

Is Conquering Depression a Matter of Spiritual Warfare Alone?

The first time it manifested in recent memory, I was jogging. Tingles started skimming along the outside of my legs, and my hands started to fall asleep, for lack of a better term.

Soon after, I was in so much pain I couldn't climb out of my bed. I imagine it feels a lot like drowning. The pressure was so extensive that moving my limbs felt like running through the ocean.

With my age and relative health, doctors thought it was Multiple Sclerosis. When MRIs ruled that out, they thought it was fibromyalgia or damaged nerves. They proceeded to quite literally shock the living daylights out of me in one of the most painful experiences I've ever dealt with.

Turns out the answer was much simpler: a medical diagnosis of major depression to be treated with medication. My Christian doctor prescribed an antidepressant.

Major depression is one of the most common mental disorders in the United States, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. In 2012, an estimated 16 million adults 18 or older in the U.S. had at least one major depressive episode in the past year, which represented 6.9 percent of all U.S. adults.

Being raised in the church and choosing a Christ-centered university for my college experience, I'd had my fair share of teaching about the spiritual warfare that can drive the fear, anxiety, loneliness and persistent sadness that are often associated with depression.

That was my attitude—and of those surrounding me—when it came to depression. Pick Jesus and don't depend on medication. Godly counseling, community involvement, pursuing Jesus through worship and the Word can cure many a spiritual ailment. But rebuking demons and seeking a prayer shield didn't fix my symptoms.

In fact, they made it worse.

I felt like there was something wrong with me that, at that time, I couldn't sustain my life on the Bread of Life. For months, I literally cried out to God from the floor of my room, praying for healing, praying for a miracle, praying for doctors to figure out what was wrong so we could treat it.

My church family cried out with me. When I went to prayer group, men and women laid their hands on me and joined me in warring in the Spirit over what was going on, pleading the Blood of Jesus and His mercies over my body.

But sometimes, depression isn't just a spiritual fact that can be fixed with prayer and meditating on Scripture.

In my case, I'm dealing with a chemical imbalance that affects my body to the point of lack of function. I can be emotionally flying high when my body shuts down and then I spend all day in my bed, unable to roll over. I fight it like a baby fights a nap, but still, I am overcome.

That's where medication comes into play.

If left untreated, or treated incorrectly, depression can lead to suicidal thoughts and actions, according to the Mayo Clinic.

I firmly believe that the American medical system is out to make money off the general public, prescribing all sorts of pills that diet, exercise, friendship, attention and/or a good vacation can fix. The more we dope people up, the less they

have to face reality, right?

Sometimes, yes, but for me, no. God gave us doctors who give us medicine. Depression can be a physical illness that requires treatment beyond Christian counseling.

The longer we demonize medication and cover depression with a stigma of spiritual warfare, the more we hurt those who need treatment for a physical illness that's progressing.

We lead those who are struggling to believe that if they just had more faith, they wouldn't be in their present situation. While that may be true of some, it's not true of everyone.

What would behoove the church is to open up an honest dialogue about depression: spiritual elements and tangible treatments in all.

Jessilyn Justice is the assistant news editor for Charisma. You can reach out to her on Twitter @jessilynjustice.