

THE
BIBLE
SPEAKS ON
MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

THE
BIBLE
SPEAKS ON
MENTAL HEALTH AND
PERSONAL GROWTH
ISSUES

HELPS FOR HURTING CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS

WAYNE WELCH

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The Bible Speaks on Mental Health Issues

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FOREWORD

THE AUTHOR IS a licensed professional counselor, with over 41 years experience, who still practices part time in the office of a psychologist friend in Tyler, Texas. He is a former pastor and has a wide variety of experience in the mental health field including state hospitals, the Texas prison system, several acute-care Christian psychiatric units in Houston, Texas, as well as caring for the elderly in nursing homes and several years of private practice. He holds a master of education degree with emphasis on counseling and has completed fifty-five hours of postmaster studies in the field of psychology. He is familiar with many psychotherapeutic schools and techniques. Many of these techniques are useful and provide much-needed insight to better serve the needs of his patients. However, he has found over the years that very little positive change is made in the lives of his patients through psychology and psychotherapeutic techniques alone.

The Bible is incredibly rich in both illustrations and teachings that promote positive mental health. In this book he has combined the Bible with psychology and psychotherapeutic techniques for intervention. Mr. Welch

has used the material in this book as handouts for several years and has received very positive feedback from his patients. In addition to the resources the Bible provides, it is usually far more effective and powerful to address a patient's problems with what God said rather than quoting Freud or Fritz Perls.

This book is designed to be of help to both the layman and the mental health professional as it addresses issues such as depression, anxiety, self-esteem, etc. But it also addresses personal and spiritual growth issues. Of particular importance is a person's belief system. Beliefs such as "I am a failure, loser, unlovable, etc." are lies from the enemy, which are crippling to personal growth and self-actualization. The Bible is a powerful tool to confront these lies.

Wayne Welch

THE BIBLE AND POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE Bible have frequently had an adversarial relationship. Many people in the field of psychology believe that the Bible contributes to poor mental health by inducing guilt and condemnation. Many practitioners of religion believe that psychology is evil and that psychology and Christianity cannot coexist in any meaningful or healthy way. Psychology and Christianity both promote good mental health, but from different perspectives. Both have much to teach us about the human mind and the way that it works.

The Bible is a tremendous resource for positive mental health. The Bible is more than a historical document or a book of wise, insightful sayings. Second Timothy 3:16–17 tells us that “All Scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (NIV). This verse tells us that Scripture did not originate with men but is what God has breathed into men and men have written down. The Scripture also

has multiple uses and applications (teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training). But in Hebrews 4:12 we find that the Scripture is much more. “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (NIV).

The Word of God can go places where no mental health practitioner can go. The Bible is not only a book filled with wise teachings, it is also filled with many illustrations from the lives of real human beings. Some of these people were good and some were not. From some we can learn healthy ways of dealing with life’s crises; from some we can learn how not to deal with life’s crises. The Bible is a morally clean and wholesome book, but it is not naive and is not afraid to address negative and distasteful subjects. The Bible does not teach guilt and condemnation without a remedy. Hell is real, but Jesus came so that no one would have to go there.

A LESSON FROM THE POTTER

(JER. 18:1–11, NIV)

MANY PEOPLE FEEL they have made too many mistakes, done too many bad things, hurt too many people, and sinned too much for God to forgive and to restore them. In Jeremiah, the Potter takes a lump of ugly clay and puts it on his wheel in order to fashion it into a beautiful and useful vessel. However, for some reason, the vessel is marred, or disfigured and ruined. The potter could have discarded this lump of clay and started over with another one. The Potter chose to continue working with the same lump of clay, and he fashioned it into a different vessel than what he had originally intended. Because the Potter is still in charge of the clay, the new vessel will also be beautiful and useful.

The Scripture makes clear in this lesson that God is the Potter, and you and I are the clay. The basic message here is clear. God doesn't throw the clay away. God has a design for your life; and if you have gotten away from God and, for all intents and purposes, ruined your life, God will take the marred and disfigured clay of your life and rebuild it into something beautiful and useful. The other important lesson

here is that the clay also has options. The clay became marred by its own choices. The clay can continue to remain in its present state and refuse to let the Potter redesign it, and the Potter will respect that decision.

You and I always have a free will, and God will not violate our will. There are times when we think we know what's best and choose to ignore the Potter's leading. So in the course of our life, we may have become marred several times. But the Potter does not become disgusted and discard us. He patiently redesigns us, molding and making us into a beautiful and useful vessel and, ultimately, into the image of Jesus Christ. The old hymn "Have Thine Own Way, Lord" says it perfectly: "Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way! Thou art the Potter; I am the clay. Mould me and make me after thy will, while I am waiting yielded and still."

NOTES:

A MESSAGE TO AMERICA

(Ps. 81:8–16)

PSALM 81 IS an appeal to Israel to repent, turn from sin, and turn to God. And there are major correlations between Israel's spiritual condition at that time and America's current spiritual condition. Hear the prophet as he speaks to Israel/America:

Hear, oh my people, and I will admonish you! Oh, America, if you will listen to Me! There shall be no foreign god among you; nor shall you worship any foreign god. I am the Lord your God who brought you out from all the nations of the world; open your mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not heed my voice, and America would have none of me. So I gave them over to their own stubborn heart, to walk in their own counsels. Oh, that my people would listen to me, that America would walk in my ways! I would soon subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their adversaries. The haters of the Lord pretend submission to him, but their fate endures forever. He would have fed America with the finest of wheat; and with honey from the rock, he would have satisfied you. (My paraphrase of Psalm 81:8–16)

On the morning of April 30, 1789, the sound of bells filled the nation's capital for thirty minutes, calling the people to go up to the house of God to commit the new government to the holy protection and blessing of the most high. After George Washington finished delivering the first presidential address, he led the Senate and the House of Representatives on foot in a procession through the streets of the capital to the place appointed for their prayers, a little stone church. The inauguration of the United States, as we know it, began with a sacred gathering before God. And as America walked with God, he blessed her more than any other nation. But America became arrogant and proud, and God was removed from our schools and government and confined to churches. The cry of "separation of church and state" has become the Magna Carta of those who would relegate God to a peripheral role in America. The voices of those opposed to God are loud and vociferous, while the voices of evangelical Christians are soft so as not to give offense. Americans felt secure with their massive armaments and a large standing army, with a healthy economy and a large gross national product.

The events surrounding 9/11 should give America a loud wake-up call. For the first time since the Revolutionary War, America was attacked on her own soil. America's response was a brief flurry of increased interest in church and in God and a military response in Afghanistan and in Iraq, against those perceived as perpetrating this offense

against America or sheltering those who did. America still felt secure in her GNP and her massive wealth. Then came the stock market crash of 2008 and the massive government bailouts of financial institutions. Financial reverberations are still being felt in America and around the world. The Department of Homeland Security was created as America attempted to tighten her borders and secure her airports. America's massive armaments, while effective against an armed invasion in force, were found to be ineffective against sleeper cells and Jihad terrorists.

God's solution to America's problems is found in 2 Chronicles 7:14: "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (NIV).

Notice that this verse is not addressed to all of Israel or all of America but specifically to God's people. The solution to the desperate condition of America will be found when God's people obey this verse.

ANGER AND BITTERNESS

ANGER IS FREQUENTLY thought of as a negative emotion, and in some contexts, it is. But Ephesians 4:26 tells us to “be angry and sin not.” So the implication here is that anger itself is not a sin but can become a sin. Does God ever get angry? Of course, he does. But can you imagine God becoming so angry he loses control? The God who created the universe has the power to destroy it if he were not in control of his emotions.

As far as I can tell, there are two ways in which anger becomes a sin. One is to lose control and hurt people or destroy property; the other is when you let it stay too long that it becomes bitterness and hate. The remainder of Ephesians 4:26 tells us not to “let the sun go down on your wrath.” This is the way of sinning with anger that most Christians are guilty of. We become angry and, rather than releasing our anger in an appropriate way, we stuff it inside. Anger that is internalized in this manner tends to sour and eventually turns to bitterness and hate. And the Bible is clear that bitterness and hate are a sin. Hebrews 12:15 describes bitterness as having roots. These roots will be described in more detail later.

Bitterness is not only a sin, but it has physical consequences in our body. Bitterness can, and usually does, if harbored over a period of time, produce one or more physical symptoms such as fatigue, chronic headaches, high blood pressure, lower back pain, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers, etc. Bitterness and unforgiveness also open a door for Satan. Satan cannot own any part of a Christian, but when you give him permission to operate in your mind and emotions through unforgiveness and bitterness, he will cause you to constantly replay the old hurt. As a consequence, much of your energy will be devoted to the past and not available for current enterprises. Do you find yourself chronically fatigued? Examine your heart and ask God to show you any root of bitterness you have been harboring.

Now let's reexamine anger. Anger is a secondary emotion, and behind it you will almost always find either hurt or fear or both. God gives only one remedy for anger and bitterness; that remedy is forgiveness. But the church and well-meaning Christians have frequently erred in regard to forgiveness. We are told, "God says to forgive, so we should just do it." This is practically impossible when the hurt is deep. As a consequence, the Christian struggling with bitterness and unforgiveness is also made to feel condemned because he doesn't instantly forgive.

To forgive effectively, it is necessary to go behind the anger and process our hurt. If possible, this should be done

with the one who offended us. But sometimes this is not possible or, possibly, not even safe. We may also process our hurts through writing them out in a journal, talking them out with a Christian counselor, or praying them out to God. In this process, it is important to be honest about your hurt and get it all out. When you have done this, ask God to show you if you have gotten all this particular hurt out.

It is also important not to excuse the offender. If you excuse the offender by saying he or she was drinking or for some other reason did not know what they were doing, you will be left with your hurt. For the truth is that whatever the reason he or she did it, your hurt was just as great. Therefore, you must forgive the offense, not excuse it.

When you have completely finished processing your hurt, you are now ready to forgive. But you may not feel like forgiving. Forgiving is not a feeling; it is an act of your will. You must make a conscious decision to forgive that person for that offense, and you have every right to ask God to help you do so. God never commands you to do something that you are not able to do with his help.

There is a reason why God commands us to forgive. It is not to help the offending person and is not for their benefit. It is to free you. It would be easier to forgive them if they would admit they were wrong and possibly even grovel a little bit. But if you wait on the other person, you may be stuck in your own bitterness and rage indefinitely. The other person may never change and may never admit

they were wrong. Meanwhile, you are left to stew in your own juice. The offense may have happened years ago, and the other person may have forgotten it and moved on. In effect, you are still allowing that person to control your life and hurt you over and over again as you continuously replay the old offense.

Bags do not fly free in the flight of life. Many airlines now charge extra for your baggage. Only your small carry-on luggage is free. All your baggage from the old hurts and bitterness exact a tremendous price from your energy and your health. When you are sick and tired of living in the past and hurting yourself, you can, with God's help, forgive the offense and free yourself. As you process your hurts, work through them, and forgive the offenders, you will be amazed at how much more energy you now have. Sustaining anger, hurt, and bitterness over a period of time requires a tremendous amount of energy. Your mind will also be freed to resolve current issues and problems in your life. God loves you too much to want you to live in that bitterness trap. But he will not violate your will. You must choose to forgive, and if it is difficult, ask God to help you.

The final step in this process involves reprogramming your mind. When you have harbored certain thoughts and ways of thinking for a long period of time, they become habitual. God will not drill a hole in your head and suck out all the bad thoughts. That is your job. You may find

thoughts of the old hurt recurring from time to time, and Satan will certainly assist you in recalling them. When these thoughts recur, remind yourself that you have forgiven that offense, and tell Satan to take a hike in the name of Jesus.

You may say that you can forgive but you can't forget. That is true. Only God can choose to forgive and can instantly do so. The Bible tells us that when God forgives our sins, he casts them into the sea of forgetfulness. You and I can't do that. However, memories are kept alive and vivid by strong emotions connected to them. When you forgive, the emotional charge attached to that memory is removed. The memory will gradually fade and will be recalled less and less frequently.

Finally, do not try to forgive all your past hurts at once. Address them one at a time, even if the other offenses involve the same offender. This process may be hard work at first, but the rewards are outstanding. As you begin to free yourself, you will find yourself with more energy, and your physical symptoms should begin to diminish.