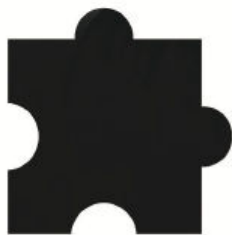




Mental Health
- a Biblical
Perspective



Problems Christians Face

Mental Health

A Biblical View

by

Sharon Durrant

Mental Health
A Biblical Perspective

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Bible quotations are usually from
the English Standard Version
(ESV)

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She has worked with clients with a variety of needs, including those experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety.

While writing the course, she has spoken to other Christians with knowledge and experience in this area to gain their perspectives.

Mental Health - Introduction

I have been very conscious when writing this course that each individual's experience of depression or anxiety may be different. It can be an experience that they find difficult to talk openly about due to feelings of guilt or shame, which are part of the core symptoms of depression and anxiety. These feelings can be made worse because of actual incidents in the past, mistakes made that have serious consequences, or due to cultural perceptions. For example, men may feel that they cannot show weakness, and women may believe that everyone else seems to be coping just fine, so they must be inferior. These distorted views are unhelpful as they can often stop people talking about what they are going through or seeking the help they need.

For a Christian, the guilt can come from within, as we question our faith and are aware that we are called to "rejoice" in all things. The guilt can also unwittingly be caused by other Christians if they question whether Christians should ever be depressed. I remember conversations with two Christians who walked closely with the Lord, but each recalled messages or conversations where they were left feeling judged due to their depression so felt like failures. This can lead some to question their salvation. So much harm can be caused by perhaps well-meaning, but thoughtless comments from other Christians. This course therefore aims to highlight examples from the Bible of godly men and women who suffered deeply

emotionally and experienced genuine fear, who cried out to the Lord in their despair and are not judged in Scripture for this.

This course offers no ‘cure’ for depression or anxiety, but instead seeks to offer encouragement and reassurance for those who are struggling. It aims to give understanding to those who have friends or loved ones who they feel helpless to support, and also Biblical examples of how to support others without judging them.

It is important to remember as you read through the course and study God’s word that it may be a long journey and that you are not expected to do this alone. The apostle Paul cried out to the Lord to be delivered from his own “thorn in the flesh” and the message he received from the Lord was clear, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9). This is not a ‘self-help’ book. The most important thing to learn from it is not reliance on self, but reliance on the Lord. Although the world would try to teach us ‘self-sufficiency’, God would teach us ‘God-sufficiency’. It is the Lord who will give us the grace to endure the difficulties we are going through, to learn through them, and to rely on His power to bring us through. If we try to ‘get better’ in our own strength, we will fail. We need to rely on the Lord and His strength every step of the way.

This course is written for Christians who may be struggling with mental health issues themselves or for friends and relatives who want to offer support. It is not intended as a medical textbook.

There are many forms of mental health conditions and this course focuses on just two - anxiety and depression. It is not wrong to seek medical help for mental health problems - just as we do for physical ailments. We do need to recognise that the path to well-being may require many different forms of help.

Chapter 1

The Biblical pattern for our mind

Mental well-being

Often the term ‘mental health’ prompts people to think of those who are mentally ill and clearly distressed, but actually mental health or ‘mental well-being’ is a continuum. We can all, at any time, struggle with stress, anxiety or various levels of depressive symptoms. Likewise, the majority of us will have periods where our mental well-being is good, we feel a sense of calm and peace, and it feels like the pain is behind us. Mental well-being is not something which should be taken for granted; it can be something which takes work, effort and a lot of support.

The secret of a healthy mind

The Bible identifies the secret of a healthy mind. It is a mind which is focused on God and on those things which are healthy and pure. In Romans 8:1-11, Paul speaks of two groups of people: those who set their minds on the flesh and those who set their mind on the Spirit. He highlights that the effect of focusing on the things that the world desires and desperately seeks after is ultimately ‘death’. We can see this around us. Lives can be destroyed because someone does not feel ‘self-sufficient’ to be good enough, pretty enough, thin enough, healthy enough, clever enough, fertile enough, strong enough, wealthy enough, or successful enough. This can lead to either physical death, or to an inward decay, a focus on self and comparison with others.

The Bible identifies the secret of a healthy mind. It is a mind which is focused on God and on those things which are healthy and pure.

In contrast, Paul highlights that “...to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace...” (v.6). If we look upward and seek help from God, instead of looking inward or at those around us, we will find help from God to cope with the pressures of life.

When writing to the Colossian church, Paul again gave instructions for where we should set our sights. He says, “...seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” and again, “Set your minds on things above, not on things that are on earth...” (Colossians 3:1-2). Paul explains that this is not just to make things easier for us right now, but because “... you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). When a person believes, their old life and their old self are crucified with Christ, and they have new life which is made possible through Christ. They also have Christ living in them (Galatians 2:20). Even more amazing than that, they have a future hope in Christ. Paul teaches that “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” (Colossians 3:4).

If we approach our lives as if this earthly life is all we have, then the things that go wrong and all the hurt in this world become the best we can hope for. This will affect our mental well-being and our spiritual life. We will forget to

If we approach our lives as if this earthly life is all we have, then the things that go wrong and all the hurt in this world become the best we can hope for.

look up, and will not see that our lives are hidden with Christ: the best is yet to come! Paul highlights that this “... light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” (2 Corinthians 4:17). Although it could be viewed that the suffering of which Paul was speaking was the result of the persecution he was facing for preaching the gospel, his words emphasise the difference between the pain faced in this life, and the joy in the next. Do you live in the light of the joy

of your salvation? Do you look beyond the pain and suffering you or your loved ones are facing, to see your future hope? Do you reflect on the pain and suffering Christ endured in order to bring you that hope and that salvation? It is often easier to ask these questions than it is to answer them honestly. Our walk with God can be affected negatively by a need to look around at the world or to look inwards, rather than to set our minds on things above.

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Paul explains how we can avoid falling into the trap of thinking as the world wants us to think. He says, “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 ...” (Romans 12:1-3). How can this transformation happen? How can we renew our minds? It is not by offering God a small part of each day, a quick prayer in a desperate situation, or by our own endeavours. Paul says we need to “... present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). What good would our bodies be as a sacrifice if our minds were unwilling? We need to give ourselves whole-

Each day, we need to ask Him to help us to follow His will and to be discerning;

heartedly to God and ask Him to transform our minds. Each day, we need to ask Him to help us to follow His will and to be discerning; careful about what we spend time thinking about and how we behave. We also need to read His word so that we can follow Christ’s perfect example. The Psalmist indicates that it is when we enjoy God’s

word and spend time meditating on it, day and night, that we draw strength from Him (Psalm 1:1-3). We become like a tree planted by streams of water, and therefore we bear fruit and have the strength and foundations to stand when the wind of change or trials come.

How do we maintain our psychological, emotional and spiritual well-being in hard times?

When things are going well it can be easier to maintain our mental well-being than it is when times are tough. However, God's word provides some foundational principles for maintaining our mental health even in difficulties. These ideas are introduced in this chapter but will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters focusing specifically on depression and anxiety.

...God's word provides some foundational principles for maintaining our mental health even in difficulties.

Rely on God's strength not our own

Paul considers the importance of emotional well-being in his letters. When writing to the Philippian church he says that he has "... learned in whatever situation I am to be content" (Philippians 4:11). This is something he has learned, rather than something that came easily to him. This is reflected in his second letter to the Corinthian church, where he speaks of his battle with a particular problem which he pleaded with the Lord to remove (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Instead of the Lord immediately taking action to remove the problem that afflicted him, Paul says that the Lord told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul goes on to say that he has learned to draw strength from the Lord when he is weak; "For when I am weak, then I am strong." James also highlights that when we look back at the difficulties we have faced, we can see how God has graciously guided us through these difficulties and helped us to grow in faith, endurance and character through them (James 1:2-4).

Rejoice in the Lord

Paul goes beyond seeking to be content. He tells the Philippian church to "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." (Philippians 4:4). This can be another difficult lesson to learn. When things seem most painful, it can take real effort to

find something to thank the Lord for. However, there is always something for which we can be thankful and rejoice about, even if all around us seems to be falling apart. Corrie Ten Boom was in prison during World War II. She did not know what had happened to her father or sister who had also been arrested for providing a hiding place for Jews. All alone in the dark, she could have been completely miserable and hopeless, but when she saw a solitary ant moving about her cell, she began to feed it and to watch it take the crumbs of food back to its nest. She admired the ant's marvellous design, and no longer felt alone. Corrie also recognised that the ant had a hiding place, and was reminded that her hiding place was in Christ. There may be times when we do not feel like rejoicing, but if we can find a moment of wonder, take the time to think of one blessing, or even reflect on the amazing gift of our salvation ('looking to Jesus'), we can rejoice in that moment (Hebrews 12:2).

When things seem most painful, it can take real effort to find something to thank the Lord for.

Pray in all circumstances

Paul also reminds us of the importance of prayer to help manage worry or anxiety. He says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7). This works only if we trust, and leave the things we have asked God to help us with in His capable hands. If we place our burdens at

If we place our burdens at His feet, only to pick them up again, we will feel no relief.

His feet, only to pick them up again, we will feel no relief. The Psalmist also highlights the importance of seeking closeness with God when we face those dark moments or dark thoughts (Psalm 73:1-5; 16-17). He uses the imagery of his feet almost slipping to explain his difficulties, but says that this was only "until I went into

the sanctuary of God”. When we try to understand things for ourselves, we can see them only through our own eyes and experience. We can forget that God has a different view. In Isaiah 40:22, God is described as sitting “... above the circle of the earth ...” and from that position His view is such that the earth’s “... inhabitants are like grasshoppers,”. Sometimes we need to pray to the Lord that He will open our eyes so we can see that He has a greater purpose for us, or so that we can have the patience and faith to trust Him to see us through our circumstances.

Seek forgiveness rather than holding on to guilt

It is important to remember when we make mistakes, lose our way, or drift away from God, that He is compassionate, merciful and forgiving. When the prodigal son came back to his father, asking for forgiveness and offering to take the place of a servant, the father did not chastise him or punish him. The father ran out

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forgiving.*

to meet him and fell on his neck and kissed him (Luke 15:18-20). God does not want there to be a gulf between Him and us. He sent His only Son to bridge the gap for us (John 3:16). Sometimes we put up our own barriers when, instead, we just need to turn back to His loving arms. He is waiting for us to do so.

EXAM for Introduction and Chapter 1

Enter the letter of the correct answer :

1. God promises His grace is sufficient in:
 - a. Philippians 2:5
 - b. 2 Corinthians 12:9
 - c. 2 Timothy 1:6
2. A mind which is focused on God is:
 - a. Focused on 'pie in the sky'
 - b. Not able to be disturbed by mental health problems
 - c. The secret of a healthy mind
3. How will we appear when Christ appears?
 - a. In glory
 - b. In power
 - c. In angelic beauty
4. God's will is:
 - a. Unknown, mysterious and inevitable
 - b. Acceptable, good and unknown
 - c. Good, acceptable and perfect
5. Which Psalm encourages us to read His word day and night?
 - a. Psalm 1
 - b. Psalm 23
 - c. Psalm 69

Enter **T** or **F** (**TRUE** or **FALSE**) for the following:

6. Guilt and shame are commonly associated with depression and anxiety.
7. A true Christian can never have mental health issues.
8. For the Christian, the best is always yet to come.
9. Rejoicing in the Lord is easy as we have so much to be joyful about.
10. The Apostle James speaks about hard times helping us to grow in faith.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What is meant today by the term “going into the sanctuary of God” in Psalm 73?



Chapter 2

Depression

We may all experience ‘mountain top’ days at some point in our lives, where we feel good, the world around us seems brighter and our hope is bubbling up. However, more often, we probably experience days when we feel fairly ordinary. We go to work, or look after the children, or spend time with others, and it is just another day with the usual ups and downs. The hardest days, however, are those days when we feel a darkness or sadness hanging over us. On those days, we struggle to lift our mood or to get energised, and we may even feel hopeless and despairing. For some, those days come and go. We find ways to overcome our sadness, or we just feel our mood inexplicably lift. For others, those dark days blend into weeks and months, or even years.

Depression can be experienced to different levels. Some may experience milder forms of depression for a period of time following a specific event, such as a bereavement or the end of a relationship. For others this may last much longer, and be more intense. When depression is more severe, it can overwhelm a person with feelings of despair, anxiety, worthlessness, hopelessness, exhaustion and desperation. This can lead to negative thinking, difficulties in concentrating, problems with memory, impulsive behaviours, irritability, lack of sleep, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide. The person suffering these symptoms may also lack motivation or experience apathy, leaving them feeling unable to

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make decisions or to complete tasks which would once have been easy. The individual can become socially withdrawn, stop looking after themselves or those in their care, and their appetite and physical health may also suffer. The depression spiral can worsen as the person, now isolated, is left with their own negative thoughts which go round in circles. This isolation can reinforce the idea that others really do not care, that the person is worthless, and that they are incapable of being loved.

The Bible provides a vivid description of what it feels like to be depressed, and highlights the extra layer of grief which the Christian withdepression might experience.

The Bible provides a vivid description of what it feels like to be depressed, and highlights the extra layer of grief which the Christian with depression might experience.

The writer of Lamentations states: "... he has driven me and brought me into darkness without any light... He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has made my chains heavy; though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer... my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, "My endurance has perished and so has my hope from the LORD"" (Lamentations 3: 1-20). For the Christian experiencing depression, there can be a feeling of separation from God, and perhaps that God has brought them to this place of sorrow. The Lord, who may once have been the person's light, their fortress, their peace, and their hope (Psalm 27:1; 2 Samuel 22:2-3), appears to be distant from them (Psalm 6:1-7).

While a friend on the outside of this experience might be able to say with assurance that God is with the person in deep depression, that God still cares, and can be their peace again, these promises can feel distant and empty when in the midst of a depressive episode. Proverbs 18:14 highlights that depression can be harder to bear than sickness: "A man's spirit will endure

sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?”

So where does depression come from? There are many theories about this, but the exact cause is still unknown and it is not clear whether biological changes are the causes or effects of depression. Depression can often stem from a combination of factors. Some types of depression, such as post-natal depression, might result from physiological changes, like changes in hormone levels. For some people, depression may have been attributed to ‘genetics’ which might have led to a chemical imbalance. However, genes are not sufficient on their own to cause mental disorder. For other people, early experiences of abuse or neglect may impact on their core beliefs about themselves, others and the world so they view these things as unsafe or negative. They may have difficulties coping with stressors and may withdraw from those things or those people who seem to threaten some form of harm.

There are many theories about where depression comes from, but the exact cause is still unknown ...

A person’s living environment can influence their mood, and role models encountered in early life can influence their coping style and emotional response to different triggers. In reality, it is not easy to separate out what the root cause of one person’s depression is, as it is likely to be the result of a combination of factors. However, teaching that depression is sin, or results from a lack of faith or selfishness is wrong and unhelpful!

Depression is a topic which, sadly, is not often spoken about in Christian circles. There seems to be an expectation that, as we are told to “rejoice in the Lord always”, we should have constant inner joy or happiness.

Depression is a topic which, sadly, is not often spoken about in Christian circles.

For the individual who experiences depression, hearing this and comparing it with their own experience

can worsen the feelings of failure, worthlessness, guilt and shame they already have. The truth is that God's word does not avoid the topic of depression, neither does it criticise those who experience it. The Psalms and Prophetic writings are full of outpourings of grief, sadness and despair. Remember that when the Lord Jesus was in Gethsemane's garden and about to experience the crucifixion, He "began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And He said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death""(Mark 14:33-34). We will consider some examples of those in the Bible who experienced depression, and the signs that they overcame it, or found ways to cope in the darkest days.

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Job

Job was a man who had walked closely with the Lord and was described as "... blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). However, when the Lord allowed Job's property, wealth, and even his children to be taken from him, Job experienced great sorrow. He was unable to sleep: "When I lie down I say, 'When shall I arise?' But the night is long, and I am full of tossing till the dawn." (Job 7:4). He felt hopeless: "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle and come to their end without hope" (Job 7:6). Job even came to a point where he hated his life and began to question God: "I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint..." (Job 10:1).

Job even came to a point where he hated his life and began to question God:

It is understandable that in such losses Job became depressed and questioned why he was facing so much suffering, and even his own existence. He cried out in his anguish, "My face is red with weeping and on my eyelids is deep darkness... My spirit is broken; my days are extinct; the graveyard is ready for

me.” (Job 16:16; 17:1). However, even before the Lord answered his complaint, Job says, “Oh that my words were written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! Oh that with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another...” (Job 19:23-27). Even in his darkest moments, Job held on to his hope in God.

Despite having this hope, however, Job still questioned God’s purpose in his suffering. The Lord was gracious in His response. He reminded Job that it was He who laid the foundation of the earth, who shut in the sea, who commands the morning and who enters the storehouses of snow. This is a clear message: we cannot really understand how powerful and holy God is. We do not know the end from the beginning, but God does. After questioning God, and hearing Him speak, Job was moved to say, “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know... I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:3b & 5-6). Job came to a point where he recognised that the Lord’s ways are higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:9), and the Lord blessed him again (Job 42:10).

... Job still questioned God’s purpose in his suffering. The Lord was gracious in His response.

We may sometimes feel that we will never recover from a loss or a traumatic event. We may come to question God, and to feel completely broken before Him. This is not necessarily a bad place to be. Sometimes it is only when we are brought low that we really recognise our weakness and have to rely on God for His strength. Job was not alone in questioning God, and this is a far better position to be in than to deny Him altogether. However,

we need to be open to His response and perhaps even to be humbled further by it. The truth that Job came to understand was that we really cannot understand all that God has planned for us, but that if we have trusted in Him, one day we will see Him. This is a hope which should prompt us to praise.

Jeremiah's Lamentations

Jeremiah was in deep distress as he wrote his book of Lamentations (Lamentations 1:1-8; 15-20). In his writings, he remembers his former days, reflects on personal shame and the shame of his people, feels alone, deserted, betrayed and let down. He questions the cause of his suffering, and blames God for the pain he has seen. Jeremiah cries out in his distress, "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger" (Lamentations 1:12). For those of us who have felt alone in our sorrow, we can perhaps understand Jeremiah's anguish.

The comforting thing is that these very sufferings also reflect what the Lord Jesus experienced on the cross for us. As the Son of God hung on the cross, He was deserted by many of His followers and the crowd had turned against Him. His own people had rejected Him and condemned their Messiah to death. In the darkness, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He knew in that moment what it was to be separated from a holy God who could not look on the sin that Jesus was bearing for us. Although we may sometimes feel that the depths of our suffering are more than we can bear, perhaps it may help us to know that our Lord knew even greater sorrow. The writer to the Hebrews highlights that our Saviour cried out to God in His suffering and was heard, but also

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that the Lord Jesus learned obedience through His suffering (Hebrews 5:7-9). If that is true of Jesus (and it is), it can also be true of us. If we cry out to Him we will be heard and, if we seek the Lord's help, we may even grow through our suffering.

*If we cry out to Him
we will be heard*

This growth can be seen in the glimpses of light in Lamentations. The author who once said "my eyes flow with tears" and "I am in distress; my stomach churns; my heart is wrung within me", came to the point where he recognised that the Lord was still with him. Jeremiah writes, "The steadfast love of

*The Lord is
my portion,'
says my soul,
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the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'" (Lamentations 3:22-24). This is a real encouragement, that there may come a time

when we can look at these periods of darkness and understand more about the character of God, His plan for our lives, and our hope for the future.

The sorrows of a faithful servant

The prophet Jeremiah is also an example of one of God's faithful servants who has a real burden for the Lord's people. So great was this burden that he could say, "My joy is gone; grief is upon me; my heart is sick within me." (Jeremiah 8:18). There are so many of the Lord's servants who feel overwhelmed with the burden that has been laid upon them. This may be the burden of service when they feel inadequate, or of reaching out to lost souls when they feel helpless to make a breakthrough.

Jeremiah's burden was in seeing the people's sin. He was given a message from God to deliver to them but they did not want to hear. He cried out to the Lord that he wanted to get away from

the people who would not turn back to Him (Jeremiah 9:2). He also wept for them, knowing what the result of their actions would be. He cried to them, “But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock has been taken captive.” (Jeremiah 13:17). When Jeremiah got to the point where he felt he could not speak the message any more, or bear the hatred and mocking from others, he still could not be silent. Jeremiah prayed, “For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.” (Jeremiah 20:7-9).

Jeremiah’s experience provides a very different message from those who would teach that the Christian walk is easy, or that

Jeremiah's experience provides a very different message to those who would teach that the Christian walk is easy, or that the Christian will receive great blessing and wealth on earth.

the Christian will receive great blessing and wealth on earth. Jeremiah clearly found his service for God really difficult! However, in the midst of his despair, Jeremiah received a word from the Lord which must have encouraged his soul. Jeremiah was able to communicate a message which still encourages the hearts of believers today: “For I

know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope... You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all of your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:11-13). Jeremiah did not give up on God. He looked to Him for hope and deliverance, “Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.” (Jeremiah 17:14). When we feel weak, inadequate, helpless or overwhelmed with the task the Lord has given us or the circumstances we face, we can remember that His plans are for our welfare and not for evil. We must

remember to continually seek Him in those times when we feel most lost and to remember that He is faithful.

EXAM for Chapter 2 - Depression

Enter the letter of the correct answer :

1. Mental health issues:
 - a. Are all in the mind
 - b. Have minor physical effects
 - c. Have profound physical effects
2. Who wrote “A man’s spirit will endure sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear”?
 - a. David
 - b. Solomon
 - c. Jeremiah
3. Teaching that depression is sin, stemming from a lack of faith is:
 - a. Harsh but true
 - b. Wrong and unhelpful
 - c. The first step to a cure
4. In his darkest moments Job:
 - a. Knew that God had forsaken him
 - b. Recognised that his sin had caused his problems
 - c. Held on to his hope in God
5. Jeremiah tells us that because the Lord is our portion we can have:
 - a. Strength
 - b. Peace
 - c. Hope

Enter T or F (TRUE or FALSE) for the following:

6. The Psalmist wrote: “He has brought me into darkness without any light”.
7. It is not known whether biological changes are the causes or effects of depression.
8. The troubles that afflicted Job were because he was not blameless and upright.
9. Our questioning God and feelings of brokenness have no beneficial purpose.
10. The servant of God who is doing the will of God will not find it a burden.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

When, like Jeremiah we feel overwhelmed by the events of life, what can we do to help ourselves?

Chapter 3

Managing Depression

This chapter explores biblical principles for responding to depression, and how they can help alongside the approaches that might be offered in the secular world. It is important that these approaches are used ‘alongside’ because where there is a physiological or a psychological problem, a person may need

We need to go to the Lord with our problems, sorrows and worries, but this does not mean that we ignore practical helps which are available to us.

professional help to tackle it, as with any other illness. We all need to go to the Lord with our problems, sorrows and worries, but this does not mean that we ignore practical helps which are available to us. This is indicated by the apostle Paul who refers to Luke as “the beloved physician”, recognising the service he could offer (Colossians 4:14).

Sometimes, the first solution a doctor recommends is anti-depressant medication. Each individual has to make their own decision about whether this is a route they want to take. There is no biblical reason that the writer can see not to take medication. 1 Timothy 5:23 indicates that Paul recommended specific practical steps should be taken to help Timothy with his frequent illnesses. Medication can be essential in some cases and may provide the lift that someone needs to allow them to think more clearly and to start to feel more able to cope. There is no shame in taking medication, and it may allow someone to be ready to talk about how they are feeling and to start to reflect and to understand why they feel the way they do. Similarly, if there is a deeper psychological or spiritual cause for

depression, counselling can be important - particularly by enhancing awareness and developing coping strategies to prevent further relapse. A secular counsellor can offer a space for talking about past problems, present difficulties, understanding early symptoms of relapse and even strategies for managing depression or anxiety. This can be very helpful, but may leave someone spiritually weakened if their relationship with God has not been considered, explored and strengthened. If someone is very conscious that the problem is a spiritual battle, which is often the case, then a Christian counsellor would be able to guide them to reflect on their experiences through the lens of the word of God. An experienced and trusted leader in the church who knows the Bible well should also be able to act as a spiritual guide. It would be important to talk with them about any issues of confidentiality and privacy from the outset so that the person can feel comfortable to share.

A secular counsellor can offer a space for talking...

... a Christian counsellor would be able to guide them to reflect on their experiences through the lens of the word of God.

How the Bible can help dispute (or challenge) depressive thoughts

When someone is suffering from depression, often the therapies recommended are focused around challenging patterns of harmful thinking. This is based on the idea that our core beliefs influence how we function and our mood. The idea is not that depression is caused by 'faulty thinking', but that once our mood changes (and there is no one proven answer for why that might occur), harmful thoughts follow. Approaches like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) emphasise the importance of enhancing our insight into our beliefs and their influence on our mood and behaviour. [see note overleaf]

Depression can become a battlefield where our minds wage war on any positivity and it can be a real struggle to make sense of what is true. It is possible that by recognising and challenging damaging beliefs about ourselves, the Lord, others and the world we may be able to rid them of their power over us. As we read God's word, we need to seek the help of the Holy Spirit to make the challenges below real to us.

As we read God's word, we need to seek the help of the Holy Spirit to make the challenges below real to us.

The Psalms contain genuine and heartfelt expressions of depression and sorrow that illustrate some of the powerful thoughts that can crush our spirit and bring us low. Alongside these outpourings of grief, are often glimpses of light and hope that provide helpful reminders for how we can dispute or challenge some of the negative thinking which depression breeds in us.

Alongside these outpourings of grief, are often glimpses of light and hope.

“No-one cares about me”

King David experienced many difficulties on his journey to being King and, even when he obtained the kingdom, he still faced moments when he felt that all were against him. In Psalm 69 he says “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 69:20). However, he goes on to praise the name of God, and to recognise that “... the LORD hears the needy” (Psalm 69:33).

Please note that CBT is most effective in milder forms of depression when a person is able to reason and problem solve, or in combination with medication. In more severe cases it would be important to seek the care of professionals so that the best treatment options can be identified.

When we feel like no-one cares, we need to remind ourselves that the Lord cares. If we can keep the Lord as our focus, He can establish our way. The Psalmist reminds us that if we look to the Lord, we can draw strength and help: “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The LORD will keep your going out and coming in from this time forth and forevermore.” (Psalm 121). Although it may sometimes feel like the Lord does not hear our prayers, the Psalmist reminds us that He does not sleep. Even when we feel He is distant, He is actually keeping us (see also Psalm 91).

1 Peter 5:7 provides the clearest dispute of all to the lie that no-one cares: “... casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.” The message could

not be clearer. The Lord cares about you. How can we know the depth of his love for us? Romans 5:8 says “... but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Psalm 69 speaks

The message could not be clearer. The Lord cares about you. How can we know the depth of his love for us?

graphically of the sufferings that Christ experienced on the cross. Our Saviour understands what it is to feel that no-one cares; He experienced that willingly because He cares for you so much. Hold on to that truth!

“I am alone”

We must remember that we are not alone. Even in those times when we feel rejected, abandoned or alone, the Lord is always with us (Matthew 28:20).

“When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Psalm 73:21-26).

This lovely Psalm highlights that even when we feel most distant from God, He is close to us, holding our right hand. The Psalmist looks beyond this world, to the blessings that we are promised when we belong to the Lord. He compares his old position, of being like a beast toward God, separated from Him by his sin, with his current position where there is nothing and no-one who he desires more than the Lord. Regardless of the Psalmist’s circumstances, whether he faces health-related or emotional problems, he says God is his priority and it is His strength that will pull him through. Who or what is most important in our lives? If we make the Lord our focus, and meditate on all that He is, it will lift our spirits and help us to feel closer to Him.

... even when we feel most distant from God, He is close to us,

One of the books in the Chronicles of Narnia series by C. S. Lewis is The Horse and His Boy. The main character, Shasta, is a young boy and during the story he gets lost in the mountains. He is alone and afraid. Shasta realises that there is someone walking alongside him but is initially too scared to speak. The voice beside Shasta asks him to explain his sorrows and Shasta talks about the perils he has faced on his long journey to Narnia. He sees himself as ‘unfortunate’ to have experienced so many difficulties. However, the voice gives him a different perception, explaining that he has been with him the whole time and that, rather than being a threat to Shasta, he has preserved him

throughout his adventures. The mist clears and Shasta sees that it is Aslan (the great lion) who has been walking with him. Shasta comes to understand that Aslan has been with him at various points during his journey to Narnia, guiding him and protecting him.

In these books, Aslan is a picture of the Lord. Similarly it is sometimes not until we look back that we realise how much the Lord has done for us! It can be hard to see it in the dark times, but that is exactly when we need to look to Him for help and to trust that He will do as He says. We must keep our focus on Him, rather than on the sadness and loneliness of the world in which we live and the pain of our circumstances.

It can be hard to see it in the dark times, but that is exactly when we need to look to Him for help

“I am worthless”

This is one of the hardest lies to overcome for someone with depression. By making us question our worth, it also makes us question our reason for living (see also chapter 6). We need to remind ourselves that we are worth more to the Lord than we can possibly understand at this time. Psalm 139 shows us that before we were born, God knew us: “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book was written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” (Psalm 139:13-16). Not only were we known before we were born, but God had a plan for us. No wonder David went on to exclaim about how amazing and

Not only were we known before we were born, but God had a plan for us.

precious God's thoughts are. God's thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts; we cannot understand how He can be interested in even the tiniest intricacies of our lives.

We may think when we make mistakes that they may cause God to love us less, but this is completely contrary to God's character.

We may think when we make mistakes that they may cause God to love us less, but this is completely contrary to God's character. John 3:16 says "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life". There is no condition placed upon this except for believing. The 'whoever' does not exclude particular people, God does not judge us in the same way that we judge each other. All sin is sin to Him, it is only by His mercy that any of us can be saved. God has been so patient with us. He does not want any to perish, He wants us all to turn back to Him in repentance (2 Peter 3:9). This shows our worth in God's sight.

We are loved by God because He chooses to love us. Some might argue that this means we do not deserve His love, but that is the whole point! "Christ died for the ungodly", not for the 'good' (Romans 5:6). God chose to set His love upon us. If you are a child of God, you are chosen and loved. What is the worth that God has placed on us? The price that had to be paid to secure our salvation was His only precious Son. How can we see ourselves as worthless when we have been bought with so great price? (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 1 Peter 1:18-19). We are made kings and priests to God (Revelation 1:6 KJV). Our purpose now is to love, serve and glorify Him.

How can we see ourselves as worthless when we have been bought with such a great a price?

These are just some of the truths that the word of God offers to help dispute the "flaming darts of the evil one"

(Ephesians 6:16). It is so important that we, as Paul suggests, “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). However, we cannot expect to do this in our own strength, otherwise we will fail. We need to ask the Lord for the help of the Spirit to fight the battle we are in on a daily basis. In the chapters that follow we will continue to explore the promises and truths in the Bible which can be our armour and weapons for the battle.

We need to ask the Lord for the help of the Spirit to fight the battle we are in on a daily basis.

EXAM for Chapter 3 - Managing Depression

Enter the letter of the correct answer :

1. CBT alone is most effective in:
 - a. Milder forms of depression
 - b. Moderate to severe depression
 - c. Hyper anxiety
2. Which king of Israel tells us that he felt alone and broken-hearted?
 - a. Saul
 - b. David
 - c. Solomon
3. Which of the Apostles does the author cite to dispute the negative thought that no-one cares for us?
 - a. Paul
 - b. John
 - c. Peter
4. We are loved by God because:
 - a. We are intrinsically lovable
 - b. He has chosen to love us
 - c. Our good works delight him
5. Revelation 1:6 speaks about our worth as believers in terms of being:
 - a. Children and sons
 - b. Servants and soldiers
 - c. Kings and priests

Enter T or F (TRUE or FALSE) for the following:

6. Depression may blur the boundaries of reality in our thinking.
7. Feeling that 'I am alone' is a negative form of thinking we need to dispute.
8. Hindsight is helpful in allowing us to see what God has done for us.
9. Psalm 139 helps us to see how important we are to God.
10. Wrong patterns of thinking are an example of the "flaming darts of the evil one".

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

How would you dispute the idea that the only help a believer needs is to get their relationship right with God?

Chapter 4

Anxiety

Sometimes people can mistake genuine anxiety for someone ‘just worrying too much’. Unfortunately, this really underestimates the power that anxiety can have over an individual. Anxiety can be defined as a fear of something which

Anxiety can be defined as a fear of something which has not yet happened or expecting a danger but not knowing what it is.

has not yet happened or expecting a danger but not knowing what it is. This may be in a social context: fear of how others might view you, fear of failure, fear of being judged, or fear of not being liked. It can also be fear related to mental health - a fear of losing control of yourself or your mind. Sometimes, if someone has already

faced an event which resulted in significant emotional, psychological or physical trauma, it may be that anxiety is the fear of something equally terrible happening. We will all worry or feel anxious from time to time, perhaps about a forthcoming event like an important meeting, a relationship problem, facing changes, our health or our family. Usually this is time-limited and we can relax or forget about it quickly.

For someone with an anxiety-related disorder, anxiety is not usually limited to one situation or event.

It can last for weeks or months with the tendency to improve or to get worse at different points. They may feel anxious about everything in their life, they may feel on edge and

For someone with an anxiety related disorder, anxiety is not usually limited to one situation or event.

struggle to sleep or concentrate, and they may not be able to relax. It can be so severe that a person no longer feels able to leave the house to do the necessities of life, like going to work, talking to others, or trusting others. While it may be viewed by others as ‘in the mind’, its effects are very real to the sufferer and can be crippling.

Anxiety can result in panic attacks (episodes of sudden intense anxiety) and other health related issues. Anxiety is accompanied by physiological symptoms as well as psychological symptoms, including a quickened heart rate or difficulties in breathing as the body decides whether to fight, fly or freeze. Anxiety has a variety of suspected causes, including a traumatic event or series of events, childhood experiences, biological or genetic factors or over-activity in the mind. This may mean that medication might help to reduce the strength of the feelings. It is important to obtain a specialist opinion before deciding on the best treatment. However, as with depression, recognising and managing your thinking is very important.

... as with depression, recognising and managing your thinking is very important.

The Bible contains a range of examples of people who have experienced anxiety or serious worry when faced with practical problems; from those who feared the loss of a loved one, to those facing imminent danger in battle. Paul talks about a mixture of real physical threats that he faced on his missionary journeys but also of “fears within” (2 Corinthians 7:5). There is a common theme in the experiences of these people as recorded in the Bible and that is, the importance of trusting in God when all seems lost. Hopefully we can learn something from them. In order to do so, we must remember that the tangible and physical threats posed to these people would feel as real as the fear faced by someone in the grips of anxiety.

Each circumstance can be viewed as a picture of the inner battle someone may face daily.

King Jehoshaphat

“Our eyes are on you” (2 Chronicles 20:3; 12; 15; 17; 20-22)

King Jehoshaphat was faced with danger in the form of “a great horde” of enemy troops who were advancing from three different nations. He was afraid. So what did he do when faced with such danger? The king proclaimed a fast, brought his people together and “set his face to seek the LORD”. He recognised that he was powerless against the armies which were approaching and said to the Lord, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” (v.12). This is such an important lesson for us to learn when we feel anxious. We know that no amount of worrying or fear can protect us from what may happen, and yet so often we fret and stress.

We need to acknowledge before the Lord that we are powerless . . . and to place all things into the Lord's hands.

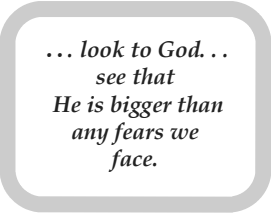
We need to acknowledge before the Lord that we are powerless to control or change the future, and to place all things into the Lord's hands. Rather than exhausting ourselves by running endless scenarios through our minds and trying to find answers in our own strength, we need to cry out to the Lord that we have no idea what to do! We need to look to the Lord for the answers and for the strength to face our situation.

God's response to Jehoshaphat's cry was to say “Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed... for the battle is not yours but God's.” So often we think that we have to face problems on our own. God does not expect us to fight alone, He is right alongside us and simply wants us to lean upon Him in dependence. To emphasise this point, God does not just say that He will make the battle easier for the people of Judah. He says “You will not need to fight in this battle. Stand firm, hold your position, and see the salvation of the LORD on your behalf” (v. 17). The people are

promised that they need only to stand firm and watch what the Lord will do. For someone who is experiencing anxiety, this is just the kind of support that they need. Not the glib words of someone saying ‘don’t worry’ or ‘you can do it’ and then leaving the person to it. Instead, appropriate support is needed with long term commitment. In some cases, when anxiety is really severe, a person may even feel they need someone to act on their behalf.

The Lord promises to be with the people of Judah. This must have been so reassuring for them. It led them to worship Him. Even the king bowed down with his face to the ground in thanksgiving and praise. King Jehoshaphat trusted that the Lord would do as He said. We know this because, rather than calling for his strongest soldiers to go into the front line of battle, he called for singers! As the army of Judah stood firm, they sang worship to the Lord. The enemy forces did not even come near to attack; instead, the Lord intervened as He had promised and the armies destroyed one another.

What can we learn from this event? Firstly, the importance of seeking God when we feel powerless and afraid; secondly, that we need to trust that He will fulfil His promises; thirdly, that the Lord is fighting for us even when we do not realise there is a battle going on and that He is alongside us in our darkest times; finally, that we can draw strength and encouragement from worshipping God when times are hard. When we take our eyes off ourselves, our worries, our problems and whatever enemy we may be facing at the time, and instead look to God, then we can see that He is bigger than any fears we face.



*... look to God...
see that
He is bigger than
any fears we
face.*

These are not promises or statements that are unique to this

situation or time. There are other examples in scripture where the Lord stands alongside His people and fights for them.

The Red Sea

“The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent” (Exodus 14:10-14; 21-22; 26-29)

The people of Israel had seen the amazing wonders that God had performed through Moses to free them from the oppressive hand of the Egyptians. However, when they saw Pharaoh and the Egyptians marching after them, they “feared greatly” (v.10) and cried out to the Lord. They quickly turned to blaming Moses for their predicament, saying that they would have been better off serving the Egyptians than dying in the wilderness. They had good reason to be afraid. They were cornered with the Egyptian army behind them, and the Red Sea in front of them. Moses may well have shared the fears of the people he was leading. However, he told the people “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you today... The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.” (vv.13-14).

The Lord made a pathway through the sea, so that the Israelites could walk on dry ground. He hardened the hearts of the Egyptians so that they would follow the Israelites, and He timed His action perfectly to preserve His people and to destroy their enemies. God not only performed these wonderful acts of salvation, but He also provided for them a sign that He was with them. The Lord had been going before them by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire to lead them as they left Egypt (Exodus 13:21-22). However, as they were about to go through the sea, the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. This meant that they could no longer see their enemies, only the path ahead

The Lord provided what was needed to guide His people safely through.

(vv. 19-20). The Lord knew how fearful the people were, and their journey through the sea was not going to be a short one. The Lord provided what was needed to guide His people safely through.

Perhaps today's battles are not with physical forces or enemies, but this does not make them any less real to us if we are suffering from anxiety. There may be times when we feel crippled with fear and unable to see any way out. We should call out to the Lord at such times, and to remember the instructions of Moses, to fear not, to stand firm, and to look and see what the Lord will do to help us on the dark days. On the days when we have no strength or ability to fight, we can know that the Lord will fight for us. This does not mean that we can expect immediate relief from our circumstances, or that our anxiety will be completely banished. The people of Israel faced many enemies; they struggled for 40 years in the wilderness, and even

... each battle that we entrust to the Lord, and which becomes a victory (however small), will give us more confidence to trust Him.

when they reached the Promised Land, fear still initially kept them out of it. However, each battle that we entrust to the Lord, and which becomes a victory (however small), will give us more confidence to trust Him. We may not have a physical pillar of cloud or fire to go before or behind us, but the Lord is with us.

He promises to never leave or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:8; Hebrews 13:5) and has sent the Holy Spirit to guide and keep us (John 14:26-27; Ephesians 1:13-14).

The unseen army (2 Kings 6:15-23)

Elisha, the prophet, had warned the King of Israel on several occasions of planned attacks by the King of Syria, and the King of Syria was not happy. One night he sent horses and chariots and "a great army" to surround the city where Elisha was. Elisha's servant saw the threat of the army and was afraid, saying "Alas,

my master! What shall we do?” In contrast to his servant’s fear, Elisha seemed confident. He said “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” He did not pray to be delivered from the enemy, or for protection. Instead Elisha prayed that the eyes of his servant might be opened, and what a sight the servant saw! The mountain was “full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.” (v. 17).

There was more to the situation than met the eye! How often we can see a problem or difficulty as insurmountable and not realise that the Lord has already won the victory.

It is important to remember that He might not choose to fight our battles in the way we expect.

The Lord is not restricted to those things which are seen. It is important to remember that He might not choose to fight our battles in the way we expect. Rather than pitching one army against the other, the Lord blinded the eyes of the enemy army so that Elisha could simply lead them to Samaria, where they were fed and then sent on their way. Sometimes anxiety can cause us to be blind to the support we have, whether the support of friends and loved ones, or the heavenly resources that are promised to us. Earthly resources such as alcohol and drugs or distractions like computer games and watching mindless programmes on television may provide temporary relief at best but can be harmful in themselves and even make the difficulties worse. We can become more distant from the Lord, and from those who want to support us. Psalm 20:7 says “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.” It is so important to fix our eyes on the one who can truly help us (Hebrews 12:2).

It is so important to fix our eyes on the one who can help with our problems

How do we find reassurance?

Anxiety can manifest in all sorts of ways. For some, anxiety can come out as anger, frustration, or withdrawal and this can result

in the problems becoming worse rather than better. For example, if someone is anxious that a relationship with a person close to them will end, they may, without realising, push that person away. However, often the behaviours most associated with anxiety are avoidance and seeking reassurance. Whatever we are fearful might or might not happen, we tend to seek reassurance from others that ‘it will be all right, won’t it?’

For some, anxiety can come out as anger, frustration, or withdrawal and this can result in the problems becoming worse rather than better.

However, there is a greater source of reassurance for us as believers. Even when we feel unable to do something, He is able. There are several examples of this in the Bible. “He is able to help those who are being tempted.” (Hebrews 2:18); “He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him” (Hebrews 7:25); “He is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.” (2 Timothy 1:12); and, perhaps most reassuringly, He “is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). We are not alone, and we do not have to rely on our own strength. If we do, we will struggle and fail.

EXAM for Chapter 4 - Anxiety

Enter the letter of the correct answer :

1. Genuine anxiety is:
 - a. Just worrying too much
 - b. Time limited to a specific situation
 - c. A medical condition requiring specialist opinion
2. What did God say to King Jehoshaphat?
 - a. He would give him strength for the battle to come
 - b. You will not need to fight this battle
 - c. There would be a peaceful resolution to the conflict
3. Which is not one of the four lessons the author draws from the story of King Jehoshaphat?
 - a. Seeking God when we feel powerless and afraid
 - b. Drawing strength from worshipping God
 - c. Taking account of our natural resources
4. In Exodus 14:13-14, what did Moses tell the people they had to be?
 - a. Silent
 - b. Bold
 - c. Courageous
5. What did Elisha ask God for concerning his servant?
 - a. Protection
 - b. Proper vision
 - c. Deliverance

Enter T or F (TRUE or FALSE) for the following:

6. There is no common theme in the Bible in the experience of anxiety.
7. Jehoshaphat put the singers at the front of the battle.
8. God demonstrated His understanding of the frailty of His people by moving the pillar of cloud behind His people.
9. When we pray for God's help He will always answer our prayers in the way we expect.
10. Hebrews 7:25 is an excellent example of the reassurance that God can give to the anxious person.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What are the common unseen sources of anxiety and how are they best overcome?

Chapter 5

Supporting those with Depression and/or Anxiety

It is not easy to see a friend or loved one suffering, and feel helpless to do anything about it. There may be times when we wish we could take their place and experience the emotional pain for them to give them relief. For some of us, who have never experienced the depths of depression or the full power of anxiety, it can be frustrating to see those we love seeming to make themselves worse and not doing what seem to us to be the easiest of tasks. We may therefore act unwisely by pushing too hard, blaming them, or minimising the difficulties the person is facing. This can result in them retreating even further away from us. With that in mind, we will think about some ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ which are important to remember when supporting friends and loved ones with depression or anxiety.

Don’t expect a quick fix – do be patient

Depression is rarely something which can be cured with a ‘quick fix’. It can be cyclical and recurring. Telling someone ‘it’s not that bad’ or to ‘cheer up’, is like putting a plaster on a gaping wound and hoping it goes away. It is downplaying the other person’s suffering. Jeremiah witnessed the same approach in his day. The priests of the time promised that there would be peace from war, just because that was what the people wanted to hear. “They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying ‘peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.” (Jeremiah 6:14).

Depression is rarely something which can be cured with a ‘quick fix’. It can be cyclical and recurring.

The priests' attempts to appease the people will not ultimately have helped them. In some ways, they may even have prevented the people from turning to God for help. We need to be so careful not to minimise the sufferings of others, even if we cannot fully understand them. The Lord Jesus did not ever downplay the suffering of those He met, or tell anyone to stop complaining about their ailments or illnesses. Even when others tried to stop a blind man who wanted to be healed from crying out, He had compassion on him. Jesus healed those who cried out to Him (Luke 18:35-43).

We need to be so careful not to minimise the sufferings of others, even if we cannot fully understand them.

The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesian church encouraging them to be united with the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3). He recognises that in order to do this, there is a requirement to walk "...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). When considering the role of the church and of individual believers in supporting those who are suffering, the Bible highlights that patience, love and humility are of the utmost importance. This can be difficult. If someone is in hospital for a long time or has obvious physical symptoms, the church may know that they need visiting and that they need prayer. For someone with a mental illness, it may be that because they appear to be doing okay, people forget how difficult just coming to church might be for them. It is easy to assume that someone is better because they come to church on a Sunday or because they are back at work. However, unless we get alongside the person, ask how they are really doing, or ask whether they would like us to pray for or with them, we will not know how much our help and companionship might be needed.

It is easy to assume that someone is better because they come to church on a Sunday or because they are back at work.

Don't blame them for their suffering – do pray with them

We have already thought about the sufferings of Job, but we have not considered the additional suffering imposed by his friends! Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar decided to

... they started well. They gave Job time and space, and they recognised that his suffering was "very great".

come together to show Job sympathy and to comfort him (Job 2:11-13). In some ways, you could say that they started well. They wept and they sat with Job for seven days and seven nights in silence. They gave Job time and space, and they recognised that his suffering was "very great". When Job

broke the silence, his friends sadly piled in with *their* perspective of the situation, giving *their* judgement and *their* advice. This is where they went wrong!

Eliphaz suggests that Job must have done something to cause his downfall (Job 4:7-8), Bildad suggests that Job should plead with God for mercy (Job 8:4-6), and Zophar suggests that Job deserves worse than he has experienced (Job 11:5-6). Job's response to his friends is strong. He says "As for you, you whitewash with lies; worthless physicians are you all. Oh that you would keep silent, and it would be your wisdom!" (Job 13:4-5). Job does not believe what his friends are telling him, and it makes him feel even worse. The comfort and sympathy they were supposed to offer is nowhere to be seen. So what is God's response to Job's friends? He says "My anger burns against you... for you have not spoken of me what is right" (Job 42:7-9). God said that He would accept Job's prayer for his friends "not to deal with [them] according to [their] folly". Job's friends definitely do not provide an example to follow!

Unfortunately, some Christians today may view depression or anxiety as being the result of a lack of faith, or guilt about an unconfessed sin. They may focus on where the person went wrong, what they have done or not done which has caused them

to feel this way. However, if we think back to those in Scripture who went through periods of depression, they are people of faith who overcame with God's help (see Chapter 3). That is not to say that they never sinned, but simply that a person's mental health does not define their level of faith or their 'holiness'. Depression can cause people to question their salvation and therefore to lose their assurance. We need to be careful not to fall into the trap of increasing another person's doubts or fears. Our role as friend and comforter should be to pray with those who are suffering, to encourage them to remember God's promises, to think about all that God has done in their lives, and to support them as they pray about the failings they recognise in themselves.

Depression can cause people to question their salvation and therefore to lose their assurance.

Don't give up on them - do look after yourself

This one is a tricky balance. Supporting someone with mental health issues requires commitment and a wealth of emotional resources. It is unhelpful to offer to support someone and then to walk away, as this may just affirm their worst fears. It may be that the person tries to push us away, and this is something we need to be prepared for. It does not mean that the person does not want help, just that they find it hard to know how others can help them. Think, for example, of a child who falls off a scooter and grazes their knee. The child may be sobbing and in pain, and it is clear that the best thing to do is to wash the graze so that it does not get infected, but the child does not want it to hurt any more than it already does. They might be unable to speak because they are so distressed, so instead they pull away from the help that is offered. This can be the same with depression or anxiety. Offers of support may result in further withdrawal and the person suffering

Supporting someone with mental health issues requires commitment and a wealth of emotional resources.

may not provide any explanation for this. Persistence is key, while also allowing time for them to recognise that we are there to help.

In Isaiah 58 the Lord speaks about the motives behind His people

The motive for our actions needs to be one of love because it requires more than just a ritual to really satisfy God's standards.

Israel's actions, in this case, their fasting. The motive for our actions needs to be one of love because it requires more than just a ritual to really satisfy God's standards. This passage says "if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light

rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday" (Isaiah 58:10).

Supporting someone whose difficulties seem relentless can really feel like we are being 'poured out'. However, the Lord will not leave us empty. We do not have limitless resources in ourselves: eventually, we too can become burnt out. So, it is important that we seek refreshment and strength from God when helping others. The Lord promises that if we pour ourselves out for others, He will strengthen us and we will be like "a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail" (Isaiah 58:11). This is reflected in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, where God is described as the "God of all comfort". We are encouraged to comfort others "with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God". Paul recognised that our own root needs to be in God's love and comfort in order that we may help others. Our own experiences of suffering can help us to provide support to others, and this means so much more if we can share how the Lord has helped us through our troubles.

It is important to seek support from other Christians when supporting those with depression or anxiety. Just as it is so much harder for a mother to look after her new-born baby when

It is important to seek support from other Christians when supporting those with depression or anxiety.

she is exhausted, so it is difficult to meet the needs of others when we feel as though our own strength is gone. The paralysed man who was laid at Jesus' feet was assisted by friends (Luke 5:17-26). There was no way just one person could have borne his weight and let him down through the roof. The men had to work together, each taking an equal part in supporting his weight as he was brought to Jesus. This is a helpful picture of how we need to support someone who provides care to those in distress. Praying for the carer is important, but practical support - love in action, is also vital and may give them the strength to carry on.

Don't be "cruel to be kind" – do show love in action

Someone spoke of a relative who was depressed and how they had told them they needed to do more to help their mother and to stop being selfish. They explained that sometimes you have to be 'cruel to be kind'. The surprising thing about these comments was that the person who made them also suffers from periods of depression. This person is not a Christian, and this attitude is not one which should ever be shown by Christians. The Bible suggests that if we close our hearts against those in need, we are not showing God's love. Instead, we are told to show sacrificial, open-hearted love (1 John 3:17-18). It emphasises the importance of showing our love through our actions, not just through our words. We should not offer platitudes or clichés, but should come alongside those who are suffering and share what we have with them. The passage in Isaiah may be referring to material need, but surely the same is true for spiritual, emotional and psychological needs.

We should not offer platitudes or clichés, but should come alongside those who are suffering and share what we have with them.

The letter to the Laodicean church suggests that while the people there were materially wealthy and would consider

themselves to be rich, the Lord saw them as they truly were: “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17). This tells us that material needs, while important for the person who does not have them, are just part of the many needs that a person may have. If a person comes to your church wearing scruffy clothing, or looking unkempt, providing clothing and food may be a first step in meeting their need. However, without getting to know this person and their needs, and showing them love and understanding, we may be failing them (James 2:14-17).

Similarly, just because someone is well dressed or wealthy, this does not necessarily truly reflect their psychological or spiritual well-being. It is so important for us to get to know others within the church, rather than settling for standard greetings and surface-level exchanges. The Lord tells the Laodiceans to go to Him for the things they lack (Revelation 3:18). Our role as part of His church and bride, is to point those who are suffering towards Him, and to come alongside them to help them .

*Our role as part of
His church and
bride, is to point
those who are
suffering to Him,
and to come
alongside them to
help them in their
walk.*

EXAM for Chapter 5 - Supporting those with Depression and/or Anxiety

Enter the letter of the correct answer :

1. Which church did Paul encourage to be “united with the bond of peace”?
 - a. Corinth
 - b. Philippi
 - c. Ephesus
2. Job had three friends who gave him bad advice. Their names were:
 - a. Eliphaz, Balaam and Zophar
 - b. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar
 - c. Elimelech, Balaam and Zilpah
3. When helping someone in need their withdrawing from you may happen:
 - a. Never
 - b. Always
 - c. Sometimes
4. Which of the following pictures does Isaiah NOT use to picture the individual pouring themselves out for the good of others?
 - a. Spring of water
 - b. Mountain stream
 - c. Well watered garden
5. Which of the following does the author NOT use as examples of things we need to move beyond in our church life
 - a. Surface level exchanges
 - b. Standard greetings
 - c. Small, practical examples of love in action

Enter T or F (TRUE or FALSE) for the following:

6. Jeremiah prophesied “Peace, Peace” to the people of his day.
7. Blaming an individual for not helping themselves is a common danger. _____
8. A person’s mental health does not define their level of faith.
9. Being ‘cruel to be kind’ is a helpful attitude in helping those who are depressed.
10. The church in Smyrna were deluded as to their true spiritual condition.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

In what way might someone who is caring for another individual usefully take care of themselves?

Chapter 6

Suicide and Self-harm

Suicide

I cannot recall ever hearing a message in church where suicide or self-harm has been explored, discussed, or even mentioned. Perhaps this is because there may be an assumption in the church that Christians will never even contemplate suicide or self-harm, or perhaps because it is something which has historically been a taboo topic. However, it would be naïve to think that no Christians ever experience suicidal thoughts or contemplate suicide.

In 2017, 5821 deaths by suicide were recorded in the United Kingdom; three quarters of those were males, one quarter females (Office of National Statistics, 2018). Suicide can have a huge impact on families, loved ones, churches, friends and colleagues. An unexpected and self-inflicted death can lead to unanswered questions, blame, hurt and pain. The grief experienced following a suicide is likely to be longer lasting and more painful than other types of bereavement. We should not add to that pain a fear of talking about what has happened. Those involved should not be afraid of judgement or blame, or being faced with the eternal consequences of the person's actions. It is a topic which needs to be thought about and talked about wisely and sensitively. There may be those in our churches or neighbourhoods who think about suicide often, who may even have attempted suicide, they need to be

It is a topic which needs to be thought about and talked about wisely and sensitively.

able to talk about their thoughts and feelings, and we should be ready and available to support them.

Why would someone consider suicide?

A person might consider suicide for a number of reasons. Suicidal thoughts may be a symptom of a person's depression or anxiety. They may feel unable to cope with their distress and want to escape the situation; they may feel hopeless and see no future, or they may be seeking help and trying to show just how serious their situation is. Suicidal thoughts may come alongside doubts about faith, questioning their salvation, or a feeling of distance from God. For a Christian, it may be more difficult to speak up about these feelings because they fear being judged, or because they think they are the only person who experiences these thoughts.

I know of one man who attempted suicide in a number different ways; he was reckless with his life because he did not care whether he lived or died. Many of us cannot understand what that feels like, but some will be able to relate to it. This chapter will explore examples of people in the Bible who felt hopeless and who wanted to die, and God's response to them. We will also consider what motivation there is for a Christian to live.

This chapter will explore examples of people in the Bible who felt hopeless and who wanted to die,

Elijah (1 Kings 19:1-21)

Elijah had witnessed and performed great miracles in his service for God. He had been fed by ravens, had seen fire come from heaven to give him victory over his enemies, and had been instrumental in bringing a widow's son back to life. He is not someone who you would expect to ask God to let him die. However, when he hit hard times he felt alone, lost hope and feared for the future. He cried out to the Lord, "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life..." (1 Kings 19:4). What was

God's response to Elijah's plea for death? He sent an angel to tend to him, feed him and give him water to drink. He was encouraged to rest before he was asked to do any more. However, he was not granted his request to die. The Lord had plans for Elijah. The angel told him that his "journey is too great", and he would need strength for it (1 Kings 19:7). The Lord knows when we have had enough, when we are tired and hopeless. He knows what we can cope with, even when we do not think we can endure any more. The Lord showed His power to Elijah through sending a strong wind, an earthquake, and a fire. There was no need for Elijah to fear, as God's power is much greater than the power of men. He spoke to Elijah in the sound of a low whisper, questioning why Elijah was hiding in a cave. The Lord was gentle with Elijah, but reminded him that he was not alone; there were other believers too in Israel, who were faithful to God.

The Lord knows when we have had enough, when we are tired and hopeless.

It was not long after this encounter that Elijah met Elisha who would assist him until he was taken up into heaven. The Lord provided Elijah with a task, but also with a helper to achieve it and to encourage him (1 Kings 19:15-21). It was not Elijah's time to die (in fact, he never did! 2 Kings 2:11-12). Life can be extremely hard, and we may experience circumstances which feel so difficult that we do not know how to get through them. However, we need to remember that God is bigger than those problems, we are not alone in them, and there may be more that He has planned for us; we have a greater purpose. If that is the case, God will equip us, nourish us, and ensure we have the support needed to make it through these circumstances. We must trust Him in this and cry

. . . we need to remember that God is bigger than those problems, we are not alone in them, and there may be more that He has planned for us; we have a greater purpose.

out to Him about the despair we are feeling. The Lord searches hearts and minds so He knows all that we think and feel, but His Word encourages us to tell Him what we feel.

Jonah (Jonah 4)

Jonah was angry with God. He had unwillingly gone to Nineveh and preached to the people that they should repent (turn from their sins). When they did repent, and the Lord was merciful towards them, Jonah did not like it. So great was his anger at this perceived injustice that Jonah asked the Lord to take his life: “Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live” (Jonah 4:3). The Lord questioned Jonah, in the same way He questioned Elijah. He asked whether Jonah was justified in being angry. He did not condemn Jonah, but He went on to provide Jonah with a lesson to learn about God’s sovereign choice.

The Lord provided a plant to grow and give Jonah shade, but He later caused the plant to be destroyed and sent a scorching wind. When Jonah again asked to die (because the plant had been taken away), the Lord pointed out that Jonah was angry about the destruction of the plant, but was also angry that God

Jonah had to learn to accept that while God's will may not have been the same as his, God is sovereign. This is a lesson we also need to learn.

had preserved the life of thousands of people. The Lord had pity on the thousands of people who were facing judgement and in His mercy he chose to deliver them. This evidences that the Lord is not willing “that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Jonah had to learn to accept that while God’s will may

not have been the same as his, God is sovereign. This is a lesson we also need to learn.

Jonah’s situation may seem quite specific and extreme, so can we really learn a lesson from it? Suicidal thoughts may

sometimes come as a result of feeling angry towards God that our efforts have been pointless, or that God's decisions and actions seem to us to be unfair. The Lord reminded Jonah, just as He did with Elijah, that God does not make mistakes. He is in control. He also reminded Jonah that He is merciful. He is a loving Father who wants to teach us, and may use surprising and sometimes painful experiences to do this. In those darkest times, when it is most difficult, we need to trust Him even more, to seek His will rather than our own, and to look beyond our own suffering to those around us. There may be occasions when we are focusing on the plant (the immediate problem), rather than seeing the bigger picture.

...God does not make mistakes. He is in control.

Saul (1 Samuel 31:1-7)

There are several men in Scripture who completed suicide including Samson, Abimelek and Ahithophel. These men were not particularly godly or faithful men. It is not clear whether they were saved. One of these men was Saul, who was once God's chosen king. Saul had made some bad decisions and after each bad decision he had grown more and more distant from God. He had offered sacrifices when this was not the role of the king, he disobeyed God in battle, and he had hunted David down and plotted to kill him. As a result of Saul's sin, the prophet Samuel no longer advised him (1 Samuel 15:35), "the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul" (1 Samuel 16:14), and the Lord did not answer when Saul asked Him what would happen in battle (1 Samuel 28:6). Saul was desperate, but when he eventually got the answer he was seeking, he was filled with fear and fell to the ground. He knew he would be defeated in battle that day. However, Saul still led his army out to fight, and he was badly wounded. He initially asked his armour bearer to end his life, but he was too afraid to do it. Instead, Saul "took his own sword and fell upon it" (1 Samuel 31:4-5). His armour bearer did the same, taking his own life.

This might be a situation to which some people who experience suicidal thoughts can relate. Any of us can make bad decisions, and often one bad decision will lead to guilt, shame and even more bad decisions. Before we know it, we may feel there is no way to recover, we are too ‘bad’ to be forgiven, and that God is no longer hearing us. However, true believers have a promise that God will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). There is no place so dark that we cannot be brought back. The apostle Paul murdered and persecuted Christians, King David arranged the death of one of his best soldiers to conceal his affair, and Zacchaeus lied and cheated to make money. The Lord forgave these men after their sincere repentance and still uses their lives as an example for us to see the vastness of His mercy. There will still be practical consequences to the majority of our sins and bad decisions, but if we cry out to the Lord in true repentance, turning from those things that tear us away from Him, He will forgive us (1 John 1:9). The Bible also highlights that when we believed in the gospel (or good news) and in Christ, we were “sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:13-14). So, unlike Saul, we can know that the Holy Spirit will not leave us. He is our guarantee.

There is no place so dark that we cannot be brought back.

What are the eternal consequences of suicide?

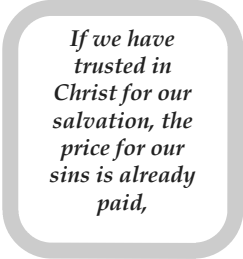
Historically, suicide has been looked at by the church as a sin which cannot be forgiven.

Historically, suicide has been looked at by the church as a sin which cannot be forgiven. However, this does not appear to be shown in Scripture. This may be a contentious topic, and there is no real example of someone who was obviously ‘saved’ in the Bible who went on to commit suicide, so it is important to think and tread carefully.

One argument has been that someone is unable to repent

following suicide and therefore it is a sin that is left unforgiven. However, even those Christians who die suddenly may have committed many sins in the course of a day and not confessed them to God or repented of them. Does this mean that someone is guaranteed a place in heaven only if they have repented of all their sins before they die? No, this is not the teaching of the Bible. Another argument may be that suicide is effectively murder, and that the word of God teaches that murderers shall not enter the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21 NKJV). However, included in that list of sins which can prevent entry into the kingdom of God are jealousy, selfishness and drunkenness. Are those sins not forgiven if someone who was once condemned confessed their sin and trusted in the Lord's salvation (1 John 1:9)?

In Romans 8:31-39, we are told that there is nothing that can separate the believer from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul explains that no-one can bring a charge against God's people. It is only Christ Jesus who can condemn, but it is also Christ Jesus who stands in Heaven and is interceding for us. If we have trusted in Christ for our salvation, the price for our sins is already paid, and we stand justified before God through Christ's finished work on the cross. These verses are a reminder to anyone who has Christian family members or friends who have committed suicide that God is the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus (Romans 3:23-26).



*If we have
trusted in
Christ for our
salvation, the
price for our
sins is already
paid,*

This is not to say, however, that suicide is a viable choice for the Christian. What is clear in the Bible is that life is precious as we are made in God's image (Genesis 9:6; Exodus 20:13). Paul highlights that our bodies are not our own to decide what we do with them: we belong to God; "for you were bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Not only do we owe our lives to

God but, as His Holy Spirit dwells within us, we are vessels for God to use. We are called to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). The apostle Paul goes even further and says “It is no longer I

So, although there were times when Paul wanted to go to be with Christ, knowing it would be “far better”, he recognised that God had a plan for him and that he had work to do in service for God

who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). So, although there were times when Paul wanted to go to be with Christ, knowing it would be “far better”, he recognised that God had a plan for him and that he had work to do in service for God and His people (Philippians 1:21-24).

When suicide feels like a logical choice, it is important to pray that God will reveal His plan for us, and to think about how we can live for Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us on.

Self-harm

In 2018, a study found that more than 100,000 children aged 14 in the UK were self-harming (Guardian, 28.08.18). This figure may well be shocking to some, but the teenagers in local churches are unlikely to be surprised by them. The difficulty of going through adolescence is made worse through the pressure of social media and the constant bombardment from the media and popular culture of how young people should look, act, dress and feel. This is a topic which seems to be largely overlooked by some churches. There is an 863 page Christian counselling book which makes only one mention of self-harm, and that only defines self-harm in terms of someone sabotaging areas of their own life rather than physical cuts or ligaturing. The self-harm spoken about in this section is when someone intentionally physically harms themselves. It is important that we understand more about it in order to be able to support those who do self-harm or who think about doing so.

A person may self-harm for any number of reasons. It might be a

way of coping with different pressures, problems, losses, difficult emotions or situations. The person may not even know why they chose to self-harm in the first place. Unfortunately, self-harm can be viewed as being a way of seeking attention. Often done in private, people may feel shame as a result of their actions and therefore unable to open up about it. If someone is brave enough to speak about how they are feeling, then this needs to be taken seriously.

Unfortunately, self-harm can be viewed as being a way of seeking attention.

Does the Bible speak about self-harm?

In the Old Testament there is reference to cutting as a pagan practice used to mourn for the dead (for example, Leviticus 19:28). These practices are forbidden in the Old Testament. However, there is little reference to self-harm in the New Testament.

The Lord Jesus met with a man called Legion who self-harmed by cutting himself night and day with stones (Luke 8:26-39; Mark 5:1-20). He did not care about clothing, and was tormented and controlled by demons. The depth of his suffering was severe and those around him were afraid to go near him. He was isolated and even chained up to try to keep himself and those around him safe. Self-harm in the West today is generally linked to depression or anxiety rather than demon possession. However, it can still have a powerful negative effect on relationships and produce social isolation. Family and friends may feel inadequate to help.

Family and friends may feel inadequate to help.

However, Jesus did not back away from Legion; instead He commanded the unclean spirit to come out of him. The result was that the man was found seated at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. The Lord did not condemn the man for his behaviour, or question why he was behaving in

that way. He took action to help the man in his need, sat with him, and then sent him to tell his story to others.

It is important for us to remember that Jesus Christ can still bring peace; His power has not changed. However, not everyone who asks for their depression or thoughts of self-harm to be lifted will receive sudden healing. God's response may be 'not yet' and, for some, it may take years of treatment (including medication and counselling) to learn to manage their depression or thoughts of self-harm. For others, the lifting of depression may be temporary and further lows may come.

God's response may be "not yet" and, for some, it may take years of treatment

After his healing, the place where the man of the Gerasenes wanted to be was at the feet of Jesus. This is an important lesson for us. Often we can cry out to God in our distress and lean upon Him during difficult times. However, when our mood lifts, we may become pre-occupied with everyday things. Or we may throw ourselves back into situations or circumstances which may have triggered our struggle to cope in the first place. Some may not feel they have the opportunity to escape those things which contribute to their depression, such as being confined, caring for a loved one, or physical illness. Rather than sitting at Jesus' feet after our mood lifts, we may find that we quickly take our eyes off the Lord. It is important to remember that before Jesus instructed the man to return to his home and to declare what the Lord had done for him, the man first spent that time with Jesus. We need to ensure that, before we throw ourselves into activity, we spend time at the Lord's feet as a priority. This will help to prepare us for the future.

How can you battle suicidal thoughts or thoughts of self-harm?

The most important thing is to persist in battling against these thoughts. We are all in constant warfare, but we do not all realise it. In Ephesians 6:10-18, we are introduced to the armour

of God, which every believer needs to wear to fight against the “rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places”. The apostle Paul knew that his biggest enemies were not necessarily just those physically around him. There is a

We are all in constant warfare, but we do not all realise it. In Ephesians 6:10-18, we are introduced to the armour of God, which every believer needs to wear. . .

bigger battle happening, and often that is within us. So, just as in the case of those depressive or anxiety-creating thoughts, we need to be prepared to face the foe. That means knowing the truth about God’s character and His teaching, being assured of our salvation and our right standing before God through Christ, staying firm in our faith in God, and knowing God’s word so that we can answer any of the doubts and temptations which come to us. We are instructed to pray “at all times”. It is so important not to become complacent and to think that these thoughts are gone. We need to be alert that these thoughts may come in cycles, and be ready to go back into battle whenever necessary.

For friends and loved ones of those who experience suicidal thoughts or thoughts of self-harm, we should not be afraid to ask whether the person is having them or what kind of thoughts

. . . the carer also needs to get support and to be prepared with the same armour.

they are. This can help us to know how the person is managing their thoughts, and whether they need any additional support. It can be hard to hear that someone we love wants to die, or to

harm themselves, so the carer also needs to get support and to be prepared with the same armour. Without being judgmental, listen, ask questions, pray with the person, and look after yourself. Together, look at Scriptures that bring hope to the believer (Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 34:18; Psalm 91:4; Isaiah 26:3-4; Hebrews 4:15-16; Hebrews 6:19).

Chapter 7

Conclusion

I hope that this course has helped you to understand more about mental health and the importance for everyone, especially for followers of Christ, to be aware of their own well-being and the well-being of those around them. We have read examples of believers who have stood firm for God, but who have been brought to a low point where they felt broken and alone. It may be that you are in that position right now. I hope you have been helped to recognise the importance of firstly crying out to God in prayer, and secondly reaching out to those around you for support, including the support of professionals. Scripture reminds us that God cares for us, He knows our pain and suffering and is with us through it all (Isaiah 43:2).

It may be that there are those who have studied this course who have friends or loved ones who are experiencing depression or anxiety, and who are struggling to find hope and a reason to live. God's pattern is that He comforts us, so that we can comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). You may have experienced your own days of darkness, and can use that experience to understand how to help others. If not, remember to be kind and compassionate even when you are at a loss to know how to help; to show them the love of Christ, not just in your words, but in your actions (Colossians 3:12-15; 1 John 3:18). This might mean sitting for long periods with someone who cannot even find words to express their pain, or helping someone to do even the smallest tasks. Pray with them and be patient. Seek support for yourself, remember that the Lord Jesus often withdrew to pray. It may be that you need a similar time to 'recharge' and to draw

comfort from God.

Maintaining mental health is a daily task, and I hope this course has highlighted the importance of keeping our minds on Christ and trusting Him. The chorus of one of my favourite hymns says:

“I know who holds the future,
and He’ll guide me with His hand.
With God things don’t just happen,
everything by Him is planned.
So, as I face tomorrow,
with its problems large and small,
I’ll trust the God of miracles; give to Him my all.”

This is the secret. It is so hard to hold on to, but whether we are in the depths of depression, or having a mountaintop experience, we need to keep in mind that God is guiding us with His hand (Psalm 73:23-24).

EXAM for Chapter 6 - Suicide and Self-Harm

Enter the letter of the correct answer :

1. According to the ONS in 2017, what is the percentage of males to females taking their own lives?
 - a. 50:50
 - b. 75:25
 - c. 90:10
2. God responded to Elijah's wish to die by:
 - a. Rebuking his selfishness
 - b. Reminding him of all that he had done
 - c. Sending an angel to feed him
3. Which picture is not used to describe the body of each believer?
 - a. A well tended garden
 - b. A temple of the Holy Spirit
 - c. A living sacrifice
4. In which gospel do we read about a man who self-harmed?
 - a. Matthew
 - b. Luke
 - c. John
5. What do Jeremiah 29:11 and Hebrews 4:15 have in common?
 - a. They bring hope to the believer
 - b. They speak about the peace of God which passes all understanding
 - c. They show us how much we are loved by God

Enter T or F (TRUE or FALSE) for the following:

6. A born-again believer would never contemplate suicide.
7. Attempted suicide is an acceptable 'cry for help'.
8. Elijah's life teaches us that even an extreme mental health problem need not mean we are no further use to God.
9. A series of bad decisions brought Saul to the point where he took his own life.
10. Jesus always answers the prayer of the faithful believer to bring immediate relief from a mental health problem.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

What should we do/not do if we suspect a friend or family member is suicidal or self-harming?