

When Daniel would eat processed foods and sweets, his blood sugars would spike too high as a result. This, combined with adverse reactions to various psych meds, caused a medical delirium that presented schizophrenic-like symptoms. There seemed to be no end to the ongoing episodes of hallucinations and psychosis.

One time he attempted to gouge out his eyes in order to get rid of the hallucinations—only to get an entire finger stuck in one of his eye sockets instead. The horrific delusions created an avalanche of crises, encounters with law enforcement, (including SWAT teams), and multiple hospitalizations. It was exhausting for our family physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and financially.

In the midst of the chaos, the LORD encouraged me through Isaiah 43:2: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, *they will not sweep over you*. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.”

I would cling to those promises like one who would cling to a life raft to keep afloat—and my heart would be renewed with hope each time! The Bible is filled with promises that buoy our spirits when we are overwhelmed.

I am an artist. One day, in the middle of the ongoing turmoil, I asked the LORD to show me how he felt about pain and suffering. As I sketched the following image of Jesus crying while comforting a

baby, tears flowed down my cheeks the entire time.

When Daniel’s mind would deteriorate to acute phases of mental illness—to the point of no longer knowing his name and needing the seclusion of psychiatric ICU—a copy of this drawing would be the only “belonging” allowed in his room. The staff would place it on a bedside table for him to look at . . . and I had the same drawing to view at home.

A nurse told me that, when Daniel would look at the picture, it would calm him down significantly. The picture became a visual reminder that gave both of us comfort, peace, and hope in the midst of the darkness.

May it do the same for you.



“The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”
(Psalm 34:18)

HOPE IN THE VALLEY

© BY EMILY BOLLER



In April 2002, my middle child Daniel was diagnosed with Type I diabetes at his eleven-year well child check up. We returned the next morning to learn about juvenile diabetes and carb counting. Afterward, a nurse drew up his first shot of insulin and told him to lift his shirt to expose his belly. Then she instructed *me* to administer it!

Just as I was about to thrust the needle into his skin, he asked, “How long will I have to do this?”

The nurse replied, “For the rest of your life unless someone discovers a cure.”

In that moment, the light went out of his eyes and a dark cloud settled over him. Consequently, our entire family's life, as we once knew it, was forever changed that day as well.

By his sixteenth birthday, after an intestinal bug that lasted for nearly a week, he was dehydrated and weak. He eventually became delirious, so my husband and I took him to the emergency room.

The assessment there was that Daniel needed psychiatric care. Unfortunately, this began our family's journey into severe mental illness and ongoing trauma for the next five years . . . until his death by suicide at the age of 21.

Several weeks after the funeral, I began experiencing symptoms of post traumatic stress and major depression. Then four years—and much progress later—I was blindsided and spiraled into even deeper despair when I learned horrific details of the harm that his illness had inflicted upon others. In addition, both of my parents passed away, which complicated the healing process all the more.

Thankfully, by God's grace, professional counseling, the unconditional love of others, and making self-care a priority, my brain has healed remarkably. The symptoms of post trauma and depression have subsided. I learned that the brain can become injured and sick—

just like any other organ of the body—and it can also heal.

However, in the midst of the recovery process the mind can become engulfed in darkness, despair, confusion, and hopelessness.

King David knew all about the dark valleys. He wrote, "Even though I walk through the *darkest* valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalms 23:4)

He also described internal suffering as:

- my strength is dried up like a clay pot
- my heart is melted like wax
- it feels like lying in the dust of death (Psalm 22)

When it seems like no one understands our distress, the LORD completely understands. He was a "man of sorrows, acquainted with grief." That's why we can feel his closeness in our darkest hours. He knows how to comfort us, because he knows first hand how it feels to be in anguish and lingering sorrow.

Psalm 34:18 states that the LORD is close to the brokenhearted and rescues those crushed in spirit. He is close to us when we are depressed, grief-stricken,

and despondent—and delivers us when we are overwhelmed and oppressed.

In addition, he also uses others in tangible ways to help us feel the closeness of his presence.

In some of my darkest hours:

- a stranger gave me a cup of ice water
- a neighbor brought over a pot of soup
- a former neighbor drove across town to visit—greeting me with a bouquet of flowers
- a friend delivered a meal and then sat down and ate it with me
- other friends filled our refrigerator and freezer with healthy food
- cards randomly arrived in the mail with monetary gifts enclosed
- friends invited me for walks outdoors
- someone gave a wad of cash to help with counseling expenses
- pastors came to hospitals and to our home to pray
- random texts appeared stating the sender was praying
- many looked past my mental state and reached out anyway

Love heals a broken heart.

Love rescues a spirit that is crushed.