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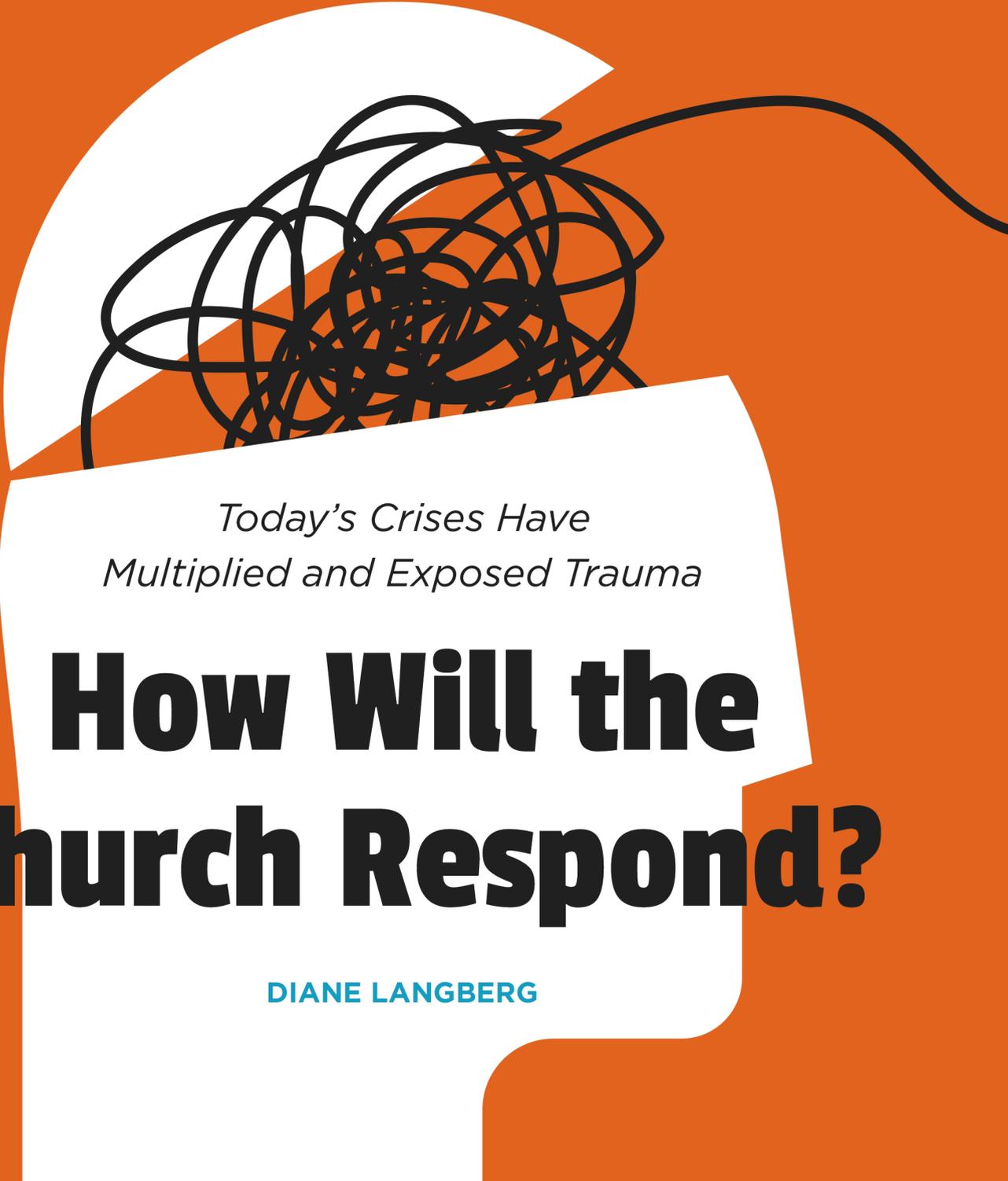
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Evangelicals

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*Today's Crises Have
Multiplied and Exposed Trauma*

How Will the Church Respond?

DIANE LANGBERG

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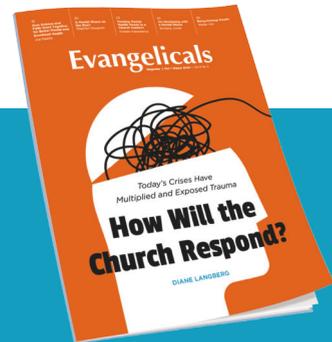
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The Magazine of the National Association of Evangelicals



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Many people don't seek help for mental and emotional issues because they don't want to be judged, or seen as weak or unable to take care of themselves. Past national research has shown that people are more likely to seek treatment for a mental disorder from a clergy member than from psychiatrists, general medical doctors or anyone else. In this way, pastors and churches have a unique opportunity to meet the needs of their community. Churches don't get to decide whether they will have a mental health ministry; they already do.

The good news is that pastors want to help and believe churches should help. According to a 2018 LifeWay Research/Focus on the Family study, 90 percent of pastors believe the Church has a moral and spiritual responsibility to provide resources and support to those with mental illness and their families.

At the same time, there seems to be a communication gap from the pulpit to the congregation. One example: 68 percent of pastors say their churches maintain a list of experts for referrals, but only 28 percent of families with mentally ill loved ones are aware their churches have such a list. The LifeWay Research study also found that pastors do not speak to their congregations about mental illness on any kind of regular basis. Nearly half (49 percent) said they rarely, or never, speak on the subject to their churches in sermons or large group messages.

We can do better. Now is a good time to break the silence and minister well to even more people. As Diane Langberg

illustrates in the cover article, the events of 2020 have both multiplied trauma and have exposed existing trauma. In a recent NAE podcast, Pastor Michael Carrion described what happened in his Bronx church: "One thing that we've noticed in our [mental health] sessions is that if you come from a family of origin where there was already underlying trauma that was never dealt with, that resurges in this. It almost awakens things. A lot of our folks have been articulating, 'I didn't realize but now I know.'"

People in our churches have lost loved ones, and experienced job loss, isolation and anxiety. The wrongful killings of several Black men and women have shed new light on recurring trauma experienced by African Americans in our country. This moment calls the Church to get its mental and emotional health care approach together like never before. People turn to pastors and churches to care for their mental and emotional health. As the most accessed form of mental health care, may we rise to the occasion. **E**



A Major Head Wound

“ [George Floyd] helped push the baptism tub over, understanding that people were going to make a decision of faith and get baptized right there in the middle of the projects. He thought that was amazing. The things that he would say to young men always referenced that God trumps street culture. I think he wanted to see young men put guns down and have Jesus instead of the streets.”

Ronnie Lillard, who performs under the name Reconcile, in Christianity Today’s article, “George Floyd Left a Gospel Legacy in Houston”

“ America is a society suffering from the infliction of a major head wound. It is a wound that was self-inflicted 400 years ago through the institution of slavery, and has never healed. It is an issue foundational to America. The Black/white, slave/free legacy and current mindset must be dealt with before any peoples can be free in this nation.

This major head wound has had a band-aid placed over it. It has become an invisible conflagration just below the surface of American society. Over the ages, we have lived in a world where this underlying conflagration is masked by a thin patina of civility — a condition often confused with peace.

There are two realities: one lived by Black Americans, where we see the reality of the head wound, the smoldering conflagration, the patina of civility; the other enjoyed by white Americans, viewed as a meritocracy where all peoples have an opportunity to succeed.”

Colin Watson, acting executive director of Christian Reformed Church in North America, in his article “Beyond Thoughts & Prayers”

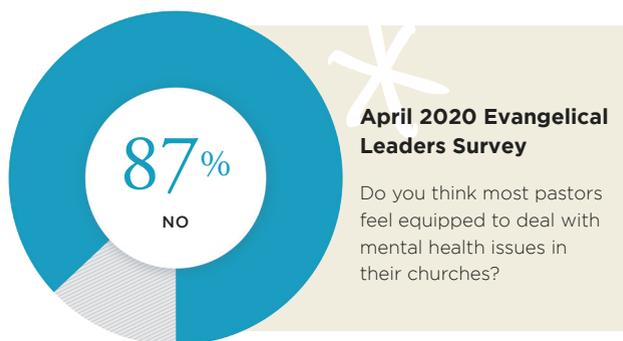
“When these videos stack one upon another and are added to our personal slights, a deep unsettling anger rises in the soul of a disinherited and beleaguered people. James Baldwin said, ‘To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.’”

Esau McCaulley, assistant professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, in The New York Times

Pastors and Mental Health Issues

“ Our world is more complex than ever and the vast array of mental illness can be overwhelming. I believe pastors need much more support in dealing with these issues and need to have a strong network of professionals that they can lean on as they minister to the needs in their congregations.”

Kimberly Reitman, executive director of World Methodist Evangelism, in the April 2020 Evangelical Leaders Survey





God Bless Immigrants

“ The reality is that immigrants are playing a critical role in front line efforts during this crisis, and all of our contributions to the economy and society are indispensable. Immigrant health care workers particularly fill roles as direct care workers, like home health and personal care aides. They fill shortages in rural areas, work nontraditional shifts, and provide critical language and cultural knowledge that other health care workers don't have In a time of pandemic, we are reminded of what matters, and that all of us carry an inherent dignity, as people made in the image of God. We have enough to fear; we don't need to fear each other.”

Tim Breene, CEO of World Relief in The Baltimore Sun

The Gospel of Jesus Christ confronts both personal and institutional sin, and calls for repentance and transformation for both. Thankful for the @NAEvangelicals's witness on racism in the Church and in the U.S.
Jim Wallis @jimwallis



Wise words from some Christ-like leaders. All I can say is, "Amen!" Watch "Message from NAE Leaders on Racial Justice & Equality" by @NAEvangelicals.
Brian Heinen @brhein



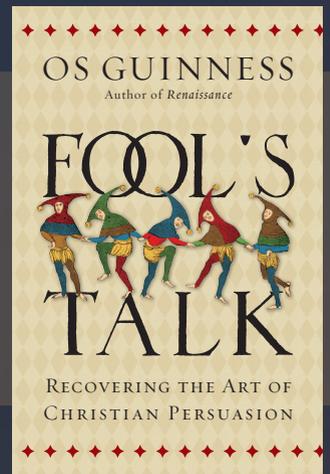
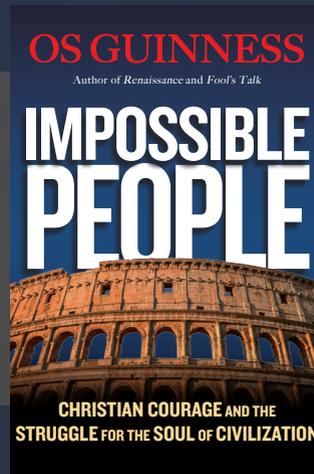
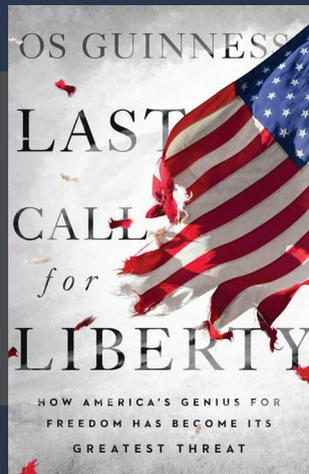
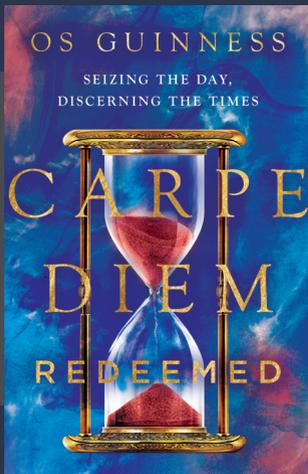
I love this #AllOfUs campaign started by @NatImmForum w/ support from @chefjoseandres @WCKitchen @NAEvangelicals @ERLC and many others to promote the contribution of immigrants in the fight against Covid-19 and to encourage a positive view toward immigrants serving w/ us all.
Alan Cross @AlanLCross

Might we see an incredible spiritual harvest in the coming weeks? New @NAEvangelicals president Walter Kim told @charnews he's hearing reports from around the country about churches sharing their online services w/ those asking questions about life & death.
Heather Sells @SellsHeather



Learn from Social Critic
and Bestselling Author
OS GUINNESS

Os Guinness is the author or editor of more than thirty books, including *Last Call for Liberty*, *Impossible People*, *Fool's Talk*, *Renaissance*, *A Free People's Suicide*, *The Call*, *Time for Truth*, and *The Case for Civility*. A frequent speaker and prominent social critic, he is a senior fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics and was the founder of the Trinity Forum.



New Book Coming April 2021: *The Magna Carta of Humanity*



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EVANGELICAL CALENDAR

Please join the evangelical community at these events hosted by the NAE and its members. **Your prayers are welcome too.**

Many of these events include downloadable resources for promotion and participation.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2020

OneAccord

Accord Network
[AccordNetwork.org](https://www.AccordNetwork.org)

The annual meeting of the Accord Network will be moved to a virtual content series during September and October, focusing on member care, marketing, back-office, research and leadership issues. Together they will learn best practices in their work to serve the vulnerable.

NOVEMBER 12-14, 2020

LifeWay Women's Leadership Forum

Hendersonville, TN

LifeWay Christian Resources

Women in church leadership will challenge one another, hear teaching from God's Word, and be equipped to lead.



JANUARY 6-9, 2021

Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents

West Palm Beach, FL

NAE President Walter Kim will keynote the annual gathering of evangelical seminary presidents in North America. This opportunity for seminary presidents and their spouses fosters fellowship and spiritual growth.



SEPTEMBER 24, 2020

Focus 2020

Missio Nexus
[MissioNexus.org/focus-2020](https://www.MissioNexus.org/focus-2020)

Join leaders of other missions organizations for this 3-hour live, interactive broadcast to reflect together on Jesus' command to disciple the nations.

NOVEMBER 12-13, 2020

National Preaching Conference

South Hamilton, MA

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
[GordonConwell.edu](https://www.GordonConwell.edu)

Come together with preachers, pastors and those training in ministry from around the world for the biennial National Preaching Conference designed to encourage resilience in ministry.

JANUARY 25-29, 2021

Christian Student Leadership Conference

Washington, DC

National Association of Evangelicals
[NAE.net/csdc](https://www.NAE.net/csdc)

The Christian Student Leadership Conference is a place where college students who care deeply about today's pressing issues come to learn and consider how to engage in public policy.

DECEMBER 2-3, 2020

Denominational Executives Retreat

National Association of Evangelicals
[NAE.net/denominational-executives-retreat](https://www.NAE.net/denominational-executives-retreat)

NAE denominational executives will spend time together virtually — learning from and encouraging one another in their unique positions of ministry.



✓ Lament and Action for Racial Injustice

The wrongful killings of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, Breonna Taylor in Kentucky, and George Floyd in Minnesota — among a longer list of names — illustrate severe racial injustices in the United States. The National Association of Evangelicals laments the recurring trauma experienced by African Americans.

Along with member denominations, nonprofits, churches and others, the NAE condemns racism and the violent abuse of power, calls for justice for victims and their families, and exhorts Christians to combat attitudes and systems that perpetuate racism. The NAE is grateful for law enforcement officers who seek to serve our communities.

Evangelical Christians believe racism is an affront to God who has created each individual in his image and with equal dignity. No race or ethnicity is greater or more valuable in God's eyes than another. When sustained by imbalances of power, racism moves beyond personal relationships to institutions and systems. It has unfairly

benefited some and burdened others simply because of the color of their skin.

Evangelicals believe that the good news of Jesus Christ has the power to break down racial and ethnic barriers. Racism should not only be addressed after tragic events. Our communities of faith must pursue sustained efforts towards racial justice and equality.



Discover racial justice resources, including a video message from NAE leaders, at [NAE.net/racialjustice](https://nae.net/racialjustice).

✓ Rising to the Coronavirus Challenge

The coronavirus has inflicted devastating consequences in the loss of life and in the disruption to ways of life. Its impact on churches has been significant; yet evangelical churches across America have responded with prayer, creativity, adaptability and compassion.

Christians and churches across denominations participated in the National Association of Evangelicals' call to prayer on Good Friday; call to lament when the United States passed 100,000 deaths from COVID-19; and call for churches to participate in Pray Together Sunday, asking God that the Church would be a light to a hurting world and rise up for such a time as this.

In partnership with the Humanitarian Disaster Institute (HDI) at Wheaton College, the NAE hosted weekly webinars and the Online Church Summit to help churches quickly adapt their church services

and ministries. The NAE also launched two websites (ReopeningTheChurch.com and NAEcarepackage.com) along with HDI to equip churches as they begin meeting in person and adjust to long-term ministry implications.



Find links to resources from NAE members and friends, along with all of NAE's COVID-19 resources, at [NAE.net/covid-19](https://nae.net/covid-19).

✔ Title VII Decision Leaves Unanswered Questions

The U.S. Supreme Court's Title VII decision in June redefined the word "sex" in a long-standing civil rights law. In a 6-3 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that employers are legally prohibited from considering sexual orientation or gender identity in their hiring and other terms and conditions of employment. The decision provides significant protections for LGBT people, but leaves unanswered how the right for people and organizations to exercise their religion — to live according to their deeply held convictions — will be safeguarded.

Judicial decisions by their nature are blunt instruments between two parties that do not allow for nuanced distinctions between types of employers, such as religious employers, and types of employment decisions. By reading into a venerable civil rights law newly discovered protected classes, the Supreme Court has teed up years of social conflict and court cases.

The National Association of Evangelicals is grateful that Justice Gorsuch's opinion includes a reaffirmation of the ministerial exception, Title VII religious employer exemption, and Religious Freedom Restoration Act protections. Since questions about religious freedom remain unanswered, the NAE will work in the courts and Congress to safeguard the freedom of religious organizations and individuals to follow their consciences and beliefs.

✔ Dreamers Still Need Permanent Legal Protections

In mid-June, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision that will, for the moment, keep Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in place. However, this administration or a future one could still terminate DACA, underscoring the continued need for legislation that protects Dreamers.

NAE President Walter Kim joined with other members of the Evangelical Immigration Table in advocating Congress to permanently resolve the situation for Dreamers. "We are thankful that, for now, the Supreme Court decision will allow continued protection for Dreamers. Immigration policy is complex, and some aspects may be controversial. But embracing the Dreamers who have grown up in our communities, schools and churches and welcoming them permanently as fellow citizens is a policy everyone can get behind. The Supreme Court has spoken, and now it is time for Congress to act with urgency," he said.



✔ Supreme Court Prohibits Discrimination Against Religion in Public Benefit Programs

In a religious freedom victory, the Supreme Court ruled in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* that government may not exclude religious groups when administering general benefit programs. The case involved a state income tax credit for donations to scholarship funds used to enable low-income students to attend K-12 private schools.

Based on a state constitutional provision that bars state aid to religious organizations, the Montana Department of Revenue prohibited the use of the scholarship funds by students attending religious schools, while they allowed scholarship funds to be applied to other private schools. When affected parents filed suit claiming this was a violation of their First Amendment Free Exercise rights, the Montana State Supreme Court ordered the scholarship program to be shut down.

The National Association of Evangelicals joined in an amicus brief that argued that the Free Exercise Clause requires government to be neutral toward religion. The Supreme Court's ruling now offers parents more options when choosing schools for their children as they access scholarship programs.



Steve West is executive director of Evangelical Chaplains Commission.



Chaplains and Our PTSD

Awareness of Vicarious Trauma Started My Healing Journey

I recently saw a news segment reporting on the work of chaplains in the COVID-19 environment. It noted that chaplains are becoming the front line of faith-based ministry. Truthfully, chaplains have always been on the front lines of ministry. Whether it be military, healthcare, law enforcement or institutional chaplain environments, chaplains are our spiritual first-responders — many times putting their own lives at risk. Their ministry also puts them at risk for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), among other mental health challenges. I know that firsthand.

The Mission

Chaplains minister to people during the worst times of their lives. Those affected in or after a crisis are emotionally charged or in some state of shock. It is a time when people are most vulnerable. Spiritual care from a chaplain during the crisis usually forever endears them to the ministry. No more significant impact can be made on a person's life than that of helping that person in a time of crisis. Many people credit the faith interaction as critical in their healing.

Being a crisis chaplain is to be bombarded with negative emotions: anger, fear and grief. Receiving those emotional

states multiple times is a recipe for mental health issues in the chaplain's life. A chaplain's mission to others is to provide comfort, hope and stability during the crisis. The mission to themselves is to draw strength from God as they navigate one personal crisis at a time.

The Challenge

The problem is that there is rarely time to grieve with so many interactions in such a short period. In situations other than compound crises, there is ample time to process grief, so it has less effect on the chaplain. Unaddressed grief results in unresolved emotional issues. The cumulative impact grows



to the point where it can compromise a chaplain's ability to minister effectively.

Crisis intervention is an inevitable part of every day for military chaplains while serving in a war zone. They not only fear for those they are called to serve, but they also fear for their own lives. The impact on their own mental health is intensified. Most ministers have great sympathy and empathy towards those to whom they minister. Continuing to carry the pain of other people is emotionally tiring. Coupled with the extra load chaplains have in dealing with their own anxiety, grief and depression, the strain can leave them more susceptible to emotional disorders.

“Heal Thyself”

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the most common manifestation of emotional disorders in caregivers. What makes it so challenging is the very ministry and faith used to help others. A chaplain's role, rank and knowledge can be the

The higher in rank we go, the less we are willing to admit what we perceive to be a weakness.

very things that work against identifying disorder in their life. Chaplains must overcome these obstacles to seeking help. In medical circles, it is summed up as “physician heal thyself.” We assume being examples of strong faith is enough to protect us. “Surely, if I'm able to identify and help others with PTSD, then I must be okay.” “I teach others coping mechanisms they can use in combating the effects of PTSD.” The higher in rank we go, the less we are willing to admit what we perceive to be a weakness. Our conclusions are based on faulty reasoning.

Before being diagnosed with PTSD, I didn't want to get help because I didn't think there was anything wrong with me. I could readily see the effects and identify it in everybody else. I would say, “I know the coping techniques. I know what to do if I feel depressed.” And yet the truth is I was exhibiting all the criteria for PTSD. I was thankful, but not happy. I was grateful because I made it back from deployment when so many didn't.

Unaware, Not in Denial

Not admitting you have a PTSD problem isn't always about being in denial, it is about being unaware. Having bad breath affects the people around you. Most of the time, you are clueless about the smell and the impact you're making on people around you. Putting it another way, what is something that everyone else can see, but you never can? The answer is your own face. Everyone sees your face except you. All we see is the reflection of our face in a mirror or photograph. We may not even be aware of our reactions. We can't see ourselves roll our eyes or make a facial expression. That is why we have our own interpretation of our words, expressions and actions. Others may have an entirely different interpretation by what they surmise from the reactions on our face.

In a recent survey of chaplains of the Evangelical Chaplains Commission, the following information was reported:

- 22 percent have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- 26 percent have not been diagnosed, but believe they have PTSD.
- 45 percent have experienced anxiety outside of the normal levels.
- 7 percent are currently taking antidepressants, anti-anxiety or psychotropic drugs.
- 26 percent have sought help for a mental disorder during their chaplaincy career.
- 15 percent have considered or attempted suicide during their chaplaincy career.

Mental health disorders are very real in the lives of many chaplains. While some have sought help and received it, others still cling to the notion that they can't have them. During my treatment, the psychiatrist told me numerous times that my biggest hurdle was not giving myself permission to have PTSD. It was not until I gave myself permission and accepted that it wasn't a weakness that things began to change for the better. My prayer is that many others suffering the effects of PTSD and other mental illnesses will give themselves permission. **E**

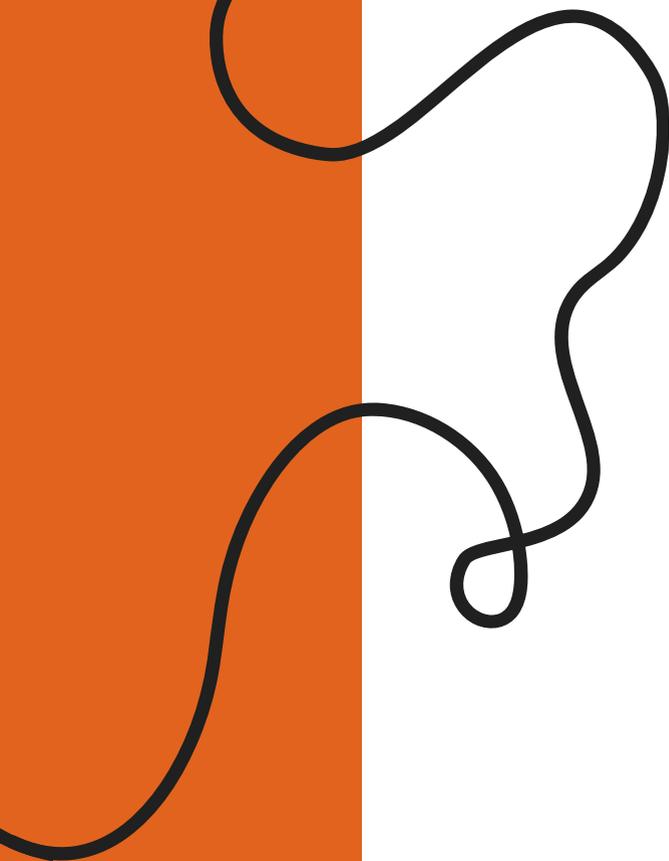


Diane Langberg, Ph.D., is a practicing psychologist working with trauma survivors, caregivers and clergy around the world and is the author of *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, forthcoming in October 2020.



*Today's Crises Have
Multiplied and Exposed Trauma*

How Will the Church Respond?



We are living in times of trauma, surrounded by confusion, threats and unrest. The COVID-19 pandemic and outcries against racial injustice profoundly impact our world, our nation, our churches, our neighborhoods and our homes. It is disruptive and unsettling. And if we're honest, we feel vulnerable. In fact, we *are* vulnerable.

But the threats are not merely external. We face internal threats as well. Many are anxious or depressed or grieving. Others are full of anger. There is no end in sight. The pandemic has exposed and escalated other crises. Confronting death, living isolated lives, and experiencing continual fear have significantly increased the level of trauma. Depression, suicide, addictions and post-traumatic stress disorder have multiplied. Our mental health systems are not prepared for this onslaught. Economic losses will only exacerbate these problems. Even if the pandemic ends and a vaccine helps prevent its return, mental health crises will likely continue for years.

At the same time, we are seeing a rise in sexual abuse and domestic violence, abuse fueled by desire for power and control. As lives careen out of control, jobs are lost, isolation frustrates, rage deepens and violence in the home increases. Research has demonstrated that this abuse damages not only each occupant of a home, but destructively impacts future generations. Since child sexual abuse is most frequently reported by teachers and other professionals, quarantine results in a deadly combination of increased abuse and fewer reports.

Understanding Trauma

As our understanding of trauma has grown in recent years, we have come to realize that many people do not experience trauma as a one-time event, but live with relentless, ongoing trauma, literally marinating in evil. Ongoing sexual abuse of any kind traumatizes humans, shaping them in grievous ways. The stressors are repetitive and chronic, usually involving direct harm and/or neglect by those who should have been caregivers. Under these conditions, the workings of individuals' brains and bodies, how they understand themselves and organize their thoughts, how they label the world, regulate their emotions,

and conduct their relationships, become deeply rooted in the life-destroying acid of trauma.

As a result of chronic, interpersonal abuse, an individual develops vigilance, constantly anticipating danger, anxiety and terror. A person's energy is all bent *by necessity* toward coping and surviving rather than toward flourishing. Evils of domestic violence, verbal battering and systemic racism all produce fear, hiding and self-protection. Traumatized people often experience betrayal by those who should be caring and nurturing. They are often unable to find assistance and safety.

In all the world the two safest places ought to be the church and the home. Statistics suggest otherwise. Today there are many people in our churches living in poor and dangerous neighborhoods, unemployed and now quarantined with violent and sexually abusive individuals. Many people in our churches who live in safe neighborhoods with plenty of money and good jobs are now quarantined with violent and sexually abusive family members. Trauma crosses all lines. It

The God of truth and light speaks through today's difficult and frightening circumstances, inviting us to examine ourselves.

not only shapes victims but also teaches them lies about who they are and who God is.

Exposed by Crisis

In "Disciples Indeed," Oswald Chambers said this: "Crisis reveals character. When we are put to the test the hidden resources of our character are revealed exactly." We are now exposed. We have not confronted sexual abuse in homes and churches. We have minimized the evil of domestic violence and have sent victims home to live with ongoing abuse and cruelty — things that break our Father's heart, things he hates. Instead of being a refuge for vulnerable sheep, we have often protected wolves. We have used, discarded and crushed precious people knit together by our God. We have marred our God's exquisite artwork based on mere physical characteristics *designed by him*. We have denied dignity to

image bearers. These crises expose our arrogance, our ungodly divisions, our self-protection and our failures to care for *the least of these*. The God of truth and light speaks through today's difficult and frightening circumstances, inviting us to examine ourselves.

Toward a Christ-like Response

Our first response to this tsunami of crises needs to be humility, lament and repentance. If Jesus is truly our Lord, then the only right response to him is love and obedience. We ought to be on the frontlines for those hurting by the side of the road and those suffering in our churches. We need to acknowledge our failures in these areas. We have failed to follow our Lord who came to us, *we who are the other side*. We have failed to care for those suffering from abuse and racism. He is the God who crosses over. Our first response is to be on our faces before him, seeking his light and truth to illuminate where we have chosen our own comfort, positions and personal preferences rather than obedience to him.

Secondly, we need to listen and learn. Do you know what it is like to be terrified and abused in your own home? Or what it is like to be sexually abused or raped? Or to raise children who, because of the skin God gave them, are highly vulnerable to abuse, threats and death? Or to watch as the perpetrators of these ungodly and evil deeds are protected? Have you ever asked? Learn about the many ways your church could partner with local domestic violence shelters to provide resources for victims. Simply feeding and clothing an increasing number of victims and their children is an enormous task. Why not call and ask how your church might help? Ask about trainings they offer to ensure your help for victims is not harmful. Your church should know about hotlines you can call and disseminate that information. Learn about sexual abuse. There are men and women in your churches who have been abused — some within a church — and have never had anyone walk with them to help reverse the horror and damage of such abuse.

Non-Black pastors, connect with African American pastors in your area and learn from them. You want to know what it is like to live in their skin as our God lived in ours. We are fellow members of the family of God. How is it that the global world sees more clearly than his family the systemic



racism we have created, denied and protected? Sit at the feet of those who are suffering and learn from them. Do not pass by. Go to the other side of the road and learn how to help.

Signs of the Word Made Flesh

Jesus demonstrated in the flesh what a human being bearing God's image is to look like. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us ... full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). He crossed national, racial, gender and religious lines. He bent down, took on our skin, and became like us. He entered into our sufferings and deprivations and sorrows. He sat with the rejected, despised and abused. *He was their refuge.* He called leaders in the house of God to follow him, to look like him. Many refused. They preferred power and position and protected their many resources. Our God is calling to us in this whirlwind of troubles as well. Will we listen and follow?

The Word who became flesh said it is better to die than to hinder one who is little, vulnerable. He tells us that when we feed those who hunger (for safety as well as food), give water to the parched, embrace and include the stranger in our home, clothe the vulnerable, give care to the sick and to those in prison (or imprisoned by abuse or racism), we have done these things to him. *What we do to the least, we do to the Highest.*

Dear Church, as we follow Jesus in caring for the least of these, let us heed Aslan's words to the children he sent on a rescue mission in C.S. Lewis's "The Silver Chair:" "Remember the signs. Say them to yourself in the morning and ... at night and ... the middle of the night. ... whatever strange things happen ... let *nothing* turn your mind from following the signs."

May the crises of our day reveal in us signs of the character of our Lord made flesh. May others witness the sign of our great love and humble service for the abused and for our neighbors. May we, like Christ, embody the great love of our great Father to a traumatized world. **E**

Recommended Resources from Diane Langberg

BOOKS

Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores, Diane Langberg (New Growth Press, 2015)

Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse, Diane Langberg (Xulon Press, 2003)

On the Threshold of Hope: Opening the Door to Hope and Healing for Survivors of Sexual Abuse, Diane Langberg (Tyndale House Publishing, 1999)

The Spiritual Impact of Sexual Abuse (minibook), Diane Langberg (New Growth Press, 2017)

Naming Our Abuse: God's Pathway to Healing for Male Sexual Abuse Survivors, Andrew Schmutzer (Kregel Publications, 2016)

Domestic Abuse: Recognize, Respond, Rescue, Darby Strickland (P&R Publishing, 2018)

Unholy Charade: Unmasking the Domestic Abuser in the Church, Jeff Crippen (Justice Keepers Publishing, 2015)

When Dad Hurts Mom: Helping Your Children Heal the Wounds of Abuse, Lundy Bancroft (Berkley, 2005)

Color of Compromise, Jemar Tisby (Zondervan, 2019)

Healing Racial Trauma, Sheila Wise Rowe (InterVarsity Press, 2020)

DOCUMENTARY

Unchained [YouTube.com/watch?v=jhnN65x53](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhnN65x53)

TRAINING

Trauma Healing Institute [TraumaHealingInstitute.org](https://www.TraumaHealingInstitute.org)

Beyond Disaster Program [BeyondDisaster.bible](https://www.BeyondDisaster.bible)

WEBSITES

Godly Response to Abuse in a Christian Environment (G.R.A.C.E.) [NetGrace.org](https://www.NetGrace.org)

Diane Langberg [DianeLangberg.com](https://www.DianeLangberg.com)



Joe Padilla is an ordained minister and co-founder of Mental Health Grace Alliance.



How Science and Faith Work Together for Better Mental and Emotional Health

The coronavirus crisis has not just impacted our physical health. As we experience a “collective trauma” from COVID-19, the medical community has signaled that we are now in the midst of a mental health pandemic. Current findings reveal that up to 50 percent of the U.S. population have experienced a negative mental health impact from coronavirus, not to mention other trauma-inducing events.

In churches, the topic of “mental and emotional health” is trending across pulpits. Yet due to a lack of mental health education and training, churches have historically been ill-equipped in mental health support. I’m here to discuss the opportunity churches have to be part of a new future where mental and emotional health is amplified so that thousands can receive real and lasting help. However, to do this, churches will have to innovate by integrating science with our faith

in Christ. I know this works, because this approach is what transformed my wife’s mental health journey.

“If There is Grace, Make It Practical”

After 10 years on the mission field, my wife’s prolonged battle with depression and anxiety eventually brought us back to the states. Back here, we started receiving extra pastoral ministry care and worked with mental health professionals.

Yet, after two years, she didn't progress, and her mental health eventually debilitated our marriage and family. We had to step down from ministry.

Like the despair of many during this pandemic, the hopelessness set in quickly with the loss, isolation and uncertainty. That's when my prayer changed from "Lord, give me grace" to "Lord, if there's grace, make it practical!" My curiosity led me to study the science and how it integrated with Jesus, and I learned a whole-health approach that led to the breakthrough she needed.

Learning the Neuroscience of Grace

As I studied the brain and body connection, I learned that people who struggle with depression and anxiety have an overactive amygdala (i.e., the threat center of the brain). This meant that most of the blood flow in my wife's brain was going to the amygdala, triggering a flood of stress hormones, a heightened nervous system, a danger response mode in her cells, and much more. In this state, the brain goes into critical thinking, which leads to a lot of spiritual scrupulosity (i.e., fault-finding guilt). Over a long period of time, this whole neuro-physical experience leads to a neuro-endocrine shutdown, causing fatigue, lack of motivation, and even a numbness to faith. Hopelessness is a brain and body state, not just a willed decision.

Hopelessness is a brain and body state, not just a willed decision.

As I learned about a whole-health lifestyle (e.g., nutrition, exercise, schedule, etc.), we began to make changes toward this, and my wife started to move out of her state of distress. In other words, learning the neuroscience helped me create a practical, graceful environment for my wife and our family, and we regained strength together.

Learning the Psychology of Grace

After hearing my wife's remarkable story, an experienced psychologist asked me if I could pinpoint one of the main

things that helped my wife recover so dramatically. It's hard to narrow it down, but I told him: "I took away the expectation for her to be healed." I remember telling my wife, "Honey, you don't have to do anything to get better. You don't have to get better so we can go back into ministry. Let's take the next two years and just live our lives. That's it."

When you look at the psychology and neuroscience, people in distress need a reaffirmed feeling of safety, control and belonging before any expectation of behavior. Isn't that what we see throughout Jesus' teachings and interactions (e.g., the woman at the well and the woman caught in adultery)?

I saw this beautifully worked out through Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which builds upon that foundation and empowers individuals with practical tools to diffuse stress. This type of therapy recalibrates the brain's neurotransmitters (i.e., neuroplasticity) and blood flow while activating the parasympathetic nervous system toward rest, calm and healing. As we incorporated these new principles and practices, we made our home both an environment and an ecosystem of grace that empowered our us in our living hope (1 Peter 1:3). I can go on with all kinds of interesting research, but the bottom line is: Grace has a practical healing, a psychoneuroimmunological impact on our whole-health well-being.

It was challenging, but a year and a half later, my wife said, "I feel like myself again." She had gone from five medications down to one, and 14 years later, she is still thriving. At this point, two different mental health professionals told me, "Joe, she is a clinical miracle. From where she was to now ... you just don't see that very often."

A Pillar for Mental and Emotional Health

Millions are searching for help, and with the right tools, the Church can be one of the main pillars for mental health support. The Church is already set up to succeed and even see clinical results. For almost 10 years, we've been working with churches to build simple mental health support, and they're seeing significant impact with research to back it up.

This post-pandemic future is an opportunity for church leaders to innovate and move mental and emotional health from a silent, stigmatized confusion to a practical, grace-filled solution. 🌱



Stephen Grcevich, M.D., is president and founder of Key Ministry, and author of "Mental Health and the Church."

Is Mental Illness on the Rise?

With much fanfare, The Washington Post reported at the beginning of summer that a third of U.S. adults are experiencing depression, anxiety or a combination of both conditions amid the coronavirus pandemic. Recent considerations aside, has mental illness been on the rise, or has increased awareness in past decades led to more diagnoses? Well, it's complicated.

Consistent Overall Rates

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), nearly 20 percent of adults experience at least one mental illness at any point in time. As reported by the National Alliance on Mental Illness, for children and teens, approximately one in six experienced a mental disorder in the most recent year studied. All told, more than 50 million Americans are affected. Those numbers sound shocking. But the percentage of the population impacted hasn't changed a great deal in recent decades.

A 2019 study published in the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* suggested that increases in mental illness in adults were primarily a result of a steady rise in mood disorders and suicide-related outcomes among persons born between the early 1980s and late 1990s. The NIMH reports that more than one in four 18-25 year olds were diagnosed with a mental health disorder in 2017, compared to one in seven adults over the age of 50. Rates of depression in the 18-25 age group increased 63 percent between 2009 and 2017, and serious psychological distress in this age group increased by 71 percent with less consistent and weaker increases among adults ages 26 and over.

Changes to Type and Severity

Among children and teens, the overall prevalence of mental illness hasn't changed much over time, but the type and severity of illness have changed, according to research published by the *Journal of American Medical Association*. Between 2005 and 2018, depression and anxiety have become significantly more common, while behavioral disorders are somewhat less common. Rates of depression in teens increased 52 percent between 2005 and 2017 (from 8.7 percent to 13.2 percent). When compared to 2005, contemporary youth are more likely to receive mental health treatment, experience more treatment sessions, and spend more time in psychiatric hospitals.

While overall rates of mental illness aren't increasing, rates of suicide are clearly on the rise, having increased by 31 percent between 2001 and 2017. Even more alarming, rates of suicide increased by 56 percent for persons between the ages of 10-24 from 2007 to 2017. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death among all Americans between the ages of 10 and 34, and the fourth leading cause of death among persons ages 35-54, according to the NIMH. In churches, there



was a spike in mental health awareness in the aftermath of the deaths of Matthew Warren (son of Rick and Kay Warren) and prominent pastors, including Jarrid Wilson and Andrew Stocklein.

Rates of depression and anxiety clearly appear to be increasing among teens and young adults, and suicide rates are increasing for everyone, especially for teens and adults under the age of 25, even if overall rates of mental illness in the general population are relatively stable.

Why the Increases for Younger People?

The larger question is why the younger age group is so impacted. Many blame ubiquitous smartphones and social media. Yet smartphones often function as an indispensable social lifeline. Are there other plausible explanations for increases in

depression, anxiety and suicide seen in teens and young adults?

People are more socially isolated and lonely than ever before. Our former Surgeon General considers loneliness to be a greater public health crisis than either obesity or smoking, an alarming thought given the prospect of another extended round of quarantining and social isolation this fall and winter from COVID-19.

We're losing our ability to respond appropriately to adversity. Research from Arizona State University suggests that resiliency following stressful events is in short supply. According to the Centers for Disease Control, four of the five most common factors associated with suicide include relationship problems, a crisis in the past or coming two weeks, a physical health problem or a job/financial problem. People who lack the resources to respond to stressful life events are at greater risk of depression or suicide.

Increases in suicide rates are a natural consequence of a

culture beginning to embrace physician-assisted suicide. The media glamorize the lives of people like Brittany Maynard, a young woman with brain cancer who overdosed on medication prescribed by her doctor.

An article in the Southern Medical Journal shows that suicide rates are significantly higher in the nine U.S. states where physician-assisted suicide is legal.

Rates of mental illness reflect challenges teens and young adults face in responding to the demands of their environment. Pressure to succeed academically is immense when the opportunities to earn a living are diminished for those without a college education. Many go out into the world carrying an enormous debt burden. More struggle to become independent from their parents.

The Church's Response

A critical issue for churches is to consider how the experience of mental illness impacts attendance at worship services and participation in small groups, Christian education and missional outreach. According to a 2018 study from Clemson University, families with children or youth with common mental health conditions are much less likely to set foot in a church. That likelihood decreases by:

- 73 percent if a child has depression;
- 55 percent if a child has conduct disorder;
- 45 percent if a child has an anxiety disorder; and
- 19 percent if a child has ADD or ADHD.

Is there a relationship between the rise in mental illness among millennials and the precipitous drop in identification with Christianity among members of that generation? Earlier research from LifeWay showed that 55 percent of adult non-attenders believe that people with mental illness aren't welcome at church.

Over 50 million fellow citizens live with conditions impacting their ability to work, learn and connect with other people, including their brothers and sisters in the church. Expressions of love and concern from evangelicals is a measure of the authenticity of our witness for Christ. **E**



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Kristen Kansiewicz is a licensed mental health counselor and founder of Church Therapy Associates.

Meeting Mental Health Needs in a Church Context

However you choose to describe the impact of the coronavirus on our world, it's been hard. It's been hard on pastors and church staff, and it's been hard on congregations. You may be considering how your church can respond to the mental health needs in your community. But wait. Before launching a response, consider these best practices.

Clarify

Be clear on what type of services you are providing. Are you offering long-term therapy or a brief mental health check-in? Are you doing some form of mental health assessment? Or perhaps you are providing increased pastoral counseling during this time. Even more likely, you've got volunteers who want to be there for those who need to talk. Whatever direction you choose to go, name your ministry or counseling service appropriately. Write up a one-page disclosure statement or informed consent that summarizes what you are providing and what you are not. Being clear on the boundaries up front can avoid a lot of complicated situations down the road.

Train

Before offering any mental health ministry, counseling or assessment, be sure that those who are performing these services are trained to do so. Churches and pastors have been sued after providing mental health services that went beyond the scope of their training. While it might sound nice to commission willing congregants to be a listening ear, have they received training in suicide prevention? What about boundaries or confidentiality? These are just a few of the many areas that require specialized training. Licensed counselors

who are supervising a ministry or offering a clinical service need to operate within ethical guidelines and state regulations. Saddleback Church's mental health ministry provides a good framework, along with Stephen Ministries.

Connect

The good news is that most areas have mental health services nearby, and many therapeutic services are now online. Christian counselors that may have been inaccessible prior to this time may now be available to help your congregation. Do some research to identify the mental health services in your area and in your state. Find out who has openings for new clients, what type of health insurance they take or what fee they charge, and which platforms they are using for telehealth. You can also build bridges by offering words of encouragement or inviting these counselors to speak to your church.

A final note: Be sure to take care of your own mental health. If you are serving in ministry, you've most likely put a lot of effort into meeting the sudden, unexpected needs of others. Pause to assess your own mental health. You aren't alone. **E**



Make sure your church has a list of hotlines available to help those in immediate danger. Find a starter list at [NAE.net/hotlines](https://www.nae.net/hotlines).



On Pastoring with a Mental Illness

Along with her husband, Brittany Jones pastors Motivation Church outside of Richmond, Virginia, where she teaches and leads worship. Motivation Church is a 3-year-old, diverse church plant of the AG Church Multiplication Network. Prior to planting Motivation Church, the couple pastored at Cornerstone Assembly of God in North Chesterfield, Virginia. Due to Brittany's transparency about her past trauma and current struggles, Motivation Church has become a healing center for many attendees.

HOW DID YOU FIRST REALIZE THAT YOU HAD A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE?

I've struggled with depression most of my teenage years, but I never had a name to what I was experiencing. I didn't know what to call it, I just knew that I battled with sadness. When I was 26 years old, an event happened that triggered extreme bouts of depression — highs and lows and anxiety that would last for weeks, even months at a time. After a season of walking through this alone, I saw a therapist who over time referred me to a psychiatrist. My psychiatrist walked with me

over a period of time before my official diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED STIGMA FROM OTHER CHRISTIANS DUE TO YOUR BIPOLAR DIAGNOSIS?

Yes! Initially Christians don't know what to do or say when it comes to mental illness. Christians tend to be very limited in their understanding. I would get the cliché and blanket statements like: "Just pray and things will change" or "You



have a choice to be happy or sad.” For these reasons, I kept quiet about it for a while.

HOW CAN CHURCH LEADERS REDUCE STIGMA AROUND MENTAL ILLNESS IN THEIR CHURCHES?

Speak about it more, and when you do, try not to narrow it down to three points and a prayer. Mental illness is complex and deserves time and energy to be explained. Educate people how to love those who suffer. Give resources and be on board with recovery from the pulpit.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN MESSAGES ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH THAT SHOULD BE SHARED FROM THE PULPIT?

- It’s ok to not be ok.
- It’s ok to seek help.
- God is not upset with you, nor are you being punished for your suffering.
- You are not alone.
- Take care of yourself. Self-care is important and often forgotten.

WHAT ARE SOME GOOD BIBLICAL TEXTS FOR PREACHING ON MENTAL ILLNESS?

I think it’s important to offer hope to those who may be struggling with mental illness. A good starting place is found in 2 Corinthians 12:9: “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.” This is a reminder that mental illness is not a death sentence to your calling but an invitation to his grace.

YOU HAVE BEEN TRANSPARENT ABOUT YOUR PAST TRAUMA, AS WELL AS YOUR MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES. HOW HAS THIS TRANSPARENCY IMPACTED THE MINISTRY OF MOTIVATION CHURCH?

From the beginning of Motivation Church, we wanted our church to be a safe house for people, a healing place. I had never heard a pastor share current struggles from the stage, and I didn’t want to feel like I needed to hide my story for the sake of leadership or hierarchy. Through our openness we

have found that more people at our church are willing to get help and seek health, because they have been given permission through our story to share their experiences. Transparency and vulnerability have made Travis (my husband) and I incredibly relatable to those who walk into Motivation Church and in our lives.

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO CHRISTIANS WHO BELIEVE THAT MENTAL ILLNESS, INCLUDING DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY, CAN BE CURED THROUGH POSITIVE THINKING, READING THE BIBLE AND PRAYING MORE?

I totally believe that God can heal me, and I believe that Scripture and prayer is necessary fuel to walk this journey out. I am often encouraged to find joy in the midst of the struggle. But I don’t think that is where we stop. People who make statements like “It must be a sin issue or lack of faith” speak from a place of ignorance and lack of understanding. I speak out now about mental illness to give voice to those who don’t know what to say and to offer awareness to those who lack understanding.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MEDICATION AND THERAPY IN HEALING FROM MENTAL ILLNESS?

I was initially apprehensive about medication, because I wasn’t sure if it was a necessary next step in my recovery. It had to be explained to me plainly, and I spent some time praying about whether or not this was the right move for me. One doctor explained it through an analogy: “Someone with cancer goes to an oncologist to get treatment and start chemo or some regiment of medication to beat the cancer. In the same way, it is necessary for some struggling with mental illness to see a doctor who can help them with the chemical imbalance.” This helped shape my decision moving forward and has been the best decision for me.

WHAT DO YOU WANT CHRISTIANS WHO STRUGGLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS TO KNOW?

God has not forgotten about you! Be kind to yourself. This journey can sometimes feel very lonely and isolating. I want to encourage those who struggle with mental illness to continue to do hard things. Those feelings and rough moments won’t last forever. **E**



Being Kintsugi People

In my office is a piece of art given to me by colleagues at church. The small, delicate bowl is made in the kintsugi (literally, “gold mending”) style, which is the Japanese craft of rejoining broken pottery pieces with lacquer and powdered gold or silver. The artist doesn’t hide the imperfections but rather embraces the fractures and illuminates them with golden or silvery seams. Brokenness is not rejected but remade.

Sometimes during the day, I pause from the work of ministry to look at this bowl, in order to remember what kind of work is ministry. We are new creations remade from the broken pieces of old creation. When we encounter the challenge of mental and emotional health, we feel this labor acutely.

Elijah was a tenacious, even ferocious, prophet. With the greatest of prophetic bravura, he defied and defeated 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah (1 Kings 18:20–40). While this story inspires me, the next one connects with me deeply.

After his greatest spiritual victory, in which he called down fire from heaven, the rugged prophet was overcome with exhaustion not elation. When Queen Jezebel issued a threat, Elijah ran for his life. He left his servant behind and traveled into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.” Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep (1 Kings 19:3–5).

Elijah was having a kintsugi moment. He was shattered by exhaustion and the loneliness of his ministry. Anxiety settled into depression, and he simply laid down to die. In that

moment of mental and emotional brokenness, the Lord fed him and let him sleep some more (v. 6), brought him to the place of revelation (v. 8), spoke to him in tenderness (v. 12), and told him that he was not alone in the good fight (v. 18). God took the shattered pieces and mended them.

In his classic work, “The Wounded Healer,” Henri Nouwen offers a profound assessment of ministry and of human existence:

Nobody escapes being wounded. We all are wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally or spiritually. The main question is not “How can we hide our wounds?” so we don’t have to be embarrassed, but “How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?” When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.

Elijah and kintsugi pottery remind me that we don’t have to hide our brokenness — emotional or otherwise — but can offer them to the Master Craftsman to make us jars of clay for his glory (2 Corinthians 4:7). **E**



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