

ROOM

13B

Pastor Jeremy Dykman has written a beautiful, honest, and sensitive account of his own personal experience of life with depression. In this brave journey of seeking God's wisdom while in the pit of despair, he breaks the silence and stigma of depression, particularly as it manifests within the Christian community. Just as his namesake, the prophet Jeremiah, learned about God's character and faithfulness through suffering, Jeremy's account inspires hope in the One Who will never leave us nor forsake us.

**Dr. Ingrid Artus**

Psychologist, DLitt et Phil. (Psych)

Mental illness is a major problem facing society today. I read recently that in Canada one in two people have suffered in one way or another from a mental problem before they are forty years of age. Pastor Jeremy Dykman has written this book on the subject of depression out of the depth of his own experience. It comes with honesty and compassion as he shares his struggles and yet he shows the spiritual steps in negotiating the problem. I heartily recommend it to any who are on this path and also to those who are seeking to help others on this rocky road.

**Harold Peasley**

Pastor to Pastors with the North American Mission Board in Canada

A PASTOR'S JOURNEY  
*with* DEPRESSION

# ROOM 13B

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# Room 13B

A Pastor's Journey with Depression

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Disclaimer: The contents of this book are not a substitute to professional assessment or treatment of mental or emotional disorders. Rather it is a forestep aiding the individual in self-identification of the effects of personal choice in contributing to their present life situation. It assumes that each individual is capable of making life enhancing decisions.

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*Dedicated to Jesus for coming to me on the waves of my storm.*

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”*

*—2 Corinthians 1:3-4*

*May this book provide spiritual reinforcement in the lives of those who do not surrender to depression but rather battle against it.*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE 11

CHAPTER ONE

IT WAS A DARK, SUNNY AFTERNOON 13

CHAPTER TWO

GOD CAN HANDLE DESPERATE PRAYERS 19

CHAPTER THREE

HOSPITAL, NOT A HOLIDAY! 25

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESCRIPTIONS 29

CHAPTER FIVE

A CHANGE OF CLOTHES 37

CHAPTER SIX

LIFE AFTER TRAUMA 47

CHAPTER SEVEN

A SMELL, A SOUND, A SIGHT 55

CHAPTER EIGHT  
"FOUR TICKETS TO RIDE THE  
MACH ONE, PLEASE!" 63

CHAPTER NINE  
KEEPING IT TOGETHER 69

CHAPTER TEN  
AM I AWAKE? 75

CHAPTER ELEVEN  
THE CANVAS REVEALS WHAT  
THE ARTIST SEES 81

CHAPTER TWELVE  
FANGS IN THE DARK 93

CHAPTER THIRTEEN  
AN OUTING TO THE AQUARIUM 109

CHAPTER FOURTEEN  
MUSHROOMS OR BUTTERNUT? 117

CHAPTER FIFTEEN  
A MISERABLE PARTY 123

CHAPTER SIXTEEN  
"COME OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP!" 131

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN  
THERE IS ALWAYS A FRANÇOIS BRODEUR 139



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN  
WHEN SOME YOU LOVE DON'T  
UNDERSTAND 143

CHAPTER NINETEEN  
REMOVING THE MASK 147

CHAPTER TWENTY  
FOUR 21S 151

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE  
THE CHAPTER THAT WILL CHANGE  
MANY THINGS 161

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 165



# PREFACE

I have participated in many on-stage performances, acting in some and directing others. In doing so, I have learned three things: first, no matter how well you know the play, lines, music, or stage, something unexpected always happens. Second, life is not an act, for your experiences are real, and so is my account of events. And third, when the stage curtain is raised and the actor steps forward, there is nowhere to hide. That is how I feel as I recount the story of my experiences with depression, but God my Savior and you, the reader, are worth the effort.

I must warn you, though, as I step on to the stage within these pages and as the scenes pass before you, there will be no pretense. This is no act. You will witness a vulnerable soul sharing his story with no cover-ups or special effects to hide unpleasant realities.

Pain, sadness, and memories will appear on stage with me as supporting cast members. I am certain they make noteworthy appearances in your story, too. But I am only the narrator. God is the Hero of my testimony. You are invited to take a front-row seat. You may dress as you wish. There is no need to do your hair (after all, I do not have much). You may choose to take as many intermissions as you feel is necessary. Only, come back. Come back if these words relate to how you are feeling. Return to your seat if you feel the call of

the Holy Spirit to listen further to my story and journey of recovery.  
Draw empathy from me but draw strength from God.

## CHAPTER ONE

# IT WAS A DARK, SUNNY AFTERNOON

*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows  
compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he  
remembers that we are dust.*

—Psalm 103:13-14

We should take comfort in the fact that God knows how fragile we are. We will have strong days as well as days that remind us we are dust. Have you ever experienced days when you could feel and see your limitations and struggles? Dear reader, God is the constant in those days. He remains the same even when we do not. You can let Him minister in perfect strength to you in your weakness. You, too, can rejoice in the fact that while God governs the universe, He tenderly and skillfully restores brittle souls. He knows!

The year 2017 was a difficult year for me. It was not because of any significant event. As the first six months of 2017 passed by, it felt like I was always walking uphill. Nothing came easily anymore. The things I always loved doing became monotonous and burdensome. Joy had

escaped me. In an attempt to cope, I withdrew both physically and emotionally from everyone. This led to loneliness, but even in my isolation, I preferred not to see too many people. I hated noise, and I hated quiet. Then, there were the nightmares. These dreams were more intense and disturbing than any horror film. I fought in the day, and I fought in the night.

As the seasons of that year changed, my stress rose, and my spirits sank; and I realized that the antidepressants were not as effective as they once were. Some who read this may be thinking, *Relying on anti-depressants? A Christian? A pastor?* Yes! I am all those things. I am a child of God. I am a pastor, and yet I battle depression. I will not apologize for it, nor will I give in to it. Even as the gray days grew increasingly dreary, I still worked hard in ministry; but I did not experience fulfillment as I had in the past. For example, the July Vacation Bible Club was an opportunity for me to place regular pastoral duties on hold in order to focus on ministry to children, work with many unique and interesting people, and explore my creative side. Ordinarily, it was with a joyful heart in praise for what God had done in the lives of those who attended the Vacation Bible Club that I would dismiss the gathering at the last session on Friday. But not this time. Instead, I wept in my study, and I did not know why. For some reason, I could not even close in prayer.

I secretly sank in and out of hope during church leadership meetings. I wrestled with God in prayer. I longed to see His hand move in my life and in the lives of my loved ones. God's Word brought strength to me as I preached and taught it, but I would leave the pulpit after the sermon and step into the land of shadows.

I sought counseling from a good Christian counselor. In these sessions, I learned a great deal about myself and how past events were affecting me. Things seemed to be improving for a time. I journeyed through an insightful book about depression and, through it, finally understood that it is an illness. I am not a doctor, but I have lived long enough to know that there are many spiritual, physiological, psychological, and historical factors that can inflame and infect the mind and emotions the same way a viral infection does the throat. The much-quoted expression “just snap out of it” is no more possible for a person with depression than it would be for an amputee to suddenly grow another arm.

For the first time, I went to a psychiatrist. My medication was changed, and for a while, I felt I was improving. But on Thursday, September 14, I had the most frightening emotional experience. Gray became black. I was driving on a busy suburban road on my way to collect my children from school when I heard a beautiful song on the local classical radio station, and suddenly, I had the desire to end my life by driving my car into the nearest large tree I could find. No longer did I notice the beautiful weather or the trees waking up from their wintery slumber. *The biggest tree could be my way out of this difficult life*, I thought.

This was not the first time those thoughts crossed my mind, but the intensity of that emotion was engulfing. I cried uncontrollably on the drive to the school. I tried to hide it well with a smile and sunglasses as I picked up my two sons, but I knew then that I could not face another day without seeking specialized medical help.

When we arrived home, I phoned my mother and asked her to fetch my sons. On that Thursday, I had a moment of clarity—I

knew what I had to do. I needed hospitalization. With a heavy heart, desperately holding on to precious faith (the size of a mustard seed), I told my mother that I would be all right.

The stigma surrounding my vocation had hindered me for months from getting the help I needed. There is a harmful idea present in large parts of Christendom today that God's children simply do not struggle with mental health illnesses. I had denied myself aid for fear of criticism and rejection. I was scared that I would lose my job. But it was time to acknowledge that I was not coping. What people would think was not important anymore.

With my sons now safely with my mother, I waited for my wife, Michelle, to come home from work. Michelle immediately knew something was wrong. As I told her what had happened earlier in the afternoon, I could see that she was concerned and surprised. She was aware of my depression, but I had hidden the worst parts from her. That afternoon, we both realized that life would be different. Depression had become a life-threatening enemy. Together we prayed and packed some clothes. That evening, I was admitted to a psychiatric hospital in Parktown, Johannesburg.

*"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1-2).*

He was the Presence and Power that gave me the clarity and ability to reject the suicidal thoughts that yelled violently at me on that dark, sunny afternoon. He was the First Responder on the scene of my emptiness. He was Strength for me as I safely drove my children home. He was the Comforter to my wife and me as we packed that bag and realized that a new chapter of our lives had just begun. And



God was waiting for me as the Chief Psychologist in that four-story building. Room 13B would become my new home for three weeks.

As I was contacting my psychiatrist before admission, I typed the following words on my laptop as a final motivation to get help:

*I'm doing this because my life is more important than my job.*

*I'm doing this because my family is more important to me than my job.*

*I'm doing this because I am ill, and I need help.*