

Suggested biblical readings on the World Mental Health Day 2012 theme of depression:

Old Testament: Job 6: 1 -10

Psalm 87/88

New Testament/Gospel: Mark 15: 25 - 34

An excerpt from the 2005 Church of England resource pack

READINGS THAT OFFER COMFORT AND REASSURANCE

Many New Testament passages offer comfort and reassurance to those who are

feeling anxious or disturbed. For example, in John *'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) and *'Trust in God; also trust in me. In my*

Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you' (John

14:1-2).

References from the Psalms and other scriptures encourage a holistic vision. The

passage in Deuteronomy 6:4 *'Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one'* shows the

reflection of humankind in relation to the Creator. The next verse goes on to say

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and strength'. In

some translations the mind is featured here.

An excerpt from the worship resources of The Department of Spiritual and Pastoral Care, South West London & St George's Mental Health NHS Trust

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 Book of Ruth

The Book of Ruth offers a touching account of the nature of loss. After the deaths of their respective husbands Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, search for ways of dealing with their respective situations. In particular, Naomi and Ruth set out on journeys, both actual and symbolic, to find meaning in their losses.

They go back to Israel and, at first, cling to each other in grief. In time, Ruth acquires a new husband. Naomi does not, but she finds solace in being able to help her daughter-in-law come to marriage. Both are transformed, each in their own way, but only after they have painfully faced the reality of their respective losses.

It is a story that speaks of the potency of loss and its potential for transformation.

Psalms

Psalms are prayers of the People of God. They express about every possible human experience and emotion and do this in form of poems and prayers addressed to God. Many of them express the grief triggered by loss. Psalms can accompany us through the process of grieving, as they help us to put words on many of the emotions we experience as we live through the process - numbness, shock and denial; pain and guilt; anger and bargaining; depression, loneliness; working towards acceptance, hope and trust.

*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

New Testament readings

'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

Mark 6: 30-32

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.

Luke 12: 22-28

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.

1 Corinthians 12: 14-26

This is such a well known passage that it is 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.

Other suggestions of readings from the Bible with notes, which have been published in previous years, are available from the Department of Spiritual and Pastoral Care. If you would like to receive them, please e-mail cathy.wiles@swlstg-tr.nhs.uk