

Mustard Seed Holes

From *Real Time*

by *George Halitzka*

Running Time: 6 minutes

Themes: Depression, Faith, Healing

Scripture References: 2 Corinthians 12:1-10; James 5:13-20

Synopsis: Katie, a young married woman who has slid into depression, refuses to seek treatment. She finally reveals to her husband that she believes her condition is caused by a lack of faith.

Cast:

KATIE—Mid-20s

BRENDAN—Mid-20s

Setting: The living room of a small apartment

Costumes: Brendan wears a moderately-dressy church outfit, perhaps a button-down shirt with khakis. Katie is still dressed in sleepwear, maybe an old T-shirt and shorts.

Props:

Laundry basket

Pile of laundry (including some holey socks)

Bible

Small table

Author's Note: Sometimes, the church's silence on emotional difficulties is deafening—a distinct irony in light of the no-holds-barred portraits of depression in the Psalms. Personally, I grew up with the impression that a real man (especially a real man of God) should take care of his own feelings with no help except prayer.

But when I found myself suffering with a numb sort of sadness that wouldn't go away in my twenties, I finally turned to a professional counselor and a psychiatrist who helped me find healing. I've come to see that "secular" help as a kind of common grace provided by God for coping with the pain.

Yet in some circles, the debate still rages over whether counseling and

medication are sources of Godly strength—or admissions of spiritual weakness. In this drama, Katie and Brendan, a pair of newlyweds, have to face that question head-on when Katie begins to show signs of serious depression.

(An empty laundry basket sits in the middle of the floor. Off to one side, there is a small kitchen table. Beside the laundry basket, KATIE sits cross-legged on the floor. She stares obliviously at a large pile of laundry she's dumped onto the floor. BRENDAN enters carrying a Bible.)

BRENDAN: Katie? *(KATIE starts.)* Is your head better?

KATIE: What?

BRENDAN: Your headache.

KATIE: Yeah . . . just a morning thing, I guess.

BRENDAN: It's been happening a lot lately. You should make an appointment—

KATIE *(they've already talked about this)*: I'm fine—

BRENDAN: Just about the headaches, that's all—

KATIE: Brendan, I'm fine. *(BRENDAN sighs, short pause.)* How was church?

BRENDAN: Good. Heath and Jenny asked about you.

KATIE: Did she have the baby?

BRENDAN: They're inducing her Wednesday.

KATIE: Is everything OK? His little lungs?

BRENDAN: He's fine. Lungs finally caught up.

KATIE: Thank God!

BRENDAN: She changed her mind about the epidural.

KATIE *(small smile)*: Wants the drugs?

BRENDAN: Her mom scared her into it.

KATIE: Why anybody would do it natural—

BRENDAN: Thank God I'm male.

KATIE: Thank God for drugs.

BRENDAN: I told Heath I'd come as soon as it happens.

KATIE: I'll go.

BRENDAN: Unless you have a headache?

KATIE: Brendan—

BRENDAN: You know it's been four weeks?

KATIE: I told you; it comes and goes—

BRENDAN: Since church. Since you went.

KATIE: My head hurts—

BRENDAN: Katie, don't . . . just—don't. *(Pause)* I'm making a sandwich. Want one? *(KATIE shakes her head.)* Loss of appetite—check.

KATIE: What's that mean?

BRENDAN: How long have you been out here? Sitting like that?

KATIE: I don't know . . . after you left—

BRENDAN: Three hours.

KATIE: I . . . the laundry. I'm folding socks—

BRENDAN: For three hours.

KATIE: A lot of them; they have holes . . . 28 of them—

(As though to prove her point, KATIE begins searching for sock matches.)

BRENDAN: You counted holey socks?

KATIE: No . . . I'm folding—

BRENDAN: Three hours staring at socks, Katie. I didn't bargain for this.

KATIE: Sure you did. "In sickness and in health"—

BRENDAN: "Sickness"; good word—

KATIE: I'm not sick—like that.

BRENDAN: What do you call it? Checking for holes?

KATIE: Brendan—

BRENDAN: It has a name—

KATIE: A headache? It was worse this morning—

BRENDAN: I'm tired of lying for you. Next week at church, I'm calling a spade a spade—

KATIE: What are you lying about?

BRENDAN: "Actually, Heath, she doesn't have a headache. It's called 'major depression'"—

KATIE: I am not—

BRENDAN: “Sometimes, Katie counts holes in socks . . . for three hours.”

KATIE (*standing up; starting to exit*): I’ll be in the bedroom—

BRENDAN: If you won’t see Dr. Cutler, you could at least go to church! There’s this “Great Physician” thing . . .

(*Pause. KATIE stops, but does not turn to face BRENDAN.*)

BRENDAN: What?

KATIE: I want to.

BRENDAN: But you have a “headache.”

KATIE: No! I—want to go, Brendan.

BRENDAN: Then—why?

KATIE: Faith.

BRENDAN: What?

(*KATIE walks back towards the laundry basket without looking at BRENDAN. She absentmindedly picks up some random socks.*)

KATIE: I was a junior. That’s the first time; when I got . . . depressed.

BRENDAN: I know—

KATIE: The campus ministry prayed; anointed me with oil; all that . . . but, like, a week later; that’s when I took a whole bunch of pills; didn’t think I’d ever get up—

BRENDAN: Babe, you never told me—

KATIE: I told him, the pastor. And he said if I had faith the size of a mustard seed, God would heal me. And suicide is the biggest sin under heaven. And if I believed more . . . if I believed—

BRENDAN: It would’ve been a miracle. God doesn’t always—

KATIE: So it’s full of holes.

BRENDAN: What?

KATIE: I can’t go to church. I’m . . . (*She looks down at what’s in her hands; holds them out to BRENDAN.*) Like socks . . . I’m full of holes. (*Pause*) I prayed, Brendan. Before I got up today, I prayed—

BRENDAN: Babe, it doesn’t work like that—

KATIE: Just that I could feel something. Sad; angry; I don't care. Something. I laid there; forty-five minutes. And finally—

BRENDAN: Does it have to be faith? Maybe the problem's—

KATIE: I just got up. Because I have holes.

(A long pause. KATIE starts to exit.)

KATIE: I'll be in the bedroom.

BRENDAN *(suddenly)*: Katie, Jenny is gonna do it. The epidural.

KATIE: What?

BRENDAN: Jenny's not just gonna pray. Before Nathan comes out, they'll give her the shot—

KATIE: Brendan, that's different—

BRENDAN: And then she won't feel it; not as much . . . does she have enough faith?

KATIE: It's different. This is my soul—

BRENDAN: It's the same thing. Maybe the drugs; maybe when there isn't a miracle—

KATIE: They don't make pills for—

BRENDAN: Sure they do! Prozac and Zoloft and stuff—

KATIE: What about faith?

BRENDAN: It's sickness; like a headache—

KATIE: Prozac doesn't fix the holes.

BRENDAN: Then what does?

(KATIE shrugs helplessly.)

KATIE: Only a mustard seed.

(She exits. BRENDAN sighs and begins putting socks back into the laundry basket. Slow blackout.)

Following Up the Drama

In his book, *Speak What We Feel, Not What We Ought to Say*, Frederick Buechner suggests that a pastor's appropriate response to hurting souls is not to offer solutions, but rather to empathize with their suffering. (Think of the Psalms rather than the Epistles as the appropriate ministry model.)

For that reason, you may want to follow up this drama with a sensitive song, an open discussion, or a testimony. In any case, the goal is to communicate empathetic understanding of depression rather than attempting to offer answers. These discussion questions may help you contemplate the thoughts and feelings facing your congregation as you strive to address a very difficult subject.

1. Should depression (and other mental illnesses) ever be seen as a spiritual issue? Is depression the result of negative thinking and lack of trust in God, or is it a biochemical condition beyond the sufferer's control?
2. What is the appropriate way for a depressed person to seek relief from suffering? Can counseling and/or medication play a role? What part should a person's church community have in her recovery? What about prayer and Scripture?
3. Have you ever experienced a very dark and bleak time in your life—whether your condition was diagnosed as depression or not? How did you cope with the feelings of sadness and emptiness?
4. Do you know the signs to look for in friends and family members who may be depressed? If someone you know is suffering from an emotional difficulty, how can you help support him? Where might you send him or her for additional help?
5. If a friend is having thoughts of death or suicide, how should you respond?



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