

INTRODUCTION

The topic of mental health might feel awkward, intimidating, or taboo for some people to discuss; however, it doesn't have to be! "Adolescence is one of the most critical times for brain development" ("Topics of Impact," 2020). During one's teenage years, it's likely they will be challenged with and have to navigate a number of difficult situations.

As a youth leader, though, you have the divine opportunity to help guide your students through different obstacles that may impact their mental, emotional, and spiritual development (C. Seemiller, 2018). But to lead students in a mentally-healthy manner, it is important to prioritize your own mental health.

For the next six days, you will learn about six different pillars of mental health in youth leadership. Each pillar will be accompanied by a daily devotional that uses God's Word to guide you through your mental health journey. Each devotional will provide statistical evidence, positive tips, and professional insight, and Bible passages will back up the research with scriptural truths! The goal of combining psychological science and scriptural study is to become more mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy while leading your students closer to Jesus.

"As leaders, we must make our own mental health a top priority. Gone are the days of concealing anxiety, depression, and mental illness. The Lord has given us victory over these things, and we must take biblically practical steps to walk in health. Additionally, the students we minister to must learn to find relief and deliverance in the Word and Spirit. Let's make it our mission to offer relevant ministry in this area to our students and leadership teams."

—Josh Wellborn, National Youth Director for Assemblies of God Youth Ministries

DAY 1 // Personal Health/Self-Regulation

A leader needs to be healthy if they are to lead students in a healthy manner. This is a both/and situation, not an either/or. You cannot expect teenagers under your leadership to be healthy if the person leading them (i.e., you) is not healthy.

As you read the following biblical truths, tips, and statistics from the various studies, the hope is that you recognize you are not alone; you are a part of a world full of issues that affect one's mental health. Ask the Lord to reveal your current level of health, and pray for awareness and clarity on any areas of weakness you may need to address. Once you have done that, think of the students in your youth ministry you can come alongside and help experience new heights in their emotional health.

There are five main components that make up a person's overall health:

1. Mental

- a. If counseling is needed, that is okay! There is no shame in seeking out help. Talk to your pastor about local resources and references. This can be done in secular settings, but professional Christian counseling (possibly offered in a local church context) may be another route to explore!

2. Emotional

- a. It is completely normal to be emotional; however, negative emotional reactions can be detrimental to one's health. This is why it is important to learn about expressing one's emotions in a way that is both positive and helpful. Below are some tips on expressing emotion in a healthy manner.
 - i. PATH to healthy emotional responses ("Helpful vs. Harmful," n.d.):
 1. P—Pause: Do not react immediately! Rather, pause and take a moment to think things through.
 2. A—Acknowledge What You're Feeling: Whatever feeling you may be experiencing, it is okay!
 3. T—Think: Think about ways you can make yourself feel better.
 4. H—Help: Now, reflect on PAT and take action to help yourself!
 - ii. Suggestions for healthy emotional expression:
 1. Journaling
 2. Drawing/doodling
 3. Listening to music
 4. Reading Scripture—Unpack what sticks out to you in the Bible!

3. Physical

- a. If you are not feeling well physically, it is difficult to feel well in the other areas of your life. You need to *feel* your best to *be* your best!

- b. This means taking the time to exercise, eating well to fuel your body, and getting the appropriate amount of sleep that your body needs.

4. Spiritual

- a. Spend quiet time with God in personal devotions and prayer. It may be tempting to always act as the “leader” during these moments, but try asking the Holy Spirit to speak to you and then participate as the listener.
- b. In order to find truth, peace, joy, and contentment, you must prioritize spending time with God.

5. Social

- a. Humans were created to be relational beings. Within this design, it is healthy and necessary to engage in relationships with others. Be mindful of fostering positive relationships, engaging with those who encourage and help you be the best version of yourself.
- b. Darin Poe, Director of Student Discipleship and Resource Development for AG Youth Ministries, provides incredible insight to the importance of a healthy social self based on his experience in youth ministry. Poe says, “As youth leaders, it is easy to get sucked into a student’s world. These students are who God has called you to mentor and minister. However, fostering and maintaining healthy relationships outside youth ministry, even outside the church, is extremely important to our personal well-being. Being able to share life and ministry, all of its highs and lows, with people not connected to our calling not only provides relief, but is life-giving. We all need a circle of friends and relationships outside our youth ministries” (personal communication, July 15, 2020).

“More than the absence of sickness, health is the balanced approach of taking quality time for work, family, and self, including total body exercise” (Conley, 2012).

Even this quote discusses the idea of balance when it comes to a person’s life and well-being. In ministry, it can be hard to keep your priorities straight! If and when students open up to you about their emotional and mental health issues, it may be in your nature to fight for them in a way where you make their problems your problems. Thankfully, we can rest in the fact that God is already on the move in their life! If they have come to you, that shows they trust you and the advice you have for them. However, you can’t be their “safe space” if you’re not healthy yourself! As you read the following Scripture passages, take time to consider how they connect to this very idea.

READ // Romans 8:26–30

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don’t know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God’s own will. And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his

Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.

READ // Philippians 3:12–16

I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Let all who are spiritually mature agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must hold on to the progress we have already made.

- 1. Knowing that God works out all things for the good of those who love Him, what do you worry about and why?**
- 2. Knowing your purpose, how can you work on trusting Him regardless of your circumstances?**
- 3. How can you learn to forget the past and look forward to what lies ahead?**
- 4. What habit(s) is God working on in you? What can you do to actively stay spiritually healthy?**

PRAY // Dear God, help me go out of my way to be full of positivity and encouragement. As I'm encouraged by You, help me encourage my students by showing them Your love! Allow me to be more relational and intentional, regardless of what my circumstances bring, and remind me You can redeem anything and everything! Put my life in proper perspective and prove to me that Your plan is pleasing and perfect, helping me rest in the fact that there is a reason for my season! And thank You for what is next on my journey. Help me be strong, courageous, and ready for what You're calling me to do next as I open my eyes to the importance of my mental health! In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 2 // Empathy

When dealing with sensitive situations, it is beneficial to have a healthy and appropriate level of empathy, especially when working with students. You want to make sure you're not getting too vulnerable with the specific student or to the situation itself. In the following points, empathy and boundaries will be discussed in a way that will benefit you and set both sides of the conversation up for success! Allow God to be the Comforter as you guide your students toward better mental health and pursue it in your own life. He will guide your conversations and set you up for a win!

Empathy and Boundaries

- a. There is such a thing as being *too* empathic. If you allow someone else's situation to affect your stability, you may no longer be an effective source of support and counsel. This is something to actively look out for.
 - i. It is great to be empathetic toward a student and their situation. However, you want to be careful not to make the student feel pitied or worse about their circumstances. Remember they trust you and came to you for encouragement and support, not for you to feel sorry for them. Be strong and courageous as you learn to navigate these challenging conversations!
- b. Invest without allowing the situation to become all-consuming.
 - i. To take care of your students, you need to first take care of yourself. If you bring the trauma of a student home, that issue now dictates your life outside of work. Find the balance! The unfortunate truth for those of us who work with teens in lower SES (socioeconomic status) areas or from broken families is they will endure trauma that they may share with us. When something traumatic is shared with you, you can support that student without letting their trauma consume you.
- c. Implement appropriate boundaries. It is important to always be sure you are setting and exercising appropriate boundaries in your interactions with students. Below are some tips to help you set boundaries.
 1. Be mindful of interactions with students of the opposite sex.
 - a. Do not find yourself alone in a car, a room, or the like with a student of the opposite sex.
 - b. Ensure that your strength of relationship with a student of the opposite sex is appropriate.
 2. Physical Contact
 - a. There should be absolutely no physical contact, specifically with leaders and students of the opposite sex.
 3. Counseling the Opposite Sex

- a. Be sure that if you are to counsel a student of the opposite sex, a trusted leadership representative of that sex is present. Your spouse is a great option!

(Evans, 2013)

**“SES affects overall human functioning, including our physical and mental health”
(American Psychological Association, n.d., p. 1).**

Based on the evidence above, our socioeconomic status affects both our mental and physical health. Keep this in mind as you lead your students! Not only should you be self-aware of where *you* fall on this spectrum, but you should actively keep an eye out for the students God has placed under your care and leadership. As you read the following passages of Scripture, let God open up your eyes and encourage you with His love! He will guide you to all your success. Additionally, be encouraged by Jesus and His presence as you navigate these deep topics. Remember, as you pour yourself out to your students, you should be seeking Him to pour energy and strength back into you. That means even in your busy seasons, spend alone time with Jesus. It's in these times He will speak to you so clearly, and these will be the moments that help you help your students discover better mental health. Again, as you dive into the Scriptures, remember there is *nothing* that can separate us from His love, no matter what! Share this with your teens.

READ // Romans 8:31–37

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”) No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

READ // Proverbs 3:5–6

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take.

1. **How does the question “If God is for us, who can ever be against us?” impact your perspective?**
2. **What does it mean to be “more than conquerors” and how does it change the way you look at your past, present, and future life situations?**
3. **Why is it wise to trust God over your own wisdom and judgment?**

- 4. We know that when we acknowledge God, He makes a way for us. When was the last time you fully trusted God with a decision (big or small), and how did it turn out for you?**

PRAY // Dear God, remind me to trust in You with *all* that I have within me. Help me lean on Your understanding instead of my own. As I begin to make true sense of the things You are revealing to me, I promise to seek Your will in all that I do! I believe You will help me every step of the way and in all conversations I have with students. Show me it is worth it! Remind me that nothing can separate me from Your unconditional love, and that nothing takes You by surprise! Thank You for never loving me less because of my emotional needs. Give me more peace about my position when it comes to Your endless love for us all. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 3 // Connection, Purpose, and Calling

As a teenager, your students may struggle with their connection, purpose, and calling as they navigate mental health issues. It is your job to provide them opportunities to get connected to other believers, regardless of where they find themselves on their mental health journey! In your sermons, you can even remind them their purpose does not change because they go through battles with their mental health. Whatever God is calling them to do, He has already equipped them for that battle, and the victory is already theirs! Remind them of this whenever you think of it.

1. Calling vs. Purpose

- a. “Your *purpose* is more than a *calling* but you cannot achieve your purpose without your calling” (Austin Bible Institute, n.d.).
- b. It is important to ensure that your calling is one you have received directly from God and not one you have created in the interest of convenience or your career. Beth Grant quotes in her book, *Courageous Compassion*, “Salary can hire staff, but salary does not create calling. Only God calls” (p. 74). This is such a humbling reminder that the calling on our life comes from our God alone.

2. Connection

- a. Self and Student
 - i. Be mindful of your connection with the student, ensuring it is appropriate and clear boundaries are set. A student should be able to trust you, confide in you, and lean on you for support, but you are not friends.
 - ii. Consistency
 1. Consistent interaction, support, and communication can have a positive impact on students. It was found that “older adolescents who experience more consistency in positive interactions with parents had fewer depressive physical health symptoms” (Lippold, Davis, Lawson, & McHale, 2016). Unfortunately, there may be children in your youth group who come from backgrounds where there are no consistent guardian figures. You cannot replace a parent or guardian, but you can certainly provide a consistent presence in their life, supporting them, encouraging them, and making a positive impact.
- b. The Bible and Mental Health
 - i. God’s truth and healing holds all the answers. But God also ordains individuals with gifts and talents to serve others. A counselor is gifted in the realm of counseling and is put in a place to help you as a physical extension of God.
 - ii. In some Christian circles, the combination of faith and science may not be widely accepted. The same goes for combinations of faith and statistics

related to mental health. The goal of youth leaders should be to disarm the hesitancy and stigmas that surround topics of mental health. If these topics are avoided just because they are unfamiliar, they will never be solved!

- iii. By combining faith and a variety of the resources God has given us (such as professional help), you and your students will have multiple ways to address problems that may come up. And in each problem, God is still there fighting the battle! Don't limit the resources He can use in this area.

Obviously, the Bible is the main written source Christians can and should go to when they need help. As a youth leader, it can be difficult to keep track of your students and their Bible reading. There are a variety of ways to go about this, ranging from the old-fashioned "memory verses" to group-based Bible studies through mobile apps such as YouVersion. As you join them on their mental health and discipleship journeys, you will discover connections between their walks with Christ and the things He has allowed them to go through. Show them that their mental health issues can actually be used as a platform for His glory! They can also encourage believers (and even unbelievers) who struggle with similar mental health issues. God can use anyone and He can redeem anything! As you read the following texts, think of about this idea.

READ // Psalm 16:11

You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever.

READ // Luke 7:1–10

When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people, he returned to Capernaum. At that time the highly valued slave of a Roman officer was sick and near death. When the officer heard about Jesus, he sent some respected Jewish elders to ask him to come and heal his slave. So they earnestly begged Jesus to help the man. "If anyone deserves your help, he does," they said, "for he loves the Jewish people and even built a synagogue for us." So Jesus went with them. But just before they arrived at the house, the officer sent some friends to say, "Lord, don't trouble yourself by coming to my home, for I am not worthy of such an honor. I am not even worthy to come and meet you. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, 'Go,' and they go, or 'Come,' and they come. And if I say to my slaves, 'Do this,' they do it." When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to the crowd that was following him, he said, "I tell you, I haven't seen faith like this in all Israel!" And when the officer's friends returned to his house, they found the slave completely healed.

- 1. Why is it easy to become so interested in the opinions of the people in our lives?**
- 2. What are some experiences you have had in God's presence that filled you with real joy, and how did it compare to earthly joy?**
- 3. If God is the only way to experience complete joy and satisfaction, how can you actively stop trying to fill your life with the things of this world that can't fulfill?**

PRAY // Dear God, help me remember the things in life that bring me real joy. Help me find more time to find joy in Your presence! Help me prioritize the joy of the Lord over the happiness I can try to find in the world. Use this joy to help me remember your goodness and faithfulness, regardless of my mental health or my students' mental health. Help me trust You in all things, seek Your will in all I do, and lean on Your help every day. In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 4 // Acknowledging and Overcoming Adversity

When it comes to struggling with mental health issues, one of the hardest things to do is admit that you are struggling. In today's society, this label of mental illness can be pretty intense, especially for teenagers with heightened senses of self-awareness and self-consciousness. First, be the leader and acknowledge your imperfections in your walk with Christ and on your mental health journey. Once you acknowledge these things, you will then be able to overcome them! And as you lead yourself in this, your students will follow the example you set first.

1. Homelessness/Socioeconomic Status

- a. 2016–2017 school year: 1.4 million students (ages 6–18) experienced homelessness. Most youth experiencing homelessness who were unaccompanied were 13–17 (“Children and Youth”, n.d.).
- b. The American Psychological Association (n.d.) has found that SES affects overall human function, including but not limited to our physical and mental well-being. Therefore, if a child is growing up in a lower SES community, it *will* have an effect on their overall health.

2. Depression/Self-Harm

- a. Consider Undergoing Suicide Prevention Training
 - i. Learn about the signs, the appropriate ways to offer support, the right things to say, the resources to share with hurting students, etc.
 - ii. Become familiar with your community's protocol for engaging with and reporting a person contemplating suicide.
- b. Resources
 - i. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-8255
 - ii. <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
 - iii. <https://www.sprc.org/crisis-protocols>

3. Broken Families/Negative Home Life

- a. “The best scientific literature to date suggests that, with the expectation of parents faced with unresolved marital violence, children fare better when parents work at maintaining a marriage” (Anderson, 2014).
- b. A family's structure has a large impact on a student's mental health. Broken families can lead to some unresolved emotional feelings, misunderstanding, and resentment.

4. Guilt/Shame

- a. Guilt and shame can have an extremely negative effect on one's mental health and spirituality. Carrying around the feeling of guilt does not allow for movement toward healing. In fact, unresolved guilt can turn into toxic shame that has the ability to prevent a person from ever getting over a situation. If Jesus can forgive

us for our actions, we need to be able to forgive ourselves. As leaders, we need to release these feelings and become our most mentally healthy self. One way to effectively target toxic shame is by using] the Jones-Lopiccolo Model:

- i. Establish a therapeutic relationship
- ii. Expose the original trauma
- iii. Confront the perpetrator (or an empty chair, imagining it to be the perpetrator)
- iv. Forgive the perpetrator
- v. Reframe the event
- vi. Have a funeral if needed for grief work
 1. This could be in the form of burning confrontation and forgiveness letters, letting it all go forever.
- vii. Bibliotherapy

(G. Jones, 2019)

5. Acceptance, Preparation, and Action Step

- a. Although the above situations can be heartbreaking, you have to accept these situations may be the reality of your students. From here, the best things to do as a leader is prepare yourself for the worst and hope for the best. Appropriate preparation will help guide you if an action step is necessary. These situations are sensitive, so you want to act in a way that accommodates that sensitivity.

As you consider the statistics above, there may be specific students who come to your mind. As you think of these students, you may feel the specific topics and numbers carry a deeper sense of importance or weight. Those numbers represent teenagers within your youth group and under your leadership influence! As we dive into the following Scripture passages, be reminded that we are all on a mental health journey, whether we know it or not, and that God will give us strength. He will also remind you miracles aren't just meant for your faith, but for others to be gripped with great wonder. This wonder will push them to pursue His plans for them more than ever before! Be encouraged to cultivate an eager expectation to see God move in your life and in the lives of your students as you read the following Bible passages. Prepare for His mighty ways!

READ // Acts 12:6–18

The night before Peter was to be placed on trial, he was asleep, fastened with two chains between two soldiers. Others stood guard at the prison gate. Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. Then the angel told him, "Get dressed and put on your sandals." And he did. "Now put on your coat and follow me," the angel ordered. So Peter left the cell, following the angel. But all the time he thought it was a vision. He didn't realize it was actually happening. They passed the first and second guard posts

and came to the iron gate leading to the city, and this opened for them all by itself. So they passed through and started walking down the street, and then the angel suddenly left him. Peter finally came to his senses. "It's really true!" he said. "The Lord has sent his angel and saved me from Herod and from what the Jewish leaders had planned to do to me!" When he realized this, he went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for prayer. He knocked at the door in the gate, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to open it. When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that, instead of opening the door, she ran back inside and told everyone, "Peter is standing at the door!" "You're out of your mind!" they said. When she insisted, they decided, "It must be his angel." Meanwhile, Peter continued knocking. When they finally opened the door and saw him, they were amazed. He motioned for them to quiet down and told them how the Lord had led him out of prison. "Tell James and the other brothers what happened," he said. And then he went to another place. At dawn there was a great commotion among the soldiers about what had happened to Peter.

READ // Luke 5:17–26

One day while Jesus was teaching, some Pharisees and teachers of religious law were sitting nearby. (It seemed that these men showed up from every village in all Galilee and Judea, as well as from Jerusalem.) And the Lord's healing power was strongly with Jesus. Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a sleeping mat. They tried to take him inside to Jesus, but they couldn't reach him because of the crowd. So they went up to the roof and took off some tiles. Then they lowered the sick man on his mat down into the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the man, "Young man, your sins are forgiven." But the Pharisees and teachers of religious law said to themselves, "Who does he think he is? That's blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!" Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he asked them, "Why do you question this in your hearts? Is it easier to say 'Your sins are forgiven,' or 'Stand up and walk'? So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins." Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!" And immediately, as everyone watched, the man jumped up, picked up his mat, and went home praising God. Everyone was gripped with great wonder and awe, and they praised God, exclaiming, "We have seen amazing things today!"

- 1. What are some chains in your life, and what are you asking God to do to help you get rid of them?**
- 2. How can we confidently look forward knowing God is able to break our chains once and for all?**
- 3. Why is an expectant faith so vital when it comes to seeing God move in your life? What is one thing you are believing God to do in your life in this season?**
- 4. Why is it important to have persevering faith when you come up against obstacles in life? Think about how you can be encouraged in your faith and encourage others to persevere in their faith.**

PRAY // Dear God, remind me that You are more than able to break the chains in my life and set me free. I trust in You! Give me opportunities to tell others what chains You have broken in my life. I pray for accountability and for people to come alongside me to push myself to become more like You! Bless my ways supernaturally and supernaturally get rid of the sin that once destroyed me. I believe in You to do this and more! In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 5 // Faith and Mental Health

There is no reason that someone struggling with their mental health should be treated differently than anyone else. Just treat them with the same amount of respect and friendliness because support may be exactly what that person is needing right now! The same is true when it comes to your students. Let them know there is a positive correlation between faith and mental health. As one gets better, so will the other! Their faith in God will lead them to heightened discernment when considering the resources they can and should use to overcome any mental health issues.

1. Overcoming the mental health taboo in the church

- a. Because the topic of mental health can be a taboo subject within the church, those who are struggling may be hesitant to speak up about their struggles. Try to normalize the topic. A person may not seek out the appropriate help if they feel as though they cannot speak openly and honestly about what they're going through.
- b. How should the church respond to this difficult topic?

1. Talk about the issues!

- a. "Both family members and those with a disorder say one of the biggest helps would be the Church working to erase the stigmatization of mental health" (Stetzer, 2018).

2. Make sure the congregation knows exactly what resources are available to them, both in the local church and in the community.

- a. 25 percent of people who pursued treatment for mental illnesses first turned to someone in the clergy (Stetzer, 2018).

3. Here are ways the Church could assist those suffering with mental health:

- a. 74 percent: Help families find local resources and support for dealing with the illness.
- b. 63 percent: Talk about it openly so the topic is not so taboo.
- c. 61 percent: Improve people's understanding of what mental illness is and what to expect.
- d. 58 percent: Provide training for the Church to understand mental illness.
- e. 57 percent: Increase awareness of how prevalent mental illness is today.

(Stetzer, 2018)

4. Normalize the topic.

- a. Struggling with mental health is not completely abnormal. Dealing with feelings such as anxiety or extreme sadness is the same as experiencing negative mental health. If a student opens up to you about their struggles, please encourage them to feel normal about their situation. The more normal they feel, the more likely they are to ask when they need help.
- b. If you are going to encourage your students to feel normal, you also need to buy into the normalcy of mental health discussion. If you are uncomfortable with the topic, it will show and your students may not feel as though they can come to you for help when they need it.
- c. Encourage your students to consider counseling by sharing about the positive impact of a good counselor. Speaking with a counselor allows a student to share their feelings with a third-party person who's professionally trained to listen and provide expert, unbiased advice.
- d. "Recognize contributions of those who've wrestled with problems."
 - i. Examples provided by Elmore (2020) are Albert Einstein and Isaac Newton, who have both shown signs of autism.

(Elmore, 2020)

Suggestions: Work with your lead pastor to create a list of referrals within the community or your church prepared for:

1. Yourself
2. Your students
3. Your students' family

Being prepared ensures you have the resources you need when they are necessary—whether it be working through your own issues or assisting a student and/or their family. Being prepared shows a student that seeking help is more common than they think, is encouraged, and is supported.

As you continue tackling the giant of combining faith and various mental health topics, be encouraged that you are not the first to do so. Even in Scripture we find people with mental health issues! They may not have the same names or backgrounds we find today, but they were still humans facing human problems just like us. For example, think about David, Elijah, Jonah, and Job. Each of these biblical figures dealt with their own mental health struggles such as anxiety, depression, and even loneliness. There are many more examples too, and after reading the passages within this resource, challenge yourself to provide your students with biblical content that directly connects to their mental health struggles or questions. Rather than avoiding God's Word because of its supposed lack of relevance or information on mental health issues, dive deeper into the text and pull out nuggets of wisdom for your students to benefit from!

READ // Colossians 2:6–23

And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority. When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature. For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross. So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality. Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it. You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"? Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.

- 1. When you are rooted in and built up in Christ, how does that change your view of your daily situations?**
- 2. What do you think it looks like to be "strengthened by faith" and "overflowing with thankfulness"? How can you practice these things in your own life?**
- 3. What are the areas in your life you need to invite God into, and how can you grow in your faith to help you fully follow Him?**

PRAY // Dear God, help me grow in my faith when it comes to my mental health journey and the ones of my students. Help me focus on keeping You at the center of every situation! Fix my priorities, and help me find time to spend in Your Word and in prayer. I know that no matter what I go through, You have plans for me to grow closer to you! In Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 6 // Overall Satisfaction

Mental health can be an intimidating topic to dive into. The encouraging thing, though, is that any amount of growth is progress! This can be a long process to endure for both you and your students. Trust in the Lord and remember He is the only thing that can satisfy! He can use *your* mental health journey to inspire all of your students more than you could ever imagine. Remember to thank Him for the growth you have experienced in the past few of days, and just imagine how much more you will grow over time. Appreciate the journey, and invite others to join you!

1. Mental Health and Job Performance

- a. Reducing one's amount of stress both at home and in the workplace can greatly affect one's performance at work. Working under stress or in a tense environment can have a negative impact on one's job performance. A positive work environment allows for opportunities for success.

2. Job Performance and Job Satisfaction

- a. It is difficult to feel satisfied in a job when you do not feel as though you are adequately performing. So, try focusing on enhancing your job performance. Maybe this means you converse more with your leadership. Be open to growth and constructive criticism!

3. Job Satisfaction and Self-Identity

- a. Studies show that on average, a person spends one-third of their life working. With that being said, it is safe to say your job has the capability of impacting your life in great measures ("One Third of Your Life", n.d.). When so much of one's life is dedicated to a work identity, it is easy to allow that identity to affect your overall personal identity. Job satisfaction can impact one's work self, which can then impact one's identity at home; therefore, job satisfaction is incredibly important. Research has shown that those who perceive their work as meaningful and satisfying report less anxiety and stress (Allan, Dexter, Kinsey, & Parker, 2016).
- b. One great way to feel satisfied at work is to ensure that you are healthy and working in a healthy environment. Focus on your job satisfaction! Talk with leadership, set professional goals, and focus on developing your "whys" and motivation. The more satisfied you are with your overall quality of life, the more you are able to be present in your position and present for the youth you are leading.

As we begin to wrap up our brief journey toward our own improved mental health and the journeys of our students, remember the overall goal is for you to be satisfied with your life and walk with Christ. Mental health issues can affect nearly every area of your life! One big area is your spiritual life, and that is the one we have been focusing on. As you read the following passages of Scripture, think of ways in which you and your students can focus on satisfaction! Yes, there are seasons to sow and reap, but thank Him for the growth you have already seen.

READ // Habakkuk 3:17–19

Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty, yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights.

READ // Psalm 51:10–12

Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Do not banish me from your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.

READ // Psalm 18:1–19

I love you, LORD; you are my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety. I called on the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and he saved me from my enemies. The ropes of death entangled me; floods of destruction swept over me. The grave wrapped its ropes around me; death laid a trap in my path. But in my distress I cried out to the LORD; yes, I prayed to my God for help. He heard me from his sanctuary; my cry to him reached his ears. Then the earth quaked and trembled. The foundations of the mountains shook; they quaked because of his anger. Smoke poured from his nostrils; fierce flames leaped from his mouth. Glowing coals blazed forth from him. He opened the heavens and came down; dark storm clouds were beneath his feet. Mounted on a mighty angelic being, he flew, soaring on the wings of the wind. He shrouded himself in darkness, veiling his approach with dark rain clouds. Thick clouds shielded the brightness around him and rained down hail and burning coals. The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded amid the hail and burning coals. He shot his arrows and scattered his enemies; great bolts of lightning flashed, and they were confused. Then at your command, O LORD, at the blast of your breath, the bottom of the sea could be seen, and the foundations of the earth were laid bare. He reached down from heaven and rescued me; He drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and were too strong for me. They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress, but the LORD supported me. He led me to a place of safety; He rescued me because he delights in me.

- 1. In your own words, what does it mean to take refuge in the Lord?**
- 2. Why do you think it's important to ask God to create a "clean heart" in you? What do you think it means to have a "loyal spirit"?**
- 3. What about God's character lets us know He loves us and cares for us? Why is it sometimes easy to base our worship on how we feel instead of on who God is?**
- 4. Write down a time when you felt refreshed in the Lord's presence while worshipping Him. Be encouraged to recreate that moment!**

PRAY // Dear God, help me love You more every day. Allow me to recognize You as my strength, rock, fortress, and Savior as I worship You! Thank You for Your protection on every journey I take. Help me properly process all of my emotions while I worship You. And finally, help me lead my students in a new way that encourages, builds up, and strengthens their mental health. Thank You for everything You have done, for what You are doing in our midst right now, and for what You will do in the very near future! In Jesus' name. Amen.

CONCLUSION

Thank you so much for dedicating your last six days to implementing positive mental health practices and investing in becoming a healthier version of yourself. Now that you have learned more about the importance of your own mental health, the mental health of your students, and appropriate ways to lead students through difficulties, obstacles, and trauma, you have become a more effective, well-rounded leader.

As you lead yourself through your own mental health journey, let God use your daily situations to inspire your students who may be struggling. Once one admits they are struggling, they are then able to be set free and pushed toward a future of growth! Mental health issues are not impossible to overcome, and with God on your side, the battle is already won! Even when it doesn't feel like it, God is working on your behalf.

As you continue to lead your students, remember His faithfulness and attentiveness to meeting you right where you are at, regardless of your progress on the journey. Use the statistics, Bible passages, and wisdom from psychology experts in the previous pages to propel you into a more educated future in the realm of mental health! It is undeniably an important topic, and it is up to you to bring this conversation to your church's youth ministry and the students within it. It may be difficult, but it is always worth it!

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