

Connection Helped Me Combat Depression

Struggling with depression has taught me the healing power of meaningful relationships.

By Emilia Brändh

It was almost Christmas, and my apartment was the only one with lights on.

My friends were scattered all over Europe, and my immediate family was celebrating together in Finland. And here I was, alone in a little apartment in England, tears rolling down my cheeks, a letter in hand.

But I wasn't crying because I was lonely—these were happy tears. The letter was from one of my closest friends, and it got me thinking about all the good times we had when we were younger. I had no idea that all those moments would mean so much to me in the future.

Facing Loneliness

There have been times in my life when I've felt like the loneliest person in the world because of depression, wondering if I would ever find friends who would love me.

When I was a teenager in Finland, I had the coolest group of Church friends that I sometimes took for granted. But then we grew up, slowly drifting apart without really noticing, until we barely spoke at all.

After this, I fell into a deep depression. Losing closeness with these friends made me feel like a burden. I wanted to reach out to them, but I told myself it would be selfish to drag them into my misery. So I lived in isolation and only dug myself out of my self-made hole of sadness (my bed) when I had to keep up my façade that everything was fine.

Despite getting professional help and taking antidepressant medications, I was still miserable and lonely when summer came. I was desperately seeking for ways to talk to people, and I became even more anxious because I felt like I was so bad at it. But when I heard about a summer school program at my university, I applied simply to force myself out of my apartment.

On the first day, I participated in one group activity and then quickly slipped away to cry at home.

But I had been trying to get better for too long to give up that easily. So I went back.

I didn't know how to make conversation, and I was stressed about getting to know these strangers. But I knew I had to try. I refused to be alone any longer.



Making Life-Changing Connections

When I felt self-conscious and afraid, I reminded myself that we are all children of heavenly parents. We may all seem very different because of our varying backgrounds and lifestyles, but we all come from the same place. And that can bring us together.

Slowly and steadily, my teammates and I got to know each other. We would hang out in our free time, and then one day we ended up sitting on my apartment floor playing cards and eating cake that we had baked together.

I wanted to open my window in that moment and scream, "I did it!" These friendships were miracles in my life.

When I connected with these friends, combatting my depression

became a lot easier. I even opened up about my mental health to them. And it turned out that most of them had similar struggles to mine. Many of them were going through difficult things and confided in me because I opened up first. Being vulnerable brought me closer to others and gave me the strength, hope, and support I needed to heal.

In the fall, I ended up moving to England as an exchange student, and I had to start all over again with making new friends. But this time I was confident that I could do it.

Accepting and Sharing the Savior's Light

When I was in the colorless depths of depression, I struggled to feel God's love and His Spirit. But by showing love and service and making deep friendships, I was able

to accept the Savior's healing power and bring His light back into my life.

Depression can make life difficult at times, but it also teaches me how to realign myself with God's plan and gives me great purpose in loving and connecting with others and myself.

Spending Christmas so far away from home would have once sounded unimaginably lonely. But knowing and trusting that God provides all that I need to make connections and find peace—no matter where I find myself on this planet—I know I don't have to feel that old loneliness again. ■



Emilia Brändh is a student who spends her days writing about adventures real and made up. She loves reading fairy tales, cooking spicy food, taking long hikes to ponder in the woods, and can often be seen wandering around old villages with her beloved camera in her hand.