



ENDORSEMENTS



Companions in the Darkness *Seven Saints Who Struggled with Depression and Doubt*

November 24, 2020 | \$17, 184 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4828-7

Diana Gruver (MA, Gordon-Conwell) writes about discipleship and spiritual formation in the every day. She serves as a writer and communications director for Vere Institute, and lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and daughter.

Depression and a Faith-Full Life Are Compatible

“This book takes us into the hearts of seven people who wrestled deeply with depression and only intermittently experienced a measure of freedom and healing. Diana Gruver, who knows depression well herself, artfully and sensitively opens up their inner pain and the outer difficult circumstances of their lives, raising many big and difficult questions about the nature of intractable depression, its stigma, and why God allows some to suffer so much before taking away their tears and releasing them through death. She draws out helpful lessons from the variety of things that helped these seven men and women to keep going, even when death seemed an attractive option, and to somehow continue to believe and trust in God in the darkness. The author has researched their lives extensively, using letters and biographies to enter their worlds. Her helpful footnotes add more information and useful resources for further reading. This book is a wonderful and sensitive encouragement for any for whom life has become unbearably dark and for those who seek to help them.”

—**Richard Winter**, professor emeritus of counseling and applied theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, author of *When Life Goes Dark*

“Diana Gruver has written a compelling book. In it she tells the stories of seven historical figures, some but not all household names, who suffered severe depression. Gruver does it just right, avoiding the many pitfalls that could have made the book excessively sentimental or judgmental. She lets the individuals describe their own experiences, refusing to subject them to modern clinical diagnosis. She chooses quotes from their writings that are so profound, human, and powerful that I kept tearing up, drawn into the nightmare of their condition. Her writing is clear and cogent and luminous. She tells their stories with sensitivity and compassion. She gives her subjects voices, as if letting them speak across the years to us. Her commentary and reflections along the way are full of hope. This is the kind of historical writing that is both responsible and moving. I will recommend this book to my friends.”

—**Gerald L. Sittser**, professor of theology at Whitworth University and author of *A Grace Disguised*

“Diana Gruver has given the church a precious gift in *Companions in the Darkness*. Diana has labored painstakingly to unearth the previously hidden details of the stories of depressed Christians of great faith and told their stories compellingly and compassionately, chipping away at the stigma of depression in the church. *Companions in the Darkness* opposes using faith destructively as a judgmental hammer and instead shows how faith sustains the depressed Christian. The gospel of God’s great love for his children, including those struggling with depression, cannot coexist with stigma. Thank you, Diana, for the gift of *Companions in the Darkness*.”

—**Karen Mason**, professor of counseling and psychology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary



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“It is rare to say that there is no other book like this, but with Diana Gruver’s *Companions in the Darkness* she has done something that no other book has done: given us true companions for dark times by exploring the depression of older Christian leaders. She weaves in her own story of depression, offers contemporary psychological insight about mental health disorders, and invites us to take heart; we are not alone. Through her keen eye—an eye sensitive to suffering—she helps us understand Martin Luther’s melancholy and physical pain, William Cowper’s despair, Martin Luther King Jr.’s exhaustion, and Mother Teresa’s dark night of the soul. These biographies are interesting and informative, but more they are manna, light, and hope. Many will be grateful for this very fine and truly helpful exploration.”

—**Byron Berger**, owner of Hearts & Minds Bookstore, Dallastown, PA

“With wise insight and palpable compassion, Diana Gruver recounts the oh-so-human stories of Christians revered across the centuries as leaders, as achievers, as exemplars. For all of their fame as ‘great’ Christians, these saints tasted their own radical vulnerability and knew the anguish of mental illness. To all who seek God yet suffer, there is comfort to be found in this sacred company among the brothers and sisters who lived faithfully amid struggle, the companions and guides who assure us that depression will not have the last word. Practical and deeply personal, *Companions in the Darkness* is a gift to us all.”

—**Karen Wright Marsh**, author of *Vintage Saints and Sinners* and executive director of Theological Horizons centered at the Bonhoeffer House

“I’ve lived with bipolar mood disorder for thirty years, so trust me when I say that *Companions in the Darkness* offers help and healing for those who have lived in the valley of depression. Diana Gruver skillfully frames her own battle with depression around unexpected but real-life stories of saints who trudged through surprising depths of darkness. From Martin Luther to Mother Theresa to Martin Luther King, we see how the many faces of depression can obscure the light and love of God. But most importantly, Gruver shows us why depression and a faith-full life are not incompatible. Discovering these seven saints deepened my sense that I’m never alone in the darkness, that there is always hope, and that there is a well-worn path to follow Jesus in the dark.”

—**Michael John Cusick**, author of *Surfing for God* and CEO of Restoring the Soul

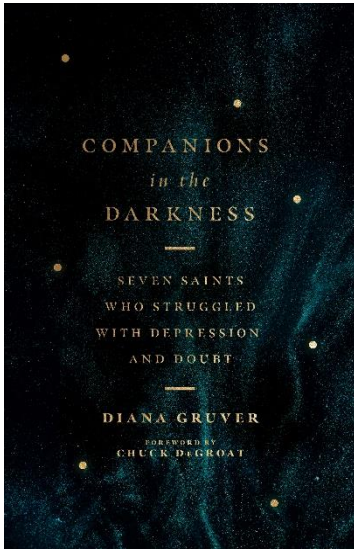


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The church's relationship with depression has been fraught, and we still have a long way to go. Drawing on her own experience with depression, Diana Gruver looks back into church history and finds depression in the lives of some of our most beloved saints, telling their stories in fresh ways and offering practical wisdom both for those in the darkness and those who care for them.

Stories of Struggle Offer Comfort

I did not have a word for it until my senior year of college. Looking back, I can see it started before then, in cycles and seasons when I described myself as “down,” “in a funk,” “struggling,” “low.” My friend talked me into seeing a counselor at our college’s health center, and there I was given the word: depression.

It felt foreign at first, as if this couldn’t be me, couldn’t be this thing I was feeling. But it had been so long since I felt emotionally steady, emotionally “up,” that I didn’t remember what normal felt like anymore. I no longer had the energy to wrestle with the thoughts in my head. I was stuck in a fog—confused, overwhelmed, suffocated.

For brief moments it lifted enough for me to sip the fresh air—to realize just how much clearer and easier life was without its presence. On the days it lingered, I cried myself to sleep, my body curled into a tight self-protective ball, begging God to hear me, begging him to make me okay.

As time went on, I wondered whether he did hear me. My tears dried up and feeling left me. When the numbness came, I lay awake, exhausted but rest-less, desperate for those tears to return, because then I would know I was still alive, not a shell of a human being. I longed to disappear, to drift off into never-ending sleep. I longed for it all to go away.

Throughout this season, I felt weak, as if I ought to be able to fight back the encroaching and all-encompassing darkness. I felt ashamed, as if I was doing something wrong. Most of all, I felt afraid, as depression tightened its grip on my sanity. Afraid of the thoughts gnawing at my mind. Afraid of how much deeper I might plunge into the pit. Afraid of my desire to cease to exist.

I survived. With the help of therapy, medication, a good support system, and God’s grace, the light slowly dawned. Life gradually became easier, the days less daunting. My mind could focus and process once again. I could turn loving attention on other people. Sleep was no longer elusive. The sensation of joy once again took up residence in my heart.

I felt like one of the lucky ones—like I had barely survived my brush with depression’s darkness. I was thankful to be alive, returned once again to the sun. But I didn’t know what to do with my experience. I didn’t know what to do with the marks it left on me. I didn’t know what I would do if it returned.

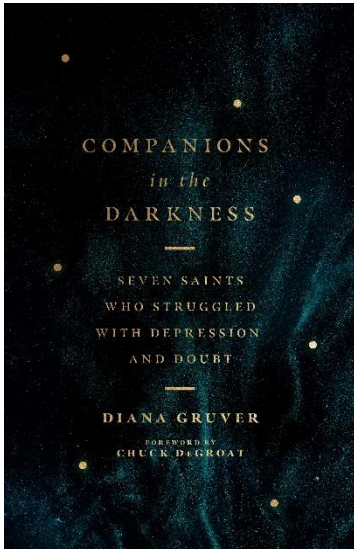


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“Diana Gruver writes with the wisdom and compassion of someone who knows the landscape of depression from the inside. She introduces us to both well-known and lesser-known Christians who battled with despair and whose stories can speak words of comfort and solidarity to those who ache for healing and deliverance. This is a brave, nuanced, and vulnerable book that offers no easy answers but points unflinchingly to the God who companions us in the darkness.”

—*Sharon Garlough Brown, author of Shades of Light and the Sensible Shoes Series*

And return it did, this time while I was living abroad in a house full of children. Once again came the darkness, the tears, the exhaustion. I was stripped of my usual support network, and I once again needed medication to help me as I clawed toward the light.

Months later, stable but still on this latest round of antidepressants, I found myself in a seminary classroom scribbling names from church history in the margins of my notebooks. With the battle of depression still fresh in my mind, I recognized something in my professor’s asides about different historical figures. These brothers and sisters were like friends whispering to me from centuries past. They too had been plunged into darkness. They too had been depressed.

So I set out on a journey, to get to know them and others like them, and to learn the lessons they might offer from the darkness.

As I slogged through seasons of depression—and as I’ve looked back on those seasons from more stable footing—I have found the stories and presence of others who have experienced depression to be invaluable. I hear a hint of something I recognize—an aside, a metaphor, a hint of those marks left by the darkness—and I zero in on them. *There is someone who knows, I think, someone who understands. They too have walked through the valley of the shadow of depression.* There’s something about it that binds us, like brothers in arms—the battle we have fought knits us together.

Their stories bring me comfort that I am not alone. They remind me I am not the only one to walk this road, that this experience is not an alien one. The lie that “surely no one has felt this” is cut down by the truth that others, in fact, have, and their presence makes me feel less isolated. These fellow travelers are my companions in the darkness of night.

They offer me wisdom, advice hard-bought on how to survive. On the lessons they learned. Of the tools they gained.

They give me hope—hope that this is not the end of my story, that I too will survive this. Hope that depression will not have the last say. I hear their stories of survival, of perseverance, and I have hope to keep going, keep fighting, keep doing the hard work of getting well.

This is true of those I find alive today. For those I can talk to, sit down for coffee with, for those I call or write. It is the case for the leaders I encounter, those who are vulnerable enough to share their struggles. It’s the case for the artists who write songs and poems, who paint or create films rooted in their experience. It is also true of those who no longer walk this earth, those who through their letters, journals, and written accounts leave us the legacy of their stories.

But the stories in this book were not chosen at random. They come from some of our heroes, from those whose tales we still tell long after their death. This gives them something unique to offer.

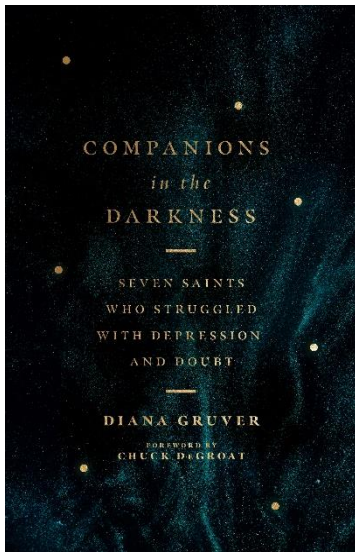


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“Companions in the Darkness by Diana Gruver is a well-written, deeply touching, and very helpful book that succinctly describes seven saints’ struggles with depression and doubt: Martin Luther, Hannah Allen, David Brainerd, William Cowper, Charles Spurgeon, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King Jr. I highly recommend it as enlightening, edifying, and essential reading on depression.”

—Siang-Yang Tan, professor of psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, author of *Counseling and Psychotherapy: A Christian Perspective*

These stories from our heroes help break the guilt and stigma surrounding depression in the church—undermining the lies that I am failing, that I am a “bad Christian,” that I should be better than this, or that if only I were more faithful or holy or strong this would not be happening to me. But can you imagine the audacity of applying this principle to the brothers and sisters in this book? Of telling Charles Spurgeon to read his Bible more? Or David Brainerd to pray more? Or Mother Teresa to just choose joy? We regard these people as giants of the faith, as “saints,” and yet they still struggled with depression. The faithfulness of their lives did not make them immune—and it will not make me immune. They remind us that sometimes these things happen, sometimes we are weighed down by sadness. Sometimes our brains get sick just as our bodies do. Their lives bear witness to this truth.

Since that seminary classroom, where I first encountered these companions, I’ve come to realize that the stories we chose to tell communicate something. Ignoring a struggle like depression in the lives of people in church history—those we still talk about today, those we may call heroes—communicates something. It says those stories don’t matter, or, worse, that we should be ashamed of them.

This is why this book exists. The stories you will read in this book need to be told. They need to be told so that we can be heirs of the wisdom and comfort they have to share. They need to be told so that we are reminded that we have the freedom to tell our own stories. They need to be told so that we are reminded that God can still use us, that depression will not be our life’s epitaph. They are, for me, models of what it looks like to follow Jesus through depression.

If you don’t struggle with depression, I hope that in these pages you find testimonies of what this struggle is like for so many people around you. I hope your humble “listening in” to these stories increases your compassion and your awareness of how to help your depressed brothers and sisters.

If you, like me, are no stranger to depression, I hope that as you read, you find a “friend” along the way. Someone whose experience you recognize and can find camaraderie with. Someone who can whisper, “Yes, I’ve been there. I know.” Someone who can offer a little advice about how to survive, how to be faithful. May they bring you comfort. May they bring you hope. May they shine a little light on your path through the dark.

—Adapted from the introduction, “Defining the Darkness”



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