

Prayers and Readings for Mental Health

Prayers and readings that may help when knowing what to say is difficult

- ✓ Lord Jesus Christ, who for love of our souls entered the deep darkness of the cross: we pray that your love may surround all who are in the darkness of great mental distress and who find it difficult to pray for themselves. May they know that darkness and light are both alike to you and that you have promised never to fail them or forsake them. We ask it for your name's sake.¹
- ✓ Lord, hear our voices when we cry to you! Our hearts say: we have longed, earnestly have we longed, to gaze upon your face. Do not turn your face away from us. Look tenderly upon your servants and, in your love, teach us to be free.²
- ✓ Lord, look upon us with the eyes of your mercy. May your healing hand rest upon us; may your life-giving power flow into every cell of our bodies and into the depths of our souls, cleansing, purifying, restoring us to wholeness and strength for service in your Kingdom.³
- ✓ Leader: When all hope is gone, Lord
Response: You are born
Leader: When the darkness is complete
Response: You come
Leader: When all things are beyond despair
Response: We find you
Leader: You roll back the stone
Response: and are there to greet us⁴
- ✓ Jesus says, 'Come to me all you who are troubled and I will give you rest'. (Quiet music in the background and people coming to light a candle)

So come, you who are burdened by regrets and anxieties, you who are broken in body and spirit' you who are torn by relationships and by doubt, you who feel deeply within yourselves the divisions and injustices of our world. Come, for Jesus invites us to bring him our brokenness. (Invitation to silent prayer)

¹ Cumings L. in Frank Colquoun (ed) Contemporary Parish Prayers London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1975 no.443, p.161

² Carmelite Monastery, Quidenham in Hear Our Prayer: An Anthology for Collective Worship Bury St Edmunds: Kevin Mayhew, 1996

³ Author unknown in Hear Our Prayer: An Anthology for Collective Worship Bury St Edmunds: Kevin Mayhew, 1996

⁴ Graham Jeffery in Hear Our Prayer: An Anthology for Collective Worship Bury St Edmunds: Kevin Mayhew, 1996

Litany of the Cross from the Iona Book of Worship:

Leader: The Cross . . .
All: We shall take it
Leader: The bread . . .
All: We shall break it
Leader: The pain . . .
All: We shall share it
Leader: The joy . . .
All: We shall share it
Leader: The Gospel . . .
All: We shall live it
Leader: The love . . .
All: We shall give it
Leader: The light . . .
All: We shall cherish it
Leader: The darkness . . .
All: God shall pierce it
Amen⁵

When praying for people with mental illness, when I can't find the words, I often pray in silence, imagining each person wrapped in light and in God's love. I sometimes say their names out loud, or use a simple phrase, like Lord Jesus, have mercy on _____. I sometimes read personal psalms of lament on their behalf, like Psalm 5:1-3:

***O Lord, hear me as I pray;
pay attention to my groaning.
Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,
for I pray to no one but you.
Listen to my voice in the morning, Lord.
Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly.***

Or Psalm 22:1-2, 19:

***My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.***

⁵ The Iona Community from The Iona Abbey Worship Book published by Wild Goose Publications, Iona Community, Unit 16, Six Harmony Row, Glasgow G51 3BA

. . . . O Lord, do not stay far away!

*You are my strength; come quickly to my aid!*⁶

Bible readings that offer comfort and reassurance

Many New Testament passages offer comfort and reassurance to those who are feeling anxious or low.

For example, in John:

‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid’

(John 14:27)

‘Trust in God; also trust in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you’

(John 14:1-2)

Biblical readings and Psalms:

Job 6:1-14 Isaiah 38:10 – end; 52:13 – 53:5

Lamentations 3:1-33

Mark 4:35-41; 5:1-20; 15:34

Luke 7:11-23; 11:1-13; 15:11-end

John 10:7-21; 11:1-44; 14:1-21

Romans 12:15; 15:17

1 Corinthians 12:22

Revelation 21:1-4 and 21:22 – 22:5

Psalms 17:1-2 & 15; 22; 23; 25; 39; 40; 69; 90; 102; 116

Other Readings/Non-Scriptural

Thank you for being honest about how difficult, no, how frightening it was to visit me. There is nothing that the visitor to the patient can do. Even the pastoral actions of prayer, of giving communion, even of touch, may have no visible effect. They do not appear to be doing any good, and they give no encouragement to the pastor. You found yourself wanting to get away quickly, away from a place, which seemed so empty, from a person who seemed but a shell. A friendship that had been two-way had no substance anymore because there was no response. You mentioned to me that you had been seeing a young man who said, “My soul has gone: I am only a shell.” Simply to be with such a person, to be fully there, aware and

⁶ Kia Stephens: www.ibelieve.com

alive, entering that empty nothing even for a few minutes, is terrifying, however rational we may be in talking about it. I am reminded of someone else's comment, "You had left us; and I did not know if you were coming back." Nevertheless, you came back, returning again and again despite your fear. But no wonder in such circumstances that the patient becomes suicidal, whether actively so with wrist slashing, or passively so, as I did, simply giving up. If there is nothing here of me but a shell, there is no point in keeping a shell in existence, barely alive and not in any way that has meaning. Yet you did not give up. You did return, trusting that in time I would also return. And eventually we discovered that it was so, your remarking that my openness about my treatment, my helplessness, my feeling of guilt, had helped, as had my courage in fighting (too strong a word, crawling perhaps) my way back, despite the setbacks and falls . . . ⁷

- ✓ A seasoned therapist proceeded to describe Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. "Picture Jesus in the Garden," she began. The Bible tells us that Christ looked at His disciples and said, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," in Mark 14: 34. Scripture further describes Christ's distress in Luke 22: 44 when it says *(and being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.)*

After she described the condition of our Saviour she ended with a question I will never forget. "What if Jesus couldn't get out of the garden?" I had never thought about it before, but it was a question worth pondering. Had He gotten stuck in this critical moment, how would we view Him? Had He remained sandwiched between the present and the unavoidable future, what would we think about His mental state? The spiritual struggle we see in the garden links our Saviour to humankind. We can clearly see why it says in Hebrews 4:15 that we have a *"high priest who is able to empathize with our weakness."* *author unknown*

Further suggestions for thought-provoking readings:

Peter Brice *on the Edge: Wrestling with God in Depression* Norwich: Millstream Press, 1995
Sheila Cassidy *Sharing the Darkness* London: Darton, Longman & Todd
Jim Cotter *Healing – more or less* Sheffield: Cairns Publications, 1990
Jim Cotter *Dazzling Darkness* Sheffield: Cairns Publications & New Alresford
Arthur James / John Hunt Publishers, 1999
John Foscett *Meaning in Madness*
Roger Grainger *A Place Like This* Worthing: Churchman, 1984 (not in print)
Roger Grainger *A Place Like That* Wakefield: Eastmoor, 1997
Gerard Hughes *God, Where are You?*
Fr Gerald Mahoney *The Other Side of the Mountain*

⁷ From Cotter J (1997) *Brainsquall: Soundings from a deep depression*. Sheffield: Cairns Publications/Berkhamsted: Arthur James Ltd

Stephen Pattison *Alive and Kicking*

Jean Vanier *The Broken Body* London: Darton, Longman & Todd

Admitting your weakness and getting support is the strongest thing a person can do. Seeking help doesn't mean you've failed. It just means you're not in it alone.

@ChristianMentalHealth

Healing doesn't mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls your life.

Akshay Dubey

@ChristianMentalHealth

Your struggle is not your identity. Your trial is not your future. Never let anything shape your view of yourself except who God says you are.

Brittney Moses

@ChristianMentalHealth

Don't be ashamed of your story. It will inspire others like you. One day someone will look at you and say "because of you I did not give up."

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