



**Educate
+ Engage**



MIND
MATTERS



The Role
of Community

OVERVIEW

As we have discussed in this series, our relationship with God is incredibly important to our mental health. He alone has the ability to guide us completely to healing and wholeness. However, this does not mean that relationships with others are not also important. Our relationships play a crucial role in both our mental health and our formation as disciples.

Scripture Passage

I Corinthians 12:26 (KJV)

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Matthew 22:37-39 (NJKV)

Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'

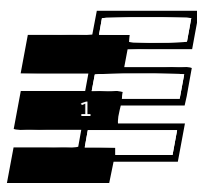
EDUCATE

Mental health can seem like an incredibly individual struggle. It can feel as if we are facing the thoughts or emotions by ourselves, and many times we are. However, there is so much benefit to allowing others to come alongside you in your journey to health. In fact, it is not only beneficial, but necessary. God created us in His image, and He is a relational God. His original intent for humans at creation was that we would commune with Him in perfect relationship. He did not need us to exist and be in relationship with Him, but He desired us. As such, we are also relational beings. We are made to be in relationship with others.

Point 1: We are commanded to "love others as ourselves."

Our last lesson spoke about the transformational power of God's love. In the Gospels we read that our first priority is to love God with everything we have, but right behind that is to love your neighbor as yourself: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37-39, NKJV). This command does not exalt us over others or others over ourselves. It simply says to love both. It is not a "first then," but a "both and." Love others as you love yourself.

Neuroscience is starting to show us the benefits of living in God's design for our lives, and this



template of love is no different. Researchers have found in the brain something called mirror neurons. The role of these neurons is to reflect or imitate what someone else is doing or experiencing. For instance, if you have ever witnessed someone fall or get hurt and you have physically winced or tensed up as you watched them, that was the response of your mirror neurons. Your brain is anticipating what the other person is experiencing and creating a similar reaction in your body.

In relationships, these mirror neurons play a critical role in our interactions with loved ones. As we commune with them, our brain begins to be formed by what we see in them.

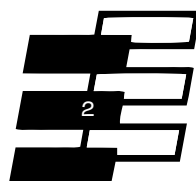
In our last lesson, we discussed how God's love can physically alter our brains. When we experience His love and care in a situation where we have not experienced love before, it changes how we remember that situation. It makes traumatic experiences less traumatic, and we no longer have the same reaction to them as we did before.

We can actually facilitate this change in our minds with each other! We have the ability to be vessels of God's love when we show up in relationship for each other. When someone provides empathy and care to you, especially in situations where you have not been met with love before, it begins to heal those wounds inside of us.

Point 2: The role of the body of Christ is to come alongside each other and mutually aid each other in our formation as disciples.

Scripture even speaks to our role in relationship with each other as the body of Christ: "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26, KJV). As we fulfill this Scripture, we help share the love of Christ with each other, thus spurring each other on in our healing and pursuit of looking more like Christ. Similarly Paul instructed: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2, NKJV).

The beautiful part of God's plan for our lives is that each time we are obedient in fulfilling His commandments, we reap the benefits in our own lives as well. When we sit with someone who is walking through suffering and help show God's love to them, we experience the love of God in that moment as well. The mirror neurons in our brains literally help us to heal and grow at the same time we are facilitating healing and growth for others. Even if we find ourselves at the foot of the cross on the behalf of someone else, the time spent there changes us as well. These relationships within the body of Christ are necessary for our formation.



Point 3: There are times professional help is needed.

There may be times in your mental health journey when you find yourself needing help beyond your peers or mentors in the church. This is all right! Much like God has equipped the modern medical field with knowledge and understanding of how He created our bodies to function, a good Christian counselor is equipped with understanding of how your brain operates and desires to help you heal and grow.

Here are some scenarios in which it may be helpful to seek additional support:

- Your mental health is difficult to navigate to the point it is affecting your daily functioning. This can look like difficulty managing your emotions, trouble with eating or sleeping regularly, or losing interest in activities that normally excite you.
- You have encountered traumatic experiences in your past and have not been able to work through them in a safe space up to this point.
- You have an active addiction, whether it is substance abuse, pornography usage, or an eating disorder.
- You are currently experiencing or have experienced abuse or neglect in your lifetime.
- Lastly, if you are struggling with insecurities, a lack of self-worth, or anxiety.

Counseling is not separate and apart from God's work in your life. The role of a good Christian counselor is to help facilitate the healing within you that only God can ultimately accomplish. The skills you learn to employ in your life can help engage your brain in the act of growth and healing, while the love and compassion you experience in the counseling relationship can help you learn to trust and depend on God and on those around you.

Closing

We are designed for relationship with others. When we fulfill this intentional design for our lives, we reap many benefits, the greatest of which is becoming more like Christ every day. The body of Christ can help us in our own formation, and we can help others in theirs.

ENGAGE

This week choose a friend, parent, or mentor and find a time to have a conversation with them. Take the time to ask questions about their lives beyond what you would normally do. As you learn more about what they are experiencing, notice what you experience while listening to them. This practice can help the person you are with, but it also helps you with your own awareness and understanding of yourself.

