

The Promise of a New Day

by Jay Abaya

*“How great is my God, and how I love to sing His praises!
Whereas I am often frightened when I think about the future,
confused and disturbed by the rapidly changing events about me,
my heart is secured and made glad when I remember how He has cared for me throughout the past.”*

For survivors of clinical depression and suicide attempts like me, each waking day is a day of thanksgiving filled with promises we can count on! The realizations revealed to me as I look back to those dark times give me a much better appreciation for life and everything that comes with it. Reminded of how enormous God's love is for each of His children and how he never forsake me, I am now reassured and confident to face whatever the future holds. God is and will always be with us. And even for that alone, I feel very blessed and I am eternally grateful to Him.

*“Through parents and people who cared, He loved and sheltered me,
and set me upon His course for my life.
Through illness and accident God has sustained me.
Around pitfalls and precipices He has safely led me.”*

We are all privileged to be instruments of God in doing His work on others. While going through my battle with depression, God sent an army of angels to my rescue. No, they did not come dressed in white robes with their magnificent wings. Instead, they were under the disguise of familiar faces—parents, brother, relatives, close friends, my psychiatrist and even total strangers who simply showed compassion without passing on judgment on my psychological condition. I would have never recovered and regained my life if not for them who have selflessly accepted God's invitation to be His instruments in extending His loving mercy and healing power to me. For His gift of wonderful people in my life, I will always be grateful.

“Even out of the broken pieces of my defeats, He created a vessel of beauty and usefulness.”

I remember how I questioned and eventually turned against God back then for allowing me to go through the immense suffering brought by depression. Maybe I thought too highly of myself and felt that there was somebody out there who deserves it but definitely not me. All my hopes and dreams were crushed

in an instant, everything just seemed pointless. But He is always faithful to His word and never abandoned me. Though I rebelled against Him for some time, He gladly took me back. I am now a better person than I was before. For his gift of forgiveness and mercy, I am humbled and thankful.

“Sometimes through me, sometimes in spite of me,

He seeks to accomplish His purpose in my life.

He has kept me through the stormy past;

He will secure and guide me through the perilous future.

I need never be afraid, no matter how uncertain may be the months or years ahead of me.

How great is my God, and how I love to sing His praises!”

Now that I am healed, I am amazed with how the experience started to make perfect sense. It's as if God was preparing me all along for a purpose that He has in store for me. Even back then, when I was still undergoing treatment, I hoped for the day that I'll be able to help others going through the same ordeal. God is not just good, He is great! Not only did it bring our family closer, it also equipped me with a better understanding of the condition.

God blessed with me with a certain talent, skill and the gift of time that I can selflessly share to somehow reach out to those going through the same dark journey that I've been through. With my first-hand experience of depression, I am now in a better position to empathize and share the lessons that I have learned from it. As a volunteer for the Natasha Goulbourn Foundation (NGF), I am able to communicate, anonymously, not only to patients but also their friends and loved ones. For this opportunity of touching others' lives and bringing the glory back to Him, I am grateful!

There are a lot of things that each one of us should be thankful for, with or without depression. We just need to look back and count all the blessings that He bestowed upon us even if, at times, we don't really deserve them. Human as we are, it is still possible for us to look beyond our needs and be a blessing to others as well. We can all accept God's invitation for us to be His instruments in bringing hope and love especially to those who seek it. NGF wishes to do just that, to bring light to depression through its awareness campaign and outreach activities. It tries to convey the message that depression is treatable and suicide is preventable.

With all the stress and unhealthy lifestyle that we are exposed to these days, everyone is a possible victim of mental depression. Students get bullied at school, OFWs are separated from their families, employees are barely breathing with unbearable workload, and executives are frantically trying to save their businesses amidst unfavorable economic conditions. Responsibilities or setbacks pile up that they become almost impossible to cope with.

While it's nice to know that some schools are now actively addressing bullying and that there are companies that invest in their employees' wellness, it is sad to note that the government tends to forget the mental health component in its programs that are supposed to promote the people's welfare. There are not enough psychiatrists, in case they even have one, in most government-run hospitals throughout the country. It fails to see how much more productive its citizens can become with strong and resilient

minds which can be developed at an early age starting with our public school system. After all, a lot of society's ills are rooted on its members' psychological well-being. It is our hope that the government will start to give serious attention to the alarming cases of depression and increasing number of suicide committed in the Philippines.

Still on the subject of being thankful, we at NGF are grateful for the increasing support that we are receiving from generous souls. To the hardworking staff, board members, mental health experts, industry practioners and sponsors who have been with us through this journey, may God continue to bless you because you are have been and will continue to be blessings to others. But wait, there's still more to be thankful for. Very soon, we will also have our very own helplines manned by trained psychologists 24/7 to receive calls and provide professional counseling to help patients cope with their situation. With prayers and a lot of hope, together we can all experience joy and peace in our lives!

**Excerpts from the prayer, "An Adaptation of Psalm 105" by Leslire Brandt