

Promoting Wellbeing in The Church
(Part 4, of 4, on Mental Health Awareness)

Pastor Mark Wallace 25/10/20

Luke 10:25-42

Sermon Summary

The church's primary task is the dedication of knowing God through the scriptures. Yet there are times when we need to segue to issues that have great impact on the church. Two of these are: apologetics and mental health.

Mental health is an important issue in many countries. The current year has been a **crazy** one dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Uncertainty, fear, doubt, all have arisen from the pandemic, and Christians are not immune from these problems. Mental health issues are **not** sidelined in scripture; they arise frequently. Any knowledge we can absorb on the subject is relevant to readers and hearers.

Two fundamental points on mental health: 1. Realizing there is more to people than what we see, and 2. The greatest need for afflicted souls is acceptance and compassion.

On point 1, Pastor Mark recounted the time he waited in a Post Office line to mail a letter. The person in front asked multiple questions regarding the sending of parcels, resulting in a long wait. Mark was amazed at the calmness of the Post Office employee, and when Mark finally made it to the counter, complimented the employee on her patience. She replied, **"Well, you can never see what people are going through."** Understanding, patience, acceptance – it was all there.

In a similar vein: Never read a Bible verse alone; always read at least a paragraph to understand the context. Similarly, you cannot understand somebody until you know them more fully.

"Blessed are the eyes that see what you see" (Luke 10:23). Although this verse concludes a joyous moment Jesus is experiencing, it also leads into a discourse on understanding what is just and righteous in a person's attitude (Luke 10:25-42). The context of these verses relates to the teaching of Jesus laying the weighty idea on us of just who God is and how we come to **see God**.

We **see God** through the eyes of the "good Samaritan" who feels pity for the robbed man: **"When he saw him, he took pity on him"** (Luke 10:33 within verses 25-37). In the verses that follow, we are told of Martha's troubled mind versus her sister's worshipful attitude (Luke 10:38-42). Lessons for us are twofold:

1. To know Jesus' compassion for each of us is to emulate His compassion for others.

2. To see God is to sit at the feet of Jesus.

In Maya Angelou's memoir I know Why the Caged Bird Sings, she writes: "*There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you.*" The world is full of people like this. We need to hear their stories and feel compassion for them.

If we are lonely and grieving, we need help. If we feel this way, we desire that others know and understand what is wrong with us. Therefore, we need to get inside those who are troubled to understand their problems before we can give them succor. Sometimes isolated people will weep in their agony. There is no greater empathy than to weep with them – it is the depth of care.

"Jesus wept" (John 11:35) is the shortest verse in the Bible. But the context is important as we see Jesus experiencing the same grief as Lazarus' family. We are to love each other as Jesus loves us (John 11:17-37). He sets the example; we follow.

We cannot come to church each week just for a theological lecture. We come together as a compassionate community. It means we come together to connect with God and each other – in both joy and sorrow. We explore each other's journeys.

Every problem comes with its own solution. It is all about finding that solution. A psychologist Ellen Baxter once faked insanity to get inside an asylum to see how its patients behaved. There was no community among them; they simply sat around all day, never engaging with one another. Baxter learned of a small town in Belgium (Geel), not too far from Antwerp, that has a unique characteristic: the mentally ill are **not** placed in asylums. Rather, they are placed as "boarders" within selected homes. They are in the care of regular citizens. The stigma of mental disorders does not exist in that town. It is not a burden to have boarders in your house. The more accepting the family, the greater the peace and tranquility of the "boarders." Baxter used her insights from Geel to begin a movement known as supportive housing and applying it within New York city.

Nobody is immune to mental health problems. A key part of the church's mission is designed for soul-care as we learn to **see people with the eyes of Jesus** and apply His heart of love.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important that Christians should understand mental health problems?
2. The first of the important points of mental awareness is to realize there is more to people than what we see on the surface. You have to start somewhere. So, here in our large church, people come and go all the time. How do you connect with new folk? What is your opening line? Do you have a way to learn more without seeming to interrogate the newcomer?
3. Has anyone in your life helped you by looking beneath your surface? Describe.
4. **Read Luke 10: 21-24.** What does Jesus mean by the word **see** in this context? (See especially verse 23).
5. **Read Luke 10:25-37.** Why is seeing important in this story (see especially verse 33)?
6. **Read Luke 10:38-41.** How is Mary doing what Jesus calls the “better” thing?
7. *There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you*, wrote Maya Angelou. Can you relate to this statement?
8. Does the example of the city of Geel have relevance for our own church community?

Prayer Suggestions for Life Groups

Join with other Christians worldwide as they pray, with love, for Hindu people... they account for 15% of the world's population (over one billion). Pray that they may hear and believe the gospel. (Some Christians are committing to pray through Diwali, from November 8 – 22)

Pray for God through his Holy Spirit to bless New Zealand as many continue to deal with family separation due to Covid travel restrictions.

Pray for God's healing for those in our own fellowship dealing with illness (including mental health) and stress in their families