

Living Room

Devotionals for
people living with
mood disorders

Book 2

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DEVOTIONALS Book 2

Samples for *Living Room* Facilitators

This collection of devotionals consists of some I've put together for use with my Brentwood Park Alliance Church group. Although you might want to use some of these with your own *Living Room*, I share them with you as samples of what kind of thing has worked for us.

My devotionals usually come together as a result of my own experience with bipolar disorder and how God helps me deal with it. They come from my reading of scripture and other Christian literature. Once you get started you will no doubt find your own material to present, material that will reflect your own personality.

I try to encourage as much discussion as time will allow. This is the most valuable part of devotional time. Go through the questions slowly, giving members lots of time to think and respond.

I hope you will find this material useful. Please feel free to photocopy them and to use them as hand-outs for use with your group.

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ME TOO

You are not Alone

In their book *Jesus Wants to Save Christians* (Zondervan, 2008) Rob Bell and Don Golden quote Anne Lamott who said that the most powerful sermon in the world is two words: "me too." Then they go on to write:

Me too.

*When you are struggling,
when you are hurting,
wounded, limping, doubting,
questioning, barely hanging on,
moments away from another relapse,
and somebody can identify with you -
someone knows the temptations that are at your door,
somebody has felt the pain you are feeling,
when someone can look you in the eyes and say, 'Me too,'
and they actually mean it -
it can save you.*

*When you aren't judged,
or lectured,
or looked down upon,
but somebody demonstrates that they get it,
that they know what it's like,
that you aren't alone,
that's 'me too.'*

And isn't that what Living Room is all about? Isn't that what makes it work so well? Isn't that what makes us like a church? What Jesus intended the church to be?

THE LIVING EUCHARIST

The meaning of Eucharist: Jesus is God's good gift to the world.
His body broken for us.
His blood shed for us.

Yes, Jesus also knows what it's like to suffer. He can identify with us. He can say "Me too" as well.

In 2 Corinthians 4:8-10, Paul said:

"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body".

Rob Bell wrote, "A Christian is a living Eucharist, allowing her body to be broken and her blood to be poured out for the healing of the world."

We at *Living Room* do not simply have to be victims of our disorder.

- How can we go outside the walls of this group – these meetings we have – and share what we learn here – to love and to accept others?...to pour out what we have received from God and help heal others?

It goes back to listening to others with empathy and being able to say, "You're not alone," doesn't it?

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

“WHAT DO YOU WANT?” A CURE OR HEALING?

- If Jesus were to ask you, “What do you want me to do for you?” what would you ask him for?

Jesus asked that of a blind man called Bartimaeus:

As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (that is, the son of Timaeus), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.”

So they called to the blind man, “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you.” Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

“What do you want me to do for you?” Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see.”

“Go,” said Jesus, “your faith has healed you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Mark 10:46-52

- Do you think it’s possible for Jesus to cure you? ...to heal you? What’s the difference?

I believe that God can heal us even though He may not take away our mood disorder. We need to open our hearts and bring the pain before Him in faith and let Him touch it and heal it. We can come to terms and find peace in Him.

And what do we do while we wait for healing? God can use us as we are – right now. We don’t have to wait. When we work for Him, serving others, healing will follow. Perhaps what we need to ask God for is strength to serve Him – for His love to share with others.

There is a neat quote from Helen Keller that shows how she found healing in a life without the ability to hear or see. She expressed her gratitude to God because in that life she experienced wholeness. *"I thank God for my handicaps for, through them, I have found myself, my work, and my God."*

In his internet article, *Heal Your Life or Cure it*, Wil Langford wrote:

"To me, healing means reaching a point of wholeness and peace, no matter what the physical condition or situation may be. I believe it is possible to have a terminal illness, but to be healed though the illness eventually takes the life. On the other hand, to be cured means that the illness goes away or is "fixed."

"Sometimes a person survives something as serious as cancer, then needs time to heal, even though he or she may have been cured...Healing will mean taking time to think about what happened and to reach conclusions about life and death and to consider the lessons learned by the experience. While a cure may be found in a short period of time, healing can take a longer time but lead to a better quality of life.

"Healing is closure, but does not mean that the lessons learned are over or that more cannot be learned. Healing leads to personal and spiritual growth. Curing means that we get to live longer and to work on healing. I sometimes think that we spend a lifetime healing.

"While curing comes from an outside source, such as a wonder drug, healing always comes from the same source, from within. When a loved one is sick or dying, first we want a cure, so that we do not lose that one, but ultimately, we realize that death is inevitable and what we really all need in the end is healing. From a place of wholeness we can face all of life's challenges."

PRAYING FOR HEALING

Here are some ideas for how you can go to God in search of healing. Pray with a sincere belief that God is a source of comfort and love:

- Pray for healing. Tell God your heart's desire. Faith works. Studies have shown that faith "aligns body, mind, and spirit, and galvanizes the healing processes built into our bodies." (Philip Yancey)
- Tell God how you feel. Pray prayers of lament. Eugene Peterson, author of *The Message*, a paraphrase of the Bible, calculated that two-thirds of the Psalms are laments.

- Confess your sins and ask people for forgiveness. This clears away self-absorption and clears obstructions in your relationship with God. It will give you a sense of freedom in your prayers.
- God is always with us, whether we feel his presence or not. Pray that God will help you feel his presence.
- Pray with compassion for others who are suffering. It will help take the focus off yourself.
- Express gratitude. It helps relieve stress. “Medical research is discovering that gratitude is one emotional trait most likely to benefit physical health and recovery.” (Philip Yancey)
- Ask for the strength to accept and endure. Pray that you’ll find meaning in the suffering.
- Ask for the grace to live out of a spirit of love.

OVERCOMING THE REJECTION COMPLEX

Although I feel confident and well accepted most of the time, I still too frequently run into times when I sense rejection. Is it my mood disorder – my bipolar disorder – that makes me feel that way? I have a feeling that it may be – at least, I believe that I may be more sensitive than a person without a mood disorder might be.

I

THE FEAR OF REJECTION: The fear of not receiving approval, the fear of not being accepted is a motivating factor for so many decisions in life, even in our ordinary day-to-day lives.

REJECTION PRODUCES A NUMBER OF EMOTIONS IN US:

- The feeling of impotence and inadequacy
- The feeling of being unaccepted
- The feeling of doing something wrong or giving the wrong impression

But look at Jesus' response to rejection in his own hometown:

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

“Where did this man get these things? They asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him that he even does miracles! Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.

Mark 6:1-6

The irony of Jesus' response to rejection is that He faced it not with fear but with amazement. He did not even deny rejection. He did not try to prove Himself by performing a special miracle or anything. He simply

acknowledged the rejection with a note of amazement. Then, He picked up where he left off...He went about among the villages teaching.

Jesus did not fall into the trap of feeling responsible for other people's opinions or other people's feelings. He did not fall into the trap of trying to justify Himself. Nor did he cave into and give up or protest or stomp out.

HOW TO OVERCOME THE REJECTION COMPLEX

1. **Know who you are and what you have in Christ.** Jesus knew who He was and where He was going.
2. **Be consumed with your destiny and purpose in life.** Jesus was totally consumed with His mission and purpose in life. His face was set as flint. Even though He knew He was headed into unpleasant waters He was firmly fixed on His mission in life. Because He was so consumed with His mission and purpose He was able to see this event through a different paradigm. How many of us are truly consumed with God's purpose being fulfilled in our lives?

“NO ONE IS INDISPENSABLE”

- This is a statement we hear often. Do you agree with it?

This is what Jesus had to say about this statement:

“What is the price of five sparrows? A couple of pennies? Yet God does not forget a single one of them. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are more valuable to him than a whole flock of sparrows.”
Luke 12:6 (NLT)

And in *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1997) Nazi war concentration survivor, Viktor Frankl wrote,

"One should not search for an abstract mission in life. Everyone has his (or her) own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it."

Each of us is indispensable as persons of value and worth to the people whose lives we touch. And we are of great importance to God. No one can replace us because each of us is unique in who we are and in what we have to offer. All people are valuable and useful in God’s eyes.

*(God) picks up the poor from out of the dirt,
rescues the wretched who’ve been thrown out with
the trash,
Seats them among the honored guest,
a place of honor among the brightest and the best.
He gives childless couples a family,
gives them joy as the parents of children.*
Psalm 113:5-9 (MSG)

Frankl: "We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a human achievement."

- Can you turn the seriousness of your mood disorder and turn it into something of value?

Jesus told Paul:

My grace is enough; it's all you need.

My strength comes into its own in your weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9 (MSG)

Robert Louis Stevenson was very clear about what he thought on the topic. He said,

“So long as we love, we serve. So long as we are loved by others I would almost say we are indispensable; and no man is useless while he has a friend.”

PRACTISING GOD'S PRESENCE THROUGH GIVING THANKS

One of the best ways to practise God's presence – to feel Him close as you go through your day – is to pray, especially prayers of thanks. King David knew this well. We see this throughout his Psalms. Psalm 100 is a good example of how close He felt to God. How he appreciated what God was to him and what God did for him.

*On your feet now—applaud God!
Bring a gift of laughter,
Sing yourselves into his presence.*

*Know this: GOD is God, and God, GOD.
He made us; we didn't make him.
We're his people, his well-tended sheep.*

*Enter with the password: 'Thank you!'
Make yourselves at home, talking praise.
Thank him. Worship him.*

*For GOD is sheer beauty,
All-generous in love,
Loyal always and ever.*

Psalm 100(The Message)

In his book *The Rest of God* (W Publishing, 2006), author Mark Buchanan talks about coming into the presence of God through thankfulness. He refers to C.S. Lewis's *Narnia Chronicles* and the wardrobe through which the children found themselves in a magical land:

“The best way I know to embody ... Godward orientation is thankfulness. Thankfulness is a secret passageway into a room you can't find any other way. It is the wardrobe into Narnia. It allows us to discover the rest of God—those dimensions of God's world, God's presence, God's character that are hidden, always, from the thankless.”

Buchanan goes on to say that the first orientation to finding God's rest "...is to practice, mostly through thankfulness, the presence of God until you are utterly convinced of his goodness and sovereignty, until he's bigger, and you find your rest in him alone."

Through thanksgiving—in all circumstances—we can find peace, rest, joy. As the Bible says:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

CHRISTMAS LOOKING FORWARD

I almost always have trouble with depression at Christmas time. I know what it is...I think. It's all the pressure of having to do this...and having to do that. I *have* to bake. I *have* to buy just the right gifts. I *have* to cook a big Christmas dinner. I *have* to have the house clean. I *have* to decorate.

In the meantime, all those bringing-me-back-to-the-past songs play in the background...everywhere. It's Christmas in every corner of the world around me, beckoning me to "rejoice."

Then why do I feel such a deep sadness?

I'm not alone with these feelings, I know. A blogging pal going by the name of Merely Me had this response when the Christmas season was over: "Can I tell you that I am simply giddy that it is over? It's twue...it's twue! Christmas is over...YAY! I can breathe easier."

- How do *you* feel about Christmas this year?
- Do you feel the kind of relief that Merely Me does when it's all over?
- If Christmas was difficult for you last year, how can you make it better this year?
- Is it possible to make it better?

What we need is a reminder of God's peace. At such busy and hectic times it will help us to remember Bible passages like this one:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus....whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is

admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” Philippians 4:6-8

We will be encouraged to actually look forward to the Season if we can look forward to the bigger picture. If we can only keep in mind why God has given us life and keep that in focus, not feeling we have to keep up with everyone, but doing what is most important to *us*. When I plan and look forward to a good and exciting project for after the Christmas season is over, I feel better about everything.

The apostle Paul encourages us:

“...I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me....one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:12-14

“...I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward – to Jesus. I’m off and running, and I’m not turning back. So let’s keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us.” Philippians 3:12-14 (The Message)

- What does God have for you next year?

- Are you obeying the urges God gives you to do things?
 1. To create something, using the talents God has given you?
 2. To try something new you’ve always wanted to?
 3. To grow by learning something new?
 4. To help someone?
 5. Or?

I hope that looking forward to all the things you can do when all the busyness is over will help you cope and actually enjoy the celebrations of Christ’s birth.

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

A while ago, Sharon U. wrote the following in an email to the editor of the Mood Disorders Association of BC newsletter, copied to me:

“For people ages 15 - 44, in the prime of their lives, Depression is the #2 reason for disability worldwide. Bipolar Disorder is the #6 reason, and approximately *30% of people with bipolar disorder face being off work permanently - that's a lot of people!* Yes, there are treatments, but obviously they are far from perfect, given these numbers.

“I personally feel discouragement, a loss of identity, and a lot of shame and guilt having been off work for this long

“It's good to have hope, but if you're not one of the 'success stories', it's hard not to feel like a personal failure. I'm wondering How can I actually feel OK about accepting this new life, and be at peace with it.

“Maybe being permanently disabled isn't necessarily a bad thing? That is where a great discussion could start in our groups and in the newsletter and/or web site - how to rebuild a life around our permanent disability.”

- Can you identify?
- How can we find purpose and meaning when we're so limited in what we can do?
- What have you done that you've found meaningful?
- What's been frustrating?

LIVING FOR GOD

When we live for God – when we give ourselves to God – He will make clear what He wants to do in and through our lives. When we let God mold us, little by little, life will become meaningful.

The prophet Isaiah wrote about how we can be molded by God, our potter. *“Still, God, you are our Father, we’re the clay and you’re our potter. All of us are what you made us.”* Isaiah 64:8 (The Message)

ALLOWING OURSELVES TO BE MOLDED

- Have you ever had an urge to do something that wouldn’t go away? Did you? Or did you procrastinate and do something easier – something safer?
- Has anything ever really bothered you? Has anything ever broken your heart...enough that you wanted to do something about it? Did you? Or did you decide to leave the problem up to others to solve?

In a sermon, Pastor Don Dyck said: “If something really breaks your heart, God is saying, ‘Do something about it!’” My experience has shown that it’s indeed true. And as God leads us in this way – as we respond to His call to us – we are molded.

There are times in our life that what worked for us in the past isn’t working anymore. We enter a different season. We allow God to start molding us all anew. Those can be exciting times.

[God gave a message to Jeremiah:] He said, *“Go down to the shop where clay pots and jars are made. I will speak to you while you are there.”* So I did as he told me and found the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making did not turn out as he had hoped, so the potter squashed the jar into a lump of clay and started again. Then the Lord gave me this message: *“O Israel, can I not do to you as this potter has done to his clay? As the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand.”* - Jeremiah 18:1-6 (NTL)

BRING ALL YOU ARE

Pastor Don Dyck said:

“God has been preparing you. He has been at work in your life long before you even knew there was a God out there. You may have had a painful life, experiences you wish you could forget, but if you give your life to God – surrender your pains to God ...he can make good things come out of the bad. He doesn’t make bad things happen, but if you give your life over to God he can make good come out of them....Out of the greatest pain God can bring the greatest work.”

Coming back to Sharon’s original question: *“Maybe being permanently disabled isn’t necessarily a bad thing?”*

THE WAY OF LOVE

Much has been written about the kind of love we as Christ-followers should have, especially, of course, in the Bible. One favourite passage is 1 Corinthians 13. Here I quote how Eugene Peterson paraphrases it in *The Message*:

If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.

If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing.

If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

*Love never gives up.
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always "me first,"
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.*

Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be cancelled.

When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.

We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the

weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU:

- Are you able to trust “steadily?”
- If not, what holds you back?
- Are you able to hope “unswervingly?”
- What holds you back?
- How can we learn to love “extravagantly?”

The next verse, 1 Corinthians 14:1 in the Message says: *“Go after a life of love as if your life depended on it – because it does. Give yourselves to the gifts God gives you.”*

In his book *The Divine Conspiracy* (Harper Collins, 1997) Dallas Willard writes about 1 Corinthians 13:

“But Paul is plainly saying – look at his words – that it is love that does these things, not us, [not as clear in the Message; check NIV] and that what we are to do is to ‘pursue love.’ As we ‘catch’ love, we then find that these things are actually being done by us. These things, these godly actions and behaviours, are the result of dwelling in love....Paul’s message is exactly the same as Jesus’ message.” (underlining mine)

What can we do to “catch” this kind of love?

What I have found in my life, is that a prayer request that God loves to answer is:

“Please God, fill me with your love and help me share that love with others.”

And when we pray that prayer with all sincerity, we will find ourselves loving others, without even trying. It’s not our doing; it’s God’s.

INTIMACY WITH GOD

We've all had a strong longing. Like when we feel lonely and wish for someone to talk to.

- How do you feel when you long for someone to talk to? How do you feel when everyone you most love isn't available?

God has a longing too. Something author Brennan Manning refers to as "*The Furious Longing of God*" in his book by that name. God longs for intimacy with us. We've been told countless times and know He loves us more than we could ever imagine. More than we can imagine, yes. But could we try to understand somehow? Maybe we could learn to understand how much God loves us and longs for us to spend time with Him.

Think of Jesus, God made human:

"...being in very nature God, [He] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross."

Philippians 2:6-8

Think of how He taught and how He healed and how He loved, even to the point of suffering a painful death for us on the cross. Could there be any better example of love than Him? Imagine if Jesus came to eat with us at our Living Room table. What would He say? What would He share? How would He show compassion for our pain?

This is a "peer" support group. That means that we all share experience of emotional pain.

- How would Jesus fit in with us? Would He understand what we are going through? Might He even share with us some of His own pain? Do you think He would?

Although the word "furious" is often used to express a kind of anger, it has another meaning as well. As in "a furious storm," the love of God suggests intense energy or fury. Manning shares how G.K. Chesterton spoke of the

"furious love of God" describing the enormous vitality and strength of God, "seeking union with us."

When you hear the phrase, "God's furious longing for us:"

- Does that make you feel you "should" pray?
- Does that make you feel you "must" pray?
- Does it give you a desire or longing to pray?

Quite a few years ago - in the midst of a depression - I called a friend and, in an emotional state, told her how ashamed I was of myself. In response to her questions, I told her I didn't want to live anymore. I had been having suicidal thoughts. She expressed her concern for me and told me she would always love me, no matter what I did or said. How amazed I was to hear her say that, especially in light of how I had been feeling! How deeply that touched me! And I know that didn't come from her alone. It came from God.

It took awhile for this to sink in, but over the next while I gradually started feeling joy. Knowing how much I was loved gave me a joy that grew - a treasure within me - a treasure I now wanted to share others.

My depression still comes back periodically. I still feel shame periodically. I often don't feel good about myself. That's all part of my disorder. But I am convinced in the end, that God does love me and longs to spend time with me. And I long to spend time with Him. I always want to be reminded - and to fully sense - how much God loves me.

God says to each of us, "I'll always love you, no matter what you do or what you say or how you feel. I long to have you close to me."

- Would you like to pray?

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Ephesians 3:17-19

LIKE A TREE PLANTED BY THE WATER

Jeremiah 17: 5-8 This is what the Lord says:

*“Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who depends on flesh for his strength
and whose heart turns away from the Lord.
He will be like a bush in the wastelands;
he will not see prosperity when it comes.
He will dwell in the parched places of the desert,
in a salt land where no one lives.*

*“But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence is in him.
He will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.
It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit.”*

- Can you keep on trusting when the heat comes? When the drought comes? Can you hang onto the confidence you have in the Lord?
- Can you be like that tree planted by the water? Your roots firmly fixed in a faith in Jesus Christ? Can you go through a drought – or through depression – without worry?
- Can you bear fruit and be productive even when you're having trouble emotionally? What's holding you back?
- How can we hang onto the confidence in the Lord when we're going through trials? Can we continue to trust Him? To rely on Him?
- And is faith the same as trust? Is it possible to believe in God but not trust Him?

- What happens when we do continue to place our trust in Him during times of trials?

Jeremiah 17:7 says: ***“We will be blessed.”***

Jeff Manion, in his book *The Land Between: Finding God in Difficult Transitions* asks:

“Is it possible to possess a vital faith that prompts you to be at your best when things are at their worst? Is it possible for the best version of you to emerge while you are passing through a season of profound disappointment, unnerving chaos, or debilitating pain?”

Manion likens the 40 years the Israelites spent in the desert after they were freed from their slavery in Egypt to a time of disappointment and debilitating pain (like depression). He believes a time like this is the time that God does some of His deepest work in our lives. The time in the desert was required for God to do His transformational work in the Israelites, to prepare them for what lay ahead.

He writes,

“Many seasoned spiritual advisers propose that this is the only space in which radical, transformational growth occurs. God intends for us to emerge from this land radically reshaped. But the process of transformational growth will not occur automatically. Our response to God while in the Land Between is what will determine whether our journey through this desert will result in deep, positive growth or spiritual decline.”

“While offering us a greenhouse for growth, the Land Between can also be a desert where our faith goes to die – if we let it. The habits of the heart that we foster in this space – our responses and reactions – will determine whether the Land Between results in spiritual life or spiritual death.”

“We choose.”

- Have you ever felt yourself transformed or changed after a depressive episode?
- If so, do you remember how you responded to God during that depressed period?

What does the Bible say about what our heart's attitude should be during times of depression?

Psalm 40:1 Wait *patiently* for the Lord. (He will hear your cry and lift you out of the mud and mire.)

Psalm 37:3 "*Trust* in the Lord and *do good*."

Psalm 13 Cry out to God, but then turn around and say "*But I trust in your unfailing love*."

Psalm 28:6-7 "Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; *my heart trusts in him and I am helped*."

ANGER WITH GOD

- Do you ever get angry at God for your suffering with mood disorders?
- Does it help?
- Is it right to do so?

Job is someone who is traditionally held up as an example of someone who loved God but suffered from depression. In his anguish he became angry and frustrated with God. His friend Eliphaz saw him this way:

“Why has your heart carried you away, and why do your eyes flash, so that you vent your rage against God and pour out such words from your mouth?” Job 15:12-13

- What happens within us when we become angry at God?

In frustration, Job asked God *“why have you done this to me?”* But God was frustrated with Job. It’s *his* right to ask questions – not ours. Job went too far when he insisted he had a right to an explanation.

“...the Lord answered Job out of the storm. He said: “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me.” Job 38:1-3

God goes on to express his awesome nature. He reminds Job of who he is. At home read Job 38:4 – 41:34.

Job repents for having questioned God:

“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” Job 42:5-6

Other characters in the Bible who became angry at God:

- Jonah: *“But the Lord replied ‘Have you any right to be angry?’*
Jonah 4:4
- Jeremiah accused God of lying: *“Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?”* Jeremiah 15:18 Immediately, God told him to repent and stop uttering foolish words. (15:19)

It’s normal to sometimes feel anger at God. Just don’t stay there. You might end up bitter and distant from God. Many of David’s Psalms are examples of expressions of anger and frustration with God, but they usually end with expressions of hope and praise.

Psalm 22, for example:

*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?
Oh my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but am not silent.
Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the praise of Israel.
In you our fathers put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
They cried to you and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not disappointed.
But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by men and despised by the people.”* (1-6)

*“I will declare your name to my brothers;
In the congregation I will praise you....”* (22...)

From Psalm 13:

*“How long oh Lord will you forget me
How long oh Lord will you look the other way.
How long oh Lord must I wrestle with my thoughts
And every day have such sorrow in my heart
Look on me and answer oh God my Father.
Bring light to my darkness before they see me fall.*

*But I trust in your unfailing love. Yes my heart will rejoice.
Still I sing of your unfailing love.
You have been good; you will be good to me.”*

THE PURSUIT OF JOY

Joy is something that is unaffected by circumstances. It's not brought on like happiness as in winning a game, getting a big raise, or when we have a great opportunity present itself. Happiness is fleeting and doesn't have much depth. But joy is a state of mind and an attitude of the heart. Joy is deep. It is a settled state of contentment, confidence and hope. Joy brings a sense of peace.

The first eleven verses of Philippians will help us understand what joy is:

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, . . . It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:3-5, 7-8)

The writer of this letter, Paul, is joyful because of his ability to share with others who partner with him in a faith in Jesus Christ.

I know I feel joyful at church on Sundays when I worship together with other believers. There's something about the joining with others to praise God that makes me deeply glad. (or – in biblical language – it makes me “rejoice”) A shared joy is a deeper joy.

- In what other ways do you share joy with fellow Christians?

And...one of the greatest reasons we have for this joy is what Paul wrote in verse 6:

...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

- How does that statement make you feel?
- Can you think of any other Bible verses that make you feel joyful?

Joy increases with time, as we stay close to God, reading His word, developing our relationship with Him.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God. [Philippians 1:9-11]

- One source I studied suggests that joyful people lead a more stable life. Given our disorders, do you think that's true?

- How can learning to be joyful help us gain stability?

The neat thing about joy is that we can *learn* to have it. It doesn't rely on what is happening to us or around us.

- What steps can we take to have greater joy? How can we develop this attitude of the heart?