

WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

# WORSHIP RESOURCES



Christ and Abbot Mena, Egypt 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Century

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,  
and I will give you rest.*

*Matthew 11:28*

10 OCTOBER 2012

## Introduction

Because of the many ways in which Christian faith communities worship God each week, it is inappropriate (not to say almost impossible) to provide service outlines that will suffice for every context. We hope, therefore, it is helpful if we offer a variety of resources, some of which might meet the needs of your own particular context.

The publication *Promoting mental health: A resource for spiritual and pastoral care*<sup>1</sup> suggests that:

‘Worship on the theme of mental health can be organised at any time of the year. Many faith communities plan events to coincide with *World Mental Health Day*, which takes place on October 10<sup>th</sup> each year.

When planning a service, try to:

- Involve those with personal experience of using mental health services and/or carers in the planning of worship and encourage them to share ideas for theme and content.
- Encourage service user participation in the service e.g. playing, singing, reading, prayers, drama, particularly of their own composition.
- Invite a user or carer to preach the sermon.
- Try to have someone speak at the service about his or her own experience. This could take the form of an interview.’

In the Department of Spiritual and Pastoral Care, we share these aspirations but, at the same time, recognise that this is not always possible. There is a stigma attached to much mental illness that precludes those who experience the effects from talking publicly about it. But since liturgy and worship have a pastoral heart, World Mental Health Day offers a particularly appropriate occasion in which faith communities can open their arms in response to the challenging question in St Matthew’s Gospel:

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’

And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’

World Mental Health Day offers us all the opportunity to ask ourselves searching questions about the nature of mental illness, to break down the barriers that are so often erected for our protection and to search for the image of God that Christians claim to see in all people. Through the ritual elements of worship - reading God’s word and breaking it open and, if it is your tradition, in the breaking of bread for the healing of all - we hope it will be possible for you to find fresh meaning in the area of mental illness.

This year, we have included some additional resources that offer reflections and prayers that touch on the subject of communication in distress. Please feel free to use these resources as you require. An acknowledgement in your service sheet or during your worship would be appreciated.

# A selection of readings from the Bible

## Old Testament Readings

*"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.*

Isaiah 54:10

The first reading considers the general theme of mental health, identifying how the stresses of everyday life can be alleviated by effective coping mechanisms.

### 1 Samuel 16: 14-23

*Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, 'See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skilful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better.' So Saul said to his servants, 'Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me.' One of the young men answered, 'I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skilful in playing, a man of valour, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him.' So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, 'Send me your son David who is with the sheep.' Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armour-bearer. Saul sent to Jesse, saying, 'Let David remain in my service, for he has found favour in my sight.' And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.*

### Notes on the reading

It's always dangerous to try and interpret, through modern eyes, descriptions that originate in a pre-scientific era. But we can conclude that Saul was a much-troubled man, beset by suspicion, sometimes bordering on the paranoid. For instance, he reacts violently to his feelings of jealousy when his young harpist, David, seems to be gaining in public affection at his expense. He certainly has a depressive aspect to his character that comes to the fore on a number of recorded occasions.

Although few of us resort to Saul's violence, many of the emotions that he experiences are ones with which we can identify. They are the stuff of the human condition. Most of us can manage them in such a way that our ability to function remains relatively unaffected. But when they become so intense or prolonged that we become emotionally paralysed, even the simplest of tasks is too much to contemplate and we experience mental distress.

Saul's response to these symptoms lies in the soothing effect of music, something that can often lift a bleak mood or quieten an agitated one. It is not an answer *per se* to his problems, but it is an effective coping strategy; and strategies for dealing with the vicissitudes of life are something that we all need.

This passage paints an all too human picture of human exhaustion in the aftermath of enormous physical and emotional effort, the effect it can have on our mental health, and how we might effectively deal restoratively with it.

### 1 Kings 19: 4-13

*But Elijah himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, 'Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.' He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.*

*Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'*

*He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'*

### Notes on the reading

It is worth noting the context of this reading. Elijah has just taken on the prophets of Baal and in a show of strength demonstrated the power of the God of Israel. However this has left him feeling exhausted and he escapes into the wilderness. At the beginning of this passage 'he asked that he might die'. In our language we might observe that he feels suicidal.

We are all used to feelings of anti-climax after a big occasion and perhaps we can empathise with Elijah here. However, maybe this reaction is a little more extreme. It is certainly familiar to people who have bi-polar disorders also known as manic depression. In human terms, Elijah isolates himself, and his self-care suffers. This is also what people in an acute phase of mental illness do. This is not to suggest that Elijah is mentally ill, but to explain that mental illness is only an exaggeration of what we all think and feel at times.

God comes and ministers to Elijah. Notice that he eats properly and takes some exercise; he also rests. These are all very necessary when the stresses and strains of life get us down. It also means that we are able to give ourselves the time and space in which to hear the voice of God which comes in the stillness and not in the whirlwind.

When, as a means of communication, words fail to make an impact, other forms of communication are called for. The prophet Ezekiel found this to be the case and resorted to an ingenious way of trying to get his point across to a sceptical audience.

### **Ezekiel 12: 1-12**

*The word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, you are living in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, who have ears to hear but do not hear; for they are a rebellious house. Therefore, mortal, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage, and go into exile by day in their sight; you shall go like an exile from your place to another place in their sight. Perhaps they will understand, though they are a rebellious house. You shall bring out your baggage by day in their sight, as baggage for exile; and you shall go out yourself at evening in their sight, as those do who go into exile. Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry the baggage through it. In their sight you shall lift the baggage on your shoulder, and carry it out in the dark; you shall cover your face, so that you may not see the land; for I have made you a sign for the house of Israel.*

*I did just as I was commanded. I brought out my baggage by day, as baggage for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my own hands; I brought it out in the dark, carrying it on my shoulder in their sight.*

*In the morning the word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?' Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: This oracle concerns the prince in Jerusalem and all the house of Israel in it.' Say, 'I am a sign for you: as I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall go into exile, into captivity.' And the prince who is among them shall lift his baggage on his shoulder in the dark, and shall go out; he shall dig through the wall and carry it through; he shall cover his face, so that he may not see the land with his eyes.*

### **Notes on the reading**

Most of the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures are proclaimed through the use of words, often very eloquently. However, despite their force and focus, we read that they often go unheeded, invariably because the subject of the communication is troubling and challenging.

So it is with Ezekiel, in the judgments about which he prophesies, during the first half of the book that bears his name. However, despite the dire consequences of Judah's disobedience to which he points, his powerful communications fall on deaf ears. So he has to adopt another approach.

His chosen tactic is to dramatise what he is trying to say. In full view of the bewildered observers, in the heat of the day, he takes his bags and walks off into the distance, returning towards dusk. After sunset, he does the same thing, only this time with the added theatrical detail of digging his way through one of the city walls.

'Acting out' is a phrase that is often used to signify behaviour that we consider to be somewhat disparaging. In fact, this is far from being the case. When other more conventional means of communication fail, often the only available response is a behavioural one. For those living with mental ill-health, words can invariably be inadequate. They do not serve to communicate the depth of feelings effectively enough or the sense of how chaotic life seems. Other, more dramatic, options are required.

Ironically, despite Ezekiel's theatrical rendering, the people of Jerusalem still didn't understand the point he was trying to get across. Perhaps, like us sometimes, they too had made a judgment about the prophet's state of mind and decided to ignore his curious behaviour. They would come to regret it!

## Psalms

Psalms are prayers of the people of God. They express almost every possible human experience and emotion in the poems, laments and prayers addressed to God. Grief, loss and anger, depression and loneliness, pain and guilt, and much more, are to be found in this treasure-store of ancient writings. They speak of the emotional responses to life's encounters.

Both the acute and chronic experiences of these emotions can lead to a significant deterioration in our mental health. Acknowledging the feelings, naming and working through them (the process described in many of the psalms) can lead towards acceptance, hope and trust, both in ourselves and others.

### Psalm 23

- 1 *The Lord is my shepherd;  
therefore can I lack nothing.*
- 2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures  
and leads me beside still waters.*
- 3 *He shall refresh my soul  
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for  
his name's sake.*
- 4 *Though I walk through the valley of the shadow  
of death, I will fear no evil;  
for you are with me; your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.*
- 5 *You spreadst a table before me in the presence  
of those who trouble me;  
you have anointed my head with oil and my cup  
shall be full.*
- 6 *Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow  
me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

### Notes on the Psalm

This is perhaps the most well-known of all the psalms. It speaks clearly to the vicissitudes of life, which we all experience at some points in time. When we pray it with those who experience chronic mental ill-health, phrases such as 'green pastures', 'still waters' and 'the valley of the shadow of death' have a redolence, which transcends any attempt at a realistic description of the feelings that can engulf us.

Set alongside this, there is the central image of the shepherd as a safe container of the emotions and experiences of life, someone on whom we can rely when we lose sense of who, and what, we are.

## Psalm 130

- 1 *Out of the depths have I cried to you, O Lord;  
Lord, hear my voice;  
let your ears consider well the voice of my  
supplication.*
- 2 *If you, Lord, were to mark what is done amiss,  
O Lord, who could stand?*
- 3 *But there is forgiveness with you,  
so that you shall be feared.*
- 4 *I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him;  
in his word is my hope.*
- 5 *My soul waits for the Lord, more than the night  
watch for the morning,  
more than the night watch for the morning.*
- 6 *O Israel, wait for the Lord,  
for with the Lord there is mercy;*
- 7 *With him is plenteous redemption  
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.*

## Notes on the Psalm

The sentiments in the first verse of this psalm will be very familiar to most of us from time to time. For instance, people can wonder where God is in particularly trying circumstances, such as the event of an untimely death. But they can also feel very low in mood and sense being abandoned by God.

In verse 2, the psalmist recognises that we all fall short of the highest standards. This makes us feel guilty but there is a distinction to be made between real guilt and false guilt. People with mental health problems are often weighed down with anxiety caused by feelings of guilt. Verse 3 is therefore important because it speaks of forgiveness. This is where there is hope for us all but we do need to acknowledge that we can be forgiven.

Verses 4–7 all expand on this theme. Notice that two verses discuss the absence of God and feelings of guilt whilst the other five discuss forgiveness and hope; hope lies in being patient and patience requires the ability to suspend the need for instant gratification. These are important spiritual qualities that will benefit our mental health.

## Selected verses from the Psalms

*You have taken my companions and loved ones from  
me;  
the darkness is my closest friend.*

Psalm 87/88: 18

*And even now that I am old and grey,  
do not forsake me, O God...*

Psalm 70/71: 18

*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted;  
he rescues those who are crushed in spirit.*

Psalm 33/34: 18

*My days are vanishing like smoke ...  
my heart is withered like the grass.*

*I forget to eat my bread...*

Psalm 101/102: 3-4

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;  
O Lord, hear my voice.*

*Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy...*

*My soul waits for the Lord  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.*

Psalm 129/130: 1, 6

## Readings from the Epistles

*'And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.'*

1 Corinthians 13: 13

Understood in the context of wellbeing, Paul's reflection on the place and significance of all people in the body of Christ is radically challenging of our sometimes complacent, even hostile, attitudes towards those whose ill-health unsettles and disturbs us.

### 1 Corinthians 12: 14-26

*Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.*

### Notes on the reading

This is such a well known passage that it's easy to miss its radical challenge, not only to the Corinthian community but also to Christian congregations today. At one level, it's clear that Paul is challenging his readers (and us) to recognise that we all have some part to play in the body of Christ, for no other reason than we are made by God and beloved of God. But the really crucial words lie in the phrases 'the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable' (v 22) and 'God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member' (v 24).

If we take these words at face value, those who suffer with physical, mental, emotional or spiritual distress (which at some time or other will be all of us) are to be the most highly valued members of the community. Being 'mentally ill' is a stigma-laden label. It is frequently attached to people whom secular society sees as threatening in some way. It almost always leads to the isolation of the person to whom it is attached.

Yet here is Paul telling us that this is not God's way of looking at things. He challenges us to be counter-cultural in our attitudes and behaviour, radical in our thinking and prophetic in our actions.

These two passages are a challenge to us to look within ourselves, acknowledge those things that we do not find easy to accept and thus begin to locate a sense of wholeness. They are a reminder that we all possess the seeds of our own mental ill-health, as well as the green shoots of our spiritual wellbeing.

#### **Philippians 4: 4-9**

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.*

#### **Romans 7: 14-25**

*For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.*

*So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.*

#### **Notes on the reading**

We all seek peace, but to have it means we need to be reconciled - to ourselves, each other and to God. To achieve this we need to learn to accept our weaknesses and recognise our strengths. If we can do this for ourselves, then we will be able to accept others and see in them the image of Christ, enabling us to be reconciled to God and feel at peace. It sounds easy, yet we know it's difficult. Low self-esteem is a common problem leading to worry, anxiety and a search for approval. Thinking about things that are true, pure etc. is good for both our mental and spiritual health. When feeling low, we need help to achieve a better sense of proportion. One of the talking therapies, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), does this through helping us to re-frame our thoughts.

#### **Notes on the reading**

This passage describes very well the inner conflict we all recognise when we try to struggle with ourselves. We may have fallen into bad habits such as watching too much television, eating too many chips, drinking too much coffee. As soon as we try to break these habits we discover just how hard it is. We may want to be healthier and take more exercise, but just wanting it does not make it happen. It's comforting to eat chips, and challenging ourselves provokes anxiety.

Any diet regime needs to consider issues of self esteem. Are we good enough to be slimmer? Trying to change our habits exposes the thinking that lies behind them. The habits and behaviours have been used to mask feelings that are difficult to know about. It can be helpful to think about this as a spiritual struggle because we may be able to recognise our powerlessness and seek help. It may also help us to see that we are human beings, but we also have a potential for divinity.

## Readings from the Gospels

*'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'*

John 14: 27

As well as pointing to the values of the Kingdom of God, the Gospels are repositories of reflective wisdom about life in general, not least because they are built around the narrative of the lives of Jesus and his disciples. At a human level, it's possible to see in their lives, many similar pressures that can affect our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.

### Mark 6: 30-32

*The apostles returned from their mission. They gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.*

### Luke 12: 22-28

*He said to his disciples, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you – you of little faith!*

### Notes on the reading

In Mark's gospel, the miraculous feeding which immediately succeeds this passage follows a period of intense activity involving much teaching and healing. Like many of our lives, the human Jesus and his disciples must have been exhausted, both physically and spiritually. The retreat to 'a deserted place' might be a metaphor for the way in which we could deal with stress.

### Notes on the reading

How much time and energy – emotional and physical – do we spend trying to manage our lives? Of course, it's far easier to preach a gospel of self-restraint than it is to practise it oneself. But the pressures of modern life, almost irrespective of our circumstances, are such that we invariably find ourselves working harder and harder just to maintain our social position. And ultimately for what purpose, asks Jesus.

The gospel challenge, to allow ourselves to be like ordinary field flowers, two a penny, yet still more beautiful in God's eyes than all the finery that Solomon wore, is immense. But it holds within it, a powerful antidote to the stress and anxiety that are almost the inevitable consequences of the rapidly spinning merry-go-round that is modern life.

One very human interpretation of this short passage from Matthew bears on the anxieties so prevalent in modern life, and our reluctance to confront our own feelings by indulging in avoidance behaviour.

### **Matthew 23: 23-25**

*"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the others. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel!"*

*"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence."*

### **Notes on the reading**

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is understood as a behavioural addiction. People need to adjust pictures so that they hang straight or check that the front door is locked before they leave. Everyone may worry a bit about these things but it can become an obsession that is very disabling. If it takes several hours to leave the house because every door and window has to be checked many times, the person finds it difficult to go anywhere and may become socially isolated. However, focusing on this means people are able to evade recognising that they are anxious or avoid facing difficulties such as work and money problems. These can then spiral out of control.

In Matthew's gospel Jesus is quite scathing of the Pharisees for their reliance on the law. In this passage he is critical that they are concerned with trivialities. Deuteronomy prescribes tithing of wine, corn and oil. It is the scribal tradition that extends this to herbs. There is also a priority given to external cleanliness. This takes attention away from what is going on inside someone. Ritual behaviour can be very attractive to people who do not want to think about their feelings. In this case, it was their zeal for the details of the law that blinded the Pharisees to the prophetic and creative character of Jesus' minor infringements. For them, there was the fear that the Kingdom of God might feel overwhelming and such anxieties might be kept at bay through an emphasis on ritual behaviour.

This exquisite account of the anointing at Bethany in Luke's Gospel is a powerful reminder that our reliance on words, as our primary form of communication, can blind us to the power and depth of non-verbal communication.

### **Luke 7: 36-39**

*One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him - that she is a sinner.'*

### **Notes on the reading**

This story of the anointing of Jesus' feet by this unnamed woman is one of the most poignant of the gospel stories. Primarily, this is because it communicates so much but without the need for any words. It serves as a reminder, if we needed one, that non-verbal communication can be infinitely more powerful, if we have the 'ears' with which to listen.

The woman is described as a 'sinner'. This, and the Pharisee's aside at the end of the passage, suggests that she was considered an outcast, someone whose only place was on the edge of polite society. As such, she holds a not dissimilar stigmatised position to those who live with mental ill-health.

Her sense of her own lack of self-worth may also account for the tears with which she bathes Jesus' feet. Instead of recoiling, Jesus not only allows his feet to be washed by her, but dried with her hair, then kissed and anointed. It is an encounter of the most intimate nature.

As observers through the text, we can use our emotional response to it, as well as our 'virtual' eyes and ears, to appreciate this woman's communication of gentle love, devotion and gratitude. No words are necessary.

## A selection of chants

The use of repetitive chants within a religious ritual is common to many faith traditions across the world. They have a calming, even therapeutic, feel, helping to still the spirit and focus the mind on God. Within the context of mental illness, their rhythmic style can be profound and safe communicators of deep spiritual truths.

### From the community at Taizé

By night we hasten in darkness,  
to search for living water,  
only our thirst leads us onward. *(Repeat)*

Lord Jesus Christ,  
your light shines within us,  
let not my doubts nor my darkness  
speak to me.

Lord Jesus Christ,  
your light shines within us,  
let my heart always welcome your love.

Jesus, remember me  
when you come into your Kingdom. *(Repeat)*

O Lord hear my prayer.  
O Lord hear my prayer:  
when I call, answer me.  
O Lord hear my prayer.  
O Lord hear my prayer;  
come and listen to me.

Within our darkest night,  
you kindle the fire that never dies away,  
that never dies away. *(Repeat)*

### From the Iona Community

Take, O take me as I am,  
summon out what I shall be;  
set your seal upon my heart and live in me.

Kindle a flame to lighten the dark  
and take all fear away.

### From other sources

- 1 Be still and know that I am God. *(Repeat 3 times)*
- 2 I am the Lord that healeth thee. *(Repeat 3 times)*
- 3 In thee, O Lord, I put my trust. *(Repeat 3 times)*

*Anon*

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm;  
still me, Lord, keep me from harm.  
Let all the tumult within me cease,  
enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

*Margaret Rizza*

## Hymns and Songs

The following are suggestions for suitable hymns and songs that reflect human feelings of ill-health and stress and the Christian theological understanding of and response to it. They dwell on the themes of pain and healing, exclusion and inclusion, service and community and, above all, the free gift of God's grace to all, whatever the circumstances.

- A**        Amazing Grace how sweet the sound  
              At even ere the sun was set
- B**        Brother, sister let me serve you
- C**        Christ be before me, Christ be behind me  
              Christ's is the world in which we move (*A Touching Place*)  
              Circle me, O God, let your love (arms) enfold me, circle me, O God...
- D**        Dear Lord and Father of mankind  
              Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name
- F**        Father hear the prayer we offer  
              Father I place into your hands the things I can not do
- G**        God be in my head and in my understanding  
              God to enfold you  
              Great God your love has called us home
- H**        He's got the whole world in his hands  
              Help us to help each other Lord  
              Here in this place new light is streaming (*Gather us in*)
- J**        Jesus Christ is waiting  
              Just as I am, without one plea
- K**        Kum ba yah, my Lord ... Someone's crying, O Lord, kum ba yah...
- L**        Lead, kindly Light  
              Let us build a house where love can dwell (*All are welcome*)  
              Longing for light we wait in the darkness (*Christ be our light*)  
              Lord of all hopefulness  
              Lord we come to ask your healing  
              Love is the touch
- M**        Make me a channel of your peace
- N**        Now the green blade rises
- O**        O the love of my Lord is the essence
- R**        Rock of ages, cleft for me
- T**        Take this moment time and space  
              Through all the changing scenes of life
- W**        When I needed a neighbour

# Prayer resources

## General prayers

I am spent, O my Christ, Breath of my life.  
Perpetual stress and surge, in league together,  
make long, O long, this life, this business of  
living.

Grappling with foes within and foes without,  
my soul has lost its beauty, blurred your image.

Did ever oak such buffeting from winds  
or ship receive from waves as I do now?  
Labour to labour, task succeeds to task...  
Friendship has bowed and illness wasted me.  
...

Do not forsake me, my Strength, I beseech you.  
When the storms beat hard, I may have  
betrayed you,  
but let me return to you now.

*Gregory of Nazianzus*<sup>2</sup>

One of the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory of Nazianzus (c329-389) was Bishop of Constantinople and presided at the Council there in 381. He experienced a great deal of stress in his life and this may have led him to pen this heartfelt prayer, only a fragment of which remains.

Lord Jesus  
help us to trust you  
even when we are going through  
the most trying times of our lives;  
to know that you are there with us  
and that your faithfulness is just.  
Amen.

*World Vision*<sup>3</sup>

O God of light and peace, give light and peace to those whose minds are troubled; grant them courage and patience, that they may seek for the causes of their ills; and give wisdom to those who help them to do so. And for those whose sufferings continue, we pray that they may be cared for in love and that none may add to their griefs. We ask this in the name of him who came to the help of the distressed, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Elizabeth Goudge*<sup>4</sup>

Dates and times;  
appointments to be kept;  
meetings to attend;  
anniversaries to remember;  
all tightly scheduled  
to fill the day.  
The diary tells it all.  
It tells of how we use our time,  
of how we fill the hours  
and wish we had some more.  
Hardly a moment to ourselves;  
almost always under pressure;  
often we drive too fast.  
We feel that we are caught –  
held imprisoned  
in the little pages  
of our life's day.

Lord,  
set us free within the daily round;  
free to do our work  
without a sense of burden  
or of constant rush and pressure  
to get done.  
Set us free to live our life  
with joy and gladness  
in the knowledge of your presence  
everywhere we go.

*Robert McN Samson*<sup>5</sup>  
South Africa

O God,  
who has so faithfully cared for me in the past,  
and so often seen me through to safety:  
grant me that in moments of depression,  
desolation, failure and despair,  
I may look back in gratitude, and refreshed by the  
remembrance of past grace  
turn again to the future in renewed trust  
and unfailing hope resting upon Jesus Christ,  
my beloved Saviour. Amen.

*George Appleton*<sup>6</sup>

God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and wisdom to know the difference.  
Amen.

*Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)*

## General prayers (continued)

We pray for those who do not know you,  
for those who struggle with doubt,  
for the lonely and those in despair,  
for families under great stress,  
for all who are homeless,  
for all prisoners and those with responsibilities for them,  
for those whose lives are being damaged by addiction,  
for the many who are unemployed,  
for young people as they look to the future,  
for the elderly who may feel unwanted,  
for those who are rich but careless for others,  
for all who praise you in word but not in life.  
Lord, make your ways known to us all,  
Open our eyes to see the needs of others  
and help us to do your will,  
for Jesus' sake.  
Amen.

*The Church Army*<sup>7</sup>

Voice of the voiceless,  
speak your soft words  
to *my/our* dry bones;  
breathe life into the carcass of *my/our* soul(s)  
wrung out by the effort of living.

Harness the sinews of your grace  
to *my/our* tired spirit(s);  
enflesh *me/us* with your love,  
knit *my/our* bones together,  
and through the winds of enchantment  
revive *me/us* with a renewed sense of life  
for you and for *myself/ ourselves*.  
Amen.

*after Ezekiel 37: 1-10*

Almighty and everlasting God,  
the comfort of the sad, the strength of those who suffer;  
hear the prayers of your children who cry out of any tribulation;  
and to every soul that is distressed, grant mercy,  
relief and refreshment;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Gelasian Sacramentary*<sup>8</sup>

Give me, amid the confusion of the day,  
the calmness of the everlasting hills.  
Break the tensions  
of my nerves and muscles with the soothing music  
of the singing streams that live in my memory.  
Help me to know the magical,  
restoring power of sleep.  
Teach me the art of taking minute vacations –  
of slowing down to look at a flower,  
to chat with a friend, to pat a dog,  
to read a few lines from a good book.

Remind me each day  
of the fable of the hare and the tortoise,  
that I may know  
that the race is not always to the swift –  
there is more to life than increasing its speed.  
Let me look upward  
into the branches of the towering oak and  
know

that it grew great and strong  
because it grew slowly and well.

Slow me down, Lord, and inspire me to send  
my roots deep into the soil of life's enduring  
values

that I may grow towards the stars  
of my greater destiny.  
Amen.

*Richard Cushing (1895-1970)*<sup>9</sup>  
Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop of Boston

Almighty God,  
in whom we live and move and have our being,  
who has made us for yourself,  
so that our hearts are restless till they rest in you:  
grant us purity of heart and strength of purpose,  
that no selfish passion may hinder us from knowing  
your will,  
no weakness from doing;  
but that in your light we may see light clearly,  
and in your service find perfect freedom;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

*St Augustine*<sup>10</sup>

An alternative version of this prayer  
can be found in Common Worship  
as the Collect for the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity.

## Confessions, Litanies and Intercessions

### Penitence and forgiveness

- Leader* For the times that we have erected barriers, to exclude those who we experience as different from ourselves, Lord, have mercy.
- All* **Lord, have mercy.**
- Leader* On the occasions that we have avoided contact with those who behave differently from ourselves, Christ, have mercy.
- All* **Christ, have mercy.**
- Leader* In the situations when we have failed to see the light of Christ in those who appear different from ourselves, Lord, have mercy.
- All* **Lord, have mercy.**
- Leader* May the Source of all life forgive our excluding instincts, remove the fear of difference from our souls, and enable us to embrace all who are created in God's image.
- All* **Amen.**

### Litany of St Patrick's Breastplate

- Leader* In all the challenging experiences of my life, Christ be with me,
- All* **Christ within me.**
- Leader* In my anxiety, when I fear to put a foot forward, Christ behind me,
- All* **Christ before me.**
- Leader* In my depression, lost to the darkness of my thoughts, Christ beside me,
- All* **Christ to win me,  
Christ to comfort and restore me.**
- Leader* In my uncertainty, when I feel that I am falling, Christ beneath me,
- All* **Christ above me.**
- Leader* When the world threatens to overwhelm me with its noise and confusion, Christ in quiet,
- All* **Christ in danger.**
- Leader* When I feel alone, lost to the world and myself, Christ in hearts of all that love me,
- All* **Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.  
Amen.**

### Intercessions

*It is suggested that a period of silence might be kept between the subject of the prayer and the bidding.*

- Leader* O Lord our God, for those whose lives are strained and stressed.....
- Leader* hear our prayer
- All* **and pour out your peace.**
- Leader* For those whose hold on life is fragile.....
- Leader* hear our prayer
- All* **and pour out your peace.**
- Leader* For those whose illness makes them vulnerable.....
- Leader* hear our prayer
- All* **and pour out your peace.**
- Leader* For those whose families struggle to understand them.....
- Leader* hear our prayer
- All* **and pour out your peace.**
- Leader* For families and friends, nurses, doctors and therapists, and all who seek to walk alongside the stressed and strained, the vulnerable and the fragile.....
- Leader* hear our prayer
- All* **and pour out your peace.**
- Leader* O Lord our God, for all whose lives are in turmoil through the effects of mental illness.....
- Leader* hear our prayer
- All* **and pour out your peace. Amen.**

### Litany of the Cross

- Leader* The cross...
- All* **We shall take it.**
- Leader* The bread...
- All* **We shall break it.**
- Leader* The pain...
- All* **We shall bear it.**
- Leader* The joy...
- All* **We shall share it.**
- Leader* The gospel...
- All* **We shall live it.**
- Leader* The love...
- All* **We shall give it.**
- Leader* The light...
- All* **We shall cherish it.**
- Leader* The darkness...
- All* **God shall perish it. Amen.**

## A prayer for those with addictions

We pray, O God of hope,  
for all families  
whose lives are torn and disrupted  
by drugs and alcohol.  
Enable them to identify the illness.  
Strengthen them to seek help.  
Bless them with the power of your love,  
which imparts transformation and wholeness  
to those who trust in your name.  
Grant that as they walk this tortured road,  
they may journey together  
and bound close in the bond of love.  
Amen.

*Vienna Cobb Anderson*<sup>12</sup>

## For those afflicted by anxiety and fear

From fear of staying still,  
O God deliver me.  
from fear of surrender,  
O God deliver me.  
from fear of decision,  
O God deliver me.  
from fear of losing respect,  
O God deliver me.  
from fear of facing my fear,  
O God deliver me.  
but from the fear that marks your presence,  
I beseech you O God  
do not deliver me.

*Janet Morley*<sup>13</sup>

Ever faithful God,  
your Son so often calmed the fears  
of those who should have trusted him;  
give us honesty to acknowledge our dependencies,  
courage to face our fears,  
strength to trust ourselves to others,  
and the humility to place our faith in you,  
so that we can find the perfect love  
that casts out all fear  
and leads us into the freedom  
that is Christ, our friend and brother.  
Amen.

## On 'losing' a loved one to Alzheimer's

They say it is a living bereavement  
that no-one else can understand.  
To 'lose' someone whilst they are still there.  
Not to have had the hard comfort of funeral rites.  
It can be a cruel calling.

Help me to remember the 'you' that you were.  
To enjoy memories that may still trigger your own  
fleeting recognition.

Help me to cherish the 'you' that is now,  
still special to me even when you have forgotten  
why.

Help me to envision the 'you' that will one day be,  
restored in the enfolding love of God,  
in whom past, present and future are one,  
and in whom we shall then be complete.

Lord, keep me in hope and give me strength until  
that day. Amen.

*Albert Jewell*<sup>14</sup>

Author and Methodist Minister

## Blessings and Endings

### In times of trouble/opposition

God is your strength and shield,  
always ready to help in time of trouble:  
so do not be afraid  
but see what he has done:  
and the Lord God almighty,  
Father Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with you ever more. Amen.

*Michael Perry*<sup>15</sup>

from Psalm 46

Watch now, dear Lord, with those who wake or  
watch or weep tonight, and give your angels charge  
over those who sleep. Tend your sick ones, O Lord  
Christ, rest your weary ones, bless your dying ones,  
soothe your suffering ones, pity your afflicted ones,  
shield your joyous ones, and all for your love's sake.  
Amen.

*The Iona Community*<sup>16</sup>

# Acknowledgements

---

- <sup>1</sup> National Institute for Mental Health in England, mentality & The Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Promoting mental health: A resource for spiritual and pastoral care*, mentality, London, 2004
- <sup>2</sup> Compiled by Dorothy M Stewart, *The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville Ky, 2002
- <sup>3</sup> Compiled and edited by Catherine von Ruhland, *Prayers from the Edge: Meditations for Life's Tough Times*, Triangle, London, 1996
- <sup>4</sup> Eds Michael Perry, Patrick Goodland & Angela Griffiths, *Prayers for the People*, Marshall Pickering, London, 1992
- <sup>5</sup> Compiled and edited by Geoffrey Duncan, *Seeing Christ in Others*, Canterbury Press, Norwich, 2002
- <sup>6</sup> Health Education Authority, *Promoting Mental Health: The Role of Faith Communities – Jewish and Christian Perspectives*, Health Education Authority, London, 1999
- <sup>7</sup> Compiled and edited by Catherine von Ruhland, *Prayers from the Edge: Meditations for Life's Tough Times*, Triangle, London, 1996
- <sup>8</sup> From David Stancliffe, *The Pilgrim Prayerbook*, Continuum, London 2007
- <sup>9</sup> Compiled by Dorothy M Stewart, *The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville Ky, 2002
- <sup>10</sup> Adapted from its original form in Dorothy M Stewart, *The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville Ky, 2002
- <sup>11</sup> The Iona Community, *The Iona Community Worship Book*, Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow, 1991
- <sup>12</sup> Adapted on [www.beliefnet.com](http://www.beliefnet.com) from Vienna Cobb Anderson, *Prayers of Our Hearts*, Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991
- <sup>13</sup> Janet Morley, *All Desires Known*, SPCK, London, 1992
- <sup>14</sup> Albert Jewell in *Vows and Partings*, Methodist Publishing House, Peterborough, 2001, used with permission.
- <sup>15</sup> Michael Perry, *Bible Praying*, Fount, London, 1992
- <sup>16</sup> The Iona Community, *The Iona Community Worship Book*, Wild Goose Publications, Glasgow, 1991