

PRESSING ON...

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



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Depression

UNVEILED



Uncovering the Truth from a Christian Perspective

■ by Shawna Sapp, MSW, LCSW

"Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know, but I pray that you will be able to know that love. Then you can be filled with the fullness of God."
Ephesians 3:19-21 (NCV)

At some point in our lives we may unfortunately experience what it is like to feel depressed or know someone who is suffering from depression. Children, adolescents, and in some cases, even infants can experience depression. Whether we experience it as a young child or as an older adult, it is important to know the key symptoms of depression, but also be aware that depression may disguise itself. Depression affects a person emotionally, but also physically and spiritually. Depression affects the whole person.

Everyone's experience will be uniquely different depending on the factors that are impacting him or her; however, there are usually some key symptoms that make depression undisguisable. I say undisguisable because depression tries to disguise itself in order to survive, just as a virus tries to survive in the human body by living off its host. The truth of the matter is that depression cannot stay disguised because God finds a way of

unveiling it. He does this by allowing us to depend on him more during this dark and difficult time. When we are faced with feelings of desperation, helplessness, or hopelessness we often turn to God. It is during this time that God utilizes depression to heighten our awareness and increase our dependency upon him. A verse from 2 Corinthians 4:16 provides us with this truth, *"Therefore we do not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly, we are being renewed day by day."*

Key Symptoms of Depression

Emotional: We typically associate depression with emotional symptoms. Children will sometimes experience the same symptoms as adults including sadness and low mood. The main difference between children and adults is that children will typically act out or display angry behavior.

Emotional symptoms can result in a loss of interest in school or activities a person once enjoyed, in addition to affecting an adult or child's ability to function at home, work, or school.

Sometimes symptoms of depression are disguised physically and/or spiritually

Physical: If you or a child has aches, pain, or headaches that do not respond to treatment,

depression may be the cause. It is common for people to visit their healthcare provider about physical symptoms not realizing that depression is the root cause. Depression can also affect sleep and appetite.

Spiritual: Children and adults alike may wonder where God is during this point in their lives. As a caregiver or parent, this can feel very disheartening; however, take comfort in knowing that this is a normal part of spiritual growth. Instead of feeling discouraged, it would be important to recognize this as an opportunity to provide children and adults with support and encouragement from God's word. I believe John 16:33 relates perfectly in this case, *"I have told you these things, so*

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More than the Baby Blues:

4 Tips for Navigating Postpartum Depression

■ by Karen Krygsheld, MSW, LCSW



including postpartum anxiety and OCD) can easily turn one dream into a nightmare.

What does postpartum depression look like?

Postpartum depression is sadly misunderstood, under-diagnosed, and often untreated. So what do perinatal mood disorders look like? What do they feel

like? They may be a variety of things:

- intense anxiety
- looking well put together yet feeling completely out of control
- fear of the future
- scary thoughts
- hyper vigilance
- lack of connection with your baby
- intrusive thoughts (visions of your baby being hurt or you hurting your baby)
- seeing the need to do everything yourself
- guilt when unable to fulfill your expectations

Postpartum depression feels scary for moms and their family members

When motherhood feels unbearable, overwhelming, scary, and something you can't even share with those close to you, these words are for you:

**You are not alone. You are not crazy.
You will not feel like this forever.**

In the midst of postpartum depression, it is difficult to differentiate between who you are (who you are, how you act, what you are like as a mom) and what are symptoms of an illness. You are not alone. You are not crazy. Through treating your symptoms, you will not feel this way forever.

Practical tips to address symptoms

1. **It is critical to let someone know how badly you feel** - without letting someone else know how you feel, others may overlook the depression.

Medical conditions (for example, thyroid

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When pregnant, you may have dreamt of the beauty of your baby and motherhood. Even the Bible has great things to say regarding pregnancy and infancy! "For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, I know that full well." (Psalm 139:13-14). But what if early motherhood emotions and experiences fall so short of this, and instead this is a time of great discomfort, fear and sadness? It may seem hard to fathom, but post partum depression (one of several perinatal mood disorders—

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that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Is depression different for men and women?

Men and women will likely experience depression in different but similar ways. For example, both men and women will likely experience classic symptoms of depression including feelings of hopelessness, low energy, or difficulty concentrating to name a few; however, the main difference between the two sexes is in the way the depression is presented. Men will more likely deny their feelings or hide them from others while women will be more vocal about their feelings.

As men and women approach middle-adulthood, ages 45-65, circumstantial issues such as job loss, loss of a loved one, or even substance abuse can impact a person's faith. It can be easy for a person to become distant from God during this time and depend on himself or others for support. While God will surround us with support from our loved ones during these times, the truth of the matter is



God wants us to first come to him. Proverbs 3:5-6 says exactly this, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

Depression in the elderly

The elderly's experience of depression will often correlate with a sense of loss. This may include loss of loved ones and loss of independence due to loss of major faculties. Losing one's independence can be very devastating, especially when a person prides himself on his independence, however at this point in our lives, God usually will surround us with the necessary care and love that is needed. As a caregiver, it would be

important to spend additional quality time with your loved one. Tell stories and reminisce about the past. This is a time for reflection or even celebration of past accomplishments. Another crucial factor is that depression can sometimes look like dementia in the elderly, and it is important to get an accurate diagnosis from a health care professional so that treatment for depression is not delayed.

Reach out and get help

In conclusion, if you or a loved one is suffering from depression, I urge you to place your hope in God's hands as he has now provided you with an opportunity to reach out and get help. I would also like to add that as a Christian, I



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have personally experienced depression and its strongholds on my faith; however, no matter how devastating or impactful it may be, God's love for us will always be greater. ■

The Baptism

■ By Erin Davis, MSW, LCSW

I was told and I listened. I followed, but it wasn't until this precise moment that I fully realize. I've spent myself waiting and hoping—believing that He would come. It feels like a lifetime that I have spent in this dry, cracked desert, seething with the toxicity of serpents slithering here and there: legalism and pride oozing from their exposed fangs. I've seen a glimpse every now and again of light breaking through the calloused surface of this town. But today, right here, it's like the sun is finally shining through...no clouds to interrupt its rays beaming down.

I see Him coming and I can't seem to tear my eyes away. It's as if I'm looking into the eyes of my oldest friend. Since that day our mothers met, my life has been connected to His. It's like coming home...only this home is so full of secret nooks and crannies that I will never grow weary of exploring it. There is so much mystery in those eyes, like the longer I gaze, the more I am consumed with wonder about the things I thought I knew.

While I have been preaching repentance, I understand now that my revelation has just been the first course; a mere appetizer, whetting the appetite for the true feast. As He draws closer to me, I can't help but declare to all who have ears and want to hear that this is the One we've been waiting for! I've been priming the pump in the desert for the only source of living water that can revive this land.

When he finally reaches me, I am simply undone—astonished at what He asks of me. Am I not just John, son of Zechariah? If this man, this wondrous man, is who I think He is, this request seems above and beyond me...and yet He asks me. I accept maybe out of pure curiosity or maybe raw desire. Something is gnawing at me, like there is a lot more to this request than meets my eye. This is no routine baptism.



And so I take Him in. We are up to our waists in the crisp, cool waters of the Jordan. The waters make way for Him, like a servant bowing to their master. He takes a hold of my hand and I am overtaken by the perfect paradox of peace meeting fire. I feel fully known in the most surprising way...not by a person, but by something profoundly MORE. Before I have a chance to wrap my head around the obscurity and wonder of my experience, He's immersing Himself in the water. It cascades around His frame as if it's welcoming Him in. He emerges quickly, not unlike the hundreds of others I have done this with. But then, something mind-blowing occurs.

I hear a voice—the one I've heard so many times in my thoughts—the one that whispers to me in the still desert nights—the one I came here for. He's telling me that this is His son and that He's pleased with this man, His son, my relation. I glance quickly at my surroundings and I see the same look of awe and perplexity on the faces of everyone observing. I'm not the only one who heard His voice...the voice of Yahweh.

There is a deep, rich, almost heaviness in the air...the good kind. I look at Him and His eyes are closed like He's drinking it in...His whole body is smiling... like He received the greatest gift of His life. There is the shimmer of a tear on His left cheek that nearly sparkles from the brightness of the sun beating down on Him.

And then I see something: this white, almost iridescent cloud-like presence. It has a form and yet it doesn't. It's descending on Him... with the gentleness of a dove, but there is also something wild and amazing about it. I can't make out really what or who it is, only that it is covering and clothing Him... like it's a part of Him.

I try to take it all in...this beautiful, indescribable, prodigious spectacle before my very eyes. I know now everything has changed. I will never be the same. He is here. He is with us. ■



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This reflection is based on the following Bible passages: *Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-23; John 1:29-34*



An invitation to reflect . . .

This reflection came about from a desire to understand the humanity of the stories in the Bible. Often, I would read scripture looking for a promise of certainty to stand on, instead of as an invitation to reflect. When I see the humanity of the experiences of John or even of Jesus, the words take on new life and meaning. I begin to explore, question and discover more in myself and my experience with God. When I read these with clients, I use them as tools of exploration...to notice what God is eliciting in them. What do they feel in their bodies, or what word or phrase jumped out at them? ~ Erin Davis MSW LCSW



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concerns) and hormone imbalances may contribute to postpartum depression and anxiety, therefore, alerting your doctor and undergoing a thorough exam and blood work is also important.

- 2. Take a moment to appreciate moments in which you feel a little bit better - a little more you.** This depression does not define you. Perhaps write down what you'll notice about yourself when you begin to feel better.
- 3. Remain in the present.** Practice mindfulness and check in with yourself on what you need right now (conversation with another adult, a snack, a drink, a walk).
- 4. Most of all, be kind to yourself.** Common to perinatal mood disorders are intrusive thoughts (fears that something will happen to your baby if you do not keep checking her or that you may do something to seriously harm your baby). Thinking something will not make it happen, and knowing these thoughts are common to the illness of perinatal mood disorders can help alleviate feeling



terrible about them. Self-doubt is also rampant—messages of “I’m a bad mom”, “I never get anything right”, “My family would be better off without me.” Start with acknowledging what you say to yourself and when it is harmful or not accurate, kindly apologize to yourself and replace it with what is accurate—“I am doing the best I can right now”, “I am the best mom for my baby.”

Perinatal mood disorders can feel like a torment—something we beg God to take from us. Through acknowledging the struggle, creating a support system, and walking through recovery with assistance, motherhood can return to more of the dream

imagined. These symptoms do not define you. There is help and hope just waiting for you to reach out. ■



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