

HOPE IN DARK TIMES

Ft sounds like you're depressed. 'I couldn't bring myself to believe my GP's words. Me? Depressed? I had always thought of myself as a 'strong' person: someone who excelled; thrived; achieved. How could this be happening to me?

I was plunged into a dark tunnel, yet riding a roller-coaster of emotions, feelings and confusion that I had never experienced before. Everything seemed such an effort and I lost enjoyment in life. My thoughts were clouded by a powerful negative filter. Life seemed pointless and hopeless. I could never have imagined depression would be like this.

Depression is a common illness, affecting one in five of us at some point in our lives. For those who have not experienced this debilitating condition, it can be a challenge to know how to support and encourage. This is one Junior Doctor's account of a journey into depression, written in the hope that it might be an encouragement to others, and a testimony to God's love and faithfulness – even through the dark times.

On the outside, people would not have known anything was wrong. In fact, I was struggling to believe the diagnosis myself. It was easier to put on a brave face than to explain... What would people think?

'Tell me one last thing,' said Harry. 'Is this real? Or has this been happening inside my head?'

Dumbledore beamed at him...

*'Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?'*¹

Having recently moved to a new area to take up a training post, I felt I had very little in the way of support. My family, who lived two hours away, were struggling to come to terms with the diagnosis and found it hard to provide the help and support that I so desperately needed.

I prayed. God provided: older Christians from church and CMF, who cared, loved, supported, encouraged, prayed and stood by me every step of the way... who offered hope that this would, eventually, get better.

I felt guilty about not being at work. I was 'letting the side down'. Each day was a struggle, without the structure and rhythm of work to fill the hours and I missed helping and caring for others.

It helped to make a plan for each day: providing a reason to get up each morning; incorporating activities I previously enjoyed; getting out of the house; meeting up with others and doing some exercise. I helped out with daytime groups and administrative work at church. I was encouraged to keep plodding on: going through the

motions of life even if I didn't feel like it. In times of distress, I knew there was someone I could phone, who understood and would offer sensible advice, without flapping, or getting upset.

Initially I grew closer to God. So many things that I valued in life (work, health, independence and participation in high-level sport) had been stripped away but I knew my identity in Christ remained. I felt supported and upheld by the practical love of my church family and I held onto the solid biblical truths that form the foundations of my faith.

Over time, God started to feel very distant. How could he allow this to happen to me? My brain felt so 'scrambled' and my concentration was so poor that I struggled to pray and read the Bible. Lively church services made me feel alienated and excluded.

People assured me this was a normal experience. I was reminded that others were praying for me, even if I couldn't pray myself; that God is good – all the time – no matter what we're going through; that he loves us: *'Your love never fails, it never gives up, it never runs out on me'*²; and that he will not let us go:

Oh no, you never let go, through the calm and through the storm

Oh no, you never let go, in every high and every low

*Oh no, you never let go, Lord, you never let go of me'*³

The overwhelming support and love of my church family, mirroring God's unconditional, everlasting love helped me to draw close to him once again.

I have not yet emerged from the dark tunnel of depression but I write this in the hope that there is light at the end of it.

*Yes, I can see a light that is coming for the heart that holds on
And there will be an end to these troubles
But until that day comes,
Still I will praise you, still I will praise you'*³

I know that *'in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.'*⁴ and trust that this experience will, if nothing else, strengthen my faith, draw me closer to God and enable me to care better for my patients when I return to work as a doctor.

references

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| 1. Rowling JK. <i>Harry Potter and the deathly hallows</i> . London: Bloomsbury, 2007:579 | 3. Matt Redman. <i>You Never Let Go</i> . Thankyou Music, 2005 |
| 2. Jesus Culture. <i>One Thing Remains</i> . Bethel Music, ChristaJoy Music Publishing, Mercy / | 4. Romans 8:28 |