

UPSIDE DOWN

STORIES OF GOD'S HELP
WHEN LIFE IS THROWN INTO TURMOIL

INTRODUCTION

The thought of putting together a booklet of stories where people had faced difficult circumstances and not got the 'happy ending' desired, was overwhelming at times. Yet as I talked to people I found they had looked to God and not relied on their own ideas of how things should be. I've seen that it is ok to tell God "Its hard, I'd like things to be different".

Like the people in the stories, I too began to focus on God and who He is, not the circumstances. I've come to see that He is able to use all things for good. As we lean on Him, it is no longer a matter of survival, but finding new hope and life.

Even though nothing changes – everything changes.

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FACING CHRONIC PAIN

You don't expect to be diagnosed with arthritis in your 20s; especially when you've just had your first child.

It should have been the most wonderful time, getting to know this new little person. Instead, I began to experience pain and it became difficult to move, and do simple tasks. I felt robbed of the joy of becoming a parent and I worried I wasn't giving my son what he needed.

My GP didn't seem willing to listen or believe me, so it took a year to get a diagnosis. After a few months of treatment, I started to feel better. However, about six months later, I developed a chest infection. This meant antibiotics, which I couldn't take with the arthritis medication, so I had to stop. Within weeks I was right back at square one, in a lot of pain and knowing it would take months to feel well again.

Things were frustrating and uncertain, and I worried what it meant for the future for me and my family.

It's been the hardest couple of years, but God has used the situation to show me who He is in a way I couldn't understand before.

God spoke to me about the importance of thankfulness. If I get stuck thinking



about the things I can't do then I miss out on the good things. At one point it took such a long time to get ready to go out, leaving the house by 10am was an achievement. As I slowly got myself ready, my son would be jumping on my bed in absolute hysterics, having the best time. I had a choice: I could focus on how long things were taking me and how frustrating that was, or the fact that we were together and enjoying that time. I felt God say, "This is what life's all about," and I realised there was nowhere else I'd rather be.

God also showed me it's my responsibility to share how I'm feeling. He calls us to share with and support each other; if I'm not open about how I'm feeling no one can help me. I've read a lot of blogs and websites about chronic pain and illness, and the world's view is that, "No one understands what I'm going through; no one can relate to me; my friends and family say insensitive things." But that isn't the truth. God has felt the worst pain and suffers with us. He has helped me see that He knows what I'm going through and He has a plan for me. I can trust Him and let Him take control of this. Other people might not know exactly how I'm feeling, but everyone can draw on their own experiences of pain, and they can help me walk this situation in the right way. The amount of practical, emotional and prayer support I've had is just amazing.

God helped me understand that it isn't the condition that isolates me, but how I think about it. If I see it as something that cuts me off, then I'm cutting myself off.

Another thing I've learned through this is that knowing God is more important than being well. The amount of pain or how I'm feeling is not what's important.

My life isn't defined by how I feel, but by the fact that I'm chosen, valued and saved. If this pain lasts until the end of my life, it would be pretty rubbish – but God promises eternal life. It's not just about my physical health, but my spiritual health.

"GOD HELPED ME UNDERSTAND THAT IT ISN'T THE CONDITION THAT ISOLATES ME, BUT HOW I THINK ABOUT IT. IF I SEE IT AS SOMETHING THAT CUTS ME OFF, THEN I'M CUTTING MYSELF OFF"

There was one point where I had to run out of the Sunday meeting because it was too hard to sing that God is good. But God has brought me through and shown me that He is so good in all situations. I don't need to be fearful that He isn't good; if my heart is to find the truth and know Him, then He will show me who He is.

This doesn't mean there are no bad days and I never feel fed up or wouldn't like things to change. It's like walking a path and coming across a big obstacle, or someone jumping out in front of you. It's ok to react – to scream, to stop, to get cross. It's not about how I react, it's about engaging with God rather than trying to walk it alone. Even though physically I've been at my worst, I can still be at my best because God gives me a hope that takes me above the situation.