

My Experience of Depression

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INTRODUCTION: - Who this is for and what my message is.

These notes are intended as a short guide to anyone suffering from a severe clinical depression and possibly contemplating suicide. You may have sought professional help and consulted a doctor, psychiatrist or psychologist. You may feel hopeless and helpless, convinced that you will never recover. A psychiatrist may have admitted you for treatment to a hospital.

I have suffered debilitating depression for many years but now lead a fulfilled and purposeful life without the scourge of suicidal depression. I hope that I can offer some comfort and help by sharing my experiences of depression and what helped me to survive and recover. My sincere wish is that I could encourage others to persevere in spite of the overwhelming feelings of hopelessness and despair. It was an inspiration to me to know that others had suffered as I had and yet they recovered to lead successful and productive lives.

Depression or mental illness does not have to be something that hangs over you, like a black cloud, for the rest of your life. While you may not be cured of it, you can find ways to learn to cope. These notes are to give you hope and to assure you that you, too, can get better.

1. SYMPTOMS:

- Suicidal thoughts
- Confusion
- Anxiety
- Paranoia
- Humiliation
- Hopelessness
- Self-consciousness
- Frustration
- Delusional or distorted thoughts
- Obsessional thoughts
- Inability to concentrate
- Fragmented thoughts and agitation
- Anger
- Feelings of being pathetic, useless or unwanted
- Feeling a burden to yourself and others
- Guilt and despair
- Irritation and aggression

Some Physical Signs

- Insomnia
- Weight loss/gain
- Reduced libido
- Loss of energy /fatigue
- Headaches
- Backaches and upset stomach
- Anxiety – rapid heartbeat, sweating and shakiness

2. WHAT I EXPERIENCED:

- I felt too far gone and beyond help.
- I felt helpless and at the mercy of others, as I was unable to make my own decisions and had to rely on others to make them for me.
- Unable to differentiate good decisions from bad ones. (I felt mentally disordered and kept thinking absurd thoughts which I had difficulty verbalizing. If I tried to express them, I felt embarrassed and stupid and it felt as if I only made things worse).
- Self-esteem was at an all time low.
- Frustrated and angry. (I hated being entirely dependant on those more sane, capable or competent family or friends who were often at a complete loss as to know what to do for me).
- I felt utterly hopeless thinking that nothing and no-one would be able to help me.

Usually people have no idea how to offer you comfort and think if they can solve your problems you will “snap” out of it. They often get highly indignant when you do not take their “sound” advice. Try not to be hard on them. Even though they may not be experiencing your hell, it is not easy living with a depressed person and can be frustrating and painful to see a loved one suffering. (See section on **GUILT**)

Sometimes religious fanatics can push you over the edge by telling you that depression is God’s punishment for your sins and your need for repentance! You may even be told that depression is “from the Devil.” This does not help. It can send you into a spiral of guilt about your own participation in this evil state. Try to ignore them.

There are also some who haven’t been through a clinical depression themselves and make glib statements with little compassion. They may be so terrified of their own dark side that they are afraid to come near you, almost as if they fear contamination. Often they live in denial of their own negative thoughts. They are usually the ones who tell you to be positive and give you positive thinking self-help books. These people think it’s your choice to be depressed and that you have no willpower to just ‘snap out of it’. They can also be afraid of their inability to cope themselves, especially if it’s their spouse or child who is depressed. Their relative’s illness may make them angry as their sense of stability and security is threatened.

So when it comes to receiving comfort from others, you often receive it from unlikely sources, often from fellow sufferers. Family members may feel completely inadequate and helpless themselves. They may also feel resentful and angry that they have to offer you so much encouragement and that you are not there for them. Often they do not understand what you are going through and find it hard to have compassion for something so alien to them.

3. HOSPITALIZATION AND HELP:

If you are severely depressed you will probably be diagnosed with a chemical or clinical depression and be prescribed anti-depressants and/or tranquilizers. You may also be admitted to a hospital psychiatric ward, a general hospital ward or even a specialized institution that caters for your needs.

Do not panic! Many perfectly normal and healthy individuals have been through this and there should be no stigma attached to it.

Do not label yourself insane! Many intelligent, gifted and highly capable individuals set their standards very high and burnout at some point in their lives. This is just a temporary state. You will get better!

At the moment you are not able to comprehend the prospect of being healthy again. But if you are willing to be patient and slowly challenge false beliefs about yourself and your attitudes towards life you **will** find healing. It is possible for you to return to normal life again and become a competent, healthy and positive person. More importantly, however, you will learn to accept and forgive yourself for your apparent mistakes and shortcomings.

Support and comfort

Loved ones: I've been lucky enough to have a loving and supportive family and a partner who believed in me and supported me even at my worst. My friends too have cared and helped me through the worst times.

Psychiatrists and psychologists: They can be wonderful lifesavers in a crisis. However, I must stress that they can't miraculously cure you. They can only facilitate your road to recovery. The right anti-depressants, chosen specially to suit your needs, can also help you get better.

I know that when you are desperate you want to put your hopes into anything that seems like a lifeline. You might hope that you will be cured instantly by these professionals. Sometimes this puts unrealistic expectations on them which they can't live up to. If this happens and you lose faith in your psychologist for example, you can spiral into a worse state of depression than before, feeling that all avenues of help have failed you.

BUT THIS IS IMPORTANT: It may feel as if everything has failed you because, as a society, we are led to believe that humanity has an instant cure for everything. We have also been led to believe that if a doctor can't help you, the situation is hopeless. **THIS IS NOT SO.** I truly believe that **FAITH IN GOD** can enable you to tap into the resources deep within you to help you to heal.

Unfortunately, you have to be patient as healing may be a slow process. Think of how many years it has taken you to develop negative coping mechanisms, hiding behind a facade of coping while all the time you have been dying inside. You may be in the habit, as I was, of condemning yourself for past mistakes. You may be unable to forgive yourself for these and have an urge to hate and punish yourself. (See notes about **Therapy and medication**). This is all part of the depression and these feelings will lessen as the healing process begins.

BE VERY GENTLE with yourself at this time and allow yourself the space to heal.

Nurses: Many have been a crucial support to me and encouraged me tremendously. I've much admiration and respect for them and, above all, gratitude for the many times they helped me.

Fellow patients: Be careful here. Do not try and solve their problems for them but offer sympathy and love if you are able to. When you first arrive in a psychiatric ward, especially if it's your first time, you are filled with overwhelming feelings of humiliation, anger, despair, hopelessness and fragmentation to name just a few powerful emotions. The last thing you are capable of doing is communicating effectively with anyone. This is normal. No one expects you to feel any different. It is quite natural for you just to sleep for a few days and speak only when necessary. You will probably go into a state of numbness. Even though I didn't speak at first, I slowly began to feel comforted by the presence of fellow sufferers around me. Gradually I began talking and sharing my feelings. Strangely enough, focusing my attention outside of myself, even though it was very difficult, proved to be my saving grace.

However some patients may be delusional and/or make you feel uncomfortable. They may become aggressive or make offensive comments about you. Avoid them. You don't have to respond aggressively or defend any of their accusations. Realize that they are probably worse off than you. If they continue to bother you, tell the sister in charge.

Other things that helped:

- Writing my deepest thoughts and feelings into a diary
- Reading books about depression and learning about others' experiences, difficulties and eventual recovery. (These gave me hope that I would get better one day too)
- Listening to music
- Having a hug from a loved one
- Sleeping (but not too much during the day)
- Listening to others with similar symptoms and realizing that I was not alone
- Speaking to someone who has been through it and recovered
- Walking my dog or just holding my cat
- Forcing myself to exercise e.g. swimming or walking
- Having a cup of tea and a chocolate
- Playing with children
- Doing something practical no matter how trivial
- Expressing myself creatively by writing or drawing (without thinking of the end result)
- Gardening

Doing some of these things may feel like pushing a boulder uphill but you will have to force yourself. It is sheer determination that will get you through. Persevere in spite of the odds. DO NOT wait until you feel like being proactive, as this will not happen.

4. RESPONSIBILITY:

- You may be responsible for some of the things that lead up to your present clinical depression **BUT YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ILLNESS ITSELF.** Would you be responsible for getting flu or diabetes? No. Depression is the same. It's a chemical imbalance that some people are more susceptible to through no fault of their own.
- Live minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. You just have to get through one day at a time.
- You are responsible for looking after yourself and finding ways to overcome depression. Try to be kind, gentle and **love yourself.** You do still have some control over your choices and decisions.
- When you are able to confront those things that caused your depression, go for therapy or talk to others and read about your illness. Be prepared to change the things that are holding you back from realizing your full potential.
- Do not try and solve problems or make big decisions until you feel better.
- If you make a mistake or wrong decision try not to dwell on it but tell yourself you will reassess it when you feel better and possibly some good may have come from it. You did the best you could in the circumstances and often we can only see value in so called "mistakes" in time. Remember that God uses **ALL** things for the good no matter how catastrophic an event may seem at the time.

- Do not compare yourself with others. What you are going through is of tremendous significance – an important period of growth. Even though it seems pointless, or a waste of time and you have a sense of futility about it all. ***The eminent scholar Proust said that the only periods of growth in his life took place when he was deeply unhappy. Those were the moments that made him one of the most profound philosophers of all time.***
- Remember that you are still a capable and intelligent person. No one has the right to make you do things you do not feel comfortable with. You may be sick but that does not make you a lesser person.
- Your state of mind is temporary. You have not done anything wrong to deserve punishment.
- Medication can really help but remember to take responsibility for the tablets you are on. Especially if you have a bad reaction at first. Take medication according to a doctor's orders. **BE VERY VIGILANT WITH MEDICATION.** Try and remember what you take and the exact dosage. **Never just stop medication.** If you feel it may be making you worse or you feel the side effects are unbearable you have the right to stop, but it is essential to discuss it with you doctor first and make him/her aware of your decision.
It is best to taper off medication unless informed otherwise by your doctor.
- You have the right to refuse medication and electro-convulsive therapy. If you consent to it, a consent form must be signed by you first. E.C.T can only be given **with your consent.**
- Some of your thoughts may be out of control and you may be unable to “think yourself right.” This does not mean, however, that you are weak, lazy or stupid.
- Remember the feelings of extreme humiliation will pass as you realize that, because your brain chemistry is out of synch, messages are not being conducted efficiently. Therefore **SOME OF YOUR DISTURBED THOUGHTS ARE A RESULT OF A CHEMICAL IMBALANCE. NO MATTER HOW CONVINCING THEY MAY SOUND TO YOU THEY ARE FALSE!**
- **You have an illness** that many have suffered and survived. Each time you go through it you will find innovative ways to overcome it.
- Try not to be angry with yourself but **ACCEPT THE DEPRESSION AS PAINFUL AS IT IS.** It is hell and all you want to do is get on with your life and feel good, like everyone else seems to be doing. Getting angry and fighting the depression will make it worse. So be patient and learn to fight it in the right way: by accepting it and going through it, trusting and knowing it will come to an end.
- It is understandable that you feel angry and resentful and maybe envious of others but is not alright to take it out on others by making their lives miserable too. This will only serve to increase any rifts there may already be and make others unwilling to help. Try to co-operate no matter how hopeless things seem. Try not to blame others. It doesn't help.
- God intends us to depend on others in a healthy way. At the moment you may be feeling over dependant and that is alright for now. You are sick at this time now but it will not always be like this. Depression is treatable and you will get better.
- Accept help and comfort from others if they offer it. Remember that you are not weak, lazy or stupid. The very person who comforts you may well have been through it, or may go through it at some later point in her life. Nobody is immune.

- There is so much more to you, so many more facets. This is just one of them that is taking precedence at the moment, but will not last forever.
- **You will conquer the darkness and despair.** Believe this, even though it feels impossible. Sometimes you have to live through other people's belief and faith. I know I had to.
- All we can do is endure, do the best we can and survive this illness.

5. THERAPY:

Do not expect miracles from therapists. They are there to facilitate self-awareness and healing. I often used to feel frustrated and angry with them, I wanted answers from them. At least I wanted them to tell me what to do.

There were many times that I felt therapy was a huge waste of time and money. Sometimes it is. When you are about to jump over a cliff, it is hardly going to help analyzing what went wrong beforehand. Sometimes when you are experiencing overwhelming feelings of pain, anger, hopelessness and confusion, the therapist seems to be just sitting opposite you, staring at you in your dark void complacently.

This is when emergency steps need to be taken and a good psychiatrist should be there for crisis management.

At times a therapist can be a great help in putting things into perspective by giving you an objective point of view. Sometimes allowing you to talk enables you to come to terms with your pain. There is no doubt that therapists have a very significant role to play in your healing and can be of great assistance and comfort.

The problem arises when patients have preconceived notions that two or three sessions will do the trick. Therapy is often a long-term commitment and one cannot expect to solve a complicated life history in two or three sessions. It is also a large financial commitment to your mental health and should be seen as such. Sadly many people cannot afford long term therapy but there are other alternatives

- **Lifeline**
- **Psychiatric institutions sometimes offer free therapy.**
- **Church groups**
- **Support groups Contact SADAG (South African Depression and Anxiety Group)**
- **Social workers and community mental health teams**
- **National department of health**

Therapists have different approaches. You may be surprised at their observations, get angry with them and perhaps just not agree. Remember that they do not have all the answers and are in the process of learning about themselves as well. Be willing to change, no matter how difficult, and be willing to hear them out even if you think they may be wrong.

If you have given the therapist a chance and feel they have not got a full grasp of your predicament you should not feel guilty about looking around for another professional that may be more experienced in the field of your particular distress.

6. MEDICATION:

This is a difficult subject. What may help one person may be poison to another. Like therapy, it is a process of trial and error.

I have been on numerous different medications over the years. I am now on Cipralex which has been working extremely well for 2 years. Prior to this I was on Prozac for about 5 years. It seemed to help me a great deal on a dose of one a day. When I was on 3 a day, I had a really unpleasant side effect that I called "Brain in a bottle". It was a disconcerting sensation in my head that unnerved me and made me doubt my ability to think properly.

Some of the anti-depressants have side effects and everyone reacts differently. Many people feel in a dilemma about taking them, but I feel that they can be a great help provided they are taken correctly and the right one is found. Sometimes people feel that the side effects are worse than the depression and opt to go off them. There are no easy answers. One thing is for certain: YOU take responsibility for your medication. Take the prescribed dose regularly to start with and should you decide to come off the prescription, **speak to your doctor first.**

While medication may be a great help, unfortunately it is not a miracle cure. The greatest comfort for me was knowing that there was help available. My psychiatrist explained that it was not my fault that I felt the way I did. It was a result of my brain chemistry. This was a relief and helped me to stop blaming myself.

It is important to remember that the psychiatrist has a difficult job and of course they can be wrong at times. Their job is to try and get you right with medication alone. Occasionally this might help but usually it takes much more than medication.

The danger is that we can feel at the mercy of the "chemical imbalance" and stop trying to fight our way out ourselves. The trick is to fight the right way. See notes about **Responsibility** and **Help and Comfort.**

7. ELECTROCONVULSIVE THERAPY: (E.C.T)

It is important to remember that there is no instant cure. I had a number of E.C.T treatments, some of which helped. For a period of 1½ weeks after the treatment I became quite elated and then started to normalize. I still felt very scared and uncertain but not quite the same despair that I had felt before treatment. However I did not always feel any different after the course. One does have a memory loss but that did not bother me much. It is not a serious memory loss and I still remembered the most important details.

It is important that you realize that E.C.T does not benefit everyone and that there is nothing wrong with you if you do not respond to it. In my experience I would say that I had mostly positive benefits. The side effects were memory loss, a headache afterwards and a bad effect on my eyesight. I am shortsighted but was more so after treatment. I had the therapy because I was in a place where my illness was life threatening and I was willing to try anything. The side effects seemed of little consequence to me.

I was given a general anaesthetic, muscle relaxants and oxygen, and then a brief electrical stimulation to the scalp. The treatment only lasts a few minutes and I came around soon afterwards. (Nothing like the old fashioned treatment depicted in the movie *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*).

My psychiatrist was with me in the room as well as the anesthetist and a trained sister. It was comforting to have someone holding my hand, as the experience can be anxiety provoking. The only minimal pain I experienced was in the administration of injections, which was brief.

It is important that you ask your doctor any questions you might have about the procedure. He/she is there to help and reassure you.

NB: A consent form must be signed by you after the treatment has been fully explained.

8. RELAPSE:

Depression can occur in episodes over a period of years not necessarily through any fault of your own. You can experience great extremes of emotion and long for the day when you are able to function on an even keel. You dread the terrible lows and the fear may stop you fulfilling your dreams, doing anything new or taking on any responsibilities. It can become debilitating and frustrating and you feel as if you will never reach your full potential.

I remember the devastating anger and disappointment I felt when, after surviving my first episode, I started to experience a second depression. After the first experience I vowed that I never wanted to go through it again and if I did I would end my life. I tried unsuccessfully.

I continued to battle with bouts of depression over a 10 year period and was in and out of hospital. This time I no longer battled as much with depression as with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) which seemed to control my mind and had a frightening life of its own. I became trapped by my obsessional thoughts and annoyed myself with my checking rituals. Self-condemning voices were strong and debilitating and I had zero confidence in myself.

I would say that my slow healing was a result of a number of things. Most important are my husband, family and my faith. I no longer fear the depression or O.C.D like I used to and it no longer has a hold on me. I can quite honestly say that I have not suffered from severe depression for over 6 years. This is not to say that I do not have bad days like everyone else but I certainly never consider suicide. I mostly enjoy life and if I do have a bad day I try not to dwell on it or condemn myself for mistakes. I try to forgive myself quickly and move on. I have also realized that my attitude affects the outcome of events.

However, it takes a long time to break old thought patterns and it is something that you will be faced with every day. Throughout your life you will be challenged to re-evaluate fixed mindsets.

I also realized that even though it was difficult for me **I could chose to listen to the positive voices instead of the negative.** Some people have to work harder at being positive and believing in themselves.

It is wonderfully liberating when you are able to challenge the misconceptions about yourself and break free from the "victim" role. The worst thing about mental illness is that you do not have the strength to fight against the false truths that you tell yourself, the lies that develop into paranoia, neurosis, a crippling of the spirit and a longing for death.

9. GUILT:

For a long time I felt guilt which only served to worsen my situation. The guilt was overwhelming. I felt guilty about my illness and blamed myself for being weak. I felt guilty mostly about the people who loved me and only wanted me to get better and be happy. My partner had endured so much and stuck by me through the worst. He had tried hard to help me and was feeling frustrated and angry at times. I felt that I had let him and my family down. Guilt can be terribly debilitating and destructive and there is no easy answer as to how to work through it and let it go.

In some instances, it is a very necessary emotion. It brings us to repentance and a sincere wish to restore that which is broken. However when it is examined out of perspective, serving only to destroy us, it becomes negative.

Clinical depression is regarded as a physiological illness by the medical profession. Being in a depressed state is an awful place to be but you are not completely at the mercy of the chemical imbalance. There are still things you **CAN** do.

When it comes to guilt remember that at the moment, while you are depressed, you are unable to see things in perspective. Even small things seem to be disproportionately huge and your mind can distort issues and feelings. As you recover though, the disproportionate thoughts and feelings will diminish to their correct perspective.

Keep in mind that the people who love you chose to believe in you and support you. As I got better I was able to give back to those who had helped me most. Don't fret about it when you are not feeling well. It might help, however, if you can tell your loved ones how you feel and ask them to forgive you for any perceived wrongs.

10. PERFECTIONISM:

Many people who suffer from depression are perfectionists or have a certain belief about how things should be. They also have high expectations of others and themselves. When life and people fail to measure up they succumb to feelings of despair. This makes them feel like victims. While I think setting high standards is a good thing, perfectionism is another ball game.

Perfectionism can be stifling, restrictive and uncreative. Coping with life often means being able to accept the downs, mistakes and disappointments as soon as you can and then moving forward. There are times when you can become overwhelmed by emotions and that is normal. But trying to control everybody and everything only leads to frustration. I believe in doing things to the best of your ability. You should not feel you have to conform to some "ideal" imposed by society or religion that really is not attainable.

11. PRIDE:

I discovered that pride can be the biggest handicap in one's healing. It stops us from trying or thinking anything new in case we make a fool of ourselves. It keeps telling us how weak and stupid we are and that we should have the strength to overcome depression without the help of others. It makes us feel pathetic, humiliated and fearful of sharing our true feelings with someone we trust. It tells us that we should always be self-sufficient and never dependent on others, always try to prove ourselves and never to be needy or vulnerable.

I found it incredibly liberating when I stopped caring so much about what other people thought of me. I stopped being afraid of making a fool of myself. This is not to say that we can just say and do as we please. Rather it's about being true to ourselves. This may mean accepting that our frailties are as much a part of ourselves as our strengths. I believe in always respecting others but not in always trying to please others at the expense of my own sanity.

Perhaps being true to ourselves also means challenging our fears and preconceived beliefs and overcoming negative thoughts so that we are free to fulfill God's will for us. It also could mean acknowledging our faults, trying our best to overcome them but accepting that we can never be perfect.

Pride gets in the way of our growth and, like perfectionism, can be very destructive. I have begun to challenge my fixed ideas of what constitutes weakness. Many of my previous beliefs seem to be turned upside down. **Think about how much your pride hinders your growth.** Keep in mind that the "embarrassing and senseless" thoughts are common to many people with mental illness even if you feel all alone in experiencing them. Our pride keeps us trapped in an unbearable humiliation as we imagine people laughing, jeering and discussing our "idiotic neurosis" and "pathetically weird abnormalities."

12. RECOVERY:

The road to recovery can be very bumpy at times. I remember having feelings of extreme anxiety and doubt about my happiness. Terrified that it would not last, I felt that I had to hold onto it desperately. I had ridiculous thoughts and felt stupid and inferior to others. But I remembered that many of the most influential and creative people in history were plagued with neuroses of various kinds. It's almost as if this was the sacrifice that they had to pay for their genius. Perhaps it's part of the package of having an overactive imagination.

The unconscious cannot be kept in neatly labeled boxes. It is unpredictable, all encompassing and mysterious. So I began to accept the other side of the coin. Instead of feeling fear and rejection of my depression, I tried to accept it. This acceptance did not happen overnight. I fought it for a long time. Strangely enough when I began to befriend it, as unwelcome as it was, I began to fear it less and less. It began to have less power in my life.

Part of me did not want to let go of the depression because I had associated it with my creativity. I began to realize that I could be creative without having to be miserable. I began to associate joy with my creativity. However I did not trust my happiness and feared that if I did anything wrong, it would desert me. This of course did strangle my peace of mind.

Slowly, I came to realize that happiness is an elusive thing and binding it, or trying to hold onto it, only serves to destroy it. I stopped paying so much attention to my moods and thoughts and just busied myself by doing things, no matter how trivial. I stopped paying so much attention to "being happy" and tried to just BE and accept where I was.

Now accepting the depression as a part of my life, I've just learnt to go with it. This does not mean that I indulge in it for weeks. Rather, I allow myself to feel down for a few days when it comes and just try to keep busy until it passes. I no longer get trapped in the downward spiral of fear that the suicidal depression will come back for good. Now I simply trust that I will come through it. Sometimes it is important to give yourself some tough love and be firm. Tell yourself suicide is not an option, that you must stop indulging in depression for weeks on end and find ways to overcome it.

Here is a poem by William Blake that expresses, so well, what happens when we try and hold onto happiness.

Eternity

He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise

William Blake

13. THE IMPARTIAL OBSERVER:

Through reading a book called **BRAINLOCK** by J.Schwartz I discovered a very helpful technique. I interpreted it in my own way. Whenever I start condemning myself for something, I imagine I am telling another person about it. That person is myself: a just, reasonable, loving and positive part of myself. I ask this person for her opinion. This helps me to access this side of myself that is never allowed to speak when I get into a depressed, anxious or obsessional state. I ask this side of myself if I am being too hard on myself. The answer usually is "Yes".

14. SPIRITUAL GROWTH: From a Christian point of view.

So many of us get stuck in the Old Testament view of God as being punishing, jealous and testing. Reading the Old Testament really challenges my faith and some of God's dealings with people seem unfair, bizarre, unreasonable and even cruel. We can get so stuck trying to make sense of the Old Testament's version of God that we forget the wonderful news of the New Testament about God's new covenant.

God in Jesus reveals Himself as a God of infinite compassion who loves His people and wants them healed. A revelation that transformed my understanding of God is this: if God is within each of us, it makes sense that **GOD SUFFERS WITH US.**

Understanding this puts a new perspective on our understanding of God. No longer is He a God watching us from a distance, judging and punishing us. But He is a God who goes through all our trials with us. Remember this and let it etch itself into your heart. It will make your cross easier to bear. Remember Christ has gone before you with His cross and goes with you now.

God is not punishing you. It is not God's intention that you suffer, even though it feels that way. God may be preparing you for something. Try not to have regrets about things you have done wrong in this life or opportunities you think you may have lost. Try not to have regrets over the days you are missing while sick. This life is very significant but I think it's only a small part of the whole. The world does not understand the importance or depth of your suffering because the world is equipped only for the temporary and short-lived. I think that suffering, in some mysterious way, transforms us and prepares us for eternity.

Right now you may be suffering self-hatred, loathing and despair. You may feel the desire to flagellate yourself. You may even feel the desire to make yourself bleed to know you are alive, to give yourself more pain than you can bear and to finally terminate existence. **It is alright to feel these things.** But to continue this way is to sin against yourself and God. Try to cherish yourself as God does. You are precious to God. Ask for God's forgiveness and for the gift of grace to show mercy to yourself and to others who have sinned against you.

Remember Christ's words "**My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness**" 2 Corinthians 12:9

If you feel that others have lost hope in your recovery (as I felt at times) remember you cannot begin to comprehend God's tremendous powers of healing and restoration. Also remember that we can beg God on bended knee for relief. **It will be given but NOT always immediately.** Sometimes the illness has a course to run, and we have to be patient and endure, much like someone would endure a physical illness or a handicap. God can and will heal us, but in my case the full course had to be run. I still have to work on negative thoughts on a daily basis. And sometimes I still have to challenge dysfunctional thought patterns and attitudes that threaten to overwhelm me.

It helps me to remember that Jesus went through a time when he felt God was not with him:

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Matthew 27:46.

The cry of desolation from Jesus reflects a real feeling of being abandoned by his father. At this moment of utter and profound despair he felt all alone with no comfort. I know I often felt so alone too. I also know that I've felt separate and fragmented, desperately needed people but not been able to be around anyone. I've been unable to receive comfort from others, unable to feel love for anyone or myself, unable to comfort or show mercy to myself. I've felt numb and tormented in my frightful cell.

When you walk through the valley of darkness you cannot see how far you have come or where you are going. It feels like you are walking in circles, or that you are playing some horrible board game and keep having to go back to the start. That is what the darkness of depression is like. Your soul may be in a place of darkness, but your spirit still lives even if it is small, scared or suppressed.

The light will be waiting for you. So try hard to access the gentle, accepting voice within yourself. For me it was hard because the condemning voice was so powerful and overwhelming. The **loving and forgiving voice is your strength not weakness.** Do not be fooled by the so-called successes of others. What this world regards as "success" is not the same as God's victory. You are fighting an eternal battle within.

Remember: the fire that does not destroy will purify.

(A helpful book to understand the purpose of suffering is **Where is God when it hurts?** by Philip Yancey)

BOOKS ON DEPRESSION from the **Msunduzi Municipal Library**

1. **How to heal depression**, Bloomfield, H.H
2. **You can feel good again: good news about depression**, Carlson, F
3. **Dealing with depression naturally**, Samuel, S
4. **Look for rainbows : for the sad, the lonely, the depressed and the despairing**, Gibson, Joan
5. **Open the window : healing ideas for the lonely and depressed**, Gibson, J

6. **Why am I up, why am I down? Understanding bipolar disorder**, Granet, R
7. **The private life of the brain**, Greenfields, S
8. **Beating the blues: self help for depression**, McConville, B
9. **Coping with depression and elation**, McKeon, P
10. **Happiness is a choice: a manual of the symptoms, causes and cures of depression**, Minirth, F.B.
11. **Depression**, Mitchell, R
12. **Depression matters**, Musikanth, S
13. **Breaking the bonds: Understanding depression, finding freedom**, Rowe, D
14. **Beating depression**, Rush, J
15. **Depressed? Here is a way out**, Smith, H
16. **Overcoming depression**, Stanway, A
17. **A mood apart: a thinkers guide to emotion and its disorders**, Whybrow, P.C
18. **The wisdom of depression: a guide to understanding and curing depression using natural medicine**, Zeuss, J

Other books - Msunduzi Municipal Library

1. **Mind power**, Kehoe, J
2. **Life's not fair but God is good**, Schuller, R
3. **Living through the Meantime: learning to break the patterns of the past and begin the healing process** Vanzant, I
4. **Finding your own North Star: How to claim the life you were meant to live**, Beck, M
5. **How to know God: The soul's journey into the mystery of mysteries**, Chopra, D
6. **Soul Stories**, Zukav, G
7. **Seat of the soul**, Zukav, G
8. **How to succeed at being yourself: Finding the confidence to fulfil your destiny**, Meyer, J
9. **Chicken soup for the soul: 101 stories to open the heart and rekindle the spirit**, Canfield, J
10. **Nothing is impossible with God**, Kulhman, K
11. **Applications for living**, Walsch, N.D

12. **Lord I need a miracle**, Hinn, B
13. **Coversations with God**, Walsch, N.D

List of books I have read: - Recommended reading with *

1. * **Terror by night : Hope shining in dark places**, David Walker
2. * **A brilliant madness** – living with Manic Depressive Illness, Patty Duke and Gloria Hochman
3. **Released from bondage**- true stories, Dr Neil Anderson
4. **Living without depression and manic depression** - A work book for maintaining mood stability,
Mary Ellen Copeland, M.S
5. **Breaking the bonds** – understanding depression, finding freedom, Dorothy Rowe
6. **Lost and found**, Mike Lipkin
7. **Depression : Lifting the cloud**, Dr Christine Read
8. * **Where is God when it hurts?**, Philip Yancey
9. * **Darkness visible**, William STYRON
10. ** **Brainlock** - Free yourself from Obsessive-Compulsive Behavior, Jeffrey M. Schwartz, M.D.
11. * **The boy who couldn't stop washing**, The experience and treatment of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Dr Judith Rapoport
12. * **An unquiet mind – A Memoir of moods and madness**, Kay Redfield Jamison

Other books

Job and the mystery of suffering, Richard Rohr

Play the ball where the monkey drops it, Why we suffer and how we can cope. Gregory Knox Jones

Swamplands of the soul, J.Hollis

Struggles with sanity, by Esje Du Toit. Everyday coping skills – suicide, hospitalisation, certification, recognize symptoms, diet, treatments & support groups.

SADAG Speaking books, Educational & instructional tools aimed at low level literacy population. Look at SADAG website.

A Life Interrupted, Stephanie Redelinghuys (Biography of an artist who suffered from Bipolar disorder. It's a tribute written by her mother)

I have life – Alison's journey as told to Marianne Thamm

"The courage which allowed her to move beyond severe physical and emotional trauma and to turn a devastating experience into something lifeaffirming and strong, is an inspiration to people everywhere."

Veronika decides to die, Paulo Coelho

Courage to change, One day at a time in Al Anon Al Anon Family group headquarters. Inc. New York

The road less traveled, M. Scott Peck

Seven things that steal your joy, Joyce Meyer