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Christian Perspectives ? The column I did not want to write

By Reverend Barbara Moulton

My dad was a remarkable man.

Legally blind since birth, he did not allow his disability to hold him back from honouring God through his ministry. As an officer in The Salvation Army, he served as a pastor and, for the better part of two decades, a travelling evangelist.

Young children are, by nature, selfish. I knew that his work meant that I didn't have my dad at home for months each year. That saddened and angered me but I rarely thought of what the sacrifice meant for him.

Dad touched countless lives with his gifted preaching and singing. He helped many enter into a relationship with Christ. He also served as an unofficial chaplain for young pastors across this big country who would share with this compassionate listener while he stayed in their home.

In the early nineties, because he was so well known, he was asked to write his life story.

This was printed, chapter by chapter in The Salvation Army's weekly publication.

He wrote with humour and grace, providing readers with an insight into the man behind his powerful personality.

And so, it wasn't until I was in my thirties, that I began to learn how evangelistic ministry had impacted my father.

?The Chapter I Didn't Want to Write?

I read that, like me, my father battled stress induced depression.

For the first time, I learned of the dark cloud that he would feel when he was alone in a strange bedroom, in a strange house, miles away from family. For the first time, I looked beyond his preaching and teaching ministry and considered what it must have been like to constantly adjust to new surroundings.

If I am staying in a house of a friend, I can visually assess the room in a couple of minutes, but every visit to every town brought a new challenge to my father.

Dad wrote with honesty, and as I read his words I knew exactly what he meant.

In writing this column today, I acknowledge what I had previously only shared with family, close friends and the members of the church.

I lived with periods of depression.

I have learned to be attentive to my mental health and know when to take care of myself.

At times, I have used the medical assistance that is available.

Depression and Spirituality

The reality is that, on the surface, depression can mimic a spiritual issue. If I am living in disobedience to God, I might exhibit sadness and withdraw from others. As a result, many Christians treat depression as a spiritual failing

As a chaplain, I know that spiritual care assists with healing of the body. Obviously, attending to one`s spiritual health, does help with depression.

Depression might look like a spiritual issue and depression can be helped by spiritual care. But, that does not mean that depression is about lack of faith or trust in God.

I trust in God.

I know He is able and that I am strengthened by the love of Jesus Christ. Dad knew that too.

Strong faith doesn't mean that we won`t have the same ailments as others. Whether we experience a physical, emotional or mental illness we need the same compassion and care from our brothers and sisters in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 reads:

?Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.?

Provide others with a safe place to share.

Respond with love and compassion to those with mental health issues.

Learn the signs of depression and reach out to help.

In so doing, we fulfill the law of love in Christ.