ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

SELF-HELP

Thank God for Antidepressants! A Journey to New Beginnings
Jane Newman
AuthorHouse
978-1-4772-3020-6
Three Stars (out of Five)

Many people think that depression is all about feeling sad. Jane Newman knows from personal experience that depression is more about feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and depleted. When the day came that this devoted Christian wife and mother couldn't face the suddenly daunting task of fixing another breakfast, another lunch, or another dinner, she knew she had to do something. In her conversational memoir, *Thank God for Antidepressants!*, Newman shares the experience of choosing treatment for her depression and how that decision changed her life.

In 1985, Englishwoman Jane Newman was married to the director of a West African mission branch and caring for two small children. Newman acknowledges that the stress inherent in these roles was a factor in the inertia, exhaustion, and indecisiveness she experienced. Feeling that her symptoms were more than a stress reaction, though, Newman sought help on many fronts. She read Paul Tournier's books on personhood, undertook an intense round of psychotherapy, and looked to her religious faith for answers. Not until a doctor prescribed an antidepressant, however, did the fog of depression actually lift.

Unlike many mood disorder memoirs, Newman's doesn't end with her diagnosis and treatment. This is not a blow-by-blow account of illness like Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation*. Instead, Newman chooses to focus on what comes after the treatment. She ponders how a patient can know if it's right to take a medication. Which one? For how long? The most important questions for Newman are about identity and faith. She wonders who she really is if antidepressants have the power to change her personality. And she studies the question of faith: does taking antidepressants mean she is turning her back on God's healing power?

The storytelling here is a bit of a patchwork affair. Newman bounces back and forth through time, leaving readers to puzzle out the chronology. Photographs, drawings, cartoons, and quotations that are perhaps intended to create additional interest distract from Newman's story in some cases. For instance, the picture of Newman as a young mother is revealing, but her parents' anniversary portrait seems less relevant.

Newman's tone is friendly and cheerful, so readers will be likely to forgive the occasional sentence fragment or awkwardly phrased explanation. This is a casual conversation, where you feel no need to correct your friend's grammar. It's the message that's important. In Newman's case, that message is one of hope to all who have struggled with depression and its treatment. She doesn't pretend that it is easy to overcome those challenges, but she shows that it is possible to do so and to come out of it feeling enriched by the experience.

Sheila M. Trask