

“I applaud Steve’s courage and professionalism in coming forward with this much needed book. The church is made up of everyday, real people and mental illness is a real problem that cannot be swept under the rug. As God gave us doctors to help us with heart attacks, back surgeries, and diabetes, he also gave us doctors to help us with mental illness. Of course God can heal somebody immediately of any disease or illness, but oftentimes he uses doctors, medicine, and other tools to help. In that regard, I believe Steve’s book is a godsend. It gives pastors the knowledge, information, and tools they need to successfully and confidently address this critical issue with those they oversee. God bless you Steve for having the courage to come out of the darkness and shine a light on your own experience so that others may be helped, healed, blessed, and God glorified throughout. Steve Bloem delivers the information in a way that will help pastors and impact the kingdom of God today and in the ages to come. God has used Steve’s personal journey mightily to help him understand the tragedy, effects, trauma, solutions, and answers for dealing with mental illness. This book is a must read for every pastor, and I believe should be taught as a course in every seminary.”

—Jack Alan Levine,
Executive Pastor, Purpose Church,
Orlando, Florida

“I have been a pastor and a seminary professor for many years, and I don’t think I’ve ever encountered a book as helpful, as complete, and as biblical as Steve Bloem’s *The Pastoral Handbook of Mental Illness: A Guide for Training and Reference*. This will become one of the most important books in your library. Steve Bloem is incredibly knowledgeable and refreshingly authentic. The compassion and sensitivity of these pages is Christlike. Get this book and, when you do, you’ll thank me for having commended it to you.”

—Steve Brown,
Professor of Practical Theology Emeritus,
Reformed Theological Seminary

“In Steve Bloem’s latest book, *The Pastoral Handbook of Mental Illness*, he draws from pastoral training and experience, plus years of professional mental health training and counseling experience to synthesize practical knowledge about mental health issues within the church that local pastors face today. Steve also gives the reader insight into his own personal struggle with mental illness and how it affected him and his family. Mental illness affects not only the individual with the diagnosis but the person’s family as well. This book will help church leaders to better understand mental illness and how the church family can lovingly extend compassion and understanding to those who are affected by this disease.”

—Gene Pearson,
Pastor of Care and Counseling,
Rush Creek Bible Church,
Byron Center, Michigan

“Every pastor needs to own this book. Here’s why. Thankfully, in recent years, our western church culture has taken some steps forward in understanding mental illness but we have a long way to go. Steve Bloem helps us move further faster by challenging us with insights from Scripture many of us have simply ignored. Yes, that’s right, the Bible talks about mental illness and the scope is significant. In addition, this is a handbook. It is a quick reference that provides us with both an introductory understanding of various mental illnesses, along with guides for helping us respond to those struggling. This is a book written from both an academic and a life-lived perspective. Steve and his wife Robyn weave their own personal stories throughout its pages, helping us gain a greater understanding and providing us with the necessary resources to make wise responses to those afflicted with mental illness.”

—Ken Taylor,
Founding and Teaching Pastor,
Creekside Church, Waterloo, Ontario

The
**PASTORAL
HANDBOOK**
of
**MENTAL
ILLNESS**

A Guide for Training and Reference

STEVE BLOEM



The Pastoral Handbook of Mental Illness: A Guide for Training and Reference

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*I dedicate this book to Robyn,
who is my soulmate,
my confidant,
the love of my life,
the wonderful Mother of our children,
and a helper in all my endeavors.*

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WHY WRITE A HANDBOOK FOR PASTORS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS?

Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a medical doctor and a very effective pastor/teacher. He knew the importance of having a book in print that would aid pastors to clearly differentiate between spiritual and medical issues, and avoided the one-size-fits-all mentality. I submit a paragraph from his writing:

Having insured that the approach has been right, we come to the actual diagnosis. If you cannot make a diagnosis you cannot help your patient. Here again lies the importance of an accurate knowledge of the facts, the facts of life and the spiritual facts. They all come together here. To me the thing that is needed above everything else at the present time is an accurate textbook which deals with the borderland where the spiritual, the psychological, and the psychiatric meet. This is the most difficult sphere of all in the practice of medicine, and in Christian pastoral work. I have thought about it for some forty-five years, for ministers have been in the habit of sending people to me and explaining, "I don't know what to think of this case, is it a spiritual or a psychological one?" There is really no adequate textbook on this problem, and it is very important from every standpoint. Much time will be lost if you cannot differentiate. You will be unhelpful to the person who is confronting you and perhaps even harmful.¹

This book is being written so that pastors, deacons, and other Christian workers might know how to help people who have mental illness. It is meant to be used in all cultures, since mental illness knows no boundaries. I believe that a correct biblical theology includes validating mental illness as a true disease entity as well as securing the appropriate help for those who are suffering from it. In this book, we will discuss how to identify the signs and symptoms of mental illness, using the historical principle of "check the first symptoms." Early intervention is important because depression, bipolar disease, and other disorders are neurodegenerative diseases; getting speedy treatment not only relieves the intensity and severity of one's suffering, but many times saves lives. It is a fact that one of the first stops for a suicidal, depressed person is the pastor's office. Many pastors, because of their lack of familiarity with mental illness, miss the real problem and offer some encouragement from Scripture such as "David encouraged himself in the LORD his God" (1 Sam. 30:6, kjv); "Be anxious for nothing" (Philippians 4:6); or "I

will fear no evil . . . thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23, KJV). I have used all of the above in my fight against depression; but we must remember that Romans 8:10 also tells us, “the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.” These diseases called mental illnesses result from malfunctioning of the brain, which in turn affects the intellect, the emotions, and the will.

Mental illness is a full-body disease. It affects the vegetative functioning of the sufferer, who either eats nothing or too much, and cannot sleep or sleeps too much; his sex drive is either very weak or very strong; his internal clock (circadian rhythm) is not functioning properly; he cannot concentrate. There are others who may be hearing voices (which are not from the devil), and others who are sure they are having a heart attack; they become somatically preoccupied. Some have developed defense mechanisms; a common one is “a smiling depression.” Another problem people have is that they lack insight into the real problem. This is called *anosognosia*. We may feel someone is “just in denial,” but *anosognosia* is a medical term from the Greek that means “to not know a disease.” When a person has a mental illness, they cannot always perceive their condition accurately. This is more common in some mental disorders than in others. Sometimes a person’s awareness can switch back and forth, making us think they are just being stubborn, when this *anosognosia* is actually evidence of the disease.

This manual will help you identify mental illnesses and their symptoms, to understand what to do when a person is suicidal, to biblically encourage and comfort the sufferer, and to make the choice of whether you can handle the problem yourself or if you need to refer the person to appropriate mental health professionals.

This manual will also help you to have a biblical, pastoral theology—one that does not get caught up in “one size fits all.” It will also unravel the differences (and similarities) between spiritual depression and bereavement or grief reactions. In my private practice, I have helped many people identify their mental illnesses. I have been able to get them treatment quickly, while continuing to give them biblical counseling as well as a clinical understanding of their mental illness. Job, no doubt, had a trifold depression and was deeply affected by great losses. One of the severest attacks launched against him was by his friends, who considered themselves his counselors. He stands as a testimony through the ages of a person who endured astounding satanic attacks; because of his unswerving fidelity to God and His purposes, his book has been a help to many who suffer.

In my research, I have been unable to find a satisfactory definition of what I consider to be pastoral theology. This is my own definition: Pastoral theology is the systemization of the truth of Scripture regarding the pastoral care of the believer. This would include the application of biblical principles and truths to the needs of the flock, answering their soul’s questions, helping them cope in trials and temptations, and otherwise shepherding the flock of God for the generation in which we live.

I spend many hours each week meeting with people who have all sorts of mental illnesses, and am able to comfort them with the comfort that I have received in the Lord. My wife, Robyn, does the same. Another of my burdens, and therefore a task I deal with regularly, is to refute teachers who are in error regarding the causes and cures of mental illness. I do this with biblical principles and facts about these diseases. People who have a mental health diagnosis need an informed godly advocate who will help them when the environment becomes too powerful for them to overcome.

What is a pastoral theology? It is a theology based on the exposition of the Bible and the careful application of truth for the generation in which we live. The Ephesian pastors were called by the apostle Paul to Miletus:

And when they had come to him, he said to them, “You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:18–20).

In the New American Standard Bible, Paul uses the term “how I did not shrink.”² He never tried to hedge on the Word of God, knowing that all Scripture is profitable. He was a bondservant of Christ and his concern was to deliver the Word of God. This is true of any doctrine that is taught in the Bible. The tendency is to come out from under the Word of God and pull back from some particular teaching because it might be too controversial. We should not love a fight, but consider our duty to fight against error.

If one finds himself omitting important doctrines from one’s preaching, he had better examine himself. The Word of God is “God-breathed” in every part and word. This is called the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible. We must preach what He has declared!

The reason Robyn and I founded Heartfelt Counseling Ministries, and its extension ministry CAMI (Christians Afflicted with Mental Illness), was to educate and advocate for the mentally ill. We chose the name CAMI after much prayer and thought. We use the word “afflicted” because we believe so strongly that mental illness is an affliction to be treated, and not a failure of character or ambition. This is also why we have started CAMI support groups, with written material and leaders trained to help others. They use our CAMI leader guides and student guides, with weekly lessons, to learn how to support each other through the episodic downturns of depression and other mental illnesses. There is no cure—it can only be managed—and everyone needs helpful and educated supporters.

There are many erroneous teachings surrounding mental illness, which cause people to spend massive amounts of money to believe things that simply are not true! The result is that the people who are sick do not improve, and are not able to serve in their local church or fulfill their familial tasks. In my

own experience, I have seen people who were treated so harshly by the church body and its leadership that they just stopped going to church all together. The pastor must be able to address those in the church who wish to thwart ministry to those who have mental illness. He also needs to exhort and comfort both the caregiver in the congregation and the mentally ill themselves.

Paul's instruction to Titus helps us understand what to do with the two groups above. Paul tells Titus, in 1:9, "Holding fast (αφντεχοπμενον³) the faithful word⁴ which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort, (παρακαλειν⁵) in sound doctrine and to refute εφλεπωχειν⁶ those who contradict αφντιλεπωγοντα.⁷ What are needed are a concept of edification and the fighting of error. Another way of explaining this uses the analogy of the sword and the trowel. Some pastors spend all their time building up their people (the trowel); other pastors spend all their time refuting or convicting of error (the sword). Both must be used in an effective ministry. Ephesians 4:15 states, "But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ."

Pastoral theology is a discipline which studies the Bible and the human heart. When I was junior in college I had the opportunity to speak with J. I. Packer, and asked him for some pastoral advice. He told me, "Know two books: the Bible and the human heart." He went on to say, "Don't be a cardboard man; be a three-dimensional man." Pastors have to leave the study and interact with God's people.

Mentally ill people need empathy and compassion. The most effective pastors in this case would be known as wounded healers. I hope to see more people with depression and other mental illnesses step out to start churches and to pastor existing churches. In a future chapter, I will discuss having the office of a counseling pastor as a position in the local church. The problem with these important goals is that many pastors, including myself, have been overlooked in regard to pastoral positions because they have a disease—a disease that they would never have chosen, and one that is so often misunderstood. The stigma surrounding mental illness is so great that as soon as a person shows signs of depression, et cetera, on the mission field, the agency will almost always order him and his family home, with no real possibility of returning.

The apostle Paul was not ashamed of his depression or the depression of his fellow missionaries. He starts one of his most personal letters with the horror of what they experienced in Asia. Paul had a story of grace to tell. This passage revolutionizes teaching about believers in Christ who are suffering:

For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, so that we despaired even of life (2 Cor. 1:8).

Paul wanted the brothers and sisters in Christ to know not only his level of stress and suffering but also the terror of it. He knew it would help others going through life's sufferings and pain, and it would also cause them to pray

for him and his fellow missionaries. Please see 2 Corinthians 1:11. His was a suffering that he describes as being far beyond human strength to endure.⁸ Paul uses words that underscore the extent of his suffering. He uses hyperbole. He also says that “we were burdened excessively, *beyond our strength*.” These last three words demonstrate that this was an unusual trial that was far beyond their ability to endure it. He also said that he “despaired even of life.”

It was a suffering that the apostle said was like a death sentence. Second Corinthians 1:9 states, “indeed we had the sentence of death within ourselves.” The Greek word for “had” carries the idea of still having a vivid recollection of that experience.⁹ In today’s language, we could say that the missionaries had PTSD.

The great lesson here, for our purposes, is that when a person is biologically or spiritually depressed to this point, they can look to God and know that not only the type of suffering but also the deliverance that will come is from a merciful and loving Father. God is a great deliverer of His suffering people. Paul goes on to talk about God’s deliverance from sorrow, grief and depression, by he “who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope, and He will yet deliver us” (2 Cor. 1:10–11). It all became part of the Holy Writ. It has been tested throughout history that the compassionate, merciful Father has a way of delivering his people. Paul said that he had learned that the Lord had delivered them in the past, was delivering them in the present, and would deliver them in the future.¹⁰

The following quote from Lange’s commentary is helpful on this passage.

Of all persons in the world, the minister of Christ should know what true consolation and a cheerful spirit is. Only those who have comfort can impart it. A *theologus non tetanus*, a minister without an experience of personal trials in religion, lacks an important qualification for his work. The more afflictions, the more power he has; and the moment he enters the furnace of affliction, he has a virtual announcement from the Lord that some great work is before him, and that God is preparing him for higher usefulness. The soldier who is allowed to remain continually around the camp-fire will never learn true bravery. A minister’s afflictions deepen the impression of his discourses. The admonitions of a veteran general have a power which no young captain can ever have.¹¹

The Puritans show us what pastoral theology is all about. They knew the human heart and their preaching and writings demonstrate how well they were acquainted with the Bible. It has been estimated that the Puritans were not published after the mid 1800s. They pastored in the late 1500s until the early 1700s.¹² These pastors were experts of the soul and the Scriptures. We now have their works available to us. I particularly like *The Mute Christian and the Rod* by Thomas Brooks; *The Bruised Reed, the Soul’s Conflict*, by Richard Sibbes and *The Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter. Thomas Manton and Thomas Goodwin also wrote a number of books on pastoral theology during

this period of English History. A resurgence of the printing of the Puritans occurred in Great Britain in the late 1950s as a result of Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones and others, who developed a Puritan Conference.¹³

SHEPHERD, AS LEADER

It is a pastoral theology that employs the metaphor of a shepherd for the leaders of Israel in the Old Testament, as well as for the pastor-teacher of the New Testament. One reason the Lord uses this metaphor is because sheep in many ways are fearful and helpless. Another reason the Lord uses this metaphor is because it demonstrates how the Lord, as our Shepherd, is full of tenderness and compassion toward his sheep. Another reason why the Lord uses the sheep metaphor is that he can use it as a model to teach and to chastise the leaders of Israel.

The shepherd/rulers in the Old Testament were often rebuked by the prophets for failing to humbly shepherd God's people. There is no hint in the Old Testament of a rancher driving his cattle. The need is for pastor/shepherds. The same is true in the New Testament. All through biblical history we see God using the shepherd metaphor to describe the role of men who would lead and teach the Word of God.

Another reason the Lord uses this metaphor is because sheep in many ways are fearful and helpless. Sheep tend to get themselves in trouble fast. In fact, when I was a missionary in Scotland as part of a Missionary Apprentice Team (MAP), I was eager to get a picture of a shepherd who was leading sheep home after grazing. I was so excited to get that perfect shot that I ran up to them with my camera. I immediately realized I had made a huge mistake; I startled the sheep. They began to run wildly everywhere; some even jumped over the wall and ran onto the nearby highway. The shepherd was visibly upset, with good cause, I might add. I felt terrible and apologized as he called them back and regathered his precious sheep. They sure are nervous creatures. But so are we.

Another reason why the Lord God of Israel used the sheep metaphor is because he will call his precious and true leaders shepherds, not the least being Jesus Christ who is also called the Good Shepherd (John 10) and the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Hebrews 13:20). We need the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, as Savior and Lord to lead and protect us.

Moses is a great example of a shepherd/leader. But he needed a lot of training by God for his leadership of Israel. Moses' life can be divided into three periods. His first forty years were in Pharaoh's household. Stephen, the "first martyr of the church," tells us:

Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds (Acts 7:22).

It is probable that Moses had been trained as an orator ("power in words") and he would also be trained as a military leader ("man of power) by men of

war (Acts 7:20–29). God had a purpose for Moses getting this training. The original call came when he turned forty years old. At that point, he decided to become the deliverer of Israel. Hebrews tells us about his heart for the LORD God of Israel:

By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward (Heb. 11:24–26).

Moses had seen the hard labor of his brethren, and witnessed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. He looked around and when he thought no one was watching, he killed the Egyptian. The next day two Hebrews were fighting; Moses tried to intervene, when one of them said, “Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me as you did the Egyptian?” (Exod. 2:14a). Moses realized someone had seen him; and when Pharaoh heard about it, he tried to kill Moses. That is when Moses fled to Midian. Moses was trained for leadership by being a shepherd in obscurity.

Moses needed the training of a shepherd in the wilderness. After Moses fled Egypt he providentially came upon a shepherdess, Zipporah, when he defended her in a dispute over water. Her father, Jethro, heard about Moses' intervention and invited him for dinner. Eventually Moses married Zipporah, and for forty years worked for his father-in-law as a shepherd. At this time, being a shepherd was also a purposeful time of training. Strong military men do not make good shepherds unless they learn humility and nurturing from the Lord. Shepherding is hard, tedious work. Coming from the palace of Egypt it must have been especially abhorrent, since shepherds were despised in Egypt. During those long and laborious hours, days, and nights of shepherding, he must have thought many times, “What in the world am I doing here?” That is exactly what God wanted him to think; and it was the reason he was prepared for the next phase of his life. God uses weak men to accomplish his work. God came to him in the burning bush, and reminded him of his calling to deliver the people of Israel from Egypt.

Forty years is a long time, and Moses had probably given up what he thought was God's calling. Moses made many excuses as to why he should not be Israel's deliverer. These refusals angered the Lord, but finally Moses capitulated. God never wastes suffering, you can be sure of it. His providence not only brought Moses into the wilderness, so that he could learn through obscurity and loneliness, but when the time came, the LORD also brought him out of it. He would begin to understand, that he as a shepherd would know now that He would lead the people of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land, Canaan.” The Scripture says:

You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron (Ps. 77:20).

The Exodus of Israel was in 1446 BC. As they left Egypt, their only visible connection with God was the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire. It was during this time that Moses received the law and the pattern for the Tabernacle. They spent about a year at the foot of Sinai. The LORD said to Moses:

Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it (Exod. 25:8–9).

So now Moses the shepherd had to wander with the people for forty years in the wilderness. All the spies were killed except Joshua and Caleb. You probably don't remember the names of the ten spies because according to Proverbs 10:7, "The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot."

Shepherding the mentally ill can be troublesome and exhausting, depending upon the severity of the illness. Many homeless people are mentally ill. What is our responsibility toward this population? Do we even have a responsibility? Who are the "least of these" whom Jesus spoke about? We have seen individuals who have families who live less than ten miles away.

Maybe their families have been burned out, and over time lost track of their cousin, brother, or even mother. These lost relatives are sometimes violent, and we understand that. That is why pastors and leaders need training.

At Heartfelt Counseling Ministries, we have a number of programs in place to reach out and stabilize the mentally ill. This type of advocacy should be familiar to those who are acquainted with the Old Testament. The Hebrew word *anah* and other related words tell us about God's view of helping those who are oppressed, bruised and poor in spirit. The mentally ill are certainly part of this populace. The study of this word and related words in the Old Testament is a wonderful way to prepare your heart and the hearts of your people to minister to the mentally ill.¹⁴

There are individuals who sit in your church every week, teach your Bible study classes, and sing in the choir. There are days they miss because of illness. The true reason they are not available is that they are in a depressive episode or experiencing a panic attack and they cannot get out of bed. The stigma and the judgmental attitudes they have encountered over the months and years of sickness have caused them to go into deep hiding. There are also people who have stopped going to church completely because they feel no one understands and they don't have the energy or resources to educate everyone. This is a major problem in our churches right now!

Moses' greatest test came after he had taken the people out of Egypt, and everything was ready for Israel to conquer Canaan. It was at Kadesh-Barnea that Moses sent twelve spies, one from each of the tribes of Israel, who carried on a reconnaissance maneuver in Canaan. When they returned with the report, ten of the twelve said it was filled with giants and that Israel would be defeated before them. The two who voted yes to go in were Caleb

and Joshua. You probably don't remember the ten spies. God killed all ten of them and sentenced everyone in Israel twenty years and older to wander in the wilderness for forty years, until all had died. As they were poised for a second time to enter the land, the people began to carp and complain.

So Moses took the rod from before the Lord, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them" (Num. 20:9–12).

Moses had been a wonderful leader/shepherd to Israel, but on this occasion he had been hasty and passionate. He had been directed to *speak* to the rock but he *smote it twice* (Num. 20:11). His great mistake, as well as that of his brother Aaron, was that they represented the God of Israel as being harsh, rash, and full of anger when it came to blessing the people. The LORD showed his displeasure about sin in a leader. Moses knew he could not go into the Promised Land, but God took him to Mount Nebo and let him see the whole land of Canaan. Remember, leaders and teachers will be examined by the Lord as to how and what they taught the people. If you want to look at a sinless Prince and Shepherd there is only one, the theanthropic person, Jesus Christ. James 3:1 states, "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment."

Moses asks the LORD to appoint a man over the congregation who should go out and in before them, and should lead them out and in, i.e., preside over and direct them in all their affairs. The words *יָצָא* and *יָבֵא* ("go out," and "go in") are descriptions of the conduct of men in everyday life (Deut. 28:6; 31:2; Josh. 14:11). The words *הוֹצֵיא* and *והביא* ("lead out and "bring in") signifies the superintendence of the affairs of the nation, and is founded upon the figure of a shepherd. One of the best descriptions of this "going out and in" that I found was in the Pulpit Commentary on Numbers 27:15:

Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them. A comparison with the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 31:2, and of Caleb in Joshua 14:11, shows that the going out and coming in refer to the vigorous prosecution of daily business, and the fatigues of active service. Which may lead them out, and which may bring them in. The underlying image is that of a shepherd and his flock, which suggests itself so naturally to all that have the care and governance of men (cf. John 10:3, 4, 16). A people or nation who does not have a shepherd is therefore, helpless, bewildered, scattered, lost, and devoured. The image is frequent in Scripture (cf. 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34:5; Zechariah 10:2; Matthew 9:36).¹⁵

As pastors and as believers in Christ, we should seek to find our purpose in our own generation. I have had a number of pastorates. But over time, God led Robyn and me in a different direction. When we began to help people with mental illness, especially Christians, we saw His leading and blessing in ministry. We founded a nonprofit faith-based corporation called Heartfelt Counseling Ministries. It would not have been our first choice, but when God put a love in our heart toward people who are hurting, we knew someone needed what we had.

The Shepherd

The books of the Bible—including those that are historical, the wisdom literature books, the prophets, and the New Testament—all contain the shepherd model for leaders and pastors. There are many references in the Prophets about the shepherds/leaders of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel strongly rebuked the kings, who were often called shepherds. He charged them with not feeding the sheep but feeding themselves. He rebuked the “so-called shepherds” for not strengthening those who were sick and diseased. The shepherds of Israel let them lie in distress without binding up their broken bones. Furthermore, they did not seek the sheep that had been scattered and lost. They dominated them with force and severity (Ezek. 34:14). They became food for every beast of the field.

Here is Charles Spurgeon on not being kind to the depressed person:

Remember what woes Ezekiel pronounces upon the strong that roughly push the weaker sort. God is very jealous over His little children, and if the more vigorous members of the family are not kind to them, He may take away their strength and make them, even, to envy the little ones whom once they despised. You can never err in being tender to the downcast. Lay yourself out as much as may be in you to bind up the brokenhearted and cheer the faint—and you will be blessed in the deed. When the natural spirits sink in those men who have no God to go to, their depression takes its own particular shape.¹⁶

The LORD told Israel that he would become their Shepherd. Before we look at Jesus as Shepherd, I would like to look at Isaiah’s prophecy of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we have seen, Israel’s leaders were called shepherds. The flock was first Israel and then the church of God. But now Isaiah brings in the Lord as a Shepherd who will tend His flock. Isaiah the prophet prophesied that God Himself would take charge of the sheep and be their shepherd. And he did so by sending His only begotten Son to become the God/Man Redeemer, Incarnate Deity. This prophecy was written about 739–681 BC. Isaiah 40:11 prophesizes about the Great Shepherd, God who became man:

Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, in His arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

Jesus, the prophetic Shepherd, would be a gentle shepherd. Lambs are young sheep; they tire easily and must be gathered and carried. The word for “bosom” can also be used to refer to one who cherishes. Perhaps the shepherd wanted the lambs to hear his heartbeat. They are little and he protects them from harm and danger. If the sheep have no defense, then the lambs are all the more helpless. In the animal kingdom, predators always go after the young, easy prey. The ewes here are sucklings. Their mothers are their lifeline and without them these lambs would surely die.

Isaiah 40:11 has significant relevance for pastors shepherding the flock which God has given them. I believe an application to the mentally ill is appropriate, since some of the lambs could easily be in this category. Having a brain illness is one of the worse diagnoses known to man. The lot that has fallen to this portion of our society is extremely painful. It not only plagues the mind, but the whole body malfunctions. In a typical episode, people report a kind of roving pain, stomach problems, headache, and back pain. Other signs and symptoms vary, depending on the disorder. Mental illness symptoms can affect emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. Confusion, lack of concentration, excessive fears or guilt, mood changes, fatigue, gloomy or scary thoughts, unusual rituals, and detachment from reality are also common. To try to cope with this onslaught of symptoms alone or shepherdless only adds to such a frightening situation.

There are people who label themselves biblical counselors but who still show a bias against those who have mental disorders. They may “play down” medications used to treat depression, bipolar disorder, panic disorder, etc. They teach that the Bible is the only remedy one needs when depressed, panicky, or suicidal. I call on my brothers to stop butting the sheep and hurting the lambs. Pastor, can you understand the love that the Triune God has for those who have mental illness? Do you understand that the Scripture said of our Lord Jesus?

A bruised reed He will not break
And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish;
He will faithfully bring forth justice (Isa. 42:3).

Our Lord Jesus is a wonderful shepherd. He said,

Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them (John 10:7–12).

Since our Lord Jesus was so compassionate toward suffering persons, why should we not be? He is the Good Shepherd.

Please help fight the stigma of mental illness in your church and among your pastor friends. We will have to give an account at the *bema* seat of how we ministered to people who are described as “smoking flax.” They are God’s lambs; they are his sucklings. These people need the true church to advocate for them and to protect them from predators, who want to maim and kill them.

A MAN CALLED PETER, SIMON PETER

Peter was a leader from the beginning. God called him to salvation, then to full-time ministry. Today’s pastors are God’s undershepherds, who must obey Peter’s exhortation:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:1–4).

The Restoration of Peter

God took Peter in the raw and we see him in the book of Acts boldly preaching. In First Peter we see a more mature, seasoned Peter, not caring whether he lived or died. He was filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Peter was a fisherman by trade. He had been taught to be a shepherd and a fisher of men by the Master Himself. The Bible tells us that after he denied Christ, during the arrest and trial of the Lord, he “wept bitterly.” It appears later that he was considering leaving the ministry and going back to his fishing occupation. He felt unworthy to be a shepherd-pastor. But the Lord had different goals for him. He was going to restore Peter to a higher usefulness.

The story is found in John 21:15–17. “So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?’” The idea is that the Lord, speaking about “more than these,” meant not the other disciples but the ship and all his fishing tackle. The Lord Jesus wanted to clearly show Peter that his work would not only be evangelistic but pastoral in nature. Peter answered him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend My lambs.” The word “tend” in the here is *βοσκει*.¹⁷ It denotes more than just feeding; it entails guarding and some disciplining. In some sense, the lambs can mean those who are greatly tried. They are more weak than strong.

I know that when I was in the throes of depression, I was weaker than I had ever been, I needed extra care and I always appreciated it when a pastor was kind to me. On the contrary, Robyn and I get reports from all over the

world telling us that their pastors “shame” those who are suffering from a mental illness.

The Lord Jesus said to Peter a second time:

“Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” Jesus replied said to him, “Shepherd My sheep” (John 21:16).¹⁸

“He [then] said to him the third time, ‘Simon, *son* of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend My sheep’” (John 21:17). In the Bible, when a phrase is repeated, it emphasizes the importance of what is said. It was also repeated three times as a reminder to Peter of his three denials. The Lord granted Peter a full pardon, and he did so in the presence of six other apostles so that no one would be able to say that the Lord had disqualified him. In fact, Christ gives him a charge that says the opposite in Luke 22:32b: “And you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”¹⁹

In Peter’s case recorded in Luke 22, part of his turning was from the sin of denying Christ. In my situation with biological depression, there was no sin from which to turn. My brain was assaulted by a substantiated clinical illness. I offer a quote from our book, *Broken Minds*, which relates an experience I had when I was being considered for a pastorate after my first episode:

The senior pastor of our church suddenly called, confiding that he was about to resign and asking for Steve’s help during the transition. He believed that Steve might well be the one to succeed him as pastor. When the search process began, Steve submitted his resume and awaited his pastoral interview. Some on the pulpit committee expressed concern about Steve’s depression. These concerns were natural. What had his mental illness taken from Steve’s qualifications as a pastor? What had God added to his abilities through his sickness? Looking back over two difficult years, it was obvious that a time could come when depression would make it impossible for Steve to fulfill his pastoral responsibilities. Someone might have to step in. There might be some feelings of embarrassment among the congregation if the pastor suddenly was unable to function because of mental illness. Pastors are supposed to be there for others with problems. They aren’t supposed to have problems themselves. But a pastor diagnosed with depression could also offer some particular contributions.

The interviews showed that a number of people felt that Steve’s depression was a concern relating to the ministry. We contacted Charles Neff, Steve’s Christian psychiatrist in Pennsylvania to ask for a professional assessment of Steve’s illness and its effect on his ability to lead as a minister. The letter did not answer all the church’s uncertainties, but what Dr. Neff said about Steve was an eloquent statement for what many depressed people can accomplish if allowed:

“. . . he is especially qualified having walked through a dark shadow of a valley which many people traverse who might well fall under his ministry, I feel he is a caring and earnest man who has great gifts and great strengths. I feel that the fact he has been wise enough to use appropriate treatment facilities is a great plus in his qualifications for any position of leadership in a church organization.”²⁰

About Peter, Charles Jefferson wrote.

When Jesus handed over to Simon Peter the charge of the Christian Church, he was careful to use the pronoun “my.” “Feed my lambs! Tend my sheep! Feed my sheep!” It is the mightiest pronoun in the New Testament for the saving of the minister from lordliness. “Simon, son of Jonas, feed my lambs. They are not yours, they are mine, but I wish you to look after them for a little while. Tend my sheep. They are not yours. I do not give them to you. They belong to me. Mine they always shall remain, but I ask you to tend them for a season for me. Feed my sheep. They are not yours. Not one of them shall ever pass from my possession, but I am going away for a few days, and I leave them with you. Guard them, feed them, guide them, be good to them for my sake. Follow me. Remember my gentleness, my watchfulness, my considerateness, my patience, my compassion, my readiness to help, my swiftness to heal, my gladness to sacrifice. Be the kind of shepherd to my lambs and my sheep that I have been to you. Follow me!”²¹

NEEDED: PASTOR-SHEPHERDS

We need to have more pastors who shepherd God’s flock, who minister in the spirit of the men of Issachar:

Now these are the numbers of the divisions equipped for war, who came to David at Hebron, to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the LORD. . . . Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do (1 Chron. 12:23, 32).

Pastoral theology is a concept that there should be men in every generation who understand their generation and have the knowledge (the word of God) of what to do in those times. Ephesians 4 says that God gave pastor-teachers to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. I believe that pastors need to be trained and train other believers in Christ, to help those who have mental illnesses and suffer from personality disorders.

First the pastor needs a solid systematic and biblical theology. He should be like Ezra, of whom we read:

For on the first of the first month he began to go up from Babylon; and on the first of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, because the good hand of his God was upon him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel (Ezra 7:9–10).

Secondly, this idea of mental illness in the church is not a marginal problem. Far too many pastors are either uneducated about mental health issues or erroneously taught that the Bible is all a person needs to deal with their illness. We would not say that about a heart problem, Alzheimer's disease, or a dermatological issue. However, when a disease affects a person's mood, thinking, and behavior the issue becomes blurred. After a pastor has a solid foundation of Scripture, he should get further training in dealing with mental illness.

Call for Pastoral Counseling

When I was first saved, our church had a counseling pastor who was very helpful. Today, one can scarcely find a "pastor of counseling." There are two reasons for this. One is that the evangelical church has dropped the pastor of counseling and has replaced him with family ministries. Do we really need a pastor for every age group? Another is that mental health professionals have replaced counseling/shepherding pastors. The problem with this is that mental health professionals, for the most part, are not pastors or even believers. I would like to see the counseling pastor reinstated. One of his important tasks would be to help minister to the mentally ill.

A good pastor-shepherd will lead his people through preaching, discipleship, and counseling. When they are fearful, his rod and his staff will comfort him. When they are agitated and nervous, he will calm them. When they are hungry and weak, he will find them good pasture. He will show them a more excellent way, which is to have *agape* love—as elucidated in 1 Corinthians 13 by the apostle Paul, who was one of the greatest pastors of all time. Was Paul a preacher? Yes. Was he a theologian? Yes. Was he an exhorter? Yes! Remember, he is the one who said to the Thessalonian church, "admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted" (1 Thess. 5:14).

This encouraging of tottering, trembling believers is very biblical. In the previous Scripture, the word "encourage"²² in the original language (Greek) is a compound word which means "to get close to a person in a very friendly manner and offer them consolation, using Scripture narratives to provide healing of the soul." The word "fainthearted" is the Greek term *oligo psuchos*, which literally means "small-souled." The minds of mentally ill people are subject to great weakness. They possess a fractured mind, and the result is very little inner resource. This is reflected in Proverbs 18:14, "The spirit of a man can endure his sickness, but as for a broken spirit who can bear it?"²³

It cannot be emphasized enough that support groups for the mentally ill, done in the right fashion, will help accomplish the strengthening and edification of the mentally ill and their families. As a shepherd, God's man can give great comfort and teach others do so. Why is it tempting at times to *warn* the fainthearted and *encourage* the unruly instead of warn the *unruly* and encourage the *fainthearted*? Is it because we are afraid to confront the unruly in light of their possible reaction, whereas the weak do not have the strength to fight back? When we accuse the fainthearted of being in sin (i.e., having

depression), they cannot explain or defend themselves; they are too weak. As Charles Jefferson says, in his magnificent book *The Minister as Shepherd*:

Many a minister fails as a pastor because he is not vigilant. He allows his church to be torn to pieces because he is half asleep. He took it for granted that there were no wolves, no birds of prey, and no robbers and while he was drowsy the enemy arrived. False ideas, destructive interpretations, demoralizing teachings came into his group, and he never knew it. He was interested, perhaps in literary research; he was absorbed in the discussion contained in the last theological quarterly, and did not know what his young people were reading, or what strange ideas had been lodged in the heads of a group of his leading members. There are errors which are as fierce as wolves and pitiless as hyenas; they tear faith and hope and love to pieces and leave their churches, once prosperous, mangled and half dead.²⁴

Right before my first depression in 1985, I did not realize that anything was wrong with me. While there had to be the seeds of depression in my mind and body, I was still feeling fine. I was preparing for a trip to Buffalo, New York, in March and the weather report was not good. Robyn was a little worried and I remember saying to her, “A man is immortal until his work on earth is through.” What I said was true but in my life it had not yet been tested.

I had just been ordained and was feeling as Adoniram Judson did when he said, “The Future is as bright as the Promises of God.”²⁵ I really had no notion of the horror of darkness and depression that would paralyze and assault me; and it was just around the corner. No matter how a person tries to describe major depression, it is unfathomable suffering. If you have experienced the darkness of the soul, you know exactly what I am talking about. Many Bible characters knew this terror. For instance when Abram was participating in the ceremony of the Abrahamic covenant it was said:

The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him, God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years” (Gen. 15:11–13).

The word for terror in the above passage is used for that state of mind that the LORD had put on the Canaanites as they faced annihilation from Joshua and the Hebrew armies, whose captain was the LORD of Hosts. Rahab the harlot hid the Israeli spies, and said to the men:

I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the *terror*²⁶ of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you (Josh. 2:8–9, emphasis added).

The word for *darkness*²⁷ is used to describe Abraham's mood after the LORD sedated him with a deep sleep. The darkness was temporary but nightmarish. David, the shepherd of Israel, used a word for darkness when he talked about "the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4). The Hebrew word for "shadow of death" is *tsalmaveth*, or "black gloom."²⁸ Jeremiah 13:16 is another example of this: "Give glory to the LORD your God, before He brings darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dusky mountains. And while you are hoping for light He makes it into deep darkness, and turns it into gloom."

If you are a pastor-shepherd, do you know the people in your church who are struggling right now with depression? It is called "the common cold of mental illness." They are there: in your services, in your small groups, and in your counseling sessions. They might not present themselves as being depressed. They would more likely say they cannot sleep, do not have an appetite, and are continually stressed out to the point of having problems at work or at home.²⁹

Many people have talked about Spurgeon's depression and the reason he had it. One of the important details that made his preaching effective is his own transparency. He understood the souls of men and women who experienced darkness and did not berate them for it. Below is an abridged version his powerful sermon, "A Child of Light, Walking in Darkness."

Who is among you that fears the Lord? The same God who also spies out His children in the dark, and looking upon them with an eye of tender love, He directs their course. This is the word of wisdom by which He directs each one of them through the darkness, "Let Him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

O you, who are walking in the light, deal gently with your Brothers and Sisters whose bones are broken, for you may also suffer from the same! Lay yourselves out to comfort the Lord's mourners. They are not good company and they are very apt to make you unhappy as well as themselves, but for all that, be very tender towards them, for the Lord Jesus would have you so. Those of you who are always bright need not be afraid of your gladness.

O Lord! We are now and then in the dark, but we do not wish others to be so. Spiritual darkness of any sort is to be avoided, and not desired, and yet, surprising as it may seem to be, it is a fact that some of the best of God's people frequently walk in darkness; yes, some of them are wrapped in a sevenfold gloom at times, and to them neither sun, nor moon, nor stars appear.

As the pastor of a large church, I have to observe a great variety of experiences, and I note that some whom I greatly love and esteem, who are, in my judgment among the very choicest of God's people, nevertheless, travel most of the way to heaven by night. They do not rejoice in the light of God's countenance,

though they trust in the shadow of His wings. They are on the way to eternal light, and yet they walk in darkness.

When first brought home to the great Father, we thought that henceforth it would be all music and dancing and fatted calf, world without end. But it is not so; we have heard the elder brother's un-generous voice since then, and we have found out many things which we wish we could forget. We dreamed that the year would be summer throughout all its months; the time of the singing of birds was come, and we reckoned that it was to continue through the year. Alas! The birds have ceased their songs, and the swallows are pluming their wings to depart, and in a few days we shall be walking among the falling leaves, and preparing our winter garments with which to meet the biting frosts. We have not found perfect bliss beneath the moon. Be not, therefore, surprised as though some strange thing had happened unto you, if you find yourself in darkness, for this text warns you of what you may expect. We may fear God and carefully obey His servant, and yet we may be out after dark and find the streets of daily life as foggy and obscure for us as for others. This condition is a severe test of grace. Now we shall see how far the man's courage is of the right sort. Darkness is an evil that our soul does not love, and by it all our faculties are tried. If you are in your own house in the dark it does not matter, though children do not like to be put to bed in the dark even in their own little room, but if you are on a journey and you come to a wild moor, or a vast forest, or to terrible mountains, it appalls you to find that the sun is setting, and that you will be abroad in the dark.

Darkness has a terrible power of causing fear; its mystery is an influence creating dread. It is not what we see that we dread, as much as that which we do not see, and therefore exaggerate. When darkness lowers down upon the believer's mind it is a great trial to his heart. He cries, "Where am I? And how did I come here? If I am a child of God, why am I thus? Did I really repent and obtain light so as to escape the darkness of sin? If so, why am I conscious of this thick gloom? Did I really joy in Christ and think I had received the atonement? Why, then, has the sun of my joy gone down so hopelessly? Where are now the loving-kindnesses of the Lord?"

The good man begins to question himself as to every point of his profession, for in the dark he cannot even judge his own self. What is worse, he sometimes questions the truth which he has before received, and doubts the very ground on which his feet are resting. Satan will come in with vile insinuations questioning everything, even as he questioned God's Word when he ruined our race in the garden. It is possible at such times even to question the existence of the God we love, though we still cling to Him with desperate resolve. We undergo a life and death struggle while we hold on to the divine verities. We are at times sorely put to it, and scarcely know what to do. Like the mariners with whom Paul sailed, we cast four anchors out of the stern, and look for the day. Oh, that

we could be certain that we are the Lord's! Oh, that we could apprehend the sure promises of the Lord, and our portion in them! For a while the darkness is all around us, and we perceive no candle of the Lord, or spark of experimental light with which to break the gloom. This darkness is very trying to faith, trying to love, trying to hope, trying to patience, trying to every grace of the spiritual man. Blessed is the man who can endure this test.³⁰

In the New Testament, we see clearly that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd:

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me (John 10:11–14).

This is fairly early in Jesus' ministry; already He is talking about the blood atonement that He, the Good Shepherd, will give for His sheep. He is not only the Good Shepherd; it was said by John the Baptist, "Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Isaiah also tells us:

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth (Isa. 53:7).

If we want to be good shepherds, we must prayerfully represent our Lord as He is revealed in the Word of God. He is our great example. Thankfully, we have the Spirit of Christ in us. We have access to the power of God in our ongoing sanctification. One of your tasks as pastor is to help the church proclaim and testify about this amazing Shepherd, the God-Man who gave his life for the sins of the world.

Part of being obedient to the Lord is to take His word and teach it to the saints. It is often overlooked, but there are implicit and explicit commands regarding those who are mentally ill. Consider this passage which talks about Christ in Matthew 12:20 (KJV): "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory." These are descriptions about the children of God who have been crushed emotionally and are at the end of their only resources. God does not come to them in their fragile, unstable state as a harsh disciplinarian, but as Shepherd who is there to carry them—to sustain the bruised reed and to fan the flame of that dim and flickering candle.

Have an attitude of compassion. If you have no compassion for the mentally ill, then please stay out of their way. They have a crushed spirit

and there are many Scriptures that instruct us to be caring and compassionate with weakened people such as these. If you are a pastor, then you are directly exhorted biblically to help the suffering sheep. I have been treated with disdain by pastors and church members. It is very demoralizing, and if it happens while I am in an episode of depression, it is like an officer in war shooting his own wounded soldier. There still are many “biblical counselors” who are not really biblical in their approach. They believe in a one-size-fits-all approach to helping a depressed person. The Bible is not a book that teaches such an easy treatment. People who trouble the mentally ill are like a hacker’s virus which upsets the highly tuned computer, wreaking havoc on its system. Much of my ministry has been acting like effective antivirus software. It involves detecting the people who do not have compassion, and eliminating the damaging effect of the virus.

Paul gathered before him the elders from Ephesus. He tells them they were made overseers of a flock of God because the God/Man by his shed blood purchased them and the flock they were called to pastor. We have mentioned Peter and his restoration to ministry. Now we go to the first of two epistles that he wrote:

Therefore I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears you will receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:1–4).

Peter had suffered after Christ was raised, eventually to be crucified upside-down on a cross. He was a much bolder preacher, and man, after his restoration:

AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right (1 Peter 4:18–19).

In order to effectively minister to the sheep in your flock, let them be aware of some of your own difficulties. I have found people relate much better to me in my struggles than in my successes. Remember what Paul said: He learned when he was weak that he was strong (2 Cor. 12:10). Pastors who deny the existence of mental illness show that they don’t understand how vulnerable anyone is to a brain disorder. Many pastors have become much more understanding and empathetic about depression when their wives or children are suddenly stricken. I did not believe it myself until it hit me in 1985. The pain and disruption of my life were monumental and life-changing.

DEPRESSION AND JESUS CHRIST THE SON OF GOD

While I was at a recent speaking engagement, I mentioned that the Lord Jesus Christ was depressed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Some people were offended by this. When God wants to prepare a pastor, he trains him by giving him trials so that he can identify with those who suffer. In fact, the same type of preparation (except without sin or pre-cross chastisement) happened to our Lord Jesus. Our Lord was a man of sorrows. The writer of Hebrews tells us:

In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation (Heb. 5:7–9).

It is important to reflect on the doctrine of the hypostatic union. The hypostatic union is the term used to describe how God the Son took on a human nature, yet remained fully God (John 1:14). The addition of the human nature to the divine nature is Jesus, the God-Man. Jesus, through his human nature, did have tears for his own grief. This was not selfish; he was a man and he was God. But he had the joy set before Him:

[F]ixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2).

Think about how Jesus now has firsthand experience of intense depression, as He intercedes before the Father for us in our weakness. Three passages that record Jesus' experience in the garden are Mark 14 and Matthew 26 and Luke 22.

Mark 14:33 (κτν) relates: "And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy." One of the two Greek verbs used is *εκταμαβεισται*, from *εκταμαβεομαι*, which means "to be amazed; alarmed; greatly astonished." The other is *αδεμονειν*, from *αδεμονεο*, meaning "to be troubled or intensely depressed and distressed."

Matthew 26:37–38 says:

And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

In verse 37, the word *αδεμονειν* is used alongside *λψπεισται*, from *λψπεο*, meaning "to grieve; weep; be sad or depressed." In verse 38 Jesus says, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death." "Deeply grieved" is from *περιλψποσ*, combining the preposition *περι*, meaning "around," with

λψπoσ, meaning “sad.” The sadness is intense, as one surrounded by sorrow. Here Jesus says that He is near death with sorrow. It was after this that an angel appeared to strengthen Him (Luke 22:43; c.f. Matt. 4:11).

In Luke 22:44, “and being in agony He was praying very fervently;” the words “and being in agony” are from the Greek *εν αγωνια*. In classic Greek literature, the *αγων* was a place of a great contest. It came to refer to a contest, race, struggle, or fight. The most intense words available to refer to emotions and emotional states were used to describe Christ’s struggle at Gethsemane. Charles Gabriel, the author of the hymn “My Savior’s Love” in 1905, wrote inaccurately, “He had no tears for his own grief but sweat drops of blood for mine.” Jesus Christ was preparing to take the wrath of God for our sins. The Father would charge those offenses to Christ for punishment. God would forsake Jesus, leaving Him in the lurch. For Jesus, the agony was so horrible that in utter darkness on the cross, He cried, “My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?” On the cross, He does not use the affectionate word of a child for a father, “Abba.” He spoke as the “one mediator . . . between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time” (1 Timothy 2:5–6).

In his exposition of Psalm 40, Spurgeon says,

When our Lord bore in His own person the terrible curse which was due sin, He was so cast down as to be like a prisoner in a deep, dark, fearful dungeon, amid whose horrible glooms the captive heard a noise as of rushing torrents, while overhead resounded the tramp of furious foes. Our Lord in His anguish was like a captive in the oubliettes [dungeon with an opening only at the top], forgotten of all mankind, immured amid horror, darkness, and desolation. Yea the Lord Jehovah made Him to ascend from all His abasement. He retraced His steps from that deep hell of anguish into which He had been cast as our substitute. He, who thus delivered our surety in extremis, will not fail to liberate us from our lighter grieves.³¹

A fourth aspect of a good pastoral theology is that which recognizes diversity of the schemes of the devil and his demons to derail the Christian and an explanation how to resist the attacks. There needs to be an explanation of the wiles of the devil and how to resist him. The question is, “Does the devil use his devices against those who are suffering from mental illness?” Yes, he does, and we need to anticipate his attacks. The devil loves to take advantage of us in our weakness. He doesn’t back away because we are having enough problems. If you are in great grief, emotionally weak, or sick with a bodily illness, Satan and his demons are not gentlemen. He constantly looks for an opportune time. He wants you for dinner. Remember, he is the Evil One, the prince of the power of air, the prince of darkness, a liar, and a slanderer.

His demons seek to overwhelm those who are believers in Christ with sorrow, fears, and doubts, even to the point where you feel God has given

up on you. He wants you isolated, alone with nowhere to turn. Christ soundly defeated him on the cross and he will burn forever in the lake of fire, but he is still in the world today tempting believers to sin. When a person is already dealing with mental illness, the fight can be more difficult. But it is doable! We never have an excuse to say that the temptation was too great and that we could not help but sin (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:8–11). Our great Savior will empower us to resist sin, but if our friends do not understand and our Christian leaders are not accurately informed, we are pushed to suffer in silence. If ever the church is needed, it is in this situation. Prayer is necessary, should be encouraged, and we should not be embarrassed to ask for it. Since the beginning of time, Satan has been devouring believers.

In order to develop a biblical theology of the devil and his aims and methods, we must go to the Bible. How do you fight the devil's attacks to bring you down? He must be resisted by the child of God, as James tells us in James 4:7, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Note the order; you cannot resist the devil unless you first submit to God. In your own strength and sinfulness, you will soon be conquered.

The great Puritan theologian John Owen had something to say about the church fighting evil:

The gates of hell, as all agree are the power and policy of it, or the acting's of Satan, both as a lion and as a serpent, by rage and by subtlety. He does not act in a visible manner, in his own person, but by his agents. He always has two sorts of them that work for him. He uses one class of demons and through them carries out his intention, which is his rage, and by the other his craft; which is his seductions; he now is acting like a lion and then acting like a serpent. The Satanic work of this kind is of a double nature;—the one, an effect of his power and rage, acted by the world in persecution—the other, of his policy and craft, acted by heretics in seduction.³²

The devil's plan was to tempt and deceive the Corinthians that they should be over-tolerant toward the man who had been immoral with his father's wife. The church took the bait and ran with it (1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2:6–11). One of the things the Bible teaches is that the devil is able to attack us by way of the mind. Like any general, he uses his officers (demons) to plan strategic attacks on nations, families, and individuals. The Bible also calls these methods "thoughts." The use of thoughts is seen in 2 Corinthians 2 where the apostle Paul tells us we must not be ignorant of his schemes. The word *noma* for "schemes" here means a mental perception, thought, and an evil purpose. It has to do with the mind formulating and organizing plans. Then there are purposes,³³ and this of course implies a battle plan which is then carried out, skillfully, for every believer. So in a general sense we must understand these powerful, deceiving beings that are wreaking havoc on the people of God. Corinth was known for its open immorality, with temple prostitutes and all

kinds of other fornication and sexual deviancy. And it was quite easy for the church to accept the young man's sexual transgression. But Paul wrote them and told them to discipline the adulterer and put him out of the church (see the whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 5). The church obeyed the Lord and disciplined the offender.

Next the devil tempted the church to be unforgiving by not letting the repentant man back into the fellowship. The devil sought by this whole incident to gain an advantage over the church and the man who was disciplined. Robertson says, "that no advantage may be gained over us." Paul writes and tells them to comfort him.

The devil then tempted the repentant stepson to despair because he found himself in no man's land between the church and the world. Satan's scheme with this attack, which he and his minions have no doubt further perfected in time, seeks to alienate the Christian from a sense of peace and love. Another one of Satan's names used in the Bible is "devil," which means slanderer. This term coupled with Satan, which means adversary, demonstrates who he is, as all of Scripture shows him as a merciless accuser of the brethren.

A principle seen here is that the devil seeks to demoralize Christians and "swallow them up." I would like to make an observation of how the devil can use the church to alienate and overwhelm people who have a mental illness. The reason would not be the same as the sinning brother in 1 Corinthians, but the result can be similar. People with mental illness in our churches are often met with a critical spirit from those who should be embracing them. They feel sorrow from the disease itself, and then the rejection or criticism from their Christian brothers and sisters drives them to total despair. We need to love and care for the hurting, and stop blaming them for something that is an illness and not moral failure.

Paul says, "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed³⁴ by excessive sorrow" (2 Cor. 2:6–7). Satan was using the unforgiving spirit of the Corinthian church working through its members to alienate and destroy him, but God in his mercy caused the church to admit him back into the fellowship.

In 1 and 2 Peter, the apostle shepherded the people with a great fervor. In 1 Peter, he also used the Greek word *καταπινο*, which is translated "overwhelmed." It is also the same Greek word that was used earlier in the case of the Corinthian offender. Peter tells us,

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world (1 Peter 5:6–9).

So then we see that God has made provision for us to not be conquered by the devil when it comes to our intellect, emotions, and will. These areas of the mind, mood, and volition are greatly affected by mental illness and so we would expect that dragon to attack those spheres. Peter had learned from his previous sifting by Satan (see Luke 24) that one must be humble and alert. He had bought into the devil's plan for him to deny Christ, and it almost cost him his ministry. But God is the God of second chances. Peter also talks about anxiety and how you should cast it on the Lord. If you have an anxiety disorder, doing this will be more difficult. You must remember this is a command of love, not of the law. You do the best you can and God expects no more. Peter also states that you must be of sober³⁵ spirit and on the alert. Again Peter no doubt remembered how he was filled with pride before he denied Christ and slept from sorrow. Our Lord told him to watch and to pray. Peter failed to do so. Therefore the devil attempted to devour or swallow him up (καταπινο).

The order for battle is: First, you must be strong in the strength of the Lord, and the power of his might; secondly, you must put on the full armor of God. In Ephesians 6:11, Paul writes; "put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." The Greek word for "schemes" here is μετρηδια. If you are a Christian, you cannot retreat from spiritual battles. The Roman soldier had no armor for the back. The demons of hell will not relent. The enemy will not just leave. He has come to fight you, soldier of the light. We need to put on the armor of God. We should not be ignorant of Satan's schemes. He may leave, then, and come back at another time. The Christian soldier can only put down his sword and take off his armor when he dies, or when Christ comes back to "catch up" the true church at His coming.

People under the stress of mental illness could be said to be in the fog of war, where confusion abounds and the ability to stay the course at times seems almost beyond human ability to cope. This, of course, would depend on what kind of mental illness the person has. We must oppose the devil and stand against him. We do not want an advantage taken of us by Satan. His wish is to drive us into despair. He wants to demoralize us. The wiles of the devil are universal, but for our purposes we are going to focus our attention toward the mentally ill and spiritual warfare.

GOD IS NOT MAD AT YOU!

Realize that though you may not feel His presence, the Lord is concerned about every hair on your head. He also cares about the millions of neurons which are not firing in your brain. This mental anguish that you feel is real. It is not your fault. God is not mad at you, and there are treatments to help you.

Realize that you must resist suicide, and get help for your mental illness.

The devil creates confusion between the physical, psychological, and spiritual realms.³⁶ This is an effective device of the devil. A person with mental illness

might be referred to a psychologist or a certain therapist, who will say to him, “You really need extensive therapy for your negative outlook and depression.” The person with mental illness becomes confused. He goes to therapy and spends a considerable amount of money—but he remains depressed, and can’t sleep at night. Some medical doctor may have seen him and told him he needed a sleeping pill. The obvious problem is that he has a mental illness, probably major depression with comorbidity of panic disorder.

If we don’t realize it is physical, then we search for a psychological or spiritual cure. Some professionals still insist depression is one-third spiritual, one-third physical, and one-third psychological. How overly simplistic! Has anyone ever had his life neatly divided into thirds like this? There may be an element of truth to the crossover of symptoms or borderline cases. But if a person has a mental illness that responds to a psychotropic medication, the other areas generally take care of themselves. This is a very important scheme of the devil. His accusations are so serious in this realm that believing brothers and sisters think they are missing some spiritual secret because their brains are not performing correctly. They blame themselves for a lack of spirituality, refuse medications, become so despondent and muddled in their thinking, that the end is death—their own death at their own hands. The devil is a liar and a murderer, and he takes every advantage he can to take precious lives.

The person who is suffering from mental illness first must get over the stigma of going to a psychiatrist. He or she must realize they are physicians who treat the brain. The patient should be willing to take medication. It should be an antidepressant; or if a person has bipolar disease, she should take a mood stabilizer. These pills do no harm, but are very effective in treating mental illness. It is not a spiritual problem, not a psychological problem, but a medical problem. Many people, when they are having (for lack of a better term) a “break,” will actually come to the pastor for help. At this time you, as a pastor, must be a physician of souls.

The devil wants to confuse the difference between temptation and sin. This is an especially effective strategy against a Christian with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). How does the pastor help the sufferer to distinguish the difference between temptation to sin and an obsession? All of us have to deal with thoughts that are sinful and even blasphemous. There is a difference, of course, between the temptation to sin and the actual act of sinning (James 1:13–17), yet we also know that thoughts can be sinful when we accept and act on them. The common saying is helpful, “You can’t stop a bird from flying over your head, but you can stop him from building a nest.” The difference is a conundrum for people who have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

I was very depressed, but still between a severe and moderate episode of depression. I also was having OCD symptoms. One of my most frequent obsessions was an inability to believe with assurance that the veil in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom as the Scripture says. When I was prescribed the right medication, I no longer had the obsession. Some obsessions are more

difficult and debilitating than my example. For these people we would use cognitive behavioral therapy plus medication to alleviate the symptoms.

A good pastoral theology, then, affects the care and maintenance of your flock.

We must have a thorough understanding of Scripture and know how to apply the principles that are found there. We are not called to be Bible answer men, but shepherds.

Community Resources for Pastors

When we talk about community resources, it boils down to three different ways of accessing helpers. Some will come from the church, some from the community, and others from medical and social work interventions.

The church that I am referencing is the individual local entity of evangelical believers, which include the pastor, deacons, and the membership. This book is written for one of the most important characters in the church and that is her pastor. Pastors can also be called shepherds; the same Greek word, ποιμην, is translated “pastor” in Ephesians 4:11 and “shepherd” in 1 Peter 5:2. In the chapter on shepherds, I give an extensive account of the pastor-shepherd. You may want to read that section a couple of times. As a pastor, you have been prepared by God for your ministry as you teach and preach the word of God to your congregation.

As a shepherd, you counsel sheep in your church on a regular basis. Some of those who need help are those suffering with mental illness, or may be family members who support them. Since you are reading this book, you have an obvious interest in assisting those with mental health issues. You are seeking ways to counsel and guide them. We trust this book will guide you in the right direction.

People who have depression disorder, bipolar disorder, panic disorder, OCD, or any of the other mental disorders are filling your churches. I wonder sometimes if the church depends too much on the government to step in where the church should already be standing. In some churches, the benevolence fund should be a larger portion of the church’s overall budget. A mentally ill person desperately needs medicine, and sometimes medications are just unaffordable. I also urge young people who are going into the medical field to consider psychiatry or another mental health discipline. Knowledgeable, caring Christians are a blessing to those who are hurting.

I offer pastors special training through Heartfelt Counseling Ministries. My theological education and my social work background have given me a unique perspective. You won’t become a “licensed counselor” unless you go back to college for that purpose, but you will be trained thoroughly in what to do with people who are desperate for direction. Your deacons and other pastoral staff can also be trained through our CAMI program. We hold training sessions to learn how to start a support group for the mentally ill in your church.

Another good way for a church to have an impact on the mentally ill is to enlist volunteers among its members and friends. In the United States, we need to know how to avail ourselves of county, state, and federal programs. When we live and work in our state, we pay taxes. Part of those taxes goes toward funding the effective treatment of mental illness. The federal government also funds these programs. As pastors, we should know what is offered.

Are you aware of the community mental health centers near you and your church? These centers serve people who do not have the money or insurance coverage to get the treatment they need. The mentally ill can also call the local United Way. In most states, you need to only dial 2-1-1, or go to their website (www.referweb.net/211community resources) and enter your zip code. The United Way provides free booklets that explain how to access health care which, naturally, includes mental health. If you have access to the Internet, a Google search is all you need to find appropriate services.

Your members, as believers, may feel more comfortable with a counselor who knows Christ as Savior and has a good understanding of the Bible. There are specific forms of psychotherapy that have been shown to be helpful for mild to moderate depression, such as cognitive behavior therapy or cognitive therapy. Many therapists use a mix of styles.

It is helpful if a therapist is compassionate and understanding regarding the pain of mental illness. Peer support groups are becoming more popular, because no one understands the suffering of mental illness like another person who has suffered mental illness. It is therapeutic in itself to be comforted and directed by a “wounded healer.” Pastors who have “been there” make good counselors, especially if they have had adequate training.

What if treatment doesn't help? Once you've settled on a therapist and a doctor, your role becomes that of a coach helping your counselee persevere through the psychic pain until the therapy and medication begin to work. Getting better takes time, often several months. Treatment for depression can be exhausting at first. Opening up to someone about very personal things in one's life isn't easy. The medication itself can take at least ten days to even begin to have its effect and months to feel the full effect. The patient needs supportive therapy during these early weeks.

I close this introduction with the words of Charles Jefferson:

It is the mission of a pastor to minister to minds diseased; to pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow; to raze out the written troubles of the brain; and with some oblivious antidote, to cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff, which weighs upon the heart. There is always someone ailing in the parish, not physically only, but mentally, morally, spirituality. The diseases of the soul are numerous, and the remedies provided by the Almighty are efficacious only when applied by a skilled physician.

There are soul diseases peculiar to certain ages and certain temperaments, and certain callings and certain environments; the minister ought to know

the symptoms of these diseases, the stages of development, and the hygienic processes by which they may be cured. . . . Here is a field in which the minister is called upon to put forth his skill and strength. His mission is to the sick, and all sick people are not sick with the same sickness, nor do they require the same remedies or the same kind of nursing.³⁷