

# HOPE *Prevails*

Insights from a Doctor's  
Personal Journey through Depression

DR. MICHELLE  
BENGTSON



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Grand Rapids, Michigan

Dr. Michelle Bengtson, *Hope Prevails*  
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# Dedication

You would likely not even be reading this book were it not for the love and encouragement of Margie Houmes. Margie was not just a spiritual mother. She was a prayer warrior, and my biggest cheerleader. She believed in me when I didn't believe in myself and taught me the most about who I am as a daughter of the Most High God.

Margie lived out her faith like no one else I've ever met. Simple conversations with Margie turned into praise and worship celebrations of Jesus. With the love of Jesus, Margie always found the wallflower of a room and made them feel like a celebrity. Margie always jokingly finished our conversations with, "When you become famous, don't forget us little people," to which I replied, "I could never forget, Margie, for I am one."

Sadly, Margie was killed in a head-on collision the day before Mother's Day, not long before I completed this manuscript. I had sent Margie a Mother's Day card thanking her for the influence she had on my life and for the kingdom. Through her death, I was fortunate to see the impact Margie had on the lives of thousands. Though she considered herself a "little person" and was one of

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the most humble people I've ever met, her faith was as big as a mountain and her influence for the kingdom even greater. I don't know if she read that card before she began dancing with her almighty Savior in heaven, but this is my chance to say thank you to her publicly for forever positively changing the direction of my walk with Christ.

My hope and prayer for every reader of this book is that you too at some point will have a Margie Houmes in your life and that you will know just how much you are loved and valued as a child of the Most High God.

# Foreword

Some people rip through life as if their hair were on fire. Others sit fearfully on the sidelines hoping not to catch sparks. Then there are those who don't care one way or the other. They say, "Bring it on . . . or not . . . whatever."

Many people don't fight external hair fires or indifference to life. Instead, they are the silent majority who trudge through their days with an internal pain carefully hidden behind cheerful competence. However, known only to the mask holder is the fear of mask slippage. Such slippage threatens to reveal deep shame, fear of rejection, and horror at being truly seen. Actually, those responses may be indicators of an undiagnosed depression: the sense that somehow "I can't make life work. I feel desperate and not sure I even care about anything anymore."

Here is the good news about mask slippage. When the mask slips or drops, there is no more pretending you have your ducks in a row. There is the freedom to admit you never liked those ducks anyway. In fact, you don't care if you ever see them again. In case you see yourself in any of these descriptions and would love to not only find relief from your pain but also gain an understanding

of that pain, I suggest you read *Hope Prevails* by Dr. Michelle Bengtson.

The book title is your first clue to the book's message. There is always hope in spite of the degree of inner pain you are experiencing.

Dr. Bengtson is a board certified neuropsychologist. Although a highly trained and specialized doctor in brain-behavior relationships, she makes this vulnerable and compelling opening statement in her book: "I see patients in my office every week with mental health disorders, including depression. I diagnose their condition and make treatment recommendations. Yet all my education and experience didn't protect me from succumbing to this devastating condition myself."

She goes on to say, "I've written this book because I've been there." When someone of Dr. Bengtson's professional stature and training tells me depression can hit and debilitate anyone at any time, I take notice. I also take heart. She says, "I'm writing today from where I stand, the other side of depression's valley. I encourage you to persevere. You will not always feel this way. There are brighter days ahead."

There are many fine, worthy, and insightful books about depression, but in my view, Dr. Bengtson's trumps them all. She does not underestimate the value of medication, therapy, exercise, and wise food choices. But in her words, "Only when I started to understand what depression does to us spiritually, as well as what it cannot do, . . . did I finally begin to experience the chains of depression falling off."

Each chapter of the book concludes with a recommended playlist of music that was uplifting and encouraging to her. She believes that listening to praise and worship music helped her hold on when her grip was shaky.

To those of us frail human beings who suffer from a shaky grip, or to those who seriously fear not making it through life, God says he will never leave us. We will make it. This book will underscore



*Foreword*

that biblical truth over and over again. Our first step of making it to the other side of the valley of depression may well be falling into the competent and compassionately written words of this God-honoring book: *Hope Prevails*.

Marilyn Meberg

Women of Faith speaker and author of *Constantly Craving*

# *When the Whole World Is Laughing but You*

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,  
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give  
you hope and a future.”*

*Jeremiah 29:11*

*They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy  
in this world: someone to love, something to do, and some-  
thing to hope for.*

*Tom Bodett*

I know how you feel. Really, I do. I see patients in my office every week with mental health disorders, including depression. I diagnose their condition and make treatment recommendations. Yet all my education and experience didn't protect me from succumbing to this devastating condition myself.

Professionally, I am a board-certified neuropsychologist with lots of degrees and alphabet soup following my name. I am trained in

identifying and treating mental health disorders, and I've worked in the field for over twenty years. I know that physiological problems can contribute to depression, and sometimes medication is necessary and helpful in treating it. Difficult life circumstances can usher it in, and sometimes therapy and counseling are also necessary and helpful.

Despite my professional experience, I too have suffered in this valley. I was sad and irritable and constantly felt defeated. My greatest shock came when I tried the same treatment suggestions I typically offered my patients—and they didn't work. I tried medication, I participated in therapy, I ate right and exercised dutifully, and I even prayed and claimed healing. For me those things weren't enough.

Only when I started to understand what depression does to us spiritually, as well as what it cannot do, and then started cooperating with God did I finally begin to experience the chains of depression falling off.

I wrote this book to share what worked for me and what can help you. Part of what I realized during my dark journey is that this condition affects us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The traditional treatments I tried didn't address the spiritual side of depression. Without addressing this aspect, and without treating the *whole* person, my healing was suboptimal.

Few books discuss what depression does to us on a spiritual level. That is the emphasis of this book. While I will address what depression is, where it comes from, and ways to treat it, I will also share what it does to us spiritually and how that perpetuates the problem. There is hope that comes from realizing how depression affects us spiritually and what it cannot do to us on a spiritual level.

*I've written this book because I've been there.* I know what depression is. I know the shame that tags along with depression like a pesky younger sibling. I know the pain it brings and how it feels to believe no one understands. If someone hasn't gone through

this journey themselves, then they can't completely understand. I tried many of the tools and techniques that mental health professionals suggest. Some I have recommended to my own patients. Some helped, but they weren't sufficient. At least they weren't for me. Not until I realized how depression is perpetuated on a spiritual level and addressed the spiritual issues did I start to walk out of the valley.

*I've written this book to walk alongside you.* In my pain, I desperately longed to have someone walk alongside me—someone who understood the depths of my despair. I needed more than anything to know I wasn't alone and that I wasn't worthless because I struggled. I want you to know you are not alone. You may feel alone at times, as I did. But someone does understand. I've been there. Our circumstances surrounding the season of depression may be different, but the pain involved is the same.

*I've written this book to help dispel some of the myths and lies about this condition* that make it difficult to see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. I've read a library of books about this topic but never found one that helped me understand it from a spiritual perspective. The enemy of our soul thrives on keeping us in darkness and unable to live in the fullness of all God created us to be.

*I've written this book to offer hope.* In the midst of my battle, hope was elusive. I wasn't sure I would survive. Actually, I wasn't sure I wanted to survive. But hope—the belief in a purpose, the belief in something better—can make all the difference. Without hope, what reason do we have to get up in the morning? With hope, we want to move forward, press on, get to the other side, and then share with others what we have learned to offer them hope during their times of trial.

Listening to praise and worship music helped me to hold on when it seemed my grip was failing. At the end of each chapter, I include a recommended playlist of music that was uplifting and

encouraging to me in the hope that you too will be encouraged. Just to get you started, you might benefit from listening to the following:

“Healing Begins,” Tenth Avenue North, © 2010 by Reunion Records

“Worn,” Tenth Avenue North, © 2012 by Reunion Records

“You Are I Am,” MercyMe, © 2012 by Fair Trade/Columbia

“You Are My Strength,” Hillsong Live, © 2010 by Hillsong Church T/A Hillsong Music Australia

“Shoulders,” For King & Country, © 2014 by Word Entertainment LLC

“Nearness,” Bethel, © 2015 by Bethel Music

“I Feel His Love,” Laura Hackett Park, © 2014 by Forerunner Music

At the end of each chapter, I also offer a “doctor’s prescription” (“Your Rx”)—questions for you to ask or steps for you to take to help you find healing from your depression. Of course, I won’t know if you follow the prescription, but I trust that you are tired of feeling the way you do and want help. I want to walk through this journey with you, and I’m confident that one day you will be in a position to do the same for someone else.

Hope Prevails,  
(Dr.) Michelle Bengtson