

DEPRESSION IN GOD'S LARGER DESIGN

Knowing ourselves teaches us what to ask. It helps us to identify the areas of need in our lives. It also teaches us how to approach God.

—JAMES HOUSTON—

The events of September 11, 2001 forever changed our lives. In less time than it takes to watch your favorite morning show, almost 3000 people in New York City and Washington, D. C. died. Our nation was stunned but resilient, in no small measure due to a reawakening of religious sentiments. Church attendance rose. People prayed. Politicians openly affirmed God's mercy. If only briefly, God took center stage. Our national outpouring of emotion reminded us of the void in this country's soul. For the moment at least, we put off spiritual amnesia by acknowledging God once more.

There had been warnings of an impending terrorist attack, but we failed to heed them because we were lulled into the belief that the threat did not exist. Only after a tragedy did we take action. In our crisis, we awoke from our denial and developed a network of preventive detection systems under a new Department of Homeland Security. In the course of these events, we demonstrated our uniquely human capacity for devising innovative problem-solving strategies. But as is so often the case, this capacity has proven to be a two-edged sword. While we find new and creative ways to solve our problems, we tend to regress to denial—we believe that the triumphs of our ability to reason are all that we need to live successfully. One of our greatest strengths then, becomes a weakness, creating a false sense of security in our own competency.

Our culture teaches that our accomplishments can replace our dependence on God. Our God-given rationality has become our Achilles' heel. We've trapped ourselves. What we have been given by God has never seemed enough. He made us a little lower than the angels, but we claim superiority over all. He crowned us with glory and honor, but we demand admiration. He loves us, but many have written Him off as irrelevant. Nothing short of assuming complete authority seems to satisfy us—and even that doesn't satisfy us. We have spurned the awe that creatures owe their Creator. We've edited the blueprint of our own design and the original is forgotten.

Faith in scientific inquiry as the only means of understanding the world has blinded us to eternity's landscape. To remove God from life's equation is to eliminate the only ground for human significance. Denying the spiritual worldview, we fail to appreciate why we're so precisely equipped to handle threats to our well-being.

In our materialism, we have dismissed questions about the meaning of life as too religious, leaving a spiritual vacuum that the cult of science cannot fill. We are just too wedded to the tangible world of "hard data" to admit to anything else. Yet we cannot reduce emotional states to the mere activity of certain biological systems without missing God's design and purpose for our psychological makeup. A colleague of mine at the college where I taught once said to me in frustration, "This religious stuff is just superstitious nonsense that keeps getting in the way of teaching the superiority of science. Why do you persist in helping these people pursue their ignorance? Can't they (*and you*) see that life is nothing more than the accumulation of stimulus-response connections that can be traced to the evolution of our biology? Sometimes, I think I might as well give up teaching—nobody learns anything from it anyway. I'll never understand you—you're educated and you still believe that stuff. I think it's pretty hopeless."

In rejecting such reductionism, Viktor Frankl argued that rather than being "pushed" toward meaning by some biological drive,

we are actually *pulled* toward meaning by something that appeals to our human spirit. From this point of view, our emotional alarm systems are designed to keep bringing us back to a purposeful life—which of course, is the life God intended—a view my colleague could never accept.

We have no difficulty explaining short-range physiological events such as the "flight or fight" response preparing the body for action. But longer-term emotional states, like depression, require a broader explanation that incorporates the divine logic behind the system. All emotional signals were originally meant to arouse our repugnance to evil and to stimulate joy in response to goodness. But after the Fall, these signals were needed for damage control. The hardships of a fallen world required a design that steered us back to the purpose of loving—back to God Himself.

Our emotional signals are therefore, part of the divine image. Any warning system, such as depression, though unpleasant to experience, is meant to guard that image. Depression is not merely a disease to treat, but an experience that leads us to something better. It may prompt us to clear away the baggage of a difficult pastor to process a significant loss.

Clinical practice tells us that in most cases, depression has a far more useful role than we think. It's not simply a matter of chance errors in the function of enzymes. Author Andrew Solomon, who experienced depression himself, agrees: "Anyone who lives through [depression] knows that it is never as simple as complicated chemistry."¹

Now, we are by no means dismissing the biological factors or genetic predispositions to depression. They certainly occur and in such instances, depression signals the onset of measurable brain dysfunction. That calls for a specific, mainly medical, course of treatment. But the majority of depression cases can be traced back to relational causes. Depression can prompt us to examine conflicts that we were previously too distracting or more likely, too fearful to face. When this signal intrudes and pries open our

tightly-held irrational beliefs, it can open up an entirely new way of thinking.

Nothing less than the trauma of depression is likely to stimulate such change.

IN THE BEGINNING: A LIVING PARADOX

Man was originally created in the *perfect* image of God—perfectly in His likeness. But Adam, denying his inferiority to God, chose the path of moral independence. And so man’s soul was marked and his moral senses permanently dulled. In love, God warned Adam against this spiritually fatal step. But Adam proceeded to damage his divine image and developed a tendency to sin. As amazing as it may seem, even though Adam freely rejected his natural spiritual inheritance, God never put a single condition on His love.

We know that God is wholly righteous with no capacity for evil (cf. Jas. 1:13). Man however, lacks God’s power to resist evil by himself, so he is reliant on God to sustain purity. Apparently though, Adam and Eve weren’t convinced. They held fantasies of moral indignation, cultivated by Satan when he openly questioned God’s goodness. As a result, they took matters into their own hands. Today’s secular humanism is only the most recent expression of this ancient theme.

The consequences for Adam and Eve were disastrous, ending their tenure in the Garden and staining their divine image. Most tragic of all was the fact that they were cut off from their Creator’s presence. They were powerless to regain any of this on their own. But God, in His mercy, took the initiative to restore this intimacy and to offer healing for a damaged divine image.

This is the story of the Gospel: an incorruptible love brought to bear on a sin-corrupted need to be loved. It’s just like God to create a people who need intimate fellowship so that we might serve God and minister in love to the hearts of people. But we are able to love like this *only* because He loved us first! (See 1 John 4:19.)

That love transforms people. It allowed Stephen, the first Christian martyr, to forgive his killers. It took Saul’s zealous pursuit of religious legalism and turned it into a white-hot fire for God. And it calls out to us in our meaninglessness and offers us a sense of purpose. If we want to find meaning to our lives, we must first ask ourselves, “What’s the point?” The point is that the good life can never be found on our terms, but only in God’s design.

When Jesus was asked to identify the greatest commandment in the Torah, He gave a two-part answer: Love God and love your neighbor (see Matt. 22:35-40). How can these two be included in the same response? It’s

a matter of authenticity. Just as faith without works is dead (see Jas.

2:26), so the profession of love is hollow without corresponding behaviors. To say we love God and yet harbor ill will toward others is a deception (see 1 John 4:20-21). On the other hand, even unbelievers can love one another. The truth is that even when mis-directed by a secular culture, love’s existence depends on God’s presence in the world. It’s part of the divine image in man—an image that is essentially relational in character.

This brings us to one of the Bible’s most puzzling observations. Before he sinned, Adam experienced complete, unhindered communion with God. And yet, the Lord said, “It is *not* good for the man to be alone”(Gen. 2:18, NIV, emphasis added). Why wasn’t God enough for Adam?

I believe it’s because Adam—who could never be self-sufficient, whose sociability was limited by a finite mind—needed interpersonal interaction with someone similarly finite. We are created with the relational character of our Creator. And we can fellowship with God. But finite man needs something that an infinite God doesn’t need. Unlike a triune God, who is whole within the intimacy of His own three-part being, man must find wholeness by connecting with someone outside of himself. God finds perfect

completion within Himself and doesn't need us to complete Him. We, however, need other finite humans to complete our powerful aspiration to love. Just as we must intimately connect with our Creator to fill our spiritual hunger, we must also connect with fellow created beings to fill our social hunger.

Adam's loneliness was not due therefore to an insufficiency in God's companionship, but rather to the fact of his own limits as a created being. And so God created woman as the man's "helper," which is translated from the Hebrew *ezer*. Most often, the Bible uses this word to refer to doing God's work. It never implies inferiority, but rather elevates the woman's role to one of honoring God. So God created the woman to do godly work in meeting Adam's companionship needs at the finite level. God meant intimacy between a man and a woman to serve as an earthly model for the relationship between God and His people. Human intimacy helped Adam understand the depth of relationship he also needed with God.

That's why God constantly refers to His relationship with His people in terms of marriage. He refers to the New Testament Church as His bride. He describes Old Testament Israel's sinful behavior as "harlotry" or "adultery," leading to a painful "divorcé." Man's relationship with God was from the beginning intended to be one of faithful intimacy, just as we see with happily-married couples. Only a relationship like this can nourish and uplift the soul.

Here we see the creative genius of our God: Our desire for intimate relationship—part of the Creator's image in us—is ultimately responsible for the spiritual unrest that lures us back to our reason for being. We find meaning when we understand ourselves as we were intended to be.

But sin changed everything. It blurred the original splendor of our design and left us in an unnatural state—spiritually-dead and emotionally-naked. Notice that Adam and Eve suddenly became aware of their physical nakedness *after* they sinned. They had lived in selflessness, absorbed in God's and each other's compan-

ionship. But sin, by nature, involves self-centered gratification—it refocused man's attention on himself. Their new awareness of their unclothed bodies symbolized the shame of their selfishness. They were "stripped" of their natural state—union of body and soul—now hopelessly divided bodies with spiritually-dead souls. Since then, man's struggle in this broken world is, at its root, his ongoing grief over the loss of what could have been.

Now, if the first couple had become inclined toward evil, for what possible reason would God perpetuate the race, allowing the birth of children who would inherit corruption and multiply evil still further? It might seem like madness, but God's purpose was, once again, ingenious. He provided yet another relational picture to help us understand His desired relationship with us. How better to understand God's forgiveness and grace than by raising and loving our own children? Don't we love our children regardless of their grievous misbehavior? If we're good parents, of course we do.

Healthy parental love is then, the best model for understanding God's love for His children, making sense of His actions and highlighting His grace as the natural overflow of a caring Father's heart. Reflecting this idea, my daughter once said to me, "Daddy, I know you love me no matter what I do—that's like Jesus isn't it?" Though still a child, she really got it. Of course, I scooped her up in my arms and showed my love for her even more!

CREATION: THE INTIMACY OF IMAGE MAKING

God's creation of man was itself a powerfully intimate act. He said, "Let us make man in *our* image" (Gen. 1:26, NIV, italics added). He made a personal investment in us—a spiritual and emotional likeness. Hebrew scholars draw attention to the profound implications of the grammar of Genesis 2:7. God did not give man a soul; he created him as a living soul, as a living personality interacting with his Creator. Our natural tendency to seek relationships in general and intimacy with God in particular, is not simply an

added human attribute—it’s who we are! We were born for love and nothing less can adequately define or justify our essence.

Most clients who walk into my office live in a world of relational pain. They talk about depression, loneliness, insecurity, never measuring up, resentments and the like. *But what they are invariably describing is a frustrated desire to be loved and to love someone in return.* Ask a client if she is lonely and she will often break down in a torrent of tears. Mention something about God’s love and he will comment on the lack of it in his relationships. One woman said to me, “All I crave for is for someone to hold me and tell me I’m truly loved. I just want to feel special to someone...is that too much to ask?”

To capture the imagination and stimulate the hope of emotionally-hungry people, we have to demonstrate that human-to-human love is an obtainable reality. This tangible demonstration has always been and still is, the most powerful pathway to understanding the reality of God’s love.

Time spent with a Christian counselor may be a person’s first true encounter with authenticity in a relationship. One of the goals of that relationship is the client’s experience of God’s loving presence. But, as important as that is, it’s only the beginning. Somehow, clients must also learn new ways of connecting this experience to their relationships with the important people in their life—in ways that will eventually make counseling no longer necessary.

Confronting our hidden fears, dealing directly with our anger and guilt, admitting our feelings of shame. This work is not merely cathartic—it is transforming. It takes the energy we’ve long used destructively and redirects it toward fulfilling relationships and productive interactions. But we don’t break old patterns easily. You would think the intense pain of such patterns would stimulate us to action. Sometimes it does. But we humans have a remarkable capacity to endure pain and resist the change that would reduce it. Every time we ignore our natural warning signals, we are saying in effect, “I know a better way.”

THE ILLUSIONS OF THE FALL DIE HARD.

When Adam abused the privilege of the Garden and ignored the importance of his relationship with his Creator, he did so believing he was better off in charge. In spite of Adam’s blatant arrogance, God’s love was patient. In fact, He didn’t merely endure our rejection. He lavished His sacrificial love upon us by sending His Son. It’s one thing to sacrifice for your friends, quite another to die for your enemies. This is rare among humans, even though it is natural for God. Yet it’s the love we hunger for (see Rom. 5:6-8).

The Gospel is the story of a sacred intimacy no other faith can duplicate. It moved the apostle Paul to claim that we become an entirely new creation when we accept our Lord’s offer of redemption (see 2 Cor. 5:17). This offer is utterly unique, which is why it became the focal point of all of human history.

It’s reassuring that even Hollywood, in its moral vacuum, occasionally gets something right. The script for the film *Tuck Everlasting* was written around the theme that, if we fear anything, it should be the un-lived life—the stagnation of so many relationships that pass for intimacy. They are filled with “busyness” but offer little meaningful interaction. Our frantic American lifestyle too often robs us of time for building relationships. And many marriages, which somehow manage to avoid divorce, nonetheless exist in a state of living death. Isn’t the indiscriminate use of tranquilizers evidence of this lifestyle’s emptiness? Must we exist as mere caricatures of the divine image, always searching for momentary pleasure?

Observe the woman, displaying anger toward her husband, but inwardly grieving over her loneliness—the loss of “the man she married.” She turns away from him to faith and friends as her only comfort. Or the husband, depressed about a marriage that’s evaporating before his eyes, believing he can never please his wife. He retreats from her and into work as his only solace.

Alarms are sounding right and left. Both are experiencing emotional crises. But the outcome depends on their responses. Will they listen to the signals and realize that their depression is point-

ing toward change? Or will they react defensively, resorting to blaming or stonewalling? Even in so-called stagnant relationships, depression is usually part of the mix, warning of impending relational meltdown. I remember one woman said after her divorce, “My husband and I could never get past our accusations of one another—it just seemed like we were both so depressed that we were determined to make each other equally miserable. If only we could have realized what we were doing....”

We see then, that depression can alter the relationship pattern itself. Emotional pain, like its physical counterpart, sharply narrows our focus and then turns it inward creating a variety of communication problems. For instance, self-preoccupation can impair our willingness to listen to others and to empathize with them. Without the ability to see life from the other person’s perspective, we cannot connect intimately.

Relationship patterns are likely most altered when depression goes unrecognized as a warning signal. It’s misused to justify retreat into silence or lashing out in defense. In such cases, we tend to talk about our depression as an overpowering “condition” with a life of its own. We become convinced that we need more understanding, more tolerance. Self-pity sets in and, in our “victim” state, our prognosis becomes even less optimistic. One man who talked this way complained, “Why can’t people see that I can’t help myself...it’s just the way I am, so why won’t they accept that?” He failed to see that while God was in charge of creating his person, he was responsible for changing his behavior.

Sometimes whole families—by their choice of words, relationships, decisions and self-imposed limitations—are organized around a single member’s depression. That’s because they are conditioned by the fear of triggering still another wave of negative reaction. Mother will tell the kids, “Don’t make any noise; your father is not feeling well, so we all need to be quiet.” Or Father may say, “it’s important to obey your mother—you know how bad she feels when you misbehave.” So you see, even guilt manipulations may be used in the effort to avoid another meltdown.

These destructive relational outcomes result when we fail to understand the purpose of depression. But if we see it as the signal it is, we have a better chance of discovering our core issues and resolving them. Sometimes, we need objective outside help to sort out these issues without becoming overwhelmed in the process. That’s because in the midst of our own depression, our problem-solving ability is overshadowed by negativism and the temptation to surrender to helplessness. We can better resist resignation if we understand our depression not as a personal failure, but

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as a context for pursuing a different course of action. This perspective however, requires a willingness to do some hard emotional work—something that many people spend their lives avoiding.

We were created both *for* a purpose and *with* a purpose. God never leaves anything to chance. We see His purposeful actions throughout redemptive history. In the events leading up to the Exodus, God targeted each of the 10 plagues at one of Egypt’s false gods demonstrating His superiority over each of them. Though these were acts of judgment, they were also compassionate demonstrations (both to the Egyptians and the Hebrews) that God is the sole intervening power of the universe.

We see purpose in God’s every act of creation and in His every act in history—even in our lives. He is a relational God who loves all He has created. Given that initial investment, we are assured that all His actions in our life are directed toward the goal of healing, protecting and glorifying His image in us.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY: A LESSON IN LOVE AND MEANING

Knowing what it means to be created in the image of God is essential for understanding the human experience. Scientific study alone will always be limited if we assume that everything is

traceable to material causes. It will inevitably result in misleading conclusions and false predictions. Worse still, such errors will be attributed to the imprecision of science rather than to the unpredictability of free will and the actions of a transcendent God. We must therefore look in a different direction to find the true blueprint for human behavior.

The average person though, is not so much interested in the technical details as in the practical implications of human knowledge. He prefers to focus on what seems to make life more worthwhile, what leads to fulfilling relationships and what adds meaning to his life's work. Most people want to believe their lives matter—that there's a point to living beyond just using up space and oxygen.

Centering the universe around ourselves however, can never achieve this goal. Man cannot manufacture his own purpose, as humanists attempt to do. When he tries, he violates the divine

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image and robs himself of the capacity to think accurately about himself. All he is left with is his intractable denial.

Faith-based critical thinking, on the other hand, focuses not so much on answering the

questions our culture raises, but on questioning the answers our culture gives. We can only find meaning beyond the natural order by seeking truth with eyes of faith, which is what makes the divine image so important. It's a humble endeavor to seek answers, not merely within ourselves but through the Creator's revelation. Humility in the name of wisdom, though, is far better than ignorance in the name of vanity.

Searching for purpose along the pathway of wisdom reveals the importance of our capacity for love. But those who are convinced of their unlovability often feel compelled to seek acceptance along an unwise path. In Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical *The Phantom of*

the Opera, the disfigured phantom, caught up in his self-perceived unlovability, implores his young hostage to relieve his unbearable solitude and love him genuinely. But the maiden loves another and the phantom lashes out in murderous rage. Tragically, the phantom's loneliness and "unworthiness" is self-imposed. He believes he is a victim imprisoned by the ugliness of his burn-scarred face and spurned by a society that rejects anything short of beauty. In reality, he is his own jailor thwarting his own yearning for a bond of intimacy. In the end, the strangely discordant opera he composed for his beloved reflected a life out of tune with reality and inharmonious with the music of life he sought.

Here we see all the interacting elements of the divine image intended to form loving connections but now distorted by rejection and humiliation. The phantom's misguided efforts ended in self-destruction. Few people seek answers by means of such monstrous behavior, but most of us have used some form of self-defeating behavior in our attempts to escape loneliness, rejection and self-hatred.

In one way or another, every counterproductive attempt to find relief is a way of avoiding personal responsibility for our growth. Playing the victim produces no long-term rewards. We can blame God, people or fate—rarely, if ever, acknowledging our own poor choices—but to do so is to surrender to the deception of helplessness. Relinquishing personal control means giving up the idea of taking active steps toward a remedy.

FOLLOWING DEPRESSION'S LEAD

Louis Pasteur once observed that, "chance favors the prepared mind."² Everyone should understand the nature of depression, whether or not they're dealing with it now. It's never too early to learn what it really means, what to expect when this alarm system is triggered and how to follow its lead to growth.

Those who have gone through depression often experience, among other surprising benefits, a greater sensitivity to the suf-

fering of others. Adversity strengthens not only our coping skills but our empathy as well. A client of mine, who had struggled with depression, was able to comfort his wife through a subsequent trauma of her own. With new understanding, he came alongside her as a healing companion in her despair. He was instrumental in helping her process her experience successfully. After the worst had passed, she reflected on her husband's help. "He is so different now. I have never seen him as sensitive as he is now. Though it was awful when we went through it, his depression has changed him... and I mean for the good!" It was apparent that his personal struggle had produced an empathy that strengthened their marriage.

God never wastes an experience, even a painful one. Even if we don't understand what's happening in the moment, our *anticipation of growth* can help us endure and see it through. The usefulness of this purpose-driven behavior is captured in a humorous incident during a family vacation a few years ago. We were visiting extended family on a farm near the Ozarks. On a hot, humid afternoon, we noted that their dog, which appeared old and worn-out, lay nearby breathing laboriously and moving as little as possible. My wife's cousin Ron grinned and told us the dog was his bird dog, capable of chasing down fallen birds with the best of them. He went into the house and soon reemerged, holding his favorite shotgun. Immediately, the slumbering dog leaped to his feet, ears erect, tail extended and began running in circles and barking like a pup, ready for bird hunting. Ron broke into hearty laughter over our startled reaction and reminded us that, "a dog with a purpose is a dog unleashed for action."

What a parable for the human scene! When we see a clear purpose—for our depression in the short run or for our life in the long run—we find new energy, new conviction and a new longing to follow our deepest desire. It unleashes a revitalized motivation to pursue the blueprint of our creation!

When we fail to grasp the purpose of this experience, it is easy to slide into despair—even suicidal despair. Either that or we

resign ourselves to an emotional numbness, accepting depression as a part of life with no meaning beyond its symptoms. Depression, in that case, becomes the color of defeat washing our entire future in shades of gray. The resulting apathy cripples our ambition and fosters escapism from anything we don't want to face. Like actor Jack Nicholson's character in the film, "As Good As It Gets," he assumed that his life would never get any better than the depressing compulsive routine he had called his life.

This resignation is similar to the way we rationalize sin as moral expediency. "That's just modern life" is the common refrain of relativism. We make a pact with culture: Cede moral authority to "them," and "they" become our defense against acknowledging our own sin. Author John Eldredge laments, "Something awful has happened, something terrible, something worse even than the fall of man. With that greatest of all tragedies we merely lost paradise and with it everything that made life worth living. What has happened since is unthinkable. We have gotten used to it. We are broken into the idea that this is just the way things are."³

When we likewise adapt to depression, refusing to acknowledge its signal value, we slip into the abyss of lost hopes, lost dreams and lost relationships—a continuous repetition of the same unproductive thinking and behavior that triggered the alarm in the first place. God has placed within us a desire for much more than that. But when we refuse to take the necessary risks in God's love, we fall back on the principle that nothing ventured is nothing lost. By then, *everything* has been lost already.

THE VIRTUE OF HOPE AND THE HOPE OF VIRTUE

It has been said that hope, however remote, is still far better than its absence. For with hope comes the determination to change. But its absence robs us of even the willingness to try. Remember, it's the precious moments of joy in our life that gives us a glimpse of a future governed by hope.

A Samaritan woman came to the town well one fateful afternoon. She had hoped for a life of love, but her pursuit of tenuous marriages and promiscuous relationships led only to disillusionment. Jesus met her there, knowing her soul's desperate thirst and He offered her the living water of His transcendent peace. At last, her thirst was quenched and her hope for a life worth living fulfilled. With excitement, she exclaimed to her startled people, "Come, I have found the Messiah!"

Today, Jesus calls us to something greater than we can ever imagine. But we are often blind to His mercy and deaf to His words of truth. A veil of emotional trauma obscures our view of God and distorts our view of self. We often have refashioned truth according to our own "wisdom," twisting it into something unrecognizable. But God always responds in our best interests. He may choose to answer our pain with a compelling revelation of our irrational beliefs. Or maybe He will bring people into our life as agents of change. Or, in His wisdom, He may simply choose to wait and let life's consequences do their work of teaching.

God's actions or inactions may not always make sense to us. Indeed, we may become impatient, accusatory or even cynical. Yet incredible though it may seem, God fully understands our responses. He is not fragile! He knows that we will never completely comprehend His infinite wisdom. Nor can we begin to understand the magnitude of His righteousness.

But trusting in His virtue is the choice that makes the difference between perceiving God as a righteous Father and viewing Him as a petty dictator. It is our acceptance of God's goodness that gives us the confidence to disclose the troubled contents of our depressed mind and heart, knowing that it will provoke His compassion, not His wrath and judgment.

It's this sense of safety that's necessary to pry open the closed heart of damaged people, to peel back the patches of lifeless brava-do which have sealed their deep wounds. In relationship with God, a trusting heart is a healing heart. And a community of believers

that speaks God's tender words of truth is a healing community.

With these loving connections, we may begin at last, to reclaim and repair the character of our divine image.

FINDING HOPE

1. **Emotional signals like depression are part of a warning system meant to guard the divine image. As such, they are vital for preventing further damage.**
2. **God's answer to man's dilemma? An incorruptible love brought to bear on a need to be loved corrupted by sin.**
3. **You were created by love and for love. It is essential for understanding your human identity and for providing personal meaning.**
4. **The best antidote to the temptation to withdraw into helplessness is to recognize that depression sets the stage for true change.**
5. **God never wastes an experience. When you believe He will grow you through your pain or disappointment, you are better prepared to endure it.**
6. **Trusting God's goodness is the first step in building the intimate connections that are healing to your divine image.**

