

"My heart breaks for my Hollywood friends who are trapped in the prison of fear and depression—when there is a way out. *The Final Curtain* reveals the key that unlocks the prison door."

—Kirk Cameron, *Actor, Producer*

# THE FINAL CURTAIN:

FAME, FORTUNE,  
& FUTILE LIVES



RAY COMFORT

# THE FINAL CURTAIN:



RAY COMFORT

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Dedicated to Frank and Charri Sutherlin

# Contents

1. The Depressed Celebrity .....	7
2. The Depressing Cause .....	15
3. Carrie Fisher .....	25
4. George Michael.....	33
5. Robin Williams.....	39
6. Naomi Judd .....	45
7. Bruce Springsteen .....	49
8. Ernest Hemingway.....	55
9. Stephen Fry.....	59
10. Amy Winehouse .....	69
11. Rita Ora.....	75
12. Jane Fonda.....	83
13. Amanda Peet.....	89
14. Rodney Dangerfield .....	95
15. Rosie O'Donnell.....	99
16. Rod Steiger .....	103
17. Woody Allen.....	107
18. William Shatner.....	115
19. David Bowie .....	119
20. Lady Gaga.....	123

21. Rod Stewart .....	127
22. Kristen Bell .....	131
23. Michael Jackson .....	135
24. Prince .....	141
25. Mindy McCready .....	145
26. Joan Rivers .....	151
27. Jim Carrey .....	155
28. Kurt Cobain .....	159
29. Marilyn Monroe .....	165
30. Honesty in Anonymity .....	173
31. Doctors Bury Their Mistakes .....	181
32. He Gave England Hope .....	185
33. Veteran Suicide — Frightening Conclusions .....	191
34. Tough Talk .....	197
35. When It's Okay to be Depressed .....	203
36. John Wayne and Mary Tyler Moore .....	209
37. How to Fight Suicidal Thoughts .....	213
Answers to Chapter Questions .....	219

## *Chapter 1*

# **The Depressed Celebrity**

**F**or many, it's only the death of a celebrity that reminds them that we all have an appointment. But passing is more common than most think. Since you picked up this book, over 100 people left this life. Every hour, 6,000 move out of the land of the living. Every day, 150,000 breathe their last, and every year a whopping 54 million human beings kick the bucket. They die. It's kind of depressing if you think about it.

Some die quickly in car accidents. Some die slowly as they reluctantly yield to diseases like cancer. Some go in their sleep. Others die drugged beyond consciousness, while others go not so quietly, in the face of our greatest fear — the fear of death. Whatever the case, like it or not, we are all part of the ultimate statistic: ten out of ten die.

But when any human being takes his or her life, it's a double tragedy. Double because a life is not only lost but the loss brings unspeakable and endless pain to friends and loved ones who are left with grief and a sense of guilt that doesn't go away. Author Jeannette Walls said, "When people kill themselves, they think they're ending the pain, but all they're doing is passing it on to those they leave behind."<sup>1</sup>

The suicides that happen daily rarely make national news. But when a celebrity commits suicide, it's international news. It hits the headlines because, in one sense, it doesn't make sense. Riches, success, and fame don't add up to suicide. They don't even add up to depression. But depression is undoubtedly the fast lane on the highway that so often leads to the place of self-destruction. Here are just some of the celebrities who tragically took their own lives:

Anthony Bourdain, age 61. Anthony, chef and best known for his show “No Reservations,” died from suicide on June 8, 2018.

Kate Spade, age 55. Kate Spade was an iconic fashion designer and mother who died by hanging in her Manhattan, New York, apartment on June 5, 2018.

Chester Bennington, age 41. Chester Bennington was the lead singer of Linkin Park and hanged himself July 20, 2017.

Chris Cornell, age 52. Chris Cornell was the lead singer of Soundgarden who died by hanging in 2017.

Aaron Hernandez, age 27. Former NFL star who died by hanging in his jail cell in 2017.<sup>2</sup>

In August of 2014, ABC News asked, “What’s the Deal with Comedians and Depression?”

Robin Williams’ apparent suicide has put a spotlight on the dark side of comedy. Williams, like many comedians, lived with long-term depression and addiction. Experts say these mental illnesses are no laughing matter.

He is certainly not the only comedian who has ever lived with depression and addiction. Comedian Marc Maron has spoken publicly about having severe depression. So has stand-up comedian Jim Norton. John Belushi, Chris Farley and Greg Giraldo all died of drug overdoses. And in 2007, Richard Jeni committed suicide by shooting himself in the face.<sup>3</sup>

How could any successful famous person who is rolling in money and surrounded by adoring fans be depressed? Happiness comes from what happens to us and if good things are happening, we should be happy. So why the depression? That is understandably the question that the fans, experts, and the celebrities ask themselves. Why?



And so, mystified doctors call it “clinical” depression. It must be an abnormality that can be treated by drugs to bring normality. It’s not rational, so it must be a mental disorder — something that is happening in the brain that has yet to be understood.

Doctors and other experts not only don’t understand it, they don’t know what causes it:

“It’s not known exactly what causes depression.”<sup>4</sup>

“It is the leading cause of disability worldwide.”<sup>5</sup>

“What Causes Major Depressive Disorder? The exact cause of MDD isn’t known.”<sup>6</sup>

What are the possible causes of clinical depression? The fact is, despite decades of research into this question, scientists at the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health and research universities around the world still don’t really know the cause of depression.<sup>7</sup>

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says that one in every ten American adults admit to fighting depression.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 6.7 percent of American adults have MDD, or major depressive disorder, during an average year. It affects as many as 23 million Americans every year, and is called a “most common serious brain disease in the United States.” The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 350 million people have depression throughout the world.<sup>8</sup>

Australia is one of the best places to live on this fair earth. They have amazing animals, beautiful beaches, an excellent climate, and friendly people. Yet there is an epidemic of depression that is skyrocketing the suicide rate:

Suicide is the most common cause of death in Australians aged 15–44 years. Australian young people are more likely to take their own life than die from motor vehicle accidents or skin cancer. Every year 400,000 Australians experience suicidal thoughts, 65,000 make suicide attempts,

35,000 are admitted to hospital for suicide-related injuries and 2,500 die.<sup>9</sup>

The United States has the same dilemma:

Every forty seconds, someone commits suicide. In the United States, it is the tenth most common cause of death in people over ten years of age, far more common than death by homicide or aneurysm or AIDS. Nearly half a million Americans are taken to the hospital every year because of suicide attempts. One in five people with major depression will make such an attempt; there are approximately sixteen non-lethal attempts for every lethal one. The rate of suicide is going up, especially among middle-aged men.<sup>10</sup>

*Time* magazine said,

Treating depression is a major challenge, since among the millions of people affected worldwide, only one in five tends to respond well to antidepressants. And for many people who are eventually helped by drugs, it can take months, even years of cycling through the various medications to find the one that works best. In the meantime, their depression persists, and sometimes worsens.<sup>11</sup>

Eighty out of every hundred who are suffering from clinical depression don't find help with drugs. Many even get worse, owing to side effects.

### Why the Increase?

Back in 2013, *Newsweek* addressed the epidemic of suicide in America and could give no reason for the increase:

This year, America is likely to reach a grim milestone: the 40,000th death by suicide, the highest annual total on record, and one reached years ahead of what would be expected by population growth alone.

This development evades simple explanation. The shift in suicides began long before the recession, for example,

and although the changes accelerated after 2007, when the unemployment rate began to rise, no more than a quarter of those new suicides have been tied to joblessness, according to researchers. Guns aren't all to blame either, since the suicide rate has grown even as the portion of suicides by firearm has remained stable.

Last fall [2012] the World Health Organization estimated that "global rates" of suicide are up 60 percent since World War II. And none of this includes the pestilence of suicidal behavior, the thoughts and plans that slowly eat away at people, the corrosive social cost of 25 attempts for every one official death.<sup>12</sup>

Experts keep insisting that depression is a mental disorder. I disagree and give reasons in this book for why I believe this. I speak in depth about how calling people who are depressed "insane" can only add to their depression, and it may drive them further to suicide. You and I may be able to handle it, but it's not so easy for the famous. After Kate Spade took her life, her sister said,

I'd come so VERY close to getting her to go in for treatment. . . . We'd get sooo close to packing her bags, but — in the end, the "image" of her brand (happy-go-lucky Kate Spade) was more important for her to keep up. She was definitely worried about what people would say if they found out.<sup>13</sup>

I think it's a huge mistake, but it's all this world has in the face of this Goliath. Plus, the experts are calling for more to be spent on drugs. I don't think that's the answer:

Drugs, alcohol and suicide could lead to the deaths of more than 1.6 million people over the next 10 years, according to a report released Tuesday that signals a troubling trend in mental health in the U.S.<sup>14</sup>

After a number of celebrity suicides in 2018, Bloomberg.com headlined:

## Amid Drastic Rise in Suicide, CDC Says It's Not Just About Mental Health

The nationwide rate increased nearly 30 percent from 1999 to 2016.

There were 44,965 suicide deaths in 2016, according to CDC data. Approximately half of such deaths involve the use of a firearm. While mental health is often a factor, the CDC cautioned that there is no single reason for the nearly 30 percent nationwide increase between 1999 and 2016, pointing to the finding that approximately half of those who died by suicide did not have a known mental health condition.

Suicide prevention largely focuses on addressing mental health treatment, the CDC found, suggesting that a wider variety of preventive measures could be taken. The findings point to the need both to address the circumstances associated with the onset of mental health conditions—such as relationship, financial or criminal problems—and to support those with known mental conditions to decrease the risk of suicide, the CDC said.<sup>15</sup>

There really is such confusion when it comes to this subject. Experts don't know what causes depression. Thankfully, I'm not an expert. The emperor has no clothes. I know the cause. . . .

### questions?

1. How many people die every minute, every hour, every year?
2. Why is it a quandary when someone who is rich and famous commits suicide?
3. Name some famous people who took their lives. Share the thoughts you had when you heard of their death.
4. According to *Time* magazine, how many people respond well to antidepressants?
5. Why is it not a good idea to call people who are depressed "insane"?

**Endnotes**

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## Chapter 2

# The Depressing Cause

There's good reason not to believe that it is a mental disorder or a brain disease. There is a much more rational explanation and a simpler cure, and it's sitting right under the nose of every human face.

The chronic depression that leads to thoughts of suicide has two major causes. First, it's caused by the hopeless futility of which the wisdom of Solomon spoke 3,000 years ago. And secondly, it's fueled by a *rational* fear, a terrible dread, one spoken of in the Book of Hebrews in the New Testament. There is a persistently depressing fear that haunts *every* human heart, from our early youth through to the day we die:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those *who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage* (Hebrews 2:14–15, italics added).

In other words, every human being has an unshakable dread of death, and because of it they are a prisoner — a slave to fear all their lifetime.

There are scores of celebrities who have publicly said they fight serious depression that is so chronic it leads to suicidal thoughts. And because none of the experts know why they have this battle, they are diagnosed as having a chemical imbalance . . . a sort of mental disease. They are therefore treated with chemicals that have

horrible side effects, some of which can be depression and suicidal thoughts.

### Therefore, I Am

There are, however, many people who don't get depressed. To them, life is just a cycle that's to be pedaled to the destination of death. It happens to all of us. It's nature's way. So be a man, be a woman, accept it and enjoy life's blessings while you can.

But for others, that's a thoughtless copout.

*Cogito ergo sum* is a well-known Latin philosophical proposition by René Descartes that is translated into English as "I think, therefore I am." I would add one word to his thought:

"I think; therefore, I am *depressed*."

Creative people *think*, and those who think, think not only about the mysteries of life but they think about the final curtain. They are not happy to just roll over and die. Something in them cries, "Oh, *I don't want to die!*" That's not a weakness. It's a strength. It's not mental illness. It's sanity to want to preserve your most precious possession.

There is an elephant in the room, and it's moving toward you with the intent of taking you out. If you believe that you have to wait for it to kill you, and there's nothing you can do about it, that's a justified depression. The dread of impending doom will steal every ounce of your joy of living, and when the enjoyment has gone, you will contemplate a way to escape the pain and futility.

Think about the successful celebrity who thinks about the elephant. He is rich, famous, happy, and has everything his heart could want. But he is still "through the fear of death . . . [is all of his] life-time subject to bondage." More money and more fame doesn't make it go away. What once lifted his spirits no longer works because of the elephant. It overshadows everything.

Daily news is depressing. It majors on death. If it bleeds it leads: cancer and who has it, who has been killed in car accidents, terrorism, kids who have cancer, war, plane crashes, fires, murders, tornados, suicides, and of course, highly publicized celebrity deaths.

## Life Can Be Depressing

He was born September 25, 1952, in New York City, to a journalist and writer/professor. He came from an upper-class family. His paternal grandfather was CEO of Prudential Financial, and one of his maternal great-grandfathers was a Supreme Court justice.

When he was four, his parents divorced. His mother moved him and his brother to Princeton, New Jersey, and married an investment banker a few years later. After graduating from high school, he studied at Cornell University while at the same time working as a professional actor. In his final year at Cornell (1973) he was one of two students selected (Robin Williams was the other) to study at New York's famous Juilliard School, under the renowned John Houseman. I'm talking of course about Christopher Reeve.

Williams was also the first student that Reeve met at university and he recalls watching Williams "in awe as he virtually caromed off the walls of the classrooms and hallways." Their strong bond lasted way beyond college as their respective careers took off in the late 1970s, with Williams enjoying massive television success in *Mork and Mindy* and Reeve starring in the 1978 blockbuster *Superman*.<sup>1</sup>

*Newsweek* said of his performance, "Christopher Reeve's entire performance is a delight. Ridiculously good-looking, with a face as sharp and strong as an ax blade, his bumbling, fumbling Clark Kent and omnipotent Superman are simply two styles of gallantry and innocence."<sup>2</sup>

His life was picture-perfect. He was tall, dark, handsome, intelligent, and extremely successful. But one terribly tragic day his wonderful life turned into a hellish nightmare. On May 27, 1995, he became a quadriplegic after being thrown from a horse during an equestrian competition in Culpeper, Virginia. He was confined to a wheelchair and required a portable ventilator for the rest of his life. He couldn't move or even breathe without help. One can't begin to imagine his emotions, or the grief of those who loved him.

He then became a courageous spokesperson for those in a similar plight, and as he did so his loving and faithful wife stood by his side.



In early October 2004, he was being treated for an infected pressure ulcer that was causing sepsis, a complication that he had experienced many times before. On October 10, 2004, Reeve died at the age of 52 from what was believed to be an adverse reaction to the antibiotic that caused his death. Then his sweet, wonderfully faithful and heartbroken wife, Dana Reeve, was diagnosed with lung cancer and died at age 44 in 2006.

*Life stinks.* But if you think that they were dealt an isolated bad hand, listen to today's news and hear of tragedy after depressing tragedy. For those who have the ability to exercise even the slightest empathy, life is depressing, even when we are able to forget our own unavoidable and miserable demise.

The thinking celebrity thinks about how time will rob him of his looks. Except for expensive transplants he will soon be a wrinkled and bald has-been. Growing old is depressing. But what's the alternative? *Death.* He thinks about the fact that time will also take what pleasure he has left — the pleasures of sex, taste buds, energy, hearing, sight, and it will rip precious loved ones from his grasping hands. Time will come with frightening diseases and the promise of pain. What began as a wonderfully sweet life has slowly turned very bitter. And so the things he achieves in this life are relegated to a place of less importance. Woody Allen understandably said, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying."<sup>3</sup>

The thinking celebrity decides to try and stay healthy. But he's aware that if he eats right and is able to stay fit and healthy, he is just waiting for a fit and healthy death. *It's unavoidable.* How true are the words of W.H. Auden, "Death is the sound of distant thunder at a picnic."<sup>4</sup> It's the ultimate party-pooper.

Yet yielding to the inevitability of death is against our every instinct. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God "*has put eternity in their hearts. . .*" Everything within us says in the face of death, "Noooo!!! This is not how it should be! Death *cannot* be the end." We know in our hearts that we were made for more. Craig D. Lounsborough surmised, "If life is nothing more than a journey to death, autumn makes sense but spring does not."<sup>5</sup> And so those who think, find themselves between an immovable rock and a very hard place.

### Celebrated Wisdom

These were the thoughts of one enduring celebrity who achieved worldwide fame and fortune in his day, well before the advent of the Internet, television, or film.

Celebrities come and go. Once household names, Cary Grant and John Wayne are largely unknown to today's generation, and even their own contemporary celebrities will become nobodies to coming generations. But this one celebrity not only gained fame in his day, his fame has lasted 3,000 years. He was rich and famous, and his wise words were recorded in a special best-selling book that is read each day daily by millions.

King Solomon spoke about depression and those who thought about life. In chapter 1 verse 18 of his biblical book called Ecclesiastes he put it this way:

For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

So if you think about the reality of life and death and it causes you to be deeply depressed, according to the wisdom of Solomon, you don't have a mental disorder. Your very thoughts and conclusions show that you have "much wisdom."

In speaking of the universality of death, he said,

All things come alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; to the good, the clean, and the unclean; to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; he who takes an oath as he who fears an oath. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead (Ecclesiastes 9:2–3).

### Another Solomon

In an interview with *Scientific America*, another Solomon, Sheldon Solomon (professor of psychology at Skidmore College) gives more good reason to be depressed. He said,

Terror management theory (TMT) is derived from cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker's efforts to explain the motivational underpinnings of human behavior. According to TMT, one defining characteristic of human beings is self-awareness: we're alive and we know it. Although self-awareness gives rise to unbridled awe and joy, it can also lead to the potentially overwhelming dread engendered by the realization that death is inevitable, that it can occur for reasons that can never be anticipated or controlled, and that humans are corporeal creatures—breathing pieces of defecating meat no more significant or enduring than porcupines or peaches. Solomon has spent the last few decades studying how thoughts of death can powerfully influence our decisions and judgments.<sup>6</sup>

If you fly regularly and you don't suffer from depression, this may get you started. Statistics tell us that one in eight airline pilots may be clinically depressed:

Hundreds of commercial airline pilots worldwide may be flying with untreated depression because they fear being grounded or losing their jobs, a new survey suggests. The anonymous survey of about 1,850 pilots from more than 50 countries found that 14 percent of pilots who had worked within the past week had symptoms of depression. Four percent of pilots reported having suicidal thoughts within the past two weeks. The survey offers one of the first snapshots of mental health among commercial pilots, who often don't disclose this type of illness to airline officials or aviation regulators because they fear negative career repercussions, said senior study author Joseph Allen, a public health researcher at Harvard University in Boston.<sup>7</sup>

So 1 in every 25 pilots is tempted to end it all. The figure is probably much higher, because (as is alluded to) those who get depressed while flying aren't going to readily admit it. It's not good for business. It's like a chef admitting that he is often tempted to put poison in patrons' dinners. Who is going to frequent *that* restaurant?

My point is that it's not just celebrities who get depressed, others also think and get suicidal thoughts. Poor and rich people are haunted by the fear of death. It's universal. They are, through fear of death, *all their lifetime* subject to bondage.

Kathy Cronkite, the author of *On the Edge of Darkness: Conversations About Conquering Depression*, said,

If you have heard John Graden speak, you will know that he firmly believes that depression is a real life long cradle to grave illness.<sup>8</sup>

Anthony Hopkin, whose thoughts led him to the dead end of chronic depression, concluded, "We are dying from overthinking. We are slowly killing ourselves by thinking about everything. Think. Think. Think. You can never trust the human mind anyway. It's a death trap."<sup>9</sup>

### Suicide Isn't Painless

Now and then someone addresses the fact that the fear of death is the problem, saying that it is better to take your life and be free of the dread than to have to live with its torment.

In his book, *The Art of Dying*, Robert E. Neale said,

Chronic anxiety is a state more undesirable than any other, and we will try almost any maneuver to eliminate it. Modern man is living in anxious anticipation of destruction. Such anxiety can be easily eliminated by self-destruction. As a German saying puts it: "Better an end with terror than a terror without end."<sup>10</sup>

I have asked hundreds of people if they are afraid of death, and have found that it's a telling litmus test. The humble will be quick to say that death scares them, but the proud won't because they seek approval, not pity. That's why so few let the deadly cat out of the bag.

My hope is that you're not proud, and that you will allow me to reason with you about this sobering and depressing issue. This is because I want to eliminate suicide as an answer to the question of depression — *To be or not to be*. That is the question. And there is an answer . . . a better way to deal with that haunting fear.

The response to the depressing depression dilemma is not to become a Christian “because Jesus will fix everything and make you truly happy.” That popular message just isn’t true. Plenty of non-Christians are already happy. That was my dilemma before I came to Christ. I was extremely happy, but I could see that the sharp pin of reality would one day burst my happiness bubble. I sat helpless in the gloomy shadow of impending death. And most come to that sad, hopeless conclusion.

A month before she died, Carrie Fisher said, “I’m not going to enjoy dying, but there’s not much prep for that.”<sup>11</sup> With due respect to the late Carrie Fisher, there *is* prep for death if you look in the right place.

As a Christian, I would be lying if I said I wasn’t fearful of dying. But the fear I have is *controllable*, because of the gift of faith that comes with the new birth of which Jesus spoke in John chapter 3.

Imagine I’m on a plane 10,000 feet in the air. I’m wearing a parachute and I’m about to jump. I’ve never jumped out of a plane and I’m sure if I had to, I would be fearful. *But I would be able to control that fear by having faith in the parachute.* The more trust I have in it, the less fear there will be. Again, the more confidence, the less fear. I am in control of my fear. I have an antidote because of my ability to trust.

When I pass through death, it will be my first time. I’m not sure what to expect, and that’s a little scary. But I have an implicit trust in the risen Savior, and so I will be able to control my fear by my faith, and for the skeptic, this is *not* mind over matter.

The Bible speaks of having a strong confidence in God, and the more confidence or trust I have in Him, the less fear I will have thinking about dying now *and* when death comes. By God’s grace, I will be in control of it rather than the fear being in control of me. I can say with the Psalmist, “The Lord is on my side; *I will not fear*” (Psalm 118:6, italics added).

And so I am able to live without the universal dread. The black cloud of the fear of death left the moment I put my faith entirely in Jesus for my salvation. If it seeks to enshroud me, I have my faith in Jesus to dismiss its ghastly influence.

But the person who lives (and dies) without faith in the Savior is like someone who has to jump 10,000 feet out of a plane with no parachute. Put yourself in that person's dilemma for a moment. *Imagine* it. There is no faith, and so there is nothing to control the terror. It will be completely out of control when he faces death. That's why the Bible calls death "the king of terrors" (Job 18:14).

The fear of death torments the ungodly every moment of their faithless existence. And so those who lack faith in the Savior are susceptible to a tormenting fear that leads to chronic depression that, for many, leads to suicide. Between 2–7% of adults with major depression die by suicide,<sup>12</sup> and up to 60% of people who die by suicide had depression or another mood disorder.<sup>13</sup>

### Rich, Proud, and Famous

Most of us are proud. We don't want to be seen as being weak and vulnerable. We dress and act for the approval of our peers. Actors are often first to admit that they are driven by their ego. They crave the applause, and so it's difficult for them to publicly admit that they are afraid to die. Depression, yes. That invokes a measure of sympathy. Fear of death, no. That speaks of weakness, and they don't want the scorn of the world or to jeopardize their career by being labeled as mentally ill.

So, as we look at these celebrities, you will have to search for clues as to the cause of their depression. Most hide it. They are not forthcoming about the irrational dread with which they live. Not many of them will say, "I am *terrified* of dying, I always have been, and it is driving me to a depression I can't shake. I've been having suicidal thoughts, and I can't see a glimmer of hope anywhere."

I want to offer you more than a *glimmer* of hope. I want to point you to *sunshine* . . . and for you to let its brilliance shine where there is no hope. To do this, I will give you documented experiences of celebrities to strengthen my case for fear being the cause of their depression. And if you will allow me to, I will present the gospel — God's offer of eternal life in place of death. While this subject is fascinating, it can be a little dark, and so I have therefore put a little light at the end of each chapter — a positive biblical promise of deliverance from fear.

## questions ?

1. Read Hebrews 2:14–15. Can you personally testify to the truth of those verses, and did it have any influence in your search for God?
2. Give some justifiable reasons (other than the fear of death) that so many are depressed.
3. Explain W.H. Auden's, "Death is the sound of distant thunder at a picnic."
4. Explain why depression shouldn't be called a mental disease.
5. Explain how faith is the antidote to fear.

### Endnotes

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## Chapter 3

# Carrie Fisher

“A human being can survive almost anything, as long as she sees the end in sight. But depression is so insidious, and it compounds daily, that it’s impossible to ever see the end.” — Elizabeth Wurtzel<sup>1</sup>

**C**arrie Frances Fisher (October 21, 1956–December 27, 2016) was an American actress, a writer and producer, and a humorist. In an ABC interview, Fisher spoke about living with depression:

“The world of manic depression is a world of bad judgment calls,” says Fisher. “Just every kind of bad judgment because it all seems like a good idea at the time. A great idea. . . . So if it’s talking, if it’s shopping. You can’t stop. It’s very painful. It’s raw. You know, it’s rough . . . your bones burn . . . when you’re not busy talking and trying to drown it out.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2013, *The Daily Mail* published an article entitled, “Carrie Fisher opens up about her manic bi-polar episode which led to a bizarre cruise ship performance.” The article said,

Carrie says that warning signs came early in the trip when she started scribbling on everything in sight. “I wasn’t sleeping. I was writing on everything. I was writing in books; I would have written on walls. I literally would bend over and be writing on the ground and (my assistant) would try to talk to me, and I would be unable to respond,” she recalls. She says that at the time of her manic episode she



was on an anti psychotic medication called Seroquel, but it was clearly malfunctioning.<sup>3</sup>

Seroquel is FDA approved and has been prescribed to millions in the United States to treat the depressive lows and manic highs of bipolar disorder and as add-on treatment to antidepressants for major depressive disorder. But here are some of the possible side effects of the drug:

Side effects of Seroquel may include mood or behavior changes, constipation, stomach pain, upset stomach, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, dizziness, tiredness, headache, trouble sleeping, dry mouth, sore throat, breast swelling or discharge, missed menstrual periods, increased appetite, or weight gain. Older adults with dementia may have a slightly increased risk of death when taking Seroquel. Call your doctor at once if you have any new or worsening symptoms such as: mood or behavior changes, anxiety, panic attacks, trouble sleeping, or if you feel impulsive, irritable, agitated, hostile, aggressive, restless, hyperactive (mentally or physically), *more depressed, or have thoughts about suicide or hurting yourself* (italics added).<sup>4</sup>

WebMD asked Fisher:

*“Without the leveling effect of medication: are you more manic or depressive?”*

Fisher: “Mostly mania. When I got older, depression became more of an issue. Mania is not that unpleasant, but . . . it’s a spin of the dial, you don’t know what you’re going to get. It turned into what they call agitated depression. I would get really impatient. I was going much faster than everything else around me, and it drove me crazy. You feel out of step with the world.”

*“Is there still a stigma attached to mental illness and to seeking help for it? Have we as a society made strides in this arena?”*

Fisher: “Of course there’s still stigma, especially when it comes to shock treatment [which Fisher experienced and

openly discusses in her memoir]. But it's getting better. I think there's more understanding now than there was, depending on what part of the country you're in, or what part of the world."<sup>5</sup>

In another interview, the 60-year-old actress was asked if she was (at that age) happier with life. She responded,

"Yep. Well, I'm not happy about being older, except what are the options? But I've learned a lot. I trust myself. I trust my instincts. I know what I'm gonna do, what I can do, what I can't do. I've been through a lot, and I could go through more, but I hope I don't have to. But if I did, I'd be able to do it. I'm not going to enjoy dying, but there's not much regret for that."<sup>6</sup>

Just a month before her death, Fisher was asked if she feared death. "No. I fear dying," she said. "Anything with pain associated with it, I don't like. I've been there for a couple of people when they were dying; it didn't look like fun. But if I was gonna do it, I'd want someone like me around. And I will be there!"<sup>7</sup>

Years ago I wrote a book called, *What Hollywood Believes*. While researching for it I came across Carrie's quote about her being open to evidence that God existed. I longed to get an opportunity to speak with her, and although that opportunity never presented itself, I will afford it posthumously, in the next chapter.

### A Conversation with Carrie Fisher

I don't think you had mental disease. I think you were a normal, witty, intelligent human being and that you thought deeply about life.

You once said, "I love the idea of God, but it's not stylistically in keeping with the way I function. I would describe myself as an enthusiastic agnostic who would be happy to be shown that there is a God. I can see that people who believe in God are happier. My brother is. My dad is, too. But I doubt."<sup>8</sup>

I have never for a moment doubted that someone built my house. Nor do I doubt that *any* painting had a painter. The building

is *proof* of a builder; the painting is *proof* of the painter, and creation is proof of the Creator. It is scientifically impossible for nature to have made itself. If it did create itself, it would have had to have been pre-existent *to* create itself *before* it created itself, which is intellectually ludicrous.

It is also outside of the realm of possibility for nature to be eternal — because of the second law of thermodynamics. That says that everything is subject to corruption. It runs down. In 100 million years everything we can see will have turned to dust. If the universe was eternally preexistent, it would have turned to dust 500 trillion plus years ago. Therefore, the universe must have had a beginning, and that prime-mover can't have been itself. It had to be created by something outside of itself — a Designer.

Everywhere we look, from the atom to the universe, we see design, and in the design we see the genius of the Designer. Can anyone really look at the miracle of childbirth and conclude that life is an accident? So we need doubt no longer. We can *know* God exists:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse . . . (Romans 1:20).

### The Power of Faith

Let's say that you are an old friend with whom I have lost contact, and you are in *big* financial trouble. You invested all of your savings in what you were told was a sure scheme, and it fell through. Then you lost your job.

This devastated your spouse, and to your dismay the bank is foreclosing on your home at noon today. You are sick to your stomach with fear that your precious family is going to be living on the streets. Pleading with the bank and seeking help elsewhere fell on deaf ears. Every avenue of hope turned out to be a dead-end street.

A mutual friend informs me of your predicament. I then make contact and assure you that I will meet you just before noon outside of the bank. *I will have in my hand a check for \$100,000.* It is a small

part of inheritance that my very wealthy father left me. I tell you that it's my joy to gift it to you.

If you trust me, your nightmare is over. You need no longer fear in the slightest, *even though you don't have the money in hand*. You can not only be immediately free from fear, but you can have joy *right now*, even though you don't have the money. That's the power of *trust* or what we sometimes call "faith."

Look closely at the words of Scripture and see faith in action:

The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; therefore, my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him (Psalm 28:7).

Notice the words "My heart trusted in Him, and I *am* helped." It doesn't say I *will be* helped. Faith has the ability to deliver *now*. It is a *present* help in time of need. The moment it's exercised it provides strength and joy.

Think now what would have happened if you hadn't had faith in my word. Instead of trusting me, you said, "How do I know you will keep your word? *I don't trust you.*" The result would be that you are stuck with your fears. No faith, no joy. Not only that, but in your lack of faith you have accused me of lying. You insulted me by not counting me worthy of your trust.

How much more then is lack of faith in God insulting to Him? The Bible warns, "He who does not believe God has made Him a liar" (1 John 5:10). We see this happen with the promised birth of John the Baptist. An angel appeared to his elderly father:

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. . . . And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years."

And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things

take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time” (Luke 1:13–20).

Zacharias was struck dumb because he insulted Him by his lack of trust.

So there are two good reasons to trust God. The first is that any healthy relationships are established on trust. And the second is that you want to be rid of your fear of death.

The Bible proudly parades those who did great things through trusting God. We are told:

But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

You said, “I would describe myself as an enthusiastic agnostic who would be happy to be shown that there is a God . . . but I doubt.” If we want to please God, we must approach Him with trust, not doubt, as we would any person with whom we want to establish a lasting friendship.

### *Bible Promise*

But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows (Luke 12:7).

## questions?

1. Elizabeth Wurtzel said, “A human being can survive almost anything, as long as she sees the end in sight. But depression is so insidious, and it compounds daily, that it’s impossible to ever see the end.” Explain how faith in Jesus solves that problem.
2. Carrie Fisher was an agnostic. She said, “I’m not going to enjoy dying, but there’s not much prep for that.” What prep can we do?
3. How would you give someone evidence that God exists?
4. How would you prove that creation can’t be eternal?
5. Explain how faith in God is a “present” help in time of need.

**Endnotes**

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