

Faith & Mental Health 4

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Date: 29 May 2022

[0 : 00] open up in prayer. Do you want to open us up in prayer? Sure. Lord Jesus, we are thankful for this Sunday. We thank you for gathering us together and we pray that this time would be one that shows us how we can walk with one another, bear with one another in truth and in grace, Lord. Teach us how we can reflect Christ to one another. We thank you for the ways you have knit us together as a body and we pray that this time would be filled with encouragement. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Alright, welcome to our final faith and mental health class. On Memorial Day weekend. So this will be our last class on this topic for now. Maybe we'll have a part to at some point in the future, but we're super glad you all are here. Today we're going to be specifically talking about how can those of us in the church, how can we as a church support people who are struggling with mental illness?

And we think the church actually has, should be the place where people who are struggling and suffering ideally would come. And we want to figure out how is we, how can we as a church really facilitate being that place as Christ has called us to be.

And just as a brief recap, because I know it's, we took a break last week. So the first week we were talking about what are the causes of mental illness? Is it due to sin or personal weakness versus kind of our understanding of biological, genetic, psychological, and social factors? The second week we talked about, you know, can Christians have mental illness and what in the Christian culture can get in the way of accepting the struggle with mental illness? And then week three was, okay, if you believe that Christians can have mental illness, how does a Christian go around navigating, getting treatment?

And so this week we're circling back to something that we had talked about a couple weeks ago, which is a new vision of what church can look like. And so we've kind of broken up our session today into four, three to four different areas.

[2 : 12] So one would be nuanced understandings. The second would be vulnerability. The third, and we'll probably end on this, is grace and humility and bearing with each other. And the fourth, which is more of like a culture church thing, would be around lament and celebration.

But we'll spend the majority of our time on the first three. And so for each of these, we'll talk about what is it, what gets in the way, and the factors that promote it. Two, three.

Oh my goodness, sorry. We are, oh, thank you, thank you. Oh, perfect, okay. Could have been a good test of my memory. All right, so just to start us off with a quote, I really like this book, so just a quick book recommendation.

It's called *Troubled Minds, Mental Illness, and the Church's Mission*. It's written by a woman who is an author and has worked in church ministry, I think, and her mother has schizophrenia.

So she writes from kind of a objective perspective and a personal perspective. So I'm just going to read this quote. The church can and should be at the forefront of this move toward loving acceptance and open support for those with mental illness.

[3 : 30] In the words of the Apostle Paul, God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members so that all the members care for each other.

If one part suffers, all parts suffer with it. And if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. So then she asks, does this passage describe your church's approach to those among you who have less dignity, to those who are suffering?

So we want to start off by just putting this question to all of you. Thinking, I guess, about Trinity specifically and about maybe we as a church, sort of more broadly as a Christian church, to what extent does this characterize our approach to those who are suffering with mental illness?

So to what extent do we, are we at the forefront of loving acceptance and open support of those with mental illness? And maybe how are we or how aren't we?

And how do you see that? No, it would seem to me that the establishment of the care team moves us much closer to that where the burden is not so much on the staff.

[4 : 55] Like how can we make it not just leadership who's caring for those with mental illness, but rather us as a church body caring for one another. Yeah? Agreed. Absolutely.

Yeah. What do other people think? And again, this could be, again, our church specifically or just churches that you have been in. I'll say awareness, like classes like this.

I didn't know that mental health professionals were, you know, attended Trinity. And so I didn't know there was any expertise to draw from there. So awareness.

Yeah. Yeah. There's something like making it a visible conversation topic. Like, maybe it's a little hard to just after church be like, oh, I have depression.

Right. But, I mean, I mean, I do things like that, but that's, you know, sometimes socially awkward.

So, yeah. Having like an organized format where it's a little more visible.

[6 : 04] Carefully consider teaching and discussion, not just, again, taking the burden off leadership where we expect that statistic about pastors addressing mental illness, what was it, one-third of them less than one time a year or something like that.

And so, there's reasons why we, our pastors can't hit every issue in front that every person is facing from the pulpit each year because there's as many individuals as there are there's as many specific issues they're going through.

Right. So, especially this verse is helpful to point out that the diversity of the body's functions help hold us together.

It's not just the head's job to do everything. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

That whole thing of the head, my pastor in D.C., he would talk very openly about himself being in counseling in front of the pulpit and to me that was like very refreshing.

Yeah, just like, I don't know, I think he did a lot to kind of destigmatize it and show like just because you're in counseling like everyone needs help sometimes and it's not like obviously we all have, and thank you for the good Godly man.

[7 : 29] Mm-hmm. So it wasn't like, so I thought that that was, I don't know, as far as like the dignity and I think that went along the way. Yeah, good segue to our vulnerability topic later.

Yeah, Tyler. I'd say truly from when I got here eight years ago, I've always found it in a place where, at least initially where the teaching gifts were really valued among the body and I think you can go too far in that direction where you value those who are articulate and teach the Bible and those are all great things.

but I think the recent years I think by some of the people at Columbus House who have come into membership and that type here, one person in particular who has a mental illness and, you know, she's very open about it.

So I've seen the teaching maternity grow in that regard. It may have valued or have been open before I got here but that's just the progression of it. Yeah. And that's a great, oh sorry Stephanie, yeah.

Oh no, I was just going to say like those are, it's also worth asking like how did we make that shift? Like how do we become a church that welcomes people like that and value gifts from the pulpit or elsewhere like in ways that leadership may model?

[8 : 41] Yeah. In terms of the broader church in this country, I was really amazed that the book had dementia sold five or six times more than any of the other books.

that is such a critical need. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Evangeline has some things to add clearly.

Yeah. Specific to Trinity and things that I've seen and have been my experience is when Sammy was very young, the people within the congregation stepped up.

We had two sleep deprived EEG, which meant everybody was going to be sleep deprived. And we had people from Trinity who signed up to come in, play with Sammy, overnight, so mom and dad could get some sleep and actually be awake for when they needed to be awake.

Right, right, right. And then we had other people who would just show up at our doorstep on Friday night and say, you and your husband are going out to dinner and a movie tonight. Goodbye, we don't want to see you until 9 or 10 o'clock.

[9 : 58] Sammy would not have things to do. That would be Miss Dorothy who did that. You fast forward into the youth group years where they would go on retreat and I would have to pack bags of special food because Sammy is gluten and casein free.

And in those days that was much bigger of a deal than it is these days. And Miss Kirsten who said, you don't have to bring about a thing, you're not doing anything and I've got one of my daughters who's going to shadow Sammy so she's ready to roll.

Well, those were all examples of people within this church and believe me, I have talked, I've done many presentations and talked to other churches about how well Trinity did this without there having to be a programmatic example within them.

They just did it. And that was something that was a true blessing and something I think really unique to this body of believers. That's so beautiful.

And I think it really illustrates well over somebody's lifetime what different needs may look like and the different people that can step in and be a team and walk alongside that.

[11 : 18] Rather than just mom for that paying attention. And that I really found incredibly helpful and supportive. And now that she can give back, which is really wonderful, I think it's an exciting piece to see happen.

It's come full circle. That's wonderful. Well, thank you all for sharing. So I think the first section that we wanted to talk about in this new vision of what a church can look like involves nuanced understandings.

So just to start out with, there are a couple of Bible verses that I wanted to share. So the first one is Ephesians 4.29. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

And I think sometimes when we think about speech that's unwholesome, we might think about curse words, or we might think about things that are, you know, lies, or, you know, things that are quote-unquote unholy. But I like the juxtaposition of unwholesome versus, you know, is this helpful to those who are hearing it, right?

And so words that may be technically true may not actually benefit the person who's listening. And so just thinking about ways that our words can be well-received.

[12 : 43] And the other is just from Proverbs 12.18. There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. So again, this emphasis on how speech can be used for healing.

So the first part of what are nuanced understandings of mental illness? Yeah, so this is kind of a review of week one for those of you who are here.

So we just want to keep in mind, importantly, we don't know what is causing another person's mental illness. To even have any idea of what that might be would have to be in a really, really close relationship with them, probably over a long period of time.

So we just want to be really careful about jumping to conclusions, especially around making attributions of personal sin or that type of thing. So if I meet Stephanie and Stephanie shares, like maybe we've known each other a few weeks at Trinity, and Stephanie shares like, oh, I have anxiety, my first response shouldn't, ideally wouldn't be, oh, here's where, you know, maybe you're failing spiritually and that's why you're having anxiety, right?

Like we want to keep in mind that probably if Stephanie's dealing with anxiety, the factors that are contributing to that are very complex and many of them might not have to do with her own choices and really kind of only in being in a relationship with somebody over a long period of time and walking with them very closely can we maybe observe or learn more about maybe what some causes might be.

[14 : 14] But honestly, causes of mental illness can be somewhat of a mystery, even to mental health professionals or to those who are struggling with mental illness. So just keeping in mind that humility that the things that cause mental illness are multi-causal and also multi-maintained as we've talked about.

That doesn't mean we have nothing to contribute or no ideas or no important encouragement to offer, but it does just important to have a kind of a stance of humility. And I think nuanced understandings is basically at its core, like do we understand what this person is going through? Do we understand their lived experience and have we communicated that to them, that we are understanding them? And then in terms of what gets in the way of nuanced understandings?

Yeah, so oftentimes this idea, like it is just cognitively easier to kind of categorize things and to use sort of quick heuristics to inform our understandings.

It's really hard and messy to sit with complexity or a sense of like I don't really know, right? Like so if we have a friend who's struggling with really severe depression for instance and we want to help and we want to help them get better and we want there to be a solution, it is just cognitively easier to be like, oh it must be because you're not reading your Bible enough, right?

[15 : 40] Like that's just an easier thing cognitively to jump to and it can kind of save us time, right? It feels like it saves us time of like sitting in this messiness and something that we don't know how to deal with or understand.

Oh I guess one more point too and this will come up a little bit later as we talk about vulnerability. I do think there's something about we like we don't want to suffer with mental illness, right?

Like I think watching somebody really struggle mind, body, and soul in a way they can't control can be scary and I think as humans we oftentimes want to categorize, that is them and their struggle and we are somehow exempt from that or we're not like them, we're kind of different, we're not going to struggle in the same ways.

So I think oftentimes we might not use nuanced understandings because it's easier to think, oh, if it's complex and mysterious and we're not sure why they're struggling, then I actually might be vulnerable to struggle too.

I think that's scary to admit that we're not different, that we're not exempt, and so I think sometimes this fear can kind of keep us at arm's length from people and kind of like, oh, they're not very holy, right?

[16 : 58] Or they kind of need to pray more and we are doing better with our spiritual life, therefore we're not going to struggle in the same ways. So I think that can kind of be, our fear can keep us from nuanced understandings too.

A third thing we came up with in terms of what gets in the way of nuanced understandings included busyness, and I mean we could talk probably like for an hour on this, but you know just as a culture, right, that we are very task oriented, we're quantifying things, we're into getting things done, and sometimes the process can get a little bit lost in that, and sometimes you know we're just, we're busy, we're, you know, it's hard to, it takes time to walk with someone who has mental illness, and so there really has to be kind of an intentionality around it, because I think by default our lives can get really crowded, and then the last one that we came up with was that it's hard to be empathetic if we ourselves haven't done our own work, and so you know if somebody is really struggling, and we minimize it, we say oh well it's not that bad, right, like the chances are good, like that's probably how we're dealing with ourselves too, that we've kind of been like spiritually bypassing some of our own emotions, and I think it's important just to realize that we can only offer to people what we've been given, what we've been able to work through with the grace of God on ourselves, and so we can't really expect ourselves to be empathetic towards other people's struggles if we haven't been able to receive that sort of love from other people and from the

Lord. All right, so, and then we'll have time for discussion here in a couple minutes, but what promotes nuanced understandings, like it's hard, it's really messy, somebody comes to you with psychosis or anxiety, depression, PTSD, they're really hurting, you don't know what to do, right, like what are we supposed to do, like how can we get to these nuanced understandings, so we think really the best thing is just to ask questions and to be curious and to ask a lot more questions than giving solutions or advice, especially up front, and to really, like Stephanie said, really try to understand what is the person's experience and really what is it like to be them, kind of what is it like to live their life, how does it feel for them every day, so these are just some practical ways of doing that, these are active listening skills which are typically used by therapists but are also good for every person for pretty much every situation, so just asking open-ended questions, not like, oh, are you having a good day, but like, like, tell me a leading question, exactly, right, but like, tell me about your last week, you know, something like that, requesting clarification, being attentive, summarizing and paraphrasing can feel a little awkward to do, but it really can help facilitate somebody continuing to share, so if

Stephanie tells me like, oh, I'm having such a hard time, here's what's going on, even just saying something like, oh, it sounds like it's been a rough week, you know, and it's really interesting how that kind of summary or paraphrase can open up somebody to continue sharing, reflecting feelings, like, sounds like you're really sad and you've been feeling really down, and asking probing

questions, like, oh, and this is where I think it's just that entering more into the complexity of somebody's experience without needing to go in with, like, here's the solution of exactly what you should do, but like, oh, have you struggled with depression for a long time, or when did that start, or, you know, just trying to find out more about the shape and the, yeah, the feeling of their experience is really helpful.

Yeah, I would say, like, almost, like, when in doubt, just ask a question, like, if you're not sure what to say, it may, it may be because there isn't anything to say yet, right, that we haven't fully understood what they're going through, and I think it's interesting when we, when we look in the Bible, right, that God asks questions when Adam and Eve have sinned, not that mental illness is a sin, but he asks, you know, where are you, right, and that's a question, not just of where are you in location, but just where are you relationally to me, and what, you know, what have you done, as well as, you know, when Jesus heals people, there, it's, or he's interacting with his disciples, right, he's asking, what do you want, what are you seeking, do you want to be healed, and then asking his disciples, do you want to go away as well, right, and so I think there's something about asking questions that puts the, you know, gives the other person agency versus trying to say, oh, you know, well, you should eat better and exercise better, and then your depression will get better, but more, you know, well, what helps or what doesn't help is what I'm saying helpful or not, right, and that can feel kind of threatening because sometimes people might say, like, no, that's not helpful at all, right, you know, and, but that's the choice, like, God gives and Jesus gives when he interacts with people, he doesn't just, like, heal them automatically, he says, do you want to be healed, right, what is the choice here, and so, you know, if that's true for God and Jesus, like, how much more is that, does that need to be true for us with our limited understandings of humans?

[22 : 15] And I'd say it's not that there's no room for, of course, godly counsel and encouragement and that kind of thing, there is absolutely a place for that, but I think sometimes if we are uncomfortable with someone's experience, the proportion of our counsel to our question asking can be, like, 90 to 10, whereas, like, especially if we are not very familiar with a person's situation, probably, like, 90% questions, 10% counsel would probably be better.

So just to kind of, like, be aware of the ways in which if we are unsure what to do or say or feel scared or uncomfortable, we tend to offer counsel to kind of distance ourselves versus asking questions to enter in and then only once we've really entered in and tried our best to understand offering and encouragement or a piece of counsel.

And we'll get more in a little bit to kind of what the, what the church can do. A couple quotes here that Stephanie had found that was really. Yeah. So I really like this quote from Bonhoeffer, which is in his book about community, life together.

So there is a, and this just kind of says again, like, you know, what is active listening, right? Um, so there is a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say.

It is an impatient, inattentive listening that despises the brother and is only waiting for a chance to speak and thus get rid of the other person. Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by him who his is himself, the great listener and whose work they should share.

[23 : 52] We should listen with the ears of God that we may speak the word of God. And then one more here. I really like this quote Stephanie found from Charles Spurgeon.

So, ah, says one, I used to laugh at Mrs. So-and-so for being nervous. Now that I feel the torture myself, I am sorry that I was ever hard on her. Ah, says another, I used to think of such and such a person that he must be a fool to always be in so gloomy a state of mind.

But now I cannot help sinking into the same desponding frames. And oh, I would to God that I had been more kind to him. Yes, we should feel more for the prisoner if we knew more about his prison. So I think that's, I don't know if any of you have ever been through the experience where you kind of judge someone for a simple example. Before I had a baby, when people would be really, really structured and scheduled about like, oh, we need to get baby home on time to take a nap and all these kinds of things.

I was like, a little overkill, right? And then after having a baby, case in point, I'm like, nap time. She's got to be home. You know, so like, if we haven't really been through something, it can be hard to understand why somebody is responding the way they are.

[25 : 10] And then sometimes if we, once we go through that, there's a moment of realization of like, oh, really that makes a lot more sense. Right. Now that we're going through this.

So just like to take some time for comments, questions about this idea of nuanced understandings and how active listening can promote nuanced understanding.

So yeah, any, any areas that people want to share experiences or ask any questions about what we talked about so far? I just want to share, I mean, mentally, this is a lot of that, especially post-COVID.

I mean, it's very critical. There's several things that I think as a church group, we can do quite a bit if we kind of like, you know, this is actually our first step to talk about it.

But in terms of, we can do quite a lot more as a church group. I think in terms of like listening is very important, I think, but this is only once.

[26 : 19] It's tough to listen when we're in a church hall and we need to go around. And to listen to somebody, you need to listen.

And it's not just five minutes. It's like sometimes, you know, 15 minutes over a month period. And I think that's, and that's tough.

So, fellowshiping, I think is probably one of the things that we can do as a group to help each other out, to talk, to listen, and to do things together.

But the other thing, I mean, this is just a suggestion. And I don't know how the church leadership feels. Like maybe just having, you know, support groups, you know, a regular support groups or, you know, for general stuff.

You know, people get together and just talk. And listen. Talk and listen. Yeah. And maybe if you have somebody who's maybe a leader who, you know, kind of like give spiritual guidance and at the same time, you know, give also some, you know, non-spiritual, which is that I think that, I think, you know, God can do a lot, but we'll be whole when we're in heaven.

[27 : 44] But we're not whole here. And sometimes we need, you know, some other people to kind of come in and kind of make things better. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Yeah. I want to look that up. Not short version by Dietrich von Hofer. Okay. Oh. Yeah. This is from Life Together, which is Life Together.

Is that the name of the book? Yes. Yeah. It's a book on, like, Christian community. Yeah. Well, thanks so much for your comment. I think that's a great point about, like, being committed to listening more than just one time, right?

Like, we're probably not going to make a ton. It's probably not going to be a ton of difference if after church once, you know, Josh comes to me and says, oh, it's been a, you know, dealing with this. And for five minutes, I've been listening to him and I never follow up. Right. That's probably not going to be like, that might be fine, but it's probably not going to make a huge difference. I mean, you make a great point about, like, the longevity of listening to, which is really important.

[28 : 45] Right. Which I think speaks to just how relationships need to be structured in order to be healing, that it requires a frequency and intentionality, and we'll talk about this later, and then a regularity to it for it to be a real relationship.

Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. Alicia. Yeah. Yeah. Just to kind of go off of that, I, so I've had anxiety since I was very young. And I think because I was so young, there was, like, this sense of it being, like, this weird mystical thing, like, how could anyone figure out what is going on with this?

But I think that actually kind of helped me understand what I wanted from, like, the people in my life, because I was like, you sleep people, you can't fix this. I just need you to, like, be here with me.

So I think, yeah, like, it can be intimidating for us when we see someone really suffering, being like, I don't know how to help them. And even maybe, like, the listen, I mean, like, you don't have the questions.

I feel like all of those things can be very intimidating. But, like, for me, it was just, like, I just need you to, like, show up and be there. It's okay if you don't know what to do. Yeah.

[29 : 52] So, yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Carolyn? I don't know. I think part of, half of listening is being okay with uncomfortable silences. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Especially in conversations both when I have been really struggling with my mental health and when talking, like, my brain just works slower. Mm-hmm. And finding words is just harder.

Mm-hmm. So, even if I'm, like, in the process of answering your question, it might take me two or three minutes to get there. Mm-hmm. And I think it's something I do when I'm, like, listening.

It's just, like, really, like, I think my initial thing is, like, oh, I asked the wrong question. Mm-hmm. All I'm getting is silence. Yeah. And so I want to make that better.

So I qualify it or ask another question or I say something and just to, like, sit in that silence.

Mm-hmm. And I think that's, like, one of the biggest gifts people have given me and that we can give one another is to sit in the uncomfortableness and in the silence and be, like, I don't care if it left.

[30 : 55] Mm-hmm. I don't care if it takes you 30 seconds or, like, four minutes to come with an answer. I still care enough about what that answer is. Mm-hmm. So. Yeah. I had a friend once tell me, like, you know, the best thing Job's friends ever did was, like, sit in silence for seven days or ten, forty, I don't know, however many days it was.

And then, like, as soon as they opened their mouths, things went down. Right? But there was, like, there is a ministry to just, like, sitting with someone. Yeah. Yeah. And it's a great point, Alicia, too, about, like, just somebody being present.

I think I've felt a similar frustration with my OCD of, like, well, it doesn't go away. Like, you know, sometimes I think it's easier to minister to other struggles. Like, a physical illness, maybe sometimes it doesn't go away either, but there's something easier about, like, somebody's dealing with something, we can minister to them, it gets better.

So often mental illness isn't really like that, and there's going to be ebbing and flowing of struggling over years, right? And so, like, a willingness to continue to check in with our friends and be present, like, some months might be good, some months might be really bad, and that might be always like that, right?

Or that might be the trajectory for a while, and so to be willing to kind of be entering in over the long term. Yeah. Tyler? Tyler? I'm struck by Bonhoeffer's last, the last line, which is with the ears of God, that we may speak the word of God.

[32 : 22] And I think one of the roles that we as Christians have with each other is helping each other understand our experiences in light of God's reality. It's not like denying the fact that you don't have anxiety, you're going to ask for something.

It's the fact that, like, yeah, that's true, but let's look at what God has said is true about himself, and all these temptations in the scriptures when we're suffering, that God's forgotten us, he's punishing us for our sins, or, you know, the blood has run out, and we can just affirm that, like, no, God's steadfast love in Jesus forever.

And I think of the Psalms, what a great book for the suffering, struggling Christians, just to go through the Psalms together and see, yeah, it's Christians that suffered with this, but look how this Christian is still relying on God's faithfulness.

I think we just help each other understand that this is something that Christians have experienced, and it's okay to experience it, but let's affirm what God has said is true in his word.

And I think that's a bonhoeffer, I think he's kind of getting out right there, where they speak the word about. Yeah, and reminding, I like, how you have, like, reminding people that God is entering in to their experience, too, and over the long term, and is ever-present, and isn't going to get tired of being present, even if you struggle with anxiety for years, right?

[33 : 42] I think that's a really powerful truth. Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. It reminds me, like, it's fresh out, I'm sure I have, like, nobody cares how much you know until they know how much you care.

Mm-hmm. If you want to be a witness for God and talk about his gospel, they need to know that you're enough to listen to God. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

That's probably the first step. Right. Is listening and learning and understanding. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, again, with, like, the relationship piece, people can't receive what it, like, what you have to say until they know that they can trust you.

Yeah. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. And it can make your word of, the word of God you speak more powerful if you're, if you're entering into relationship with them over the long term.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I think that will make more meaningful and more powerful the word of God that you speak to them. Yeah. It's hard to express yourself and talk to somebody if you feel like they're half listening and they don't really care to take the time or effort to understand.

[34 : 51] Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. It shuts down. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. So, I think to move on to the second section, and thank you all for your feedback, it would be on vulnerability as kind of another necessary condition to be able to walk with people well in mental illness.

And I think somebody in, like, a previous class had mentioned, you know, when we go to church, we see happy, shiny people, right? And so, there's kind of that, like, feeling of, like, well, what's wrong with me that I'm not happy and shiny?

And vulnerability goes a long way towards being able to share in the struggles that other people have. So, in terms of what is it, vulnerability is an invitation to be fully known and fully loved by one another.

And when we think about, you know, what is needed to create life literally, biologically, right, you need to be vulnerable, you need to be naked in order to create new life. And in the same way, like, a nakedness emotionally is needed to be able to create new life within the church.

It's a skill to be practiced, right? So, it's not just something that happens, but really trying to challenge ourselves, you know, are we actually being vulnerable with one another when we share? [36 : 14] In terms of what gets in the way of vulnerability, we have broken it up into, you know, both what, for those who are in the midst of struggling with mental illness, what gets in the way of being vulnerable.

vulnerable. And we think about, you know, sometimes, you know, hard events happen, somebody shares that they're struggling with depression, a suicide happens, and everybody else says, oh, we never knew that this person was struggling, right?

And we'll circle back to that. But then the other piece is also, you know, what gets in the way of us who are not currently struggling with mental illness, being able to be vulnerable or participate in that culture of vulnerability.

In terms of, you know, when someone is in the midst of currently struggling with mental illness, I think the big two are that there's a lot of shame around it, which then leads to aloneness.

And I think shame as opposed to guilt is this idea, not just that I've done something bad, but I am bad. I'm not enough. And then that can lead us to hide our struggles and to isolate a lot more, which worsens the mental illness, but it's also common to all mental illness, right?

[37 : 21] And so if you think about depression, somebody's too depressed to get out of bed, they can't join the body of believers. Somebody with eating disorders is like counting their calories and can't share in the life of food with the, you know, which so much of our culture is built around, right?

Because they're like doing their own little thing that has to be, you know, X calories and look a certain way. The same with like tics or compulsions, right? That people often kind of withdraw and isolate because there is a lot of shame around what that looks like.

Um, with anxieties and phobias, right? Not being able to leave the house because they're worried a panic attack is going to happen. And then there's not going to be anybody around to help them.

So like, or even psychosis, right? Which is you're worried. You might be worried people are out to get you, right? It's hard to trust anybody. There's a conspiracy against you. Um, so all of these are just kind of different aspects of how, even across the spectrum of mental illness, there are these kind of really core things that further isolate people from the life of the church.

Um, yeah. Um, so for those of us who, I think this can apply to both, but for those of us who maybe are supporting people, um, who are struggling with mental illness, but don't have mental illness ourselves, uh, there's a lot that kind of make it hard for us to be vulnerable to when, when we're in those places.

[38 : 45] Um, and our vulnerability, even when we're not specifically struggling with mental illness can actually free up people who are struggling with mental illness to be vulnerable to.

So it's, we still play an important role when we're in that place. Um, so I think, yeah, sometimes we, we want to protect ourselves. We want to protect our image and church, right? I think sometimes there's a, there's a sense of like, Oh, if I, if I revealed, like I've had a terrible week and I feel like I'm falling apart, even if that's true, I think there can be an implicit sense of like, well, people think less of me.

Like, will I not be seen as, as godly? Like, will people, yeah, kind of look down on me? I think that's a real, a real fear. Um, busyness, like sometimes, you know, we're rushing out of church, we're rushing out of small group.

It takes time and intentionality to sit down with someone and say, Hey, I'm really, really anxious.

And I'm really struggling with just, it takes time. Um, I think also we can, um, uh, sort of do transparency as opposed to vulnerability.

So one time transparency was described to me as like giving a lot of information, but vulnerability is giving information and giving an invitation, um, to another person to enter into what you're

experiencing.

[40 : 03] So, and this can kind of go along with, um, spiritual bypassing, which we talked about a couple of weeks ago. So an example of this, um, so let's say Stephanie and I are chatting at small group.

Stephanie says, how are you? And, you know, I'm having a rough week with OCD and I say, Oh, you know, it's been a rough week, but today is okay. I know that God is faithful and he's going to get me through it.

So I'm like, I'm feeling, you know, I'm feeling better. Right. Like those things might all be true, right? Like I might've really had a rough week.

God really is faithful and it's going to get me through it. Today might really have been a better day. Like those things might all be true. And that's not a bad, those aren't bad things to say. However, that doesn't really give Stephanie an invitation to enter into my experience.

And that kind of response is a lot less risky than a vulnerable response, which would be saying like, honestly, Stephanie, I'm really struggling. Like I want to trust in God's promises and I'm trying to, but I'm having a really hard time.

[41 : 09] Would you be willing to meet up with me a couple of times this week? And could I talk to you more about how I'm doing? Like personally, even as I'm saying that I like recoil against that more internally, right?

Like that's a lot harder to do than to say like, it's okay. Getting through. You know, so I think we can actually, whether or not we're struggling with mental illness at a given time, we can free people who are struggling up to be vulnerable if we are willing to actually give people an invitation to enter into our experience.

Laura Denny once described it to me like transparency is like, if you have like a room, if your internal experience is like a room, it's like inviting someone in like a museum and saying like, look, there's a nice dresser.

There's a desk. There's a bed. Okay. Leave now. And vulnerability is like saying like, okay, can I'm inviting you to like open up the drawer and rifle through the drawer and say, oh, here's like a stray sock.

And like, oh, under your bed, there's all this stuff, right? So it's a lot harder to do. It's, you know, it takes a lot of courage to do, but I think that that can really both help us if we're experiencing mental illness and just having that kind of attitude and atmosphere in church can make it easier for people to share.

[42 : 26] And I think that it necessarily requires kind of like smaller groups, right? And again, like that trust and relationship building. I think we had a, we were talking about how like on social media, right?

There's like the illusion of vulnerability because everybody's just kind of posting about how bad they're doing or, you know, like, you know, hashtag XYZ, you know, and sometimes mental illness is part of that, right?

Like, you know, you're just kind of announcing to hundreds of people that you're having a really bad day, but there's no, but you're just kind of like throwing it out there with no expectation necessarily of response other than like a surface level like or dislike or something like that.

And so there's something about kind of opening ourselves up that is only possible in kind of smaller groups where you can read the feedback of what this person is seeing and feeling that is really challenging.

And for those of us who have kind of been in church culture for a while, I think there's kind of the tendency to get adept at kind of an illusion of vulnerability without actually being vulnerable, right?

[43 : 35] Like we know how to perform vulnerability, which is, you know, like you say certain things, you sprinkle in certain verses, you kind of like tie it up with a nice bow and like, oh, you've like shared, right?

I mean, I've done that. Yeah, no, totally. We're all guilty of that, right? Yeah, we've all done it because it, you know, it's protective in some ways, but it also precludes or it like kind of shuts out other people from being able to speak into our lives.

And something I'm always trying to, when I see clients, I'm always suggesting they do, but I think is very good for us to do is every one of us, whether or not we're struggling with our mental health or not to just, we should be inviting our brothers and sisters to enter in with us.

And so I guess a challenge or an encouragement is to just like, like ask a person like, hey, will you meet up with me for coffee or lunch or whatever? So I can share about this hard thing in my life and ask for your support.

Like that is not fun to do. Like it's, it's really, that is not always fun to do. Like for me, it's much easier if somebody asks me to have lunch that they can share. Right. But I think like, regardless of whether we're struggling with mental illness or not, that is a thing that we should all do as believers in Christ to believe that we are prone to weakness and struggle with our struggles with sin or with mental illness or with family dynamics or, you know, whatever the case might be to really invite someone to enter into that, I think is, is important.

[45 : 06] So that's a, that's a. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And even invite people to support us too.

So don't just say, here's my life story. We're good. You know, but like, can you ask me more about my struggles with body image or can you ask me more about my struggles with, you know, X, Y, Z? I think that's a good point about like maybe sometimes giving people permission to do that. Right. Or like, you know, when I'm not feeling well, I may not have the words to.

You know, kind of fully describe my experience, but you know, I want, I want you to walk alongside me. And so now I'm telling, you know, now I'm saying like, even when I withdraw, like, please come find me, you know?

And so giving people permission a little bit when we're able to is helpful. Just to read a little part of this quote, I think what makes vulnerability uncomfortable?

[46 : 04] Like what makes it uncomfortable to receive vulnerability? And I'll just read the end here. Speaking of people with mental illness or who are suffering, we don't want to look at them because they remind us of what we're trying to forget.

The truth about every single one of us. And I think there's an important thing we can acknowledge. I think that we have a, as Christians can acknowledge, like we're sinners, right?

We're all sinners. We've all fallen short and we are all prone to weakness and struggle on this side of heaven. And so when somebody else is struggling or seeming really visibly weak or not having it all together, a good stance is not like, oh, they've got that going on, but I'm okay.

But rather like, oh, like you and me are the same. You know, it might not look exactly the same. Like maybe I have a better outward presentation than you, but like internally, like we are the same in terms of our susceptibility to weakness and struggle.

And that doesn't mean we have to be exactly where they are, but like, this is kind of our, how we can bear with one another. And then the last piece, I mean, and we've talked about this kind of sprinkled in is what promotes vulnerability.

[47 : 17] And so we've talked about how having regular frequent contact with a couple people, being intentional about sharing in real time what we're struggling with, not just when it's all kind of wrapped up is really important.

Are we able to, you know, are there two or three people that we've given kind of permission to be intrusive in our lives? Are there people that we are regularly kind of confessing all the good, the bad, the ugly, you know, conflicts, desires, thoughts to, um, and just really choosing a couple people that we can do life with?

Um, yeah. And I think that, so a couple more, um, from other sources would be Hebrews. Um, where it talks about, you know, let's spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, but encouraging one another.

And all the more as you see the day approaching. Um, and again, just the idea of how the church is uniquely situated to be a place of community and welcoming into new relationships, right?

That it was such a radical thing for Jesus to say, you know, my biological mother and brothers, who are, who are they, right? The people who are doing God's will. Those are the people who are my brothers and sisters at a, in a culture where family ties were preeminent.

[48 : 37] Um, and when, and when Jesus heals the bleeding woman, he doesn't just heal her, but he calls her daughter. And there's kind of a naming of that relationship of really welcoming her into a network of ties, um, that is really life transforming for people.

That is part of the healing process. Um, not just like the practical healing of X, Y, and Z, which often is not possible anyway with mental illness. So I think just the, um, last quote that, or maybe not.

Oh yeah. Oh, okay. Yeah. The last quote again from Bonhoeffer, cause it's a really good book on life together. Um, it's kind of, it's kind of a long one, but just the parts, I mean, I think the paraphrase is, you know, often we think that it's easier to confess our sins to God than to our brothers and sisters.

And why is that when God is so holy and just and blameless? And maybe it's that there's a part of our confession to God that is actually self-deception, right? Because, and if it's easy, you know, if it's easier, we should ask ourselves, are we self-deceiving?

And that being able to confess to another broken human being who can reflect God's presence and forgiveness to us is often another good litmus test of, you know, have we actually confessed this thing that we're really ashamed about?

[49 : 51] And so the importance of just being vulnerable with one another. It makes me think of the Catholics that go to the priest and confess, and I've heard that a lot of Protesters put that down as only between you, it only needs to be between you and God.

But this would kind of give grievance or affirmation to the idea of going to a priest? Or someone else? I mean, I don't know.

Or that I think that... Or I think that it doesn't... That, you know, maybe a priest, but also like all of us should be capable of receiving another person's confession of sin, right?

Because all of us have a personal relationship with Christ and we are able to reflect God's forgiveness and presence and be able to tolerate that confession. So it doesn't just need to be mediated through...

It doesn't have a weakness. It doesn't count a little weakness. When you think of the people in the New Testament, like Paul and all, they talked about their weaknesses. And I think...

[50 : 55] Their struggles, they didn't hide it. Right. And I think this kind of confession... I know Bonhoeffer here is talking about confessing probably sin specifically, but I think there's a different kind of confiding what we have a hard time with about our mental health, which is similar but different, right?

Like if I go to Carolyn and say, hey, I'm really struggling with my mental health, I'm not necessarily confessing sin in that case. Maybe I am. Who knows? Like maybe both. But, you know, there's a similar sense of like, I'm going to choose another person who I trust and invite them to either support me, hold me accountable, get me out of bed in the morning, you know, whatever it is. And choosing not to just go it alone, but rather invite somebody else into that, I think is important, whether that's sin or mental illness or both. I think in answer to that, another answer to that first question, why is it often easier to confess those sins to God than to a brother?

Because we know that we don't have to impress God. He already knows our sins and our weaknesses, whereas with other people, we want to give a good impression.

Yeah. Yeah. And we want a good reputation. Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. What do other, like, it's a good point, like in terms of vulnerability, what do you all think makes it easier or harder to be vulnerable in a church setting or among Christian friends?

[52 : 29] What are things that help that or barriers that you've maybe experienced with that? Alicia. Alicia. So when, like, in the process of growing up, I guess, I realized that I was, like, telling myself, like, oh, I don't want to burden other people as, like, a way to prevent, like, protect myself, I think.

Mm-hmm. But I remember having a friend going through, like, a very difficult thing for months and then she finally told me about it and I was, like, appalled that she, like, I was, like, thinking to myself, like, why hadn't she come to me earlier with this?

Mm-hmm. And I realized, like, why, if I'm always presenting, like, this, like, perfect facade, like, people are going to want to be, like, oh, you are perfect. Like, here's all my work.

Oh, okay. So, like, in order to, like, love the people in my life well, I needed to be, like, more, like, be okay with burdening them because then they would feel, like, you had said, I'd much rather be the person, like, not to come to, like, hearing about other people's struggles than, like, and so I think in order to be able to give other people that support, we have to, like, let them support us too.

So, yeah. Yeah. And I think that's the beauty of the church body is that there, you know, people are struggling with different things. So it's not just, like, so I think maybe the challenge and invitation of, for us is, you know, how to, like, quote, unquote, healthy people in different ways, walk with people who are struggling in different ways, right, although we're all struggling with different things.

[54 : 02] But it starts with kind of modeling it first, right, that we can't expect, you know, a culture of vulnerability of, like, we ourselves have not been able to show that, yeah. And I would say 98 times

out of 100, like, someone will, if somebody is struggling, they're going to go to someone who they also know struggles with something.

I mean, at least for me, I'm, like, exactly what you said. I'm, like, if I'm really having a rough time with my mental health and I think of, like, the 10 people I know at church I might want support from, 10 out of 10 times will be, like, okay, has anybody experienced, you know, they don't have to go through someone's struggle with mental health, but has anybody talked about struggling?

Like, has anyone walked through something difficult? Has anyone been vulnerable? I mean, I don't consciously think that, but that's who I'll probably gravitate toward feeling more comfortable with. And so I think we can do a lot to encourage our friends who are struggling with mental illness by, even if we don't have a longstanding struggle of depression, being willing to say, like, hey, you know what?

This is what I'm walking through that's really hard. Could you support me? They're probably going to be a lot more likely to reciprocate that. Yeah. Any other comments?

Yeah. I think sometimes we're afraid of a breach of confidentiality. Hmm. We share ourselves, like, I've shared things with them, so just keep it confidential, say anything, say anything, say anything, say anything, say anything, say anything.

[55 : 28] And if they do that, we'll trust them. Hmm. So, and that may make us a little more hesitant. Hmm. Sure, yeah. And then they say, yes, you know, keep it between us, and they do some of it out and tell us faster.

Sure. Right, sure. Yeah. Yeah. Tyler? It reminds me of a CS Lewis quote where he sort of says something like, friendship forms the moment when you can say, you too.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. You too, you experience the same thing. Oh, I saw. You too, like, you love Christ, so do I. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And it reminds me that, you know, God, he discloses himself to his people.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And God had never done that. We can never be friends. Mm-hmm. We can have a relationship with the Lord. Yeah. And he comes to us and he said, these are my thoughts, these are my feelings, this is what's important to me.

Mm-hmm. And I wonder, if we don't do that with other people, do we truly have any friends that, in the meaning of, the biblical meaning of friends, where a friend sticks closer than a brother, something like that where we can go to.

[56 : 35] Yeah. If we're never vulnerable, I don't think we have any of those friends. Mm-hmm. The Bible clearly is pushing us to, like, that's, those are the, our church fans, like, we should be that close to each other.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And that requires one of those people. Yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. I want to also mention that, you know, to be vulnerable, to be, to be more vulnerable, you need to repeat it.

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. And, To repeat, you said? Yeah. To repeat interaction. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. It's easier. And the other thing is that, sometimes people separate the people they, you know, share positive things with negative because they don't want those things to interact one with the other.

Which I don't think is a good idea because when that happens, then the person you kind of vent on after a while would probably want to shun you because of a weird, like, transparency, of, you know, emotions and just kind of view you as like a, so that's why it's important to be open or positive and negative and a big, and I guess that's what a friendship is, right?

I mean, eventually, you know, it's not just something you dump on or something you just be happy with, but, you know, share ups and downs of a life. Yeah, yeah, yeah, Carolyn.

[58 : 01] Well, just on notes really funny, I'm sorry, to add on to it, this idea that God also shares his sorrows and his anger with his people and, like, the non-fun emotions.

Yeah, you have to read much of the Old Testament and what, like, breaks God's heart and what makes him angry and, like, I think sometimes it's hardest to be vulnerable with the, like, emotions we see as messy or complicated, which often mental illness touches on that whole spectrum.

So, I think to see God model that and God having humans model that through that model. And then what I would like, vulnerability is hard, so it's okay if you take it in small steps.

There's, like, personality-wise is like, okay, vulnerability is good, I have to do it, check. Check. And then it's just like, that doesn't ever happen.

So it's like, maybe in a conversation with a friend, like, going one, like, saying one more sentence than you would, like, normally feel comfortable saying. Or share one thing in your life that's not, like,

going up on the pulpit and having to share with everybody.

[59 : 19] Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So this is a little unorthodox, but I hear my, I think my baby's very hungry, so I'm going to just feed her right back there, and I will then be back.

So Stephanie will just, I'll be observing, and then I'll be right back. Okay. All right. Sounds good. This is, like, I guess vulnerable life as it is. All right.

So I, I think we'll end on this last section of, you know, what is grace? Grace and humility. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah. Oh. Of grace and humility in kind of our new understanding of what a church can look like. So in terms of what it is, right, it's this idea that we are all sinners in need of grace. We are all bearing with one another. It's not just the strong helping the weak, but we are all weak.

[60 : 18] And in terms of what gets in the way of bearing with one another, we've, we've talked about this throughout, but, you know, one might be being too quick to share truths, quote unquote.

And so a good kind of litmus test might be, you know, if some, if you end up saying, you know, well, I'm, I'm just being honest, right? That's usually a good sign that, you know, maybe there are other ways to, to have shared that.

And, and I think, you know, somebody had asked, you know, well, how do I know what the right thing to say is? And, and I think sometimes we don't know what the right thing to say and it's okay to say, you know, well, you know, what you're sharing brings to mind X, Y, and Z, either that I've walked through or that, you know, from scripture and then asking at the end, like, was that helpful or how did that land?

Like, how was that received for you? Right. And I guess that, that is also a tricky thing because somebody might say that was not helpful at all or like, I can't, you know, I know that intellectually, but I can't, I'm not in a place where I can receive that right now.

But not, but being willing to ask, like, what did you think of that thing that I just shared? I think we also, we also worry that when we bear with one another that we might, like, in trying to understand their emotions, we might be validating poor life choices sometimes, right?

[61 : 42] And so, Elena and I had talked about this vignette of somebody who has really strong anxiety and as a result they're kind of, you know, and they don't want to seek treatment and so they're just kind of managing on their own and then they end up self-medicating with alcohol, right?

And so we worry sometimes if we're not experiencing that, like, you know, if I'm trying to understand your experience of what you're going through, am I actually, you know, allowing you to make these kind of self-destructive choices?

Should I just kind of cut it off quickly and say stop drinking, right? Well, and one, like, that's probably not going to go over well. But I think there's a difference between saying, like, stop drinking, it's so bad for you, you're going to kill yourself versus, you know, it must be so hard to be so anxious that any sort of escape is tantalizing in some way, right?

Like, I don't know what it feels like to have such a hard time sitting, you know, sitting alone with my thoughts or going out that I feel like I have to turn to something to numb my experience and, you know, what is that like for you, right?

And so I think we don't want to lose the truth part, but we also can sit with somebody in the messiness of their feelings and try to understand how they're making these choices that they are without, you know, saying, like, oh, well, everything you're doing choice-wise is okay.

[63 : 11] And I, yeah, and we've also kind of mentioned this before, but I think sometimes it's hard to sit with the messiness if we're, we, you know, by nature, we really want to be helpful, right?

And that's a good thing, but I think sometimes we kind of treat ministry to each other as kind of like a deer hunting thing, right? We're like, bam, we got it, like, we're done, you know? But I think that there's this idea of, like, you know, you have multiple chances.

It will require a regular conversation, and if something doesn't land, you have another opportunity as long as you're in a regular relationship with that person. And we think about, you know, the relationship with our children, that it's not, you know, a good parent isn't one that, like, never messes up and never has any ruptures, right?

Because that's impossible, but are we able to repair that well? Are we able to be humble and seek forgiveness when things that we've said have been hurtful to the person who's struggling? So, you know, not letting, just wanting to fix the problem get in the way of actually being helpful.

In terms of ways that help us, like, promote grace and humility and bearing with one another, I think we had talked about a couple of different categories.

[64 : 25] So one is something that y'all have mentioned, right, which is practical needs. And there's a verse in James 2 about, suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, go in peace, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is that?

And we've talked about this through the Sunday school, you know, but the compassion that we might more instinctively show for people who have had heart attacks or strokes, right, how does that translate into people who are struggling with depression and anxiety?

And so, you know, something like diabetes, right, if you're not making good, you know, there's the genetic predisposition, there's diet, and so if somebody lands in the hospital for, like, their diabetes going out of control, we don't just show up at the hospital and say, like, well, you should have lowered your blood sugar, right?

We kind of recognize that they're at a place where they just need to receive support, and maybe later on, part of their work towards recovery and maintaining a healthy lifestyle includes, again, some of these truths, but is this the right time and place to share that with them?

And I think it's, you know, I think mental illness is slightly different than kind of like breast cancer or heart disease because there are no, like, 5Ks, there are no galas, well, maybe there are, but it's not as common, like 5Ks and galas and celebrations to fundraise for that because the people who are struggling with it are often, you know, don't have the energy to organize those sorts of things, and their family members may also not have the energy to do that, and so there's a way, again, in which kind of the shame and isolation of mental illness can get in the way of the visibility of how we are able to support.

[66 : 04] And so in terms of other practical needs, I love some of the examples that you all shared, right, like, is it child care? So, you know, you can go out on a date or you can go to therapy.

Is it somebody who's so anxious they have a hard time going to small group or showing up in church, right? Do we drive that person to church? Do we sit with them so they don't have to feel alone? It might look like helping them navigate treatment, which we talked about last week, can be really tricky.

So can we help them find a therapist when they don't have enough energy to pick up the phone? Can we, and then in terms of presence, right, are we checking in regularly?

Are we texting? Are we calling? There's spiritual help, too, in terms of, you know, somebody who might be so incapacitated by their depression that they can't open the Bible?

So do we sit alongside them and choose a song to read together or a song to sing together? Can we pray with them when they don't have words to be able to offer the Lord?

[67 : 06] And I think we just want to, you know, if you're not in the mental health field or if you haven't struggled with yourself, I think that there's some, like, mental illness can feel really mystifying and very other.

But I think, you know, so then it's sometimes hard as a person outside of it to be, like, how can I help in this instance? I don't even know the first thing about it, right? And I think we, as like professionals, would say, like, there are, like, a lot of boundaries and limits to what we can do, right?

Like, we can't spend a whole day with one person, but a friend can. We can't, you know, offer prayer unless it, well, yeah, we generally don't offer prayer, right, but a friend can, right?

And we don't text to check in. So I think there's a lot about friendship itself that you all have mentioned of just being with that is really important and to not minimize that because that is something that professionals can't do.

And I think there's kind of, like, the over, like, well, anyways, I think that sometimes, yeah, relationships in general, trusting relationships, like therapy is one form of a trusting relationship, but you need, like, a whole network of them in order to really thrive.

[68 : 16] And then I think the last thing is that, you know, as y'all have kind of shared your experiences, right, that like when one person is struggling, it really takes a whole family to come around them.

And it's not just like, oh, here's this person who's struggling, I'm going to be this one person who saves them, right? Like, we have to also be mindful of our messiah complex and really invite other

people, widen that circle of, like, support networks for them.

We're inviting other people to walk with them, right? And sometimes it may be that the person who's struggling with mental illness can't get out the door, you know, doesn't show up like, and walking with that person may be walking with a family member who is, you know, kind of that direct caregiver.

So just kind of thinking about ways that we can kind of practically and presence-wise support people who are struggling. So we kind of ran through that last section.

But any, like, thoughts, comments, questions about what it looks like to bear with, what's made it harder or easier, suggestions and what we can do in church? Uh-huh?

[69 : 25] I thought something that was really insightful to me is the, like, throughout this whole class, is just being willing to ask questions. I think that I'm really nervous to ask people questions because I don't want them to be offended by me asking and, like, not asking so that I can, like, you know, understand and, like, tell all these people or, or, you know, like, but it's truly that I can understand and help or just listen.

So I'm still kind of perplexed by that, like, how do we know what questions do I ask? And I know a lot of that in the Holy Spirit. And even just, like, reading the situation, but it is still kind of unnerving to know, like, how much is too much, and especially with different people experiencing different types of mental illness, like, which ones are, I don't know.

But that was helpful to just know that questions are welcome. I guess. Yeah. Yeah. And sometimes it's helpful to acknowledge, like, I don't quite know what to say or ask in the situation, so feel free to let me know if you don't want to talk about it right now, right?

Like, can you tell me more about X, Y, and Z? Yeah. So I think just coming from a place of curiosity is usually pretty welcome. And then people will let you know, like, no, don't ask me that.

I don't want to talk about that right now. That's going to, you know, worsen my mental health right now, or something like that. And sometimes even asking, like, what do you, and somebody might not know, which is okay, but it's always not bad to ask, like, oh, what is the best way for you to be supported?

[70 : 51] Like, do you need someone to, like, you know, be distracted and go out to fro-yo? Do you need someone to, you know, stay on the phone with you?

Yeah. A lot of times what somebody might need might not be, like, diving deep into their trauma per se, but rather, like, it's never bad to ask, like, oh, do you need to be distracted? Do you want to talk about it?

You know, and then seeing if they have an idea of, like, what might be most helpful. You could just be doing something else and go out. Yeah. Like, what will be?

Yeah. Having dinner with friends and who is not conflict with your phone. Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. I feel like those things are, and that's so much of what the church can offer that, like, a therapist or psychiatrist can't offer, right?

Like, someone comes to our office, we're specifically there to talk about things that are hard. We can't be like, oh, let's go to fro-yo, right? But, like, that's, I would love that. You know, which wouldn't be very ethical, but that is something that is needed, like, just, like, feeling normal, spending time, having presence, and I feel like that's so much of what the church really can't over.

[71 : 59] It's so easy, and I'm proud all the time. It's too overwhelming. I mean, isn't there a verse in progress that's a very hard, do with the, maybe the spirit do with, very hard, do with the spirit?

I don't know, but, um, a joyful heart is good medicine? That's true, and there's another one. I don't know. I don't know. Sorrow pushes the spirit, or something like that.

And I think there's a balance, right? Like, at times, we might be in a place where we're like, all right, Carolyn, I need to tell you all about my sorrow in life, right? Like, and we, that is necessary to do sometimes, and there might be times when I'm like, poor Carolyn, just because I'm looking directly at you, get all my hand.

I'm like, yeah. Then there might be times where, like, I've had such a hard week, I just need to watch Great British Baking Show for three hours, you know? And, like, there might be different things, and I think within a friendship, a balance is helpful of, you know, what we might need at different times.

Yeah. I think it's very important, because there's really no one's, you know, there's no one's solution to the problem. It's a very terrible problem. I mean, I think it's important to, you know, have these sessions, you talk about these things, and, you know, one of the things I have a big proponent of is

that we can learn from each other, and that people who have actually suffering from mental illness have a lot to offer, and that's about what works and what doesn't work the same.

[73 : 35] That's why I said, you know, I think support groups are very important, and you know, obviously at the end of the day, I mean, you need medicine, but don't deny that either.

You know, so you want to remember that. And the other thing is that once, you know, mental illness is not a all-house switch. So, you know, a lot of stuff they're talking about is actually the lighter end. of the time, but there are people who are at points where we need to get help, and we need to really emphasize that, because one of the things I find is that when somebody has anxiety, a Christian, I have a non-Christian friend, you know, one of the things they say is, you know, don't worry about it, you're still worsening, you'll save it that person.

When you say that, you're kind of slapping them in the face, you're kind of saying that, you know, what you're not, you know, what your feelings are real. So, you know, but again, it's a spectrum. I think it's very important to really remember that, and we do need that for professional help, whether medications or therapy or combination of that.

[74 : 56] So Bruce, I was thinking of it, 1722, a cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crush, they recognize that development. Yeah, and there's, it's always good to, I mean, maybe you don't have to be so explicit to say, oh, do you want me to be cheerful or crushed?

But, you know, sometimes it's good to kind of, even day by day or within a single day, the needs of someone with a mental illness might change from like, I need someone to sit in silence with me while I cry, to then like, oh, I need to go to movies, you know, and watch Marvel or, you know, whatever.

So like, yeah, both of those are so important to keep in mind, absolutely. And I think that's why the, like, again, the relationship is so important, right? So you think about like your close family members, like sometimes you even know what they're going to say before they're going to say it because you know their patterns.

And so for somebody you walked alongside with mental illness for a while, you know, kind of like the ebb and flow, right? You know, like, maybe, you know, that when they look back on periods of depression, they're like, yeah, I really struggled with keeping a clean house, like all the dishes piled up and I never left the house and I never like took a shower, right?

And so maybe as you've seen that through a couple of episodes, the next time they're in a, you know, a depressive episode, those are things that you end up suggesting or doing with them or for them with their permission, right?

[76 : 22] Because you like, because maybe in the midst of their depression, they don't know what they actually need, but you're able to kind of hold that memory for them and say like, oh, like in the past, it seems like that's been helpful.

Is that something that would be helpful now? But that requires kind of, again, an intimacy of knowing what does that person respond to. And to the point about like support groups and organized support, we've had, I mean, one of the things that has come from this class, like a few different times is folks have given feedback about like having some sort of ongoing space in the church to talk about mental illness and get support.

So we, yeah, I think that those are great suggestions. So we are going to start a conversation with the, we'll talk with the elders and kind of see what that might look like or, and we've kind of considered ourselves what that might look like.

So I guess stay tuned. That could be something that might be coming up. Yeah, depending. So thanks for the suggestions too. Yeah.

Are there other, yeah, just, I know we've covered a lot today, just lingering questions or experiences. Yeah. I think we'll look into peer-to-peer support training. And so, and I'm sure other people would be happy to too.

[77 : 38] And just to have a community where people are being willing to be vulnerable and support each other. It doesn't have to be a depressing sad. I mean, it can be life-changing community, fun, and, you know, really, truly fellowship and, you know, being there for each other.

Yeah. Yeah. And I think, like, being able to walk alongside that spectrum when it's such a chronic thing is so important, right? So it doesn't always, to your point, it doesn't always have to be like this really sad, like, let's get together and talk about all the terrible things.

But sometimes it's about having, like, a support group to celebrate when, you know, somebody has been able to, like, do, you know, X, Y, and Z. That was a goal that was really hard, right?

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Mm-hmm. Right. But taking those, yeah, taking those moments to celebrate.

And I think the AA model has, like, you know, where it's like, you know, 24 hours after you abstain from an addiction, right? You get this visual reminder, like, yes, you've been able to do it. And then, you know, and then they have, like, these regular kind of sobriety chips.

[78 : 54] And it's not, and, you know, it's understanding sometimes people fall off the bandwagon, but, like, we're going to celebrate in the moment, you know, for the victories that are happening right now. Yeah. Or this medication worked for you.

Like, we've tried, you tried five medications, and now this one works. Like, there is something to celebrate. And recognizing, like, people with mental illness are not only their mental illness. Like, that's a part of their experience.

But there's still a whole person to get to know and be in relationship with. And it's going to include a lot of ups and downs. Right, right, right. Yeah. Yeah. So it's 10-20.

Okay. Well, if anyone has questions, we'll stick around. But thank you so much for being part of this class. This was, yeah, we so appreciate all of you sharing and engaging. And, yeah, it was really wonderful.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.