

Mental Illness: An Insider's Journey

By Ruth Eleos

I had been exhibiting bizarre behavior for a few weeks, but the day I asked my husband to shoot me, he knew he had to find help. He had two men from church drive us to the psych ward. As he put his arm around me, he gently asked, "What do you see?"

Relieved he wanted to know what I was experiencing, I responded, "I see fire and brimstone raining down from Heaven, but it's bouncing off our van."

He lovingly replied, "We must have made it." I relaxed in his arms.

The peace did not last long, though. I became angry when, just before he admitted me, my husband, Joshua, said, "God will use this somehow. He is faithful."

A few minutes later as I walked into my room, my roommate yelled, "I don't like cats. Get that cat out of here!"

"That's not a cat. It is Aslan," I replied, referring to the lion from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, "and he is good. It will be okay." She was pacified, and I was convinced God was with me.

Quest for Peace

It has been roughly 18 years since that incident. My husband was very patient and supportive, even though he was criticized by my family for not seeking help sooner. This was just the beginning of a lengthy, turbulent quest for peace and stability. Over the following eight years I had to be admitted to the psych ward three more times. The doctors first called it postpartum psychosis because it was related to giving birth. However, when the condition did not go away, they labeled it bipolar.

Dealing with a mental illness is very frustrating for all involved.

One night, I was standing in my parents' bedroom when I heard my name dispatched over the police scanner. The police were coming to get me. I was terrified! My mom did not hear it, not because she was

not in the room, but because at the time I was out of touch with reality. She sensed my fear and got in my face, “You have three beautiful children who need a mother. Get better!” The next day, I was committed to the psych ward.

If following her command was that easy, I would have declared myself “healthy” and gone on with life. Believe me, I tried.

In actuality, I spent the first eight years of my illness seething with resentment, highly medicated, and angry at God and everyone I encountered. I struggled to be a good wife and mother and wasted a lot of time playing the blame game. In one heated discussion with my husband, he blurted in frustration, “You can’t think your way out of this!” The words stung. I had a lot of pride. Looking back, I see this as a turning point in my journey with darkness.

Help from the Church

I was an exceptional student when I was young and had not done anything to consciously destroy my body with the use of drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. In addition, I had memorized many Scripture verses in my youth. I may not deserve this, and I certainly do not understand it, but I have started to embrace my circumstances.

One doctor said, “Take the medicine—the first one may not work, but we’ll keep trying until something does.” Then he admitted that doctors and scientists do not know why medications do or do not work. He then explained, “We do not yet have enough knowledge of the brain.” Great, I get to be someone’s laboratory rat! The medicine helps, but it only slows down my mind so I can succeed in taking my thoughts captive. However, like most bipolar patients, getting me to consistently take my medicine is challenging. Either life gets too boring, or I become convinced someone is out to poison me. My husband reminds me—there must be a physiological component to this condition because the medicine helps.

I have church friends who are on top of the latest health trends. They insisted my diet was partly responsible for my mental instability. I

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have increasingly tried to eat healthier, but I have noticed little difference in my overall mental health.

I have friends in the Christian community who questioned my salvation, in essence communicating that I would not be like this if I were really saved. Talk about feeling like Job. Seldom have I heard someone make comments that degrade the dignity of those with diabetes or cancer patients—why is my condition treated differently?

My Christian counselor learned of the sexual abuse I experienced as a child and wanted me to attend group therapy. I attended two 13-week sessions after I was first diagnosed and two more a few years ago. I learned much. Open, safe dialogue within the church community is very refreshing. Although it has not alleviated the war raging in my mind, it has been among the most helpful in understanding the effects of sin on and in my life. We live in a fallen world. It stands to reason *all* diseases are a result of sin entering the world.

There are multitudes of variables in each person's life that make dealing with a mental condition a sensitive issue. While we must admit there is much we do not know, the Church has much it can offer: faith, hope, and love. My faith was greatly strengthened once by a man who freely admitted life is full of unanswered questions, yet God thought the Bible was enough to guide our actions. I live in hope—hope that my affliction is temporary and hope that something better waits for eternity.

How You Can Respond

It seems few people know how to treat the mentally ill. We suffer in silence. Here are my suggestions as to what you can do to love us:

- Know it might feel like trying to pet a porcupine, but keep caring; please keep asking questions and listening.
Sometimes, when friends began to probe and I tried to

verbalize what I was experiencing, I would discover my own irrational thoughts. It was a helpful process.

- Remember that bizarre thoughts are not sins; only sinful behaviors are sins.
- Do not minimize our struggle by telling us that what we are experiencing is typical. If you have not needed psychiatric hospitalization, we have a hard time believing you can truly relate.
- Give grace for questions and doubts.
- Notice when we disappear and offer words of encouragement. A simple, “I missed you at church today, but it is okay” is usually safe.
- We need hope, and there is no better place to find it than among friends in a biblical church.
- Remind us that you love us.

Employers can create ways to work with people with mental challenges and preserve personal dignity. During the hardest and most volatile eight years of my life, I was able to work for a gracious and flexible employer.

I still struggle with anger and feel anything but “normal.” But I think my husband, Joshua, was right and God will use this if I will let Him.

Ruth Eleos is a pen name.

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This article has been edited from the original for grammatical reasons.

Wings of Victory

Mental Illness and our Walk with Jesus

Ruth and Joshua Eleos

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*I have said these things to you,
that in me you may have peace.
In the world you will have tribulation.
But take heart;
I have overcome the world.”*

John 16:33

Acknowledgements

Writing a book anonymously presents some special challenges, including the frustration of wanting to publicly thank those who have assisted us along the way but finding ourselves unable.

First, we would like to acknowledge those who helped us during Ruth's first episode—those friends and fellow church members who supported us as best they could. They watched our children (including our newborn) and drove us to the hospital when we needed to admit Ruth. Thanks to our pastor and his wife, who befriended Joshua when Ruth and the children had to stay with her parents while he finished his teaching obligations.

Secondly, we would like to thank our families: our parents, our siblings, and our children. They stepped in many times throughout the years to provide childcare, transportation, housekeeping, and support in so many other ways.

We relocated when my teaching contract was completed. In the churches we have attended over the years, we have found members, leaders, and pastors who have come alongside us in our struggles—not everyone, perhaps not as many as we would like, but enough that we did not go through our struggles alone. To those who have befriended and supported us over the years, thank you.

There are two groups of people we would especially like to thank.

The first are those who read drafts of Ruth's book and wanted to read more. These were friends or those we encountered who have struggled with mental health issues or know someone who has. These people found Ruth's initial writings helpful and really encouraged her to continue writing. Thank you.

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Thank you to SoniaRai for patiently working with us to design our book cover and being a faithful friend through some of our most difficult years.

Thank you to all our beta readers who have given us constructive feedback and encouragement.

Most of all, we want to give thanks and glory to our God who has been faithful to sustain us through it all.

To God be the Glory,
Ruth & Joshua Eleos

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Dedication

To those who are experiencing mental illness,
may you find solace in knowing others have walked a similar path
and thrived despite the struggle.

To those who love someone with a mental illness diagnosis,
may our experiences encourage you to stand beside your loved
one
during your days of challenge.

To our Lord, Savior, and God,
may You receive glory from our story,
and may Your people be encouraged.

To God be the Glory

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Preface

*My son, beware of anything beyond these.
Of making many books there is no end,
and much study is a weariness of the flesh.
(Ecclesiastes 12:12)*

It has been said, “We read to know we are not alone.” This begs the question, “Why does one write?” In fact, many books have been written—why write another one?

One may write for any number of reasons. One may write to remember, reflect, and record what has occurred in one’s life or in history. One may write to express one’s creativity, whether through poetry, fiction, or narrative. Yet ultimately, one writes to express one’s thoughts, to preserve those thoughts on paper (or in some other media), to communicate with others beyond themselves, to share their thoughts and experiences. Like so many others, we, the authors, seek to share our experiences. We seek to share so others might learn they are not alone, that their struggles are not unique.

We are followers of Jesus the Christ—the Anointed One, the Chosen One; we are a Christian husband and wife who have survived the ongoing ordeal of mental illness, namely bipolar disorder.

Our experiences are not unique, except that they happened to us in our circumstances, and initially we thought we were alone. It is our hope that our experiences, and the lessons we learned from them, might provide encouragement to those who have suffered through the ravages of mental illness—encouragement in learning that you are not alone, and that regardless of what you feel, God has not left you, nor has He forgotten you.

It is also our hope that you will learn vicariously, through our eyes and from our experience, the lessons we have fought so hard to

learn over the years. In a sense, we have hacked our own way through the jungle of mental illness, and we hope that our journey might make your journey through this jungle a little easier.

Our Audience

There have been many books written on this and related subjects, though primarily with a secular worldview. We know this because we have read many of them while trying to make sense of our experiences. Some are very well written and helpful (and some of these are included in the bibliography).

However, we write as Christians to Christians. If you are not a follower of Jesus the Son of God, you are still welcome to listen in. We write as Christians because mental illness has many worldview implications associated with it which are not directly associated with other aspects of physical medicine. This is largely because mental illness involves the sufferer's mental state and behavior. Over the years, we have suffered at the hands of well-meaning Christians who told us we were experiencing these problems because we did not have enough faith, or because we sinned, or some such thing. While it is true that we sin, and sometimes these sins have had implications in our experiences, mental health is more complicated than we want it to be. Misconceptions and blanket assumptions do not change the nature of God and His Word, but rather misrepresent it. We hope to share what our life of faith looks like as we make this journey through mental illness, seeking mental wellness and glory for God.

We write primarily to those experiencing mental illness and those who love them. Again, we write from our experience to help those who are going through similar experiences. We have experienced firsthand the discouragement and despair that can accompany these battles. Firsthand accounts help to encourage and give hope to those suffering, and those that love them, that a new, healthier normal can be achieved.

Our secondary audience is those who live around our first audience, who are experiencing mental illness thirdhand, so to

speak. It is our hope that you will gain a deeper perspective of the struggles experienced by those suffering from a mental illness. Often, those with mental illness are experiencing a wide range of emotions which they struggle to express, and if they can express their emotions, they do not often feel safe sharing their thoughts and feelings for fear of being judged. We would ask that you read *Wings of Victory* to better love those who struggle.

Our Method of Presentation

Mental illness has a deep and lasting effect on the one afflicted with the condition. It affects the way one thinks, speaks, and acts. As a result, it creates tremendous shockwaves within family relationships. Therefore, we believe it is important to share, as a couple, the impact it has had on us, our marriage, and our family. Statistically, marriages involving a bipolar spouse have a survival rate of only about 10%.¹ The stresses on the marital relationship are intense, overwhelming, and often last for extended periods of time, in some cases years. At the time of this writing, our marriage has lasted 30 years; thus far we have beaten the odds and have every intention of continuing to do so by God's grace and mercy!!!

For this reason, we have written this book as a bit of a dialog, each of us responding to what the other has written. Grammatically and otherwise, we edit one another's material, yet we have sought to allow each spouse to have her or his own voice, writing separately. We each have our own perspectives on the experiences we have encountered; at times, the differences were incredibly significant. Therefore, we believe that both those who are suffering from mental illness and those who love them need to be encouraged and heard.

Generally, Ruth begins each chapter, as she is the one struggling with bipolar disorder. Joshua generally responds to what Ruth has written, giving honor to Ruth for the struggles she has had firsthand.

¹ Marano, Hara Estroff. "Managing Bipolar Disorder," *Psychology Today*, November 1, 2003, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200311/managing-bipolar-disorder>.

Joshua shares about how he has responded to Ruth's feelings, thoughts, and behavior. While we contemplated alternating chapters, we decided it would be best for Ruth's story to be heard first as a complete, uninterrupted unit, followed by Joshua's story. We hope you enjoy and are encouraged by the dialogue.

On the Use of Pseudonyms (Pen Names)

Much of the stigma associated with mental illness has diminished in recent years. However, it has not yet disappeared. This stigma can have implications for employment and especially for relationships. Because mental illness is not clearly understood and may have multiple causes including environmental (family) factors, we have chosen pen names to "protect" family and friends who might not appreciate our frankness. This gives us the ability to express our thoughts and feelings more freely, while providing those close to us a measure of privacy.

May you be blessed and encouraged as you read,

Joshua and Ruth Eleos

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Introduction

*And the Lord said to me,
"Write my answer on a billboard
large and clear,
so that anyone can read it at a glance
and rush to tell the others."
Habakkuk 2:2 (TLB)*

I felt God calling me to share my story a few years ago at a retreat. My husband just sort of rolled his eyes and went with it, as if thinking, "I'm sure it will never happen." A year later, we were at the same retreat, where I shared an article I had written with the goal of educating the Church on how to love those of us suffering with a mental illness. Tears were streaming down my face as I read to the small group. I am usually a very quiet, private person, and I felt vulnerable giving these people a glimpse of my heart. I was affirmed by the group enough to continue pursuing this project. A woman in the group gave me a small stained-glass heart with a seam in the middle and told me, "Sometimes, God breaks our heart and then mends it back stronger than it was before." At the time, I did not feel strong. I did not feel like I had a huge amount of faith. But I knew that God is bigger than my feelings.

God may never tell me the "whys" of the things I have wondered about, but I am learning to be more thankful and to appreciate who God is and to trust His wisdom. I have struggled with my disease for more than twenty years. The struggle has been long and grueling, but God remains faithful. Therefore, I write and share as an act of faith, with a sense of reluctance mixed with hope. Reluctance because in writing about this journey, I expose a part of myself that

makes me uncomfortable. Hope that in sharing a portion of my struggle, you may embrace your journey with less anger and bitterness. In a sense, I have written what I wish had been available to me when I began this journey in darkness so many years ago. I felt so alone and condemned.

As for feeling alone, I now know several people who suffer from a mental illness. I find comfort when talking with some of them. Being able to relate to and share with a fellow sojourner who has experienced similar feelings is refreshing on this journey. Thus, one of the major objectives of this book: I hope you will realize you are not the only one to face these obstacles.

As for feeling condemned, this may have simply been part of my own insecurity that stemmed from feeling so alone. There are many authentic Christians who care, yet who are unfamiliar with the reality of a mental illness and do not know what to say or do. I can empathize and cry with you. Our journeys are uncharted and may prove difficult. Know, as Christians, you and I have much hope!

I am a Christian with a mental illness writing this for other Christians who struggle with mental illness. By Christian, I mean a disciple or follower of Jesus, someone who seeks Him, spends time getting to know Him, and wants to please Him. If you have never accepted Christ and His teachings, I hope my writing will inspire you to read the Bible and investigate the merits of Jesus and what it means to be one of His followers. It could be that God is giving you a chance to ask some hard questions about life and death and is eagerly waiting to give you an identity and hope you never knew existed.

The gospel, or good news, in a nutshell is found in 1 Corinthians 15 in the Bible. Here, you will find that Jesus Christ died for your sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day. His life, and the ability to conquer even death, is our hope. If you are not familiar with Jesus, a good starting point is the book of John in the Bible. Once you have investigated

the claims of Jesus as found in the Bible, there is a plan for salvation in Appendix A of this book.

For those of us who belong to Jesus, we have more than a glimmer of hope—Jesus assures us that He is with us, for us, and in us. In addition, we have the knowledge and faith to believe that although the world gives a bleak diagnosis for our illnesses, victory is a possibility in this life and a certainty in the life to come.

Any illness causes us to stop, question, and think a little. This can be good. It slows us down in our busy lives. Maybe you have been moving through life so fast that you have never pondered the deeper things in life. You thought it was impossible to slow down, but now it is like you are stuck in a traffic jam or are experiencing a stay-at-home order and have no choice. This can make us angry. Anger is not wrong so long as we do not let it control us and lead us into sinful actions.

Because I have struggled with a lot of anger, I realize a book may be the safest way to lead you in your journey to victory at this time. A book allows you to process and interact with my experiences and recommendations at your own pace. There may be days when you get upset with me for suggestions I make. That is okay. Another day, you may thank me for the same sentences. Just read what you can, when you can. I expect you to be encouraged and challenged.

The writing of this book has been a long journey filled with doubt and fear, but there have been times when I have pulled out my draft and found it encourages and blesses me. It is my hope that whether you have been struggling with your condition for years or are new to this madness, this book will be helpful.

Part A:

Hope

Expect Recovery

*Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.
(Psalm 34:19)*

I have come to realize many people have never met the God of Hope. It is easy to sit through church and realize the righteous lifestyle to which the Bible calls us is an impossibility. We want to be loving, forgiving, patient, and kind; we do not want to feel depressed; but we repeatedly fail. We have met a “god of condemnation” by focusing on law-keeping and the things we cannot do. You are not alone! Even the great apostle Paul lamented, “For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate” (Romans 7:15). It is easy to beat ourselves up. This, however, is not the point of the Bible. The Bible exposes our wretched position before a holy God, communicates to us how valuable we are, and points us to Jesus, who gives us true life and hope. Read about this man who encountered Jesus, the God of Hope and Healing:

*After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “**Do you want to be healed?**” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the*

water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

(John 5:1-9, bolding by author)

I have always found this passage interesting. Here, Jesus heals this invalid, but first He asks him what seems to be a dumb question: “Do you want to be healed?” Evidently this question was not so dumb, because the man begins to make excuses. Could he not simply have answered, “Yes!”? Having struggled with a mental illness for several years, I begin to understand the man. He had lost hope. Healing seemed impossible.

The hope for healing in that day was the belief that being the first to climb into the pool after the water was stirred would somehow magically cure you. This man was in an impossible situation because of his disability. He could not walk, and he had no friends to help him get to the pool. When Jesus asked him if he wanted to be healed, he could imagine no other method for healing.

What is your hope for healing? Do you hope to have a daily visit with your doctor or therapist, but find this too expensive or the professionals too busy? Are you looking for a wonder drug that will take all your problems away? Or a surgery that can “fix” you? Can you hear Jesus’ question echoing for you today: “Do you want to be healed?” No matter what excuses you think of, I encourage you to say, “YES!” While there are no magic formulas for getting better, and the doctors have no cure for mental illnesses, knowing Jesus changes us. As I see it, we have three possibilities:

- 1) We will experience a miraculous healing,
- 2) We will grow in grace and faith through the process, or
- 3) We will give up.

I wanted a miraculous healing. Who would not? So, since I have always been a student of the Bible, when I realized I was sick, I took James's instruction seriously:

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.
(James 5:14-16)

I kept asking, and really insisting, that God heal me. My definition of healing would have looked like God restoring me to what I was experiencing before. Initially, God's failure to act according to my expectations intensified my anger and resentment. As I was writing this book, I was leading a Bible study where we were discussing Paul's thorn in the flesh:

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

It dawned on me that this was similar to my experience of having the elders repeatedly pray for healing. Sometimes I noticed a difference for a time, and other times it felt like a waste of time and energy. But regardless, God kept sustaining me, keeping me humble, and reminding me that His grace is sufficient. God may give you a miraculous healing or He may not. Obviously, if He gives you a miraculous healing, you have no need for this book except to identify with those who do not receive one.

My advice is to allow God to redirect you without expecting Him to miraculously return you to “normal.” Was your life before your trials and diagnosis the one He wants you to return to, or is He using your illness to give you the time to reprioritize or to awaken a desire in you for something different? Was your previous life going in the direction you really wanted to be heading, even if you were still able to function? An even better question is, “Was it heading in the direction God wanted you to be travelling?” Do you trust Him enough to believe He will work all this together for good because you love Him (see Romans 8:28)? In the midst of my hopelessness, God gave me an analogy, which I have entitled “The Depressed Caterpillar”:

The Depressed Caterpillar

I find myself surrounded by darkness, but it is not night and I am awake, feeling miserable. I have so much to do, and surely people have noticed I don't have the energy or desire to go to work. The darkness just seems to be getting darker. What is happening to me? I remember several years ago, the wise old owl told me someday I would fly. I laughed hysterically—I am a caterpillar and caterpillars don't

fly like the birds and the oh-so-beautiful butterflies. How did the owl get the adjective “wise” to describe him, anyway? He must be one of the stupidest creatures on the earth. Everyone knows caterpillars don't fly.

I've suffered from several disappointments in my life. My friends kept abandoning me and I've come to feel so lonely. Just a few days before this darkness overtook me, I remember basking on a leaf. As I was soaking in the rays, the most beautiful butterfly fluttered by. Not only did its wings contain a beautiful array of colors, but there was something in its eyes that brought back memories of old friends. It was a feeling that I might have actually seen those eyes before, but that was silly—I only hung out with caterpillars.

Romans 12:2 reads, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

I have been told the word for “transformed” in the Greek is epitomized by the transformation of the caterpillar into the butterfly. If you have never met the God of Hope, you are likely to feel like this depressed caterpillar. Is it possible God knows your situation and is in the process of transforming you into something you never imagined possible?

If you have already met and accepted the God of Hope, listen for the Holy Spirit as you travel this road. If you have only met a “god of condemnation,” meet anew a God who wants to give hope, healing, and victory.

Given we are dealing with a *mental* illness, let us start by taking a closer look at Romans 12:2, which talks about the renewal of our *mind*. Few verses in Scripture give us more hope than this one. I call it our biblical prescription for a healing hope. God works and heals on His timetable; do not let anyone condemn you for not getting “quick” results or guilt you into not spending enough time renewing your mind. This is between you and God. Let us look at this verse phrase by phrase:

“...DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD...”

To experience a transformation, you must reject the world’s fundamental way of assigning value to people. Our society, influenced by evolutionary thinking, assigns value based on what a person can or cannot do. Ask yourself, who are you trying to please—God, self, society, or family? The only acceptable answer is God. Be careful, however, because I know how easy it is to say that you’re trying to please God when this is really a masquerade for how you would want your life to be if *you* were a god—in essence, trying to please yourself. To please God, we must first learn what God thinks and expects of us. We must learn the things that matter to Him. This comes from studying the Bible.

“...BUT BE TRANSFORMED...”

We want to experience transformation, but our natural response is to ask, “How do we experience this transformation?” Currently, scientists do not understand the “how” of a caterpillar’s transformation into a butterfly, but they do know it is an amazing, mysterious process! Paul, however, gives us a hint as to the “how” in our lives:

“...BY THE RENEWAL OF YOUR MIND...”

The renewal of the mind is essential for us on an ongoing basis. We may deny that our mind is broken or malfunctioning. However, others *will* tell us if this is the case. You may need to find a medication that restores your mind to clear thinking. Then, you will need to fill your mind with God’s Word—let me caution you,

though, that you need to read it while keeping in mind the context in which it was written, and not just pull verses out of their context and assign them your own meaning. I was constantly doing the latter, but my husband, who has his master's degree in theology, kept correcting me—read the Word in its context. My husband recommends any of the following one-volume commentaries on the Bible: *The New International Bible Commentary* by F. F. Bruce, *The NIV Bible Study Commentary* by John Sailhamer, or *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* by John F. MacArthur.

“...THAT BY TESTING YOU MAY DISCERN WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD...”

As your mind is renewed, you will be better able to discern the thoughts in your head and figure out where they come from. Because my condition is partly physiological, I take medicine to slow my mind so that I am able to take my thoughts captive, as the apostle Paul exhorts us in 2 Corinthians 10:5-6. Over time, I have learned how to discern the craziness and irrational thoughts I experience and enjoy victory.

“...WHAT IS GOOD, AND ACCEPTABLE, AND PERFECT.”

Isn't it nice to know that God's will is good and acceptable? God's plan for you is good, too. Seek Him. Trust Him. Let Him transform you, and then enjoy your beautiful wings.

Adam and Eve's disobedience led to a world filled with death and illness. This was not God's perfect plan. He knew and knows that we must be given choices, or we would be nothing but robots. His good, acceptable, and perfect will is that we willingly return to a life of trust and obedience.

Living with a mental illness is a challenge with many obstacles to overcome, but I am confident that God will work to transform you, too. For me, I had to release my anger and excuses and learn to agree with God and trust His timetable for victory. It has not been a quick process. God gives me hope that His grace is sufficient for now and that life will continue to get better. He is slowly

transforming me into a useful vessel for His service. At times, I even feel a little like a butterfly, having been given glimpses of a life I never imagined. After all, I have garnered enough courage to write about this experience and continue to walk in victory.

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Part B:

Affirmation

Know Your Identity

*I write these things to you who believe in the name
of the Son of God, that you may know that you
have eternal life.*

(1 John 5:13)

I often say that if you are not crazy when you go into the psych ward, you will be crazy when you come out. The whole experience is creepy and demoralizing. Had I not had several years of solid Biblical teaching and positive Christian experience under my belt, I am not certain I would have come through this darkness. I am still bothered by the fact that somewhere, buried in my medical records, are clinical assessments. It appears that someone is writing one every time they visit with me. Here is one of my better reports after dealing with this illness for 13 years:

MENTAL STATUS: Alert and fully oriented. Mood is irritable/hypomanic, and affect is expansive. Client appears as stated age wearing bi-focals. Client's grooming, hygiene, and dress are all within normal limits. Client is cooperative during the interview process yet guarded. Client's concentration and attention appear within normal limits. Thought process per client is marked by "mild racing thoughts" and content marked by paranoia. Denies suicidal and homicidal ideation. No overt psychosis. Insight and judgement are within normal limits. Gross estimate of intellectual functioning based on vocabulary and fund of knowledge is in the above average range. Immediate, recent, and remote memory appears within normal limits.

One thing which makes having a mental diagnosis hard is that we are often treated in such a sterile way. The doctors will visit with you for 15 minutes to an hour and because they have read and seen so much, they slap a label on you that will affect your entire life. Then, every doctor you visit thereafter treats you like just another [name your illness] patient.

Once a doctor confessed that doctors in general do not know why the medicines work, so they just keep prescribing different medicine until they find one which works. No wonder I feel like a science project.

Therefore, it is important to learn and remind yourself often of what God's Word has to say about you. You will likely experience many unruly emotions, and it becomes your job to bring your thoughts and emotions in line with God's Word.

We like to point to things like going to church, doing good works, etc., but authentic Christianity is more about knowing who God says you are and acting in accordance with that knowledge. You need to be securely grounded in what God has to say about you so that you can survive your battle with mental illness. Many people will have advice, and they mean well, but they have not experienced what you are experiencing. In some ways, this is a journey you must overcome by yourself—it is your illness, and it is unique. You must become the expert on your condition. However, you must also understand in the depths of your soul that God loves you, that He has not abandoned you, and that He has a purpose for your condition even if He never tells you what that purpose is. It is easy to trust God when life is good and things are “normal,” but trusting Him in the difficult times is what strengthens our authentic faith.

Knowing what God says about you will give you the foundation to overcome, endure, survive, and someday thrive because of what you experience and how you learn to depend upon Him. I have compiled 13 identity-building verses. These are anchors for our soul, given to us by God. Know that His promises and sufficient grace will

build your strength and courage to conquer and overcome, but that He has not promised to make your path obstacle-free.

Think about His grace. It is sufficient...

adequate...

enough...

satisfactory...

necessary...

appropriate...

ample...

plenty...

abundant.

His

grace IS sufficient.

No matter how you feel or what you are experiencing, this statement is true, and it is for you just as God is for you. God's grace will pull you through these most heart-wrenching moments—even when the minutes and hours and days turn into years and decades—no matter how long you struggle before you find some sense of normalcy. God's promise to you is that He is enough. Know that His love and grace is given abundantly to you. No one can take it away. No one—not parents, siblings, relatives, friends, doctors, lawyers, judges, police officers, or social workers. No one can take it away. Hallelujah!

Many Christians along the way may quote some of these verses in a trite way and expect you to “get better” quickly. In contrast, my experience leads me to warn you that this is NOT a get-well-quick method. I know this statement would have angered me in the early stages of my diagnosis, so if you are angry, that is okay. This book is intended to be a testimony of encouragement for your faith journey. I know you will likely feel like giving up at times. That is okay, too. Just do not give in—rest, take a nap, retreat, re-strategize—do anything but give in and give up.

Here are 13 identity-building statements:

1. You are created in His image.

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

(Genesis 1:27)

This is a statement about mankind in general and it matters not whether you are a Christian. The idea, however, is uniquely Christian. When you stop to ponder the wonder of human beings, you must be amazed. There are over 7.5 billion (7,500,000,000) people in the world, and we are told that no two people have identical fingerprints. We are each uniquely crafted in the image of God. This leads me to conclude that my manifestations of bipolar disorder—or any other illness, for that matter—will be unique as well, and yet similarly recognizable to doctors. So, when you are treated like just another number, know that you are actually and truly a unique case.

Death and disease were not part of creation when God declared that “it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). But due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve, sin became a reality, and death and disease became the new standard. You inherited a fallen, sinful nature, but the story does not end there. God provides forgiveness and redemption through Jesus. Do you know Him? Have you ever come to terms with your own sinfulness? Or do you think you are good enough to get into heaven? Maybe you think you cannot be good enough to get into heaven and have no hope. The gospel message is not about being good enough—it is about recognizing your “not-good-enough-ness” and acknowledging, accepting, and sharing God’s gift of love and atonement. Salvation is simple. Sanctification, on the other hand, is hard.

2. You are a new creation in Christ.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

As a Christian, God has placed His Holy Spirit in you, and He began a new process in you. You got to identify with Christ through water baptism by being buried with Him in a watery grave and raised to walk in a newness of life (See Roman 6:3-4). What a beautiful, symbolic experience to point back to with confidence. God began a new creation process in you; it is a reality. Being a new creation does not mean you are exempt from death and illness. Now as you wrestle through life with the symptoms associated with your illness, your wrestling will contribute to the finished new creation He has in mind. This new process is referred to as sanctification and it can seem painfully unpleasant, but God assures us that it is not without purpose (see Romans 8). In fact, James exhorts us:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

(James 1:2-4)

Does the idea of lacking nothing appeal to you? Hang on. It may be a wild journey, but you have an incredible destination!

Because of salvation—our reconciliation with God—we have been entrusted with the mission of spreading God's good news to

others. You may not be in an emotional position today to declare God's praises or count it all joy. However, as God works in your life and you embrace the process of the newness He gives, a time will come when you will be excited to share with others. Be assured that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to a perfect completion (see Philippians 1:6).

3. You are free from condemnation.

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those
who are in Christ Jesus.
(Romans 8:1)*

It is truly good news to know there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. This is not to say that if you make some bad choices you will not have to deal with the physical, earthly consequences. But Christ will not condemn you for eternity. You have hope!

There is a reference made in Romans 8 to two laws. One leads to death, the other to life. You can choose to follow the law of sin and death by being a law-keeper, or to follow the Spirit of life that leads to a greater life.

When we choose to follow the Giver of Life and live by His Spirit, Romans 8:1 becomes one of the most freeing and hope-filled verses in the entire Bible. You may face internal turmoil, thinking that surely you did something to cause this condition, as well as external blame from family and friends. Remember, there is no condemnation in Christ!

Paul confesses that he finds himself doing things he does not want to do. Our growth process will lead us to a Godlier life. The freedom you will experience when you truly comprehend the grace and mercy of God will help you to breathe more easily. Christ suffered for your sins, and God uses our suffering to mold us into the people He wants us to become. I had a hard time accepting my suffering because I thought Jesus died so that I would not have to suffer. Reality, however, is just the opposite. Jesus clearly preached that when we follow Him, we will suffer. I had and still have a lot of pride and arrogance. First, God had to break me. So,

congratulations—you are among those chosen by God to suffer in this way, and so must depend on Him to give you sanity.

4. You have been adopted by God.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"
(Romans 8:15)

God wants you. God chose you. Most of us remember some game where captains had to choose people to be on their team. Those chosen first were either the really good players or friends of the captain. It always feels good to be wanted and chosen. You are special to God. He chooses you. He chooses you because He created you and because you, having chosen Jesus, are holy and set apart for Him. He desires with all He is to lavish you with His grace, mercy, and love. Can you accept this? Unlike humans, who may naively begin the adoption process and find it much harder than anticipated, or who might not have the success they anticipated, God knows. Just because you are in a broken, earthly vessel right now does not change His thoughts and feelings about you. He loves you and has given you true sonship.

The context here is that being a child of God affects how we live. Just as children have characteristics of their earthly parents, we have been given the Holy Spirit to bear witness to the fact that we are God's children. Lift your head high and walk with confidence. The King of the Universe has chosen you, and you are His. He will guide and protect you on this journey. He desires for you to talk to Him and seek His righteousness.

The Spirit works within us to remind us of who God wants us to become. The Holy Spirit will convict, comfort, and encourage us. Do you hear Him whispering to you when you know you are thinking about doing things not fitting for a child of the King? This

is evidence that you are His child. You are God's chosen child and He wants you, no matter what you struggle with.

5. You are redeemed and forgiven.

...to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight...

(Ephesians 1:6-8)

You have a need for redemption and forgiveness because you inherited a sinful nature from your ancestors. God says that you are valuable, that it was worth giving His life for you and washing your sins away to remember them no more. Stop beating yourself up. God has this.

God has forgiven you for all that you have done or have failed to do. No need to re-hash the past and dwell on your mistakes. Forgiving yourself is harder than acknowledging that God has forgiven you. This passage shows that God really does know what you have done and how you have been treated. Not only has He forgiven you, but He has redeemed you and cherishes you.

Redemption is the idea that you are bought back. Something happened to separate you from your rightful owner, and He paid the price for your safe return. We have been separated from God due to our natural, rebellious spirit. But God, knowing our nature and our acts of rebellion, paid the price to restore us to a life of dignity. You are valuable.

Redemption and forgiveness are possible due to the riches of God's grace, wisdom, and insight. Not only is He capable of redeeming and forgiving you, He thinks it is a good idea. He knows you are going to love Him for it, and He sees the "not yet" you in the here and now. He sees the finished product and rejoices in you.

6. You have the Spirit of God living in you.

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

It will be the Spirit of God living in you that will sustain you through this difficult time. At times, I had an elevated awareness that God was with me—so elevated, it bordered on insane. No, to others it was insane! But these feelings also gave me an odd sense of peace. The problem came when I became so consumed with the idea of God living in me that I began to think I *was* Jesus. I would lay my hands on people, pray, and expect the miraculous. In my mind, the miraculous would happen whether I could see it or not. I would walk away satisfied that I had done what God had called me to do. Had this been my only seemingly bizarre behavior, it might have been interpreted as bold and Spirit-led, but it was not. I would be lying if I told you I do not miss some of those elevated feelings. How I long for the ability to be less inhibited and more alive in Christ, without being insane. I remember one psychiatrist questioning my grandiose thoughts with what we know of Jesus—He lays hands on people and *does* heal them (every time), and He speaks to the weather and it listens *all* the time. I did not really have an answer to this point, and I felt sheepish. It was a good reality check!

The reality for us, as Christians, is that Christ does live in us and sustain us and guide us. How this manifests itself when our brain chemistry is out of balance will vary. If those closest to you notice that something is wrong, do not be afraid to listen to their outside, objective opinions. Be thankful and rest in the fact that God will walk with you in this journey.

7. You have been given the mind of Christ.

*“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so
as to instruct him?”*

But we have the mind of Christ.

(1 Corinthians 2:16)

This verse is a little tricky. If we really operated with the mind of Christ every day, we would either be confined to a psych ward for life or have no need for one, depending on your perspective on how Christ would be received in the 21st century. Having the mind of Christ is a radical concept. We are given glimpses of what Jesus would be thinking if He were in our shoes. We are not, however, God. Having the mind of Christ enables us to love when love would be unthinkable, forgive when forgiveness seems unreasonable, and trust Him when we think it makes no sense for us to do so.

The mind of Christ allows us to identify with Him in a more real way. As a man, He was considered by some to be a lunatic. You can empathize with what He felt. He did not allow other people's thoughts and opinions of Him to rob Him of His identity and purpose. You, too, will have to overcome stigma and discrimination, but God says you are still His, and He has a plan for your craziness, too.

The tension between having the mind of Christ and having a broken mind can be difficult to reconcile. But your ability to accomplish this is part of God's gift to you. Relax and be patient; He will sustain you in this difficult time.

8. You are reconciled to God.

*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled
us to himself
and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;
(2 Corinthians 5:18)*

By our nature, we are rebellious toward God. God knows this, but it does not keep Him from loving us and pursuing a relationship with us. No matter how many times we rebel and tell God that we are not interested in Him, He puts Himself in a position to bring us back—to reconcile us to Himself. Of course, the obvious act of reconciliation was Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins. Jesus died once for all time to pay the penalty for our sins. But have you noticed the other, more subtle ways God has orchestrated the events of your life to give you opportunities to experience His love? Maybe this book was a gift from someone who loves you, or from a more distant acquaintance who heard about your condition. It could be that you “accidentally” stumbled across it in a bookstore or at a garage sale (though my goal is not the garage sale market). The point is that God works in a variety of ways to demonstrate that He cares for you. Many people, unfortunately, miss His advances and lead lives void of the excitement of having partnered with the Creator of the Universe.

It is no secret that He has gone to great expense to reconcile you to Himself. You are valuable and He is constantly attempting to draw you into closer fellowship. Won’t you embrace this gift and appreciate the journey?

9. You have direct access to God.

*For through him we both have access in one Spirit
to the Father.
(Ephesians 2:18)*

Jesus has given you direct access to the Father. And the Father wants to hear from you. Forget for a moment everything you have been taught about prayer and have an honest conversation with God. It should be more than a short, “I hate you for this!” Express the “whys” of your hatred if that is what you are feeling. Write it out if you need to. God sees and He knows. There is no need to try to hide from Him.

Then, take some time to be quiet and listen for His response. What do you hear from Him? Does what you hear line up with His character as found in the Bible? It is possible to discern if what you hear or think comes from Him. The voice of the Lord always calls us to unity within the body of Christ and to servanthood. So, if there is an action He wants you to take, it will not cause harm to you or to others. His voice will prompt you to trust Him and others who love you. He will remind you that He loves you and that He will be with you through these trying times. He will acknowledge what you are feeling is okay but will challenge you not to get stuck there. Life is precious and so are you. You will be better because of this experience. Keep talking to Him.

10. You are a citizen of heaven.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (Philippians 3:20)

There are two main things to consider when you ponder the idea of being a citizen of heaven. First, you are given all the rights and benefits of heaven. Your true home is a place where there is no insanity, death, or disease. I imagine the economy never suffers, and I expect that since Adam and Eve were given jobs in the beginning, everyone will have the job of their dreams. Your true home is perfect.

In contrast, however, the second thing to consider as a heavenly citizen is that you are a foreigner here on earth. You will never feel completely comfortable here. Your native language—the language of love, grace, and mercy—is often unknown or misinterpreted here. Many parts of your life will not feel comfortable here.

All that being said, God has you here, at this point in history, for a purpose—likely a two-fold purpose. He is teaching you and shaping you into the person He wants you to become, and He has given you a circle of influence and will empower you to be His witness. You have a mission.

We do not have the authority or freedom to determine when the mission is over or to declare that we have learned all God wants us to learn. Trust is still a major component of our heavenly calling. We can have faith and trust God, who will work all we have done and experienced for His good in His perfect timing.

11. You are a child of light.

For you are all children of light, children of the day.

We are not of the night or of the darkness.

(1 Thessalonians 5:5)

I used to love playing hide-and-seek as a kid. I always tried to find a hiding place where no one could find me. Sometimes we have done things in our lives that we are ashamed of, and we try to play hide-and-seek with God. We think that if we pretend we did not do the bad things, or do not talk about them, that everything will work out. Well, this would be a good time to come clean. Jesus is the light of the world and in Him there is no darkness—there is no such thing as a good hiding place from God. Do you have a closet full of secrets or just a cobweb or two in your life that needs a refreshing dose of God's light? I remember confessing some behaviors that had haunted me for more than 15 years. It felt so good to get them out into the light because then they no longer had a hold on me. Now these behaviors do not seem like such a big deal, but while Satan had them locked in a dark closet they created shame and guilt.

Basically, anything you think you cannot or should not talk about is suspect here. Bring it to God's redeeming light. Tell someone you trust who can affirm God's grace, mercy, and forgiveness to you. (However, if it was illegal behavior, the person you tell may be required or compelled to report illegal actions.) I believe taking responsibility for your actions and having a clear conscience will lead you to better mental health. You do not have to hide. God will be with you as you walk in the light.

12. You are a temple of God.

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and
that God's Spirit dwells in you?
(1 Corinthians 3:16)*

Many of us are unfamiliar with the concept of a temple. However, Paul's Jewish audience would have been able to picture and identify with the Jewish temple. It was a magnificent structure set aside for worship. It contained only the best and was filled with expensive items made by master craftsmen.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul says that we are the temple of God. From the beginning, God created us to be special—like nothing else in creation. But with the advent of Christianity, the concept of God living within us and making our heart His home was introduced. With this most precious gift comes a responsibility. We are to care for our bodies in a manner pleasing to God. We are to work on developing a clean mind, heart, and body. We do this by guarding our mind and evaluating the things entering our mind through our eyes, ears, and mouth. We are to think on the things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable, as stated in Philippians 4:8.

We protect our heart by guarding our relationships. The people we hang out with on a regular basis should exhort us to lead a godlier lifestyle. Another way to protect your heart is to study the Word and obey it. Have you pondered how much simpler and stress-free life is when you do things God's way? Your relationships are less complicated because you always tell the truth, and you do not have to remember to cover your lies. In addition, you have God's assurances of eternal victory for the tough times.

Taking care of your body through diet and exercise is good, too, so long as it does not become your primary focus. Sometimes a few

changes can make a big difference. For instance, the doctors often warned me about my caffeine intake, but my love of soda or addiction to it prevented me from making an immediate change. I believed if I had to give up soda or ice cream, life was not worth living! Confessing this exposes my idolatrous heart, and God is still working on me in this regard. I did in time learn and notice the effects of caffeine in the management of my condition and made changes.

Given what you know about God, have you made yourself an inviting home for Him? Or is He just an unwelcome intruder? It may be difficult to even get out of bed each day and get dressed during this time of life. But push yourself and do it. Have a daily appointment with God and ask Him to make you a worthy vessel of His love.

13. You are a partaker in a heavenly calling.

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, (Hebrews 3:1)

The context of this passage is clearly faithfulness. It is easy to get trapped in thinking that things will never get better, and to long for heaven in the here and now. You may even be tempted to end your life, but nowhere in God's Word does it suggest that we are given the freedom or authority to make this decision. We are exhorted and encouraged, in passages like this one, to recognize that our life is about more than the here and now. These passages give us the hope and motivation to keep on keeping on. We are to remain faithful. These trials are temporary; God intends to use them to shape and mold us into people worthy of, and prepared for, eternal life. Somehow, our present actions will contribute to our future rewards.

I am not saying that you can earn your way to heaven. You cannot. Heaven is a gift from God purchased by the blood of Jesus, but what we experience there will be based on how we react and prepare while here on earth. Set your mind and heart on heaven but realize that the here and now is God's gift to you as well. Remain faithful. Consider Jesus. He came from heaven. He knew He would someday return to heaven. He did not rush the process but stayed connected to the Father and obeyed. We should too.

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Part C:

Equipping

Set Your Own Expectations

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
(Hebrews 12:1)*

Nobody knows what you are really experiencing and struggling with but you. You may not even be able to discern whether the things you are struggling with are real or imagined. I know I was frustrated when the doctors asked me, “Are you seeing or hearing things that aren’t there?” How am **I** supposed to know? The things were there for **me** to see and hear! A little later in my journey, I learned to watch other people’s reactions when I **suspected** I was seeing or hearing something that wasn’t there, so as not to react to it and get myself in trouble.

I believe you can learn to adapt and react in ways that appear normal even during some intense battles. However, I have also found some medications that lighten the battles. I understand that resistance to medication is inherent in the typical bipolar patient. I was no different. Initially, I only swallowed the pill because my husband encouraged me. (I was experiencing much paranoia and was having major trust issues with those in the psych ward, but I was still able to reason that if taking the pill was the wrong thing to do, God would honor it. I was being submissive to my husband.) Years later, I finally relented to daily, consistent medication simply because it was so exhausting to continually be fighting for sanity. For example, this used to be a fairly “typical” morning:

I got out of bed, showered, and got dressed. For most people, that is a pretty simple process, but for me, a lot would go through my mind, for example, “Which shirt should I wear?”

I might have chosen the one that says, “Of course I don’t look busy, I did it right the first time.” There were days I was convinced that I was a re-incarnated Jesus, and this shirt reminded me that nothing more could be done. If the New Testament is accurate, what more could one have wanted from Jesus? He became a man, lived among us, shattered the views of the Pharisees and Sadducees, offered Himself as an atonement for our sins, and made a way for anyone to enjoy fellowship with their Creator. I then had to tell myself: “I am *not* a re-incarnated Jesus. Jesus came one time. He sits with the Father in heaven. This is just a fun T-shirt.”

Or I might have chosen my “Upward” shirt. This shirt always gave me hope.... Would this be the day that the true disciples of Jesus would meet Him in the clouds for something incredible?

My “Onward” shirt was an option, too. The verse on it was Philippians 3:14: *“I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me...”* (NIV). The song “Onward Christian Soldiers” would flash through my mind. I would ponder the intense war I went through each day. I would remind myself that today was a new battle. I would psych myself up by telling myself: “I am not alone. Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world. I shall not fear him who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” (Matthew 28:20, 1 John 4:4; Matthew 10:28)

I also had a patriotic option that said, “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation UNDER GOD, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” I would become distraught because it seemed *any* god would work. However, I was taught that the early settlers who came from overseas were looking for religious freedom—freedom to worship the God of the Bible. Surely the “Greatest Generation” has failed to pass on a legacy of faith to the next generation! My

agitation would grow. My mind would swirl. Nothing was simple, nor was a shirt just a shirt.

I had a few more options, but I think you get the picture. Getting dressed began a spiritual battle of the mind each day. I had actually considered buying several plain shirts to make this process simpler, but I knew my mind could manufacture a crisis from nothing more than the color of the shirt!

The same process then went into my choice of footwear. I had a pair of hiking boots, some nice, white tennis shoes, some black and white “holey” shoes that I should have discarded, and a pair of blue and white shoes manufactured by Dr. Comfort. Can you imagine the thought process I had to go through in picking out my shoes? Paul exhorted us to keep our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace (see Ephesians 6:15). My choice of shoes had to reflect my mood and purpose for the day, too.

See what I mean? I had not even left the bedroom and my mind was whirling. It has been a long time now, largely thanks to my medication, since I have had to exhaust myself just to get dressed in the morning. Now I can spend my energy on something besides fighting *every* thought.

With my disorder, I struggle with the extremes for days—being so tired and exhausted I don't want to get out of bed or being so keyed up I can't sleep—which inevitably leads to a psych ward visit. Staying in bed is a much safer position than the manic side, but both are unwelcome intruders into a truly abundant life.

You must be the one to set expectations that will challenge where you are at in the process of recovery—but do not set them unrealistically, because you will become more discouraged. I have often described setting expectations as learning to ride the waves of my emotional state. You must also learn the side effects of the different medicines available to you and weigh the potential benefits against these side effects. My husband has a much more scientific mind, so he would do most of this. Then I would determine if how a

medicine affected me was worth the benefit. The medical establishment loves to prescribe different medicines—try this one, then this one, etc. Having personally resisted medicine for so long, I have become thankful I found something that helps. Unfortunately, I do not have a terrific solution or good advice for treatment. Doctors are *practicing* medicine because they *do not* have all the answers.

There may be times in your recovery when your goal will be to get out of bed, shower, and get dressed for the day. Your goal might include eating three meals when you do not feel like eating at all. At other times, it may be applying for jobs or exploring volunteer opportunities. Only you know what your goals need to be. The key is to commit yourself to not letting this disease win in your life. It will be extremely hard at times, but we are more than conquerors. You can do it.

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Find a Reason to Live

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.
(1 Corinthians 15:57-58)

You must know what you are fighting for, why every battle is worth winning. I was fighting for my kids. At the time I was diagnosed, my children were 6, 4, and a newborn. This was enough motivation to keep me fighting. Sometimes, it was all that kept me fighting. My kids are grown now, and I think they would be okay without me. Now I fight simply because of stubborn pride—I do not want to lose, and I do not want Satan to win. But I am certain stubborn pride would not have been enough motivation in my earliest, weakest moments.

You do not live in a vacuum. Your life affects the lives of other people. The enemy will twist every available thought to try to convince you that you do not matter. This is another reason to be firmly rooted in your identity in Christ. Your loved ones will be profoundly affected if you choose to take your own life. You are someone's child. You may be someone's spouse, or you may have children. Know that losing a child is the hardest thing a parent ever goes through. Because I had a lot of anger toward my parents, at times I wanted to inflict this pain upon them. I believe my identity in Christ probably saved my life in this regard. Know, too, that if you have a spouse or children, you will leave them with lifelong

scars, no matter their ages. You are a Christian; you know taking your life is wrong, no matter what you feel. Do not give in!

I expect that at some point in your life, you had a dream. Resurrect the dream. Is it even a remote possibility? If yes, break down the steps it will take to make your dream happen. Start today to work toward your dream. Do you think it is unrealistic? Dream anyway, for without a vision, the people perish (see Proverbs 29:18, KJV). And nothing is impossible with God. Be creative and find a purpose. I have never really considered myself a writer, but I felt a deep need to write *this* book. I dream about writing some “fun” books and being able to speak at women’s events. For several years, my only goal was to stay out of the psych ward. Victory is freeing.

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Commit to Love

*And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,
(Philippians 1:9-10)*

Most people think love is a feeling, but it is actually an action you choose to take or not to take. The most valuable thing I have learned concerning love is to ask this question: “What will love look like in this situation?” Under no circumstances would the most loving thing be to take your own life, or even attempt to.

I mention this because I expect you have considered suicide, even if you have never confessed it to anyone. The pain you are experiencing is so great, your mind is not working correctly, and the evil one wants to destroy you—these three reasons are why I expect you have considered it. But there are more appropriate ways to communicate your intense feelings of pain and anger.

Let me briefly address the blame game. It is easy to want to blame all your feelings and actions on the actions of others. When it came to my mental illness, it seemed everyone I encountered had a theory as to why I had a problem. There was a lot of finger pointing, which only made a bad situation worse. The truth of the matter is we just do not know the cause of many mental illnesses. The reality of the situation is that mental illness knows no boundaries. It strikes the rich, the poor, those in stable homes, and of course those whose lives we would already consider chaotic. What I do know is that you and I are responsible before God for our attitudes and actions. We are not in control of other people, nor are they truly in control of us. We have a choice of how we will act and react. I will grant that there are

some instances where we do not truly grasp what we are doing, but others likely know we are out of our minds and will try to get us help. But eventually, we must take responsibility for ourselves; I recommend doing this sooner rather than later.

As for expressing pain, I was taught in college to use “I feel” statements in such a way that I can own my feelings and not accuse other people of being responsible for creating my pain. However, I have found that miscommunication occurs frequently even with “I feel” statements because if the other person is experiencing guilt, they will hear an accusation even when you are not making one. In dealing with relationships, it is best to have your identity fully grounded in what God says about you to the point that your identity is not based upon the need for others’ approval.

Your illness is all about you, but not in a secular, selfish way. It is not about everybody understanding you and your experiences. It is about your relationship with God and how He chooses to mold you. He promises that He will work all of this together for His glory. That statement would have angered me throughout most of my early struggles. However, know that the view from the top of the mountain is beautiful. Keep climbing.

If you are struggling with anger, be honest. The most loving thing may be to stay home and not venture into a situation that could escalate into an explosion. If you are fighting with a spouse, the most loving thing may be to walk away long enough to cool down. The more you emote when you are angry, the deeper the trash pile becomes. In the heat of anger, stop and breathe. Process your feelings. Figure out why you are angry and with whom. I was angry at God for letting this happen to me. From my perspective, I did not deserve it and it was not fair. This seems childish now, but it was my reality, and God wants me to be honest with Him and not try to hide behind a false mask. Sometimes, it is helpful to process your feelings on paper in a journaling format. I know journaling may itself be

scary at times because I experienced much paranoia and it did not feel safe. Just hang on and believe better times are coming.

Maybe your dominant emotion is not anger. It could be sadness, guilt, regret, etc. The key is to process the emotion, confess it, and let Jesus cleanse it. This could be a long process, or you could experience a quick refreshing. No matter how long it takes, your goal should be to get to a point where you can ask yourself, "What is the most loving thing I can do when interacting with others?"

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Embrace Your Condition

*But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness."*

*Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my
weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest
upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content
with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions,
and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am
strong.*

(2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

Once you have your identity securely grounded on what God has to say about you, do not let your diagnosis or misjudgments and stereotypes of others hinder your love for God and others. As you begin to have more victorious days, realize we live amid a broken, hurting world. Most people have been touched by a mental illness. I am convinced you will have opportunity to share your struggles and be a blessing and encouragement to others while at the same time being blessed.

I have found encouragement and resources among strangers when I have been brave enough to share my condition. I felt like mine was a relatively new illness when I was first diagnosed in 1998 because no one seemed to talk about mental illness except in the context of hardened criminals who had committed unthinkable crimes. I remember my discharge conversation with the doctor from my first psych ward visit. He led me to believe that part of the reason I was admitted to the hospital was that the doctors were using my prior behaviors as a measuring rod of what was normal for me. I was behaving in ways that were way out of character. This gave them an indication that something had changed in my brain. My husband was

convinced something was wrong when the Scripture verses he knew I could quote accurately were coming out of my mouth jumbled. This confirmed in his mind that there were chemical malfunctions in my brain that medicine could help.

The medicine does help, and others have been blessed by my seemingly “normal” condition—it gives them hope concerning a relative or friend who is also struggling with mental illness. If God prompts you to reveal your condition in a conversation, do it. Take the risk. There will be a blessing in store for someone.

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You are Not Alone

*“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of
the age.”*

(Matthew 28:20b)

If reading this book does not convince you that what you are experiencing is somewhat common, then I urge you to find and attend a support group. NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) was a group I stumbled across one day as I shared my condition with a stranger.

I remember that the first meeting I attended was in a second-floor room called “The Upper Room.” For someone who struggled with a Messianic complex, this was more than a little unnerving. Then I walked in to find two black large-screen TVs facing the discussion area, and I just knew that there were cameras embedded into the screens to record and broadcast the event. I made some mention of these paranoid thoughts and someone blurted out, “So I’m not the only one who has thoughts like that!” How comforting to find that I was not alone in my distress—and neither are you.

Let me be clear: Your experiences, struggles, and battles will be as unique as you are, but there will be some common threads in the process, too. I felt alone and like no one really understood for over 14 years before I ever attended a NAMI meeting. I have some major philosophical issues with NAMI; however, I realize they filled a void that the Christian community had, up to that point, failed to fill. But here is some good news—there are now two distinctly Christian options growing today: Fresh Hope (<http://www.freshhope.us>) and Grace Alliance (<http://www.mentalhealthgracealliance.org>). Is attending a support group essential to the recovery process? Probably not but know that they exist to encourage and educate you.

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Guard Your Heart and Mind

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17)*

Did you attend church as a child? I used to sing the song “O Be Careful, Little Eyes” with the toddlers in Sunday School. The song warns us to be careful about what we see, what we hear, what we do, where we go, and what we say because God sees and knows.

When my mind broke, I started experiencing everything I had read and seen. If you have not experienced anything like this, be thankful. But if you have some sense of what I am talking about, I hope you have an Aha! moment when I say, “O be careful little eyes what you see! O be careful little ears what you hear!”—not because there is a God in heaven looking to punish your every action, but because do you really want to experience every TV show you’ve ever watched or every song you’ve ever sung? A healthy mind may be able to filter out the crud, but the admonition to think about whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise (see Philippians 4:8) needs to be heeded for your long-term mental health. Turn off the TV, choose your movies very carefully, pay attention to the lyrics you are feeding into your mind. These all have an impact on your mental health. Be a caterpillar that feasts on the holiness of God.

Honestly, I think this is partly why I struggle with what psychiatrists call a “Messiah complex.” I have memorized and meditated on enough Scripture that my mental illness sometimes causes me to think that I am Jesus. During these times, I have learned

to use self-talk to remind myself of the truth: Jesus came *one* time. When He returns, it will be in the clouds and *everyone* will know it. Therefore, this must be an irrational thought. Bring it into submission to the Lordship of Christ. Chill out and act normal.

The extent to which you guard your heart and mind will have a direct impact on your ability to overcome the obstacles with which Satan tries to block your path to recovery. Do your part, and God will be faithful to do His.

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Part D:

Challenge

Love Yourself

*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:
(Ecclesiastes 3:1)*

My life had been so focused on loving and serving God and doing good deeds that I had missed a part of Christ's commandment:

*The second [greatest commandment] is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."
(Mark 12:31)*

This can be extrapolated to mean "love yourself." Really! How can you love your neighbor if you do not know how to love yourself? Elsewhere, the Scriptures assume that we know how to feed and clothe ourselves. However, there were times during my battle that it took all my energy to focus on getting out of bed, taking a shower, getting dressed, and eating at the proper time. So, do not panic if God takes you back to the basics of loving yourself in a way that may humble you. If you need permission to do some things just for you, I am giving it to you. The loving-your-neighbor thing comes only after you know how to properly love yourself.

Loving yourself means making some decisions that you know are in your best interest and may not be popular with others. Are your identity and actions bound by someone else's expectations of you? My pastor was preaching a series on the book of Revelation shortly after I was hospitalized with the feeling that I had lived through the book of Revelation. Being in church during the sermon

was too much for me, so I got in the habit of leaving during the sermon. It was a hard thing to do because few people would affirm this choice—how can not being in the presence of God’s Word be the right thing? All I know is that my memories were fresh and my emotions were raw. It hurt even more to feel that no one understood me, but I still know I made the right decision.

At one point, my mother was seriously ill and in the hospital. I was in the process of moving across the country to begin a new job and was going to be passing through the town where she was in the hospital. Given my emotional unrest due to the move, and historical family triggers related to such a visit, I chose not to stop and see her. By the time I felt confident enough in my mental health to make the visit, she did not want to see me because she was mad that I had not stopped by before. Again, this was a decision only my husband understood, and even though my mother died angry with me, it was still a good decision on my part.

Maybe for you, loving yourself means changing jobs or saying no to social activities that interrupt your sleep routine or provide unnecessary temptations. It may mean saying no to a host of “good” deeds because you need time for rest and renewal. It could also include taking time to exercise, eat healthier, and go outside to get fresh air and sunshine. Do what you can to guard your own mental health.

On every commercial flight I have ever taken, the stewardess gives the spiel about the oxygen masks: *Please secure your own before assisting others or even your child.* Similarly, you must take the time necessary to make sure you are getting the life flow from God before you can think about rescuing and loving others. This is not to say that you must be 100% healthy before you can reach out to others. It does mean, though, that you have permission to take some time for yourself. Self-care is not selfish care—it is a prerequisite for loving others.

For several years, our family attended a church where the pastor instilled this teaching in our mind: “*We do not minister out of need; we minister out of calling.*” The needs are too great for you and me to handle. We must minister out of calling. What is God calling you to do?

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Protect Your Dignity

*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what
does the LORD require of you but to do justice,
and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your
God?
(Micah 6:8)*

Having spent years wrestling with the chaos of a mental illness, it is easy to get discouraged and think nothing will ever change. It feels to me like the system is set up to perpetuate our conditions and steal our freedom, not to bring us to victory. The favorite phrase of those who profit from our illnesses is, “Recovery is a process.” While this may be a true statement, you can learn the rhythm of your moods and adapt accordingly. This is why you must swim against the tide of society and choose to trust in the transforming power of the Creator God. His grace is sufficient! Victory in life will not truly occur until Christ returns or calls you home. But you should still fight right now to protect your dignity.

It is very common in our society to take any opportunity to get something for nothing, whether it is free meds from pharmaceutical companies or free money from the government (by using your condition to file for disability). Know that these are schemes of the enemy to entice you to give up your freedom and independence. The focus of your life can subtly shift from freedom to enslavement. Having a mental condition that is exceedingly difficult to deal with does not change Paul’s admonition that those who are not willing to work should not eat (see 2 Thessalonians 3:10). My situation was such; I never had to accept money from disability insurance or Medicaid to survive during the peak of my illness. I recognize this may not be the case for all my readers, so I will give you the grace

to lean on it for a time. However, make it your goal for this to be a temporary situation. Avoid developing a victim mentality.

I have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and experience bipolar symptoms, but that does not give me permission to refrain from using my God-given talents and abilities to be a blessing to others. Instead, it gives me a platform with which to prove that His grace is sufficient to see me through this affliction.

It is very tempting to let your diagnosis get the best of you. But remember that God created you for good works. Find volunteer work that you can do when you feel up to it. Ephesians 2:10 says, *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”* God has good works for you to do. Resist the idea that no one understands how hard your life is and commit to doing good works. If you give up, you will not accomplish what He prepared for you to do.

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Section 2: Joshua's Journey with Ruth

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Expect Recovery

*“The threshing floors shall be full of grain;
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.*

*I will restore to you the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent among you.
(Joel 2:24-25, bolding by author)*

When our third child, our son, was born, I was a teacher in a rural northwestern state. He was born at home without incident. But over the following weeks leading up to Christmas, Ruth began to experience increasingly bizarre symptoms: paranoia, assigning meaning to events, etc. At one point, I was called from my classroom to answer a call from our midwife, who said that one of our older children had been left with her after Ruth fled in fear after irrationally confronting her. I had no idea where Ruth had gone with our other two children. After collecting our abandoned child, I thankfully found Ruth and the other children safely located in our home. The events Ruth describes in her article at the beginning of this book occurred after this incident and did not happen suddenly. Ruth began sleeping less and acting more and more irrational. I began to sleep with one leg over hers as it was necessary for me to know when she got out of bed. Things gradually built up until after 10 to 14 sleepless nights, she began to hallucinate, and I simply could not function properly as a husband, father, and teacher without finding her help.

Over the years that followed, in Ruth’s most challenging moments, she would again ask me to shoot her. I don’t know that I

have experienced anything more heart-wrenching than these requests, but with God's insights into my wife, I have over time learned to hear them for what they are: statements of the mental anguish she is experiencing and ultimately cries for help and relief from her suffering.

Mental health issues have been a challenge for the Christian community. Some Christians deny the possibility that mental health issues have biological causes. Some attribute all mental health issues to spiritual or demonic forces. Many people who have not experienced mental health issues simply believe they are a weakness of character and that those experiencing these problems just need to get tough and make life happen. Many people suffering from mental illness have even been told that they do not have enough faith. Most Christians are simply uncomfortable with even speaking about mental health issues, as if it is bad press for God.

Ruth and I had been in several of these camps prior to her experiences. Experiencing mental health issues can be overwhelming and will likely modify your view of how the mind works. I was so deeply affected that I changed the subject of the work for my master's degree, from the Christian worldview regarding the history and philosophy of science to how theology impacts how we should be loving those afflicted by mental illness.

As Christians, we do have some extra homework regarding our understanding of mental health issues, as I believe the mind is the interface between the body and the spirit.² There are several passages which speak about this connection. Consider 1 Thessalonians 5:23:

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul

² I recognize some scholars believe the mind/soul is the same as the spirit; however, I believe that part of our likeness to God, being made in His image, is the triune nature. I believe Scriptures such as Mark 12:29-30, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, and Hebrews 4:12 support this view.

*and body be kept blameless at the coming of our
Lord Jesus Christ.
(1 Thessalonians 5:23)*

What we need to understand is we as humans are wonderfully, complexly made and that our body, mind, and spirit all play a part in our well-being. Because these are so closely intertwined, it may be difficult to determine the true cause(s) of the problem. Ruth and I began with prayer and asking the elders to pray over her and anoint her with oil (see James 5:14), yet this did not seem to address her problems. We prayed against demons, yet the symptoms did not go away; neither did they truly manifest themselves as demonic.³

Over time we began to see that Ruth's symptoms ebbed and flowed with her monthly cycle, and this is what ultimately convinced me that a major portion of her struggle was tied to the physical chemistry of her body. I believe there were also environmental/nurture issues and spiritual issues at play, yet medications helped bring her symptoms under control so that she could be obedient to Paul's admonition:

*We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion
raised against the knowledge of God, and take
every thought captive to obey Christ,
being ready to punish every disobedience, when
your obedience is complete.
(2 Corinthians 10:5-6)*

What Recovery Is Not

Initially, we expected Ruth's diagnosis of postpartum psychosis to go away and for life to return to normal. But her symptoms remained, and the doctors relabeled her condition as bipolar

³ Appendix B addresses a process regarding discernment of the source/cause and treatment of mental illness.

disorder. The extended family and I continued to look for ways to fix Ruth; meanwhile, Ruth's experiences continued to be real to her and she was not certain she wanted to be fixed. All of us needed to change our expectations of what recovery was going to look like.

Over time, Ruth and I came to understand that turning back the clock on her condition was not an option. Life would likely never be as it was before, and we came to understand God intends for something better to come of the suffering He allows in our lives, to make us better people, to help us better love others.

What Recovery Is

When I was about 38 years old, I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and initially controlled it with diet and exercise. Some would say I was cured, yet, if I deviated from my regimen of diet and exercise, my blood sugars would disagree. If I overdosed on black jellybeans (my addiction of choice), my blood sugar would spike. If I failed to exercise regularly, my blood sugars would run high all the time. Over time, I have come to need oral medication in addition to diet and exercise. I continue to have the condition, diabetes, yet I manage the condition to keep it under control.

Mental illnesses seem to be similar in that they are conditions that need to be managed. Similarly, managing a mental illness does not mean that life returns to its previous "normal." Instead, your loved one and those around him or her will be required to adopt a new normal over time.

This may require dietary changes; it will more than likely require medication. Medication is a difficult topic, especially among Christians. Doctors and researchers do not fully understand how psychotropic medications work, nor why they work for some people and not for others. Just to complicate things, each medication has its own unique side effects that must be weighed against its effectiveness.

Because of environmental/nurture issues, counseling or therapy may be helpful or necessary for a season or possibly indefinitely.

Family members may also need to be involved with therapy in order to support the recovery of their loved one, and perhaps support for themselves as they respond and react to the behavior of their afflicted loved one.

My point is this: recovery is not a cure. The healing of a mind is not like the healing of a broken bone. More often, the healing of a mind from biochemical problems is about management and learning to live with changes.

What Should We Be Looking For?

I believe our goal is the support and encouragement of those who are suffering from mental illness to:

1. See our afflicted loved ones accept responsibility for managing their own condition if possible. This may not be possible for some with extreme cases of conditions like severe schizophrenia, yet our loved ones need to take ownership of this portion of their lives. This may be difficult to watch; in the early years, I found Ruth resented my attempts to control and fix her (we still struggle with this at times). After three trips to the psychiatric ward, she stepped up and decided to handle her medication and condition herself (though I am her #1 cheerleader, and I am proud of how well she does manage it). At the time of this writing, it has been more than 16 years since her last hospitalization.
2. Encourage them to participate as best they can in the family, community, and workplace. What this looks like depends on the individual, the nature of the condition, the severity of the condition, their season in life, etc. It is important that the dignity of our loved one is protected, and one of the ways we can do this is to encourage them to aspire to be the person they are called to be and to fulfill their place in life.

Our loved ones need us to come alongside them, to go through the experience with them as best we can. We need to help, support, and encourage. At times, we may need to step in to keep them from

hurting themselves or someone else. However, **our most common and true role is to love them sacrificially**—not to enable their problems, but to build them up, that they may become more like Jesus.

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Know Your Identity

*So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right,
evil lies close at hand.*

*For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,
but I see in my members another law waging war
against the law of my mind
and making me captive to the law of sin
that dwells in my members.*

Wretched man that I am!

Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God

through Jesus Christ our Lord!

*So then, I myself serve the law of God
with my mind,*

but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

(Romans 7:21-25, bolding by author)

Ruth and I met at a Christian seminary, in a youth counseling course. We were quickly drawn to one another because of our mutual love for Jesus and a willingness to at least be open to whatever and wherever His teachings led. Our wedding included a worship service with hymns and choruses, multiple passages of Scripture shared by family and friends, exhortations from the officiating minister and his wife, as well as a dedicated time of prayer and blessing. Because of our mutual commitment to put Jesus first, we spent the first eight years of marriage attempting to put Him at the forefront of our lives, together. When children came along (starting in year two), we naturally made a point of giving them meaningful, Biblically related

names. Our daughters came first. After the birth of our third child, our son, our life became turbulent and troubled.

At the time, I was considering a vocational change, the nature of which induced emotional stress upon Ruth that I did not anticipate or properly detect. I believe that this stress, combined with the hormonal changes that come with having a male child, pushed her beyond what her physical brain was capable of properly enduring. She began to exhibit symptoms of paranoia and loss of sleep over 14 days, which led to or induced hallucinations. These delusions took on a manifestation that appeared spiritual because of our deeply religious background and the amount of Scripture she had memorized as a child. Her mind simply worked with what it had stored over the years.

Suddenly, within just a month or two, the woman I had married seemed to change into someone I did not know. Over the next few years, Ruth began to question almost everything about our faith and beliefs. I found myself fielding both basic and advanced questions about our faith, often repeatedly answering the same issues and questions. During the next 8 years, I felt as if I had to maintain the faith for the entire family, especially for Ruth. Over the first few months, which grew into several years, both of our personalities were deeply affected and even changed. These eight years were extremely hard on our relationship, and we sometimes refer to this period as our marital “hell.”

The Identity of the Afflicted Beloved

Understanding that we are made in God’s image and just what that means is crucial in learning to accept and adopt a new “normal” as we embrace how our loved ones are struggling with challenges to their mental well-being.

It is important to remember that *who* your loved one is has not changed. Their behaviors and thought processes may have changed, yet the person has not truly changed. This will be challenging for all parties involved to understand and believe. As a society, even as

Christians, we tend to define a person by their actions, yet a person is far more than simply a sum of what they do. People who experience a stroke are still the same person, even if their physically damaged brain prevents them from speaking or using their limbs properly. They are still the same person inside their skull, their head. In a similar manner, those who are afflicted with a mental illness are struggling with physical problems within their brain that affect how they may behave, perhaps radically. Yet they remain intrinsically the same person.

During some of Ruth's most maniac and psychotic times, I managed to listen to her when others would not. What I heard surprised me. Most of those around us thought she was just speaking nonsense. However, if one would take the time to concentrate and truly listen, it was possible to follow her thought processes, as patterns of thought were still present. Though often disjointed, and in many cases faulty, they could still be followed. And they reflected the woman I had married years ago, though often distorted by her condition.

As humans, we are not simply electro-chemical machines. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, as shared by David in the Psalms:

*For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully
made.*

(Psalm 139:13-14a)

We are more than a pile of chemicals mixed with water. We are more than the sum of our environment and patterns of habit. We are made in the image of God to reflect who He is, and this is what gives each of us value.

Ruth has compiled a series of 13 Scripture verses to help us understand who we are as bearers of the image of God, who we are

as followers of Christ. While directed toward and intended for those suffering from mental health issues, they are applicable to all of us. I would encourage you, whether you are afflicted or love someone who is, to spend time reading, studying, and meditating on these verses.

As one who loves someone who is afflicted, I sometimes struggle with *defining* Ruth by her condition. This is wrong, just as it is wrong to *define* someone as being diabetic. In both cases, these people have conditions which need to be managed. They will experience successes and failures. As those who love them, we are called to come alongside them, hold them, encourage them, mourn with them, and rejoice with them. In all things we are called to be Jesus to them. And in time, as they learn to manage their condition well, we all learn to adopt a new normal. In the process, we all become more like Jesus.

In all my years with Ruth, coming beside her and learning to live with and manage her condition, I have learned what she needed most was for me to continue loving her as Jesus loved the Church. I have found joy in this, and the difficult journey has deepened our love in ways that we could not have experienced otherwise. While I would never choose the path the Lord has led us down, I do not regret staying with her through the worst of the journey, and I look forward to us making it to eternity together.

The Identity of the Spouse (Or Loved One) of the Afflicted

Initially, a mental health diagnosis is a frightening, even terrifying, experience. How it is accepted, handled, and managed determines much about the success of the relationships we have with one another. When Ruth was first diagnosed with a bipolar condition in the 1990s, we read that marriages with a bipolar diagnosis were estimated to have about a 25% survival rate at best. As noted earlier, this had dropped to less than 10% by 2003. More than 9 in 10 marriages in which a spouse has a bipolar diagnosis fail. A mental

health diagnosis often seems to define not only the afflicted person, but the spouse and even the family as everyone seeks to adjust.

Just as your loved one is *not* defined by their condition, neither are you, though at times it will seem like you are. Your loved one may need extra sleep to control their condition. This may change the way you spend your evenings, your times of intimacy (in and out of the bedroom), and how childcare and your children's events are handled and attended. As one who loves someone afflicted with a mental health diagnosis, it is important and critical that you care for yourself, as well as for your loved one and the rest of the family. As flight attendants often state: *"When the oxygen mask drops down, secure your own mask before helping children and other passengers."* If you are incapacitated because you did not care for yourself, you can no longer help anyone else.

*And he [Jesus] said to him,
"You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind.
This is the great and first commandment.
**And a second is like it:
You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**
On these two commandments depend all the
Law and the Prophets."
(Matthew 22:37-40, bolding by author)*

Remember that you will need respite, rest, even time away. I remember times, especially in the early days of Ruth's diagnosis, when people around us would send me away, by myself, to find rest. I would spend a night or two in a cabin at a campground or a motel room in a nearby town, just to find moments of rest by myself. Initially, this was exceedingly difficult, as I felt responsible for making sure Ruth and the children were properly cared for. I had to trust those who were helping care for my family. Ultimately, I had to learn to trust Ruth again, as she learned to manage her condition.

I needed these times to simply remember who I was before God, to find my rest in Him. You will need these times as well. Find something that you can do that can help take your mind off “your” problems. I built hope chests for both of our daughters. Ruth and I coached Upward basketball teams. Ruth gave me the opportunity to earn my pilot’s license, a lifelong dream. The point is to find opportunities small and large to continue fulfilling who God has made you and called you to be. Find and remember those things you enjoyed both individually and together.

Keep your lives as normal as possible. Often, living with someone struggling with these conditions can be very intense. You need to remember to trust God, as living life with anyone is not a sprint that is done quickly. Life, and loving those around us, is a rewarding marathon. Find ways to enjoy the journey and find your rest with God.

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Set Your Own Expectations

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.
(2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

As one who loves someone afflicted with a mental illness, I had many challenges of my own as we adjusted to Ruth's condition. My initial reaction was to attempt to control the situation, to control Ruth's behavior, medication, and condition and attempt to return to our "normal," pre-diagnosis lives.

Ruth came to resent my attempts to control her and her condition. In time, I recognized my inability to do what only God could do and that I was called to love Ruth "in sickness and in health," whether she returned to her previous "self" or not. This was overwhelming until I humbled myself and submitted myself to God and the situation.

Once I trusted God and submitted myself to the situation of Ruth's illness, our marriage improved, though it did not return to what we had experienced before. Instead, our relationship has become deeper and stronger than ever before. This did not come easily. I had to release my expectations: expectations of how life would unfold after we were married, expectations of what my wife would be like and how she would behave.

Instead, I could submit myself to God and ask Him to change me, to make me more like Jesus, to love, encourage, and support the wife He had given me. One of my new roles in life was the renewed, revamped role of supporting Ruth by helping her to meet her expectations for managing her condition. In her corresponding chapter, she shares quite descriptively some of her mental struggles. She goes on to describe the need to set expectations for overcoming those struggles. This does not come all at once but takes consistent effort and time. Overcoming the struggles requires being filled by the Spirit of God, and I have been called to come alongside her in these struggles.

Dealing with the Unreal

As caregivers and family members of those with mental health conditions, we need to process our grief over the loss of what we once had in our relationships with the afflicted people. We also need to accept our loved ones for who they are and who they have become. This has been one of the most difficult challenges of my life.

Our loved ones wrestle continually with thoughts and emotions which may not seem real to us. They may encounter hallucinations, thoughts, and emotions which are very real to them, yet to the outside observer are clearly imaginary. Put yourself in their position: imagine that what you see is not seen by others, that what you hear is not heard by others. Imagine the inability to motivate yourself because of biologically based depression. Such an experience would leave you feeling very isolated and betrayed.⁴

During the first few years, Ruth experienced these feelings. Shortly after Ruth's initial diagnosis and due to my inability to care

⁴ I highly recommend the 2001 movie *A Beautiful Mind*. I appreciate its perspective on trying to understand what our loved ones are experiencing and why it is so difficult to convince them that what they are seeing/hearing may not be real. It also gave me hope that a relatively "normal" life might be possible. *A Beautiful Mind*. IMDb, IMDb.com, 4 Jan. 2001, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0268978/>.

for her and the children, I released Ruth and our children into the care of her family while I completed a teaching contract. Well-meaning relatives continued to attempt to control her behavior, force her to take medication, and participate in therapy. After completing my contract, I rejoined Ruth and the children and began rebuilding our relationship. I learned that while I must not deny that she was experiencing hallucinations, I still needed to respect her as my wife and fellow-heir in the gospel. Learning to walk this path was difficult and often put me at odds with her family.

Yet I have no regrets in honoring and respecting Ruth as a woman made in the image of God and as my wife. I spent many hours talking her through her hallucinations and misconceptions. I do not mean to pretend that my amateur talk therapy was sufficient or that it replaced medication. What I did was provide her with support and give her the opportunity to share what she was experiencing. Sometimes she only needed to vocalize her erroneous thoughts to understand it was a hallucination. Yet medication was necessary to give *her* the ability to manage *her* condition.

Dealing with Medication

Is Medication Effective?

Let me begin by reminding the reader that I am not an authority on mental health or medication used for mental health. I am at best an authority on my experience with Ruth and her affliction. This disclaimer stated, I need to address the effects of medication, both good and bad. Based on my experience with Ruth, I have the following recommendations to you as a caregiver and supporter of your loved one.

Be patient, both with the medication and with your loved one. Many medications take time to be effective, and unfortunately a specific medication may not work the same way for everyone. The first medication may not work as expected or the side effects may not be tolerated well, and it may be necessary to try multiple

medications. This will likely be very difficult for your loved one—they may even feel like they are being treated as a guinea pig.

However, if your loved one is truly dealing with a physical condition, medication will help and, in many cases, prove effective in providing relief from the symptoms and easing the struggles they face.

Side Effects

Unfortunately, the medications your loved one might take will have side effects, side effects which can affect their health and even their relationship with you. Be patient with both your loved one and the process of finding the best medication for them. Like every advertisement for medication states, the possible side effects are numerous, yet some happen more consistently.

Weight gain is among the most common side effects. Unfortunately, this is considered one of the more tolerable side effects, yet it can have wide-ranging health effects, including type 2-diabetes and other conditions. Weight gain has been a struggle for Ruth from the beginning, affecting her self-image. Some medications have proven less problematic than others, and finding a tolerable combination is important.

Diminished sex drive is another common side effect. As a spouse, it is important to recognize that what may seem like rejection of intimate advances is likely not an outright rejection, but a result of the medication. Your loved one might not recognize this side effect either. This may manifest itself in difficult and awkward ways. During our 8-year period of marital hell, Ruth told me multiple times that sex is evil. In hindsight, I do not believe she, nor I, were fully aware of the medication's contribution to this attitude. In time, we worked through these issues, but they were extremely difficult as we went through them.

I cannot attempt to address all of the possible side effects of psychiatric medication. Instead, my goal is to share an awareness of the possibilities and give you hope that a combination of medications

will provide relief from some or most symptoms. Yet it is important to note this relief will come at a price. And as a spouse or loved one of the afflicted, it is essential that we anticipate these possible side effects and come alongside our loved one as adjustments are made. I cannot state this strongly enough: **Keep the lines of communication open and always assume the best**, rather than the worst, during these times of conflict and transition.

Medication-Resistant Patients

One of the most difficult struggles Ruth and I faced was Ruth's resistance to taking the necessary medication to treat her symptoms. The first few years after her initial diagnosis were the hardest in this respect. Because the symptoms she experienced were in her mind, it was exceedingly difficult to convince her they were not real; this was a struggle of perception, of individual "realities." Initially, I felt attempted to compel her compliance (extended family members participated in this as well), and in response, Ruth pushed back and resisted taking her medication. In time, I came to realize that Ruth needed to be responsible for managing her condition and that I was only called to come alongside her and encourage her to do so. God changed me, and in time our relationship improved as a result.

Ruth's eventual compliance with medication largely came in response to her aversion to being admitted to psychiatric wards. Her motivation for years was to be available to our children, to be well enough to be the best mother she could be to them. Yet ultimately, Ruth had to make the decision to manage her own care and find her own motivations. Your loved one will need to do the same.

Supporting Your Loved One

If you have ever prayed for patience, God may have answered your prayer through the affliction of your loved one. Patience may be the most important quality you will need to support your afflicted loved one as they adjust to the diagnosis, treatment, and management of their condition. It is your calling to support him or her. You play a crucial role in their ability to successfully manage their condition.

You will need to be patient during those times when sleep seems to overwhelm them and you feel as though you are carrying your entire household on your shoulders. Remember, sleep may be a side effect of the medication (or the condition). Or if your loved one is manic, it may be that their medication is not effective, not that they are deliberately attempting to create chaos in your home. I recall one unnecessary trip to the psych ward when Ruth's regular doctor was unavailable, and the emergency room doctor prescribed an antidepressant rather than an antipsychotic. This cost Ruth a 96-hour hold, an ambulance ride to the psych ward, and hundreds of dollars in bills.

As your loved one struggles with taking every thought captive and adjusting to the changes in medication, the various side effects and the impacts of this on the family, remember your vow to love and cherish "in sickness and in health." Be there as Aaron and Hur were there to hold Moses' hands up during battle (see Exodus 17). This will pass, and your relationship will become stronger, better. Hold on.

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Find a Reason to Live

*Two are better than one,
because they have a good reward for their toil.
For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow.
But woe to him who is alone when he falls
and has not another to lift him up!
Again, if two lie together, they keep warm,
but how can one keep warm alone?
And though a man might prevail
against one who is alone,
two will withstand him—
a threefold cord is not quickly broken.
(Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)*

Ruth and I included the passage above on our wedding invitations and in the wedding service. In fact, the Greek form of the word “threefold” is *entriton*, which we had inscribed on our wedding bands. The wisdom of this passage has encouraged us over the years during difficult times. During these times, one of us would carry us through, then the other would pick up where the other left off, like a team of draft horses pulling a load. As much as we depend on one another, it is that concept of a “threefold cord” which has carried us through the years. Without the presence and support of the Lord as the third part of our “cord,” our marriage would not have survived. With this in mind, I consider the ideas that Ruth shared in her corresponding chapter.

Ruth refers to her struggle with thoughts of suicide. This was very pronounced in the early years after her diagnosis and was terrifying from the outside looking in. In time, I came to understand

this as the only way she knew to communicate the magnitude of the emotional pain she was experiencing. I gradually learned to read her well enough to understand she was not a danger to herself or others. **HOWEVER**, I **NEVER** took her statements lightly, and **NEVER** ignored them. Together, we worked to get her (and us) through those times, seeking outside help, even hospitalization when necessary. This type of experience will be among the most challenging you may have and will even be scary at times. Yet there is no higher calling than being there when your spouse and family need you.

As healing comes, your loved one will need to find their reason for living, for carrying on when it seems too difficult, when they are tired of the medication and its side effects, etc. For Ruth, our children were her motivation, and I came alongside her as best I could to help her in this.

Find Your Own Purpose

As you care for your loved one and your family, the dailiness of your efforts and the intensity of maintaining your relationships make it very difficult to keep a proper perspective. It is important to see the big picture. It is very likely your situation will change, even improve, as you and your loved one learn to adapt and manage. Somehow, you need to look beyond the urgent events of the present and see where you might be in 5, 10, even 15 years.

Your children will grow up and leave your home. Remember to equip them for life beyond the home. Disciple them to be followers of Jesus who love people of all kinds, with all kinds of needs. Teach them to learn for themselves, that they might be able to adapt and thrive in any situation or environment in which they find themselves. Remember to inform them about their parent's condition and prepare them for the possibility that they or a sibling may manifest a similar condition (statistics indicate biological children of those with mental illness have a 25% chance of developing a similar condition).

If you are staying home with your children, consider how your life will change as they begin leaving home for college or to start

their own families. You need to think ahead about possibly reentering the workforce. This was and is difficult for me, as Ruth handled her condition better when working outside the home, and frankly made better money than I could. So, I became the “domestic educator” and “household steward,” i.e., I was a stay-at-home dad and homeschooled the children. After a 10-to-12-year absence from the workforce, I found it nearly impossible to reenter. I had not maintained my teaching certification and gained little to no experience that contributed to my resume during this time.

So even as your loved one needs a reason to go on, so do you. Look beyond the moment, see the BIG picture, call out to God for a vision of something better, and follow Him in it.

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Commit to Love

*Now before the Feast of the Passover,
when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart
out of this world to the Father, **having loved his own
who were in the world, he loved them to the end.**
(John 13:1, bolding by author)*

Honoring Your Covenant

Love is not simply an emotion; it is truly a choice followed by actions leading to emotional responses. Too often we try to reverse this process. As a result, we complain of “losing that loving feeling.” If you are married to the afflicted one, or the afflicted one in your life is a child, you have made a covenantal commitment, a promise, that you will do what is best for them regardless of the cost. You have committed to love your spouse “...for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.” Mental illness falls into the “in sickness” category. Whether we anticipated this or not, we committed to love our spouse, or our child, regardless of the difficulties we encounter in our journey with them.

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is
wasting away, our inner self is being renewed
day by day. **For this light momentary affliction**
is preparing for us **an eternal weight of glory
beyond all comparison**, as we look not to the
things that are seen but to the things that are
unseen. For the things that are seen are
transient, but the things that are unseen are
eternal.
(2 Corinthians 4:16-18, bolding by author)*

Remember, what may seem like insurmountable problems pale in comparison with our eternal prospects. The love we display for those who are suffering reflects God's glory, increasing in glory as the difficulties grow.

Honoring Your Loved One

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.
(1 Peter 3:7)

In the heat of the moment, it may seem like all we can do is simply get through the latest difficulty. Yet we need to see our loved one as being made in God's image, a fellow-heir of the grace of life. They deserve our respect, even during those times of disagreement and conflict, even when they have seemingly lost contact with reality. Honor them because they are made in God's image, and this reason alone is enough to justify honoring and respecting them.

Coming Alongside

As you come alongside your loved one, I want to give a word of warning: make sure to find your identity and security in Jesus and the sacrifice He made for you. I repeatedly heard how Ruth's love for the children is what motivated her to continue living, and I rejoiced in this, yet I personally struggled to hear I was never included in the list of loved ones for whom she lived. It took a *long* time to experience healing in my own soul, as well as in our relationship, before I realized Ruth was *not* saying she that she did not love me. During these times, I had to find my worth and purpose in my Savior, and it was only in doing so that I was able to continue.

Our circumstances did not begin to change until I submitted myself to loving Ruth whether she changed or not. By God's grace

and mercy, things turned around for us—not all at once, but God provided the strength and love I needed to extend to Ruth during the difficult times. As I did, she continued to improve, and our relationship did as well. I cannot promise that you will experience what we have; however, I know that God will provide you with what you need to love your spouse or family member.

Asking for Help (Or Setting Your Pride Aside)

Fairly early in the diagnosis process, Ruth suggested the problems in our relationship resided in me, my personality, and the baggage I brought into the relationship. This was deeply frustrating, and as anyone who has lived in such circumstances for any length of time does, I began to question my own sanity. In response, I sought out professional counseling, qualified to provide therapy and quantifiable testing to help identify any problems I was bringing into the relationship. Through these services I found the support I needed during a very difficult period of adjustment. I found reassurance that I was sane and that I had very good reasons for struggling with adjustments to Ruth's condition.

Swallow your pride and reach out for private counseling. To care for your spouse and any children you may have, you need to make sure you are healthy physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. As we are integrated body, mind, and soul, when one part of us suffers, the other aspects of our nature are likely to suffer, especially over long periods of time. If sought early enough, counseling can help prevent the need for medications to treat symptoms of stress that manifest themselves physically, such as migraine headaches, a compromised immune system, etc.

Your marriage and/or relationships will fray at the edges, even to the breaking point, if you do not maintain, protect, and even repair them. Seek wise counsel, even professional counseling as necessary.

Finally, carefully, with wisdom and discernment, through prayer, seek out a Christian couple who can and will support and mentor you and your afflicted loved one through these rough waters.

Do not go through this alone as an individual or as a couple. If you cannot find someone in your church, consider looking for someone in another church. They do not need to have been where you have been, but they do need a deep and abiding relationship with the Lord, with the ability to listen first and counsel only when asked.

Ask for help and take care of yourself so you can care for others. Remember, we are Jesus to our loved ones, loving them to the end, for God's glory. Stay the course.

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Embrace Their Condition

But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

(2 Timothy 1:12b-14)

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

(Romans 1:16-17)

Assuming you and your loved one know, love, and believe in Jesus the Anointed One, you have salvation, and not even a mental illness will separate either of you from Him. This illness is not a surprise to the Father in Heaven. He has perfect confidence that the salvation He offers through Jesus is sufficient to cover your sins, and His power is more than sufficient to help you overcome the difficulties that you face. Your struggle does not bring shame to Him; NO! It gives Him glory as you overcome your weaknesses through His strength.

Honoring Your Loved One

Ruth has said I am “painfully transparent.” Initially, this may seem like a positive trait: transparency and honesty. Yet I have had to learn discretion. There were times when I was open about Ruth’s condition before she was comfortable sharing with others, even before she was willing to accept her condition. There were times I spoke out of turn and created relational issues, trust issues which took time and effort on my part to heal. We have learned (and continue to learn) to communicate our thoughts and feelings with one another before we share with others. We have learned what the other is comfortable sharing. Over time, I have learned how to respect Ruth and her feelings, and to effectively share our story at the right time.

Sharing with Others

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

(2 Corinthians 1:3–7, bold by author)

As we came to accept Ruth's condition as a couple, we became more open to sharing our struggles with others, hoping they might find encouragement in knowing that we have survived and even thrived over time, working together. We have shared in public settings and one-on-one. We have received feedback at times as we have shared during Upward basketball halftime testimonies, learning how much it means for others to hear that there is hope.

The important thing is to not isolate yourself from others. Others are suffering, and even if not from the same things, they can benefit from hearing how God is working in our lives. Share as you and your loved one are able.

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You are NOT Alone

*But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, **while Aaron and Hur held up his hands**, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.
(Exodus 17:12, bolding by author)*

In Exodus 17, Joshua led a battle against the Amalekites, and he was successful when Moses held his staff overhead. As the battle proceeded, Moses' arms tired, so Aaron and Hur came alongside him to hold up his arms. On and off the field of battle, a team effort is required.

Living with and loving someone with a mental illness, we can sometimes feel like Moses supporting Joshua. As we tire and grow weary, we need trusted comrades to step up and give us aid. The Lord will provide as we have need, yet we should remember we and our loved ones are members of the Body of Christ (the Church), and even if we do not advertise our situation, the Body of Christ suffers when we suffer. It benefits both the Body of Christ and our families to be proactive in seeking help. Aaron and Hur were already present with Moses when they were needed, and they stepped up.

Your closest source of support will be family and church members. These people are your first line of defense, yet they will likely lack the specific knowledge, skills, and experience to address the needs of you and your spouse. Ideally, your pastor will have some training in this field; likely he will be able to give support and knowledgeable referrals, however pastors seldom have specific training to give clinical or therapeutic counsel for mental health

issues. If your pastor does not support your need for outside medical advice or is adamantly opposed to the use of medication, I would encourage you to seek a Biblical pastor who will support the management of your loved one's condition.

Finding Local Support

*But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. **If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.***

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

(1 Corinthians 12:24b–27, bolding by author)

Once, not so long ago, mental health and mental illness were not openly spoken of and finding support was difficult. While not stigma free now, support is more available than ever. There are numerous books on the subject, mostly secular firsthand biographies and clinical non-fiction, though there is a growing number of books in the Christian media about these issues (see Appendix C for those we have found helpful). As Ruth has mentioned, the National Alliance on Mental Illness has filled a void which the Christian community has been slow to address. However, in the last twenty years, groups and resources have been established which support the mentally ill with a Biblical worldview. There may be support groups in your area, and if not, you may want to consider starting or hosting a support group at your church or another location. These support groups are not intended as a substitute for professional care, but instead are intended to be a source of mutual support among peers in similar situations who can relate to your journey, who become one another's Aaron and Hur.

As mentioned by Ruth, two such support groups we have encountered and recommend are Fresh Hope and Grace Alliance. Fresh Hope seems to be more structured and has more accountability. Grace Alliance seems to be less expensive, more curriculum driven, and more flexible. Both offer virtual support videos via YouTube.

Finding Virtual Support

For various reasons, you may want to investigate virtual support options. You may be in a remote or rural location and unable to meet face-to-face with others who have the same journey and struggles. At the time of this writing, the world is experiencing the 2020 coronavirus outbreak and meeting in person has been discouraged for health reasons. Regardless of the reason, you may need to explore your online options. If you are not up to hosting your own Zoom, Facebook, or other virtual meeting, both Fresh Hope and Grace Alliance offer ways to meet virtually with others.

A Word of Warning

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.
(Hebrews 13:4)

Take care when finding support. In the early years of Ruth's diagnosis, I was part of an online support group. It was not unusual to read about two supporting caregivers becoming emotionally entangled, divorcing their mentally ill spouses, and marrying each other. Now, I do not wish to judge these individuals; however, I believe we need to learn a lesson from this. As we seek help, we need to predetermine that we will remain faithful to our loved one, both emotionally and physically, for we will be tempted as we share with others, particularly with those of the opposite sex, the shared struggles we face. This may create a sense of acceptance and

intimacy that we may not be finding in our spouse. Beware, be aware and be prepared. Be faithful to the vows you made before God to your spouse.

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Guard Your Heart and Mind

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

(Philippians 4:8–9)

Lifestyle Modifications

One of the most challenging modifications to my life after Ruth's diagnosis was changing my media consumption, especially when in Ruth's presence. Prior to her diagnosis, I had enjoyed science fiction books and movies, however simple exposure to them were troubling to her, especially when she was experiencing a psychotic episode. Over time, we eliminated the things in our lives which were triggers for her and found things which soothed her. In some cases, we eliminated things we should already have discerned as inappropriate; in other cases, we eliminated things which might have been acceptable, but simply served as a trigger for Ruth. For example, we eliminated my VHS collection of early Star Trek movies given to me by my mother (yes, this dates me). I let go of them because I valued Ruth more than the entertainment I received from them.

We found some audiobooks were okay and others were not. I found that I could attend some movies with her (initially these were few and far between), and for others I might need to find a buddy if I really wanted to see them with someone. In time, we learned to

communicate about these things, and as she learned to manage her condition, her tolerance levels increased. We can now listen to mystery novels, which she might not have been able to tolerate soon after her diagnosis, or even during sensitive times of the year.

Sensitive times of the year might include Daylight Saving Time changes. Ruth was sharing with her doctor once about the struggles she was having, and the doctor remarked, “Oh, most of my patients are struggling right now because of the switch to/from Daylight Saving Time.” So be proactive and communicate if you anticipate an event that might trigger an episode.

Consider family events and other special gatherings. Some events may have too much stimulation in the form of lights, music, noise, and smells. Be sensitive to your loved one if they indicate they need to leave; try not to blame them, but instead encourage them for trying to manage their condition. Be especially sensitive to events such as funerals as these carry extra emotional significance and impact for relationships.

Frankly, family relationships can be among the most intense triggers simply because of the desire to please and be loved. Other family members may struggle to understand why their relationship with the afflicted person is a trigger. Worse, they may think their solution to an issue or to your loved one’s condition is the best and may fail to understand why you or your loved one cannot accept *their* solution.

Leading the Way

As the person closest to your afflicted loved one, you have a difficult role to maintain. You may need to be your loved one’s advocate, protector, counselor, caregiver, or restrainer, possibly all at one time. Whatever role you find yourself in, always, always, ALWAYS communicate your love AND respect for your loved one. You may not approve of their behavior in a given moment, but *always* treat them with the love and dignity they deserve simply because they are made in God’s image. If they are in an especially

vulnerable state, be proactive by being the buffer, managing the schedule and responsibilities as if they were home sick with the flu. You may need to step up and be a firewall between your loved one and other family members and possibly medical personnel, as you may be the one with the clearest understanding of what is going on. Remember to treat others with respect as you seek to provide the best care for your loved one. They may have the best of intentions; however, you are the one living day in and day out with your loved one. Listen and make informed decisions, but ultimately you and your loved one need to act in unity.

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Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

*And he [Jesus] said to him,
“You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart and with all your soul and with all
your mind.*

*This is the great and first commandment.
And a second is like it: You shall love your
neighbor as yourself.*

*On these two commandments depend all the Law
and the Prophets.”*

(Matthew 22:37-40, bolding by author)

Mental illness, like other illnesses, can be debilitating at times. When you are depressed, simply getting out of bed may be a success. Perhaps, if you are struggling with PTSD, not cowering in a closet during a fireworks display may be a success. When you are manic or psychotic, taking medication may be the success, when the euphoria of thinking so quickly is intoxicating.

Your loved one may face truly debilitating struggles that from the outside seem so minor, but to them these tasks/behaviors seem insurmountable. At these times, your role is not to chastise, but to encourage and protect, to give them the opportunity to overcome. Listen to your loved one. Do not give in to whining, but be sensitive to their legitimate concerns. Come alongside them, be positive, and reward their successes with words of praise or perhaps a backrub, quality time, or whatever speaks to their love language.

Once again, be willing to be a buffer between them and the world while they are in their weakened state. Do not enable them in bad behavior or habits, but help them heal and manage their condition.

Supporting When Others Do Not

Ruth shared that certain Scripture passages were triggers for her. Initially, I was uncomfortable and self-conscious when she left a service because a passage bothered her. As I came to better understand her motives and trust her to manage her condition, I wholeheartedly supported her. Our congregation came to expect this, some even supported her in this, and eventually most congregants came to a point of accepting this.

I remember times of family conflict when I went “toe-to-toe” with extended family members about Ruth’s treatment. More than once, others thought she needed to be hospitalized, and I supported her, even ran interference, so she could recover at home. Ruth’s psych ward experiences traumatized her enough that the mere thought of going back motivated her to take care of herself, to manage her medication and condition. During these times, my goal was to provide a loving, quiet environment. I was her firewall against the world during the times when she was mentally and emotionally fragile. Over the years, we have become convinced that our marriage survived, by God’s grace, partially because I was a buffer during those times.

Becoming Something More Than You Are

By nature, my personality is not forceful. I am not naturally a bulldozer type person. Yet because of circumstances affecting my wife’s condition, I have had to step up in several situations to provide protection in relationships where I did not before. Over the years, God has used these situations to shape my personality and abilities. It has not changed who I am internally, though it has shaped my ability to address the difficult situations I encounter, not only in our relationship, but also as an employee, a teacher, and a pastor.

Early in our relationship (and even now), I have depended on Ruth’s financial skills. However, during the first year after she was diagnosed, I had to step up and address financial concerns that I had not needed to handle before (and thankfully not much since). While

your loved one adjusts to the diagnosis, medications, and new means of managing their condition, you will likely need to pick up some of the slack. It may seem unfair, yet your loved one and the rest of the family need you to help. You will grow, and hopefully as your loved one heals, they will be able to return to their previous “duties,” or perhaps you will both renegotiate responsibilities.

As you support your loved one, ask the questions:

“If I were in their place, what would I need to be successful?”

“Would what I am thinking of doing be a blessing?”

“Would this be embarrassing or discouraging?”

Be proactive, yet be quick to listen and respond to what they share. The very act of sharing their thoughts and feelings can feel dangerous to them. Therefore, when they do share their thoughts, **LISTEN VERY CAREFULLY**. They are demonstrating their trust and that needs to be honored.

The most important thing you can do to help your loved one is to “...love the Lord your God with all your heart...” (Matthew 22:37). You cannot do this in your own strength; allow God to step in and do it through you. When you reach the end of your strength, and seemingly that of God’s, allow God to work through those around you. **DO NOT** isolate yourself or your loved one; seek out those who understand and can provide the support you need.

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Preserve Their Dignity

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

(2 Thessalonians 3:6-12)

We live in a day and age when productivity and wealth define the value of a person. Sports figures, celebrities, and business tycoons are “worth” millions or billions. At the bottom of that scale, trash men and dog catchers work for peanuts. Modern philosopher Peter Sanger and others express that people only have value based on what they can produce and the nebulous “quality of life” they can have. It might seem like the apostle Paul is suggesting the same;

however, Paul is not addressing the value of a person here, but idleness.

In Genesis 1-3, we learn that we are “created in the image of God”. We are made in His likeness, to reflect His likeness in our lives. He gave instructions that Adam (Mankind) was to have dominion over the earth, a stewardship, a job, a purpose. To be productive is hardwired into our nature. Further, as believers we are each given gifts, not for our own benefit, but to bless others (see 1 Corinthians 12-14).

Our loved ones may not be capable of everything they were before their diagnosis. Yet most, if not all of them, are capable of something. We should encourage them to do what they can, for the Glory of God and the blessing of others. By God’s grace and mercy, Ruth has, by all appearances, “fully” recovered (though we both know she is simply managing her condition very well). Ruth is a fully functional member of our society, yet this is a by-product of being made in the image of God and does NOT define her value. Has she always been able to function at this level? No, but over time things have gotten better. This will not be the case for everyone, yet everyone can do something for others. Everyone can display the image and the glory of God in their lives in some way.

Everyone, your loved one among them, is made in the image of God and therefore has inherent dignity. It is because of this inherent dignity that we love them and care for them. Each of us, loving one another as the body of Christ, declares the glory of God.

In Matthew 25, Jesus shared parables about the Kingdom of Heaven, one of which was the “Parable of Talents”:

*“For it will be like a man going on a journey,
who called his servants and entrusted to them
his property.
To one he gave five talents [an amount of
money],*

*to another two, to another one, to each
according to his ability.*

Then he went away.

*He who had received the five talents went at
once and traded with them, and he made five
talents more.*

*So also he who had the two talents made two
talents more.*

*But he who had received the one talent went and
dug in the ground and hid his master's money.*

*Now after a long time the master of those
servants came*

and settled accounts with them.

*And he who had received the five talents came
forward,*

bringing five talents more, saying,

*'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I
have made five talents more.'*

His master said to him,

'Well done, good and faithful servant.

***You have been faithful over a little; I will set
you over much.***

Enter into the joy of your master.'

*And he also who had the two talents came
forward, saying,*

*'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I
have made two talents more.'*

His master said to him,

'Well done, good and faithful servant.

***You have been faithful over a little; I will set
you over much.***

Enter into the joy of your master.'

(Matthew 25:14–23, bold by author)

The master addresses each servant in turn, the first two who produced more and a third who simply hid money given him. Here is a cautionary note, however; I did not quote what happened to the third servant, the one who buried his talent. He was punished. This is not to say that salvation is won or lost by our good works. I deliberately left this out as most struggling with mental illness are

already struggling with feelings of condemnation. However, we are called to be faithful with what we are given, and we will be rewarded accordingly when Jesus returns.

The master (Jesus) never chastised those with fewer talents [a Greek monetary unit, though we can also understand this to be the actual talents we have been given as well] for having fewer talents. The master praised those who used the talents He had given them, for producing more, for the master's kingdom. With each he said, "*Well done, good and faithful servant.*" Each did what they could with what they were given.

I am indebted to Richard Baxter for opening my eyes to this passage in relation to those with mental illness. Those with mental illness may not have been given "five talents" of abilities; perhaps they were only given "two talents" of abilities, whether those abilities are creativity or labor or financial. Our loved ones are called to use the talents they are given, not to use talents they were not given. Let us encourage them to do what they can.

The master also said, "*You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much.*" Someday when this life is over, our loved ones will be freed of their present suffering and given more by which they will be able to continue glorifying our God. The master closed with two of the three servants, "*Enter into the joy of your master.*" The goal of every believer is to be in the very presence of God; we are promised this by the salvation we have through Jesus. As faithful servants, we will enter into the *JOY* of our master. He will find pleasure in our presence with Him. We have so much to anticipate with our God.

In closing, let us come alongside our suffering loved ones, encouraging them to run the race we have been given. Let us see them as who they are, redeemed sinners who are made in God's image, who are given gifts and talents to glorify God and bless others. Let us help them to use the gifts that God has given them, giving glory to Jesus, and looking for His soon return.

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Conclusion: Ruth's Parting Words

Well, we are nearing the end of this journey and I want to conclude by reminding you that our hope is in Jesus and His power to transform our lives. We may feel darkness and depression, but God is still at work. Continue to root your identity in who God says you are. There are a lot of voices in our head vying for our attention, and the more we tell ourselves the truth, the better off we will be. I identified some strategies for finding some victory over the condition you are facing: setting your own expectations, finding a reason to live, committing to love, and embracing your condition by listening to the Holy Spirit, Who will tell you when to share your condition with others. I reminded you that although your condition is unique, you are not the only one who ever faced these obstacles, and I exhorted you to guard your heart and mind so as to minimize your struggles. Finally, I challenged you to love your neighbors and protect your dignity by doing good works.

I started this book by sharing with you that one of the benefits of reading this book would be that you would realize you were not the only one to face these struggles. I would love to hear from you and a bit of your story and victories. You may reach out to me at Victory@RuthEleos.com.

While I, in my pride, suggest that I am victorious over this condition, a recent setback reminded me that victory is a gift from God and not something to boast about—it is His grace that is sufficient. So, in closing, I want to share with you a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier, which was read by my school's valedictorian during my high school graduation ceremony in 1983. I could not remember all of it while I was fighting this disease, but the paraphrase I had in my head reminded me that I would never know how close to victory I was if I quit.

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Don't Quit

When things go wrong as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
 When care is pressing you down a bit,
 Rest if you must, but don't you quit.
Life is strange with its twists and turns
 As every one of us sometimes learns
 And many a failure comes about
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up though the pace seems slow—
 You may succeed with another blow.
 Success is failure turned inside out—
 The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell just how close you are,
 It may be near when it seems so far;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit—
It's when things seem worst that you must not quit.

This poem is in the public domain.

Appendix A: *How to Become a Christian*

(Appendix A has been taken from page 667 of *The Baptist Hymnal*, Convention Press, 1991. *Items in italics have been added or modified by the authors.*)

A Christian is a follower of Jesus Christ, has a growing relationship with Him, tries to obey Him in all things, and draws on His strength to help with problems.

God made us for Himself and our souls are restless until they find rest in Him. Only God can fill the void in your life. The answer to your search is accepting Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of your life. To become a Christian, you need to know these basic facts from the Bible:

1. **God loves you.** Because of God's love for all persons, He desires that you have unbroken fellowship with Him. (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4-5)
2. **You are a sinner.** All persons are sinners in that they disobey God. Sin is choosing to go your own way and do your own thing as opposed to being obedient to God. (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:10)
3. **Sin separates you from God.** Sin forms a barrier that prevents you from entering into unbroken fellowship with God, who is holy. As an unholy sinner, you cannot have fellowship with God. You are headed for a Christ-less eternity that the Bible calls hell. (Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:23)
4. **You cannot save yourself.** People often think that through their efforts they can overcome the sin barrier between themselves and God. That is not true. There is nothing you can do to restore the broken relationship with God. You cannot earn God's salvation. (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; Romans 4:4-5)
5. **God sent His son Jesus to remove the sin barrier.** The death on the cross of Jesus Christ, God's Son, removed the sin barrier

between you and God. Jesus died for your sins, taking your punishment on Himself. God did for you in Jesus Christ what you could not do for yourself. (1 Peter 2:24; Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21)

6. **You can receive Jesus Christ through faith.** Faith is trusting in what Jesus has done for you rather than trusting your own efforts to restore fellowship with God. Faith is complete reliance on Christ to put you in right relationship with God, allowing Him to live His life through you. Faith also involves repentance: genuine sorrow for sin and willingness to turn away from sin. (John 14:6; Acts 16:31; Romans 10:9-10)
7. **Through prayer, you can trust in Jesus Christ.** Admit to God that you are a sinner. Express sorrow or repentance for your sinfulness. Ask Him to forgive your sins. Invite Jesus into your life as Savior and Lord. Thank Him for entering your life. Commit yourself to live for Him. (Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13)
8. ***Be obedient by following Christ in baptism.*** *Accepting Christ is only the beginning. You will need to unite with a church,⁵ make a public profession of your faith, and experience the putting on of Christ through water baptism.* (Acts 2:38; 1 John 5:3; Galatians 3:27; Hebrews 10:24)

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⁵ If you don't know of or can't find a Biblical church, reach out to us at church@findusfaithful.net, and we'll try to help you find one.

Appendix B: *Mental Illness and Demonic Possession*

What role does demonic activity play in mental illness?

When we search the ESV New Testament for the terms “unclean spirit(s),” “evil spirit(s)” and “demon(s),”⁶ we find approximately 134 instances of these terms, which refer to some kind of direct or implied interaction (generally an accusation) between a demon and a person. The three terms are used interchangeably, sometimes within the same verse. We are not concerned with every instance, but only with those that relate to the influence and/or possession of a person, as this could hold critical information for how we should view mental illness and mental health. Thus, in examining these passages we can make the following general observations:

- 1) In examining a list of illnesses, diseases, and lameness in the Bible, demonic influence or possession is simply one of several causes of such conditions.⁷
- 2) Manifestations of demonic activity seem to be limited to deafness, muteness, blindness,⁸ convulsions,⁹ and/or rational evil behavior (rational in the sense that the demon can converse with Jesus and others) which overwhelms the afflicted via one or many demons/spirits.¹⁰

⁶ References to Satan and “the devil” are generally in reference to the person/entity himself. There are some instances in which Jesus addresses Peter as Satan, and the exact meaning of this is debatable. There are references to Satan entering Judas. As a fallen angelic being, Satan would exhibit the same qualities as other demons. However, as a created being, Satan is not omnipresent. Therefore, most references to Satan in reference to believers in general are better understood as representative of all demonic influences. Further discussion on Satan and “the devil” is of little value to our discussion.

⁷ Matthew 4:24; 8:16; 10:1,8; Mark 1:34; 6:13; Luke 6:18; 7:21; 8:2; 9:1; Acts 8:7; 19:12.

⁸ Matthew 12:22; Mark 9:25; Luke 11:14.

⁹ Luke 9:42.

¹⁰ Matthew 8:28ff; Mark 5; Luke 4:338:2,27-39; Acts 19:13.

- 3) Biblically, madness only appears to be associated with demonic activity when it involves making accusations against Jesus.¹¹

Sorting Out Mental Illness and Demonic Activity

In short, madness and demonic activity appear to be distinct afflictions, though they may manifest similarities. Because of this, it is necessary to seek a means of distinguishing between the two. One excellent set of “diagnostic” criteria can be found in expanded form in *Strength for His People* by Steven Waterhouse, where he suggests the following list:¹²

1. **Attraction versus Aversion to Religion [Christ]:** Attraction to Christ seems to indicate mental illness rather than demonic activity. Demonic activity is generally averse to anything associated with Jesus the Christ.
2. **Irrational Speech versus Rational Speech:** Irrational speech is generally representative of a mental condition. ‘Rational’ speech (though not normal) may be representative of demonic influences.
3. **Ordinary Learning versus Supernatural Knowledge:** Knowledge of things outside the individual’s direct observation, experience or training may be an indication of demonic activity.
4. **Normal versus Occultic Phenomena:** Those with mental illness do not/cannot exhibit extra-ordinary abilities such as extra-ordinary strength, etc.
5. **The Claim to be Possessed:** Those who generally make that claim to be possessed are not.
6. **The Effects of Therapy**
 - a. If the condition is responsive to prayer, not likely a medical condition, not mental illness.
 - b. If medication alleviates the symptoms, the condition is likely a medical condition.

¹¹ John 8:48.

¹² Waterhouse 1994, 107-112.

This list is intended as a guideline to assist those caring for the mentally infirmed, not as a medical or spiritual diagnostic tool. Often, those caring for the afflicted are initially in a confusing crisis and assurance regarding what they are actually dealing with is invaluable. As we wrestled with my wife's initial behavior and diagnosis, this list proved to be immensely helpful to me, Joshua.

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Appendix C: Recommended Resources

Support Groups

Fresh Hope for Mental Health. <https://www.freshhope.us/our-story/>

“Support Groups, Coaching & Learning Community”

Fresh Hope seems to be modeled loosely on Celebration for Recovery. Groups are facilitated and are separated into those with diagnoses, the family, and teens. There are numerous resources to explore.

Grace Alliance, Healthy Solutions for Your Mind.

<https://mentalhealthgracealliance.org/the-team>

“The Grace Alliance cultivates healthy solutions for hearts and minds through simple, innovative biblical truths, scientific research and practical tools.”

Grace Alliance primarily provides curriculum with which to organize autonomous Grace Groups at local churches. Groups provide community and support to help individuals, marriages, and families. Curriculum is also available for teens.

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

<https://www.nami.org/Home>

NAMI is “the nation’s largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.”

NAMI is a secular organization and may be helpful if support cannot be found through Christian or church sources. Given the nature of mental health issues, we believe it is especially important to seek out godly support and counsel. However, if such cannot be located in your area, NAMI may be able to help get you on your feet.

Print Resources

Allender, Dan B., and Larry Crabb. *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse*. NavPress, 2018.

The Wounded Heart was recommended reading during some of Ruth's counseling. The book is aimed at helping those who have suffered sexual abuse as a child to deal with "the psychological effects and theological foundations for healing". As Ruth's husband and a pastor, Joshua found reading The Wounded Heart very helpful and enlightening. Allender acknowledges the harm done by the abuse, yet he encourages victims to be honest about what happened, to repent of their own sinful thoughts that are in response to the abuse, and to love boldly. Joshua found this helpful in addressing hurts caused from other sources than sexual abuse. The principles shared are true regardless of the source of hurt, we are all called to honesty, repentance and love.

Baxter, Richard, and Michael S. Lundy. *Depression, Anxiety, and the Christian Life: Practical Wisdom from Richard Baxter*. Crossway, 2018.

Depression, Anxiety, and the Christian Life is wisdom from Puritan Pastor, Richard Baxter (1615-1691). His godly wisdom about depression is very compassionate and true. Lundy and J.I. Packer bring his words to us afresh.

Carson, D.A. *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering & Evil*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1990.

While it does not specifically address mental health issues, this is the best work Joshua has read on suffering and the Christian walk. D.A. Carson says, "It is, first of all, a book written by a Christian to help other Christians think about suffering and evil."

Chapman, Gary D. *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate*. Northfield Pub., 2005. *Misunderstandings often occur in relationships. The Five Love Languages helps us understand that each of us receive love*

which may be different from our spouse. Healthy relationships are the result of learning to speak the love language of our spouse, and communicate when we are not feeling loved. The Five Love Languages was very helpful not only in our relationship but in our family as well.

Cheney, Terri. *Manic: A Memoir*. New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008.

This book is a transparent, adult read about Cheney's experiences as someone with bipolar disorder. While the descriptions are not graphic, they can be descriptive enough to be disturbing. This is definitely NOT a Christian work; however, it gives insights into the bipolar experience. Read with caution.

Cloud, Henry, and John Sims Townsend. *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, When to Say No, to Take Control of Your Life*. Zondervan, 2017.

Living the Christian life can be challenging, especially as we interact with important people in our lives. Boundaries helps to biblically address how to love the people around us while setting appropriate boundaries in our lives with loved ones, extended family and others. Learning to set appropriate boundaries enables us to fulfill our role as disciples and engage those around us in a loving and meaningful way.

Eggerichs, Emerson. *Love & Respect: The Love She Most Desires, the Respect He Desperately Needs*. Thomas Nelson, 2004.

Love & Respect is aimed at getting couples out of the "Crazy Cycle" of using disrespect and unloving actions in unfruitful attempts to get what husbands and wives want and need. Using Ephesians 5, Dr. Eggerichs instead encourages couples to live in the "Energizing Cycle" of giving respect that husbands and the love that wives need. This book is helpful to any married couple but was especially helpful as we wrestled with the "Crazy Cycle" and the bipolar diagnosis together.

Eleos, Ruth. "Mental Illness: An Insider's Journey." *Lookout Magazine*, October 25, 2015: 6-7.

<https://lookoutmag.com/2015/mental-illness-an-insiders-journey/>.

This is Ruth's first published article about her first episode, and her discussion about how the Church can help those struggling with mental illness.

Greene-McCreight, Kathryn. *Darkness is My Only Companion: A Christian Response to Mental Illness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015.

Darkness is My Only Companion is the only first-hand, Christian treatment of mood disorders we have found to date. It is laid out in three sections: in the first, Greene-McCreight shares her experiences as one who suffers from mood disorders; in the second, she attempts to address theological issues associated with mood disorders; lastly, she attempts to share practical help and advice in dealing with mental health. While we differ theologically from Greene-McCreight (she is quite liberal), we might have benefited more if this book had been available earlier in our experiences.

Haycock, Dean A. *The Everything Health Guide to Adult Bipolar Disorder: A Reassuring Guide for Patients and Families*. Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2010.

We recently picked this book up at a garage sale in hopes it would help us write our book. It is a secular work intended to provide lay people with information about bipolar disorder. Topics include causes of bipolar, common side effects of medications, alternative methods of treatment, mania, and other disorders. This is a helpful guide to beginning one's treatment journey.

Hessamfar, Elahe. *In the Fellowship of His Suffering: A Theological Interpretation of Mental Illness—A Focus on "Schizophrenia"*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014.

Joshua purchased this as an e-book for his extended research paper for his master's degree. Hessamfar examines mental illness with special emphasis on schizophrenia. While not denying the possible usefulness of medication in treatment and management of mental illness, Hessamfar explores the impact that community has by way of influence in causing mental illness, and likewise in the treatment of mental illness. This was a particularly interesting read exploring alternative treatment methods, especially in Europe. However, this is not what I would call an easy read, as it reads more like a research paper than a how-to manual.

Jamison, Kay Redfield. *An Unquiet Mind: A Memoir of Moods and Madness*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995.

Jamison is a professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and suffers from bipolar disorder. An Unquiet Mind is an insightful clinical read as well as an autobiographical treatment of her experiences. Joshua found this particularly helpful in understanding Ruth's condition and its treatment. It is well worth reading.

Marano, Hara Estroff. "Managing Bipolar Disorder." *Psychology Today*. November 1, 2003.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200311/managing-bipolar-disorder>.

Penner, Clifford, and Joyce Penner. *Restoring the Pleasure*. Word Pub., 1993.

One of the most challenging complications we experienced as a husband and wife was regarding marital intimacy. Side effects of medication complicated this further. Restoring the Pleasure is intended for couples in general, and we found the principles found it to helpful and resolving some of our issues. (This is a very frank book, and discretion is advised).

Stanford, Matthew S. *Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Illness*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012.

Grace for the Afflicted is an excellent attempt to address implications of neurological and physiological research with our understanding of Scripture and Theology, specifically in regard to mental illnesses. One of the benefits of Grace for the Afflicted is the ability to relate the physical basis for the mental conditions of which he speaks. Stanford then broaches the issue of, "How do we help those who are afflicted?" Joshua would recommend this resource to any pastor, counselor or interested lay leader.

Waterhouse, Steven. *Strength for His People: A Ministry for Families of the Mentally Ill*. Amarillo, TX: Westcliff Bible Church, 1994.

This was one of the few Christian resources I could find on mental illness in the 1990s. Waterhouse addresses the issues of psychology from the perspective of a pastor who grew up with a brother suffering from schizophrenia. While Waterhouse intended this work to be a practical help to those who have family members suffering from mental illness and those who minister to them, his book also indirectly serves to help clarify theological categories for such conditions. Most helpful to Joshua personally has been his approach of answering the question, "How can we integrate our understanding of schizophrenia into a Biblical system?" The chapter on "Differentiation of Schizophrenia from Demon Influence" was of particular help (see Appendix B). While not an exhaustive academic work, it is VERY practical and understandable on a layman's level.

Whybrow, Peter C. *A Mood Apart: A Thinker's Guide to Emotion and Its Disorders*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1997.

A Mood Apart is intended to give lay readers a knowledgeable understanding of mood disorders. It is a secular, clinical book with case studies to help humanize the people with the conditions. Joshua has found this well-written book to be quite helpful in learning about mood disorders and about how much researchers know and do not know.

Media Resources

Howard, Ron, dir. *A Beautiful Mind: The Story of John Forbes Nash, Jr.* Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2001. DVD. *Ruth identified with John Nash's story. Joshua found this movie and the autobiographies listed above to be among the most enlightening things he encountered, helping him to understand and relate to Ruth.*

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About the Authors

Joshua and Ruth Eleos met at seminary in the late 1980s after earning their degrees in physics and accounting, respectively. They married in 1990 with a desire to serve the Lord together and pioneer a Christian family. Due to postpartum psychosis and bipolar disorder, Ruth spent several years as the accountant of her parents' family business while Joshua homeschooled their three children.

Presently, Ruth serves uses her training in an organization serving missionaries, helping to advance the Gospel. Having developed a heart for world missions, Ruth loves having the opportunity to interact and pray with missionaries.

Joshua has served as a high school math and science teacher and as a pastor, having earned his master's degree in theology.

Joshua and Ruth also enjoy providing hospitality to friends and "strangers," and to their children & grandchildren.

Joshua and Ruth are available to speak at your event. For details, visit <http://findusfaithful.net/wp/events/>.

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