

## Breaking the Chains of Depression and Anxiety with Friends Who Help

### SLIDE

**Introduction:** My name is Tim Sumerlin and I am honored to speak today on *Breaking the Chains of Depression and Anxiety with Friends Who Help*.

Slide re family, DU adjunct,

Our time today is designed to start or continue a conversation for you and your trusted friends. I'm speaking to both those who struggle...and those who want to help those with anxiety and depression. The principles of help are similar. Tonight, we will focus on anxiety- the most common mental health challenge facing us.

A disclaimer: in one hour it is impossible to cover such a complex topic as anxiety and depression. I will focus today on dealing with these issues in the church setting.

There is no judgement in this room today. We simply come as friends seeking to better understand our challenges, and to help each other out.

I come to you as a fellow sufferer. Members of my family and I deal with anxiety and other mental health issues and have taken medication at times to help relieve the symptoms.

I was somewhat skeptical about those with mental health challenges until my mom had lung cancer and died and I was helpless to do anything about it. I then had my first panic attack, in the back seat of her car – it was terrifying and my life radically changed...

For those sceptics in the crowd, please be aware of the reality of these symptoms. Just because you can't relate, does not mean they don't exist. There is always a need for understanding and grace.

Can someone tell what empathy is? Going to a difficult place inside of you in order to relate to someone hurting, without telling them.

**Let's try something: Turn to the person next to you and share how either yours' or someone else's mental health issues have affected you and practice an empathic response.**

By the buzz created in the room, it's obvious this is an important topic.

Process: What happened just now? Connection

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Anxiety and depression are the most prevalent challenges we face. It is not a new phenomenon – they have been around a long time. Actually, in many ways they were created by God to be an important part of the human condition and at times can be quite helpful.

Without anxiety we would be eaten by bears, run over by cars, or suffer other dangers in the world. Anxiety is a survival feature of our life. It helps you get going on that exam coming up or finish the project with its deadlines. When the car is low on gas, that anxiety we feel, helps us to stop and get gas. Anxiety can be a warning siren for many harmful times in our lives.

Depression, too has useful features. Without depression, we would not know how to grieve our losses, how to feel sorrow, or how to create down times in our lives for rest and recuperation. Without depression, we would not have much of the finest art, music, and writing we all enjoy.

Depression is an opportunity to dive into the human character of textured feelings, and colors many of our most enjoyable experiences. Depression takes us to the very questions of life. Without some depression, we would be robotic creatures, unable to feel and understand ourselves, or have the ability to empathize with others.

SLIDE re bell curve:

The irony of anxiety:

**Think of your brain.** It is very complex and has many functions. We have an “anxious brain” which is designed to keep us safe from biological fears – fight or flight. We also have a logical brain (pre-frontal cortex) which allows us to stop and decide to make rational choices after weighing options.

**Job of anxiety is protection.** It (the anxious brain) scans the environment for danger and when it sees danger it gets our body ready for action (biological dangers – bears, bad people – fight or flight)

We have plasticity in our brain – the ability of the brain to re-create itself. Our thoughts are actually physical proteins that can change and develop new neural pathways. We can change the way we think.

Our goal in anxiety is to access our logical brain when the anxiety part of our brain is in charge.

Anxiety tells us the **worse case scenarios** to help us avoid.

**The Irony of Anxiety:** anxiety is thinking it is protecting us from our worst psychological fears, but it is really making our fears become a reality.

EXAMPLE: We may perceive threat in a social situation. Our anxiety tells us to withdraw so we do and that a social interaction may reveal that we are not good enough to be with these people. As we withdraw socially, others perceive that we just don't like them and they may withdraw and we find ourselves isolated. Our worst fear of others not liking us is realized.

Or we're afraid to raise our hand in class to ask a question in order not to look stupid. We sit through the class, not understanding and our lack of knowledge increases which adds to our insecurity at not understanding the material. The test comes along and we fail it. Our worst fear is confirmed...we're just not that smart. It is ironic that what we think we are doing to protect ourselves, we do the opposite, making our fears a reality.

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**The Paradox of Anxiety:** The more we do what we want anxiety to do, the stronger it becomes and the more anxiety we have. Are you listening to your “anxious brain” or your “smart brain”?

EXAMPLE: This is about avoidance. By avoiding our anxiety we strengthen it. A paradox is a situation when you do the opposite of what seems to be right. Our body is saying to us, run, escape. The paradox is that the more you run and escape, the worse things go. We can strengthen (or discipline ourselves) to the very thing that is causing us pain.

My abscessed tooth. The idea of the dentist was too fearful to consider so I endured the pain of the abscessed tooth until I could bear it no more. My anxiety made things worse.

We want to face our fears, challenge their pretenses, overcome them. Our job is to master anxiety, not avoid it. By facing our fears, we reduce the anxiety and anxious things actually become easier as time goes by.

Often, mental health challenges, are character builders, intricately connected to our faith, and our growth as disciples of Jesus. I would rather grow by having great quiet times in front of the fireplace (and those are always needed) but God seems to grow me through my challenges. He did it with Jesus, so why do I think I'll be any different?

Our weaknesses are often an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to develop unique and useful skills that otherwise we would not develop. Weakness has a way of bringing us closer to God and actually attracts others to your faith in God.

In one interview, I asked a co-worker about her anxiety. She mentioned that her mom, who was a teacher, also suffered from anxiety, before they really diagnosed it, so she did not receive any treatment. I asked her how her mom handled her anxiety, and my co-worker replied that she became known as the most loving teacher in her school.

Because she did not have the opportunity to reduce her anxiety, she compassionately reached out to her weakest students and developed the reputation of love. Her anxiety trained her to love more.

Our weaknesses are often an opportunity to develop unique and useful skills that otherwise we would not develop. Malcom Gladwell in his book, *Outliers*, discussed movie producers in the 1960s with dyslexia, did not diagnosis it and they became very created as they had to solve their problem.

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Our weaknesses are often an opportunity for us to develop unique and useful skills that otherwise we would not develop. Weakness has a way of bringing us closer to our faith and each other and is actually attractive to those you love the most.

Our weaknesses are often an opportunity to develop unique and useful skills that otherwise we would not develop. Paul even said, *When I am weak, then I am*

*strong!* He meant that! Weakness has a way of bringing us closer to God and attracts others to God.

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SHARING TIME: Share with your neighbor a time you pushed through an anxious moment and how it made you grow.

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But at times, our mental health challenges become too much and our lives suffer. In a given year, 27% of adults will suffer from some form of mental health disease, the highest rate in the world. Chances are 50% that over a lifetime we will have to deal with this. Forty million adults in the US with anxiety, or about 18% of the population. Like other problems, they can begin to invade our private spaces and ruin our motivation to live, sour our relationships, and create isolation. Here are three dangers:

- 1) Suicide and self-harm—the rates are alarming. Please, if you struggle with suicide ideation, see someone for help. Never assume your friend is not serious when they share this. Always, always immediately, get someone else involved. Always. The need here is for support. You're not in trouble, just in need of support.
- 2) A lost faith in God, others, and the church. Some of us come to God and the church looking for a fix to our issues and it does not happen the way we want. You may be asking "*Why me?*" Remember the man born blind and Jesus was *asked WHY* this happened? He replied, "*no one sinned but this was done to give glory to God.*" As with the man born blind, often God has in mind to use us, to bring him glory.
- 3) Finally, discouragement & isolation—some of us have suffered shame, embarrassment, and guilt over our diagnoses. Perhaps you've blamed your

parents, God, or others for your place in life and daily live in confusion and isolation. Anxiety and depression can ruin our plans for the future and sour relationships. Be aware of isolation. Stay involved– it's our best opportunity for change.

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We can't control every aspect of our challenges but there are ways to lessen the negative effects of them.

I like this quote: *I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can **adjust** my sails to always reach my destination.*

Let's talk about **adjusting** sails.

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Two areas I want to speak about tonight in adjusting our sails. The first is how we **identify** ourselves and the second is the **role of the a meaningful community in our lives** in our mental health challenges.

So, let's talk about identity. We, or others give us labels that we begin to live by– fat, skinny, goofy, smart, depressed, anxious, insecure - black, white, brown, male, female, gay, straight, and on and on.

What are some ways he has lied to us? Perhaps you're ruminating on what people called you as a child. There may be trauma from an experience that you need to process. Often, sibling order with other family dynamics going on, may play a role – these can all determine the lies we've come to believe.

Lies can be wrapped around anger, unfulfilled hopes, failure and shame, guilt, legalism, and even the fear of death. Some of our lies are simply from an unknown source—they just are.

Usually the lies we believe and live by have strong emotional attachments, which make them doubly difficult. We may shape our lives by and become loyal to the lies in our lives.

They become automatic and reflexive. Once I sold my six-speed Jeep and bought an automatic, but still pushed my left foot down, looking for the clutch. Lies are like that—like the clutch on a six-speed Jeep, we automatically do them.

We see this at our *Disciples In Motion* meetings over and over again—people get caught up in their addictions, bitterness, marriage issues, and character deficiencies because of faulty thinking. We not only believe these lies but we structure our lives and live by them.

Our identity is not wrapped up in what we do, what our Quiet times were like today, our talent level, or spirituality. Our identity is wrapped up in one thing and one thing alone—the cross of Jesus. That bought us our identity.

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Challenge yourself when you want to identify with your diagnosis by using God's identifiers—disciples take God at his Word.

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**Time out for a public service announcement: please get your smartphones out.**

**I want to give you the opportunity to receive more information on this class. I actually created more than an hour's worth of notes and would like you to have it, as well as other information on mental health challenges, I send out weekly, through my Disciples In Motion ministry.**

If you want this, please take out your phones and TEXT the word inmotion to 66866 – the number is on your handout.

PAUSE...

SLIDE

We just got done discussing how God gives us a new identity. And there is a purpose to our new identity. The second area I want to speak on helping us lessen the negative effects of mental health challenges is the Lord's church.

We have become a part of a remarkable community – the church. A community like none other in the world. It is unique and yet multi-faceted. While full of imperfect people, the church is also the body of our perfect and loving Lord, Jesus. There is no community like the Lord's church.

I recently read a book called: **Lost Connections** by **Johann Hari**. This New York Times bestseller is an excellent resource to build conversation around any mental health issue we face.

His opinion is that over the past 20 or so years, the narrative to help those with depression and other mental health challenges, is to treat them like a problem with your brain chemistry and thus is a medical **only** problem to be resolved only with medication.

This sounds like a compassionate approach, but in reality, it can be harsh. If these issues are only a result of brain chemistry issues then medicine should clear it up—right? But if meds don't clear it up, then I'm in trouble – if that doctor can't help me, then who can?

So, Johann traveled the world over, looking for established research on ways to lessen the effects of mental health challenges and how to better resolve these issues in our lives. He found several areas of discussion beyond the medicine **only**

approach that I want to briefly share with you, and how I believe the church is the perfect place to find help.

Remember, the author is **not** saying that medication is not relevant, so keep on seeing your doctor and using your meds, but **alongside** medication, consider these features of mental health challenges and how the church setting helps us.

REPEAT re medication.

The author found that people suffering with mental health challenges have lost **vital connections** and by restoring these lost connections, we lessen the negative effects of anxiety, depression, and other issues.

Here are his “Connection Points”... areas of our lives that we can improve on to lessen the negative effects of mental health challenges.

The first couple are not directly related to church, but we can certainly gain encouragement and insight to these as Christians: **Physical activity, our value at work, and meaningfulness in our careers**, are all important factors in considering how to lessen the negative effects of mental health disease.

Other connection points that our time in church **can help with** include **childhood trauma, issues with a lack of respect, addiction to self, isolation, and your future**.

The Connection Point I want to explore is **the need to be a part of a Community** as a part of the answer to reducing the negative effects of anxiety and depression. The author of Lost Connections shared this story of how *being a part of a community*.

Share about woman and suicide.

I want to share how I think the church is the perfect place for recovery from all sorts of issues we may face.

Sometimes we get used to the church – it is the water we swim in. But my being numb to the greatness of the church does not make the Lord's church any less amazing.

Let's have another short sharing time. Turn to the person next to you and share how the church has helped you overcome a serious problem in your life.

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Here are a few reminders of the Lord's church in light of mental health challenges:

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1. You are **important** – God says so. God uses us to make sure there is no division in the church and that we have equal concern for each other. Each one of us is important and the world takes notice. We may not feel important but God say you are. On my flight to Orange County, there were a lot of parts of that airplane I never saw, don't understand, or even unaware of...but that does not mean they are unimportant!

In Ephesians 2:19 we see this:

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, **but fellow citizens** with God's people and also members of **his household**,<sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.<sup>21</sup> In him the **whole building is joined together** and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> And in him **you too** are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

There is no difference among us in regards to our importance in the church. We are **fellow citizens and members of God's household**. I heard a brother sharing last week about their adoption of their son and how difficult it was and he said that he cannot imagine his family without their son. God feels the same way.

Also, he says the **whole building is joined together**. Not just certain people, leaders or really cool people, but the whole building. Understanding your importance is one of God's protective factors in helping us to deal with mental health challenges.

2. You are **accepted** here. You are not a lesser citizen but a full member of God's people. We need to continually deal with clichés and exclusivity in the church. We need to accept everyone. Those that society has rejected, the Lord's church accepts.

Satan's lies in many different ways. Sometimes he lies straight into our hearts about us. Other times he allows us to mis-interpret our interactions with each other. Someone leaves you out of an event, or says something that hurts. We may be projecting our experiences, histories, moods, etc. onto others and our interactions can create divisions and disunity among us. Be careful when you start feeling like others may not want to be around you – it may be a lie from Satan. As an elder in the Denver church, I've seen this at the start of many issues.

On the other hand, you may be accurate in seeing rejection. Please speak up when this is obvious – humbly and honestly.

3. You are **safe** here. I'm always amazed at the freedom I find when I share the most difficult areas of my life with a brother or sister and I find acceptance, understanding, advice, and love.

We need each other and we need professional to help – we need both. “I’m the only one that knows...not fair! Use your friends but also know that the severity of your issue may involve a professional. (Jackie and her advice about my colon and the doctor’s advice)

Quick plug here: At the Disciples In Motion groups we insist on a safe & confidential environment – it’s a great place to work on any mental health challenges you may have. The Orange County church will begin this program in the new year.

Building a safe and confidential environment is indispensable for people to open up. We’ve seen this at Disciples In Motion. Learn to listen. Don’t judge – especially in your own heart. Ask questions in order to understand better.

Ask for permission before you share with anyone else! Unless it is harm to self or others. Creating a safe environment in the church is essential for us to deal with our mental health challenges.

- 4) You will find **purpose** here. The church is about more than just me. It is also about others– the weak, the hurting, the addicted, the lost. We honor, lift up, and live diversity. We serve the poor. We reach out with the good news to a lost community. We love those who others will not love. The Lord’s church is literally a beacon of hope and love for a lost world around us.

When people walk in, it’s the first thing they notice – there is something different about this group. They may not remember the sermon but they usually won’t forget the love of the disciples.

Ephesians 4:15 says: Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, **joined and held together** by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as **each part does its work**.

When we all work together, we can often come up with very creative and effective ways of serving each other and making God look good.

### Story about Sue.

What about you? What is your purpose here? How about the little things? Saying hi to a stranger? Jumping in on a study. Sitting with that person others don't sit with. You were created to do good works - Titus.

- 5) And finally, **we care**: Here are a few tips on caring. One is to develop empathy.

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#### Brene Brown on Empathy

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As I close out allow me to share a few tips for us as a church. This is for all of us, as we seek to love each other:

We help the weak by being weak. No one wants to be helped by a perfect person. We all have issues. When we are in touch with our own weaknesses, we are more compassionate, kind, insightful, and effective in helping others. Vulnerability is vital, as we strive to help others.

We help by listening to each other with humble hearts. Everyone wants to be listened to and understood. Listening takes humility, a stance of not knowing another's perspective, parking your judgements, and patience to get to the heart of a matter. When we listen like Jesus, we hold the moment.

We listen in a respectful way that allows us to ask helpful questions, like:

*Help me to understand you better or...How can I help? Or...who else can we get involved?*

## **SLIDE**

### **Other helpful coping strategies include:**

- Have a healthy sense of exercising, sleep, and nutrition – consider eliminating caffeine, energy drinks, or unneeded stress; Use meditation, breath counting, and other centering techniques
- Use a Thought Record – Google “thought record.” It is a simple exercise to help you deconstruct a lie in your life and what lies behind or drives the lie. This simple procedure allows you to see the thought, what’s behind it and then helps you to replace them with a healthier approach.
- Look at your environment: be aware of the 24/7 news cycle. Learn to limit what you see. Control what you can control.
- Writing in a journal helps. Someone told me that journaling takes the anxiety out of my head – and “What I **don’t** journal I take out on my family.”
- Keep others involved in your life – ***Grayson’s statement***
- Nurture a Dream. Have a dream for God – something to pull us through and gives us a reason to change. What is your dream for God? What is bigger than you, that only God can manage? This puts your issue in perspective and brings God into the picture in a way that he desires – to bring him glory.

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- Finally, think resources. God provides many useful and effective resources at our disposal to help – here are a few I’ve used over the years.

Resources help us make ongoing progress – ***progress and not perfection***

Results will not be instantaneous. We seem to gradually grow in meaningful ways as we trust, gain confidence, and love for God. As we do so He draws us closer to Him and uses us in unique and encouraging ways. We trust him more and He reveals his love more. We grow in our faith in a living God and become more like his Son, Jesus, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion, if you are dealing with a mental health issue do the following:

- 1) Recognize and own the problem
- 2) Create a social network around you for support
- 3) Educate and advocate for yourself
- 4) Develop and execute a self-help plan with short- and long-term goals

## **SLIDE**

One of my favorite authors, Ed Welch said: *The best stories are not those of victory over struggles but of a stubborn faith in the midst of them.*

## **SLIDE**

Thank you for your attention and participation tonight. I'll be back at the Book Table selling my books and answering questions.  
God Bless each and every one of you.

inmotion