

When Healing Doesn't Come

By Anusha Atukorala

It began during a year of loss. In the space of five short months, three loved ones passed away—my father and my husband's, plus my husband's only brother. Both our fathers had lived full lives and died at the ripe ages of 90 and 87, but my brother-in-law was only 51. Why did he have to die so young? Perhaps it was the stress of the year which led to a downward spiral in my health. I felt tired all the time. My muscles were sore. My stomach protested vehemently at foods it had coped with before. Chemicals bothered me. What was going on?

As the months went by, the symptoms worsened. I endured visits a-plenty to the doctor, but no one could dispel the inexplicable symptoms. Sure, tiredness is part of all our lives, but this was different—incessant fatigue and debilitating pain. The simplest task became a gigantic challenge, like climbing a steep mountain. I'd wake after an eight hour sleep feeling battered and bruised all over as if a truck had run over me. The symptoms became intrusive visitors who refused to leave, even when I was unwelcoming and rude toward them!

One specialist told me it was due to my having had glandular fever. She asked me to manage the pain and fatigue by using my mind. I got home excited. Hooray! There was nothing wrong with me. Of course I could think positively. Or could I? I tried, but my body didn't listen to my pep-talks. Sadly, it seemed to have a mind of its own.

Often the pain was unbearable and did not respond to medication. I spent hours on the web, researching how to manage the illness. My doctor was kind and supportive. Whenever I suggested trying a new supplement he'd always go along with it, but we were both equally at sea as to how to treat the strange malady. I did have good days, but in time they seemed as rare as finding a pink striped elephant lumbering down an Australian street!

Going to work was soon out of the question. I spent hundreds of dollars of my husband's hard earned money on hoped for miracle supplements. There was Magnesium, Malic acid, Vitamin B12 injections, Vitamin B complex, Vitamin D, D-Ribose, Coenzyme Q, Colostrum, D3 ... and more. You name it, I tried it. Often, the supplements had nasty side effects—a gnawing hunger, nausea, anxiety, stomach ache, extreme sleepiness.

Some supplements seemed to work for a while, making hope flutter wildly—a butterfly ready to fly out of its chrysalis into a new world. But even as I breathed a sigh of relief, certain I was cured, the symptoms would return full blast. I became a trapped deer and

the hunter's name was fibromyalgia. No matter what I did or where I went, the hunter pursued me and found me. Dark clouds filled the sky, colouring my world with ugly streaks of black and grey.

Several years ago, our church fasted for a few weeks as we prayed together. I decided to fast from all dairy products (which I love). And guess what ... it happened. The big miracle. No more fatigue. No more pain. *Eureka*, I screamed. *I'm healed*. I blogged about it, proclaiming to all the world that God had restored me. But after three short months, the relentless pain and fatigue returned, worse than ever.

Life with God has always been a grand adventure, but *this* battle has been hard. Too hard! Sometimes, I've cried out to Him: *Oh Lord, have you abandoned me? Why do you ignore my pain? Please heal me. Please Lord!* I've turned to faith healers, to no avail. Friends have prayed over me, as did my pastor. I spent hours seeking God's face and I love spending time with him, but he has not healed me. My husband has been exceptionally understanding and a wonderful comfort. Caring family and friends have blessed me through their prayers and support. But a number of well-meaning people, in their desire to help, only deepened my anguish. 'God told me he'd healed you. You simply need to reach out and receive it.'

Really? What does that mean Lord?

One Sunday morning, I went to a pastor renowned for having the gift of healing. I asked close family and friends to pray for me. The fire of hope glowed bright in my heart that day. *Was this going to be it?* She looked at me, but not with compassion. Her words crushed me. 'Your problem is not to do with prayer. It's because you don't have enough faith!' Tears pricked my eyes. I tried to swallow my pain but despair enveloped me, a heavy cloak around my head and shoulders, suffocating me.

How can one share the loneliness of a battle such as this? One friend prayed with me expecting an immediate answer each time. When it didn't come, she was surprised. I felt embarrassed—as if I had failed her. *Abundant life? How could this be abundant life, God?* Even grocery shopping was too much. One hour of walking in the shopping centre and I'd collapse for the rest of the week. I felt guilty that I needed to be selfish in order to survive. On bad fibro days, talking on the phone, reading my emails or even thinking rationally was too difficult with the pain screaming in my ears. The worst part was trying to explain to someone what constant fatigue does to one. 'You feel tired? Oh yes, I get tired too,' they'd tell me. *If they only knew!*

One day after twelve years of battling the illness I'd had enough. I'd invited a friend over to lunch that week, but when I tried to prepare for her visit my body didn't cooperate. I asked my sisters to pray for me. I cried out to God: *O Lord, where are you? Please tell me why you haven't healed me! Is it something wrong I've done? Is it due to a lack of faith?* But even before the words left my mouth, I heard his gentle voice soothing me. His 'no' and 'no' to my two questions were a beam of approval from a beloved Daddy to his little girl.

Friday morning dawned, crisp, cold and clear, and my beautiful friend Emma came over. I had hoped to bless her that day, but she turned my plans turned upside down. You see, it was *she* who blessed me. Emma gave me permission to whinge and whine about my fibro battle and oh ... how good that felt. We spoke the same language because God had led us both on a narrow, lonely road. We discussed a topic not popular in the world today: suffering.

If you know Jesus, all your problems will disappear. If you live a godly life, you will always be healed. Come to Jesus and life will be easy. Isn't that what we Christians too often imply? But surely, God never promised us a pain-free ride? What God has assured me over the years is not that I will never suffer, but that he will be with me through every moment; and that when I surrendered it all to him, he will use even my pain for good.

Before Emma left, I took her outside to show her the fruits of my husband's gardening efforts. Refreshing winter breezes tugged at our hair when we walked up and stood on a lush green carpet of grass. Parrots swooped and screeched around us while we enjoyed the view.

As we walked back down my backyard steps, I spotted my favourite place outdoors.

I smiled at Emma. 'Let's have two minutes together on the swing.'

Emma nodded and smiled back. We sat there for the two minutes. Two minutes stretched into twenty minutes ... then an hour ... two hours ... in the bracing winter cold, but our hearts were warm. The words we shared were sacred and God met with us there. Emma began to pray for me—for healing. But she stopped abruptly. 'I'm sorry. I'm so sorry,' she said. 'But ... I just can't pray for healing for you today. I have a strong sense that you are presently in a season of suffering.' It was a holy moment. She went on. 'You being crushed through your pain has released a precious aroma. And God is being glorified through it.'

After my friend left, joy washed over me in waves. I felt stronger in my spirit than I had in a long while. God had answered my prayer of the day before—not in the way I'd hoped, but he'd answered. Oh, the thrill of knowing that he cared enough not only to respond but also to re-assure me. My friend's 'non-prayer' spoke peace to my soul.

Sometimes, healing doesn't come. But in other ways God performs a lasting work in my heart. He fills me with joy. He is present. And he is enough.