

How I Survived

In December 2018, I was admitted to hospital with pancreatitis. I returned home in early January, but stomach pain persisted and nine days later I was in agony. There followed thirty-six days in intensive care. I had five operations, none of which I was expected to survive. When I finally came round, I found I was so weak that rolling over in bed was difficult, and I needed to use one arm to lift the other arm up.

For a week or so I thought it would have been better if I had died. My best hope was that I would be in a motorised wheel chair for life. The only good times were when I was asleep and dreaming: the waking reality was horrible.

Then one morning I remembered my time at Woking's Lighthouse, a community project where I had been on the counselling team. We gave 'life readings', which meant hearing people's stories, sharing Bible verses that seemed helpful and praying with them. I had often quoted the advice of Paul: "Give thanks whatever happens, for that is what God in Christ wills for you (1 Thessalonians 5:18)." The natural thing is to feel down about hardship. The supernatural thing is to believe that God has everything under control.

I needed to act on my own advice. I forced myself to say the words every morning – "Thank you God for my incredible weakness. Thank you that I am walking in the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4)."

It took a fortnight before I really meant it, and I found myself praying "Thank you Jesus that I am on this path, because if this is where you are, I don't want to be anywhere else."

After that it was a case of doing my best. The only thing I could do was to show love and kindness to the medics and nurses. I also asked for a set of foot pedals, and I sat in the armchair pedalling for thirty minutes each day. I needed to be lifted from the bed to the chair by a hoist as I was too weak even to sit up in bed.

My GP relative says those pedals saved my life. I have done 8000 kilometres on them in the twenty months since that time.

In the event I have made a full recovery, to everyone's amazement. People who meet me now don't know I have been ill. Extraordinary. Lovely!

Not all stories end happily.

The three Bible verses that helped me most were about dealing with fear.

Psalm 23 which I quoted above.

The opening of Psalm 46, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the mountains be cast into the sea."

Thirdly, Isaiah 41 verse ten, given to me by a good friend. "Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my right hand."

Thank you. David Pennant, April 2020.