

'When you are in that zone you feel like you shouldn't be on the earth. Basically you are a waste of time' The darkness of depression impacting Anthony Field, the vibrant, energetic Blue Wiggle. Labelled 'Black Dog' by Winston Churchill, depression a fact of life for many. Some of you know its grip in your life, identifying with the experience of a young Australian author who wrote, *'Depression isn't a war you win. It's a battle you fight every day. You never stop, never get to rest. It's one bloody fray after another.'*

Job 3 one of the darkest chapters in the Bible. As we move into that dark space that is Job's inner thoughts let me pray that God will be with us, help us and teach us. We know a lot about Job. He is a righteous man. A true believer. Important for our understanding of this passage. We see Job's loneliness. Now we listen to it as Job speaks to himself. His friends hear him. Readers of the Bible hear him. Though Job doesn't know it God is patiently listening. We hear a soul enveloped by an all-consuming darkness. Job is in despair, severely depressed. God gives us the privilege of listening. Not to judge Job. Not to heal his despair. Not to speak yet. We are to listen; to accept the honesty of his darkness. This is a faithful brother speaking. Listening may take us to a place we do not want to go. May reveal truths that shatter shallow convictions about joyful Christian living. Listen we must because we are listening to a true believer experiencing deep, dark despair though he is righteous. A despair not because of unforgiven sin or lack of faith. But because God, in his perfect goodness and infinite wisdom, takes him into a dark place. The darkness is real. Job curses his very existence. Crying out for the dark to erase the joy of the lovemaking by which he was conceived; the birth by which he came into the world. *'May the day of my birth perish, and the night that said, 'A boy is conceived!' That day— may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine on it.'* **v3-4** He laments that his healthy birth denied him death; the only path to peace he can contemplate. *'Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?....For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest'* **v11,13** Never being born preferable to his present anguish and suffering. His very existence the ground of his turmoil, *'I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil.'* **v26** Brothers and sisters. an insight into the focus of despair. The past. Despair usually looks back, not forward, Job curses what has already taken place. What cannot be changed. The darkness reinforced. The powerlessness relived. Sisters and brothers, be in no doubt. Depression is real. There are many

complex medical, emotional, psychological, environmental, spiritual factors at work. But it is real. Don't minimize; disregard; judge or dismiss sufferers as weak, unbalanced, unspiritual. Mature, godly Christians battle with depression within our parish family and beyond. William Cowper was a contemporary of John Newton, the author of the hymn Amazing Grace. A gifted poet and hymn writer, his Christian faith deep and abiding. A sufferer of severe depression. His pain captured in these words, *'I was struck with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who have felt the same, can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair.'*

Weep with those who groan under the weight of depression. Share with them the love and grace of God in your actions and your words. As a true believer, Job's experience of despair, dark though it is reveals a small ray of light. Job groans as one convinced God has withdrawn his favour, hidden his blessing, turned his back on him. *'Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?'* **v23** Yet he grapples, from the perspective of faith with that which remains unanswered; Why? He knows God is the giver of light and life even to those in such despair they long for the release of death. He knows God is the author of his life experience. He wants to understand what God is doing. He engages with God even when he believes God has abandoned him. *'Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure,'* **v20-21** Here is a smidgeon of hope in the darkness of despair. In light of the revelation of God in Christ this glimpse of hope blossoms into living hope. Years after Job another true believer, King David, cries out, *'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?'* **Psalms 22:1**. That same cry from Jesus' lips hanging on the Cross of Calvary paradoxically echoes Job's cries of despair and is the answer to Job's turmoil and questioning. By dying in our place the doors of the eternal Kingdom are opened. Life beyond death secured. Paul, in the context of being knocked about, persecuted, struck down declares, *'Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.'* **2 Corinthians 4:16-18** Unlike Job we have the sure and

certain hope that says the best is yet to come. Sisters and brothers the best is yet to come yet while we wait for that day brokenness, darkness, suffering beyond words remains part of human experience. As bearers of living hope, we have good news to live and to share. Listening to Job's despair ought to move us to mature, godly reflection on ministry to one another especially in the experience of depression. Three things to consider in that godly reflection. First, the conviction, that in God's purposes, true believers, righteous in character may be taken to places of darkness. This journey not a pointer to hidden sin or slackness of faith. With this conviction we are to stand against the damaging, false teaching that blames depression on unforgiven sin and lack of faith. Second, in loving one another and desiring truth to shape our worship and our fellowship we resolve not to engage with superficial, happy clappy Christianity. The Christianity that dares to sing trite choruses like, *'With boldness we draw near and in his presence our problems disappear.* Imagine the spiritual and emotional impact of those words on suffering brothers and sisters trying to sing along, hearing others sing them with gusto and passion. They are drawing near to the throne of grace in faith and obedience yet their suffering persists; the darkness of despair refuses to lessen its grip on them. Third, our love and care for suffering sisters and brothers ought to be marked by patient, long term walking alongside with gracious humility. Listening, loving, praying, wisely speaking of the Lord they follow gently reminding them in the words of the Apostle Peter, *'Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.'* **1 Peter 5:7**