

Emotional Well-being Sermon Series - Sermon 2

Sermon Title: Well-being is *being* truly human

Scripture text: Romans 8:18-25

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 groups 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 “Core Questions” of two sessions and choose one “Further Questions” from either session.)

1) What does Romans 8:18-25 say about suffering and hope for well-being?

Intention: Members to share their perspective of suffering. Help members to align their understanding of suffering with scriptural understanding.

Note to leader: You do not have to answer or address their questions on “why suffering?”; rather this is a time to simply hear one another’s view and focus on the hope for well-being expressed in the assigned text.

- You may invite members to talk about their views/mental picture/questions of suffering e.g. Covid-19, wars, abuses, broken relationships, illnesses, God is unfair, suffering is part of life, meant to toughen us up, when will suffering end? Why does God allow suffering?
- Establish that suffering is real and it can have different impact on different people.

- Creation is subjected to the effects of the Fall, and God allowed creation to be subjected to the Fall even though it is not responsible for the Fall. (v20)
- God promises to restore things to the way they're meant to be – humans exercising godly dominion and stewardship over a creation that is free from corruption and decay (v21). Recall also the functional aspect of the image of God (see the previous week's sermon discussion guide) which entails godly care and stewardship of God's good creation. However, the Imago Dei in humanity is presently tainted (though not eliminated or removed) by the Fall, hence we fail to properly steward God's creation. Thus when God redeems, renews, and restores, this is well-being which extends from humanity to all creation.
- Part of our hope is the redemption of our bodies (v23). The word 'body' here does not refer to our sinful nature, i.e. our instinctive inclination toward wrongdoing, which is a consequence of the Fall and is to be put to death. Rather, 'body' here refers to our physical, material bodies, which were created as 'very good' by God. In other words, our material selves will not be removed but redeemed. We will, in God's new creation, experience well-being not just in our souls but also in our physical bodies.

2) As you reflect on Psalm 8 (from the previous week) and Romans 8:18-25, how do you think one could approach suffering, especially long-term suffering? What does well-being look like for persons who are suffering from chronic conditions, whether physical, psychological, or emotional?

- First and foremost, we affirm that persons who are suffering from chronic conditions are no less than fully human and full bearers of God's image. This is the case regardless of their physical condition, state of mind, or emotional expression.
- Second, it is important to recognise the present, the here and now. We are alert to the dangers of escapism, of desiring only to be in the world to come and ignoring the present, of giving up on this world when God hasn't.
- This means that we acknowledge that suffering is part and parcel this fallen world (v18-20).
 - i. Examples:
 - Talk about the suffering you are going through with your loved ones and close friends. Allow them to understand what you are experiencing, thinking, feeling or fearful of.

- You are not alone. Seek help, both in the aspects of **(a) cure / treatment**, e.g. medical therapies, psychological interventions, counselling; and **(b) care / healing**, e.g. spiritual direction, mutual support groups, etc. (See sidebox below for more insights).

“Moreover, by seeing mental illness as part of creation’s fallenness, mental illness is included in God’s redemptive plan for creation, rather than being something outside of the Bible’s concerns. God’s redemptive work thus encompasses persons with mental illnesses, giving them true hope that is grounded in God’s promise that they will be restored to complete wellness when Jesus comes again.

A foretaste of that hope can also be experienced in the present through the healing community that the Church is called to be. Hence, **while a person’s biological cause of mental illness might not be cured in this lifetime, that person can through the Church receive healing**, namely, ‘the emergence of meaning, transformation, and personal growth that may take place alongside cure, but which may also take place in its absence’.”

- Leow Wen Pin, in *Good News for Bruised Reeds – Mental Health & The Gospel Community*.

- We also groan with creation (v22-23).
 - ii. Examples:
 - Talk and/or cry to God honestly about our painful experiences.
 - Be a listening ear or companion to someone who is suffering.
 - Pray and intercede for those who are suffering.
 - Be an advocate for a cause you believe in, be part of a support group etc.
- We hope and wait for the full restoration to come (vv.21, 24-25).
 - i. Examples:
 - Stay close to the God of hope and receive His counsel, strength and care for you in the midst of suffering.
 - Allow people who care to pour love into your life e.g. accept their gifts, spend time with you, send food to you, drive you around.

- 3) Try to take the perspective of someone who is suffering from mental health concerns, such as major depressive disorder, general anxiety disorder, phobias, or even neurodegenerative diseases like dementia. The best way to do so is to hear from persons suffering such mental health concerns in their own words – speak with them, or alternatively read their published stories (see sidebox for recommendations).

Having done so, discuss the following questions.

- How do you think his/her daily life looks like? Are there ways in which they are treated (consciously or unconsciously) as less-than-fully-human?
- What are some stigmas that this person may have to face? How do these affect their well-being?
- What adjustments do you think the family / caregivers / community need to make at home / work / church / social setting?

Recommended Books:

- *Good News for Bruised Reeds – Mental Health & The Gospel Community*, edited by Jonathan Cho, et al. (Graceworks, 2019). [An excerpt is available at https://graceworks.com.sg/wp-content/uploads/ebook_samples/Good_News_For_Bruised_Reeds_Mental_Health_and_the_Gospel_Community_sample_-_Graceworks.pdf]
- Kathryn Greene-McCreight, *Darkness Is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness*. (Brazos, 2015).
- Kathleen Greider, *Much Madness Is Divinest Sense: Wisdom in Memoirs of Soul-Suffering* (Pilgrim Press, 2007).
- Catherine P. Downing, *Sparks of Redemptive Grace - Seeking and Seeing God Amid a Loved One's Mental Illness* (HIS Publishing Group, 2016).

Newspaper Article:

“Give more help to caregivers who often ignore self-care: Expert” *The Straits Times*, 2 Nov 2020

<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/give-more-help-to-caregivers-who-often-ignore-self-care-experts>

Intention: To allow members to empathies with someone who is suffering from mental health concerns. To consider how mental health concerns not only impact the person but also have effects on the family and community.

“The stigma attached to mental illness is widespread and often affects the lives of people with mental illness in several ways. As a result of stigma, a person with mental illness may be **denied equal life opportunities** in areas such as employment and housing, and face **discrimination** from others in the form of social distancing. In fact, many individuals with mental illness feel that **the experience of stigma is worse than the condition itself.**”

- Tan, “Causes of stigma towards mental illness in Singapore – A qualitative Inquiry” IMH Research New, Research Division, Institute of Mental Health, (2020).

Some examples of social stigmas include:

Stigma	Reality
<p>“Why don’t you just snap out of it?” “They are so weak”</p>	<p>Mental health conditions such as major depressive disorder or general anxiety disorders have a biological basis and are not simply a lack of motivation or willpower.</p> <p>Proper psychiatric treatment and care can help to manage the symptoms of these disorders.</p>
<p>“He is a psycho” “She is mad woman” “This person is crazy” “Stay away from this dangerous man”</p>	<p>Persons with mental health concerns may sometimes behave in a manner that is inappropriate in social settings. However, they may not have ill intentions. Often, it is simply the effects of the condition and hence the inability to make sound judgements or behave appropriately e.g. a person with OCD may experience the urge to wash his/her hand for an extended time to ensure his/her hands are bacteria-free.</p>
<p>“Incapable of many things” “Burden to the society” “No face for the family”</p>	<p>As established in the sermons, we are all made in the image of God. Persons who are suffering from chronic conditions are no less than fully human and are full bearers of God’s image. This is the case regardless of their physical condition, state of mind, or emotional expression.</p> <p>People with mental health concerns can be creative and proficient in many ways e.g. Artists with bipolar disorder, Pastors with major depressive disorder, Marketing Manager with general anxiety disorder.</p>

“Persons with mental illnesses can therefore participate in God’s redemptive plan as “wounded healers” (following Henri Nouwen). As people who themselves have known the depths of human struggle, they themselves can minister to others using a profound compassion that emerges out of the common experience of pain. **Hence, people with mental illnesses should not be regarded as helpless recipients of charity, but Spirit-empowered disciples capable of service.** They can serve well, not just despite their illness, but even because of their illness. Their lives can breathe hope into the beating heart of the Church. Thus, they are indispensable to the Church.”

- Leow Wen Pin, in *Good News for Bruised Reeds – Mental Health & The Gospel Community* (emphasis added).

Further Questions:

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

- 4) Consider pre-assigning your group members to research and share with the group about different types of mental health concerns, such as:
 - Major Depressive Disorder
 - Postpartum Depression
 - Bipolar Disorder
 - General Anxiety Disorder
 - Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
 - Eating Disorder
 - Dementia / Alzheimer’s Disease
 - Parkinson’s Disease

Suggestions for Prayer:

Share and pray together in your group:

- 1) Are you going through some form of suffering? Have you spoken to God or shared with a close friend (e.g. fellow small group member) about your pains? Would you take this time to pray with one another, talk to God about your experiences and allow the Holy Spirit to minister His love to you.
- 2) Do you know of someone who is suffering? Ask God how you can pray for the well-being of this person. You may also want to ask God if there is something you and/or your small group can do for this person as an expression of God’s love towards him/her.
- 3) Have you, whether consciously or unconsciously, imposed or reinforced social stigmas on persons suffering from mental health concerns? Ask the Lord to show you. If you have, ask God for forgiveness, and ask Him to help you see these persons through His eyes, and love them with His love.