

“In *Hope for Wholeness*, Sharon L. Fawcett shares a great gift: a true-life story filled with transparency, courage, and, above all, grace. This is a real-life journey through the darkness of depression and related disorders, told with a gentleness of spirit and firmness of personal conviction that lifts its eloquent message high above more didactic works on the subject. Fawcett’s lean, unsentimental style draws us in, sits us down near a warm fire, and confidently shares with us the soul-secrets of a true survivor. The most profound kind of healing always comes from those brave enough to return from battle, emotionally undress, and show us their ugly wounds. And by allowing us into this most private of places, *Hope for Wholeness* reflects the true face of the healing Christ.”

—JIM ROBINSON, professional recovery counselor; author of *Prodigal Song: A Memoir*; founder of ProdigalSong Ministries

“As a professional counselor, I have witnessed the spiritual, emotional, and physical devastation caused by depression. And as a survivor of suicide, I’ve experienced the ‘collateral damage’ Sharon Fawcett describes—the trauma sustained by those who love someone with depression. But Sharon’s words break through the darkness like a beam of hope for those grappling with this illness. Out of her own healing, Sharon offers a hand up to the wounded trying to find their way out of the valley of depression. Each chapter is a trail marker, carefully placed for journeyers willing to follow her through the rugged terrain. *Hope for Wholeness* will illumine your course to freedom and empower you to illuminate the way for others.”

—DR. DAVID COX, author; counselor; speaker; coauthor of *Aftershock: Help, Hope, and Healing in the Wake of Suicide*

“*Hope for Wholeness* gives a fresh look at the subject of depression from a spiritual perspective. This book is more than the author’s own dark but ultimately triumphant journey through depression. It is a comprehensive look at the physical, emotional, and spiritual stranglehold depression has on a multitude of individuals, Christians included. Sharon Fawcett provides a voice of encouragement, understanding,

support, and hope for those languishing in the wilderness of depression. This book is a must-read for the depressed and those who love them.”

—CANDY ARRINGTON, coauthor of *Aftershock: Help, Hope, and Healing in the Wake of Suicide*

“Sharon Fawcett’s drama—trauma, one might say—explodes upon the mind in its opening paragraphs. *Hope for Wholeness* is no mild documentary of one woman’s depression; rather, it is an excavation of the ruins of one woman’s soul—and the silent movie of its reconstruction. Whether you have wrestled this enemy personally or know others who have, Sharon’s warfare of hope will become your own, and you will be equipped like never before to defeat the scourge of depression. I highly commend it.”

—JEROME DALEY, leadership coach and church consultant; author of *Soul Space* and *The New Rebellion Handbook*

“Sharon Fawcett does an excellent job illuminating the spiritual aspects of depression without discounting the potential benefits of medical evaluation and treatment. Sharon’s firsthand account of her illness, along with chapters that share perspectives from her husband and children, is both tragic and triumphant. Honest and inspiring, these pages offer a lifeline to those struggling with depression. If you or a loved one is suffering, find hope here.”

—PAUL LOONEY, MD, practicing psychiatrist; teaching pastor, Fellowship of the Woodlands

“Sharon Fawcett’s story of depression and anorexia is woven with the fibers of anguish and hope. Anyone who has experienced the pain of either of these disorders will recognize the conflicted emotions, confusion, and struggle. But what they will also see is the beautiful thread of God’s hope woven into the tapestry of this account. This hope is not presented glibly but as a necessary and much-overlooked spiritual component to treatment and recovery.”

—KATHY PRIDE, author of *Winning the Drug War at Home*

SHARON L. FAWCETT

H O P E

for

WHOLENESS

THE SPIRITUAL PATH TO
FREEDOM FROM DEPRESSION

NAVPRESS 



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ISBN-13: 978-1-60006-215-5

ISBN-10: 1-60006-215-6

Cover design by Arvid Wallen

Cover image by Shutterstock

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fawcett, Sharon L., 1963-

Hope for wholeness : the spiritual path to freedom from depression / Sharon L. Fawcett.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

ISBN-13: 978-1-60006-215-5

ISBN-10: 1-60006-215-6

1. Depression, Mental--Religious aspects--Christianity. 2. Depressed persons--Religious life. 3. Fawcett, Sharon L., 1963- I. Title.

BV4910.34.F39 2008

248.8'625--dc22

2008023747

Printed in the United States of America

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 / 12 11 10 09 08

ADVISORY

The ideas, procedures, and suggestions contained in this book are not intended to replace sound medical, psychological, or spiritual advice and evaluation to treat specific maladies. Neither the publisher nor the author is engaged in rendering professional advice or services to the individual reader. All matters regarding one's health require medical supervision. Neither the author nor the publisher shall be liable or responsible for any loss, injury, or damage allegedly arising from any information or suggestion in this book.

The stories in this book are true, although some names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals involved.

*Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength;
loving someone deeply gives you courage.*

Lao Tzu, philosopher

To Tim, Lauren, and Jenna. Because you loved, I live.

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FOREWORD

Have you ever felt hopeless? Helpless? Despondent? Worthless? Mentally and physically exhausted? Have you ever thought that the world and, more specifically, your loved ones would be better off without you? If you have, then you are among the countless victims of the “blues” epidemic sweeping the country. The number of people seeking medical treatment for depression has more than doubled in the United States in the last ten years. What is even more alarming is that most who suffer from depression never seek any kind of help even though many treatment options are available.

Suppose you have the courage to come out of the shadows and ask for help. Where should you go? Should you see your pastor? A doctor? A therapist? A psychiatrist? Suppose your doctor correctly diagnoses your depression. What is he going to do in the ten minutes allowed by most HMOs? The doctor has only two choices: to write out a prescription for medication or make a referral. A psychiatrist is also a medical doctor and most do very little therapy work. So the psychiatrist will likely prescribe an antidepressant as well, or electroconvulsive therapy (shock treatment) in extreme cases. Licensed counselors and therapists cannot legally medicate, so they will treat depression as a psychological disorder and employ various techniques to help you think and live more responsively.

Pastoral counseling will vary greatly depending upon the pastors’ education and experience. Some will not even try to provide

counseling for mental and emotional problems. Godly pastors will try to help you in your relationship with your heavenly Father. Family and friends may try to jolly you up, scold you, or ignore you. It seems that friends do a lot better job of taking care of others' physical needs than of their mental and emotional needs. "How is your back doing today?" is a legitimate question, but "How is your head doing today?" isn't. That is one reason depressed people withdraw from others.

Depression is a body, soul, and spirit problem; and it requires a body, soul, and spirit answer, but seldom is such holistic help available. Most people will seek medical treatment first, and that usually takes into consideration only the physical. There certainly is a proper place for medication. Taking a pill to cure your body is commendable, but taking a pill to cure your soul is deplorable, and may the Good Lord grant us the wisdom to know the difference.

It is unlikely that the human race has undergone such radical physical changes in our brain chemistry and genes in the last ten years that would cause this increase in depression. It makes more sense to view the roots of the epidemic as being psychological and spiritual. Cognitive therapists have observed that depressed people generally have a negative view of themselves, their circumstances, and the future. Many agree that it is a sense of helplessness and hopelessness and that the precipitating cause is most often a reaction to losses in their lives.

I generally agree with this reasoning, but secular psychology can vary quite a bit from Christian psychology. God has not only defined who we are in Christ, He has also revealed in His Word adequate answers for our helplessness and hopelessness and shown how we can overcome our losses. Pastoral counselors also incorporate the reality of the spiritual world and rely upon the Holy Spirit to guide them. In *Discipleship Counseling*, I explain the role that God plays—or should play—in every counseling session.

My own counseling started to produce incredible results when I intentionally included the Wonderful Counselor in the process. There is a role that God and only God can play in our lives, and we must

usurp that role. Only God can bind up the brokenhearted and set the captive free. Including the reality of the spiritual world means we must take into account Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 4:1, "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons." That is presently happening all over the world.

Sharon has written a remarkable book about her long ordeal with depression. The length of her depression was largely due to seeing her problem as only a biological and psychological disorder and seeking help only in the secular world. When she finally accepted godly counsel, she found her freedom in Christ. Her story is not unique; we have seen hundreds set free in the same way she was. I hope you read every page of this book and learn from someone who has "been there and tried that."

—DR. NEIL T. ANDERSON, founder and president emeritus
of Freedom in Christ Ministries; coauthor of
Overcoming Depression with his wife, Joanne

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I spent nine years in depression's wilderness and the next nine years writing a book about it. During each journey, I became lost and in need of direction and support. God provided both, often choosing to use human ambassadors.

Tim, in the darkest period of my life, your love seemed like the only thing I could count on. Though God felt far off, I now know He was there all along, wrapped in your skin. Thank you for loving me so deeply, so faithfully, and so well.

Lauren and Jenna, though you did not choose your parents, you did choose your response to a mother who failed to be all the things you needed. Thank you for offering love, forgiveness, and a second chance. You are so precious to me.

Tim, Lauren, and Jenna, I deeply appreciate your great patience in the seemingly endless process of writing this book and your willingness to allow me to share about a traumatic time in our history. Your contributions to chapter 5 were much needed; you are truly the experts on how to survive when a loved one is depressed.

To my family: They say it takes a village to raise a child. At the very least, it takes an extended family, particularly when one parent's presence is diminished by depression. Your involvement in Lauren's and Jenna's lives has not gone unnoticed, nor has the love and support you've offered me in spite of my many flaws and aggravations. I am deeply grateful. Mom and Dad, thank you for the values you instilled

in me; for the hard-work ethic, honesty, and integrity you modeled; and for your love. George and Roberta, I am indebted to you for all you invested in your son—my devoted husband, a wonderful father, and a generous human being.

I'm grateful to my faith family for offering acceptance and love rather than condemnation and criticism during the years of my depression. Your response should be the model for churches everywhere.

Without the compassion and expert care I received from my psychiatrist, I would not have survived depression. Dr. C., you are a wonderful person and an extraordinary professional. I will never forget your wisdom, perseverance, and legendary patience.

When it looked as if my depression would never end, God led me to the office of a woman He would use to change my life. Berys Richardson, not only did you lead me to God's healing, you helped me develop a deeper relationship with Him. I wish it hadn't taken me nine years to find you; you are a truly gifted counselor.

Near the beginning of my writing journey, I received a phone call from a fellow writer and friend who offered some much-needed advice. Glenn MacDonald, if you hadn't suggested I attend a writers' conference, this book may never have come to fruition. Thank you for your encouragement and enthusiasm. I'm also grateful for the advice you kindly offered (and I initially spurned) to consider Christian counseling and read *The Bondage Breaker*.

I'm indebted to Marita Littauer and the staff at CLASServices for conducting top-notch speakers' and writers' conferences. Through the CLASSEminar and Glorieta Christian Writers' Conference, I met many of the people who became my mentors, encouragers, teachers, and friends—I'm grateful to you all.

Jerome Daley, I will always remember you as my first "divine appointment" at my first writers' conference. You've passionately seen this book through from its disjointed beginning to publication. Thank you for challenging me—in writing and life—as my coach and friend.

Jim Robinson, your life is a testament to the healing power of Christ and the fullness of the redemption He offers. I am so blessed to know you. Thank you for your generous spirit, your support of my writing, and your friendship. Maybe one day we *will* get to work together!

Les Stobbe, my agent, I appreciate your willingness to take a chance on an unknown first-time author. Thank you for representing me well. Thanks to Kate Epperson for championing my book at NavPress, and to the many people at this fine publishing house who committed to seeing this project through to completion.

Liz Heaney, thank you for your enthusiasm and encouragement and for enlarging my vision for this book. You really raised the bar—and gave me a boost over it! I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to work with such a gifted editor.

Dr. Neil T. Anderson, your generous endorsement brings me full circle: initially running from your teaching, finally embracing it, and now receiving your support of my work. As readers will discover, my freedom from depression is a testament to the power of your own book *The Bondage Breaker*. I am deeply indebted to you for your offer to write the foreword for *Hope for Wholeness*.

And finally, to God, the Engineer of this project and my life, I don't deserve Your grace, mercy, and love, but I accept them with gratitude. Thank You for carrying me when I was too weak to follow and for holding me close to Your heart. Though You are still writing my story, I know it will have a happy ending.

PART ONE

ILLUMINATING
THE DARKNESS

CAUGHT IN THE DELUGE *of* DEPRESSION

*The waves of death swirled about me; the torrents of
destruction overwhelmed me.*

2 Samuel 22:5

It should have been a day for tears, but I was no longer able to cry. Shrouded in a damp, gray fog of apathy, I had lost the capacity for emotion.

It was April 22, 1990, three days after my baby's first birthday. The winter snow had finally melted on Canada's east coast, and the promise of new life whispered in the warm, fragrant breath of spring. But my spirit was out of touch with the seasons, still trapped in winter's long, cold night. I walked slowly across the yard to my house, soggy brown grass squishing beneath my feet. *How long will I be gone?* I wondered.

Hearing the door open, my daughters came looking for "Mommy." One-year-old Jenna tottered into the entryway, still unstable with her new skill of walking. Four-year-old Lauren followed closely behind her sister, eyes wide, looking like a concerned little mother with arms ready to catch Jenna should she stumble.

As they made their way toward me, my soul sighed. *How can I leave them? How can I help them understand what's happening?* Even I didn't understand, yet I knew I was no longer able to provide the love and attention my daughters needed and deserved.

Just one year earlier, as I lay holding my newborn daughter in the birthing room, I had been overcome by a sense of peace and contentment unlike anything I'd ever felt before. My life seemed perfect. I had a wonderful husband, Tim, and two beautiful children. So what had gone wrong?

In the past few months, it had become apparent to me that my fairy-tale life was slipping away. Instead of looking forward to each new day, I dreaded waking up. Talking to my girls, telling them stories, and listening to their chatter once delighted me; now the sound of their voices grated on my raw nerves. I no longer wanted to talk, listen, or answer anyone's questions. I craved solitude and silence.

None of my previous hobbies or activities interested me anymore. I didn't want to leave the house, or even my bed. I just wanted to sleep — eternally, if possible.

Who is this person I've turned into? I wondered. I had become an empty arrangement of bones dressed in skin — warm, breathing, and moveable but devoid of any spark of life. It seemed that my spirit had died, and as each day passed, my longing to rejoin it, wherever it had gone, grew stronger.

After I described my desire for death to my physician, he immediately referred me to a psychiatrist. Dr. Ahmed* agreed to see me the next day. He diagnosed me with major clinical depression and recommended I be hospitalized for my own protection.

As I carried my bags down the stairs and stopped in the hallway to say good-bye to my girls, I waited for the sadness to well up and spill over — but it never came. There was only a twinge of pity for these two precious children whose misfortune it was to have me as their mother.

* Name changed.

Holding my daughters tight, I assured them I'd be back soon. Then I walked out the door, climbed into the car, and vanished. For nine years.

Though I would return for weekend visits, or be discharged from the hospital for a few months at a time, the woman who came home was not the mother my children remembered. She would not return before they learned to live without her.

BEING ADMITTED

As I made my way down the long hallway toward the psychiatric unit, I sensed that with each reluctant step I was losing a piece of myself. As the heavy metal door clanged shut behind me, despair and confusion flooded my soul. *What's someone like me doing in a place like this?* I asked myself.

While my husband met with the psychiatrist, a nurse showed me to my room and proceeded to search through my belongings. I fought back tears as she removed the sharp items. I had always believed myself to be a responsible person; the realization that I couldn't be trusted with a disposable razor or metal coat hanger was very humbling.

After the nurse completed admission procedures and outlined the unit's rules, Tim returned and sat next to me on the small cot in my tiny curtained room. I searched his eyes for some sign of hope. Taking my hand in his, Tim told me that the doctor was confident the medication he prescribed would help. "Dr. Ahmed said you should be feeling better in a couple of weeks. Then you'll be able to come home."

Two weeks isn't such a long time, I assured myself. But the doctor was wrong.

Searching for the Missing Pieces

If I had known what lay ahead for me in my struggle with depression, I am not sure I would have persevered. But since I didn't know healing would elude me for many years, each time a new medication was

prescribed, I could hope that it might be the one that would cure my brain and restore my life. Each night when I went to bed, I could imagine that tomorrow might be the day the doctor would ask the “right” question and some revelation in my counseling session might help me discover the cause of my despondency.

I am thankful that God keeps some things to Himself.

Dr. Ahmed and his colleagues seemed to believe I should know why I was depressed, but I didn't. My symptoms of depression didn't begin until eight or nine months after Jenna's birth, so postpartum depression was ruled out.¹ Other than having a baby, nothing in my life had changed in the previous year, but a painful transformation had taken place within me, a transformation as confounding as it was profound. I began to wonder if anyone could help me or if I would be left to solve this puzzle on my own.

As the days stretched into weeks, I searched for answers to a question that would turn my life upside down, a question that would take nearly a decade to solve: *Why?*

During my depression, I was an information junkie; I read everything about the illness I could get my hands on, thinking that if I learned enough, I could find my way out of the pit I'd fallen into. I tried to put into practice all the advice from each author and expert—to take my medication; change my thoughts; express my anger; make goals; visualize myself as a happy, successful person—but it seemed my efforts were in vain. *Either I'm a failure or these authors don't know what they're talking about*, I believed. I now understand that the authors did give good advice for those whose depression is emotionally or biologically sourced. It's just that I was not one of those people.

When I emerged from depression, I felt compelled to write a book that would help others, like me, who did not find complete and lasting freedom through medical or psychological treatments. *Hope for Wholeness* is that book.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

As you journey with me through the pages of this book, I hope you will come to understand that depression is not an enemy trying to rob you of life but rather an opportunity for self-examination and spiritual growth. I hope you will learn to identify the potential spiritual roots of depression and investigate spiritual treatments. I hope that through the deeply personal account of my battle with the illness, you will gain insight into your own depression. Most of all, I hope you will find in this book what I wish it hadn't taken me nine years to discover: the path to freedom.

Hope for Wholeness is divided into four parts:

Part One: Illuminating the Darkness investigates the complex relationship between physical, emotional, and spiritual health, and addresses the impact of depression on loved ones.

Part Two: Identifying Spiritual Roots dissects five contributing factors to spiritually rooted depression.

Part Three: Exploring Spiritual Treatments describes three powerful spiritual treatments for depression.

Part Four: Preserving and Advancing teaches how to maintain freedom from depression.

Each chapter opens with part of my story and moves into a discussion of the chapter theme, followed by "Encouragement from God's Word," a section designed to offer you hope found in Scripture. Sometimes I'll share a story from the Bible that corresponds with the chapter's topic; other times I'll use scriptural principles.

The questions in the "Self-Reflection" section are designed to help you consider what you've learned and apply it to your life. You may want to keep a journal or notebook so you can record your thoughts and answers.

Each chapter concludes with relevant quotes or Scripture verses for

you to meditate on. You may want to memorize them, but if memorization is difficult for you, write them out and post them where you will see them every day. Let these positive messages nourish your spirit.

While the chapters in *Hope for Wholeness* loosely follow the chronological progression of my depression, there may be times when you feel compelled to read a certain chapter out of order. For example, if you are struggling with thoughts of suicide, skip ahead to chapter 4. This book is designed to be a manageable read for those who have difficulty concentrating due to depression. You can focus on a chapter at a time, or you may choose to read just one section of the chapter before taking a break. Do whatever works best for you.

At the end of the book, you'll find three appendixes. Appendix A lists some resources I recommend for further information, inspiration, and encouragement. If you have unresolved questions when you finish the book, check out these resources. Appendixes B and C offer help to those who have loved ones with depression (your friends and family members, for example). Please feel free to share those sections with them so they will know how to better support you as well as take care of themselves in this difficult time.

In between each of the four parts of the book, you'll find an inspirational story. During my depression, I was drawn to stories like these, though I didn't understand why at the time. Mostly I read memoirs of Nazi Holocaust survivors and in the span of a year or so had devoured more than three thousand pages in a dozen books. Every story I read was about someone who lived to tell it, who persevered through incomprehensible suffering. These documentaries helped me believe that if humans could survive such horrors, it was possible that I could endure my own emotional nightmare. These extraordinary accounts of courage fostered in me the kind of grit and determination I'd need to stay alive. They gave me hope. For that reason, I've decided to share a few of my favorites with you. If there's a day you're in desperate need of encouragement to keep going, feel free to jump ahead to a "Story of Hope."

I am grateful to the people who shared their life stories and wisdom with me over the years. God worked in my life through them. Now it's my turn to pass something on to others. It's my prayer that God will use this book to restore your hope and launch you on your own amazing path to freedom.

If you benefit from *Hope for Wholeness*, I'd love to hear about it. Send me a "postcard" from your journey by using the Contact Form on my website, SharonFawcett.com. I can't wait to find out where God leads you!

