



UN | BROKEN

A SERIES BY
CROSSWALK CHURCH

Un/Broken

A series on Mental Health and Scripture

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A quick note:

This series guide is a bit of a departure from the normal writing style and contribution to the series guides. We have asked some Mental Health Professionals to help us with some of the material. Therefore, the voice and the material may seem a little different. It might be a bit less devotional, but yet still incredibly relevant and meaningful. Some days have questions, some do not, but we will continue to give you space to reflect upon the writing that you read each day.

We understand that everyone's journey with mental health is different, and if any of this is triggering or too much, we would ask that you feel free to seek professional help.

First and foremost, we want you to know that there is no shame in asking for help and no shame in seeking healing.

Thank you for entering into this journey with us. May God continually bless you and yours as we all seek wholeness for God's Kingdom and our lives.

Dr. Timothy Gillespie
Teaching Pastor, Crosswalk Global Network of Churches

Introduction

According to the National Association of Mental Health, 1 in 5 Americans will report suffering from a mental health illness. In truth, it's likely a higher number because people often underreport when it comes to mental health for a variety of reasons like shame, fear, or embarrassment.

One might think the numbers can't be as high for church-going Christians. The assumption is that those with a strong faith should experience peace, joy, purpose, and connectedness. However, just as many Christians report struggling with mental health issues, which is also underreported for many of the same reasons save one, Christians face more stigmas than non-church-going people because of the misunderstanding that a strong faith should cancel out mental health challenges. And it's not just church members; according to Lifeway Research, 23 percent of pastors acknowledge they have personally struggled with a mental illness, but only 49 percent say they've spoken to their congregation about mental health.

You may have heard that Abraham Lincoln, former president and man of faith, battled depression. You may not have heard that Mother Teresa, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who impacted millions of lives around the globe, also

struggled with depression. Though never diagnosed, her writings to her spiritual director showed a woman who did so much for God but rarely sensed God's presence and often struggled to find peace.

I, too, have had my struggle with mental health. Seventeen years ago, I was diagnosed with a general anxiety disorder with a side of depression (those two often go together). The first two years after my diagnosis were some of the darkest times of my life, but with lots of counseling, the help of a physician, the support of my family, my journey of faith as supported by close friends and a father in my faith, and a lot of hard work, I'm in a much better space, and I continue to grow in an understanding of my challenges and my faith.

In this new series that we're calling Un/Broken, we'll look at some of the myths related to mental health and faith and then tackle stories and characters from Scripture that we think relate to mental health. We hope that as we go through this journey, we'll at least accomplish three things:

We'll help remove the stigma many have around mental health, especially involving our communities of faith, and create spaces where it's encouraged to talk about these things.

We'll debunk some of the false expectations around mental health and faith and help you

see that addressing mental health issues must be done on a spiritual level, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

And finally, through this series, we'll all recognize that though we are broken people, we have hope in a Savior who experienced what we do and can empathize with our journeys. And that same Savior desperately wants to help us find healing here on earth as we journey toward the ultimate day of restoration when we see him face to face.

Our guiding metaphor for this series comes from the Japanese art form called kintsugi. Developed centuries ago, this process takes broken pottery and restores it using a special tree sap lacquer dusted with gold, silver, or platinum. The gold highlighted the breaks and fractures instead of hiding them and pretending they didn't exist. The Japanese believed this was a beautiful way to celebrate the history of the pottery, cracks, and all.

Our human stories are similar. We all have our wounds and scars from our time on earth. When we meet Christ and join a community of faith, restoration is possible, but there can still be scars from the journey. However, those scars often serve not just as reminders of our healing but as opportunities for us to help others in their own paths towards healing.

We hope you'll follow along each day, and listen in each week as we illuminate what it means to be a people who are truly, Un/Broken.

Paddy McCoy, David Ferguson, Timothy Gillespie, and the Un/Broken Series Guide Team

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Week 1

Day 1

THE MYTHS OF FAITH & MENTAL HEALTH

Myth #1 - Disorders aren't for everyone

First, thank you to my wife, Tricia McCoy, for her contribution to this week's thoughts. Tricia is a licensed social worker who serves as a mental health facility counselor.

Secondly, I write about what I know, as you'll see unfold as I contribute to the first week of this series guide. About 17 years ago, I was diagnosed with a mental health challenge that threatened to take my life. By the grace of God, and with an incredible team of support and an incredible church, I am here today and thriving. Though I still have my scars and bad days, I have more good than bad ones, and I lean more on God than I ever have before. But I'm also aware of the many myths that plague mental health and those of us who profess faith in Christ. So, let's read on and learn together.

The doctor looked me in the eyes and said the words that didn't surprise me, but at the same time, words that still shook me to my core, "Paddy, you have a general anxiety disorder."

He indeed was one of the best doctors I could have ever asked for because during my time as his patient, he took time to be with me in my

diagnosis. This is the first lesson to learn in treating our mental health: **your care team is critical.** Whether it's your physician, counselor, spiritual leader, or support team (i.e., family, friends, etc.), getting the right people around you is critical to healing and growth.

As the news began to sink in, my physician said that disorders are just how you and I have learned to adapt to a broken world. This means, in theory, that we all have a disorder of some kind or another. Maybe it's diagnosable or not, but either way, we've all had to learn to adapt to a world full of pain, loss, abuse, divorce, betrayals, and many other things that we were never created to have to endure. In addition to our broken realities, the devil seeks to lie to us about the realities of the divine realm. He'll try to convince us that we're the only ones that struggle. He'll make us believe we can never get better, heal, or grow. He'll try to cover us with shame, which makes us feel like we can't even approach God with our problems because He's too disgusted with us. But remember, the devil is the father of lies.

“For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”
John 8:44 NLT

The devil's lies started in heaven when he was crafty enough to deceive a third of the angels; imagine how many that could be if there are millions of angels. Then those lies are carried to this earth, where the devil tries to destroy and distract anything that resembles the image of his enemy (that's you and me).

The good news is that when we recognize our true identity as children of the living God (1 John 3: 1) and give our lives over Christ, we are new creations.

"This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT.

This doesn't mean we don't have flaws, scars, etc. but it gives us hope that healing can come. As we'll learn later in the week, there are times when the thorn in our flesh, like Paul's thorn in his (2 Corinthians 12: 8-10), will keep us on our knees, crying out for God to help us once again. But depending on God is exactly where we each need to be, for He is the gold that not only pieces us back together but bonds us to Him making us even more substantial.

So the myth that some are better than others, some struggle and others don't, is just that: a myth. Paul writes, "We have already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin." Romans 3:9 NLT

Week 1

Day 2

THE MYTHS OF FAITH & MENTAL HEALTH

Myth #2 - Everyone else has it all together

As I exited the church I worked for one Saturday, I saw a woman sitting at the back of the sanctuary. She looked like something was weighing on her, so I stopped, introduced myself, and asked her if everything was okay. She said, "Yeah, I don't think I can return to this church." Worried that someone had said or done something to her that led her to that conclusion, I kindly asked, "Why, what's wrong?". She said, "Everyone here seems to have it all together, and I don't."

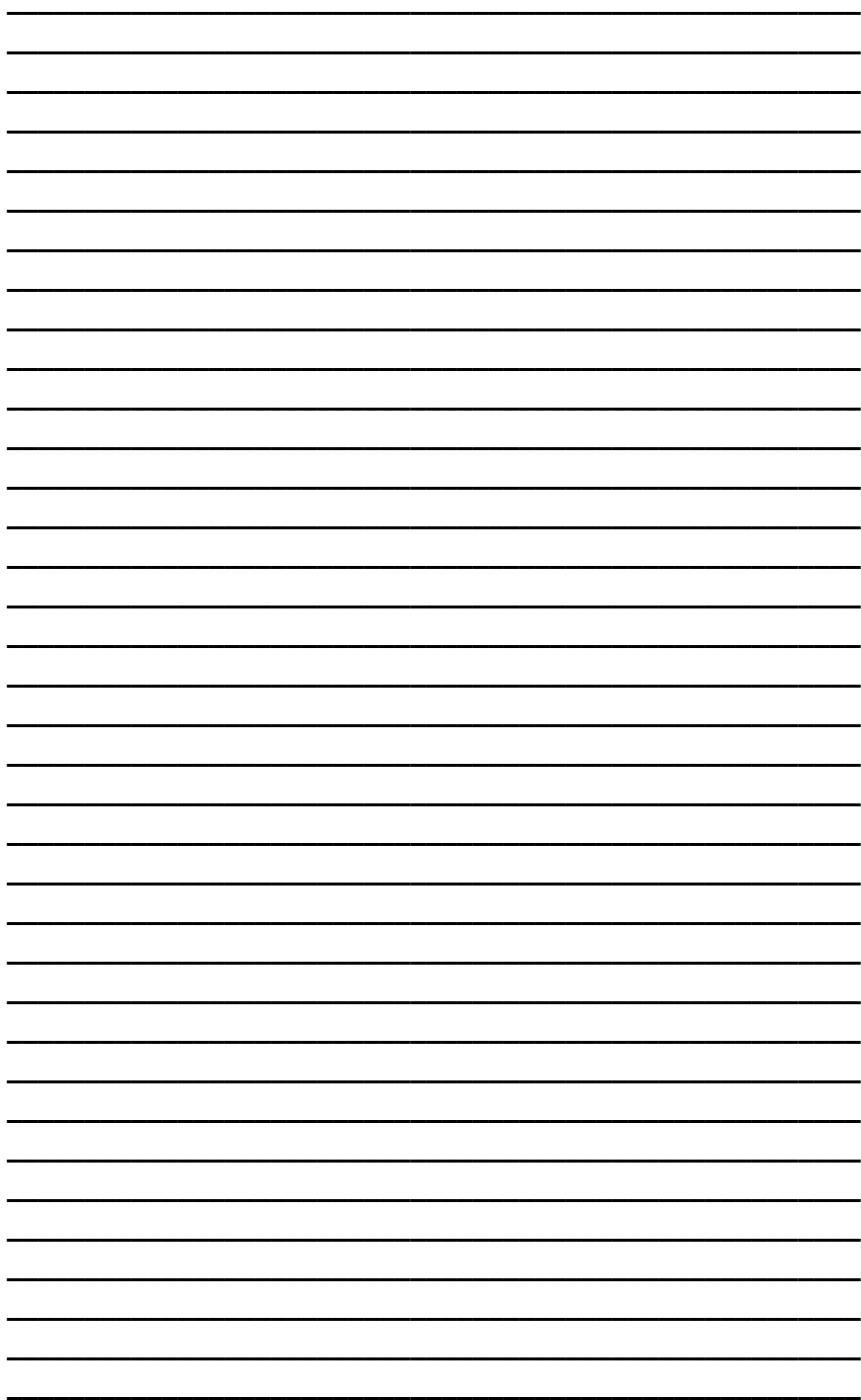
We had a good conversation where I told her, "Oh, everyone here must just be good at hiding the wrong things." I said, "Even the best-dressed people still have holes in their socks."

We often like to give off the appearance to others that we've got our act together, that everything is going great, and that we are masters at this thing called life. Maybe it's fear, envy, jealousy, but for whatever reason, we're quicker to hide our scars than show them off or share them with others.

For several months, I tried to hide my diagnosis from the people I worked with. I was afraid I'd lose my job and the respect of others. After all, if I can barely hold my life together how can I help anyone else do that with theirs? Then, one day, God sent me an angel. A student approached me right before I was responsible for a chapel program and asked if everything was okay. I said yes, but that was a lie. I was fighting off a panic attack and had just gotten off the phone with my wife where I begged her to say it was ok for me to leave work and come home.

Thankfully, I stayed because, after the service, that same student returned to me and said, "Are you sure you're OK? Because I don't believe you when you say that you are." Tears welled up in my eyes as this angel saw past my veneer and into my heart. All I could say was, "It's been a tough week." When I got home that day, I told my wife that we had to start sharing my secret with others.

That's when I learned that our secrets keep us sick. Until we can start to share them, we won't be able to begin healing. And you know what I found when I finally did share my secret? I found church. I found a room full of people who didn't judge me for my struggle but were willing to come alongside me in my pain. I found a room full of people who dared to share what was going on with them when I found the courage to share what was happening with me.



Week 1

Day 3

THE MYTHS OF FAITH & MENTAL HEALTH

Myth #3 - Pray more and let it go

“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then, you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4: 6-7...verse of the week)

The most common response I received from people when I was diagnosed was to pray more, sometimes citing the verse above. Along with that advice came, “You have to let go of your worry.” That’s great advice and all, but at the time and in my state, I had no ability to “let it go.” Often, it was hard to pray; when I did pray, all I could get out was the name of Jesus.

If you’ve never experienced an extreme mental health challenge, it’s hard to imagine what it feels like. In my anxiety, I couldn’t just pray it away. That didn’t mean I lacked faith; that meant I lacked the tools to know how to climb out of the pit of my thoughts. I couldn’t “pray it

away” any more than I could grow a new limb. That said, when it comes to prayer and mental health, I have something I take great comfort in.

Throughout my life, but even more so during my mental health struggle, the apostle Paul’s thoughts in Romans 8 have inspired me. For years, I held onto this part of the chapter, especially when my heart was too heavy, or broken, to pray...

“And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groaning that cannot be expressed in words.”
Romans 8: 26, NLT

There have been times when my prayers weren’t audible words but just moans and groans. Knowing that the Holy Spirit interprets those things in those times into prayers lifted up to the Father has always been comforting to me.

However, it wasn’t until later on in my life that I realized something in Romans 8 that had never hit me before. According to Paul, the Holy Spirit isn’t the only member of the Trinity who prays for us when we can’t or as we struggle.

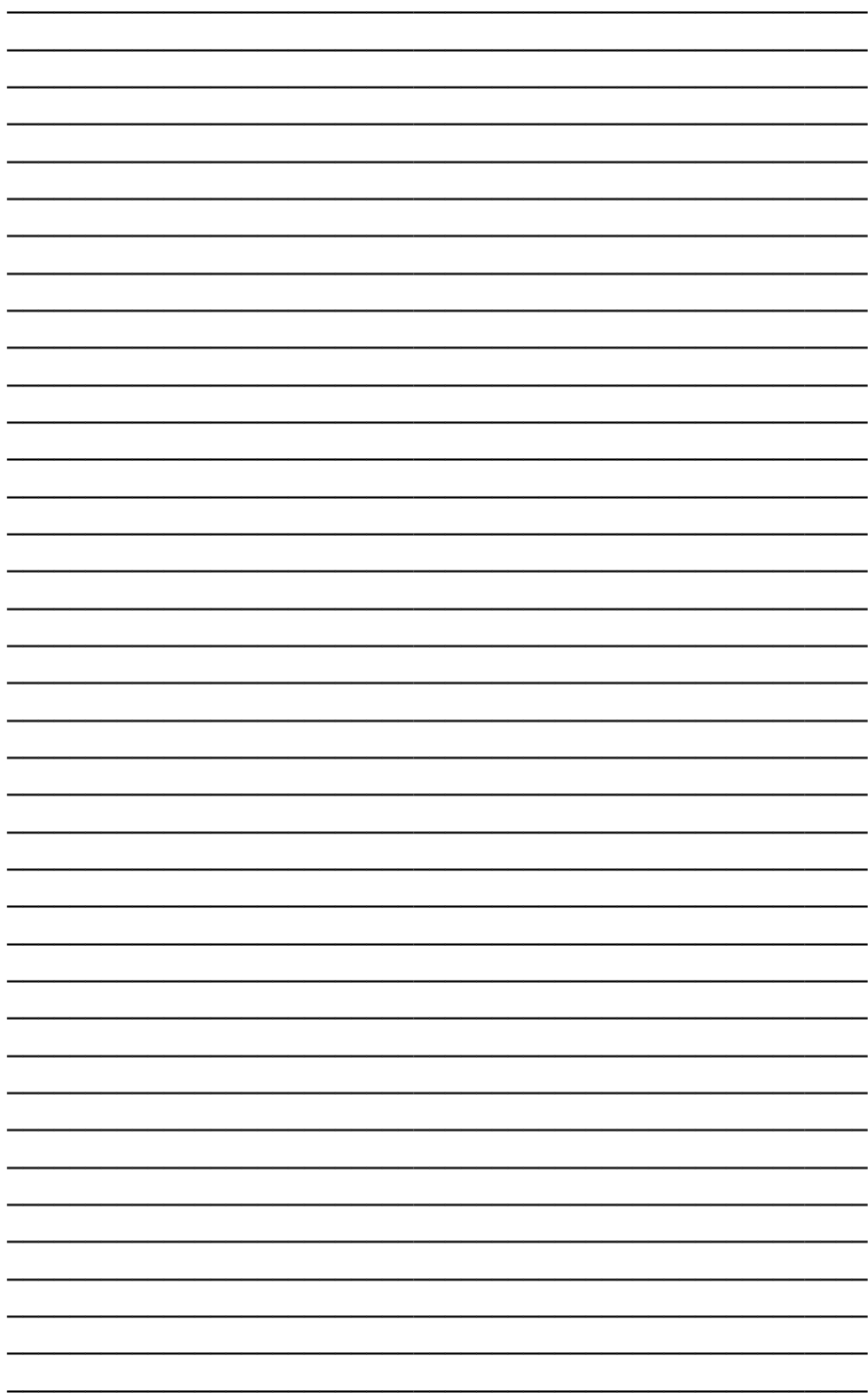
Paul writes, “...for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us.”. Romans 8: 34

What?!? Jesus is also interceding for us? That means every member of the godhead is actively involved in praying for us, two interceding on our behalf even when we can't pray or don't know what to say, and the third listening and moving heaven and earth to be near unto us (just read Psalm 18: 6-19, for the imagery of a God who moves creation to be near).

Mental health is not just cured by prayer, though prayer can undoubtedly be a significant part of your self-care. But know this: even when you can't pray, know that the godhead has you because they care about you more than even fully understand.

Questions:

- Have you ever struggled with something heavy on your heart, only to hear the advice to pray more or give it to God? If so, how did that make you feel?
- Are there specific prayers you pray or verses you quote when your mental health struggles? What works for you?
- How does it make you feel to know that even when you can't pray, two of the three members of the Godhead are praying over you for you?



Week 1

Day 4

THE MYTHS OF FAITH & MENTAL HEALTH

Myth #4 - One book, one pill, one prayer, will fix everything

Several years ago, I was talking to a member of my faith community who had been stuck in a pattern of thinking for quite some time. Years ago, she had hurt another person and was struggling to forgive herself for what she had done.

After years of beating yourself up, it's hard to start thinking differently. You likely need a mental health professional to help you identify your negative thinking patterns and replace those with positive ones. However, this person desperately wanted to keep meeting with me until I said the "magic words" that would finally click and fix everything. I tried to convince them that's not how it works, that there is work they must do, work they need a guide to help them with. But they wouldn't listen and finally stopped meeting with me altogether.

I get that feeling. When I was diagnosed, I wanted the doctor to give me a pill that would take my anxiety away, or seek a counselor who could give me the right formula that would

reverse my negative thinking or the pastor who could anoint me and say the right words that would once again make me whole.

I learned, in my journey, and I believe with all my heart, that most of our mental health concerns must be addressed from every possible angle: mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We call this wholistic care; in the Adventist faith tradition, we have leaned into this wholeheartedly (pun intended). We started hospitals, in part, because we know that to have good spiritual health, you need good physical health. We started schools, in part because we know how important it is to help you develop throughout all of life's stages.

When Jesus came across the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, who had been coming to that pool for 38 years hoping for a magic pill kind of healing, Jesus asked him a critical question. He said, "Would you like to get well?"

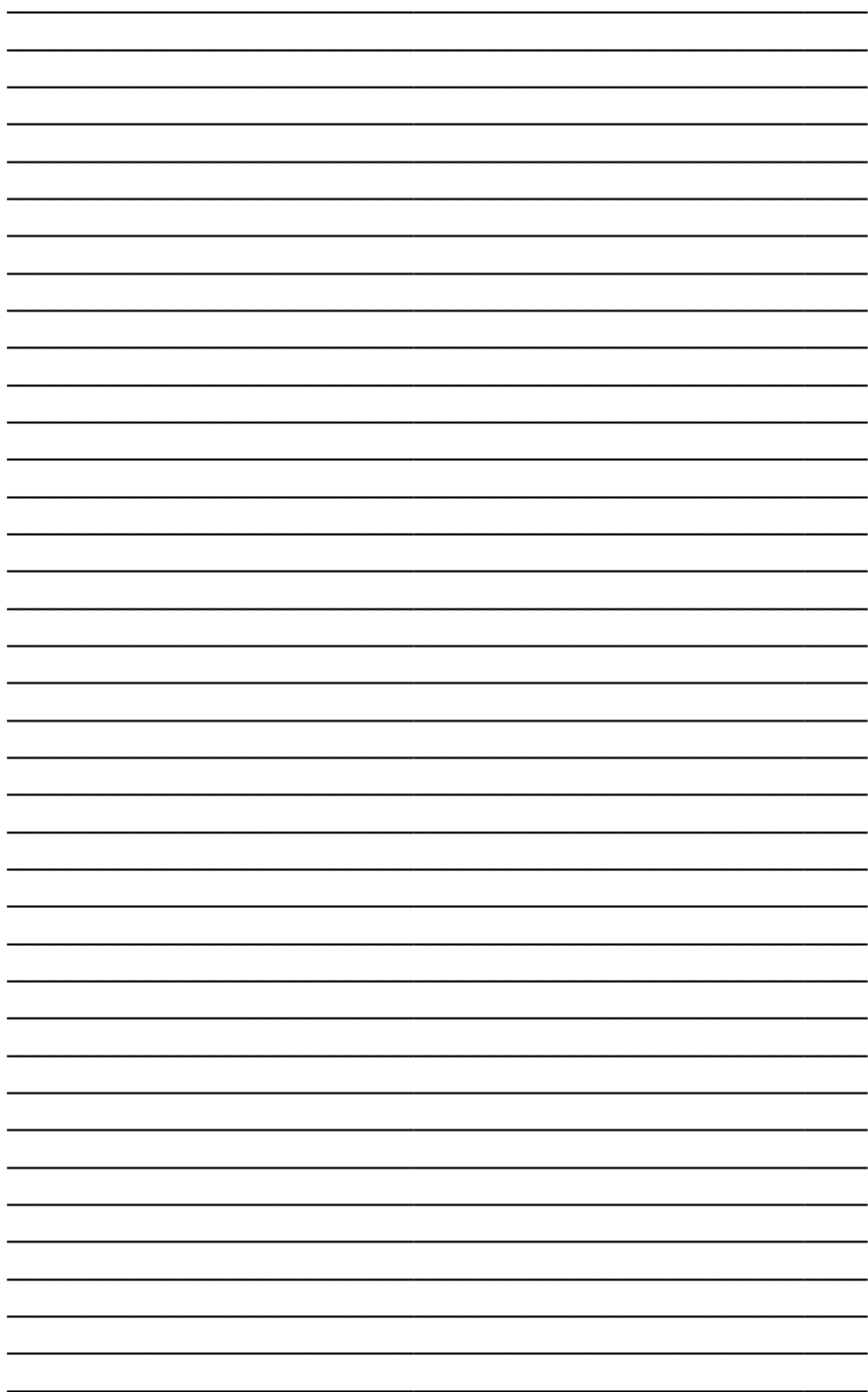
At first read, it's easy to say, "Well duh! Absolutely! Why else do you think I've been coming here for 38 years? However, what I believe Jesus was getting at was that to seek real, meaningful, transformative healing, there is no quick fix. It takes work, commitment, and often, it takes you fighting to do the thing that is the exact opposite of the thing you want to do (for example, when you're anxiety is high,

exercising can bring incredible natural benefits but it's the absolute last thing you want to do).

But if you're ready to heal and willing to do the work, it may be one of the toughest and most rewarding things you'll ever do. It may well take seeking a physician for your physical health, a pastor for your spiritual health, a counselor for your mental and emotional health, and a support team to cheer you on when you want to give up. But if you're willing to do the work, healing can come, keep up the good fight. You are worth it!

Questions:

- When working on a car, a problem at work, or a challenge at home, was there ever a scenario where it was just a straightforward problem that fixed the issue?
- Why do you think we desperately want the one magic fix instead of a list of things to do?
- How could we find accountability to help us stay the course toward good mental health?



Week 1

Day 5

THE MYTHS OF FAITH & MENTAL HEALTH

Myth #5 - Mental Health Care is for crisis times only

For roughly 6-8 months of my own diagnosis, I could only think about surviving the next hour ahead of me. It was all I could do to get through a day, and it was exhausting. But after time and with a lot of hard work with all my care professionals, I realized that my anxiety no longer controlled every moment of every day. I started to find a healthier rhythm to life, and for the first time in a VERY long time, I began to feel like myself again.

My response to feeling “normal” again, whatever that means, was to stop working so hard at feeling “normal.” That means I stopped doing all the things that helped me to get to a better place, all so I could go back to living the way I was before my mental health crisis.

Within weeks, my mental health was worse than before, all because I had stopped doing the things that were helping me heal.

Though I didn't have to start from scratch, it felt that way. I had to start taking my medication

again, connect again with my doctor, get back into my counselor. Through this time, I came across another one of Paul's passages that changed how I prayed.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul writes about his famous thorn in the flesh. Scholars have argued for hundreds of years whether this was a physical pain, a metaphorical pain, a spiritual attack, and so on. But whatever the thorn was, Paul didn't like it, didn't want it, and begged God to take it away from him. In his words...

"Three different times, I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time, he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:8-10
NLT

Paul begged God to remove his thorn, and when that didn't happen, when Paul accepted it, he began to live differently.

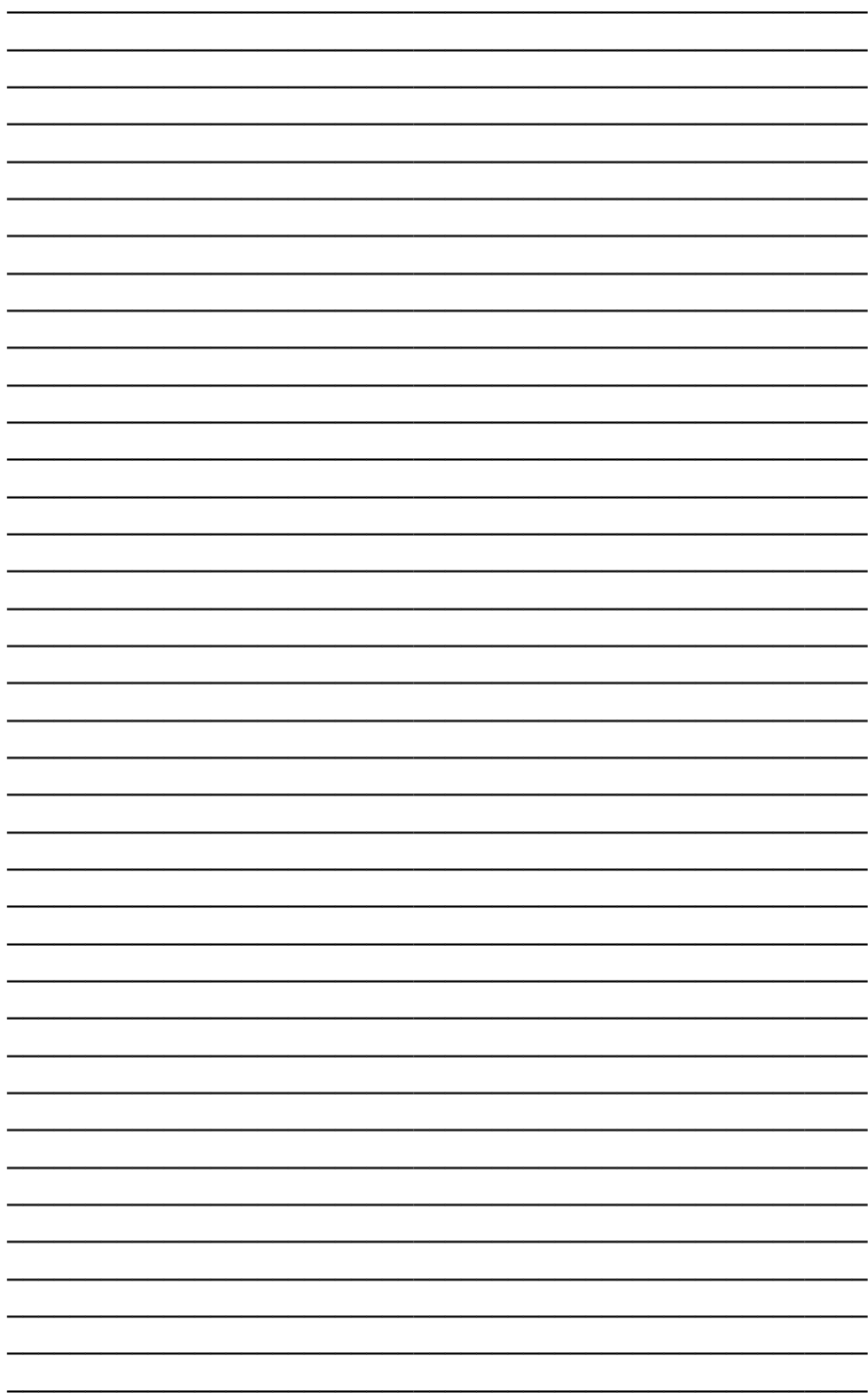
What came out of that time was a new way to pray. Instead of begging God to remove my anxiety and being continually disappointed when that didn't happen, I began asking God to help me live with my anxiety in a way that brings Him glory. An incredible peace came

over me when I accepted my “thorn”. I knew it would be a journey, one God would be with me on, and that my anxiety would be a constant reminder that I needed God, that He was with me, and that in my weakness, his power is made...perfect.

Good mental health care is always needed, not just when the floor drops from under you. And when you find methods that help, stick with them so that you can lean on God and grow towards healing. Then, never forget where the source of your strength comes from. Accept the call of Jesus in Matthew when he says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11: 28, NLT)

Questions:

- Do you have a thorn in your life right now? If so, what and how often are you reminded of it?
- What are some ways that you take care of your mental health?
- Is there some activity that you could do today (or soon) that you feel you need and that could greatly benefit your mental health (vacation, massage, exercise, etc.)?



Week 1

Day 6

THE MYTHS OF FAITH & MENTAL HEALTH

Myth #6 - Perfection is possible

“And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.”

Philippians 1:6 NLT

On the wall in my office hangs a picture of Crazy Horse Monument in South Dakota. Crazy Horse was a Native American leader, and the sculpture was commissioned to celebrate the spirit of the Native American warrior and his people.

I first saw Crazy Horse on a trip with my family, which profoundly impacted me. It's a sculpture that has been in the works since 1948, and when finished, it will be the world's largest sculpture standing at just under 600 feet, three times the size of the Statue of Liberty.

They've been working on the sculpture for 75 years, and so far, the face of Crazy Horse is finished, and they're working hard on his arm pointing off into the distance as he rides atop his horse. They probably have another 20-30 years to go before it's completed.

Under the picture in my office is the quote from the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:6. Like the artists working on Crazy Horse, God is working on each of us, restoring His image. On one hand, when we are in Christ, we are indeed “new creations” (2 Corinthians 5: 17), and as such we are “God’s masterpiece...created anew in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2: 10). But we are also works in progress. That work won’t be completed until “it is finally finished on the day Christ Jesus returns.”

What does this mean for our mental health journey? It means we owe ourselves some grace for the journey, and we owe others the same courtesy. God is at work in our lives, and at times, it is a painstakingly slow process. Even Paul said, “I want to do what is right, but I can’t. I want to do what is good, but I don’t.” (Romans 7: 19)

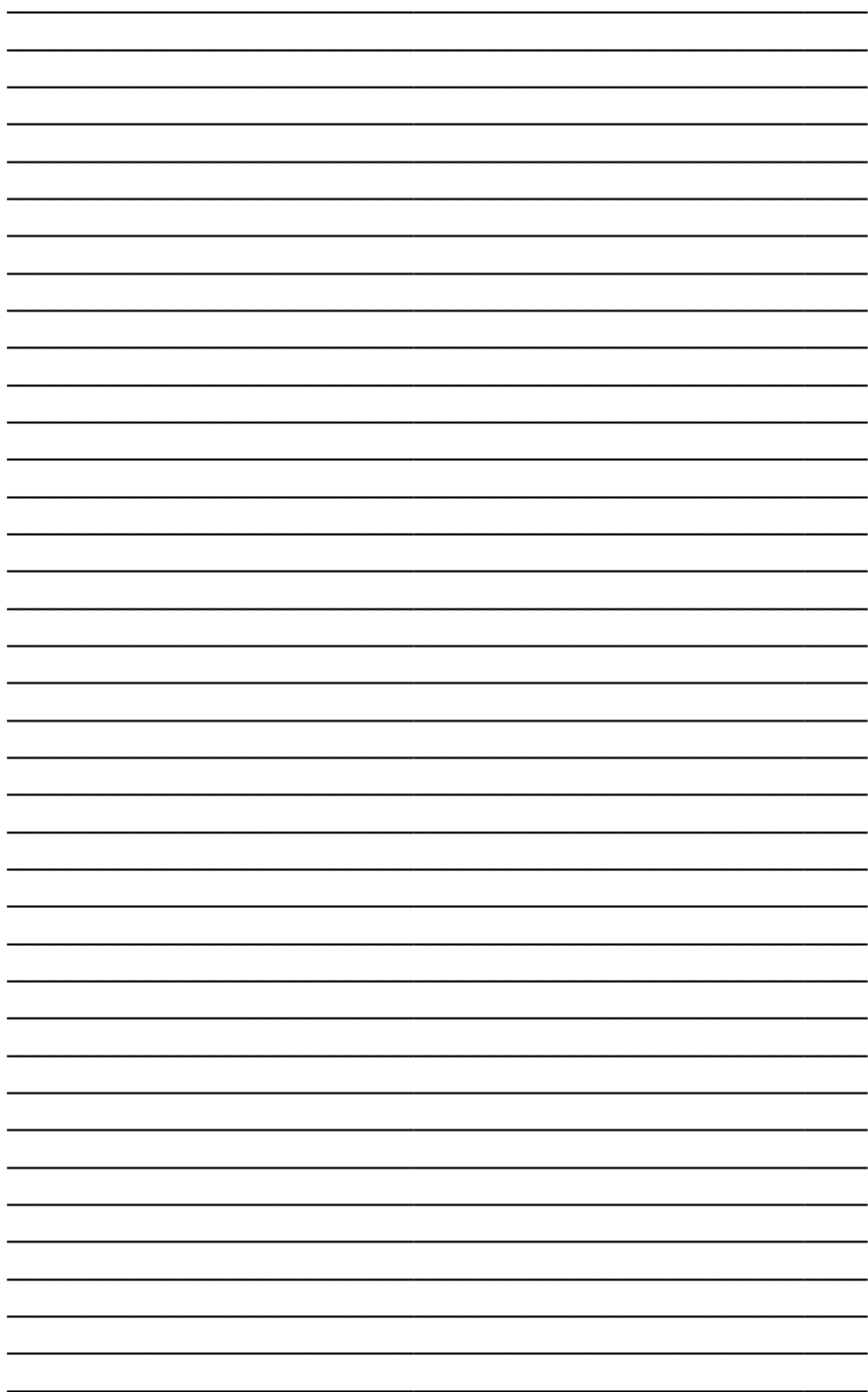
The journey toward good mental health can often feel like two steps forward and three steps back, but in my experience, it’s not a linear path. There are good days, bad days, awful days. But the best way to approach it is one breath at a time, one step at a time. In your worst moments, it can feel like seeking good mental health is all-consuming, but after a time, and when you put in the work, you can wake up one day and realize that your mental health

struggles no longer control or dominate your every waking moment.

Rest assured, God is at work when you put your life into His hands. Remember, He is the potter; you are the clay. (Isaiah 29:16) Let Him do His work. Perfection on this side of heaven means God is taking our brokenness and putting us back together, piece by piece, with the healing power of the blood of Jesus Christ. When Jesus comes, we will be fully restored in the twinkling of an eye (I Corinthians 15:52). Until then, one breath, one step, at a time trusting in Jesus all along the way.

Questions:

- Are there any areas in your life where you struggle with perfection?
- What fears do you have if others were to find out you aren't perfect or that you messed up?
- As you look over your life for the last ten years, what areas have you seen growth and improvement (God at work)?



Week 1

Day 7

Small Group Discussion Guide

The following guide is designed to serve as a potential framework for your discussion. Feel free to use it as is or adapt as the Spirit leads.

INTRO

As we begin this series, there are so many different places we could go in Scripture for this first study, but we wanted to begin by encouraging your connect group to share your own experiences. We have also included two Psalms to help you think through our faith and mental health journey.

OPEN

What are some of the struggles or stigmas you've heard or been taught about faith and mental health?

Have you had your bouts with mental health struggles that you're willing to share or have you been close to others in their journey? Share as much of your experience as you're comfortable with remembering the expectations of safety and confidentiality within your group.

HEAD

Read Psalm 22 together, then share any thoughts, ideas, or insights that you gain simply from the reading of the Word.

According to this Psalm/prayer, how did David feel about his relationship with God?

If we're told God will "never leave us or forsake us" (Deuteronomy 31: 6) and He is "with us always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28: 20), were David's feelings representative of reality?

In verse 3, what does David do that changes the tone of how the Psalm started?

HEART

Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt that God abandoned you? If so, what was that like and how did you deal with it?

David often shares his struggles in the Psalms. He's not afraid to cry out in anger or fear or share his questions. But often, he brings his Psalms back to a place of worship. What part does worship play in helping us establish healthier mental health practices?

When we're in the thick of a struggle with maintaining good mental health, it can be tough to do the things that we know are good for our heads and our hearts. David turned to worship as best as he could, even when it hurt. What is one positive mental health practice that

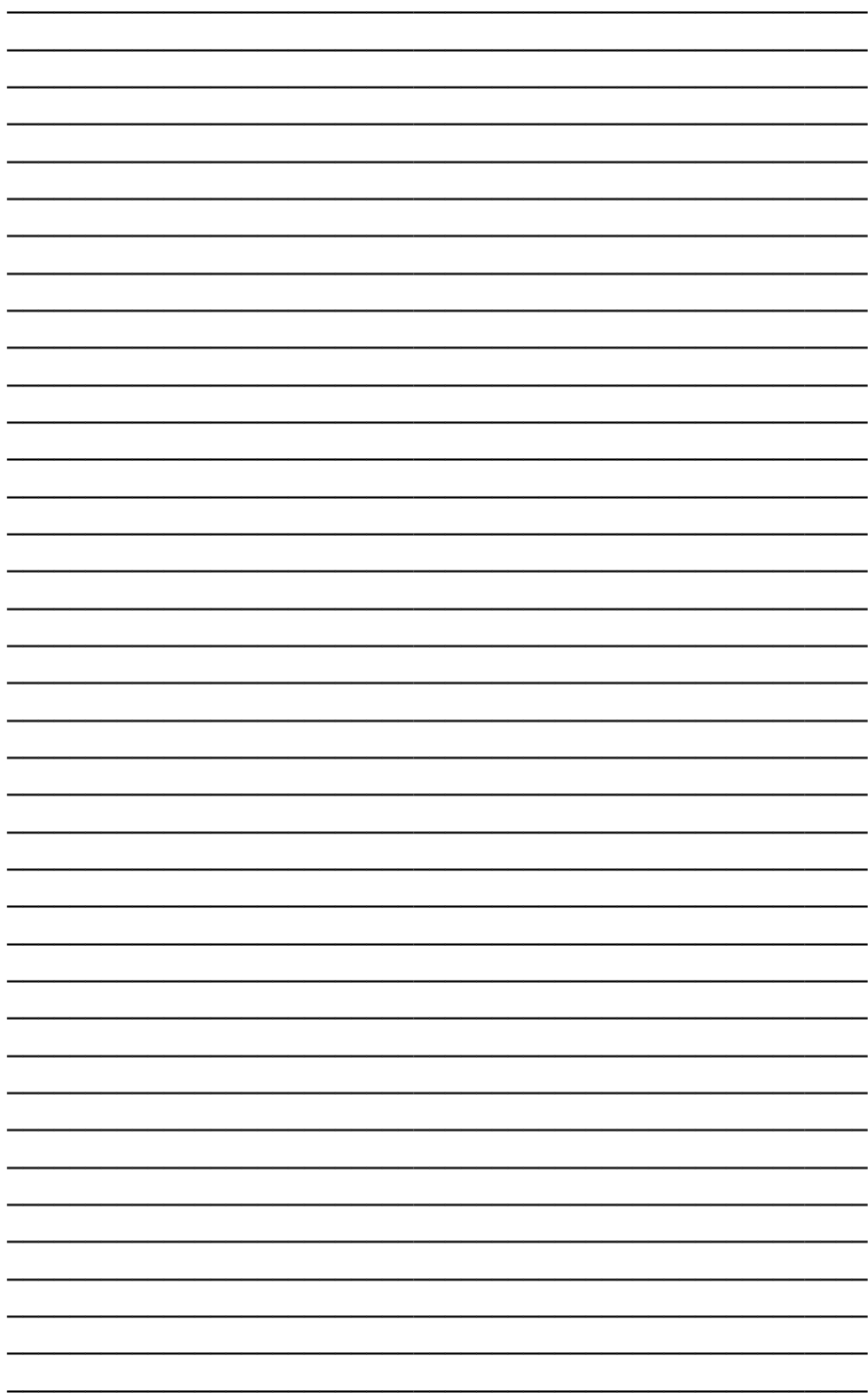
has worked well for you in the past and how can you keep it at the forefront of your thoughts?

HANDS

The Psalms are a beautiful picture of what it's like to follow after God even with the roller coaster of life and all its emotions and challenges. Through this series, one suggestion would be to read through a Psalm a day, and instead of Psalm 1, Psalm 2, and Psalm 3, read them as if it's Day 1, Day 2, and Day 3 journal entries in the life of a follower of God. Make a note of what you identify with and don't, but always note how David tries to turn his attention away from himself and his circumstances and back to God.

WORDS TO REMEMBER

"As the deer longs for the streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him?... Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again - my Savior and my God!" Psalm 42: 1-2, 5



Week 2

Day 8

Luke 4:1-2

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them, he was hungry.

When we are hungry, we are more susceptible to moral shortcuts. In an experiment with college students after fasting for 12 hours, the hungrier they were, the less disgusted they were by a morally problematic dilemma in a short story (Vicario et al., 2018). We could have less energy for moral reasoning when our blood sugar is low. It is probably easier to agree with whatever is going on.

Luke reports that Jesus was much more food-deprived than the study participants, and we can only imagine what kind of hunger he was experiencing. There is no mention of why Jesus didn't eat anything during that time and if he planned to go that long without food. Regardless of the reason, as we learn in Luke's subsequent verses, Jesus did not take the easy moral shortcuts he was tempted towards, but this must have been excruciating and only because of his immense moral strength.

For the rest of us, in addition to relying on the Holy Spirit and bible study for our moral strength, it is an excellent idea to minimize our human vulnerabilities

Week 2

Day 9

Luke 4:3-4

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'

The appetite for food is something that we all experience. We have to eat to survive and thrive. However, eating can become problematic. Eating disorders or being overweight are relatively common for the U.S. population. Not all are caused by inappropriately turning to food for spiritual fulfillment, but many likely are (Exline et al., 2016). Of course, the experience of eating can be spiritual in nature, which is a good thing and a gift from God. It is possible for an amazing meal to inspire the participants to greater spiritual heights. Jesus enjoyed eating with his friends and talked about banquets. However, eating cannot fill the emptiness when we have a spiritual void and are searching for the sacred, meaning, or purpose.

Religion psychologist Kenneth Pargament has defined false gods as "inadequate substitutes of the sacred that can...rush in to fill this spiritual void" (2007, p. 140). Food can become a false god, probably for some of us a lot of the time and for a lot of us some of the time. Of course, we have to eat; hunger and the need for food are inherent to life and bring us great

Week 2

Day 10

Luke 4:5-7

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours."

Jesus' temptation here was for power and influence. As previously mentioned, false gods are poor substitutes for the sacred we seek. The need for power and influence is a strong motivator and a false god for many of us. When the wise among us have influence, it is a good thing, and any organization is blessed to have leaders with Jesus' ideal of being as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves. However, the desire for power and control is also linked to what is wrong with human nature. According to theologian Ray S. Anderson, trained in the Reformed tradition and influenced by Christian psychotherapy scholars, humanity's original sin was the craving for omnipotence or power (Anderson, 1995/2010).

A group of psychologists outlined a version of this observed in scientific research with both humans and animals, which they called the dominance behavioral system (Johnson et al., 2012). They described it as being composed of dominance, motivation and

Week 2

Day 11

Luke 4:8

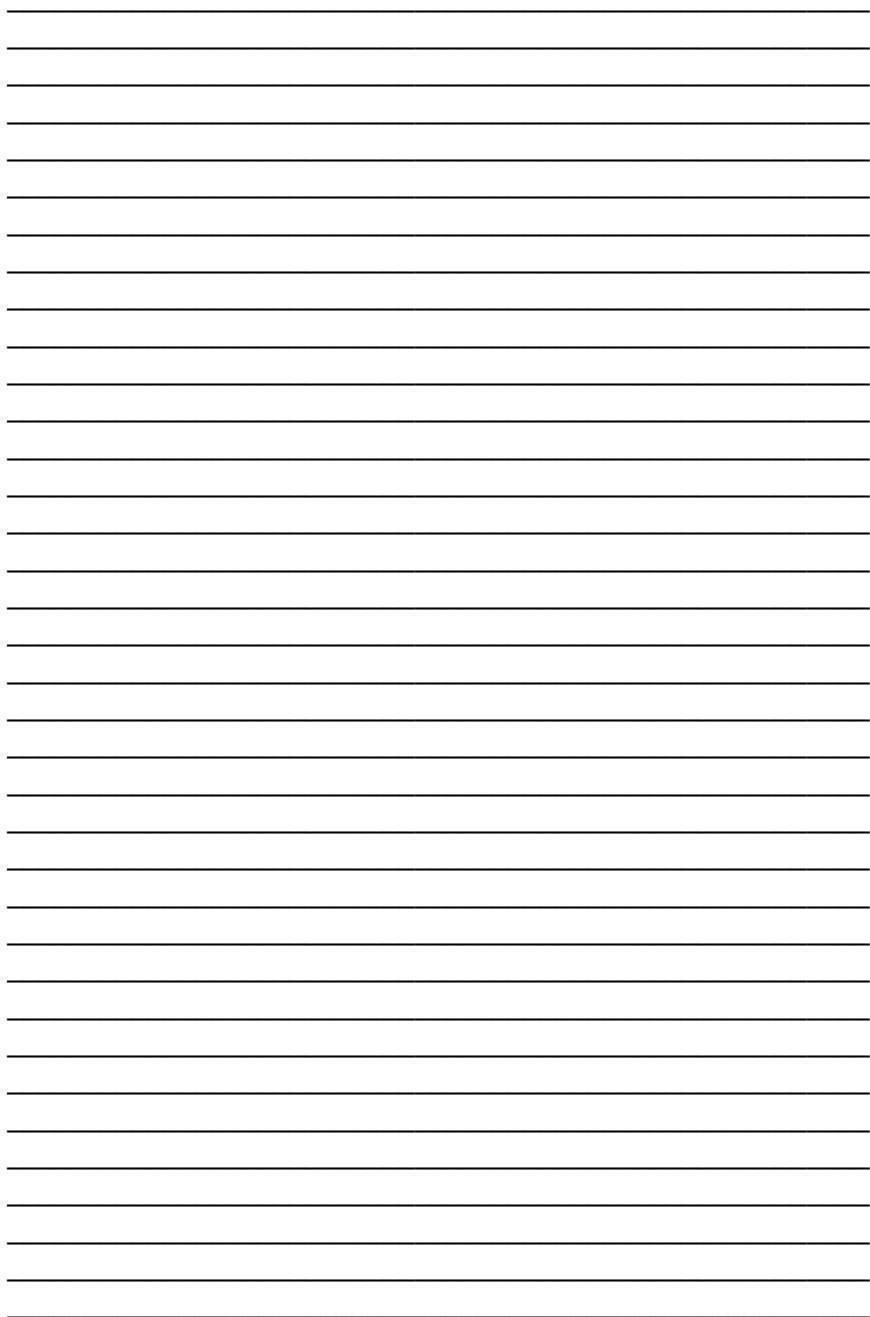
Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'

In rejecting the temptation for earthly omnipotent power, Jesus appealed to the commandment that we are to put only God in what Pargament (2007, p. 33) describes as the sacred core. Closely linked to the false gods of power and fame (described in the following three verses) is making a false god of the self. As theologian Thomas Oden clarifies, "It is God whom we worship. We gather not to worship ourselves...but nothing less than God alone..." (1983, p. 94).

Still, the self is not inherently unsacred. Pargament (2007, p. 42) points out that the self can be sanctified and manifest the sacredness of God, as seen in texts such as "God created man...in the image of God" (Genesis 2:27) and "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). However, this is when the self is enlightened by God, who is the only entity worthy of true worship.

It is too easy for most of us to put ourselves in the sacred core, making ourselves a false god; when are you most susceptible to this?⁴

⁴ Oden, T. C. (1983). *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*. United Kingdom: HarperCollins.



Week 2

Day 12

Luke 4:9-11

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written:

*"He will command his angels concerning you
to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their
hands
so that you will not strike your foot against a
stone.'*

There are various ways to interpret the intent of this temptation, one of which would be to immediately reveal Jesus' divine nature to the Jewish people, which could have made his mission seem much more manageable. The temptation may be a desire for attention, celebrity, and fame. Pargament mentions fame as a common false god (p. 279).

We all like our share of recognition from people who are important to us, but sometimes it is better to be loved and admired by everyone. At an extreme is *histrionic personality disorder*, where a person constantly tries to be the center of attention by being entertaining, dramatic, or seductive. However, this comes at a cost as the disorder tends to lead to major depression (van der Wal et al., 2018).

Even when one becomes famous, the experience is not what it would seem. In a study where fifteen well-

Week 2

Day 13

Luke 4:12-13

Jesus answered, "It is said: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

When Jesus responded with his statement and refused to jump off the temple, one interpretation is that he rejected the idea of willingly putting himself in danger where he would need a divine miracle to save him.

Pargament and his colleagues have studied religious coping methods for over three decades. Some religious coping strategies are seen as a means to gain control over stressful events or situations. The following are from Pargament et al., 2000, with the associated results of the strategy.

- **Passive Religious Deferral:** passively waiting for God to control the situation
 - Positive religious outcome
 - Lower distress at the time of the event
- **Pleading for Direct Intercession:** seeking control indirectly by pleading with God for a miracle or divine intercession
 - Positive growth
 - Positive religious outcome

- Worse physical health
- Higher distress at the time of the event
- Higher current distress

- Active Religious Surrender: an active giving up of control to God after doing what one can
 - Positive growth
 - Strongly positive religious outcome

- Collaborative Religious Coping: seeking control through a partnership with God in problem-solving
 - Positive growth
 - Strongly positive religious outcome
 - Better physical health

It would seem that Jesus did not use passive religious deferral here, as he argued with Satan. He did not jump and plead for direct intercession. Jesus' response seems to fit best with collaborative religious coping and active religious surrender because he quoted God's word and was content in surrendering to God's plan for him to live out a human life filled with distress and ending in death. This likely would not have happened if he had jumped and appeared to the crowd to float gently to the ground.⁶

While some positive aspects of passive religious deferral and pleading for direct intercession, active religious surrender and collaborative religious coping generally lead to better outcomes. Which styles do you tend to use?

⁶ Pargament, K. I., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. M. (2000). The many methods of religious coping: development and initial validation of the RCOPE. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56(4), 519-543. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&dopt=Citation&list_uids=10775045.

Week 2

Day 14

Small Group Discussion Guide

The following guide is designed to serve as a potential framework for your discussion. Feel free to use it as is or adapt as the Spirit leads.

INTRO

Dr. Kenny Boyd writes to us from his experience as a mental health professional. He is a member of Crosswalk church in Redlands and has expertise in mental health. We understand that each of these weeks will look and feel slightly different, but we are excited that he was willing to write for us.

OPEN

What temptations have you had to deal with, and how did you overcome them? where are you? How have temptations formed you or made you who you are today?

Would you be willing to share any of your experiences and what helped you process these temptations?

Remember, this must be a safe space for everyone to share.

HEAD

If you continue to read Luke 4, you will see that right after the temptations, Jesus outlines the mission of God that he came to fulfill.

How has dealing with temptation shaped you in a way that has made you more prepared to be able to do the work that God has called you to do?

How did people receive Jesus after he said what he was here to do?

HEART

Do you know what breaks the heart of God? Is it the same thing that breaks your heart? Is there a way that we can use the learnings that we acquire as we deal with temptations to help heal not only God's heart but our hearts as well?

Why would dealing with temptation be a question of the heart as much as of the mind and hands?

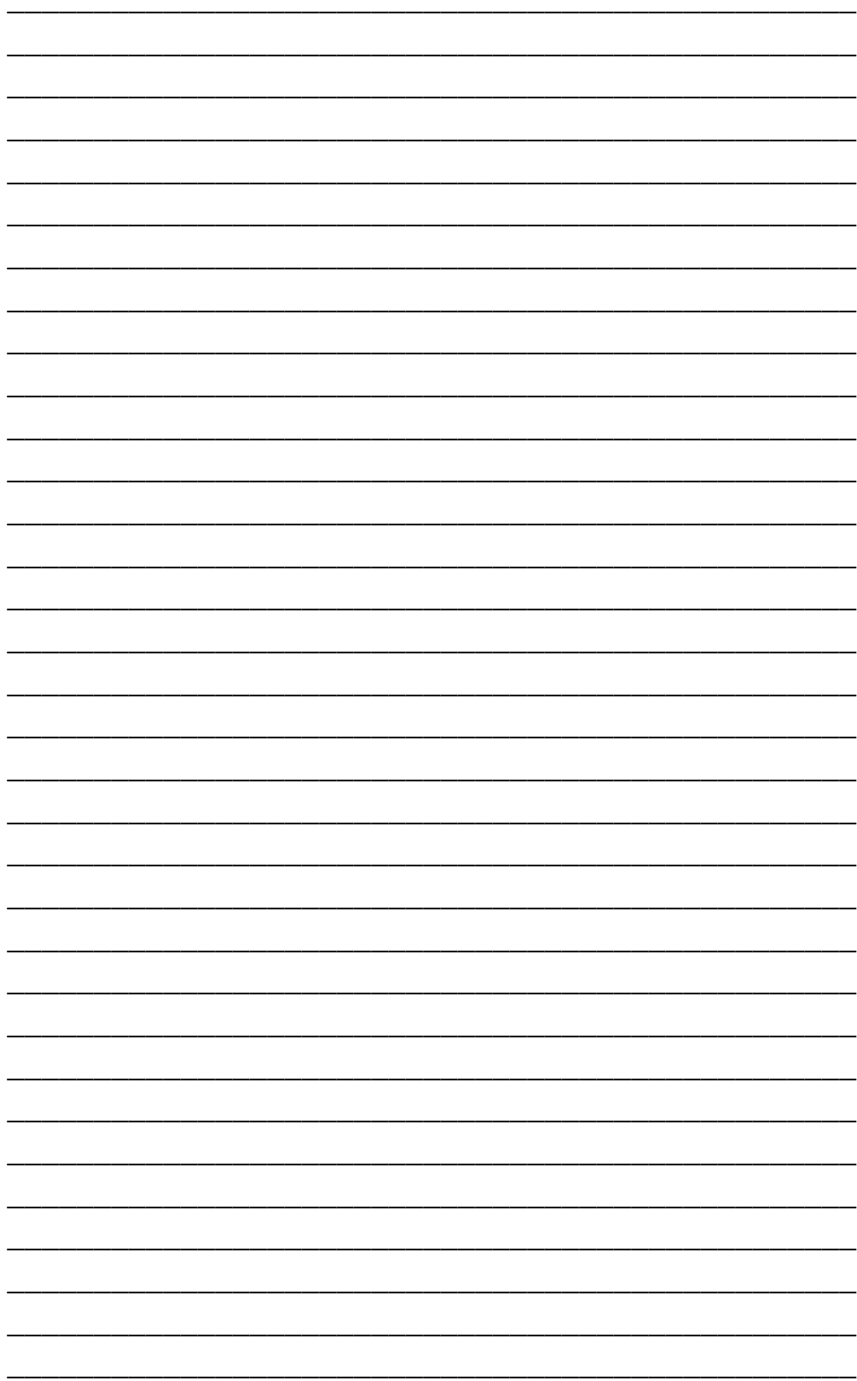
How can you help others with temptations they might be dealing with?

HANDS

It is often in the doing that we are made a bit more healthy. What can you do today to work toward a greater mental health and stability around this idea of temptations? Is there a call you need to make, a connection with a counselor or pastor that might be helpful? What can you do in order to keep things moving forward in the way that you deal with temptation and the ripple effect of those temptations in your life?

WORDS TO REMEMBER

*1 Corinthians 10:13—**13** No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is*



Week 3

Day 15

Was demon possession in Scripture just mental health issues? If it was demons, are demons the root of all mental health issues?

Crosswalk family, I will be honest: this was a tough week for me (Paddy) to write and reflect on. I'm not sure how I got the privilege to write on it. I'm not an expert in the matter, and when I reached out to folks who were way more educated than I am, they all pointed me in different directions, some of which were helpful, others not so much. I do have some thoughts on the matter that I'll do my best to share this week, though I'm sure six days isn't enough to discuss all that is needed. However, I'll try to point you in the right direction.

To begin, I think it's important to state that I believe there are demons in our world. These demons are fallen angels tricked by the devil into believing that the God of the universe isn't a good fair or just God. Like the devil, these fallen angels were cast to this earth, and their job is to take as many of God's creations down with them.

As we're told in Revelation, "Then there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. And the dragon lost the battle, and he and his angels were forced out of heaven. This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was

thrown down to the earth with all his angels.”

Revelation 12:7-9 NLT

What are they after? Like Jesus said in John 10:10, “The thief’s purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.” The demons seek to steal, kill, and destroy anything that reflects the image of their enemy. “Anything” includes you and me, created in the image of God. (Genesis 1: 27)

There have been some interesting studies in the last couple of decades on how people in the Western world view the devil and demons. In 2008, a study discovered that only 59% of Americans believe in Satan as an actual being. In another study, Christian researcher George Barna stated that 40% of Americans believe Satan is not a living being but only a symbol of evil.

But if you’re anything like me, talking about the devil and demons can sometimes give you the heebie-jeebies (yes, that’s an actual term defined in the Oxford Dictionary as a state of nervous fear or anxiety). C.S. Lewis once said that the devil doesn’t care if you fail to believe he exists or if you’re so scared of him that you hide in the corner. Either way, he’s got you.

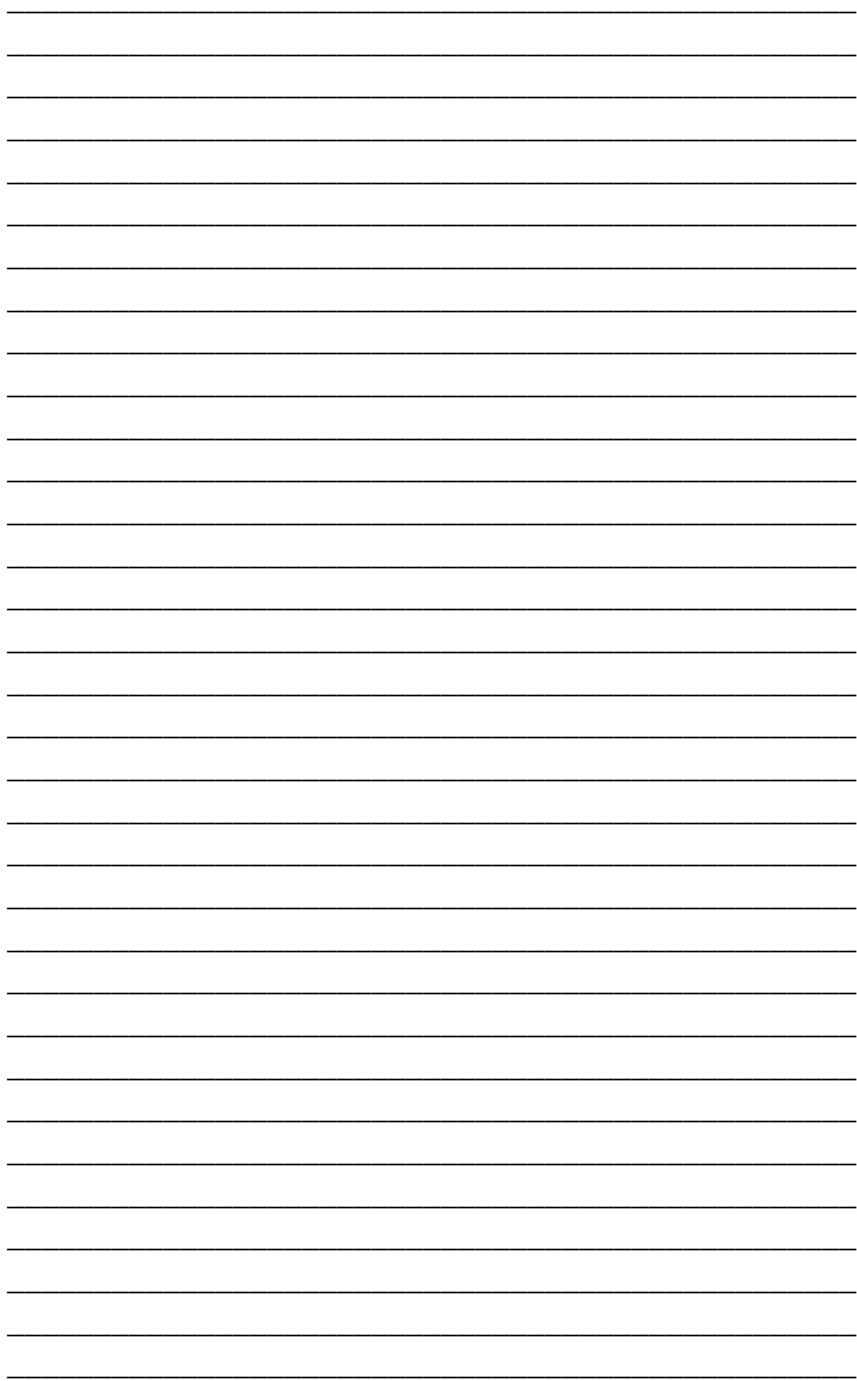
So yes, I believe that demons are real, and therefore, I believe in demon possession. However, because of Jesus, I don’t think we have to be afraid (more on that next week). And because we live in such a developed world, I believe that demons are often more subtle than not in the Western world. I think demons can plague a person’s mental health, using tools like

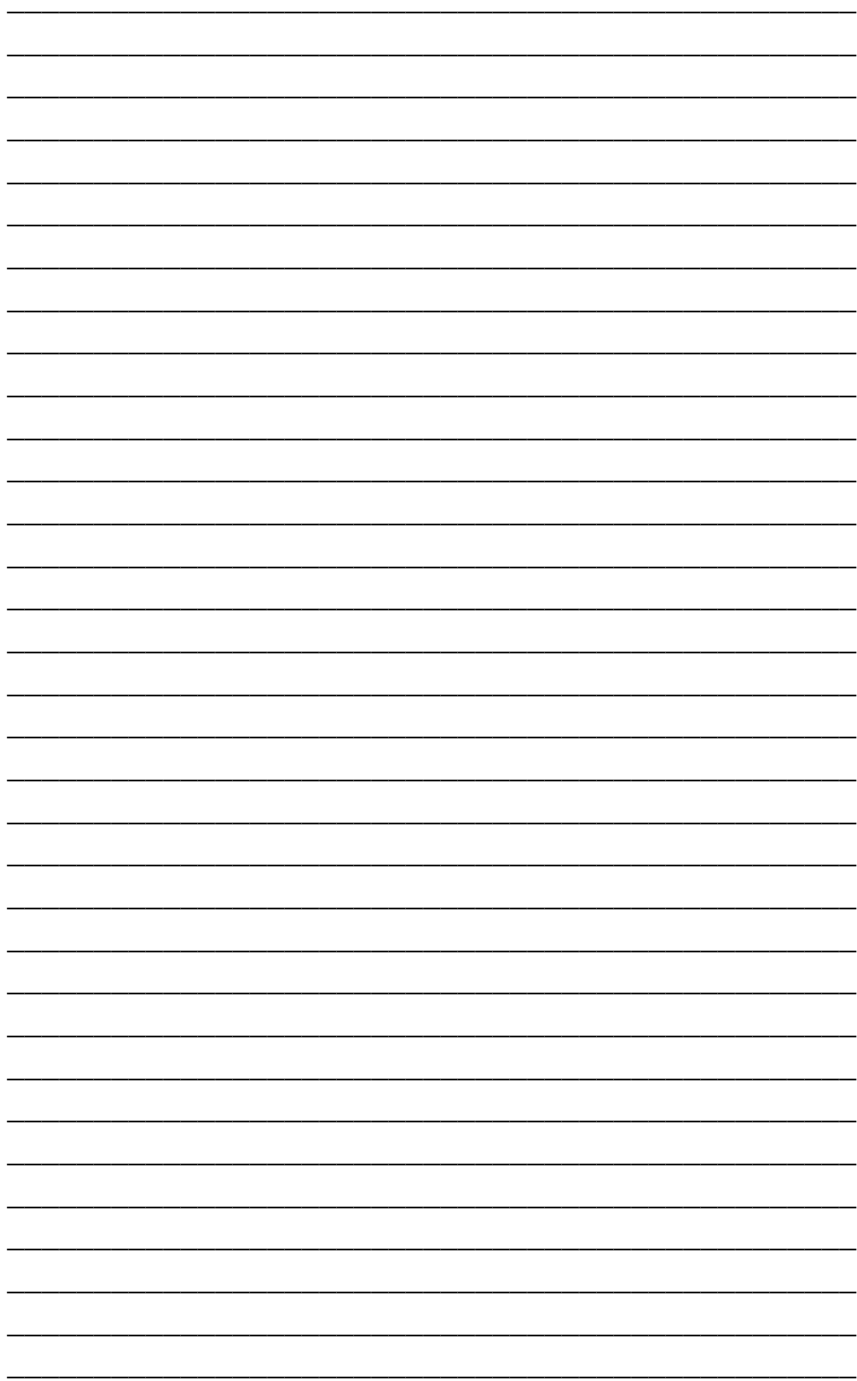
anxiety and depression to rob you of faith in God and living in the present moment (or worse, rob you of the will to live at all). I believe demons can also cause a cascading of events that seem to rob you of life like a broken relationship, financial disasters, job worries, abuse, comparisons, etc. I often say that the devil and his demons don't care what you're focused on as long as it's not Jesus.

So, I do believe in demons and demon possession. But I do not believe that all mental health concerns have at their root demons or are a sign of demon possession, nor do I think that all demon possession displays itself in mental health. I believe that when you give your life to Christ, you are filled with the Holy Spirit and cannot be possessed by demons, but they can still attack you.

Thankfully, and as a steady reminder for the week, the devil and his demons can not touch the power of God. They can't even stand when the name of Jesus is mentioned. But understanding demons and mental health is essential as we journey through this series on mental health and faith. So I hope you'll go on this journey with us, as you may discover courage and a sense of freedom you never knew was possible.

Remember, "at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth..." (Philippians 2: 10, NLT). Jesus is more significant, Jesus is more powerful, and though the devil may try to fight, his fate has been sealed. So, each day, may we be reminded to claim His victory over the powers of darkness.





Week 3

Day 16

Through the gospels, Jesus regularly encounters demons that have possessed human beings. Let's look briefly at one of these stories that shares elements with most of the others involving Jesus and demons.

The story is found in Luke 8, where we're told that Jesus and the disciples had landed on the shores of what is called the region of the Gerasenes, located on the other side of the Sea of Galilee from where they usually traveled. As they climbed out of the boat, they were met by a man "possessed by demons." The man had been living in this area, homeless and naked for a long time, and filled with not just one demon but many. The townspeople had tried to handle things themselves, but every one of their attempts failed. Every time the people tried to subdue the man, he broke free, lashed out at them, and ran.

Though the people were powerless to protect themselves from this demon-possessed man, Jesus was not. Jesus and the disciples land, get out of their boats, and are immediately confronted by this naked, homeless, demon-possessed man.

Luke writes, "As soon as he saw Jesus, he shrieked and fell down in front of him. Then he screamed, 'Why are you interfering with me, Jesus, Son of the

Most High God? Please, I beg you, don't torture me!"
(Luke 8: 28, NLT)

At least two notes we can point out from this one verse that is common when Jesus encountered demons.

One - the demons fell in front of Jesus, a position of worship. They knew who Jesus was, even when the people didn't, and they had to act accordingly. This is always how the demons encountered Jesus, with worship first. To the point where Jesus would silence them because he didn't want the people to learn from the demons who he was (see Mark 1: 21-28).

Two - the demons try to paint a picture of God as torture when, in reality, the demons were torturing the man. The demons will always try to throw shade on the character of God, using lies for they come from the father of lies (John 8:44).

As the story continues, the demons beg Jesus to be thrown not into the "bottomless pit" but into a herd of pigs. Though the reasoning and meaning of some of these things are immediately apparent, what is clear is that the demons know that they have to do whatever Jesus says - that is never in question. Jesus permits them, and off they go.

In fact, in every encounter Jesus has with a demon, Jesus wins. And Jesus gave the disciples authority to cast out demons (Mark 3: 15). How? By using the name of Jesus (Luke 10:17).

Though we'll look more tomorrow at Jesus, demons, and mental health specifically, it's important to note

that when Jesus is in the same room with a demon, it's clear who has the power and who is in control. There is never a doubt or question. The spiritual realm knows who is more extensive, though the devils will try to convince you otherwise.

When counseling someone who fears the devil, one verse I often point them to, in addition to Jesus' encounters with demons in the gospels, is the book of Revelation.

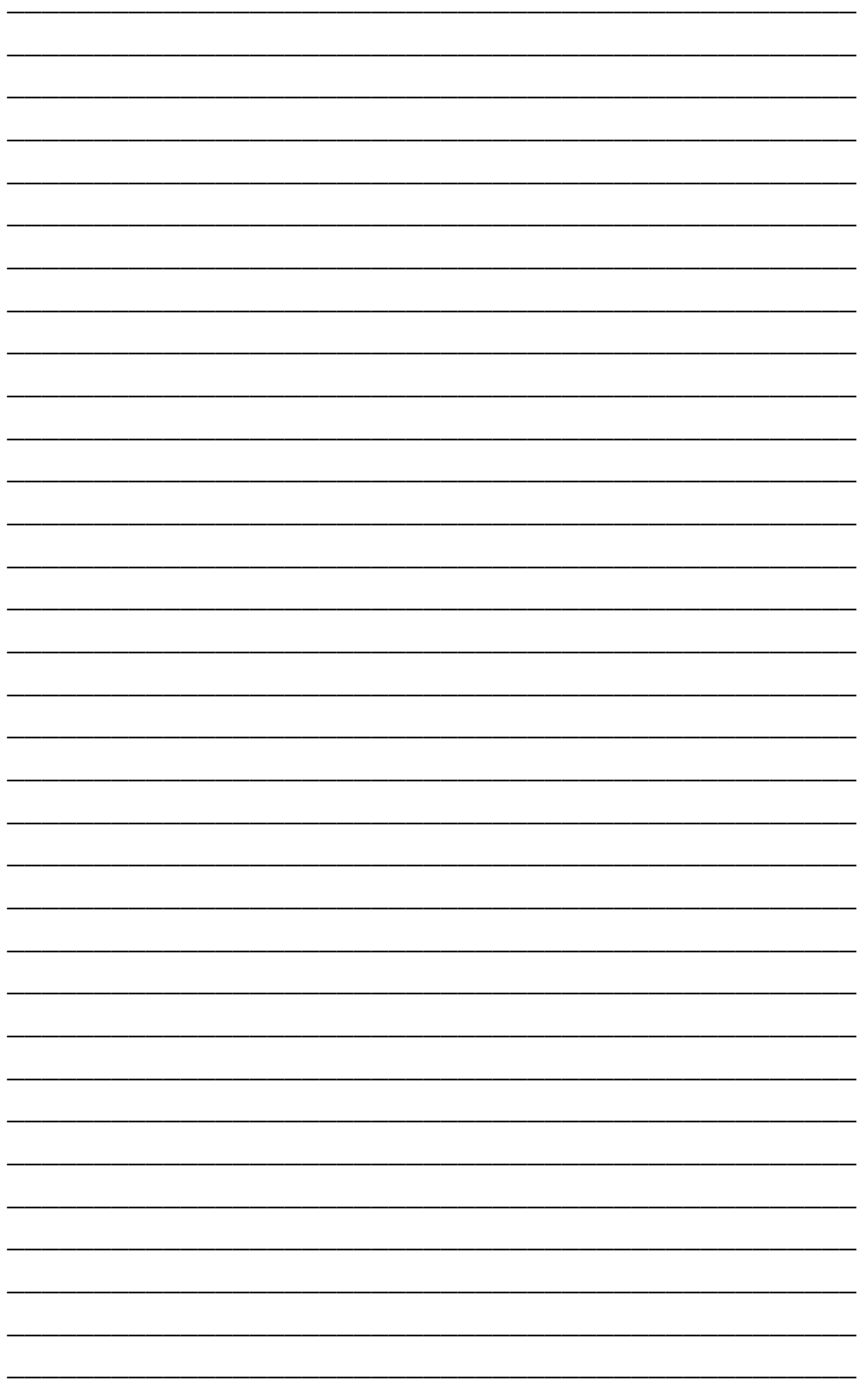
In context, after Jesus has rescued us from the earth, the devil's reign finally ends. Then, we read about an angel who came down from heaven with a heavy chain in his hand. It goes on to say that the angel "seized the dragon-that old serpent, who is the devil, Satan - and bound him in chains for a thousand years."

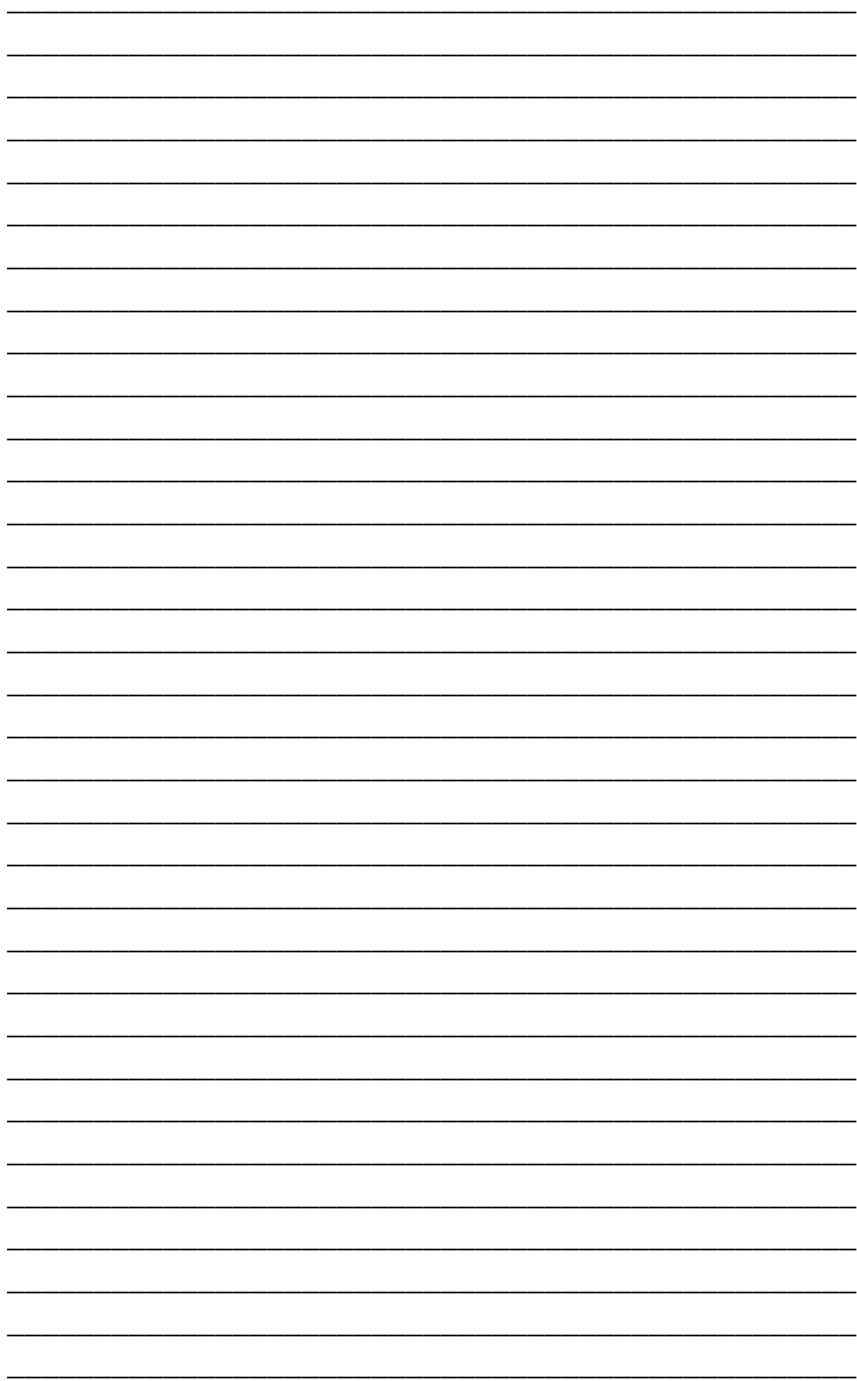
Did you notice how many angels it took to bind the enemy of God? Just one. One angel of God binds up the devil that so many have been so afraid of for so long.

So when it comes to Jesus and demons, Jesus is bigger, and Jesus always wins. So when you feel attacked, claim the name of Jesus. When it seems like the darkness is closing in on you or your family, rebuke it in the mighty name of Jesus and claim the victory Jesus won over sin and death. As the adage goes, it only takes one candle, even a small one, lit in a dark room to push back the darkness. So light that candle and watch the darkness run.

QUESTIONS

- Have you ever been afraid of the devil? If so, when and why?
- What is one way, one reminder, one action that you could live or take with you today to remind yourself that Jesus is bigger than any darkness you may face?
- Pray this simple prayer today: “I pray for protection today in the name of Jesus. Protection from the forces of darkness. And I rebuke the devil and his influences over me and my loved ones, in the name of Jesus and by the blood He shed for me on Calvary. I receive His victory both now and forevermore. Amen”





Week 3

Day 17

Regarding Jesus and the conversation of mental health and demon possession, I think it's essential to reference two things we mentioned in our opening week.

Our mental health issues must be confronted on every possible level: mentally, spiritually, physically, and emotionally. There are often no single causes and no quick fixes.

Two, we all have disorders, ways in which we've learned to adapt to this broken world that may not be the best.

And I think it's super important to recognize that Jesus wasn't immune to struggles maintaining good mental health. As discussed in this series, Jesus battled extreme anxiety in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. He suffered so extremely that he sweat drops of blood. (Luke 22:42) And we also know that Jesus was "a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief." (Isaiah 53) The author of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus experienced what we do; he knows our struggles. (Hebrews 4: 15)

So, I believe we can come to Jesus with our mental health because Jesus knows what it's like to struggle.

But how do we use that relationship with Jesus to help combat the forces of darkness that may be

connected to our mental struggle? Scripture has several words of advice.

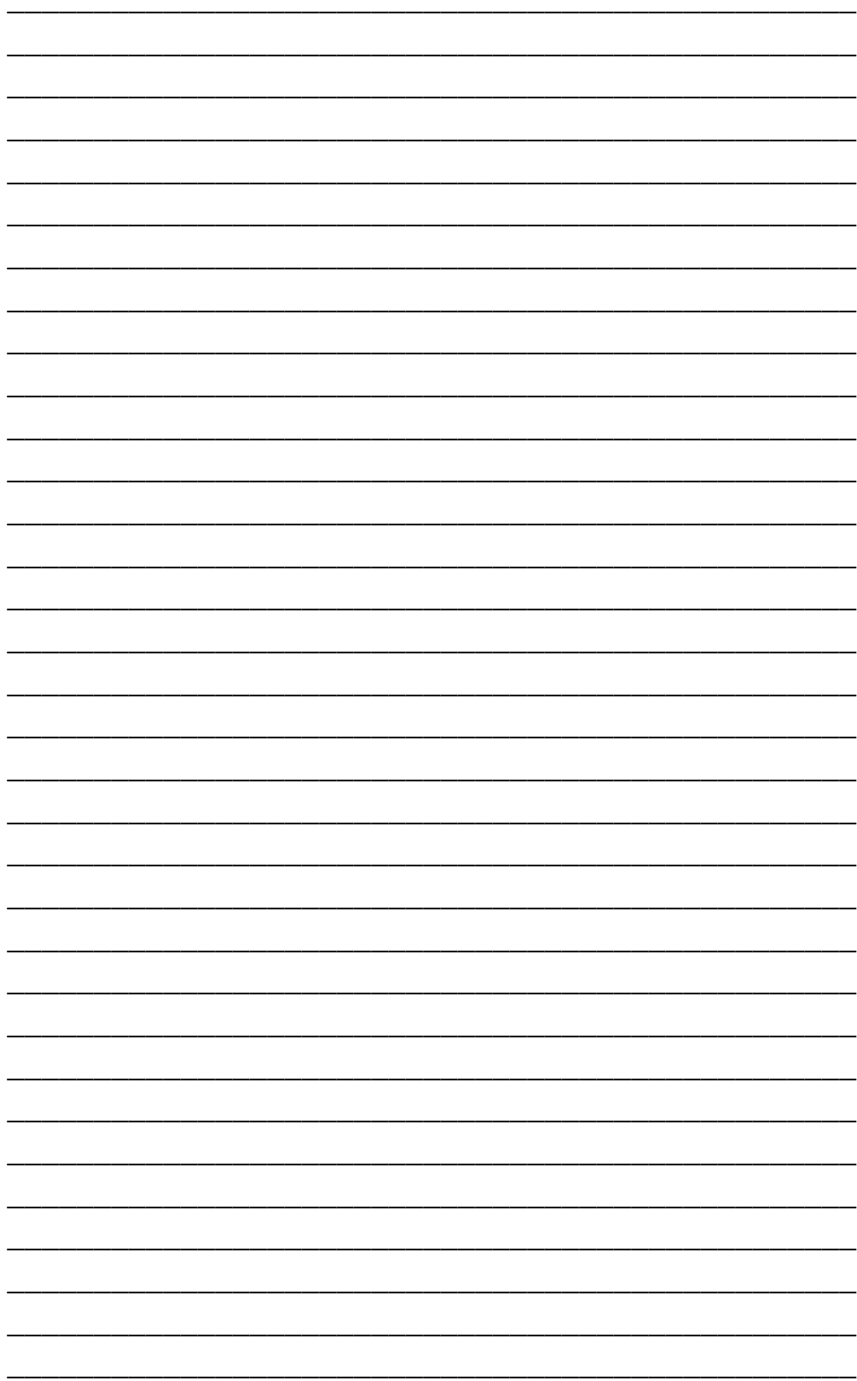
1. Keep your thoughts fixed on Jesus - The author of Hebrews tells us not to let the things of this world, or the works of the devil, distract us from running the race of faith. To do this, he reminds us to “We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith...” Hebrews 12:2 NLT
2. Take every thought captive - The apostle Paul faced many battles as a follower of Jesus. His obstacles came from those in the flesh and from the spiritual realm. As such, he wrote, “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:3-5 ESV). So please keep your thoughts in check; don't let them control you. And when you struggle, ask for help from your mental health care team to redirect you to a sustainable path.
3. Pray - After Jesus' transfiguration, he came down from the mountain to discover a demon-possessed boy, a frustrated father, and a group of impotent disciples unable to help. Jesus took care of the demon and told the disciples, “This kind can be cast out only by prayer.” Prayer is a critical part of our mental health journey; thankfully, the Holy Spirit and Jesus pray for us even when we can't. (Romans 8)

4. Worship - Exodus 4... When Moses was scared and didn't think he could accept the call of God, when he was stuck looking at himself and all his weaknesses and insecurities, God reminded Moses to stop worrying and start worshipping. Moses said, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?" God answered, "I will be with you." Exodus 3:11-12 NLT. A few verses later, God gave Moses his sacred name, Yahweh, or I AM. God wanted Moses to take his eyes off of himself and onto God. That's what we do when we worship.

Remember, in the battle of good and evil, Jesus has promised never to leave or forsake you. He has already claimed victory over the powers of darkness. So lean into His name, even when His name is the only word you can formulate, and rest in the knowledge that His name is higher than any other name in the universe, and He is on your side.

QUESTIONS

- In addition to the above advice from Scripture, what other passages do you go to or cling to help your mental health in times of struggle?
- How does knowing what Jesus went through before you help you come to him with your worries, fears, and sorrows?
- After this reflection, find one of your favorite worship songs or hymns to listen to today. Reflect on its words and may the tune carry you through the day.



Week 3

Day 18

Though the devil and his agents may not be something we fear, we must be aware and fight back wisely. We must also not invite the devil into our lives to gain a stronghold.

You may respond to that last statement with a “No duh! Of course, I’m not inviting the devil anywhere.” But let me explain the different ways this happens that are ever so subtle.

For many years, someone close to me had been hurt by the church, and so they walked away. They walked away from church, but as is often the case, they also walked away from any investment in a relationship with God.

At the same time, this person also explored their interest in the dark side of the spiritual realm. They explored black magic, witchcraft, Wiccan practices, an obsession with stories of the undead (vampires, ghosts/spirits, demons), and so on. This also showed in the books they chose to read, the movies they decided to watch, and the music they chose to listen to in their free time.

Again, I refer to a verse we shared yesterday, “For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and

take every thought captive to obey Christ," 2
Corinthians 10:3-5 ESV.

My friend was giving the darkness a stronghold on their life. How did these strongholds influence their life?

For years, I watched as my friend struggled with weight, with drugs/alcohol, and with decisions that caused more harm than good in their life. Then, when some things started going their way, good things finally started to happen, inevitably they'd be sucked back into the darkness, and things would fall apart; marriage, relationships with others, weight, job, etc...

Again, CS Lewis wrote, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician the same delight."

Scripture uses light and dark to speak to represent good and evil. We do the same in many of our movies today. As such, we are often referred to as children of light, as when Paul wrote, "For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded."
1 Thessalonians 5:5-6 NLT

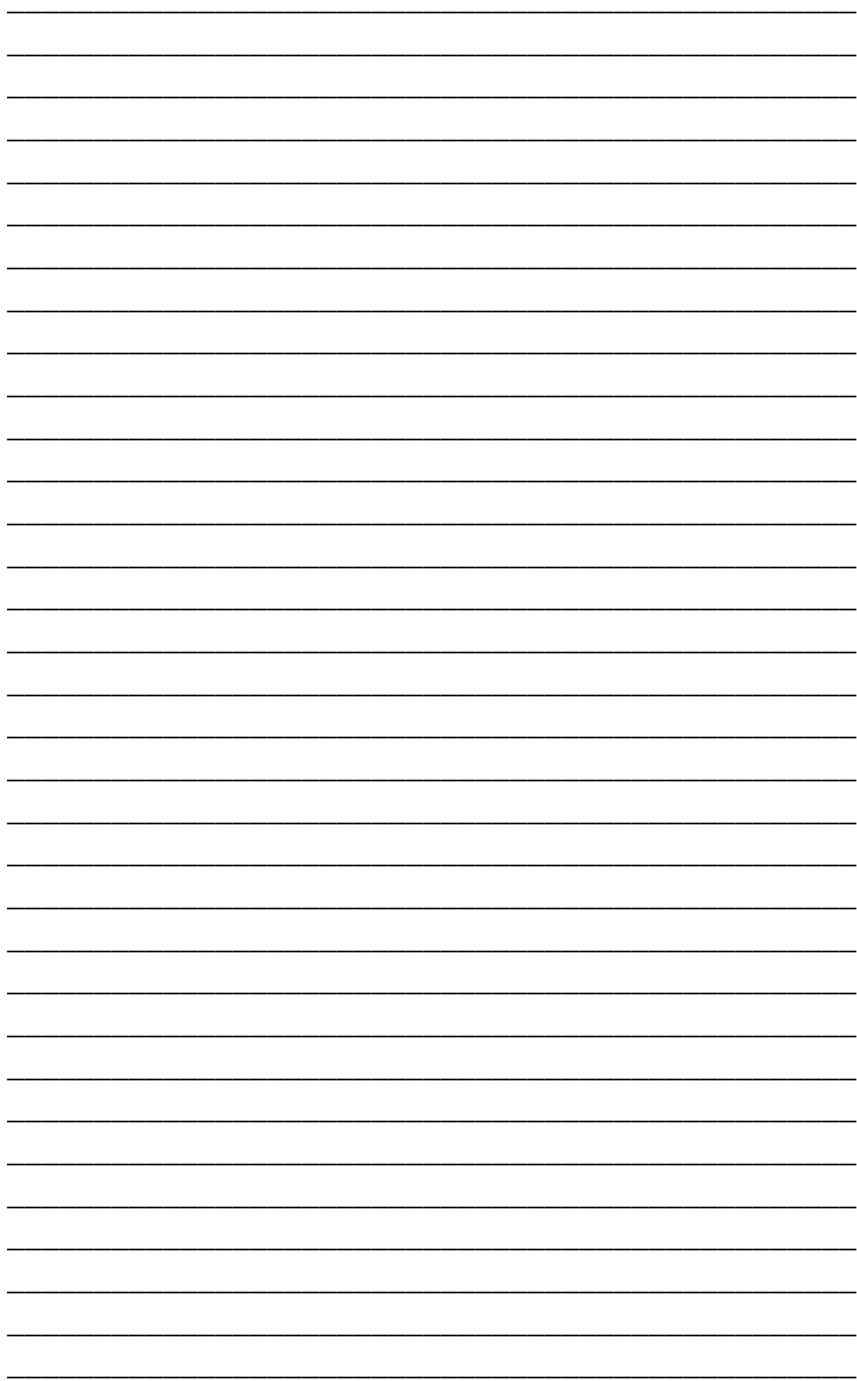
Paul may have been thinking of Jesus when he said, "Walk in the light while you can, so the darkness will not overtake you. Those who walk in the darkness cannot see where they are going. Put your trust in

the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light.” After saying these things, Jesus went away and was hidden from them.”
John 12:35-36 NLT

So, another way to help battle the darkness is not to give the darkness a place in our lives. To steer clear of practices, literature, and expressions that glorify the prince of darkness, but instead, walk in the light of God’s love and grace. And when we find ourselves stuck, trapped by our past, we need to seek freedom in Christ with the help of a pastor, a mentor, and maybe a mental health professional.

QUESTIONS

- How do we subtly open the door for the darkness to gain a foothold in our lives?
- What are some practices that help us walk in the light?
- How would you define freedom in Christ?



Week 3

Day 19

One of the hardest things about beginning the journey out of the darkness and into the light of feeling whole in our mental health is the ability to be vulnerable. Vulnerability can be tricky, especially when we don't feel safe or deeply fear rejection. However, as mentioned in week one, our secrets keep us sick, so we need to begin to share if we will start the journey towards healing.

One of our biggest fears of vulnerability is admitting to another person that we can't make it on our own. We are raised to be self-sufficient self-reliant, to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. But amid our mental health and spiritual attacks, admitting that we can't fight the battle alone is critical.

As I considered this topic, my mind drifted to King Saul's story.

If you know Saul's story, you know he was chosen to be the first king of Israel. But things didn't go as planned, and in 1 Samuel 16, something changes in Saul. We read, "Now the Spirit of the Lord had left Saul, and the Lord sent a tormenting spirit that filled him with depression and fear." 1 Samuel 16:14 NLT

Saul went from being anointed to being tormented. Sounds like he spent a week or two as a pastor.

Did God send the tormenting spirit? Well, that's debatable, and it doesn't sound like something the

God we see throughout Scripture would do. But you have to understand the worldview of the Hebrews of this time. They believed that God was all-powerful and that if God didn't stop something from happening, then God was seen as the one who did that something.

Regardless of the source of it, however, Saul was tormented and was often filled with depression and fear. He discovered that one of the only things that helped him was music. Long story short, Saul was led to a young shepherd named David, who had a talent for playing the harp. Saul learned to be vulnerable in his struggle, and when he was at his worst, he would call for David to come and play.

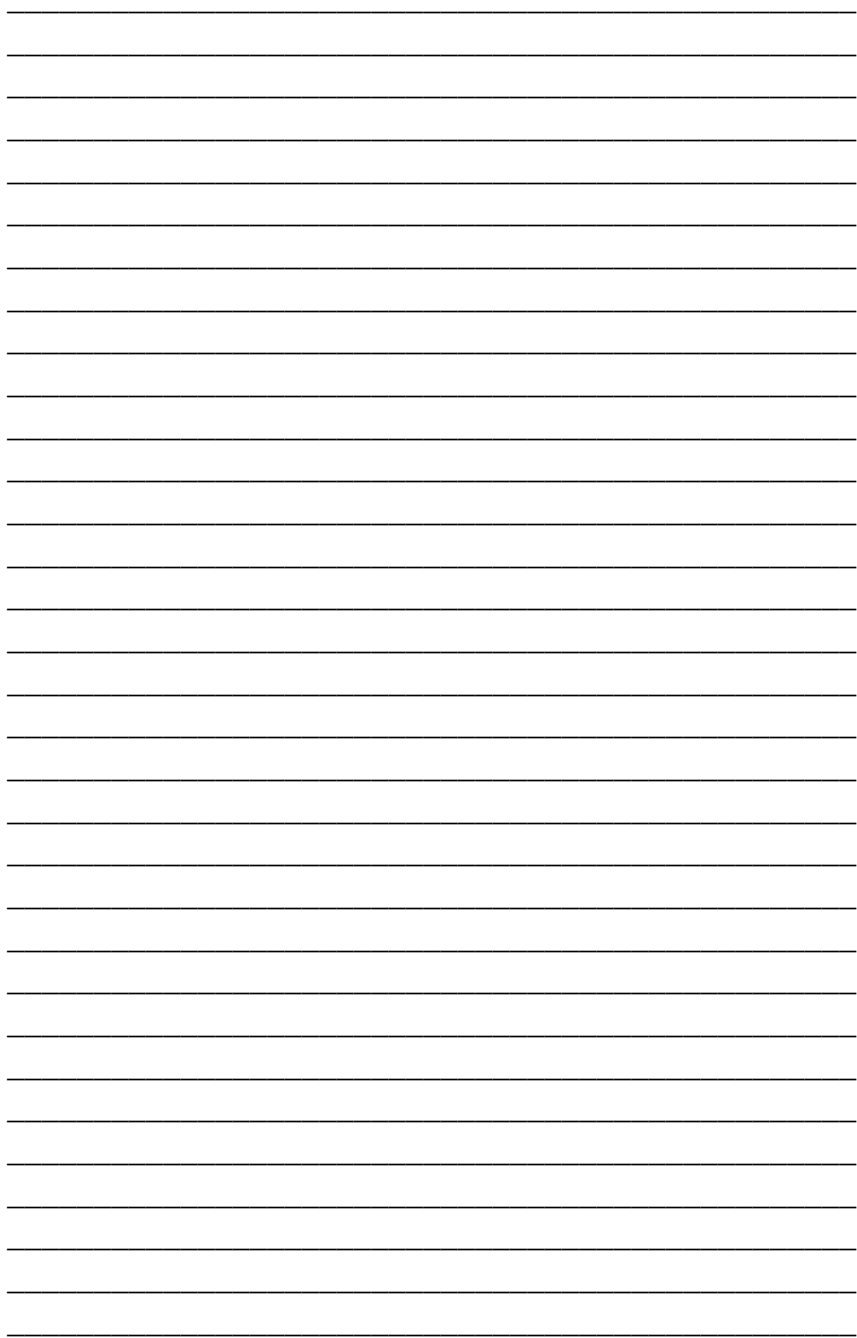
“And whenever the tormenting spirit from God troubled Saul, David would play the harp. Then Saul would feel better, and the tormenting spirit would go away.” 1 Samuel 16:21-23 NLT

But we also know that Saul became jealous of David as the people began to see David as the better leader. Saul tried to kill David many times, even though David was the only one who could help him. We are often our own worst enemies.

Asking for help can be one of the most challenging things you can do, but it is the beginning of the road to healing.

QUESTION

- What are you afraid of someone finding out about you?



Week 3

Day 20

On my desk sits a copy of one of my favorite books, *Steps to Christ* by Ellen G. White. If you just let the book open, it will do so with pages 72-73 showing and the pages almost falling out.

The chapter is called *Growing Up Into Christ*, and I often reference a quote on these pages because it speaks to my heart and my struggle so well. It's a long quote but a powerful one. Allow me to share it.

“When the mind dwells upon self, it is turned away from Christ, the source of strength and life. Hence, it is Satan's constant effort to keep the attention diverted from the Saviour and thus prevent the union and communion of the soul with Christ. The pleasures of the world, life's cares and perplexities, and sorrows, the faults of others, or your own faults and imperfections—to any or all of these he will seek to divert the mind. Do not be misled by his devices. Many who are conscientious, and who desire to live for God, he too often leads to dwell upon their own faults and weaknesses, and thus, by separating them from Christ, he hopes to gain the victory. We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength. Commit the keeping of your soul to God, and trust in Him. Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him.” (SC 71.2)

A few things to note in this chapter as it relates to our mental health and the devil's role in seeking to steal,

kill, and destroy all those who reflect the image of his enemy.

First, she says it's "Satan's constant effort" to keep us from Jesus, to distract us from what we need most: communion with Christ. And he doesn't care what we're focused on as long as it's not the source of our strength.

Second, she talks about everything we get distracted by - "pleasures of the world, life's care, and perplexities and sorrows, the faults of others, or your faults and imperfections.". So often the devil beats me down by filling my thoughts with any or all of these things. I become judgmental, allow myself to be filled with shame, or overwhelm me. Whatever it is, the light in my world dims, and I'm trapped in the dark.

Third, her response to fighting these things is so simple that we struggle to believe it works. She says, "Talk and think of Jesus. Let self be lost in Him." She's not the only one to say this.

John the Baptist declared, "[Jesus] must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less." John 3:30 NLT

The apostle Paul proclaimed, "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me..." Galatians 2:20 NLT

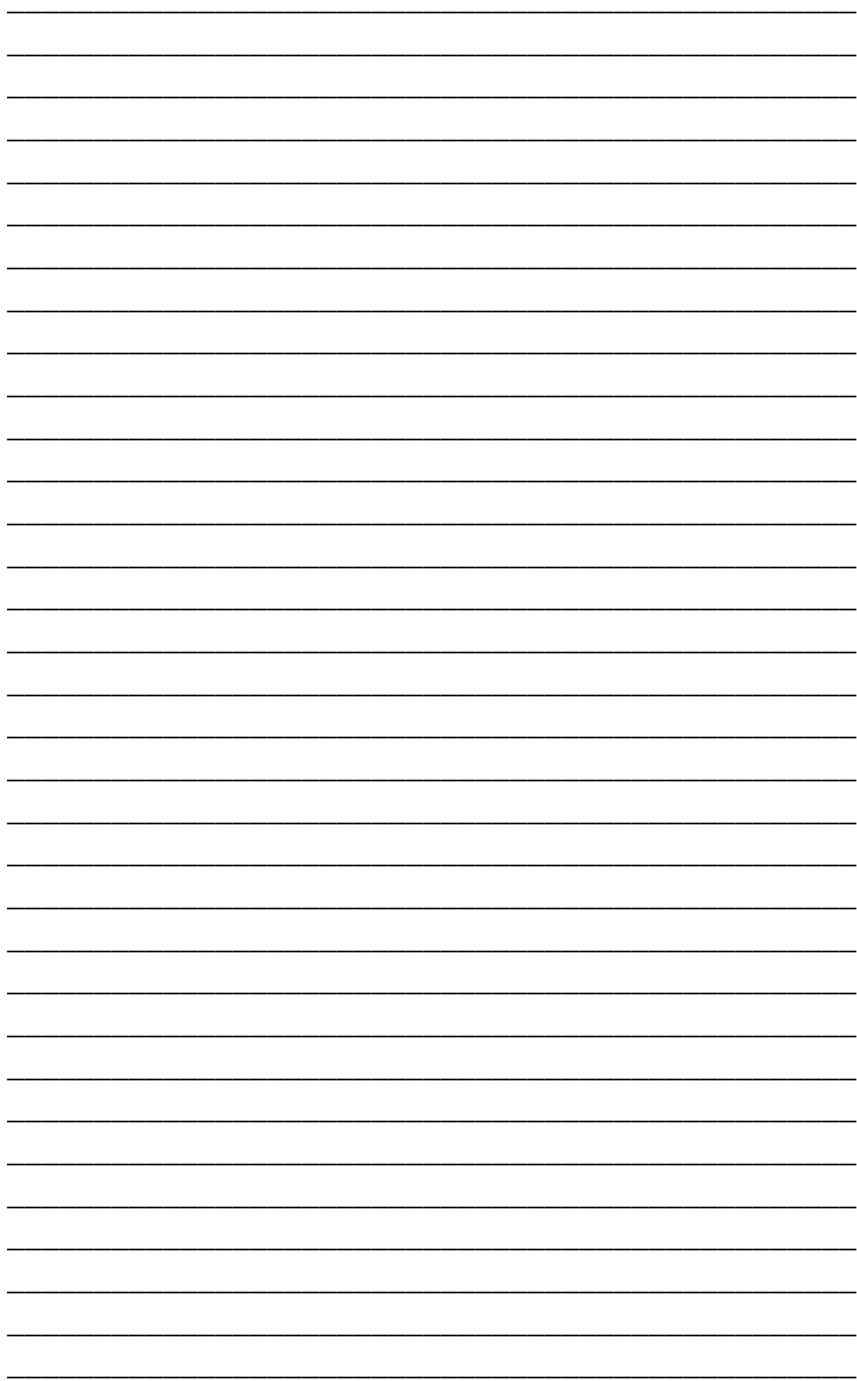
Again, addressing our mental health struggles must be a wholistic experience (mental, spiritual, physical, emotional). Still, when it comes to the forces of darkness and the role they can play in our struggles, there is no better solution than Jesus. Talking about

Jesus, singing about Jesus, finding a community that helps you see Jesus more clearly and answer His call to love well, all are critical in helping us live as children of light that pushes back the darkness.

So, let's talk a lot more about Jesus and help each other ward off the devil's distractions by bringing all back to the world's Savior and how he loves us.

QUESTIONS

- What things distract you right now from talking and thinking of Jesus?
- Why do you think it's important to focus on him instead of yourself and your problems and challenges?
- It was once said, "My life begins to have a point when I am no longer the point of my life.". What does that mean, and how might it apply to good mental health?



Week 3

Day 21

Small Group Discussion Guide

The following guide is designed to serve as a potential framework for your discussion. Feel free to use it as is or adapt as the Spirit leads.

OPEN

What are your thoughts about demon possession and mental health in Scripture? What did you hear growing up? Was there such a thing as mental health, or was it all demon possession, or vice versa?

GETTING INTO THE TOPIC

Do you think demon possession happens today? Why or why not?

Do you think a demon could also possess a person who surrendered to Christ? Explain.

HEAD

Read 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and share any wisdom, insights, or impressions you received from reading the Word.

What does spiritual warfare look like today in our Western world?

How do we take captive our thoughts and fight back against the darkness?

Read Luke 8: 26-39 and share any wisdom, insights, or impressions you received from reading the Word.

Why do you think the demons yelled and shrieked when they came in contact with Jesus?

This exchange between Jesus and the demons was the longest of any other story. Usually, the demons just said who Jesus was and did whatever he said. Why do you think Jesus allowed this exchange? Why let them into the pigs instead of the abyss or bottomless pit?

In verse 35, why do you think the people were afraid of seeing the man with Jesus being sane and in his right mind? Wouldn't this be time to rejoice?

HEART

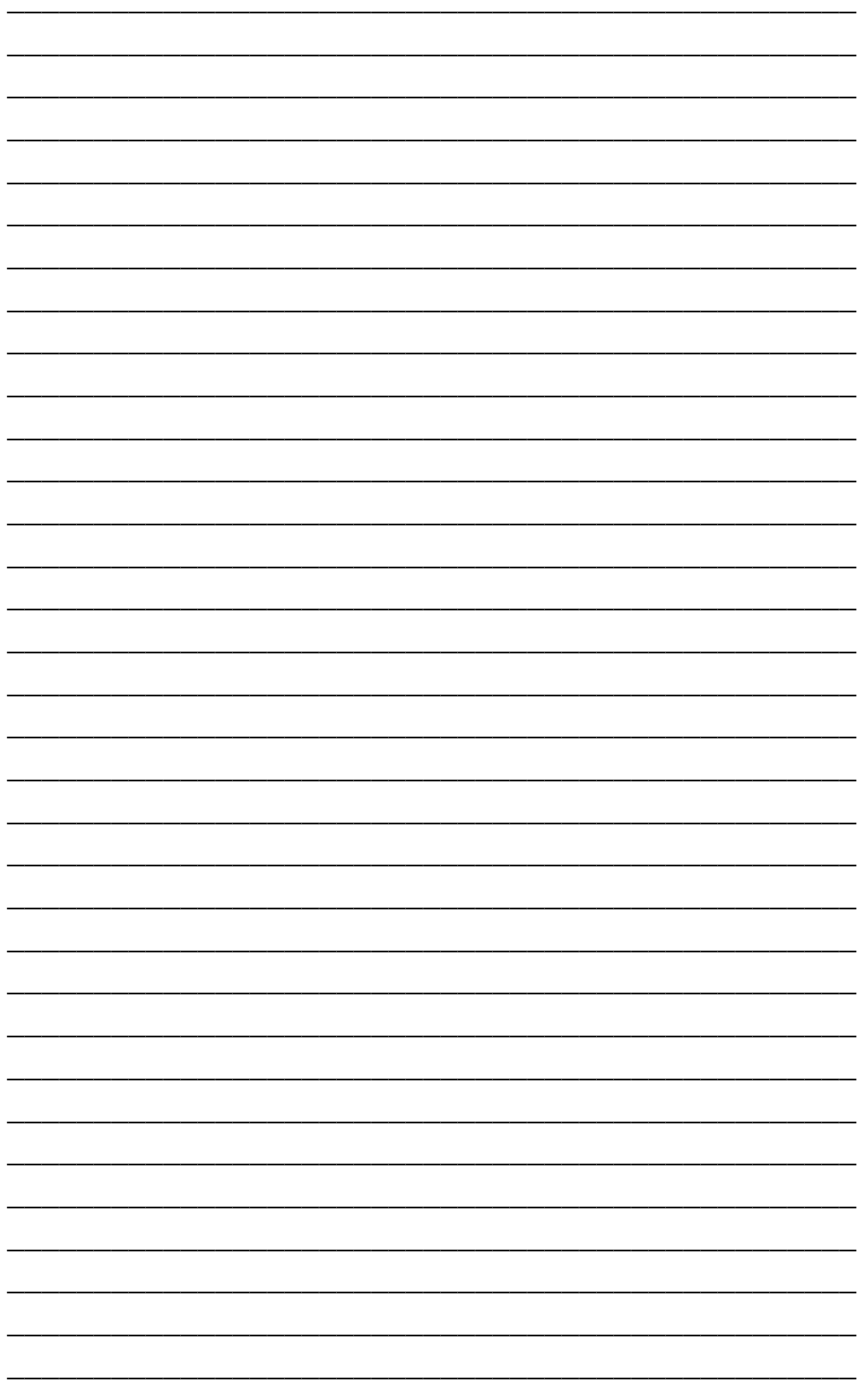
How can you and I help each other remember that the battles we face every day have a physical and spiritual component?

How can we help each other fight the battle?

HANDS

What's one thing your connect group members can pray over for you today that concerns your own battle? When you close your connect group time, have one person commit to pray over another person until every person is covered in prayer. Then, share those prayers with the team so that over the next week, your connect group family can continue lifting you in prayer.

WORDS TO REMEMBER



Week 4

Day 22

What to do When You Suspect Suicidal Thoughts

If you suspect a loved one might be struggling with Suicidal Ideations or SI, what can you do? Directly asking someone you care about if they are about to end their life can come across as a bit harsh and accusatory. However, the question must be asked, and I find it helpful to soften the question like this: Are you having any thoughts of wishing you were dead? If the answer is yes, ask what is happening (or not happening) in their life to drive them toward such thoughts. At that point, it's your job to listen, empathize, and reflect on what you have heard in your own words.

Whatever you do, please don't get caught up in trying to fix the issues they describe. Their problems are too much for you to solve now, and your efforts to do so will drive the person to pull away from you. It never feels good to be someone's fix-it project.

Then you need to ask the following: Have your thoughts ever reached a point where you considered ending your life? If the answer is no, then the danger is less serious. If the answer is yes, you could ask their plan.

People are generally willing to answer these questions when I ask with authentic caring. Once they tell you their method, you need to ask if they have access to it. For example, do they have access to a gun if they plan to shoot themselves? If they plan to take a bunch of pills, do they have access to the pills they plan to take? If they do have access, ask if it might be helpful for them to hand their gun (or their pills) over to a trusted friend or family member until they're in a better place and no longer a danger to their safety.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever struggled with thoughts of wishing you were dead? If so, what was that like for you, and what brought that about?
2. Has anyone among your friends and family members attempted suicide? If so, how did that impact you?
3. Have you ever been at a low point and had someone you deeply trust ask with genuine caring how you are doing? If so, what was that like for you? Could you share with this trusted friend what had been bothering you? If so, what was it like to feel heard?

Week 4

Day 23

What to do When You Suspect Suicidal Thoughts, Part 2

Once you've established that someone is having thoughts of ending their life, and you've explored their plan and access to the materials needed to implement their goal, it's time to find their strength. The reality is that they have not yet ended their life, so it's time for you to get curious about what has kept them up to this point from acting on their thoughts.

Please list family members, friends, or pets they care about and would not want to put through such a terrible loss or that they feel responsible for caring for. Adding roles, goals, or responsibilities they still feel called to fulfill can be helpful, such as caring for a pet or a child or finishing a major project. In addition, they may fear being lost or going to hell if they commit suicide, and I would add that to this list, though we'll talk about that another day.

I once worked with someone who chose not to hang herself because she feared what it would do to her younger sister. I made the most of the opportunity to affirm this young lady for having the where-with-all to rise above her pain enough to pay attention to the potential pain of her sibling.

Next, you need to list what soothes them—what helps them overcome the emotional hump of needing to

end their lives. In my experience, individuals with SI don't desire to be dead; they've just lost all hope of ending their pain any other way.

So, help them make a list. What calms their troubled feelings and gets them over this emotional hump? For some, the answer will be listening to certain kinds of music. For others, it might be talking with a good friend, walking, playing a video game, reading a good book, or watching a movie. I call these activities coping mechanisms, including alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, etc. I should add that while these latter activities might not be as socially or morally acceptable, they are way better than ending one's life!

Lastly, suppose someone is struggling with suicidal ideation. In that case, it is always wise to encourage that person to seek professional assistance through a suicide hotline, counseling, medication, or inpatient treatment.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are things in your life important enough to keep you from thoughts of ending your life when things get hard?
2. What are the activities/practices that soothe you and lift your spirits when you are feeling low?
3. Talk about a time when you were able to be there for someone who was going through an emotional rough patch. What was that like for you?

Week 4

Day 24

From the Heights to the Depths

It took real courage for Elijah to go to Israel's king and declare that there would be no dew nor rain for the next few years. Kings did not tend to accept lousy news well in those days. The phrase "shoot the messenger" comes to mind. But Elijah was faithful to his calling and delivered God's message to Israel's king.

Then God miraculously provides for Elijah by sending food by ravens until the brook he is camping by dries up. At that point, God directs Elijah to a widow in the community of Zarephath. Elijah shows up when this widow is one handful of flour away from starvation. Elijah assures this woman that her flour and oil will only run out once the famine ends. Still, he commands her to make him something to eat first with the little she has left, which she does, and sure enough, God comes through and supplies sufficient for Elijah, this woman, and her son until the famine is over.

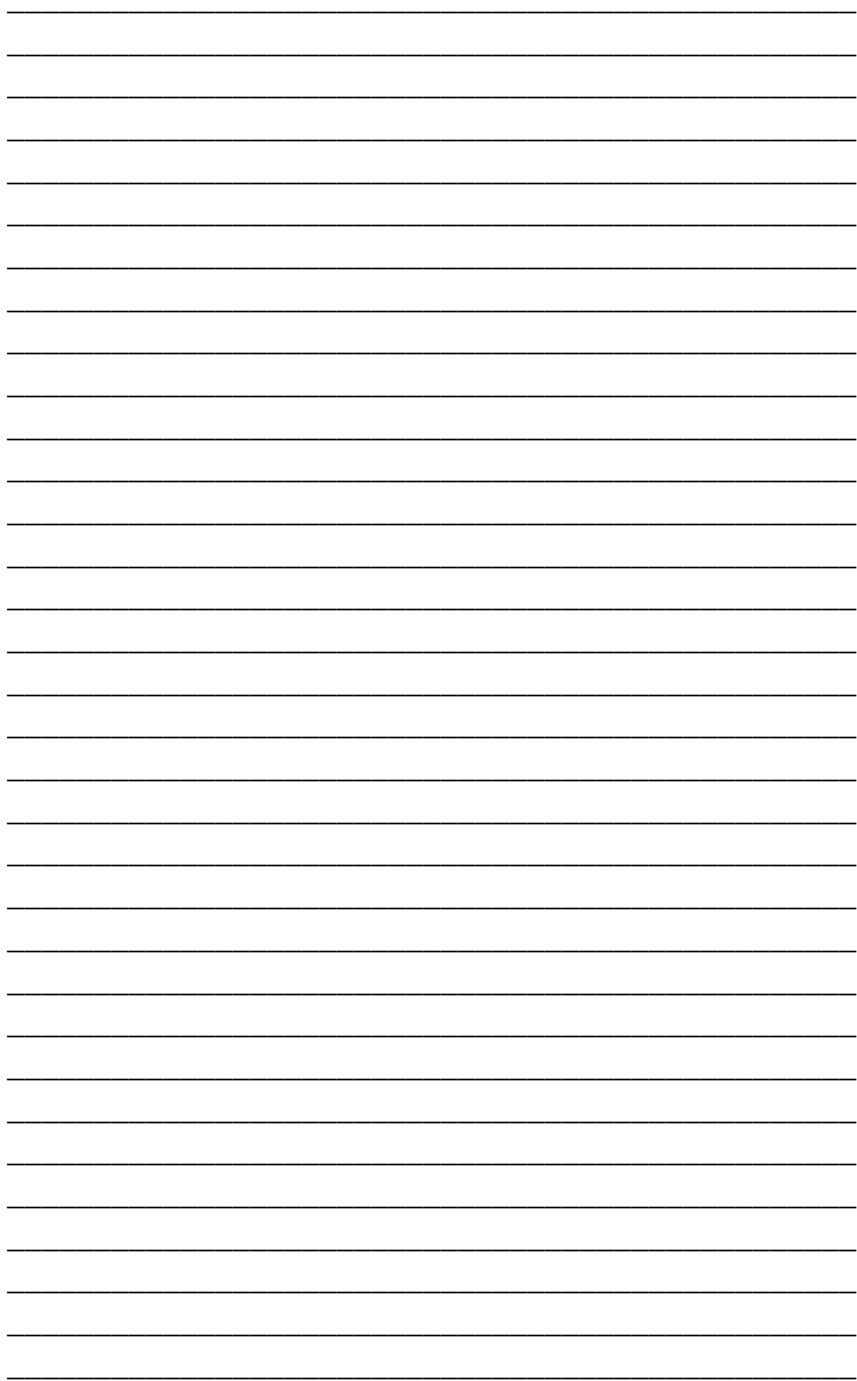
It must have been quite an experience for Elijah to see God's miraculous power revealed through ravens dropping off food and jars of flour and oil refusing to empty. But this pales in comparison to what God did on Mt. Carmel. On that mount, Elijah stood alone against the 450 prophets of Baal. He watched as God

worked a mighty miracle to bring fire down from Heaven to consume not just the sacrifice but the stones of the altar and even the water in the trench around the altar! Talk about a rush! Wow! To stand alone like that and come out entirely on top through the mighty power of God must have been a true high.

But then Jezebel threatens to destroy Elijah, and he completely loses his trust in God, runs for his life into the desert and becomes so depressed that he asks God to end his life! Let me remind you that emotional lows often come after massive highs. It's how our bodies find equilibrium. It's common to experience depressed mood after the excitement of moving into a new home, securing a new job or bringing home a baby from the hospital. So, let's not be too hard on Elijah, and let's not be too hard on ourselves when we hit an emotional low that comes on the heels of something grand. It's just part of life! And note that God was very patient with Elijah at his low point. God understood what Elijah was going through, and this can give us hope that God will know what we are going through when we hit the emotional skids.

Discussion Questions:

1. Talk about times when something very positive came your way (significant promotion, new home, birth of a child, etc.). What was it like to experience those positive events? What were some of the emotions bubbling up during those experiences?
2. During any of the experiences you listed above, did you experience an emotional letdown or crash afterward? If so, what was that like?
3. Talk about a time when you did something impulsive that was driven by fear. How did that



Week 4

Day 25

How Do We Handle the Emotional Fallout of Suicide?

When a son or daughter, brother or sister, or close friend takes their own life, we naturally want to assign blame. We want to know what could have been done to prevent this from happening. So, it's common for us to blame God for not sending someone to prevent the problem. We blame ourselves for not paying closer attention to what was happening in the person's life and stepping in to prevent this tragic loss.

You may have heard stories of God impressing someone to call or visit a friend or loved one only to discover afterward that the person was on the verge of carrying out their plan to end their life. In the film *A Man Called Otto*, the critical character (played by Tom Hanks) is depressed after losing his wife. He is determined to end his life, but every time he attempts to carry out his plan, his intrusive next-door neighbor comes knocking, and his dreams are foiled. Otto spends so much time with this family that his attempts become difficult.

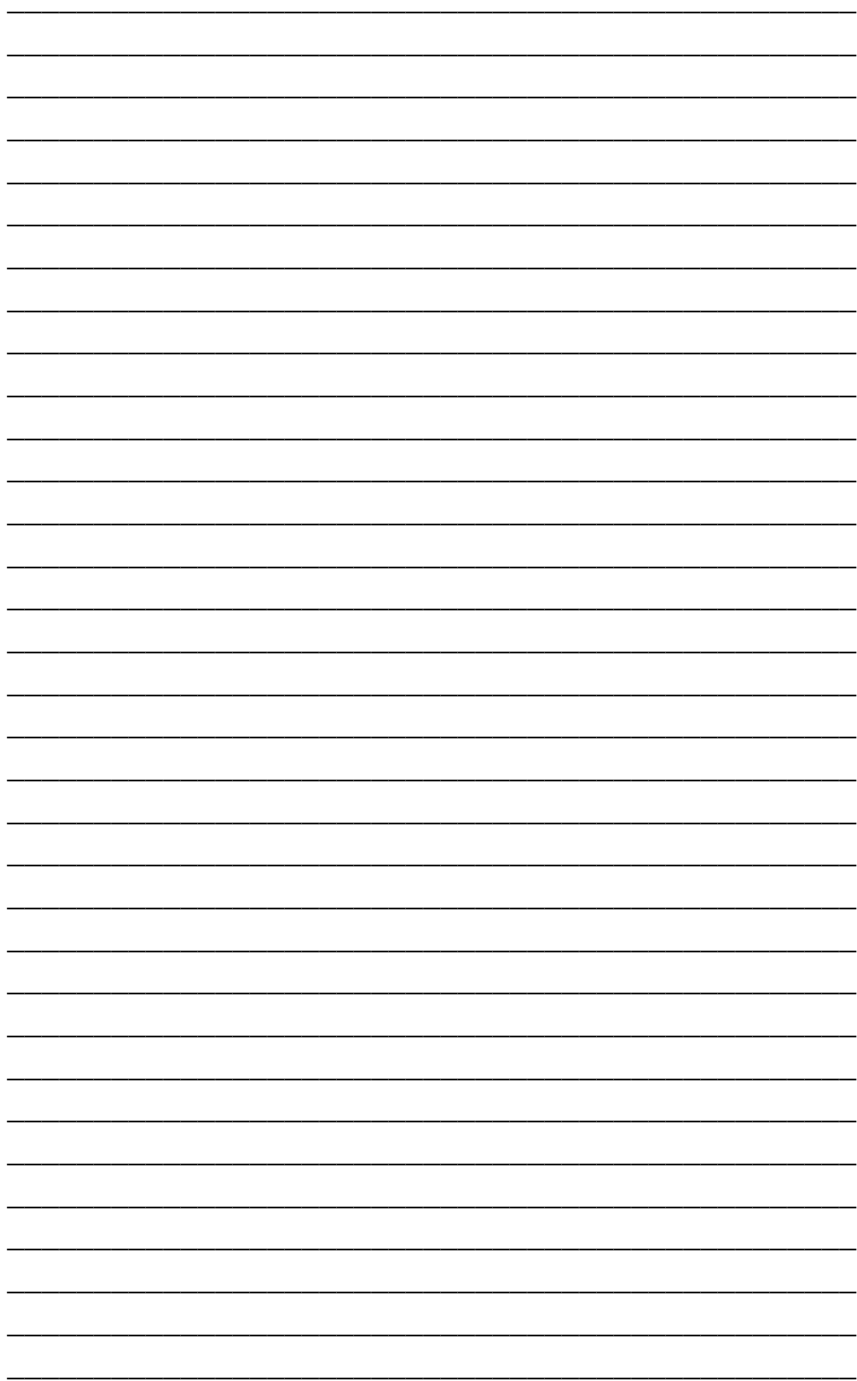
We wonder why God failed to send a pesky neighbor or a nosy friend at just the right time to prevent the tragic death of one we love. Why does God step in sometimes but not others? I wish I had an excellent answer to this question, but I'm afraid it's above my

pay grade! I admit that in times such as these when God fails to stop an event, I'm tempted to believe I could manage the universe better than God, for I would certainly have sent someone at just the right time to prevent such senseless loss of life.

But perhaps God does not step in because he is counting on us to partner with him in caring for those around us. After all, we are our brother's keeper! God's trust in us is a risky proposition that I don't fully understand. But, as we take responsibility for loving those struggling with anxiety and depression, we are offering to partner with God in healing the hurt in the world around us. Stepping into the aftermath of suicide is a part of our call to love well.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you ever had an experience in which God failed to come through for you or for someone you care about? If so, what was that like for you?
2. Have you ever had a difficult or painful experience in which a friend, relative or work associate stepped up to be there for you in a significant way? If so, what was that like?
3. Have you ever had the privilege of being there for someone who was going through a difficult time? What was that like for you to be there for them? Did you have a sense of God working through you? If so, what was that like?



Week 4

Day 26

What Drives Suicide?

What drives suicide? What gets inside of a person that leads them to carry out a plan to end their life? What part of the person takes over and pushes for this result?

In my experience, three basic scenarios drive a person toward suicide: loss of purpose, loss of hope, and when one part of the person is trying to prevent another person from harming someone else.

When a person loses their purpose for living, they feel they are no longer needed. Sometimes, they come to believe that they are making things worse for those around them, which drives them to conclude that the world would be a better place if they were gone.

Most of the time when someone is struggling with thoughts of ending their life, they are in severe physical or emotional pain. When they've tried everything they know yet nothing eases their pain, they tend to give up. It's not so much that they desire to be dead; they've just lost all hope of ending their pain in any other way.

Sometimes, the individual is convinced that ending their life is the only way to prevent another angry part of themselves from harming someone they hate. I've seen cases where the person had been horribly

wronged by someone, and a part of that person was pushing hard for vengeance. This can trigger another part of the person to push to end their life to prevent the vengeful part from carrying out his vengeance.

So, if we are called to partner with God in preventing those we care about from ending their lives, we need to tune in to their loss of purpose and/or loss of hope and pay attention to their possible desire for vengeance. This will require us to know one another well enough to notice these factors in their lives, and it will need us to care enough to ask the tough questions in a caring way.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you have a strong sense of purpose for your life? What would it be if you put your sense of purpose into a one-sentence personal life mission statement?
2. What are the three things you most hope for in life? And why is each of them important to you at this point in your life?
3. When you think about those things you hope for, what is the foundation for your hope?

Week 4

Day 27

Am I Lost if I Commit Suicide?

Years before I was born, my mother's oldest brother found a secluded location and ended his life. So, I grew up under the shadow of this event. In my mind's eye, I can still see the picture of this uncle on my mother's dresser.

Many have proclaimed that anyone who has committed suicide has committed the sin of murder with no opportunity to repent, and therefore, they would be lost for all eternity. But is it really that simple? Or is there room for a more nuanced approach?

For example, in a court of law, we exempt a murderer from the total penalty of the law if the person is found to be criminally insane. So, human courts consider the mental and emotional state of the accused. Would not God be as compassionate as a human court?

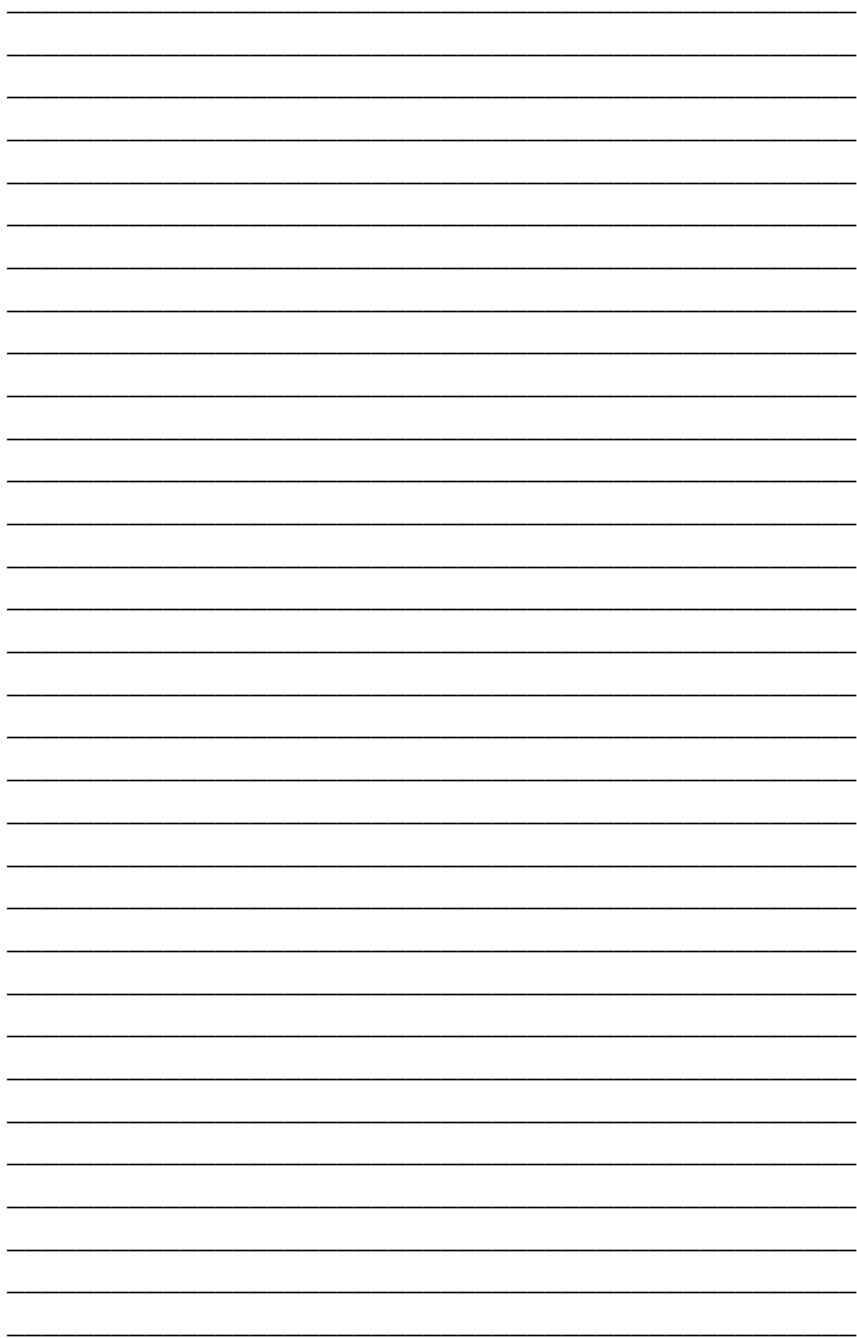
In his book *After*, Dr. Bruce Greyson tells the story of a college student named Peter who jumped from the roof of his dorm to end his life. A voice inside his head had been screaming at him that he belonged to Satan and deserved to be in hell; therefore, he must jump. This student told Dr. Greyson that as he fell, time stopped, God began to speak to him, and God said, "Peter, you are one of my children. You do not

belong to Satan. You are loved more than you will ever know. I will not let your life end like this.” Sure enough, Peter broke both his legs, but he was otherwise unharmed. Could it be that God understands what we are going through and responds not with criticism and shame but compassion and love? This was how Jesus answered tax collectors and prostitutes. Why would his response to someone who has ended their life be any different?

We see God enacting this kinder, gentler approach toward Elijah in his darkest hour. Elijah has just experienced the rush of the mighty revelation of God's might on Mt. Carmel, but now he's been running into the desert—running from a woman who has threatened his life. He begs God to let him die. But rather than lecturing him on his negative attitude or chiding him for his lack of faith, God sends an angel to bring him much-needed sustenance. God meets Elijah at his lowest point with caring and compassion, not judgment or criticism. Is there any reason to doubt that God will respond to us in our darkest hour similarly?

Discussion Questions:

1. What's your view on the potential salvation of someone who has chosen to end their life? What is the basis for your thinking on this?
2. Elijah fearlessly stands alone against the 450 prophets of Baal. What do you surmise must have happened for him to cower in fear at the threat of a woman?
3. Elijah ran away in fear. Have you ever done anything similar?



Week 4

Day 28

Small Group Discussion Guide

The following guide is designed to serve as a potential framework for your discussion. Feel free to use it as is or adapt as the Spirit leads.

OPEN

This week is about helping those who might have been in danger of self-mortal harm (suicide). This is the last thing we want anyone to go through. The central message is that we must help them get professional help as soon as possible. But Dr. Pruehs gives us some great counsel on how to help someone in this situation. However, please ensure you don't try to handle this yourself unless you are a mental health professional.

GETTING INTO THE TOPIC

Have you or someone you know ever had Suicidal Ideation? How does this connect to someone's spirituality and mental health?

If it is not triggering, would anyone in your group share a time they have struggled with SI or had gotten to a pretty dark place in their mental health journey?

HEAD

We know our mental health has peaks and valleys, like anything else in our lives. Is there some scripture that can help with this?

Psalm 34:17-20- When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.

Isaiah 41:10- Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Exodus 14:14- The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

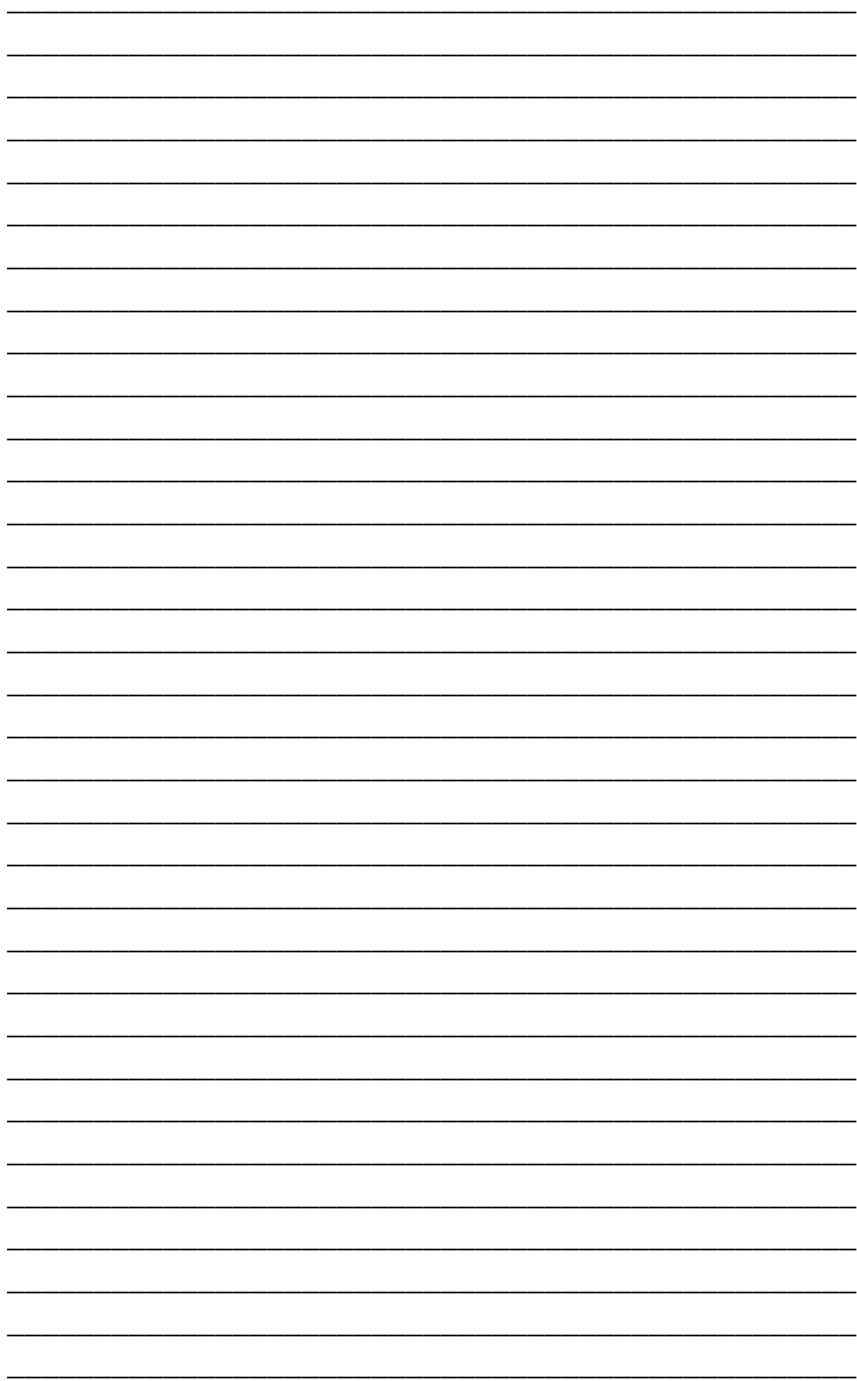
1 Corinthians 12:9- But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

We do not give you these texts to shame anyone for having these thoughts, but we want you to know how much God loves you and is walking with you through these valleys. Not only friends and family and community would miss you, but so would God.

HEART

How can we as a community, family, and friends help one another when we see someone slipping into despair? What is appropriate and reasonable to do and take responsibility for?

HANDS



Week 5

Day 29

Matthew 26:36-37

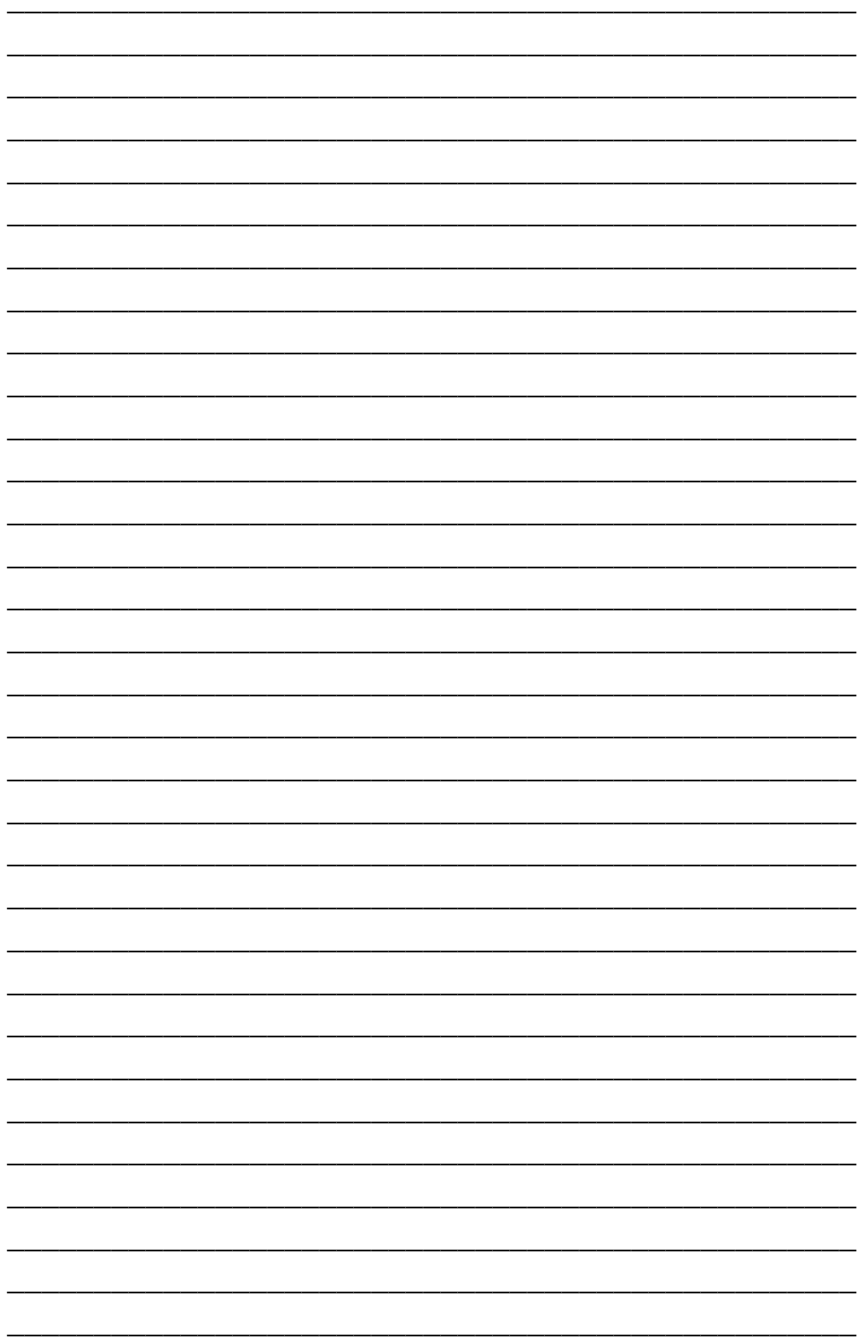
Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane and said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled.

This week, we look at Matthew’s telling of Jesus in Gethsemane, in chapter 26, verses 36-46. The first verses describe Jesus looking for a private place to pray in his distress. In particular, he sought isolation with his trusted inner circle of Peter, James, and John.

Friends are essential for emotional support in times of stress. A study on men’s stress management and spirituality found that being around peers had beneficial effects (Houle et al., 2017).⁷ Further analysis uncovered two reasons for this: shared activity and being mutually inspired. As we read in the first of tomorrow’s verses, Jesus wanted them to keep watch with him, including sharing activities and being mutually inspired.

When men are sorrowful and troubled it can be counter-intuitive in mainstream American culture to look for support of friends, particularly other men. This may have also been the case in Jesus’s culture, as

⁷ Houle, J., Meunier, S., Coulombe, S., Mercerat, C., Gaboury, I., Tremblay, G., de Montigny, F., Cloutier, L., Roy, B., Auger, N., & Lavoie, B. (2017). Peer positive social control and men’s health-promoting behaviors. *American Journal of Men’s Health*, 11(5), 1569-1579. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988317711605>



Week 5

Day 30

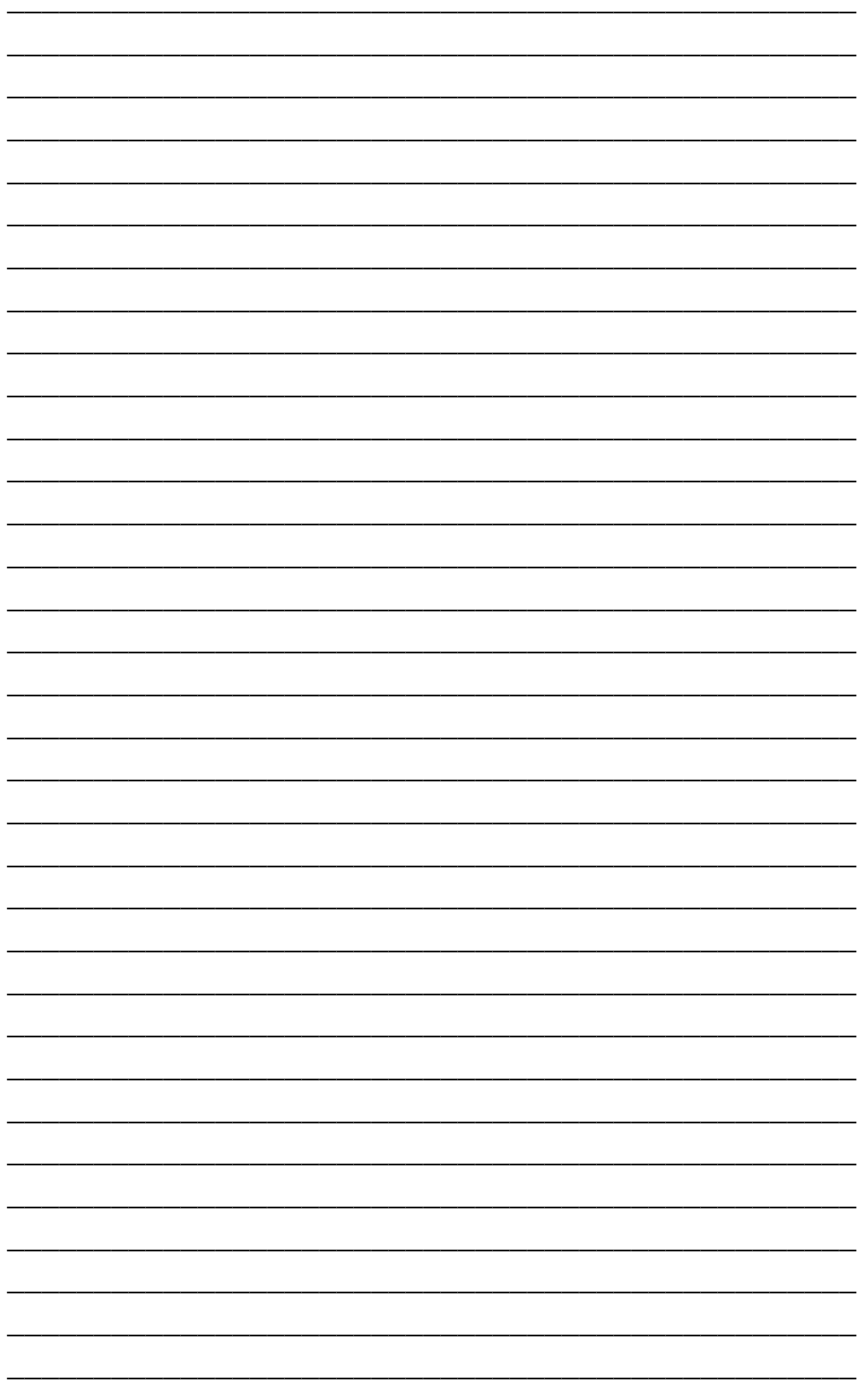
Matthew 26:38-39

Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.” Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”

In the first-century Greco-Roman world there were particular attributes of the ideal man (Conway, 2015), although it is unclear what percentage of men actualized them. One attribute was mastery, being overall non-men, and having high self-control. Another was achievement, proven in competition with other men. Being masculine was also a moral quality, as being seen as manly was always positive, even when women displayed the characteristic; conversely, being effeminate was always seen as morally negative.

In Gethsemane Jesus being overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death would have appeared to be effeminate, a loss of his manly control, as would asking for the cup to be taken from him. The Greco-Roman ideal was to endure hardship and pain without complaining or giving in (Asikainen, 2018, p. 157-158).⁸

⁸Asikainen, S. (2018). *Jesus and Other Men: Ideal Masculinities in the Synoptic Gospels*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004361096>



Week 5

Day 31

Matthew 26:40-41

Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Sleep is a big deal for our health across multiple body systems. “Adverse outcomes of insufficient sleep and/or sleep disorders are weight gain and obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, accidents and injuries, stress, pain, neurocognitive dysfunction, psychiatric symptoms, and mortality” (Grandner, 2017, p. 1).¹⁰ That list is worth re-reading and saying, “I need to be kind to myself and get adequate and regular sleep, or go to a sleep medicine clinic if that is not happening despite my best efforts.”

Presumably, Jesus had some insight into the importance of sleep. Still, it is obvious he had more immediately essential things on his mind and hoped to get social support from those he trusted.

Another effect of sleep deprivation could have been impairing the disciples’ support of Jesus in his greatest hour of need. An experiment compared the moral reasoning of partially sleep-deprived military

¹⁰Grandner, M. A. (2017). Sleep, health, and society. *Sleep Medicine Clinics*, 12(1), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsmc.2016.10.012>

Week 5

Day 32

Matthew 26:42

He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

Jesus is now becoming more centered and moving to different religious coping strategies. Rather than pleading for God to miraculously take away the coming suffering, he moves to what psychologists of religion have termed collaborative religious coping and active religious surrender (Pargament et al. 2000).¹²

Collaborative religious coping is “seeking control through a partnership with God in problem-solving” (Pargament et al. p. 522), and is characterized by statements such as “I try to put my plans into action together with God.”

Active religious surrender is “an active giving up of control to God in coping” (Pargament et al. p. 522), and is illustrated by assertions like “I do what I can and put the rest in God’s hands.”

A longitudinal study of the later effects of various religious coping styles found that collaborative

¹² Pargament, K. I., Koenig, H. G., & Perez, L. M. (2000). The many methods of religious coping: development and initial validation of the RCOPE. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56(4), 519-543. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&dopt=Citation&list_uids=10775045

Week 5

Day 33

Matthew 26:43-44

When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

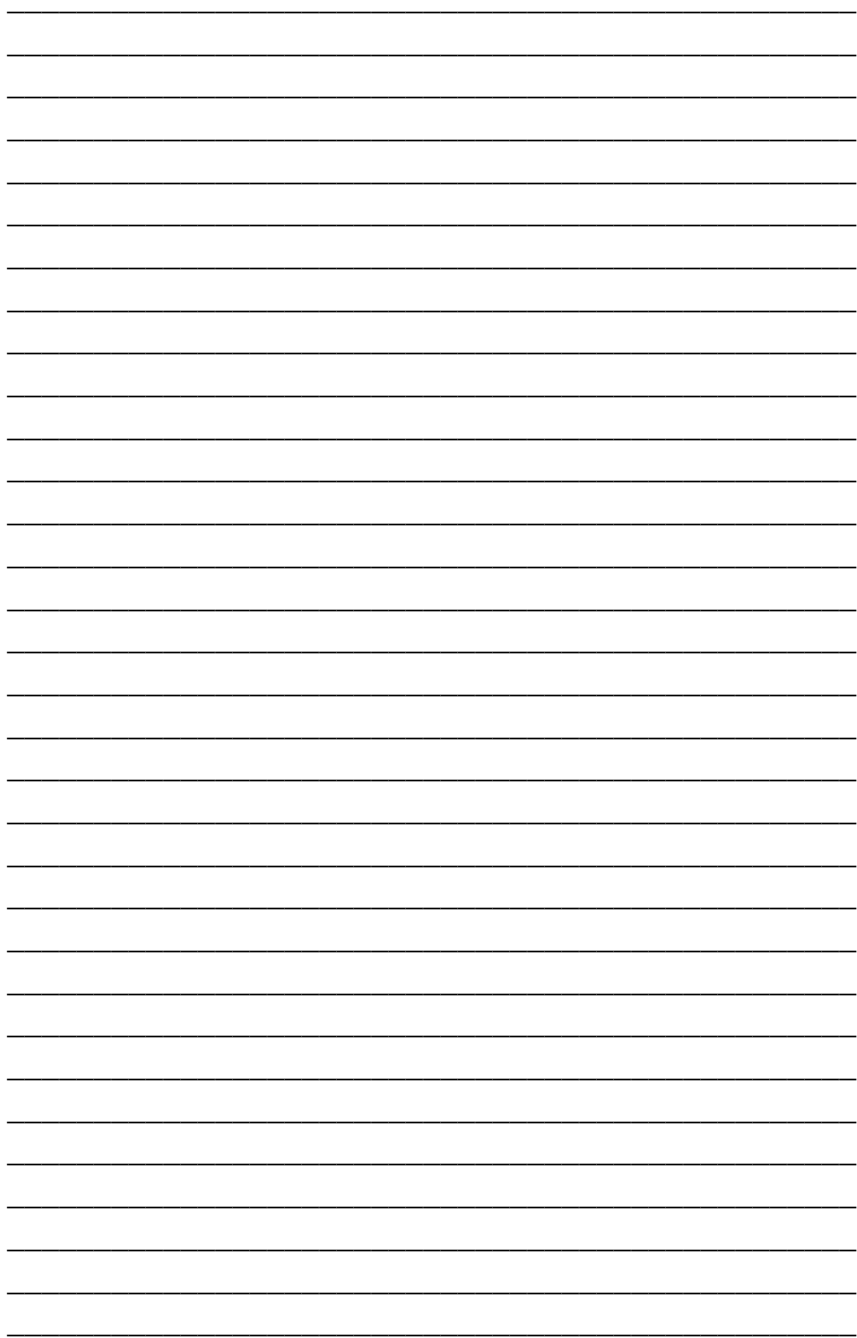
It could be that Jesus was more at peace by now and less in need of his disciples' social support. He went back to the prayers that had been helping him.

His request of “may your will be done” is a type of prayer that scholars have called a petitionary prayer, asking God for something. In a study of different kinds of prayer, petitionary prayer was associated with more optimism, higher well-being, and lower stress (Ai et al. 2008).¹⁴

In the next verses, Jesus seems ready to face his impending torture and death actively.

When crises confront us, it is helpful to remember Jesus asking God for a particular outcome while adding that ultimately, he wanted God's will to be accomplished.

¹⁴ Ai, A. L., Tice, T. N., Huang, B., Rodgers, W., & Bolling, S. F. (2008). Types of prayer, optimism, and well-being of middle-aged and older patients undergoing open-heart surgery. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 11(1), 131-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670701324798>



Week 5

Day 34

Matthew 26:45-46

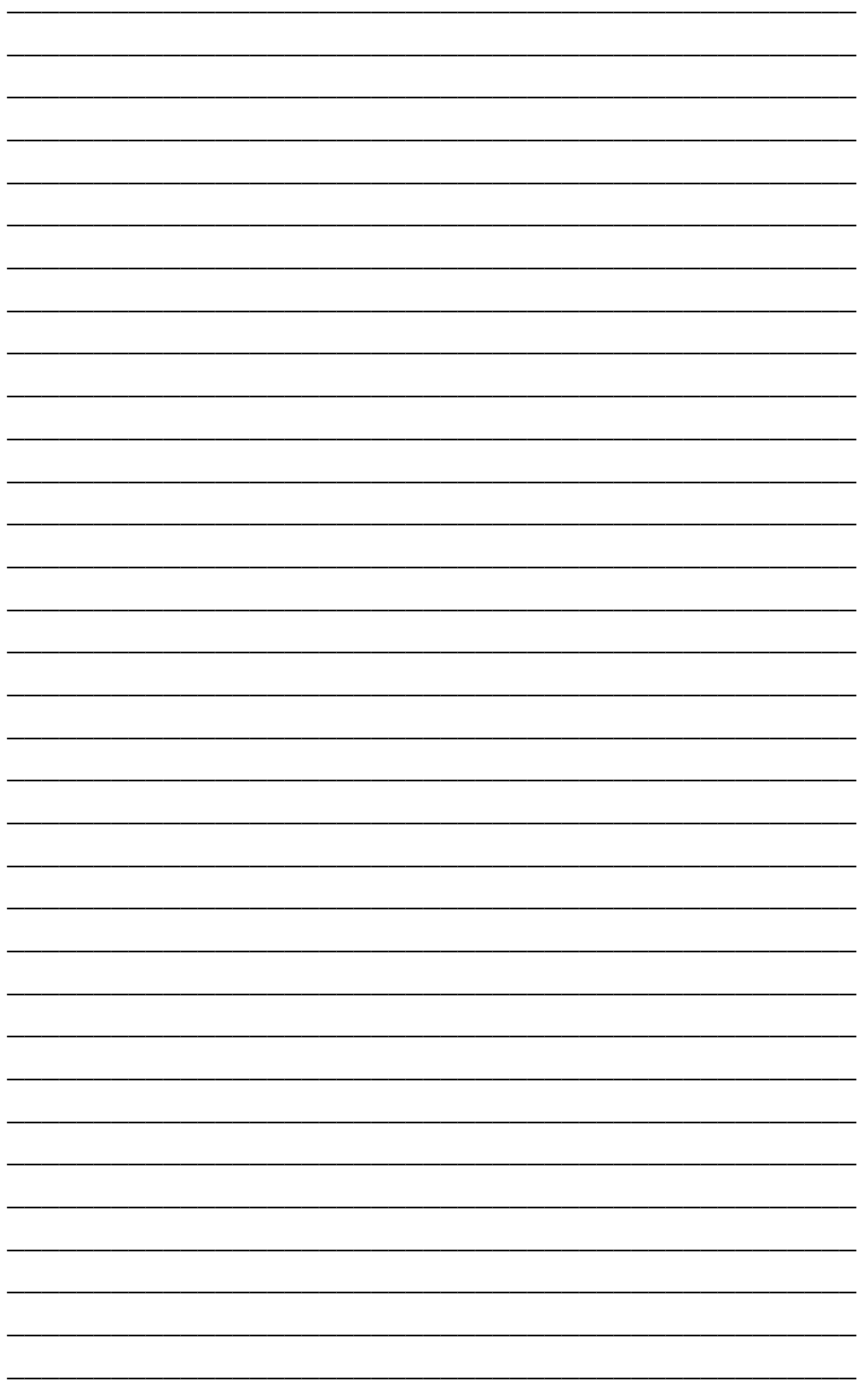
Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

By now Jesus is ready to face what is next, and he confronts Judas and the armed men coming to arrest Jesus. It was a display of hardiness.

Psychologists have studied hardiness and have defined it as being able to adapt to and cope with difficult situations and environments (Eschleman et al. 2010). Multiple things have scientifically been shown to be related to hardiness, such as the personality dispositions of optimism and self-esteem, stress management, and social support. As noted earlier, Jesus did not get any helpful social support in Gethsemane; his personality was set, and God was not taking away the coming stress.

Importantly, hardiness is also associated with active coping (Eschleman et al.).¹⁵ Jesus’s active religious coping strategies detailed earlier seemed to have helped him; for the rest of the narrative Jesus is courageous.

¹⁵ Eschleman, K. J., Bowling, N. A., & Alarcon, G. M. (2010). A meta-analytic examination of hardiness. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 17(4), 277-307. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020476> [10.1037/a0020476.supp](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020476.supp)



Week 5

Day 34

Small Group Discussion Guide

The following guide is designed to serve as a potential framework for your discussion. Feel free to use it as is, or adapt, as the Spirit leads.

OPEN

Shared experiences and mutual respect are important for us as we build friendships and also build a healthy understanding of who we are. As you get together today, share with the group a time when your respect for your friends grew through something that you all went through together.

GETTING INTO THE TOPIC

Jesus was deeply moved in this pericope. He cried, which would have been seen as something less than masculine in his time. We see that Jesus was often someone who eschewed cultural and societal norms. What do you think we can learn from this episode in the life of Jesus?

How do you think the disciples would have interacted and understood the way Jesus was behaving and feeling?

How does this stack up to the experience that happened right afterward with Peter pulling out a sword?

HEAD

We are always fighting what is expected of us. In the first century, there was much expected of men in particular. Today, while things are different, are there expectations for both men and women that we, as Christians, should be pushing against? And what would those be?

HEART

How can we help one another lead more authentic and honest lives, both emotionally and spiritually?

What kind of homes and safe places will we need to create to live our most authentic lives?

HANDS

As you sit with your connect group, can you share a time when you were vulnerable with your emotions and how it went?

Did it go well?

Was it painful?

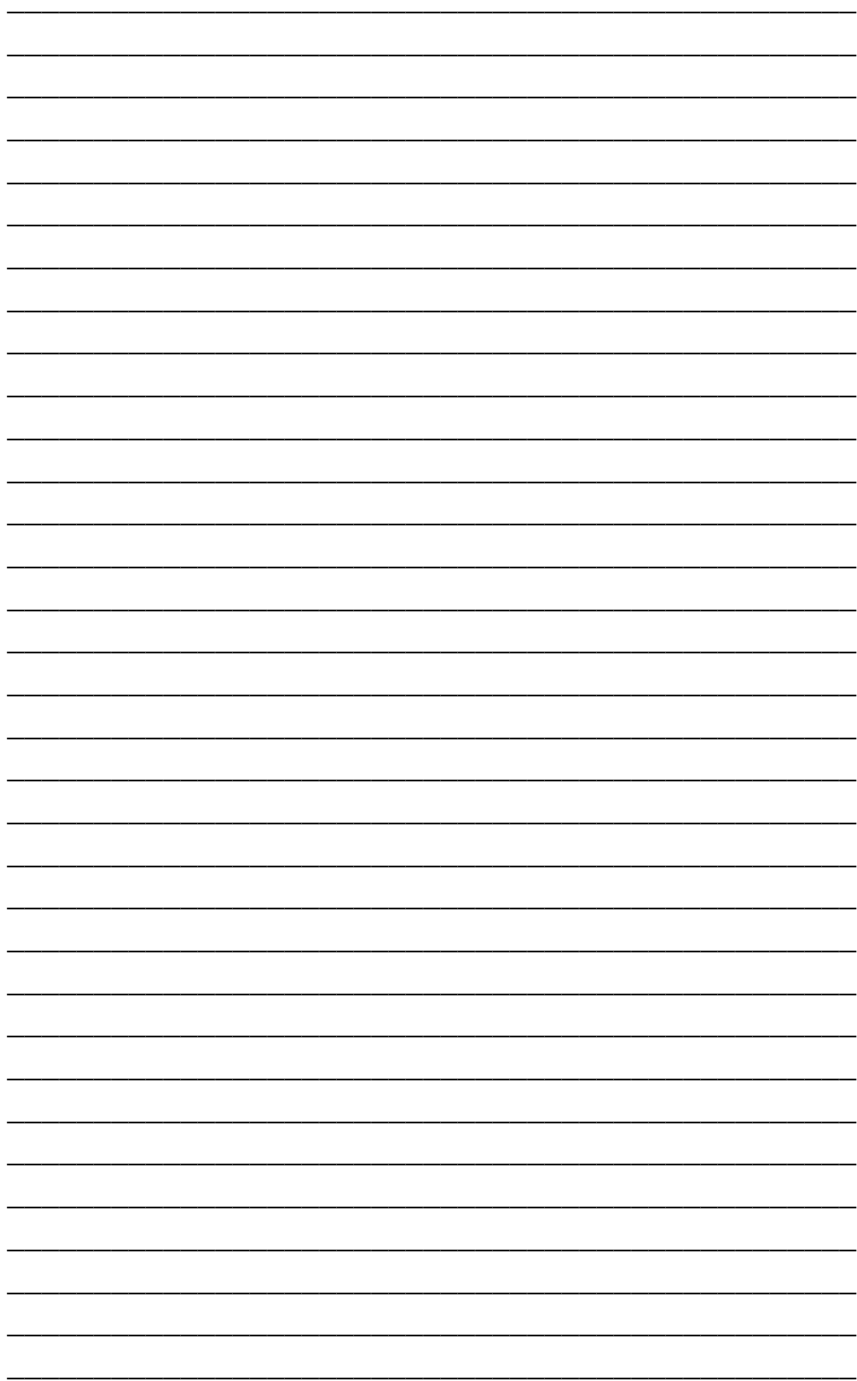
What would you do differently?

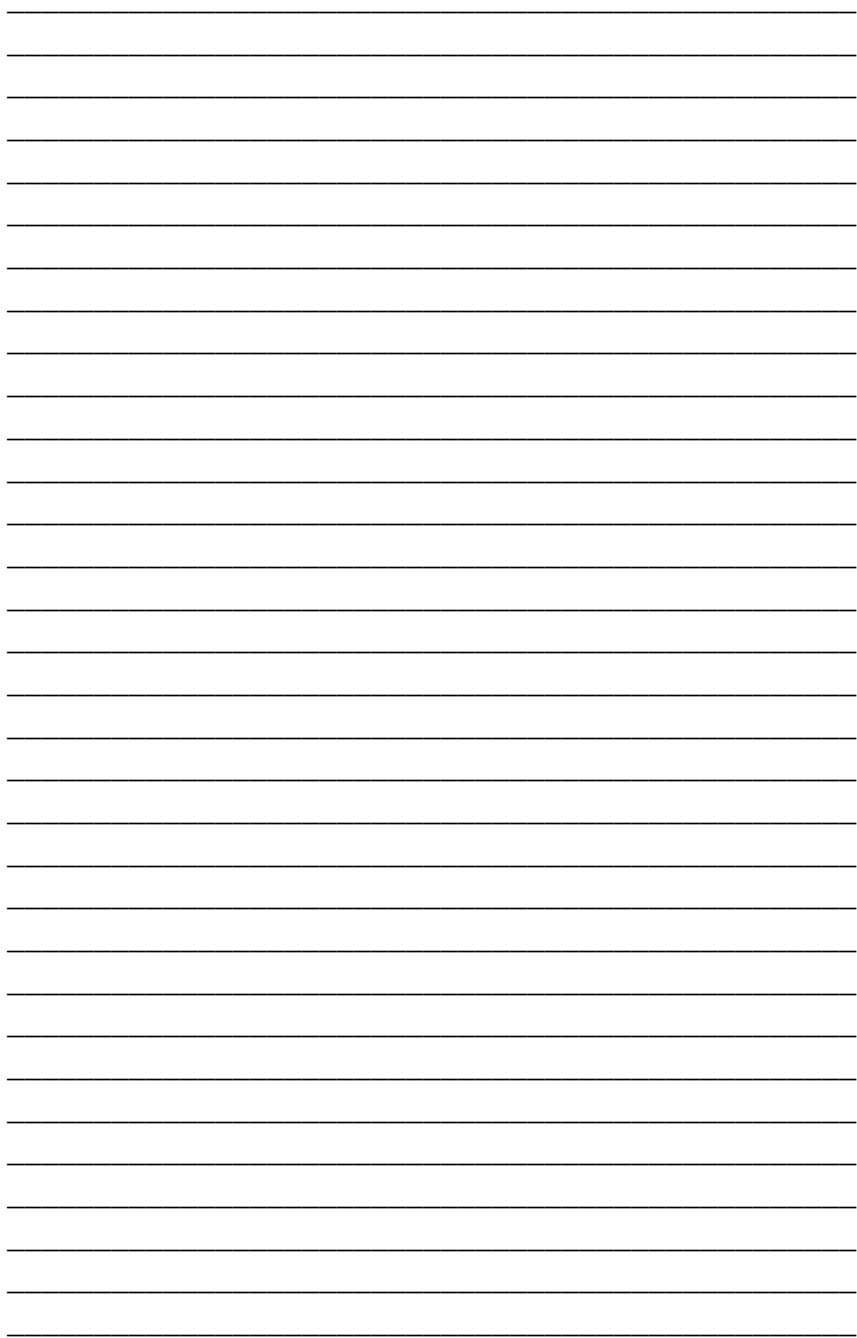
What can we learn from each of these experiences?

WORDS TO REMEMBER

2 Corinthians 6:11-13

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.





Thank you for engaging with this content throughout this series.

It is our distinct pleasure to grow with you, to learn with you, and to explore different aspects of mental health, demon possession, suicide, and even the effect that lack of sleep has on our moral decisions.

Again, this is a bit of a departure from our regular series guides; we hope it helped deal with the struggles that so many of us have with our mental health. Know this: you are not alone in your journey. The Church, your community, your pastors, and your family and friends are all with you and want what is absolutely best for you and your health.

We are blessed to be a part of a community that has access to mental health professionals and believes in getting help. There is no place for shame when it comes to making sure we are healthy and making sure that our churches are places that help you find health, wholeness, and hope.

May God indeed bless you and yours as you consider how you are doing, where you might need help, and how that help is accessed in your life.

—Pastor Tim and the Crosswalk Series Guide Team.