

A Short Reflection on a Decade of Weakness

I'm being more introspective than normal, but strangely, I feel I need to mark the day.



Ten years ago today I ran my brain into the ground. I had a "break-down."

Some people don't like that negative imagery. They would rather speak of a "break-through" or something more positive. But let's not hide the reality; I broke my brain. It came from my own lack of wisdom, my unresolved insecurities and unhealthy drives, which collided with a complex and conflicted context. I used up all my fuel, and then some. I came to a crashing reverting-to-childlikeness traumatised halt.

In the immediate aftermath was much grace from my church, much strength from my wife and family, and much affection and support from my friends. I was helped to a road to recovery.

I have learned to be open about my experience, mostly on the off-chance that someone reading this is going through the same. I know how useful it is to know that you're not the only one to fall off that path. As a grumpy old churchwarden remarked to me on my way back to being functional, with a knowing wry look of an old bloke who's just seen a welp grow up a bit: "So, you're not as strong as you thought you were, Will."

No, I'm not. That was the painful thing to learn. It was the most blessed thing to grasp.

Ten years later, I am well. Well, well enough. Like an old sporting injury, it'll trigger a twinge every now and then. But the lesson remains.

Ten years and one day ago I thought I was strong. I put my shoulder under every burden. I didn't realise that there comes a point when you're not mustering your strength, you're cashing it in... and spending it.

My strength was my weakness. I was achieving outcomes according to my capacity and my skill. It wasn't nothing; I had some game. But it maxed out at the size of me. It wasn't that impressive.

Over these last ten years, I can see where the real fruit has been; the stuff that lasts, the real stuff that lingers. The sorts of things which makes you give thanks to God and trust that he's true. It's when you see lives turned around, and people baptised, and find in brothers and sisters in missional arms a fellowship that lingers across years and latitudes. It's that sort of stuff that lasts, and it's not generated by my strength.

I used to think I could exercise force of persuasion; now I know that the real stuff happens by the the Spirit touching hearts.

I used to think I could exercise strong directive leadership; now I know that the real stuff happens when good people find themselves together under the apostolic heart of Jesus.

I used to think I could, and should, fix everything and everyone I see; now I know that the real stuff happens when I wait on the Lord.

This isn't passivism or even nihilism. It's still about being present. It's still about being familiar with sufferings. There's still a need for conviction and passion and purpose and excitement. But that only works when it rests on peace. And peace comes not from my feeble strength, but knowing I am

weak, and held by very strong hands.

In short: Jesus, all for Jesus, all about Jesus, all to Jesus, I surrender.

It has been a decade of weakness, beyond anything I ever asked, or imagined.

Thanks be to God.

R U OK? I wasn't.

Today is R U OK? Day. We've all seen the ads with Hugh Jackman. The concept is simple – take a moment to look your friend or co-worker in the eye and ask them “Are you OK?” It may not be necessary, but it does no harm. But it can do a lot of good, as my friend Sally Oakley, blogs, and asks “Well, are you?”



It is also rather poignant for me because a year ago today, I wasn't OK. On the afternoon of September 15 2010 I went to bed and couldn't stop crying. I call it my “crash.” It was “burn out”, a “nervous breakdown” – whatever you call it it was the fruit of mismanaging self-made expectations, working too hard, too long, not listening to my own body when it was sick, nor to my wife in her ever-present wisdom. Above all it came from forgetting the core purpose of my existence – to worship and glorify God through faith, trust and hope.

Last year I needed more than just the question (although that may have helped), I needed to heed the statement: "U R not OK." But I didn't.

This is not the place to tell the details of the story.

Suffice it to say that there has been much grace from many people – not least of which was Gill, and Josh Skeat and many others at Connections and the Parish of Burnie teams who stepped up as I fell down. God, in his grace, switched off my brain and made me rest. He taught me how to worship again, in weakness and utter dependence. He met me through gardening, through sleeping, through moving concrete and walks on the beach. He ministered to me through doctors and counsellors and the wisdom of those who are my leaders in the church. He ministered to me through the soothing truths of my wife's words and affections. I think I learned a lot.

I am now OK.

Some of you are not OK.

Some of you, if I asked the question would answer falsely – with bravado, or assurances, or caveats. Perhaps you need to hear a statement then: U R not OK – you have lost your first love, you are running on empty, that performance-giving stress is about to cause the fuse to blow.

If this is you. If you are where I was...

Please stop. Take the time-out now. Don't fall off the edge.

Don't give an excuse. This must be your priority. Because a crash costs. It costs you. And it costs, very dearly, the ones who are near to you. Go to a doctor. Take some advice. Don't let the diminishing returns spiral out of control.

If you can't stop. If it's "too late" in some sense. Please hear this: even though you are not OK, *you*, as a person, are much much much more than OK. No matter how you feel. Or where you are at. Or what people are saying. This does not

change God's love for you, his grace towards you. He is your refuge. You are safe there. Trust, simply trust.

Hear the heart of Christ, described as the servant in Isaiah 42:3

*A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.*