


MENTAL  
HEALTH   
IN THE
PSALMS  

TROY M. BORST

Mental Health in the Psalms

*An Attempt at A Helpful View
of Mental Illness and
Christianity*

By

Rev. Dr. Troy M. Borst

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If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org or 800-273-8255.

Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a volunteer crisis counselor.

If you need assistance locating long-term mental health resources, talking through a problem, or exploring mental health treatment options, call 211 to speak with a live person who can help.

Veterans Crisis Line call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and press 1; or text 838255

ccef.org/find-a-counselor-near-you

THANK YOU

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DEFINITIONS HEREIN

ADHD: Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder is one of the most common mental disorders affecting children. Symptoms include inability to keep focus, hyperactivity and impulsivity. This is not the same as “that kid needs to be spanked.”

Anxiety: A feeling of dread, fear, and uneasiness resulting in a physical reaction of fatigue, sleep disturbance, or restlessness. This is not the same as worry.

Bible: The inerrant inspired Word of God containing the 66 books of the Old Testament (Genesis-Malachi) and the New Testament (Matthew-Revelation).

Brain Chemistry: The make-up of the human brain of neurons, electrons, hormones, proteins, and peptides along with physical brain matter which produces patterns of thought/feelings.

Church (with a big ‘C’): When the word Church is used I mean Christianity and most churches in general. When the word is used not capitalized, I most likely mean your local church.

Christian Counseling: Counseling done by a Christian who has an accredited degree in counseling or Christian counseling.

Compassionate Intrusion: Prayerfully humbly helping a mentally ill family member or dear friend find the correct doctor and/or medication right for them because their patterns of thinking are not allowing them to pursue it.

Condemnation: A religious word used to describe just punishment or guilt based on the breaking of God's Law.

Condemnation [self]: The act or habit of punishing oneself as worthless or useless because of sin or mistakes or abuse. Self-condemnation can have roots in truth or untruth.

Defensive Thinking: The priority of a hurt person to avoid further loss or any type of suffering leading to inaction or actions that they perceive will induce no more harm.

Depression: Feelings of sadness or anger with a loss of purpose in a situation for a season or for a lifetime.

Depression [dysthymic]: Chronic depression lasting for years usually triggered by an event, but propelled by brain chemistry and sometimes predetermined by genetics.

Despair: The complete loss or absence of hope.

DSM-5 / DSM-V: The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders is in its 5th edition as of 2013 and is the official dictionary encyclopedia manual for mental health professionals. The DSM-5-TR was released in 2022 and adds some entries and textual updates.

Eating disorder: An umbrella term for serious mental conditions affecting physical, psychological, and social function with regards to food and self-image.

Emotional Intelligence: The ability to be self-aware of feelings, what has triggered them, and in an advanced stage... how to properly deal with the emotion.

God: YHWH of the Bible Who is the Creator and only Eternal Being. First Person of the Trinity; the Elohim of elohim.

Guilt [objective]: A palpable negative view of 'self' predicated on the inner responsibility for violating boundaries, laws, rules, or religious truth.

Guilt [subjective]: A palpable negative view of 'self' predicated on the inner responsibility for something, even though they know that they did nothing wrong nor have they violated any laws or rules.

Holy Spirit: The eternal Spirit of YHWH; Third Person of the Trinity; sent as a deposit and seal after Jesus Christ's ascension into heaven for believers in Jesus.

IBS: Irritable Bowel Syndrome is an umbrella term for various GI tract issues. Individuals with IBS often have higher rates of anxiety disorders, depression, and other mental health issues compared to the general population.

Jesus Christ: The co-eternal Son of God; Second Person of the Trinity; Provider of salvation for all people.

Loneliness: A state of mind (pattern of thinking) mixed with emotions where one feels isolated resulting in painful inner emptiness.

Medication: Psychotropic pills or injections which alter the brain chemistry or mental state of a person towards mental health and away from mental illness.

Meditation: Thinking in your own mind about yourself or other issues with the Holy Spirit connecting you to God reframing what you are thinking and feeling. May include some breathing exercises. You may call it prayer if you like.

Mental Health: A balance of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health expressed through the ability to properly-regularly cope with life situations and people.

Mental Illness: An imbalance of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health expressed through the inability to properly-regularly cope with life situations and people.

OCD: Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a long-lasting life-interfering disorder in which a person experiences uncontrollable recurring obsession and engages in repetitive compulsions.

Panic attack: A sudden (once or reoccurring) intense episode of exaggerated fear and emotional discomfort that can cause unexpected physical sensations.

Pastoral Counseling: A conversation with one's pastor either once or regularly in which the non-certified person

listens, directs to the Bible, prays, and offers any advice for which they are asked.

Prayer: Talking to God the Father in Jesus Name in the power of the Holy Spirit.

PTSD: A mental health condition, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, that's triggered by a terrifying event. One can either experience it or witness it.

Shalom: (sha-low-m) The utter peace that passes all understanding, predictability, and rationality given only by God Almighty through His Holy Spirit.

Shalom Health: The spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical together producing a healthy individual rather than efforts that are separate.

Shame [chronic]: The consistent feeling of “not good enough” or “never measuring up” when it comes to self-worth and identity.

Shame [existential]: Guilt, disgrace, and embarrassment one assigns to oneself based on self-judgment. Not easily dislodged from the psyche.

Shame [toxic]: Any guilt, disgrace, or embarrassment allowed to fester in a heart, mind, or soul generating the formation of low self-esteem, anxiety, perfectionism, addiction, and eating disorders.

Shame [transient]: Guilt, disgrace, or embarrassment based on a mistake in a social setting which passes quickly.

Sin: Any wrongdoing against God or other people or self; based on God's law.

Sleep hygiene: A set of habits that are conducive to promoting good quality sleep leading to overall mental health.

Stress [distress]: Stress that is harmful.

Stress [eustress]: Stress that is beneficial.

Therapy: Regular meetings with a certified counselor to talk over life, issues, and move towards possible resolutions of those mental and emotional issues.

Worry: Apprehensive expectation that is centered around circumstances or a person. Considered situational and is not the same as anxiety (though it is a form of it).

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON BEFORE READING:

What do you hope to get out of this book?

What is your current opinion on mental health and the Bible/Christianity?

What is your current opinion on mental health and the Church?

Does mental illness run in your family?

Are you willing to follow God, the Scriptures, and listen to His perspective on mental illness and mental health?

Are you predisposed against medication or therapy?

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE BIBLE

CHAPTER 1

"In a moment of desperation, Jesus could have spoken new revelations or said nothing, but He chose the cling to the written Word as His sword in the battle. We cannot live on bread—natural means—alone. We cannot rely solely on medication or any other means that has been provided for us in the wilderness, but only by the Word of God. Jesus knew this and He lived this." – Julie Busler

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as *“a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in.”*¹

Why bring up this definition?

We are beginning a journey in the Psalms and our focus is going to be mental health. Before we get too far, we have to address an issue that may plague us in these chapters as we read, think, and pray about mental health.

¹ [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response)

I have to dive right in and bring this up right away or you may put this book down right away.

The issue: We may not think this is a worthy topic to address in a Christian book or study in the Bible or bring up in Church.

Mental health is not a topic that the Church (the big 'C' church) traditionally addresses well. In fact, I believe we have epically failed like Samson trying to keep a vow or the Apostle Paul writing something simple. Over the years, we Christians have left mental health to godless psychoanalysts and human-centered therapists to the detriment of generations of Christians.

In reviewing this book, my daughter asked me what that previous statement meant to me. I think she was a little offended for her professional field. I thought it was self-evident, but upon further investigation, this may not be so and it is quite an extreme blanket statement.

Human-centered therapy is good, involves the religion of the client, and takes the whole person into account. This is great! Yet, many times God and faith are left out of the equation of mental health or is even seen as the source of illness. In addition, championing 'self' as the solution to our ills, whatever they may be, is never the whole answer. Seeking ourselves as the center of what will heal us is a dead-end avenue with hooligans in the shadows lurking to jump us.

We have not done a good job addressing mental illness and mental health with regards to faith.

Justin Cantuar, the Archbishop of Canterbury says: “People who face mental health challenges do so in every aspect of their lives: in their faith, which often underpins the rest of their worldview, their work, their families and their identity. It has been the case in the past that the worlds of faith and mental health have often been polarized. The guilt that some in Christian communities have been made to feel when it is falsely assumed that mental health issues are a result of sin, and the erroneous belief that failure to be ‘cured’ means that one is somehow lacking in faith, have meant that many in the Church have suffered an extra and heavy burden unnecessarily.”²

We divide mental health and spiritual health as two different areas of life. Not everything a psychologist or psychiatrist may offer is terrible or even untrue, but God has much to say about mental health because our mind is an integral part of how God Almighty made us.

FULL DISCLOSURE: I do believe that the Bible (both the Old Testament and the New Testament) deal with mental health, but one must really dig to find God’s Word as it applies to how we talk about mental health in our culture. It is there, but we often miss it. The emphasis is there for their culture, but language and metaphor drift with time. Culture shifts so we have to dig a little to find Truth.

Don’t be discouraged.
I’ll help you dig.

² The Bible and Mental Health: Towards a Biblical Theology of Mental Health. (2020). United Kingdom: SCM Press.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Mental health is described and dealt with in the Old Testament to be sure. From Moses' palpable anxiety of going back to Egypt to face Pharaoh (Book of Exodus) to Jeremiah's extended lamentations and sadness (Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations); the Bible does show mental struggles.

A great example of depression that comes and goes, but definitely lasted for years comes from 1 Samuel 1 with a dear woman named Hannah. Hannah has a loving husband, but he is also a bonehead because he has more than one wife.

Hannah had no children while the other woman did have children. This brought great distress, self-criticism, shame, and low esteem to Hannah year after year. Her emotional pattern was one of shame which impacted her outlook on life and her appetite. The depression would get worse every time she would go to worship with her family.

1 Samuel 1:7-8 (ESV)

“So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore, Hannah wept and would not eat. 8 And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

We have a word for that: depression.

One of the best examples (one that surprises us) is the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 18-19. Elijah is dealing with acute isolation, severe depression, and suicidal thoughts. Elijah was a prophet of God, perhaps the greatest prophet ever in the Old Testament, but that did not make him exempt from extreme mental health pressures.

He was pressed and pressed and felt like giving up.

We are introduced to Elijah and throughout his life we see him being fed by ravens sent by God, raising the dead, leading a school of prophets, healing, and calling down fire from heaven. This man was a prophet of God in every sense of the word. Yet, he felt like he was the only one obeying the Lord.

1 Kings 18:22 (ESV)

“Then Elijah said to the people, “I, even I only, am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are 450 men.”

1 Kings 19:10 (ESV)

“He said, “I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”

Elijah served the Lord and there came a point where he felt like the sole voice for God. Everyone else was advocating another way. In 1 Kings 18, Elijah points out that there are 450 prophets of Baal... which are those that serve an idol.

He doesn't mention it in this verse, but in context there are 400 prophets of another idol as well... 850 total.

I can kinda see where Elijah is coming from. 850 religious leaders are saying to follow idols and forget the God of Israel, but he is there calling people to God. He calls people to faithfulness to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob Who is the God who led the people of Israel from Egypt.

We can see what creates the feelings of isolation and depression in Elijah. Most of the time we want to fit in to be accepted by others. It is difficult when we stick out and stand out or can be pointed at as being very different. Elijah felt like he was the only one pointing people to God, he was the lone voice, and it wore on him. He felt isolated and alone. Feeling isolated and alone can make you want to quit.

For him, it made him want to die.

1 Kings 19:4-8 (ESV)

“But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” 5 And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” 6 And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. 7 And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.” 8 And he arose and ate and

drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God.”

Elijah was so depressed he wanted to die. The Bible describes this. Don't miss it. The Bible describes this committed man of God struggling in the depths of his soul. He rested. He ate. He was ministered to. He ate. He then went to the presence of God. That is not a prescription on how to get out of depression, but a description of what happened to Elijah.

Certainly, we encounter mental illness in the Psalms. I happen to personally believe that the best place to dig into mental health in the Bible is in the Psalms. Mental health issues exist in the Psalms.

A great example of depression that touches on the dysthymic or chronic depression is King David who wrote many of the Psalms and whose life we read about in 1st-2nd Samuel and 1st Chronicles.

We see a pattern of thought and feelings from David that seem to indicate that depression was a persistent damaging impactful part of his daily life.

Psalm 6:6 (ESV)

“I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.”

Psalm 13:2 (ESV)

“How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?”

Psalm 42:3 (ESV)

“My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?””

Psalm 69:20 (ESV)

“Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.”

Psalm 102:4 (ESV)

“My heart is struck down like grass and has withered; I forget to eat my bread.”

We have a word for all of that: depression.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

An emphasis on the mind and mental health exists in the New Testament... even in the ministry of Jesus! Let’s just take a look quite quickly at the Gospel of Mark for example:

Mark 3:20-21 (ESV)

“Then He [Jesus] went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. 21 And when His family heard it, they went out to seize Him, for they were saying, ‘He is out of His mind.’”

I cannot help but see in Mark 3 that Jesus’ family was concerned for His mental health as He began His ministry which was physically and emotionally taxing. In their opinion, He was not taking care of Himself and they thought He was traveling down a destructive path.

Mark 8:32-33 (ESV)

“And He said this plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. 33 But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’”

In Mark 8, Jesus sees in Peter unhealthy thought patterns that were leading him away from God and towards Satan. Jesus wanted to correct them immediately. Peter’s thought life led him to act in ways that had to be changed.

Mark 12:29-30 (ESV)

“Jesus answered, ‘The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’”

Even in Mark 12 Jesus cites the most important command from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) as focusing on God with our hearts and souls and also our minds!

Not only do we see this emphasis on the “mind” in the life and ministry of Jesus, but the word “mind” itself is used 139 times in the Bible, 75 times in the New Testament, and 10 times in the book of Romans including Romans 12:2:

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

My point is simply this: We should not ignore mental health for it is an integral part of how God fashioned us as human beings.

God knows us best as our Creator and as the All-Knowing Almighty, we should absolutely understand God's Word for us about mental health.

Mental health issues exist in the Psalms (which we shall dig into), but other passages deal with this tender topic as well.

HERE ON OUT

From here on out, we will look at the Psalms and dig into them because they hold for us Holy Spirit inerrant inspired Truth from God about mental health, mental illness, and coping with these pressing issues.

We will not cover every Psalm in this book.

We will go in an order that will help you think through various issues that touch on mental health.

KEY QUESTION: HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE MENTAL ILLNESS?

Recognizing signs of mental illness can vary widely (we may not note them ourselves), but there are some general signs and symptoms:

- ❑ Prolonged change in mood or behavior from your “norm”: Shifts in mood such as prolonged sadness, irritability, or anxiety are a good indicator. Excessive anger is also a good indicator when it is over a prolonged period of time.
- ❑ Difficulty coping with daily stress and problems: Everyone has stress and issues, but feeling overwhelmed by ordinary tasks and unable to manage responsibilities at work, school, or home might indicate just a hard season or a mental struggle settling in.
- ❑ Impaired thinking patterns is a solid symptom. Difficulty concentrating, problems with memory, disorganized thinking, or inability to think clearly might be an indicator of poor mental health.
- ❑ In general, people do not seek to harm themselves temporarily or permanently as this is an indication of unhealthy thoughts and emotions.
- ❑ Legal or illegal substance abuse or alcohol use can be a trigger for mental illness and/or can be used to deal with mental illness.

❑ Prolonged sin for someone who is highly religious can be a trigger for mental illness. The prolonged guilt, fear, or anxiety with sin can impact brain chemistry in a permanently damaging manner.

❑ Prolonged negative self-perception can be a trigger for mental illness. Persistent feelings of worthlessness, guilt, or low self-esteem impact mental health in significantly negative ways.

❑ Because we are integrated beings, mental illness may present physical symptoms such as sleeplessness, headaches, stomach aches, IBS, frequent illnesses, and heart issues.

❑ A general feeling of disconnection with self, life, and relationships may be an indicator of poor mental health.

❑ Experiences that are not shared by others such as paranoia, hallucinations, and/or delusions most likely indicate mental illness.

❑ Extreme mood swings are an indicator of mental health struggles. These dramatic shifts in emotions are out of proportion to the circumstances.

❑ Social withdrawal is an indicator of mental illness. Avoiding social interactions, neglecting personal relationships, or isolating oneself is a large sign of struggle.

If you are experiencing several of these symptoms persistently over a period of time (usually weeks to months) and they are interfering with your daily life, these may be signs that you are experiencing not just a difficult time in life, but mental illness.

=====

nami.org/about-mental-illness/warning-signs-and-symptoms/

webmd.com/mental-health/mental-health-making-diagnosis

KEY QUESTION: HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE MENTAL ILLNESS? [PHQ9 FORM]

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3
3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3
4. Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3
5. Poor appetite or overeating	0	1	2	3
6. Feeling bad about yourself – or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite – being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way	0	1	2	3

Total Score _____ = _____ + _____ + _____

Total Score _____

If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

- Not difficult at all
 Somewhat difficult
 Very difficult
 Extremely difficult

Major depressive disorder (MDD) is suggested if:

- Of the 9 items, 5 or more are checked as at least 'more than half the days'
- Either item 1 or 2 is checked as at least 'more than half the days'

Other depressive syndrome is suggested if:

- Of the 9 items, between 2 to 4 are checked as at least 'more than half the days'
- Either item 1 or 2 is checked as at least 'more than half the days'

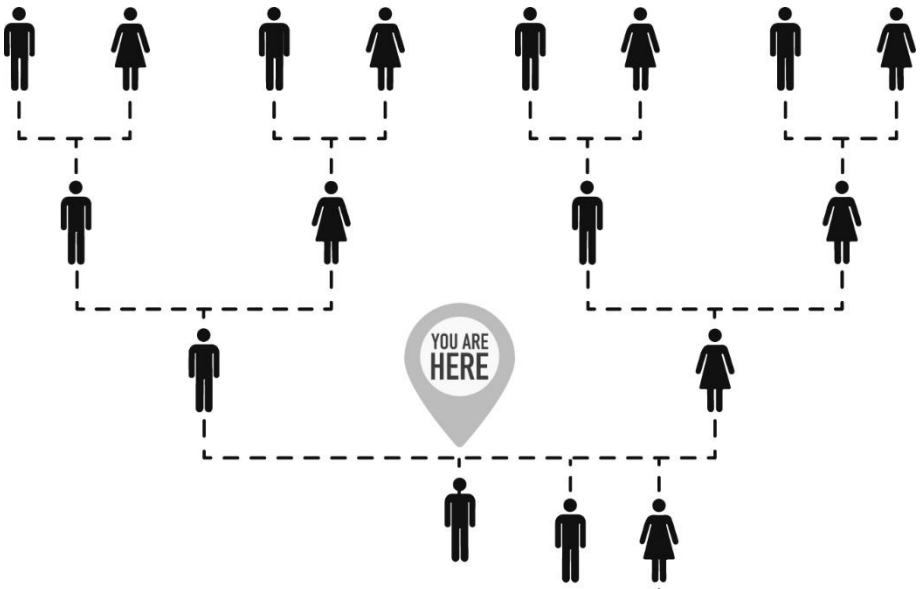
PHQ-9 scores can be used to plan and monitor treatment. To score the instrument, tally the numbers of all the checked responses under each heading (not at all=0, several days=1, more than half the days=2, and nearly every day=3). Add the numbers together to total the score on the bottom of the questionnaire. Interpret the score by using the guide listed below.

Guide for Interpreting PHQ-9 Scores		
Score	Depression Severity	Action
0 - 4	None-minimal	Patient may not need depression treatment.
5 - 9	Mild	Use clinical judgment about treatment, based on patient's duration of symptoms and functional impairment.
10 - 14	Moderate	Use clinical judgment about treatment, based on patient's duration of symptoms and functional impairment.
15 - 19	Moderately severe	Treat using antidepressants, psychotherapy or a combination of treatment.
20 - 27	Severe	Treat using antidepressants with or without psychotherapy.

KEY QUESTION: HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE MENTAL ILLNESS? [family history]

PRAY and THINK about your blood related relatives. Is there a history of mental illness or struggles in your family? Please keep in mind that family verbiage about mental illness may be unique to your family or it might be a well-hidden secret.

Circle below any blood relatives you know or suspect may have had mental health struggles on a regular basis.



PSALM 40 (ESV)

“I waited patiently for the LORD; He inclined to me and heard my cry. 2 He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. 3 He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD. 4 Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie! 5 You have multiplied, O LORD my God, Your wondrous deeds and Your thoughts toward us; none can compare with You! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told. 6 In sacrifice and offering You have not delighted, but You have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required. 7 Then I said, “Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your law is within my heart.” 9 I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as You know, O LORD. 10 I have not hidden Your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness from the great congregation. 11 As for You, O LORD, You will not restrain Your mercy from me; Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness will ever preserve me! 12 For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me. 13 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me! 14 Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether who seek to snatch away my life; let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who delight in my hurt! 15 Let those be appalled because of their shame who say to me, “Aha, Aha!” 16 But may all who seek You rejoice and be glad in You; may those who love Your salvation say continually, “Great is the LORD!” 17 As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my Help and my Deliverer; do not delay, O my God!”

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PSALMS

Psalm 40 | #mentalhealth

CHAPTER 2

“Historically, Christians have been actively involved in ministries of healing and stressed the importance of caring for the human body. Surprisingly, however, as at least one study has suggested, among the various groups of Christians, members of more theologically conservative Christian groups generally have more negative attitudes toward people who face mental health difficulties, primarily due to the association of mental illness with personal sin and demonic possession. Although a movement has emerged with the aim of raising awareness of mental illness in US churches, it has failed to reach the entire Christian population in the country.”

- Santiago Almazar (2017)

Music is not a big thang to me. I don't sing well at all and I play no instruments. I was neither in the school band nor in the choir. I have tried thrice to learn the guitar, but have quit thrice. I also can never tell what lyrics are when I hear them on the radio. Never. It is quite frustrating.

I mention music because there is a whole book in the Bible in the Old Testament that are songs. Bibley people call them Psalms. We call them psalms to be confusing and to set them apart from regular pagan musak that rots the soul.

That's not true, but quite funny.

They are called ‘psalms’ and not ‘songs’ because the formation of English comes from Anglian, Latin, French, with a side of Greek. In those languages, a spiritual song expressing thanksgiving often played on a harp was called a ‘psealm,’ ‘psalmus,’ ‘psaume,’ and ‘psalmos’ respectively. Basically, we stole the word and now we are stuck with it refusing to pronounce the ‘P.’

The Book of Psalms in the Old Testament, many written by King David (his life is found in 1 and 2 Samuel), is an ideal book to dig into mental health because the psalms often share with us unfiltered thoughts, raw emotions, and a mind that is awash with the highest of highs and the lowest of lows.

PSALM 40 VERSE 12: OUR ORIENTATION

Our Psalm in this chapter is Psalm 40. As we read Psalm 40 (printed for you right before this chapter), we are meant to center on verse 12 which gives for us an orientation about the whole psalm.

Psalm 40:12 (ESV)

“For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me.”

Notting Hill is a 1999 Romantic Comedy movie starring Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant which still stands all these years later as one of my favorites.³ The story centers on William Thacker, an unsuccessful Notting Hill England bookstore owner who meets Anna Scott, the world’s most beautiful

³ Universal Pictures, 1999

woman and best-liked actress, when she enters his shop. A little later, William literally runs into her again spilling orange juice over her. Eventually, Anna and William get to know each other better over the months she is in England and that's all I will tell you about "a girl standing in front of a boy asking him to love her."

One scene in that movie came to mind as I thought about Psalm 40, the orientation of the Psalm, and where it is leading our thoughts.

At one point in the movie, the famous Anna Scott joins William Thacker for dinner where she meets his closest friends. At the end of dinner, the host says: "I am going to give the last brownie as a prize to the saddest person here." It is a competition among all who are there at the table.

A man speaks up to say he works at a job he does not understand, everyone gets promoted above him, and he has no romantic prospects because he is overweight. A lady at the table admits she works a low-paying job in the world's worst record store, she has googly eyes, and is attracted to cruel men. The wife of the host chimes in that she is in a wheelchair the rest of her life in a house full of ramps, she's given up smoking, and she and her husband cannot have children. The host then points out William who is unsuccessful professionally, divorced, used to be handsome, is now "squidgy around the edges," and that his nickname in school was Flobby. He is of course embarrassed that his friends have done this in front of his maybe-movie-star-girlfriend.

In a heartwarming twist, the starlet Anna thinks she should have a shot at the brownie. She mentions she's been on a diet since she was 19 and has been hungry for a decade. She has had a series of not-nice boyfriends one of which was physically abusive. Newspapers splash her heartbreak about like it is entertainment. She states she's had two major painful surgeries to get her movie star looks, she is afraid that one day the fame will go away, and she will be left with nothing.

Who gets the brownie?

This scene from the movie shows a very awkward human perspective about the hardships of life and brings everyone at the dinner table on the same level because life is difficult.

That sentiment... that life is difficult... is the orientation of Psalm 40 and of David when he wrote this psalm. Verse 12 in the psalm summarized this well for us: *“For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me”* (ESV).

Psalm 40:12 tells us that a discouraging amount of ‘disagreeable malignant unpleasant sadness and distress’ has encompassed David.

When he uses the word “*evils*” in Psalm 40, that type of emotional state is what he means by the word he uses (Hebrew: ‘rawaw’). The word means: malignant unpleasant sadness and distress. The word means: adversity, misery, and unhappiness that leads to injury. We have a word for that: depression.

Psalm 40:12 further describes for us that for David this state of feelings and thoughts means that his heart is failing him. He thinks about his life for all he feels is dark guilt all over his life. It is important that we note that his state of being is not influenced by one thing or one event or one mistake or one person or one pressing issue, but rather his depression comes on him because of more heavy issues than he can possibly count. This results in heartbreak.

We have a word for that: depression.

In Psalm 40:12, David tells us that his state of being leading his orientation for life is utter heart forsakenness. His heart feels deserted. He looks inside and there is a vast emptiness because he feels abandoned and empty.

We have a word for that: depression.

The orientation of Psalm 40 is depression.

DISORIENTATION: DEPRESSION⁴

The word ‘depression’ covers a wide variety of symptoms and mental difficulties that vary in severity, frequency, duration, and reason.

Depression impacts feelings to bring about:

sadness

low self-esteem

self-criticism

hopelessness

shame

worthlessness

pessimism

anger

It also impacts thinking. Depressed people have negative thoughts that seem as real as any thoughts they might have when thinking differently. Self-destruction, self-criticism, and trouble concentrating are the order of the day in the mind. Depression impacts behavior in that apathy is real as well as social withdrawal, neglect, and constant complaining.

Depression also impacts physical health in that fatigue is common as well as sleeplessness or sleeping too much. Go figure. Aches and pains are also common.

Depression can come for a season. For some, depression can come in the winter months or can come in a particularly hard time of life when unexpected changes happen or when a loved one dies.

⁴ Gary Collins, *Christian Counseling*, 2007, pages 119-139

Depression can also be something that is genetic to stay with a person for a lifetime. This is called chronic daily depression or dysthymic depression that lasts for years and is often treated with medication (even for Christians).

Depression can also be more severe such as bipolar disorder, postpartum depression after the birth of a baby, and even major depressive disorders. These are often explosive, disruptive, and most likely have a cause in brain chemistry.

Why do I share all of this with you?
I share it because depression is real.

Depression is real for the person whose life shifts in unexpected ways and for a season their life is turned upside down. Life is sideways. Their heart reacts with sadness or a critical spirit rules them for a while.

Depression is also real for the person whose brain chemistry is ransacked by genetics or drug use or unhealthy patterns of living. Depression stays not for a season, but for years or decades of their life and for many folks for a lifetime.

Psalm 40 is one that brings depression to the forefront of our mind to makes us pay attention to this very human emotional state. Verse 2 talks about a “*pit of destruction*” and David describes his heart as being in a “*miry bog.*” Verse 12 clues us into David’s state of mind and heart.

So, what do we do when depression is a seasonal or chronic part of our lives? Do we seek counseling?

I hope so. 👍

Will we be open to medication which will help aid the healing of our brain chemistry?

I pray so. 👍

Will we look to the Word of God for guidance as to new patterns of thoughts to adopt and allow God to transform us by the renewing of our minds?

Please do. 👍

That is precisely what we are about to think through.

REORIENTATION OF PSALM 40

In the midst of David's daily, chronic, oppressive depression, I want you to notice how he was attempting to train his heart with God to push back from the depression by reorienting himself.

I would count King David as a mature person dealing with depression especially since he seemed to deal with chronic depression, but he did not have access to medicines as we do. I personally consider him an expert.

What did he do?

Verses 2-3 tell us that as he was making his way through depression that he sung praises to God. His focus was a pattern of praise even though his heart was a pattern of pessimism and problems. The result? He believed God

would draw him from the pit of destruction and place him in a secure place. That '*drawing up*' by the way is a continual ongoing process because the depression is also continual and ongoing.

Verse 4 shares with us that David placed his trust continually in God. This is not a onetime placing of trust, but a daily continual effort to trust God even though the depression darkened his mind and heart. David continually trusted in God Who brings blessings.

Human beings have a spiritual tendency to back off of God when in distress. Don't do that. Don't leave God out of your problems because that only compounds the issues. The consistent process of choosing to trust God is difficult at times, but we can be confident that He will be faithful to complete the good work which He began in us (Psalm 40:2, Romans 8:28, Philippians 1:6).

Verse 5 reminds me of verses 2-3 because David says in the midst of his depression he focused on the wonderful blessings of God and tried to be thankful. A major part of depression, any type or shade of depression, is negative self-defeating thinking patterns that continually bring us down into a pit that feels like it will never end.

We must prayerfully train our mind to focus on the lovely things that are worthy of praise; things that are true, honorable, and pure (Philippians 4:8). These thoughts will work in our minds along with the Holy Spirit to create a natural outpouring of thanks.

In verses 6-8 we see that King David, in the midst of the miry bog did not leave God's Word behind. We tend to do that as well... when life gets rough our Bible goes unread. We see David finding delight in God's Law. The Holy Spirit will activate His Word in us to use it to restore and encourage us.

We must must must be in God's Word daily to fill our heart with His Word or the depression will fill our heart instead and will win.

Period.

That is simply true whether or not you have a solid medicine regimen or Dr. Phil himself whispering sweet nothings in your ear... there is no permanent help without God's Word.

Verses 9-10 David tells us that not only does he work on patterns on the inside, but he makes it a habit to verbalize goodness, faithfulness, and thanks. He does not restrain his lips to speak positive thankfulness to God for His goodness. We must make it a continual practice, led by King David who is the mature expert, that the overflow of our heart needs to lead to our mouth. We should not hide what God does in us, but share it. This beats back the depression in a practical way that our heart can follow.

In some of the final verses of chapter 40, verses 11-15, King David who is in the midst of oppressive depression himself, says not to trust ourselves, our own hearts, our own patterns of thought, or our dark feelings and impulses, but place all our confidence and trust in God. God will preserve us through His lovingkindness because His Truth will work

in us by His Spirit to show us our self-deception and disillusionment. David shares that when he was consumed by his iniquities and was apart from God, he was not able to see himself or his life properly.

Imagine this scene. You are at dinner with your closest friends. At the end of dinner, the host says to everyone: “I am going to give the last brownie as a prize to the saddest person here.” It is a competition among all who are there at the table.

One man speaks up to say he works at a job he does not understand, everyone gets promoted above him, and he has no romantic prospects because he is overweight. A lady at the table admits she works a low-paying job in the world’s worst store, she has googly eyes, and is attracted to cruel men. The wife of the host chimes in that she is in a wheelchair the rest of her life in a house full of ramps, she’s given up vaping, and she and her husband cannot have children. The host then points out another person who is unsuccessful professionally, divorced, used to be handsome, and that his nickname in school was Flobbit.

And then everyone looks at you.

You have never been more depressed in your whole life. Nothing seems to go right. Instead of joining in the competition, you tell everyone that even though you feel depressed, daily you praise God for your family and that you have a job even though it feels like everything is empty. You tell them that you trust God to work things out for your good. You list three things you are thankful for that

happened that day. You read to them a Bible verse you were pondering that morning. You repeat that even though it feels like discouraging amount of disagreeable malignant unpleasant sadness and distress has encompassed you, you trust in God.

You pass on the brownie.

To pass on the brownie, we have to do some inner work in prayer with God along with some medication and a good support system. Depression ain't no joke. Raging anxiety (especially since COVID-19) is increasingly real for many people. Mental illness comes in many shapes, sizes, and colors. Tension can creep in and surprise us. David knowd this well. (Yes, I knowd it... *knowd* is not a word).

What can you do?

How can we do this?

Ask God and perhaps a trusted friend (or a counselor) to help you identify thought patterns: We need to recognize negative or distorted thought patterns that contribute to anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues. We have to replace negative thoughts with Truth, but we have to recognize where our mind or emotions have gone awry first.

Pray asking the Holy Spirit (along with perhaps your caring pastor) to renew your mind. We have to replace irrational beliefs or unhealthy thought patterns with thoughts that are in line with God's loving truth. Satan may have weaseled his way into our minds by tempting us towards unhealthy

patterns. He's a sly serpent. We may need help finding him to stamp out his influence.

We can begin habits to act differently. Christians can regularly incorporate spiritual practices like prayer, worship, and service to others as part of transforming our inner lives.

Pray. Pray some more. Pray for God to help you find the right psychiatrist who understands your faith and also can prescribe the correct medication. Medication may not be needed, but pray that the psychiatrist will have wisdom beyond their years to see what is truly needed.

Talk with your pastor⁵ about how faith impacts thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Talk about how biblical teachings can guide you toward mental and emotional health.

Seek gracious forgiveness from God in order to understand that Jesus Christ forgives and enables God to forget our sin. The Spirit does this work in us. God's grace is bigger than any sin or any mistake or any secondary impact that mental illness makes in our lives. Meditate and pray on forgiveness. Meditate and pray on grace for yourself.

In these ways, we can emulate King David and do some inner work to push towards mental health and wellness.

⁵ Yes, I am assuming regular church attendance 4/4 Sundays.

PSALM 28 (MSG)

Don't turn a deaf ear when I call you, God. If all I get from you is deafening silence, I'd be better off in the Black Hole. 2 I'm letting you know what I need, calling out for help and lifting my arms toward your inner sanctuary. 3-4 Don't shove me into the same jail cell with those crooks, With those who are full-time employees of evil. They talk a good line of "peace," then moonlight for the Devil. Pay them back for what they've done, for how bad they've been. Pay them back for their long hours in the Devil's workshop; Then cap it with a huge bonus. 5 Because they have no idea how God works or what he is up to, God will smash them to smithereens and walk away from the ruins. 6-7 Blessed be God— he heard me praying. He proved he's on my side; I've thrown my lot in with him. Now I'm jumping for joy, and shouting and singing my thanks to him. 8-9 God is all strength for his people, ample refuge for his chosen leader; Save your people and bless your heritage. Care for them; carry them like a good shepherd.

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PSALMS

Psalm 28 | #mentalhealth

CHAPTER

3

“Melancholy is a humour, boystous and thicke, and is bredde of troubled drastes of blode [...] Of this humor havying maistry in the body, these ben the sygnes and tokens. Fyrste the colour of the skynne chaungeth into blacke or bloo: Soure savour, sharpe—and erthy is felte in the mouth. By the qualite of the humor the patient is feynte—and fereful in hert without cause, and oft sorry [...] Some dread enmyte of some man: Some love and desire dethe.” - “De Proprietaribus Rerum” by Bartholomeus Anglicus (1203-1272)

The Psalms are songs in the Old Testament part of the Bible. Psalms are worship songs that the people of Israel would sing when they gathered together to worship and confess and support each other.

Psalms teach us about God and ourselves.

Psalms are very emotional. We can't read the Psalms without an emotional response. As the psalmists cry out in joy or grief, they stir us as we identify similar emotions in ourselves. Many people call the Psalms mirrors of the soul. The Psalms are soul music. The Psalms speak to us in a wide variety of situations and a wide variety of emotions.

SG Meyer, a psychologist, wrote in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (1974): “The range of emotional expression often allows the reader to express [his or her] inner life. They assist [us] in verbalizing what [we] have been unable to communicate. In doing so, [we] often crystallize the nature and identity of [our] problem[s].”

The Psalms put us in touch with our deepest emotions. As readers of the Psalms, we feel seen and understood. The Psalms can also make us sensitive to the emotional struggles of others. These Holy Spirit inspired songs show us that emotions and struggle are part of a relationship with God, are not separate, and can help us understand our emotions. The Psalms were born from life struggles and speak to people who struggle today. They also arose from people who had experienced liberation in God from struggle whether a permanent victory or victory that comes day by day.

The mirror to the soul that we are going to look at in this chapter is Psalm 28. Psalm 28 is a psalm by King David. When he refers to God’s “*anointed*” one in verse 8, we see that he is referring to himself as the anointed covenant king.

Psalm 28 is a royal prayer and a call out for help to God. We can tell from the verses that he is praying in the midst of some crisis. To be honest, if you look at David’s life, he lived through one crisis after another. It was either trouble from an enemy that wasn’t his fault or the results of poor parenting on his part or a boneheaded move that created heartache or just a natural disaster. No one knows what

particular trouble David may have been in and it could have been any of his issues.

PSALM 28:1-9 (ESV)

“To You, O LORD, I call; my Rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if You be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. 2 Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to You for help, when I lift up my hands toward Your most holy sanctuary. 3 Do not drag me off with the wicked, with the workers of evil, who speak peace with their neighbors while evil is in their hearts. 4 Give to them according to their work and according to the evil of their deeds; give to them according to the work of their hands; render them their due reward. 5 Because they do not regard the works of the LORD or the work of His hands, He will tear them down and build them up no more. 6 Blessed be the LORD! For He has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy. 7 The LORD is my Strength and my Shield; in Him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to Him. 8 The LORD is the strength of His people; He is the Saving Refuge of His anointed. 9 Oh, save Your people and bless Your heritage! Be their Shepherd and carry them forever.”

What do these verses share with us?

THE CRY (verses 1-5)

Verses 1-5 share with us the state of the heart of David. These verses are filled with words like: “call,” “deaf,” “silent,” “cry,” “pit,” “plea,” “drag,” “wicked,” and “evil.”

The word he uses in verse 2 that is the English word “cry” is a very specific intense word [Hebrew: ‘shaw-vah’]. It means “to cry out for help” or to “shout in need.” This is the cry heard when someone is wounded and cries out for aid (Job 24:12). This is the cry heard when someone is on the street, is oppressed, hungry, and they call out for someone to help them (Job 29:12, 35:9; Psalm 72:12). This is the sound that someone who is afflicted makes (Psalm 22:24; Jonah 2:2).

Do you know how I know this cry on David’s heart is terrible and heart wrenching? Do you know how I know this is an intense word? It is exactly the same word used later by the Prophet Jonah in Jonah 2:2.

Jonah 2:2 says: *“I called out to the Lord, out of my distress, and He answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and You heard my voice”* (ESV).

If you know your Bible, you know where Jonah is at in Jonah 2:2 when he makes this cry of distress. He was being digested as a tasty morsel inside of a huge fish in the ocean. Jonah had rebelled against God and God called a pre-planned pre-meditated audible to snatch Jonah from the ocean to teach him a lesson. Jonah is literally in the belly of the beast and knows death is near. He cries out in deep distress to God.

This is the same word David uses that frames his emotions and his state of mind in Psalm 28.

David cries out to God naming his fears:

- He fears that God will not listen to him and He will be silent (verses 1-2)
- He fears that he will die without hope (verse 1)
- He fears not having strength or what is needed to make it (verse 1)
- He fears wicked people will win over him (verses 3-4)
- He fears that injustice will have its way in his life (verses 3-5)

The major fear of David is that his prayers are ineffective and that he is only talking to himself. In our wording, David was afraid that his prayers were “bouncing off the ceiling.”

It can feel like that because God is spirit and we are not. Prayer can feel that way because God does not always answer right away. It can feel like that because God doesn't answer in the way we want. It can feel like that because doubts can be strong.

David's perspective is...

... pain

... anguish

... hurt

... and it makes his world seem smaller and it makes him doubt God.

He feels powerless.

CONNECTION TO MENTAL HEALTH

I'd like to review just a moment about what is going on in David's life and make sure we connect it with us in our lives. The sense we get is that David is enduring some kind of crisis. His emotions are all over the place including fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, and a whole host of other emotions. Tension exists in his life. He is even having doubts that God is hearing him.

The truth about stress, tension, and fears is that everyone processes life a bit differently. For instance, one person may become overwhelmingly angry by traffic, while another person might just turn up their music to enjoy the extra time in the car. A fight with a friend or family member or spouse might follow one person around for the rest of the day, while another person shrugs it off. We all have trouble, but it impacts us differently.

We all have issues and stress and crisis just like David.

There are folks who deal with someone completing suicide. There are the people who suffer from daily physical pain or a prolonged sickness. There are widows and widowers who are left alone after many years of marriage. Each of these cause us stress, anguish, and issues with which we must deal.

Financial problems cause stress and anxiety. Financial problems cause arguments, guilt over spending money, and fear whenever the phone rings. Changes in job, schooling, or housing are also something that can bring fear. Change is not easy and most change comes with a

healthy dose of the unknown which fuels anxiety. Conflicts with bosses or co-workers can create long lasting stress and issues. Crisis at work can create anxiety, depression, difficulty concentrating, fatigue, headaches, heart palpitations, mood swings, muscle pain, and even stomach problems.

I haven't even mentioned parenting, being too busy, changing priorities, miscommunication in marriage, dating woes, sexual problems, entering a new life stage, the nightly news, or the fact that the McRib keeps popping in and out of existence at the whim of some McDonald's executive.

Life is difficult, people are even more difficult. Our mental health is always under assault.

In this psalm, we find David in a situation where his emotions and mind are in crisis. He doesn't say it, but we can guess he is feeling his emotions physically as well. I hope you see that we can relate to him.

He is relatable.

His emotions are relatable.

His life crisis (whatever it is!) is relatable.

THE RESPONDER (verses 6-9)

The entire tone of Psalm 28 changes in verse 6. Verses 6-9 share with us the changed state of the heart of David. These verses are filled with words like: “*blessed,*” “*heard,*” “*mercy,*” “*strength,*” “*shield,*” “*trusts,*” “*helped,*” “*exults,*” “*thanks,*” “*saving refuge.*”

I think Psalm 28 is helpful for people who claim faith in God, plead the blood of Jesus Christ, and try to live in step with the Holy Spirit. I say this because David is a God-fearing man and his life was not going well! Difficult circumstances come for everyone whether we believe in God or not. Sometimes finances or relationship problems or the impact of the nightly news is the same for all of us... but what is different for some of us is faith in the Responder.

We may think there is nothing we can do about stress or anxiety or depression or anger or obstinate trouble-causing people in our lives. Psalm 28 says we can do something. We can turn to God to look for His response.

Verse 1 says God is our Rock.

Verse 8 says God is our Strength.

Verse 8 says God is our Stronghold.

Verse 9 says God is our Shepherd.

The tone of the psalm changes in verse 6 because David’s heart turns towards God and his thoughts change. David has been pouring out his fears about people, situations, and about things he cannot control. David has been talking out his anxiety in prayer and writing down his thoughts. David shares his doubts and anger with God. It is in the sharing

through prayer and writing that David takes a step towards wholeness. It is in taking a step of faith towards God Who is our Rock, Strength, Stronghold, and Shepherd that David begins to make his way through the crisis.

Moses says the very same words of faith in Deuteronomy 33:27: *“The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms”* (ESV).

The Prophet Isaiah says the very same words of faith in Isaiah 40:11: *“He will tend His flock like a Shepherd; He will gather the lambs in His arms; He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young”* (ESV).

Many times, we believe in the separation of the mental and the spiritual. We do so at our own detriment.

In addition, many times we Christians have attitudes and say things that are not helpful for those who deal with any type of mental illness or extreme stress or anxiety or situational fears:

Churches traditionally tell people with mental illness to go elsewhere for help. 🙏

Christians tell other Christians just to pray more to make stress and anxiety disappear. 🙏

Christians tell other Christians just to read their Bible and everything stressful will get fixed. 🙏

A common suggestion is also to sleep with a Bible under one's pillow to help feel happy. 🙏

Christians also say that 'real' Christians don't get depressed or have doubts or stress. 🙏

Every. Single. One. Of. These. Is. Wrong.

As we think about Psalm 28, it is my hope that you see in the Scriptures the importance of mental health. Mental illness, situational anxiety, worry-churning fears, and extreme tension are something that impacts us all whether it be for a season or a lifetime. It could also be that someone we care about in our lives deals with such things.

A step in the right direction when in a crisis is to turn to God as we see in Psalm 28. We need to turn to God Who is our Rock, Strength, Stronghold, and Shepherd in times of crisis. Prayer should be our first action towards mental health, but it doesn't have to be the only action we take.

May you find peace and strength in God first for He is Rock, Strength, Stronghold, and Shepherd.

May you find medicine to be helpful as a tool of God for wholeness and health.

May you have support and love from people around you.

May you forgive those people around you who say the wrong things at the wrong times.

May you know your brokenness brings you closer to God Almighty not further away.

May you know that God sees you in each and every crisis as you struggle.

APPLICATION: A PRACTICAL HABIT

As I was reviewing Psalm 28, it occurred to me that David did something that we all can do when in a crisis. I mentioned it earlier, but it might be helpful to highlight it again. David is in crisis and in the midst of his crisis he wrote down what was going on inside of him.

He probably called it: writing a song.
We might call it: journaling.

How does jotting down our emotions and stress to God help? It helps in three ways:

#1 Process our emotions: Getting our emotions down on paper helps us to recognize our emotions and process our feelings. Writing them down will be an invitation to the Holy Spirit for Him to help clear our mind and spirit. Giving time and space to our emotions allows Him to bring us peace and direction.

#2 Alleviate our stress: Concealing emotions increases stress. Getting them out on paper can help to reduce the stress surrounding negative emotions. Again, being open with God in confession or expressing our stress opens our heart and mind to God to engage with Him.

#3 Melting our 'snowballs.' 'Snowballing' occurs when we let negative emotions build up racing out of control. When we grab a piece of paper or write ourselves a text or doodle out how we are feeling it can put a stop to this acceleration as we rest in the Spirit with self-control.

We all have moments when things get on top of us as we struggle to cope with our emotions. Whatever is causing us stress, scribbling down our emotions to invite the Holy Spirit to minister to us is a step in the right direction.

Writing down our thoughts and feelings may help us label our emotions. Labelling is key for understanding "what" we are feeling. It may also help with the "why."

Being self-aware or emotionally intelligent is not something many of us do well or comes to us naturally. Writing out what we are thinking and feeling in a crisis may also help us process our feelings, which can reduce the intensity of emotions... and as I said... we are doing this to invite the Holy Spirit to do what He does best.

I'm also not talking about writing these thoughts down to yourself, write these thoughts down **TO GOD**. 🙌 Write out your prayer amid the stress. 🙌

Developing a habit of journaling your feelings to God can be an enriching practice which not only is focused on prayer, but increases our emotional intelligence and our ability to cope with emotions.

Here's how you can approach it:

Set aside a regular time: Choose a specific time each day or a time during the week to record how your emotions and thought life has been going. Not a journaler like me? Start weekly on one particular day.

Do it without distractions: Find a quiet place where you can focus without distractions. This doesn't have to take long, but you do want to focus on your emotions and our Heavenly Father.

Prayer: Begin with prayer, meditation, or reflection to center yourself to invite God's presence into your writing. He is to Whom you are writing. He is the One you are inviting into the middle of your emotions and thought life.

Express your feelings honestly: He already knows. Write freely and honestly about your thoughts and emotions. Share your joys, struggles, hopes, fears, and doubts without holding back. He already knows, but you may not, so write them out honestly.

Listen for guidance every so often: After expressing your feelings, take a moment to quiet your mind and listen for any insights or guidance that may come to you. Pay attention to any thoughts or impressions that feel inspired by the Holy Spirit. Also, watch for God to send you a person who may say or do something to answer or help what you have been journaling about.

Keep your Bible handy.

Try finding one thing or person for which you are thankful if it is a terrible no good very bad day.

Be consistent: Like any habit, consistency is key. Commit to journaling your feelings to God regularly, even when you don't feel particularly inspired or emotional. Over time, this practice can deepen your spiritual connection and provide clarity in your relationship with God. It also will; help you track your emotions and perhaps even what triggers you to have bad days.

Journaling our feelings to God is an intimate personal practice that can help us deepen our faith, clarify our emotions, and strengthen our relationship with God.

In Psalm 28 when David was in crisis, he turned to God to write down his thoughts and feelings. By the way, this is only one suggestion. This is not a “turn to the Bible and pray” type of book, but God does need to be in the mix if we are to be mentally healthy.

Don't leave God out of the regimen for mental health.

MENTAL HEALTH *Journal*

DATE: / /



MY DAY SO FAR:

.....

.....

.....

MY FATHER IN HEAVEN I FEEL...

1.

2.

3.

MOOD



JESUS I NEED YOU TO SHOW UP...

.....

.....

.....

.....

HOLY SPIRIT I INVITE YOU...

.....

.....

.....

.....

FOR TOMORROW

.....

.....

.....

.....

RIGHT NOW I AM GOING TO...

1.

2.

3.

MENTAL HEALTH

Journal

DATE: / /



MY DAY SO FAR:

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MY FATHER IN HEAVEN I FEEL...

1.
2.
3.

MOOD



JESUS I NEED YOU TO SHOW UP...

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HOLY SPIRIT I INVITE YOU...

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FOR TOMORROW

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RIGHT NOW I AM GOING TO...

1.
2.
3.

MENTAL HEALTH *Journal*

DATE: / /



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MOOD



JESUS I NEED YOU TO SHOW UP...

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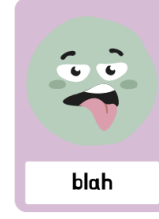
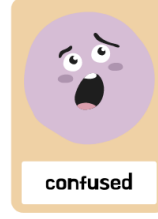
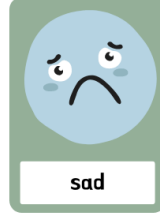
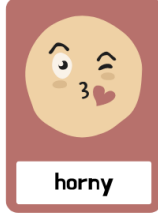
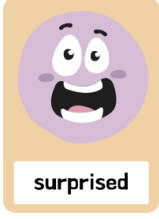
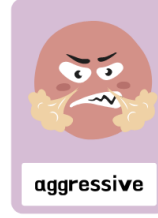
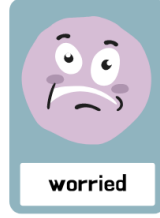
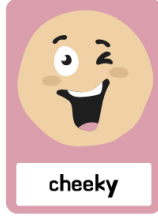
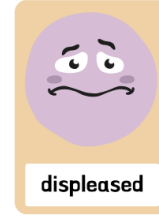
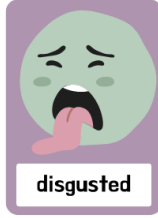
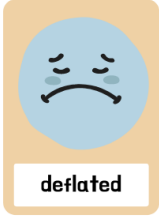
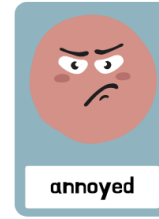
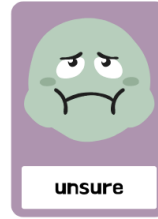
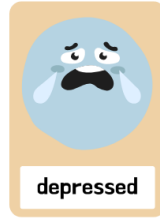
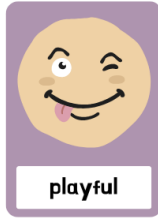
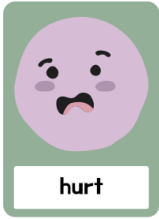
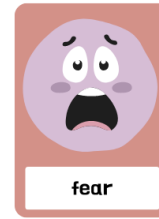
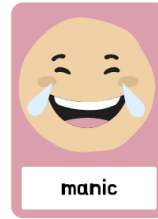
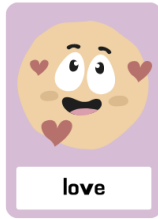
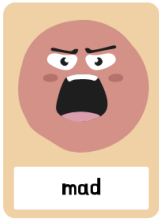
FOR TOMORROW

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RIGHT NOW I AM GOING TO...

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IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS



SIDE NOTE: *Emotional Intelligence*

Emotional Intelligence: The ability to be self-aware of feelings, what has triggered them, and in an advanced stage... how to properly deal with the emotion.

Increasing emotional intelligence involves developing skills that help you understand and manage emotions effectively.

The biggest part of this is “self-awareness.”

Self-awareness is reflecting on your emotions, your actions, and your reactions. Understand what triggers certain emotions in different situations. This is not easy. This is hard.

But it is worth it.

Romans 6:20-23 (ESV) reminds us: *“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

How do we do this? A divine download from God? Meditation? Some kind of weird breathing technique?

Here are some practical steps you can take to develop your self-awareness and EI:

Reflect Regularly: Write down your thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a journal or on your phone in order to reflect on what triggers certain emotions.

Ask Somebody Else: Ask for feedback from trusted friends, family, or colleagues. They can offer perspectives on your behavior, comment on areas for improvement, and share what they have noticed.

Prayer and Meditation: Regular prayer and meditation can help you observe your mental and emotional processes with His insight.

Track Your Emotions: Keep track of your emotions and their triggers in something like what is presented on pages 46-47. Note patterns, changes over time, and even the people you are with when changes occur.

Non-Verbal Cues: Pay attention to your body language, non-verbal signals, and how others respond to you. Take to heart how people say you are perceived.

Therapy or Counseling: A mental health professional can provide guidance, tools to improve self-awareness, and emotional intelligence.

PSALM 30:1-12 (ESV)

“I will extol You, O Lord, for You have drawn me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me. 2 O Lord my God, I cried to You for help, and You have healed me. 3 O Lord, You have brought up my soul from Sheol; You restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit. 4 Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to His holy Name. 5 For His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning. 6 As for me, I said in my prosperity, “I shall never be moved.” 7 By Your favor, O Lord, You made my mountain stand strong; You hid Your face; I was dismayed. 8 To You, O Lord, I cry, and to the Lord I plead for mercy: 9 “What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it tell of Your faithfulness? 10 Hear, O Lord, and be merciful to me! O Lord, be my helper!” 11 You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness, 12 that my glory may sing Your praise and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever!”

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PSALMS

Psalm 30 | #mentalhealth

CHAPTER

4

“Increasing attention has been given in recent years to the importance of spirituality for mental health, but in research it is impossible to distinguish between spirituality and the psychological variables that it purports to influence. Those things that are identified as being the concerns of mental health professionals overlap significantly with the concerns of religion.” - “Theology: Mental Health in the Kingdom of God” - CCCH Cook (2020)

Psalm 30 was written by King David who started out his life as the youngest runt of his family and the one who did the lowliest jobs. He then by God’s planning, faced off in a battle with a giant warrior and won in a miraculous manner which set his path towards the throne of Israel.

He was a poet and a musician.

He was also someone whose mind and heart were often in crisis, turmoil, anger, depression, stress, and doubt.

This psalm was written to the people of Israel who followed God and wanted His presence in their lives. David wrote this as a song to be used when Israelites gathered to worship. I think the Israelites realized they

were more like David than they were different even though he was a king.

I also happen to think that the psalm was written to us!

Psalm 30 is God's Word.

Psalm 30 is Scripture.

As you read through the psalms, I think you will realize that you and I are more like David than we are different even though he was a shepherd king who lived thousands of years ago. His words ring true.

What does David write to us in this song?

Psalm 30 (KJV): *"I will extol thee, O Lord; for Thou hast lifted me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me. 2 O Lord my God, I cried unto Thee, and Thou hast healed me. 3 O Lord, Thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: Thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. 4 Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness. 5 For His anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. 6 And in my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. 7 Lord, by Thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: Thou didst hide Thy face, and I was troubled. 8 I cried to Thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication. 9 What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? shall it declare Thy truth? 10 Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me: Lord, be Thou my helper. 11 Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; 12 To the end that my glory may sing*

praise to Thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto Thee forever.”

David talks about prevention, restoration, and transformation in this song. He is under great stress, tension, and mental anguish, but in the middle of all of it he sees God at work in his life in several ways.

In verses 1-3 (then again at the end in verses 11-12), we see that David has great urgency in his heart. David is dealing with difficult people in his life. He is thankful that God has been preventing them from gaining victory over him. The prevention of God in his life is not lost on him. He is thankful for God's hand in preventing disasters in his life. He knows that life or situations could be so much worse if God were not working in his life.

David prays for God to prevent terrible things from happening to him, but also sings about God's restoration of things when it all goes badly. In verse 2, David praises God for His “*healing*.” This healing could be from a physical illness, but it also can be from other types of issues.

Restoration is something God does well. David knows that God's Hand of healing and restoration is present in his life. David sees that whatever life hands him that tears him down and tears him up that God will be there to walk with him through it, bring healing, and provide restoration.

Verses 11-12 end with the idea that God is also a transforming power in his life. David sees his dire circumstances changing and his thought life being uplifted

by God. David sees the mercy of God as his mourning turns to dancing and sadness turns to gladness. David knows he is not alone in life, but has God as a constant companion.

To quote from the last chapter in Psalm 28, David believes in God Who is our Rock, Strength, Stronghold, and Shepherd. It is through God's presence that David makes his way through any crisis.

David is in crisis and knows that God is with him.

As we focus on Psalm 30, verse 5 jumps out as does some other verses throughout the psalms because a theme emerges. This is a theme that David sings about. I hope you will see a central issue that is plaguing David in Psalm 30, but also in his life in general.

It might also be something that you deal with.

I cannot help but continue to think that you and I are more like David than we are different even though he was a shepherd king who lived thousands of years ago. His words ring true about his heart and mind at night for some of us can relate.

Psalm 6:6 (ESV)

"I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping."

Psalm 16:7 (ESV)

"I bless the LORD Who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me."

Psalm 22:2 (ESV)

“O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.”

Psalm 30:5 (ESV)

“For His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”

Psalm 63:6 (ESV)

“When I remember You upon my bed, and meditate on You in the watches of the night...”

David has a consistent experience that nighttime is stressful, full of angst, full of tears, and is when anguish comes to the forefront. David does not sleep well. I get the sense that when the lights go out, that darkness creeps into his mind and heart.

For David, one of his most difficult times mentally and spiritually and emotionally is at night.

- He says in Psalm 6 that his sadness is fully present at night
- He says in Psalm 16 that at night his heart and mind are active
- He says in Psalm 22 that he finds no rest at night and no answers
- He says in Psalm 30 that his sadness is fully present at night
- He says in Psalm 63 that his mind is active all night long

I know David is not alone in this. Nighttime is hard for many when it comes to thoughts, feelings, emotions about life, and processing the day's events.

The human mind becomes more active at night both consciously and unconsciously. Brain chemistry studies show us that certain parts of the brain slow down at night while other parts kickoff running. At night, reason, logic, and inhibitions tend to go to sleep when our bodies want to rest. Dangerous behavior and harmful thinking often increase during the night.

For example: The risk ratio of suicide is substantially increased at night; a 4-fold greater risk at 2AM than any other time of day. In fact, Veterans are 8-fold more likely to die by suicide between midnight-3 AM.

For example: Murders are more likely to occur between 6 PM-1 AM and murder rates in Manhattan peak between 6 PM-midnight. More broadly, an estimated 55% of violent crimes are committed between 7 PM-7 AM.

For example: Illicit or inappropriate use of substances increases during the night. Peak substance use is around 10 PM with an almost 5-fold greater risk of opioid overdose at night.⁶

There is something about nighttime that is terrible for our mental health. This was true for King David thousands of years ago. It may be true for you today or true for someone that you love. Nighttime often brings overwhelming thoughts, feelings, and impulses.

⁶ frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnetp.2021.830338/full

This happens because the busy business of the day has fallen aside. Our mental-emotional guard is down. The mind reflects on things we couldn't while we were tending to more pressing matters throughout the day. Slowing down at night becomes hard.

This happens because we start worrying about work, finances, children or grandchildren, or a frustrating discussion from earlier in the day. We tend to overthink the events of the day compiling a list of wishes for what coulda shoulda woulda gone different. Night is the time we complain to ourselves about ourselves for all the things we didn't do or we could have done, but chose not to do. Emotions run high.

This happens because during the day we are concerned about another's point-of-view or opinions, but at night it is just us. Me, myself, and I are the only company at night. The only perspective, concerns, or views we contend with are our own. Night is the time when a person is just him/herself with no pretensions and no complications. During the daytime we are 50% of our real selves because we can hide while at night we are 100% of our real selves with nowhere to hide. You are with yourself at night.

Psalms 30 presents King David talking to us about mental and emotional crisis in the nighttime when we can't sleep because thoughts, emotions, worry, and tension are at an all-time high. Nighttime can be a nightmare whether you are asleep or not. Nighttime makes depression, anger, worry, or stress even worse because our hearts and brains do not shut off... but go into overdrive.

David tells us in Psalm 30 that he places all his thoughts, emotions, worry, and tension in the hands of God. In the terribleness of the night, he prays. In the terribleness of the night, he places his trust in God. In the terribleness of the night, he seeks strength and grace from God.

Please remember, emotional health and spiritual health need not be mutually exclusive. It is my hopeful prayer to encourage you in these chapters as we dig through the Psalms to look at mental health to see it as a normal regular important part of life, health, and wholeness. I want you to see the spiritual and the mental together rather than something that is separate.

I want you to see that therapy or medicine is a blessed tool given by God to help. You may need to chat with someone about sleeplessness or intense stress at night. I also want you to see that God provides healing or grace to make it just through one night... for He does both. My prayer is that you know that God cares about your mental health.

Why did David think it important to turn to God in the middle of the night? Why should we turn to God in the middle of the night?

I think the answer to WHY? comes at the end of verse 5. The last 5 words of verse 5 are tremendously powerful when we face a night full of stress and tension.

Psalm 30:5 (ESV): *“For His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”*

Psalm 30:5 (KJV): *“For His anger endureth but a moment; in His favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”*

“Joy comes with the morning.” 👍

“Joyeth cometh uponeth the morroweth.” 👍

Joy is a unique state of being that is not dependent on circumstances or completely tied to our emotions. True lasting joy is a spiritual condition that results in abiding in God. It is not happiness although happiness is part of joy. It is not peace although peace is part of joy. It is not contentment even though contentment is part of joy.

“Joy” is its own thing given by God. Psalm 30 shares with us a promise from God that “joy” comes from Him. God is the only source of joy you will ever find in this rotten stress-filled depressing world. God is the only source for true lasting joy that will bring happiness, peace, contentment, assurance, and direction to our lives in the middle of the night when things feel terrible.

David, the song writer of Psalm 30, absolutely believed this because he talks about “joy” over 50x in the Psalms. The same Psalms in which he writes about weeping in his bed and being emotionally wrecked at night he also sings about joy that comes from God.

Psalm 5:11 (ESV)

“But let all who take refuge in You rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread Your protection over them, that those who love Your Name may exult in You.”

Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

“You make known to me the path of life; in Your presence there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”

Psalm 35:27 (ESV)

“Let those who delight in My righteousness shout for joy and be glad and say evermore, “Great is the Lord, Who delights in the welfare of His servant!”

Psalm 51:12 (ESV)

“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”

Psalm 63:7 (ESV)

“For You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I will sing for joy.”

Psalm 126:5-6 (ESV)

“Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.”

Psalm 149:5 (ESV)

“Let the godly exult in glory; let them sing for joy on their beds.”

I couldn't help but notice Psalm 149:5. In Psalm 30:5, David is weeping and drowning in sadness at night, but in Psalm 149:5 he is singing for joy in his bed. His bed was an extreme place of sadness and tension, but also a place of joy.

I do not think for those of us who deal with depression, suicidal thoughts, anger, stress, tension, addiction, and sleeplessness at night that we should just “take two prayers and call me in the morning.”

I am not saying that!

Do you read me?! I am not saying that!

Am not.

I am saying that turning to God in prayer because He is the only source for joy in this life should be part of your plan to be mentally healthy and emotionally strong. We must seek the Lord diligently at night when the darkness creeps in from under the bed or from our closet or from the inner recesses of our mind. We must seek the Lord when our mind is over-actively blaming us for every woe and problem in our lives. We must seek the Lord and ask for happiness, peace, contentment, assurance, and direction in our lives in the middle of the night when things feel terrible.

I am also saying that turning to medicine and therapy without God in the mix will lead you away from the only source for true joy that is offered.

Please consider medication and therapy or some forms of self-care as God-given tools to help you in your mental and emotional health.

Please do not consider doing it all on your own without God’s help. We must seek the Lord and ask for His help with medicine and therapy as we pursue happiness, peace,

contentment, assurance, and direction in our lives in the middle of the night when things feel terrible.

In my opinion, you should seek a licensed Christian counselor or therapist, but such a person may not be available or you may not like them or click with them. In that case (or in any case), please seek out a therapist or counselor that takes “all of you” into consideration including your faith. You don’t want a therapist that is hostile or passive aggressive with your religion.

Find someone you jive with and can be helpful.

Recall that Psalm 30 presents #1 prevention, #2 restoration, and also #3 transformation.

PREVENTION:

Proper obedient sabbath habits where there is work-life balance with proper worship.

Continual and faithful taking of prescribed medication.

Continual and faithful therapy or pastoral counseling.

Journaling.

Pray through a crisis seeking wisdom from God to prevent your mind from slipping into a darker place only focused on self.

Listen to the Christian radio station.

Exercise and diet help our bodies to be healthy which is part of mental health.

Educate yourself by reading books by Larry Crabb, Max Lucado, CCCH Cook, Les and Leslie Parrott, Henry Cloud, and David Clarke.

Cultivate proper sleep hygiene.

Prayer and Bible reading.

Recall that Psalm 30 presents #1 prevention, #2 restoration, and also #3 transformation.

RESTORATION:

Continual and faithful taking of prescribed medication.

Continual and faithful therapy or pastoral counseling.

Pray for the chance to offer forgiveness or give forgiveness as God makes it available. Take the God-given opportunity to clear out any brokenness between you and other people.

Write a letter to someone and mail it.

Write a letter to someone who is dead and bury it.

Write a letter to someone you hate and burn it.

Get rid of social media permanently.

Find a local convent, Christian camp, or retreat center where you can get away for some days for a spiritual retreat and peaceful time.

Find a hobby that serves other people.

Take the opportunity at church to pray up front when an altar call is given and pray over changes you wish to see in yourself with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer and Bible reading.

Recall that Psalm 30 presents #1 prevention, #2 restoration, and also #3 transformation.

TRANSFORMATION:

Memorize: Philippians 4:8 (ESV): *“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”*

Continual and faithful taking of prescribed medication.

Continual and faithful therapy or pastoral counseling.

Get rid of social media permanently.

Pray for an accountability partner to present themselves in life. This will be someone you meet with monthly or bi-weekly to share how you are doing with mental health and also how they themselves are getting along.

Let it go.

Find and attend regularly a local Celebrate Recovery ministry.

Prayer and Bible reading.

SIDE NOTE: *Sleep Hygiene*

Sleep hygiene: A set of habits that are conducive to promoting good quality sleep leading to overall mental health.

Sleep hygiene means:

A consistent sleep schedule: Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends. This helps regulate your body's internal clock. I-phones even do this for you.

Have a relaxing bedtime routine: Develop calming activities before bed, such as reading a physical book, taking a warm bath, or practicing relaxation techniques like deep breathing. There are apps and youtube channels dedicated to this.

Take note of your sleep environment: Make sure your bedroom is cool, quiet, and dark. Use earplugs, blackout curtains, or a white noise machine if necessary. These things are not expensive, but are helpful. Use a comfortable mattress and pillows that support your body to ensure proper alignment.

Limit screen time: Avoid electronic devices for at least an hour before bed as the blue light emitted can interfere with melatonin production to disrupt sleep. Most devices have the ability to adjust the warmth of the screen. Adjust the warmth of the screen at least!

Be mindful of your tummy: Avoid heavy meals, caffeine, and alcohol close to bedtime. These can disrupt sleep patterns to impact the quality of your rest.

Exercise, but not late at night: Engage in regular physical activity, but try to avoid vigorous exercise close to bedtime as it can be stimulating and getchoo going.

Get rid of naps: Don't nap for hours at a time (shoot for 20 minutes). Train your body and mind when to sleep and when to be productive. "Resting" is a skill where the body chills out, but there is no sleep.

By adopting these practices consistently, you can improve your sleep quality and overall well-being. Good sleep hygiene is essential for maintaining optimal mental health.

This does not solve the overactive mind or wave of feelings that may overwhelm at night, but it is a place to start.

SLEEP HYGIENE

Five effective tips to establish a healthy sleeping habits

Stay clear of stimulants late in the day.



avoid beverages and foods that contain caffeine

Do a regular exercise.



regular exercise routine earlier in the day can help contribute to improved sleep.

Stick to a consistent sleep schedule.



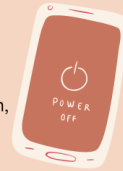
going to bed and waking up at the same time every day

Create a relaxing bedtime/pre-bedtime routine.



any relaxing activity about an hour before bed helps creates a smoother transition.

Unplug an hour before bed.



Keep screen use to a minimum, at least an hour before bed,

Keep your room cool and comfortable.



ideal room for sleeping is cool, quiet, and dark.

Avoid foods that can disrupt sleep.



when you lie down right after a big meal, your digestive juices are still cranking.

source: combined from several articles about sleep hygiene and mashed together

QUESTIONS TO THINK ON:

What is your opinion of taking a medicine either temporarily or consistently to help your mental health?

What is your opinion of a committed Christian taking a medicine either temporarily or consistently to help your mental health?

What are your thoughts on spending money on therapy to help your mental health? Is this something you can or for which you should budget?

Where has God already provided for you in the area of mental health in your life?

- > Services provided by health insurance
- > A caring pastor
- > A good confidant
- > Resources for good God-centered self-care
- > Answers to prayer

Where has God already shown Himself mighty in your life?

Where can you invite the Holy Spirit to begin to do a good work in you?

PSALM 42 (ESV)

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for You, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” 4 These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival. 5 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my Salvation 6 and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember You from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar. 7 Deep calls to deep at the roar of Your waterfalls; all Your breakers and Your waves have gone over me. 8 By day the LORD commands His steadfast love, and at night His song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life. 9 I say to God, my Rock: “Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” 10 As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” 11 Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God.”

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PSALMS

Psalm 42 | #mentalhealth

CHAPTER 5

“Interwoven with the need for more explicit discussion and teaching, many participants felt that the symbiotic effect resulting from discussing mental health and illness more openly in church teaching, would have the consequence of increased acceptance of the prevalence, and often deeply human experience, of mental illness: Put into real practice the view that mental illness is part of being human.”

- Christopher EM Lloyd

In 2022, I became acquainted with a book by/about a puritan pastor, Richard Baxter (1615-1691) which addresses depression and anxiety from a Christian perspective. The title is “Depression, Anxiety, and the Christian Life: Practical Wisdom from Richard Baxter.”⁷ It is well worth your time.

Two things struck me about this book. First, it was written in the 1600s and the guy was 100% on target. Second, it was written in the 1600s and the guy was 100% on target.

I would like to share with you a little of what he explains about mental health for those who walk the Christian life.

Richard Baxter helps us with a definition of depression in that he says: [adapted and edited for brevity, but quoted]

⁷ Lundy, Michael S. Crossway. 2018. 192 pages.

“I mean a diseased craziness, hurt, or error in imagination, and consequently of understanding. It is known by these following signs (not all of which occur in every individual case of depression):

- They are fearful and everything they hear and see is apt to increase fears.
- The imagination errs most in exaggerating their sin, danger, and unhappiness.
- They are consumed with excessive sadness and think this is somehow proper.
- Religion for them emphasizes mourning and punishment.
- They are extremely self-critical and second-guess themselves always.
- They continually sense themselves forsaken by God and are prone to despair.
- They feel that grace has past them by.
- They feel that God has rejected them.”

Puritan Pastor Richard Baxter then goes on to lay out 35 more marks of what depression looks like in a person’s life. Even in the 1600s, he could see the deep hurtful nature of this type of mental illness. Some of our wording has changed from Richard Baxter’s time, but depression has not.

Why bring this up?

Mental health and/or mental illness is not a new issue.

It’s not.

Psalm 42 is our focus in this chapter. If some of the words sound familiar, that is because Martin Nystrom wrote a praise song in 1984 which uses some of Psalm 42.

Psalm 42:1-11 (AMP)

“As the deer pants [longingly] for the water brooks, So my soul pants [longingly] for You, O God. 2 My soul (my life, my inner self) thirsts for God, for the living God. When will I come and see the face of God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, While they say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” 4 These things I [vividly] remember as I pour out my soul; How I used to go along before the great crowd of people and lead them in procession to the house of God [like a choirmaster before his singers, timing the steps to the music and the chant of the song], With the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a great crowd keeping a festival. 5 Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become restless and disturbed within me? Hope in God and wait expectantly for Him, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence. 6 O my God, my soul is in despair within me [the burden more than I can bear]; Therefore I will [fervently] remember You from the land of the Jordan And the peaks of [Mount] Hermon, from Mount Mizar. 7 Deep calls to deep at the [thundering] sound of Your waterfalls; All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me. 8 Yet the Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, And in the night His song will be with me, A prayer to the God of my life. 9 I will say to God my rock, “Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” 10 As a crushing of my bones [with a sword], my adversaries taunt me, While they say continually to me, “Where is your God?” 11 Why are you in despair, O my soul? Why have you become

restless and disquieted within me? Hope in God and wait expectantly for Him, for I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God.”

As we look over Psalm 42 in order to think about what David is writing to us, he begins by letting us see the insides of his heart which are not in a good place. Then as we deliberate his mental state, we are going to look at deer behavior to see some very specific applications that I personally believe David has in mind for us.

THE STATUS OF THE HEART: DOWNCAST AND TURMOIL

The words overall in this psalm denote a person who is having issues. Panting, thirsts, tears, cast down, turmoil, forgotten, mourning, oppression, wound, and adversaries. The tone of this psalm is one of mental and emotional pain.

There are two words I want you to notice because David repeats the words in the song so we will see the way he describes his heart-patterns and state-of-mind. These words are significant and specific.

First, we have the word “downcast.” Three times in these short 11 verses David says that his soul is ‘downcast’ or ‘cast down.’ This is not the kind of sadness that one feels, for example, when you go to your favorite restaurant for breakfast discovering they no longer serve the sunflower multigrain bagel breakfast sandwich. That is one kind of sadness, but not what David says here.

The kind of state that David is indicating in these verses is sadness that goes deep into his soul reaching to levels of

despair. It bears repeating that King David, the writer of the Psalms, is a person who knows about depression and anxiety and other mental and emotional stressors. Much of David's life was abject chaos.

We see a pattern of thought and feelings from David that seem to indicate that depression was a persistent, damaging, impactful part of his daily life. He knows what it means to have despair as a constant companion.

Psalm 6:6 (ESV)

“I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.”

Psalm 13:2 (ESV)

“How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?”

Psalm 102:4 (ESV)

“My heart is struck down like grass and has withered; I forget to eat my bread.”

‘Downcast’ is excessive sorrow, loneliness in the midst of sadness, joylessness, an overactive accusative conscience, discontentment, with physical fatigue all rolled into one with the downside benefit that it does not stop. This is the type of feeling that King David is describing.

We have a word for that: depression.

Second, we have the word “*turmoil*.” This word is repeated twice in these 11 verses. In case we miss the state of his heart and mind, David adds another descriptor for what is going on inside of him. The word he uses that we translate ‘*turmoil*’ (ESV) or ‘*disquieted*’ (KJV) or ‘*troubled*’ (YLT) or ‘*disturbed*’ (NIV) means a loud roaring growl that stirs in a tumultuous manner. This word is used 34 times in the Old Testament with a proper illustration of this word being sights and sounds of the worst storm at sea.

David has in mind a hurricane in his soul which blows beating against his heart with wave after wave of trouble.

Another proper illustration of this word, based off of a use in Zechariah 9:15 is a destructive loud howling raging drunk. That same word would have been used by David to describe such a person. David has in mind a loud raging drunk crashing through his soul tossing over self-confidence, spouting profanity, and causing trouble that damages everything at the next family reunion.

We have a word for that: anxiety.

The state of King David’s soul is downcast turmoil. I hope that you can see that his state of mind and the disposition of his heart is one in need. David needs relief from being downcast in the turmoil.

What I appreciate about David in Psalm 42 is that not only does he give us a word picture of his mind as a destructive storm sea or a raging drunk, but he also gives us a word picture on how he navigates that storm and deals with the drunk. The word picture is in verse 1, but I believe is laced

all throughout Psalm 42. Before we get practical for us, we have to understand deer behavior because a deer at the side of a stream is the word picture that David uses.

DEER BEHAVIOR⁸

Verse 1 of Psalm 42 gives us a picture of a thirsty deer by a stream of water. Let's discuss some Bambi or Bullwinkle or Rudolph behavior to understand what King David has in mind. David already knows how deer behave. You may already know how deer behave. As a certified city-dweller for most of my life, I don't know and so we shall cover it so we are all on the same page.

I will relate five observations about deer behavior.

First, when it comes to deer behavior, they will drink several times per day. Deer are fairly large animals which you know if you have ever introduced your car to one. A 200-pound deer will typically drink about half a gallon to over a gallon of water per day. This number fluctuates, but it does generally fall within that window. This does not happen all at once, but throughout the day.

When it comes to Bambi's thirst, temperature usually dictates quantity. The biggest factor in how much a deer will drink is temperature. The hotter it is outside the more water is needed to stay hydrated. In this way, deer are a lot like people. For us, the hotter it is the more we sweat and

⁸ realtree.com/brow-tines-and-backstrap/5-watering-habits-of-mature-deer

the more we need to drink. It is the same for deer. Makes sense, right?

Additionally, deer, reindeer, and other selected moose-type animals will sleep relatively close to a water source. Hunters and “wildlife researchers with guns” tell us that most deer beds are discovered in heavy cover with the vast majority of them have been located within 75 yards of a water source, even if it was a very small source. Deer sleep close to their water.

Fourth, we should also know that Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and Vixen often go to water before finding food in the evening. This is a general observable fact that deer go find water before searching about for food. Before doing other needed activities, a deer will make sure their water needs have been tended.

Lastly, deer don't need large sources of water to drink from, a puddle will do every so often. Deers will absolutely drink from a pond or brook or a river, but will also make use of a rain puddle. A deer can drink from anywhere and keep on going.

So, now you have the basics of deer drinking behavior. I don't know if that makes us experts, but it does actually help you find a deer in the wild. I think I should add that deer are not a fans of drinking beer even though it rhymes with their name and some desert dwelling deer like gazelles can recycle their urine internally so they need less water.

I am a fount of knowledge.

Why bring up such stellar facts about deer-folk?

King David has a panting deer in mind in this psalm/song even as he reflects on his downcast soul full of turmoil. The two are connected. I believe the answer that David found to his downcast tumultuous soul is in his recollections of deer which he applied to his life. We can do the same.

APPLICATION: DEER BEHAVIOR FOR THE SOUL

If you are someone who deals with mental illness or have someone in your life who would resonate with the words David uses for his soul, then the application of Psalm 42 should be quite helpful.

David tells us how he deals with a soul that is downcast in the full throes of turmoil.

First, for someone who is dealing with mental illness, what is needed is to take time to slowly drink from the Lord throughout the day. Make no mistake, the streams in this psalm are the Lord. Several times a day a person whose soul is downcast needs to hear and remember that God steadfastly loves them. He is in control. He is salvation. The problem is we think we are not thirsty for God, but we are indeed. We need to slowly continually take Him in.

Listen to the Bible in small bursts throughout the day

Begin listening to a sermon at breakfast, continue at lunch, and then finish before dinner

Use your phone to listen to encouraging Christian podcasts whenever driving in the car

Keep Christian music on in the background at work if possible

Work out with a friend a habit of texting back and forth Bible verses

The reason I am saying slowly throughout the day is because depression, anxiety, and other forms of mental illness are continually-ongoing. Only a gulp of God in the morning or only a chug of God at night means you are suffering during the day. Your soul is wearing down.

Note deer behavior: They drink several times a day. So too must a soul that is downcast continually. Therefore, ongoingly take in God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

By the way, this suggestion is helpful to anyone no matter their mental state.

Second, for someone who is dealing with mental illness, what is needed is to have an intentional pattern of being mindful of the temperature of your life. Some days are harder/hotter than others. Some situations or days at work or family situations will plunge you deeper into depression than other days. If you know bad days or difficult seasons are coming up, be prepared. Love yourself enough to realize who you are, what you struggle with, and plan to stay mentally healthy.

The reason I am saying to be mindful of the temperature of your life is because increased stress, hard conversations, comments from people, and difficult life situations only make depression-type mental illness worse because this is another layer on top of what you are already dealing with.

The more difficult life is dictates the more intense you will need to be about staying connected to the Lord by resting in the Holy Spirit. God is our rock in times when it feels like life is sinking.

In verse 4, David talks about being part of a throng, procession, and multitude that are all focused on praise for/in/under/about/with God. It seems counterintuitive for mental illness (which is very isolating), but including people when life is overwhelming is key. Including people who believe in God, love you, and are willing to help you manage the changing temperatures of life is key. We need other people. [Yes, you do]. It is going to feel like a massive effort to reach out to someone when hurting, but it will be worth it. [Yes, it will].

If you know people in your life will be oppressive, schedule times of prayer at home.

If you feel forgotten by the Lord on hard days, have a person you can call to pray with.

When life gets too much, plan to stop by to see your pastor.

By the way, these suggestions are helpful to anyone no matter your mental state.

Third, for someone who is dealing with mental illness, you must end every day drinking from living water. It must be a holy habit to conclude your day resetting your brain patterns and emotions with the Lord in a wise routine. It must be a holy habit that the last thing your conscious and subconscious mind thinks on is the Lord.

The reason I am saying to end your day resetting your emotional patterns and thinking processes is because deer never sleep far from a water source. Neither should we... spiritually speaking. Those of us who continually struggle with diseased craziness, exacerbated hurt, error in imagination, or error in understanding need to re-pattern what is in there with what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, or worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8).

Depression creates physical and mental weariness. Making a routine feels like the opposite of what you want to do. None of what we are talking about is easy. It is still true.

Create a habit of having a spiritual conversation before bed with your spouse or parent.

Spend time in prayer as you go to sleep.

Journal about your day while also writing down Bible verses to re-frame to re-think what happened.

Use an app to go to sleep listening to the Scriptures as you drift off meditating on God.

By the way, these suggestions are helpful to anyone no matter your mental state.

Fourth, for someone who is dealing with a downcast soul or turmoil, having spiritual priorities in their proper place is important. This will help stem the tide of trouble. Do not drink before other activities. Spiritually speaking, we need to place God first. In verses 4-8, David lines out that he prays, fellowships with others, actively remembers what God has done, and sings to God... he makes God a priority.

The reason I am saying to have proper spiritual priorities is because the self-recrimination that lays our souls naked, sinister temptations, disordered thoughts, unhappiness bombs, and purposeless feelings will take over. They will take front row in our soul if we do not occupy those chairs first with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we let our spiritual life slide, we allow mental illness to slide in and take over dictating who gets to be in the mosh pit.

Make sure you are studying the Bible in a group on a weekly basis.

Reading Christian books on mental health is important.

Worship and prayer and Bible study and fasting and giving are non-negotiables for living.

Serve the Lord in the church to get outside yourself.

Take your medicine regularly praising God all the while that such help exists.

By the way, these suggestions are helpful to anyone no matter your mental state.

Lastly, for someone who is dealing with a downcast soul or turmoil, having even small amounts of spiritual pick-me-ups will be helpful. Deer can drink from a puddle. Even small spiritual things are helpful when a soul is in distress.

Richard Baxter, in the book I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, has this as an insightful principle to learn from all the way back in the 1600s.

He says on page 87: “Do not engage too long a time in any private duty you find yourself unable to bear. Prayer itself, when you are incapable of it, must be performed only to the degree that you are able. When you are unable to do better, then short confessions and requests to God will have to serve rather than lengthy private prayers.”

He also says: “Where you find yourselves incapable of private devotions, don’t be too hard on yourselves. Instead, go at a pace that is not too uncomfortable. Preserve your willingness to fulfill your duty, and avoid things that make it miserable for you.”⁹

He would say drink from puddles when you need to. By the way, this suggestion is helpful to anyone no matter your mental state.

Psalm 42:1-3 (ESV): “*As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? 3 My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?”*”

⁹ Lundy, Michael S. Crossway. 2018. 192 pages.

King David writes these words as his soul is downcast and in turmoil. He has in mind a deer panting for waters. He likens this to our own spirits that pant and thirst for God. Please understand that a person dealing with mental illness needs medicine and therapy, but they also need a good steady source of the Lord.

If you are a person dealing with mental illness, please do not leave God behind.

He is worthy of praise (verse 5).

He is the source of salvation (verse 5).

He is the wave breaker (verse 7).

He is steadfast love (verse 8).

He is the rock (verse 9).

SIDE NOTE: Cytochrome P450 Testing (CYP450)

Find a doctor with access and willingness to use CYP450 tests to help determine how your body processes a drug. The human body uses cytochrome P450 enzymes to process medications. Because of genetic traits that cause variations in these enzymes, medications may affect each person differently.

Drug-gene testing, also called pharmacogenomics or pharmacogenetics, is the study of how genes affect your body's response to medication. Tests look for changes or variations in these genes that determine whether a medication could be an effective treatment for you or whether you could have side effects from a specific medication.

By checking your DNA for certain variations, CYP450 tests can offer clues about how your body may respond to a particular antidepressant, anxiety medication, or ADHD medication.

Medications for depression are usually prescribed based on symptoms and medical history. For some people, the first antidepressant tried relieves depression symptoms and has tolerable side effects. For many others, however, finding the right medication takes trial and error. For some people, it can take several months or longer to find the right antidepressant.¹⁰

¹⁰ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/cyp450-test/about/pac-20393711>

THOUGHTS ON PSYCHIATRIC MEDICATION

ANTIDEPRESSANTS



Used to treat depression and anxiety: Prozac, Zoloft, Celexa, Lexapro, Luvox, Paxil.

ANXIETY MEDS



Some meds are specific to anxiety like Xanax, Valium, Ativan, Klonopin.

ANTIPSYCHOTICS

Meds like Thorazine, Trilafon, Serenitil help hallucinations, mania, and schizophrenia.



STIMULANTS

Mostly used for ADHD: Ritalin, Adderall, Dexedrine.



MOOD STABILIZERS

For bipolar and other personality disorders: Lithium and Lamictal.



When taken as directed, medications can alleviate symptoms of mental illness without becoming addictive.



Medications can have side effects.



There's no reason to feel shame for using medication to help you alleviate symptoms of depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, ADHD or any other mental health disorder.



PSALM 69 (NASB)

“Save me, God, For the waters have threatened my life. 2 I have sunk in deep mud, and there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and a flood overflows me. 3 I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched; My eyes fail while I wait for my God. 4 Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; Those who would destroy me are powerful, those who oppose me with lies; What I did not steal, I then have to restore. 5 God, You know my foolishness, And my guilt is not hidden from You. 6 May those who wait for You not be ashamed because of me, Lord God of armies; May those who seek You not be dishonored because of me, God of Israel, 7 Because for Your sake I have endured disgrace; Dishonor has covered my face. 8 I have become estranged from my brothers, And a stranger to my mother’s sons. 9 For zeal for Your house has consumed me, And the taunts of those who taunt You have fallen on me. 10 When I wept in my soul with fasting, It became my disgrace. 11 When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a proverb to them. 12 Those who sit in the gate talk about me, And songs of mockery by those habitually drunk are about me. 13 But as for me, my prayer is to You, Lord, at an acceptable time; God, in the greatness of Your mercy, Answer me with Your saving truth. 14 Rescue me from the mud and do not let me sink; May I be rescued from those who hate me, and from the depths of water. 15 May the flood of water not overflow me Nor the deep swallow me up, Nor the pit close its mouth on me. 16 Answer me, Lord, for Your mercy is good; According to the greatness of Your compassion, turn to me, 17 And do not hide Your face from Your servant, For I am in distress; answer me quickly. 18 Come near to my soul and redeem it; Ransom me because of my enemies! 19 You know my disgrace, my shame,

and my dishonor; All my enemies are known to You. 20 Disgrace has broken my heart, and I am so sick. And I waited for sympathy, but there was none; And for comforters, but I found none. 21 They also gave me a bitter herb in my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. 22 May their table before them become a snare; And when they are at peace, may it become a trap. 23 May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see, And make their hips shake continually. 24 Pour out Your indignation on them, And may Your burning anger overtake them. 25 May their camp be desolated; May there be none living in their tents. 26 For they have persecuted him whom You Yourself struck, And they tell of the pain of those whom You have wounded. 27 Add guilt to their guilt, And may they not come into Your righteousness. 28 May they be wiped out of the book of life, And may they not be recorded with the righteous. 29 But I am afflicted and in pain; May Your salvation, God, set me safely on high. 30 I will praise the name of God with song, And exalt Him with thanksgiving. 31 And it will please the Lord better than an ox Or bull with horns and hoofs. 32 The humble have seen it and are glad; You who seek God, let your heart revive. 33 For the Lord hears the needy, And does not despise those of His who are prisoners. 34 Heaven and earth shall praise Him, The seas and everything that moves in them. 35 For God will save Zion and build the cities of Judah, So that they may live there and possess it. 36 The descendants of His servants will inherit it, And those who love His name will live in it.

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PSALMS

Psalm 69 | #mentalhealth

CHAPTER

6

"If God's intention for us is wholeness, shalom, health, we need a life beyond this one in order for this to be accomplished. To be sure, we do not want to give up too quickly in our hopes for health within this life. But, on the other hand, we should not be so narrowly bound in our expectations that disappointment, frustration, pain, and illness in this life leave us with doubts about the goodness of God or our own worthiness." - DJ Simundson

The Psalms put us in touch with our deepest emotions. As readers of the Psalms, we feel seen and understood. The Psalms can also make us sensitive to the emotional struggles of others. These Holy Spirit inspired songs show us that struggling is part of a relationship with God, not separate, and can help us understand our emotions.

The Psalms were born from life struggles and speak to people who struggle today.

They also arose from people who had experienced liberation in God from struggle whether a permanent victory or victory that comes day by day.

It is my hope to encourage you in these chapters as we dig through the Psalms to look at mental health to see it as a normal, regular, important part of life and health and

wholeness (shalom health). I want you to see the spiritual and the mental together rather than something that is separate.

Please see the blessing of therapy or medicine as a tool given by God to help. See that God provides healing or also grace to make it just through one day... for He does both. My prayer is that you know that God cares about your mental health.

The soul mirror that we are going to look at in this chapter is Psalm 69. Let's read God's Word (it's a biggun so don't speed read through it).

Psalm 69:1-36 (ESV): *“Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. 2 I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. 3 I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God. 4 More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. What I did not steal must I now restore? 5 O God, You know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from You. 6 Let not those who hope in You be put to shame through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; let not those who seek You be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel. 7 For it is for Your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face. 8 I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons. 9 For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me. 10 When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. 11 When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a*

byword to them. 12 I am the talk of those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me. 13 But as for me, my prayer is to You, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of Your steadfast love answer me in Your saving faithfulness. 14 Deliver me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters. 15 Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me. 16 Answer me, O LORD, for Your steadfast love is good; according to Your abundant mercy, turn to me. 17 Hide not Your face from Your servant, for I am in distress; make haste to answer me. 18 Draw near to my soul, redeem me; ransom me because of my enemies! 19 You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor; my foes are all known to You. 20 Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none. 21 They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. 22 Let their own table before them become a snare; and when they are at peace, let it become a trap. 23 Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually. 24 Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them. 25 May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents. 26 For they persecute him whom you have struck down, and they recount the pain of those you have wounded. 27 Add to them punishment upon punishment; may they have no acquittal from You. 28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous. 29 But I am afflicted and in pain; let Your salvation, O God, set me on high! 30 I will praise the Name of God with a song; I will magnify Him with thanksgiving. 31 This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs. 32 When the

humble see it they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive. 33 For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise His own people who are prisoners. 34 Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them. 35 For God will save Zion and build up the cities of Judah, and people shall dwell there and possess it; 36 the offspring of His servants shall inherit it, and those who love His Name shall dwell in it.”

Psalm 69 has a pattern to it.

DESPAIR (verses 1-4)

The Psalm begins with words that set the tone for the whole song. “Save me O God!” I was a little shocked as I began to pray and study this psalm because of the last word in verse 1. In English, the last word of verse one is translated ‘neck’ which is not a bad translation, but it can also mean ‘breath.’ The verse is expressing that David feels like he is up to his ‘neck’ in water and his ‘breath’ is in danger because he is drowning.

What shocked me is that this same word in the Old Testament, depending on how it is used, can mean ‘neck’ or ‘breath,’ but it can also mean ‘soul.’ In the New Testament, when the same type of word is used (46x) it always means ‘soul.’

I believe verse 1 of this psalm is meant to be a poetic play on words as we begin to read or sing it. We are meant to take notice that David is speaking about deep issues in this song. There is nothing surface-level here!

David is letting us know right away that his life is overwhelming him. He is like Artax... up to his neck in it. He is in so much despair that his soul is overwhelmed. That is quite a statement for verse 1. We know he is feeling overwhelmed because verse 2 talks about him sinking with no foothold, he's in deep waters that sweep over him, and his eyes are growing dim. For anyone with a fear of water, this imagery is petrifying.

I give the first four verses of Psalm 69 a label... that label is "despair."

BROKENNESS: SIN AND SHAME (verse 5-7)

The Psalm continues in verses 5-7 where David introduces us to a word that he will use 6 times in this psalm over and over and it clues us in more to his despair. He uses the word 'reproach' in Psalm 69, but I do not think that is a word that we normally use. It feels like an old-fashioned word. I once asked the word-smithing dinosaur... thesaurus... what other words are like reproach. It said: disgrace, abuse, blame, condemnation, disapproval, rebuke, shame, and stigma.

None of those are fun words.

As David is thinking over his life, he is full of chronic and existential shame. He even intensely worries in verse 6 that people who trust in God will turn away from God or be dishonored because he is a God-follower and he is a dirty rotten scoundrel full of reproach.

It is not always the case with despair and mental illness, but sometimes sin comes in to make a home sickening our soul.

For David in Psalm 69, he seems to be dealing with wrongs he has done that are not hidden from God (verse 5), don't seem to be hidden from others (verse 6), feeling disgraced, and feeling dishonored (which is a related word to reproach).

He feels ashamed.

SHAME¹¹

Shame is a big deal. Shame is a big deal because it can be fueled by objective guilt which are inner feelings of remorse or self-condemnation because of sinful actions and failures. Shame is a big deal because it can be fueled by subjective guilt which has no basis in any wrongdoing, but we assign it to ourselves anyway (this is mentally no bueno and spiritually ne goditsya).

Leaving these feelings of shame alone means they stay in our heart and mind as a seed. They can grow into several nasty emotions with consequences:

Defensive thinking arises as we blame others which can become our normal way of operating.

Self-condemnation can be set on high alert regularly. Over time, a highly developed voice of self-condemnation leads to anxiety, depression, and despair.

¹¹ cptsdfoundation.org/2019/04/11/the-neuroscience-of-shame

Believe it or not, shame can also impact us physically because shame warps part of our brain the longer we experience it. This can trigger depression and anxiety.

The late Dr. John Bradshaw (1933-2016), in his book, 'Healing the Shame that Binds You'¹² stated the following: "Prolonged shame states in life can result in permanently dysregulated autonomic functioning and a heightened sense of vulnerability to others. Their lives are marked by chronic anxiety, exhaustion, depression and a losing struggle to achieve perfection."

When shame stays in our systems, it becomes toxic because a part of the brain called the insula is damaged. This can cause many mental health issues because it generates the formation of low self-esteem, anxiety, irrational guilt, perfectionism, addiction, anorexia, bulimia, and other eating disorders.

Like I said, shame is a big deal.

It is a big deal to David in this psalm. It is a big deal to you and me and it is a big deal to the people around us.

¹² Health Communicaitons Inc, 2005, 316 pages

LONELINESS (verse 8-12)

In the midst of David's soul being overwhelmed by despair and shame, he also feels isolated and alone. He says in verse 8 that he is '*a stranger to my brothers*' doubling down that he is '*an alien to my mother's sons.*' Those are isolating words. He says in verse 11 that he is a '*byword*' which is a poetic way of saying he is mockingly forgotten. He continues to say in verse 12 that he is gossiped about by leaders in his community. Even drunks make up songs about him.

It is a bad day when drunks make up limericks about you.

David feels absolutely alone.

CORRECTIVE PRAYER: Verses 13-18

David takes a break in Psalm 69 after verse 12 from reflecting on his drowning soul to spend time in focused prayer correcting his patterns of thought. He asks God to help him in the midst of his despair, brokenness, shame, and loneliness. What does David focus on? The question directly relates to us: When we are in despair, brokenness, shame, and loneliness, what should we focus on?

First, David focuses on the '*steadfast love*' of God. This kind of love is also talked about in the New Testament as '*unconditional never-wavering everlasting agape*' love. God is love (1 John 4:8) and defines it by His holy never-changing patient holy character. God is love. God acts in love. God is motivated by love. God is love and gives abundant mercy (verse 16). The love God has for David is

God's motivation for answering his prayers, delivering him from overwhelming feelings, and blessing him with goodness.

It is the same for us when we drown in our despairing emotions and they overcome us. God is love. God acts in love. God is motivated by love. God is love. The love God has for you and I is God's motivation for answering our prayers, delivering us from overwhelming feelings, and blessing us with goodness.

- That might mean giving us strength to make it through the day. 👉
- That might mean sending us the perfect person to counsel us when we need it. 👉
- That might mean making a way for us to use medicine as a tool for mental health. 👉
- That might mean completely healing us once and for all from despair. 👉

Second, David focuses on the 'saving faithfulness' of God. I love the phrase here because David literally says God saves him firmly. There is no wishy washy or softness, but when God saves He firmly completely saves. David uses words like 'deliver' and 'delivered' (verse 14) and the powerful words 'redeem' and 'ransom' (verse 18). We know David is still thinking about his soul as in verse 1 because the same word for verse 1 is here again in verse 18. David looks to God for ultimate salvation from his despair, brokenness, shame, and loneliness.

It is the same for us when we are dealing with despair, brokenness, shame, and loneliness. It is overwhelming us

to the point that we feel like we are drowning in depression, anxiety, or other mental illness.

Our first source of joy, healing, peace, freedom from guilt, forgiveness, wholeness, and comfort needs to be God Almighty in the Name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul reminds us of this several times in the New Testament:

Ephesians 2:14a (ESV)

“For He Himself is our peace”

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (ESV)

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.”

2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV)

“For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

THE REPEATED THEMES

We might think that David would end his song there, but he does not. David continues his psalm and repeats the themes that we have already talked about because that is how poems/songs work... repetition is beautiful and makes the point.

He repeats thoughts about brokenness, sin, and shame in verses 19-20 to reiterate that his heart is utterly broken.

He repeats patterns of loneliness in verses 21-28 getting more specific that the people who surround him are not helpful, but rather hurtful.

Verse 29 is another bout with despair where he uses the vivid words “*afflict*” and “*pain.*”

I mention the repeated themes after the corrective prayer because the psalm neither ends nor is David suddenly happy all the day with rainbow farts and chocolate sprinkles.

The despair remains.

The despair remains, but he has the steadfastly loving God of the Universe right next to him in the water with Him as his Saving Lifeguard.

I want to mention a truth because the truth needs to be said. God can absolutely heal mental illness when we come

to Him and pray and ask. He can. He can. He can. He can. This Psalm indicates to me that He does not always.

He may.

When I think and pray on this issue I think of another passage of Scripture which I believe speaks to David's situation and the topic at hand. I can't lie to you, this is my least favorite verse in the Bible. I absolutely hate it. It is also a verse with hope in every single word; so I love it.

Paul writes to us in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (ESV)

“But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

The truth that David knows in Psalm 69 as he feels like he is drowning in despair is the same truth that the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12 as he feels afflicted and oppressed. That shared Truth is that God can completely heal, but even if He does not, He still is steadfast in His love firmly saving us with His grace. He gives power in our weakness which makes us struggle.

PRAISE: Verses 30-36

This truth is why David ends Psalm 69 praising God.

I want us to re-read the praise portion of Psalm 69 which comes at the heels of 29 verses of despair and sin and

shame and guilt and brokenness and loneliness and depression and anxiety and feelings of worthlessness and helplessness. Whew... that is a lot.

Psalm 69:30-36 (ESV)

“I will praise the Name of God with a song; I will magnify Him with thanksgiving. 31 This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs. 32 When the humble see it they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive. 33 For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise His own people who are prisoners. 34 Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them. 35 For God will save Zion and build up the cities of Judah, and people shall dwell there and possess it; 36 the offspring of His servants shall inherit it, and those who love His name shall dwell in it.”

In David’s conclusion of Psalm 69, I noticed in verse 32 that he says that those who seek the Lord will have revived hearts. I like that idea. That word “seek” in the verse is telling us to seek with care in order that we are very intent about our loyalty to God. Even in the midst of overwhelming emotions David never once wavered from his believing loyalty to God, but rather continually looked to Him for a revived heart.

These verses tell me one thing about God. God pays attention when we are in need and hurting. He revives and saves those who belong to Him. That is what I get from these verses. This is the encouraging thought I would like to leave with in this chapter.

I do not know your life situation, the pressures you are under, what illness may be impacting you physically and mentally, family issues that are stressful, or work situations that are intolerable, but I do know... God pays attention when we are in need. He revives and saves those who belong to Him.

David knew that and believed it.

I know that and believe it.

May you know that and believe it.

REDUCE SHAME

CHALLENGE THE NEGATIVE

SHAME OFTEN INVOLVES NEGATIVE SELF-TALK PROMPTED BY SATAN EVEN AFTER FORGIVENESS.

FOCUS AHEAD

STRAIN FORWARD TO WHAT LIES AHEAD IN CHRIST JESUS.

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

YOU WILL STILL MAKE MISTAKES AND FALL BACK INTO IT. DON'T SETTLE COMFORTABLE IN SIN.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

CONSIDER TALKING TO A THERAPIST OR COUNSELOR WHO CAN PROVIDE SUPPORT.

SELF-COMPASSION

PRACTICE GOING TO GOD FOR GRACE RECOGNIZING THAT EVERYONE MAKES MISTAKES.

SEEK SUPPORT

TALK TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS.

FRAME FEELINGS PROPER

SHAME IS A COMMON HUMAN EXPERIENCE. IT DOESN'T DEFINE YOU. JESUS DOES.

PRAYERFULNESS

PRAY ASKING FOR SUPERNATURAL SHALOM TO COME BY WAY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO COMBAT ANY SHAME. CONTINUALLY.

SIDE NOTE: *Challenge Negative Thoughts about Guilt*

Challenging negative thoughts about guilt involves actively questioning ourselves, reframing beliefs, and uncovering assumptions that contribute to feelings of guilt. It also involves prayer, accepting that God has forgiven us, and internalizing the elusive feeling of forgiveness.

How do we do that?

Identify Negative Thought Patterns: Start by becoming aware of the specific thoughts or beliefs that lead to feelings of guilt. For example:

“I should have done better because I knew better”

“I'm a bad person for making that mistake”

“I guess I really am what they said all along”

“I will always mess up”

Question the Evidence: Are you being overly harsh or critical of yourself? Is your inner critic having a banner day kicking you in the teeth or is there actually merit to your thoughts? Are you holding yourself to unrealistic impossible standards?

Seek Perspective from Christ: Read the Bible and dive into your feelings of guilt. Let the Truth of your identity in Christ outweigh everything else.

Challenging negative thoughts about guilt takes practice, patience, prayer, and probably talking with a trusted friend.

SIDE NOTE: *Qualities of a Good Christian Counselor*¹³

A good Christian counselor is someone who:

- loves people, perseveres through tough times, and is confident that Jesus works redemptively through suffering and struggle.
- believes that God's Word is sufficient to counsel for all of life's issues (2 Pet. 1:2-4; Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).
- gives clear evidence of a vital personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

It's important to ask prospective counselors about their theoretical orientation, their use of Scripture in counseling, and how Christ figures into the way they think about helping others.

Counseling is an interactive process. It is established and maintained on the basis of trust. Open honest dialogue between a counselor and a counselee is the most important component of building trust.

BIG NOTE: Not all Christian counselors are licensed so they do not have regulations or standardized ethical codes. Find a licensed one. Please. Also, many do not accept insurance. (see churchandmentalhealth.com)

Search for a Christian Counselor at:
christiancounselordirectory.com/
christiancounselorsnetwork.com/

¹³ <https://www.ccef.org/find-a-counselor-near-you>

SOME GOOD
THOUGHTS:

BE FEARLESSLY AUTHENTIC

FEEL THE MOMENTS

EAT
MORE
GREENS

HEALTH IS A
BLESSING

LOVE JESUS

CHERISH FAMILY BECAUSE
THEY SUPPORT

STAY POSITIVE
AND PRAY

SELF AWARENESS

TAKE MEDS

THE MORE WE TALK, THE MORE
WE UNDERSTAND

BE CURIOUS

SERVE SOMEONE ELSE

ASK GOOD
QUESTIONS

PSALM 88 (TLB)

“O Jehovah, God of my salvation, I have wept before You day and night. 2 Now hear my prayers; oh, listen to my cry, 3 for my life is full of troubles, and death draws near. 4 They say my life is ebbing out—a hopeless case. 5 They have left me here to die, like those slain on battlefields from whom Your mercies are removed. 6 You have thrust me down to the darkest depths. 7 Your wrath lies heavy on me; wave after wave engulfs me. 8 You have made my friends to loathe me, and they have gone away. I am in a trap with no way out. 9 My eyes grow dim with weeping. Each day I beg Your help; O Lord, I reach my pleading hands to You for mercy. 10 Soon it will be too late! Of what use are Your miracles when I am in the grave? How can I praise You then? 11 Can those in the grave declare Your loving-kindness? Can they proclaim Your faithfulness? 12 Can the darkness speak of your miracles? Can anyone in the Land of Forgetfulness talk about Your help? 13 O Lord, I plead for my life and will keep on pleading day by day. 14 O Jehovah, why have You thrown my life away? Why are You turning Your face from me and looking the other way? 15 From my youth I have been sickly and ready to die. I stand helpless before Your terrors. 16 Your fierce wrath has overwhelmed me. Your terrors have cut me off. 17 They flow around me all day long. 18 Lover, friend, acquaintance—all are gone. There is only darkness everywhere.”

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PSALMS

Psalm 88 | #mentalhealth

CHAPTER

7

“First, it cannot be stated enough for the church to simply be open, honest, and vulnerable enough to talk about mental illness and keep talking about it. People struggling with it eventually should feel comfortable enough to share and bring an end to the stigma of silence and shame. There is such profound healing in sharing within the midst of a supporting community of believers.” - Daniel Welsh

The Psalm we will be looking at in this chapter has quite a bit talked about it and not much of it good because it is just like the day after Girl Scout Cookie season ends... sad.

If Psalm 88 were a baseball team, it would be the Cleveland Spiders which is considered to be the worst team in any sport ever. In 1899, the Spiders went 20-134; only ever having a winning streak of 2 games.

If Psalm 88 were a football team, it would be the 1934 Cincinnati Reds. Now I know you are thinking I messed up typing “football” instead of “baseball,” but the Cincinnati Reds Football team played from 1933-1934 and set records for the lowest amount of points scored in a season with 38 points in 1933 and 37 points in 1934. The team in 1934 had an 0-8 record.

Basically... just sad.

High-falootin' Bible scholars talk about Psalm 88 with the same impression across the board:

“Psalm 88 is a song, yet a remarkably sad song, and is often regarded as the saddest psalm in the entire collection.” (David Guzik, Enduring Word)

“Psalm 88 builds to an emotional climax and then an abrupt end which is ‘darkness is my only friend’ but provides no sense of closure.” (Daniel Estes, NAC Commentary, Ps 73-150)

“The Psalm is almost without divisions and is a ‘slow unbroken wail’ expressive of the ‘monotony of woe.’ (The Pulpit Commentary, 1913 pg 230)

“The person who wrote this was called to walk in darkness and had no light.” (The Pulpit Commentary, 1913 pg 232)

“He does not speak of one kind of calamity only; but of calamities so heaped upon one another that his heart was filled with sorrow, till it could contain no more.” (Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume V, pg 409)

“The prayer is a deeply piercing shout... here a loud cry for divine help. The psalmist shouts loudly to the Lord; hoping that He will hear.” (VanGemeren, Expositors BC, pg 565)

The tone of the Scripture that we will read is incredibly sad.

More than sad.

The other background information we need to know about this Psalm before we read it is that unlike others we have read, this one was not written or composed by King David. This Psalm was written by Heman the Ezrahite.

What do we know about He-Man? We know that his real name is Prince Adam. He comes from a planet called Eternia. The Sorceress gave him a magic sword. When Adam calls on the power of Greyskull, the power comes on him to transform Adam into He-Man in order to fight evil Skeletor. His toys were all the rage in the 1980s.

No?

Ok, wrong Heman.

The Heman who wrote this Psalm is most likely the one mentioned in 1 Chronicles 25:5 as being “*the king’s seer,*” one who sang worship and played instruments (1 Chronicles 6:33, 15:19, 16:41-42), and he who is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible as being incredibly wise (1 Kings 4:31). This man was musically talented, led worship, and was considered wise. In many ways, it shocks us that this man wrote this Psalm.

So, we have a very depressingly sad song as our Scripture focus, not written by David, but by a wise man we should very much call a prophet.

Folks who say the Bible does not address mental illness, emotional struggles, or doesn’t have anything to say about depression has never read Psalm 88 or any of the other Psalms we have been digging into (just sayin).

Our purpose in all the chapters in this book is to look at mental health in the Bible to learn from the Scriptures what God says about mental health, emotional fitness, healthy patterns of thinking, rollercoasters of feeling, and human living. We can do all of that because God shares those truths with us!

Let's read Psalm 88:1-18 (ESV)

“O LORD, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before You. 2 Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry! 3 For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol. 4 I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength, 5 like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom You remember no more, for they are cut off from Your hand. 6 You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep. 7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and You overwhelm me with all Your waves. Selah 8 You have caused my companions to shun me; You have made me a horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape; 9 my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon You, O LORD; I spread out my hands to You. 10 Do You work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise You? Selah 11 Is Your steadfast love declared in the grave, or Your faithfulness in Abaddon? 12 Are Your wonders known in the darkness, or Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? 13 But I, O LORD, cry to You; in the morning my prayer comes before You. 14 O LORD, why do You cast my soul away? Why do You hide Your face from me? 15 Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer Your terrors; I am helpless. 16 Your wrath has swept over me; Your dreadful assaults destroy me. 17 They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on

me together. 18 You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.”

As I looked over this Psalm, I saw two emphases immediately that brought me then to an obvious question.

FIRST EMPHASIS: SADNESS

The first emphasis Heman the Ezrahite makes is the sadness of his heart as he explains what is going on inside of him. In this way, he is like David with the other Psalms at which we have looked. Heman’s soul is sad, in despair, gloomy, and full of very unhealthy patterns of depression.

Verse 1: *“I cry out day and night”*

Verse 3: *“My soul is full of troubles”*

Verse 4: *“I am a man who has no strength”*

Verse 5: *“remember no more”* and *“cut off”*

Verse 9: *“my eye grows dim through sorrow”*

I think we get the point. Well, maybe. Maybe we get the point. Maybe we don’t. Hopefully you are not someone who feels that a person with ‘darkness as their only friend’ should just pray in faith a little more and then they will snap out of it.

If you think that, then you do not get it.

If you don't see how depression impacts a person's soul, body, mind, emotions, motivations, sex life, spending habits, sleep patterns, self-concept, and even their very important view of God, then you... do not... get it.

Psalm 88 is 18 verses about utter despair of the soul. We have a word for that: depression.

Psalm 88 is 18 verses about wanting to die. We have a word for that: depression.

Psalm 88 is 18 verses about living in a pit of hurt and pain. We have a word for that: depression.

The word "depression" covers a wide variety of symptoms of mental difficulties that vary in severity, frequency, duration, and reason.

Depression impacts feelings by bringing about sadness, low self-esteem, self-criticism, hopelessness, shame, worthlessness, pessimism, and anger.

It also impacts thinking. Depressed people have negative thoughts that seem as real as any thoughts they might have when thinking in a non-depressed manner. Both (though sometimes contradictory) feel equally true. Self-destruction, self-criticism, and trouble concentrating are the order of the day in the mind.

Depression impacts behavior in that apathy is real as well as social withdrawal, neglect, and constant complaining.

Depression also impacts physical health by way of fatigue, sleeplessness or sleeping too much, and muscle aches.

Depression can come for a season. For some, depression can come in the winter months or can come in a particularly hard time of life when unexpected changes happen. Death of a loved one is a common trigger that hits with both barrels.

Depression can also be something that is genetic with regards to brain chemistry which stays with a person for a lifetime. This is called chronic daily depression or dysthymic (diss-thigh-mick) depression that lasts for years. It is often treated with medication and therapy.¹⁴

Why do I share all of this with you?

I share it because depression is real. It was absolutely real for Heman the Ezrahite when he wrote this Psalm by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that you could read and reflect on it thousands of years later.

Depression is real for the person whose life shifts by changing in unexpected ways during a season of life when it is turned sideways. Their heart reacts with sadness or a critical spirit rules them for a while during the tumult.

Depression is also real for the person whose brain chemistry is ransacked by genetics, drug use, or unhealthy patterns of living. The bare-knuckle brawling depression stays not for a season, but for years, decades, and many times for a lifetime.

¹⁴ Gary Collins, *Christian Counseling*, 2007, pages 119-139

Mental illness and mental health is a real issue for the person who deals with an eating disorder, OCD, ADHD, anxiety issues, panic attacks, PTSD, and a whole host of other challenges.

These are extremely difficult issues that reach into a person's soul... Christian or not. Yes, Christians can have these issues! It is not because their faith is faulty or they are irreparably broken or they aren't really Christians deep down. Such things are part of the sin-brokenness of creation. Everyone deals with it. Some better than others.

Heman the Ezrahite brings his sadness of soul to our attention and unfortunately, does not leave us with any answers.

He is at a loss.

He is in the pit.

He is hurting.

This Psalm, unlike all the other Psalms, does not end on a high note or a praise or a positive spin, but ends with him just sitting in his despair with no answers.

I mentioned above that as I looked over this Psalm, I saw two emphases immediately. The first was the sadness that stacked itself up in this man's heart to weigh him down so much that he felt like he was in a pit dying. The despair, sadness, and soul-gloom are apparent. That is the first emphasis. The second emphasis was quite shocking and is an important topic for us to discuss.

SECOND EMPHASIS: BLAME OF GOD

The second emphasis in Psalm 88 is that Heman the Ezrahite absolutely 100% no-holds-barred take-it-to-the-bank-and-smoke-it without-any-reservation blames God for the despair in his soul. By my count, Heman blames God for what is going on with him 17 times in 18 verses.

Verse 6: *“You have put me in the depths of the pit”*

Verse 7: *“You overwhelm me with all Your waves”*

Verse 8: *“You have caused my companions to shun me”*

Verse 14: *“O LORD, why do You cast my soul away?”*

Verse 15: *“I suffer Your terrors; I am helpless.”*

Verse 16: *“Your dreadful assaults destroy me.”*

This fellow is mad at God and blames Him for his perpetual anguish! No diggity, no doubt. Heman has no idea of God’s rationale for setting such sadness and grief in his heart and he does not appreciate it.

Not one bit.

He blames God.

Heman wants God to deliver him, save him, bless him, and bring him out of the pit, but God doesn’t seem to be answering Heman’s prayers on this subject. As a result, Heman is not only full of despair, but also blame for God.

The NIV translates the last phrase in verse 18 to say: “*darkness is my closest friend.*” Do you know why he says “*darkness is my closest friend?*”

Because God isn’t.

Heman feels abandoned by God. He feels justified in telling God for 18 verses that he is hurting and God did it.

The blame of God in Psalm 88 makes us a bit uncomfortable because we aren’t sure that blaming God is something that should be done. We know we do it, but we also have a great sense that blaming the all-knowing, all-powerful God of the Universe for our problems may be blasphemy at the least and rejection of God at the most.

Yet, Heman blames God over and over again in Psalm 88.

There are three truths about blaming God that must be acknowledged. These truths may not help you, but they are three truths nevertheless.

First, blaming God is human nature. I would hazard to say that most people probably blame God for something somewhere at some time because God is an easy target for blame. God is all-knowing, all-powerful, has the best retirement plan, and is in-charge of everything. Therefore, if something is bent out of shape, it is obviously the Divine One’s fault. I know it is human nature to blame God because the very first human being did it.

In Genesis 3:11-12 (ESV) Adam did it: *“He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’”* 12 *The man said, ‘The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.’”*

Please take note of whom Adam eventually blames for his sin. God. Blaming God is human nature, which does not excuse it or make it right, but does mean the sin of blaming God exists early in human existence and is not unheard of.

Second, blaming God is about assigning fault to God which is dangerous any way we look at it. The word blame means “to find fault.” Blaming God goes beyond acknowledging God’s rule and reign over our lives. Blaming God steps into the idea that God messed up and that there is a fault to be found in Him.

When we blame God, we make ourselves His judge and jury by ceasing to believe in His holy righteousness, love, and perfect will. We finite fleshly human beings have no right to pass judgment on the infinite divine Almighty. We do it anyway, but we have no right. Blame is very dangerous when it comes to God.

Third, blaming God is very dangerous because we may end up just sitting in the blame. A human soul that decides to just blame God ends up turning away from God. That is simple spiritual truth that we must acknowledge. Blame God long enough and it will wear away all believing loyalty one has towards God. Blame leads to rejecting God.

I wonder about Heman the Ezrahite. Was he totally committed to blaming God? Or was he just expressing his blame and he is struggling through it? To be honest, I can't decide.

On one hand... Heman uses words like:

Verse 1: *“O LORD, God of my salvation”*

Verse 1: *“I cry out day and night before You”*

Verse 2: *“Let my prayer come before You”*

Verse 9: *“Every day I call upon You, O LORD; I spread out my hands to You”*

Verse 12: *“Your righteousness”*

He is praying to God frequently and believes God to be His Saving Lord. That Saving Lord will help. That Saving Lord hears His prayers.

On the other hand... Heman breaks with the tradition of this type of Psalm by not ending with praise or encouragement. He simply ends with darkness and gives no sense of relieving hope.

As I looked over this Psalm, I saw two emphases immediately: sadness and blame. Those two brought me to an obvious question: Is there an answer?

Is there an answer in Psalm 88 to mental health in the midst of despair?

Is there an answer in Psalm 88 for when we blame God from the depths of our being?

QUESTION: IS THERE AN ANSWER?

How we answer this question is very important; supremely important. How we answer it indicates whether or not we are fundamentally a person of faith to the core of our being or someone who fakes religion on Sundays.

How we answer this question shows us where our faith... our believing loyalty... really lays. I do not know how it turned out for Heman the Ezrahite after he wrote Psalm 88.

I know how God wants it to work out for us.

The answer is that we must cry out wrestling with God through the sadness and blame. The Bible is full of people who faced life-altering tragedies, formidable mental obstacles, and deep spiritual struggles all the while maintaining their faith in God. They did so by crying out to God which is struggling through the sadness and blame with Him. They did not quit. They did not reject. They did not blaspheme. They cried out to a holy loving God.

Romans 5 encourages us that on the other side of suffering is hope in God: *“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love*

has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (5:3-5, ESV).

2 Corinthians tells us that God works with us in our weaknesses to give us grace, power, and strength: *“But He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (12:9-10, ESV).*

James encourages us to remain faithful to see God’s promises come true: *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love Him” (1:12, ESV).*

The answer is that we must cry out wrestling with God through the sadness and blame.

For some reason, we often think we have to do this alone. We do not have to struggle through sadness and blame of God alone. In answer to prayer, God has already given us believers around us who may be helpful when we feel like our heart is a mess. They can come alongside to listen, pray, and encourage us.

God has given Christian counselors and/or therapists to talk to and with whom to pray.

God has blessed human beings with inventive brains to create medicines as tools to relieve severe depression. These medicines can be helpful with some forms of depression that have their roots in physical causes.

Puritan Pastor Richard Baxter said: “Note carefully how much the Devil delights in confining you to sad, despondent thoughts. You may then easily see that such a focus cannot be your duty or in your best interests if it is so helpful and pleasing to the Devil! ... You have poor, low thoughts of the infinite love of God and are unfit to weigh it or perceive it. You are like someone with constant acid reflux, which causes constant bitterness in the mouth and hinders one from taking any enjoyment in eating. Your low thoughts of God prevent you from loving Him and incline you to hate Him or to flee from Him as from an enemy. Meanwhile the Devil misrepresents Him as hating you.”¹⁵

He also said: “My last advice is this: strive for the cure of your disease and commit yourself to the care of your physician and obey him. Don’t be like most depressed persons, who will not believe that medication will do them good, but who think it is only their soul that is troubled. Because understand this... it is the chemistry, reason, and mood that are unbalanced.”¹⁶

We can find balance in God with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit along with therapy and medicine. It is possible. With God, all things are possible.

¹⁵ ‘Depression, Anxiety, and the Christian Life.’ Richard Baxter. Crossway 2018. Page 98

¹⁶ ‘Depression, Anxiety, and the Christian Life.’ Richard Baxter. Crossway 2018. Page 100

5

KEY ACTIONS TO DEAL WITH BLAME

01

FOCUS ON SOLUTIONS & THE TRUTH

Instead of blame, shift the focus towards finding solutions to the problem at hand and away from mistakes.

02

OWN IT BY "I" STATEMENTS

Truth is usually somewhere in the middle. Use "I" statements to express how you feel or what you need, rather than accusing others.

03

JUST THE FACTS

Stick to facts and specific behaviors rather than making generalizations or assumptions. Keep discussions objective.

04

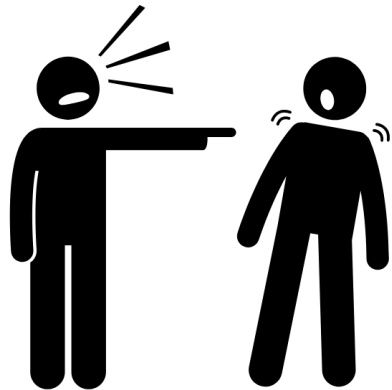
LET IT GO

Holding onto blame can hinder progress and maintain negative emotions. Practice forgiveness, both towards yourself and others.

05

MINDSET SHIFT

Reducing blame requires a mindset shift away from the false self and towards Truth.



SIDE NOTE: *Anger with God and Blame*

Sometimes when confronted with hardship, adversity, injustice, misfortune, and/or affliction we develop anger towards God. This is human. We should not consider it normal, but it is human.

People will often blame God when what they have lived for comes up empty. *“When a man’s folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord”* (Proverbs 19:3, ESV). Emptiness or loneliness can make us blame God for our situation.

When God’s children wandered about in the wilderness, He summed up their attitude as, *“They grumble against Me”* (Numbers 14:27; see also Exodus 16:8, Numbers 14:29, 17:5). In context: *“your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me”* (14:29). The circumstances of the Israelites made them displeased with God’s actions.

It is human nature to want to blame and be angry at others. When hardships seem overwhelming, God is often a scapegoat to be blamed. He is an easy target for He is God... the ‘In-Charge One.’

For example, Job was in unrelenting pain, and his wife’s reaction was: *“Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die”* (Job 2:9, ESV). In response Job said: *“You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?”* In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (2:10, ESV).

We can add God's answer to Job in chapters 40-41, as example: "*Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: 7 "Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to Me. 8 Will you even put Me in the wrong? Will you condemn Me that you may be in the right?"*" (40:6-8, ESV).

Our unfair circumstances, volatile state of mind, physical pains, and long-lasting anguish may make us turn on God in anger. We may feel that our mental state is not of our doing, but is of His doing... this is unfair.

Thus, anger and blame.

Our mental illness may be the result of genetics which puts the blame for our depression, anxiety, or OCD squarely in the arena of the One Who created us.

Thus, anger and blame.

When God blesses a person we wish He would curse, anger can erupt. God showed mercy to Nineveh, and "*it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry [with God]*" (Jonah 4:1, ESV). Life is unfair and God is in charge of life.

Thus, anger and blame.

When men and women reap what they sow, they often harshly judge the One who rightly judges them. People "*cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds*" (Revelation 16:11, ESV). We don't like the consequences of our sin so we get angry with blame for God Who is the Consequence Giver or Consequence Allow-er.

In all things, as we make our way through angry blame with God, we must settle down our mind and our roiling heart to believe that He is good.

He is good.

He is always good.

The Bible tells us in 2 Samuel 12:15-23 that David went before God humbly on behalf of his sick baby, fasting, weeping, and praying for him to survive. When the baby passed away, David got up, worshiped the Lord, told his servants that he knew where his baby was, and that he would someday be with him in God's presence.

David cried out to God during the baby's illness and afterward he bowed before Him in worship.

No lingering anger.

He had no lingering anger because his base belief in God Almighty is that His plans and His ways are graciously good. He did not know why God allowed his baby to die, but he believed in God's goodness.

I don't know what to tell you about being angry at God (sorry), but eventually please settle on His goodness.

PSALM 142 (KJV)

“I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. 2 I poured out my complaint before Him; I shewed before Him my trouble. 3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then Thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. 4 I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. 5 I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. 6 Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. 7 Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy Name: the righteous shall compass me about; for Thou shalt deal bountifully with me.”

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PSALMS

Psalm 142 | #mentalhealth

CHAPTER 8

“This means that whatever impacts or affects a man’s physical body also impacts his soul and spirit. Whatever affects his soul also impacts his spirit and body, and whatever affects his spirit also impacts his body and soul.”

- Eric Joseph

The life situation David was in when he wrote Psalm 142 is one that we know about from other passages in the Old Testament. It is most likely reflected in 1 Samuel 22-24 which means David probably also wrote Psalm 34 and Psalm 57 about the same time.

David was on the run for his life from King Saul.

The amount of stress, fear, and constant pressure would have been overwhelming for anyone. David was literally hiding for his life overcome with intense helplessness and feverish hopelessness.

I see David dealing with much anxiety.

I see David wracked with depression.

I see David invaded with loneliness.

I see David doing his best in a terrible situation.

Psalm 142:1-7 (ESV)

“With my voice I cry out to the LORD; with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD. 2 I pour out my complaint before Him; I tell my trouble before Him. 3 When my spirit faints within me, You know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me. 4 Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul. 5 I cry to You, O LORD; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.” 6 Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me! 7 Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to Your Name! The righteous will surround me, for You will deal bountifully with me.”

Psalm 142 reflects all of what was going on inside of David and shows us how David was struggling. There are three primary thoughts in Psalm 142. All of them direct us to think about mental health because we see ourselves reflected in David.

After we talk about these three areas, I want to also investigate what we can do to help, love, and minister to those in our lives who may deal with emotional and mental obstacles.

Many times, a mental illness or struggle will prevent someone from helping themselves, therefore, help comes from God and many times help comes from God through another person which may in fact be us!

TROUBLE AND LOWNESS

David felt troubling lowness in his spirit:

- In verse 1 he says: “*With my voice I cry out to the LORD*” and asks for mercy.
- In verse 2 he says: “*I tell my trouble before Him*”
- In verse 3 he says: “*When my spirit faints within me*”
- In verse 6 he says: “*I am brought very low!*”

In verse 2, David uses a specific word that means “*sharp troubling distress.*” In verse 6, he uses a word that means to “*be brought low*” with physical weakness attached to it. Overall, David is feeling trouble and lowly in his spirit.

His situation is overwhelming his heart. The overwhelming of his heart also impacts him physically. That’s how mental health works. A struggle in our spirit, emotions, or patterns of thinking translates to sleeplessness, physical weakness, heart issues, weight issues, stomach problems, headaches, and a whole host of other physical issues. David is dealing with all of that as he sits in a cave hiding for his life.

We need to realize that mental struggles impact us physically. We should realize it, but maybe we do not. We should always keep in mind that anxiety, grief, or intense emotions always impact us physically because human beings are made that way.

It was that way for Jesus as well. Before He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus’ emotions overwhelmed Him in wave after wave. Luke 22:42-44 describes it best: “*Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me.*”

Nevertheless, not My will, but Yours, be done.” 43 And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (ESV).

Jesus was in such emotional agony that the capillaries in His head burst mixing blood with His sweat.¹⁷ These verses are not fiction, but describe a real human physical reaction to emotion. Jesus is experiencing intense emotion combined with a physical reaction. This is how we are made as human beings. Our emotions and mental health impact our physical health. David was undergoing something similar as he sat in a cave hiding for his life as a spear-wielding madman (his father-in-law) pursued him.

David not only speaks about trouble and lowness in Psalm 142, but he also curiously speaks in Psalm 142 about feeling very alone.

ALONE

David felt very alone:

- In verse 4 he says, “*there is none who takes notice of me*”
- In verse 4 he says, “*no one cares for my soul*”
- In verse 6, he mentions that no one is around to hear his cry.

I find it very interesting that David feels alone.

¹⁷ hematohidrosis

I say that because in 1 Samuel 22-24, which gives the background of this season of David's life, we note that he is not by himself in anything he endures. David is not on the run by himself. David is not hiding by himself. David is surrounded by others; many others.

1 Samuel 22 tells us that relatives came to aid him. Others which numbered around 400 also joined him. These others that joined him were not of the best of character (poor pirate motorcycle gang with antisocial tendencies), but that is not the point. David was in fact not by himself, yet he felt alone.

That small truth gives us a hint about the power and nature of the mind. David was not alone, but his mind and heart told him he was lonely... therefore... he was lonely.

Loneliness has absolutely nothing to do with the facts of real life of if you are by yourself or in a crowd of people. Feeling alone is a state of mind and a pattern of thinking mixed with emotions where you are isolated in your heart. Loneliness is painful inner emptiness.

Mental illness whether short term or long term is something that is very isolating. A person who feels like they are alone feel as they do because patterns of thinking lead them to see their lives according to the facts their heart is telling them rather than reality.

We should realize that mental struggles impact us in terms of how we see ourselves and how we relate to other people. We should realize it, but maybe we do not.

We should always keep in mind that anxiety, grief, or intense emotions can impact us by isolating us from people, social situations, and decrease our willingness to be social.

Our minds and hearts can even lead us to isolate ourselves from God by pushing Him away. Before He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' emotions overwhelmed Him in wave after wave. In the same passage we looked at above, Luke 22, note what is described just a few verses later as it relates to feeling alone:

Luke 22:42-46 (ESV)

“Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me. Nevertheless, not my will, but Yours, be done.” 43 *And there appeared to Him an angel from heaven, strengthening Him. 44 And being in agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. 45 And when He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, 46 and He said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.”*

The Gospel of Matthew (26:40) adds the phrase from Jesus in this same timeframe of His life: *“So, could you not watch with Me one hour?”*

What additional emotion is Jesus feeling in that moment of complete anguish, grief, and anxiety when He walks back to the disciples discovering they are all sound asleep?

I think He feels alone.

I think He feels isolated.

He feels like He is by Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane even though He is clearly not physically alone for all the disciples are all present. He even had the benefit of an angel to attend Him at one point!

And yet, Jesus felt alone.

David not only speaks about trouble and lowness and feeling very alone in Psalm 142, but he also speaks in Psalm 142 about feeling trapped.

TRAPPED

David felt trapped:

- In verse 3, he says: *“In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me.”*
- In verse 6, he says: *“Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me!”*
- In verse 7 he talks about being in prison.

All three of those verses speak about this feeling of being trapped or in a situation where there is no way out or feeling emotionally backed into a corner. This feeling is very real for David and I imagine that this feeling of being trapped presented itself as anxiety.

When I use the term ‘anxiety’ in the context of mental health, I am not speaking of worry, although it can encompass that. ‘Anxiety’ in a mental health capacity is a bit broader than just a feeling of worry or the inability to control worry.

Anxiety includes feeling nervous, restless, or tense. There is also fear of being trapped, helpless or embarrassed depending on the person. Some feel impending panic or doom which results in increased heart rate, sweating, and trembling which then means they are often weak or tired. Anxiety can bring on gastrointestinal issues.

The anxiety that I am speaking about has made a huge surge after the COVID-19 pandemic. I can almost guarantee you know someone who is dealing with increased anxiety after the societal shutdowns, family isolation, arguments over masks, protests over vaccinations, and the long-lasting shift that happened in many communities, organizations, and schools.

Anxiety is real and it is all the more real after COVID-19.

We need to realize that anxiety is real. It impacts us physically, socially, and eventually spiritually. We should realize it, but maybe we do not. We should always keep in mind that anxiety is a real struggle for some around us.

I believe Jesus endured anxiety before He was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus' emotions overwhelmed Him in wave after wave. We have been reading from Luke 22, but let's also read from Matthew 26. I want us to read the whole section and I want you to see in Jesus of Nazareth the presence of anxiety about what is about to happen to Him:

Matthew 26:36-46 (ESV)

“Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and He said to His disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” 37 And taking with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, He began to be sorrowful and troubled. 38 Then He said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with Me.” 39 And going a little farther He fell on His face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” 40 And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And He said to Peter, “So, could you not watch with Me one hour? 41 Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” 42 Again, for the second time, He went away and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Your will be done.” 43 And again He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 So, leaving them again, He went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. 45 Then He came to the disciples and said to them, “Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Rise, let us be going; see, My betrayer is at hand.”

Jesus is about to be betrayed by one of His dearest friends, tortured by experts, subjected to a series of unfair trials, and die the most horrible death ever invented.

Yes, Jesus felt anxiety.

Yes, Jesus prayed about it earnestly.

He prayed. The anxiety and fear about crucifixion, separation from God, and all that He would endure was there. Over and over that night He dealt with emotions that

overcame Him. Jesus seems so very much like us in the Garden of Gethsemane, don't you think? Like David in a cave in Psalm 142, Jesus was feeling great anxiety pressing down on His heart in a garden in Luke 22. Anxiety is real and a struggle for some.

Psalm 142 presents a window into David's heart and mental situation. We see him as full of troubling lowness, feeling alone, and also riddled with the feeling of being trapped which causes anxiety.

The Psalms are mirrors for ourselves.

These struggles are real and present in the life of Jesus which to me makes it all the more real. Such feelings may be centered around a catastrophic event, a drastic life change, or may be a persistent mental illness challenge.

What can we do?

Why should we bother being an encourager when it comes to mental health?

How can we love someone who is full of trouble that brings them low?

When should we make ourselves available?

Where is it best to step in and be helpful and when is stepping in hurtful?

HELP

Overall, I think about the following Bible passages in answering some of those questions:

Galatians 6:9-10 (ESV)

“And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

Colossians 3:16 (ESV)

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)

“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace...”

I cannot deny seeing an overall message in the Bible that we are to constantly do good for each other, help, carry burdens, admonish one another, teach where we can, encourage each other continually, love others, and minister to each other in as many ways as we possibly can.

Mental health is not excluded anywhere in there.

We just assume we can't help so we don't.

We just assume it is someone else's problem so we do not make the effort and investment to love each other when struggling with mental health.

God would have us love and encourage people no matter their internal struggles.

God would have us love and encourage people no matter their emotional struggles.

God would have us love and encourage people no matter their mental struggles.

How about some practical examples?

First, share with the person over and over that God's Word is the power to help aid with patterns of thinking.

God can speak right to our hearts through the Bible. The Bible presents our identity in Christ and proper patterns of thinking.

Our faith in God's deliverance and help and strength must be foremost in our minds and hearts if we are to navigate mental illness properly. Sometimes we need someone else to point that out for us.

We must cling to God when nothing else makes sense because we should not believe everything we think. We must cling to God when our patterns of thinking lead us to trouble and low places. As a spouse or friend or parent or family member, we can encourage the person to cling to

God and His Word because we don't want them to lose Him as their focus in the midst of struggle.

Text them Bible verses daily when you pray for them.

Use the YouVersion App to read the Bible together.

Pick them up to bring them to church even when they don't wanna.

I know that focusing on God is something we should do because it is specifically what David did. The same verses that I mentioned above which express his trouble and lowness also express his vision, focus, prayer, attention, and hope all on God Almighty Who listens to our cries (verse 1, 5, 6), grants mercy (verse 1), hears our troubles (verse 2), shows us the way (verse 3, 7), offers deliverance (verse 6) and bountiful blessings (verse 7). David sees trouble all around, but he also knows to keep his believing loyalty on God.

Encourage the person not to neglect the gift and opportunity of medication. It may be that a person does not understand that their emotions are impacting their physical body and sending their spirit out of whack. A medication may be needed.

Mental illness is not only in the mind, but medication can help the mind, body, and spirit recover. Healing and creating a new balance might mean medication. The soul and body and mind are all linked.

We do not need to say “just pray more” to help with mental health, but be wise in that a medicine may be needed to address a physical root cause of mental illness or anxiety.

We might also need to lovingly remind the person that they are important, needed, loved, and deserve to get the help, counsel, and medicine needed to get mentally healthier.

When you pray with them and for them, ask God to help them see themselves as God sees them.

Help them search for a doctor that will fit their needs.

Offer to take them to the doctor if they aren't sure about medication.

Offer to talk about how medication might be helpful for them.

Pray with them for wisdom about what is good and right for their health.

Help them see medicine as a blessed tool from God to help.

We may need to compassionately intrude into their space to interrupt the unhealthy patterns of thought with loving unwavering consistent insistence that they seek a professional counselor or start medicine or re-take medicine they already have in their medicine cabinet.

We can make sure a person we love and care for does not spend too much time alone.

We can arrange for friends to visit, take them with us as we do errands, as we visit with people, or go out to eat.

Sometimes idleness can breed loneliness or anxiety. Doing an activity with them that is physical as well as mental can be helpful.

The person in the persistent debilitating doldrums may not want to do it because they do not see the value in it, but that is where the compassionate loving consistent insistence and humble intrusion comes into play.

The other side of this is that presence of others may not automatically cure loneliness, but it is a step in the right direction.

Insist that they continue to go to church and serve.

Be compassionate but firm when mental illness is winning over reality.

Pray for them and with them about God reshaping their patterns of thinking.

Being cognizant of our patterns of thinking, our emotions, and how they impact our physical selves. Our spiritual life is important. We are created to be whole in all these areas.

I would like to be prayerful and bless those who struggle with mental illness and perhaps give you good words to share with someone in your life:

May you find peace and strength in Christ first for He is the source of peace and strength.

May you find medicine to be helpful as a tool of God for wholeness and health.

May you have support and love and firmness from people around you.


May you forgive those people around you who say the wrong things at the wrong times.

May you know your brokenness brings you closer to God Almighty not further away.


BOOKS I WOULD RECOMMEND TO HELP WITH MENTAL HEALTH AND REFRAMING THE PATTERNS OF YOUR MIND:

 Crabb, Larry. *Soul Talk*. HarperChristian + ORM, 2005.

 Giglio, Louie. *Don't Give the Enemy a Seat at Your Table*. Thomas Nelson, 2021.


 Groeschel, Craig. *Winning the War in Your Mind*. Zondervan, 2021.

 Lucado, Max. *You'll Get Through This*. Thomas Nelson, 2013.


 Mansfield, Stephen. *Healing Your Church Hurt*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012.

 McCracken, Brett. *The Wisdom Pyramid*. Crossway, 2021.

 Sauls, Scott. *Beautiful People Don't Just Happen*. Zondervan, 2022.

 Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*. Zondervan, 2017.

 Stutz, Phil, and Barry Michels. *The Tools*. Random House, 2012.

 Winkler, Kyle. *Shut Up, Devil*. Chosen Books, 2022.

 Yaconelli, Mike. *Messy Spirituality*. HarperChristian + ORM, 2009.

MENTAL HEALTH IN THE PSALMS

FINAL THOUGHTS | #mentalhealth

CHAPTER
9

“Unfortunately, the negative influences of the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s and 1970s are still being felt in the Christian community today, limiting the possibility of a holistic approach to treating mental disorders that incorporates both religious and psychiatric resources. This movement perpetuated the idea that the causes of mental illness are solely spiritual in nature (e.g., personal sin, lack of faith) and thus should be dealt with in a pastoral counseling context separate from all secular psychiatric or psychological involvement. Although the relationship between the Christian church and the mental health profession remains tense, inroads have been made on both sides.”

- Matthew S. Stanford (2007)

I have absolutely no clue how to end this book. I thought about writing a story or perhaps some kind of testimony or a series of poems highlighting faith and mental health.

I guess I will end this version of the book (since I am sure I will have more sermons and more thoughts as years progress for another edition), with prayers and hopes for you in a bit of a stream of consciousness style.

It is what it is.

You picked up this book probably because you are a Christian and you deal with mental illness. Thank you for reading.

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I hope it has been helpful to see permission to take medicine, seek professional help for mental struggles, and also making sure God is at the center of your life. If you leave God out, you have no hope.

You picked up this book probably because you are a Christian and you want to give this book to someone you love. Thank you for sharing. I hope it helps a little or a lot.

> Person who received this book... the person who gave it to you loves you dearly! <

The people who love us and are close to us see us struggle; not knowing what to say or how to help. They're just tryna do their best like you.

May you know that mental illness seems correct whilst you are in it and totally incorrect once you are through it. This is the nature of the issue. It clouds everything.

Our thought patterns and emotions can be derailed by so many factors. Genetics, prolonged sin, drug use, and abuse can all impact us in ways that muddy our mental health. It creates permanent barriers we have to deal with.

Yes, I said sin causes mental illness. It is not the only cause, but I will not shy away from Truth. Sin causes mental illness as does crap genetics impacting brain chemistry, super hard seasons of life, and verbal, physical, and sexual abuse.

Yes, there is 'a sin that does not lead to death' Apostle John, but sometimes those sins lead to hurts that never go

away and emotional baggage that we'd rather just lose as we travel this life.

If you have ever been told that 'demon possession' is mental illness or that you 'don't have enough faith' and so you suffer... I am sorry. Those are thoughts that have a small sliver of truth to it, but the falseness of those thoughts far outweighs anything helpful.

At the same time, yes, demon possession can present with mental illness symptoms. If I denied that, I would be lying. I happen to believe that spiritual warfare is real. Demons and the Devil are real and so I cannot deny that demonic influence looks like mental illness and has similar outcomes. It is true. What false is to say all mental struggles have a demonic component. To say that, is irresponsible and not true.

At the same time, yes, faith is important to our mental health. God created us as integrated people where the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual all work together for health or even illness. It is how we are made. That means faith is important to mental health. That means a poor pattern of thinking can impact us physically. This means something physical can impact us emotionally or spiritually.

Psychotropic medicine does help, but it is not a cure-all or a silver bullet to kill the beast.

Taking psychotropic medicine does not mean you are weak or somehow a bad Christian. It means you have a thorn in

your flesh or mind. You need to rely on God to walk in victory... and perhaps He's provided medicine as part of your victory. Don't discount it.

In Matthew 9, the Pharisees asked Jesus why He spent time with sinners. He replied, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.' Jesus recognized that sick people need doctors. He did not condemn using doctors or medicine.

Proverbs 17:22 says: "*A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones*" (ESV). This verse presents medicine in a positive light as a metaphor for a happy heart.

This makes me think that someone who likes to smoke weed would use this verse to prooftext or rationalize their use of cannabis. I told you this was a stream of consciousness kind of chapter. My mind went to ganja... my bad. But the Bible is used to rationalize all kinds of things that are wrong.

Using medicine to be healthy is not wrong. Abusing medicine or substances is wrong for we should not be mastered by anything other than our faith in God in Christ by the power of the Spirit.

I wonder if Jesus struggled with depression after (assumption coming up) Joseph died some time after his 12th year?

Talking with someone you can trust is always a good thing.

Trust sparingly.

Part of paying for therapy is paying for someone to be professionally discreet and to tell you the truth and to be bound to trustworthiness. If you can, pay for discretion.

May you forgive someone who doesn't know the difference between worry and anxiety.

May you be thankful when your kids seem to rise above the garbage you've dumped into their lives as a result of your mental illness. May you give yourself grace. Pray for grace for them when they walk your same path.

Yes, I said 'garbage' when it comes to mental illness. Mental illness creates anger and harsh temperaments and days not getting out of bed and loss of employment and poor choices and overreactions and underreactions and trouble concentrating and physical illness and a whole host of other issues.

It is a lot to deal with and for people around you to deal with. But you must deal with it. Don't let it sit like leftover Taco Bell in your fridge. You know how that turns out.

May your mind recover to pre-COVID days.

Please remember that you can find healing and wholeness in the Bible. The words of the Bible are not just words... they are the very words of the Creator God Who has fashioned life and they will be a balm for your soul. You must must must be in the Word. You need to be in church. You need to worship and serve.

Yes, church is sometimes a bad place. I have been a pastor for over 25 years at this point... trust me... I know church people. I have been eviscerated by elders, demeaned by deacons, trash-talked by trustees, and cursed by church members... I still go to church. You don't think a pastor is abused by church people? ROFL

I still go to church because church isn't about them. Or me either. They are broken and lost. So am I. Jesus is what church is about and I need Him. So. Do. You.

Yes, you can find Jesus without church, but you can't have Jesus in your life if you diss His wife. Find a church that can be a caring community as you make your way through life. A good church is people focused on Jesus and will constantly push you to Jesus.

Because Jesus is what you need.

We need Jesus as our foundation. Jesus is life and hope and healing and strength and deliverance and peace for today. Jesus' promises come true in the life after this one and also in this life now.

I haven't got all this figured out, but I do know that because we are integrated people where the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual all work together; we should deal with mental illness on all fronts; physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual.

Physically deal with mental illness by exercise, eating clean, and adopting good sleep hygiene. Understand that there might be a brain chemistry issue that needs to be addressed

though medication. You will have to do this even when you don't want to.

Mentally and emotionally deal with mental illness by striving for self-awareness of emotions and illogical mental patterns. Talking with trusted pastors or therapists can help identify places where we are blind to ourselves. You will have to do this even when you don't want to.

Spiritually deal with mental illness by steadfastly dedicating yourself to meditating on the Bible, consistent church worship, serving others, and constant prayer. You will have to do this even when you don't want to.

Get rid of social media.

Get Covenant Eyes or some other internet monitoring service that helps you avoid porn.

Read good books on mental health from Christians.

Manage your time better by learning to rest on Sundays.

Have dinner as a family where there are no phones allowed.

Don't give the enemy a seat at your table. Thank you, Louie Giglio, for that good thought.

Well, since I am treading into other people's thoughts and not my own, I'll call it a day. May the Lord bless you and keep you and make His Face to shine upon you and give you peace...peace of mind.

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Website to which the author contributes regularly:
www.dwellinginscripture.com
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About the author:

Rev. Dr. Troy M. Borst is a 25+ year veteran of local Christian church ministry in Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Indiana. He has taught on the post-secondary level in the areas of public speaking, interpersonal communication, preaching, and worldview. He enjoys martial arts, science fiction, SEC College Football, and the Tampa Bay Lightning (NHL). He lives in Indiana with his wife and has three adult children.

