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Title: Mental Health

Series: Let's Talk About

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Text: [Psalm 13](#)

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In the winter of 2009 I knew something was off. I was struggling to get out of bed. I was coming home from a day at church, sun setting at 5 pm, and all I could think about was crawling back into bed. We had a bonus room upstairs in our house, and in this room we had a tv with a big comfy chair in front of it. I would tell my spouse, Mary Michael, that I was going upstairs to watch football or a movie. A few times I would, but more often than not, I would close the door to the room and just sit in the chair.

People who had known me for a while would have described me as easy to be around, someone who makes others feel comfortable, an encouragement, a person of energy. I felt none of that. I also felt like I couldn't let my church know and I couldn't let my friends know because I didn't want to let anyone down. And truth be told, I was worried about what my church would think if they knew I was struggling.

Well, thanks to some friends and my spouse, I finally made an appointment to talk with someone about my mental health struggles. A part of my struggle with mental health at that time was that surely I could not be experiencing a struggle with my mental health. I had a great life, a wonderful spouse, and good friends. I was living out God's calling upon my life, and I was the one who was there for other people when they struggled or needed conversation. I had a faith that I thought could support what I was going through, but faith alone wasn't enough for me.

I went to talk to a therapist who diagnosed me with depression. Following that diagnosis, he prescribed me some medication. I also did more research—because my family never really talked about this—and I discovered that depression ran in my family. The doctor told me that most likely, I was predisposed to experiencing depression in my life.

He also helped me unpack some of the things in the years before that had happened and led me to sitting alone in an upstairs room. To this day, I still see a counselor for conversation and still take medication. The thing I wish I could tell you is that a lot of people know this about me. The truth is, very few people do because I haven't shared it.

We are in a sermon series called *Let's Talk About...*, talking about some of the things that we don't really talk about in church but probably should. The number-one requested topic was mental health. During the sermon today, we are talking about mental health. In recent years, our culture and the church has come a long way in removing the stigma from mental health struggles. But we also have a long way to go.

When I think about the church and mental health, they go together. If what we do is connect with God so that we become the best version of who God created us to be, well it's hard to do that without talking about mental and emotional health.

I believe that when church is at its best, it is a completely safe space. Safe space to be open and honest about what we are going through and what we are experiencing. In the church, there should not be an ounce of shame for anyone who is struggling with mental health.

This morning I want to share some numbers with you: Around 21% percent of American adults have some sort of mental health diagnosis. So that's around 50 million Americans struggling with diseases like anxiety, depression, and bipolar depression. About 5% of American adults struggling with severe mental health diagnosis. And about 48,000 people died by suicide last year in the United States.¹ In rural areas of the country, about 25 million Americans live in a place where there are too few mental health providers to meet demand.

Adolescents who spend more than three hours per day on social media face double the risk of depression and anxiety as compared to peers who don't.

There was a 93.6 percent increase in anxiety from April 2020 over April 2019 for teens ages 13 to 18 years old. And there was an 83.9 percent increase in depression from April 2020 over April 2019 for teens ages 13 to 18 years old.

One of the categories of Psalms we see in the Bible are Psalms of lament. About a third to half of the 150 Psalms in the Bible are Psalms of lament. Each of these Psalms struggle with the idea that we are created by and uniquely loved by God, that we have worth because of the love of God and the idea that in difficult times, God seems to be nowhere to be found:

How long will you forget me, LORD? Forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

¹ Statistics courtesy of NAMI

How long will I be left to my own wits,
agony filling my heart? Daily?
How long will my enemy keep defeating me?

Look at me!

Answer me, LORD my God!
Restore sight to my eyes!
Otherwise, I'll sleep the sleep of death,

and my enemy will say, "I won!"
My foes will rejoice over my downfall.

5

But I have trusted in your faithful love.
My heart will rejoice in your salvation.

6

Yes, I will sing to the LORD
because he has been good to me. (Psalm 13)

There is a great scene from the movie *The Apostle*, starring Robert Duvall. Duvall plays a southern preacher, and one night he's upstairs in his home and he is yelling. It's so loud that the neighbor calls over and asks what is all the noise? Sonny's mom is over and answers the phone. She says, Oh, that's just Sunny. He's talking with the Lord. Sometimes he whispers, and sometimes he yells.

We feel that in this Psalm. One who feels abandoned, forgotten, alone.

How long O' Lord? Why have you forgotten me? How long will you hide your face? And then the desperate plea for answers... Answer me God.

We have obviously come a long way in understanding the human brain, in understanding human emotions. We don't know if this Psalmist was perhaps struggling with mental health. But whether you have struggled or not, you perhaps have known the feeling. Why have you forgotten me O' Lord? Why are you hiding your face? And the answers simply do not come.

Sometimes, often in fact, we cannot find those answers on our own. We cannot hear the voice of God or sense the presence of God on our own. We need others. We need a community of faith.

Scott Peck once wrote this great truth: "Life is Difficult."

Sometimes the others we need are mental health professionals.

I want to be clear, Seeing a mental health professional does not imply a lack of faith. Rather, seeing a mental health professional is an act of faith. Faith in something better, that God desires the best for you.

Mental health professionals have been gifted with unique gifts and the wisdom to get the training and education they need so that they may help others. Just like ministry, working as a mental health professional is a calling from God, a purpose greater than just oneself, so that all may be the people God intends for us to be.

In that spirit, I want to close by offering some things that we can do:

- Creating safe space for people to acknowledge mental health struggles. Part of creating safe space is assuring others of the deep love God has for them and God's desire for them to be the best version of themselves
- Breaking the stigma. One of the great barriers to seeking assistance with mental health is the stigma that surrounds it. May the church not be a place of shame, but a place where worth and dignity is lifted up at each turn. May the church be a place where we share stories of resilience and hope.
- Cultivating self-care. Taking care of one's self is not selfish, but it is a gift from God. Pay attention to yourself with silence, meditation, exercise, and time outside.
- Developing supportive relationships. It's one of the reasons we believe relationships are so key to doing church together. Reach out to people, check on them, and be kind to one another. We know that something that is key to human flourishing are strong supportive relationships. We believe that the church is a place where we can develop these relationships
- Finally, if you are struggling with your mental health, reach out to a mental health professional. It is an act of faith to do so.

One resource for this is through the state of Indiana at <https://www.in.gov/bewellindiana/>.

Any of your pastors are willing to be a listening ear and point you in the right direction for the long-term.

Will you pray with me?