

## Battling Brain Fog

It starts as an irritation – a few forgotten names, the repeated loss of keys, minor memory lapses that can easily be ignored. But for some of us it progresses to much greater distress. Those of us who have, in the past, had sharp minds and capacious memories gradually find ourselves unable to retain half of what would once would have come so easily. Names of work colleagues, key dates, items on the to-do list seem to slip away as water through a sieve – even a once great ability to focus on the task in front of us can disappear, leaving us feeling unable to concentrate on even the smallest of tasks.

At first, many of us try to cover it up – hopeful the people around won't notice too much. Some try to laugh it off, quips about getting older can deflect from the pain. But, quietly, lots of us can wonder, “what's happening to me?” – “am I going mad?” – “has early onset dementia set in?” Brain fog can have a detrimental effect on our ability to write, speak, even maintain friendships – it whispers in our ears “you're messing up – you're a failure – your value is starting to ebb away”.

### **The God who sees**

The Bible reminds us that God is the God who sees (Psalm 139). He does not fall asleep – he is not unaware of the plight of any of those he loves. Whilst, on a scientific level, it may be the drop in oestrogen that is bringing on brain fog (or possibly some other medical condition – a trip to the GP is wise to rule that out) this symptom of the perimenopause is not happening outside of his gaze. Why is that important? Because when God sees, God loves. His knowledge of us, his presence with us means that even on the days when our minds seem to be betraying us, his love for us is firm, he knows what we need.

### **The God who remembers**

God's sovereignty flows out of his great knowledge of the world over which he rules. Even if we forget many things, nothing is ever going to slip through his net. Whilst we may forget many things, many women can testify to the fact the Lord has brought to mind something crucial at just the right time. He doesn't always, of course – but there are moments when he overrules our confusion and brings Spirit-induced clarity to our world. And, even when he doesn't, we can trust him to lead us into the future well.

### **The God who values**

And it is in this season of forgetfulness and confusion that God can grow us in one important aspect of our faith. Our worth was never rooted in our ability to be productive, it was only ever rooted in who Jesus has made us to be. Our memory or clarity played no part in our election, our adoption, our redemption or the indwelling of the Spirit – our ability to function well has never been relevant to God’s love for us or his decision to bestow the gifts that he sees fit. All that we are is a grace from him, not a product of our mind. So, in the frustration of brain fog, we can cling on to the fact that our status and value has not diminished one jot (1 John 3:1).

### **The God who leads**

Indeed, God’s commitment to us holds firm in the middle of our brain fog. The Good Shepherd who was willing to lay down his life for his sheep, is still the Shepherd who is leading, guiding, protecting and providing (Psalm 23). He has promised to keep leading us until that day he calls us home – even in this painful and confusing part of the journey, his Lordship and care can be utterly relied upon.

### **The God who surrounds**

It can be hard to step back from things when brain fog hits. Most of us would much rather be invincible and keep pressing on as if nothing has changed. But there is merit, at times at least, in looking at our capabilities and capacity and saying, “maybe I do need to review what I do and how much I do in this season”. That’s what wisdom looks like. It probably won’t mean stopping everything, it might simply mean doing life differently – with more support – but brain fog can be an opportunity to grow in humility. It can be the context in which we wrestle afresh with the fact we are not just needed but needy. And that can help us – and, as we delegate more, the people around us – grow.

### **The God who provides wise community**

Our sisters in Christ who have walked this path before us are often brimming with wisdom that helps us persevere. From the simple, “don’t panic” to the more strategic tips of having a single A4 diary where everything you need to remember gets recorded on the appropriate page, there can be practical wisdom shared in abundance. (Paper often works better than tech – you can see more in one glance and its physical presence makes it harder to miss). Breaking tasks down into bitesized chunks – listing out not just “sort admin for home group” but teasing out the stages into “identify term dates – update diary - confirm teaching material – draft email – liaise with co-leader – send message” can mean it’s less likely that a step will be forgotten.

And little by little, brain fog can be something that is persevered through with eyes on Christ. And rather than being a stumbling block, it can be the context for life-giving

growth. After all, “because of the LORD’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail” (Lamentations 3:22).