



Hope in the Midst of Depression

It was the spring of 1995 and Spring Breakaway was just around the corner! Normally, this event was the highlight of my year. I have always looked forward to teaching at this very special retreat for women in Fort Lauderdale, Florida where I live. But not this year. I didn't even want to go and I certainly did not want to teach!

I felt completely empty and totally drained. My energy was gone. My heart and mind seemed paralyzed. I was absolutely exhausted in every way. But then, I really had a right to feel that way! After all, it had been a non-stop year for me.

My husband, Dan, was the Pastor/Teacher of Flamingo Road Church, a contemporary, seeker-sensitive ministry in Fort Lauderdale that had exploded in growth that year and begun meeting in multiple services. I attended every service, going early to welcome newcomers and staying late to smooth any ruffled feathers that came my way. We were in the process of transitioning from a very traditional church to a very contemporary one. Change is always hard but this experience had been a nightmare! I had never encountered such opposition. I had never been the target of such criticism. I had never known such rejection as people that I thought were my friends attacked my husband, his integrity, his heart, his vision! It seemed as if there was always someone waiting in line to question and criticize what we were doing. I felt like a walking wound! I knew that we were being obedient to what God had called us to do, but it seemed that many disagreed. I was hurt and angry and did not know what to do with those emotions.

Music has always been an important part of my life. In the past, music had been a source of great joy and healing as well as a precious avenue of service. In hard times and in good times, I would sit down at the piano and sing it all out! But lately, I had grown to hate Tuesdays and Thursdays, the days when I taught twenty piano and voice students how to serve God joyfully with their musical gifts. I felt like a hypocrite! Now I, the teacher, found myself dreading each weekend and my own responsibilities as the church pianist. Singing was no longer the overflow of a daughter's full heart, but the hollow performance of a spiritual chore.

I had been traveling a great deal, speaking at conferences and retreats for women. I directed the very active ladies' ministry of our church and taught a Community Bible Study each Tuesday morning. At least two or three times a week, I met with women in crisis who needed a listening ear, a caring heart and a solution for the problems that they were facing. It was only natural for these women to expect me to listen, to care and to hand out answers filled with great wisdom, since my husband was a pastor and everyone knows that a pastor's wife has her act together!

My son, Jered, was eleven and my daughter, Danna, was eight at the time. They kept me running with school and church activities, homework, soccer games, baseball practices and the daily consuming race of childhood. I had always loved being a mom, but lately, even this role seemed to feel more like an unwelcome burden.

My house was spotless. It had to be! After all, a perfect woman has a perfect house! Since we lived in a neighborhood near our church, the possibility of people dropping by was an every day occurrence. We also hosted the New Members Reception at our home each month as well as a Christmas Open House for the entire church! I was used to being the one that gave help. I was always the one that others came to for strength and direction. I was the great encourager - the caregiver. People who knew me well would describe me as someone who was very strong. All of my life, I was driven to excel in everything and if I couldn't do it perfectly, I didn't do it! I was a raging perfectionist... legalistically disciplined...with little sympathy for weak people. Now I, the strong one, couldn't get out of bed. The simplest decision sent me into a panic. The great wisdom-giver could not compile a grocery list. The woman who taught hundreds of women couldn't bring herself to face crowds of any size. The large tasks of life were out of the question and even the simplest tasks seemed like huge mountains.

Meals, housework and even shopping were all left undone. If I managed to get out of bed and get dressed by the time my kids got home from school, the day was a success. All I wanted to do was sleep and to be left alone! I was paralyzed! I had fallen into a deep, dark, nameless pit. I had no idea how I got there. And even more frightening was the stark reality that I had no idea how to get out!

I decided that I was just tired. All I needed was some rest. With that hope in hand, we escaped the hot, humid flat lands of Florida to enjoy three weeks in the cool mountains of North Carolina, my favorite vacation spot! That vacation is a complete blur. I remember very little about our time there. My two responses, when asked any question during those three weeks, were "I don't know!" and "I don't care!" My children knew something was terribly wrong. They had never seen their mom so quiet...so still...and so sad. Dan listened patiently as I poured out my fear and confusion, night after night. There seemed to be no answers - only questions. I could see the growing fear in his eyes that I felt in my own heart. We had never been here before. It was a foreign land...unfamiliar waters that we had no idea how to navigate. It was very simple. I was in serious trouble and I needed help.

As each day grew darker, Dan and I both realized that we had to come up with a plan - quickly! We decided I would see a Christian counselor that Dan often referred people to and in whom he had great confidence. Her name was Betty Wells. My first visit with Betty was uneventful as far as I could tell and a total waste of time! She did, however, accomplish one thing. She named my pit.

Clinical depression was a problem that I knew little about. Evidently, it was an enemy that strong, committed Christians were not supposed to encounter, because I had never heard anyone in the church even talk about depression much less admit that they struggled with it. I recoiled at the thought of such blatant weakness in my life. I felt ashamed of what was obviously a great failure on my part, but I was very desperate and willing to do whatever it took to climb out of that pit! I also knew that for once in my life, I could not make this journey alone. Over the next several months, Betty and Dan, along with many others, climbed down into that dark, slimy pit with me and became God with skin on! They sounded the alarm and gathered the troops!

Today, I can say with the certainty of an experienced pit dweller, that there is a way out! I am not a psychologist. I am not a bible scholar. I am just like many of you who are

desperately seeking light and freedom from the darkness. I simply want to share my heart, my pain, my victory ... and my journey out of my pit!

In the midst of those dismal days, God gently whispered fresh hope to my weak and wounded spirit. He nurtured and grew that tiny sliver of hope until it became a sure and solid foundation upon which He has built a new life, a stronger life, a better life! God gave that hope to me in the darkness but it has become an even more precious certainty in the light. This same certain hope can be yours today!

That hope is found in Psalm 40:1-3 and says "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord."

I have good news for you! I believe that one reason God allowed me to experience the pit of depression is to help others find the way out. I want to say to those of you who are in that pit – and to those of you who are peering over the edge of that pit wondering how to help someone you love - that you do not have to be a prisoner of the dark! You do not have to stay in your pit! You do not have to stand helplessly by while a friend or family member drowns in the darkness of depression. We were meant to dwell in the light! So, lift up your head...open up your heart and listen for the voice of the One who knows you best and loves you most! He can and will bring you out of the dark!

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