

“With compassion, clarity and humility, Chris Cipollone walks the reader through a refreshing look at how God’s grace in Christ is the most important antidote for anxiety and depression. As I read *Down, Not Out*, I found myself growing in compassion for so many people I know who struggle in significant ways. Chris offers a personal, gracious God who walks with us, encourages us, and provides hope and comfort along the path. Each carefully written chapter exudes comfort and hope. I can’t think of anyone who doesn’t need that!”

DR TIMOTHY LANE, *President, Institute for Pastoral Care*

“This book is beautifully straightforward, deeply honest and consistently profound. Chris Cipollone not only gives us a gentle yet compelling insight into the world of depression and anxiety, but consistently and winsomely points us to the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom real and ultimate answers are to be found. It may not take long to read this book, but the time invested will change the way you think about and respond to mental-health issues, whether in your own life, your family or the church.”

GARY MILLAR, *Principal, Queensland Theological College*

“For followers of Christ who live with mental illness, this book acknowledges the reality and pain of that suffering, and points to the sweet solace that can be found in our gospel identity.”

TANYA LING, *blogger at GoThereFor.com
and patientreflections.wordpress.com*

“Chris has written a book the church needs. The result is winsome and wise biblical counsel which honours Christ profoundly and will help sufferers and carers alike. I’ve already been helped; now I’ll be using this book, and commending it widely.”

DR ANDREW NICHOLLS, *Director of Pastoral Care,
Oak Hill College*

“Chris ‘gets’ mental illness. He has been in the dark places and openly shares his personal experience. We hear of the help that can be gained from medical and psychological treatments, and the difference that a supportive community can make. But with a pastor’s heart, Chris’s main aim is to speak biblical truth into this difficult context—to gently correct false patterns of thinking and feeling, and above all, to point the reader to the joy and refreshment that is found in knowing that our acceptance, security and hope depend upon God’s unchanging love, not the quality of our mental health.”

KEITH CONDIE, *Co-Director, Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute, Anglican Deaconess Ministries, Sydney, Australia*

“Mental health is an important issue that is often overlooked or misunderstood in the church. *Down, Not Out* is a step in the right direction—an encouraging book for those of us suffering from anxiety and depression, and a helpful guide for those who do not.”

ADAM FORD, *Founder, The Babylon Bee*

“*Down, Not Out* is a wonderfully helpful book for anyone struggling with mental illness or seeking to better love and understand those who face this challenge. God’s immense kindness, faithfulness and goodness in Christ is powerfully proclaimed throughout. I wholeheartedly commend this book and the truth therein that Jesus makes the ultimate difference to depression and anxiety.”

LILY STRACHAN, *Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students*

“Chris Cipollone combines insightful intelligence with the real grit of lived experience to bring perspective and hope to those living with mental-health difficulties.”

JOHN BURNS, *Clinical Psychologist*

CHRIS CIPOLLONE

DOWN
NOT OUT

The logo features a stylized, curved line above the text "the goodbook".
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Down Not Out

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INTRODUCTION

WELCOME

Thanks for picking up this book. We hope you find it helpful. In it we will look at the pain of mental illness, especially depression and anxiety. And we will raise some difficult questions, especially asking what it means for a Christian to live with these illnesses.

Both of us have experienced the pain of depression over many years, so we know first-hand what that struggle is like. Our hope and prayer is that we can serve you well, whether you experience mental illness yourself or are caring for someone who does. We want to give hope and encouragement, as we look together at the difference Jesus makes to those of us who are depressed or anxious. Our belief is that our gospel identity—as loved and forgiven children of God—transforms our experience of these difficult and unwanted illnesses.

But we also want to ask you, please, to take care of yourself. It may well be that the pages of this book raise painful issues for you, maybe even for the first time. If so, please don't struggle alone. One of the joys for any Christian is that they have been adopted into God's family. We have brothers and sisters in Christ. So if the themes of this book cause you to struggle, please turn to a pastor, counsellor or trusted Christian friend for help. Alternatively, you will find a list of supportive organisations at the end of this book.

As we have worked on this book together, we have prayed for those who will read it. Our prayer is that your hope in Jesus will grow as he shows you how your identity in him transforms every area of your life.

Chris Cipollone (*author*)
and Alison Mitchell (*editor*)

CHAPTER 1

THIRTY

My story

My blood pressure had dropped from its normal 120/80 to 90/50. I'm no doctor, but even I know that's not good. I'm sure the unseasonable warmth of a sunny September day was not the main reason I'd collapsed. Rather, it was the climax of the days, weeks, months and years leading up to that moment.

It was the morning of September 23, 2014. In three days' time, I would be turning 30. I had two children under the age of 3 and a wife who loved me, and I was literally weeks away from completing my theological training. I had an offer to join the pastoral team of a church, and the deadline for a decision was looming. I had just completed a personal training session in which I had pushed myself too far, and now I found myself lying on the floor.

Lying on the floor of a psychiatric hospital.

It wasn't meant to be like this. Turning 30 should have been momentous for so many reasons, but this shouldn't have been one of them. Instead of celebrating with my kids and enjoying breakfast in bed, I would wake up to a nurse and pills.

My twenties had been a time of great change—graduation from university, the beginning of a career, marriage, parenthood, multiple house moves and entry into vocational ministry. Through it all, career choices had become my greatest anxiety. On the cusp of another life-change, I couldn't cope. What if I made the wrong decision? What if I was heading down a path that was not well suited to me? Shouldn't I have felt validated in the “call” to ministry? Instead, I was crippled.

In the years leading up to this, I had been on and off medication, in and out of psychologists' offices. In the week prior to my admission to hospital, I walked around my neighbourhood at 3am, sure that God would give me an answer. Instead, all I felt was further turmoil. I knew I needed more medical help than I'd received to that point. Life was impossible, and in my mind, it was no longer worth living with this kind of pain. Perhaps you have felt like this as well.

Seasons

A friend once introduced me to the idea that life is made up of seasons, each with its own joys and challenges. Some seasons are marked by change, others by stability.

It made me think of a song I first heard at my grandparents' house as a young boy. That song was "Turn! Turn! Turn!" by The Byrds. It's a song that says there's a time for everything. What I didn't realise until later in my walk with God was that the words came from the Bible:

*There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:*

*A time to be born and a time to die,
A time to plant and a time to uproot,
A time to kill and a time to heal,
A time to tear down and a time to build,
A time to weep and a time to laugh,
A time to mourn and a time to dance,
A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
A time to search and a time to give up,
A time to keep and a time to throw away,
A time to tear and a time to mend,
A time to be silent and a time to speak,
A time to love and a time to hate,
A time for war and a time for peace.*

ECCLESIASTES 3 v 1-8

The years leading up to this lowest of points in my life seemed like one long season of tearing down. There was very little building or planting, but rather, what felt like constant uprooting. Laughing and dancing had made way for weeping and mourning.

Since graduating from university, anxiety about what to do next had plagued me. I initially trained as a teacher, and worked quite happily in the classroom for a number of years. But I worried about how long I could remain in the profession. So I considered any possible career you could imagine: doctor, marketing executive, carpenter, gelato-maker, pilot, psychologist, sporting coach. The list went on and on, and so did the days I fretted about it.

After much agonising, my wife, Lara, and I decided I should go to Bible college. Given the anxieties that had led up to the moment, I'm not going to give a romanticised picture of receiving a calling to go. All I knew was that what I felt most strongly about in this life was the gospel. I was passionate about sharing my faith with others.

And so I went. Some see Bible college as a route towards church ministry. I didn't see it that way. I could also envisage myself in school chaplaincy, or maybe a not-for-profit organisation, or even academia. I was sure I'd know at the end of the three years of training which avenue God had placed before me. So here I was, after a long season in the wilderness, waiting for a clear path.

And it wasn't coming.

I felt as if I'd wandered through the desert. Not for 40 years, but for at least five years since growing discontent with my teaching career. I thought this would be the time when I'd peer over the mountain, and gaze out at what was set before me. Instead, I had become a ball of anxiety, unable to know which way to go.

A diagnosis

In time, what I thought was anxiety a psychiatrist diagnosed as depression. The two often go hand in hand. The reason I couldn't work out what to do was because I couldn't help but see the negative in everything. Nothing was appealing because life itself had become impossible to enjoy. When I thought about being a doctor, all I could think of was the oppressive training involved. When I thought about being a pilot, I could only see the financial costs. And when I thought about carpentry, the toll on my body was too much to imagine.

For the final 12 months of my Bible-college training, the church I was working at as a student minister was keen for me to come on board at the end of the year. In my depression, I couldn't see the positive in the situation—but of course no other option seemed any different. In my depression, everything seemed hopeless.

For the reader

Perhaps you are reading this book because you live with mental illness. If so, it is my hope and prayer that my story will encourage you to see that your faith in Christ can make a dramatic difference in how you navigate your life. My story does get better, and so can yours.

Don't hear me over-promising. I still live with depression. But life has seasons, and in God's grace it is possible to press on. Your life has dignity because God gave it to you. Read this book at your own pace. It's

intentionally written in short chapters so you can digest as much, or as little, as you can cope with.

Maybe you're reading this book because you care deeply about someone who is suffering from mental illness. If that is you, thank you. Thank you that you care deeply enough to offer an outstretched hand. I should warn you that it's likely there will be times when your offers of help will not be wanted or appreciated. You will probably do or say the wrong thing. Please rest in God's grace and keep loving that person, whoever they may be.

Maybe you don't know of anyone who is presently suffering, but you're learning of the effects and extent of mental illness. For you, I hope this book helps you better understand what mental illness looks like, particularly for the servant of Christ.

Or maybe you have reservations about mental illness, doubting its legitimacy. If this is you, can I assure you that depression and anxiety are real. Thank you for picking up this book, and I would encourage you to approach it with an open mind.

I'm aware that this is my story, and that the stories of others will be very different. Depression and anxiety are as individual as those who live with them. But no matter what the life circumstances, causes, manifestations or treatments, I know that in the gospel we have one identity in Jesus Christ—and so I hope for this reason that the pages of this book prove useful for all who read them.

A gospel identity

Throughout this book, I will come back to the idea that, as Christians, we have a “gospel identity”. What do I mean by this? In the gospel, we have victory over sin, death and the devil. This victory is achieved for us through Christ’s death and resurrection, in spite of our own sin.

This truth leads us to rightly conclude that God loves us more than we could imagine. When we experience dark times and feel as though God doesn’t care, we must come back to the fact that he has not even spared his own Son in pursuit of us. Our identities are not as depressives, or the anxious. We are not defined by bipolar, schizophrenia or addiction. These may all be significant parts of our journey through life, but they are not at the core of who we are. Rather, we are beloved children of God, and this, more than any other truth, must impact how we navigate mental illness.

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

I JOHN 3 V I

For reflection

The beauty of the gospel is that, even at our lowest, we are more than our illness. If we are in Christ, then our identity is secure in him. This helps us to process and grow through all seasons.