

Getting Closer to God During the Dark Days – by Lorelei Pepe

One Sunday morning during the Pandemic I turned on TBN, the Christian TV station and caught a few words from Charles Stanley, a great old-time pastor whom I consider to be very wise. He truly preaches the word of God and does not “**sugar coat**” anything. That morning he said, “**if you are without God you really are not living**” – and those words resonated with me throughout the day. Most Christians just take for granted God is always there and don’t think about Him constantly. But, in a crisis He is the first person we call upon.

I kept thinking we need to be more than “**surface**” Christians. We need to dive deeper and discover His words everyday not just when we are in trouble. He wants us to discover and explore a relationship with Him. I know my mighty Lord has become my helper, protector, friend, father figure as well as my Savior. As it says in the Bible, when you draw closer to Him, He will draw closer to you.

I think there is a time in all our lives we are looking for our own identity, and I have come to understand after many years of struggling, that when we truly lose ourselves in Christ we can truly discover who we are and what we stand for. After reading so many self- help books when I was younger, I realized that the Bible has all the answers! What a revelation.

There was a time in my life that being a caregiver had truly overwhelmed me. I felt like I was unraveling like a ball of thread day by day. I couldn’t think clearly or focus or eat or sleep well. I was shaky and depressed and worn out. Finally, I was diagnosed with adrenal fatigue and then I knew I had to get back on track. But how? I was at the point where even praying could not fix me. I knew I needed professional help and luckily the church I was attending had a lovely Christian counselor on staff. I made an appointment but was “afraid” of what people would think. Going to a psychologist was frowned upon in my family. I guess they thought it was a sign of weakness or failure, as I came from a very competitive, motivated hard-working family. I charged ahead and had counseling for 6 months and the church picked up the tab, much to my relief. What I liked most about the counselor was she made so many references to the Bible and it became a great tool in rebuilding my life.

Sometimes we all need a little professional help. I often wish it was recognized earlier in my family as my father’s brother, my uncle Rudy, had mental problems all his life. He fought in World War 2 and came home a broken man filled with a lot of pain. He had nightmares of the horrors of war and was a tortured man inside. He was only in his late twenties when he returned however it was hard for him to be back in the world again and start a new life.

At that time, no one talked about the traumas of war and PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was not even a term that was known. So, my uncle Rudy struggled working with my dad in his butcher shop, a very unhappy man. Of course, all my dad knew was that “hard work”

would cure him. Rudy did not seek help, nor did my father or anyone in the family help him. He was depressed and they put him through electric shock which did not work anyway. No one knew how to communicate in my dad's family. Faith was not part of their lives and they came from a cold family. Rudy was so lost for so many years. Sorry to say, he tried to kill himself a number of times and one day he finally succeeded. He killed himself in the butcher shop when no one was around.

I was very young at the time and this absolutely devastated and confused me. My family continued to keep it a deep dark secret and was never spoken about. I never understood how Rudy must have been feeling until I started to slide down that deep dark tunnel of darkness, frightened and feeling alone. To this day, I feel so bad and wished there was some way he could have been helped. But I think this was a lesson that I learned. So, I encourage people to get professional help when needed. No longer is this stigma attached to weakness and failure. It is okay to get help and talk about it openly. In those days mental illness was never looked upon as a disease and it was not handled properly. I thank God I can recognize the symptoms now and that we live in a world that is evolving and we are being educated about it.

So I believe God will guide us all to the right person, or place or direction when we trust in Him. We just have to open our hearts and minds and listen to Him. Those little negative tapes in our head need to stop and sometimes be erased or reversed. I know I am guilty of that and I need to pay more attention to God who wants to speak to me, instead of me always speaking to Him. I think through meditation, some quiet time and prayer I can hear Him best. I know He wants the best for me and others, and to help others when I can. Because really **“why are we here”?** It is as simple as serving God, loving Him and the same for our fellow man. Think about that and pray about it. As David did in **Psalm 88*** he cried out to God. He trusted. He will bring us out of the dark days and our Lord will never abandon us, so **Hope in Him...always!**

Psalm 116: 1,2

“I love the Lord, for He heard my voice and my cry for mercy. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will CALL UPON HIM as long as I live”.

***Psalm 88:1-3**

“O Lord, God of my Salvation, I have cried out day and night before You. Let my prayer come before you. Incline Your ear to my cry. For my soul is full of troubles and my life draws near to the grave...”