



CONVENTION of Atlantic Baptist Churches
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[About](#) [Departments](#) [Resources](#) [News & Events](#) [Staff](#) [Podcasts](#) [Donate](#) [Church Locator](#)



The Rapha Initiative - Testimonies

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Attachment	Size
Testimony_Sharon_Fawcett.pdf	124.79 KB
Testimony_Brian_Reid.pdf	105.31 KB
Testimony_Anonymous.pdf	48.03 KB
Testimony_Sharon_Leighton.pdf	105.39 KB



Departments

- ▶ The Executive Minister's Office
- ▶ Atlantic Baptist Mission
- ▶ Communications
- ▶ Development
- ▶ Operations
- ▶ Public Witness and Social Concern
- ▶ Regional Ministry
- ▶ Youth and Family

Upcoming Events

- ◊ Religion Soup
71 days
- ◊ Parents & Teens Mission Trip
121 days
- ◊ NEXT Conference (Children's Ministry)
163 days
- ◊ Springforth 2012
184 days
- ◊ Island Adventure Mission Tour
263 days
- ◊ Oasis: Refreshment for the Journey
287 days
- ◊ Tidal Impact 2013
612 days
- ◊ BWA Youth Congress 2013
616 days

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1655 Manawagonish Rd., Saint John, NB E2M 3Y2
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Testimony for RAPHA

By Sharon L. Fawcett

My journey with Jesus began in a tiny country church on a bright summer morning in my fifth year of life. I was visiting my grandparents on their farm in a small rural community in New Brunswick. The local church hosted a Vacation Bible School, which my sister and I attended each morning. On the last day, the leader of my group asked if any of us would like to ask Jesus into our hearts. I raised my hand. After the other children had been dismissed she led me in a prayer for salvation. I remember feeling very special and very loved by the Saviour.

As I grew older, this special feeling diminished. In my head I knew God loved me, but in my spirit I felt very un-lovely. I had a sense that I was somehow flawed and inferior. I desperately tried to hide this “truth” from others. By carefully controlling my behaviour and emotions I believed I might be able to influence what others thought about me. Lacking a healthy sense of my own value I became dependent on the approval of those around me to make me feel good about myself, earning their praise through performing, people pleasing, and perfectionism. It became a costly addiction.

I burned out at the age of twenty-six. For some reason, beyond my realm of understanding at that time, I became overwhelmed with despondency. Instead of looking forward to each new day, I dreaded waking up. I couldn't concentrate on the simplest of tasks and lost interest in all the activities I had previously enjoyed. I withdrew from others, just wanting to be alone, quiet, and still. I had everything to live for—a loving husband and two beautiful young daughters—but began to long for death.

My first admission to a hospital psychiatric ward came just days after my youngest daughter's first birthday. As the door to the unit closed behind me I felt defeated and confused. What's someone like me doing in a place like this? I wondered.

The diagnosis came easily: major clinical depression complicated by personality disorders. The cure was more complex. During my first hospitalisation I also developed the eating disorder anorexia nervosa, which threatened my life for the next three years. My battle with depression lasted nine years and during that time I accepted every form of medical and psychological treatment offered including approximately twenty antidepressant medications, more than one hundred electroconvulsive treatments, eighty weeks as a patient in hospital psychiatric wards, and numerous forms of psychological counselling. The quest for healing became my occupation. I had many periods when my desire for death was stronger than my will to live. I survived one suicide attempt.

When my psychiatrist announced that she was considering changing my diagnosis to treatment refractory depression (depression that does not respond to most forms of treatment) I realised it was time to try something else. After nine years of medical and psychological treatment, I began to see a Christian counsellor. She helped me identify and address the spiritual roots of my illness. Within three months of my first appointment with her I was free from depression. I never returned to the psychiatric ward, never had another electroconvulsive treatment, and no longer

needed medication or the care of a psychiatrist. A decade has passed and I remain free from depression.

Many view depression as an enemy bent on destroying them. That's how I felt when I was in the pit myself. But I now see it in a different light. Though I would prefer to never experience depression again, I'm grateful for how God used it to ultimately bless me.

God used depression to show me what I needed to change.

My illness eventually revealed a hunger for God I'd ignored all my life, trying to quiet my spirit's grumblings with activity rather than a relationship with my Creator. God knew I would never deal with the poverty of my soul while I was attempting to fill myself up with chores, accomplishments, and things. Depression made me leave all of that behind and focus my attention where needed: within.

God used depression to increase my faith and dependence on Him.

For most of my life I'd been very independent and never really "needed" God. But as depression stripped me of my ability to help myself, I became acquainted with the God who helps the helpless and grew to understand that I could trust Him for everything.

God used depression to prepare me for the life He longed to give me.

Since I spent most of my life trying to please others and win their approval, I never considered what I was created for or what might bring me fulfillment. Depression forced me to identify and address the lies that had made me become a people pleaser in the first place, and as God replaced those lies with His truth my praise addiction vanished. I'm now free to discover my own longings, passions, and purpose and am now pursuing them instead.

God used depression to transform me into an ambassador of hope.

In the years since my depression ended God has been leading me to use what I've learned to bring hope to others. Paul explained, "He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When others are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us" (2 Corinthians 1:4, NLT). For nearly five years I have been writing and speaking about depression and other topics related to spiritual health and wholeness. I've been interviewed on national television; local and national radio; and spoken at churches, conferences, and other venues, sharing my story of hope. I've had articles on depression and eating disorders published in magazines and anthologies, and in October 2008 NavPress publishers released my book, *Hope for Wholeness: The Spiritual Path to Freedom from Depression*. *Hope for Wholeness* addresses the complex relationship between physical, emotional, and spiritual health; explores spiritual roots of depression; and describes three powerful spiritual treatments that can bring lasting healing.

Many believe that depression is something to be ashamed of. They believe it is a sign of failure or of weakness. I do not. I am not ashamed that God loved me enough to do whatever it took to

get my attention, so that He could transform my broken life into one characterized by peace and hope. I do not believe that being ill makes me a failure. And as for depression being a weakness, I know that nothing is further from the truth because I know the truth: When I am weak, God makes me strong.

Sharon Fawcett is a member of Petiscodiac Baptist Church in New Brunswick. To learn more about her writing and speaking, please visit www.SharonFawcett.com.

God in my depression

Brian Reid, 2007

When I hit my rock-bottom, I was working at a shelter workshop for mental and physically challenged adults. I was responsible for a small “crew,” and, over time, I grew very attached to these people.

Then, within a short period of time, two people on my crew passed away suddenly and I was devastated. It was like a one-two punch that floored me. I sank, very quickly into a deep depression. I questioned many things; why did this happen? Did I still want to work with this population? Why would I let myself get so attached to these people?

I was new Christian and thought that the depression was punishment for my sins; but I finally realized that if we are struggling with a demon, I mean, really struggling and trying to do better, and we are really trying, then one day we slip and fall; in the midst of our pain and suffering God does not (then) come along and punish us. He surrounds us with His love and understanding and encourages us to try again. “For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” (John 3:17)

When I was in my full depression, I didn’t want to go out of the house, I didn’t want to see people, I didn’t want to, nor could I work, I didn’t want to go anywhere or see anyone.

But I knew deep down inside that I had to do something. I turned to God and asked Him everyday to help me crawl out of the pit that I found myself in. I knew no one could help me, so I had to do it myself; but I didn’t have to do it by myself. No understood, I couldn’t make anybody understand what I was going through – about my inner anger, and about the little things that just troubled me so much.

Then I realized that God knew what I was going through, He understood, He was the only person, He was the only way, that I could see myself getting any better – by His help and His grace – as I trusted Him.

It took a long time for me to work things through and God was there every step of the way. He answered my cries for help on the days I didn’t think I could do it, He patiently waited on the days that I completely forgot all about Him, and He showed me a glimpse of that inner peace that comes only through faith in Him.

I still fight depression daily, but I don’t fight it alone – for God is with me; “For God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”

An Anonymous Testimony of God's Grace

Experiencing mental illness for the first time is an experience which I would have to say is almost always frightening for not only the patient, but for all the loved ones.

Living with a mental health problem, or as it is also referred to, a chemical imbalance in the brain, creates definite challenges, and obstacles to daily living for the person affected.

However, I feel that my story is one example of the fact that no one needs to be forced into defeat by a mental illness. My problems began to surface at the young age of fourteen, when I realized that I could hear very scary words being played through my head at totally unexpected intervals -- much like hearing a recording. To add to my anxiety, I found I was helpless to control or stop what I was hearing.

Voices and images in my head, of the vilest kind, were merciless, and unrelenting, thus convincing me that I must be the worst kind of evil person. As I fought for even five minutes of peace from the tormenting words and images, I became more and more convinced that not only was I desperately wicked, but that my car ride with Mom and Dad on that beautiful May morning, I was on a one way trip to hell.

In my mind, I was a person of the worst evil -- and Judgment Day had come for me -- my arrival at the Waterville hospital was surely my final sentencing to hell. My stay in the psychiatric ward of the Waterville hospital was strange, mysterious and scary. Medical experts had told my Mom a long time ago that my entire body was so chemically imbalanced that I should not even be alive. (I guess God had something to say about that!) An entire panel of psychiatrists interviewed me in the psych. unit. I concluded that I was one of the worst cases they had ever seen.

BUT GOD...!! Ah, yes! Enter God into the picture. To make a long story short, after having experimented with various medications (the psychiatrist later told my Mom that the high dosage could have killed me), the right medication was finally found. I was not completely cured, but wonder of wonders, I regained a healthy state of mind once again.

I attribute the success of this medication to a whole church praying for me and **THE POWER OF GOD!!** Now some nineteen years later, I live in an apartment on my own with my beloved pet cat Mischief. Through the years, God has slowly and gradually restored me to a new and whole person -- one who lives for Jesus. I was once self-centred and lived in fear. God has blessed me with countless beautiful friends, a wonderfully renewed closeness with my mother. Today I volunteer, caring for children, the handicapped and the elderly.

However the most important change of all was this: I recognized that I am a valued person to someone thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus. I see myself as cherished and precious, as a daughter of the King. No longer are fear and worthlessness my constant companions. So if you are caught in the grips of mental illness, consider my story -- what God did for me, He can do for you!!

My Journey with Mental Illness

by Sharon Leighton

I wrote, and have, on three occasions, acted a small play called, “He Came to Me.” It portrays a young woman locked in a dark, cold, dungeon, and chained to her place on the floor. She watches the feet of people passing by her only window, placed high in the wall, so that that is all she can see of them. She fantasizes about how a pair of feet might someday stop and enter, so she would no longer be alone, but she knows it is not going to happen. And then – it does. One man enters, releases her from her shackles, helps her to stand, encourages her to walk, opens the door, and sends her out into the wondrous world, filled with sunshine and flowers and marvelous, marvelous people, all kinds, like colours in a rainbow. And she exults, “I am free – and He is with me.”

This play is my testimony. I was the woman, and Jesus was the man who freed me.

As a very small child, I experienced several psychological traumas. I have forgiven the people who were responsible, and I have no desire to see anyone who loved them suffer, so I would prefer not to share details of those traumas. However, given what two psychiatrists considered a genetic predisposition to mental illness, those traumas did lead to mental illness in me.

One form this illness took was an “anxiety disorder,” which is a polite way of saying that a person is deathly afraid of just about everything in the universe. I was afraid of ceilings that might fall on me, floors that might open at my feet, highways that might lead to disaster, and, above all, of people. I was afraid of crowds and afraid of solitude; I was afraid of wide open spaces and of small, enclosed spaces; I was afraid to speak and afraid to be silent. In fact, I could count the things I was not afraid of quite easily: cats, rocks, books, bees, butterflies, trees. That was about it.

When I was fifteen, on an August night when I was too terrified to sleep, I asked Jesus to help me. He walked into the dungeon of my heart and gave me the courage to live again. It wasn’t a sudden, overnight cure, mind you! It took me thirty-five years to overcome every vestige of mental illness, to become “saner than most” (in the words of my last psychotherapist). I would never have been able to endure those forty years, if Jesus had not walked beside me every step of the way.

Today, I can only contemplate enduring the next forty or so years of life because I know Jesus will be with me. I may be sane, but I still bear the marks of my past. There are things I cannot do because of that past, because of what was done to me. There is a common misconception that young children cannot be seriously damaged, that they simply bounce back from all kinds of trauma. According to the psychologists I have seen, if the boundaries of the personality are violently breached at the time they are forming, they never do form properly. Much of the damage I experienced has been healed, but I do have what they call “leaky boundaries”. If I am with a person who feels despair, I react as if the despair is mine. I have been rejected as a possible missionary because of this, and I had to switch from studies leading to the ministry to an academic degree in theology because of this.

Unlike many people with mental illness, I have been able to provide for myself most of my life, even if it was living under the poverty limit. I have been able to obtain a B.A. in drama and an M.A. in theology. I am now contemplating further study to become an historian, specializing in the history of women in the church. I am currently working on researching and, eventually, writing the biography of the late Dr. Miriam Ross. God can use my gifts, in spite of visible cracks where he and I and a series of God-sent healers put me back together.

I am free, in spite of everything, and He walks with me every day. Thanks be to God.