

Mental Illness and the Church

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Be my Sight when what I see is not reality.
Be my Quiet when the whispers get too loud.
Be my Light in all the darkness and depravity.
Be my Shelter under every forming cloud.

Be my Patience in the longing and the waiting.
Be my Reason why I get back up to fight.
Be my Truth when lies become too captivating.
Be my Fire burning steadfast through the night.

And in the midst of unknown probability,
be my Hope when life itself appears bereft.
And if the day arrives my mind loses all reliability,
be Everything when nothing else is left.

~ Prayer in Suffering

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Intro: Honesty and the Church

I spent months without telling anyone. I was planning to die in October, and it was a secret that only I knew. I kept it locked away, the secret that I was sick, the secret that I was broken, the secret that I was going to shoot myself. With each day that passed it grew darker and darker in my mind. I was consumed by it because I was alone. I was alone because nobody knew. And nobody knew because I was afraid to tell.

Perhaps Matthew West's song *Truth Be Told* tells it the best: "Lie number one: You're supposed to have it all together. And when they ask how you're doing just smile and tell them 'never better.' Lie number two: everybody's life is perfect except yours. So leave your messes and your wounds and your secrets safe with you behind closed doors. Truth be told, the truth is rarely told."

The truth is rarely told. How many people are struggling in silence because they are afraid of the reaction they might get if they open up about what is going on in their life? This not only goes for mental health but for anything we might be facing. For me personally, the fear of judgment and rejection is a beast and often used to keep me from sharing what was really going on. For others of us it might be fear of being a burden, the fear of our pain being invalidated or minimized, or fear due to negative past experiences. The list goes on and on.

But if there's anywhere that these fears shouldn't exist, it's in the Church. And there should be *no pressure* to have it all together. Jesus didn't say "Follow me and your life will be perfect." He said, "In this world you will have trouble. But

take heart, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) He didn’t say, “It’s every man for himself, so good luck.” He said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12) In other words, the Church should be a place of healing, a place of openness, and a place where fear of judgement is the furthest thing from our minds when it comes to sharing our struggles. Because the truth is, *it’s no secret that everyone is suffering*. And we need to stop acting like it is.

How often have you heard the phrases, “Just choose joy”, “If you just had more faith...”, “God doesn’t give us more than we can handle”, or “You should pray more.” Answers like these are *never helpful* to someone who is struggling with their mental health – or with any pain or heartache they are experiencing. Not only is it frustrating to hear, but it can be downright invalidating and belittling of our problems when we are told these things. What *is* helpful is when someone responds with grace and understanding. Letting them know you are there if they need someone to talk to and simply being willing to listen are just two of the many ways of encouraging someone. Sometimes just listening is one of the best things you can do.

So perhaps the best place to start is right here: being honest with ourselves about how we are really doing, being honest with those around us, and giving our brothers and sisters the space to be honest as well. Steve Austin, author of *Hiding In The Pews*, says, “Loving like Jesus is giving people space to feel whatever it is they’re going through. Loving like Jesus means sitting with others in their darkness. The only way to

truly love our neighbor is to show up and let them know they are safe to heal here.” It’s that simple.

Keeping suicidality a secret almost killed me, and up until then I didn’t know just how dangerous staying silent about our struggles could really be. I ended up getting admitted to a mental hospital, and one of the best things that happened in that turn of events was really what felt like the worst at the time: I was forced to be open about the struggle to my family, which led to me being open about it within my church. Since then, the most healing thing I have experienced has been the support I have found through the people around me. And most importantly, I’m still alive.

Honesty and openness can start *right now*, but we must be willing to take chances. We must be willing to love and to be loved. If we within the Church are willing to not only be vulnerable ourselves, but allow others to do the same, I truly believe that it will be worth it.

Mental Illness vs. Physical Illness

There is no difference between mental illness and physical illness, mental disability and physical disability. Many physical symptoms happen within mental illnesses, and anything that happens in your brain is very much a physical thing, be it neurotransmitters misfiring, abnormalities in brain structure, and other causes.

Moreover, belief in Christ does not just automatically solve all of our problems in this life, and we should not expect it to solve mental illness any more than we expect it to solve physical illness. I'm not saying that your faith does not *matter* when it comes to mental illness. Our beliefs matter in every aspect of our lives. We read throughout the gospels that Jesus heals all kinds of illnesses, and we are told in scripture to pray in all things. But mental illness is no more affected by our faith than physical illness is, in that just because we pray about it or put our complete trust in God does not mean it's necessarily His will to heal us. Even so, when He doesn't remove us from the fire, His promise is that He will be with us through it.

Strength and Suffering: What God Gives

“God doesn’t give us more than we can handle.”

Chances are, you’ve heard this saying before. It is often quoted when someone needs comfort in the midst of suffering or hard times, and it can be an encouraging notion to think that God takes into account our personal strength and would not let difficult life experiences overwhelm us.

But the truth is, this particular platitude is a lie.

Nowhere in scripture does it say that God doesn’t give us more than we can handle – in fact, Paul himself talks about facing more than he could endure, even to the point that he “despaired of life itself.” (1 Corinthians 1:8-9) It is clear here that even in the Bible God lets life experiences overwhelm His people.

But that’s not the end of the story.

He gives us more than we can handle so that we learn to trust that He can handle it. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” Life is hard. It should be no surprise to us when we become exhausted, drained, and feel downright defeated. But every form of suffering is an opportunity to turn to God. He may not remove the suffering – most of the time he does not “fix” our problems – but He promises that he will always be with us and we do not suffer alone.

Additionally, He gives us more than we can bear so that we abound in daily opportunities to bear each other’s burdens. Galatians 6:2 is proof of how important it is that we share our

suffering with each other, and that we were never meant to carry the weight of the world alone: “Carry each another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” This is partly why He tells us not to neglect to meet with other believers; to encourage each other, to build each other up, and to help each other in more tangible ways. Jesus isn’t on earth anymore, so we are to be Jesus to each other.

In my own experience, God has given me MUCH more than I can handle when it comes to mental illness; schizoaffective disorder affects my whole life, and I know what Paul meant when he said he “despaired of life itself.” But, God has also given me my faith. My family. The most supportive husband in the world. Medication. Other Christians who care about me. And a million other gifts in my life and in nature that remind me on a daily basis that He is everywhere.

To those who are suffering it is not helpful to hear “God doesn’t give us more than we can handle.” It puts too much emphasis on our own limited strength, when in reality people everywhere are facing situations they cannot handle, every day, no matter how strong they are.

But the truth is, no matter what happens, He works all things together for the good of those who love Him.

The truth is, God doesn’t give us more than HE can handle.

Anxiety in Life and Anxiety in Scripture

I have yet to find any Christian-based resources that 1) speak directly to those who live with clinical anxiety disorders every day and 2) don't just imply that anxiety signifies a lack of faith or prayer. What I want to emphasize here is that anxiety disorders have nothing to do with faith at all.

Anxiety is something I have dealt with my whole life. It makes socializing extremely difficult, and even affects normal everyday things like going to the grocery store, going to appointments, eating out in restaurants, being in large crowds of people, and many normal interactions with people. Sensory overload is a whole problem in itself; I'm very sensory sensitive so it's easy to get overwhelmed by noises, smells, and feelings.

There are several verses in the Bible that speak of worry, trusting God, and knowing that He is in control. Joshua 1:9 says, "Do not be afraid or discouraged..." Philippians 4:6 says, "Do not be anxious about anything..." Matthew 6:34 says, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself..." These are just a few snippets of the many verses that mention fear and worry.

But as true as they are, people often quote verses like these as pertaining to clinical anxiety disorders, and belief that this is the correct interpretation assumes that everyone who battles these every day can simply choose not to. For individuals who do battle these every day, those verses put in this context all the time can be very disheartening, and this is why: anxiety disorders are not your everyday stress or occasional worry. They can not only involve environmental

and situational factors but are also physiological and even genetic, which is not something we can control.

I used to be so afraid that the fact I was still battling anxiety – and sometimes having to say no to doing certain things – meant I was failing God. But I have come to believe that as long as we face anxiety with courage, we are doing the best we can do, and God knows that. God knows how difficult even anxiety disorders can be because he knows us completely. “You have searched me, Lord, and you know me,” says Psalm 139. “You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.” And what has been the biggest encouragement to me is that even though He knows about all our struggles, nothing can separate us from His love. I particularly appreciate the way The Message Bible paraphrases Romans 8:38-39:

“I’m absolutely convinced that nothing – nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable – absolutely *nothing* can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.”

But even though anxiety disorders are not something we can control, there is one thing I believe we can control: what we do in the midst of it. I have also learned that utilizing any and every tool I have to take care of myself is *completely okay*. For some of us, that means going to therapy or taking prescribed medication. Sometimes getting out of bed in the morning means I have to bribe myself with a reward. I use earbuds at work and take extra breaks. I bring my earbuds and listen to

my music when I go to the grocery store because it helps to keep me grounded and focused. And sometimes going into a particularly anxiety-provoking situation, I pull out all the stops by wearing my most comfortable clothes, making sure I have at least one helpful item on hand, and utilizing my entire arsenal of coping skills. These are the ways I have figured out how to have courage and control illness-induced worrying as far as I am able in the midst of anxiety.

Depression and the Christian Faith

Depression is something that I have struggled with for a long time. It's not that I'm thinking about "sad" things and it's not simply a feeling. It envelops all of me, and anything and everything I try to think or do is worn down by the heaviness. The only thing I know to do is to not try to avoid it, but to let it run its course, and do things to combat it, like utilize distractions or go for a walk. Even though it can be very hard to do anything when I am in the midst of it, usually making myself do something helps a lot. And oftentimes spending time with someone supportive can be helpful, too.

But it wasn't until a conversation I had recently with an old friend that I realized that some people have genuinely never experienced it. And among those who have never experienced it or been close to someone who experiences it, *there is still so much stigma.*

Bring up depression and you might get told to pray more. Or to have more joy. Or to give it to God. Bring up the topic of suicidality, which oftentimes accompanies clinical depression, and many people don't know what to do with it. I have heard some claim that suicidality signifies a lack of hope in Jesus, and some even claim anyone who commits suicide goes to hell. But these claims are not rooted in scripture. They're rooted in misunderstanding and ignorance (see more on this in the next chapter).

The problem is, many people are slow to educate themselves about mental illnesses but quick to judge. We often have too many opinions about lives we haven't lived.

Being told to pray more is not helpful. Issues like clinical depression are not due to a lack of prayer. I prayed countless prayers that God would take the highs and lows of bipolar away from me. But it isn't always like that. Just as God doesn't always heal physical conditions like diabetes or asthma, we can't expect him to always heal us of mental illness just because we pray about it. He has every power to heal us. But not being healed does not mean we don't have enough faith. It simply means he has a better plan. (Sidenote: Sometimes his better plan involves or comes in the form of a medication that works.)

Being told to "have more joy" can also be very discouraging. Because not only does that imply that joyfulness is synonymous with happiness, but it implies that clinical depression determines the state of your heart. When I was at my lowest of lows, it wasn't because I didn't have hope in Jesus for my salvation – it was because of neurotransmitters in my brain.

To Christians who don't struggle with depression: help break the stigma. Start by educating yourself about mental illness, being intentional about making safe spaces, and normalizing mental health treatment by not only accepting others decisions to seek professional help, but encouraging it.

And to any other Christians who struggle with depression: I have found that the best thing to do in the midst of it is simply to keep doing what you know to do. Keep going to church, even when you don't feel like worshipping and your brain wants you to isolate yourself from others. Keep reading

scripture, even though you probably don't feel like it. Keep fighting. Keep loving. Keep going.

“Through Christ, the miraculous can happen,” writes Julie Busler, author of *Joyful Sorrow*. “A mentally ill mind can also be a sound mind. I’ve learned that my mind with depression and PTSD can also grasp scripture, pursue holiness, have wisdom, and a flourishing relationship with Jesus. And yes, the medical world has helped me immensely, but only I can choose to follow the Holy Spirit’s prompting to boast in my weakness and humbly depend on God, because with ‘the humble [the teachable who have been chiseled by trial and who have learned to walk humbly with God] there is wisdom and soundness of mind (Proverbs 11:2 AMP).”

Suicide: The Lie Straight from Hell, and the Lies that Surround It

In some Christian circles, bringing up the topic of suicidality is like opening a can of worms, because many people don't know what to do with it. I have heard some claim that suicidality is selfish. Some claim that it signifies a lack of hope in Jesus. Some claim that suicide is an unforgiveable sin and that anyone who commits suicide goes to hell. But as I touched on in the previous chapter, these claims are not rooted in scripture, but in misunderstanding and ignorance.

Before I go any further, let me add that everything written here comes from my own experience of suicidal thoughts and urges, acknowledging that not everyone's experience is the same and everyone's journey takes different turns. There are a lot of lies and misunderstandings surrounding the topic of suicide, and I'm hoping that this chapter can shed a little bit of light on a subject that many people are afraid to talk about.

This October marks two years since the season I was suicidal with a plan in place. It was the darkest time of my life, a time during which the state of my mental health was affecting my physical health in a way that it genuinely felt like if I didn't end up carrying out my plan to kill myself, I would waste away anyway. I was in a very dark pit, struggling with deep anxiety, bipolar moodswings, very little sleep, self-harm, and my deadly secret that I was going to destroy myself. My mind, body, and heart were under enormous strain, and every hour of every day was a struggle.

I would not say that I *wanted* to kill myself. What I *wanted* was for the pain to stop, and the infernal lie that

suicide was the only way for that to happen had burrowed its way so deeply into my brain that I could think of no other way out. It became the only thing that made sense. This, along with the skewed belief that I was a burden to the people that loved me, was enough to fuel my plan.

Something I was told during that time, and what I would finally come to understand, is this: the idea that suicide is the only option is a lie straight out of Hell. There is *always* another way, even when it doesn't look like it from our viewpoint. God can bring healing into our lives through people, medication, therapy, prayer, and many other ways.

But there were also other things I would come to understand, such as the many lies that surround the subject of suicidality within Christian circles.

One of those lies is that suicidality is selfish. More often than not, people who are considering killing themselves actually believe they are a burden to the people around them. Of course, anyone who has ever loved someone who was suicidal would say that their loved one is *not* a burden, and they would do everything in their power to keep them on earth. But to the mentally-ill mind, suicide can feel like a very self-*less* thing to do, because it is removing the perceived burden from the people they love. Moreover, whether you believe that suicide is selfish or not, once you encounter someone who is suicidal, selfishness should not be your utmost concern.

Another lie is that people who consider suicide must not be Christians, because they don't have enough hope in Jesus. This line of thinking puts a *major* barrier between those who

live with mental illness and those who don't, because we are not the ones to judge who is "really saved" and who isn't. We are called to love all people. Regardless of their religion, their ethnicity, their social status, their mental health – we are to love them. Period. Suspicion, or even assumption, that mentally ill Christians are not actually Christians – is that really loving them?

A third lie is that Christians should not need medication for their mental health, as it downplays the power of faith and prayer. Sarah J. Robinson, author of the book *I Love Jesus, But I Want to Die*, covers this excellently. She writes this:

"There's a dangerous double-standard when it comes to mental health care. We don't say people lack faith when they depend on life-saving medications like insulin for diabetes, an inhaler for asthma, or an EpiPen for extreme allergic reactions. And we certainly don't shame them for talking to doctors about their illnesses. We are grateful that our family members receive good medical treatment and that we live in a world where things that used to kill many people are now very manageable. But perhaps because we still don't think of mental illnesses as *real* diseases, many believers don't see it the same way. We are more hesitant to thank God for the lifesaving medications that prevent tragic deaths by suicide. We suddenly develop amnesia, forgetting how often the Lord works through the knowledge and wisdom he's given to humankind."

The Church, as the Body of Christ, should be a place of safety and healing, a place for those who have nowhere else to go. It is up to us to form a proper understanding of hard topics like

suicidality and the mental illnesses that can cause it. We can't be afraid to talk about it, we can't be afraid to encounter it in our everyday lives, and we can't avoid the subject – because for those of us who struggle with it and look for support within our community, it's a matter of life or death.

To Those Who Walk Alongside: What's Helpful Vs. Unhelpful

Things that are helpful:

- **Researching.** Not only is doing good research easy and educational, but for those of us who actually live with a mental illness to know that you are putting time and effort into understanding, it can mean the world.
- **Being conscious of how you talk about mental illness.** More on this in the next chapter.
- **Being willing to have hard conversations.** Sometimes the things we talk about can be very, very difficult to hear. But sometimes all we need is to just tell someone we trust about what's going on.
- **Remembering that we are trying.** Just because progress may be slow does not mean we are not getting anywhere, and more often than not we are trying our very best – even when that means just staying afloat.
- **Listening.** When you don't know what to say and it doesn't feel like there's much you can do, simply listening without judgement can mean the world. But this also involves respecting our boundaries when we don't want to talk about it.
- **Checking in regularly.** Checking in does not mean prying, it just means showing us that you care, asking how we are doing, and reminding us that you are there no matter what.

Things that are not helpful:

- **Assuming that everything you research will pertain to your loved one.** Yes, researching and educating yourself using reputable websites, podcasts, and books is an awesome

thing. But even in sharing the same illness there's a wide spectrum of experiences that each of us have.

- **Assuming that we are struggling because we are doing something wrong.** Sometimes our brains are just wired differently, and clinical mental illnesses are not punishment for lack of prayer or faith.

- **Trying to “fix” us.** We just want someone who will walk alongside us. Many mental illnesses cannot be fixed, but they can most definitely be managed.

- **Taking it personally when we say ‘no’ to things.** Sometimes saying no is a good thing to do. It doesn't mean we're letting anxiety control what we do, it doesn't mean we're weak, and it certainly doesn't mean we don't like you. In many instances it simply means we are trying our best to preserve our mental energy.

- **Assuming that everything we do is because of the illness.** Not every mood or every struggle is a symptom, and everyone has bad days.

- **Giving unsolicited advice.** Don't get me wrong, sometimes it can be helpful to talk things out with someone and get ideas. But in many instances it can be discouraging and frustrating to hear opinions that we didn't ask for and ideas we've already tried implementing. It's much more helpful to make sure we are actually looking for advice.

5 Ways to Start Breaking the Stigma of Mental Illness in the Church

- **Educate yourself.** Educating yourself about mental health is the very first step in breaking the stigma, because change starts with us. We can't expect others to be educated, aware, and accepting if we aren't living up to that either. Educate yourself about mental illness and the importance of mental health. There are so many reputable resources out there, from websites to podcasts to a plethora of books. You can start anywhere. (For several book recommendations, see the last chapter.)
- **Be willing to talk about it.** If there is anywhere that should be a safe place to talk about mental health, it's the Church. As the body of Christ, we are called to love one another, bear one another's burdens, and be Christ to one another, and if we aren't willing to listen to others' struggles and share our own, we are failing to do that. The more we talk openly about mental illness, the less fear of judgement there will be, and all it takes is one person to be honest about it for others to feel they are safe to talk about it as well.
- **Be conscious of your language.** I'm certainly not suggesting that words like 'crazy' and 'insane' be considered foul language, but I definitely think it is important to be aware of how we're using them and be intentional about not referring to *people* in this way. Similarly, throwing around phrases like 'I'm so OCD/depressed/[insert mental illness here]' isn't

helpful to anyone, especially those who actually struggle with these mental illnesses, as it downgrades and invalidates the significance of the actual illness.

- **Normalize mental health treatment.** The truth is, sometimes God's method of healing includes therapy or medication. We wouldn't tell someone with diabetes or chronic pain to just 'pray more' or just 'turn to scripture' – we'd all agree that they needed to utilize the medical help that is available to them. In the same way, we should not only accept others decisions to seek professional treatment for mental illness, but encourage it. There is no shame in seeking help.
- **Be intentional about creating safe spaces.** "I believe," wrote Steve Austin, author of *Hiding in the Pews*, "if the church is ever truly going to become the hope for the world that Jesus offered in his ministry, we need the courage to be vulnerable in a safe community...The church needs to become a place of true belonging. But as Brene Brown says, "True belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world.""

~ Personal Experiences ~

Mental Illness and My Faith

I know firsthand how it feels to wonder if God really cares. I have doubted His goodness, His promises, His faithfulness. I have doubted everything. My struggle with anxiety and extreme moodswings have made it even harder, because often in the clutches of intense anxiety or throes of depression, devotion is even harder to keep.

So keeping the habit of reading my Bible can be very difficult. And going to church has been difficult at times too – sometimes it's very easy to fall into the line of thinking that I'm supposed to have it all together and be able to give God my full attention Sunday mornings. But it's just not realistic when my brain isn't willing to work with me. The reality is, I have often arrived at church distracted by anxiety or barely holding up under despair. The reality is, I have often felt unable to honestly sing the worship music, because it has not felt "well with my soul" and I don't feel enough faith to sing "praise Him from whom all blessings flow." And then the guilt sets in, because I'm not supposed to feel hopeless with Jesus, right?

The reality is, sometimes my faith is very, *very* small.

But God does not discount small faith. In Matthew 17, Jesus talks about faith the size of a mustard seed – which is tiny, almost unnoticeable. What I have had to learn is how to hold onto faith this small – which has meant continuing to go to church and commune with the body of Christ, even when I'm

not feeling it. *Especially* when I'm not feeling it. I've had to learn that sometimes keeping the faith means simply showing up. *Regardless of how you feel, it's through your actions that you live out your belief.* This has been one of the most important things I have learned.

And for me keeping faith has included having to accept the fact that sometimes God chooses not to alleviate suffering. It has taken me a long time to be able to come to terms with this – that God may very well not take away mental illness – but that does not mean He loves me any less. Nor does it negate His faithfulness and His promise that one day we will be made whole. Nor does it mean He does not cause blessings and very good things to come out of seemingly hopeless situations.

So, I continue doing life together with my community. And I continue learning what it means to persevere. Some days, all I'm able to pray for is that some good comes out of what hurts. And that's ok.

The lyrics to MercyMe's song, *Even If*, have become a continuous prayer when it comes to journeying through the fire and facing mountains that He chooses not to move: "I know You're able and I know You can save through the fire with Your mighty hand, but even if You don't, my hope is You alone. I know the sorrow and I know the hurt would all go away if You just say the word, but even if You don't, my hope is You alone."

A Glimpse into Schizoaffective Disorder

I didn't know what to do. It felt like I was on a violent roller coaster with no way to get off, and it would go on for months on end. The euphoric highs were always great; I got extremely productive, had all the energy in the world, and it felt like I could do anything I wanted. But the highs always eventually collapsed and gave way to despairing lows in which I didn't want to exist anymore, and it was a cycle I couldn't get out of no matter how hard I tried. It was constant and exhausting, and interfering with even the smallest aspects of daily life.

The other symptom I started experiencing during this time was what is called 'psychosis', during which I began hallucinating increasingly more. It started out years ago as just seeing animals and dark forms sometimes, but now became regularly seeing people, and hearing voices and noises that weren't actually there.

Finally, the moodswings got to the point where I knew I needed help. I made the call to schedule my first appointment with a therapist, and, knowing that some people have really difficult experiences trying to find the right one, I thank God that from the time we first started meeting, it was a really great match and positive experience. Therapy and medication changed my life for the better. It has provided me with invaluable support and skills I didn't have before, and I finally discovered the issues I was experiencing have a name. But that doesn't mean navigating schizoaffective disorder isn't still an ongoing journey.

I experience what is called “hypomania”, which is a less severe version than what they call full-blown “mania” of bipolar. Hypomania involves an elevated mood, a whole lot of energy, and increased self-esteem. I’ve done some pretty stupid things before in the throes of a high, like getting pulled over for driving 35 miles over the speed limit on the bypass. It’s very enjoyable for the most part – though, for me, when it peaks, it evolves into a good deal of agitation and stress. And now, having experienced it enough, I know that what goes up must come down; it always gives way to a transition into depression.

Depression takes all the joy out of everything, makes you feel worthless, and makes life feel meaningless. I get very tired, so much so that it’s hard to do even tiny things. Everything feels impossible, whether it’s getting out of bed, or putting effort into doing things I previously enjoyed, or spending time with people I care about. It makes me want to be alone, to isolate from everyone, which often gives me ample time to spiral more and puts me in an even worse headspace. And, perhaps one of the hardest effects of my depression has been self-harm.

Lastly, hallucinations continue. It makes being alone difficult, as separating from other people makes it harder to determine in the moment what is really there and what is not. When I am with at least one person it generally makes it much easier to judge.

I have come to find that there is a lot of good that has come out of this diagnosis, which is essentially just a collection of specific experiences and symptoms, and nothing to be afraid

of. I have not only found some amazing books and resources to help me along my journey, but I have learned exponentially more about life and about myself, and have grown closer to my family and my church community than I ever was before.

Scriptures for the Suffering

Romans 8:18 (ESV)

“For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Nahum 1:7 (ESV)

“The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.”

Isaiah 43:2 (NIV)

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”

John 16:33 (NIV)

“I have told you these things, so that that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Revelation 21:3-4 (ESV)

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be morning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.’”

Psalm 46:1 (NIV)

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”

Psalm 27:13-14 (NIV)

“I remain confident in this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.”

Book Suggestions

***Hiding in the Pews*, by Steve Austin.** In this book pastor Steve Austin tells his own mental health story, including his suicide attempt, and discusses the importance of mental health awareness in the Church. This book does a great job of informing us about the prevalence of mental illness both across church congregations and leadership, and highlights ways we can do a better job of supporting those who are struggling within the church.

***I Love Jesus, But I Want To Die*, by Sarah J. Robinson.** This is a great book that discusses the topics of depression, suicidal thoughts, and self-harm. She does a wonderful job of using the book to not only tell her own story of battling mental illness but also looks at different aspects of mental health, therapy and medication, and self-care from a Christian perspective.

***Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving*, by Pete Walker.** In this book Pete Walker discusses C-PTSD in great detail, and it is a really good resource for learning about where it comes from, symptoms, and coping strategies from a licensed therapist's perspective.

***The Bipolar Disorder Survival Guide (3rd Edition)*, by David J. Miklowitz.** This is a great practical resource for anyone who has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, loves someone who does, or simply wants to learn more about the illness in depth. An easy book to pick up and put down and come back to when needed.