

"...even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you."  
- Psalm 139:12

We live in a broken world, and our minds can fall into unhealthy ways of thinking. For some, seasons of depression, despair and doubt are very real. There is powerful truth for all in the Gospel. We are known, and loved by the Living God. This brings us hope, even in moments of disorientation – when our minds leave us distressed.

### **Read Psalm 139:1-12**

#### **1. The Nature of the Mind**

Our minds are beautiful things, with so much potential for creativity, imagination and design. Our minds are complex, affected by nature and nurture. Our minds are fragile, affected by many things - some of which we can control, and some things we cannot. Mental health problems are common, approximately 1 in 4 people in the UK experience mental health concerns each year.

The Bible attests to many individuals who have struggled in similar ways: Job, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Solomon – to name a few. We should not fear talking about mental health issues within the Church. God is not uninterested, dismissive or unmoved of the issue, and neither should the Church be.

#### **How have the Church, and Christians, treated the subject of Mental Health (seen by society, or personally)?**

#### **2. Common Thought Processes**

Our minds create an impression of the world that shapes our experience. If we expect danger around every corner, it affects how we relate to the world. We live in the reality our thoughts create. God is able to discern our thoughts (*Psalm 139:2*), and how that shapes our view of reality. We are not so good at doing this. We can sub-consciously fall into thought patterns, that lead us to see the world differently. We have an invitation that the Gospel can reshape our thinking (*Romans 12:2*).

In order to reshape our thinking, it is important to challenge those thoughts, and thinking patterns that are shaping our reality. There are 12 common thinking patterns, which David Murray has described in 'The Happy Christian' which we can all be prone to. These thought patterns affect how we view the world, and the truth.

- **Black and White** - Allowing your thinking to be trapped into extremes
- **Generalising** - Basing belief on one experience - believing that it happened once, so it will always happen that way
- **Filtering** - Focussing on the negative from a particular experience, forgetting the positive
- **Transforming** - Turning a positive experience into a negative one
- **Mind-Reading** - Assuming that you know what others are thinking, allowing that to negatively shape your thinking
- **Future-Telling** - Expecting a negative result from your actions to prevent taking action to start with
- **Comparing** - Looking at someone else, to work out your own self-worth and value
- **Perfecting** - Putting on a self-imposed pressure to get everything right
- **Personalising** - Taking personal responsibility for actions - even when not involved
- **Ruminating** - Living with your head in the past
- **Translating** - Believing the grass on the other side is greener
- **Catastrophising** - Imagining the worst possible situation

#### **Which two or three of these thought patterns do you commonly relate to?**

#### **How can we see these thought patterns affecting how we interpret our reality and the truth around us?**

#### **3. Forming New Tracks**

##### **Read 2 Corinthians 10:5**

These patterns of thinking become like arguments that obscure the reality of God. They give us an inflated view of the problems, and ourselves, and take the view off God. As we read the word of God, as we focus on Him, our view is taken away from ourselves – and turned to Christ. Re-orientating our minds in this way takes divine power. This is found in the Word of God, by the Power of the Holy Spirit. We have repeatedly fallen into a way of thinking – to form new patterns takes work.

First we need to recognise our patterns, then we need to communicate this recognition – letting others know. Once communicated, we need to challenge negative thinking – with the help of others. Finally, we must choose which path to take.

##### **Read Philippians 4:4-11**

These are protective habits for choosing the path God has chosen. Rejoice – not in your state of mind, your feeling or your circumstances; instead in the Lord. Bring requests to God with thanksgiving – enlarging your view of God, reducing (although not removing) your view of your situation or concern. Enjoy life in God – whatever is true, noble, pure... enjoy God.

#### **What Biblical truths can we hold onto to challenge the common thought processes mentioned above?**

#### **4. God's Grace in Darkness**

Some are prone to darkness, despite seeking to cultivate good habits. Sometimes this is the result of an experience, circumstance or crisis. Sometimes there seems to be no reason. There is no use denying the darkness – and neither does the Bible. It is easy to fall into a gospel of works in these situations, to 'think your way out of it' – but this is impossible for us.

Firstly we should acknowledge our situation. Consider the symbolism in the Psalms, and how they can reflect our feelings. Don't isolate, but be around friends you can trust. Find help: prayer, pastoral support, and professional help. Hear what the Gospel says (*Romans 10:17*) - faith comes not but thinking or evaluating (internal), but by hearing the word of God (external).

#### **How can the Church Bring Hope in times of darkness and despair?**

#### **How do we enjoy Jesus as the source of truth, peace and joy for our minds?**