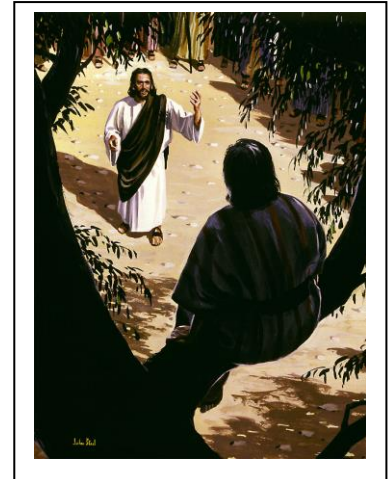


Sunday 2nd July 2023.

Lifting the Lid on Mental Health.

Scripture: Luke 19:1-10.

For the next 5 weeks we will be looking at how God helps all of us heal our mental health issues.



Maybe when you look at the details of your life, it is hard to believe that a God with good intentions, would plan each part of the life you have lived.

God's definition of "good" is very different from the worlds. God uses the messy, confusing and painful moments of our life to transform us more into the image of Jesus. Because of the Gospel we are freed from impossibilities.

Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus is contained in Chapter 61.

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn."

We are told: ***Instead of ashes, the oil of joy. Instead of mourning, a garment of praise. Instead of a spirit of despair, oaks of righteousness. Instead of shame, a double portion and instead of disgrace, a reason to rejoice in our inheritance.***

Let's take a look at the journey of Zacchaeus and witness the compassion and healing from Jesus.

Zacchaeus, Jewish by birth was a man of 5foot, which was considered a small height in those times. As a tax gatherer for the occupying Romans, he was notoriously unrighteous, a traitor to God's chosen nation and a spiritual disappointment to his people. He rose to the rank of "chief tax collector" and would have overseen lower level but still wealthy individuals. He would overcharge which had the backing of Rome and pocketed the excess. He was in a co-dependency relationship with Rome. Perhaps he was conflicted between the prestige and financial overabundance he was obtaining and an ache in his heart for healing his spiritual bankruptcy. But this changed the day he got a glimpse of the Messiah and his whole life changed.

What happened? Jesus stopped and noticed Zacchaeus. He allowed Zacchaeus to interrupt His journey. He asks Zacchaeus for help, giving him status and self-esteem. He comes to Zacchaeus' house, bringing the holy into his existing life, rather than demanding Zacchaeus change immediately.

This is what happens when we meet up with Jesus. Jesus values Zacchaeus in a way that the community has not, and He gives Zacchaeus ways of re-thinking his value to the community. Jesus tells us that He came to save all people, including the lost and the worst of sinners. Zacchaeus has a complete change of direction – complete repentance because of his spiritual relationship, trusting God in faith. Being loved, forgiven, and saved by God changes you.

This story is about the ostracised, judged, and isolated people in society. 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem at some point in their lifetime. 9 out of 10 people living with mental health issues, experience stigma and discrimination. There is still a lot of misconceptions about mental health today. In Christian circles, sadly many living with mental health issues have been judged and labelled.

“If you had more faith – you wouldn’t be suffering.”

“Repent of your sin – that is why you are unwell.”

Some say that true Christians should not suffer from mental health issues, but becoming a Christian does not make a person immune to challenges in their mental health. Just like physical injuries and diseases, mental health challenges can affect anyone.

Mental health affects how we think and feel about ourselves and others, how we interpret events, how we learn, how we cope with life events and how we develop and sustain relationships.

Every single one of us must manage a daily activity of balancing life’s stresses with the emotional resources available to us. Our emotions are fuelled by our thinking.

Think of the lights in your car – you notice the red engine light staying on – it is a warning light telling you something is wrong, and you need to investigate.

Our emotions do the same – so when they are triggered, we need to determine the thoughts behind them, which come from our hearts. We need to track our thinking not our feelings.

The power to change comes only through God's grace. As we grow and move through recovery from our issues through God's grace, we get to know Him better and want to model His teaching and His ways – to become more like Him.

The more we know about God, the more we will experience His grace and peace, instead of getting stuck in the lies Satan tells us. As Christians we are called to care for all – whether living with physical, mental, or spiritual health issues.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26 “if one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.”

Living with mental health challenges does not mean that God cannot use you. In fact, we will be exploring some of the Bible heroes who were mentally unwell over the coming weeks.

Closing:

God wants to take our pain and heartache and transform us through it, but we must first come to Him with our hurts and hangups, to receive His healing.

Come into God's presence and ask Him to touch your life today (pause).

Invite the Holy Spirit to minister to you and begin to do a new work in your heart, asking Him to conform you into becoming more like Jesus.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I am so grateful that You are working all things together for my ultimate good. You are working the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, the blessings and the burdens for Your eternal purposes. Help me to hold onto this reality and to trust You in the midst of every circumstance, especially when I don't understand. In Jesus' name. Amen.