



June 25, 2020

Greetings, Lettered Streets Covenant Church!

****Over the past few months I've been sending these weekly updates because I know how isolating it can be during a global pandemic. My update topics have varied in scope from calls to prayer and encouragement from the scriptures, to addressing racial injustice and outlining our strategic plan for re-opening.**

Today I want to take a moment to address mental health.

It's fairly common knowledge that there is a stigma in our culture about mental health. Most of our system of corporate marketing, music, and film, project an ideal image of the person who is happy, stable, independent, self-sufficient, and if flawed then we only care about the story if they are an edgy anti-hero or if they have a story in which they *overcome adversity*. That is, as they say, the American way.

But it is not the human way.

Humans are complex creations, designed by God as physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional beings. We are complicated! However, due in part to our cultural focus on materialism and our inheritance of Modernist, Enlightenment emphasis on humans as merely biochemical machines, we have emphasized the physical body over and against the spiritual, mental, and emotional parts of the human experience.

To make matters worse, much of the church in the western world has adopted a materialist mindset, conveniently separating the human experience to physicality and spirituality but holding mental health with a sort of suspicion.

To put it bluntly, we have compassion for physical ailments and physical treatment to those ailments, but are suspicious and ashamed of mental illness.

Lettered Streets Covenant Church

P.O. Box 5645 Bellingham, WA 98227

Phone 360.920.6712 • info@letteredstreetscc.com • www.letteredstreetscc.com

If our spiritual life seems in disarray, we think it normal and acceptable to reach out to a pastor or engage in spiritual practices. We speak openly about how hard it is to have a sustained prayer life, or to stay motivated in studying scripture. To follow Jesus, is to struggle with staying connected. It is not a shameful thing to listen to a sermon for encouragement and growth. It is not a knock on your spirituality to be in a Bible study where the accountability to be in community is something we need.

We also know that physical healing sometimes takes experts like doctors, physical therapists, dentists—professionals who may prescribe drugs or exercises or *therapies*, to help us heal.

I recently went to the doctor for some severe back pain and she prescribed me some muscle relaxers to help me sleep since I had gone four days without sleeping through the night. My family prayed for me. Someone from the lead team came over to my home and anointed me with oil and prayed for me. But they also said, *you should go to the doctor*.

Most mainstream, orthodox Christians, would not think me less a disciple of Jesus for going to the doctor or for taking a drug to help ease my muscle tension. Most might even say this is one of the ways God works through the healing hands of a practitioner.

But when it comes to mental health, and you are clinically depressed, or have an anxiety disorder, or suffer from a panic attack, or have bi-polar disorder, or are dealing with trauma, or any number of other mental ailments—there is a stigma that if you were truly a spirit-filled believer, then you should be able to overcome your issue with prayer and meditating on scripture.

If you are struggling with this dichotomy and have felt ashamed for living with a mental health issue I want you to hear from me that you have nothing to be ashamed of.

If you would go to a doctor for a broken arm, why not go to a counselor for a broken trust? If you would go to a cardiologist for chest pain, why not go to a therapist for the heart palpitations of a panic attack or crushing anxiety? Sometimes such therapies may include prescription medicine. You are no less

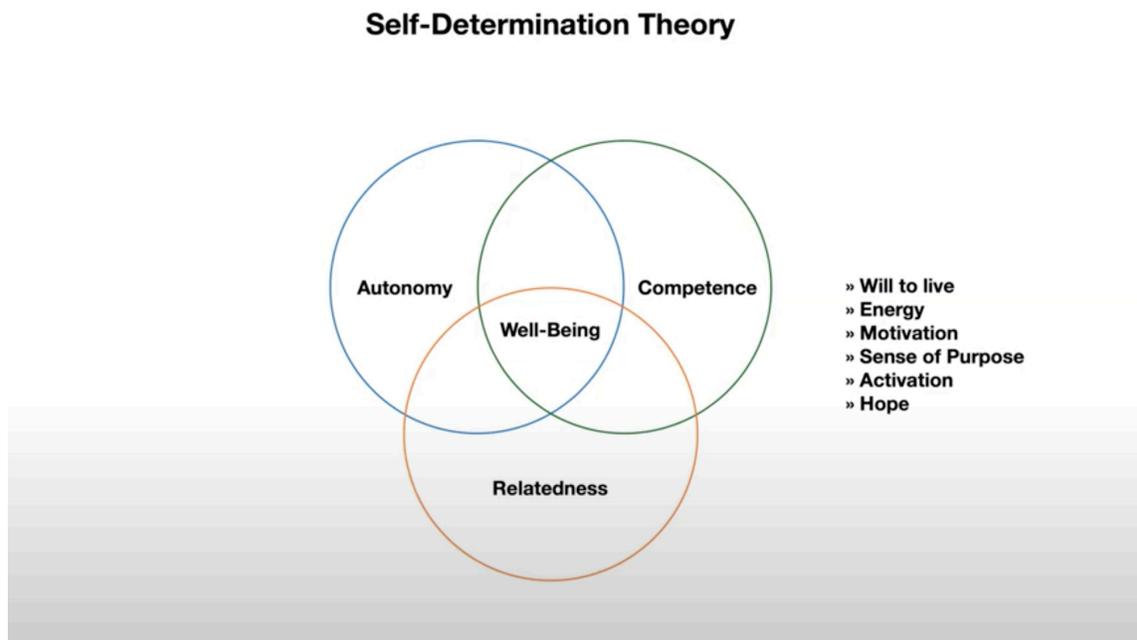
spiritual, or faithful, or close to Jesus for needing therapy or for needing a prescription to help you with a psychological ailment.

In fact, I would argue that paying attention to your mental health like you would your physical and spiritual health, honors God. When you honor the complexity of you humanness, you honor the Creator.

I bring this up because especially during this pandemic, more and more people in my world have been struggling. Some have sheepishly reached out almost as if they are testing the waters to see how I will react. Others sometimes feel at the end of their rope and I wonder to myself, *what if they had reached out sooner?* And if people are reaching out sheepishly, *how many more are there who are trying to hold it together on their own.*

I want you to know, you're not alone.

Peter Sung, a Covenant pastor and part of our conference staff, recently presented a helpful talk about how the pandemic is affecting our mental health. This chart is from his talk:



Simply put, there are three main contributors to our well-being: Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness.

Autonomy involves our ability to make decisions, to plan for the future, to exercise our will. Clearly, the pandemic has eroded much of our autonomy.

Competence refers to our unique role in the world. You know how to do what you do and that helps give you meaning and a station in life. If you are a student, you know how to navigate your social and intellectual world. If you are a business person, or a parent, or a teacher or engineer, you know what it takes to do what you do. But in this pandemic, many if not all of us have either had our areas of competence taken away or severely altered such that we feel largely, *incompetent*, and thus ashamed and unsure of how we fit.

Relatedness includes our social connectedness along with our connectedness with God and ourselves. We are literally in a season of *shelter-in-place*, which has robbed us of so much relatedness.

Take any one of these three away and our well-being is jeopardized. But with the pandemic attacking *all of us* on two or three fronts at once, and you begin to see a decrease on the attitudes on the right of the chart: will to live, energy for life, motivation, sense of purpose, and hope.

If you are finding yourself on the continuum from feeling “off” to feeling depressed and even suicidal, please know you are not alone. You are not a bad person. You are not shameful. You are human, made in God’s image, and you are experiencing a global, comprehensive stressor that you have likely never experienced before.

So have grace for yourself. Seek help if you or someone you love needs it!

*[Suicide Prevention Hotline](tel:1-800-273-8255): 1-800-273-8255

*[Substance Abuse Treatment](tel:1-800-662-4357): 1-800-662-4357

*Domestic Violence Helpline: 1-877-715-1563

*Counseling Services: Feel free to contact [pastor Chris](#) for a referral, or consider this [directory of local counselors and therapists](#).

Psalm 34.18 reminds us, *The Lord is near to the brokenhearted
And saves those who are crushed in spirit.* If you are struggling right now, it's not necessarily because you are far from God; it could be an invitation to reach out knowing his is near to you, because he loves you.

May the peace of Christ be with you,

Chris