

What to do when your spouse has depression

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There are stresses to every marriage. We made it 30 relatively peaceful and happy years. We had good communication. My wife was my best friend ... until she got depression. We didn't know if we would make it to 31.

I wondered: What happened? Where is the wife I was married to? Why is she now so manipulative? Why is she so unreasonable, suspicious and untrusting? Why is she crying and sometimes in hysterics? What happened?

The beginning of depression

"It" happened after we both had insanely busy schedules. I was self-employed and in my busy season. I was a deacon, Bible teacher for senior adults, author of an online Bible-teaching ministry and co-commander with my wife in the Awana children's program. My wife also led a group for moms with college students, co-directed a children's choir, processed medical claims and kept our business and personal budgets in line, in addition to the normal duties of a homemaker. There was little downtime or opportunity to recharge for either of us.

Busyness can be a trap used by our enemy, the devil.

I wasn't interested in physical intimacy. I developed a problem common to older men, which made my wife feel insecure. She wondered if something was going on outside our marriage. It wasn't true, but I couldn't explain and didn't understand it myself at the time.

My wife's hysterics, severe anxiety, insecurity and controlling nature were

difficult to understand. No one in our family knew what we were dealing with. It was distressing. She felt like she was slipping into a dark hole and trying to grasp at anything to keep her from falling. She was sometimes suicidal, and so I asked her parents to come over and watch her while I was working. I quit everything but the business and my online ministry to focus on her.

At about the same time, my oldest daughter became engaged to someone we didn't know and weren't sure we trusted. She separated herself from my wife—her best friend—because of my wife's unreasonable and controlling nature.

Her depression worsened, and she felt abandoned and betrayed by her daughter. Things deteriorated in our relationship with our daughter and son-in-law to the point we didn't go to the wedding. We felt it was the right thing to do, but missing the wedding worsened my wife's condition.

Trying to deal with depression

We got medical help and counseling when the symptoms were diagnosed, but the depression continued. Medicine was effective only for a couple of days, and then her body rejected them and returned her back to deep depression. This went on for several months as the doctor tried to find the dosage and medicine that would work.

Sometimes, I didn't want to come home. I didn't want to be falsely accused or screamed at. Only the sense of duty to my wife and the fear of losing everything—my home, respect from my family and church, all spiritual ministries and my wife—made me stay. I probably would never get her back. She would feel I betrayed her and might even commit suicide.

I also feared the Lord, for he hates divorce. It is an act of violence on the family and is dishonoring to him (Malachi 2:14-16). Nevertheless, we were

very close to splitting up half a dozen times.

I prayed in anguish and earnestness daily, feeling the devil was using my wife's depression to try to break us up. Somehow, God helped us stay together. I might argue I didn't sign up for this kind of marriage, but yes, I did. I promised to love, honor and cherish her.

Cherishing her even in depression

Cherish—that is the word I needed to focus on. I was concerned mostly about my own pain. I wanted her to stop heaping emotional guilt and pain on me. “I have done nothing to deserve this,” I thought.

But cherish? No, I can't say I was doing that. I wasn't treating her as I would wish to be treated. Tired of what I was going through, I sometimes talked harshly with her. I just wanted her to get over it. I wanted “normal.”

But what if it were me? What if it was me falling into the black hole?

I didn't want to cherish her. I was hurt, but God wanted me to do it. It is what I promised, whether I felt like it or not.

When I started cherishing her, things started to improve. Instead of withdrawing, I moved toward her in kindness. I held her a lot and let her sob.

She replayed her pain and hurt endless times, like a scratched record. And when she did, I tried to sympathize and empathize with her.

When I went to work, I checked on her every two hours. Other friends and family also checked with her regularly; so, she felt supported.

I went to the doctor and got help with my physical problems. This helped her feel more secure.

We prayed together every night. For three years, day and night were an up and down experience, but things gradually got better with time.

My wife also was pro-active in dealing with her depression. She went to counseling, bought a cat to cuddle and pet, took her medicine, used a Happy Light to replicate natural sunlight and improve her moods, tried to get out of the house to change her environment, had daily devotions with the Lord, taped up postcard pictures with Bible verses all over the house, prayed with me, re-focused her life to minister to young mothers and got a new hobby.

Enduring depression

We are not heroes. With the Lord's help, we survived her depression. Now, we can encourage others.

I tell spouses to be strong. Usually, things will get better with time, much prayer and persevering patience. Cherish your spouse, and you can help him or her through it. Stick with your spouse.

“Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth” (Malachi 2:15, NIV).

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