I Trust When Dark My Road
A Lutheran View of Depression

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About the Author

- Pastor @ Messiah Lutheran Church in Kenosha, Wisconsin, for 11 years
- Husband to Kathryn, father of 4 children (ages 9, 7, 4 & 2)
- Graduate of Seward and Fort Wayne
- Deaconess intern supervisor (once)
Good Friday

In God my faithful God,  
I trust when dark my road;  
Great woes may overtake me,  
Yet He will not forsake me. 
My troubles He can alter;  
His hand lets nothing falter.  
(LSB 745:1)

Disclaimer

I am not a

- DOCTOR
- PSYCHIATRIST
- THERAPIST/PSYCHOLOGIST
The perspective is..

- Personal
- Pastoral
- As both the receiver and the giver of care

No one ever learned anything apart from suffering.
- Malcolm Muggeridge

Building Up to the Fall
The Disease

Bow down Your gracious ear to me And hear my cry, my prayer, my plea; Make haste for my protection, For woes and fear Surround me here. Help me in my affliction.

(LSB 734:2)

What is Clinical Depression?

An all encompassing low or severe mood that is often accompanied by a lost of self-esteem, interest in the outside world, and a lack of interest in pleasure or any regular activities.
Other descriptions

- darkness
- a fog
- walking through thick water
- seeing the world in the faintest of grays
- the noonday demon
- extreme “incurvatus se”
- chemically induced narcissism
- Mental paralysis

What are the different elements?

- Physiological
- Psychological
- Situational
- Spiritual
Why is the church worker at risk?

4 Reasons

SUPERPASTOR
Satan

Living with Depression

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
Psalm 73:26 (ESV)
Impact on Spiritual life

Some of the spiritual effects...

- Can’t read
- Can’t hear God’s Word
- Anger at God
- Self-absorption
- Guilt/Shame
- Hard to go to church at all
From the wife of a pastor...

It is so hard to understand how depression changes everything about how a person sees the world. I imagine you will also discuss the spiritual confusion that depression/mental illness can create. My relationship with God has been deeper, more primitive, more fraught, and sometimes so painfully distant in the midst of depression. The law is misery to me when I am deeply depressed; grace absurd and life-giving.

From Robert Preus...

Pastors who suffer stress and affliction, like any Christian in similar circumstances, may be tempted to look to their faith as a reason for self-esteem and assurance, rather than to the only object of faith, Christ and His pardoning Word. They conclude that failure and inability to cope are due to weak faith or the lack of faith altogether. They are viewing faith as their act rather than as their reception of God's mercy.
Reception:
The Story of Merle

- Raised 5 Daughters by himself
- Ever present, ever serving, ever positive
- Cancer
- “Pastor, I don’t want to be a burden on anyone!”
- “Sometimes the greatest gift you can give is to let others serve you.”

The Confessions...

Thus the worship and divine service of the Gospel is to receive from God gifts; on the contrary, the worship of the Law is to offer and present our gifts to God...This passage, too, brings the greatest consolation, as the chief worship of the Gospel is to wish to receive remission of sins, grace, and righteousness. Of this worship Christ says, John 6, 40: This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life. (Ap III, paragraph 189)
Impact on Family & Relationships

The Megaphone
Impact on Congregational Life

How does depression impact your ability to serve?

- Energy
- Ability to interact with others
- Patience
- Lack of Sympathy/ Empathy
- Self-Absorption
- Time Management
- Forgetfulness
- Related question: whom do you tell and when?
How does the congregation respond to a suffering church worker?

- Confusion
- Guilt
- Love
- Frustration
- Anger
- Trust
- Mistrust
- Uncertainty about their role

Hope
Physical
(putting the pieces together)

• Medication
• Light
• Exercise
• Food

Mental

• Therapy
• Rethinking expectations
• Clarify Expectations
• Understand you are not a goddess that can do anything anytime
Spiritual

- Receiving God’s grace changes how you think about yourself
- Confession
- Intercession
- Regular consultation and encouragement in the Word

Personal

- You will learn who your friends really are
- Learning how to receive mercy from others is the best training ground for learning how to show mercy
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END OF DAY ONE

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DAY TWO

Saturday, June 26, 2010
An Approach to Serving the Mentally Ill

- Pray
- Talk (and listen!) to them
- DON'T try to simply talk them out of it
- Talk to their spouse or family
- Give them space, but don’t be too far away
- NEVER GIVE UP

The “Team” for Healing
The Team for Healing

Pastor

Doctor
(preferably psychiatrist)

CHRIST

Advocates
Family
Friends
Deaconess

Therapist
(Psychologist or counselor)

Who will mother this work?

- Spouse
- Other Family
- Pastor
- Doctor or Counselor
- You
The Challenges to Quarterbacking/Mothering

- Walking the fine lines between serving/leading and intruding
- Experience vs. Expertise
- Serving from below vs. directing from above
- Finding the gaps or holes in healing

Three Case Studies
#1 The Deaconess

#2 The Pastor
#3 The Parishoner

Conclusions and Implications