

**Seeing in the Dark**

**Dee Vaughan, Speaker**

**The Columbia Metro Connection Podcast 007**

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Chris Reinolds: Welcome to the Columbia Metro Connection, a podcast where you can go to get valuable, relevant, and quality resources for you and your congregation. The Columbia Metro Connection is sponsored and supported by the Columbia Metro Baptist Association and the almost 100 partner churches that support the ministry of the CMBA. Hosts for this week's episode are George Bullard, the Director of Missions at the Columbia Metro Baptist Association, strategic leadership coach, lead missiologist, and virtuoso of all things church related. JayWill Wilson, teaching pastor at Generation Church, urban missionary, and radio host at Urban City Radio. And I'm Chris Reinolds, lead pastor at Killian Baptist Church and founder of [chrisreinolds.com](http://www.chrisreinolds.com).

 This week's episode features pastor, Dee Vaughan, author of *Seeing in the Dark*, and senior pastor at St. Andrew's Baptist Church in Columbia, South Carolina. Pastor Dee's book, *Seeing In the Dark*, was birthed out of his own personal time of depression, and a desire to share with others that the Bible does, in fact, speak to those who are experiencing similar times of darkness.

George Bullard: Hey, guys. I'm so glad that we're here tonight with Dee Vaughan and having the opportunity to talk to a friend of mine for many, many years about life experiences and those kinds of things. Dee has a story that others need to know. Dee is one of those people who is very courageous and would be glad to tell his story.

 In fact, he has told it in a book, and we've already shared an article around with folks that need to know about his book, because there are many, many, many people who do need to know about his book. But we're glad to have Dee here with us, personally, tonight to ... for us having the opportunity to hear his story. So Dee, we want to start out by saying, for those who haven't heard your story, what occurred in your life that made you realize that something's not quite according to Hoyle here?

Dee Vaughan: Thank you, George, for the invitation to be here, and I'm proud to be a part of what you're doing through this podcast and through all your ministries. Thanks for the invitation.

George Bullard: You're welcome. Certainly.

Dee Vaughan: I had been a pastor for more than 20 years when I began to see changes inside me. Less energy, less interest, small things frustrated me much more than they had. I preferred to withdraw from people instead of being with people, and the work of the ministry became a burdensome job. And when I saw those things happening, I knew something was wrong.

 I'm blessed to have a wife and family who see those things too, and often, when you're talking about depression, others can see those changes before you recognize them yourself, and that's the key, is to be willing to listen to other people. But together with them, I began to see that my life was not going in a positive direction, wasn't going in a healthy direction, and I needed some help to work through that.

George Bullard: Well, we're pleased that you're doing that kind of thing. Chris, take us all here.

Chris Reinolds: I agree wholeheartedly. I mean, one, admitting that is a pretty big deal. I mean, we're all church leaders in some form or fashion, and most of the listeners that listen to this podcast, they are also church leaders in some capacity. So, as a church leader, how difficult was it to go out and seek help? And then, where did you find that help?

Dee Vaughan: I began with my family doctor. My primary care physician is a great Christian gentleman. We were in Greenville at that time, and Dr. Bloodworth, which I think is a great name for a doctor, it just has a ring to it, but Jim was also a friend. And through the years when I had seen him, we not only talked about medical issues, we talked about our churches, we talked about our faith, and he would always ask about my ministry.

 Well, my first stop was to go to Jim, and I will not forget the day that I went specifically to see him about this, cause he walked in the room and tears just began flowing. I was very emotional, and I just said, "Jim, I'm just not doing well." That's what began the conversation. And Jim asked the right questions, he assessed my situation, and he said, "Dee, there are things that I can do with depression. I'm limited in what I can do, but I'm willing to do what I feel qualified and comfortable to do. If my efforts don't help you, then I'm going to ask that you let me put you in the hand of a specialist.

 Well, I wasn't too sure about that at that point, you know. I had done well to go to my doctor, I thought. I said, "So, let's do what you're going to do." And he prescribed medication, and asked me to do some things that were conducive to healing, and we tried that for a while, but it wasn't getting the results I needed, which led me to the big challenge. And that's when he wanted to refer me to a psychiatrist.

Chris Reinolds: Now what was it that made you not want to go down that road?

Dee Vaughan: Pride was a big part of it.

JayWill Wilson: Understandable. That's very understandable.

Dee Vaughan: You know, I grew up in a southern culture, in which there were two categories of mental health. You were okay, or you were crazy. That was sort of the way it was described. And living in Columbia now, the phrase that was often used in South Carolina was, "You need to be on Bull Street," which is where the state psychiatric hospital was located for a long, long time. And so, I felt some of the stigma that was attached to emotional illness, and I very much resisted going to see a psychiatrist and a counselor that worked with him, though Jim recommended them very gently.

 He did a good job in trying to make that transition for me, but I fought it, and I just put off making the appointment for a few weeks, and I just drug my feet, every way I could. But that was the breakthrough for me too, because that's when I began to get the specialized help that I needed to get better.

JayWill Wilson: Now your story, it's not an isolated issue; this is something that's actually a very taboo conversation in churches. I mean, you actually hear people almost talk shamefully that they're on anti-depressants, and then some churches, we can be honest, can say there's something wrong with you, because maybe you don't have enough faith if you're on medicine. How do we address those pastors or address those church leaders or members who may think there's something wrong for people to get medicinal help or just some type of professional help?

Dee Vaughan: Well, I think we've made God way too small in the healing process when we say there's one way to do this. You know, pastors know a lot about prayer, and know a lot about confession of sin, and know those spiritual resources, but as the old saying goes, "When the only tool you have is an old hammer, everything looks like a nail." And pastors, sometimes, using the skills they know to use, can give people the false idea that this is the only way that God can work in your life to bring healing, and I think we need to broaden our view of God and how God works.

 When you use the word stigma, one of the things I think we, as church leaders, have got to do to help our people is get past that ourselves.

JayWill Wilson: Yeah, right. Yeah.

Dee Vaughan: I have friends, I've had people who've talked to me about their illness who've said, "I went to my pastor for guidance, and he said, 'Get on your knees and let's pray this thing through, and you're going to be okay.'"

Chris Reinolds: Wow.

Dee Vaughan: And you know, that may be a factor. I think unresolved sin and personal issues with God, those can contribute to depression, but seldom is depression going to be cured with a prayer or a trip to the alter, or memorizing a scripture.

JayWill Wilson: A lot of times you can't just pray it away.

Dee Vaughan: That's right.

Chris Reinolds: One of the things that I've had people that express those things to me—that you just need to trust God more. Specifically, you are correct. They fall within the context of church leaders who just are trying to do what they know how to do, and so my question always to them is, "Say you have a son or daughter who breaks their arm, and the bone is sticking out of the arm. Do you just pray it away? Or do you take them to the doctor?" And they say, "Well, I take them to the doctor, obviously."

 Well, I think about depression, or other types of mental things that are going on, things that I don't even begin to understand. It's almost like a broken arm of the mind that exists there, and you have to go, at times, to seek out a medical professional of some kind.

Dee Vaughan: I think that's a great analogy, and one that can help people get past their hesitation. The mind and the spirit are so closely bound together within our existence, that we have a hard time, sometimes, separating what may be a physical issue that's expressing itself emotionally or mentally from a spiritual issue.

Chris Reinholds: Right.

Dee Vaughan: And that's where I think all of us, as pastors, have got to be honest with our limitations, and find out that we can play a really positive role in helping people overcome depression, without saying that we are the sole source of their help.

George Bullard: But I would assume that one of the key issues is, like with the broken arm analogy, you see the broken arm, but not many people, unless those who are very close to you, see what might be going on with the person that has depression. Did your church people start recognizing it themselves? Did you come out and say, "I'm getting treatment for depression?" And did some of them say, "Well, you just need to trust God more?" What do we do when our God representative doesn't trust God enough?

Dee Vaughan: Right. I did have people in the church recognize that something was going on, and some who were close friends, I shared with them what was going on. I didn't have people come to me and offer me a simplistic answer, and I'm glad they didn't. They may not have appreciated the response. A little righteous indignation there, maybe ...

George Bullard: Right? A little honest to God kind of talk.

Dee Vaughan: But a lot of folks were very supportive in that way. But one of the things that I chose to do was, at one point in my journey of healing, I took a month off. I took a medical leave to focus. My doctor used a good picture of that. He said, "You know, I don't think we can repair this road while the traffic continues to flow on it."

Chris Reinolds: That's good.

JayWill Wilson: That's great.

Dee Vaughan: And so, I took some time away, but the Sunday I came back, my sermon was about where I'd been, and what I'd experienced, and I used the story of Jacob wrestling with the Angel, to talk about what the previous year, year and a half had been like for me.

 And I found a lot of love and support in sharing my heart with that, and it opened the door to all kinds of ministry opportunities, because that day, that one day, in a congregation of about 500 in that church, I had more than 20 people say, after the message, some of them whispering so no one would hear, "I'm struggling with that right now."

JayWill Wilson: Wow. Yeah. Wow.

Chris Reinolds: Yeah.

Dee Vaughan: Thank you for naming it. You know Jesus named demons before He threw them out, and I think we have to name our problems, because when you name something, you're beginning to gain some power over it, and it have less power over you.

JayWill Wilson: You said something very interesting. You said, "Jesus named the demons before He cast them out." How do you think, as church leaders, we can address that more, to name the issue, to try to help people get recovery? Through recovery?

Dee Vaughan: Well, in my case, it wasn't so hard, in the sense that I'd been away, and the question was, where've you been and why? But I think all pastors can recognize, this is a part of life for many people. I've seen different statistics, but one of them said that two out of five adults in the United States will have an episode of depression that would meet the criteria for a diagnosis of clinical depression.

 All of us have ups and downs emotionally, but close to 40%, and if you think about that, how many in my congregation have experienced this? So I need to name it, just as I would name issues of marriage, or raising children, or personal spiritual growth. This is a live issue among my people, and that's part of my ministry is to name those. So I think we have to take the power and the stigma out of it by talking about it. That's where we start.

George Bullard: Right. Well, that's sort of where the book came from, wasn't it? That was your opportunity to systematically talk about it?

Dee Vaughan: Yes, it was. During my year and a half that was the hardest part of this journey, I had a list, a little computer file that I entitled, *Wisdom*. That's the word I put on it. I was really striving to find anything to hold on to that felt solid.

 Your spiritual life gets very much out of kilter when you're depressed. Prayer is very hard, even reading scripture is hard because it's hard to concentrate, it's hard to remember, it's hard to keep at bay those cynical, caustic voices that seem to well up inside you that you're not worth it, and you're never going to get better.

But anytime I came across a scripture verse, or a truth that a friend said to me, or a counselor said to me, or that I just thought of that seemed like it was a solid rock to stand on, I put it on that list, and I returned to it frequently to just try to get a hold. To just see a little bit of light in the darkness. It was like these were stars in a very dark sky.

 After I came out of depression and was doing better, I had a lot of counseling opportunities with people dealing with depression, and I found myself going back to that list in my mind, and sharing those same truths with people who were struggling. And in those conversations, they began to take shape, and I refined them, and they got better, and so at a point I said, "I'd really like to share this with a wider audience. They may benefit." Because the folks I was working with said, "This is helpful."

 So I began working on what became *Seeing in the Dark*, the book that I published late last year. And it's a collection of 41 biblical meditations is what I call them. Almost all of these came off of my list, and what they are, it's a daily scripture, and an exposition of that scripture, often using a personal experience, and all of them related to depression, and then I followed that with a prayer exercise, a conversational prayer to get people started.

 As I said, it's difficult to pray, so I wanted to get people started, a prayer that's attached to the truth of that day, to get a conversation going between the struggler and God.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Dee Vaughan: And I end each one with a little summary statement. I call it a Truth to Affirm. Hopefully, something people can take away that's memorable.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Dee Vaughan: It's short enough that you can hold on to it, and repeat it, and share it with others. So I put those together, and sent it, as people who write do, sent it to a bunch of publishers.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Dee Vaughan: And had one who said, "I want to do this." So, I was excited to have it go into print, and be available to help other people.

Chris Reinolds: Now, your desire with the book, just to clarify, it's not to really take the place of medical treatment, or anything along those lines. I just want to makes sure that nobody says, "Hey, I've got somebody that's struggling with this, I'm just going togive them this book, and it will fix that."

Dee Vaughan: Yeah, this is a paperback book, not a silver bullet. And I say in the introduction, this book is not intended to cure your depression.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Dee Vaughan: Most people who deal with depression need several sources of help and hope. You may need to work with a doctor, you may need medication, there are lifestyle issues you need to deal with, but you also need encouragement from God's word, so this is a source of help that needs to flow into a bigger river of help, to get you through. So, you're exactly right. This is not a cure, but it is part of the cure, especially for Christians.

JayWill Wilson: And I think it's very unique, cause it's not a devotional, and it's not a self-help book, but it's actually your life story, interacting with God's word.

Dee Vaughan: One of my friends who read this early said, "I appreciate that you've written, not a textbook, but a guidebook."

JayWill Wilson: Yeah.

Dee Vaughan: This is what I've seen on the journey that's been helpful, and so, maybe these markers will help you on your journey, so yeah, there's a lot of me in that. And I think the only authority that we have on issues like this is experience.

Chris Reinolds: Right.

Dee Vaughan: And because I traveled that road, I thought I had an insight that might ring true with people. You know, I wondered for many years why veteran friends of mine spoke so little of their combat experience. I finally came to realize that words can't convey those experiences. If you haven't lived it, you don't know it, and you can't know it, right? And I think if you haven't lived depression, in a smaller sense, I'm not comparing it to being in active combat.

Chris Reinolds: Right,

Dee Vaughan: But if you haven't lived it, there are things about it you can't understand and can't communicate, and so, believing God put me in that situation, let me be in that situation, with redemptive opportunities inherent in it, I wanted to share that, and put my wounds to work to help other people.

Chris Reinolds: Well, what would you say, if you don't mind, to an individual that's beginning to, maybe they're even seeing and feeling these symptoms exhibited in their own life. What would you say to that person?

Dee Vaughan: You know, I think the worst enemy of emotional health is isolation and withdrawal. And if you believe that emotional illness is beginning to get a grip on your life, you need to talk to someone about it. You might begin with a trusted friend, with your spouse, with your pastor, but you need a place to start saying, "This is happening." And get someone involved in the sense that they can not only hear you, but hold you accountable for how it's going.

 You've got to break out of isolation and denial of the problem before you can get better. Now for me Linda, my wife, was my primary resource there. She saw it every day, and saw the ugliest side of it. Because, like many people dealing with depression, I could pretend through the work day, but that left me so depleted, I was not a fun guy at home, by any means. But that led me to the doctor, which led me to the specialized help that I needed, which got me on the road toward healing.

JayWill Wilson: Right. Now to church leaders, what would you say to their families and friends, if they're experiencing this person going through that right now?

Dee Vaughan: If someone you love is dealing with depression, I think the most important thing that you can do is let them know that your love for them hasn't changed just because they're sick. One of the things depression will do to you is totally convince you that you are unlovable and hopeless. And that message just reverberates inside you all the time, if you're very sick with depression. And to know that there's a constancy of love that surrounds you is really, really important.

 I compare it to an experience one of our dear friends had. She suffered a miscarriage, was in the hospital, and her pastor came to see her. And he said to her, "You are hurting so much right now, it's all you can do to hurt. Let us, as your church, do the hoping. And one day, you'll be able to take up the torch of hope again for yourself."

 And I think there's a sense in which, people who surround a depression sufferer, have to do the hoping, and have to remind you that I believe it can get better, and I'm praying, and I'm working to see that happen. And you focus on the hurting, and we'll do the hoping until one day, God restores hope to your heart, and you'll carry on by yourself.

Chris Reinolds: That's good.

JayWill Wilson: That's real good.

Chris Reinolds: Well, Pastor Dee, thank you so much for being with us today. If there's someone that wants to find out more information, what's the best way for them to connect with you?

Dee Vaughan: Well, I am at St. Andrew's Baptist Church in Columbia. You can go to the website and find my email address there.

Chris Reinolds: Alright.

Dee Vaughan: Or you can just send an email to deevaughan@standrewsbaptist.org.

Chris Reinolds: Okay, sounds great. And we'll also put that information in the show notes as ways that people can get in contact there. Well, thank you so much for being with us this evening, and we've really appreciated being able to sit down and talk.

Dee Vaughan: Well, I appreciate the chance to share my experience, and for anyone who hears this, if you feel depression has a grip on your life, which happens to ministers more often than the general population, I'm convinced, seek help, and know that you are loved.

Chris Reinolds: Right. Absolutely.

JayWill Wilson: Absolutely.

Chris Reinolds: Well, once again, thank you, Dee, for joining with us. If you're interested in connecting with Dee Vaughan, please be sure to check out today's show notes from the episode, and all of the applicable links will be there. Also, if you found this podcast helpful to you or your ministry, share it with others, so we can get the word out about what God is doing in the Columbia Metro area. Until next time, from all of us at the Columbia Metro Connection, we thank you for listening, and urge you to share this podcast with everyone you know. It's the good news about the Good News in the Columbia Metro Baptist Association.