



Key Takeaway: Your identity is found in Christ, not your mental health.

Scripture: John 9:1-3

INTRO

I want you to imagine the most complex structure in the universe. Maybe you think of a rocket ship that can launch and survive in outer space. Maybe you think of the giant skyscrapers that touch the Chicago skies. Maybe you even think of the powerful device in your pocket that is known as a smartphone. All of those would be good guesses. However, the most complex structure according to The National Geographic is the human brain. The human brain only weighs three pounds on average, but it is responsible for housing billions of cells.

According to Northwestern Medicine, our brain's storage capacity is considered virtually unlimited. Our brain is truly a powerful structure. Although it might not seem like it, our brain is an organ. Just like any other organs, our brains can become sick, damaged, or injured.

The reasoning for the injury or sickness of the brain can come from several different areas. It can come from a past traumatic experience, genetic vulnerability, medications, chemical imbalances, etc. No matter how the brain became damaged or ill, the result is the brain functions differently than we expected.

TENSION

I believe that when we hear about mental health, we usually hear several lies that go along with it. Maybe you have heard the lie that you are the only person who is going through whatever you are going through. Maybe you have heard the lie that you are too broken to be used by God. Maybe you have heard the very common lie that your mental illness is a sin.

It is important as we continue to jump into this topic to look at the differences between mental illness and health. Mental illness is something that is a permanent situation. Mental health is the way that it affects the way you think and act on your emotions. You can have a mental illness and be mentally healthy. When we hear about mental disorders, we usually think of the big two. Anxiety and depression. However, we know that there are a

lot more mental health issues than just those two. The top ten common mental illnesses according to Nexus Recovery are as follows:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Bipolar Disorder
- Substance use disorders
- Eating Disorder
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Dementia

When living life with one of these diagnoses, it can feel frustrating. It can feel like everyone is moving at a speed that you are unable to match. Some of you have probably wished that you could just be normal, and you view your diagnosis as a curse. You may have even prayed to God and asked Him to take it away and to give you a new brain. Living with one of those diagnoses can be hard if we are honest.

Of course, there are even more mental illnesses than that, but those ten are probably ten illnesses that a lot of us in this very room battle. Unfortunately, we do not have time to breakdown all ten of those illnesses but once again we know that the ten of those have been caused by past traumatic experiences, genetic vulnerability, medications, chemical imbalances, and other things.

Notice that when I was listing the reasonings of injuries and illnesses to the brain earlier, I did not mention sin as a reason. Someone's sin is not the reason for their personal mental illness. Yes, we live in a broken world where we have illness and sickness because of the result of sin. However, you would never look at someone who has a broken arm and assume that they sinned, resulting in a broken bone. Neither should we look at someone who has a mental illness and believe that they struggle with their mental illness because of the sin in their life. There are illnesses and sickness in this world because of sin in general. But no one has an illness directly tied to the sin that they have committed in their life.

TRUTH



How to Talk About Mental Illness with Students:

Identify the Win: When a student shares something painful or intense, our gut reaction is to fix them or clean up the situation. We are not here to fix them; we are here *for* them. We can do much by listening and showing them that they are known and seen. Don't freak out or overreact. Thank them for having the courage to share and empathize with them. We don't have the time or qualifications to fix people; only God can do that. But when people know we are for them, we can create an ongoing dialogue that goes beyond Wednesday night.

Create A Culture of Safety and Honor: Make it clear to your group that if someone shares a struggle, we don't share someone else's struggle outside the group to our friends. It's okay for students to process what is shared in small group with their parents. *The only time we share someone's struggle is when it involves someone being harmed or in danger.*

Helpful Responses: The following are some key phrases that are helpful in response to what a student shares that show empathy and security: "Thank you for sharing," "What can we do to help?," "I'm sorry you are dealing with that," "How can we pray for you about that?," "Do you have anyone that you can talk to when you struggle?," "Can we be the people you talk to when you struggle?"

Small Group Questions:

- Why is it hard for us to talk about mental illness?
 - What can we do to make it easier?
- What are ways that you think God might want to display His works through your mental illness?
- What are some ways a diagnosis can become our identity? (Examples: not feeling normal, guilt, shame.)
- Who has the right to label you or give you an identity?
- What is something that God says about your identity in Him that resonated with your heart? Why is it important?

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