

Sermon Series: Mental Health

Sermon 2: Mental Health and The Virus of Sin Genesis 3



This is the second in our sermon series on Mental Health. Today I want to talk to you about the consequences of sin. I don't want to talk necessarily about your sin or my sin — I just want to talk about the consequences of what happened when mankind fell into sin, So, I let's look at Genesis Chapter 3, and we'll start with verse 20.

So, the man named all the domestic animals — (that's Chapter 2 by the way) — all the animals, all the birds, and all the wild animals, but the man found no helper who was right for him, so the Lord caused him to fall into a deep sleep. And while he was sleeping, the Lord took out of the man's rib and closed the flesh of that place. And then the Lord God formed a woman from the rib that He had taken from the man and He brought her to the man. And the man said, "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken from man."

And that's why a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they weren't ashamed of it. I don't know about you, but if I'm naked, I don't even look in the mirror. But they didn't have that problem at all. Their bodies were perfect at this point. They functioned perfectly. Now, one of the age-old theological questions you get at the seminary is, "What if man had never sinned, would man die? Would man have..." No. There was no speaking of death. Everything was perfect, including the way their bodies functioned. They were fearfully and wonderfully made and they were in the image of God. What does it mean to be made in the image of God? It does not mean that this is how God looks. But

instead, it is the fact that they were sinless; and they had this perfect relationship with Him.

Chapter 3 continues, “The snake was more clever than all the wild animals the Lord had made.” Now, we know that it wasn’t a normal snake, but it was the enemy. Let me just ask you this question: How did Satan end up being Satan? Who was Satan before? We know he was an angel. He was in charge of worship, wasn’t he? And yet, he ends up Satan. And, as Satan, he’s trying to pull everybody away from the very thing that will bless them, and that’s worship, and a focus of putting God first.

Why did God allow this? Why didn’t God cut him off? Because perfect love never controls. Perfect love does not manipulate. So, God knows what’s about to happen. The snake asked the woman, “Did God really say you must never eat of the fruit of any tree in the garden?” And, by the way, we don’t know that it was an apple — but just that it was a fruit. “The woman answered the snake, “We’re allowed to eat the fruit from any tree in the garden, except the tree in the middle of the garden. God said you must never eat it or touch it, or you will die.” “You certainly won’t die,” the serpent told the woman, “God knows when you eat it, it will open your eyes, and you’ll be like God.”

That is the core of sin itself — the desire that we will be like God. That we know just as much as God. That we know just as much as to how things should and always will be, and we like to tell God how to do it.

The reality is that at the very core of every struggle you have, it is always that you believe that somehow you know how it’s supposed to be. So the enemy says, “You certainly won’t die; you’re not going to die.” No, not immediately. But, they will die.

“And the woman saw that the tree had fruit that was good to eat, nice to look at, and desirable for making someone wise, so she took some of the fruit, and ate it.” (I don’t know why, as a kid, I envisioned the serpent handing it to her until I realized a snake has no hands.) So, she took it. “She took some of that fruit and she ate it. She also gave it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it.”

“Then when their eyes were open, they both realized they were naked.” *Now* they had shame; *now* they had guilt. And in that instant, humanity forever changed. At that point, humanity was infected with a virus that was never intended to be. And that virus changed humanity forever.

A lot of people seem to think that children are born sinless, and there’s this age when they start sinning. Psalm 51:5 says, “In sin did my mother conceive me.” Children are born with this virus. Even their little newborn bodies are subject to the consequences, physiologically, of sin. They’re born with bad hearts, or a disability, a disease, or whatever it might be. A baby is not born perfectly. And all it takes is a couple of weeks and you know they’re very self-centered. And, if nothing else, wait until they’re one or two, and you’ll discover they’re self-centered. No one had to teach that child how to sin. Anybody here have to teach your child how to misbehave?

It’s by nature we are sinful and unclean. If you miss this part, you will get all of life wrong. It’s why politically there’s a problem when you and I believe that people, for the most part, are good. We’re not. We’ve been infected by a virus. We don’t want it, but we have it, and boy, is it strong.

Jesus did not come to take that virus away. If that were the case, you would never sin again. You’d never have another struggle. What He did, though, is come without the virus, without the problem, and He paid the price for you and me. He

paid that price upon the cross of Calvary, and because of that we have redemption through His death. Jesus came to change death for us. Your body is affected by sin. Death was the consequence.

Our bodies don't function right. People have heart problems. They get cancer. We're reminded that it doesn't matter who you are — politician John McCain had a brain tumor, and singer Aretha Franklin had pancreatic cancer. Life is a struggle. You've got to take care of your teeth, and you have to take care of your eyes, and thankfully the Lord has allowed a lot of science and things that can help us with our bodies. We understand that, right? We know that, intuitively. Even if you don't know God, you know when something's wrong, because life is difficult, life is hard, and the body doesn't function right.

Now, this issue comes up with our bodies. We know that physically everything is broken —everything's a problem. Scripture also deals with this in praying for the sick, and healing. Jesus came to bring healing. He miraculously heals at times so that people can trust Him and know He's there. But what Jesus came to do was set us free within our spirits, within our souls, to live free of all of this, realizing that someday this will all be over and we will have new bodies. I can't wait to be able to go through walls and doors. I can't wait to be able to walk and run and dance and not perspire like a pig.

So, if you understand that the body is falling apart, is not your big, beautiful brain [display drawing/picture of a brain] also part of the fall of mankind into sin? Has your brain not been affected by the fall? Of course it has. And it's not been affected just by the fact that you could get a brain tumor. You could have convulsions. You could have problems with your eyes that are connected to your brain. You understand that there's such things as mental handicaps. When we see

someone with Tourette's acting out, nobody makes a big deal out of it. We know their brain doesn't work right, and that they were born that way.

But is it not amazing that when someone has a diagnosis of a mental health challenge or a mental illness that that we don't get it as well? We just don't understand it as much. And we shame people all the time. You know, what if physical illnesses were treated like many of us treat emotional illness? What if we say to someone after a heart attack, "Well, you just need to trust God more. This will heal you. It will go away. You just, you know, you need to pray more. You need to be stronger in your faith." We've got it quite mixed up.

All illnesses are rooted in demonic things because of sin. The brain is no more special in regards to the body than anything else. Sometimes, as Christians, we don't know what to do about it. Every church has an average of 1 out of every 4 individuals who are struggling with a diagnosable mental illness in any given year. And the Christian Church, as a whole, really doesn't know what to do about it. Shockingly, some 30% of all pastors believe that mental illness is demonic, or that it is a spiritual issue. So if you consider those individuals turning to their church for help, what they're going to find is a pastor who thinks it's demonic and a spiritual issue. I'm sorry, but that's abuse. It's spiritual abuse as far as I'm concerned. Ignorance. No understanding. In fact, I know of a couple of pastors that preach and wail against mental illness, but don't understand anxiety or social disorders. They don't understand PTSD or what trauma does to the brain. They preach against it while at the same time someone in their family takes medicine for it. I know numerous situations like that. I've known a lot of pastors through the years that preach "Don't drink, don't drink", and yet *they* drink.

So, there's this inconsistency among pastors and how they view mental health. As I said earlier, approximately one third of all pastors believe that mental illness is demonic. Another 33% don't have a clue. They don't know what they think. The other third understand the physiological aspects of mental illnesses – but only **THREE PERCENT** of this group knows how to respond, or what to do when it hits their door. What does it look like? What do you do? *And yet*, more people go to their pastor than go to psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, or internists combined. They go to the clergy first. **The church has got to get this.**

The Christian church at large has got to get the fact that brains don't work, just like any other body part may not work, and that feelings and emotions are physical.

So, what do we do? Where do we end up? There's a couple of things we need to understand. Romans 3:23 says that all have fallen short of the glory of God – *all* of mankind. Everybody's a broken person. Everybody. I don't care who you are, no matter how much you exercise, no matter how you eat just perfectly — you're going to die (unless of course the Lord comes before then). I hate to tell you if you haven't thought about it yet, but you're going to die. Death is inevitable on this side of heaven. It's just going to happen. And until then, your body is not going to work right. There's going to be problems. If nothing else, you're going to have some cavities. Or something else isn't going to work right. And it will, most likely, be the cause of your death. Even if it's a car accident, the cause can be because you or the other driver wasn't paying attention, or were driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

So, everybody's going to die. And when it comes to our brains, we need to remember it is an organ. You have a brain, and your mind is what your brain does. Paul says in the Bible that we are to renew our minds, right? Scripture also says

that we're to have the mind of Christ. So, if your brain functions properly — or for the most part, properly, you are considered to be in your right mind. When your brain does not function properly, if it misfires and the chemicals don't work just right for whatever reason — you might have depression, anxiety, or bipolar. And then there's this thing called paranoid-schizophrenia, or schizo-affective disorder — that's the most scary one to most of us. There are people who hear voices, and there are people who see things and smell things. It's nothing different than instances when you're with your spouse or friend, and they ask, "Did you see that?" And they respond, "No, there was nothing." Or you ask, "Do you smell that? Don't you smell that?" [Share personal scenario, or adapt Pastor Brad's: I walked in the house one night and my wife thought I had absolutely lost my mind. I said, "I smell dog poop." Of course, she smelled nothing. "I can smell it. I know the dog has pooped somewhere in the house. I went downstairs and looked; no dog poop. I looked on the main floor; no dog poop. I went upstairs, and sure enough, dog poop in the hall right by her door. She had thought I was crazy, but I was right – that time.]

Those are just those times when our brains misfire. There are people who claim they see shadow people, they see this, they see that. Now, for those who have that issue with their brain, it's just like their brain gets stuck in it. The brain doesn't function right and so they get that little glitch. Or you think you have déjà vu, where it's like, "Whoa, whoa!" That's a brain issue; a perception issue. For some people, the brain just keeps misfiring. [Insert personal experience, or adapt: There's a guy at my gym right now who just talks constantly, and you know that he's not talking to you. I initially engaged in conversation with him — and then I realized he wasn't really talking to me. And then I was sorry I had engaged, because I didn't know how to disengage from it. But I felt bad for him, because he

was hearing voices as square-on as he heard my voice. My voice just became another one of the voices he was hearing. It's not like he hears them just in his head, he physically hears them. I know of a lady who finally got a dog so that she would know when somebody else was around. She lived alone, and the only way she knew whether there was another human being there, was to watch the dog — because it was so real to her.]

Those of you who worry or ruminate a lot, where you think about the same thing over and over and over, that's a spiritual gift gone bad. That's the gift of prayer, of intercession, that you would even think about those things. Some of us don't. We can see horrific things on the news before we go to bed and we sleep just fine. And, so, for those of you who have that gift, why not? Why wouldn't the enemy mess with your brain and get you to just keep looping that thought around, over and over and over again. Negative, negative, negative, negative, negative, negative, negative, negative, negative – and pretty soon that's all you are able to think about.

So, Paul says what? “Take captive your thinking.” Paul says, “Think on these things.” You can look at secular articles online about how to stop ruminating, and they say exactly what Paul says in the Bible. It's fascinating. And it's all about taking control of what you think about.

The issue is that you can't be in your right mind if your brain doesn't work right. If you have Tourette's or you have convulsions or you have a tumor pressing on the inside of your brain, it's not going to work right. And it's the same thing with any kind of mental illnesses. It's just part of a brain not working right.

I may have bipolar disorder — but I am not bipolar. None of us define ourselves by our illness. And yet, with mental illness, so many people become their

diagnoses. And the lie of the enemy is that he can get you to believe that if you have a mental health diagnosis, your life is over, that this is as good as it's going to get.

People overthink these things all the time. You'll hear, "Well, I procrastinate. That's part of having bipolar disorder." No, it's not. It's part of your personality. You not only have a brain that has to fire and do millions and billions of things to cause emotions and evoke actions in what you do, what you think about, what you dream about, all those things. Do you know that when we sleep, our brain resets? It turns off in a sense and files things where they need to go. If you want to make somebody crazy, keep them up for days. They will act like a mentally ill person.

So here you have all those things going on, and you are also emotionally broken. Aren't you glad you came to church today? Aren't you just thrilled to know how broken and how messy you really are? But we all are. Emotions. Everybody's got emotional issues and emotional baggage — everybody. We're complex. We're fearfully, and wonderfully made. And what did I tell you last week? That when God made you, He knit you together in the innermost being. All those things are that innermost being. There are no people with perfect personalities. There's no people with perfect anything. So, just praise God that when you have a day that something of yours didn't become an issue: Lord, thank You that I got through that. And when you do mess up with emotional issues, own it, and ask for forgiveness. Don't try to cover it up with other stuff. Instead, like Paul says, take control of your thinking, that your mind might be renewed. That you and I might more fully function in the mind of Christ. Bottom line: the virus goes away when you draw your last breath. Then we're done with the virus. And we live eternally with Him without the virus.

[Insert a personal story or adapt Pastor Brad's:] Is anyone in here a germaphobe? A little OCD? I probably have OCD more than I care to admit. The first time I went to Africa was when antibacterial wipes, the ones that are supposed to clean 90% of all germs, came out. I filled my suitcase with those and granola bars and bags of peanuts, because I'd been told that Nigeria was going to be quite dirty and messy, and that I wasn't going to like their food. So, my OCD was just coming out everywhere and when we got there – I won't go into detail – none of us wanted to go into the bathroom at the airport, because there was that much sewage on the floor. The trip to the hotel was quite the exciting ride. Then we got stuck on the elevator. The next morning my system was so messed up I could not get off the toilet. And the Nigerians came running in, "Oh, we will lay hands on you." And I'm like "Where you going to lay your hands?" They actually came in the bathroom while I was sitting on the toilet!

Everywhere I went, I'd wipe down stuff before I used it. Yet despite all that, I was absolutely certain I had come home with something. On the flight home, I felt like I had an alien that was going to jump out of my belly at any given moment and go screaming through the plane. It hurt so badly. When the plane was going to land I was in the restroom and the flight attendant said, "Sir, sir, you have to come out." And I said, "No, just hand me the seatbelt." Well, I came out and I was sick — I knew Africa was going to make me sick. But it really wasn't Africa. I had gotten sick because I had eaten so many crepes on the streets of Paris where they make them and don't have refrigeration. I'm telling you all this because it shows how my brain got focused on something and it just didn't let it go.

It's not that we're not going to have illnesses — it's not that we're not going to have struggles. Like Paul says, put your mind on this. Think about these things. When you find yourself obsessing about something, turn it into a Godly lament.

Do what's Scriptural. Tell God, "I need you to intervene in this. I can't do anything about it. All I'm doing is worrying and it's going over and over. So this is what I'm going to do: I'm going to trust You. I'm going to believe that You're going to get me through this — I believe that You have an answer." You do this every time you find yourself in a similar thought process, and it actually will change your brain.

The really interesting part is, until we die, our brains continue to grow and change. They don't stay the same, unless you isolate. The more you isolate in your life, the more unlikely you are going to be able to adapt and make changes and think differently, and the more rigid you'll become. You lose the plasticity of the brain. Here's the interesting thing: what does Scripture say? Does Scripture say go off and be alone? No. It says don't give up, don't forsake meeting together. It's so important to continue to have relationships because it's good for your brain, and it's also good for the soul.

That virus that I caught in Africa was very painful. My doctor prescribed medicine that took care of it. I don't know if I still have that virus or not. I don't know how that works, but let me tell you this: the virus that we all have is worse than that. It's so bad that we learn to live with it so much that we just accept it. Don't accept it. Whether it's your brain or your body or whatever, keep focusing on the Lord. There is healing in Him. There is hope in Him. There are new beginnings in Him. There's power to live in Him. And He likes it when you and I have to depend on Him. Trust God for whatever it is. And fear not – don't worry — He's got it.

Closing Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we ask that by the power of Your Holy Spirit You would help this to go deep into us today. Help us to understand how fearfully and wonderfully we're

made, but how that virus has just affected every aspect, our personality, all the way down to our toe nails and everything. So, Lord Jesus, I just ask that by the power of Your Holy Spirit, You would bring within us a comfort of knowing that You've 'got' the virus — You have our backs. We can trust You, and we can continue to walk forward. Amen.