

**Resisting Therapy Culture***The Dangers of Pop Psychology and How the Church Can Respond*

August 18, 2026 | \$21.99, 224 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1268-0

**Matthew Loftus** teaches and practices family medicine at a mission hospital in Kenya. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *Christianity Today*, *First Things*, *Comment*, and *Mere Orthodoxy*. He is the 2025 recipient of Trinity Forum's Michael J. Gerson Prize for Excellence in Writing on Faith and Public Life.

## The Church is Not Therapy

**What is therapy culture and why is it bad?**

**Matthew Loftus:** Therapy culture is the medicalization of normal emotions and experiences, the choice to judge institutions solely or primarily by their potential impact on mental health, and the way that people lose their sense of agency when they think about everything in therapeutic terms. It's bad for everyone's mental health because it's not in line with the best practices of therapy and psychiatry. It also makes institutions (like the Church) weaker and less meaningful by forcing them to contort to the expectations of what people think is "therapeutic." This isn't just a Christian thing, though—many secular professionals are concerned about these problems and have started to call out the way that popular misconceptions about therapy and psychiatry are promulgating messages that make people sicker.

**What experiences led you to write this book?**

**Matthew:** I heard lots of stories from friends and pastors about how people were using therapy-speak to justify their own selfishness in a variety of ways. I personally read and heard different instances of therapy culture that either misappropriated psychological ideas or made other things (like theological ideas) less potent and real by medicalizing them. As I was wrestling with some of my own mental health issues, I also encountered the temptation to misuse psychological concepts to remain stuck in my own illness and sin.

**Mental health resources and books are abundant. How is *Resisting Therapy Culture* distinct?**

**Matthew:** Most books about mental health and the Church are unaware, much less willing to call out, the dangers of therapy culture. Some of that is due to the fact that therapy culture has really exploded in the past decade. Some of it is that people are swimming in polluted cultural waters and don't recognize the pollution is there. There's a handful of books that have taken aim at therapy culture, but most of them want to throw out the baby with the bathwater and don't recognize the value of therapy and psychiatry for people who are genuinely suffering.

What's distinctive about *Resisting Therapy Culture* is that I'm not condemning therapy and psychiatry outright. I'm laying out the distinct and often complementary roles that churches and mental health professionals have in helping people. I'm making the argument that churches aren't meant to do for people what therapists do for people and that churches will be places of healing for suffering people when they focus on what God has called them to. This will help people who doubt that therapy is helpful, and it will help people whose perceptions of what is good have been distorted by therapy culture.



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The book is not a long list of nightmare anecdotes and lies you might find on social media because I didn't want it to be a big dollop of negativity. Rather, *Resisting Therapy Culture* is a book that walks through the most important truths about how God created our minds and answers the biggest questions that parents, teachers, pastors, and others have about therapy and psychiatry right now as they relate to faith.

**What are three ways that therapy culture has influenced Western churches?****Matthew:**

1. By talking (and singing!) more about things like wellness, balance, shame, identity, and mental health than biblical concepts like sin, salvation, guilt, and sanctification, Western churches have minimized the essential aspects of our faith and replaced them with low-quality therapy speak.
2. By pressuring pastors to think and speak like therapists because they feel like their job is to solve their congregation's emotional problems.
3. By encouraging more and more people to judge their churches and pastors by the standards of therapy culture—which are often changing and not even reflective of evidence-based therapy.

**What can the Church NOT do that therapy and psychiatry can and should do?**

**Matthew:** The Church cannot diagnose people with psychiatric illnesses, prescribe medications, or (in the course of, say, a worship service or Bible study) walk people through evidence-based talk therapy protocols. Any given church could start a ministry that does these things for people, but that would be like the difference between a church building a house for people to live in and people sleeping in the pews every night. Some pastors might be able to distinguish between “you are miserable because you're sinning and you'll feel better when you stop sinning” and “you are miserable because you're clinically depressed and you need medication,” but I wouldn't expect or want every pastor to feel like they have that responsibility to do that for any given member of their congregation who is struggling. One of the challenges with people who are wholly antitherapy/antipsychiatry is that by assuming an individual's sin is at the root of that person's mental illness or suffering, they are laying a huge burden on pastors and church leaders by taking away the resources of therapy and now making that person's church responsible for helping that person.

**How is the lens of psychological health and wellness shaping people's expectations of the Church?**

**Matthew:** People are allowing their expectations of the Church to be shaped by the lens of psychological health and wellness in a variety of ways, but primarily when people react negatively to difficult teachings that feel “un-therapeutic,” gravitate towards services that are addressed entirely or mostly around feelings and emotions, and by encouraging people to discount the authority of pastors and church leaders who “don't get it” when it comes to whatever therapy culture deems to be in vogue in the moment.



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Q & A



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#### **How are words like *trauma*, *toxic*, *triggering*, *abuse*, and more adding to the mental health problem?**

**Matthew:** Some of these words (like *trauma* and *narcissism*) have fairly specific psychiatric definitions that have been arrived at after decades of research and study. Others (such as *abuse*, *toxic*, and *triggering*) are naturally more malleable. Therapy culture wants to expand their definitions to be even broader so that a person who is feeling a particular way can lend a sense of medical-scientific gravitas to their experience, thus legitimizing their feelings. This can easily make them feel disempowered to do anything about their situation or decrease their internal sense of their own responsibility in changing their lives to make themselves feel better.

#### **What are the five main things you want readers to take away from your book?**

**Matthew:**

- Therapy can be helpful, but it's a bad culture.
- The Church shouldn't try to do for people what therapists do; their roles are distinct.
- The Church will be a good place for people who are suffering from mental illness when it focuses on the unique mission that God has given it.
- There is a lot of misinformation about mental health that makes people less emotionally healthy when they believe it, especially around agency, attachment, and trauma.
- Having a healthy perspective on suffering and agency gives us key insights into maintaining and restoring mental health.



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