

When Grace Looks Like Help

By Rev. Dr. Ricardo Jimenez-Reyes

October invites us to pay particular attention to mental health, with Mental Illness Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day offering opportunities to deepen the conversation. But beyond observances, diagnoses, or statistics, this is really about people. Our neighbors, our congregations, our families, our leaders, and perhaps ourselves.

As both a pastor and a clinical psychologist, I have learned that some of the deepest struggles people carry are often invisible. Anxiety can hide behind a smile. Depression can exist alongside faithful and meaningful ministry. Grief does not follow a predictable timeline. And sometimes the person who is always caring for everyone else is quietly exhausted and wondering, *¿y quién cuida de mí? Who is caring for me?*

Our faith communities can make a difference.

Sometimes mental health struggles are still met with silence, stigma, or even well intentioned spiritual responses: *Pray more. Trust God. Have more faith.* Prayer and faith are beautiful and powerful gifts, but they are not substitutes for therapy, medication, supportive relationships, rest, or professional care when those are needed.

Seeking help is not a failure of faith. There is no shame in saying, *"I need help. Necesito apoyo."*

We proclaim a God who entered fully into our human experience, into our bodies, relationships, grief, fear, suffering, joy, and hope. God's grace meets us right there, in the messy, beautiful, complicated reality of being human.

Perhaps one of the most faithful things we can do this month is create room. Room for someone to say, "I'm struggling," without judgment. Room to listen without immediately trying to fix. Room to encourage one another to seek help. And room to remember that none of us was created to carry everything alone.

So check on the person who has grown quiet. Listen a little longer. Ask again, "How are you, really?" And when someone trusts you with their pain, receive that trust gently.

Sometimes grace looks like prayer. Sometimes it looks like a therapist's office. Sometimes it looks like medication, rest, boundaries, comunidad, or someone simply sitting beside us saying, *"I'm here. Estoy aquí."*

All of it can be holy.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (nami.org)

NAMI -Help Line

1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

Text **NAMI** to **62640**

Message us at helpline@nami.org.