

# Mental Health: Caring for One Another

LIFE Fellowship

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# Mental Health

- Not just about absence of mental illness
- Well-being / wholeness
  - Cognitive (thought), psychological, emotional aspects
- WHO definition:
  - “Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

# Mental Health

- Multiple factors impact on mental health
  - Biological (e.g. genetic predisposition, physiology)
  - Physical (e.g. physical health)
  - Psychological (e.g. emotions, personality)
  - Spiritual (i.e. relationship with God)
  - Social (e.g. relationships with others, isolation, loneliness, conflict, societal factors, economic factors, etc.)

# Mental Health Challenges

- Challenges with mental health are common
  - “In any given year, 1 in 5 people in Canada will personally experience a mental health problem or illness”
  - “Mental illness affects people of all ages, education, income levels, and cultures”
  - “By age 40, about 50% of the population will have or have had a mental illness”

Source: Canadian Mental Health Association  
<https://cmha.ca/fast-facts-about-mental-illness>

# Mental Health Challenges

- Mental illnesses may include, for example,
  - Mood disorders (e.g. depression, bipolar disorder)
  - Anxiety disorders
  - Thought/psychotic disorders (e.g. schizophrenia)
  - Eating disorders
  - Personality disorders
  - Trauma-associated disorders

# Mental Health Challenges

- Often expressed in Scripture
  - “I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes” (Psalm 6:6-7)
  - “Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses.” (Psalm 25:16-17)
  - “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” (Psalm 42:5,6,11; 43:5)

# Mental Health Challenges

- Often expressed in Scripture
  - “For my soul is full of troubles... my eye grows dim through sorrow... O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me?” (Psalm 88:3,9,14)
  - “I am like a desert owl of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places; I lie awake; I am like a lonely sparrow on the housetop.” (Psalm 102:6-7)
  - “For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn – conflicts on the outside, fears within.” (2 Cor. 7:5)

# Mental Health Challenges

- If you are struggling with mental health challenges...

*You are not alone!*

*Don't struggle alone!*

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- We are created as creatures with spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess. 5:23)
  - Created by God in His image
    - *Our lives are fullest when lived in alignment with His design and His purposes for us*
  - Wellness of these 3 elements is interconnected
    - Unwellness in one aspect can impact on the others

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- Self-care: Spirit
  - We are created as spiritual beings, sustained by God, and intended for relationship with Him
    - First & Greatest Commandment: To love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30)
  - Take care to cultivate a growing relationship with God
    - Confession & repentance (e.g. Psalm 32:1-5)
    - Regular time with God, in His Word and in prayer
    - Meditation on His Word and prayer throughout the day (and night) (e.g. Psalm 1)

*“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” (Isa. 26:3)*

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- Self-care: Spirit
  - Learning to
    - Cast our cares and anxieties on God (1 Pet. 5:7)
    - Find strength in Him (Psalm 84:5-7)
    - Find our hope in Him (Lam. 3:24)
    - Trust in His sovereignty over all aspects of our lives
      - in the things outside our control
      - in the things we think we can control
  - Dependent on Him at all times; clinging to Him, especially...
    - when we are broken
    - when He seems far off or absent
    - when we struggle to understand

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- Self-care: Soul
  - The invisible, inner self
    - Personality, mind, will, emotions, etc.
  - Daily renewal of the inner self (2 Cor. 4:16)
    - Practicing thankfulness - seeing the mercies of God every day (e.g. Lam. 3:22-23)
    - Being transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2)
      - Aligning our desires with God's desires, and our purposes with His purposes
      - Seeing people and situations/circumstances as God would see them

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- Self-care: Soul
  - “Talking to yourself”, rather than “listening to yourself”
    - “The main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression in a sense is this, that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self.... This is the very essence of wisdom in this matter. *Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?*” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures*, p.20-21)
  - “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.” (Psalm 42:11)

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- Self-care: Soul
  - Building & maintaining healthy relationships
    - The second greatest commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31)
      - “Love is patient and kind...” (1 Cor. 13:4)
      - Looking beyond yourself → acts of love & kindness to others
  - Regular worship & fellowship with other believers

*“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”* (Heb. 10:24-25)

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- Self-care: Body
  - Maintaining physical health
    - Healthy eating habits
    - Exercise
    - Maintaining hygiene/self care
    - Seeking proper treatment for illness

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- Self-care: Body
  - Created for work and rest (Gen. 1:28-2:3; Exod. 20:8-11)
    - Importance of regularity of both work and rest
    - “Six days you shall labor... but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work...” (Exod. 20:9-10)
    - Maintaining regular schedule & routine of work and rest
      - Diligent, productive, God-honoring work (not necessarily paid!) – even when “unemployed”
  - Setting goals/objectives

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- Self-care: Recap
  - Spirit
  - Soul
  - Body
- Aligning with how God created us as human beings
  - Not only for Christians, but produces benefits for all people who live thus, by God's 'Common Grace' (Matt. 5:45)
    - Many (though not all) secular 'wellness' tips align with how Scripture teaches us to live

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- Reach out to others for accountability & help
  - If you're struggling, don't struggle & suffer alone
    - Your suffering impacts others in the Body of Christ, whether you realize it or not

*"If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Cor. 12:26a)*

- Talk to someone - a friend, family member, small group leader, fellowship counselor, church leader, or pastor
  - "Could you please pray for me?"

*"And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken." (Eccl. 4:12)*

# Taking care of your Mental Health

- Reach out to others for accountability & help
  - Don't assume...
    - That others know what you're going through
      - (especially during social isolation, it's very easy to lose track of one another)
    - That everyone's OK except for you
    - That others are too busy or don't want to be bothered
    - That others don't care

# Question #1

- “Lots of friends who struggle with anxiety have said that they have received the sentiment: "The Bible says not to worry, so don't" or "just trust in God more and it will go away". What is the interplay of God's commands not to worry vs. mental health struggles -- How can we recognize the truth of the Bible-that God says not to worry- without insensitivity to the individual/ it not going away?”

# Question #1: A response

1. Seek to understand the root causes of the anxiety
  - Remember the interplay between spirit, soul, body
    - Spiritual causes?
    - Engrained habits or patterns of thought?
    - Physical/physiological causes?
      - e.g. chemical or hormonal issues → need for meds?
  - Situational vs. general?

# Question #1: A response

2. Remember that sanctification is a process, not a one-time event
  - “A long obedience in the same direction’ (E. Peterson)
  - Daily choices to walk in obedience to Him (Matt. 7:24-27)
  - Developing and deepening healthy habits & thought patterns over time
  - Learning daily to trust God and cast our anxieties on Him (1 Pet. 5:7)
    - Growth in obedience to Christ over time
    - Setbacks are not unexpected

# Question #2

- “How can we best support those who have mental illnesses? How do we create a trust so that these people can be vulnerable and share their struggles?”

# Mental Health: Caring for One Another

- Being part of a caring community is an important part of maintaining mental health
  - Mutual encouragement and accountability (Heb. 10:24-25)
- As members of the Body of Christ, when one member suffers, all suffer
  - “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (1 Cor. 12:26a)

# Mental Health: Caring for One Another

- Caring for one another is not just the pastors' or elders' (or counselors' or leaders') responsibility
  - Far too much work for so few people!
  - *“You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone.”* (Exod. 18:18 – but a little out of context 😊 )
- Rather, as followers of Christ, we are **all** called to help bear one another's burdens
  - *“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”* (Gal. 6:2)
  - It's generally not difficult – but often it's costly

# Mental Health: Caring for One Another

- Some important principles
  - Availability
    - Make time and be available for others
  - Learn to listen more than you speak
    - “...let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak...” (James 1:19)
    - Confidentiality – Yes, but...
  - Prayer
    - With and for the person you’re caring for
    - Sharing your own struggles & prayer requests
      - Caring & vulnerability is a 2-way street!

# Mental Health: Caring for One Another

- Some important principles
  - Kindness & compassion
    - Understanding that the suffering is real
  - Empathy
    - Sharing and entering into another's suffering
  - Love
    - *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:35)
    - Speaking truth, in love
      - Speaking God's truth into one another's lives

# Mental Health: Caring for One Another

- Some important principles
  - Consistency
    - Regular follow-up / touchpoints
  - Setting appropriate boundaries
    - Men with men, women with women
    - Know your own limits – you are not God!
      - Maintain self-care
      - Foster dependency on God, not on you
    - Proper balance:

“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ...  
...For each will have to bear his own load.” (Gal. 6:2,5)

# Mental Health: Caring for One Another

- Some important principles
  - Seek help from others if/when you're out of your depth
    - Other brothers or sisters
    - Pastors, elders, fellowship counselors
    - Other professional help (e.g. psychiatrists, Christian counselors)
    - Call 911 in situations of imminent threat / danger
  - Encourage your brother/sister to seek help from others as needed

# Questions #3 & 4

- Q: “Many people say they are ‘depressed’, even before COVID. Do you think this word is used too easily and casually? How do I react and counsel when people claim they are ‘depressed’?”
- Q: “How can I be a support to a friend who is feeling hopeless about life/perhaps mildly suicidal at times/experiencing anxiety/has had minimal experiences with God?”

# Questions #3 & 4

- A:
  - Yes, there's a very wide range of what people mean when they say 'I'm depressed'
    - From feeling sad because something bad happened, to clinical depression
    - Need to observe & listen carefully to understand what they mean
  - Seek to understand the root causes – spirit, soul, body
  - Provide appropriate care & encouragement (availability, prayer, compassion, empathy, love, etc.)

# Question #3 & 4

- A:
  - Have a low threshold for seeking help, especially if signs of clinical depression are apparent
    - Symptoms of depression for most of the day, and are present most days for an extended period of time (2+ weeks), that are out of keeping with the situation
      - Sadness/depressed mood; feelings of hopelessness or despair
      - Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
      - Fatigue or loss of energy
      - Sleep disturbances (too little or too much)
      - Impaired concentration; indecisiveness; restlessness
      - Loss of interest in normal activities or relationships
      - Recurring thoughts of death or suicide

# Question #4c

- Q: “How can I be a support to a friend who... has had minimal experiences with God?”
- A: Remember God’s Common Grace
  - Aligning with how God designed & created us produces benefits for all, not just for believers
    - Spirit, soul, body
  - As opportunities present themselves, engage in conversations about the spiritual elements of wellness
    - point to God and Jesus Christ, who “*came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*” (John 10:10)

# Summary

- Mental health challenges & illness are common
  - You are not alone!
  - Don't suffer alone!
- Mental health self care involves spirit, soul & body
  - Our lives are fullest when lived in alignment with His design and His purposes for us
- As followers of Christ, we are all called to help bear one another's burdens, even as we each carry our own load (Gal. 6:2,5)

Questions?