

I have suffered with hormone-related migraines intermittently since my teens. During autumn 2009 they gradually began to build in frequency and severity. In January 2010 I was taking ten days of meetings and interviews - for a Christian charity - in the south of England, when I was suddenly laid low with a painful migraine, and was forced to cut the trip short. I could not understand why God let it happen but as I lay in a darkened room with my eyes covered in a home in Cornwall, I had a strong sense that He was allowing it for a reason.

From then on, I began suffering from increasingly severe migraines, sometimes lasting for up to a fortnight at a time. As well as headaches and nausea, I had intermittent paralysis of my limbs, and vertigo. Within a few weeks the vertigo was constant (both the room and my head spinning in several different directions). I was unable to work a full week, and in May my family doctor signed me off indefinitely. Another strange symptom of the migraines was of hearing my own voice in my head talking non-stop. But I had no power over the voice in my mind even though it was my own voice.

In March I developed a migraine in church so at the end of the meeting, my husband Adrian took me to pastor Nick and elder Rob for prayer. Around that time my line manager had offered to pray with me several times to ask God to heal me of the migraines but my theology was wrong – I actually thought it was an imposition to ask the Lord to heal me! But I also knew that He had answered prayer for healing at Grace church, so I approached Nick and Rob with a bit of an attitude of it being a magic formula. God had a lot to teach me, so looking back it is no surprise that absolutely nothing happened when Nick and Rob prayed for me. Nick counselled me that God might well want to do something more in my life.

By May I was much worse, so elder Rob and some friends prayed with me. Before we began, Rob read James 5:13-16:

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed

sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Rob asked if I had any unconfessed sin in my life. The Holy Spirit convicted me of a sin I had been messing about with for years and excusing as not being wrong. I had not realised how serious it was to give the devil a foothold in my life. I repented, and then Rob and the others went ahead and prayed over me. I had immediate but temporary healing of the vertigo for a few days. God backed up the seriousness of playing with sin through a significant dream - I hesitated to ask Him what it meant as I sensed it was a telling off. But I did ask Him and God showed me that it was a picture of what I had done by deliberately sinning in a particular area, thus giving the devil a foothold in my life. The dream was very effective and literally put the fear of God in me.

A couple of weeks later some friends prayed over me again at our church weekend away. As they prayed I felt 'badness' come out of my head and the irritating, non-stop voice in my head stopped and never returned. Again, I had immediate but temporary relief from the vertigo for a few days.

As summer progressed into autumn, I became more and more ill. Occasionally Adrian had to stay off work to look after me when the vertigo was particularly bad. Anything could set it off: noises (my neighbour sweeping her path for example), light, movement, jazzy colours. I forgot how to use my limbs, it was as though my legs and hands belonged to someone else and weren't connected to me. I was unable to tell how hot or cold I was, and I lost the ability to feel hunger. Consequently I sometimes felt ill because I had forgotten to eat or had not eaten enough. I became weaker, sometimes I was overtaken with sudden whole-body weakness similar to being paralysed. At those times I was unable to sit up in a chair or support my own head. There were occasions when Adrian had to feed me, wash my hair, sit me up from lying down, and generally help me to function. I lost my short-term and long-term memory and had zero concentration. Losing long-term memories was difficult to cope with, because I felt I was losing my identity; I no longer felt like 'me'. I forgot how to read and often failed to understand what people were saying to me. My speech was slurred and I would mix up my words. Confusion reigned in my mind.

Yet throughout this difficult time I knew real peace and enjoyed the presence of the Lord Jesus in a fuller, deeper and richer way than ever before. The impossible joy of the Holy Spirit constantly bubbled up inside me. I was learning to truly say with the Psalmist: 'Your love is better than life' (Psalm 63:3).

By late September the paralysing weakness was so debilitating that sometimes it took every ounce of energy and brain-power just to breathe. I would leave several seconds between inhaling and exhaling because I simply did not have enough energy to breathe in a regular pattern. I also had episodes of violently shaking for no apparent reason, I could not control it. My body and mind were in such a poor, weakened state that I actually began to wonder if I was dying. After a particularly bad night, I was gripped with fear, wondering how it would feel when my body shut down completely. But immediately the Holy Spirit was present, comforting me, lifting my eyes from the physical loss to the spiritual gain. He bypassed my messed up, confused mind and lovingly revealed Scripture truth to me. I began to smile joyfully through my tears as joy and peace returned.

I lost my job and frequently had to resort to using a wheelchair as I was unable to walk far or stand for any length of time. The specialists I saw – including two neurologists – were puzzled by many of my symptoms. An MRI scan showed that a small part of my cerebellum had died: the area of the brain controlling co-ordination and balance. After further testing, my main neurologist diagnosed me with episodic cerebellar ataxia. I tried a variety of medications and treatments but nothing made any difference at all, except occasionally to make me worse because of the nasty side effects.

Thankfully in October a couple of concerned friends agreed to fast and pray for a week to see me healed. At the end of that week, our church home group leaders prayed over Adrian and me, resulting in temporary relief of my symptoms. On the following Sunday, the church elders and some friends gathered around me in church and cried out to God for healing. Pastor Nick and elder Phil firmly supported my hands and arms as Nick instructed me to stand. I had to act in faith; I had shuffled out to the front, half carried by Adrian and collapsed into a chair. As I stood I sensed the Lord's presence, as if He too was laying His hands on me. My forehead was wet with oil where Nick had anointed me as we all prayed aloud

using the spiritual gift of tongues. Immediately, the vertigo and paralysing weakness went – and never returned. I jumped and spun in circles in church with no ill effects whatsoever, and I hopped and skipped in the car park, praising God!

Although I was still not completely well, there had undoubtedly been a huge breakthrough. God was at work in me! From then on I battled the illness with praise. I sang and prayed in tongues every day for complete healing. And very gradually week-on-week I slowly gained in strength by waiting on the Lord. Praise was vitally important; it was my life-belt in the fierce, stormy sea of illness. There was an obvious spiritual battle going on. A few nights after the breakthrough, I dreamed that a demon was suffocating me, and awoke to find it actually happening. Only praying aloud in Jesus' name ended the attack.

Elder Phil remained concerned and prayed over me again with our home group leaders. Later that week the ability to sense temperature was restored. Then more good friends prayed over me in church, specifically requesting that I would be able to feel hunger again. Shortly after, my sense of hunger returned.

During Christmas and early January, I failed to give priority to praising God – mainly because I was not alone in the house and felt self-conscious. Straightaway my health went downhill, with increasingly painful, debilitating migraines and chronic fatigue. Medication provided no help. It was only when I got back on track worshipping God that I gradually began gaining in strength again.

Recovery seemed so slow; I was susceptible to discouragement. I was in a dark place, struggling badly with nightly insomnia, temptation and demonic nightmares. I learned the hard way the value of putting on the spiritual armour described in Ephesians 6¹. Spiritual warfare is real; praise God we are assured the victory in Christ! Around this time I was greatly encouraged by reading Simon Holley's article on healing in the *Newfrontiers* magazine². It renewed my faith and confidence to keep going.

My church had a week of prayer and fasting in February. I fasted from Facebook and Twitter – a poor second best but it was all I could sensibly do. And God honoured me. On the Thursday I was sitting at home praying and meditating on the Psalms when the Lord drew near and touched me powerfully, healing me

instantly of the migraine I had. The ME (chronic fatigue) completely disappeared overnight. My confidence immediately returned and I was cured of insomnia. The next day – for the first time in months - I was able to stand during the whole of the two-hour church prayer meeting. And now I can easily stand during the whole of worship on a Sunday!

I have learned that no valley is too deep or dark to keep God out. His light cannot be extinguished by darkness. When I went through my shadowy valley, God was glued to my side and fellowship with Him was wonderfully intimate. I never knew that being a Christian could be so fantastic! I believe, because of so many people praying for me that the Lord shielded me from the worst of the illness because I was not anxious and very rarely down. 99.9% of the time I knew His wonderfully real joy and peace.

I have also realised that God delights to heal, and that He longs to bless us far more than we desire it.

Mandy Baker Johnson

www.mandybakerjohnson.com

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¹<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%206:10-18&version=NLT>

²http://www.newfrontierstogether.org/Groups/152972/Newfrontiers/Magazine/Current_Issue/Healing/Healing.aspx

The opinions expressed in this document are those of Mandy Baker Johnson.