

Faith & Mental Health 2

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Preacher: Team Taught

[0:00] Good morning. Good morning. Thank you, everyone, for being here. I can open some. Perfect. Okay. Let me open us up in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for gathering us on this Sunday, this Mother's Day.

We thank you for the mothers in our lives, spiritual, biological, that have guided us on this journey. We thank you for a time to learn about your word and who you are, who you have revealed yourself to be in scripture.

And we thank you that you're a God who has entered into our weakness, who knows our struggles with thoughts and feelings, and that you have borne witness to that and you give us grace.

We pray that this time would be used to accomplish your purposes, to make us more into a community that bears with one another and that can show one another grace in truth and in love. In Jesus' name we pray. All right. So thank you, everyone, for being here. How's the sound? Are we getting perfect?

[1:12] Okay. Last week we had some issues with projecting our voice. So we are excited to talk about faith and mental health week two.

Last week, for those of you who might not have been here, we did an intro kind of talking about causes of mental illness and common misconceptions that might pop up in Christian communities around causes of mental illness.

So today we're going to be diving in more. Yeah. More excited to talk about specifically why it might be difficult in Christian communities to talk about mental health and mental illness.

So what we're going to be really looking at today, and we're going to be digging into scripture quite a bit, is how, not necessarily in this church setting, but just in other Christian communities broadly, how might we have incorrectly applied Bible verses or Christian principles in a way that might have contributed to mental health stigma?

And we're going to be diving more and more into that. And there's a lot of stigma at every step of the way. And I think how we've broken it up for this week is how does stigma manifest in just kind of even faithful Christians having mental illness?

[2:39] And next week, as we talk a little bit about, as people start the process of seeking help in therapy, what suspiciousness there might be as well around our profession. But today, just even around, like, can mental illness exist with Christians?

So yeah, there's, yeah, different ways. So yeah, today we're specifically focused on why is it hard to acknowledge as a Christian having a mental illness?

So just a brief review of some statistics we talked about last week. So around one in five people in the U.S. at any given time have a diagnosable mental illness.

This includes Christians and includes pastors. So it seems like the rates for Christians and pastors are pretty much the same as for the general population. But there's a few interesting statistics.

There was a big Christian organization did a research study about this and kind of polled people around somewhere between 60 and 65 percent of people who are either affected by mental illness or who have a family member affected by mental illness are hoping that their church will talk more openly about mental illness.

[3:52] But they did a sort of a survey of Protestant senior pastors and found that 66 percent talked about mental illness once a year or less. So there seems to be a discrepancy between, yeah, sort of how comfortable churches are talking about mental illness and how much people actually want to talk about it.

They also did a review serving people, Christians who do have mental illness and found that 30 percent had had a negative interaction with their church around mental illness. And there was

different reasons for that.

So it seems like there's a gap between what people are experiencing and how frequently we're talking about mental health in the context of just Christian communities more broadly.

So we were curious to look at why, like, why is that gap? Like, why is our church a more difficult place to talk about mental illness when people are actually hoping to talk about it?

And we think that there's some, yeah, some probably pretty good reasons for that. And we wanted to explore further. But first, just to hear from all of you, as you know, we're therapists, so we like to have more of a group conversation.

[5 : 06] How easy or difficult do you feel like it is to talk about mental illness in Christian communities? So it could just be churches more broadly, Christian spaces you're in.

How easy or difficult is that? Either from your personal experience or from your observation. So I moved from Midwest to Connecticut.

Well, I'm back. But I found it much easier, much more accepted that mental illness even existed in New England.

Part of that might have been, I came to work for a social service agency. I was working at a social service agency before in a different capacity.

But I found in the Midwest in particular, at least enough, the Christian circles that I was involved in, I had a much more black and white view of, you know, this is right, this is wrong, this is good, this is bad.

[6 : 15] And I find there's a lot of people that I've been doing. And I find there was my experience in the women that we're much more willing to accept that there's a broad spectrum that real life gets in the way of what we call biblical theory.

And that, you know, God knows that and he's okay with that. And they cover more than just mental health. Yeah, that's actually one of the first big topics we wanted to talk about was just kind of the black and white thinking.

And so thank you for bringing that up. And it's interesting, different regions of the country. I've had the same experience, too. So that's an interesting observation. How about other people?

And it might be easy and there might be really good experiences or difficult experiences. I was born and raised in a very small town in Ohio. And when I was going through a very difficult divorce, I saw Christian counseling and spoke to friends in the church, friends out of the church, and they all encouraged me and supported me.

And I never had a problem. That's great. That's wonderful. That was wonderful. Yeah, and a great support system. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah?

[7 : 45] When I say, when it comes to mental illness, I believe that, you know, people tend to spiritualize it more than it needs to be. There's a lot of blaming and shaming. You know, who sins? His father was parents.

You know, the answers for nothing. That kind of thing. And it doesn't take into account the physiological illness, you know, physical sickness that's happening. Yeah.

Yeah. And how that can be such a struggle. Yeah. Yeah, these range of experiences, right? From, like, the church being really safe and supportive and the best place to be in a struggle to kind of feeling sort of blamed and stigmatized.

Yeah. Thanks for sharing. How about others? Any observations of how easy or difficult it seems to be to talk about mental health?

Carolyn? Carolyn? I think I found it easier to talk about mental health when it seems to be in conjunction with, like, an event.

[8 : 46] So a death or a trauma or something to then be like, because of this, I'm experiencing this. I think it feels particularly hard to talk about when it feels like there is no cause and effect.

It's like, oh, I'm just experiencing depression or anxiety, and I can't tie it to something that seems to be causing it.

Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. For sure. I've found, too, for myself personally, it's easier to talk about in the past tense than the present tense. It's a lot easier to say, oh, I used to struggle with this, and now I'm over it, and I'm better than it is to say, today I'm having a really bad day.

You know, there's something about that that feels more difficult, more vulnerable. We like narrative arcs that are a little more tidy and complete. Yeah. Yeah.

Anyone else? I think theology can affect it as well, if you think that Christianity fixes it. Like, I think theology is one that bends to, like, we solve everything, or the church is the place of the healed.
[10:09] Yeah. I think your theology can affect it. Yeah. But if you're in a church, so a safer church might be one that says, like, we're born to trouble as the sparks fly upward, and, like, trouble and sin and this consistency of, so I think sometimes theology runs into it.

If you're in a name and climate kind of place, it can be very difficult. Because you're not supposed to be broken, you're supposed to be fixed. Yeah. Whereas if you're in a place where it understands the messiness of life and the drama of sin, that there's a now and not yet, I guess.

Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. Good segue. Yeah. That's a great segue. Y'all are teaching the Sunday school. So today, I think, so we wanted to just kind of focus on three main messages that we might have received kind of growing up in the church or in different church communities. And so the first one we'll talk about is either or thinking or black and white thinking, kind of this idea of moral absolutes and how does that play into the broad spectrum of kind of our lived experiences. The second one is around, you know, when we call it mental illness, are we letting people off the hook and not keeping them accountable and calling them to repentance?

[11:30] And the third one is around, some of you have also mentioned this idea of over-spiritualizing and spiritual bypassing. And just kind of as we're going through each of these three messages we may have received, I think as Alina was talking about before, right, that it's not necessarily that it's bad, but it's that it's a very narrow, it can be a narrow view where scripture is much more complex.

And that often, even if scripture doesn't teach it, there's a gap between our theology and kind of the culture we may see in churches. And so just kind of thinking about, you know, what do we do, you know, the difference between what we say we believe and how our churches are structured and how, you know, what do we do?

What do we prioritize? Who is visible? That kind of a thing for each of these. All right, so subtle messages.

Okay, so the first one is about this either-or thinking, the black and white thinking that some of y'all have mentioned. And I think as Christians, there are parts of our faith that are absolute, that are very black and white.

And we think about verses like Luke 11, 23, where Jesus says, whoever is not with me is against me. And whoever doesn't gather with me scatters.

[12:57] Or we think about John 14, 6, where Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. And we have a couple more listed. Romans 6, 11, you know, you're either dead to sin or alive to God in Christ.

Matthew 6, 24, you can't have two masters. You either hate the one, love the other. 2 Corinthians 5, 17, you're a new creation.

You're not the new. The old has gone. The new is here, right? So there's very much that you were this, now you are this. And that can kind of obscure some of, again, that already but not yet nature of how we live our Christian lives.

And when we think about kind of implicit messages we may have received in the church, right? I've had somebody talk about, you know, you either have faith or you don't.

Just like you can't be a little pregnant. You either are or you're not, right? And so kind of the ways that we talk about having faith can be very like, are you in or are you out?

[14:01] And then when we apply that to mental health, you know, we might implicitly be thinking or, you know, people may have experienced others saying, right, you're either depressed or you have faith in God's goodness and promises.

You're either anxious or you trust God or you have all these idols in your heart that you need to repent of. God has given us a sound mind and so you can't have a thought disorder.

Or, you know, the spirit of God has given us power, love, and self-discipline. So if you have self-discipline, you wouldn't struggle with addiction. So these are just kind of the ways that some of these black and white ways of thinking might get translated into how we think about mental health. And I think you had a couple of examples. Did you have a couple of examples? Yeah. And I think, too, there's, it's complex because there certainly are. Like Stephanie said, blacks and whites and absolutes.

We are sinners who need to repent and trust Christ. And sometimes we take some of those absolutes and might apply them to places where there actually is more complexity, like an area like mental health.

[15 : 15] So, yes, sometimes we might think. I had somebody once, just a friend once tell me who was struggling with panic attacks and, like, really, really suffering with this.

And she had told me that she had been told and kind of had come to believe the reason she was struggling with panic attacks is because she was making an idol of other people's opinions. And if she were to stop making an idol of other people's opinions, she would stop having panic attacks. And, again, she very well possibly could have been making an idol of other people's opinions.

I'm not sure. But it was definitely like a, I'm, I have this physical, physiological symptom because of the sin in my heart. And sometimes that can become very frustrating for those people who are struggling and trying to repent and trying to, you know, overcome a sin but not feeling like the mental health symptom is improving.

And so that can just get complex. So, and we talked last week about does sin play a role? And certainly sin plays a role in all aspects of our lives.

[16 : 24] But, like, I think someone, you mentioned there's biological reasons that contribute to mental illness, trauma, psychological reasons, a lot kind of going on there. So, we have proposed an alternative.

And we'll try to talk about the scriptural support that we see for this. But we'd love to hear from all of you, too. That it is possible to suffer in mind and body with mental illness, just like it is with physical illness.

And to have a flourishing relationship with Christ such that one doesn't negate the other. You can be, feel very anxious, very depressed, and be growing and pursuing Christ at the same time.

And I think sometimes it's hard for us to have categories for that in the church. What does it mean if someone is really anxious, having panic attacks, but pursuing Christ?

It's like, what do we, how do we understand that? What do we do with that? And also that, I think along with that, mental illness can prompt us to actually have greater hope and expectation and anticipation for the day when God will redeem our minds and our bodies.

[17 : 37] So, as opposed to it being like, oh, this is really a hindrance to your spiritual life. And this kind of shows that you're spiritually weak or have some kind of unconfessed sin.

This is actually a struggle, like a thorn in the flesh that can prompt us to really long for the day of redemption. Yeah, so in terms of the both and nature that we see in scripture, the one in Matthew, you know, talks about the Beatitudes.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. And there's also, you know, I think unique to Christianity that aspect of the already but not yet, right, where Jesus has come, but we haven't seen, and he has brought God's kingdom, but we don't see the fullness of that quite yet.

And how does that translate into the things that we end up struggling with? Oh, sorry, I had already moved to 10.

Oh, yes, thank you. All right. All right, Alina is on top of it. All right, so in terms of just kind of even understanding already but not yet, right, so here are a bunch of Bible verses around, you know, how we are already adopted in Christ, but not yet adopted.

[19 : 03] We're already redeemed, but not yet redeemed. We're already sanctified, but not fully sanctified, saved in Christ, not yet saved, already raised with Christ, but not yet raised.

So even, I mean, I'm not going to go through all of the Bible verses, and this is kind of from a professor at Westminster. But just to go through one of them, right, so the language of Romans 8.15 says, you have received, past tense, the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

And then Romans 8.23, just a couple verses later, say that we're not yet adopted, right? We wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies, and that's kind of in the context of our groaning and our struggles.

And so even just in the ways that we already are all of these things in Christ and yet have not seen the fullness of it, that can translate into how we experience life on this earth.

And so there are tensions in our Christian life as a result, right? And last week we talked a little bit about Mark 9, where this beautiful prayer of, I believe, help my unbelief, right?

[20 : 20] So that there are times where, you know, we do have faith in Christ, but we're still asking for more faith in order to believe his promises. And those are honest prayers that made it into the Bible.

And then Romans 15, where Paul says, I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do, I do not do. But what I hate, I do.

And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me.

That is my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do.

This I keep on doing. So a little bit of like a tongue twister there, but just that idea of these conflicting desires within us. And we want to want Jesus, and sometimes it's hard.

[21 : 20] And that, you know, both the fallenness that we see around us and kind of individual choices, that those all contribute to the tension that we are living in right now.

Thank you. And so David Paulison has written this, I think a whole book. But there was this great example that he had where he's talking about, you know, yes, the moral absolutes help us orient rightly on the journey.

Right. But it's not either you're in oily rags or you're in this garden of delights. But it's really a change process where you're going from oily rags to the garden of delights.

And if we think about our faith journey and the process of sanctification, you know, we might be tempted to think, oh, you know, it's about he uses the example of going from Boston to Philadelphia.

Right. You know, is it this formula where it's how fast you're going, the distance you're covering and this formula of when you get to arrive at your destination?

[22 : 29] And he says, well, it's much more about, you know, regardless of speed, are you even headed in the right direction? Are you headed towards Philadelphia? If you're headed towards Seattle, it doesn't even matter how fast you're going.

You're just not headed in the right direction. Right. And that having a long view of the process of sanctification is so important for us, you know, both as we kind of interact with others in the church and with ourselves as we struggle with various sufferings.

And that there may be seasons where it's amazing and, you know, everything is great and you're leaping around and it's filled with joy. And then there are seasons where you are just kind of trudging along and it's a steady progress. Right.

And we like those stories. We like the narratives of being able to kind of show that we are getting better and better. But sometimes, you know, we're just kind of, you know, on our hands and knees and crawling along.

And sometimes we're in gridlock and the car has broken down and we're not going anywhere. But we're as long as we're oriented in the right direction towards the Lord, like that's not nothing. Right.

[23 : 41] That is still an act of faith. And so being oriented to the Lord, even if there is no perceptible movement, is still so important in times where we're suffering.

And so just kind of keeping that in mind that it's not about the absolute distance we're covering, but just are we oriented towards the Lord in our cries? Are we oriented towards the Lord?

I'm curious if people have questions, comments, disagreements, or even personal experiences you have of like thinking through how this either or thinking minor might not apply to mental health.

We'd love to hear from anyone who has thoughts. What you just pointed out provides another lens through which to help us progress. And a lot of this sounds like what we're in is in actuality a transition process.

And we think of transition as maybe not being quite so long in a lifetime. But that that's pretty much what that looks like to me.

[24 : 53] Thank you. I think, hopefully, as I get older and wiser, I've learned not to compare myself with others. And then their walks. Because we're all on a different walk.

We're all on different levels. I think that's the best thing I did for my own mental health. Yeah. That's an important one for sure. Yeah.

Absolutely. Absolutely. I used to struggle a lot with, like, who am I really? Like, am I two of me?

Or am I one of you? Right? With that passage you read from, it sure sounds like there's two of me. Right? But it's God has had the final word on our identity.

The flesh is a tagalong. It's this zombie that keeps crawling out of the grave. But, you know, the Bible tells us to put it to death.

[25 : 52] But it doesn't, nowhere does it expect us to have that done any time before the end. We read the letters of Paul and his ongoing struggle, you know, to the very end.

And as he progresses toward the end of his life, he says, I'm chief of sinners. But at the same time, he's like, I expect shortly to receive the crown.

Like, he doesn't. He keeps the cross in mind. He keeps grace in mind. Suffering is not a sign of your, not always a sign of your disobedience.

It's not a sign of God's displeasure. It's a tool of his fun. Yeah. And I think mental illness, too, can be at least like a reminder of our sort of frailty and our vulnerability and our dependence on God, you know.

And for me personally, anytime I would like to escape that reality of my dependence and my frailty and my need for God, my mental health quickly reminds me.

[26 : 59] Or, you know, quickly sort of, I can't stay sort of prideful for long. So in that way, it's, you know, we're reminded that we're, yeah, we're waiting for redemption and we're not yet there.

The redemption of our minds and bodies. Yeah. Yeah. That even that groaning indicates that there's so much more that we're hoping for. Yeah. Any objections?

We love to hear objections, too. You can tell we're therapists here. Yeah. Anything that y'all is, uh-huh?

This is not an objection. Sorry. We were hoping for some objections. But it does occur to me that even more so than just seeing that this is a reality, to see it as a grace.

Because it seems like one of the patterns of the gospel is that it's in our weakness that God's glory is shown. And in our neediness is when the gospel is sweet and rich to us and meaningful.

[28 : 07] And it does seem like one of the ways that the church culture can mitigate against having a healthy approach to mental illness is we kind of, we just want to have a, can't we get it right mentality.

And part of what the gospel tells us is we're going to increasingly see our neediness for God in the gospel. And for his help, you know, his sustaining help, his healing help, his transforming help. And that it's, it's not just a circumstance we have to navigate, but it's actually a grace that God gives to us to walk with whatever length he gives us in life.

Yeah. In the process. So that was my. Yeah. Amen. Amen. Amen. Yeah. And I think it's, I was thinking, I think it's common to feel with mental illness or maybe just for myself of like, why do I have this limp?

Right? Like, you can have somebody else's limp. That limp seems a little easier. Like, this one is particularly frustrating and kind of makes me look bad. You know, and I think it's good to keep in mind that this is, yeah, that this can be a grace that can point us toward Christ.

[29 : 28] So I'm glad that you said that. Yeah, Tom. I just, no objections I'm affirming. We need some objections here, yeah.

Those Bible verses you were using, they're not cherry-picked because they're all over Scripture. I mean, it just comes up again and again and again. And you read the Psalms, and the Psalms is just like, why is my soul downcast?

Mm-hmm. And, you know, there's entire books, Lamentations, Jeremiah, Job, that are struggling with various emotional or psychological trauma that people are experiencing.

And I'm just reminded of how this is not only in the Bible but also with Jesus, that, like, he didn't just take on our physical sufferings. He knows what it's like to struggle with the temptation towards anxiety or depression or whatever it may be.

Yeah. Scripture says that he knows that. And he became like us in every way. So he can redeem us in every way. And that includes our minds and our emotions. Mm-hmm.

[30 : 31] Mm-hmm. Yeah. Amen. Yeah. Yeah. And that there is still, he's acquainted with the struggle, but there is still no sin. And, like, we don't want to minimize the struggle that he had because there is so much scripture around that, for sure.

Mm-hmm. Yeah. Well, great segue. Yeah. Yeah. Well, we'll get to Jesus in his experience in a little bit.

But this is one that I think actually comes up pretty often in Christian communities sort of implicitly, if not explicitly, which is if, especially because mental illness, it affects our behavior, right?

People behave in ways that we don't understand when they're experiencing mental illness. It affects people's emotions, their relationships. It's, you know, it contributes to disruption, disruption in a lot of ways.

And so often there's the sense of, like, oh, if we just call it mental illness, are we kind of letting people off the hook, and are we not encouraging them to repent? But, and this can get sticky, so we're going to try to, try to, oh, thanks, Stephanie.

[31 : 39] Wait, this is as best we can. So I won't go through all of these in detail, but of course we know that in scripture there is absolutely, that we are, there's an emphasis on personal responsibility.

Like, we are sinners that we are accountable to God who created us, and that is a fundamental reality in scripture that we can't, you know, can't dispute.

And, you know, there's, there's a few examples here, but that we will reap what we sow. And Stephanie pointed out this interesting verse yesterday that it will be, our work will be revealed with fire, and we'll test the quality of each person's work.

So certainly we are accountable before God for our, for our behavior, for our actions, for our attitudes. Awesome. Oh, thank you. But there may be ways that we take this emphasis on personal responsibility, and we might misapply that to some areas involving mental health and mental illness. So we made a couple of vignettes here. Oh, I forgot to name these two. I named the vignettes later on in the session. So, but first, so I'll just, I'll just read this first one.

[32 : 53] And I think this is not uncommon, honestly. A church member feels so depressed that their concentration and focus is severely impacted, and he can no longer focus to read scripture.

He also cannot make it to church because he is unable to get out of bed, even to shower. However, church friends say his commitment to Christ and to the church body is failing, which people might, that might be a first assumption if somebody stops coming to church and stops reading scripture, and somebody doesn't know sort of what is going on underneath.

That could actually be a logical assumption to make. A second vignette, a church member has severe social anxiety and cannot bring herself to attend small group.

She has tried, but she has multiple panic attacks before leaving the house and cannot get beyond her driveway. Other church members are concerned that she is not investing in community.

And again, if somebody doesn't know, that might be an assumption to make. So that's an example of sort of people not wanting to let somebody off the hook, or who might be sort of cautious to attribute somebody's behavior to mental illness, lest they be sort of excusing what they see as kind of a failing commitment.

[34 : 05] So I really, really love this quote from C.S. Lewis. I think I might just read it, because I think it really captures kind of this proposed alternative we would suggest, which is having grace for one another and humility to recognize that we might not know always where somebody is at internally, what they're dealing with.

So C.S. Lewis says, The bad psychological material is not a sin, but a disease. It does not need to be repented of, but to be cured. Human beings judge one another by their external actions.

God judges them by their moral choices. When a neurotic, we don't use that term anymore, FYI, but at least we don't use it in that way, who has a pathological horror of cats forces himself to pick up a cat for some good reason, it is quite possible that in God's eyes he has shown more courage than a healthy man may have shown in winning the highest honor for military valor.

That is why Christians are told not to judge. We see only the results which a man's choices make out of his raw material, but God does not judge him on the raw material at all, but on what he has done with it.

So, I mean, I think that this quote pretty much says it all, but going back to those two examples, or, you know, even different people that we might know in Christian community, we see somebody's behavior.

[35 : 32] We kind of see the tip of the iceberg, like the glacier poking up out of the water, so to speak, of, oh, how friendly do they seem? How committed are they to different church events?

How much are they serving? Yeah, and that might be some indication of where somebody is at, but it could also be that if somebody is struggling with really severe anxiety, for them making it to

church might be a much greater act of faith and perseverance than it might be for somebody else to be serving on five committees.

And I think sometimes we don't always have the categories to see that, or a person who's depressed bringing themselves to read the Bible for five minutes, you know, might actually take a lot more heart, effort, and perseverance than it might for somebody else to read the Bible for two hours on their Bible reading plan, right?

And so just to kind of have the humility to realize, like, oh, we don't, especially when it comes to mental illness, like, we don't really know what somebody is going through and what, and it's good to ask them.

It's the first step to understanding. But it's always good to take a pause if you don't understand someone's behavior and they're experiencing mental illness to think about, oh, what are they doing with what they have and the energy that they have right now?

[36 : 50] So I guess as a follow-up with that, kind of a, what would be an alternative sort of response by the church body to these two individuals?

So the man who is experiencing, oh, yeah, go for it. Well, I'm just thinking, in both of the things that, what disturbed me was that other church members were saying about this person, well, they've lost their commitment, they've lost their, they're losing their faith or whatever, what they should have done and it's gone and it's been a better time to be willing to listen.

Yeah. You know, I don't know anything about this, but I hear you and I want to, you know, how can I help you, kind of walk into church with you, you know, that kind of thing. Rather than, what really bothered me about both vignettes was church members were saying this about that person.

And, you know, like, you know, it's just so good for me to hear that, you know, we don't know, like, what brain material we're working with, what kind of travel we've gone through and how we're working with that and how we're swimming through our day-to-day, you know, that kind of thing.

So, anyway. That is great. You just gave a better follow-up on the vignettes than I could have. That was awesome. Exactly. I think, you know, I think the best first step, especially if you suspect somebody might be dealing with mental illness or if you don't know, but it's always a possibility because we know one in five people are, it's always good to ask.

[38 : 24] You know, you don't have to be a counselor to ask. You don't have to have any sort of training, but just to be a caring person and saying, hey, are you dealing with something, like, is there something difficult going on in your life that's making it hard for you to come to these events?

Or are you dealing with depression? And even, like, what's that like? You know, as opposed to sort of jumping to conclusions about what they should or shouldn't be doing in that given moment, even just taking time to ask, like, how's it going?

Like, what are you experiencing? And so, yeah, I love your examples. And I think there are ways to support people in both of these examples. The man who had a hard time making it to church, the woman who had a hard time making it to small group, there are ways to support people in engaging with the body of Christ, but it could look more supportive and less sort of blamey.

You know, so for instance, I love how you said somebody might need someone to go to church with them. Like, maybe they feel really anxious and they need someone to drive them and walk in the door with them.

So a better response. And sit with them. Exactly. Yeah. So a better response than, oh, why aren't you going to church would be like, hey, can I accompany you to church? And is there any way that I can help support you so that you don't feel so anxious or that we can help you, you know, kind of do that.

[39 : 41] So it's not that you have to say, oh, it's fine to never attend church at all. But there are ways to approach, oh, is it hard for you to read scripture? Let me buy you a subscription to the Dwell app because that might be easier than like trying for some people who are depressed.

Reading and concentration can be difficult. Or are you so anxious? Like your mind is swirling when you try to read scripture. Here's a worship list playlist I can send you. There's ways to engage that are more supportive as opposed to why aren't you doing this and you should be doing it.

But a good first step is always to just ask. And yeah, it's amazing what even asking a simple question about someone's experience can kind of open up for them.

And it might be even just around kind of like starting with an observation, right? Like, oh, hey, I've missed you being a small group. Like what's what's going on? Right. And yeah, so just kind of even starting with like what you've noticed and expressing a desire for that person's presence and

relationship.

And I think all the things that you were mentioning about how we support people, right? It's often easier to think about when somebody, you know, cancer is a very sympathetic disease. You know, somebody has cancer.

[40 : 54] What do we do? And they are so debilitated by chemo that they can't come out. We're not like, well, you should come out anyway, right? At all costs, right? That, you know, they immune deficiency and that kind of a thing.

But we might bring the service to them, right? We visit people who for various disabilities can't get out of their house. We bring them meals. We really try to support the practical needs and walk alongside them.

And to, you know, to whatever extent we feel we're able to do that for people with mental health issues. I think that's always a good way to kind of translate, you know, what should we be doing, right?

When you think about somebody who's had a heart attack or a stroke, do we expect them to show up to service right away? And, you know, there may be seasons where they need intensive care. But when we think about physical illness, we often tend to be a little more compassionate towards that.

And I think the other thing, right, is that for sure there is a lot of hurt and brokenness that can come, you know, come with mental illness and the ways that it affects our relationships.

[42 : 07] And so, you know, there is still room for, you know, when that person is in a season to be able to hear that to bring up ways that others have been hurt, to talk through that, to, you know, to take accountability for that, right?

And so, again, an example that I've heard that's been helpful is, you know, somebody's driving a car and they have a seizure and they lose control and they, you know, crash into the car in front of them, right? And that person obviously needs help for the seizure. And maybe as the person whose car has just been damaged, you're not asking for reparations right away. But, you know, the person, when they're in a better space, is able to take accountability for, hey, I'm sorry that I, you know, crashed into your car. Like, let me make some amends, right? And so, in the same way, for people who are struggling with depression and can't get out of bed and have trouble being around other people, and they can't go to a birthday party, right? Is there, are there kind of things that they can do along that spectrum? Again, maybe not in that season, but later on to still affirm like, hey, I'm sorry I missed that birthday party. I was struggling. I still value our relationship.

You know, here's a card kind of a thing, right? And people who struggle with bipolar disorder, which is kind of this constellation of, you know, needing less sleep, but being much more disinhibited during a manic or hypomanic episode. And they might be prone to spending a ton of money. They might be prone to being more disinhibited around sexual relationships.

There is genuine hurt that happens in relationships as a result of that disease. And again, you know, in that moment of going through a manic or hypomanic episode, the goals may be different than afterwards it may be, you know, stable stability, but afterwards there are still things to kind of work through. There are still things, um, that that person may be able to apologize for. But again, I think it's a issue of wisdom of, you know, what is this person able to handle right now? And are we able to extend grace for this whole journey and not just expecting them to, you know, do it right away on our timeline kind of a thing? So we'd love to hear, I won't go through all of these, but I think there are a lot of scriptures to, to support, um, yeah, not judging other people and to, to really approach people who are suffering with a stance of humility and with grace. Um, so I won't go through all these because it, our, our next topic is a big one. We want to be sure we get to that. But, um, yeah, just this idea with personal responsibility, do people have questions or experiences or hopefully any objections to that? Alicia?

What if we, like, as a mental health sufferer, are applying this concept of personal responsibility to ourselves? Like, why can't I beat this frustration? Do you have any, because it seems like grace and humility might be similar strategies to you, but do you have any?

[45 : 17] Yeah. Oh, yeah. Like feeling, like feeling self-critical if we're not able to, yeah. Putting that, like, yeah, condemnation on ourselves, maybe. And then, like, I should be able to go to church and, you know, being angry with ourselves that, like, depression is keeping us in bed or cheating. Yeah, yeah. No, I think that's a really good question and probably a place where a lot of us find ourselves at times, right? And I think, I think, yeah, remembering God's tender compassion for us in

those moments and that sense of, like, okay, this is, I may not be capable of all of this right now. I may not be able to join five committees at church or lead a small group. Maybe my act of faithfulness is opening my Bible today and trying to pray, right? And kind of thinking, like, yeah, just like that C.S. Lewis quote, that God, God sees those acts of faithfulness, even if it might not be something that other people are recognizing or acknowledging as, like, you know, super, super committed, but remembering God's compassion. I think that's a great question. Yeah. I think also that's where not comparing is really helpful and, you know, recognizing that God is doing individual work in each of us.

But it is hard because comparison is all around. Maybe we'll jump to the third one.

Yeah, this is a big topic. This is a big topic. Before 10. Okay. All right. So our third one is, we could probably talk about this for a long time, but, you know, we've used the term spiritual bypassing. And I think some of y'all have mentioned, you know, the idea of over-spiritualizing things that are, you know, that may have other causes.

And so just to even define the term of what is spiritual bypassing and why does that make it harder for us to talk about our struggles in church communities, spiritual bypassing is using spiritual explanations to dismiss or avoid complicated emotions or psychological issues or developmental needs. And so we came up with a couple, three aspects of that. And so the first one is...

And I'll say really quick, as I was putting this together, I just want to know, like, we all do all of these things. We're not trying to call anyone out. In fact, I was doing, putting this together and I was like, oh my goodness, I think I said a spiritual bypassing statement like last week, you know, last week. So we're, it's very, it can be very automatic and it's something that we all do, including us. So just to keep in mind to have grace for ourselves, even as any spiritual bypassing statements we might make. Cause I was like, oh, I'm a psychologist and I spiritually bypass, I think quite a bit. So, um, yeah.

[48 : 22] Um, I would say it's a little bit different. So gaslighting would be if somebody says, oh, I've gone through this trauma. Somebody would say, oh no, you haven't. Right. Or kind of imply that they really haven't. Spiritual bypassing is a tendency. Maybe you acknowledge that something has happened, but you minimize it and you try not to go into depth with it because it feels uncomfortable. So maybe this vignette will help. And tell me if, if this doesn't make sense of the vignette. But, um, so one, one aspect of spiritual bypassing is kind of a detachment from feelings or a distrust of feelings as not being something reliable or not something that we should sort of explore too deeply. Um, and to focus more on like, I want to think correctly, but I'm going to try to kind of avoid these feelings. So, um, we'll take Bob. I actually named, I'm so sorry if anyone here is named Bob, I was trying to choose names that, uh, other, nobody would have. Um, but so Bob is finding himself consistently discouraged, disinterested in his activities and low energy.

He suspects these feelings might result from past trauma. He wonders if he should try to explore these feelings more, but this feels very uncomfortable. He reminds himself that the heart is deceitful and decides it would be more beneficial to pray for God to remove these feelings. Um, so this is a sense of like, Oh, like I'm feeling something that's really uncomfortable. I'm feeling maybe a lot of anger about my past trauma, sadness, like what's happening. Um, but there's a sense of like, it is kind of dangerous or uncomfortable or not right to really process these feelings. And it's better to focus on like, I know it's true and I'm going to keep moving forward. Does that, does that make sense?

Um, as one aspect of what spiritual bypassing might look like? And we're not saying that prayer is wrong. You know, that asking God to remove suffering is wrong, but I, but I think it's that we're trying to shortcut around the difficult feelings and just kind of jump to the right answer without really. Yeah. I think it's like oversimplifying, minimizing things. Right. So again, it's not that like the end goal is wrong. Right. Which is maybe to pray for healing, but it's that like, we just kind of want to jump to that without any of the process in between.

For people who use the term spiritual bondage, to me, it's kind of a generalized, simplified, getting into the integrity. Yep. Yep. And as we'll talk about, we might do this to other people because we're uncomfortable with what they might be feeling or talking about. And it seems really complicated and it's like, I don't really want to dive into that. So I'm going to kind of like use, right. Like say it kind of a more statement to kind of stay away from that. Or we might do it to ourselves, um, for different reasons, which we'll, we'll talk about. So let's do another example here. Um, so another aspect we do, and I totally do this. I was, as I was writing this, I was like, Oh, I do this all the time, um, is

overemphasizing the positive. Um, and so, so let's take Wanda again. I hope nobody's named Wanda. Um, but Wanda's panic attacks and anxiety have been getting worse and worse. She's having trouble eating, sleeping, and going to work.

She wants to share with her small group, but she worries these symptoms will reflect poorly on her spiritual life. She decides it would be safest to mention it in passing, but not share the depth of her feelings. When a friend at small group asks how she's doing, she says, I've been a bit anxious, but I'm so grateful for the many blessings God has given me. Her friend smiles and moves on.

[52 : 04] Wanda realizes no one knows how much she's struggling. So again, it's not wrong for Wanda to say that she's grateful for the blessings. Certainly that is an important aspect of our spiritual life, but is Wanda using it in that moment because she actually is expressing all of her gratitude or she using it to kind of maybe cover up like how she's really doing? Cause you know, if, if Wanda's not sleeping, eating or able to go to work, like I would hope that her friend might know, you know, that she might need people's support, might need people to kind of come alongside her and really know, but sometimes we can use these spiritual explanations, um, to kind of keep people from really seeing us, I think too. Um, so one more example, and then we'll get to some discussion.

Um, and this is maybe more of what, what you were sharing about, but, um, impersonal spiritual responses to vulnerable concerns. And there can be some cliché phrases that we might use like this too shall pass or, you know, different things, but, um, Randall struggling with depression, which has worsened because it is nearing the fifth anniversary of his late wife's passing.

He reaches out to a friend from church to ask for support, but his friend appears very uncomfortable and replies, time will heal all wounds. Just keep trusting the Lord. Randall gets the feeling that his friend doesn't really want to hear about his feelings and decides to keep his concerns to himself.

And again, it's not that it's bad to encourage a friend to keep trusting the Lord, but the, the way of saying a statement, you know, can, it can be very different. Are you entering into somebody's feelings and really trying to like go into that messy complication with them?

Or are you trying to say a statement to sort of like smooth it or self and make things sound better? And we all do this. I think it's really, really common for us included. Um, and I, and I think they're linked that when we kind of spiritually bypass or minimize the messiness of our own, it's, we're kind of like, well, why can't you do the same? Right? Like, why can't you just suck it up and get over it? Cause I did. And so I think that spiritually bypassing ourselves can link to how we treat other people. Um, so any, before we move on, um, do people have either questions about spiritual bypassing or maybe like what it is or maybe any other examples of that that you might share or think of?

Can I ask you guys to process a little more of the idea of distrusting feelings? Um, and I say that's because I look at our culture and our culture right now is trusting their feelings very well.

[54 : 48] Um, in the sense of the way that anger and, and the, the breakdown of common decency seems to be fueled by this. This is how I feel and I'm just going to live it out of here. So I'm just wondering how you guys think through this, like, because it seems like as Christians, there is a sense where our feelings are important and yet there's also a place where our feelings shouldn't be ultimate in determining how we live and, you know, often, and sometimes in our culture, it feels like our feelings determine our, our reality and define, uh, or in, you know, our justify our any action because I feel this way.

So how would you nuance distrusting feelings in light of what I'm thinking? Yeah. Great question.

That's a really good question. Yeah. I think that's really interesting because I was, I was going to say, I think like with, you know, the culture that maybe we're reacting to was kind of this post enlightenment, like over rational, everything must be like scientifically inquired about Descartes. Like I think, therefore I am right. And I think this is kind of a swing at which minimizes emotions and is like, you know, you have to think the right way. And then we've swung to the other end of the pendulum of, you know, feeling, feelings mean it, it must be true.

And I, and it may actually be just kind of like a cultural response to kind of all these things where we've just kind of been trying to sweep things under the rug. Um, I think it's, I mean, and you may have a different response, but I think of emotions less, right. Like they don't have the final word, but rather than saying, I shouldn't feel this way. I wonder what is this telling, like, what information are, is my feelings, are my feelings giving me, right? Like I feel sad and frustrated and angry rather than saying, well, that has no place because I should just be joyful.

It's like, okay, well, what information are my emotions telling me about this situation that maybe I wasn't even aware of. Right. And I think there's also that distinction between, you know, you can't change necessarily, or you can't will yourself with the feelings necessarily. That's a little tricky, but also the actions of what we do, right? So it's like in your anger, do not sin, but it's not like, don't be angry. It's just, you know, what are the actions that flow from emotions? And I think, you know, in, in kind of like this cultural moment, it's not just, oh, my feelings are rampant.

It's my feelings are rampant and therefore I'm going to call out everybody, you know? And so there's that action that is linked with feeling that, but also, you know, why are people feeling so upset and sad and heartbroken, I think is important for us to at least engage with.

[57 : 49] I think too, I think of an example, I do a lot of treating anxiety disorders and phobias and OCD. And so one example I think of is like somebody might have an extreme amount of anxiety about like, let's say leaving the house, like with agoraphobia. And that is a real emotion. Like there's true, legitimate, debilitating panic, but as a psychologist, it would not be good for me to say, okay, because you feel that let's follow that and stay home, right? Like that would be actively detrimental. And like, that would not be ethical, right? Like what, what I should do is say, that is so real. Let's talk about that. And we have to do exposure, which is a whole other conversation we have, but exposure therapy is kind of like progressively and incrementally exposing someone to their fear. Like, can you go to your driveway? Can you go to your car? Can you go to Safeway? You know, whatever. And so the idea is not to say, oh, don't tell me about your anxiety.

You shouldn't be anxious because that'll just keep somebody stuck where they are. But to say like, okay, that's really real. Now, how do we still move you in the direction that you need to go to heal? Does that make sense? But yeah, I think that's a good question. Because even as a therapist, sometimes I'm like, you know, people like following the impulses of our feelings can be detrimental. Yeah, John.

One of the things that I could mistakenly take from this is, oh, okay, I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna bring these spiritual truths to bear on this sort of circumstance. Because in the end, that would probably be mistaken. Because at the end of the day, probably these spiritual truths are really germane to that. And maybe the helpful thing about the notion is simply the bypass. It's not the adjective spiritual. It's just, am I truncating the process here? So when I'm trying to get to church and I hit a red light and I get really, really angry, I could stop myself and just say, shoot, I shouldn't be angry. That's not glorifying the Lord. But I'm not getting to what, I'm doing a bypass in the sense of, I'm failing to do some sort of deeper engagement with it to figure out where to bring the spiritual truths to bear.

I realize, oh my goodness, I, why am I so upset? Well, I think I'm losing control. I can't, why do I think I am in control today? But, oh, wait a minute. God is in control. I'm not in control. So once I begin to see what the problem is, then I need to bring those spiritual truths. The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice.

These things are in his hands. I can trust him. So it seems like the very useful thing in my mind is this notion of bypass. It's not that these spiritual truths are not going to actually be the key.

[60 : 54] But it's discerning where precisely to bring them to bear. And we can miss that if we're just trying to stuff, I guess, the expressions of these things. I wonder if that, I mean, that's a question, that's an invitation to comment because I'm trying to discern here.

Absolutely. No, I'm glad you brought that up exactly because I think it's, yeah, in their scriptural support for not necessarily minimizing negative emotions. I might've changed that a little bit, but their scriptural support for the idea that like we don't need to despair, right? And that there is always hope and we can, um, that God is working all things together for good.

And certainly, yeah, I think the bypass is the key, not the spiritual part. I think as there, there's many other ways to bypass, um, for those who are not people of faith. So for instance, all your people bypass who might not be Christians or religious at all. And they say, oh, things are rough, but I'm fine. It's okay. I'm having a good day. Like that's a bypass too.

And I think as Christians, we might tend more to use spiritual language and sort of co-opt it as a part of our bypass just because that's part of our, you know, common, um, ways of speaking with each other. However, it's not because the spiritual, it's not the spiritual principle, which is wrong. That is the correct foundational principle of our lives and our healing, but it's the way that we use it or apply it for our own purposes to kind of stuff emotion is kind of how I think about it.

[62 : 32] Is that, yeah. And I think the particular tricky part is that on the surface, it seems very spiritual and appropriate and good. Right. And so like, how can you argue with these, you know, God truths?

Right. And so I think that makes it even more tricky to say, yeah, like those things are true. And there are all of these other things that I'm dealing with. Um, but I think that's a good segue into kind of our proposed alternative, which is the idea of lament and celebration. And so, um, Soon Chan Ra is someone who's written a lot about lamentations and he's written a book called prophetic lament. Um, and he talks a lot about, you know, how the American church in particular, because it's been quite privileged and prosperous has kind of forgotten the language of lament. Um, and so he talks about how lament is honesty before God and each other. Um, and, and that healing, right. Bringing shalom is requires really engaging with the other person so that we're all cohering together and not so much, you know, diminishing what they're experiencing so that we can celebrate, you know, God's risenness and that kind of thing, but really understanding how that brokenness is getting in the way of having a just society where God's kingdom can be felt more. Um, so it's to, again, not deny that Jesus brings life, but also to not deny that there is a lot of death and brokenness and hurt in our midst. So this importance of lamenting first before we jump to the celebration.

And so we, yeah, we, we talked a little bit about how, if we spiritually bypass ourselves, we can do that to other people. And just even this idea of, you know, being mindful of how, you know, as a body of Christ, right, when one person is suffering, the whole part suffers. And to what degree do we feel the suffering of other people in our body?

Yeah. And the, and I guess the second point is actually, John, what you were saying, right? Like that I think for ourselves, we're sometimes kind of like, you know, oh, this doesn't matter, but in the way, or we're kind of like glossing it over with like Jesus is risen. But I think there's a way in which when we delve into the specifics of what we're struggling with, that how Jesus meets us becomes that much more rich because it is specific. And I think about the ways that, you know, God could have just called himself, I am who I am, but there's also all of these other scriptural names for Jesus that speak to how people have experienced him, right? Like, so where do we need to see how God provides? Where do we need to see how God is our banner? How do we need to see how God fights for us in these different circumstances? Call out the beauty of who God and Jesus are in a way that we might not be able to experience if we're just like, oh, like Jesus is Lord, right? And so this like lamenting and inviting God into our suffering allows us to see really how Jesus meets us specifically. And we think about the ways that Jesus heals. Sometimes it's with a word. Sometimes it's from a distance. Sometimes it's with spit, something really visceral, right? And, you know, he could have healed anyway. He chose, but there was something about that interaction that he knew the other person would benefit from. And I think in the same ways we can't under, we don't understand the depth of who God is until we've kind of entered into the depth of what we're struggling with.

[66 : 16] See, I think to your good point, John, it's yeah, that, that truth is so a truth like, um, you know, Jesus has risen is so true all the time and we'll have deeper levels of meaning.

If we enter into like what we're feeling ourselves and understand how Jesus risen, this comes to bear on that. Or if we really enter in with somebody else, um, in their darkness and understood to understand how Jesus risen, this will come to bear on that. Um, cause we might, we might actually diminish the power of that if we sort of use it as a bypass. So it's actually kind of a, it is a way of, um, like emphasizing the power of that more, um, rather than using it for our own, using a phrase and even a true phrase for our own purpose of sort of avoiding somebody else's emotion.

Um, is I guess what we propose, but yeah, what are, what are thoughts about that or questions or concerns even about that? Cause it is, yeah, a complex topic for sure.

I wanted to ask like, if you guys had suggestions on how we can, and I think you're maybe getting there, I don't know, but like actual practical things to put in place to say, like when we're sitting with a friend who's bearing their heart on like, I feel lonely and I feel like God's not with me or this is an example. Um, and in that moment you want to remind them like the truth you need to know is that God is always with you. He has given you the spirit to be in your pain with you.

How do you say that without bypassing, like without minimizing what they're dealing with, but rather how can we practically lament with them, but also provide the truth that as someone who's maybe not dealing with that can actually speak into that and be a bearer? Yeah. How can we faithfully do that without like destroying them? Yeah, absolutely. I think that's a, yeah, that's a really good

question. I mean, the first couple of thoughts that come to mind are, you know, it might be right that there, what, what do we have in common is scripture, right? And the spirit. And so it might be sharing a verse and reading it together and then even asking them, you know, how does that, does that resonate with you or does that feel super far from where you're at? Right. And giving them room to let you know that, yeah, like I read this, but I don't, I'm not there yet. Right. And so I think just giving people space to, you know, be able to object or be able to say, you know, that doesn't feel true right now and that's okay. And I think one of the things we wanted to bring up was, you know, that there are so many Psalms of lament that 40% of the Psalms we have are lament. And yet, you know, only like 15% of the songs we sing in church service are, are that, but, but I think that it's so important to look at the Psalms as kind of expressions of emotion that are still oriented towards the Lord. And I really love Psalm 88 because, I mean, there are a lot of Psalms that are like, why are you, you know, downcast on my soul, look to God. Right. But then Psalm 88 is this great example of, you know, who's going to praise you when, when I'm dead, you know, like, where are you help? But then it also ends on darkness is my closest friend, right? Darkness is closer to me than God right now. Right. But it's still, it starts with still crying out to the Lord. And I think that so often in like one meeting with a friend, we want to be able to say all of these truths, right.

[70 : 05] And, and we want to do all of it. And it may just be like, like the Psalm, right. That, you know, only part of that can be done or received in a certain way in that meeting. And that's not to say, like, as you continue to walk with that person, that not, you're not bringing those truths to bear, but maybe it can't be done in one hour, all of it. Right. And it's okay to sit in silence or to sit with that person and their suffering without, you know, forcing them to kind of acknowledge something they're not able to do right now. Yeah. I think to John's point too, it can be, oh, actually real quick, I'll say a matter of timing. Like, oh yes. Have you really asked the questions and waited to hear from the person and understand like the very messy, uncomfortable, painful, debilitating things they're feeling before you bring the truth to bear? So I think oftentimes it's not a matter of, do you bring it or not? I think as Christians, we should, and that we should encourage each other in our hope in Christ, but to make sure you're not using it as a bypass, have you made sure to ask the questions and even maybe sit in silence with like, wow, that is a really debilitating feeling. I'm so sorry. And then bring the truth to bear. So I think oftentimes it's a matter of timing and entering and before bringing it, which can be helpful. Sorry.

Yeah. There's two comments over here. I know. I know. You know, I know. I know. You know, I know. I know. I know.

And how, you know, how, how we just struggle and suffer. And I think it's so easy for us to want to fix, you know, to fix each other. You know, I mean, I feel hard when I'm not trying to walk into church with a very pun about the Bible. So I mean, we're all suffering in a lot of ways. And I think it's hard, it's hard to understand that. It's hard to feel that for other people. But to sit with somebody and really feel their self, feel their loneliness, it's a lot harder than trying to fix it. But you said, you know, it's easier if you should sit with them and then encourage them having time to.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You basically said it was basically the, you're bypassing when you aren't engaging with what's going on. Right? And so if you're just, you know, you hear what they said, you know, you shouldn't feel that way, you kind of scoff, blah, blah, blah. Like that's bypassing.

Mm-hmm. To instead is, can you tell me more about how that feels or what you're going through? Or, let me try to understand that feeling. Yeah. And then you can apply scripture actually more elegantly because now you have a better idea of what's actually going on. And I think that's the key is trying to understand what's actually inside rather than what you heard and the immediate response with, well, you're the man they put on.

[73 : 19] Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. I just, I, I volunteered at a women's abuse shelter for a couple of years. Mm-hmm. And I just found that the best thing to do is just listen. Mm-hmm.

Yeah. Don't interject. You know, let them talk. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And that was the best thing for them. Mm-hmm. And I think that's a good segue on kind of what we'll end on, which is just even when we look at how Jesus heals.

I love the story in John 11 where Lazarus dies. Both Mary and Martha kind of accuse him, right? Like if you had come here sooner, we wouldn't be in this position.

Mm-hmm. We wouldn't be grieving like this. And to Mary, he says, truth, right? I am the resurrection. He asks questions. And to Martha, she gets to invite him to come and see.

And he bears witness to her grief and he weeps, right? And so I think Jesus is able to hold those so well in tension and both, right?

[74 : 21] And that there may be a person at a particular season who needs to hear the truth of who Jesus is and there may be another person who really just needs to be wept with. And Jesus, you know, follows, you know, goes to the tomb.

He doesn't go, you know, he doesn't stand at a distance. He's invited in. And I think in the same ways we as a church should be thinking about, you know, have we, before we're jumping to these, you know, truths again, right, have we been touched so deeply by other people's sufferings in the way that Jesus has, you know, have we wept over somebody else's suffering before we bring, you know, these truths.

And yeah, I think it's never a bad thing to ask. Like I think to Jessica's question, if somebody's really struggling and suffering and they're sharing with you, it's never bad to ask like, hey, do you think it would be most helpful to open scripture together or do you need me to make you dinner or what do you or do you need me to just listen?

You know, it's never bad. Honestly, people often have a pretty good idea or have some idea about what would feel more helpful. And you can communicate those truths, those truths of scripture, oftentimes by sharing scripture and also sometimes by making them dinner, you know, can be another way of revealing the truth of scripture.

So it's never bad to ask. John 16, 12, Jesus says, I have so much that I need to communicate to you, but you're not able to bear it yet.

[75 : 53] So it doesn't. So it's in one sense, we're not just teaching truths, we're teaching people. We have to taper that to what they have a capacity to receive at that time.

That makes a lot of sense. Yeah. Yeah. And then once you've made them dinner and sat with them and they've got their medication starts working or, you know, like, sometimes we need to, yeah, honestly, we might need to pull back.

Yeah. One of my favorite stories is the story of Elijah. I think we're good for children. But when he basically is sitting under a tree and he prays to the Lord, Lord, let me die.

And God's response to him is to send an angel and the angel tells him to eat and then sleep. And then he wakes up again and then the angel feeds him and tells him to go out to sleep. And then he like walks for 40 days and there's a lot going on.

But it isn't until like he's eaten and he's sleeping and God has cared for his physical needs that we get that beautiful passage about God's voice not being in the thunder or in the raging wind, but rather in a still, small voice.

[77 : 03] But I think the, yeah, just the beauty of like God knew that like God's first response to his despair and distress and sorrow was not like, okay, well, I'm God.

Like I've commissioned you on good things. Believe me. And like, get out there. But was rather to like gently care and minister and know that what he needed right there was a good meal and some sleep.

And then, yeah, to like not rush, but rather to like kind of, I think, especially in sitting with people with mental illness, you kind of got to sign up for the long haul.

Like sometimes we interact in one conversation and I think God can really use that. But I think there are ways that it's just a longer walk. Yeah. Yeah.

That's a great point. I'm linking to Jessica's question too, about when do we say a scripture truth? How do we know? Like to even consider like the length and the sort of depth of our relationship with someone.

[78 : 08] Like if you've had a friend over the long haul who has walked with you and things, and that might be a time more when they're feeling discouraged, you say, hey, remember this truth because you've sort of sat with them and all of these different moments of despair.

Whereas if you just met with somebody and it's your first conversation, that might be a time to ask them more of what they need. So both timing and like, what is the depth of relational experience that you have with someone?

Or like if you're first time meeting someone in church and you know, let's say I just met Stephanie and she's like, oh, I'm really struggling. It might probably be a time for me to ask more as opposed to me saying like, well, remember to trust God, right?

And I'm going to be, but if I know Stephanie over a long period of time, which I guess I have and Stephanie's like, oh, I'm really struggling.

That might be a time when I could be like, hey, remember like what God has done. You know? So I think that there's, there's that consideration as well. Um, these are great questions. Yeah.

[79 : 15] Thank you. Yeah. Well, I know it's almost 1030, but we'll stay around for more questions. So maybe just as a, I think to end on, I mean, this is an open question and I think our church is already doing this by the fact that we're all here talking about this, but, um, just something to consider, like, what would it mean if we were marked by these kinds of nuanced understandings about mental illness and grace, humility, vulnerability.

Um, and then as Stephanie mentioned, kind of this joining of lament and celebration, like, I just think that would be a very safe and flourishing community to, to support one another with, um, mental health struggles.

Um, and obviously because we're sinners on the side of heaven, we have a long way to go in that, but just some, just some principles to kind of imagine as we, as we go forward.

Yeah. So in the next couple of weeks, we'll dive more into, you know, like when you do seek therapy, like, does your therapist need to be Christian for it to be valid and kind of the suspicions people might have.

And so bring your questions and objections to that as well, that that will be for the next couple of weeks. We welcome suspicions about our, we will not be offended.

[80 : 28] I, we have some suspicions about our profession too. Yeah. All right. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.