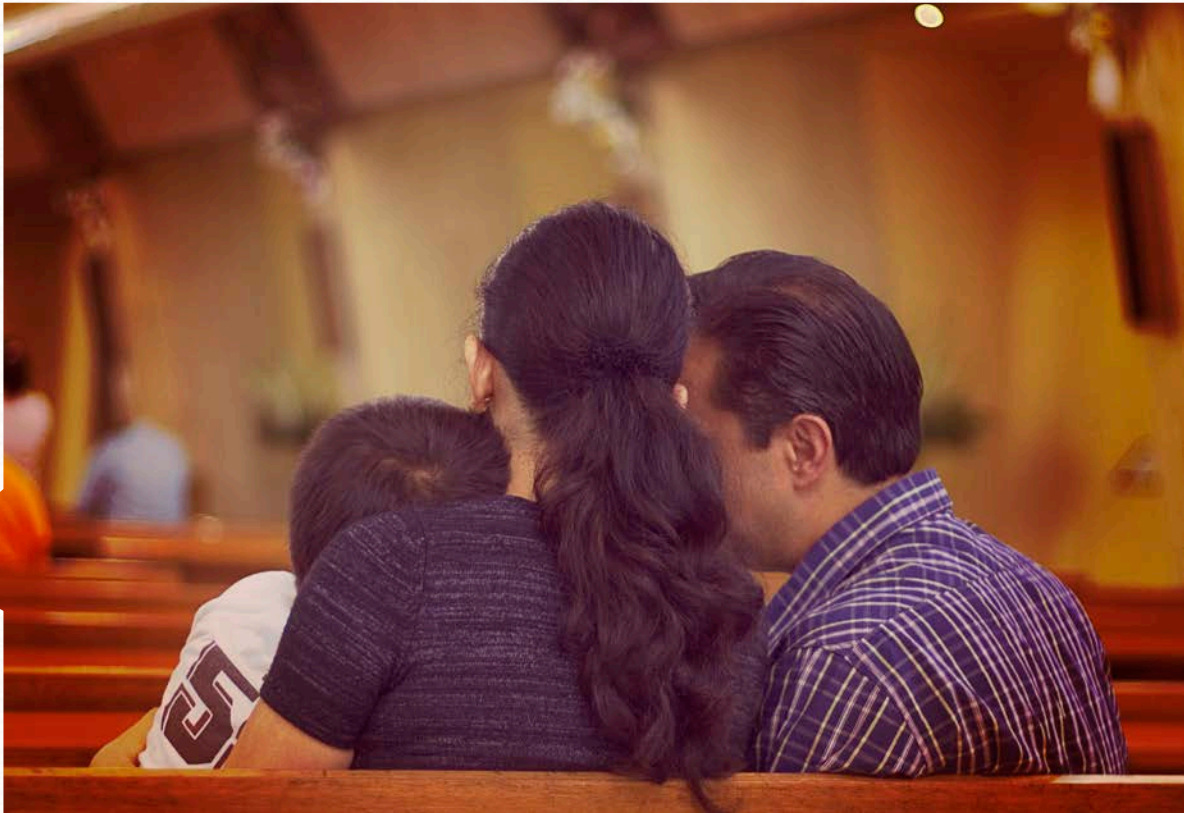


# MINISTRY IN THE FACE OF MENTAL ILLNESS



## ***We are called to serve. And to serve everyone.***

In the church, we readily pray for one another when we're dealing with sickness, surgeries, cancer, or chronic illness. Mental illness, on the other hand, isn't often mentioned. Mental illness can take many forms, and it's estimated that 1 in 10 people suffer from depression.<sup>1</sup> People suffering from mental illness are all around us, including the church.

Instead of ignoring the issue, let's consider a more positive approach.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if God allowed you to be a part of His ministry to others? And He does! Second Corinthians 1 shows us God can take the worst things that happen in our lives and use them in a way that would actually help us grow and help others get through difficult circumstances. We are called to join God in a powerful outreach and ministry to others.

This study on comfort can apply to so many areas of life, but let's use it to focus on helping others who deal with mental illness, emotional struggle, depression, and other issues that often go unseen and unnoticed in our culture—and in our churches.

Listen carefully to what God says to you in this study. The message isn't easy, but it can be extremely advantageous to anyone with an open mind, an open heart, and a willingness to hear the Spirit of God.

1. Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "An Estimated 1 in 10 U.S. Adults Report Depression," <http://www.cdc.gov/features/dsdepression/>, (published March 31, 2011), (accessed March 3, 2014).



### *Frank Page*

Dr. Frank Page is president and CEO of the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention. He has written several books and pastored for more than three decades, but he likes to be known as husband and father. Dr. Page wrote the book *Melissa: A Father's Lessons from a Daughter's Suicide*. His goal is to use that tragedy to help as many as possible.







# MINISTRY IN THE FACE OF MENTAL ILLNESS



*What comes to mind when you hear the words “mental illness”?*

**QUESTION #1**

#BSFLministry

## THE POINT

*God's people are to care for those suffering from mental illness.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I hope prayer is a part of your Bible study group. In most groups and churches, prayer requests usually focus on people with physical illnesses or injuries. We also pray for those who are hurting because of the loss of a loved one. All of this is as it should be.

However, we're also surrounded by people—both inside and outside the church—who bear wounds that aren't as visible. Those wounds are just as debilitating, just as serious, and often just as deadly.

Specifically, there are many people struggling today with mental illness and emotional pain. The most common form of these struggles might be called depression, but mental illness takes many forms. We typically know how to pray and minister to those with physical health concerns, but what do we do for those struggling with mental illness?

Instead of ignoring, looking the other way, or denigrating persons with mental and emotional struggles, let's look to the Scripture to see how we can serve those who suffer in this way.



# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## **2 Corinthians 1:2-7** (HCSB)

**2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

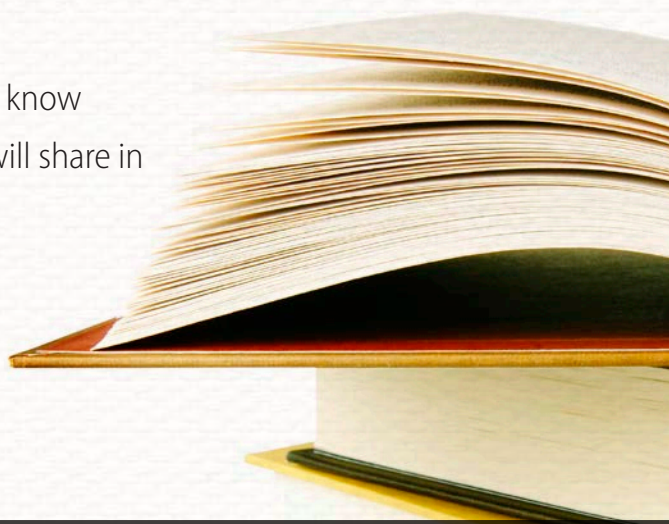
**3** Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

**4** He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

**5** For as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so through Christ our comfort also overflows.

**6** If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is experienced in your endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer.

**7** And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will share in the comfort.





***When have you  
experienced  
God's comfort?***

## QUESTION #2

## 2 Corinthians 1:2-3

By referring to God as “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort,” Paul made a definitive statement about God’s connection to those who are hurting. While books, counseling, and even medicine may offer some degree of help, God is the ultimate Source of healing, hope, and help. Let us never forget that.

That’s not to imply that all anyone struggling with mental illness needs to do is “trust God more and pray more.” The roots and causes of mental illness can be varied and diverse, and God does indeed work through medicine and counseling. But it all starts with Him.

One of the most difficult times in my life was the death of my firstborn child. In moments like those, it’s easy to become bitter toward God and blame Him (or others) for what happened. Thankfully, I chose to turn to our Heavenly Father in my time of need. Words of Scripture I had memorized long before came to my heart, bringing both compassion and comfort:

- ▶ “The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. Praise the name of Yahweh” (Job 1:21).
- ▶ “Your heart must not be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if not, I would have told you. I am going away to prepare a place for you. If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come back and receive you to Myself, so that where I am you may be also. You know the way to where I am going” (John 14:1-4).

God’s precious Word contains practical help. It has helped me throughout my life in good times and bad times—and His Word is available to help you, too.



## 2 Corinthians 1:4-5

The issue is not *if* you're going to have trouble in life, but *when*. Troubles come to everyone. Unfortunately, an increasing number of people are experiencing mental and emotional turmoil in today's culture.

- ▶ One recent study showed that more young people are dying by suicide than by traffic accidents.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ The U.S. Army Chief of Chaplains told me we have been losing more soldiers to suicide than to combat—and this was at the peak of the Iraq and Afghanistan war.
- ▶ Suicide has risen dramatically for young women, ages 18 through 30. For youth between the ages of 10 and 24, suicide is the third leading cause of death.<sup>2</sup>

People respond to trouble and turmoil in different ways. Some experience bitterness and regret, even though their lives continue on. Others fall into negative patterns such as drug abuse or unhealthy relationships. Still others fall into a deep pit of despair, depression, or worse. And many couples view divorce as the first option when trouble comes into their marriages.

Thankfully, God reaches out to all of us during difficult times. The text is clear that God comforts us in all our troubles—not just some.

One way God desires to express His comfort to others is through us. God calls us to comfort people who are going through difficulties similar to those we have experienced. As we have received grace and peace from our Lord, we can come alongside others to extend grace and peace to them.

**We are called to be the face, the hands, the voice, and the presence of our Lord Jesus in the lives of others.** I think that is an awesome responsibility as well as a wonderful privilege.



*Since Christ's comfort overflows to us, what are practical ways we can share that overflow with others?*

**QUESTION #3**



***What are some similarities and differences between physical illness and mental illness?***

**QUESTION #4**

## **2 Corinthians 1:6-7**

God can use even difficult things for the good of others and for His glory. When experienced in the life of a believer, both distress and comfort can work for good in the lives of others who are struggling.

This is a concept people in our world struggle to understand.

- ▶ How could something good come out of something bad?
- ▶ How could something most of us seek to avoid actually turn out for the best?
- ▶ Is it truly possible that the deepest tragedies of life can bring about some of the greatest victories?

This is one of the many instances in which God's wisdom runs contrary to the wisdom of the world. In fact, according to human logic, God's wisdom simply doesn't make sense.

But let's look at our problems in another way: the fact that God brings good out of sorrow means nothing is wasted in this life. As the apostle Paul wrote: "We also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope" (Romans 5:3-4).

Who doesn't wish for endurance, character, or hope? It's truly a wonderful attribute of our Lord that He would give us these things in the midst of struggle and trial.

# HOPE

Still, these blessings aren't meant for us alone. It's true that much good can come out of suffering, but Paul's message in 2 Corinthians 1:6-7 points beyond our own advantage and growth. Paul calls us to use what has happened to us for the aid and benefit of others.

God can use our difficulties to comfort others. Instead of running from or hiding our difficulties, let's ask God to use our struggles in a way that would bring honor and glory to Him. And one of the best ways to do that is to use our own struggles as a way of providing help and comfort to others.

***As God's people,  
what can we do to  
care for those with  
mental illness?***

**QUESTION #5**

# WHAT WOULD YOU SAY?

*How would you respond to the following statements regarding mental illness? Choose one.*

- 1.** "Mental illness is a myth."
- 2.** "Churches aren't equipped to serve or minister to people who suffer from mental illness."
- 3.** "I don't think anyone I know has ever suffered from mental illness."

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

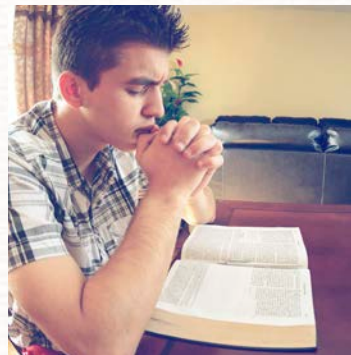
.....



## LIVE IT OUT

What practical steps can we take in light of the realities surrounding mental illness in our culture? Consider the following:

- ▶ **Look for needs.** Ask God to help you find someone who needs a loving touch, the ministry of presence, and an encouraging word from you.
- ▶ **Get educated.** Research the impact of mental illness in our culture, as well your church and community. (Consider starting with the book *Troubled Minds*, by Amy Simpson.)
- ▶ **Raise awareness.** Take action to help people in your spheres of influence become more sensitive to those who are hurting from mental and emotional illness.



Most of us feel uncomfortable with the topic of mental illness. We don't always know what to say or do. But followers of Christ can feel confident in the knowledge that God calls us to serve all who suffer.

### *You're Not Alone.*

*I was in my yard-working clothes when the call came. It was Friday morning. The day after Thanksgiving. Ten more minutes and I'd likely have been out on my mower, cutting the grass in preparation for getting our house ready to sell. If so, I don't know how I would have initially heard the news. Maybe a neighbor waving panicked from her front porch, pointing first to me, then pointing to her phone receiver, back and forth, frantically motioning me over. Maybe a friend's car screeching into our driveway, engine still running, the door flying open. "Come quick! It's Melissa!"*

*But like you, perhaps, my first confirmation that something was tragically wrong came through a phone call.*



To continue reading "You're Not Alone" from the book *Melissa*, by Frank Page, visit [BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles](http://BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles).



- © 2014 LifeWay BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE **145**