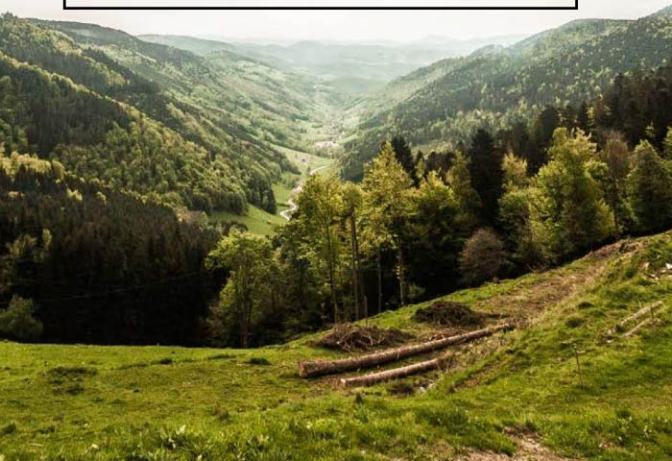


MARTHA O'REILLY

Beyond

THE DECEPTION
OF DEPRESSION

WHAT THE BIBLE TAUGHT ME



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DECEPTION OF
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SOWING FOR A GREAT AWAKENING

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Foreword

For far too long the Christian community has allowed a shroud of darkness to cover the issues surrounding depression, while we or our sisters and brothers suffer in silence. Depression has been made a secret, and like all secrets, those keeping it become increasingly silent and isolated, weighed down with an unreasonable sense of shame and separated from normal social paths supporting recovery and healing. All the while, this community has access to the sacred text that offers a way through and beyond depression.

Martha O'Reilly has broken the silence by weaving threads of experience, Scripture, wisdom writers, and soulful reflection into a unique guidebook for those seeking a Christian path through the valley of depression into vitality. In this thoughtful account of Christian wholeness, Martha discloses significant personal moments of her life held in the grips of depression, perceptively diagnoses its destructive hold, and points to the provision of God's invitation in Scripture to walk into a new reality. While her own

life is a witness to the healing power of a long obedience, this work leans solidly on the invitation and promises of Scripture that are available to anyone who has had enough of the chaos and is willing to learn the ancient way of trust and surrender.

"Solvitur ambulando," a phrase attributed to Augustine, means "solved by walking." The journey out of depression and depressive ways of living is rightly that—a journey, a process. It is Pilgrim's progress, it is Tolkien's journey of the ring. As we walk, we discover. We learn. We are changed. But this journey is not a rabbit trail meandering through forest and meadow to no particular destination. It is a guided expedition, a pilgrimage beginning with a sacred invitation and accompanied thereafter, step by step. These adventures cannot be safely taken alone. Too much is at risk. There must be fellow travelers; Jesus steps forward and promises to be the first one. Others will follow. A person on a journey awakens hope in the hopeless, and soon it is a company—a community that is about this mission of discovering abundant life.

My own experience as a Christian leader personally acquainted with the very real dynamics of the suffering of depression makes me skeptical of writers who offer simple solutions or clichéd guidance for uncomplicated recovery. I take great offense in the "If you really trusted God, you would not be in this situation" rhetoric. I get a sense that these writers are more uncomfortable with the depressed person than desirous to help, and want the problem to be resolved,

fast and clean. Such material simply adds to the shame as reality again fails to adjust itself so easily. I admit I came to this book with that lens in place. Instead, I found Martha O'Reilly able to compassionately relate to the journey toward wholeness, understanding the way to be a long one, involving many facets including medical support, community engagement, reformation of the mind/thought life, and adoption of life-giving daily habits. For many, it is a lifelong journey with significant hills and valleys.

Martha is able to mine the depths of Scripture and identify the invitation set out therein to guide the pilgrim in their long obedience toward fresh experience of life. Her confidence is not in the conscious cooperation of the pilgrim, necessary as that is. Rather, her surety is in the One who says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." The powerful presence of God accompanies those who are learning to walk in faithfulness and trust, making transformation and renewal possible.

Read this book slowly and allow each strand, each color, to remain in your thoughts. Meditate on the Scriptures quoted therein. Listen to the ancient wisdom. Treat sections like a prayer, or a poem. Listen for the accompanying voice of the Father of Jesus Christ who will whisper into your ear, "This is the way, walk in it."

Dr. Marilyn Elliott
Vice President of Community Formation
Asbury Theological Seminary

Preface

I am one of the 10.8 percent of the American population that deals with depression. According to the Centers for Disease Control 6.7 percent have major depressive episodes, 1.5 percent have chronic, low level depression (dysthymia) and 2.6 percent have bi-polar disorder. You could be one of these folks or live with or know of someone who has depression. It can be a debilitating disease but more often those with depression put on a brave face and try to appear normal. However, accompanying depression are low self-esteem, feelings of hopelessness, and a sense that you are a failure or that you let yourself or your family down. It's impossible to be your best when you are feeling worthless.

This hopelessness and worthlessness is what I refer to as The Deception of Depression. Depression causes us to feel one way about ourselves but God did not create us to live with low self-esteem and we need to know the truth. He created us in His image and we

are wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14). He wants us to be joyful and live life abundantly.

To learn the truth about myself I turned to the Bible. The assurances of hope I received from the Bible literally transformed my life and now rather than being shaped by depression, I am shaped by the Word of God.

As you read the subtitle of this book, "What the Bible Taught Me," you might rightly ask, "Does the Bible address depression?" I will be the first to admit that you can look in any concordance or do a word search on your favorite Bible software and the word *depression* will not come up. But the Bible addresses every condition of the human heart and every situation under the sun, as well as our human responses to them.

If a Bible scholar were to pick up this book he or she could very well accuse me of picking out a passage of Scripture to prove a particular point. I am certainly guilty of that. And by no means is this an authoritative text on depression. Neither is this an exhaustive study. This is simply my experience of how Scripture helped me through my darkest days. God has lessons for each of us that speak to the most secret places of our soul and teach us lessons relevant to our particular situation. Second Timothy 3:16 tells us, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."


Each chapter of this book starts with a Scripture verse that I hold dear to my heart and that has been

transformative in my life. I wanted to share the lessons I learned, and it is my greatest desire that you will meditate on these Scriptures and be blessed by them. This is a story of my spiritual journey to wholeness, a journey that I could never navigate on my own without the Holy Spirit dwelling in me.


This book is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the problem—we simply don't think or act the way God wants us to. Each of us is going after our individual endeavors, and many times this takes us away from God and, in the process, diminishes our mental health. The second part concentrates on the very nature of God, which binds our wounds and gives us hope. Part three delves into the attitudes that need adjustment, ingrained thought patterns that need to be changed, and behaviors that need to be modified if we are to lead a God-centered, joyful life. Charles Stanley states, "If we are to change and to grow, we must be willing to move away from what has been holding us back, pushing us down, or keeping us from being in a position to receive God's best. We must be willing to give up our hold on the things to which we have been clinging with all our might."¹

Depression is a condition that many of us have dealt with for part of our lives and, for some of us, our entire lives. It may be situational depression caused by a traumatic event or loss. It may be chronic depression, acute depression, or even bi-polar disorder, and at times a combination of conditions. I have struggled

with depression for as long as I can remember, but I struggle no more, although I do have to avoid stressors that may cause a depressive episode. Thanks to the grace of God, I have gone from brokenness to blessedness, from despair to delight. My fervent hope is that this book and the Scripture it points to will encourage those who struggle as I have.

I allowed the Holy Spirit to guide me in writing this book. He told me that I was to search the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The Scriptures spoke to me, and it was clear to see what God wanted me to write. The power to receive depended on my willingness to be open to the Spirit, and I believe I was. As a pastor I have many different Bible editions and translations, but I was led to use *The Spiritual Formation Bible, New International Version*.² The contributors to the commentary of that study Bible represent some of the finest theological minds of today and provided me with insight and much to contemplate. This book is peppered not only with Scripture but also with quotes from the cloud of witnesses who have gone before me. I am grateful to these sages who helped in this endeavor as they testify to the preeminence of God and the power He has to conform us to His image and, by doing so, heal us. 

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to all who helped birth this book with me. First and foremost, God inspired this book and gave me the courage to write it. My husband, Jim, has been my rock throughout our life together. His unwavering love, encouragement, and support have been indispensable for my growth. My friends Fran Downing and Tricia Pulsifer were the first to read an early draft and lovingly gave me insight to ponder. Rev. J. D. Walt inspired me in chapel at Asbury Theological Seminary, believed in this project, and was instrumental in shaping its contents. Cecilia and Michael Gallery provided a quiet place for me to commune with the Spirit. They embody living simply and abundantly. I have been blessed to have each and every one of these people in my life as sojourners along the way. 

PART I



The Problem—
The World's Turmoil


The world's turmoil often has a way of becoming our own personal turmoil. At times we can empathize with Job when he said, "I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil" (Job 3:26). Turmoil has been apparent from the beginning of time. Before God created the world, "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (Gen. 1:2 KJV). In other words, chaos reigned. It wasn't until God spoke light into being and began to order the world that the turmoil was subdued. But just like a rabid dog that may be contained for a while, the world's true nature reared its ugly head. And even though humans were made in the image of God, we chose to sin.

What happened was this: People knew God perfectly well, but when they didn't treat him like God, refusing to worship him, they trivialized themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his

hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand.

So God said, in effect, "If that's what you want, that's what you get." It wasn't long before they were living in a pigpen, smeared with filth, filthy inside and out. And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshiped the god they made instead of the God who made them—the God we bless, the God who blesses *us*. Oh, yes!

Romans 1:21–25 THE MESSAGE

This first section deals with how the world looks so tempting that we cannot resist eating of its fruit, fruit that can be harmful to us. While the world in all its glory looks good, it can proliferate turmoil if we are not careful. We go our own way; we disobey God, and then are left to our own devices, which lead us astray. It is all too easy for us to be people of the world rather than God's people. 

CHAPTER 1

Going Our Own Way

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

Philippians 4:8



When I read the Bible as a new Christian, certain truths seemed to just pop out—truths that were new and amazing to me. I was astounded that the Bible spoke to the deepest needs of my heart and soul. These truths were too pertinent to my personal situation to simply read and let go, so I wrote them down and referred back to them. Now, some thirty years later, I still have these Scripture verses on the original index cards tucked away in a desk drawer. I look at

them from time to time and ponder how these verses have guided and molded my life over the years.

I wrote down Philippians 4:8 in such a fashion, and it is the inspiration for this book. While God wants us to think about the noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, and praiseworthy things, the world does not. Just look at our newspapers—the pages are filled with all sorts of crimes and heinous deeds people have committed against their fellow man. TV news is even worse—it brings war, famine, and calamity into our homes on a daily basis. So-called “reality shows” seem to bring out the very worst in people as they strive to get attention with one-upmanship on their fellow contestants. The more egregious the behavior, the more popular it seems to be.

But God wants us to think about the true and lovely, and it is this dichotomy that causes angst in our lives. God created the cosmos and proclaimed everything in it to be good, but the world pulls us in a different direction. It's the age old battle between what our human nature wants and what God intends for us. The Bible tells us, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). There is no getting around this simple fact—each of us has veered from the path set for us by God. Though we say we want to follow God, we try to keep some of our old ways. We can see this in the plight of the Israelites after God rescued them from Egypt. On their way to

the Promised Land they encountered many difficulties—many of their own making.

Although many of them loved and feared the Lord, they strayed time and time again. They experienced the many miracles and wonders the Lord performed on their behalf—the plagues against the Egyptians, the parting of the Red Sea, the provision of manna and quail in the desert—and yet they stumbled repeatedly. Shortly after receiving the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–17), they responded by saying, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey” (Exod. 24:7), and yet they built the golden calf (Exod. 32). Even Aaron, Moses’s brother, fell in behind the people. “You shall have no other gods before me” is the very first commandment, but the Hebrews did that very thing. They wanted a god of their own choosing and making, one that would not make demands on them.

We, too, are like the Hebrews. We say we love God and want to obey Him, but our human susceptibilities get in the way. Over and over we make a promise to God and then fall back. We say we love God and want to obey Him, but our human tendency is to repeat what is familiar and easy. We find ourselves committing the same sins and falling into the same old traps. We hold on to toxic relationships. Too often we listen to the lies of the world rather than the truth God promises. Even the apostle Paul struggled with backsliding as he admits, “We know that the law is

spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do" (Rom. 7:14–15).

God wants us to live in truth, but how do we do that? The only way to live in the truth is to know the Truth. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). So we know the way, but we still falter. Many of us stumble all the way to depression. For me, a big part of my depression can be attributed to wrong, negative thinking, and I needed to be delivered from it in the same way the Hebrews needed to be delivered from bondage in Egypt.

I was trapped in behavior patterns that spawned guilt and shame and left unhealed wounds that shaped my personality. My sense of self-worth had been damaged and I struggled with low self-esteem. Thankfully, I knew that Jesus came preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people, so I turned to Him for renewal. He led me to green pastures and quiet waters as He restored my soul (Ps. 23). Just as my cup now overflows, so can yours, by turning to the one true healer, Jesus Christ. 