

## Faith & Mental Health

*Submitted by Natasha Beaumont for the Peace & Justice Committee*



Growing up in a Jamaican household in Brooklyn, NY, the very concept of mental health was shrouded in

silence and stigma. It was a subject not merely ignored, but actively feared, often dismissed as something “demonic.” The idea of seeking professional help—a therapist, psychologist, or especially a psychiatrist—was completely foreign, equated in some ways to consulting a “root doctor,” a practice deeply outside our accepted norms. Within the church community, this taboo intensified; mental illness was gossiped about, whispered to be a sign of possession, and met with fervent prayers rather than understanding. To be seen at a behavioral health clinic was to risk being labeled as someone whose faith was weak or non-existent. Yet, despite this prevailing narrative, the reality was different. Many believers quietly navigated their struggles, secretly visiting doctors and taking medication, living a hidden existence to avoid judgment.

Decades later, an ordinary errand on a busy avenue led me to a forgotten moment. My eyes fell upon a weathered building, a beautiful relic of brick and stone, where the words “Mental Health” were boldly carved into its façade. In that instant, an undeniable sense of déjà vu washed over me. A vivid flash of memory surfaced: a younger me, standing outside that very building, waiting as my mother hurried in and out, her movements swift and discreet, clearly anxious to avoid being seen. For years, I carried that memory, unspoken. I never asked my mother about it, knowing intuitively that such a query would force an uncomfortable reckoning between faith and cultural expectations, between tradition and genuine well-being. My profound takeaway from that moment was not just

the memory itself, but the poignant question it raised: where was the space for true community and support in such private suffering?

This journey of personal discovery illuminated a critical truth: nurturing mental health, particularly within a framework of faith, demands a holistic approach built on five foundational pillars, as well as others not listed here: *Understanding, Community, Rest, Healing, and Action.*

### **\*\*Understanding\*\***

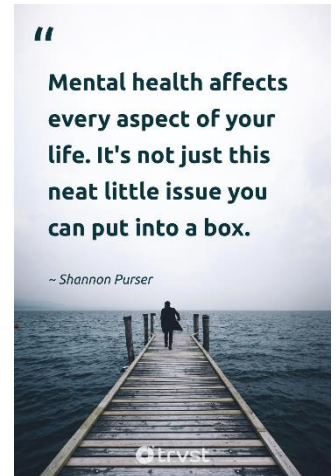
To acknowledge what I am struggling with—be it depression, anxiety, sadness, or grief—is not to internalize it as my identity. These experiences are happening *\*to\** me; they are not *\*who\** I am. A diagnosis is simply an identification of a problem that exists, a label that helps us navigate towards solutions, but it never defines our inherent worth or spirit. Understanding allows for self-compassion and clarity, empowering us to address the condition without allowing the problem to overtake our true selves.

### **\*\*Community\*\***

The embrace of community is where we rediscover our fundamental belonging. It reminds us of whose I am: whose I am in Christ, whose I am within my spiritual family, and whose I am in my own body, reclaiming agency over my self-perception even amidst challenges. This supportive network provides a safe space for vulnerability, offering validation, prayer, and practical encouragement, ensuring I never feel isolated in my struggles.

### **\*\*Rest\*\***

Rest is not merely a luxury; it is an absolute necessity for healing and optimal functioning—for both our physical body and mind. To shift from



maladaptive coping mechanisms to adaptive, healthy ones, we must first allow ourselves to process, recuperate, and reimagine a creative, nurtured, and healthy vessel. Prioritizing rest is a profound act of self-care, a deliberate pause that allows for restoration and renewal, enabling me to engage with life from a place of strength rather than depletion.

### **\*\*Healing\*\***

Healing transcends the purely physical; it encompasses our spiritual being as well. It's about reconnecting one's physical self with one's spiritual self, allowing spirit to ascend into a sacred communion where scripture breathes life into one's very core. As Isaiah 40:29 reminds us, "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak," and Psalm 147:3 affirms, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." This spiritual healing allows us to anchor ourselves in faith, leaning on our Heavenly Father, thereby lessening the weight of our anxieties. It empowers us to discern strengths and blessings even when sorrow persists, ushering the Holy Spirit into our minds, bodies, and souls, guiding us toward profound peace.

### **\*\*Action\*\***

Faith, in its truest form, is faith in motion. Our revered brother Job stands as a profound testament to this. Job's unwavering perseverance, even in the face of unimaginable adversity, revealed the depth of his love for God. Job's faith was not passive; it was a dynamic force as he continued to trust, to believe, and to wait with steadfast patience and kindness. Job taught us that faith can be embodied in tangible ways—not just in spiritual contemplation, but in the deliberate steps we take to care for our whole selves. Tangible, according to Merriam Webster, "suggests what can be grasped and engaged with, both physically and mentally." It means actively seeking support, implementing healthy habits, and engaging with our faith not as an escape, but as a proactive foundation for mental well-being.

The journey from silent struggle to empowered living is one paved with intention and divine grace. By embracing Understanding, leaning into Community, prioritizing Rest, committing to holistic Healing, and putting our Faith into Action, we honor both our humanity and our spiritual inheritance.



The intricate relationship between mental health and faith is undeniably complex yet deeply intertwined. While faith offers a profound framework that instills hope, provides purpose, and cultivates belief in the seemingly impossible, its capacity to coexist

harmoniously with mental well-being hinges on several foundational principles. These principles, when actively embraced, can foster an environment where individuals find strength, healing, and profound connection.

### **\*\*Fostering Inclusive Community\*\***

A vibrant, supportive community is paramount in dismantling the harmful narratives and stigmas often associated with mental health challenges. It is crucial to unequivocally state that mental health struggles are not manifestations of spiritual weakness or, as historically misconceived, demonic possession. A proactive faith community can serve as a powerful force for demystification, challenging pervasive myths and religious dogmas that isolate individuals. By fostering an atmosphere of inclusion, empathy, and open dialogue, faith groups can significantly reduce stigma, mitigate isolation, and build bridges of understanding. This involves cultivating healthy outreach and ministry initiatives that genuinely affect change in developing and facilitating healthy conversations about mental health within the community, encouraging open discussion of social norms that might inadvertently

marginalize those struggling, and ensuring effective support for all members.

### **\*\*Establishing Supportive Frameworks and Practices\*\***

The integration of faith and mental health requires cultivating intentional social frameworks and spiritual practices that offer structure, accountability, and ongoing connection. Whether through regular prayer, participation in small group fellowships, quiet contemplative practices, or even simple routines like sharing a cup of coffee with a friend, these frameworks provide essential anchors for spiritual growth. They create space for consistent routine, shared experience, and mutual support—elements vital for mental resilience. Consider the profound impact of small, consistent acts of grounding: a few moments of quiet reflection with a hot cup of coffee for an overworked parent facing a demanding day, a brief meditation for a student navigating academic pressure, or a spiritual practice for a pastor managing relentless responsibilities. These seemingly minor rituals, imbued with spiritual intention, offer essential respite and prove the tangible, everyday power of spirit-led and spirit-filled practices in sustaining our well-being.

### **\*\*Embracing Unconditional Love\*\***

At the heart of this conversation lies the transformative power of love, echoing the profound message, “For God so loved the world that he gave...” Love, in its purest form, transcends judgment, disagreement, or challenge; it simply embraces. It is an active, compassionate force that covers a multitude of human frailties and struggles. When we extend unconditional love to our community, neighbors, and even those we perceive as adversaries, we start a profound process of transformation. This divine love, exemplified by a willingness to give without expectation, empowers us to love others into life, into health, and into a deeper connection with their spiritual journey. Love calls on us to sustain this type of love, supporting one another until individuals find their own strength

and can persevere with newfound resilience, reflecting the enduring and boundless love we are called to embody. To love as Christ loves us.

### **Sources:**

- [10 ways faith can support mental health | Mental Health America](#)
- [Faith & Spirituality | National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)
- [The Nap Ministry | Rest is Resistance](#)
- Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*
- Dr. Stephen Critchlow, Faith and mental health five-minute series  
<https://youtu.be/h1Hh9MmuVaY?si=NPRnjIJMpZozxqay>

### **Additional Resources:**

- [Community Health Council of Lebanon County](#)
- [Compeer of Lebanon County](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) Central PA](#)
- [NAMI December Youth and Young Adult Summit](#)