



Love lifted me!

by Beverley Hutton

**Are you fearfully
and wonderfully
made?**

**Oh yes! Let's shout
that from the
rooftops!**

I am a psychodynamic psychotherapist and Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) Practitioner. At this moment, I need to pause for breath to reflect upon that statement and to praise God for his compassionate love that enables me to make that declaration. I would like to share something of my experience . . .

Since early childhood, I had known God, but my search to find a therapist or a doctor who was willing to integrate faith with therapy seemed impossible. I had to manage that side of who I was, the biggest part of who I am, on my own, and it was this struggle with keeping those two parts of myself separate that led me to establish the mental health charity, Still the Hunger.¹

Over time, I have come to see how difficult (impossible?) it is to determine what is psychological, physical, or spiritual. Is there even a difference anyway? For me, EMDR makes the most sense of this, as processing memory can take the form of visual images, sounds, our emotions, physical pain, and our spirituality. It involves the whole person. I am constantly amazed by the complexities of the human brain, our central nervous system, and how this all overlaps with the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in one's life. Fearfully and wonderfully made indeed!

I have experienced incredible personal healing through prayer ministry, and I have also encountered God through therapy. I have prayed for others and seen amazing healings, and have also experienced God graciously

partnering with me to help others through the therapeutic skills I have learnt. As therapists we understand how the brain interprets and expresses emotional distress and as Christians, how anger, unforgiveness, and body hatred are loaded with spiritual toxicity. We simply cannot separate out spirituality, physical health, and emotional well-being and try to treat somebody from merely one perspective.

When I was little, I had to find God myself. I lay in bed every night praying the Lord's Prayer repeatedly, over and over and over again. I curled up as small as I could make myself, in fear of something dragging me out of the bed as soon as I shut my eyes. My parents, you see, ran a terrifying and very abusive occult group from our house every week and my sister and I were not allowed to talk about it with anyone. We never did, not even to each other, as if that would somehow make it more real. This ongoing tension took root in my young heart and mind.

It has taken me many years to be able to talk about what happened as it had been so fiercely programmed within me not to talk. In fact, when I first started to write this article I found myself skimming over the details of what had taken place, a tactic I have deployed for most of my life. Only when I began to experience strange flashbacks that didn't appear to fit into the story I remembered, I realised that there had been more to this group than I was prepared to admit, but it is still very hard to integrate this awareness into my history.

A few years ago, a school friend informed me that I had told her, when we were about five or six years old, that Mummy and Daddy used to bring me downstairs at night and tie me up and hurt me. I had told her, apparently, that I was upset about waking up in different places.

I was shocked that I had been able to say this at such a young age,

but I realise now that as things deteriorated further over the years, I must have separated this part of my life completely from the amount of fear I allowed myself to retain. My friend's recollection, though, fitted with the flashbacks, so I came to believe it as true. With this realisation came a gratitude to God for the ability he had given me, whereby I fragmented memories simply in order to survive. Without that happening, I doubt very much that I would have been able to achieve what I have ever since. My experience has given me an understanding that I can use in my work helping others with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) who have suffered all sorts of extreme childhood abuse.

When I was 14, I stopped eating as I felt so overwhelmed with the fear of what we were living through and not having anywhere to turn. I had asked Jesus into my life and I clung to him as the only secure attachment figure in my life, but the most perfect. I could have turned anywhere and I'm so grateful that God was there.

Anorexia took over my life for the next ten years and I found myself sectioned under the Mental Health Act more times than I can remember, locked in a room on a

regime of 'punishment / reward'. This meant the removal of all my clothes, earrings, rings, make-up and books, as well as the enforced absence of phone calls and visitors. There was nothing at all for me to do, and I was even denied normal access to the bathroom and toilet. Total bed rest was the order of those long days, with a nurse sitting by the side of my bed 24/7. I was only allowed to have 'privileges' if I ate several meals in a row, after which I would be rewarded by being allowed to take a shallow bath in a couple of inches of water, while a nurse sitting close by, observing me. Not much of a reward, and with too many sinister associations to my childhood for me to be able to perceive it as being for my benefit.

My strongest reaction occurred when my make-up was removed from me. Unbeknown to me, I was living with undiagnosed Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), which I hadn't even heard of back then in the 1980s. I was so ill that I didn't care about anything else, but the prospect of being seen without my make-up on by those coming into the room, filled me with horrendous anxiety. Attempting to manage this, I insisted that anyone entering my room turned the light



off, and I made sure the shutters on my window were kept closed. Furthermore, I would lay with my face towards the wall all day long. Unfortunately, the problem was compounded when staff realised how much make-up meant to me, which led them to withhold it in terms of leverage and power, hoping to persuade me to eat again. I spent a year living like this and, quite honestly, expected to die, and that was pretty much the expectation of those around me too.

Traumatised and depressed, I didn't believe anybody could help me, but life took a different turn when a local church took me in and gave me a place to live. The love the people there showed me was something I had never experienced before, and alongside discipleship instruction and lots of prayer ministry, I was shown how to live a normal life within the home of a young Christian family in the church. I am completely indebted to them. This helped me to sense a calling on my life, right back then, to help others to never have to go through what I had experienced. This became my daily prayer, although I had no idea how it might be accomplished.

Trusting God to continue finish the work he had in me, I claimed truth over my life on a daily basis; for instance 'God hasn't given me a spirit of fear, but of power, love and a sound mind' (2 Timothy 1:7). I went into church leadership training, before going to work for Freedom in Christ, an organisation that specialises in discipleship training and spiritual liberty. I began to teach a little within the church, on eating disorders and self-harm, praying all the time for the door to open for the establishment of a residential ministry centre.

I knew something was still wrong deep inside me, but was taken by surprise by the emergence and relevance of childhood factors and the discovery that I had Dissociative Identity Disorder.

Maybe this was all connected to the fact that I was good at keeping secrets as my childhood had always been one of secrets, and even in hospital I had never betrayed my parents or told anyone what they had been doing. And in all honesty, it quickly became apparent that I didn't really know myself very well, as a consequence of those parts of my mind that were protecting me from the full horror of my life. My defence mechanisms were very much in place. Even when the flashbacks started, they seemed so ridiculously unlikely that I was still unable to share any of my story for fear of not being believed, or locked up again.



Despite all this, I had also been working in the NHS since my initial healing back in the church. I had been taken under the wing of a consultant surgeon and his wife at the church and he took me to work with him to support his secretary at the hospital (something that would never be allowed now). I gained experience as a medical secretary until I could secure my own paid job in the hospital, then

I worked my way up over the years. I studied NHS Healthcare Management at university on a day release basis and managed to make my way up into senior management. Again, I saw God's hand in this as I knew he was training me for the day when I would open up a ministry centre.

Living with DID led me on a search for therapy, something that I had avoided after my experience of treatment for anorexia. Through my work as a medical secretary, however, I eventually found a medical psychoanalyst who specialised in spiritual trauma, and he was the first person I slowly began to trust with my story, which led me to understand the helpfulness of therapy. Despite the area in which he specialised, he would not pray with me or share his own faith, although I was free to talk about mine, meaning that once again I struggled with what felt like a split. I recognise that this was very much part of who I was as a fragmented person back then, but I felt as if I was having to manage my faith on one hand and my therapy on another. This led me finally to the decision to train as a psychotherapist myself.

I had no idea just how triggering the training would be, with the background that I had come from. I became physically ill, and found myself requiring endless surgery for my hips and subsequently on my spine too. I developed a stomach ulcer, and lost four stone in weight from being constantly sick. The doctors even suspected cancer at this point as I was so ill.

All of this was a physical reaction to my fear of doctors, which was linked to historical sexual abuse by a doctor (when I was anorexic) in addition to the story of my childhood. The fear of having hip surgery, being under general anaesthetic, touched, exposed, examined, and unable to move, was beyond what I could cope with, but led me to discovering Body Dysmorphic Disorder. With the help of a leading consultant

in that field, I was eventually able to disclose the sexual abuse that had taken place, which led to a police investigation and finally being able to tell my husband about everything, after 25 years of marriage at that point.

I completed my training, a major feat, and Still the Hunger opened its work in 2012, offering a Christian therapeutic community programme as a resource for the local church network. It was not until 2015, that I finally experienced healing from the DID, and this came after a short prayer led by Chris Gore, Director of Healing at Bethel Church in California, at a healing conference here in the UK. There had also been an incredible impartation and, as we prayed for others during that period, we saw others experience miraculous healing too.

Despite all the miracles that I personally have experienced, and those in the lives of those with whom I have been privileged to work, I have continued to suffer with my physical health, enduring a dozen or more operations, including three disc implants in my spine. I have continued working but at times have battled with enormous physical pain, which has caused me to cry out to God. He has shown me that there are consequences to living the way I had lived for most of my life. There are consequences to hating yourself, to starving, and to self-harm. There are consequences to living in a way that does not comprehend how much we are loved and valued by God.

If God loves us so much and we are fearfully and wonderfully made, then to some extent we are calling him a liar if we don't believe that about ourselves too. Not only is my body suffering from the years of emotional pain and fear that I was unable to express to anyone, it is also suffering from the years of self-inflicted self-hatred. Where now is the distinction between what is emotional, physical, or spiritual?

I sensed God weeping over not just my life, but over, too, the sheer number of people who hate themselves, and are unable to see themselves as he sees them. I felt a wave of grief from a God who delights in us, who wants to bless us, who wants us to enjoy the gift of life he's given, so that we can marvel in his amazing creation alongside him.

I understand how children end up believing that they are bad, and how a child's brain interprets any such belief in terms of physical attributes, in order to survive and keep the environment outside themselves good. I find that Fairbairn's object relations theory² makes enormous sense regarding how these things go wrong, but that putting them right again involves not just therapy and / or medical intervention, but also the love of God and an understanding of who we are in Christ, as precious, significant, and accepted.

Compassion-focused therapy works brilliantly with learning how to renew your mind with truth. I have also found that EMDR is often the only way to get to the root of the problem beyond the powerful repression associated with conditions such as DID and BDD. It is through EMDR that I have encountered God bringing a deeper healing that gets beyond my own human barriers - not that he needs EMDR to show me anything, but because he is a God who loves to partner with us, working alongside us with the skills we have.

In John 21:1-13 we see the disciples, traumatised following the crucifixion of their Lord. Peter announces that he's going fishing, returning to that with which he is familiar, and the disciples accompany him. They fished all night but caught precisely nothing! Jesus enters the narrative (verse six) and encourages them to throw their nets over to the opposite side. This they did, and were amazed by an enormous catch! Then follows a beach barbecue of freshly-grilled

fish and bread.

In that story, we note that Jesus doesn't actually do the hard work for the disciples. He does, though, bless them with the cooked fish he has at his disposal, inviting them to come and share breakfast together. Jesus invites them to bring what they have. He could of course just as easily have multiplied the fish he was cooking, but he preferred to partner with his friends, utilizing their skill as fishermen. Whatever life-experiences we have had, God will use them. He will turn them around to glorify himself and bless others. This has certainly been my experience at Still the Hunger, where we work with people living with DID, BDD and chronic pain. We use our personal experience, our theoretical understanding, and the tools we have, all in partnership with the God of John 21.

He lifted me out of the hell I was in and, despite my own feelings of utter worthlessness and hopelessness, he uses me to work with him in the treatment of others. I love the way he does that with all of us!

References

- 1 <https://www.stillthehunger.co.uk/>
- 2 <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/fairbairns-object-relations-theory-in-the-clinical-setting/9780231149075>

Beverley Hutton

About the author

Beverley Hutton is a Psychodynamic Psychotherapist & EMDR Europe Accredited Practitioner. She is Clinical Director at Still the Hunger.

