

For Broadcast: 13th October 2019

DEPRESSION

Interview

“I’m a really proud person. I don’t want to think I’m mentally ill. What I’ve realized is when you become unable to function, when you can’t work out the next step of the day, then that’s a sign, for me, of depression.”

I’m Celia Fielke and this is Messages of Hope. Depression affects men and women from all ages, races and economic groups. It can be the result of a specific event or a chemical imbalance in the nervous system. Whatever the cause there is hope for stepping out of the cloud of depression. Today I’m talking with Rosemary about her lifelong experience of depression and what keeps her going.

Celia: We hear a lot more about mental health these days and that it’s a common issue for many people. But how do you know when things like sadness or tiredness or lack of motivation has deepened into something like depression? Thanks for joining us today Rosemary. Depression's been part of your life since childhood. Could you tell us a bit about that?

Rosemary: I come from a family where my father had depression. His father before him had depression and died in Glenside. His father before him committed suicide, so there was quite a strong family history. I used to think depression is just suppressed anger, so I'll make sure that I always get angry and I won't turn it in on myself and then I'll never be depressed, you see. I realize actually that it's not as simplistic as that. There was hard-wiring, I think, and then there was just the way I would tend to react to things. The glass is always half empty, not half full.

Celia: Can you tell us what kind of things trigger a period of depression for you?

Rosemary: Yes, I think for me it was fairly potent events in my life. When I had miscarriages, when a friend of mine suicided, I went into times of great sadness. Then those times seemed to just sort of hang around. I think it was the breakup of my marriage which made me realize no, this is serious, because I became almost paralyzed.

Celia: What do you mean by paralyzed?

Rosemary: I couldn't think what to do. I felt that if I got in the car, I didn't know where I would go. I didn't know how to do my next step. I felt enormous feelings of

shame and guilt. Going into almost a blankness. It's sort of like a heavy blanket, almost like you can't breathe. To do anything was a great effort. To go to the shops was a huge effort. To think about what I was having for tea. To think about having to get ready for work was just massive.

Celia: You mentioned before the feeling of great sadness. When does sadness, or perhaps grief, turn into depression?

Rosemary: I believe that you should grieve people and events. What I've realized is when you become unable to function, when you can't work out the next step of the day, or when waking up, you wish that you were still asleep, getting to the point where you don't want to be alive. Not that you necessarily want to kill yourself, but you just do not want what's happening in your life to be, and you would rather not be. Then that's a sign, for me, of depression.

Celia: One of the things that can keep us stuck in depression is trying to handle it alone. The idea of seeing a psychologist or taking medication can be the last thing people want to do. Rosemary, what finally led you to see a psychiatrist?

Rosemary: A good friend of mine had been depressed and he'd said, "I know this psych. He's a really good bloke. I'll give you his number." I just felt like I've come to this, this is the end of the road. Oh God, I'm really a loony. When I rang this man, the psych, he was so gracious and he just treated me with great dignity and like I was normal. He listened to me. He did put me on medication and, again, that was another thing I was determined never to have medication. But he gave me choice. He said, "You can take this medicine. But you don't have to take it. We will keep on having a relationship and we'll talk and I'll listen." It was terrific to have someone who wasn't part of my world who gave me respect, who would listen to all the stuff that was going on in my world. He made me feel normal.

Celia: Have you been able to develop other ways of managing your depression apart from medication?

Rosemary: The good thing about seeing a psychiatrist is that we've looked at some strategies for dealing with these things. It's very important for me to get up at a certain time, and to get dressed, and to change what I wear each day because that lack of self-care can often creep in. With depression, I lose my appetite, don't want to eat, so in spite of myself, I make sure I eat three regular meals a day. It's important for me to have regular exercise. I'm really not an exercise person. I really don't like going to the gym and stuff like that, but I do it because I know that it's good for me. I guess those things that I do when I'm in a good head space I need to keep up with when I'm down, so to keep on exercising and seeing friends, then those habits that are well-established are there when I go into a patch where I know that the world is looking scary and too big for me. I'm already in practices that are helpful. Then that whole thing of saying to yourself, "Well, actually, right at this moment, this moment is okay." I'm driving in the car. This moment is all right. Not projecting to the next moment, but that's a lifelong skill I think, trying to live in the moment. Jesus said today is what you deal with.

Celia: When it comes to depression some Christians can feel like there's something extra wrong with them. Why are they depressed when they believe in God? Why doesn't the depression go when they pray? Rosemary you've been a Christian all your life. What role has God played in your journey?

Rosemary: If I see those jolly songs where you sing everyday with Jesus, it makes me happier than the day before, it just makes me want to throw up, really, because I don't find that. He didn't promise us that we would be hap-hap-happy. I do lots of ranting and raving at God, which I guess is a good thing. There's a whole heap of psalms my dad once taught me, a list of psalms. Psalms for when you're feeling really bloody awful. The psalms where he feels overwhelmed and the seas are engulfing him. Those psalms I find really helpful and really useful. I hope to be happier than I am. I hope to have those things that I don't at the moment, but that doesn't mean that I won't, it doesn't mean that he doesn't love me, that God doesn't look at me and go, you're fantastic, you're really precious. Just because I don't feel that doesn't mean that it's not so. It's a faith thing, and faith is about assuming something about the nature of God and who God is,

Celia:

Rosemary: I keep attending a church because there are people there who know and love God.

Celia: How important are other people in managing depression?

Rosemary: Really important. My friendships are very important. One of the things I tend to feel when I'm depressed is, ah look, I'm such a bore. I've got nothing to say. I would be a real drag to be around. Who the hell would want to be with me? In fact I find if I actually actively seek to be with my friends, I'm actually really interested in their lives, so I'm not depressive when I'm with them. They feed me, and they reduce my sense of being a freak, and help me to feel normal. We don't sit around talking about my depression the whole time. We talk about what's happening in their lives, and then they'll ask me about my stuff. It's been good sometimes for people to say, "Okay, enough of that. Let's get going." If I'm raving or not, if I'm gloom and dooming, they might just take me out or just get me to do something, or they'll say, "At the moment, I find this really hard to hear."

When they're really honest with me, I really appreciate that. I think fair enough. I realize this is mutuality in friendship. I would be lost without my friends. Also, to encourage people that they're not always going to feel like this. They felt like this before, and they've felt better, that they can actually come through this, that life isn't always going to be like this. These days come, and they go, and they don't have to stay forever. That is really important because even though you don't really believe it at the time, when you come through you go, ah, that's right, yes.

Celia: That's really encouraging to hear. Finally, Rosemary, has there been a tangible experience where you felt God's presence reassuring you?

Rosemary: There was a time when I was very depressed and I went away with a group of people to central Australia and was out amongst the largeness of it and the wildness of it, and it was great because the sense of the universe was far bigger than me. It was exquisite, and beautiful, and God had created that, and then I remembered that stuff about how he looks at us and cherishes us. The wonder of all that I was seeing somehow reinforced the largeness of God, the smallness of me, and yet the importance of me too, that I mattered.

If you or someone you know is struggling with depression I encourage you to seek help from a medical professional. Or call Lifeline 13 11 14, that's 13 11 14.

As Rosemary discovered there are many things that can be done to help manage depression and to live a hopeful life. For more information about depression, go to messagesofhope.org.au, where you can order your free booklet, DEALING WITH DEPRESSION. Or call 1800 353 350 to order your free booklet.

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