

Emotional Well-being Sermon Series - Sermon 1

Sermon Title: Human Worth and Well-being

Scripture text: Gen 1:26-28; Psalm 8

Note to leaders:

Some of the experiences shared by members during this sermon series may contain sensitive information. Do take some time to emphasize the importance of respect and confidentiality in the group before you start each session.

We pray that your small group will be a safe place for members to share and receive support.

The recommended time allocation for your group meeting is:

If you meet weekly :

- Worship through song (10 mins)
- Discussion - 1 session worth of core questions (40 mins)
- Discussion - 1 session worth of additional questions (30 mins)
- Sharing, Prayer, Fellowship (30 mins)

If you meet fortnightly :

- Worship through song (10 mins)
- Discussion - 2 sessions' worth of core questions (60 mins)
- Optional - additional questions (10 mins)
- Sharing, Prayer, Fellowship (30 mins)

Core Questions:

(If your group meets fortnightly, combine the "Core Questions" of two sessions and choose one "Further Questions" from either session.)

1) How does Psalm 8 shed light on the phrase "we are made in the Image of God"? In your opinion, what does it mean to be truly human? How is your understanding similar or different from what is presented in the sermon?

Intention: To help members consider what the Bible says about the Image of God in light of Ps 8. To guide members towards alignment between biblical understanding and their personal opinions.

Psalm 8:

- The Psalmist started by proclaiming the majestic nature of God, the glory of heavens and God's splendid creation of the cosmos and humanity.
- With such an awesome creation in mind, the Psalmist asks "*what is man that you are mindful of him?*" He marvels that God not only pays attention to, but actively cares for men and women.
- V5: The reason why God pays attention to, and cares for, human beings is because of their exalted status within the created order - *a little lower than the angels*.
- More than any other creature, humans reflect and represent God. God has crowned humanity, as image-bearer, with glory as well as honour. God is glorious, and humanity, as created in the image of God, reflects that glory. It is a derivative glory, analogous to the way in which the moon reflects the light of the sun.
- V6: we learn that God made them rulers over *the "works of your hands"*. Humanity functions as 'rulers on earth', representatives of the heavenly King. Humans are to

govern God's good creation – not as masters or owners, but as stewards of the High King of Heaven.

Image of God:

- The image of God in humanity is critical to our understanding of what makes us human. The implications of the image of God should inspire us and set the parameters for our view of all humanity.
- According to the Bible and Christian tradition, human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27). This distinguishes people from all other creatures as this expression is only used for humans.
- The image refers to the elements in the human makeup that enable the fulfillment of human destiny. The image is the powers of personality that make humans, like God, being capable of interacting with other persons, of thinking and reflecting and of willing freely.
- There are 3 aspects of the image of God: the Substantive, Functional, and Relational (see Background Note). All three are needed, not one or the other. Implication: we are more than our minds, more than just our capabilities, more than just what we can contribute.
- The Image of God in humanity, while marred/stained by sin, remains intact and valuable. This includes persons with mental health concerns.
 - o Therefore, every human is valuable. The sacredness of human life is an extremely important principle in God's scheme of things.

Background Note

The **Image of God** (Latin: *imago Dei*) is a phrase found several times in the book of Genesis (Gen 1:7–27; 5:1–3; 9:6). This phrase:

- Is applied only to humans and distinguishes humankind from the animal and plant kingdoms.
- Elevates humankind above all terrestrial created things so as to exercise benevolent and ethical stewardship (but not ownership) over creation.
- Indicates that humanity is, in some way, like God. The copy is like the original Creator in some way.
- Is found in the New Testament as part of the Christian's responsibility to imitate Christ, who is the image(r) of God *par excellence*.

Note also that:

- To "image" God means to "reflect" God in creation.
- "Image" and "likeness" are largely synonymous.
- The *imago Dei* includes all human persons.
- There is no hint that humanity grows into the image, or develops the image. There is no "potential" image of God.
- Nothing suggests that the image has been or can be bestowed incrementally or partially. There is no "partial" image.
- Nevertheless, sin has affected the image in some way. This means the image, while present, is marred by the Fall and stands in need of restoration.

Imago Dei: Structural aspect

- A set of capacities which characterize human beings and reflects the divine being in some way, most commonly, our capacity for rational thought, volitional will, sentience, and communicative or linguistic ability.
- The Structural aspect does not stand alone. For not all these capacities are present among all human beings at all times (e.g. infants, mentally-ill persons, persons in vegetative states). These capacities are also not unique to human beings (e.g. higher primates also display intelligence, emotions, and communicative abilities).

Imago Dei: Functional aspect

- This is grounded in Gen 1:26–28. Human beings are portrayed as God's representatives, tasked with stewarding God's creation. This view means that all human endeavor and enterprise has spiritual meaning—work is a spiritual exercise.
- Again, the Functional aspect cannot stand alone. For not all human beings have the capacity to undertake these tasks of stewardship at all times.

Imago Dei: Relational aspect

- This recognises that human beings relate to God, to one another, and to creation in a way that is unique among all creation. This aspect also recognises the inherent relationality within the Persons of the Holy Trinity, a relationality which is in some sense "imaged" in humanity.

- excerpted and adapted from *Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Lexham Press: 2016), and Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury T&T Clark: 2010).

- In reference to this sermon series, a person who is struggling with mental health concerns is also made in the image of God, precious and valuable to God. He/She would still have the ability, albeit in varying degrees, to know, love and obey God, and live in harmony with other humans.
- Hence in our relationship and interaction with persons with mental health concerns, they are to be valued and respected as a fellow human that is loved and cherished by God. It is the same if you are the one impacted by mental health concerns, you are still made in the image of God, loved and cherished by God, and have all the abilities to know, love and obey God.

2) How does this biblical truth (i.e. humans are bearers of God's image) impact your understanding of human well-being? How does this biblical picture impact the way you act for your own well-being and for the well-being of others?

Intention: Help members to consider what is human well-being in light of biblical truth. Guide them towards reflecting on their personal well-being and how they would care for the well-being of others in the different contexts they are in, e.g. home, workplaces, church, public space.

- Wholistic well-being through these 3 aspects: Substantive (internal capacities), Functional (stewardship), Relational (with God and with others)
 - Substantive aspect: sabbath, self-care, balanced rhythm of life, lifelong learning, adequate sleep,.
 - Functional aspect: meaningful work, creative acts, recreation.
 - Relational aspect: seeing our neighbours as fellow human, nurturing meaningful social interaction and relationships with people, building strong and close relationship with God.
- If others are as valuable as us, then we need to care for their well-being in a holistic manner too.
 - E.g. Are my employees having sufficient rest and family time? Are my children having sufficient recreational time in the midst of their schooling years? Is this newcomer integrating well to the small group?

“The brain-centred understanding of mental illness can be reductive in the sense that it fails to take into consideration the emotional and social aspects of the individual. This approach tends to reduce our ‘humanity’ – our beliefs, aspirations and values – to the integrity (or lack thereof) of the frontal lobe, that aspect of our neural anatomy that distinguishes us from other animals. Thus, although there is a profound relationship between brain function and our mental and emotional health, **we must resist the temptation to reduce people to their brains** in our attempt to understand mental illness.”

- Dr Roland Chia, “Darkness Has Become My Companion: Some Reflections on Mental Illness” (<https://ethosinstitute.sg/darkness-has-become-my-companion/>), emphasis added.

3) Do you know of someone with mental health concerns? Or perhaps you may have some personal experiences. What is your perception and attitude towards mental health concerns? What has changed for you after this bible study? Share your experiences or observations with the group.

Intention:

- To create a safe space for members to share about their personal experiences with mental health concerns.
- The small group as a place where members can experience acceptance and support during their sharing.
- The small group will have an increased awareness of each other’s mental health status and experiences.

Allow everyone to take turns to share their experiences or observations.

- It may be positive or negative experiences, perceptions and/or attitudes.
 - Invite members to talk about the feelings involved e.g. shame or guilt for experiencing mental health issues, anger because God did not deliver him/her from depression etc.
 - Give attention to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, if there is an appropriate opportunity, ask if any member is currently facing mental health concerns. With their permission, you may direct them to BRMC Care Center for counselling or SGM Pastoral Team for pastoral care.
- Allow participants to pass if they are uncomfortable or not ready to share.

Recent Singapore Studies

"The second Singapore Mental Health Study (SMHS) – a nationwide, cross-sectional, epidemiological survey - was initiated in 2016 with the intent of tracking the state of mental health of the general population in Singapore. The lifetime prevalence of at least one mood, anxiety or alcohol use disorder was 13.9% in the adult population... The SMHS 2010 showed lifetime prevalence as 12.0%".

- Subramaniam, et al., "Tracking the Mental Health of a Nation: Prevalence and Correlates of Mental Disorders in the Second Singapore Mental Health Study." *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences* 29 (2020)

"..a recent study that looked at more than 1,000 Gen Zers aged 18 to 24 in the Asia-Pacific region, including Singapore, found that they faced the highest levels of stress compared with other generations".

<https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/gen-z-faces-different-forms-stress-may-be-more-anxious-depressed-others-them-says-imh-ceo>

Further Questions:

(Optional question for discussion if time permits. Do allocate adequate time for prayer and fellowship.)

4) What is one small step you or your small group can take to prepare towards the increased prevalence of mental health concerns globally and in Singapore?

Upcoming BRMC Webinars on Mental Illness:

Seminar 1: Thu, April 22, 2021, 8pm
"Mental Health and the Christian"

Seminar 2: Thu, April 29, 2021, 8pm
"Ministering to the Mentally Ill"

Format:

Online via Zoom. 90 minutes of talk followed by Q&A.

For more information and registration, visit:
<https://brmcsg.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/789284>

Intention: To invite group members to begin considering preventive measures as well as the possibility and impact of someone in the group experiencing mental health concerns. So that when it does happen, the group is more prepared to embrace it.

- Talk about possible steps towards well-being e.g. share tips on self-care, going for walks/exercise together as a group, attend a mental health course/talk together.
- Talk about how to build a safe and open culture in the small group e.g. no labeling or name calling of persons with mental health concerns, check in with vulnerable members more regularly, smaller support groups within the group for more intimate sharing and support.

Suggestions for Prayer:

- 1) How has the knowledge and reality of being made in the Image of God impacted you? Take this time to talk to God about it. Allow the Holy Spirit to work in you as you experience being truly human.
- 2) Pray for yourself or someone you know of/heard of who is experiencing mental health concerns.
 - Pray for the well-being of the person(s), for the shalom of God to fill their hearts and minds.
 - Pray for God's divine healing and restoration.
 - Pray also for a supportive community to surround and love them.
- 3) Pray for yourself and people in your group:

God is gracious and compassionate towards us. There is no shame in acknowledging our weaknesses and limitations before our Heavenly Father.

- Are there barriers that might be preventing you from showing Christian love towards a person with mental health concerns e.g. fears, negative past experiences, lack of understanding? Commit these concerns to God and ask for His divine help to remove any barrier.