

April 21 - "Healing: The Mind"

Judges 21:23-25, 2 Timothy 2:14-15, Philippians 4:8-9, 1 Kohn 1:8-10

This week in our healing series we are looking at healing the mind. We've so far considered healing our land and healing relationships. This one is markedly different, yet when we talk about healing of a corporate body or a relationship we need to recognize that personal healing is an integral part of these others as well. This message is going to head down two paths. Both are Biblical, though one is what some might call more directly "scriptural".

Brokenness of mind looks a lot of different ways. One way is very much biological. Chemistry is out of balance in the mind and the result is that there are all kinds of complications and struggles that result. Of course a tool available to everyone, and certainly to every Christian is prayer. As we've often noted, however, prayer plus action often has better results than prayer alone.

When it comes to the mind we lean on the many stories in scripture where God provided a person to step in and provide aid for someone else. Particularly in our day we see that most of God's influence in the world is the result of people responding to God's nudging the heart and acting on God's behalf. The hungry family with no food doesn't get fed because God whammies their stomachs full. They are fed because someone steps in and drops a box of groceries on their porch.

So it is here. There are people who are talented, gifted, and skilled to understand the mind. How it works. How it becomes broken. How to mend it. When there is biology out of balance, there are people gifted by God to help sort out the way to manage that imbalance. There are therapies, treatments, and medications that help restore balance to the mind.

There are many times when someone is afflicted in the mind and they receive the right treatments or meds and the healing that takes place is called "miraculous" by family and friends. The balance allows the individual to be who they are, not whatever the imbalance has created.

A misconception is that a pill or treatment that restores balance is all that's needed. It's a magic solution that makes everything better. Unfortunately in the course of a biological imbalance in the mind often there are other situations that arise. Relationships are damaged. Habits are formed. Unhealthy coping strategies are adopted. These also need addressed. The treatment simply gets the mind healthy to be able to do this next level of work to find a new way of thinking and doing that is healthy for them personally and socially.

This brings us to another reality. The mind isn't fully formed when we're born. It develops. The terminology is that pathways in the mind are developed depending on how someone has to handle outside influences. A mind that develops amidst support, love, abundance, and good boundary setting might be said to create pathways to thrive. A mind that develops amidst neglect, abuse, abandonment, need, and deprivation might be said to create pathways to survive. Those pathways likely aren't the healthiest regarding social interactions, self-image, and managing stressors in life that are plentiful.

This is brokenness of mind.

Fortunately there are counselors, therapists, and so forth that understand the mind and can help a person walk through their background and develop better, healthier ways of seeing the world and managing life and relationships.

There is a tragedy here though. Brokenness of mind doesn't necessarily look like brokenness of body. There are many who shun medication and doctors. Sometimes proudly so. Bodily, this only works until the tumor is discovered, the bone is broken, the organ is diseased or inflamed, and the pain makes it so that there's no ignoring it. Most people will bend to the medication or doctor to cure the issue. After all, most of us want to stick around as long as we can, and do so as healthy as possible. Medical science becomes conveniently acceptable.

On the other hand, while brokenness of mind can produce physical symptoms, often they can be ignored. We can't see the brokenness of mind as clearly, so we can ignore it. And too many do.

Biblically some struggle because mental illness as we understand it isn't mentioned. Of course not. Our understanding of the mind has grown through the centuries. In Biblical times there was no

language or understanding of mental illness, much less how to treat it. Even today, given the youth of understanding brokenness of the mind we hear folk wondering “why do we hear so much about this today, why are there so many more cases? We didn’t have this sixty years ago.”

Of course not. What has been learned in modern times wasn’t known then. Mental illness existed in Biblical times and all through history. They just didn’t have names for it as we do today, and without properly understanding and naming something finding treatment or a cure is near impossible. Today psychology, psychiatry, biology, neurology, neurobiology, neuropsychiatry has advanced leaps and bounds to not only understand brokenness of mind but also how to manage it into healthier ways of being.

There is the joke about the man in the flood. A truck comes by to take him to safety and he says “I’m waiting on God.” The water rises and a boat comes by to take him. He says “I’m waiting on God.” The water climbs to the roof and a helicopter comes to take him. “I’m waiting for God” the man says. He drowns and when he meets God he asks why God didn’t save him. God’s reply? “I sent you a truck, a boat, and a helicopter. What more did you want?”

I fully believe there are people suffering through mental illness, brokenness of mind, and when they meet God will ask “I prayed to you and you never answered, why?” And God will say “I sent you psychologists, neurologists, psychiatrists, therapists and more...what more did you want?”

The caveat here is that sadly there are places in the world that don’t have access to this treatment. Even in this country we talk about the mental health crisis and see the results on the streets and in our homes. People don’t have access. If we do and have the need, this may be the answer to prayer that God is providing. Like God has done all through history, using people as instruments of His grace.

The reality that our minds are works in development leads us into our next sense of brokenness. This is brokenness of mind as we deviate from God’s intent for how we are to live, love, and view the world. Imagine it this way. God has a path God wants all of us to walk down. Unfortunately people deviate from that path. When someone goes off on their own we say they have “broken from the path”. In this instance the path is determined by how our minds view the world, and any view that is counter to God’s is by nature broken. Brokenness of mind.

That our values, ideals, and faith are products of our environment can be demonstrated by one simple illustration. I’ve worked with youth since 1994. That’s a long time. Especially among younger youth I’ve found that I can peg their parents’ politics without every talking to the parent. All you have to do is sit back and listen. Particularly when our politics are contentious eventually they will hatch on that subject on their own. When they do, they will argue. What you are hearing isn’t them, it’s their parents. The politics of the adults are instilled on the kids.

Just like everything, if nothing is ever questioned whatever is formed in childhood persists into adulthood. On the good side this means that what we’ve been taught right holds fast. On the down side whatever we’ve been taught wrong also holds fast.

This is the root of so much conflict. We dig in and dig in for life. Even when we’re wrong. It’s also the root of chaos. In our disagreement there is angst and anger. When we don’t come together to figure out what is truly true we end up where Israel did in Judges 21. They were destroying themselves because “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” It wasn’t about God’s way. It was about their own.

I would imagine there was no shortage of people co-signing God to their opinions. Even when their opinions were wrong. This is a deadly place to be for any people. Our brokenness of mind not only blinds us to God’s way, it pits us against one another.

Timothy has the cure for this kind of brokenness. “Study to show yourself approved.” Paul in Philipians also has a solution. “Whatever is TRUE, whatever is pure, whatever is good, think on these things.” In other words keep our thoughts focused rightly. The problem with Paul’s solution is that if our “truth” isn’t genuine truth we’re thinking on the wrong thing which leads to more brokenness.

So study. But what does that look like? Let me share with you what it doesn’t look like. People tell me how much they study and I do the deed of asking them if they ever entertain thoughts different than

what they already believe. That's study. Challenging what we believe to make sure what we believe is true. Sadly this isn't what many do. Here are some answers I get to the question "do you entertain differing views?"

No

Yes, but I don't believe them. "Why?" Because I don't trust them. Under the surface it seems that they don't trust them because they disagree with them. This isn't actually entertaining anything. This may be the most insidious. Leaders tell their followers that anything that disagrees with the interpretation they are passing off is from the devil and leading someone astray. Salvation is based on agreement. Incidentally the notion that anything disagreeing with the leader is wrong is one of the top signs of a cult. And this isn't encouraging honest faith. It's control. If I can convince you that your salvation is dependent on agreeing with me, then I have you.

Only diving into voices that agree isn't study. Study is difficult. It requires suspending what we think we know to examine another perspective honestly. What is their evidence? Why do they come to their conclusion? Is there something I've missed that they have figured out? And if I'm mistaken do I have the humility and courage to change my position?

Timothy tells us to study, yet there are voices that tell us not to dive too deeply into our study of scripture. It's not because we'll be led away from God. It's because we might find holes in their own belief system. Think about any other discipline, particularly the ones teaching our kids.

Would you tell the health teacher not to dig too deeply into reproduction because it's uncomfortable? Just tell the kids that storks deliver babies to the doorstep.

Would you tell the historian not to look too deeply into the frontier expansion because it paints too ugly a picture of what was done to the native Americans? Just paint them as savages and let it go.

Would you tell the science teacher to not dig too deeply into the earth's actual shape? Flat earth was good enough for the Bible and for most of recorded history. Don't upset the apple cart.

Of course we wouldn't!!!

Ask the questions. Search the answers. Don't be persuaded that just because you disagree with a person means you disagree with God. I'm not advocating some free for all theology. Quite the opposite. I am calling for every believer to stop believing just because someone told them to. I am calling for every believer to seek deeply the realities of scripture, and be brave enough to step away from incorrect beliefs to embrace real truth.

This is how we heal brokenness of mind when it comes to God's mind up against our own.

There are two kinds of thinking.

If I change my beliefs I'm risking being wrong. If I'm wrong I may forfeit the Kingdom of God. (catch is that all of us are wrong on some, likely many, things)

I know I am wrong on some things. If I don't challenge my beliefs I'll never figure out where I'm wrong and be able to move closer to the genuine mind of God.

Be the second. It's scary. It's also bold. Ultimately it's the only path to finding the truest mind of God.

I want to encourage us with something else. It is an incredible comfort. We find it in 1 John 1.

If we say we have no sin we make God a liar. In other words if we say we have not brokenness of mind we make God a liar. Because we're all off the mark somewhere. So we confess that we're off.

In that there is freedom. We are freed because we don't have the pending consequence of guilt hanging over us. We are forgiven. God can be counted on to forgive us and cleanse us of all unrighteousness. Yes, we'll still mess up. We'll still be off base in our thinking in some places. But as we search out truth we know that even when we miss it there is grace to cover us. The question isn't if we're forgiven. It's if we're brave enough to keep searching truth even if we make a mistake. It's if we're humble enough to own the need to search because too often we don't know what we don't know until we seek it and find it with an open mind and open heart.

At the end of the day, I hope all of us can hear the following. Whether it's medical brokenness of mind, brokenness that comes from a traumatic past, or brokenness that has led us away from the mind of God, God's grace is sufficient to cover us. God's grace leads us, if we are willing and able, to the

people, places, and resources that God has provided to help us through our circumstance. Any of the above is simply the result of being human. The answer remains the same. Find and seek the avenues God has given for us to heal.

It may be meds, it may be therapy, it may be hard realities that cut against what we've been taught (maybe our entire life), Whatever it is, the goal is the same. Find the mind of God. Pursue it. Live into it. The closer our lives get to God's way the better, the more peaceful, and the more full life becomes. Amen.

BIBLE STUDY 1 Samuel 17

This chapter of 1 Samuel is one of the most known stories in our Christian faith. Sadly it's also one of the most unknown stories because of how it has been sanitized. This is a children's story that unfortunately sets an understanding of it that misses many of the points of the writer of the actual story.

Goliath is painted as an invulnerable adversary. This is intentional to contrast his opponent, David. Goliath can't be stopped, unless it's by God's intervention. And this is the set up for David's character. Saul nor any of the Israelites are trusting God in this battle. They are intimidated by Goliath's stature and strength. David sees things differently. He introduces to the army the reality that if God has their back they can't lose. Where Saul fails in faith David succeeds. The contrast in the story isn't David and Goliath. It is David and Saul. The "reproach of Israel" David speaks to isn't Goliath. It is the lack of faith in God that causes the Israelites to cower in fear.

When David comes to the battle we see a fantastic example of where true life enters into the story. His eldest brother scolds him, assuming David has ignored his responsibilities and is coming to the battle just for the spectacle. We know differently, but his brother is acting just as an elder brother would. "What are you doing here and who do you think you are?" David's response is also typical. "Shut up and let me do my thing!"

David's focus is on God. While his brother is outraged at him under false pretenses, David is outraged at the army for abandoning their trust in God. That David is underestimated by everyone, including Saul, evidences this. Goliath underestimates him, which is to be expected. Saul tries to gussy David up in armor which isn't effective. The picture is an Israelite army trembling at the sense that this kid could save them.

The trash talk becomes revealing. Goliath is focused on David. David goes further. He threatens not only Goliath but the entire Philistine army. He'll kill and behead Goliath and the Philistine army will be left dead for birds and animals to pick clean. Goliath doesn't buy it, yet we see as the story unfolds that David's words are accurate and true.

It's not about David. It's about God.

What follows is a bit confusing. Saul doesn't seem to know David. He's asking questions about who this kid is and who his father is. Didn't he already know this? Chapter 16 seems to indicate such. There are many gymnastics people make to rectify this. Particularly because as we're taught the story of David the details are woven into a very cohesive story. Studying the actual scripture raises questions. Fortunately there are answers,

Keep in mind that the book was written many, many generations later when Israel was in exile. The oral traditions about how David got close to the throne were likely myriad. The writer is likely trying to both convey history and oral tradition at the same time. . Yes, there are details that don't agree. What is in agreement is that David is anointed by God, a strong warrior, and while Saul had God's Spirit depart from him David had God's Spirit resting on him. And the contrast is significant. Where Saul can't seem to follow God David is intent on seeking and following God in his life. Several stories from different vantage points shouldn't be strange to the believer. The gospels don't agree with one another on some points. That's fine. They are telling the story of Christ from their own perspective and trying to convey theology at the same time. The Old Testament writer is no different. It's just not broken down into separate books. The image of David is portrayed to help us know who this future king is going to be.

The execution of Goliath is grisly to say the least. It is not the simplified children's version most of us grew up with. The stone is imbedded in the giant's forehead. He is beheaded with his own sword. David carries his head around like a trophy. Let's not forget that these Old Testament times were set in an age that was in many ways barbaric. This is an example of the kinds of things that not only happened but were celebrated.

There are a couple more things to consider in this chapter that are worth noting/correcting/explaining.

Some say that Goliath was the "last of the Anakim giants". There is a flaw in this. The Anakim giants were descendants of the Nephilim in Genesis. These existed before the great flood in Noah's story. If the great flood is to be believed, all of them would have been destroyed, therefore no descendants of these giants would exist. Goliath was essentially just an anomaly. He was just a big guy.

It also says that David took Goliath's head to Jerusalem. This would be difficult as Jerusalem wasn't a place yet. Once again knowing the authorship of the book is useful. It is certainly possible that Goliath's head was kept as a trophy. It is also possible that once David made his way to Jerusalem years later this trophy came with him. So while it might not have happened immediately it certainly is plausible that David did indeed ultimately take his trophy head to the city of Jerusalem.

Finally we see a nuance in the question Saul poses to David at the end of the chapter. We've already addressed the oddity that he doesn't seem to know who David is. The question sets the stage for the sad fallout to come in their relationship. When Saul asks "whose son are you?" it may well have been a plea for David to pledge his loyalty to Saul above everyone else. The answer he may have been looking for was "I'm Saul's son." That's not what he received. David stays true to his family and confesses Jesse as his father. David's failure to devote himself may well be the first strand that begins unraveling his relationship with Saul.

A little later this is reinforced by how Samuel is greeted at the city gates. Is he coming in peace? They are themselves frightened. Perhaps they heard about Samuel executing Agag? This prophet isn't one to be trifled with. Or perhaps the feud between Saul and Samuel has become known to the larger group of people. If this is the case and Samuel is on the outs with an angry Saul, it might be possible that his arrival would bring a vengeful Saul on his heels. No one wants any part of that. Whatever the case, it's clear that there is tension afoot.

The "out" he is given is to go under the guise of a sacrifice. If there is a concern that God is participating in some kind of deception or lie that can be put to rest. Remember when Saul and Samuel first met as Saul was looking for some donkeys? Samuel had anticipated his coming as the one God was ushering in as the first king. They had already sacrificed an animal and set up a banquet. Saul comes in and is whisked in as the guest of honor and given the best hunk of meat from the animal. In other words, sacrifice was part of the ritual of anointing a king. He can claim he is going to sacrifice honestly.

Setting Jesse's family apart for the selection of the new king, a parade of seven sons occurs. None of them are the one. The first son Eliab is a nod to the mistake of Saul. Samuel's assumption that his height and appearance make him the obvious choice. Saul was tall and with a good appearance. He was no prize. Eliab is a quick example that God's criteria are different than a human's, even Samuel's. This time it wouldn't be someone to appease the people's expectations. He would meet God's and God's alone. The heart is of primary concern.

The unexpected is selected. The youngest son relegated to watching the sheep while the older ones go to the "important" business. Some interesting parallels between Saul and David exist here. Both had to be fetched. Saul was hiding in the baggage (as we saw last chapter this was a sign of his character). David was doing his duty watching the sheep (also a sign of his character). When Saul was selected the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily. When David is anointed the Spirit of the LORD comes upon him mightily. There is intentional noting of both similarities and contrasts of these two kings.

Once again we see a troubling passage. God's Spirit departs from Saul. This makes sense. In rejecting Saul as king the power to empower him is similarly removed. But we see that God "sends an evil spirit to torment him." This doesn't reconcile with God revealed in Jesus. All good things come from God. We are led away from God by our "own desires." "Let no one say he is tempted of God." This doesn't sound like a tormenting God sending evil spirits. So what gives?

First, we know Saul's temperament already got in the way of his ability to lead even when the Spirit of the LORD rested upon him. He had issues that were likely being mitigated by God's Spirit despite his own spiritual shortcomings. When that mitigating Spirit is lifted what else would happen? Naturally the fullness of Saul's troubled sensibilities would roar to the surface.

Second, the spirit language is used to remind us that Saul's problem isn't just in temperament of mind. It is also deeply spiritual. He has a very troubled relationship with God that got in the way of being a Godly king. He preferred his own way over God's. This is a spiritual issue that hasn't resolved and sadly will never be in Saul's lifetime.

Finally, the cure is a sign of their interpretation. It was believed that when someone was troubled by spirits the way to soothe them was with music. Thus they seek out a skilled musician to come play for Saul. David is the one recommended. If we want a modern equivalence, think about what a tremendous number of people use to cope with emotion. Music. We no longer need to send for a skilled musician. We turn on a radio, an iPod, Spotify, whatever we use and get our playlist going. In a way David for Saul was the equivalent of wireless earbuds playing tunes to calm him down.

David's description is also intentional and foreshadowing. He's not just a musician. He is a brave warrior. Well spoken. The LORD is with him. This man is a leader. What we will see from him down the road is all of these coming together to make a well-rounded king for Israel. Most importantly, not only is the LORD with David, but David is with the LORD.

In a note of irony it's not until the end of the chapter that someone utters David's name aloud for the first time. This person is Saul, the king David is anointed to replace.

Let's take a moment to consider what's about to happen, and what it must have been like for David and

his family. If your son was anointed king you'd most likely shout it from the rooftops in pride and celebration. What a tremendous honor on the family! What an achievement to see your child climb to such a height! It should be joyous. Not in this case.

What happens if a young existing king finds out someone else is slated to replace him? That's not a good place for the new king and his family. Kings were known to eliminate their competition. To expose David for who he has been anointed to be is a death sentence. The temptation is to say that if David is the true king why not just take Saul out and assume the throne? Keep in mind the rest of the people are likely not in on the rejection by God. If Saul is killed it's not David stepping in as the assassin, it's Saul's son. The argument might be for David to announce that he's been anointed. How would that go over? Someone kills royalty and then says "God told me to so I could take over!!!" It sounds insane.

No, David and his family have to keep quiet. Besides, Samuel said David was king but he didn't say how, when, or where. David is next to the throne even if not on it.

The chapter ends on a note happy in the moment but tragic in the end. Saul loves David. He wants him consistently with him to soothe him. David becomes his armor bearer, which we know from an earlier chapter is an intimate and close position. Their relationship starts out beautifully, if not under tense circumstances that Saul is unaware of. We know it's not long before the relationship sours. That it begins so well is a genuine sadness.