



An Open Letter to the African American Church About Depression

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Data collected by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health reveals that African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health challenges than the general population. A significant portion of this same 20% can be found throughout every African American church, from the pulpit to the very last pew.

Sadly, misconceptions about depression within some African American churches have severely undermined their members' recovery. These same misconceptions have caused some living with depression to question whether they actually have faith in God and reinforces shame and stigma.

When faced with shame, stigma, and possible rejection by their beloved church, African American members, preachers, and teachers become expert at using everything except the appropriate treatment to hide their depression.

They continue preaching, teaching, and serving despite the crushing weight of despair associated with untreated depression, all while silently praying for a fresh anointing. The African American church must be that same hedge of protection around those living with depression and other mental illnesses. As an institution, the church cannot effectively speak life, healing, or peace to anyone unless its preachers, teachers, and members are mentally and spiritually healthy.

Fulfilling your role as the hedge of protection around African Americans requires you to support those within your community who live with a mental illness. You have taught us that we overcome through the power of our testimony. However, that testimony will ring hollow if members, teachers, and preachers continue to wear the invisible chains of untreated depression while carrying the baggage that accompanies it.

So, dear African American Church, I am calling you out. Lives are at stake. "The Potter wants to put you back together again" (Jeremiah 18:3-4). It is time to convene a candid and crucial conversation about depression.

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