

GROWING THROUGH
GOD'S FAITHFULNESS
IN EVERY CHAPTER

seasons of change



Stephanie is learning to adjust to a big change in her health and she has shared some of her experiences with us and some of the ways God has been helping her.

She hopes that others who face change in their health and their capacity will be encouraged that they are not alone, and that God still has plans for them to grow.

Her testimony is also an encouragement to all of us to stand faithfully by those who may be out of sight due to long term illness.

Stephanie began to experience fatigue early in 2020 and was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome in 2022. She explains that it's particularly difficult to have an illness that doesn't have a treatment, and that many people don't understand, or think is in your head because it's invisible.

To help us understand, I asked her to describe the range of symptoms she suffers with:

I feel extremely tired all the time and I'm still tired after I've slept or rested. Sleep is often disturbed. I have problems with thinking, memory and concentration. I have continual headaches and aching all over my body. My skin feels tight and sensitive, a bit like it's sunburned. I'm unable to stand for any length of time and can only walk a short distance without getting breathless.

I asked her to give us a picture of how debilitating this is, how she's had to change her life around it and what are the things she most misses.

I plan and prioritise everything. I have to split my daily activities up and have rests in between. When I do something, I can often have a delayed effect from the exertion, maybe a few days later.

In a good week, I can cope with four activities.

Even self-care takes energy. I was beginning to worry about my driving so I'm giving up my car for a mobility scooter. In a good week, I can cope with four activities. Some weeks I don't leave my home.

Some weeks I don't leave my home.

One of the hardest things is constantly monitoring myself so I don't do too much and relapse.

I miss walking in the countryside and meeting with people. I miss being able to go to all the events I'd like to go to.

Many of us define ourselves by what we do and how we can serve God. I asked Stephanie in what ways she has struggled with this and what God has been showing her.

I have struggled with no longer being able to lead a connect group, use my car to give lifts and other things I was doing amongst the church family. I have all this time and would love to serve more, but I can't. It feels like such a waste.

Gradually the Lord is teaching me that He is in charge not me and if all I can do on some days is pray and read His Word, that's fine. But I must be open to His prompting for what His priorities are for my week, because He will give me the energy if it's something He wants me to do, which may just be phoning someone and having a chat. I'm learning to see this time I have as a gift so that I can become more attuned to and expectant of his voice.

In the face of these multiple losses, changes and frustrations I asked Stephanie how God has been bringing her comfort

It's not easy to resist falling into the trap of self-pity and resentment, particularly on days when I have very little energy, but I am learning to tell God exactly how I am feeling as David did in the Psalms. *"Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free."* Psalm 118:5. Or when I find it difficult to pray myself, I ask friends to pray for me. He doesn't necessarily change my circumstances, but He helps me cope with them. But it can be a daily battle.

The words of Proverbs 3:5&6 have taken on new and deep meaning for me. Here they are in the Amplified version. *"Trust in and rely confidently on the Lord with all your heart. And do not rely on your own insight or understanding. In all your ways know and acknowledge and recognize Him, and He will make your paths straight and smooth [removing obstacles that block your way]."*

I asked Stephanie what she has come to believe about how God sees her and her value to Him and His Kingdom?

We all believe Jesus loves us, but when you feel useless and weak it's harder to believe. I'm learning in a much deeper way how unconditional God's love is. He's the all-powerful God, and I'm smaller than an ant to Him, but He wants me to know Him and enjoy Him. It's humbling and wonderful that just my relationship with Him and my trust is precious and enough.

To what extent does the hope God has given you for eternity play a part in keeping you going day by day?

God keeps saying to me "it's only for a short time." By comparison with eternity, it is! I know heaven will be a wonderful new creation and the things I miss now will pale into insignificance then.

1 Corinthians 15 reminds me that *"if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."* Because of the resurrection, I have hope and don't have to ask what the point of my life is at the moment.

I'm learning in a much deeper way how unconditional God's love is... He wants me to know Him and enjoy Him.

