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I WANT TO BE HEALED

Interview with Stephen and Therese Abraham

“We tend to believe this lie of God is this Santa Claus keeping a list and checking it twice and if we do all the right things and live a good life God will give us what we want”

Celia: Have you ever felt like life is ripping you off? No matter how hard you try you feel like you're getting a raw deal. That what you're suffering is unjust. My guests today, Stephen and Therese, have had to face those feelings for over a decade. Where is God when you are suffering? I'm Celia Fielke and you're listening to Messages of Hope.

In 2003 Stephen suffered an injury that has left him with debilitating pain ever since. All the things he and his family were looking forward to were crushed. And over the years the hope of getting those dreams back has gone. And yet, somehow, they have found ways to embrace life, even amongst the daily suffering.

Stephen and Therese how has life changed for you as a result of your injury?

Therese: His whole personality has changed. You know he was a very outgoing, gregarious, a real people person. Now the pain makes him very tired. So if we have guests over, after about 2 hours, he needs to retreat to the bedroom.

The medication affects his thought processes. Emotionally his quite fragile at times. You know, getting frustrated and dealing with the frustration of not being able to do what he wants to do. So really, from the man that I married he's extremely different.

Celia: And Stephen what's one of the big frustrations for you?

Stephen: Not being not being able to be an active outdoorsman father playing sport with my son or motorbike riding, rock climbing. Anything like that is out. I found that really difficult. I have a close friend who's a father who tries to assist a bit with that and Therese tries her very best to make up for that. But where I can be involved in Joash's life I am. Whether it's creating worlds in Minecraft on the computer or a common interest in movies and music and things like that, that we connect, explore and enjoy together. He's very good at understanding what I can't do. He's probably better at handling it than I am!

Celia: What about relationships outside of your immediate family - has the constant pain affected those in any way?

Stephen: We've lost a lot of friends because the condition, you know, suffering is a deformity and it's an ugly thing and it puts people off and.....

Celia: Makes them feel helpless too, which is something you don't want to feel?

Therese: Yeah, possibly. Hard to accept.

Stephen: Yeah, it's confronting and that's difficult for people to understand.

Celia: Stephen, you were working as a Christian pastor at the time of your injury. Has that been a struggle for you to come to terms with - your faith?

Stephen: I feel like before this I was so naive about suffering. We kind of tend to believe this lie of, god is this Santa Claus keeping our list and checking it twice and if we do all the right things and say all the right prayers or live a good life then god will give us what we want and so many times he just says life is suffering.

Therese: Stephens tried almost every procedure there is under the sun. Y'know, try this doctor, try this doctor, come and try this healing thing. None of its worked.

Stephen: I mean I remember feeling really gutted, absolutely gutted and what is wrong with me that God won't heal me when, you know, this promise is supposedly given that you'll be healed. There's only so many times that I think you can emotionally put yourself in that vulnerable position and when it doesn't work, or if it doesn't work it's absolutely shattering. I can really understand why for some people that ends their faith.

Celia: So after all you've been through, do you still believe God can heal?

Stephen: There are times where god miraculously heals and I don't deny that but I think we're just over living our life thinking I'm gonna be healed, I've gotta be healed, I've gotta get over this. Rather than, No, god is with us in our suffering.

Therese: I think that for us, until we accepted it we couldn't actually move forward.

Stephen: I'm also aware that when I read the Bible now, every single character, every single person in there is beset by some challenge or suffering or hardship. There are no super heroes who have it all. Every single one faces a challenge. That's been a really helpful understanding and something that I understand now really well.

Celia: So with that understanding how do you make the most of each day?

Stephen: The limitations of my condition mean that there's only so much planning we can do. What will my pain allow me to do right now is as far as we can go to a degree. Although we can make plans for the future we're very much bound by what is happening right now, what can we do, what can't we do right now.

Therese: and cherishing the moments of things that we can do

Steve: and making the most of them.

Celia: When you're suffering everyday what are some of the practical things that can help you get through each day?

Stephen: One of the things I've had to really come to terms with is asking for help. It is inherently difficult to ask for some help and now I have no choice. I can't paint the house or I can't do the stuff outside. I still hate it but I actually have to ask for someone to do those things or ask round a mate and say I need your help. I've still got to force myself to do that. I guess what I've come to learn is that that people want to help and

Therese: Often don't know how.

Celia: One of the people who has helped you a lot is your psychologist.

Stephen: Oh, he saved us on many occasions. He's dealt with each of us individually and together and given us tools to be able to understand how we approach this and what happens when things go wrong and you can say things to them that you can't say to other people. To a degree the healing is in the listening. That was one thing I learnt early on in my ministry. Being able to share stuff brings emotional healing.

Therese: I think too right from when we started seeing the psychologist he really encouraged us, particularly Stephen, to block out a time once a week where he would whinge. He would whinge to god, he would be upset, he would cry. Actually it still is in the calendar. So allow that time for it but then when that time is up move on with other things, so it's not all consuming.

Stephen: So it doesn't just build up into this huge thing.

Therese: Yeah, so it's a healthy release. I think that's been a helpful suggestion from him.

Celia: You've found good support in your doctor, your psychologist and the people who have stuck by you despite the difficulties. How do you see God now, who hasn't miraculously healed you, fitting in to the way you look at life?

Therese: I would say God has provided those people in our life to support us. It's a bit like the whole medication kind of thing, some people say "you should just trust God." I feel that God has put these people in our lives, he's trained doctors and scientists to develop these things. Why would we not use them? So I don't think it's about not trusting God. I think it's about using the resources that God has placed in our lives.

Celia: Stephen, there are so many things that you can't do as a result of your injury. What things can you do to find fulfilment?

Stephen: Making my wife coffee! (laughter) There's a so many things I can't do that the things that I can do become really important, passionately important. The one thing I can do is cook and make my wife a coffee and there's some days that that's all I can really do as far as contributing to the house and the family goes. Having a wicked sense of humour helps (laughter)

Therese: A shared wicked sense of humour, definitely.

Celia: If there's one key thing you've learnt from this experience, what would that be?

Stephen: I've got a different world view of Christ and his suffering for humanity and his suffering for me and God's understanding of how much suffering hurts. God's not this vindictive lightning thrower out there trying to spoil everything. This is just the way life is, suffering is a part of life and God is our way of understanding that and coming to terms with it and living. Despite all of this having a fruitful life and a solid marriage and still being a parent and a friend and having a place in the world.

Celia: How would you encourage others who are going through something similar?

Therese: Surround yourself with understanding, supportive people and know that you'll still make mistakes. We still make mistakes when we think we've got it all sorted when we're doing something and then we reflect on it and realise we shouldn't have done this or that. You'll still make mistakes, you're never gonna have it clear in your head and worked out.

Stephen: It's not a death sentence. It can mean the death of some things in your life, many things. There's a way, there are ways forward and there are ways to live with this condition. Just seek help, Learn to ask for help.

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