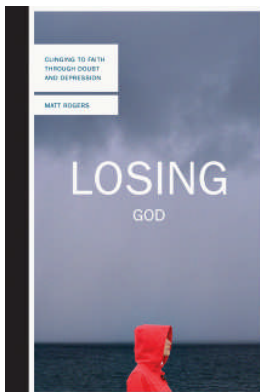


# Q&A

## AUTHOR INTERVIEW



*“Depression is far more common in our churches than many of us realize, and too often our churches unintentionally make the suffering even worse. In Losing God, Matt Rogers courageously tells the story of his depression with unflinching honesty, theological insight and deep human sensitivity.”*

Brian McLaren,  
author/activist  
([brianmclaren.net](http://brianmclaren.net))

### **Briefly describe depression as you experienced it.**

**Matt Rogers:** Depression for me usually begins as numbness. I can’t feel emotions, or the intensity of them is diminished. I feel gray, blah, mechanical. I’m simply going through the motions without any desire or excitement. Over time, the gray turns to blackness. I go from feeling nothing to feeling overwhelmingly sad, as though someone very close to me had died. The grief is accompanied by loneliness (even when I’m around friends), loss of appetite, sleeping too much or not being able to sleep at all, loss of interest in activities I would normally enjoy, inability to concentrate or make decisions, and a lack of energy for even simple tasks.

### **How is depression often misunderstood, especially in Christian circles?**

**Matt:** In general, the most common misunderstanding I’ve found is the idea that depressed people ought to be able to pull themselves out of the pit. Mentally healthy people, when feeling blue, can, by thinking right thoughts, turn their emotions around over time. But severely depressed people have been robbed by their own brains of the ability to think right thoughts or to simply “Cheer up!” Often counseling and medication are needed to bring the depressed brain back to health.

In the church, the most common misunderstanding about depression seems to be that it’s a spiritual weakness or failure. I fell into this faulty belief during my four-year battle: “If I loved God more, I’d have more joy.” Depression is more complicated than that, and rarely is a spiritual weakness to blame. Many well-meaning Christians have inflicted terrible wounds on the hurting by offering ignorant but pious-sounding platitudes. We need to walk very softly around depressed people, thinking before we speak.

### **How did you view God in the midst of your depression?**

**Matt:** I both loathed him and longed for him. Depression turns everything dark, and God appeared very dark—even evil—to me. I thought there was a good chance that he had rejected me, condemned me to hell, and that he was getting great pleasure out of watching me writhe in mental anguish. Yet, at the same time, I had the contradictory desire to be with him, to feel his acceptance again. For four years I had no conscious awareness of his presence. He seemed to have simply gone away.



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# Q&A

## AUTHOR INTERVIEW



**Matt Rogers** has used his experience with depression and doubt to help students understand and find solutions for their own struggles. He serves many students directly as copastor of New Life Christian Fellowship at Virginia Tech.

*Losing God: Clinging to Faith Through Doubt and Depression*  
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### **Why did you decide to share your story in *Losing God*?**

**Matt:** For those four awful years that I was depressed, I searched in vain for a book that I felt described well the torment of mental illness. I found plenty of “how-to” books that offered ways and means of overcoming depression. That was all well and good, I suppose, but what I really wanted was just to know that someone else in the world had felt what I felt and made it out the other side with their faith still intact. I just wanted a story that could offer solace. I never found a book like that, so I decided to try writing it.

### **One reviewer said that you should offer a light at the end of the tunnel earlier in the book. Why did you not offer a ray of light early on in the book?**

**Matt:** My goal in writing this book was to accurately describe the experience of depression. Depression, if it is severe, does not permit its sufferers little rays of hope. It doesn’t come with encouragement to carry on. If it did, thirty thousand people in the United States would not commit suicide every year. I understand the reviewer’s desire for hope—every depressed person in the world wants hope, as well—but if I’d introduced hope too early on, I would have served poorly both the reader and the story because I would not have been describing depression truthfully.

### **How are people struggling with depression often hurt by well-meaning people?**

**Matt:** I can only speak from my own experience. For me, well-meaning people often didn’t realize the severity and complexity of my struggle. They thought a Bible verse or two ought to fix the problem. When this didn’t work, I’d often feel even worse than before, and sometimes the people trying to help would just give up, adding to my sense of hopelessness. Better education in the church about what depression is and how it works would go a long way toward turning well-meaning people into truly helpful people.

### **What do you want readers to understand about depression—their own and/or a loved one’s depression?**

**Matt:** I hope the reader will see two things about depression from my story: (1) Depression is a serious illness and should be taken seriously by both the sufferer and the sufferer’s friends and family. (2) Depression can be beaten. A combination of counseling and medication is often necessary, but most people do recover.

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