

*LOOK up*<sup>®</sup>



# MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

## VOLUME 1



#breakthestigma

MAY IS MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH

INSPIRED BY

THE **Lutheran**  
Foundation

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*Transforming lives from head to soul*

## INTRODUCTION

In order to help fulfill our mission to advance Gospel sharing and promote mental wellness that silences the stigma of mental illness, The Lutheran Foundation has prepared the **Look Up Mental Health Toolkit** for congregations to use during Mental Health Awareness Month in May. We hope that it will be a blessing to you to have these ready-made materials at your fingertips.

Even though these materials were created with Mental Health Awareness Month in mind, much of the information in this toolkit can be used at any time during the year as your congregation strives to reach out to those in your midst living with mental illness.

These materials were prepared before the COVID-19 pandemic occurred. The extended period of social isolation associated with the pandemic can contribute to increased anxiety and depression, making this toolkit an even more timely resource.

Additional mental health articles and resources for faith leaders are available to you on the [Look Up Indiana](https://lookupindiana.org) website. Log in to [lookupindiana.org](https://lookupindiana.org) frequently for new faith resources, as well as articles and videos relating to depression, anxiety, substance use and suicidal thoughts.

We pray that these materials will help you provide mental health support to your congregation and community as you reach out to them with the love of Christ.

In Christ's Service and Yours,

Deaconess Carole Terkula, Ministry Associate at The Lutheran Foundation



*The Healing Christ statue at the Lutheran Park and Gardens in Fort Wayne, Indiana*

**Note on Implementing the Bible study *Hope and Comfort in the Midst of Depression: What We Can Learn from the Biblically Based Practices of Martin Luther, C.F.W. Walther, and Mother Teresa***

This Bible study was created for use by congregations desiring to address the topics of depression and mental wellness in their adult or youth group Bible study classes. It was written for use during the “May is Mental Health Month” campaign; however, we encourage congregations to incorporate more Bible studies on the topic of mental wellness throughout the year.

This study is geared for adults but could also be used by high school youth groups. It is divided into six sections with discussion questions at the end of each section. Depending on the size and discussion level of your group, approximately two sections could be covered in the span of about an hour. Therefore, this study could be spread out over the course of two to three Bible study classes in a month. Or, each of the six sections of the Bible study could be used as stand-alone Bible studies.

Healing during depression and other mental health conditions is best done through a holistic approach: healing mentally, physically, and spiritually. This Bible study covers some Biblically based practices to help provide a spiritual balm for souls who are hurting. As you care for your congregants, comfort them with God’s Word and refer them to medical and mental health professionals as needed. Additional local mental health resources can also be found on the [Look Up Indiana](#) website.

We pray that this study will generate valuable discussion and be a blessing for your congregation as you seek to care for those in your church and community with the love of Christ.

In Christ’s Service and Yours,

Deaconess Carole Terkula

Ministry Associate at The Lutheran Foundation, Ft. Wayne, IN



## Bible Study on Hope and Comfort in the Midst of Depression

### What We Can Learn from the Biblically Based Practices of Martin Luther, C.F.W. Walther, and Mother Teresa

By Deaconess Carole Terkula

#### ***Special Note***

Depression is a common condition that will affect many adults at least once during their lifetime. Healing during depression is best done through a holistic approach: healing mentally, physically, and spiritually. This Bible study covers some Biblically based practices to help provide a spiritual balm for souls who are hurting. If you or a loved one is experiencing depression that lasts longer than two weeks, you are encouraged to reach out to your pastor for additional care. You may also wish to schedule an appointment with your primary care physician to see if there may be a physical cause for some of your symptoms that could be alleviated by medication. Likewise, your pastor or physician may recommend a Christian counselor to you with whom you may be able to openly share your experiences toward more complete mental healing. Please visit the [Look Up Indiana](http://LookUpIndiana.org) website for help finding local mental health resources.

## Introduction

It is common, during times of distress, to feel that we are alone and that no one truly understands what we are going through. We may even have guilt or shame for the way we are feeling, making us afraid to share our thoughts and feelings with another. But, did you know that Martin Luther, C.F.W. Walther (the founder and first president of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod), and Mother Teresa – three “Spiritual Giants” – went through their own periods of spiritual distress, doubt, and depression? From their writings, we can glean some Biblically based practices that helped them through their times of crisis: **1) Meditation on Scripture; 2) Sharing the burden with another; 3) Prayer; 4) Singing hymns; 5) Taking a sabbatical (rest); and 6) Visitation.** Let’s explore these practices and the Scriptures upon which they are based.

## Meditating on Scripture

Meditation on Scripture was at the heart of Martin Luther’s faith practice. He clung to God’s promises in His Word during times of anxiety and doubt. In 1527, in the midst of unbelief, depression and despair he wrote, “I dispute much with God with great impatience, *and* I hold on to his promises” (Griffith). In God’s promises, Luther found comfort for his troubled soul. His meditation on Scripture often formed the basis for his prayers and also served as the inspiration for many of the familiar hymns he penned, such as “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” based on Psalm 46 and “From the Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee” based on Psalm 130.

C.F.W. Walther, founder and first president of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), wrote a letter to his congregation in 1860 revealing his struggle with clinical depression. Of his condition, he stated, “For I, weakest man that I am, have nothing but the treasure of the Word” (Harrison). Like Luther, Walther clung fast to God’s promises in His Word. He wrote, “I hoped to hold fast to the fact that God can never repudiate His promise to a poor sinner, if only that sinner be saved and righteous before Him through the grace of Jesus” (Harrison).

Let’s meditate on some of God’s comforting promises to His children through faith in Christ Jesus:

**Deuteronomy 31:8**

**Psalm 34:18**

**Psalm 46:1**

**Psalm 130:5**

**Isaiah 42:3a**

**Matthew 11:28-30**

**Hebrews 10:23**

### Discussion Questions

1. What do the above verses teach us about our human condition?
2. What do the above verses teach us about the character of God?
3. Which of the above verses especially speak to you at this time and why?

\*Note: To add to your discussion, you may wish to include this short three-minute video clip titled ["Rest in God's Word"](#) from Right Now Media.

## **Sharing Our Burdens**

Luther, Walther and Mother Teresa were all able to open up and honestly share the burden of their depression with close friends, mentors, and confidants, and they found relief in doing so. Mother Teresa wrote of her faith struggles and bouts of depression, which she often referred to as darkness, to her friend Archbishop Perier of Calcutta. She wrote, "There is so much contradiction in my soul. Such deep longing for God—so deep that it is painful—a suffering continual—and yet not wanted by God—repulsed, empty, no faith, no love, no zeal. . . .The pain within is so great. . . please ask Our Lady to be my Mother in this darkness" (Beyond Blue).

As a monk, Martin Luther often turned to his father confessor, Johann von Staupitz. Luther recalled, "When I first entered the monastery it came to pass that I was sad and downcast, nor could I lay aside my melancholy. On this account I made confession to and took counsel with Dr. Staupitz (a man I gladly remember) and opened up to him what horrible and terrible thoughts I had" (1517.org). Later as a pastor, Luther would regularly write letters to those who sought his pastoral advice and comfort in their despair and distress.

There is indeed comfort that comes from unloading our cares, concerns, and worries with another who will listen. Let's examine God's Word on encouraging one another:

**Proverbs 12:25**

**Proverbs 15:23**

**Proverbs 17:17**

**Galatians 6:2**

**1 Thessalonians 5:11**

**Hebrews 10:23-25**

**1 Peter 3:15**



Discussion Questions

1. What feelings arise in us as we are able to share our worries and burdens with another, according to these verses?
2. When we are able to share openly with another our deepest feelings and concerns, and they listen compassionately, how is the relationship affected?
3. A. How can you be prepared to give a reason for the hope that we have in Jesus Christ?  
  
B. What Bible verses have brought you comfort that you could share with another in time of need?

*\*Note: God gives us the gift of others to help us in our time of darkness: family, friends, our pastor, doctors, licensed counselors and therapists. If you are experiencing depression or despair, please reach out to them so they can provide you with holistic care. If you're not sure where to turn, ask your pastor.*

*\*\*Additional resources are available that help equip congregations to share one another's burdens. If your congregation does not have these ministry opportunities, you may wish to look into the possibility of implementing them: [Stephen Ministry](http://StephenMinistry.org) (Stephenministries.org) and small group ministry.*



## Praying

Luther, Walther and Mother Teresa also turned to God in prayer. They prayed for themselves, and they also asked others to pray on their behalf. Luther believed God heard the prayers lifted up by others for him and was confident that God answered those prayers. In a letter to his friend Melanchthon on August 2, 1527, Luther wrote: “I spent more than a week in death and hell. My entire body was in pain, and I still tremble. Completely abandoned by Christ, I labored under the vacillations and storms of desperation and blasphemy against God. But through the prayers of the saints (his Christian friends), God began to have mercy on me and pulled my soul from the inferno below” (Griffith).

Here is what God says about prayer:

**Psalm 34:15; 17**

**1 Timothy 2:1**

**2 Corinthians 1:10-11**

**James 5:13**

**Philippians 4:6-7**

**1 Peter 5:7**

### Discussion Questions

1. Who are the “righteous” mentioned in several of the above verses?

**See *Romans 3:22-24*.**

2. What does God promise regarding prayer?

3. Does God always answer prayer the way we expect?

**See *Matt. 6:9-10* and *Isaiah 55:8-9***

4. In the introduction to this section on prayer, part of Luther’s quote is: “. . . Completely abandoned by Christ. . .” Read **Deuteronomy 31:8** and **Psalm 94:14** and then discuss Luther’s comment in light of God’s promises. Consider Luther’s state of mind at the time he wrote that as you discuss.

## Singing Hymns and Other Christian Songs

Martin Luther also knew the soothing qualities of music. Therefore, he advised Christians to sing and play hymns and spiritual songs unto the Lord until their sad thoughts dissipated. In a letter dated Oct. 7, 1534 to Matthias Weller, Luther advised, “When you are depressed, and it is all threatening to take over, say: ‘Up you get! I must play a hymn to the Lord on my regal’ . . . as David and Elisha did, until your depressed thoughts go away” (Johnson).

*(\*Note: a regal is a small portable organ that was especially popular during the Renaissance.)*

Indeed, God has something to say on the topic of hymns and spiritual songs:

**Samuel 16:14-23**

**Ephesians 5:19-20**

**Colossians 3:16**

### Discussion Questions

1. What kind of music puts you in a good mood and why?
2. A. What are some of your favorite hymns?  
  
B. Which words in the hymn(s) stick with you?  
  
C. What are some of your favorite contemporary Christian songs?  
  
D. Which words in those contemporary Christian songs resonate with you?
3. Much of Lutheran liturgy is based on Scripture. That is, we receive God’s Word, and we say and sing it back to him. For example, the Offertory “Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God” is based on Psalm 51, and “The Nunc Dimittis” sung after Communion is based on Luke 2:29-32.  
  
A. What are some benefits of putting Scripture to music?  
  
B. How can such canticles and hymns help us in times of distress?

\*Note: Included in this guide is a sampling of hymns ([page 25](#)) and contemporary Christian songs ([page 24](#)) that may bring hope and comfort to those facing mental health concerns.

## Taking Sabbatical

In 1859, Walther experienced a severe depression that affected his ability to function well. “His close friends and LCMS leaders intervened and convinced him to step away from his mountains of work and responsibility to rest. His beloved congregation sent him on a sabbatical to Germany” (Harrison).

Merriam Webster defines “sabbatical” this way: “A break or change from a normal routine (as of employment).” “Sabbatical” is related to the word “Sabbath,” which means “A time to rest.” God designed the Sabbath for mankind for spiritual, mental, and physical restoration. Let’s examine some of what God says about the Sabbath, about rest:

**Genesis 2:2-3**

**Mark 2:27**

**Exodus 16:29-30**

**Mark 6:31-32**

**Exodus 20:8-11**

Sunday is the day of Sabbath rest for Christians. Unfortunately, many Christians only view going to church on Sunday as another obligation (because God commanded it) on their list of things to do. However, when we shift our perspective to see that the Sabbath is God’s *gift* for our overall spiritual, mental, and physical well-being, the more we desire to partake in it. God knows we need refreshment, so He comes to us with the gifts of His Word and Sacraments. In church, God soothes us as we hear His Gospel promise of grace by faith in Jesus Christ. He reassures us of his abundant mercy as we make corporate confession and receive His absolution, the forgiveness we don’t deserve. He extends forgiveness and strengthens our faith in the Lord’s Supper where He is truly present. Furthermore, in church we have the fellowship of other believers who help encourage us on our life journey, especially when the road is difficult. God knows this life is hard, so He invites us to His house where He comes to us and cares for us in these ways. Hear Jesus inviting you and your family as He did the disciples in Mark 6:31, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

### Discussion Questions

1. Why did God create the Sabbath?
2. How does seeing the Sabbath as God’s gift affect your perspective of it?
3. How might society be different if we practiced Sabbath rest the way God intended it?

4. What do you do for personal refreshment? How often do you get to enjoy that? What can you do to schedule time for that?
5. How can your congregation encourage your pastor/priest to get the rest and refreshment needed as Jesus' servant?

\*Note: A wonderful resource on rest is the non-profit organization [Run Hard. Rest Well](http://runhardrestwell.org) (runhardrestwell.org) which offers retreats and workshops on the topic of rest for individuals, groups, organizations, congregations, etc. Camp Lutherhaven in Albion, IN also provides "A Day Away" personal retreats for individuals needing a quiet space to retreat and rest. More information is available on their website: [www.lutherhaven.org](http://www.lutherhaven.org).

## Visitation

Sometimes those suffering from depression are not able to attend church for a variety of reasons. And sometimes for lack of energy, depressed people may stay secluded at home, missing many of the activities they used to enjoy. It is precisely in these circumstances that Christian brothers and sisters can practice the art of visitation. Luther himself counseled against solitude in times of depression, recognizing that persistent introspection could be harmful during times of melancholy. “He would recommend those caring for the depressed or in their company to engage them in small talk and excite them to laughter and jesting, but most of all to read or recite comforting verses from the Scriptures” (1517.org). Luther emphasized that God works through Christians to support, comfort, and encourage struggling people. “Luther advised one severely depressed person, ‘cease relying on and pursuing your own thoughts. Listen to other people who are not subject to your temptation. Give the closest attention to what we say, and let our words penetrate to your heart. Thus God will strengthen and comfort you by means of our words’ (Adams). Although we do not have the specifics on some of the acts of kindness that Walther received from his Christian friends during his breakdown, he does acknowledge them in his letter to his congregation. Walther wrote, “It was the flood of words and consolation and acts of brotherly love and care that fourteen days ago began to flow over me. These kindnesses irresistibly moved my weakened heart. They compelled me to open myself to the divine consolation that the Lord has not rejected me and still recognizes me as His poor servant” (Harrison).

Let’s examine Jesus’ very words concerning the art of visitation and the acts of kindness that accompany it in **Matthew 25:31-45**.

### Discussion Questions

1. According to the above Scripture, ultimately whom are we serving when we care for one another?
2. A. Is there someone in your family, neighborhood, workplace, or church that you know is needing some extra care at this time?  
  
B. How could you visit this person with a specific act of kindness (the gift of listening, a card, some flowers, a meal, a balloon, a hug, some magazines or a book, etc.)?  
  
C. What are some of the Biblical practices discussed in this Bible study that you could intentionally apply to help comfort someone with depression?

\*Note: Pathways to Promise offers a workshop on “The Companionship Movement: A Practice of Presence” which focuses on developing relationships with others who may be experiencing isolation and suffering for a variety of reasons and supporting them in a compassionate way. The Companionship model revolves around many of the Biblical principles mentioned in this Bible study: sharing one another’s burdens through active listening and supporting the other person through acts of kindness and connecting them to community resources as needed. The Lutheran Foundation’s Ministry Associate Carole Terkula can train your ministry team and/or congregation members in The Companionship Movement; contact Carole at [carole@thelutheranfoundation.org](mailto:carole@thelutheranfoundation.org) for information on this training. More information about The Companionship Movement can also be found on the Pathways to Promise website [www.pathways2promise.org](http://www.pathways2promise.org).

## **Closing Prayer**

Sing or recite these stanzas from LSB 734, “I Trust, O Lord, Your Holy Name.”

*Bow down Your gracious ear to me and hear my cry, my prayer, my plea; make haste for my protection, for woes and fear surround me here. Help me in my affliction.*

*You are my strength, my shield, my rock, my fortress that withstands each shock, my help, my life, my tower, my battle sword, almighty Lord—who can resist Your power?*

*With You, O Lord, I cast my lot; O faithful God, forsake me not, to you my soul commending. Lord, be my stay, and lead the way now and when life is ending.*

*Amen.*

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## Book Club Suggested Readings on the Topic of Mental Health

*Consider forming a book club in your congregation where you could read and discuss the following:*

### **And She Was a Christian: Why Do Believers Commit Suicide?**

By Peter Preus, August 2011

Suicide has been a historically difficult and taboo topic for the church. Christians can struggle to understand it. This is especially true when it is a fellow believer who takes his or her own life. *And She Was a Christian* provides answers straight from God's Word, with a strong emphasis on the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

### **Bruised Reeds and Smoldering Wicks: An 8-week Bible Study for Small Groups in Trauma-Informed Ministry and Compassionate Outreach to Individuals with Adversity in Childhood**

By Chris Haughee, 2019

Bruised Reeds and Smoldering Wicks is a study on the intersections between the science of adversity in childhood (ACEs), trauma, and ministry. Suitable for individuals exploring how their faith and the science of brain development, toxic stress, and spiritual formation are connected, this study is best explored by small groups that want to begin trauma-informed ministry interventions and outreach within their faith communities.

### **Darkness is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness**

By Kathryn Greene-McCreight, 2015

Where is God in the suffering of a mentally ill person? What happens to the soul when the mind is ill? How are Christians to respond to mental illness? In this brave and compassionate book, theologian and priest Kathryn Greene-McCreight confronts these difficult questions raised by her own mental illness: bipolar disorder. With brutal honesty, she tackles often avoided topics such as suicide, mental hospitals, and electroconvulsive therapy. Greene-McCreight offers the reader everything from poignant and raw glimpses into the mind of a mentally ill person to practical and forthright advice for their friends, family, and clergy.

### **Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness**

By Matthew S. Stanford, 2017

Matthew S. Stanford has seen far too many mentally ill brothers and sisters damaged by well-meaning believers who respond to them out of fear or misinformation rather than grace. *Grace for the Afflicted* is written to educate Christians about mental illness from both biblical and scientific perspectives. Stanford presents insights into our physical and spiritual nature and discusses the appropriate role of psychology and psychiatry in the life of the believer. Describing common mental disorders, Stanford probes what science says and what the Bible says about each illness.

### **How to Live in Fear: Mastering the Art of Freaking Out**

By Lance Hahn, 2016

In *How to Live in Fear*, Lance Hahn tackles the pervasive problem of fear and panic head-on by inviting readers into his world. In this genuine and practical book, he invites readers into the life of a pastor living with anxiety disorder. Through humorous personal stories—like losing it on an airplane or collapsing onstage as he is about to preach—Lance will win over readers with his transparency. He will also share the remedies that have helped him recover and overcome throughout the years.

### **Mental Health and the Church: A Ministry Handbook for Including Children and Adults with ADHD, Anxiety, Mood Disorders, and Other Common Mental Health Conditions**

By Stephen Grcevich, 2018

In *Mental Health and the Church: A Ministry Handbook for Including Children and Adults with ADHD, Anxiety, Mood Disorders, and Other Common Mental Health Conditions*, Dr. Stephen Grcevich presents a simple and flexible model for mental health inclusion ministry for implementation by churches of all sizes, denominations, and organizational styles. The model is based upon recognition of seven barriers to church attendance and assimilation resulting from mental illness: stigma, anxiety, self-control, differences in social communication, sensory processing, social isolation, and past experiences of church. Seven broad inclusion strategies are presented for helping persons of all ages with common mental health conditions and their families to fully participate in all of the ministries offered by the local church. The book is also designed to be a useful resource for parents, grandparents and spouses interested in promoting the spiritual growth of loved ones with mental illness.

### **Souls in the Hands of a Tender God: Stories of the Search for Home and Healing on the Streets**

By Craig Rennebohm, 2009

Craig Rennebohm shares the evocative stories of those he has encountered on the street who desperately need psychiatric, psychological, and spiritual support. We meet people who, abandoned and marginalized by their community, need care and treatment to find their way back to a life of stability and meaning. Their stories become parables that explore mental illness and the spiritual heart of care and recovery, helping us understand what it means to be human, on a pilgrimage together toward wholeness.

### **Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission**

By Amy Simpson, 2013

In *Troubled Minds* Amy Simpson, whose family knows the trauma and bewilderment of mental illness, reminds us that people with mental illness are our neighbors and our brothers and sisters in Christ, and she shows us the path to loving them well and becoming a church that loves God with whole hearts and whole souls, with the strength we have and with minds that are whole as well as minds that are troubled.

*Note: These synopses taken from the book descriptions on Amazon.com.*

## Mental Health Myth Busters for Media Announcements

The following “May is Mental Health Month” myth busters highlight common myths surrounding mental illness and the facts that bust those myths. We invite you use these in your bulletins, newsletters, email announcements, social media posts, etc. during the month of May. Talking about mental health is the first step toward breaking the stigma associated with mental illness.

### Week 1

*Click on image for link to download*

#### Bulletin



#### Social Media



1 in 5 people have a mental health condition. May is Mental Health Awareness Month – let's work to break the stigma and bring healing. #breakthestigma #lookupindiana

## Week 2

Click on image for link to download

### Bulletin



### Social Media



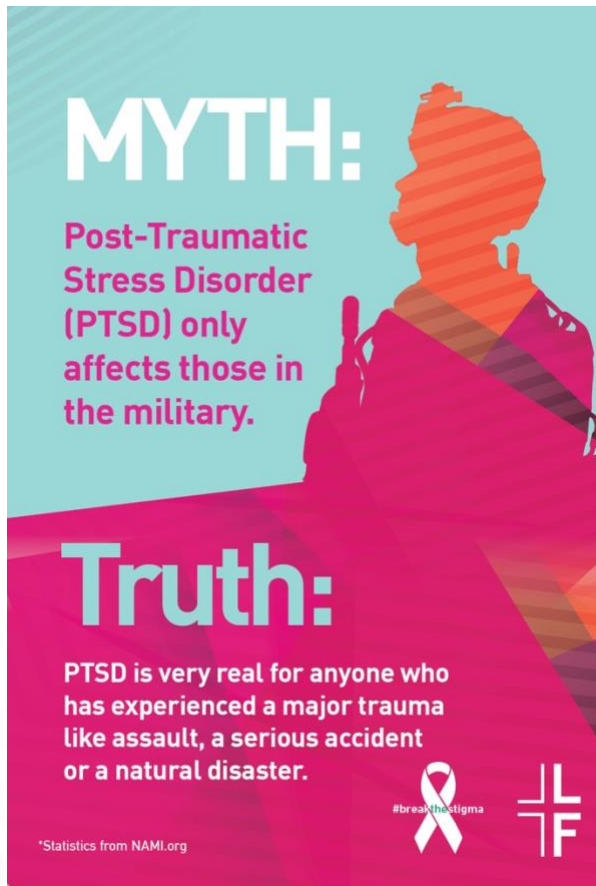
1 in 50 children live with serious depression. May is Mental Health Awareness Month – let's work to break the stigma and bring healing. #breakthestigma #lookupindiana



## Week 3

Click on image for link to download

### Bulletin



### Social Media



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is very real – not just for military veterans, but also for anyone who has experienced a major trauma like assault, a serious accident or a natural disaster. May is Mental Health Awareness Month – let's work to break the stigma and bring healing. #breakthestigma #lookupindiana

## Week 4

Click on image for link to download

### Bulletin



### Social Media



Mental illness is an illness of the brain. For many with mental illness, medication is necessary, just like taking insulin is critical for a diabetic. May is Mental Health Awareness Month – let's work to break the stigma and bring healing. #breakthestigma #lookupindiana



## Week 5

Click on image for link to download

### Bulletin



### Social Media



Mental illness is not a sign of weakness. It is a medical condition that needs treatment, just like any other physical illness. Many factors are involved in mental health, including brain chemistry, genetics, and life experiences/trauma. May is Mental Health Awareness Month – let's work to break the stigma and bring healing. #breakthestigma #lookupindiana

## 15 Contemporary Christian Songs of Hope and Comfort

**Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)** by Chris Tomlin

**Confidence** by Sanctus Real

**Cry Out to Jesus** by Third Day

**Eye of the Storm** by Ryan Stevenson

**Flawless** by Mercy Me

**Greater** by Mercy Me

**Hello, My Name Is** by Matthew West

**Nobody** by Casting Crowns

**Overcomer** by Mandisa

**Praise You in This Storm** by Casting Crowns

**The Best News Ever** by Mercy Me

**Voice of Truth** by Casting Crowns

**Who You Say I am** by Hillsong Worship

**Whom Shall I Fear (God of Angel Armies)** by Chris Tomlin

**You Say** by Lauren Daigle

## 10 Hymns of Hope and Comfort

**I Trust, O Lord, Your Holy Name** (*Lutheran Service Book {LSB}734*)

**In God, My Faithful God** (*LSB 745*)

**Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me** (*LSB 756*)

**Entrust Your Days and Burdens** (*LSB 754*)

**When Peace, Like a River** (*LSB 763*)

**A Mighty Fortress** (*LSB 656*)

**O God, Forsake Me Not** (*LSB 731*)

**What God Ordains is Always Good** (*LSB 760*)

**Abide With Me** (*LSB 878*)

**Jesus, Priceless Treasure** (*LSB 743*)

Some Practical Ways to Implement These Hymns:

- Introduce one of these hymns in your Sunday worship service.
- Sing one of the hymns (or a few stanzas of the hymn) as the opening or closing prayer for your adult Sunday School class.
- Use one of the hymns as a basis for one of your adult or high school youth group Bible studies.
- Include one stanza of one of the hymns in a thinking-of-you card that you send to someone who could use some extra encouragement.
- Text one stanza of one of the hymns to someone you know who needs a little extra encouragement.
- Find a YouTube version of one of the hymns and share it on your Facebook page as a way to encourage and uplift others.



## Prayers For Those Affected By Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders

(The following prayers have been adapted from *Your Life Matters!*, an initiative of the Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention as supplied on the [mentalhealthministries.net](http://mentalhealthministries.net) website. Used with permission.)

### Prayer 1

God, we ask you to comfort and heal all among us who experience various mental health concerns, whether they be depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, dementia, or others. Lord, we know that at times their suffering is great and their isolation can seem unbearable. May they experience the love and support from their family here at (Name of Faith Community) that is the hallmark of your Kingdom as we reach out to them in love. Also, we ask you to show your hand in helping them experience the effective treatment they need from doctors and caregivers. There are others among us who carry the weight of an addiction. Some involve alcohol or prescription drugs; some are other addictions. You know them all, Lord. We rejoice that some persons are in recovery, and we ask for your continued grace and mercy for their journey. For those who are still in the powerful grip of their illness, we pray that your good news would, as the prophet Isaiah affirmed and Jesus proclaimed, “bind up the broken hearted and proclaim freedom to the captives.” And Lord, we pray for all who care for and love our brothers and sisters who daily face the many challenges of living with mental illness and substance abuse, in any of the many ways those conditions manifest themselves. Their work can be exhausting. Raise up in us a caring community to help them in their times of need. Amen.

### Prayer 2

God of love, today as we celebrate Mental Health Sunday, stir in us deep compassion for people living with brain disorders and their families. Raise our awareness of how we can create a supportive and safe spiritual community for people who feel isolated, shunned and ashamed. Inspire us to reach out in love as a sign of your radical hospitality and grace. Encourage us to receive the gifts that are given by all, including all who are living with mental health concerns. Amen.

### **Prayer 3**

Lord, we pray for people who live with untreated mental illness and who are unable to find help and cannot afford medical care. We pray for an end to the stigma of mental illness. We pray for families torn apart by mental health diseases. We pray for all who have lost a loved one to suicide. We pray for mental health caregivers, for scientific researchers, and for professionals who seek to bring compassion, treatment and healing to those who suffer from brain diseases. We pray for children, teens, and young adults learning how to live with newly diagnosed brain diseases. We pray for people burdened by labels and stereotypes. Lord, as the mysteries of the human brain unfold, we remain in awe of the intricate ways in which we are created in your image. May we be reflections of your love in this world. Amen.

### **Prayer 4**

O God, we place before you the illnesses of major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar and anxiety disorders, eating and post-traumatic stress disorders, and alcoholism and drug addiction. Be with all who live with these conditions and their loved ones, reassuring them that You are their Savior, sustainer, and guide. Be the light in our dark times; be the love in the places of our isolation; be the truth when our fears bring falsehood; and be the grace that overcomes our shame. Enable all to speak and live with honesty and courage, resting in Your grace which is sufficient for every need. Through Jesus Christ Jesus we pray. Amen.

### **Prayer 5**

Let us pray to the Father of Mercies: Father, we pray for the unity and mission of the holy Church of God; that it may welcome and serve all who live with a mental illness. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Guide us, the citizens and leaders of this land, this state and this city ... that we may unite to provide for and protect the poor, the homeless and all who suffer in mind, body and spirit. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Forgive us when we knowingly or unwittingly ridicule, look in disgust, neglect or discriminate against the mentally ill. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Comfort and relieve all who are troubled in mind and spirit. Bring them hope, peace and the consolation of a loving community. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**



Grant patience and courage to the families and friends of all who are ill. Increase their perseverance as they face challenges to recovery for their loved one. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Protect and defend people living with mental illness from exploitation, addictions and abuse. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Walk with the homeless and missing persons, those who are destitute and have no one to care. Forgive us for our indifference. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We commend to your mercy and defense all who are contemplating suicide today, right now. Bring someone or something to intervene. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

For the families who have lost a loved one to mental illness, comfort them as they trust in your abounding mercy and grace. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Guide those who do research for the prevention and treatment of mental illnesses; uphold them with your compassion and diligence. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

For those who are in recovery and for treatments that enable them to return to full and rewarding lives, we give you thanks. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, Giver of life and health, we trust that in your time and way, you will dispel all darkness with your light, all confusion with your order, all fear with your peace. Through Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

## Prayer 6

For persons with a mental illness, and their families to find effective treatment for their illness and understanding and acceptance from others, **we pray to the Lord.**

For families who strive to understand and help their loved ones with mental illness, **we pray to the Lord.**

For people who live on the streets without homes or hope, **we pray to the Lord.**

For people with mental illness who are confined in jails and prisons, **we pray to the Lord.**

In thanksgiving for the compassion and dedication of mental health professionals and those providing care, **we pray to the Lord.**

For our elected officials to come to an understanding of the need for increased funding for mental health care, **we pray to the Lord.**



That the darkness of stigma, labels, exclusion and marginalization might be dispelled by the light of greater understanding, acceptance and respect for the dignity of every person, **we pray to the Lord.**

For each of us to reach out with support as we form a caring community, **we pray to the Lord. Amen.** *(This prayer prepared and distributed by the NCPD Council on Mental Illness, 2009. [www.ncpd.org](http://www.ncpd.org). It may be reprinted provided you credit this source.)*

## Prayer 7

**Leader:** God of love, we celebrate that today you are still speaking words of acceptance, wholeness, and mercy for all your differently abled people.

**People:** **As a congregation, we are glad to lift up our voices and our spirits to break the silence that often happens when we are confronted with mental illness.**

**Leader:** As the body of Christ, we name people who so often go unnamed among us – all who live with a mental illness such as major depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, schizophrenia and the like.

**People:** **We pray for mental health caregivers, for scientific researcher, and for caring professionals who bring compassion, treatment and healing to all who suffer from brain diseases.**

**Leader:** We pray for an end to the stigma of mental illness.

**People:** **We pray for all who live with untreated mental illness and who are unable to find help and cannot afford medical care.**

**Leader:** We pray for people burdened by labels and stereotypes.

**People:** **We pray for families torn apart by mental health illnesses, and for families that hold on to one another during difficult times of illness.**

**Leader:** We pray for all who have lost a loved one who died by suicide.

**People:** **We give you thanks for this church and the ways we seek to live out Jesus' commandment to love You, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.**

**Leader:** We stand in awe of the mysteries of the human brain and the intricate ways in which we are created in your image.

**People:** **May we all be reflections of Your love to each person you bring into our lives, through Jesus Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.**

## Prayer 8

*Note to worship leader before worship:* One way to illustrate that one in five people live with a mental health concern, is to put a colored sticker (green is the preferred color of sticker) on every fifth worship bulletin or information sheet handed out to people as they enter worship. As the worship leader begins to speak the words below, reference can be made to bulletins with a sticker on them.

**Leader:** If you have a colored sticker on your bulletin, I invite you to stand, as you represent the one in five people in America who live with a mental or behavioral health illness, whether that is a severe, moderate or mild illness. We acknowledge today that we are often uninformed about these issues and how they impact people among us and their families.

**People:** *(those who are seated)* At times, because of our lack of knowledge and understanding, we find ourselves separated from our sisters and brothers who live with serious mental illness and substance abuse, as well as their families who live this journey along with them.

**People:** *(those who are standing)* We seek God's wisdom to help us all dispel ignorance and misinformation about mental and behavioral health illnesses such as major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, panic disorder, any form of anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, and the like.

**Leader:** We pray for troubled minds and hearts, broken lives and relationships. Almighty God, we pray that you would provide Your people with hope, peace and opportunities to participate in a loving community.

**People:** *(those who are seated)* We pray that the cloud of stigma, labels, exclusion and marginalization might disappear from our language and behavior towards all who are touched by mental and behavioral health concerns as well as all with whom we live and work and go to school with as we are called to be Christ to all our neighbors.

**People:** *(those who are standing)* We pray that through our words and actions we may convey hope to individuals living with mental and behavioral health concerns that they may receive better treatment, steadier recovery, and greater opportunities to work and serve with the gifts God has given to them. We pray also for the families of people living with serious mental health issues who often feel overwhelmed and isolated; sustain them in this journey as well. As they provide care and compassion for their loved ones, may others provide care and compassion to them also.

**Leader:** We offer our gratitude for compassionate, dedicated caregivers and mental health professionals, for new discoveries in brain research, for better medications, and for the body of Christ to provide companionship and understanding for all who daily live with mental and behavioral health concerns, as we walk with one another side by side on life's journey.

**People:** *(all who are sitting and standing)* **O God, we seek the power of Your Spirit, that we may live in fuller union with You and all living with mental and behavioral health concerns. Grant that we may gain courage to love and understand each other, as you love and understand us. We offer this prayer in the name of the Risen Christ who makes all things new. Amen.**

### **Prayer 9— by Amy Simpson**

Loving God, I pray for all whose brains have been hurt by disease, injury, stress, trauma, and other factors of human life in a hard world. I pray for all who love them and want to help. I pray for your comfort in their grief, hope amid loss, and the balm of community with people who understand.

For people with mental illness—may they find hope in you and feel your longing for them.

For parents of children with mental illness—may they know the limits of their power both to cause and to cure.

For children of parents with mental illness—may they know you as loving parent and find places where they can grow up in safety, no matter how old they are.

For friends of suffering people—may they resist the temptation to try to “fix” their friends and recognize the simple power of their loving presence.

For spiritual leaders—may they deny both helplessness and overconfidence, courageously serving as first responders and faithful shepherds.

For people who need treatment and don't receive it—may they recognize their need, believe life can be better, and find people who can help.

For those burdened by shame and stigma—may they walk into the light and find compassionate people.

Lord, I pray for light in the darkness. I pray that people with vulnerable minds will find hope and help among followers of Christ who will love them and point them toward what they need while letting them live with that need. I pray for acceptance and grace—the same kind of grace you

offer so freely to all. I pray that many churches will embrace the opportunity for messy and sometimes thankless ministry among the marginalized, in the name of the one whose love knows no margins. Amen.

### **Prayer 10: Benediction**

May the God of compassion who says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” encourage you.

May the God of mercy and grace who says, “Take heart, son; Your sins are forgiven” comfort you.

May the God of love who says, “You are precious and honored in my sight” embrace you this day and every day. Amen.

*(This benediction adapted from the UCC Mental Health Network [mhn-ucc.org](http://mhn-ucc.org). Used with permission.)*

## Scripture For Encouragement And Support

*The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-27)*

*The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. (Deuteronomy 31:8)*

*For the sake of his great name, the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. (1 Samuel 12:22)*

*But you are a shield around me, O Lord; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head. To the Lord I cry aloud, and He answers me from his holy hill. (Psalm 3:3-4)*

*I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. (Psalm 18:1-2)*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)*

*God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)*

*Find rest, O my soul, in God alone, my hope comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people, pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. (Psalm 62:5-8)*

*Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. (Psalm 63:7-8)*

*Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from all who hate me, from the deep waters. Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the pit enclose its mouth over me. Answer me, O LORD, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly for I am in trouble. (Psalm 69:14-17)*

*Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay. (Psalm 70:5)*

*I lift my eyes unto the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you—the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. (Psalm 121)*

*He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. (Isaiah 40:20)*

*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)*

*But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isaiah 43:1-2)*

*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)*

*For nothing is impossible with God. (Luke 1:37)*

*My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one. (John 10:27-30)*

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)*

*For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us for the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)*

*For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)*

*May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)*



*But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. (2 Corinthians 12:9)*

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)*

*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)*

*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)*

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3-5)*

*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)*

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (Hebrews 10:23)*



## **Some Practical Ways to Implement These Scripture Verses**

- Include one of the verses in a “thinking-of-you” card or “We’ve missed seeing you” card and send it to someone you know who could benefit from some encouragement.
- Text a verse to someone you know who needs to be remembered and uplifted to let them know you are thinking about them and care about them.
- Meditate on one verse as a basis for your daily devotion.
- Print out this list and distribute it as a resource for your church’s Stephen Ministry Team, Christ Care or small groups ministries, Parish Nurses, Nursing Home Visitation Team, Food/Clothing Pantry Volunteers, Church Café Ministry Team, Evangelism Canvassing Team, Comfort Dog Ministry Team, LERT (emergency response team), or other volunteers who come into contact with people who may be in distress or need extra encouragement.
- Put one verse per week/month on your church’s/school’s website homepage or Facebook page.
- Select a few verses and use them for discussion in one of your Bible study groups.
- Use some of the shorter verses as memory verses for Sunday School kids.
- Have the Sunday School kids use them on handmade bookmarks or other artwork that can be given to your shut-ins or those in the hospital.
- Print out some of the verses and attach them to the bags/boxes of food you distribute through your food pantry.
- Print out some of the verses and attach them to the quilts, baby blankets, other knit items or handicrafts that your LWML/women’s group creates for distribution.
- Print out some of the verses and affix them to the coffee cups used in your church’s coffee fellowship/ministry.
- Use them on your church’s bulletin cover(s).
- Use them on your church sign.

*The possibilities for sharing these Bible verses are only as limited as your imagination!*

## Sermon On Job 3:1–26

### *Learning to Lament*

Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing  
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PSALM 119:114, ESV

### Introduction

There are parts of the United States that some people call “fly-over country” because they don’t see these areas as being very exciting. You have to fly over them to get to more exotic places—like New York or LA. Without stepping on too many toes, I suggest that Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas are the top three fly-over states. And, I realize that this may be difficult for many of us to swallow, but we must come to grips with the fact that when it comes to fly-over states, Indiana is in the top ten.

Have you ever noticed that there are portions of the Bible that are “fly-over” books? Perhaps one of yours is Leviticus with all of its rites, rituals and regulations. Or maybe it’s the book of Numbers with all of its, well, numbers! 1 Chronicles is right up there on the list of “fly-overs.” Why, it begins with nine chapters of genealogies. Then for many there are the Old Testament laments. Life can be depressing enough. Why should I read a bunch of stuff that adds to my grief?

### Old Testament Laments

Laments begin early in the Old Testament. When Moses is a state slave living in Egypt, he asks God, “Why have you mistreated this people?” (Exodus 5:22) When Joshua hears that the Ammonites defeated the Israelites, he asks God, “Why have you brought this people over the Jordan?” (Joshua 7:7) When Gideon is surrounded by fierce and ferocious foes, he asks God, “Why has all of this happened to us?” (Judges 6:13). Sixty-five of 150 psalms are Psalms of Lament. Then there is an entire book in the Old Testament called Lamentations.

Heart-breaking questions permeate Old Testaments laments. Why did this happen? Why is life so unfair? Is there any order in the world? God, where are you?

Our collective response to these laments? “Fly over!” We’d rather live by words like “Keep your chin up!” “Big boys don’t cry.” “Play with pain.” “When the going gets tough, the tough get going!”

## Job's Lament

Don't tell that to Job. After his numbed shock of seven silent days and nights in chapter two, Job breaks his silence in chapter three with a massive scream. In chapter three Job describes his life with words like darkness, night, blackness, a grave and death. "Why did I not perish at birth?" (Job 3:11) "Why were there knees to receive me?" (Job 3:12) "Why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child?" "Why is light given to those in misery?" (Job 3:20) "Why is life given to a man?" (Job 3:23) Job ends his lament with these words: "What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil." (Job 3:25–26)

## Stuck in a Sinkhole

Every year we read about ground in Florida that collapses, creating a depression called sinkholes. Cars, sidewalks, lawn furniture—and sometimes complete houses—fall into these holes. Sinkholes occur when underground water erodes the ground below to the point that the surface ground loses its underlying support. Suddenly everything caves in.

Sadness and grief are a lot like a sinkhole. On the surface things look ok. "How are you?" "Fine." But pain and loss erode our lives to the point that one day everything collapses. Suddenly life caves in and we fall into a deep, dark hole.

Just ask Job. His livelihood is in ruins. His children are dead, and his health is broken and crushed. Job has become an object of horror and a sickening sight. In chapters one and two, Job is the model of godliness and patience. Now in chapter three, Job lets it all hang out. Job looks at his loss and refuses to fly over.

What we can learn from Job when we are stuck in a deep, dark emotional sinkhole?

## Go Through It

First, we learn that we survive (we never get past sorrow; we can only survive it) by going through it. I wish I could tell you that we survive emotional angst by going around it, tunneling underneath it or taking a big jump over it. That wouldn't be true. And that's not what Job does. Job faces his broken heart head-on.

Instead of actually feeling the pain, grieving over it and going through the season of mourning—let's face it—it's easier to put our head down and keep going. "Ignore the torpedoes. Full steam ahead!" Mental anguish is unpleasant, messy and ugly. So we avoid it. Deny it. Stuff it. Ignore it. "Fly over!"

There are things that happened to us as children—professional mental-health workers call it *Adverse Childhood Experiences*. There are things that happened to us at school. There are things that happened to us in marriage. And we haven't grieved over these things. Then we wonder why we have anxieties, phobias, fears and low self-esteem. It's because we live with two words. "Fly over!"

When we don't grieve over an alcoholic dad or an unloving mother or mistreatment or prejudice or bigotry, we bury toxic waste in our heart. Then it's only a matter of time before the emotional poison comes to the surface, and we end up saying and doing things that bring more sorrow.

That pain in our lower back? Our aching neck? Our diabetes? Our heart-disease? Our upset stomach? A lot of this is because we stuff sorrow inside. God didn't design us to look at massive loss and fly over. That's what Jesus says. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (Matthew 5:4) If I cover up my sorrow, if I ignore my sorrow, if I deny my sorrow, if I pretend my sorrow doesn't exist, then Christ's comfort becomes elusive.

David prays in Psalm 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death."

David invites us to walk through sorrow because it doesn't work to walk around it, tunnel underneath it, or try and take a big jump over it.

We survive sorrow by going through it. How? By following the biblical pattern of lament—Job's lament. The acronym is C.A.R.E.S.

**Complain.** We need to be ourselves to succeed in any relationship. This means off with the masks. Away with pretense. “It’s me, it’s me, it’s me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.” *It’s me!* Honest expressions of emotional and spiritual pain open the way for hope and healing. Job complains to God in vivid detail. He feels as though God is assailing him, shattering him, seizing him by the neck and crushing him. God is using Job as an archery target (Job 16:7–14).

**Appeal to God’s love.** Trust God’s mercy and compassion in Jesus. Job makes this appeal: “Even now I know that *my witness* is in heaven, *my testifier* is on high, *my mediator* is my friend, while my eye weeps to God.” (Job 16:19–20)

**Remind God of his promises.** “God, you said that you are faithful.” “God, you said that you would answer my prayers.” Job expresses his faith in Christ. He trusts that Jesus will intervene and “put his hand on the two of us” (Job 9:33), enabling Job and God “to go to court together” (Job 9:32) and settle their differences in a just and equitable manner.

**Express hope in God’s wisdom and the things you don’t understand.** Our Father in heaven knows best. Job confesses, “Though he slay me, I will hope in him.” (Job 13:15)

**Seek help from a professional.** Your pastor, a Christian counselor or another healthcare professional will be able to help you.

## Look Beyond It

Second, we learn from Job that we survive sorrow by looking beyond it. Job famously says, “I know that my Redeemer lives.” (Job 19:25) We know, though, that before our Redeemer lived, he experienced heart-breaking sorrow, pain and loss.

Psalms 22:1 is the most famous biblical lament. Jesus prays it on Good Friday. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Psalm 22 includes these words of lament. “I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: ‘He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.’ I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”

We survive sorrow by looking to Jesus on the cross; his suffering and death; his love and forgiveness; his deep compassion for us.

We survive sorrow by looking to Jesus bursting forth from the empty tomb! Christ is alive! Death has no more dominion over him! Heaven's best took hell's worst and triumphed! The master of death could not destroy the Lord of Life! Christ is risen. Christ is risen, indeed! Our Lord's Psalm 22 lament was turned into a song of everlasting deliverance.

## Conclusion

As your pastor who loves you and cares for you very much, I encourage you to weep during the long nights of life. Acknowledge your pain and sorrow. Refuse to fly over. Survive sorrow by going through it. Survive sorrow by looking beyond it. Look to Jesus, our sin-bearer and death-destroyer. His love and compassion fill us with hope. Just ask Job. Amen.



## Bible Study On Job 23:1–17

### *I Will Come Forth as Gold*

Rev. Dr. Reed Lessing

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### Introduction

An old “Alfred Hitchcock Presents” TV show is about a woman prisoner who became good friends with the prison caretaker. When a prisoner died, he would ring the death bell, get the body, put it in a casket and nail the lid shut. Then, placing the casket on a wagon, he would take it to the graveyard outside the prison walls, and bury the corpse.

Knowing this routine, the woman prisoner devised an escape plan. She shared it with the caretaker. “The next time the death bell rings,” she whispered, “I’ll leave my cell and sneak into the coffin with the dead body. Nail the lid shut. Then, take the coffin outside the prison, with me in it. Bury the coffin,” she continued, “and because there will be enough air for me to breathe for some time, come back to the graveyard under the cover of night, dig up the coffin, and set me free.” The caretaker agreed to the plan.

One day the woman prisoner heard the ringing of the death bell. She got up, walked down the hallway, found the coffin containing the dead body and climbed in. Soon she heard the pounding of the hammer and nails. Men lifted the coffin onto the wagon and took it outside to the graveyard. After they poured dirt on the coffin she began to giggle softly, “I’m free, free!”

Feeling curious, she lit a match to identify the prisoner beside her. In the glimmer of light she discovered that she was lying next to the dead caretaker! In classic Alfred Hitchcock fashion, the final scene fades as we hear the woman screaming, screaming, screaming—then silence.

Have you ever been buried like that before? Sure you have. So have I. We’ve been buried in questions. “If God is so good, why do I hurt so bad?” “If Jesus is the light, why am I in the dark?” “If Jesus is alive, why do I feel so dead?”

We’ve been buried in disappointment. “You’re fired!” “I don’t love you anymore!” “I regret to inform you that your disease is terminal.”

We’ve been buried in the past; the minute we lost our temper, the hour we lost our purity, the day we lost control, the years we lost our priorities.

Then they nailed the lid shut.

Buried, boxed in, six feet under; it's dark, frightening and claustrophobic. If there isn't screaming, there are heavy sighs, lifeless looks and broken hearts.

### Discussion Questions

1. When was the last time you felt buried? Did you feel buried by questions? Disappointment? The past? Something else?
2. How did you handle that?
3. Looking back, do you wish you would have handled it differently? If so, how?
4. What do you recall about Job's anguish?
5. How would you describe Job's emotional and spiritual struggles? How are they like yours? How are they different?

## **Towards a Golden Character**

Throughout most of his book, Job is buried under a mountain of pain. Yet, there are several islands of hope. Consider these words from Job 23:10, "When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold." Job confesses that God is after a golden character; a mature faith; a life marked by depth and compassion. God is taking bitter events, working them together, and creating amazing beauty. The secret—the secret—is in understanding how it all works together. There are five ingredients in the recipe that creates a golden character.

**Shock:** When your world falls apart. We are never prepared for the time we're sitting at our desk, and we get a call or a text and something tragic has happened. Or we're at the doctor's office, and he says the "C" word—cancer. When those things happen, it's like jumping into an ice-cold lake. You know, the Polar Bear Plunge! We can prepare all we want, but when we jump in, the shock to our system still takes our breath away. After he lost everything, Job 2:13 says that for seven days Job just sits and stares. Job can't say a word.

### Discussion Questions

1. Would you care to share a time in your life when you found yourself completely in shock? What did you do?
2. When someone is in shock over something they have experienced, what might be helpful for them? What might not be helpful for them at that time?

**Silence:** When God doesn't show up. In Job 23, God is nowhere to be found. God is absent without leave. Job describes his search for God in 23:8–9. Job looks to the east, to the west, to the north and to the south—the four points of the horizon and the compass—but God can't be found. In fact, for 35 chapters God is silent. For thirty-five chapters God doesn't show up.

We can sympathize with Job. Doesn't Jesus promise in Matthew 7:7, "Ask and it will be given. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you"? When something goes wrong, we believe Matthew 7:7. Sometimes, though, God doesn't hit reply to our email. God doesn't call back. God doesn't respond to our Facebook post.

### Discussion Questions

1. Would you care to share a time in your life when God seemed silent to you? What did you do?
2. What are ways to remind yourself that God is, indeed, listening?

**Struggle:** When we don't understand. Job 23:2, "Even today my complaint is bitter." We all know about bitter complaints. Why? Why this? Why is this happening? Why is this happening to me? Why is this happening to me right now? Why did my husband walk out on me? Why did my wife die in a boating accident? Why did I lose my job? Why didn't I get that promotion? Why was my child born with cystic fibrosis?

Life can get dark—really, really dark. We can let tragedies beat us down. We can get down. And we can stay down in the darkness the rest of our life. Consider Job 23:17, "I am not silenced by the darkness." God may sit in silence, but Job won't! Job keeps struggling and keeps holding on.

If we keep up the struggle, like Job, we'll eventually advance from our adversity, learn from our losses, profit from our pain and be transformed by our troubles. Don't give up the struggle! Refuse to let the darkness silence your prayers! Run from that four-letter word that comes straight from the pit of hell. What word would that be? Q-U-I-T. Quit. Never, ever, ever quit!

### Discussion Questions

1. What does it look like for you when you're struggling with God over something you have experienced?
2. How do you usually work through that?

**Sanctification:** When God turns our wounds into wisdom. Sanctification is a big word that describes God's process of making us more like Jesus. Too often, we think that God's plan is to make us happy. Then the book of Job breaks the news. God's plan is not to make us happy. His plan is to make us holy—more like Jesus.

That means every problem has a purpose. Other people may want to wound us, but God uses it so we grow in wisdom. Anybody can turn good into good. God specializes in turning evil into good. Job 42:10 is one of the most important verses in the book, "The LORD restored Job's fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before." God reversed the curse. What looked like a dead end was anything but! God finally restored everything Job lost—two-fold!

It looked like a dead end, too, on Good Friday when Christ died for your sins and mine. Arrested abruptly. Tried unjustly. Sentenced callously. Mocked repeatedly. Abandoned ruthlessly. Beaten brutally. Crucified barbarously. But, but, but he is risen triumphantly! God reversed the curse! Christ is alive, never to die again. Death is dead!

Meaning what? Meaning our nightmares are not random events that serve no purpose. Let me say that again. The resurrection of Jesus guarantees that our nightmares are not random events that serve no purpose. They are wounds suffered in a cosmic battle between good and evil, where God uses those wounds so we grow in wisdom. That's what Paul teaches in Romans 8:28–29. "We know that God works good in all things so that we are conformed to the image of his Son."

Notice what Paul doesn't say. Paul doesn't say, "All things are good." All things are not good. They haunt us and hurt us and mess with our minds. Neither does Paul say, "We're pretty sure that ..." Nor does he say, "Wouldn't it be nice if ..." No. Paul is convinced, "we know." We know that the God of Job, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, takes bitter experiences, works them together, and creates lives of amazing beauty. "So that we are conformed to the image of his Son."

### Discussion Questions

1. How is God turning some of your wounds into wisdom that you can share with others?
2. Of the four referenced so far – shock, silence, struggle, and sanctification – what comes easiest for you? What is the most difficult?

**Service:** When we use our pain for God's glory. God wants to take our greatest pain and turn it into his glory. He wants to use our mess for a message. He wants to use our tests for a testimony. He wants to take the thing we are most embarrassed about, the thing we're most ashamed of, the thing we most regret happening, and he wants to use it for good in the lives of others.

Who can better help parents of a Down syndrome child than parents who have had a Down syndrome child? Who can better help someone going through a divorce than someone who's been divorced? Who could better help somebody struggling with an addiction than somebody who struggled with an addiction? The very thing we don't want to talk about is the very thing God wants to use most to help other people.

In Job 42:7–8, God calls Job a “servant” four times. What does God's servant do? He lives a life of service. Job intercedes for his enemies—Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz. Job blesses those who curse him. He doesn't return evil for evil. Though Job is still a broken man, still scraping his boils with pieces of broken pottery, he refuses to unleash weapons of revenge.

Job has served countless generations. He still serves by reminding us of God's gentle faithfulness. “You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.” (James 5:11)

#### Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of a time when you have been through something very difficult, but God used that situation to show you something or to benefit someone else as a result of it?
2. How does Romans 8:28–29 speak to you?

## Conclusion

That's the plan. Shock. Silence. Struggle. Sanctification. Service. It's a divine plan where all things are working for our good and the Father's glory. The secret—the secret—is in understanding how it all works together. Job puts it this way. "When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold."

### Discussion Questions

1. What does Job 23 teach you about mental health and/or mental illness?
2. Where do you find yourself today – shock, silence, struggle, sanctification and/or service?
3. If you find yourself right now in shock, silence, struggle please know there are resources available for you. You may want to talk with your pastor or a counselor. You may also find some resources at [www.lookupindiana.org](http://www.lookupindiana.org)



## Be Known As A W.A.R.M. Congregation!

### **Welcoming:**

Create a *welcoming* environment for all people, including anyone with mental health concerns and their families:

- Welcome people by name, especially visitors.
- Sit with visitors during worship service and Sunday School.
- Invite visitors to join you for conversation during coffee fellowship time and get to know them.
- Train your greeters and elders in the 5 practices of Companionship offered by [Pathways to Promise](#).

### **Actively Engaging:**

Actively engage people by listening compassionately, and actively engage the topic of mental health in worship service and Bible study:

- Listen compassionately and without interruption to peoples' stories.
- Actively include people you know with mental health concerns to participate in all facets of congregational life, especially in the work of your Mental Health Ministry Team.
- Intentionally include sermons, educational events, training opportunities, etc. on mental health throughout the year.
- Offer prayers for those living with mental health concerns, using specific language such as, "We pray for people with depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, PTSD, eating disorders, and substance use disorders."
- Have Bible studies on mental health related topics.

### **Responsive:**

Respond with support and encouragement:

- Start a Mental Health Ministry Team to understand mental health concerns and address stigma around them in the larger community.
- Offer a spiritual support group for mental health each month in which individuals living with mental health concerns and their families can share stories and offer each other mutual understanding and support in a faith-based safe space.
- Develop a community mental health resource list that can be shared and used by church staff and volunteers, including resources available on [lookupindiana.org](http://lookupindiana.org)
- Offer rides to church or to local support groups.
- Provide the proverbial "casserole" to those who are experiencing mental health concerns at home or who have a loved one in a hospital or treatment center.

- Consider practical support for caregivers, such as respite care.

### **Mission Minded:**

Be mission minded by providing educational and outreach opportunities to the larger community:

- Offer educational workshops at your church, on mental health-related topics, that are open to the public
- Provide mental health training, such as Mental Health First Aid certification training at your church.
- Connect with community partners, including other local churches, homeless shelters, NAMI, Mental Health America, and other organizations.
- Allow outside groups that deal with mental health concerns, such as NAMI or Celebrate Recovery, to use your facility without cost.

*\*This WARM model has been adapted from the UCC's WISE model with permission.*

## Resources

Find help and resources from these national organizations that can assist your church or faith community with developing a mental health ministry focus. For local resources, visit [www.lookupindiana.org](http://www.lookupindiana.org).



Mental Health Ministries

<http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/>



Pathways to Promise

<http://www.pathways2promise.org/>



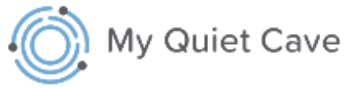
Mental Health Gateway

<https://mentalhealthgateway.org/>



Fresh Hope for Mental Health

<http://www.mentalhealthministries.net/>



My Quiet Cave

<https://myquietcave.org/>



Advocate Aurora Health

<https://www.advocatehealth.com/about-us/faith-at-advocate/office-for-mission-spiritual-care/congregational-health-partnerships/>



Hope and Health Center and Institute

<https://hopeandhealingcenter.org/>



Key Ministry

<https://www.keyministry.org/mentalhealthandthechurch>



Mental Health Grace Alliance

<https://mentalhealthgracealliance.org/>



Duke Divinity School: Theology, Medicine and Culture

<https://tmc.divinity.duke.edu>



Full Strength Network

<https://fullstrength.org/>



National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention: Faith Communities

<https://theactionalliance.org/communities/faith-communities>



Interfaith Network on Mental Illness

<http://inmi.us/>