

## AVOIDING ISOLATION

The solitary confinement that prisoners are sometimes put through as punishment is cruel. Yet the emotional isolation experienced in depression is a similar prison, one not easily escaped.

- How can we avoid the isolation we experience during depression?
- How can we trust and wait patiently for the depression to lift?

Nelson Mandela, in his autobiography, *Die Wit Man*, wrote about his experience with solitary confinement:

“I was locked up for 23 hours a day, with 30 minutes of exercise in the morning and again in the afternoon...There was no natural light in my cell; a single bulb burned overhead 24 hours a day...I had nothing to read, nothing to write on or with, no one to talk to. The mind begins to turn in on itself, and one desperately wants something outside of oneself on which to fix one’s attention. I have known men who have taken half-a-dozen lashes in preference to being locked up alone.”

Mandela went on to talk about the relief brought about when an insect appeared from the crack in the floor, and he had something he could watch – something to keep him company and preoccupy him.

Being deeply depressed could be looked on as emotional solitary confinement.

- How is deep depression like Mandela’s experience in solitary confinement?
- How can we find relief, the way Mandela did in watching the insect? What are the simple pleasures that help you with your sense of isolation?
- But when our depression is not deep or when we are only on the verge of a depression, what strategies can we employ to avoid isolation?
- How can we reach beyond ourselves? to others? to God?

The psalmist, David, knew about isolation. This psalm is something many of us will be able to relate to. David often talks about his fear of going down into the pit, but he always ends by expressing his trust in God’s love and protection. We can hang onto God’s great love for us, knowing he will always be there for us.

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?*

*How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and every day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?  
Look on me and answer, O Lord my God.  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;*

*But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord,  
for he has been good to me.*

Psalm 13:1-3, 5-6

In her book *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom includes a wonderful line: "There is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still."