

Jesus came to heal the sick. It therefore behooves us to expect there to be emotionally disregulated/mentally ill among us in our congregations. In this workshop, we will discuss:

1. How to distinguish between personality quirks from emotional/mental illness in someone.
2. How to come alongside someone in emotional distress without adding to their stress.
3. Procurement of resources in our community to aide congregants in distress.
4. How to set healthy boundaries when interacting with this population.
5. Provision of self-care when we interact with this population.

1. Distinguishing between personality quirks from emotional/mental illness in someone

- We all have personality quirks and idiosyncrasies: I'm spatially OCD; someone might be a perfectionist; I place priority of food over fellowship; someone likes to read encyclopedia for fun...
- We also all have some proclivity toward some diagnosis, but we are not diagnosed with one unless we fit all the criteria: some are socially awkward and exhibit Asperger like traits ~ Needing to adhere to rigid schedule or routine; having a hard time to keep eye contact; avoid unstructured social interactions, etc...
- Usually, an emotionally/mentally ill person exhibits pretty obvious behaviors/symptoms, i.e.: if one's emotions gets extremely heightened over a period of several days and then crashes and is bed-ridden depressed for the next days; one appears to be hearing and/or seeing voices or people that are not there.
- To be emotionally/mentally ill, one'd need to fit certain number of criteria for a particular illness/diagnosis.

2. How to come alongside someone in emotional distress without adding to their stress

- When a person is Psychotic = Not being in touch with reality ~ it's because our present reality is too harsh for the person. So she "comes up" with another brand of reality in order to cope.
- It would be helpful then, to not try to "bring" the psychotic person into our reality, as it could trigger a mental breakdown (Example of working with a deeply depressed senior to get her to talk about her tremendous losses which sent her to the hospital each time).
- Instead, we can validate the person's experience and feelings: *The analogy of the Blind Folds and the Elephant.*
- Everyone wants to be: Seen, Heard, Understood, Accepted and Loved.
- We can Listen to the person and don't be quick to give advice.
- We validate the person's experience and feeling through "JOINING" ~ "Joining" the person's brand of reality so s/he doesn't feel out of sorts: over-stimulated, jarred, traumatized, alienated.
- "JOINING" means that we join the emotions/feelings, while we don't have to be in agreement with the statements.

Examples of Joining:

A. **Jessy** is afraid to get together with people and has been isolating herself and feeling isolated. I was encouraging her to open up to others. She tells me that her in-laws have loose lips and repeats the things she told them in confidence, to her husband; her mother has chronic major depression while her sister has schizophrenia.

Jessy: I'm afraid to have contact with people. Everyone has problems and I already have plenty problems myself. It's just so hard to then have to deal with their problems if I was to have to interact with them.

Me: Why would you want to spend time with more people when the people you have contact with, all have problems?

B. **Yvonne** cried over how spiritually lost her siblings are...

Me: It is hard to just stand there and helplessly watch your siblings go through what they're going through.

Yvonne: It would be simpler just to walk away.

Me: It would be simpler!

- Use Ministry of Presence ~ just be fully present with the person emotionally and spiritually.
- Taking on the role of the Holy Spirit, Who convicts us but does not condemn us: 2 Corinthians 7:10 ~ "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." So, act as the Holy Spirit acts with us – gentle, accepting and loving, Who taps our shoulders for us to see our own blind spots once in a blue moon...
- After validating the congregant of their experience and feelings, ask, "How can I help?" (Contact Function = Wait until the person verbalize what they'd like from us, instead of jumping in to fix the person).
- Manage Expectations of the congregant by setting limits on what s/he is asking for, by saying, "No," graciously.

3. Procurement of resources in our community to aide congregants in distress.

- Obtain list of mental health and social service agencies that can help a person to obtain therapy, a psychiatrist, Day Hospital, Sheltered Workshop, volunteer opportunities to keep a person productive and occupied. Resources like PALM Directory, Mental Health Programs in NYS~ <http://bi.omh.ny.gov/bridges/directory>
- Whenever a person is suicidal, 911 needs to be called so family and friends don't have the burden to keep a person alive: The three markers of a serious suicidal threat vs attention seeking: 1) There's a plan; 2) There's access/means to accomplish the plan; 3) A specific time has been set.

- Mobile Crisis Units can be called to have crisis mental health professionals go to the person's home to assess what's going on.
- Know your local psychiatric hospitals and be ready to accompany someone to get themselves admitted.

4. How to set healthy boundaries when interacting with this population

- Don't be an Enabler/Co-Dependent in the form of a rescuer/savior by:
 - Establishing healthy boundaries in allowing the person to *experience natural consequence* of their behaviors.
- Be mindful of *Compassion Fatigue* and be aware of *Vicarious Traumatization* without becoming bitter or calloused.
- We're no good to ourselves nor to others if we became resentful or we are burnt out.
- "At all cost, avoid resentment"
 - Do only what you can and are willing to do.
 - Do not be a doormat and resent the person or yourself later.
 - Know that you have limits. Ask God to help expand your limits, but do not do so when it might lead you to resentment.
- To offset Burnt-Out, ask God to give you the willingness to be willing to help in spiritually, mentally and emotionally healthy and effective ways.

5. Provision of self-care when we interact with this population

- Take time to take care of yourself, physically, emotionally, mentally, interpersonally, nutritionally, including spending time with God on a daily basis.
- Make sure you have someone there *for you* – whether it be your discipler and/or your prayer partner/spiritual journey partner.
- Surround yourself with mutual friends who are supportive, accepting, who demonstrate unconditional love and grace toward you.
- Take time out for yourself to do what nourishes your spirit, soul and body, on a regular basis, including the keeping of a weekly Sabbath, and consider going for Analysis (long term therapy where the Analyst/Therapist is there to nurture you emotionally and mentally on your life's journey) so you can continually be aware and work through your personal issues in order to separate your issues from those whom you're ministering to.
- The "Ten Things I Like to Do By Myself and For Myself" List. The goal is to be able to do all ten every two weeks...