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CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
Pastor Dale L. Crawley Sr.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

Rev. Dr. Deborah Crawley, Teacher
Sis. Tammi Brown, Asst. Teacher

PROTECTING HUMAN LIFE
"Mental Health"

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

The Bible does not explicitly speak on the topic of mental health; however, it does have a lot to say about the heart and mind, spiritual brokenness, and the condition of the soul. Mental health is important, as it affects the whole being: "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it" (**Proverbs 4:23**).

The world is in a fallen state (Genesis 3). Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2), corrupting creation as it groans for freedom from its state of decay (Romans 8:21–22). The fall of mankind has had physical ramifications for the body and spiritual effects on the soul. Mental health is not guaranteed any more than physical health is, and, like the body, the mind can get sick or injured.

The Bible has many passages that speak indirectly of mental health. The Lord is the One who renews the mind (Romans 12:2) and restores the soul (Psalm 23:3). God has given His children "a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Timothy 1:7, ESV). We have Jesus' promise of peace (John 14:27) and rest (Matthew 11:28). And, of course, there are many scriptural injunctions to "fear not" and to bring our anxieties to God (Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 6:34; Philippians 4:6; 1 Peter 5:7).

Spiritual sickness is often a big part of mental illness. When our spirits are healed and whole, our minds can think clearly. Psalm 23:3 says that our Good Shepherd "restores my soul." While many mental illnesses are directly caused by

brain abnormalities, many others are due to souls that need restoration. **Unforgiveness** (2 Corinthians 2:10–11), **bitterness** (Hebrews 12:15), **fear** and **anxiety** (Philippians 4:6–7), and **low self-worth** can all cripple our souls. When our souls are wounded, we cannot think clearly. *We see every life event through a distorted filter*. A sunny day only reminds us of the day we were hurt. The sight of a happy couple walking down the street brings a surge of fury due to an unhealed wound. Casual remarks, normal life stresses, and inconsiderate treatment can all cause a person with an **unhealed soul** to react like a person with mental illness. When we continually give in to those wrong thoughts, we perpetuate our own struggles.

While Jesus directly healed people who were considered mentally ill, He also recognized demonic control in others and cast the demons out (e.g., Mark 1:34; Luke 11:14). The demoniac of the Gerasenes was a man psychiatrists would call mentally ill (see Mark 5:1–20). He was out of control, behaving in unacceptable ways, and today we would confine this man to an institution. But Jesus went directly to the real problem. He ordered the legion of demons to come out of the man. After they did, the man was "**in his right mind**" (verse 15). While not all mental illness is due to demonic involvement, there may be people diagnosed with mental illness today who are experiencing some sort of demonic influence. Such people need, first and foremost, the spiritual deliverance that surrender to Jesus would offer them.

Mental health is linked to the health of both the body and the spirit. We have a biblical example in Elijah, whose mental health suffered during his conflict with Queen Jezebel. Elijah fled the country to a place by himself where he wished to die (1 Kings 19:4). God dealt with Elijah's physical needs first, feeding him and giving him time to sleep (verses 5–6). God knew his journey was "too much" for him in his current state (verse 7). After Elijah had rested and recharged physically, God gave him encouragement, a new purpose, and an assistant (verses 15–18).

Jonah is an example of someone whose mental health was tied to bad choices he made. Jonah wished for death after God spared Nineveh (Jonah 4:3)—a desire quite indicative of a depressive state. Leading up to that was Jonah's rebellion against God. He had directly disobeyed the Lord's command (Jonah 1:1–3), but, even after God brought him back in line, his heart was not in tune with God's desires. Rather than marvel at God's mercy and praising Him for His grace, Jonah wished to die. Getting realigned with God was the only way Jonah's depression could ever end.

In some cases, outside spiritual forces have a direct effect on mental health. King Saul suffered distress as a result of an evil spirit tormenting him (1 Samuel 16:14). He only found relief when David played the lyre for him and "the spirit from God came on Saul" (verse 23). Another example of demon-related mental illness is the man from the Gerasenes who lived naked among the tombs and constantly cried out and cut himself (Mark 5:1–5). After Jesus cast the demons out of him, the man was "in his right mind" (verse 15). The spiritual battle had been won, and the man's mental health was restored.

The Bible gives some guidelines on attaining and retaining good mental health. We have a description of the healthy thought life in Philippians 4:8. We have Jesus' example of taking breaks from the busyness of life to focus on spiritual matters (Luke 5:16), and He called His disciples to do the same (Mark 6:31). We have Paul's acknowledgement that physical exercise is profitable (1 Timothy 4:8). Self-care, both physical and spiritual, is a necessity.

God is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit (Psalm 34:18). He works all things together for the good of His children (Romans 8:28). The testing of faith produces endurance and maturity (James 1:2–4). Mental health struggles, while they are difficult, are not pointless. The Bible clearly shows how God can and does use them for His glory.

Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Jesus invites us to find comfort in Him when we feel burdened, offering rest for our weary hearts and minds.