**What happens to faith for those who suffer depression in the context of the Church of Ireland?**

**by Jonathan McFarland**

**Abstract**

Depression is terrifying and this complex and often misunderstood illness is a common plight of modern times. When Christians experience depression the struggle to hold on to their faith can be prolonged and highly intensive. If depression is left undiagnosed or untreated, the thought of suicide can soon develop. If depression persists and seems endless the prospect of living out a hopeless existence can easily become unbearable. The tragedy of depression leading to suicide is, however, preventable.

This dissertation aims to examine depression from a biblical perspective by taking an overview of notable characters who experienced despair to a level that would likely be diagnosed as depression today. These insights are parallel with case studies in order to further explore the theological and pastoral implication that people with depression experience. Two of these case studies are historical figures within Anglicanism and two are contemporary studies within the Church of Ireland. Additionally, current statistics are highlighted to give a global and national perspective on the pastoral problems and dilemma being considered.

As I have had first-hand experience of severe depression, my own story and personal insights are drawn on within this work. This was necessary because I experienced reluctance from those who minister, to be willing to have their experiences recorded due to the fear of stigma. It is my hope however that these experiences, together with the research findings, are shared in order to offer hope of recovery to the many people who may be coping with the complexities of depression.

As far as I could see there are few resources in this major pastoral area. There appears to be little Biblical research by modern scholar who could bring their professional application to the biblical texts in light of the medical advances in treating depression. I believe that this research will be informative and useful to clergy, and others, who minister to Christians with depression.

This dissertation the need for more training and development for those who minister in the Church of Ireland, but it also maintains that the experience of depression can be overcome by, faith can be strengthened and deepened, and hope can be found again.