

# Confessions of a Depressed Christian

*How a Pastor Survived Depression  
and How You Can Too*

Jason R. McNaughten

Confessions of a Depressed Christian

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## About the Author

Jason is married to his lovely wife Lori and has two daughters. He has pastored churches in Missouri and Louisiana and is currently the pastor of First Baptist Church, New Roads, LA. He received his Master of Divinity from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and his Doctorate of Ministry from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Jason is an avid runner and has participated in numerous 5k's and marathons.

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## Introduction

Depression can be shameful. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne is caught in an adulterous affair. She must wear a scarlet “A” on her dress. The “A” is a symbol of shame for her sin. I have never committed adultery, but I have struggled with depression. At times I have felt like an outcast, as if I was wearing a “D” for depression, rather than an “A” for adultery. I have learned that I have no reason to be ashamed of my depression. You have no reason to be ashamed either. If you are a Christian, you especially have no reason to live in shame. You can be a solid, Bible-believing, Christ-loving Christian and still struggle with depression.

I am a Christian who has struggled with depression. I also have the unique perspective of being a pastor who has struggled with depression. I still wrestle with depression at times, but I had an especially dark time in my life. The following recounts my dark days of depression and how I survived, and still survive today. **I confess, “I was hesitant to write this book.”** Making private struggles public is not something I am comfortable doing. I have decided to share my struggle in spite of my misgivings. It has resulted in the book you now have in your possession. Perhaps you are dealing with depression, or have a loved one who is depressed. Maybe you are just curious about Christianity and depression. It is my hope and prayer that this book will be of great encouragement to you.

Writing this book was not as easy as anticipated. It is far more real and personal than planned. I hope you can relate to and appreciate my transparency. Writing my story has been therapeutic to my own life and soul. Perhaps it would benefit you to write your own story. Above all, I have written this to bring glory and honor to Christ. My story is not as important as THE STORY, the story of God’s love through Jesus Christ. To Him be glory and honor. I have not written this book from the perspective of a professional counselor, psychiatrist, or medical doctor. My perspective is a personal and spiritual one. I am a follower of Christ and a pastor of a local church. These are the confessions of a depressed Christian.

# Chapter 1

## MY CONFESSION

I ran 31 miles by accident. I was running a marathon, which is 26.2 miles. I missed the left turn at mile 21. It was not my first marathon. I am a seasoned veteran that made a rookie mistake. I didn't know how to get back on course. No one else knew either.

I had two choices. I could call for a race official to pick me up, which would result in a disqualification, or I could plod along and keep running. I kept running and eventually crossed the finish line. Instead of completing the marathon in less than four hours, I ran for five hours. I was disgusted when I finally finished. Now I am glad I missed the turn. I had never run more than 26.2 miles before the incident. Now I know I can run 31 miles. I suppose I could run 41 miles if need be.

Life is like running. It has its peaks and valleys, victories and defeats. How you respond makes all the difference. If life is like running, depression is an ultra-marathon. It is long and grueling. It seems like a missed turn that morphs into a miserable journey. You seem lost and don't know where the finish line is. No one can seemingly point you in the right direction either. You have two choices. You can give up, or plod along and keep going. Depression has been a real part of my life and ministry. At times I wanted to give up, but I have decided to plod along and keep going. This book is a peek into my own personal journey of depression, my missed turn if you will.

**I confess, "I am a Christian who has struggled with depression."** I admit it. It is now a matter of public record. I am not confessing a horrific sin. I have committed no serious crime. It sounds silly, but struggling with depression is not an easy confession to make. I am not ashamed of my depression, but depression does carry a certain stigma with it. To some, depression is a plague of shame, a scarlet letter that stains the soul and reputation. It is hard enough to admit being depressed. To complicate matters, I am a Christian who has struggled with depression. A depressed Christian sounds like an oxymoron. Christianity and depression are as compatible as peanut butter and gunpowder or snow storms and the Caribbean.

Christians are to be a people of joy. James wrote, in **James 1:2**, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." No matter what we face, and no matter how depressing life gets, we are to count it all joy. It does not mean we have to be excited about a certain trial or tribulation. It does mean we can respond to life's challenges and burdens with a joyful attitude. Consider the apostle Paul, a man of heroic faith. Paul had numerous trials and tribulations. He was beaten, thrown into prison, stoned, and shipwrecked. Read about the struggles and trials of Paul when you are having a crummy day. It will change your perspective. He maintained an attitude of joy in the midst of it all.

Paul wrote, in **Philippians 4:4**, "Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say rejoice." A few verses later he proclaims he is content whether he has everything or nothing. He reveals the secret in **Philippians 4:13**, "I can do all things through Him (Christ) who strengthens me." Paul practiced what he preached. For example, Acts 16 records the imprisonment of both Paul and Silas. They are not in prison for robbing a bank or cheating the government. They are chained for preaching the Gospel. It would be easy to respond

with discouragement and depression. How do they respond? They sing with joy! Depression is like being in prison. You are bound by the chains of pain and anxiety. It is hard to rejoice and count it all joy like Paul and Silas did.

Some well-intentioned Christians think depression is either a sin or a lack of faith in God. But being depressed is not a sin, nor is it always the result of a sin. One may say, for instance, “If Paul can sing with joy in prison, why should any Christian be depressed?” Someone else might reason, “If you really believe the Bible, trust Christ, and know God is in control, how could you ever be depressed? Just pray harder and read the Bible. Love Jesus and the depression will be lifted.”

Maybe you have been told that and feel like a spiritual loser. You pray, read the Bible, attend church, and still are depressed. Praying, reading the Bible, and loving Jesus are important; yet, Christians get depressed. In 2011, the Center for Disease Control revealed that at least 1 in 10 Americans struggle with depression. If your church averages 100 in attendance, for instance, odds are that at least ten of them deal with depression. Chances are someone in your family struggles as well.

Depression is not an indicator of being a spiritual loser. Depression is not a sign of being weak either. Strong, successful people get depressed. Abraham Lincoln, the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, struggled with depression. Winton Churchill, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, wrestled with depression too. Churchill referred to depression as his “black dog.” Good and godly leaders deal with depression. Martin Luther, whom God used to spark the Protestant Reformation, had fits of depression. Charles Spurgeon is known as the Prince of Preachers. Spurgeon preached to thousands, wrote an abundance of books, and was used mightily of God. He had dark times of depression. Spurgeon noted:

Fits of depression come over the most of us. Cheerful as we may be, we must at intervals be cast down. The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyous not always happy...This depression comes over me whenever the Lord is preparing a larger blessing for my ministry. The cloud is black before it breaks and overshadows before it yields its deluge of mercy. Depression has now become to me as a prophet in rough clothing, a John the Baptist heralding the nearer coming of my Lord's richer benison (blessings). So have far better men found it. The scouring of the vessel has fitted it for the Master's use.<sup>1</sup>

You are not a second-class citizen if you deal with depression. You are not on the bottom of the Christian food chain either. I have to remind myself of that reality, especially when I am depressed. It is not easy being a depressed Christian. It is certainly not easy being a depressed pastor. While burdened with depression, I have had to preach, pray, visit the sick, and leap tall buildings in a single bound. People often have unrealistic expectations of pastors. Some even see pastors as beyond human. Pastors are people too. We have bad days, headaches, and even dark times of depression. If I were Superman, depression would be my kryptonite.

I carried the shame of being a depressed Christian for a while. I also carried the shame of being a depressed pastor. My wife knew about it of course, but not my church or immediate family. God convicted me of my silence. How can I help others with depression if I remain silent about my own depression? Paul wrote, in **2 Corinthians 1:4**, that God “comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” God has indeed comforted me in times of depression. He wants to use me to comfort others who are depressed.

Perhaps you are struggling, or have struggled, with depression. Perhaps God wants to use you to encourage others. Maybe you have a family member who is depressed. Perhaps you are just curious about a pastor and his depression. I still struggle with depression at times, but I had an especially dark time in my life. The following recounts my dark days of depression and how I survived, and still survive today.

*Questions for reflection:*

1. Are you keeping your depression a secret?
2. Do you feel guilty and less of a Christian for being depressed?
- 3 Are you surprised by the depression of Luther, Spurgeon, Lincoln, and Churchill?

*Notes:*



## Chapter 2

### MY JOURNEY INTO DEPRESSION

The National Guard went on a search and rescue for my dog. Houdini, my Jack Russell Terrier, was a fuzz ball of energy. His groomer once remarked, “What do you feed him, gun powder!” The name Houdini is no coincidence. Like the great magician, he always found a way of escaping. My in-laws were in town spoiling the grandkids, so my wife and I decided to watch a movie. The plans were interrupted with a frantic phone call. Houdini had escaped. My mother-in-law and my oldest daughter searched the area. The neighbors helped too. A National Guard Armory is located less than a mile from my house. A few guardsmen took notice and sent out two or three search teams. Houdini was eventually cornered and captured.

Houdini has since passed away. He was like another member of my family. Though he loved our family, Houdini was a natural hunter. So he yearned to escape our backyard in hot pursuit of a squirrel, cat, or dog. Like Houdini, we want to be free and rejoice in God’s good creation. Depression, at times, seems like you’re fenced in. For me, I had times where I yearned to be free and live with joy. I wanted to escape the backyard of my depression. Most people get down and have brief periods of depression and discouragement. My depression far exceeded the Monday blues. The days and weeks turned into months and years.

I was not just sad. **I confess, “Depression crippled my whole life at times.”** I think all of us have dark places in our hearts. Some of us are more prone to linger in the darkness. I was in an exceedingly dark place at one particular point in my life. Depression crippled me physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. My depression, like a heavy fog, lingered for eight years. My depression was not for eight consecutive years. It stayed two years and drifted away, only to resurface a few years later. The pattern repeated itself. It was a vicious cycle with no end in sight.

I have been free from serious depression for several years now. I do have brief periods of depression, but they do not linger long. If I ever do fall back into a long-term depression, I am better equipped to respond in a way that promotes health and healing. Depression can be a result of several factors. A few reasons are emotional pain and loss, negative thinking, low self-esteem, and inward anger. Depression has also been linked with physical factors like genetics, diet, lifestyle, and seasonal changes. I believe my prolonged period of depression was a result of three main factors:

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### 3 Causes of My Depression

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#### 1. CHANGE

My descent into depression began while attending seminary. I loved seminary. I enjoyed studying Theology, Greek, and Church History. I made good friends who loved and served the Lord. My marriage was healthy and vibrant. In the midst of all the good things, something was not right. The check engine light of my soul came on. **I confess, “I felt sad all the time.”** I was emotional and irritable. I had no

motivation or energy. I dreaded getting out of bed. My soul was a barren desert. I did the only thing I knew to do at the time; I talked to a seminary professor. He is a professional counselor who has dealt with his own bouts of depression. He referred me to a friend of his, another Christian counselor. Getting counseling gave me insight into my battle with depression. It was my first step out of the darkness.

While I cherished studying at seminary and being in the ministry, it was a drastic change to my life. My mom and dad ran a small, yet successful printing business. I grew up planning to take over the family business. My wife and I got married and bought a home close to family. I then graduated from college with a business degree. My father was preparing to retire, and I was going to step in and take the lead. The course of my life was set, or so I thought. Everything changed in 1999, when I surrendered to vocational ministry.

When I began to sense God calling me to vocational ministry, I pulled a Jonah and ran. Thankfully, there was no large fish to swallow me! I delayed surrendering to God because being a pastor is a serious and life-long commitment. Not only that, my life was already settled. My calling, or so I thought, was to carry on the family business. I also ran from God's calling because I was naturally shy and reserved. Being a public speaker and public figure was not on my wish list. I could relate well to Moses who said, in **Exodus 4:10**, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." I finally obeyed God and surrendered to the ministry. My wife and I sold our house, packed up everything, and moved to Kansas City, Missouri for me to attend Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

I entered my first bout of deep depression while at seminary. I believe change was a contributing factor. My life radically changed in the course of a few years. Being a pastor was not in the plans. Moving wasn't either. My wife and I left all our family and moved 500 miles away. I went from being in business to being in the ministry. More changes were yet to come.

Change is part of life. Change, even good change, can lead to stress, weariness, and depression. A great truth to remember is that God does not change. Malachi writes, in **Malachi 3:6**, "For I, the LORD, do not change." Regardless of what change you may be facing, God never changes! You can always count on Him.

## 2. DISAPPOINTMENT

While I was struggling with change, my wife and I desperately wanted children. We were trying to start a family long before I entered the ministry. We were the first of our friends to get married and the last to be parents. When all of our friends had children we publicly celebrated and secretly mourned. Our home and hearts were empty. The doctor said everything looked okay after several tests and procedures. The green light was given to start a family. Nothing happened. Each failed pregnancy test was a kick in the gut. We were on an emotional roller coaster for eleven years. It was sheer agony.

**I confess, "My wife and I were disappointed and devastated."** Infertility was a constant thorn in our flesh. Like the apostle Paul we prayed numerous times for God to remove it, but God had to remind us, "My grace is sufficient." So far, infertility has been the worst trial of my life. However, it was a source

of an even greater blessing. We began the adoption process after about nine years of infertility. Two years later we adopted our first daughter.

Looking back we would not change a thing. We knew God was in control of the process, and our daughter was a confirmation of that reality. That was not the end of God's blessings. We got the surprise of a lifetime when our oldest daughter was seven. A friend called my wife and asked if we were interested in adopting again. We prayed about it and a week later brought home the second addition to our family, another precious baby girl. God has far exceeded our hopes and dreams.

Infertility was not the only source of disappointment. I began my first full time pastorate right after graduating from seminary. It was a good church, and the people loved my wife and me. The church saw considerable growth. Things were going well, yet I fell back into the rut of depression. I believe change was still a contributing factor. I was still getting used to the idea of being a pastor, as well as being away from home. The reality of ministry hit too. Being a pastor for the first time was eye-opening. It is no easy task.

It is one thing to study at seminary to become a pastor, it is quite another thing to be a pastor. God called me to the task, but I was learning what the call really entailed. Being a pastor involved more than teaching the Bible, visiting nice folks, and attending pot-luck suppers. I rubbed shoulders with death, disappointment, and heartache. I stood in a hospital room while they pulled the ventilator on someone, thus leading to her death. I ministered to a family whose little boy drowned. I dealt with people telling me I was "too young to be a pastor." I thought, "What am I supposed to do until I am the right age? What age is that?" On a lighter note, a woman in the church called me to babysit her dog. I thought, "I went to seminary for this? I am not the pope of pooches!"

While I love being a pastor, it lends itself to disappointment. People disappoint you. You are exposed to the dark and dirty sides of their lives. Situations at church can be disappointing as well. Here is an entry from my journal that gives a picture into my soul: *November 16, 2005*, "Life seems to be a blur, a great mystery. As per God, I seem to know Him no longer. Things used to be so certain and straightforward. I would work, enjoy life, spend time with family and friends, and then enjoy an hour or so with my Lord. But, now life is no longer compartmentalized as it once was. I have no family here, apart from Lori, nor do I have any friends here. I have a job that seemingly separates me from everything else. A pastor is not just what I do; it is who I am. As a result, my life has been greatly shaken and changed and turned about." I was learning to be a pastor and how to deal with the struggles and pain that followed.

### 3. LOSS

I enjoyed my first pastorate. I will always cherish those first years of ministry. Lifelong friendships were established. Soon after my oldest daughter's adoption another church called me as their pastor. It was a church in Louisiana, my home state. I accepted the call and moved back home, only one hour away from family. My wife was able to stay home as a fulltime mother too. My second pastorate was quite contrary to my first. Instead of growth, it shrunk. Instead of peace and unity, conflict thrived. Feelings were hurt and relationships were damaged. It was a hard pill to swallow. My wife and I had never experienced anything like this before.

**I confess, “I felt like a failure.”** I literally felt like someone, or something had died. I still hurt thinking about what happened. I felt God wanted me to stay after the storm, so I stayed at the church four more years. I learned a lot about ministry and myself during that time. Though it was a difficult experience, the people at the church were and still are a great blessing to my life. Someone observed, “Life is like photography. We develop from the negatives.” The Lord was using this pastorate to make me the leader and pastor I needed to be. Hard times, even times of loss, make us more like Christ. Paul wrote, in **Romans 5:3-4**, “And not only this, but we also exalt in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.”

The church was not my only source of loss at the time. My father died of cancer. He was the epitome of health, until cancer struck. My journal entry reveals my struggles with his sickness. *May 17, 2008*, “The last few days have been hard to describe. Dad has been in the hospital sick. More than that, the prognosis is leaning towards cancer. He has a mass on his lungs and probably in his throat as well. My dad has been the epitome of health my entire life. It seems absurd, but the last few days I have been contemplating dad’s funeral. It is a strange thought because he is still alive. But, perhaps it is my way of dealing with the loss and thinking of how his life has impacted mine.”

My fear came true. He passed away two months later. It was a shock to my family. My father was not just my dad; he was my hero and best friend. He is still my hero and always will be. His death was a great loss. While grieving the loss of my dad, I was still grieving the events at church. In the book of Job, Job lost everything in one fell swoop. He still praised God. I had not lost everything, but it seemed like it. I was searching for a way to praise God.

Maybe you are in a time of loss. You feel like a failure. A loved one has died. Something didn’t turn out as you had imagined. Grieve the loss. Cry. Be honest about your emotions. It is understood that grief has five stages: **Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. What stage of grief are you in? Are you properly grieving your losses? Loss, disappointment, and change were not the only issues that led to my depression, but they were certainly the major contributors.**

*Questions for reflection:*

1. What changes have you experienced over the past year?
2. Could disappointment be a factor in your depression?
3. Have you properly grieved your losses?

Notes:

## Chapter 3

### THE PAIN OF DEPRESSION

“Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.” Judy Garland coined those famous words in the classic film *The Wizard of Oz*. It is one of my oldest daughter's favorite movies. It is also a picture of my depression. A violent tornado sweeps Dorothy away. She lands in Oz, a land far away from home. It is a strange, yet fascinating world of witches, flying monkeys, and munchkins. It seems all a dream. Despite the wonder of Oz, Dorothy yearns to be home, to go back to life as it once was. All she has to do is click her ruby slippers and say, “There's no place like home. There's no place like home. There's no place like home.” Dorothy goes back to Kansas. All is well, and she lives happily ever after.

What does *The Wizard of Oz* have to do with my depression? The dark clouds of depression swept me away from life as I knew it. I didn't wind up in Oz, but I was in a strange, yet fascinating world, the Land of Depression. Instead of witches, flying monkeys, and the yellow brick road, it was full of pain and sorrow. Life seemed like a dream, not a good dream mind you. If only I could click my shoes three times and repeat, “There's no place like home.” If only I could get out of the Land of Depression and back to the way life once was.

**I confess, “I was in a lot of pain.”** The pain was not primarily physical; it was emotional and mental. In some ways depression is more troubling than physical pain. People understand physical pain. You break an arm and people see your cast and understand, to some degree, what you are going through. You can visit a doctor without fear and shame. You can tell your friends and family about your experience. They understand and even feel sorry for you. Not so with depression. Most people do not understand the pain of depression. Depression is not as visible as a broken arm. It is not treated as easily either. You cannot put a cast or bandage on depression. It doesn't heal in a matter of weeks or days. It is embarrassing to go and see a doctor, especially for men. Most people will not even know you are depressed.

When, and if you tell your family members and friends about your depression, they may not understand. Some may even mock your pain or question your sanity. There are numerous types of depression. Many who are depressed readily identify with Major Depressive Disorder, better known as clinical depression. The term “clinical depression” may bring to mind white coats, electroshock therapy, or being committed to an insane asylum. It doesn't mean you are crazy, unstable, or incompetent. It simply means you have “five (or more) of the following symptoms during the same 2-week period... At least one of the symptoms is either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure.”<sup>2</sup>

- ☐ Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day
- ☐ Loss of interest or pleasure in most activities
- ☐ Significant weight loss or gain
- ☐ Sleeping too much or not enough
- ☐ Slowed thinking or movement that others can see
- ☐ Fatigue or low energy nearly every day
- ☐ Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- ☐ Loss of concentration or indecisiveness
- ☐ Recurring thoughts of death or suicide

Perhaps you can identify with one or more of the symptoms. Perhaps it describes your exact struggle. Maybe your depression has taken on a different form. Not everyone with depression will fit the mold. Men can especially differ from the classic signs. Depression in men tends to surface more as anger than sadness.<sup>3</sup> Depression is often associated with anxiety as well. For some, depression entails serious medical conditions such as bipolar disorder. Seek a professional for diagnosis if you think you are depressed.

Maybe you deal with clinical depression. You have seen a medical doctor and perhaps a counselor of some type. Maybe you have short seasons of darkness and sorrow. Maybe you are not sure what you have. You just know you are depressed and cannot seem to shake it. William Styron, in *Darkness Visible: a Memoir of Madness*, wrote:

In depression the faith in deliverance, in ultimate restoration, is absent. The pain is unrelenting, and what makes the condition intolerable is the foreknowledge that no remedy will come—not in a day, an hour, a month, or a minute. If there is mild relief, one knows that it is only temporary; more pain will follow. It is hopelessness even more than pain that crushes the soul. So the decision-making of daily life involves not, as in normal affairs, shifting from one annoying situation to another less annoying—or from discomfort to relative comfort, or from boredom to activity—but moving from pain to pain.

I can certainly connect with Styron's perspective. I lost the pleasure of everyday life. Though I had reasons to rejoice and celebrate, I felt numb to it all. I was miserable even while on vacation or spending quality moments with my wife. I felt worthless and sad. I lacked energy. The hardest part of my day was just getting out of the bed. I remember several times, while in my office studying, I would lay my head on my desk and zone out. I had no energy or desire. I still had hope in God, but I lost hope in life.

**I confess, “Everything seemed hopeless and pointless.”** I am a pastor, so I am supposed to be a source of hope and joy. I had neither. Nothing seemed to matter. I was irritable too. I felt like a total failure because of my depression. I thought something was wrong with me, that I was less than human. By not disclosing my depression to my family and church family, I felt like I was living a lie. I felt ashamed and defeated. My being depressed also took a toll on my wife. I felt I had let her down.

Here is an entry from my journal. *July 28, 2008*, “In Psalm 6, David is expressing grief and sorrow. His enemies overwhelm him. David fears for his very life. At night he cries and saturates his bed with tears. By day his eyes waste away with grief. He is seeking vengeance upon his enemies and comfort from the Lord. Some things in my life seemingly relate to David’s predicament. I think of the years Lori and I struggled with infertility. Some days my soul was in great agony, and I was overwhelmed with sorrow. The caverns of depression are another such episode. Recently, the conflict at church has caused much sorrow and pain. Lastly, my dad’s passing is fresh upon me. My soul and bones are dismayed. I am weary with tears and burdened with sadness. In the tough times God is there. The Lord is gracious to hear my prayers and take heed to my sad condition. Lord, deliver me today and give me strength to endure.”

My depression was a vicious cycle. I was tired because I was irritable. I became irritable because I was tired. I didn’t enjoy life because I was depressed. I became more depressed because I didn’t enjoy life. I felt depressed because I felt worthless. Because I felt worthless I lacked energy and motivation.

Depression is a vicious cycle. Have you ever had a washing machine get unbalanced? The machine gets wobbly and noisy. Depression is an unbalanced spin cycle. Everything is wobbly and off kilter. I never thought I would recover. My soul was in constant winter. Spring seemed like an unattainable reality. Another depression survivor observed, “Depression lies to us that we’ll never get better. In the midst of the storm we look both back and ahead and see nothing but the high winds, fog, and darkness. As we look back we think, ‘I’ve been like this so long that I can’t remember what it felt like to feel good.’”<sup>4</sup>

**I confess, “I forgot what it was like to be happy.”** I believed I was not worthy of anything but depression. Depression became like a pair of jeans. Have you ever had a favorite pair of old jeans? They are torn and tattered from repeated use. The jeans may be faded or ripped. You need to throw them away, but you hesitate. Why? You feel at home in the jeans, regardless of their flaws. Depression became an old pair of jeans to me. Despite all of its drawbacks, depression became comfortable. It was all I had known. It became a way for me to cope with the pain and struggles of life. Depression became my friend. It was a painful friendship indeed.

It may seem strange for a Christian to be depressed. It is even stranger to hear about a pastor being depressed. Depression in the ministry is common. The Shaeffer Institute reveals approximately 70% of pastors battle with depression.<sup>5</sup> Why are so many pastors depressed? **I**

**confess, “Being a minister is not always easy.”** Pastors constantly feel inadequate. They are on call 24/7. They struggle with loneliness, problems in the church, and unrealistic demands. Pastors deal with the burdens of their life, but also the lives of those whom they serve. In the course of one week a pastor may face a crisis in the church, counsel a troubled married couple, and visit someone dying in the hospital. Not only that, a pastor is seemingly given prayer requests on a daily basis. All the while, he has his own problems and life events to deal with.

Pastors are flawed and deal with temptation and sin like everyone else. They are asked questions they cannot always answer and presented with problems they cannot fix. Many pastors either burn out or abandon ship. Please don't get the wrong impression. It is a blessing to be a pastor. Nevertheless, odds are your pastor has struggled with depression. Pray for your pastor and the leadership of your church. Let this be an encouragement to you. If pastors battle with depression, it is no surprise that other Christians do too. You are not alone in the struggle.

*Questions for reflection:*

1. What pain are you feeling because of depression?
2. Do you feel like you deserve your depression? Why?
3. Do you remember what it was like to be truly happy?
4. Do you know a godly person who has struggled with depression?

*Notes:*

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