. He was trustworthy and I had nothing to fear.

At that moment I realised that I needed to trust Jesus in and through the sufferings of the members of my family too, just as I had learnt to trust Him in and through my own. So instead of longing desperately for my son’s suffering to end, I surrendered this burden to Jesus and recognised that He was in control of my son’s life too. Of course I continued to pray for his recovery, but now did so with faith, rather than with impatient desperation.

The Bible tells us to ‘Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.’ (1 Peter 5:7) When I realised that I did not need to carry the burden of my son’s troubles, but could give them to Jesus to carry for me, peace returned to my heart. Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Surrendering this burden to the Lord did not end my son’s sickness right there and then, but it made all the difference in how I reacted to it. I reacted now by accepting he was ill, (Philippians 4:12-13 ‘I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,’) I was willing to live with his suffering rather than fighting or fearing it (John 14:1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in Me,”) and I was willing to persevere and let time pass (James 1:2-4 ‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.’)

My son did recover soon thereafter, and his health slowly improved over time. Now he is four, and I can barely keep up with him!

Of course, the sufferings that I have examined in this post pale in significance with what many have gone through, with crippling, life-threatening, or terminal illnesses threatening their family members. Yet through this I re-learnt one of God’s eternal truths - Jesus is Lord of all things and completely trustworthy. ‘I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True.’ Revelation 19:11.

Seeing me rejoicing in Christ and clinging resolutely to Him despite my flagging health, my wife once said to me, “You have a special gift of faith.” Hearing this greatly encouraged me, yet I do not think my faith is any
different from the faith God gives to all believers in Christ. Rather, back when I was in the worst phase of clinical depression, when hope, joy, and life itself seemed to have been torn from me, I considered the alternative to trusting in Christ. If Jesus was not trustworthy, I was faced with an empty life devoid of any meaning that teetered on the edge of a precipice overlooking a yearning black hole of sheer and utter terror.

That was an alternative I refused to embrace. I concluded back then, when my life reached rock bottom, that Jesus was more than trustworthy, He was (and is!) completely trustworthy. There is no yearning black hole of sheer terror. There is Jesus, our rock, our refuge, our unshakeable foundation. And He is the reason for my faith.

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." John 6:68

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:5

44. The Thief comes only to Kill and Destroy

I took a day off work today so that I could take my family to Werribee open range Zoo today. My little son was especially excited to see all the animals.

For me, however, this was a trip I did not want to make. I find travelling through the city difficult at the best of times, as the city centre is a rabbit-warren like maze of freeways, tunnels and confusing off-ramps.

Yet the primary reason for my reservations for this trip was that the city is in the midst of carrying out extensive road works, and I heard a couple of months ago that they had closed the road I normally used to get through the city to reach the West Gate Bridge.

As this day approached, I found myself bombarded with fearful thoughts. Those insidious “what if” thoughts came in thick and fast. What if I couldn’t find the correct off-ramp? What if upon finding the correct off-ramp, I was in the wrong lane and couldn’t reach it in time? What if I ended up travelling down an unknown section of the freeway, not knowing how to get back to the West Gate Bridge?

So I woke this morning looking for any excuse not to go. Perhaps the threatened thunder storm was moving in? That would make the perfect excuse. But with sunshine streaming through my bedroom window, I knew that excuse would not wash.

Then I made a decision. I would face this fear. I would not let fear of what could go wrong immobilise me and ruin this family occasion.

I recalled what I had read in the Bible last night. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 Paul writes, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

So it was God’s grace working through Paul that helped him to serve God, to live the life God gave him.

So I loaded my family into the car, faced my fears, and braved the changed traffic conditions, availing myself of the power of God’s unlimited grace.

And after all those fearful thoughts, after all those “what ifs” - do you know what went wrong? Absolutely nothing – I followed all the road signs and found the route to the bridge, and all the way to the zoo. (And if something had gone wrong, we would have found our way back to the correct route eventually.)

And we had a wonderful time. We watched an irresistibly cute family of meerkats frolicking in their habitat, we learned that zebras roll in rhino poo to smell like rhinos, so that the short sighted rhinos think the zebras are rhinos and leave them alone (ewww), we saw giraffes, hippos, even camels. And my kids had a ball, racing around the walkways and giggling their heads off.

On the way back from the zoo, I reflected on how Satan wants to rob us of the fullness of life that Jesus has given us. Satan will never hesitate to throw fears at us in an attempt to scare us into immobility, to stop us stepping forth in faith to receive the blessings that God is reaching out to give us.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

Satan wants to rob us of God’s blessings to make our hearts sick, but by trusting in God and stepping forward in faith, by availing ourselves of His grace, we stand ready to receive fulfilled heart’s desires, and life.
Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. Proverbs 13:12.

45. Over Discipline Distorts our View of God

Some parents over discipline their children, punishing them harshly for transgressions and mistakes. Such punishment is based on fear and greatly wounds those children.

One of the wounds inflicted by over discipline is a distorted view of God. Instead of seeing God as patient, kind, merciful and loving, a child learns to see Him as an angry authoritarian ready to smash us over the head with a brick every time we sin or take a wrong step.

I remember reading the Old Testament as a teenager, and as my view of God was distorted by having been over disciplined as a child, I saw God as being impatient, quick to judge and ready to bash me over the head if I ever took a step out of line. I over reacted to every mistake or sin I committed, even punishing myself, even though I doing my utmost to follow Him.

Although we have ‘all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,’ Romans 3:23, and deserve to be judged and held accountable for those sins, God did not abandon us to such a fate. God is love, and This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 1 John 4:9-10.

Although I knew Jesus since my early childhood, when I was nineteen I had a personal encounter with Him that changed my life completely. He gave me a revelation of the depth of His love for me, a love so deep, so powerful, that it completely changed my worldview. I read the entire Bible again in the months that followed, and this time, I did not see an angry God ready to punish us the instant we took a step out of line, but for the first time, I saw a God who was very patient, slow to anger, and full of love. I saw a God who lovingly disciplines those He cares for in order to turn them from waywardness and be restored to wholeness, everlasting life, and fellowship with Him.

I echo the words of Paul, in that I wish everyone could know just how much Jesus loves us. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:17-19.

Unfortunately, I still carried deep wounds from being over disciplined, and hence much of the counselling I received while suffering from depression was spent addressing the lingering irrational fears I still harboured that God was an impatient and angry authoritarian.

From my diary: 18/2/90 - I'm terrified of disobeying God...I live as though He has a detailed plan for my life and if I take one wrong step, I'll mess up the whole thing. I have this concept that if I disobey Him or mess it up even once, that nothing good I've done before - ever - counts for anything anymore, and that my whole future will be stuffed.

Why did I react like while depressed? It was because of the over discipline that I had received as a child, where one of my parent’s reactions to my disobedience or mistakes was to tell me that I was useless, that each transgression or mistake nullified and cancelled out all previous good behaviour, and that I would grow up to be a complete failure.

As a result of counselling, Bible reading and prayer, I finally came to the place where I truly believed and understood that The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Psalm 145:8.

There is a very big difference between loving discipline and punishment/over discipline, since punishment tries to generate obedience and good behaviour through fear.

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” John 14:15. Jesus did not say, “If you love me, prove it by obeying me.” I do many things for my wife and children, yet I do not force myself to do them - I delight in doing things for them because I love them. That is why we obey Jesus, we delight in obeying Him because we love Him so much - it is a spontaneous reaction to our love for Him. And why do we love Jesus so much? It is because He loved us first, a love He demonstrated by dying on the Cross in our place, to pay for our sins. We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

Over discipline with its fear of punishment is not an effective motivator to do what is right, for there is no love in it. God’s system of love is the perfect motivator. The Bible teaches that we should discipline our children with love, with the goal of guiding them in the way they should go. There is no fear associated with such discipline - it is replaced by respect.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:16-18

46. Should being Happy be the Most Important Thing in our Life?

When I went to teachers’ college, our psychology teacher handed us a questionnaire on priorities. It went something like this:

Priorities Questionnaire

Below is a list of common priorities. Completing this questionnaire will help us to see what the most important things in our life are. Please number them from 1 to 12, ‘1’ assigning the number 1 to the priority which means the most to you at the moment, and 12 to the one which means the least. Note that there are no right or wrong answers.

Job Security
Financial Prosperity
Being Happy

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Of the twenty-five students in my class, twenty-three of them chose ‘Being Happy’ as their highest priority. One other student and I, both Christians, chose ‘God’ instead.

Western society has become obsessed with the pursuit of happiness. You only need to browse online bookstores such as Amazon.com to see that a staggering number of books have been written about how to be happy. Yet hand-in-hand with this obsession with happiness is an increase in the number of people suffering from depression. Billboards and radio-advertisements claim that one in four people have suffered or will suffer from depression.

Why can the goal of being happy as highest priority cause problems?

Happiness is a wonderful emotion and I treasure it as much as anyone does. However, happiness was never meant to be our highest priority. Why? Because happiness is completely dependent upon our circumstances. When things go our way, when we feel in control of our lives, when intense or prolonged suffering is absent, we feel happy. Yet when things spiral out of control, when things do not go our way, when persistent trials afflict us, happiness vanishes. Suddenly we are faced with the ugly situation of having a life goal that is constantly being frustrated.

So what should our highest priority be?

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33

‘These things’ refers to health, food and clothes, that is, the things we need.

Seeking first God, His Kingdom and His righteousness, should be our highest priority.

Let us take a moment to examine the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which He seeks to develop within the lives of Christians.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Galatians 5:22-23.

As we can see, happiness is not listed as one of the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit, whereas joy is. Unlike happiness, joy is not dependent upon our circumstances.

Joy runs much deeper than happiness, and springs forth from our relationship with God, from the knowledge that through Christ, God has saved us from sin so that we can spend eternity with Him in heaven.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Psalm 51:12

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Psalm 95:1

We also need to keep things in perspective. This human life is not all we have - it is not all about eating, drinking, and material possessions. It is not about, “Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17

The fact is that Christians are travellers passing through this world on the way to eternal life in heaven.

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, Philippians 3:20

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. John 17:16

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. 1 Peter 2:11

The knowledge that my trials, such as epilepsy and deafness, are only temporary fills me with joy. What a wondrous hope those who trust in Jesus have – that one day we shall spend eternity in heaven, where we can see the face of God and God everyday, a perfect place filled with love, joy and peace. We shall also have a brand new body that is perfect in every way.

When I consider the unimaginable, eternal riches that await us in heaven, the temporary trials we endure on the earth fade into insignificance.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs –heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.’ Romans 8:17-18

Let us look at Christ’s example. He willing endured the shame and agony of the cross because of the joy that was set before Him. That joy was to spend eternity with those who would believe in Him and follow Him as Lord.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2

He died for us so that, whether we are awake (on earth) or asleep (in heaven), we may live together with him. 1 Thessalonians 5:10

Through Christ’s strength and the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do the same. We too can endure trials because of the joy that is set before us - eternity in heaven with Him.

Rather than lamenting when things do not go our way, the Bible says to praise God in all and every circumstance.

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The Bible also says to consider it pure joy when undergoing
trials of many kinds, as these trials help us to mature and grow in our faith.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2-4

Paul tells us of the many trials he endured.

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

How did Paul respond to these trials? Did he worry, grumble, or blame God?

No, he relied upon Christ’s strength instead of upon his own. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 2 Corinthians 12:9

He learned to be content whatever his circumstances.

Philippians 4:12-13 ‘I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.’

More Bible Verses about Joy

We receive joy from meditating upon God’s word and His wonderful promises. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. Psalm 19:8

Being able to take refuge in the Lord during the storms of life also gives us joy. But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you. Psalm 5:11

Knowing that the Lord gives us strength fills us with joy. The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I will give thanks to him in song. Psalm 28:7

Whereas happiness flees when the going gets tough, the joy of the Lord sustains us during difficult times. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Nehemiah 8:10

Contemplating the work of God’s hands, His amazing creation, gives us joy. For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD; I sing for joy at the works of your hands. Psalm 92:4

In conclusion, happiness is wonderful but as it is dependent upon our circumstances, it must not be our highest priority or life goal. When our highest priority is to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, we can experience a deep joy that is not dependent upon our circumstances – it comes from our relationship with Him, from our salvation - the anticipation of eternity with Him.

All verses from the NIV.

47. Some say, “You’re depressed because you don’t have enough faith.”

For a Christian leader to pass judgment on a Christian suffering from depression by saying, “you're depressed because you don't have enough faith,” or “you need to have more faith,” demonstrates not only a lack of sensitivity that beggars belief, but also demonstrates the depth of the leader’s ignorance.

To demonstrate how such comments are so far off the mark, let us take a moment to consider what King David wrote in Psalm 143.

Psalm 143:1-7
A psalm of David.
O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief. Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.

The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in darkness like those long dead.

So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed. I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.

I spread out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. Selah

Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit.

The persecution afflicted upon King David by his enemies has lead him to the depths of depression, as we can see as he laments that he has been crushed to the ground, that he feels like he is dwelling in darkness like those long dead, and that his spirit has grown faint and his heart dismayed. Overwhelmed, David cries out to God to save him quickly lest he becomes like those who go down into the pit (which could refer to the grave or hell.)
We see David pouring his heart out before God. There is no empty religious rhetoric in a vain attempt to comfort himself - he makes no pretense that everything is fine. Yet in all this David is not demonstrating a lack of faith. Rather, although he is going through a very difficult time, David has found the courage to honestly express exactly how he is feeling.

The intensity of David’s suffering is so devastating that his life has been shaken to the core. Yet even as so many aspects of his life are crushed, we get to see what is left - the very foundations he is standing on. Let us keep reading:

Psalm 143:8-12
Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love,
for I have put my trust in you.
Show me the way I should go,
for to you I lift up my soul.
Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD,
for I hide myself in you.
Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God;
may your good Spirit
lead me on level ground.
For your name’s sake, O LORD, preserve my life;
in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.
In your unfailing love, silence my enemies;
destroy all my foes,
for I am your servant.

So what are the unshakeable foundations in David’s life that have withstood these terrible trials? It is his trust in God - “I have put my trust in You,” and “I hide myself in You.”

This proves that it was not a lack of faith in God that led to David’s dire circumstances or depression. In fact, it was his faith in God that SUSTAINED him throughout that dreadful trial.

And so is the case with so many if not most Christians who are suffering from depression and other disabilities such as long term illnesses and handicaps. It is their faith in God that sustains them through such trials, that helps them keep going and not give up when so many others have done so.

My diary has entries very similar to Psalm 143, such as this one:

13th May 1990 –

Boy it is hard, it is so hard.
The deep pain is gone, but I’m still a mess.
This is one difficult road,
And I feel for all those who have had to tread it before me.

The old fears and doubts which swamped me before rise up against me,
But I have found that if I don’t examine and analyse them,
Then they don’t overcome me, I don’t fall.
I try to keep my eyes on Jesus, to trust Him, to rely completely upon Him.

How I long to be normal again,
As I believe this will end one day.
The recovery will be slow, I think.
It needs to be, I couldn't cope with anything instant.
I'm beginning to see some hope for the future, which is good I guess.
But it still seems so distant.

The Bible says to consider it joy to endure trials,
I must say that there has been no joy in this trial.
It defies any previous experience known to me.
But I’ve been forced to trust God when it seems He has abandoned me.
I have been forced to come to a place where I have trusted Him without feeling like doing so.
All I want to do is cry out that He had abandoned me, that He is not faithful.
But He is faithful. And I know that.
He is faithful and true. He is Jesus.

The fact is that depression destroyed my life goals and for a time, turned my life into a living hell. Yet in the midst of that hell I did not walk away from God or give up on Him.

Instead, I clung to Jesus like a shipwreck survivor clinging to a life-raft, and He did not let me down. He sustained me, helped me to cope and keep going - even during the blackest phase when I could not feel Him doing so. And then, in His timing, He led me out of that place to greener pastures. And as I continued to trust Him, He used the trial for good, drew me closer to Him, set me free from lifelong anxieties, and helped my faith to grow so that I would be better equipped to deal with future trials.

Now that is faith – trusting in God when our world falls apart. Anyone can say, “I trust in God!” when they are well off, healthy or their life has no problems, but how deep is such faith? Gold is purified by fire and the Bible uses the same analogy regarding the maturing of our faith. Faith grows and matures when tested by the fiery trials that come our way.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:3-9

These judgmental leaders who say, "if you had more faith you would not be depressed, or would not have this or that illness or handicap," are suffering from faulty theology to the extreme! Faith does not prevent us from going through trials - such trials develop our faith.
I would go so far as to say that those Christians who trust in God to sustain them through depression and other disabilities actually have a much stronger and deeper faith than leaders who tell them that they “need to have more faith.” The fact is that these accusers have obviously never been through such a trial; otherwise they would have never made the accusation in the first place.

God uses such storms and trials to develop our faith, and this developing of our faith will assist us throughout the rest of our lives.

‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.’ James 1:2-4

Honestly, if such people stopping being so aloof, and instead of standing back at a distance and passing judgements, were to get close enough to someone suffering from depression, and upon seeing what they endure on a daily basis and yet continue to trust in God and cling to Him, and if these accusers honestly cared about the depth of their own faith, they should fall on their knees and ask, “Please God, put me through such a trial so that I too can have faith like that.”

48. A Bruised Reed He will not Break

While suffering from depression back in the 1990s I was painfully aware that I had become a broken, shattered person, a shadow of who I had been.

From my diary, 10th April 1990:
I once saw a spider that only had four legs,
The poor thing had lost the others somehow.
Yet the spider, a creature of instinct, did not even know,
It just kept struggling, vaguely aware something was wrong,
But not knowing what it was exactly.
That’s how I feel.

And 15th May 1990:
Self-hate keeps descending upon me like a swarm of angry hornets.
I look at myself and find nothing but contempt for this pathetic person I have become.
But I know this is wrong.
If I examine myself through the eyes of Jesus, I see someone special,
I see how much He loves me and cares for me,
How much I mean to Him
And that He understands.
But knowing these things does not take away these feelings,
Feelings of self-hate, feelings of depression, of despair, and doubts.

And 18th May 1990:
I wish You were here on Earth, Lord, so I could go to You.
I would ask You to take compassion on me,
And heal my wounded spirit.
The fact was that Jesus was with me, holding my hand and comforting me. And one of the greatest sources of comfort was His word. In this post I would like to share a particular passage of scripture that brought me great comfort, a prophecy from Isaiah about Jesus. (God the Father is speaking.)

"Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
the one I love, in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will proclaim justice to the nations.
He will not quarrel or cry out;
no one will hear his voice in the streets.
A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out,
till he leads justice to victory.
In his name the nations will put their hope.”
Matthew 12:20-21

The latter part of this passage spoke volumes to me. I could think of no better description of someone suffering from depression than to portray them as a bruised reed or smoldering wick. That was exactly how I felt - bruised and battered, with my passion and zeal for life virtually extinguished, leaving nothing behind but a smoldering ember.

It reassured me greatly to know that Jesus held me gently in His hands, a bruised reed He would not break but restore to wholeness. How wonderful that although there was nothing left of me but a smoldering wick, He would take the time to gently fan that flame back into life. And that is exactly what He did. Jesus healed my bruises and rekindled my life flame, making me whole once again.

Jesus knows how frail we are.

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. Psalm 103:13-14

Yet even so, He treasures us so much that He gave His own life for us.

The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

How comforting to know that those who follow Him are held safely within His hands, even in the midst of life’s trials and storms.

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.” John 10:27-28

Another comforting scripture that talks of Jesus binding up our broken hearts setting us free from captivity and darkness:

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour...
49. How do you Support Someone Suffering from Depression?

The purpose of this post is to provide some practical tips that family members and close friends can follow to support a loved one suffering from depression.

A Trip to the Doctor

Family members (or a close friend) should encourage or even take someone suffering from depression to visit the family doctor. In a situation like this, a doctor can be of great help.

Seek Professional Help

Encourage a family member/friend suffering from depression to seek professional help from a suitable Christian counselor who understands depression, or from a professional health care worker (preferably a Christian). This will help the sufferer to identify and deal with often-private issues that are causing the depression. (I will address this issue in more detail later.)

Our Role – Patience, Not Pressure

Someone who has not experienced depression cannot possibly understand what a sufferer is going through. Although it is tempting to pressure them to “Snap out of it,” or “Pull yourself together!” this is the wrong course of action.

When my wife succumbed to depression as a result of postnatal depression and a serious problem in our church, she suddenly announced one day; “I don’t want to go to church any more.”

There were a number of ways I could have responded: I could have said, “The Bible says believers must not forsake our assembling together with other believers!” or perhaps, “That’s our church, our home, we must stick it out!” But her request reminded me of a similar request I had made of my church back in 1989 when depression had overwhelmed me. I was confused and bewildered and my behaviour completely erratic. Having just returned from an extremely hectic and sleepless ten-day missionary orientation trip to Thailand, (where my weight had fallen to 55kg), I asked if I could take time off to work out what was wrong with me. Sadly, I was told to get my act together and fulfil my responsibilities or a drastic course of action would be initiated. This simply sent me spiralling into shock as well.

My wife’s request and condition also reminded me of a married couple who had been down this very road. When the wife had become depressed due to a family tragedy, her husband responded with the most amazing depth of understanding and Christ-like patience. He left church with her and was just there for her. He never put her under any pressure but waited patiently for her to recover. And sure enough, she did recover, and they returned to the church.

Bearing these things in mind, my response to my wife’s statement was to call the senior minister and explain our situation. He was very understanding, and sent us on our way with his blessing, telling us not to be concerned about dropping suddenly out of the Sunday School and music teams. For the next two years, I was simply there for my wife. I encouraged her to get counselling, and took her to see a doctor, but I made no demands on her. We attended another church during that time, but did nothing more than attend the services. After about two years, my wife recovered and returned to her normal self, strengthened by her ordeal. At that time we went back to our church (the serious problem had gone) and are still busily serving the Lord there today.

If someone suffering from depression feels trapped by their circumstances, and wants to leave their church, we should not pressure them to stay. A couple of months after I returned from Thailand, I ended up leaving that church. The leadership thought I was the target of a concentrated spiritual attack (which was certainly true a degree) and pressured me to return. They meant well, and genuinely cared for me, but this pressure only made me worse, as you can see from what I wrote in my diary at that time.

28/2/90
My previous place of fellowship puts me under pressure. Come back to us! You need the ministry we can give you. But they don’t really understand, they can’t see the pain. How do I explain to them how I feel? The last few nights I cried, a deep crying that hurt more than it healed.

The best way that we can support a loved one suffering from depression is to simply be there for them and spend time with them, even if merely watching TV or together or engaging in a mutual hobby or chore such as gardening or housework. Be someone they are content to be with, someone that they can talk to without worrying that we will respond judgementally.

I am always encouraged by the way Jesus views our frailty – He knows we are weak, and He treats us with gentleness. Isaiah 42:3 ‘A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.’

Sherry Castelluccio, who suffered from severe post-partum depression after the birth of her daughter, offered this advice when I asked her if there been any particular person who supported her greatly through depression.

My husband has been my biggest advocate. When I had the post-partum depression he got his feet wet and kind of had no idea what to do with me. He really believed that I just needed to pray and allow God to heal me. Little did he know; LOL. Fast-forward six years. He’s very understanding of what I’m going through and he supports me in the decisions I make. In every way he’s there for me, regardless of whether he “gets it” or not. He’s learned that most of the time I don’t want him to fix anything. I just need him to listen and he’s perfectly fine with that.

We must be careful not to badger them to change back to what they used to be like, nor try to push them to recover. Recovery, or at least, learning to cope with depression, will come with time, but we must give them that time. If there are things that they cannot face, we should not force them
to face them, but allow time to bring healing. This may mean that we have to take over some of their household chores for awhile, be willing to cancel social engagements for a time, perhaps even church.

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

50. Signposts

I had been suffering from severe depression for just over three months when I wrote this. Although feelings of despair dominate the diary entry, threads of hope are also woven through it.

25th March 1990 – Will I Ever See Daylight Again?
I feel like a bird trapped in a small birdcage, A birdcage hidden at the bottom of a dark basement. And all I want to do is break out of the blackness, And fly into the Sonlight which waits outside.
I can feel it, the Light – It’s all around the basement.
The Light is greater than the basement.
All I want to do is get into that Light, And loose myself in it.
But it is an impossible task – I can’t get out.
And the thick, murky black air closes in...

I feel like I’m in a room with invisible walls.
But it’s so black in the room,
That I can’t see through the walls.
And I am the centre of the room.
Where I go, the room goes – I can’t get out.
I wish someone would chain the room still,
So I could get out into the Light outside.

There must be Light outside! I can remember it!
And other people I see everyday walk in it.
But how do I get out?
How do I get to the Light?

Oh Jesus, You are the Light of the world.
Please shatter this darkened prison I live in,
And take me into Your light.
Let it consume me, encompass me, surround me.
Let me become one with You, You in me, me in You.

Will this nightmare ever end?
Those who have been here before me,
Have left signposts along the way,
Showing the way out.
But they all say the same thing:
“Wait, you’ll come through it,
it doesn’t feel like it now,
but you will come through it.
Life will be normal again one day.”

In time Jesus did shatter the dark prison walls that had trapped me for so long. As I trudged along that forlorn track He lead me to signpost after signpost, each nudging me in the right direction, towards being able to cope with depression and finally overcome it.

And now, twenty years after I wrote the above, I am one of those ‘others’ who, having recovered from depression, is leaving signposts along the way for others to follow – and that is the whole purpose of this blog.

And here are some of those signposts…

Although our life may appear to be a complete mess and out of control, this is not the truth.

We need to break depression’s fear, flight, fight cycle in order to reduce the flow of negative adrenalin. It is ironic that in order to do this, we need to accept the very sensations that are disturbing us, since the act of fearing, fleeing or fighting depression and its symptoms/causes is what causes the adrenalin to flow. (1)

Instead of desperately wanting to escape depression and its disturbing symptoms, we need to be willing to live with them by being content whatever our circumstances.
When we accept and learn to live with depression and its symptoms, and let time pass, the flow of adrenalin begins to diminish, and as it diminishes, the symptoms lose their intensity, shorten in duration, and slowly begin to disappear.

And the good news is that we do not need to do this alone or through our own strength.


51. Life after Depression: better Equipped to Deal with Future Trials

The years of 2003 to 2006 could have been the worst four years of my life. My health was literally disintegrating before my eyes.

Although I had been gradually going deaf since my late teens, in 2003, my thirty-seventh year, I lost all hearing in my left ear. This crippled me. I had to leave the church band, could not engage in social dialogue, stopped listening to music (one of my greatest pastimes), could not hear the television, and almost drove my family crazy asking them to constantly repeat themselves. Otosclerosis, an inherited disease that causes the calcification of the bones of the middle ear, was the cause of this ailment. Yet of equal concern to me was the accompanying tinnitus. Although both ears suffered from it, my deaf ear produced a cacophony of continuous, “deafening” sounds, including roaring, thundering, grating, and an extremely deep humming that was extremely unsettling.

Just prior to losing my hearing in one ear, after undergoing MRI and EEG scans in 2003, I was also diagnosed as suffering from complex partial epilepsy. Prior to this, I had never heard of this condition, thinking the partial-seizures to be a symptom of depression. At this time I ceased taking anti-depressants and took anti-seizure medication, which had (and still has) quite horrid side effects. I lost interest in almost all of my hobbies, entered a continual state of exhaustion, and both short term and long term memory deteriorated significantly.

During these years a recurring injury received from my childhood worsened to the point that I was frequently afflicted by agonising, throbbing pain for ten hours a day, for up to three months at a time. (An operation in 2006 healed this injury.)

It was a Sunday morning in November 2004, when I had come down with the flu for the sixth time in a row, (which may have had something to do with burning the candle at both ends recently…) that I reached a crossroads. With the deafness, epilepsy, injury and apparent inability to return to any semblance of health, I felt the crushing weight of despair threatening to descend upon me. This was the last straw.

I had a choice. My life appeared to be in a state of utter disarray. I could succumb to despair and slip into the miry pit of depression, or I could turn to Jesus and rely upon His strength in my weakness, as He said to Paul in 2 Cor 12:9, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

I chose the second option. While I drove down Canterbury Road that November summer morning, I waited upon Jesus and recalled something I had heard in a sermon.

My life was like riding in a bus, and the bus driver was Jesus. I was comforted by the fact that the bus driver always knew the destination and how to get there. This was my situation in a nutshell. Although my life appeared to be a complete mess and out of control, this was not the truth.
The truth was that Jesus was in control of my life. I had nothing to fear. Jesus said in John 10:27-28, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”

So rather than let these burdensome troubles drive me to depression, I surrendered them to Jesus and placed my trust in Him. The pressures faded away and hope, joy, and peace prevailed.

May I ask you, the reader, a question here?

Considering the breadth of my troubles at this time, does it seem too easy?

I know the Bible says in James 1:2 to ‘Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,’ but trust me, although I reach this place eventually, this is not my initial reaction to trials!

Perhaps you are wondering why it did not take me days, weeks or months to learn to cope with these trials. How could I, after going through so much, ‘seem’ to shrug off their debilitating affects and yet live a normal life?

The only reason these afflictions did not drag me headlong into depression’s merciless grip was because I had already been down that road, back in 1990. It began with an eight-month period of living hell which included an endless cycle of debilitating anxiety attacks, chronic insomnia, crippling feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, utter despair at what was happening to me, and much more. As the days turned to weeks and then to months, I was crippled by the fear that this ‘thing’ that had overcome me would never lessen or end.

Here is an extract from my diary dated February 20th, 1990. (At this time, I had no idea what was wrong with me.)

Oh Lord, when will this end?
Day after day, I remain trapped
In this endless personal hell of pain and confusion.
I want to get out of myself!
To be someone else, anyone but me.
The me I know is gone, yet somehow I am still me.
I must escape from myself, but
I’m trapped in a suffocatingly small, dark room.
I know there is sunlight outside.
I run, push, and strive to reach that light.
But the room comes with me--I cannot get out!
Why? Because I am the room.
Jesus, for what reason have you allowed this?
Where are you? How long will you remain silent?
They say that others who have been down this route
Have left signposts along the way
To help those like me find the way out.
But where are these signposts?

By His grace and provision, Jesus helped me overcome depression and live a normal life again. And in learning how to cope with depression, Jesus set me free so that I need never again succumb to its depths. Galatians 5:1 ‘It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.’ In conclusion, it was because of what I learnt during my trials of the early 1990s, that I was able to endure the trials of 2003 to 2006 and through Christ, overcome them.

John 10:10 Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

52. My Depression Testimony

This is my testimony (in a nutshell) in dealing with and eventually overcoming severe depression.

For me, 1989 had been a productive and hope filled year. After graduating from Bible College in 1988, I had joined a church planting team as the assistant pastor. I expected 1990 to be one of best years of my life as I planned to further my theological training and join another church planting venture in pursuit of my goal of becoming a missionary in Thailand.

Probably the primary factor in causing my depression was genetic inheritance, both of my parents had suffered from it. However, there were many other factors that contributed to its severity and duration. Throughout that year a number of factors combined to cause the gradual decline of my mental and physical health. I had neglected physical exercise, eaten poorly and devoted little time to rest and recreation. I worked full time as well as serving part time in the church. The sleeplessness which had troubled me in recent years had developed into chronic insomnia. As I became ever more fatigued, panic attacks and obsessive fearful thoughts afflicted me in increasing frequency and severity, even though I had no idea what they were at that time. Undiagnosed complex partial epilepsy could have been another factor.

On the other hand, throughout that year I remained positive and full of zeal for life, excitedly pursuing my goals.

In late November 1989 I went to Thailand for a hectic ten-day missionary orientation course, where I barely slept at all. When I returned to Melbourne, I fell apart emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Although 178cm tall, my weight had fallen to 55kg. The final straw came a few days later - I suffered a shock so powerful that for almost 24 hours I was unable to complete a single thought in my mind.

After eight nightmarish days that defied all reason, I suddenly bounced back to some semblance of normality. Unfortunately, I collapsed again two weeks later, where my mind unravelled to the extent that for the next several days, I did little else but lay on my bed, rocking from side to side as I tried in vain to pull myself out of terrifying panic attacks that would not cease.

This time, instead of bouncing back, I remained stuck in the hellish nightmare, which continued without respite into the New Year. I felt disturbed and ill at ease all day and could barely sleep at night. My mind became sluggish, stuck in a rut of thinking fearful, anxious thoughts all the time. Many physical complaints assailed me, missed, palpitating and racing heart beats, very painful aches in the shoulders and jaw, nausea and chest pains, difficulty breathing, and more. Emotional symptoms included anger, confusion, irritability, loss of interest in life, fear that I would never escape the nightmare, and I withdrew from almost all relationships. My spiritual life was equally a shambles, I struggled with anger and bitterness towards God, could no longer feel His presence, and felt guilty all of the time.
Although I continued to languish in this miry pit of bleak hopelessness for the next seven months, there were a number of things that slowly helped me cope with the ordeal.

When my mother, who had been away, returned to find me bedridden, she bundled me off that bed and kept me busy me with menial chores around the home. Although this required a massive effort on my part, I soon realised that the distraction provided by these activities slightly lessened the inner pain. When I had to return to work a few days later, although I was still a complete and utter mess, I found that being busy at work further dulled depression’s intensity.

Around that time a friend who had experienced depression, gave me a very helpful piece of advice. “Find anything that you enjoy and pursue it. Just try to have fun.” My unspoken response was, “How can I have fun when I am like this?” However, although very difficult to do, with Christ’s help I was able to put his advice into practice. (‘I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.’ Philippians 4:13 KJV.) I bought a computer, played engrossing computer games, and over the next five years wrote three novels. These hobbies helped keep my mind productively occupied and were a significant factor in helping to break my mind’s habit of thinking fearful thoughts. I can remember one day when I was lying on my bed stuck in the grip of a savage panic attack, when I managed to fix my eyes upon Jesus, and He said, “Peter, you don’t need to do this. Come with Me - I have lots of constructive things for us to do together.” So I got off the bed, sat at my desk and lost myself in one of my hobbies, and started to feel better.

‘Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,’ Hebrews 12:2

In March 1990 I admitted I needed professional help, so I forced myself to see a trained counsellor. She counselled me once a month for several months, sympathising with what I was going through, giving practical advice, and through prayer, God’s Word, and her own experiences, helped me to face and deal with several deep emotional wounds and flawed thought processes. She also helped me to see the fearful thoughts that were terrorizing me from another perspective – the true Biblical perspective.

Following my counsellor’s advice, I went onto anti-depressants under my doctor’s supervision. Although the tablets did not heal the depression, within two weeks they had significantly dulled its effects. My diary entries began to contain a faint glimmer of hope. With the symptoms dulled, I found myself more able to concentrate on the task of recovery.

Although I was still suffering from many of depression’s side effects, she said it was time to get back into things. Over the next six months, I joined a new church, became a musician in a home group, started teaching Sunday School, and engaged in normal social activities again.
It took about four more years to recover from depression, but I kept busy throughout that time, staying involved with the church, joining a gym, and pursuing engrossing hobbies. Some of depression’s symptoms took longer to fade away than others, especially the mental ones, but by changing the way I reacted to them robbed them of their power as I no longer feared them.

Today I can look back at that time and say that I have no regrets. It was during those years that I learned to rely completely and utterly upon Christ and His Word, rather than upon my feelings and circumstances. I can see how He brought good out of that trial, drawing me closer to Him and setting me free from lifelong anxieties. I also found myself better equipped to deal with future trials.

And now I share my story so that others may find comfort and encouragement, as I received from the Lord in my time of great distress. 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.' 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

53. Becoming Part of God’s Family

How do we become one of God’s children and enter His family?

We need to recognise that 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,' Romans 3:23. (NIV)

We need to 'Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,' Acts 3:19 (NIV)

We need to believe in Jesus. 'For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world that He gave up His only begotten (unique) Son, so that whoever believes in (trusts in, clings to, relies on) Him shall not perish (come to destruction, be lost) but have eternal (everlasting) life.' John 3:16 (AMP)

Romans 10:9 (NIV) tells us, 'That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'

That’s how we enter God’s family. 'Yet to all who received him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.' John 1:12 (NIV)