

Running the Race

(Oxford Centre for Mission Studies website, 2021-07)

David Symon

Our scholar, David Symon, shares how he carried on with his research through chemotherapy..

“PhD is a journey,” our group was told during our induction at OCMS. I knew my PhD research would take years of perseverance considering that I was doing it part time alongside my ministry obligations and raising four small children. What I was not prepared for was what took place in 2020. I had not been feeling well for some time. One day, my doctor called me into his consulting room and said: ‘Listen, you have nearly zero white blood cells,’ and sent me promptly to the hospital for more check-ups. There they figured I had acute leukaemia and immediately started chemotherapy.

It was hard, but after the initial shock, my wife and I had peace. The good thing was it was the most treatable type of leukaemia. Many people prayed for us all over the world; the OCMS community prayed for me. From the beginning I felt God’s presence and enormous support from people. One night, my roommate and I were watching a movie about Formula 1. The stands were full of spectators, and I realized: “This is it, I have full stands of people watching me as in Hebrews 12: the cloud of witnesses and I run the race together .”

When I was better, they brought my laptop to the hospital, and I started to analyse the interviews I performed the previous two years. My roommate was a sales manager and had a laptop too, so we both had our “home office” and worked even as chemotherapy went into our veins.

I was reminded that I am not the lord of my life. Romans 14:7-8 says that whether we live or die, we do it for the Lord for we are His. So, if anything bad is happening to me, it does not mean I should turn my back on God. On the contrary, I need to be with Him even more. There is not much privacy in the hospital, but I had my earphones and was able to listen to worship music and pray. God touched me, and those were precious moments.

Currently, I am doing well. I’ve recently sent in the full text of my thesis on identity of Czech missionaries in former Yugoslavia countries. I’m near the end of my studies at OCMS! I would

like to encourage my fellow travellers at OCMS that no matter what major or minor obstacles appear on your PhD journey, stick to God and press on.