

GROW IN GRACE

NEWSLETTER

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South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 / **The Grow in Grace Newsletter**— a weekly Bible Study, plus news notes— designed first and foremost for members and those attending services at Southside Church... sent forth to aid one and all, (including friends far and wide who receive the Newsletter), in the experience of 2 Peter 3:18. ***"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen."***

Embracing the Edge: Living Without Anti-Depressants, By Jim Elliff; March 7, 2008 Note: Below is an important article by a lady in our church who wishes to remain anonymous for the sake of her former church (referred to in her previous article). She has been open about her condition with several of the women in our fellowship, however. You may wish to read her earlier related article entitled **"Anti-depressants and Spiritual Conviction"** (her title was "Living on the Edge") found here: <http://www.ccwtoday.org/article/anti-depressants-and-spiritual-conviction/> Please feel free to distribute this article to those who might benefit from it. Jim Elliff [2/22/14— **Last week, Jim confirmed to me that this lady continues to walk in faith and freedom; and she is in training to do Biblical Counseling!**]

Embracing the Edge

*"Hear my cry, O God; Attend to my prayer From the end of the earth I will cry to You,
When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Psalm 61:1-2*

In a previous article I shared my experience in weaning from anti-depressants. That article described the deep sense of unrepentant sin in my heart that surfaced when I stopped taking the medication. This realization was followed by an urgent need to recognize and repent of besetting sin. I was living with a number of habitual sins, deaf to the conviction of the Holy Spirit, I believe, because of the numbing power of the antidepressants. In the six months since my complete weaning, God has brought a whirlwind of trials, heartache, and circumstances that were finely tuned to bring about sanctification and spiritual growth in my life. These months have been difficult at best, devastating at worst, but always orchestrated by God for my good and His glory

When I stopped taking the pills and the effects of them wore off, I was able to observe more clearly the condition of my household. We had homeschooled our children from the beginning, but after our older son went to a Christian High School, our Junior High-age son became lonely and somewhat defiant, not wanting to submit to his mother's authority. We decided he needed more accountability in his schooling and sent him to join his brother at the Christian school. As the months had gone by, however, we saw more and more worldly attitudes in him, and less spiritual growth. He was becoming progressively more peer-dependant and hostile to the things of home and family. After much prayer and

consideration, we decided to bring him back home. **Homeschooling is very different when Mom is not medicated!!** I say this somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but there is a sliver of truth in it. Stress is harder to handle when you really *feel* it. Being alone is lonelier, and anger is much less manageable when you feel depressed. I saw that my tendency to be irritable and short-tempered when my son was uncooperative was magnified without the drug. As I shared in the previous article, an angry outburst at my son was the event that made me realize the need to get off the medication and clearly see my sin. How ironic that bringing him back home to school would be the first test of my repentance.

Not only did I now have the burden of homeschooling, but I also had given up the large quantities of "me time" that I'd had when my son was in school. I had begun to pursue an educational goal that I had put off for years, and was very excited about being close to finishing. Now I would have to put that off longer. The self-satisfaction I had from my near-accomplishment was gone, as well as most of my free time. This brought out other sinful attitudes that I had to wrestle with. Still, I was managing through prayer, Scripture memory and accountability, to cope and even to honor God with my life. Though this transition was difficult, I managed to get through it, praising God for His provision for us.

The next thing God sent for me in this odyssey was a knee injury. I have always enjoyed regular exercise, and have rarely gone a day without power walking, jogging, or some other form of aerobic activity in my adult life. As a result, I have developed osteoarthritis in my knees. This is a condition I had been able to tolerate for some time. Shortly after weaning from the antidepressants, however, I tore the cartilage in my left knee and was rendered completely unable to walk, bike, or do any kind of aerobic exercise at all. Weeks went by as I waited for my surgery date, then more weeks of recovery were necessary before I could work out again. In that time, I became very depressed. Exercise is a great endorphin-producer, and I had become quite dependent on it to keep my mood up. Even while I was taking the anti-depressants I was addicted to the adrenaline rush of an accelerated heart rate and a good sweat. Well, that was out of the question now. I could barely walk to the mailbox, much less induce any kind of "runner's high." I was very frustrated with this situation and did not understand why God would do something like this when all I was trying to do was be obedient to Him. I began to turn inward and to despair of my circumstances. I felt very sorry for myself, and wanted others to do the same. Now, instead of calling my friends for accountability, I called them with the "complaint du jour," looking for sympathy and a shoulder to cry on.

At this point I realized that I had no idea what it meant to depend on God. I always thought it meant depending on Him to provide for my needs, and it does, to a point. But what does it mean to depend on *Him*, apart from temporal provision? As the weeks went by after the surgery, I began to realize that I was clueless in this area. I had read the Psalms and wondered at David's reliance on the Lord in his times of trouble. I never understood, though, what that really meant. The Lord revealed this truth to me one day when I was feeling very depressed and overwhelmed. **As I prayed, I asked God, "Is this what you have ordained for me? Is this my portion in life? To just endure each day, filled with dread as I open my eyes, going through the motions of my responsibilities, looking forward to bedtime because it will mean I got through the day? This surely cannot be the abundant life**

You promised me." The words of Psalm 73:26 held the answer for me: *"My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."*

In that moment, I realized that my *lot* in life right now is difficult, but that has nothing to do with my *portion*. These circumstances are temporary, not eternal, and all completely under the control of my sovereign, compassionate and perfectly just Heavenly Father. **My flesh and my heart have to do with my lot—a frail human spirit, difficult circumstances, and an inconsistent mood. But they do not determine my portion.** My portion was determined before the foundation of the world and cannot be changed no matter what happens to me. To many of you this may be a no-brainer, but to me it was an epiphany. Yet it seemed so obvious once I embraced it that I began to struggle with why this had taken me so long to grasp. The answer, I found after much prayer and soul searching, can be summed up in one word: Idolatry. I had made idols out of so many things in my life that it was impossible for me to understand God's rightful place in my heart. These idols included physical health and fitness, my children's happiness, money and financial comfort. My earthly comfort and my family's happiness and well-being had become my supreme goal, above all other things.

Though this realization came with the knee injury, I took no action to knock those idols off their pedestals. My knee began to feel better and I was able to work out again. The depression lifted somewhat and I tucked my lesson on self-focus and idolatry away, thinking what a sanctifying experience that had been. Glad to be aware of the problem, I determined to change and have a more God-ward focus and Christ-centered life. Never again would I let worldly comforts become an idol in my life. These were very good intentions. I had *plans* to deal with my sin, but the LORD was still directing my *steps* (cf. Proverbs 16:9). My resolve to change would not be enough to make it happen.

God had shown me through the injury that my physical well-being had become an idol, but the *nature* of the idol was not the issue. It was the fact that He was not at the center of my heart that He could no longer tolerate. **I focused spiritually on that one idol, without really seeing that He didn't want me just to get rid of the things I was wrongly seeking for my happiness. He wanted to have all of my love and worship.** It didn't matter *what* was drawing me away from Him, the fact that I was allowing *anything* to take my heart away from Him was the problem.

In His wisdom, He chose one of those idols, probably the most highly elevated one, to make his point clear: My family. All I had ever wanted was to be a wife and mother; to have a family I could love, care for and nurture, and who would love me back. It seemed that dream had been fulfilled, and I thought my family was doing well. Sure, we had our bumps and problems along the way, but in my mind, we were no different from any other family, and things were fine. Then, we experienced a crisis I never would have dreamed imaginable. **The very foundation of our family was shaken** by it, and it caused me to question everything about my role as wife and mother, as well as my belief that God was good and that all things work together for my good and His glory.

Without going into a lot of detail, I will tell you that **this event in our lives shattered the progress** I had thought I was making in overcoming the depression, and brought the fresh realization that I was completely helpless against it. I had no idea how to handle this emotional upheaval. I was in

a state of shock and panic, unable to sort out my feelings or even begin to pray. And I was angry. Outwardly, I knew it would be wrong and sinful to be angry at God. I thought of Job and his wife: Will we accept good from God, and not bad? This must be for my good and His glory, so I just needed to trust Him. I knew these things in my head, and I dutifully pronounced them to my sympathetic friends. **But in my heart, I was bitterly disappointed in my Father for allowing this.** I struggled and wrestled with it, but in the end, He restrained me from holding on to anger at Him, always calling me to repentance through His Word.

But there were also days when I did not find comfort in God, His word, or prayer. I felt like the writer of Psalm 77, who says in verses 2 and 3: *“My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing; My soul refused to be comforted I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed.”*

I was troubled by thoughts of God. On good days, I felt only abandoned by Him. On bad days, I was certain that He had it in for me. During those times, Psalm 38:8 described me perfectly: *“I am benumbed and badly crushed; I groan because of the agitation of my heart.”*

Some days, I felt so bad that I chose to feel nothing. I was in survival mode. I went through the motions of my God-given responsibilities robotically. There was much to do to resolve this crisis, and I focused on those things. But when there was nothing more I could do, nothing to keep my mind occupied, I cried. I cried more during this time than I think I have in my entire life. I cried over everything and over nothing. Sometimes, I would wake up crying, having no idea what started it. A song or a passing thought could trigger a crying spell that lasted literally for days. I did many activities with tears in my eyes because they simply would not stop coming.

I began to think again about my old friend, the antidepressant. I looked back fondly on the days when I couldn't have cried even if I wanted to. I missed that inability to go beyond sadness to depression. I wanted to have that perceived control again that I had when I was on the medication. I wanted something that would put the brakes on my racing thoughts which seemed continually to plummet toward the depths, completely out of my control. I wanted to be able to fall asleep at night and stay asleep, never again to wake up in a panic or a flood of tears. **I wanted something to take the edge off of this raw, aching, exhausting pain I felt. How could I bear it? I was sure I could not.**

Persevering through all of this was the quiet presence of the Holy Spirit in my heart. My God and I had moments of intimacy that would never have happened without this discipline He led me through. We also had times of distance and silence that sent me nearly into despair. But through it all I somehow knew that He was there, and that He was watching over all that happened to me. I clung to His promises. He walked with me through every circumstance, earthly function of life, and mundane daily duty that was required of me. I was able to do those things only because He lives in me. Without the knowledge that He went behind, before, and sometimes instead of me, I would not have been able to cope. It was this belief that saved me from being drowned in the whirlpool of emotions that

threatened to destroy me. It was this belief that kept me from running to that dark corner of my basement or back to the doctor.

But why and how did I believe that God was good, despite all these devastating circumstances? I am convinced that the key to my survival was the local church. This body of Christ where God placed me believes the Bible and practices its precepts in the lives of its members: **Exhort, rebuke, support the weak, strengthen the fainthearted, etc. Without the loving support of my church family, my pastor, and my sisters in Christ, I believe that I would have lost all hope, despaired, and gone back on the medication.**

The women of my church held me accountable for sinful attitudes in a loving way. They listened and sympathized when that was appropriate. They never judged me or allowed me to dwell on the mistakes I had made. They constantly reminded me that the LORD can redeem the years the locust has eaten (Joel 2:25), and that His plan was not to harm me. They held me up in prayer, called me often, helped me in practical ways, and generally made me feel the love of Christ, even when it seemed absent in my heart. They made me see that my father loves me, no matter what I may *feel*. They taught me to walk by faith. As David says in Psalm 27, *"I would have despaired if I had not believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."* **My sisters in our local church** convinced me that I would see the goodness of the Lord through all of this, that just getting through the day is not all there is, that I would see God's goodness in *this* life as well as the next, and that I would feel joy again. **It was this truth that sustained me and brought me through that valley.**

Because of my brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, I was able to shift my thinking from worldly to Biblical, from panic to peace, from despair to a desire to please God through the trial. This shift in my thinking was never easy, and there were plenty of days that it never really did get in gear, but overall, I learned to think rightly about my circumstances. **Thought control is the believer's means of staying out of depression.** I had always believed that I could not control my thoughts, but through this ordeal, I learned that that is a lie. If we cannot control our thoughts, then why does God's word command us to "think on" certain things (cf. Philippians 4:8-9)? **The truth is, God does not give His children commands that He will not enable them to obey.** He gives us scriptures to memorize. These become a ready replacement for anxious thoughts. I challenge you to search God's Word for the passages that apply best to your situation. He will reveal them to you. **When you have God's word deeply planted in your heart and mind, it will drown out even the most fearful thoughts. It is a powerful and effective tool for bringing your emotions back under your control.**

There are also some excellent books on depression: ***Out of the Blues* by Wayne Mack** is a brief but thorough overview of all the biblical encouragement you need to understand your depression and the steps needed to get out of it. Ask those close to you to read it too so that they can understand what you are going through. ***Spiritual Depression, its Causes and Cures* is a sermon series by D. Martin Lloyd-Jones.** These sermons spoke to my heart deeply. I knew that this author had been where I was and had struggled to understand and overcome depression. Interestingly, the best authors I read were the ones who did not have access to antidepressants. **They had no choice but to rely on God**

through His Word, and I began to praise God that they didn't! Where would I be today if Charles Spurgeon had run to the doctor and gotten unlimited refills of Prozac? Instead, he suffered through physical illness, deep depression, and despair, not only trusting his God, but writing many volumes of encouragement for us today! His example to me was invaluable.

John Piper also has struggled, and wrote a book entitled, *When I don't desire God: How to Fight for Joy*. This book also encouraged me and taught me that I must refuse to accept joylessness if I am to glorify God with my life. I have read and admired Piper's work for some time now, and his confession that he experiences depression was validating for me. If he could struggle, with all his learning and biblical understanding, maybe my depression did not make me such a weak Christian after all.

If you are considering going on medication for depression or anxiety, read *Will Medicine Stop the Pain?* By Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson, MD. I did not learn of this book until long after I first began taking antidepressants, but it would have been very valuable to me in evaluating, from a biblical perspective, whether or not I truly needed them. The authors address many specific circumstances that can bring on depression, offering biblical methods for redirecting our thinking about what is happening to us. **They also offer concrete, practical steps to take in determining whether your emotional problems have a medical or hormonal cause, and how to proceed after making that determination. They blend their medical and counseling backgrounds to offer a balanced and informative view of emotional struggles.**

If you are currently on medication and are considering getting off, read *The Antidepressant Solution*, by Dr. Joseph Glenmullen. This book contains a step-by-step guide for safely overcoming dependence on antidepressants. Of course, if you do decide to go off the medication, see your doctor. Never try to go off antidepressants on your own. These are powerful drugs, and weaning should be carefully monitored by your physician.

My message to you is that there can be joy, right thinking, and a (somewhat) stable mood without antidepressants. Again, as in the first article, I do not claim any medical knowledge and would never presume to tell anyone whether or not they should take medication. That is something you, your doctor, your family, and your Lord must counsel together and decide. If the Lord puts it on your heart to stop taking antidepressants, or not to start, **there are things you can put in place to ensure the best possible outcome:** A heart that is determined to please God (2 Cor. 5:7-9), diligence in scripture reading and memorization, a body of believers who are willing to fulfill the obligations the Bible lays out for them—namely, brothers and sisters in Christ who are not afraid to confront you in your sin.

I no longer want to take the edge off my pain. I do not wish to be numbed and shielded from emotional anguish because I know that at least for me, it is the only way I can be sanctified, grow and change to be more like Christ. The verse at the beginning of this article brought a mental picture to my mind when I read it one day in the midst of all these trials. I could not reach God that day, and felt I was at the end of the earth, so far from Him that I would never find Him, clinging to the edge of a precipice,

surely headed for a drop into the deep end at any moment. I was wishing I had never written that first article because I wanted to go back on my medication and feel good again. I'd had enough sanctification, thank you, and I was ready to get back to feeling "normal."

That same day, my pastor forwarded to me an email regarding some positive feedback on the first article. I responded that I was glad to see it was helping some people, but still hated what I had to go through. He replied with the following encouragement:

God is glorified by your continual need of Him. Like a woman clinging desperately to a solid rock cliff in order not to fall to her death, you are clinging desperately to God in order not to 'go off the deep end.' In this position you are certainly uncomfortable-you would rather be up on level, solid ground-but being where you are for now, you are constantly pressed into being thankful for the strength of the Rock you are clinging to.

Those profound words completed my mental picture. I realized that, instead of taking the edge off, what I needed to do was embrace the edge, for it is the place just before despair, where I see the depth of my sin and my desperate need for the Savior. The edge is where I see most clearly the difference between happiness and joy, and where I experience forgiveness for my sin. The edge is where I get a glimpse of the glory of God. I dare not remove it, because it causes me to cling all the more tightly to Him, trusting Him to supply the strength to hold on. I may be devastated by my circumstances, blown fiercely by the winds of grief and change. **But I need not despair because I have a firm grip on the Rock. I cannot rescue myself. I must rely completely on the Lord who is the portion of my inheritance, and who maintains my lot.** Today I embrace the edge I once so desperately wanted removed because it is my prescription to make me more like Him. I can fully trust that He will cause me not one pang beyond what is necessary for my sanctification, which has now replaced earthly comfort as my supreme goal. Charles Spurgeon, in the treasury of David, puts it best, saying, **"However low the Lord may permit us to sink, he will fix a limit to the descent, and in due time will bring us up again."** Remember and cling to this: God's faithfulness is great. His mercies are new every morning, no matter what the day may bring.

Today I am a contented (most of the time) homeschooling mom with a bum knee, a family that is healing, and an empty nest not far in the future. I know that God is ultimately in control of all my earthly circumstances, so I depend on Him daily. The words of Psalm 116, verses 1 and 2, express my feelings and plans perfectly: **"I love the LORD because He heard my plea for mercy, and listened to me. As long as I live, I will call to Him when I need help."** Source URL: <http://www.worldviewweekend.com/news/article/embracing-edge-living-without-anti-depressants>

SOUTHSIDE NEWS NOTES!

TUESDAYS: Come and sing with us every Tuesday night at Gallatin Health Care nursing home. Meet at the front door at 5:30PM. Any questions contact Bradley Pennington at 615-804-3054.

*** LADIES BIBLE STUDIES— **EVERY other Thursday, 11:00am. NEXT ONE, 3/6/14,** led by Cindy Bell

***** WEDNESDAYS: PRAYER SERVICE at 7:00PM! NOTE:** Jody Allen is ministering to young Children, up to about age 10 during Prayer Service. Older children, but not old enough for the Youth Group... will be with their parents in the Prayer Service.

YOUTH GROUP: Wednesdays 6-8pm... led by Byron Smith_

*****SATURDAY MORNINGS @ 8am: Men's Fellowship/Bible Study!*****

[3-2-14: Celebration of Life Service for Cindy Bell's father, Bob Baker: At Southside; Visitation from 1:30pm until 3:00pm. Memorial / Celebration of Life Service at 3:00pm]

REGULAR SUNDAY SCHEDULE FOR MARCH 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

1. 9:30am- Sunday School → Bible Study and Small Group Fellowship
2. 10:45am- Morning Worship / Children's Church [LORD'S SUPPER, 3/16/14]
3. Noon: Fellowship 'covered-dish' Meal together!
4. 1:00pm- Early afternoon Service, in the Fellowship Hall

NOTE: 3/9- Time change: Spring Clocks forward ONE HOUR the evening of 3/8!

SOUTHSIDE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL!

Children are like young plants in a garden— while young and tender they must be protected.
Southside Christian School works in harmony with the local Church and empowers parents!

<http://www.aceministries.com/curriculum/?content=presentingACE>