



What does the Bible say about Mental Health?

SESSION 1

The Bible and Mental Health

- ▶ The Bible has no category for mental health!
- ▶ But the Bible has a lot to say about suffering.

Because...

The Bible and Suffering

In the Bible

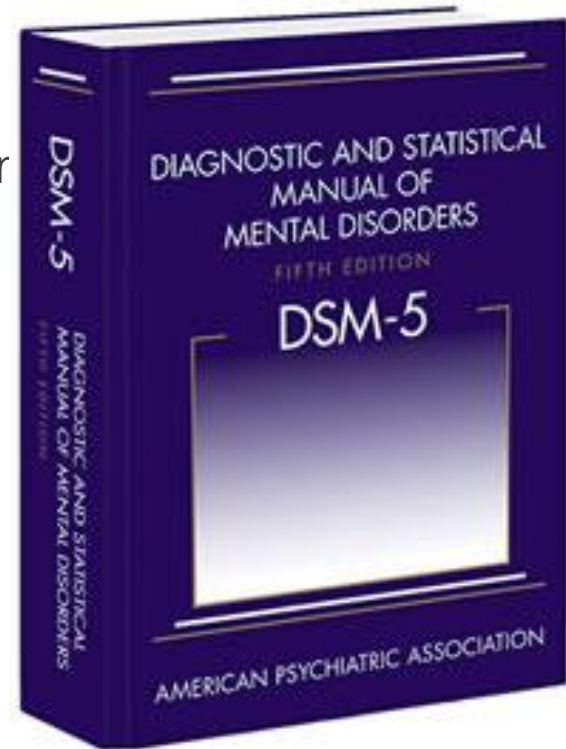
1. God declares his love for all who suffer
2. God reveals his importance to all who suffer
3. God promises an end to all his people's suffering

Two assumptions

- ▶ We're all impacted – personally or relationally by mental health issues
- ▶ We do want to help biblically, wisely and practically
 - ▶ With our limited capacities
 - ▶ In the name of our “unlimited” God

The range

- ▶ Depressive disorders
- ▶ Anxiety disorders
- ▶ Schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders
- ▶ Obsessive compulsive disorders
- ▶ Feeding and eating disorders
- ▶ Dissociative disorders
- ▶ Sexual dysfunction
- ▶ Personality disorders
- ▶ Addictive disorders
- ▶ Gender dysphoria



The labels

- ▶ Outstanding at giving us descriptions
- ▶ Limited in giving us explanations:
description \neq reason
- ▶ Helpful in indicating medications
- ▶ Sometimes function to abnormalize the normal
- ▶ Sometimes seem to take over identity

The signs

- ▶ Outer change – behaviour - obvious
 - ▶ Physical changes
 - ▶ Speech changes
 - ▶ Relationship changes
 - ▶ Church-going changes
- ▶ Inner change – thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears, certainties, doubts – available only to listeners
 - ▶ View of self
 - ▶ View of others
 - ▶ View of God

The statistics

- ▶ Every week, 1 in 6 adults experience a common mental health struggle
- ▶ About 1 in 5 adults have considered taking their own life at some point (about 7% of people will try at some stage)
- ▶ 8% will struggle with anxiety and depression
- ▶ 6% with general anxiety
- ▶ 4% will struggle with PTSD
- ▶ 2% may struggle with bipolar
- ▶ <1% with a psychotic disorder
- ▶ Christians are just as susceptible as everyone else. Churches should be more welcoming than anywhere else!

The common struggles

- ▶ Anxiety
 - ▶ Restlessness – feeling “on edge”
 - ▶ Fear of future
 - ▶ Irritability
 - ▶ Physical symptoms including palpitations, shaking, short of breath, nausea and muscle aches

The common struggles

▶ Depression

- ▶ Low mood – including feelings of worthlessness – possible thoughts of death
- ▶ Disengaged from activities usually enjoyed
- ▶ Weight changes and sleep changes
- ▶ Struggles with concentration

The common struggles

- ▶ Anxiety
 - Fear of something bad happening to someone or something you care about
- ▶ Depression
 - No enjoyment, no joy, only sorrow, or feeling emotionally flat, dead

These are essentially simple ideas. We can grow understanding by listening!

The spiritual dimension

- ▶ Is this God's punishment for what I've done wrong?
- ▶ Am I the only Christian who struggles like this?
- ▶ Will I ever be well again?
- ▶ Am I a second class Christian when I struggle to pray / read / serve?
- ▶ How can God love me?
- ▶ What's the point of all the suffering?
- ▶ Can I ever have normal relationships in the church?
- ▶ Will the church ever understand me?

These are urgent , non-technical questions for the church!

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The Bible and Suffering

In the Bible

1. God declares his love for all who suffer
 1. His plan
 2. His understanding – Psalm 88
 3. His experience - Gethsemane

The Bible declares God's love

- ▶ Perfect world (Genesis 1-2)
 - ▶ Embodied souls
 - ▶ In relationship with God and others
- ▶ Broken world (Genesis 3)
 - ▶ Broken relationships
 - ▶ Broken bodies
 - ▶ Broken experiences
 - ▶ Broken desires

The Bible declares God's love

- ▶ Perfect world (Genesis 1-2)
 - ▶ Embodied souls
 - ▶ In relationship with God and others
- ▶ Broken world (Genesis 3-11)
 - ▶ Broken relationships
 - ▶ Broken bodies
 - ▶ Broken experiences
 - ▶ Broken desires
- ▶ God's Glorious Rescue Plan of Steadfast Love(rest of Bible!)

The Bible and Suffering

In the Bible

1. God declares his love for all who suffer
 1. His plan
 2. His understanding – Psalm 88
 3. His experience – Gethsemane and the Cross

The Bible and Suffering

In the Bible

1. God declares his love for all who suffer

God expects his people to love those who suffer

the wounded sheep (Ez 34), the weaker part (1 Cor 12)

The Bible and Suffering

Because in the Bible

1. God declares his love for all who suffer

Q. How could someone at ACC with depression hear and experience God's love, even if their ability to respond/enjoy /participate is broken?

On a Sunday, in the week?

A caring church culture

- ▶ Accept the normality of brokenness – model a life of dependence
- ▶ Set a tone of appropriate openness – in the general ups and downs of life
- ▶ Avoid the miracle of the church car park
- ▶ Use testimonies / bookstalls / posters to raise awareness
- ▶ Normalise praying together after services for tough life circumstances

A caring church culture

- ▶ Apply sermons to every day situations over coffee midweek
- ▶ Avoid temptation to “fix” others – no-one wants to be a project
- ▶ No boundaries on love but clear boundaries on time because we are finite
- ▶ Share the privilege of serving others (informally or circles of concern)

A Caring Christian

- ▶ Love – as sisters and brothers, no judgement or simplistic advice , coming alongside
- ▶ Know – ask great questions, get to know what people are really going through
- ▶ Speak – humbly point people to the one who knows them best. Worth learning!
- ▶ Do – practical things that help people thrive, small steps of growth

(Based on Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands – Paul Tripp)

Words that root – in who God is

- ▶ God is with us ... he knows every facet of our pain
(Psalm 139)
- ▶ God is our Refuge ... we can go to him as we are
(Psalm 18)
- ▶ God is our Shepherd ... he is leading us through the fear
(Psalm 23)
- ▶ God is our Provider ... he gives us what we need each day
(Exodus 12)
- ▶ God is our King ... sovereign over our circumstances and
bringing purpose to them
(Genesis 50)

Words that root – in who we are

Genesis 1

- ▶ Image of God

Ephesians 1

- ▶ Past forgiven ... as we are lavished with grace
- ▶ Present equipped ... as the Spirit dwells inside
- ▶ Future secure ... as our inheritance is kept safe

Words that relate – to God

- ▶ Prayers of release ... *“Please take this away ... “*
- ▶ Prayers of reliance ... *“Help me trust in you, Lord ... “*
- ▶ Prayers of repentance ... *“I’m sorry for those moments when I’ve doubted you ... “*
- ▶ Prayers of reorientation ... *“As I struggle, change me to be more like Jesus ... “*
- ▶ Prayers of reward ... *“Thank you, that one day I will be free ... “*

Words that relate – to others

- ▶ Love one another
- ▶ Bear with one another
- ▶ Encourage one another
- ▶ Pray for one another
- ▶ Rebuke one another
- ▶ Teach one another
- ▶ Forgive one another
- ▶ Build one another up

Maintaining good mental health

- ▶ Commit to dependence on the Lord – weakness is normal
- ▶ Feed body and soul with a balanced diet
- ▶ Aim for sacrificial service that's sustainable
- ▶ Take regular rest that is Christ-centred
- ▶ Build community that speaks truth in love
- ▶ Acknowledge the reality of sin and be quick to repent and believe
- ▶ Be aware of changes in circumstances and responses – be willing to ask for help sooner rather than later

The Bible and Suffering

In the Bible

1. God declares his love for all who suffer
And his people can reflect and point to him
2. God reveals his importance to all who suffer

God reveals his importance to all who suffer

- ▶ God is the creator of every human – we belong to him first and always
- ▶ God is the sustainer of every human being – we need him first and always
- ▶ God is the redeemer of every kind of brokenness – we deploy his gifts in medicine etc to soften the fall,

but

God reveals his importance to all who suffer

- ▶ If we use our new strength to suppress him more effectively, we are not better off, however happy we feel.
- ▶ If suffering brings us closer to Jesus, we are richer than we have ever been.
- ▶ All therapy which misses this God-reality is misleading at best.

God reveals his importance to all who suffer

Q. At ACC, where does your help come from In mental illness?

Q. At ACC, what does “healthy” look like?

Q. When people need mental health services, how does ACC walk alongside?

The Bible and Suffering

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And his people can affirm or deny it

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God promises an end to all his people's suffering

- ▶ We are often especially impatient with suffering.
- ▶ Repentance and faith in the gospel is the most precious thing
- ▶ Temporary relief from suffering this side of death is a sweet gift. But resurrection is infinitely sweeter.
- ▶ In mental illness we must help each other find ways back to the gospel, to Jesus, to the church.

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In the Bible

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And his people can reflect and point to him
2. God reveals his importance to all who suffer
And his people can affirm or deny it
3. God promises an end to all his people's suffering
And his people must hope most in him

Further reading

Biblical Counselling UK

www.biblicalcounselling.org.uk

Christian Counselling and Education Foundation

www.ccef.org

Biblical Counseling Coalition

www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org

