

Focus on Mental Health

God Cares for His Children

In this Home and Family feature, which believers have requested, God's children of different ages and stages in life share psalms and experiences they or close ones have encountered. May God bless this feature and help the authors of these writings and all *Voice of Zion* readers to know that no one is alone in their struggles. May these words offer hope and support and a desire to remember one another with empathy and prayer.

As is noted in this Home and Family spread's writings, mental illness comes in many forms: clinical depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, dementia, and the like. These can afflict any one of us, and any family. Mental health issues can vary in degree and duration—sometimes they're temporary or situational; other times they can challenge us on a longer-term basis. Depression, one of the most common such disorders, isn't always clinical depression; yet, it can affect people in varying ways and degrees. Studies have shown that mental illness affects one in four adults and one in five children.

As with all struggles and trials in life, we pray for God's continued care and guidance. May He give hope and renewed health and one day lead each of us to heaven's home, where all illness and struggle are left behind. There, we will know only unending joy and freedom from all earthly afflictions. We can trust that God will care for His own to the end of life's journey, as He promises: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5).

Christ Is Strong in the Weak

Many Aspects to Mental Illness

Cast all your care and sorrow on Him who cares for you; the Lord who knows tomorrow has helped you hitherto. He who from dust you made, your breath and spirit gave, He knows your needs and trials. His arm is strong to save (SHZ 391:1).

With this verse, the songwriter gives comfort to all who are under burdens and who are suffering. Mental illness is bewildering to the rational mind. Outward appearances can be deceptive; with some psychiatric conditions, behavior can be confusing and even contrary to what is socially proper.

Individuals with schizophrenia may hear an array of voices, with confusing messages. Medicine and other therapies can lessen or control symptoms and help to quiet the voices. It can take time to find the best medicine for the condition, sometimes years. In the not so distant past, some individuals who had illness, such as schizophrenia, may have been confined.

We Have Many Questions

For the sufferer and near ones, it can take considerable time to recognize the illness and then more time to accept it. Often it seems that no one understands. The individual who is ill may act out or behave ab-normally; the family may feel overwhelmed, helpless. Others may ask questions that betray their lack of understanding or are otherwise unhelpful. Some will avoid the affected individual or the family dealing with such issues because they don't know how to relate. Societal resources can be hard to find and not easy to access.

How do caregivers live with someone who has a mental illness? First, it is necessary to realize that it is an illness, such as diabetes, heart disease, or the like. Medicine and other care can lessen the effects, help the ill person learn appropriate behavior, quiet the symptoms, and give insight. Acceptance of and insight into the condition replaces denial.

When I suffer grief and pain, I ponder: "For what reason?" And the answer is not found through weary days and seasons. Jesus, give Your gospel Word; my faith increase and strengthen. With your presence You bestow true peace and consolation (SHZ 441:1,2).

Help in God's Word and Kingdom

Prayers help. James writes: "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience...Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy...Is any among you afflicted? let him pray...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:10,11,13,16). Prayers of faith enclose both the sick person and the needs of family and friends. God's will, however, does not heal in every case. In this, we ask: "Thy will be done." Grant us strength!

Songs give comfort. Sing songs of Zion 391, 440, and 441, from which excerpts are quoted in this article.

Jesus, oh, remember me as I travel with affliction. In my illness night and day to You, Jesus, now I pray. Help me in my tribulation, You who humbly suffered woe, bore the cross for me below. Jesus, oh, remember me! (SHZ 440:1).

Scriptures give comfort. John writes: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," and "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 7:14,17).

Look to the Reward

Our family has also experienced these kinds of trials. It would be nice to be able to write that the trials have not been difficult, and that we've had good understanding and great compassion. However, due to our weakness and faultiness, we must confess that we have so much needed the support and prayers of family and believing escorts. We have needed to pray for strength to accept and deal with the trials granted during our walk of faith. How important it has been to remember the reward of heaven promised to us, received by faith. In spite of all of our lacking, sinfulness and faults, we can say: "Unto this day the Lord has helped."

Jim Moll

Navigating Change, Battling Depression

Life is full of changes. Our jobs or places of schooling might change; we might move to a new home, or to a new area. Our friends can change; our families can grow or get smaller. New children are born; children grow older, leave the home, and begin their careers and independent lives. We're given many new and adventurous opportunities. Trials also come into our lives, and they also change with time. God allows these trials to come. At times, we welcome change, and other times, it's very difficult. When trials, challenges, and changes come, we can pray for a heart to accept what has been given, for escorts to preach the gospel and for a heart to believe, remembering to thank God for the blessings that He has given. God's Word never changes. He promises to care for His own.

In my life, I have struggled with depression. It's been a trial not only for me, but also for those around me, including my husband and children. Yet, God has guided and sent many escorts on the journey.

When I was first diagnosed with depression, it was very difficult to talk about. I was too proud. I couldn't accept that I had to take medication for a mental illness. Life at that time was also full of changes. I had gotten married after a year of university. Financially, I needed to make that very difficult decision to stop going to school and to work several jobs to help pay the bills while my husband continued his education. However, our first child was born that first year after we were married and my work outside the home ended. We both felt strongly that I would be a stay-at-home mother. With my husband working and going to school fulltime, we rarely saw each other. This was not what I imagined marriage to be.

Some people handle these types of changes well; others have a hard time. I had a hard time. During all of this, I was unable to recognize that I was slowly becoming overwhelmed. It's hard to describe how I felt at the time. I remember wondering—shouldn't I feel happy? I loved my husband and we were about to have our first child. Why then did I feel sad and discontent? The feelings didn't go away. My sisters recognized the signs of depression in me and took me to see the doctor. God sent escorts in my time of need!

I began to take medication for depression and started to feel a bit better. As the months turned to years, the doctors have needed to adjust my medications and try different ones. I have also tried to go off the antidepressant medication with help from my doctors but have now accepted that I may need medication the rest of my life. Many prayers have risen, "Help me through this moment, Lord." Many times I've thought, "Will I be able to live another day?" God has protected me until today on my journey to heaven.

By God's grace, I am where I am today. God has given me the ability to be more aware of my body now than when I was first diagnosed with depression, and years later, with hypothyroidism, which can go hand in hand. There have been trials and doubts about taking anti-depressants while pregnant and with nursing babies; however, God has blessed us with seven beautiful children. It is a miracle every time I hold a precious baby in my arms...a gift and a blessing. As I reflect on this, I am again reminded of our gracious and loving God. If we trust in Him, He will surely bless our lives. He has promised to care for His own and will never give a burden too hard to carry.

We can be comforted to know that whatever situation comes, we can pray to our Heavenly Father. Seek the counsel of a beloved brother or sister in faith about faith matters, ask for professional advice when it's needed, and most importantly, pray for God's guidance in difficult decisions.

A sister in faith

Answers in God's Time

I have struggled with depression for 20-plus years. It has been much like a roller coaster, with times of happiness, and then times of deep depression. I have tried to find lasting happiness in my life by making changes—changes in jobs, moving to an area with a sunnier climate, changes in medications, new doctors, alternative treatments, finding hobbies. None of these have had long lasting positive effects on my life.

During times of deep depression, it's very difficult to carry on day to day. Work and household chores become

overwhelming. Hobbies that I once enjoyed no longer interest me. Being around people is difficult; I have very little to say to add to the conversation. I find myself wanting to withdraw from society. The tendency is to sit at home and read, sleep, or just sit and think. Negative thinking is a constant battle.

There are several things that have brought rays of hope to my life. The support of my family has brightened many dark days. Just a phone call or a visit makes the day better. I have attended classes that teach Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). These classes have enlightened me to different ways of thinking.

The gospel is the surest source of strength and comfort, and the thoughts and prayers of many in God's kingdom are essential. I trust that God hears them, and I trust that they will be answered in His time.

A brother in faith

Why Me?

Why me? Oh, why me? Couldn't I have something else? Something more acceptable—something without stigma, something that isn't so crazy! God help me to accept my lot, help me to go on, help me to trust in You. Hold my hand. Give my loved ones patience and love. Help them accept and support me. Help us all.

Six percent of the U.S. population has diabetes. We talk about diabetes being an epidemic. But 25 percent of us have some kind of mental health issues. We don't talk about mental illness. We whisper. It's taboo. We don't want to be labeled. It's still me—God in His wisdom made me this way. Notice how this writing is anonymous—it's very humbling. It hurts. Oh why, oh why, me?

There are many kinds of mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar, schizophrenia, and there are many levels of illness. Each of them has a wide spectrum. Those afflicted are all human. They get hurt. They cry, experience sadness. They pray for acceptance, for peace, for healing, knowing there may be no cure.

Praying helps. Natural remedies can help, as can aromatherapy, sauna, exercise, relaxation techniques, therapy, medicine, scary medicine. My blue, diamond pill that I know I need. It keeps me normal, level, comfortable. One day at a time I can go on, with God's help.

Hypomanic, manic episode, maniac, me. I always was me, but now I have a label. Did I lose myself? Who am I? I'm also a spouse, a mother, an artist, and a human with flesh and blood and an undying soul. A sad person with mental illness, a medical condition in my frontal lobe. Firing, firing fast, no sleep. Who needs sleep? Energy, productivity, fun, full speed, then the crash, and nothing makes sense anymore.

Let's try to be compassionate and pray for those who suffer. Let's make it more understandable; knowledge is power. Let's accept them as they are and love them with Christian love, as part of God's creation work. Let's encourage them to seek professional help and let them know they are loved just as they are.

Every trial has a blessing. Is there a blessing in all of this? When we find the blessing, we also find acceptance. And acceptance brings peace, even happiness. Mental illness gives insight for this kind of suffering. It gives compassion and humbleness. Maybe we from our lowly spot could share our experiences and help others. Most of all, mental illness brings us close to God.

A sister in faith

Cast Down but Not Destroyed

For many youth, life is full of joy and adventure. Much energy is focused on study and work to be successful in temporal life. This is good, and I believe God allows this time to transition into independent and responsible adults. However, one can forget to love God with all of his heart, soul, and mind, as Jesus teaches is the greatest of commandments.

During this time in my life, I was also given much energy, determination, and ability. While maturing into adulthood, I was successful in my temporal work and God had granted me much happiness. I enjoyed playing sports and traveling. I had a busy social life, and God also blessed me with a lovely believing spouse. Life was going so smoothly, and perhaps too much so, that my thankfulness and devotion to the Heavenly Father and His Word was lacking, and maybe even foolish pride had crept into my heart.

One day through a tragic personal experience, my mental health was taken from me. It was as if a lightning bolt from heaven cast me to the ground. I was encompassed with such suffering, fear, and desperation that I lack words to describe the situation. God had allowed a fiery trial to descend on me. I was eventually brought so low that I was utterly helpless and could only plead for my near ones to pray on my behalf.

A long battle and struggle against my mental illness ensued, including psychiatric treatment and professional counseling. Many prayers were uttered to the Heavenly Father to restore my health. The enjoyment of this earthly life was completely removed, replaced with what seemed to be relentless pain and despair. It felt that God had completely forsaken me, and I even prayed that He would take me home. Under God's mighty hand, the insignificance of the things in this life and my own smallness had been powerfully revealed to me. Difficult days turned into months, which dragged on for a year. My only solace was my believing family and friends, who cared for me so preciousely and had much love and patience. I thank God exceedingly for these escorts.

A glimmer of light appeared after a year, which gave me hope of healing. I was also given the desire to listen to God's Word through online sermons. This was a great comfort to me, as I struggled through the ups and downs of recovery over the next few years. And most importantly, through the hearing of God's Word, my faith was strengthened and God steadied my gaze to look past the temporal to the everlasting glory that awaits the faithful in heaven. Now with a restored mind, I look back and see God's infinite wisdom. His chastening was because of His great love for my undying soul. God allows trials to come into our lives for different reasons and at various times. The afflictions can be very difficult, but we must bear the suffering through trusting in God's promise to deliver us. Our Lord and Savior suffered the ultimate trial when He died on the cross for our sins.

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:16,17).

A brother in faith

Our Dreams Are Different Now

When my spouse first began to experience unrealistic thoughts about life and asked if I could hear the things she was hearing and see the things she was seeing, I became very concerned. I began to travel the road of cause and effect—what is causing this? What did we do wrong? Are there matters of secret sin? At first, I didn't want to admit that this was a reality; I hoped it would just go away.

I didn't want to speak about it, didn't want people to think that I had somehow caused this because of being an irresponsible spouse. I even thought people would think that I had somehow abused her, either through words or actions, or maybe I was too controlling. I thought maybe I hadn't seen the signs because I was too involved in other things I was doing, such as my job or other duties, and wasn't giving enough support to my family. If only I could have been home more, if I was more caring, or if I weren't so selfish, this wouldn't have happened. Previously, I'd had a few thoughts about illness of the mind, and to some degree I had an idealistic view, thinking that a sound mind was a result of believing correctly.

So our life as we formerly knew it was no more. The dreams I had for us were going to be different than what we initially had. I had and still have many things to learn about this trial. I began to research much on the topic of the mind, how it works, and what and how things affect it. I thought we would just go to the hospital and they would prescribe some medication, and when we found the correct dose and type, life would be as before.

What we have learned is that our life won't be like it was, but it will be as God has intended it. We needed to grieve what was taken away and learn to live for each other in ways we didn't think of before. I had to think not only from my view, but try to think of things from the view of one suffering every day. I had to realize that what we have and the trials we're given are not by choice, but for a bigger plan than I can grasp. It helps to understand a person when we can realize that what someone else has to deal with is not because they want what they have. They can't just wish it away, for if it were so, why would any of us suffer in anything? Who likes to be sad or live in sorrow?

The trial that we live is not one that others can see with their eyes; it's not one that everyone will understand, but to us it's our life. We just want to believe, and we can't imagine how we could be happy outside of the grace care of God and His kingdom. Even the counselors and doctors have expressed that with the illness we were given to deal with, how wonderful and fulfilling our life is. They've said that because of our lifestyle choices we're spared much grief. For this, we thank God for the protection that He offers to His children by faith—many more blessings than the enemy would want us to have.

If it were not for the power of the forgiveness of sins, it would be much more difficult to live with these trials. So often on life's journey as we grieve for things we no longer have, unintended words have formed in our minds and have been expressed. But when we can put them away with the gospel, all guilt and grief are washed away. It's truly a comfort and relief to know that living faith is a matter of the heart and not of the mind. God knows everything that lies before us, and He has a plan for all His created people to make it to heaven.

Bible stories are very encouraging. Jesus always showed compassion to the people who suffered; He even healed those with difficult illnesses, also those of the mind. It shows us that people have always had illnesses here in this life. In Jesus' time, He also showed us that God has power to end all suffering. God's children can live looking forward to good days, too. We are also assured of God's support in whatever lies ahead, His gift of happiness and contentment, and also

the comfort of knowing that trials end when God calls us to heaven, where there is no illness or suffering.

A believing husband

Dealing with a Mental Health Crisis

Those who work in a crisis intake area of an emergency room are often the first health care personnel to have contact with someone in crisis. As with medical emergencies, there are times when psychiatric emergencies exist, and it is then imperative that emergency services are called.

What are signs that an individual may be in or entering a mental health crisis? When is it appropriate to seek mental health crisis services?

A person may have thoughts of self-harm, causing harm to others, or suicide—or symptoms of such: saying goodbyes, paying debts, abruptly quitting a job, impulsively buying firearms, etc. Or, there may be a drastic change in behaviors or interactions. A person may have irrational fears or paranoia, or be losing touch with reality. He or she may exhibit dangerous or impulsive behaviors, or may be experiencing psychotic symptoms, perhaps seeing things that others don't see or hear. It's appropriate to seek mental health crisis services whenever these symptoms are noticed or suspected.

What can individuals or family members expect when they seek mental health crisis services?

Persons seeking mental health crisis services should be able to expect a thorough, accurate assessment, an impartial recommendation for appropriate level-of-care, and information regarding such.

What are ways that family and friends can help to support a loved one during a mental health crisis?

It's very important to support a loved one without condemnation or judgment. Assure the loved one that seeking help is in their best interest, and continue to offer encouragement and participation throughout the process.

What should you not do during a crisis? Don't ignore warning signs. Don't panic, but try to remain calm. Don't attempt to diagnose serious mental illness with web resources, like webMD or Google. Don't judge or threaten the person who could be in a crisis situation. Don't give up or lose hope. Help is available.

Guy Waaraniemi

RN working in a psychiatric emergency setting