

SERMON, VCBC, OCT. 18/2020

HOW TO BEGIN CARING FOR PEOPLE SUFFERING FROM MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN YOUR CHURCH.

Let us briefly define the problem in our Christian churches.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- At least 25% of your church, and every church, is suffering from a significant MH problem today. By the end of the year up to 50% of your members will suffer from a significant diagnosed MH problem.
- MH problems are often not talked about in the church. Many suffer in silence.
- Those who suffer are usually ashamed to talk about their struggles. They may fear judgment or ridicule.
- Leaders in our churches may know of people who are suffering from MH problems, but often don't know how to help them partly because they have not been adequately trained and equipped to help those of us who suffer from mental health problems.
- As the Body of Christ, how are we to carry each other's burdens if we aren't aware of what they are?

WHAT ARE MY GOALS WITH THIS SHORT MESSAGE TODAY?

- Speak to people in this church who are suffering from mental health problems: To encourage you in your grief and suffering, and to motivate you for good deeds in your church.
- To reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues found in most Christian churches.
- Show how you as a church can begin loving and caring for your neighbour who is truly suffering and needs the help and support of the church. Whether you consider the church as a family, a hospital, or a body, all members need to be cared for. If one suffers, we all suffer, **1 Cor. 12:26**

"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."
- To share a few practical suggestions on what a church could do in managing mental health problems that are on the rise.

WHAT IS NEEDED TO HAVE GOOD HEALTH?

- One needs to be healthy physically, mentally and spiritually.
- Each of these three affects and is affected by the other two.
- Examples: a chronic illness such as chronic back pain will often lead to depression; a person with significant anxiety will often suffer symptoms such as headaches, feelings of burning and tingling over the body, palpitations, chest pains, diarrhea; someone in depression will often feel alienated by God; a person suffering from a terminal disease such as cancer can feel angry at God and suffer from anxiety.
- Our physical, mental, and spiritual health is changing each day, and rarely are all three in excellent condition.
- We need to work on all three of them on a daily basis in order to maintain good overall health.
- A good picture is a three-legged stool. If one leg is broken, the stool falls; if one leg is shorter than the other two, the stool is unstable.
- **What should be the role of Christians and the church regarding health in general?** Should we care only for salvation? If we do care for the health of our Christian family, should we care only for physical health, or both physical and mental health?
- What did Jesus care about when He was on earth? Salvation of souls, physical health and mental health. We are called to carry on the work of Christ. We are to preach the Gospel and lead people to salvation; we are to care for the sick and the poor.

SUMMARY OF DEFINITION OF POOR *MENTAL* HEALTH

- Significant disturbances/problems in the way someone thinks, feels, and acts.
- **Or** problems with underlying psychological, biological, or developmental processes – an organic process related to brain function!
- Usually related to significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities.

WHAT MENTAL ILLNESS IS NOT:

Not a normal reaction to difficult life situations such as:

- Death of a loved one
- Job loss
- Romantic break-up
- New changes – moving living situations, changes in schools and jobs.
- These can cause mental health symptoms that may lead to a diagnosis of a mental disorder if the symptoms persist.

DIAGNOSES OF COMMON MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

List some of the diagnoses.

- Over 300 diagnoses exist.
- Mood disorders (depression, bipolar disorder)
- anxiety disorders (general anxiety, phobias, social anxiety, panic disorder)
- thought disorder (schizophrenia)
- eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia)
- addictions (alcohol, drugs, pornography, video games, gambling)
- obsessive compulsive disorder
- Delirium
- Alzheimer’s disease and other forms of dementia.
- Autism, attention deficit (ADHD)
- Personality disorders.
- PTSD (Post traumatic stress disorder.)
- Sleep disorders.

PREVALENCE (ADULTS)

- 1 in 5 adults experience a mental illness in a year (44 million in USA; 6 million in Canada)
- 1 in 25 adults live with a **serious** mental illness (10 million in USA; over 1 million in Canada)
- If you add substance abuse, then 33%.
- Substance abuse alone 22%.
- 18% anxiety disorders.
- 7% depression.
- 3% bipolar.
- 1% schizophrenia

PREVALENCE (YOUTH 13-18 YEARS)

- 20% have a MH problem
- 11% depression.
- 8% anxiety.
- 10% behavioral.
- 50% of all lifetime MH problems begin by age 14 and 75% by age 24.
- 37% students with MH problems age 14 and up drop out of school.
- 70% of youth in jails have a MH problem.

PREVALENCE (CHILDREN UNDER 13 Y.O)

Very significant and increasing.

WHAT ABOUT AMONG CHRISTIANS?

- Same as among non-Christians.
- 25% of people in your church and every church.
- Same comparison of physical illnesses among Christians and non-Christians.

Let us begin with some general thoughts from scripture:

- The Scriptures we will read may convict some of us and lead us to repentance.
- We need to be doers of the word and not just hearers. (James 1:22)

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

1. We need to stop showing partiality to those that are healthy and stop discriminating against those that suffer from mental health problems. (**James 2:1-10**)

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin

and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.”

2. We need to recognize that those suffering from mental health problems are our neighbours, brothers and sisters in Christ, part of the body of Christ to which we ourselves belong.

- We are called to love our neighbor as ourselves.

3. We need to see these suffering vessels as *important members of the body of Christ*.
(1 Cor. 12:14-26)

“For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”

Now let us discuss some possible specific practical plans.

These are simply suggestions as to what could be done.

1. Equip church leaders.

- Educate leaders on the topic of mental health, such as a conference, courses on Biblical Counselling.
Please show your leaders some grace on this topic. Most leaders have not had any or very little training on this topic.
- Provide leaders with resources.

- i. A group of professional and trained people such as doctors, nurses, Biblical counselors, psychologists, prayer and care pastor.
- ii. Set up support groups for the entire church. To be led by people who themselves have suffered or are presently suffering from a mental health problem.

2. Equip the entire church.

- Have a conference on mental health for the entire church.
- A good library with books on mental health.

3. Set up support groups for the entire church. To be led by people who themselves have suffered or are presently suffering from a mental health problem.

- Provide the church with support groups such as for:
 - i. Depression and anxiety
 - ii. Addictions.
 - iii. Post-partum depression.
 - iv. A group for parents who have children suffering from MH problems.

4. Come along side those suffering from mental health issues for regular support, prayer and encouragement.

5. Provide teaching on Biblical treatments to those suffering from MH issues.

- E.g. a Biblical counselor from your own church, or using a counselor from another church.

6. Have a long-term approach to treating the ill (years, not weeks).

7. Allow people with mental health issues to serve in the church. Don't take away their roles but support them through their illness and allow them to help others in the church to be comforted, to heal, and serve.

8. Teach and preach on MH from the pulpit.

- Have at least one sermon each year on this topic.
- Today's sermon is a good example of this point.

9. Provide more practical resources for people to use for themselves, and to help others, (e.g. the devotional "**Overwhelmed Again**").

- Discuss the book.

10. Reach out into the non-Christian community to those suffering from MH issues as a form of evangelism.

11. **Teach more courses on MH in seminaries**, preparing church leaders to deal with these important topics in the ministry locally and in missions.

AS A CHRISTIAN, HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD, SPOUSE, PARENT, FRIEND, BROTHER AND SISTER IN CHRIST, WHO SUFFERS FROM A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM?

- **Help them see a medical professional** (preferably a Christian) and attempt to get a correct diagnosis. Eg.
 - Elderly with Alzheimer’s disease mistaken for psychosis; child with depression or anxiety mistaken for a behavioral problem; a woman suffering from numerous physical and emotional symptoms whose proper diagnosis may be menopause.
- **Help them prayerfully consider the treatment plan** offered.
 - They will often be frustrated, confused, have difficulty making decisions. They often need someone to help them make decisions.
- **Encourage them to always combine medical treatment and sound Christian spiritual treatment** (Today this is called Biblical counselling) as a full treatment package.
- **Help them seek spiritual support** from your Pastor and church and other Christian organizations involved in caring for people experiencing mental health struggles.
 - **Encourage them to attend church**, home groups, prayer meetings, on a regular basis.
 - To read their Bibles.
 - Consider a devotional book such as “Overwhelmed Again”.
- **Be an advocate** in your church for people suffering from mental health.
 - Frequently ask people to pray for them;
 - Encourage them to serve in their church using their Spiritual gifts;
 - Take extra effort to greet them and speak with them;
 - Encourage your church to begin caring for your congregants suffering from mental health problems, by setting up teaching sessions, providing spiritual support and follow-up, good resources, counseling, etc.
- **Love them** unconditionally.
- **Provide them with the physical, emotional, and spiritual help** needed during times of **acute illness**, similar to helping a cancer sufferer or a person having surgery, e.g. etc.

QUESTION

1. What has been your attitude toward those suffering from mental health problems?
Does it need to change?
2. Have you loved them as your neighbor?
3. For those of you who have suffered from significant mental health problems and have recovered or are well managed, have you considered helping others in your church who are now suffering? Would you consider helping to lead a support group, or provide resources for others?
4. When you pray for the physically ill in your church, such as those suffering from cancer, would you also remember to pray for those suffering from mental health problems?

MENTAL HEALTH SEMINAR ON YOU TUBE

- Watch it yourself.
- Recommend it to family and friends who need help with their mental health problems.