

Jing's story: A journey towards recovery...

My name's Jing, and I'm a 21-year-old university student. I developed bulimia nervosa when I was 14 and struggled with it for years. I'm sharing my story in the hope that it might help someone else.

I was born in Asia, and my family immigrated to Australia when I was 12-years-old. My parents aren't religious, but they sent me to a private Christian school to get a good education. I became a Christian at school camp when I was 13.

I felt really lonely as I struggled to settle into Australia and to make friends. Kids at school started bullying me about my weight when I went through puberty. Before that I'd always been a fairly slim. I felt like my body had betrayed me; changing in ways that felt out of control. I felt unsafe and ashamed - like I wasn't good enough.

So, I thought I'd do something about it and I started dieting with Mum when I was 13. When I was dieting, I felt really hungry and started eating uncontrollably when Mum was at work. Strangely, I found that that made me feel numb - which was a temporary relief from my loneliness and not feeling enough. But I felt so guilty afterwards. I thought God must see me as a disappointment. I certainly felt like one - I felt weak, and pathetic and unlovable. Around that time, I saw a girl make herself vomit to lose weight on TV. I started doing that after binge eating to try to make myself feel better and stop myself from gaining weight. It seemed like a solution. But it really just created more problems.

When I started university, the dieting, bingeing and purging got worse. On the outside I looked fine, but inside I felt completely overwhelmed and consumed by my thoughts. It's strange - how something so loud and world consuming could be silent to everyone else. I kept telling myself that I was going to stop, but then I'd do it again - it was just a massive cycle.

I was scared and ashamed to ask for help. Out of desperation and with a friend's encouragement I eventually started seeing a university psychologist. It was really hard - but also a relief not to be trying to deal with it alone. The psychologist started helping me to understand the eating disorder and explore why I was doing what I was doing. She also encouraged me to see a dietitian, who helped me begin to establish a more regular eating pattern. During treatment, my psychologist also asked me whether I had any religious beliefs, explaining that she'd had some other clients who had found their faith helpful in eating disorder recovery. I'd never really considered that before: I felt like a disappointment to God, but otherwise my faith and my eating disorder seemed disconnected.

I started looking up online stories from Christians who'd recovered from eating disorders. And I shared what I was going through with an older lady who I trusted from the church that I used to attend. I started to realise that perhaps I didn't really understand grace - that I'm completely and utterly acceptable before God, because of what Jesus has done. That I'm the one who God never turns his face from. That God could be my safe place, and I could run to Him in prayer. Knowing that God made all foods - and so they couldn't be bad - helped me start to challenge my food rules and be a bit more flexible. And even though it didn't always feel like it, knowing that God made my body and that it doesn't matter what we look like because God loves all of us was reassuring.

Things didn't get better overnight. There were still days when I felt ugly, times when the bingeing and purging just kept happening, and nights when I was yelling at God and crying on the floor. And I do feel like I'm still on a journey of really internalising God's grace. But slowly - gradually - things did improve.

And I'm so grateful. I actually like myself now. And I didn't know you could live like this - I didn't realise that other people live like this - eating what I want and enjoying food. Thinking less about food and exercise gives me freedom to do other things that I value in life. I still feel lonely sometimes, but I have hope for the future, rather than just thinking about the despair of the now. I want to use my experience to help others through this journey.