

Ps Amy de Vetter – How do I overcome Mental Health Issues?

Mike and I are the lead pastors of Elim North, and have been there almost 2 and half years. We have been married for 18 years, were high school sweethearts, meet and married in Whangarei and we have three gorgeous kids Rosie Grace, Josiah James and Zoe hope (show picture) children I never thought I would be able to have but that's another story.

It wasn't until after Zoe was born and named that Mike announced that their names were all a part of a bigger marketing strategy.

Taking the first syllable of each name we have the registered trademark of Rojozo. Makes it easier to call them because with three kids and pastoring a church I can't even remember my own name most days, let alone my kids. ROJOZO its dinner time, ROJOZO are on the go. Mike jokes that if we ever have more children, we should call them Obed and Noah. Then it would be ROJOZO OH NO.

We have had many questions around mental health for this new series. What God thinks of it, should Christians take medication? Essentially asking "How do I overcome mental health issues and have mental wellness in my life."

Can I just say at the outset, I'm not an expert on mental health. I'm not a GP, psychiatrist, psychologist or counselor. I'm looking at this list and I can't even spell all these professions 😊 I'm Amy, a credentialed Elim pastor and I've been in full time church ministry for 16 years alongside my husband.

I stand here today by Gods grace with a story to share. This is my story I'm well aware that every mental health journey is different. Its so important not to compare. But I'm here to tell you this morning that there is hope and this morning I'm here to start a conversation.

Near the end of 2014 was an extremely stressful season in my life. I was pregnant with our third child Zoe and had just found out that my world, as I knew it was about to change. It had been confirmed we would move back north to become the campus pastors there under Ps Luke and Marilyn. Mike was away and I was home alone and I remember vividly the panic attack I had in the early hours of one November morning and the resulted sleepless night that sent me on a spiral of insomnia and anxiety, which ultimately lead me to depression.

Over the rest of my pregnancy I suffered terrible insomnia. I had a husband that needed me, 2 small children that I couldn't look after, pregnant with another. Many days I couldn't even get out of bed and dress myself. And here I was meant to be pastoring a church, and preparing to move to a new city, a new church and a few hundred new people that I quite honestly were terrified to meet.

At 30 weeks pregnant after numerous visits to my GP and Midwife, after being giving sleeping tablets and taking any and every natural remedy, I was told I needed to go on antidepressants. It's hard to explain how devastating that diagnosis was for me. I felt such shame, shame that my faith wasn't enough to fix this. Shame that this medication would harm my baby and shame that I was a pastor and pastors don't get depression do they?

Mental health disorders are very common and there is a very wide spectrum. My beautiful friend Dr Sarah McArthur tells me that NZ Statistics say up to 1/3 of all adults attending a GP in the past year will have enough symptoms to diagnose some form of mental illness.

20% of us will have depression. 25% of us will have an anxiety disorder. 12% of us will have a substance abuse disorder. Get this statistic - 40% of us will have some mental health unwellness in our lifetime.

Those are huge statistics that if it doesn't affect you, it affects someone close to you.

Comedian Mike King is quoted saying "It's not the suicidal thoughts or depression that is killing New Zealanders it is going through it alone and seeing no hope"

I'm so thankful for the Word of God that brings such life and such hope in dark times. When as the psalmist wrote "*darkness is my only companion*" Psalm 88:18 (CEV) there is hope.

If you have your bible turn with me to Psalm 27:13-14 "***What, what would have become of me] had I not believed that I would see the Lord's goodness in the land of the living! Wait and hope for and expect the Lord; be brave and of good courage and let your heart be stout and enduring. Yes, wait for and hope for and expect the Lord***"

What woman would ever leave the house without her handbag? I sure wouldn't? In my 'sucks to me' days I know I've got everything in here that will help me. I've got my makeup to touch up during the day, got my lipstick to help me look bold even when I don't feel it.

I've got my tissues for those weepy moments, I've got wipes (a mothers best friend) I've got hand sanitiser (keep the school sores away – that's another replenish story) I've got my sunnies (to hide my puffy eyes) I've got my phone (to take an insta story) to help me feel better and try and convince everyone that everything is OK in Amy's world.

I've got everything in here that I think will help me, but really most of it is cosmetic. To find wholeness and healing I've realized that there was a deeper work that needed to take place with a whole different set of tools.

I love to watch the BLOCK NZ. There's a new series just started. This year it's the guys against the girls. I have got my money on the girls. I get so inspired by girls doing the building and renovation projects. They get cool work boots, get muddy and stuck in.

So this morning I'm ditching the handbag but because im still a bag lady Ive got this awesome pink tool bag. I don't do belts I do bags. This morning I was us to look at some tools that we see in scripture that will help us overcome mental health issues.

If you want to know someone that struggled with mental health issues look no further than David who wrote many psalms or songs to God. David began as a shepherd boy, harpist, and warrior and then become King of Israel. He went through some very dark times in his life. Scholars believe it was David that said in Psalm 43:5 (NIV) ***Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.***

I can relate to him, this sounds like someone struggling with depression.

Psalm 27 is another Psalm of David. Commentators say this psalm of David is written in the early years of his life during his years on the run from his mentor King Saul. I've found some really helpful tools for my toolbag from this passage.

Question: So how do we overcome mental health issues?

1. BUILD YOUR HOPE

"Wait and hope for and expect the Lord" Psalm 27:14. HOPE is something I love to speak. Zoe's name.

A young woman tells the story of her father who was a prisoner of war during World War 1. When she was little she would go fishing with him, she didn't like fishing but liked him. She would often tire of waiting and it would get dark and cold. Her father had an understanding of timing as at just the right moment he would delve into the pocket of his oil skin coat and produce on his outstretched a single square of chocolate. He had been an officer in charge of men in the second world war.

Captured in the North African desert they endured horrific things. He would go on to tell his daughter that sometimes in the prison camp one of his men would begin to die. They were starving and ill but the worst thing was when they had lost hope. Occasionally Red Cross parcels made it through and her father would hide the chocolate.

At some point he would offer the dying soldier a single square of chocolate that somehow seemed to condense hope and give him the will to go on. One small piece of chocolate restored a man's hope and help him live. How many people can give me an amen on that one! Just add a good cup of coffee.

How much more does our GOD restore hope where it has been seemingly lost. Hope is incredibly powerful. Hope is what fuels the soul. Hope is so much more than wishful thinking. Biblical hope is: ***"Hope is a patient, confident and joyful expectation of good" Ps David Peters***

The central theme of the whole bible is one defined by hope, promises and stories of hope. The story of David, the psalms he wrote are in essence songs of hope. **What did David do? We see in vs 14 that David waited for, hoped and expected God to help him. David built hope into his heart.** If your hope is low you need to build it back up again. Essentially get your Hopes up!

Hope has an element of **wait**, patience not exactly my strong point. Building hope means we patiently hold on and expect God's goodness, expect our circumstances to change. Don't get discouraged when the journey is in your mind taking far too long. Continue to build up your HOPE stocks.

In my darkest depression. God has never felt so distant. Because of chemical imbalances I had a terrible lack of concentration, there were many days I could not read my bible or even pray. The only thing I knew to do and could do, was to get my hopes up and believe that my circumstances would change. How did I do that I held onto God's Word, his promise to me. Like Psalm 46:5 'God is within me and I will not fall, he will help me at the break of day' This built hope in my heart.

I've learnt that **hope that remains after suffering is true hope indeed.** Build HOPE into your heart. As Ps Mike and Lis G say HOPE IS: Hugely Optimistic and Positively Expectant – what for? For God to breakthrough

2. BUILD YOUR COURAGE

David then tells us in vs 14 "***be brave and of good courage" Psalm 27:14 (AMPC)***

I want to say this morning being courageous is a decision. It is a choice, it is something that we do. What would have become of me had I not "believed". David made a decision. David was speaking Gods truth over in his life even when the facts of his circumstances didn't look great. David knew that his words either would bring Life or death. He was announcing what he knew to be true of God, not what he was feeling.

Part of building courage is being brave enough to ASK FOR HELP. Recognise and confront any mental health issues and ask for HELP. There is no shame. There is a lot of shame associated with mental illness. I felt it.

One in 100 people in Whangarei come to our campus up north. I smile and wave a lot because if they're being friendly and I don't know who they are, they probably come to Elim. I can remember the shame I felt at the doctors I go to, because there are nurses there that come to Elim, so I was like don't let anyone see my notes. I felt such shame when having a C-sec at the hospital because there are hospital staff that come to Elim. I would so paranoid that someone would see me that came to church and would find out.

BUT when the top pediatric specialist in Whangarei Hospital had to come and explain to me that the reason Zoe was shaking for 2 days was because she had a reaction to the antidepressants I was on. I was humbled. She encouraged me that I had done the right thing taking medication, as my mental health was vital to me taking care of a newborn. AND ZOE WAS TOTALLY FINE.

I was also humbled when the most lovey mental health nurse sat with me, encouraged me and gave me amazing support. This was not because I was Pastor Amy but because in that moment I was Amy struggling with antenatal depression and I didn't need to be ashamed. Give a shout out to the medical profession – those that work in mental health. You're amazing and we so appreciate all that you do!

I think sometimes as Christians we can speak of mental health issues in hushed whispers. Whether we mean to or not we treat mental health as a sign of personal or spiritual weakness. That strong Christians shouldn't really struggle with these conditions.

Pastor Rick Warren from saddleback church in the states who lost his 27 year old son 4 years ago who has struggled with mental illness most of his life says "***If you struggle with a broken brain, you should be no more ashamed than someone with a broken arm. It's not a sin to take meds. It's not a sin to get help. You don't need to be ashamed" Ps Rick Warren***

Lets remember that mental health issues are no different to those who have a broken limbs, need medication for blood pressure, heart conditions or those who wear glasses because they cant see. A broken brain, chemical imbalances are no different. Get expert help and guidance, that's what GP's and professionals are there for.

Who you have around you when facing mental health issues is so important. My wonderful friend Rachel in Tauranga who had herself journeyed a season of depression in her early twenties was such an incredible support to me. Mike Griffiths who was National

Leaders at the time drove from Auckland to see me. Becs messaged me scriptures most days for months. This built courage into my world. ***"By yourself you're unprotected; with a friend you can face the worst..." Ecclesiastes 4:12***

3. BUILD A STRONG HEART

The Psalmist writes, ***"let your heart be stout and enduring."*** Psalm 27:14

What does it mean to have a Stout heart: strong, robust and durable? Sometimes we can feel pressure from people and even ourselves to 'harden up'. Problem is when we harden our hearts, not even God can get in. We don't need to harden up, we need to **strengthen up**.

Psalm 27:14 says ***Be of good courage, And He shall strengthen your heart;*** God wants to come and strengthen our hearts. But we have to partner with him. We have to take responsibility to ***"Above all else guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it"***
Prov 4:23

The writer of Proverbs is saying here 'there are a lot of things you could guard, but the most important thing, which needs to take top priority, is your heart, Why: because everything flows from it. Another translation says it determines the courses our lives.

That means I have had to learn to put boundaries around my heart. You know what I've discovered I cant please everybody. If you were to ask pastors their greatest challenge - its trying to please people. You know what I have discovered I cannot meet everyone's needs and expectations. How have I discovered this amazing tool in my toolbelt? - Through Christian counseling.

So take care of your heart by seeking professional help. Christian counselors are in the Elim movement pastoral care experts and all our campus ministry teams totally agree. On our ministry team at North has a seasoned Pastor, A Christian counselor and a Christian GP with many other skilled and passionate individuals. It's so beautiful to watch the Holy Spirit do his work through this team.

Christian counseling has given me new tools for my tool belt and helped retrain my thinking, helping me identify trigger points and new ways of processing.

MAKE STEPS TO BUILD A STRONG HEART

NZ has horrific stats around suicide. Once again in 2016 NZ suicide toll is the worst its been since the coroners office began keeping records. This needs to change. Mike King's quote I mentioned at the start of my message was profound. He identified isolation and hopelessness as major contributors to kiwis taking their lives.

Stats will tell us the first place most people turn to is the church. As the church of Jesus Christ we can help with both isolation and hopelessness. We specialise in helping people feel at home, connected, help them join a life group where they can be safe enough to be real. We also specialise in HOPE. That is our vision. We are a Centre of Hope to reach, serve and influence our communities. Hope for today and hope for eternity.

www.hope4mentalhealth.com

Lifeline (24/7) 0800 543 354

Depression Helpline (24/7) 0800 111 757

I love that God says *"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers"* 3 John 2. God wants us to prosper in every way – holistically - body soul and spirit.

From my experience and the recommendation of our Elim ministry teams we believe the best approach to mental illness is one that is holistic: Physically, spiritually, relationally and therapeutically helping people on a journey to wholeness and freedom. Depending on our makeup, our experiences in early childhood and the support around us we each have our own journey. Even after we have taken advantage of all the resources available it **sometimes takes as long as it takes**. So our counselor on our staff's advice and my advice is don't give up.

How do we achieve mental wellness? This applies to us all. Julia Grace visited up at north in April on her Girl on the Kitchen Floor tour with Tear Fund. She herself has had a mental health journey and shared 7 F's to mental wellness. They were so good I want to share them with you.

FAITH. Don't throw away what you do know about God, just because of what you don't. Get prayer/ministry. Do all you can.

WHANAU - FAMILY How can family members help? - Pray more and speak less. Mikes example.

FITNESS – fresh air brings perspective. Half Marathons good for my mental health. Add in eating and sleep.

FUN – find the things that make you go Mm Mm

PHARMACEUTICALS Get good GP advice. Medication if you need it.

FORWARD FOCUS Lighten your load of the past and look ahead

PHILANTHROPY Taking your mind off your own stuff , give out and give back.

I can remember a text message my beautiful mama Judy sent me on one of my darkest days. Amy I believe not only will you get through this, you will be stronger than you were before. God is going to use you to help many others.

I thought coming up north in the state I was in would hinder not help people. But last year I had a message from a lovely newly married couple in our church. She wanted to encourage me that Mike and I being in the place we were when we moved up here and having gone through what we did is actually exactly what they both needed. She says I know it sounds a little poetic but "your dark place is what I needed to light up mine"

"God wants to take your greatest loss and turn it into your greatest life message"

"God wants to take your broken places and do something beautiful with them,"

"God wants to take your valley of despair and use it as a doorway of HOPE for others.

God is the only one who can restore lost hope.

My mothers words have come true, she had hope for me when I didn't have it for myself. I am stronger for through this, and I have found a new level freedom from the strongholds that had kept my mind bondage for far too long, freedom to be myself, freedom to fear God alone and not people, Freedom and courage to share my story and remove some stigma that mental health issues carry in the church. God hasn't just patched me up with Band-Aids, he's made me new and better than before.

I'm still on journey to wholeness and freedom myself. That doesn't mean I won't have some wobbles along the way. This happened to me a month ago. I had a day off all I wanted to do was go back to bed and watch NETFLIX. But I have new tools in my tool bag, things I've learnt through counseling and my holistic approach. So I made some good choices. I got up and went for a run around town basin. Went and had an allpress coffee, had a facial and then sat in my car and listened to a podcast. I thought of a preacher I know who has some pretty good things to say. Oh that was me. I listened to my own sermon and thought Amy start putting this into practice.

Why can I say that there is HOPE for mental health? David doesn't just say ***Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?*** He goes on to say ***Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*** Psalm 43:5

David also declares in Psalm 30:5 ***Weeping may stay overnight, but there is joy in the morning.***

Imagine if we as a community of believers would take stigma and shame off mental illness and work together and help each other to find wholeness, healing and breakthrough. Imagine if we started a conversation in our marriages, in our family and with our friends, in our life groups, in our campuses. Imagine if the medical profession begins to start referring people to the church because we can be trusted to help people in a holistic way? We are seeing this and with our CAP money centre and I believe we will see that more and more

So what tools are in your toolbag this morning? Especially if you or someone you know are facing mental health issues. What steps can you take today on the journey to wholeness and freedom. TO:
Build Hope?
Build Courage?
Build a Strong heart?