



God of the crushed

The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18) | Read: Mark 5:1–20

Mental illness has such a stigma that it wasn't that long ago that people had mental health prescriptions filled in other counties, paying for them out of pocket, because they couldn't risk having people know they had "a problem." Those days are mostly gone, but mental illness is still not treated like any other physical problem. Because of the complexity of physical, environmental, cognitive and emotional issues involved, there is a residual perception that mental illness is at least partly the victim's fault. People with depression that affects their work can be fired for lack of productivity. There is a failure by all concerned to see such impairment as a disability that needs accommodation. To make matters worse, people who are mentally ill are not able to be their own advocates because their judgment is skewed.

Study: Mental illness in the Bible

Leading biblical characters experienced what we today would call mental illness or depression. The ancients often talked about mental illness in terms of having an evil spirit (see 1 Samuel 16:14), yet the Bible is realistic in its depictions of mental illness and offers hope.

Job, Jonah, Elijah and Jeremiah all experienced such deep anguish that they wanted to die (see Job 3:11; 7:15; Jonah 4:3; 1 Kings 19:4; Jeremiah 20:18). King Saul's behavior suggests that he might have been bipolar, according to an article by George Stein in the March 2011 *British Journal of Psychiatry*, citing 1 Samuel 10:10–13, 16:23 and 19:23–24. Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar had a period in his life when his reason departed from him (see Daniel 4:36), but this served to teach him that God alone is sovereign of life. The Psalms are full of mental anguish (especially Psalm 88).

An extreme example is found in the story of the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5. At the beginning of this story, the man is like the Incredible Hulk on a rampage. It sounds like behavior I witnessed the summer I served on the locked schizophrenia ward at the Maudsley Hospital in London, one of the oldest facilities for the treatment of mental illness. Full-blown mania is dangerous—to the person and to those seeking to restrain the person from doing harm. However, Jesus offers healing from those forces that seek to damage and destroy. After his encounter with Jesus, the one who wandered among

the tombs "howling and bruising himself with stones" is found "clothed and in his right mind" (Mark 5:5, 15).

Remember: Store up Scripture

Memorizing verses such as the following can help quell the disturbing thoughts that affect mental health:

"God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline."
(2 Timothy 1:7)

"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 4:6–7)

"Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand."
(Isaiah 41:10)

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God."
(1 John 4:1)

"Surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."
(Jeremiah 29:11)

Pray: Breath prayer

Breath prayer consists of repeating a phrase with every breath in order to implant the prayer deep within your soul. Pray one of the preceding verses as a breath prayer.

Live: Good thinking

The Bible instructs us: "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8). As ambassadors of Christ, who heals our infirmities, we have spiritual medicine to offer alongside medical treatment. We are called to be advocates and comforting companions for those suffering from mental illness, exorcising, in Jesus' name, all forces that seek to hurt or destroy.

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