

### **The texture of depression:**

It is hard sometimes to figure out what is wrong. You know that you are unhappy but you are unable to locate the cause of your unhappiness. Every time you think you are getting close to the truth of what it is, the landscape of your emotional life changes. Your inner world shifts constantly, like great ice-floes. Each day you awake to the same feeling of discontent but set within the frame of a new day, new experiences, and new dilemmas. You feel like you stand on a ground that is like sand. You have some purchase but never enough to create a bounce in your feet, or a sense of moving forward with deliberation.

If you suffer from depression or anxiety these descriptions are familiar to you. You have this sense of going around in circles. You head in a new direction in the morning only to arrive back at the same place by afternoon. The weight of your emotions sweeps across you like waves over sand.

At times you feel utterly lost. You stand in the busy street of your life as people move by in different directions. You don't know which way to go. You follow the crowd for a while only to find they have a purpose, a focus which eludes you. One moment you are a solitary figure wandering a bleak desert, another moment you stand isolated among a multitude.

If you are anxious, you worry. Your heart skips with the relentless beat of things that go wrong. In your helplessness to control the people or things in your life, your mind goes overtime in trying to compensate. What if I did this? Or maybe that? You ask endless questions of yourself or else you obsess over recent errors or mistakes. Things you should not have said or done. You relive these unpleasant moments trying to change the tape. You rewind and play it again; looking for something you may have missed something that might allow you to see it all differently. But each time you play it back you find more evidence for your incompetence.

If you are depressed, you sink into your days. You wade through the marshland of your life seeking some little cottage on the river bank into which you might climb and find some relief. Though you move through your everyday life like everyone else, the voices of other people are as if they come from a distance – the way voices carry over water. You know you are not where they are. The sounds of laughter, animation, and pleasure surprise you - as if reminding you of the texture of a life you have long since forgotten.

You carry a weight around your chest that pulls you inward. When people ask you how you are you tell them “fine”, knowing that words will fail to describe that haunting sense of distance that surrounds you, the fog that seductively envelopes you.

You try to figure out what is wrong. You almost unravel the knot that is yourself only to find it again recoils back into itself like a spring. You spend time digging into the soil of your life to find the root that has wound its way around your ankles. You grasp at the problem and solution like some slippery eel only for it to squeeze from your hands as quickly as you have it in your grip.

Everyday your mind teems with its questions. Like a bumbling detective you remain confused by the endless clues and stream of questions you pose yourself: “Is it my negative thinking, my lack of confidence, my poor self-esteem? Is it what I learned growing up? My bad childhood? The things I saw? Is it my lazy attitude? My bad relationships? Maybe it’s my marriage? Or maybe I was just not meant to be a parent? Or maybe it’s my unfulfilled dreams? That I got married so young? Or maybe it’s my work, my boss, my colleagues? Or maybe I am just under stress or need a holiday or maybe I don’t get out enough. Or maybe it’s in my genes? The family anxiety I have inherited. Or maybe I am stressed-out and under pressure? Or maybe I don’t go to church enough and have lost my faith? Maybe that is it? Or maybe I am sick. Maybe I am unwell physically?”

So you torment yourself with self-doubt and uncertainty. One thing is sure, if you know these places, these feelings, and these endless self-critiques you have an obligation to find a companion, a mentor, a guide who can encourage you on the journey toward freedom. This is not how life is supposed to be and you will need help in remembering that.

Little by little as you leave the voice of your own-self-doubt behind, the stars will begin to burn through the sheets of cloud, and you will hear there a new voice which you will slowly recognise as your own, that will keep you company as you stride deeper toward the dawn, determined, as the poet Mary Oliver put it, “to save the only life that you can save”. Your own. Do it.

Tell someone.