

Christian Mental-Health Expert: What Many Christians Don't Get About Mental Illness

Editor's note: This is part two of a two-part series. For part one, [click here!](#)

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I believe we really need to understand first that Jesus was *not* against seeking out a doctor when you're sick—and that includes both physical and emotional sickness. Jesus said in Matthew 9:12b, "Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick." Besides being an evangelist, Luke was also a doctor, a medical physician. The apostle Paul was instrumental in leading him to Jesus. So why would Luke, this doctor, be led by the Holy Spirit, give his heart to Christ, be part of this whole Christian explosion, yet have nothing to offer the body of Christ in terms of his occupation? The presumption is that he did offer his medical skills as an apostle. You see, God clearly made a place for Luke as both an evangelist and a medical doctor to the body of Christ. Let me say that again: "to the body of Christ"! Do we read anywhere in Scripture where Luke was asked to renounce his medical trade and skill set? Let me answer that—*no*. There's nothing that even alludes to such a thing in Scripture.

Even the way we're called to love God has to do with our mind. Jesus said in Matthew 22:37, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." The word "mind" here means "psyche" or "thoughts." Jesus understood how we were made and that His Holy Spirit

talks to us through our psyche, which stems from our brain. The human brain in this case is like a computer that programs all our actions and thoughts (good or bad) and even processes our ethics and beliefs. When a person is depressed, multiple chemicals are involved within the brain, especially serotonin and dopamine. When these chemicals are operating in a dysfunctional way in the brain, moderate to severe depression can take place. When you compound this with negative childhood memories, parental abandonment and emotional, physical or sexual trauma, then you're talking about the "perfect storm" for potential suicide.

Now here's where the hard-line evangelical faith people will probably paint me as a heretic. In many of these cases, an antidepressant (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor, SSRI) can be very helpful in lowering depression/anxiety in a person. Obviously not in all cases, but in many cases, depending on the emotional complications. These medications can work, and they can help balance a person's mood and provide relief for many emotionally troubled strugglers of depression and/or anxiety.

Could you imagine if Martin Luther, Charles Spurgeon, John Wesley, King David, Jeremiah, Job and others had access to antidepressants in their day? Not to mention some of our current leaders who are presently on SSRIs. I've counseled national leaders across the country, and the guilt, shame and condemnation that have been programmed in them and others in the body of Christ for just thinking about taking an antidepressant are just awful! In several cases, because of being perceived as not having enough faith to believe for their healing by "hyper-faith" Christians, many of these beautiful believers in Jesus would rather suffer emotionally than be pointed out as being faithless and not trusting God for their mental wellness.

This is the reason the church has ignorantly created throughout the years this dark corner of shame for those

suffering with mental illness. From both a theological and clinical perspective, as far as I'm concerned, this is nothing more than spiritual abuse. Paul is crystal-clear in Romans 14:3 about believers judging one another for what they have the liberty to eat or not eat. We're all guests at Christ's table by definition of the great grace He has provided for each of us. And never should we place guilt or condemnation on another believer by presupposing we hear from God for them, in this case, for what is best for their mental wellness when it comes to avoiding medication or even professional counseling.

Jarrod Wilson and Andrew Stoecklein have taken their lives, and that is tragic and terribly sad. And there is no doubt that there are many people who are confused and perhaps even frightened about how seemingly two young, emotionally stable national Christian leaders could, out of nowhere, commit suicide, thereby devastating their families and those they've ministered to for years. But there lies our evangelical dilemma, doesn't it? Having little understanding of what "seemingly" and "out of nowhere" really mean when it comes to mental illness. Because, in reality, when it comes to those who suffer every day with clinical depression and then you hear that someone has lost their faith, had an emotional breakdown or possibly even taken their life, be assured that it was never "seemingly" or "out of nowhere."

Genetic depression is incubated over years and mixed into our genealogy by virtue of Adam's original sin. If not treated, and in some cases continually treated, through counseling and medication, the outcome could potentially be devastating. Without question, there's always the endless importance of the Word of God, prayer, meditation, the power of the Holy Spirit and the community of believers in our lives—that of course is never to be discounted. But in case you haven't figured it out by now, life is not always one-dimensional. As sure as God has given us a diversified, multifaceted fivefold ministry (Eph. 4:11), He's also provided us with various beneficial ways to

approach life's challenges as those made up of spirit, soul and body (1 Thess. 5:23).

In the end, none of us is exempt from the pressures, disappointments, struggles and heartaches of this world. Jesus gave us all a clear-cut heads-up on how this journey called life on this planet intends to treat us. "In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world" (John 16:33, MSG). Nobody better understood this than Paul with all that he went through. He even struggled on the job with the growing amount of church pressure he was under as an apostle. Listen to him—the man even experienced anxiety! "Besides everything else, I have a daily burden because of my anxiety about all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28, ISV).

Here's what we need to know. There is no shame as a believer in Jesus, or even a nonbeliever, in struggling with depression, anxiety or any other mental health issue. The brain is an amazing organ, created by God but corrupted by sin. Consequently, this complex muscle can be our best friend or our worst enemy. Like anything else, it can, and does at times, break down and develop irregularities like any other part of our body. That's the bad news.

Now here's the good news—we have a Savior who is infinitely limitless and transcends all human physiology and logic. He's the antidote to sin and all its destructive forces. He's the maker of our brain's limbic system (our emotions) and at the end of the day, through faith, hope and determination, it is God and God alone "who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine, according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20, MEV).

Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life." For the severely depressed, there appears to be no hope, so they live in their sickness. That's their reality. But one of God's firm

foundations is hope, and the enemy knows that, so he tries to delay that powerful truth in us for as long as he can. Why? Because he realizes that God's hope in Christ not only desires something good for our future, but expects it to happen. That's the true life-giving reality. By addressing depression in whatever forms available, we are then able to hold on, with great expectation, to our "blessed hope," thereby reversing the plans of the evil one regarding our mental wellness. #Victory! {eo}

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