



# MENTAL HEALTH

A 6-WEEK  
INTERACTIVE  
BIBLE STUDY

EXPERIENCING GOD'S CARE FOR OUR MIND,  
BODY, AND SPIRIT **DORCAS CHENG-TOZUN**



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Taken from *Mental Health* by Dorcas Cheng-Tozun.

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# SESSION 1

# Opening



We're so glad you have chosen to participate in this six-week study on how God is with us in our mental health journeys!

In this first session, we will learn about mental health, including the mental health challenges that many face and how they fit within our spiritual lives. We'll spend time reflecting on what we've been taught about mental health and how that has influenced our own perspectives. We'll also introduce the path point statements (which are like thesis statements) that we will focus on throughout the study. This session sets up the framework through which we will view the topic of mental health.





# Pulse Check

*As defined by the US Department of Health and Human Services, “Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.”*

## REFLECTION

*As we begin to consider the notion of mental health, take about fifteen minutes to consider the following reflection questions.*

1. When you think of mental health, what are the first associations that come to mind?

2. Have you ever heard mental health discussed in Christian churches, organizations, or social circles? If yes, what opinions, ideas, and teachings did you hear? If not, why do you think mental health hasn't been addressed?

3. How do you think our mental health intersects with our spirituality and our relationship with God? What questions do you have about this?

# INTRODUCTION

*In the United States, at least one in five adults struggles with mental health; as many as one-third of individuals will have an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives. Recent studies suggest these numbers may be rising. Perhaps you or someone you know has experienced this form of suffering.*

Mental health and religion have a long history of being intertwined together. Ancient peoples believed that mental health disorders were caused by demon possession or divine punishment. The perspective began to change around 400 BC, when Greek physician Hippocrates treated mental health issues as physiological illnesses. But, many centuries and scientific discoveries later, those ancient religious beliefs continue to persist, affecting how we perceive mental health and perceive those who face emotional hardships today.

For the most part, the modern church has a terrible track record of judging and marginalizing those who struggle with mental health. But this treatment has never reflected God's heart—in ancient times or today. A close examination of Scripture shows us narrative after narrative of psychologically vulnerable individuals. We see depression in Elijah, Naomi, Jeremiah, and Jonah; we see anxiety in Moses, David, Jesus, and the disciples. And these same individuals are seen, loved, embraced, and called by God. Their vulnerabilities did not bar them from the presence, will, or plan of God. Instead, we see God responding to their struggles with tenderness and compassion, and filling their lives with purpose.

God wants to bring beauty, hope, and purpose to each of us. God wants to give us his very presence in every facet of our mental health journeys.



# PERSONAL STORY

Open, honest conversations about mental health don't tend to happen as often as they should. As a result, we can internalize ideas that cause us to neglect, dismiss, or harm our own mental health. These misguided ideas can come from our families, communities, churches, and media.

*Watch a brief excerpt of a conversation between PAX staff members Dorcas Cheng-Tozun and Osheta Moore, who have both lived with anxiety and depression. Start at 7:50 and end at 10:11. Then respond to the reflection questions below.*

**“How Mental Health Struggles Changed Me”**

WITH DORCAS CHENG-TOZUN  
AND OSHETA MOORE

## REFLECTION

1. What messages have you heard in your families or churches that negatively impacted your mental health?

2. If we are to be compassionate and caring toward those with mental health challenges, what common theologies or beliefs within Christian circles do we need to challenge? What is a more loving and biblical approach to mental health?

# PATH POINT STATEMENTS

Each step in our discipleship pathway has a statement that captures the main idea of that path point. We begin with an audacious truth (Manifesto) that will frame our entire study on mental health; then we move to address a common false belief (Myth) that impedes us from believing God's truth. We then focus on the word of God and person of Jesus to strengthen our theological understanding of mental health (Material), and conclude with practical ways in which God calls us to embody these truths in our everyday lives (Motion).

*Read the four statements and answer the reflection question. Then pause and fill out the "what if" questions in the holy imagination exercise. You'll have the opportunity to share your responses.*

## MANIFESTO STATEMENT

Beauty and brokenness coexist in our stories.

## MYTH STATEMENT

"Faith is all I need."

## MATERIAL STATEMENT

Jesus experiences our mental health journey with us.

## MOTION STATEMENT

Caring for our mental health is a sacred practice.

## REFLECTION

Which of these statements sticks out most to you? Why? What is your initial response to it?

## Holy Imagination Exercise

Christians throughout the ages have engaged their holy imagination, also called *faithful imagination*, to expand their capacity for understanding God and his kingdom. Because these Manifesto, Material, and Motion statements are true (and the Myth statement is categorically false), we can be empowered to imagine how our world might be different.

*Take a few minutes to write out at least three “what if” statements that could be true if we recognized that God values our mental health, desires us to make use of the mental health resources available to us, and experiences our mental health journeys with us. (Examples: What if churches were uniquely safe and supportive environments for those who struggled with mental health challenges? What if we truly believed that Jesus understood and empathized with our mental health journeys?)*

**What if**  ?

**What if**  ?

**What if**  ?

**What if**  ?

Share your statements with the group, as well as any thoughts or reflections this exercise prompted.

# BENEDICTION

Mental health can feel like a deeply personal topic shrouded in shame and complexity. Yet God invites us to come to him with our greatest vulnerabilities, believing in God's gentle care and unconditional love. We don't know if our mental health journeys will involve full healing, partial healing, or no healing. But can we still believe that God is good and is doing good work in us?

*Read this prayer from Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, called "The Slow Work of God," to close your time this week.*

*Above all, trust in the slow work  
of God.  
We are, quite naturally, impatient  
in everything to reach the end  
Without delay.  
We should like to skip  
The intermediate stages.  
We are impatient of being on  
The way to something unknown,  
Something new,  
And yet it is the law of all progress  
That it is made by passing through  
Some stages of instability—  
And that it may take a very long  
time.  
And so I think it is with you.  
Your ideas mature gradually—*

*Let them grow,  
Let them shape themselves,  
Without undue haste.  
Don't try to force them on,  
As though you could be today  
What time will make you tomorrow.  
Only God could say what this new  
spirit  
Gradually forming within you will  
be.  
Give Our Lord the benefit of  
believing  
That his hand is leading you,  
And accept the anxiety of  
Feeling yourself in suspense and  
incomplete.*

# APPLICATION ACTIVITY

## Scripture Reading and Reflection

*Set aside fifteen minutes to read and reflect on 1 Kings 19:1-17. Below, trace the emotional journey of Elijah over these series of events, and consider how God responded. We will spend more time with this passage in the next session.*

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