

**Mental Illness // (2 Week Series Part 1)****Description of Series:**

God cares about our mental and emotional wellbeing so we should too. This series talks about mental illness and what the Bible has to say about it. So many students and their loved ones are plagued by mental illness but God's word tells us exactly how to respond. Part one of this series will give more broad overview on how we should view mental illness from a Biblical standpoint. Part two tackles anxiety and loneliness.

**Bible Verses:**

Psalms 139:10  
Matthew 11:28  
Galatians 4:7  
Galatians 6:2  
Ephesians 2:10

**Preparation:**

Mental Illness is a heavy topic so just be aware of what you are teaching. Be ready spiritually and also with resources to equip your students. Have local counselors and or mental health workers contact information ready as well. Slides are and verses are highlighted in yellow for powerpoint use.

**Graphics Example:**

## **MENTAL ILLNESS PART 1:**

When you hear mental illness, what do you think of? Padded walls, people with helmets on, people licking windows, people running around naked. It's wild. When you see it portrayed in entertainment and the media, it's always in extremes.

We are not going to be going into the extremes of that stuff.

Who would have thought growing up in America would be so wild?

The personal struggles U.S. teens reported experiencing in the past 3 months:

- 3 in 4 teens reported feelings of loneliness.
- 2 in 3 reported high anxiety.
- 3 in 5 reported depression.

American teens are struggling more than their global peers.

Of the 20 countries surveyed, the U.S. ranked in the top 5 countries with the highest rates of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. The younger age group (13–15 years old) transitioning from middle school to high school reported experiencing more suicidal ideation than the high schoolers (16–19 years old).

**U.S. TEENS HAVE THE HIGHEST SUICIDAL RATE OF ANY COUNTRY IN OUR GLOBAL STUDY.  
TEENS ARE STRUGGLING MORE THAN WE MAY HAVE REALIZED.**

We want to look at what mental illness really is, how you can reach through your own darkness if you're suffering, and how we can love you well the way we need to.

Sometimes we, as Christians within the church, tend to “spiritualize away” the mental health struggles of others or even ourselves. We say things like, “You just need to trust God more!” or “God is testing you.” We may even think that our suffering is a punishment from God. Or even a sign that we aren't following Jesus the right way. These ways of thinking about mental illness can cause a ton of damage to ourselves and others. They make us feel shame and guilt, like it's our fault.

When we are ashamed or feel shame, it's very hard for us to correct or allow God to heal because we are so hurt. Shame will keep us in chains and lock us down. Believing that we aren't worth love or support. This is the furthest thing from the truth. That leads me to the first point of this lesson...

### **Point 1: Struggling with mental illness is not a sin.**

It's not a sin. If someone says it is, that's their opinion; that's not fact. Perhaps you've heard a Christian, even a pastor, say that it is a sin. I want you to hear me, your pastor, tell you that's not true, and I'll back that up with the Bible.

Mental illness is a physical health condition caused by the chemicals in a person's brain. Specifically, mental illness primarily occurs when a person's brain has low activity levels for chemicals.

Two major things that mess with your chemicals in your brain are stress and hormones.

As a teen, you are in the most stressful and hormonally involved times of your life.

You are growing, taller, and getting hairier; girls are going through that time of the month; boys no longer think girls have cooties. Your body is changing, and it's weird. You are also totally stressed out; you deal with school, family, sports, friends, jobs, and everything else that stresses you out in life.

This isn't an anatomy or biology class. I get that, but what I want you to understand is that mental illness is a biological problem.

You shouldn't associate depression with sin or distance from God any more than you should associate diabetes with it.

For someone who has diabetes, their body doesn't produce insulin; therefore, he or she has an illness and takes medication like synthetic insulin to treat it.

Just the same, the body of a person with a mental illness doesn't produce enough of a particular chemical in the brain; therefore, he or she has an illness and can and should be treated.

Some other common factors, along with what's going on physically, are:  
Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse, and a family history of mental health problems

**Point 2: Anyone can struggle with mental illness, even Christians who deeply love Jesus.**

Even if we don't struggle with a diagnosable mental illness, we most likely know someone who does!

Let me say this again: having mental illness is not a sin, but don't let it cause you to sin!

Mental illness is not a sin, but it definitely can cause or drive you to sin. You shouldn't allow it to do that, but it can if you let it. Self harm. self-medicating with drugs, alcohol, sexual activity, or other unhealthy coping mechanisms, and of course, suicide are all sinful choices. They are not good solutions.

**Matthew 11:28**

**"Come to me, all you who are tired, worn down, and burdened, and I will give you rest."**

**True peace and true rest are found with Jesus! You need to be steadfast in making sure you do not let it drive you to sin. You are more than a mental illness. You are not defined by this.**

**Galatians 4:7**

**You are God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.**

God already factors in everything that we are, struggle with, and walk through in life. Even in our mental illness struggles, God still accepts us as children.

Our father does not reject us because of a defect or illness, but yet he draws us closer to him. He calls us his own.

In order for us to help or start our journey in dealing with this, we have to:

**Point 3: Look for the signs.**

When I want to eat at ChickFila, I look for signs of it. When my wife wants Starbucks, I look for the signs for them. The signs will guide me to ChickFila or Starbucks. The signs will help guide me to the location where I need to be.

We must be able to look for signs and recognize mental illness. Just like getting hurt physically will give you signs (a bruise, a cramp, a sharp pain, etc.), mental illness has symptoms.

They affect our mood, thinking, and behavior by making every day more difficult. You might have a loss of appetite or feel overly tired. Your emotional feelings may range from being super angry to being sad or even numb.

It's important for us to realize that mental illness isn't just black or white. It's like a spectrum of different colors. In certain seasons, we might experience one of the symptoms that make up a diagnosis.

So, what do we do? Well, we must have grace and patience with ourselves and others.

We must help one another deal with these things!

**Galatians 6:2: Share each other's burdens, and in this way, obey Christ.**

We may be suffering, but suffering doesn't mean we have to do it alone.

For those who trust Jesus, it means we will be comforted. It's good to openly share our brokenness and struggles within the context of trusted, godly relationships in order to receive encouragement and support.

Acknowledging our suffering is not only okay; it's an essential part of walking through mental illness. By being open with those we love and trust, we help carry each other's burdens. This is pleasing to God.

Our bodies and emotions are designed by God and were designed to experience the full spectrum of human emotions. We are emotional people, and sometimes those emotions get out of whack.

We must be vulnerable and open to talking with those who can help us.

Loneliness and isolation make mental health struggles worse, so remind them that they aren't alone in their struggles.

Maybe you are here and you think, "Is something wrong with me?" or "Am I mistaken? Or "Why am I even here if I am broken like this?" Well, broken crayons still color.

So many of us think that I have to be fixed, have to be whole, or get rid of this mental illness I am dealing with in order to be loved by God. I have to be fixed in order to be used by God and to step into his purpose.

**You don't have to be perfect to be used by God or loved by God.**

Actually, God's purpose and plan in your life, if you are in a relationship with him, are working, moving, and in play right now as you sit here. Regardless of what you are struggling with,

So many times, in life, we are trying to be the "super hero" in other people's lives, so we put what's going on in our lives—the danger—on hold or pause and try to help others.

Let's work on all of your stuff first. Let's work out your mental health things first.

Just know that even if you're helping other people or even if you're just trying to work this all out, God is working in your life right now! God knew you would be dealing with these things, yet he still gave you purpose and value.

**Psalms 139:16**

**You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.**

That means every single day, every single moment of your life has been recorded by God and laid out. The good moments, the bad moments, and the silly moments The moments you acted great and the moments you didn't act great!

**Ephesians 2:10**

**We are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.**

God knows us perfectly and completely, yet he still declares that we are his masterpiece. When we realize that he knew every detail about us before we were even born, we are reminded that his purpose for our lives is not corrupted or delayed by challenges with mental health within ourselves or those we love.

God knows what's going down! He knows you. I want you to know tonight that you can and are able to do good work! You are able to do this today! The "good things" Paul is talking about are what you are able to do. Even as you struggle, there is a purpose and a plan for your life!

You never have to worry that your words or emotions aren't going to shock or offend God. He's ready to talk and wants to listen to how you honestly feel. Praying is simply an honest conversation with the one who knows them best.

He saw you when you were still in your mom's belly, and he hasn't taken his eyes off you since.

He cares about your pain. He's felt your pain. He's not judging you for your pain. He's not condemning you for your pain. It's not a sin to feel. He loves you deeply. Don't run from Him because you hurt. Run to him, because you hurt.

Close out the service with prayer and a time of response.

**Mental Illness // (2 Week Series)****Small group questions:**

1. Do you or anyone you love struggle with any type of mental illness? If so how has this effected your life?
2. Identify a time this week when you felt weary or burdened. What is one step you can take to bring that burden to God and seek His rest?
3. Think of someone in your circle who might be struggling silently with mental health issues. What is one tangible way you can offer to help carry their burden this week?
4. Reflect on your own self-worth in light of being God's child. Write down three affirmations based on this truth to remind yourself during moments of self-doubt or mental distress.
5. Consider the metaphor of broken crayons still coloring. What is one area of brokenness in your life that you can still use to create something beautiful or help others? Plan a specific action to do so.
6. Mental health is often shrouded in shame and stigma. What is one conversation you can initiate this week to help break down these barriers and encourage openness and support within your community?
- 7 . In what ways can individuals find rest when they are feeling overwhelmed by personal struggles, such as mental health challenges?
8. What are some of the burdens that young people might carry, and how can a community help to lighten these burdens?
9. How might the knowledge of being valued by God as His child and heir impact someone's perspective on their own struggles with mental health?
10. What did you learn from the lesson that impacted you in a big way?



**Mental Illness // (2 Week Series: Part 2)****Description of Series:**

The sermon continues to address the complex and often stigmatized topic of mental illness, particularly within the Christian community. This sermon specifically touches on the issues of anxiety and loneliness and how to navigate those seasons biblically in every day life.

**Bible Verses:**

Ephesians 2:10  
Philippians 4:6-7  
Psalms 56:3

**Preparation:**

Mental Illness is a heavy topic so just be aware of what you are teaching. Be ready spiritually and also with resources to equip your students. Have local counselors and or mental health workers contact information ready as well. Slides are and verses are highlighted in yellow for powerpoint use.

**Graphics Example:**

## **MENTAL ILLNESS PART 2:**

Welcome back to week two of our series on mental illness. I'm excited to be teaching this two-part series. It's not that it's an exciting topic. It's a heavy topic, but I'm excited to speak the truth about it. I acknowledge that people with mental illness have been overlooked, misjudged, and mistreated for a long time in the church, and I want to see that end. I want to end the misunderstanding, break the stigma, and invite you to be fully yourself here.

In lesson one we used science and the Bible to show that mental illness is not a sin. That means having a mental illness does not break God's laws. We talked about what causes it: a deficiency in naturally occurring chemicals and neurotransmitters in the brain. You can't cause it; you can't decide to increase the amount your brain makes; you just have the brain and brain chemistry God gave you. Having a mental illness is not a sin. Don't let it drive you to sin. We also talked about how you are a beautiful masterpiece that God has created.

5 key things I want you to remember, when it comes to Mental Illness and how we view it.

### 1. Basic Truth

It's important to start with this basic truth: Anyone can struggle with mental illness, even Christians. Even if we don't struggle with a diagnosable mental illness, we can still go through seasons of negative thought patterns and overwhelming feelings such as stress, social anxiety, body image issues, and depression.

### 2. Damaging

Trying to spiritualize away mental illness struggles can be very damaging to ourselves. Acknowledging our suffering is not only okay; it's an essential part of walking through mental illness. Our bodies and emotions are designed by God, and we're designed to experience the full spectrum of human emotion.

### 3. Talk to someone godly that they trust for encouragement and support.

Loneliness and isolation make mental health struggles worse, so remind them that they aren't alone in their struggles. There are people who have, or maybe are going through, the same thing as you. Find someone who will walk this journey with you!

### 4. Don't worry.

We never have to worry that our words or emotions are going to shock or offend God. He's ready to talk and wants to hear how they honestly feel. Praying is simply an honest conversation with the one who knows them best.

### 5. Be Aware.

Self-awareness is key to working toward good mental health, so advocate and make space to evaluate and adjust your habits and behaviors. Getting practical is key. Ask yourself to think of a few of your favorite go-to (healthy) things that help calm your mind and body. Whether it's exercise, listening to a positive podcast or playlist, or digging into a favorite scripture, help them get creative with a mental health action plan.

Here's the truth: God has a lot of things to say about what you are going through. Make sure you know that God sees you and cares about you, your mind, your body, and your emotions. Anchor yourself in the truth of Scripture and care for yourself in ways that honor God.

Growing up on TikTok and YouTube, you are quite familiar with mental health terms like anxiety and loneliness to describe their experiences, so I want to take a look at these two especially.

Anxiety and Loneliness.



## ANXIETY

Anxiety comes in many different forms. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders describes anxiety as “apprehensive expectation,” and though many of us have experienced this from time to time, it can be difficult to describe.

Fear is the root emotion of anxiety.

When our brains sense danger, our stress response is activated, which sends us into fight or flight mode.

We are either going to run or we are going to put them up and try to give them the old 1, 2, 1, combo!

Think of it this way: when you encounter a bear in the woods!

You don't have much time to rationally weigh out all the available options. Your danger-sensing brain takes over and sends your body immediately into action before you can waste time and get yourself killed. After the danger has passed, our nervous system kicks in and allows our bodies to return to a resting state—our whole brain comes back online, our heart rate slows, breathing becomes normal, and muscles relax.

Anxiety is your body being stuck on high alert, even when no actual danger is present.

This is why so many teens feel their relationship problems so deeply—being cut off or outcast from one's peers is seen as an existential threat, and our brains treat this type of threat the same way they would handle an angry bull running toward us. The only problem is that the response to an angry bull is pretty easy to identify—run!

People experience anxiety in a variety of ways. Some experience it through looping thoughts—the same words playing over and over again in their mind like a recording. Some experience it as an emotion—fear, apprehension, or a sense of dread. Others, and especially children and teens, experience anxiety physically.

The heat of threatening situations exposes deep spiritual realities and triggers physical and chemical responses. We are fundamentally vulnerable people who need more help than our own resources can provide.

Sometimes, in a moment of fear, we can find the spiritual resources in God to take a deep breath and reorient ourselves toward Him. For example, imagine that a good friend accuses you of something you didn't do. Will you lash out at them or pause and seek God?

Many Psalms are written by people who, finding themselves in the heat of battle, took their troubles to God.

### **Psalm 56:2–3**

**“I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me. But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you.”**

How often do you feel anxious or worried about things in your day?

Why do you feel like you have to worry or be anxious about those things?

How do you handle all that anxiety and stress?

What do you think about when you're anxious?

Anxiety comes from a lack of trust in an outcome.

When you can't control the outcome of a situation, it can make you anxious and nervous. When you don't know how things are going to work out, you become afraid and worried.

**Philippians 4:66**

**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**

Verse 6 tells us to be anxious about nothing. Say what? How is that possible? The rest of the verse gives us the answer: By prayer and request, along with thanksgiving.

**LONELINESS:**

Loneliness is an uncomfortable yet very common experience. Teens can experience loneliness in particularly acute ways as they are going about the natural developmental task of establishing their identities, which is inevitably done in connection to other people.

Rejection has a particular sting for teens because their rational-thinking brains are still developing. Pain, especially emotional pain, can feel like it will never end. Teens can have difficulty imagining a future different from their current experience.

Loneliness can be a wilderness experience where we feel helpless and cut off from others. But faith can also begin in the wilderness.

From Moses to Jesus, the Bible is filled with the stories of those whose journeys with God are marked at the start by a wilderness experience. Joseph was a teenager when his brothers betrayed and abandoned him. **“But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles” (Acts 7:9–10, NLT).**

God’s strengthening presence allowed him to rise up in the end. Though you may be in a moment or season of struggle, God can redeem it and use it to develop you.

Think about babies! They’re young, and they are so cute! Say awwww..

They are cute until they get upset and cry over things that probably don’t matter in the grand scheme of life. It matters to them, though. Whether they drop a cookie, get dirty when they don’t want to, can’t find their favorite stuffed animal, or whatever, sometimes they cry a disproportionate amount for the situation at hand. You know what I don’t think in those moments? “This is stupid. Why are they crying?” I become super annoyed at first, but if I really listen, I can hear that it’s real for them.

My heart aches at the sound of a child’s cries. When they hurt, it unsettles me. When they cry, I respond. I get up or leave what I’m doing to attend to them because I love them. They often cannot even tell me why they’re crying at first, because we struggle to speak through crying. I just hold them and hug them until they are at a point where they can speak.

God feels this way about you, but on a much deeper level than we ever could. He is your Heavenly Father. He created you, and He loves you. He wants you to come to Him when you’re hurting because He cares so much. That’s why you should draw near to Him in times of need—to come near His throne of grace. He wants you there, as His child. He wants to comfort you in your time of pain. God hasn’t left you alone; He doesn’t want you to feel alone. He wants you to know that He is right there with you, aching for you in your pain.

**Psalm 34:17 The LORD hears his children when they call to him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles.**

A good parent will hear his children’s cry and help them, that is what God does he hears us and he helps us.

**Mental Illness Part 2 // (2 Week Series)****Small group questions:**

1. Do you or anyone you love struggle with being overwhelmed or anxiety? If so how has this effected your life?
2. Identify a time this week when you felt weary or burdened. What is one step you can take to bring that burden to God and seek His rest?
- 3 . Reflect on a recent moment when you felt overwhelmed or anxious. How can you incorporate prayer and thanksgiving into your response next time you face a similar situation?
4. Identify a good work you believe you were created to do. What is one step you can take this week to fulfill that purpose, even amidst personal challenges?
5. Think of a time when you felt alone or afraid. What is a specific way you can remind yourself to trust in God during those moments?
6. Consider someone in your community who might be struggling with mental health issues. What is one tangible act of support you can offer them this week?
- 7 . Recall a situation where you felt the peace of God in your life. How can you share this experience with someone who is currently dealing with anxiety or fear, to encourage them
- 8 . What does Ephesians 2:10 suggest about the purpose and value of each individual?
- 9 . According to Philippians 4:6-7, what is the prescribed response to anxiety and what is the promised result?
10. What did you learn from the lesson that impacted you in a big way?