

**Reflections on Faith and Life for March 21, 2021** Parents: parts of this may be PG-13

**St. John:** If you'd like to provide either lilies or spring flowers to decorate the sanctuary, please bring them by Saturday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>. If the flowers are in memory or in honor of someone, please let Rose know (*legibly*, or typed) by Monday, March 29<sup>th</sup> (352-2524). My "miracle lily" provided by St. John's Altar Guild for *last* Easter, when COVID shut us down, is still green, and would love to have some floral company!

I continue to share how God has used the crises and traumas of my life to draw me closer to him; today I write about my lifelong depression.

What was it like for me in depression? Like I was at the bottom of a deep well, encased in glass that no one else could see. They thought I was "normal" for the most part, but I knew that if anyone got through the glass to me, they'd see my shame and cast me out.

I knew I was depressed in high school, but it wasn't severe until my first year in college. I spoke to the chaplain, and he referred me to the school psychiatrist, who was good with meds but not with counseling. I wasn't able to convey the depth of my pain; he kept telling me I was "well put together" (whatever that meant). After graduating from the U of Redlands in Southern California, I spent a year in Berlin (Germany); when I returned to graduate school in Baltimore, I was suffering from real culture shock and experienced my first "suicidal ideation." I was ready to take a bottle of aspirin when God sent me my first "angel," a fellow German student whom I'd met just a few days earlier. She came to my apartment to chat and ended up sitting with me all night till she could take me to the health center. From there I was referred to another psychiatrist, who was even better at meds and even worse at counseling!

Two years into my marriage with Joe, I realized I was depressed again and began seeing a very good counselor at the Student Health Center at the U of Miami. No meds, but helpful in working out a bunch of stuff from my earlier life. By the time Paul was born (December, 1978), our marriage was very rocky. [True confessions: every time we "fought," he would go out and buy a used Corvair, and I would go to the Humane Society and adopt a dog. By the time of our divorce in 1980 we had 4 Corvairs in the driveway and 5 dogs in the house. Dysfunctional??] I was still seeing my counselor, barely hanging on. One morning I woke up thinking that I was such a mess, Paul would be better off without me, so I might as well kill myself. I called Dr. Z (the 2<sup>nd</sup> "angel" God sent me) and for the first time since I'd known him, he told me what to do: "You need to get a divorce." A better option than suicide. I told Joe I had to leave him. I've already written about how that went.

Paul and I moved to Chico, California, and our life was more settled. He was a "perfect" child till he turned 10; when he began his pre-teen rebellion, life became very difficult for both of us. We were in counseling; he was in counseling; and one day his counselor called to tell me Paul was getting in with a really nasty crowd and he'd heard from a member of the "gang" that Paul's life was in danger and he needed to get out of Chico.

Within 48 hours I'd arranged with Joe and his wife for Paul (then 13) to fly to Tampa and stay with them for 6 months. I drove him to the Sacramento airport, where he—almost 6' tall—looked at me and said, "You can't make me get on the plane." He was right; but he did go.

By that time I was really depressed; I called the counselor we'd seen together, David, and asked if I could see him while Paul was gone. The timing was perfect: my mother was on a 4- month cruise, out of the country; my boss and his wife were in Europe. I began seeing David once a week, soon moved to twice a week, and occasionally saw him 3 times a week. I used up all my vacation, all my sick leave, and all my savings (this wasn't covered by insurance)—and it was worth every penny. At the end of 8 months, David told me I'd done more work in that time than many people do in 3 years. The acute depression had lifted, and I'd learned several techniques to deal with life more effectively.

The most dramatic healing of a deep depression happened during my second year in seminary. Our Pastoral Care professor had asked us to keep a journal, and I must have written at least 600 pages the first 2 years. He pointed out that every time I "confessed" a shame or guilt, it would go away; but within weeks it would be back. In April, 1997, he invited me to a private service of confession in the beautiful seminary chapel. I had nothing to confess that he hadn't already heard or read, more than once. But he invited me to leave every guilt and shame at the altar, and to trust that since God forgave me, I could finally forgive myself. Since then I've never been burdened by guilt or shame about the past.

I continued to have "bouts" of depression, but never to the depths of the past. While I was in Green Bay I asked my doctor to prescribe an antidepressant. He did, but he also told me that once a person has been on and off antidepressants 3 or more times, it was better to just stay on them. That was about 2008, and I've been on one or another medication since then and will never try to go off again. I literally don't have it in me to fight off depression without meds.

The last time I saw a counselor was about 7 years ago. I wasn't really depressed but felt a need to talk some things out. It seems I was finally ready to confront the original cause of my shame and guilt and depression. We figured out that I'd been molested as a very young child. As soon as the counselor asked if that could have been the case, a tremendous weight lifted off me. All those years of depression, never knowing why. . . .