



Biblical Counseling and Mental Health

Introduction:

A theology of human experience needs to take seriously the possibility of defective mental conditions so that the dynamic functions of the heart can be addressed realistically. The dynamic expression of faith will look different in every person, and those suffering from unique physical deficiencies will need unique compassion.

Realistic expectations, appropriate to the given conditions, help counselors love people well through the change process. Being aware of physiological conditions helps establish appropriate expectations. The response of faith does not completely neutralize the physiological condition, but it gives hope for establishing new patterns of action that, for embodied creatures, brings more stability than would otherwise be.

This is hopeful news for people waiting for their broken bodies to be made new on that future day when Jesus returns. Complete healing will not occur before that bright day. Pierre, Jeremy. *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Kindle Locations 1583-1589). New Growth Press. Kindle Edition.

I. How do we respond to mental illness in a Christ-like way?

A. Avoid foolish and reductionist arguments:

- **Mental Illness doesn't exist.**
- **Brain Science alone holds the key to progress.**
- **You can pray mental illness away.**
- **Mental Illness is mostly demonic oppression.**
- **Mentally Illness mostly stems from spiritual compromise.**

B. Engage with them with _____: You don't have to understand "why" in order to care.

- Nearly 20% of American adults suffer with an anxiety disorder and 100% struggle with worry.
- 400,000 U.S. patients are currently prisoners; twice that number have previously been in jail and stand a good chance of rotating back; and about 200,000 are homeless.
- Nearly 11% of college age/young adult individuals report severe depression in the last year.
- Nearly 5% of adults will deal with bi-polar struggles at some point in their adult years.
- 1 out of every 50 people exhibit some form of OCD.
- An estimated 3.6% of U.S. adults had PTSD in the past year.
- There were more than twice as many suicides (44,965) in the United States as there were homicides (19,362).

C. Engage with them as a _____: Here are five ways that any Christian can be a good friend with those enduring through mental health struggles. Apply the “One- Another” concepts in compassionate and understanding and compassionate ways.

- Seek to treat them as image-bearers – “Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you...” (Romans 15:7) “...In humility consider others better than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3)
- Spend time as a friend with them – “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.” (I Peter 4:9) “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love...” (Romans 12:10)
- Speak bold and clear truth to help anchor them – “Encourage one another daily...” Hebrews 3:13) “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.” (Ephesians 5:19)
- Serve them and with them as they serve others – “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others...” (I Peter 4:10) “Carry each other’s burdens...” (Galatians 6:2)
- Stop the stigma surrounding mental struggles in the church – “...Stop passing judgment on one another.” (Romans 14:13) “...Have equal concern for each other.” (I Corinthians 12:25)

Key Question: How would it impact the lives of those with mental struggles if they had people in their lives committed to live with them in this type of community?

If churches are going to be effective in shepherding those with mental struggles, it will require an investment in the relationship. You can’t effectively help those with mental struggles by treating each person the same.

D. Engage with them as a Shepherd: Engage in _____.

Our goal must be to love all who suffer with the love of Christ and enter into their struggle with the hope that God gives. We must patiently and persistently help those with mental struggles understand and apply the wisdom of the Word to the practical issues of life, and ensure medical care for them when the Word doesn’t seem to be comprehensible.

People tend to turn back to those who spoke the truth to them when they needed it most, even if they have seemingly rejected the source in the meantime. God is always faithful, and his faithfulness allows us to take this same stance of longsuffering for the good of those in need. Speaking the truth in love over time in community is the pathway for spiritual growth for anyone, not just those with mental struggles.