



BEAUTY IN THE BROWNS

WALKING WITH CHRIST IN THE
DARKNESS OF DEPRESSION

PAUL ASAY

Depression is a lens through which everything looks ugly and hopeless. But in this honest, raw account of his depression, Paul Asay reminds us that no matter how much depression distorts and discolors the world, God provides hope and beauty.

JIM DALY

President, Focus on the Family

I never fathomed a book on depression could be so funny, but Paul's *Beauty in the Browns* is the perfect blend of humor and heart. It's not only an eye-opening glimpse into the life of someone struggling with depression and anxiety, but a helpful guide as to understanding how to discover hope in the midst of feelings of hopelessness.

JONATHAN MCKEE

Author of over 20 books including *If I Had a Parenting Do Over*

This is a book for anyone touched by depression. Those who battle depression will learn from someone who understands it on a very raw and personal level and be encouraged to be vulnerable and honest about their personal struggles. Their loved ones will develop empathy and learn how to be effective caregivers who communicate unconditional love and acceptance. And those of us who are mental health professionals will come face to face with the effects of depression on the heart and soul and be better equipped to support the client for whom depression is a familiar foe.

JOANNIE DEBRITO, PH.D., LCSW, LMFT

Director of Parenting and Youth, Focus on the Family

Paul Asay's searching, confessional book explores the darkness and terrors many experience in their lives and families. As reported in *The Gazette*, the daily paper where Paul and I have covered religion, many Christians would rather avoid the whole subject of depression. For those who want to understand and love people who "live in the browns," Paul's humor, hope, and practical suggestions can help.

STEVE RABEY

Journalist and author

Vulnerable. Thoughtful. Personal. Paul Asay takes us to the deep unsettling waters of depression but doesn't leave us there alone. His story lovingly confronts that happy-clappy veneer of the American church and clears space for those of us who feel the weight of darkness, depression, and mental illness, either in ourselves or in those we love. He points us to an all-knowing and all-loving God who runs to us, stoops low, and calls us beloved. Maybe it's my Enneagram 4-ness or my own battles with depression (generational and personal) that make me love this book. *Beauty in the Browns* is not a breath of fresh air; it's cross-ventilation for so many.

ERIK LØKKESMOE

President, Aspiration Entertainment

Paul Asay has written a provocative, revealing book about the subject most of us don't want to talk about, whether it is about ourselves or about others. And why is that? Because we don't want to be mislabeled as weak, or cowardly, or lazy, or fearful, or far from God. But those of us who have known this illness for many years can tell you it's not a matter of fear. It is an experience of darkness and pain that is like no other.

Along comes author and writer Paul Asay to shed real light, and compassion, on the subject. And how? By revealing his own struggle with it through a lifetime. Asay talks about the immobility of depression, the desire to lie on one's back in a bedroom, the sometimes dead end with even the best doctors and psychiatric help. So what's the answer? It's something practical, something personal, something attainable. Read about his life and discover what works for him.

JOHN SLOAN

Editor

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PAUL ASAY

FOCUS
ON THE FAMILY®

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CONTENTS

- CHAPTER 1: Hidden *1*
CHAPTER 2: What Is Depression? *19*

PART I: DOWN

- CHAPTER 3: Belonging *39*
CHAPTER 4: Of Brain and Blood *59*
CHAPTER 5: Gut Check *85*
CHAPTER 6: Silence *105*

PART II: UP

- CHAPTER 7: One Foot in Front of the Other *129*
CHAPTER 8: A Time for Everything *153*
CHAPTER 9: Dark Night *169*
CHAPTER 10: The Dragon *187*
CHAPTER 11: Living in the Browns *207*

NOTES *219*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR *229*

CHAPTER 1

HIDDEN

*Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there, wondering, fearing,
Doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before.*

EDGAR ALLAN POE, *The Raven*

DEPRESSION IS FUNNY.

Not *ha-ha* funny, obviously, because it'd be super-rude to laugh at a depressed person for being depressed. It's funny in a way that might cause scientists with fake-sounding German accents to stroke their beards thoughtfully. It's funny in the same way that bologna is when it's past its expiration date, or when your dog growls at your closet door for no reason, or your football team is looking at first-and-goal and decides to punt. It's funny as in *outside the norm*, funny as in *disquieting*, funny as in *you're making me uncomfortable so please just cheer up already*.

And who could blame them? Depression is just so . . . depressing, y'know? Being around someone who's obviously depressed is not much fun. Trust me, I know: Being a person who deals with depression myself, I have days when I'd rather not hang around with me, either.

Depression's funny in that there's not much fun to be found in it for anyone. By definition, it's something of a fun squelcher. Those affected by it can have a difficult time enjoying much of anything. And like a rock chucked in the middle of a pond, the impact of depression ripples out to friends, family, coworkers, and even unsuspecting motorists and harried Starbucks baristas. Depression is a burden for those who suffer from it, a worry for friends and family, and—let's face it—a hassle for anyone else exposed to it, even in passing. In a society that doesn't dare push pause, depression is an inconvenience few can afford.

Maybe that's why so many depressed people try to hide it. If we can.

We're like vampires, only moodier.



Back in the mid-1990s, my son and I would get up every Saturday morning and, without fail, watch an animated series called *The Tick*, centered on the titular “nigh invulnerable” superhero and his accountant-turned-sidekick, Arthur. Episodes featured an array of other wacky superheroes and supervillains, some of whom would hang out for the whole show, others gone before you could blink. My favorite in the latter category? A guy in a domino mask and a caped bear outfit.

“This looks like a job for . . . Bi-Polar Bear!” he shouts. Then, crestfallen, he shakes his head. “But I just can't seem to get out of bed this month.”

People not familiar with depression might imagine that the condition is just that obvious, and for some it is. No, not in terms of dressing up like a bear (though maybe a few do, and who am I to judge?), but in terms of how it impacts our waking, day-to-day

realities. It renders normal life, much less the life of a superhero, impossible. It can be as obvious as Vincent van Gogh's missing ear—a debilitating sickness that cripples us, imprisons us, and robs of us of who we are and what we'd like to be.

But depression comes in many guises—seasonal to chronic, mild to severe. It dresses in so many different outfits that it might even dwarf the litany of costumed crime-fighters and evildoers in *The Tick*. And trust me, that's saying something.

Plus, frankly, there's very little money in being depressed. We gotta make a living somehow, so many of us find the energy to pull ourselves out of bed in the morning and go to work.

That's me. I hold a “regular” job, even if it's not all that regular—and even though, as my coworkers will attest, I'm not all that regular, either.

I write movie reviews for a Christian organization, so parts of the working day can feel a little like church. For instance, every Monday the ministry holds a stand-up meeting/prayer in our cavernous central hallway that we call “Main Street.” These Monday-morning meetings are pretty innocuous: a joke, a prayer, ministry updates, more prayer. I typically stand on the second-floor walkway with some associates of mine, and we eye the proceedings below—applauding at the appropriate times, laughing at the appropriate punchlines, and maybe making a puckish quip or two. The idea behind these Monday Main Street stand-ups are to start the work week on the right foot: a few updates, a little encouragement, and bam! We dive into our deadlines and meetings and spreadsheets. And if some of our minds wander a bit during our gathering . . . well, that's to be expected, right? No harm done, unless you miss an announcement for an upcoming potluck.

But when my mind wanders—as it invariably does—it leaves Main Street behind and explores . . . darker avenues.

I look at Main Street below the balcony and wonder if I'd potentially die if I jumped. Likely not, so I think about hanging myself, pondering whether if I tied a rope to the railing, it'd be able to hold my weight. (I've gained a few pounds, after all.) I look at the peaked ceiling and its spiderweb of supportive struts, and I speculate how I could hang a rope up there.

These thoughts and others flow through my mind like a small, dark brook, right alongside the other thoughts I might have—the day's to-do list, past conversations, what I want for lunch. I don't touch the stream: This suicidal ideation rarely strays from its banks, and I've learned not to get too close. I don't want to die—not really. And I'd certainly not kill myself. I'd hurt too many people and miss way too many deadlines. But still, I can hear that dark stream. See it inside me. Feel it. It's run alongside me since I was twelve. Maybe earlier.

And then, someone down below says, "Oh, heavenly Father." I turn my eyes away from the beams and bow my head. I turn my attention away from death and toward God, as much as I'm able. A thread of light stitches through my darker thoughts and creates, again, the fabric of another day. "Amen." *So be it.*

And with that, the stand-up is over. I open my eyes and walk back to my desk, sharing another joke or story with a friend as I go.

Funny, right?



During those weekly stand-ups, a couple of people invariably take the microphone to tell us how we've helped people struggling with some really dark issues of their own: divorce. Infidelity. Drug use. Sexual abuse. The world is so full of hurt, and our ministry does its best to help a little. We dive into that world as best we

can and write and talk and give advice and, as much we we're able, comfort. And ultimately, we want to point people toward God, where they can find the hope and healing that only He can give. He heals the brokenhearted, we read in Psalm 147, and binds up their wounds.

We're not particularly unique, and many faith-based outfits are not as office-bound as ours tends to be. Thousands of Christian ministries and organizations, and millions of Christian people, go into society's darkest corners, hoping to bring a little light to those who need it most. A 2017 study found that American households affiliated with a religion (most of which would be Christian) donate nearly \$1,600 to charity every year—more than twice as much as unaffiliated households do.¹

Contrary to what some secular observers might believe, most Christians don't live in a protective bubble of our own making, sealing ourselves away from the world's problems. We want to help. We Christians believe we have *The Answer*, and we'll yammer on to anyone who asks. It's Jesus. As silly and arrogant and Pollyannish as that may sound to some, we believe it to be true.

I've seen the power of that conviction in action. I know people who've made fortunes and spent them all in the service of God. I know people who've nearly lost their lives following Him. And then when they're out of danger, they risk those lives all over again.

Jesus loves you, we say. He sees you. He wants to heal you and save you, if you just let Him.

We believe it. I believe it too.

But as I listen to how God is working through our ministry to heal hurting people, I feel my own hurt inside. My emotional wounds don't feel bound. My pain does not feel salved. Sometimes, I don't feel like I've been saved. I feel as though the lifesaver missed me, and I'm still treading water. And my arms are getting tired.

Jesus is the answer. I say it. I know it. I believe it. But I don't always feel it.

Where does my salvation lie? Jesus, I know. Jesus always. But a piece of me—always small but never gone, forces my head upward—not toward heaven, but to those beams above. *Peace*, they whisper. *Escape*. And sometimes, more insidiously, *Salvation*.



Salvation. I've heard that word ever since I can remember, before I could even tie my shoes. It's a beautiful word, I think, representing a beautiful idea. To be saved. The word's related to the word *salvage*, too, which seems wholly fitting. We're broken by sin, we're taught in Sunday school on up. We're twisted and mangled by our own pettiness and selfishness and desires. By all rights, we should be tossed out with the garbage, thrown into Gehenna. The devil, as old-timey preacher Jonathan Edwards said in *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, "stands waiting for them, like greedy hungry lions that see their prey, and expect to have it."²

But God saves us. He salvages us, broken though we are. He fixes us, heals us, and shows us a better way.

So why do some of us still feel so broken?

I think most of us probably struggle at times with the reality of our own inadequacies and sinfulness. We understand what Edwards told his (allegedly fainting) congregation nearly three centuries ago: We're fallen creatures, unworthy.

I also think that most of us feel something else, too—what seventeenth-century mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal called the "God-shaped vacuum" at our core. We feel incomplete, like we're missing a puzzle piece or two that would make us feel whole. Most of us look for myriad ways to fill that hole, stuffing

all manner of addictions and dependencies into it, hoping to find a little peace. And even those of us who try to fill that God-shaped hole with God sometimes find it doesn't quite do the trick. We love Him and worship Him and follow Him as best we can, but temptations still whisper. Old addictions still nibble away at us. Maybe it's because we're so warped and broken that the seams don't fit as they ought. Maybe it's because none of us can be fully healed on this side of eternity. "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy," C. S. Lewis famously said, "the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world."³

But for those of us who struggle with depression, that sense of separation from God is deeper (and for a few of us, the desire to leave this world is consequently stronger). Maybe, at its core, that's what depression is: We can't ever forget the vacuum. And, like vacuums do, it sucks some of the joy away that we might otherwise feel. And sometimes, that sense of being an alien in your own life is so strong, that longing for "another world" is so great, we're impatient to start the trip back.



This dynamic leaves the Christian church understandably perplexed over what to do with us depressed believers. And I totally get that. Christianity is all about finding hope in the midst of a despairing world. *Gospel* literally means good news. To be depressed in the face of that news seems not just ungrateful; it seems illogical. Some would suggest that depression is even a sin.⁴ *Rejoice and be glad!* They'll quote from the Scriptures. *Have you not been listening?!*

I've heard scads of sermons and devotions imploring us to rejoice, to be glad. I've written a few myself. And again, it's absolutely true.

One of my favorite go-to verses when I'm feeling particularly anxious is John 16:33: "In this world you will have trouble," Jesus says. "But take heart! I have overcome the world" (NIV).

And here's something else encouraging: Statistics suggest that faith really can be a bulwark against depression.

A 2018 study from the University of Michigan found that Christians who are lonely are less likely to be depressed than non-affiliated lonely hearts.⁵ In 2012, another study found that folks who said religion was "highly important" to them were much less likely, over a ten-year period, to report a major depressive episode than those who didn't care much about faith.⁶ Yet more studies show that suicide rates are "significantly" higher for atheists and agnostics than those who adhere to a religion.⁷

It's not because Christians are inherently happier than those outside the faith, or that we're less mindful of the world's problems. Indeed, a Christian life well-lived is, I think, often harder, what with its extra responsibilities and suspicion of some of the world's (ahem) stress-relieving pastimes. But a life of faith is a life with a built-in purpose attached to it. We know that God put us here for a reason, and knowing there's a reason for us to be here gives us a bit more resilience to put up with the world's bunkum. We believe that, whatever gunk we have to deal with today, God will redeem tomorrow—that there's a purpose to it all. And yeah, we also believe that God's looking out for us, too. "For I know the plans I have for you," He says, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).

Atheists get no such assurances. They don't pop out of the womb with a God-given purpose. They have to find their own. And, not believing in a concerned Creator and (often) embracing a morally indifferent universe, they find that purpose often defaults

to squeezing all the happiness and joy out of life they can. Life becomes a more selfish pursuit. And when times get tough and they're not getting what they think they ought from it, it's easier to slip into depression and, perhaps, consider turning their cards in early.

I've heard it described as the difference between pursuing holiness and happiness. Christians don't need to feel happy all the time to feel a sense of rooted, purpose-driven joy. Purpose, even when it's hard, fosters its own sense of fulfillment.

That's all great, of course. But I think that the very sense of purpose has given rise to something strange in the church itself: a cult of happiness.

It's most obvious, I think, when I flip on Christian radio. My wife loves contemporary Christian music, so I hear a lot of it when she's driving. I get it. I'm not immune to a catchy Christian earworm, and I like the Newsboys as much as anyone.

But sometimes, Christian radio stations can make me feel like I'm trapped in Disney's *It's a Small World* ride, only with better percussion. So happy! So optimistic! So relentlessly, aggressively positive and chipper! Each song, taken by itself, is meant to hearten and encourage people—to lift folks up when they're feeling down, even. But thirty of them together feel like propaganda: *Be happy! No, really. Be! Happy! Or else the DJ will hunt you down!*

Christian radio is an exaggerated form of what we see in lots of corners of Christianity, especially evangelical Christianity, the tradition I'm a part of. We're optimists, we evangelicals. While Catholic sanctuaries are typically graced with the corpus of Christ, bleeding and suffering, evangelical churches are graced with an empty cross. We've scrapped the somber, soaring ceilings and dark stained glass of traditional church and built light, bright warehouses filled with stackable chairs. Forget hymns and bowed

heads: We raise our hands above our heads on Sunday mornings and, in some churches, we might even dance.

And all that's great, if it's a genuine outpouring of joy for being loved by God and being saved by Jesus. But not all of us feel so joyful on Sundays. Not all of us feel like celebrating.

Historically, the Church has been a place of sanctuary for hurting souls. You'd think that, of any spot in the world, the church would be a place where people could show their real selves, where they could grapple unfiltered with their own fears and angst and pain.

But the Church, at least the evangelical church, is typically not such a place. Not on Sunday mornings. For someone to carry a cloud of gloom into such a sunny sanctuary seems ungrateful and uncouth. With every face holding a smile, we plaster on one of our own. Perhaps we raise our hands so we don't look out of place, singing joyous worship songs as we feel anything but joyful.

And so the Church, with no malice on its part, sometimes shuts down or shuts out some of the very people whom Jesus said were blessed: the poor in spirit, those who mourn. How many people come to church with a sense of obligation—a social need to pretend that everything's fine? How many of *you* do?

Christianity can indeed serve as a safeguard from depression. But no matter how much we all smile and sing, sometimes depression haunts us anyway. We may not suffer from depression at the same rates nonbelievers do, but we're hardly immune. And sometimes, it feels as though the Church doesn't know what to do with us.



Matthew Warren was the son of one of the most prominent pastors in America—Rick Warren, founder of California's Saddleback Church and author of the bestselling book *The Purpose Driven*

Life. Matthew was a committed Christian and had a strong support structure in his family. From the outside, it would seem that his life was truly, unmeasurably blessed.

On April 4, 2013—four days after Easter—he spent the evening with his mom and dad, watching television and laughing. Everything, it was said, felt pretty normal.

The next night, Rick Warren and his wife, Kay, stood outside Matthew's locked house, holding each other. He didn't come to the door when they knocked. He didn't answer when they called. They couldn't get inside—they didn't have the keys—but they knew. They knew what was waiting for them on the other side of the door.

For years, they'd known that Matthew suffered from depression and mental illness. For years, they'd try to help him battle the darkness inside him. His father said that Matthew's affliction might have, paradoxically, helped many others over the years: He seemed to have a sixth sense for the person in any given room who was hurting the most. He looked to have that purpose—that key component that helps so much with depression. But it wasn't enough.

In a CNN interview a few months later, Rick recalled what Matthew told him. "Dad, I can help a lot of other people," Rick paraphrased. "I just can't get it to work for me."⁸

On April 5, 2013, Matthew Warren took his own life. He'd given hope to others, but ran out of it for himself.

"For 27 years, I prayed every day of my life for God to heal my son's mental illness," Rick Warren said in his return to the pulpit July 27 of that year. He added, "We had the best doctors. We had the best medicine. We went to the best therapist. We had the most people praying. We have a family of deep, deep faith. It just didn't make sense."⁹

That's the thing. How can such a bad thing happen when you

know the Good News? How can we lose hope when we know the Author of it?

The Christian life is filled with paradox: We must be forever welcoming and forever vigilant—filled with justice while also filled with mercy, judicious without being judgmental. It's built on the biggest paradox imaginable, really—a death on the cross brought about new life; what looked like a crushing defeat was instead a galactic victory. Depression in Christianity is a paradox too. But even here, we see evidence that healing can paradoxically come out of the greatest of hurts.

In the wake of Matthew's suicide, the Warrens, especially Kay, have become fervent, passionate advocates for mental health. They've helped bring issues such as depression and suicide out into the open within the sometimes closed confines of evangelicalism. They're facilitating conversation—hard, honest talk—about these grave but often manageable problems. I've watched them, from afar, grieve and share their stories, giving permission for folks touched by depression—folks like me—to offer up their own.

“There are more conversations taking place, more pastors willing to preach a sermon on mental illness or suicide, and more people who are living with mental illness that are willing to tell their stories,” Kay Warren told *Christianity Today*.¹⁰ “More churchgoers are willing to say, ‘This is a place where we should be showing up.’”

And as Kay knows, it's a place where lots of us already live.



In the summer of 2018, my son overdosed on cold medicine and ibuprofen. He was twenty-seven, the same age Pastor Warren's son was when he died. We didn't lose my son that day, but I'm well

aware that the threat isn't behind him, or us. Depression doesn't release its grip easily.

It wasn't the first time he'd tried. Just the first time his mom and I knew about it.

Funny.

I've struggled with depression, off and on, most of my life. I knew that my son suffered from his own form of depression long before the overdose. Months before. Maybe years. He'd been seeing a counselor. He'd sometimes taken medication for it.

But I'd never talked to him about my own condition. He knew I dealt with it, but we'd never talked about it. He never asked, and I never volunteered. I didn't want to worry him, I told myself. Misery loves company, the cliché goes, and depression loves the company of misery. Best to simply allude to my struggles and then show him that it's possible to push on in spite of them without going into too much detail.

But let's not kid ourselves. I was afraid. I still am. It's so much easier to pretend. So much easier to smile when I'm supposed to.

But I'm scared of losing my son even more.

My own depression doesn't scare me anymore, but it terrifies me when I see it in my son. The helplessness of standing apart from him, of being unable to reach inside him, pull him out of himself. As a dad who's spent his whole life working and wanting for his kids to be safe and happy, I don't know if there's a worse feeling than that sense of helplessness—of standing outside that closed door without a key or crowbar.

It's my fault, I think to myself. I wasn't kind enough. I wasn't strong enough. I wasn't honest enough. I wasn't sane enough. I passed whatever's wrong deep inside me on to him. It's my fault.

And that's the depression talking too. The despair. The shame. That sense of self-pity and unworth.



It's telling that Edward Rochester locked his crazy wife in the attic in Charlotte Brontë's classic novel *Jane Eyre*. That's what we often do with mental illness: We lock it away. It's too uncomfortable, too dissonant, too funny to deal with openly. Better to stuff it behind a door and pretend it isn't there. Better to hope it simply goes away.

Of course, if you've read *Jane Eyre*, you know that Edward's crazy wife eventually burned Edward's house down and herself along with it.

For years—all of my adult life, and sometime before—I've kept my own personal crazy locked away, as much as I was able. I'm deeply discomforted by discomfort. I don't like for folks to fuss or fret or worry. I'm an accomplice to society's willful ignorance of depression. Even as I write this book, I secretly hope that those closest to me—my wife, my parents, my dearest friends—won't read it. I fear that anything I confess in these pages may change how they view me in a critical way; that when I tell a joke or laugh, part of them will be looking for the “depressed person” underneath, like they might a ticking bomb.

I'd insist—truthfully, I believe—that they shouldn't worry: As stubborn as it might be, my depression is milder than what many people suffer from, including my son's. Yes, I've had periods of my life when I've succumbed to a sense of hopelessness and despair (which I'll talk about later), but over the years, I've developed lots of tricks and techniques that help me keep it (mostly) under control, and you'll read about those, too. I know my triggers. I know some tricks to keep the worst of despair at bay. My depression mainly just whispers now, scratching on the wood, singing through the keyhole, reminding me that it's still there, reminding me to be ever vigilant, ever careful.

But even as I write that, I understand that depression can plot

behind those locked doors. It can thrive back there, out of sight, under a haze of denial and desire for normalcy.

I'm fine, we say. *Nothing's wrong*, we say. And behind the door, depression smiles a little. Sometimes it laughs.

And then—perhaps with a start of horror, perhaps with a sigh of relief—we realize that we never locked it away at all. We locked ourselves in with it.



Depression is all about hiding ourselves. We lock ourselves in our rooms, literal or emotional. We wrap ourselves in little balls and sit in the back of our closets, curl in fetal positions, push the covers over our heads. We quit work, we avoid responsibility, we shun friends, we lose ourselves and the joy that God intended for us. We avoid life and, in some cases, we reject it outright—the glorious gift of life and love for an eternity of imagined dark, perpetual silence, cold and still. Oblivion comes not as a monster, but a mother, wrapping our souls in folds of bleak forever. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. What was once created comes undone, becomes formless and empty. Over the surface of the deep.

Depression seeks to uncreate us.

But that's not God's desire. He does not want us to unmake ourselves, to lose ourselves in our own darkness.

Before Kay Warren left her home that fateful day—the day she knew she'd likely learn that her son was no longer alive—she consciously put a necklace on that read, “Choose Joy.”

“I put it on because somewhere in the dim recesses of my frozen mind I was certain the only thing that would allow me to survive the loss of my son was what I knew and believed about God . . . and joy,” she later wrote on Facebook.¹¹

It's another paradox, really. To reach for joy in the shadow of death—not in some cheesy, Christianese way, but when that shadow is so dark and cold and clutching. That small act feels profound to me, and telling.

It reminded me of something I read in N. T. Wright's biography, *Paul*. The apostle, Wright says, was raised in an atmosphere of hope, even as the Jewish community was struggling for existence and self-identity in the Roman Empire.

"Hope could be, and often was, a dogged and deliberate choice when the world seemed dark," he writes. "It depended not on a feeling about the way things were or the way they were moving, but on faith, faith in the One God."¹²

"'Hope' in this sense is not a feeling," Wright adds. "It is a virtue."¹³

Hope is not a feeling. It's a virtue.

I'm writing this book for a lot of reasons. I'm writing it in the hopes of better understanding how I can help my son. I'm writing it to process and understand my own struggles with depression. I'd like to think that, by talking about it here and by sharing some of the things I use to deal with it, I can help people touched by depression themselves—those walking down the same difficult path or those walking alongside someone who is. I don't pretend to have a cure or a solution. I myself have more questions than answers.

But I do have a few, I think. And for those who like to skip to the end of books—to know how things turn out—I think the real key is found in that early Christian understanding of hope. It's not about what we feel, but what we do. We choose it. Hope is a virtue.

Ultimately, we choose to find hope in a world that sometimes seems hopeless. We choose joy in a culture that pushes us to despair. It's not easy, and sometimes we need a lot of help to make

that choice. But ultimately, it's up to us. We hold the key to our own door. We just have to use it.

We like to keep things hidden. We want to be alone. But the only way through depression is together, shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand—to be honest even in the pain it brings, in the embarrassment we feel.

Depression is funny. It loves locked doors. It grows in the darkness. We need to lift the latches, open the curtains, let in a little air. Let in a little light.