**DEPRESSION (done)**

**Clark:**  Previously on Living and Effective

**Langberg:**  Think about the cross. That's a place of no hope. Everything went dark. Absolutely everything went dark. He was dead. He was completely silent. I mean, the disciples had no hope. It was the place of greatest truth, and life came from that. So grieving here and being in that place is a taste of the fellowship of His sufferings.

**Clark:**  I'm Richard Clark.

**Smith:**  And I'm Joy Beth Smith.

**Clark:**  The Christian Standard Bible and Christianity Today present Living and Effective season two, a podcast about what happens when the Bible and humanity collide.

This is where our narrative diverges with the prosperity gospel. We'll say goodbye to Peter Popoff too because his story doesn't veer into areas of darkness. The prosperity gospel preacher's focused on keeping things light, not sitting in the darkness with us. Depression is a heavy topic, and you can feel that in conversations when the subject comes up. This episode's going to be a little different because of that, but also because we're treating the episode itself a little differently. We're going to explore how that darkest part of grief manifests in the lives of three different people. If depression is something you're currently facing, we want to be mindful of that. These interviews are raw and honest. You might want to consider listening with a friend or processing these ideas with someone later.

Psychologist Diane Langberg's thoughts on depression are going to be our guide in this episode. They're going to provide us with perspective and context. These three stories aren't meant to paint a comprehensive picture of depression. Still, we hope they show how it impacts our lives and how we might help one another in those times.

**Langberg:**  It's one thing to be on a dark road and see a light a mile away. It's another thing to be on a dark road and not see any light, anywhere, at all. You don't even know which way to walk. So you sit. You don't know what to do. It's the darkest place, because you get there because you have looked at this thing pretty full in the face, maybe not completely, and you might have to circle around 65 more times, but you've gotten some of that in you, and then it drowns your hope. I mean, clearly, somebody's not going to come back to life. Or if it's been something like a divorce or if there's a chronic illness, I mean, you get to the place that is the darkest. You haven't reconnected to life in any way yet, really, so you're feeling the full weight of the loss. It's not going to change, so you have no hope that something is going to make that all better, and you can't see the way forward.

**Clark:**  Just a note here. When I talked with Todd Billings, he didn't go into detail about depression specifically or personally, but he did talk at length about his experience with the darker moments of grief. "Because of the nature of his suffering, I knew he must have had experience with intense feelings of sadness. In fact, I was somewhat nervous about triggering those feelings even more just by asking questions. "

Why are you doing this interview? I feel a certain amount of guilt putting you through this. You're talking about trauma, and PTSD, and the last thing I would want to do is put someone through that.

**Billings:**  Well, it's kind of like if you have a parent who has had a young child die, and people, sometimes they expect the parent to be over it after like a year or three years or whatever. But as we saw on a very public level with George H.W. Bush and when he died, and his daughter, who died when she was young, his big hope was to be reunited with his daughter.

We can talk about whether that's a very good eschatology, but like it's clear a parent never gets over it. They never get over it. That doesn't mean they're in the same place always. But if you go up to a parent and tell a story about that child, and name that child by name, it's not as if you're bringing up something that they're not thinking about.

**Clark:**  Yeah.

**Billings:**  So when I talk about these things, that's present to me all the time. So it's not retraumatizing me in any sense to talk about it. It's just the reality.

I tend to know when my pain will come. The pain, accompanied with the pain is often a heavy fatigue. Sometimes just emotions of sadness that I hadn't experienced before. And when you're in a place where there's pain and then there's fatigue, you don't have a lot of energy.

**Clark:**  Yeah.

**Billings:**  And the sort of imminence of it. I don't even consciously, necessarily think of it all the time, but you have this sense at times of your former life or your imagined life kind of going on at its own pace. Then I'm living something different, and this different thing is connected closely with the fact that I'm dying.

Every book I write now is quite possibly my last book. Again, I am not going to speculate about reasons why there's illness or weakness or that sort of thing, but I certainly believe that God uses these things to remind us that we are dust, that we are creatures. And that reminder isn't, it's not like God is pounding in some message that's just bad news. That's actually good news for us. We're not healthy when we act like we are God, when we act like we are in control.

This is not a life of flourishing, and so there's a certain sense in which embracing even the weakness in which we find ourselves before God, I mean that's much more a life of flourishing than some of the American Dream sort of life of flourishing, where you try really hard and you become the master of your universe.

**Clark:**  Can you explain why there is an ending of Job that feels almost weirdly redemptive tacked on. This idea that Job gets everything and more back. If you were making a Christian movie, that's how it would end, you know what I mean? Can you explain why that ending is there and how you read it?

**Billings:**  I think that if I was making a Christian movie about it, which I don't know if that would be a good idea, it would actually be much more solemn than just celebratory because any parent who has lost a child knows that having another child is not a replacement.

**Clark:**  Yeah.

**Billings:**  You don't want a replacement. Even if we're talking about the life in the age to come, it's not a replacement.

A member of my church had been married over 50 years and then his wife died and it was, I think, the second anniversary and he just starts crying and he says to me, "I know I shouldn't be crying because she's in a better place and that's what everybody's told me, but I want her here, right now."

**Clark:**  Yeah.

**Billings:**  "I don't want her there right now. I need her here."

Even though death is the final enemy, that final sting has been taken away, there's still a profound loss to it. I especially hear sometimes in some Christian music songs on the radio that everything that is lost will be restored. I get and I affirm the general idea there in a certain sense but on an experiential level, I'm just like, "I have no idea what that means," because losses are just losses. So, there's a sense win which there are these gifts from the Lord to Job but how he enters into it now is totally different. All of these relationships are contingent. They're all unstable. He has a huge challenge, basically, he has the challenge to love a new family that is going to die. With this strong awareness that they're going to die, they're going to be taken away and with the wounds of that.

But, that is the sort of thing that God can do and that God does.

I know families who have experienced great loss with their own children and then they adopt a child in need, they become foster parents. It's not a replacement. It's not making everything better.

**Clark:**  Yeah.

**Billings:**  But God can still work powerfully through that.

**Clark:**  Depression tends to be isolating. That moment of intense realization that things really are that terrible is accompanied with a contrast. It's the moment we realize that the rest of the world just isn't on the same page. Most of us then tend to withdraw as a result, we turn inward. When I've been depressed, my bed pulls me toward it like a tractor beam. I crave naps about as often as I crave water. Conversations feel stilted and jarring and I'm submerged in a reality that was fundamentally sad. No one else is there with me. No one else wanted to be there with me, and even if they did, I'm not sure I'd want to drag them down there.

So, typically, whenever I was depressed... So, typically, whenever I'm depressed, I feel alone, more than anything. I think this is how it works for a lot of people, which means when people are depressed, you don't exactly know. They're not anxious to tell you or talk about it. You might be able to recognize the warning signs, but more likely you'll be oblivious to just how deep the sadness goes. I found that to be the case, even with those closest to me.

So, for instance, I sat down with my cohost, Joy Beth Smith, to talk about her experience with depression. We're coworkers, and we have an ongoing back and forth, obviously. We talk every day about our personal lives. But in my conversation with her about this subject, I discovered just how oblivious I tend to be about those sorts of profound feelings of sadness that can linger under the surface of my relationships.

**Smith:**  Think there are no more tissues in here. What a terrible thing, to not have any in here.

**Clark:**  Oh, yeah. You want me to get some?

**Smith:**  I mean (inaudible) .

Richard Just in case.

How did you feel about being involved on a podcast about grief?

Is it weird to say that I kind of love it?

**Clark:**  Does it scare you?

**Smith:**  No, no.

Richard So working on this doesn't scare you at all?

No, uh-uh (negative).

**Clark:**  Do you have any negative feelings associated with it?

**Smith:**  No, I kind of, in a weird way, like the six year old kid who has a bruise but he keeps pressing on it ... There are often times at work where we'll come in and you'll play something and it'll make me cry, but I love it.

**Clark:**  Right, yeah.

**Smith:**  I mean, it makes me feel deep things.

Richard If Joy Beth cries it means it works.

Right, yeah. It's like a measurement.

**Clark:**  At what point did you realize you were comfortable with sadness? Because to me, as someone who just got to know you really well, about six months ago, it seems like a part of your identity.

**Smith:**  Oh, interesting. My familiarity and comfort with me emotions.

**Clark:**  The interesting contrast between light and bubbly, fun person, also let's go into despair. That's Joy Beth.

**Smith:**  Uh-huh (affirmative).

**Clark:**  So that hasn't always been the case?

**Smith:**  Yeah.

**Clark:**  So do you remember ... what's the earliest you remember experiencing depression?

**Smith:**  So my family, I was raised kind of by village, so it was during that time period that I went to move in with my aunt and her husband and my two cousins. I think that for as much as I could understand it at 10 years old, there was a ... And when people hear hopelessness, I think what they think is like despair, like, "I have nothing to live for," but when I talk about hopelessness, it's almost more of a resignation, There's so much pain, my emotions felt so big, especially at that age, and so overwhelming, I saw no way around them, and I saw no way to think through them. So I figured, "If this is all there is ... " I couldn't understand how I could live a whole life like that.

**Clark:**  We’re not meant to be alone and someone in grief, someone experiencing depression, can only be helped by becoming more aware of their surrounding community. Other people. To become aware that they’re not suffering alone and to even go so far as to be for others what they would love for others to be for them.

**Smith:**  I can’t speak for everybody. In my own experiences with depression, I have different capabilities at different points. So at some points I can reach out and try and offer things to people, and reach outside of myself and what I'm feeling, and get distractions, which is helpful.

Then sometimes, you're alone, in the dark, and sometimes there's a light a mile away. And then sometimes you're alone in the dark and there's not even a light a mile away, and you're just alone in the dark.

I think at that point in the depression journey, there is nothing. It's sort of like an abyss. It's sort of like where you feel everything and you feel nothing, and you're incapable of connection, but you're desperate for it, and you know that the best thing for you is A, B, and C, but you have no ability to make those things happen.

what we can at least establish is that in these moments of depression, connection is at least a theme, someone who is at least sitting with you in the dark, whether they're holding your hand or whether they're just there. You know?

**Clark:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Smith:**  A presence, I think that that is so invaluable. And I will say that that is a long game, and that is a patient person because most often in those moments I just have nothing to offer, and I am not a charitable person.

**Clark:**  Right.

**Smith:**  I am not a good friend.

**Clark:**  Right.

**Smith:**  I am not someone who is returning your texts and taking your calls. And this is not a give and take situation.

**Clark:**  Did you have someone like that when you were young?

**Smith:**  Here's the thing. It's really hard to tell people. I mean, most often, people don't know. People don't know. People don't know that you're there. People have no idea.

**Clark:**  That you're depressed.

**Smith:**  Yeah. And ...

**Clark:**  'Cause they usually just, it presents as usually a bad mood, a case of the grumpies, angry. I'm speaking a little from my experience, not with you, but with myself. Like I know that I come across as lethargic, tired, all those things.

**Smith:**  I would say sometimes.

**Clark:**  You do a better job of hiding it than I do?

**Smith:**  I don't know how to describe it. I think there's like high-functioning depression.

**Clark:**  Oh, interesting, yeah.

**Smith:**  Where-

**Clark:**  That sounds exhausting.

**Smith:**  Yeah. And I think it's like you put it on to go to work, and then you come home, and then everything crashes. I mean, you turn on the TV and you don't move for 8 hours, and then you go to bed. And then on weekends, you're just in front of a TV and you eat to-go food, and that's it. You haven't really made any plans to go out with anybody in months. I mean, showering has really become optional, but I mean dry shampoo is really good these days, so you can mask that for a long time.

I think that our world is so busy that people don't really notice, and if you're in a society, if you're in a social group where you come to work every day so people still see that, and you're not really involved in a church, and you don't really have local friends but you have your long distance friends and those people you only check in with every month or two anyway, it takes a long time for people to take in that something is wrong.

I think that that's one of the scariest parts for me, is that I know that. So when I start getting pretty bad, I know I have to say something before someone notices because people don't just notice.

**Clark:**  Yeah.

**Langberg:**  You're smashed. You're crushed. You certainly don't have any energy. You can hardly think. It's like being at the bottom of a pit all by yourself, and you can't see the way out. It's a shutdown. You know, the blinds are drawn. You can't see the light. You can't relate. You don't have energy. You don't think clearly.

I mean, I've had clients through the years who have been in just terrible grief in a place like that because of just atrocities and all kinds of things, and the best thing I can give them at that point is, "I'll just sit in the pit with you. It's okay. You can be in the pit. I'm there too. I'm not leaving." 'Cause they can't do anything to move it at that point, but I can move.

I mean, that's the incarnation. That's what He did.

**Clark:**  Okay. So, obviously I don't go around asking my coworkers about their mental health. That can be pretty unprofessional or intrusive. So, it makes a little bit of sense that I wasn't fully keyed in to Joy Beth's struggles outside of this conversation, but my wife, I knew that Jennifer was sad. I knew that my wife had even suffered from postpartum depression for awhile, but we never really sat down to explore it in a lot of detail. And so, I used this opportunity to do just that, to find out exactly how much I had picked up versus how much I'd missed during a time when even my wife was really depressed.

Okay, good.

**Jennifer Clark:**  So this one?

**Clark:**  Yes.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Okay, yeah, that's fine.

**Clark:**  Okay. It's interesting to talk about this because, again, we talk about this stuff a lot, but as I was thinking about this interview, which it's weird to call it that, which I think is an opportunity for us. I feel like our relationship might change as a result of this. Not in a bad way, in a good way.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Yeah. I thought about warning you because I could see how I might be sharing things today that I haven't actually said to you.

**Clark:**  Yeah, I think we both are feeling this, which is why I came into this interview actually feeling weirdly nervous. Dealing with grief is not fun or easy.

**Jennifer Clark:**  No.

**Clark:**  Okay, so what's your relationship to grief?

**Jennifer Clark:**  I think I've only recently started to do that, and for a long time I ran away from those feelings of grief because I was afraid of what would be behind them, what would happen when it caught up to me. And yeah, I hadn't really taken the space before to actually grieve.

**Clark:**  Yeah, but it sounds like you've had things to grieve.

**Jennifer Clark:**  I've had some things to grieve, yeah.

**Clark:**  Like what?

**Jennifer Clark:**  Losing a job. I've grieved not getting to raise my kids where I thought I would, and also not having the support that I thought we would. Yeah, just kind of the life I'm living right now not looking the way I thought it would.

So we moved to Wheaton, Illinois in April 2015, and six weeks later I gave birth to our son. We didn't have a church. We were barely unpacked. We had been there for six weeks, so just enough time to unpack most of the boxes, find a hospital, find a new doctor, just all the things you do to get ready for a baby. I had no friends, I had very little support, and you were off to work, I think like from two days after we got there.

**Clark:**  Yeah.

**Jennifer Clark:**  So it was very little met my expectations of what it was going to be like.

**Clark:**  What did you think it would be like?

**Jennifer Clark:**  Well, I think I had envisioned myself being a stay-at-home mom at our other church where a lot of my friends were stay-at-home moms, and I had really invested a lot of time, and I felt like, "Oh, now I get to join this club of stay-at-home moms at our church," because most of the moms there were stay-at-home moms. There were very few working moms.

**Clark:**  Then you moved here.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Yeah. A lot of the moms I met here were either working part or full time. Probably where it got bad for me was that I could not sleep. I had literal insomnia. It didn't matter if I hadn't slept well, I could not shut off my brain and go to sleep. I had racing thoughts. I kept picturing awful things happening to Atticus, and I couldn't get it out of my head. So thoughts like that really cheerful, fun, sweet, mother-baby thoughts.

**Clark:**  Yeah, and I was not on the same page.

**Jennifer Clark:**  No.

**Clark:**  That was not something I was relating to you about.

**Jennifer Clark:**  No.

**Clark:**  Were you talking to me about it?

**Jennifer Clark:**  I don't think in great detail, but you would find me a lot, I think, in tears, exhausted-

**Clark:**  Right.

**Jennifer Clark:**  ... saying that we need to find a church.

**Clark:**  Yeah, why were you saying that?

**Jennifer Clark:**  Because what I really needed was community, and I didn't have it.

**Clark:**  Yeah.

**Jennifer Clark:**  I didn't really have anyone, much of anyone to talk about what I was thinking and feeling, and to get the feedback, or kind of having reality pointed back out to me. I remember ... it's really uncomfortable for me to say, but it's where I was. I remember hating you for a lot of the first year of Atticus's life. I would be so frustrated at you for not being able to read my mind of what I wanted and what I was thinking about.

**Clark:**  Well, but also for not trying very hard.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Yeah, that was part of it. I think, yeah, in some ways you let me take the lead with parenting him and it didn't feel like there was all that much for you to do even though there was, and I didn't know how to ask for the help.

**Clark:**  It's hard when two people are grieving. Well, sometimes it makes it easier if you have self-awareness to go, "Hey, we're in this together."

**Jennifer Clark:**  Yeah, I don't think either of us really had that self-awareness.

**Clark:**  No, I think we were very inward focused.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Yeah.

**Clark:**  I know I was.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Well, you tend to withdraw, I tend to get more dependent.

**Clark:**  Oh yeah.

**Jennifer Clark:**  And my pressuring you, and really not seeing you graciously, meant that you were withdrawing more.

**Clark:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative). And both of us grieving the fact that we weren't making each other happy.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Clark:**  Or at least I was.

**Jennifer Clark:**  You were grieving that you weren't making me happy?

**Clark:**  Definitely. That was the main ... I took that personally.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Even though, given the nature of what depression is, and especially postpartum, the thing that I believe is that you could've been the perfect husband, and I still would've found something wrong with what was happening, and with you.

**Clark:**  Yeah. But, man, it's complicated, right?

**Jennifer Clark:**  Yeah.

**Clark:**  Because I wasn't the perfect husband.

**Jennifer Clark:**  No.

**Clark:**  And I could've not taken it personally.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Mm-hmm (affirmative), you could've moved towards me instead of away,

**Clark:**  That would've helped both of us. Yeah, I could've moved towards you.

but that happened.

**Jennifer Clark:**  It did.

**Clark:**  That period of time happened.

**Jennifer Clark:**  And we're still married.

**Clark:**  And we're still married, and I think we're closer because of it.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Yeah.

**Clark:**  I don't know why God did it. I don't know if that's why, or some other reason. I'm not sure if that would be worth it, in my book. But ...

**Jennifer Clark:**  But I have the memories I do have of the really low moments, I feel like I was being ... I was not forsaken, I was held really closely. When having these real moments of, "I am not sustaining myself. I haven't had enough sleep. I'm not eating right," so in a very real sense, feeling like my very life was being held and protected by Christ. And it's so hard to admit that, but it's so good at the same time. It's so good that He was doing that.

**Clark:**  Yeah. Why is it hard to admit?

**Jennifer Clark:**  Because it doesn't feel victorious to think about those times. There isn't this epic sense of like, "I triumphed, and I grew so much, and I have this amazing testimony about this time in my life."

**Clark:**  Yeah, we don't have a resolution like that.

**Jennifer Clark:**  Yeah.

**Langberg:**  When somebody's sitting in that darkness and no hope, they're sitting in the place of truth because what they have lost is indeed lost, and there's no light to change that. But also, if you really think about that, it shows you how fragile we are, and it shows you how much we need, in those places, how much we need a comforter who understands. Not full of words, and ideas, and tasks, and corrections, but who is with us in the darkness.

But that terrible empty place has the seeds of life in it, because you cannot really have life after, let's say, a death, until it's based on the truth that the death occurred. Otherwise you're pretending.

The darkest place actually has hope in it. It is a hope not felt, but it is inherent in it. And just to use the analogy of sitting in the pit with somebody, at some point, you can say, "So, do you think we might both stand up?" And they find out, "Oh, I can stand up. And I can stand up because even if I feel like I can't, you can help me." There's connection to life right there.

**Clark:**  Depression is serious, and it’s not something we’re seeking to address in full here. Only to provide a glimpse into how it affects the lives of others. If you listened to this episode, and it resonated with you, we hope you’ll let it be just a start to finding help. Find someone who you can talk to about these things. Joy Beth, Jennifer and I all see therapists on a regular basis, and we’d recommend the same to you. If you are struggling with thoughts of suicide, we encourage you to reach out and talk to your local pastor or call the confidential National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255.

On the next chapter of Living and Effective Season 2