

## God is Bigger than Bipolar

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"

2 Corinthians 12:9

I didn't understand what was wrong with me. This pregnancy was vastly different than the previous ones. I thought it was a combination of being pregnant for the sixth time, having five other young children and keeping a busy schedule. Yet as the pregnancy progressed, I knew it had to be something besides regular pregnancy exhaustion. Many women in the parenting stage talk about postpartum depression, but that wasn't me. It would be several months before I would be "postpartum."

Then I saw it—an article on antepartum depression, the kind of deep depression that sometimes takes place *during* pregnancy. I could have been the woman the author described in the article. What I felt actually *did* have a name. Yet I felt it was too late in my pregnancy to do anything about it, and I did not want to take any medication during pregnancy. I continued to read my Bible more and more, knowing that God would give me the strength I needed to get through the next months. I continued to suffer through it, knowing that God would deliver me even from antepartum depression when I delivered our baby. I never expected him to deliver me from it in the way that he did.

I had our sixth baby and was overjoyed, not to mention that I felt changed, better, like my old self. Depression gone! But three months later, my world was shaken when I fell into postpartum psychosis. This happens in less than 1 in every 1,000 deliveries. From there, hospitalization and medication happened quickly. It was determined that my thyroid was severely malfunctioning, and I was suffering from postpartum depression. A further diagnosis came ten months later, when I fell into psychosis again, several months after my doctor determined I was doing so well I could be weaned off my depression medication. This time my doctor said without a doubt, "You have bipolar disorder."

Really, Lord? You delivered me from my deep antepartum depression, but now you're allowing mania to overcome me? Mania is the polar opposite of depression—the result of an imbalance of chemicals in the brain—and now I had to deal with both. I was angry and even more depressed. Why me? Why now? I would love to say that I did not ask those "why" questions, but I did. Often. For months.

Depression or bipolar disorder do not occur because of a weakened faith, but as I asked those "why" questions, I wondered if having the disease would affect my faith. I couldn't understand why God would give me so many blessings (husband and children) to take care of, and then give me an illness that might affect my ability to care for them.

I went to doctors and counselors who helped me work through coping with my illness. I talked with my husband and closest family and friends about my daily struggle to function. I took the prescribed medication faithfully, even though the medication was just another reminder of the lifelong illness that

had now invaded my brain. Doing all of these things helped me understand, helped me cope, but I found my true comfort and hope in God's amazing words to me.

I began to identify with the Apostle Paul quite well. I prayed to God over and over to take my "thorn" away from me. I knew that he might answer my prayer in the same way he answered Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." I would repeat those words as a reminder that God is bigger and stronger than bipolar disorder.

Through further study of his words, I received the comfort I needed to make it through each passing day. "But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." (Romans 8:24-26) I hoped for better days ahead, but nothing compares with the eternal hope we have in Jesus. Jesus, our Savior from all sins, will also deliver us from all our diseases when he brings us to our eternal home of heaven.

As my days wore on, I slowly began to see that my life could still look "normal." The medication was working. A knowledgeable team of doctors and supportive family were essential in helping me deal with my bipolar disorder. In the early months, I could not see how God would work this out for my good like he promises. But his Word tells us that his plans are not to harm us, but to give us hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

We cannot believe these words on our own, but the Holy Spirit comes to nurture us with promises of hope. On the bad days, I am reminded that God says to "rejoice in the Lord always." (Philippians 4:4) The Apostle Paul rejoiced despite the struggles of his thorn, hunger, persecution and imprisonment. Paul continues in Chapter 4 of Philippians with this encouragement, which has been a source of great comfort: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your *minds* in Christ Jesus." [emphasis added] And on the good days, I praise God for the good that has come into my life through this illness. Not only has God given me the resources to cope, but in this weakness, God shows his power.

### Prayer

*When in the hour of utmost need We know not where to look for aid,  
When days and nights of anxious thought Nor help nor counsel yet have brought,*

*Then is our comfort this alone That we may meet before your throne;  
To you, O faithful God, we cry For rescue in our misery.*

*For you have promised, Lord, to heed Your children's cries in time of need  
Through him whose name alone is great, Our Savior and our advocate.*

*And so we come, O God, today And all our woes before you lay.*

*Be with us in our anguish still; Free us at last from ev'ry ill,*

*So that with all our hearts we may To you our glad thanksgiving pay,  
Then walk obedient to your Word And now and ever praise you, Lord. Amen.*

*When in the Hour of Utmost Need, CW 413*  
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**Author's additional comments:** If you or someone you know is suffering with an untreated mental illness, please seek help. A good source of help is Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services. They can also give you additional resources when necessary.

Due to the sensitivity of this issue, the author has asked to remain anonymous.  
Reviewed by Professor-emeritus David Valleskey