

Exploring the relationship between faith and health

ON Tuesday this week my memoir *Choosing Joy* was published. It explores the relationship between Christian faith and the mental health issues I live with (anxiety and depression).

It illustrates both how some Christian beliefs and the way they have traditionally been taught can be experienced as wounding and how faith can bring comfort in times of emotional pain.

As a child and teenager it was impressed on me that I must be “born again” if I were to be God’s friend, and given a single model of what this would look like, but the prayer didn’t work for me.

There was profound dread that my parents would



Christian Viewpoint

by John Dempster

be taken by Christ at “the Rapture” leaving me alone to face the apocalypse in a godless world.

The expectation that Christians should keep themselves “from the world” persuaded me I couldn’t have real, mutual relationships with others.

Later, I was traumatised (though to a lesser degree because of my growing understanding) by the expectation that our spirituality must conform to

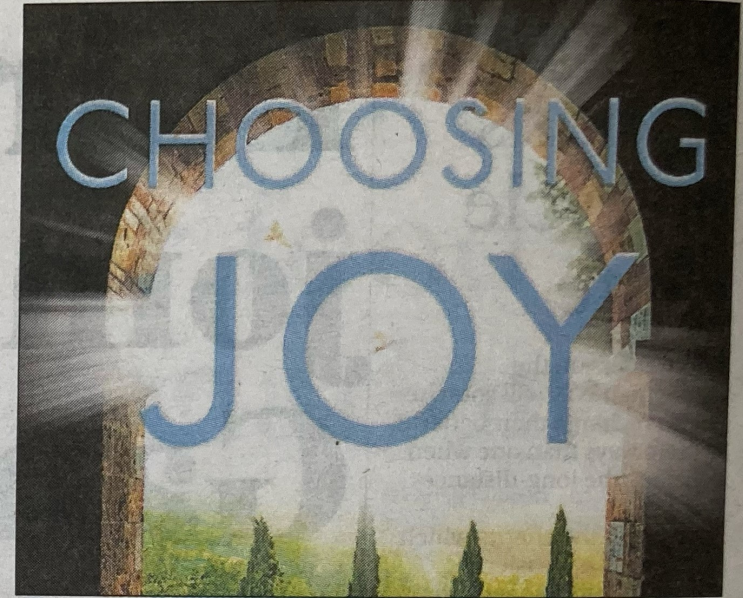


A fundamental goodness lies at the heart of all things and darkness will not have the final word.

the template we were given (receiving “baptism in the Spirit” for example) when the experience eluded me.

And there was the belief that as evangelical Christians we had to sign up to a fixed list of doctrines, which troubled me as I began to doubt the truth of some of what we’d been told and concluded that, in fact, in God’s eyes, how you live is a whole lot more important than the specifics of your beliefs.

Choosing Joy is published out of the conviction that I should share my story of “spiritual trauma” both as a comfort to people with their own stories of trauma, and a gentle reminder to religious leaders of how fragile we are, how easily – and lastingly



Part of the cover of John’s new book.

– wounded.

I remain a Christian, and gladly take my stand in the Christian tradition for two main reasons.

Firstly, it seems to me that something unprecedented and transformational took place that first Easter Sunday. And secondly, the most joy-filled moments of my life, the times I’ve felt most

“whole” have been come in the context of faith in Jesus Christ.

To “choose joy” does not mean pretending darkness doesn’t exist.

Rather it is holding to, and acting on, the conviction that a fundamental goodness lies at the heart of all things, and that darkness will not have the final word.