

MENTAL ILLNESS:
YOU ARE NOT WEAK.
THERE IS HOPE.

It isn't easy for us as Christians to admit when we're not doing well mentally or emotionally, and our faith, while vital, offers no immunity from mental illness.

BUT WE ARE NOT ALONE

Many heroes of the faith have struggled with mental illness, including:

- Naomi (Ruth 1:20-21) - profound grief
- Elijah (1 Kings 19:4) - overwhelming fear, desire to die
- Job (Job 30:16-20) - deep sadness, trauma, and depression
- David (Psalm 6:5-7) - grief and depression
- Jeremiah (Lamentations 2:10) - trauma, oppression, anxiety, and depression
- Apostle Paul (Romans 9:1-3) - great sorrow and incessant grief
- Martin Luther (1483-1546) - anxiety and severe depression
- John Bunyan (1628-1688) - serious depression
- Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) - paralyzing despair
- Charles Wesley (1707-1788) - depression, weakness, and poor health
- William Cowper (1731-1800) - depression and attempted suicide
- Benedict Joseph Labre (1748-1783) - mental illness
- Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) - severe depression, heard voices
- Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) - lifelong battle with depression
- Mother Teresa (1910-1997) - desolation, loneliness, and (for nearly 50 years) depression.

YOU ARE LOVED. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.
YOU ARE NOT WEAK. THERE IS HOPE.

PRAYER

Lord, I feel broken and weak. My body feels this mental anguish. Yet where I see weakness, You see strength. Weakness keeps me humble and honest, Lord, but how I need You to sustain me! I'm desperate for You, my firm foundation, hiding place, strength, and refuge. I fall on my knees before You, Lord. Comfort me, encourage me, and sustain me, *please*. Amen.

MENTAL ILLNESS METAPHORS

"Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space." (Orson Scott Card)

Understanding mental illness is difficult, but metaphors can build a bridge facilitating greater understanding, empathy, and compassion.

Consider these metaphors. Ponder them. Pray about them. Then consider writing your own metaphor for mental illness.

- **Mental illness** is like playing rugby with a baseball.
- **PTSD** is like an unpredictable child: you never know when the child will shriek, flail, laugh, cry, sleep, or throw a tantrum.
- **Depression** is like a mental bruise, like starting each day with a negative number, like living in a thick fog, or like being dogged by a dark shadow.
- **Anxiety** is like a maze with moving walls, constantly shifting and confusing, or like a cyclone of spinning, flying, and chaos.
- **Pain** is like quicksand; the more you struggle against it, the faster you sink.
- An **eating disorder** is like a weed. If it's watered and given what it wants, it overtakes the garden, choking out everything else.
- **Addiction** is like a wolf in sheep's clothing, a Siren's call, a poisoned well, or a maze of compulsions.
- **Bipolar Disorder** is like being trapped on a runaway rollercoaster without brakes or a steering wheel, careening high, low, left, right, upside down, right side up, over and over with no end in sight.
- A **neurodevelopmental disorder** (ADS, ADHD) is like being a can of soda. Each thing that requires concentration and energy shakes the can a little bit more. Sometimes, you can release the fizz slowly, but sometimes, it can explode.
- **OCD** is like a raging sea with thoughts crashing and colliding.

CRAFT YOUR OWN METAPHOR

- What image comes to mind when you think about mental illness?
- Does it describe how you feel?
- Consider your emotions, interactions with people, and stressful situations. What adjectives describe those?
- Pray about the metaphor you are crafting. Ask for God's help. Write as you go and continue to revise it until it "holds the most truth in the least space."

God is with us every difficult, delightful step of the way.