

Integration of Mind and Spirit

An Inductive Bible Study on Mental Wellbeing

Leader's Notes:

Goal of Study

The goal of this study is to provide space to have an intentional conversation about mental health, so that stigma can be lessened and God invited in. Opening up to others and God doesn't mean the struggle goes away, but it is a step on the path to wellness. The hope of the study is that it helps a person feel seen and know he/she is not alone.

Throughout the study, it is imperative to say, **"I am not a mental health care professional."** There are limitations to the help you can provide. You are hoping the study serves as a springboard to explore more about a person's wellbeing, as they seek to honor God through their mental health. It is not designed to be a solution, and it is not your role to "fix" any struggles that surface.

"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

In Luke 10:27-28 (NIV), Jesus tells a questioning lawyer that the way to experience eternal life is to love Him with all your being and to love others as ourselves. This study is aimed at helping you love God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. In order to do this, we have to be honest with ourselves and God about how we are feeling and what we are thinking.

From our time together in this study, our hope is that you feel the freedom to take all your thoughts to the Lord, even the hard ones, knowing He cares about you. Our goal is to start a conversation around mental health from a biblical worldview. We pray this will be one step in a journey of walking with Jesus in this area of your life.

Mental Health

This section has two aims: 1. To help students connect with and share their own mental health struggles and 2. To surface any shame and stigma associated with mental health.

After reading the introduction paragraph, talk about the everyday anxieties, worries, thoughts and struggles they may experience as a student-athlete. Examples may include: feeling the pressure of trying to financially help their family back home, feeling overwhelmed by an ever-changing schedule, the pressure of the university and coaches to succeed, feeling like they want to escape the demands on them, having thoughts of self-harm.

Move into a conversation about the stigma that prevents people from talking about these harder thoughts and feelings—even in discipleship and Christian communities. Sometimes the stigma in Christian circles can feel even stronger than outside. Some people have been told that if they have enough faith or practice spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible reading, their mental health struggles will go away.

Leader Share: Share a quick story about your journey with the stigma of mental health.

Mental health

Just as we all have physical health, we all have mental health. Being aware of our mental health wellness is vital in loving God with our minds. Everyone's mental health is affected by sin and the brokenness of a fallen world. We will all experience stressors and situations that can lead to challenging thoughts and emotions. Sometimes, these thoughts and feelings result in anxiety, depression and mental illnesses.

“Mental illness is a condition that affects a person's thinking, feeling or mood. Such conditions may affect someone's ability to relate to others and function each day. Each person will have different experiences, even people with the same diagnosis.”

—National Alliance on Mental Illness

Dig Deep

How do we glorify God in our mental health journeys?

This section is designed to help your student share their feelings around their mental health and bring any shame into the light.

We need to help our students acknowledge that shame has no place in this discussion. Brene Brown, a researcher and expert on shame, says,

“Shame is the intensely painful feeling that we are unworthy of love and belonging.”

Shame is very different from guilt; while guilt says “I did something bad,” shame moves this further, saying “I am something bad.” It is an attack on our identity and self-worth.

When we hide in shame because of the stigma attached to mental health struggles, we often end up in a painful and dark cycle. Shame leads to isolation, which is where depression and anxiety flourish.

Depression/Anxiety---Shame---Isolation---Depression/Anxiety.

Help your student understand you are talking about this topic because you want to make it normal to talk about mental health and how he/she is doing. You want to speak against any shame and stop the shame cycle many athletes live in.

During this section, you want to listen for anything they might be believing about mental health or how God views their mental health that isn't true. You don't need to address these now, but be aware of them as you move forward. This would be a good time to share your own experiences as well.

It starts with our minds. Our thoughts are affected by our feelings and emotions. Our thoughts, feelings and emotions all play into our mental health. It can be hard to talk about our mental health because of the stigma our culture has associated with it. Here are some questions to consider as you at look at the feelings chart:

What has your experience been with understanding your mental health?

When it comes to thinking about your mental health, with which feeling(s) do you identify?

Emotional Intelligence 2.0

Five Core Feelings

INTENSITY OF FEELINGS	HAPPY	SAD	ANGRY	AFRAID	ASHAMED
HIGH	Elated Excited Overjoyed Thrilled Exuberant Ecstatic Fired Up Passionate	Depressed Agonized Alone Hurt Dejected Hopeless Sorrowful Miserable	Furious Enraged Outraged Boiling Irate Seething Loathsome Betrayed	Terrified Horrorified Scared stiff Petrified Fearful Panicky Frantic Shocked	Sorrowful Remorseful Defamed Worthless Disgraced Dishonored Mortified Admonished
MEDIUM	Cheerful Gratified Good Relieved Satisfied Glowing	Heartbroken Somber Lost Distressed Let down Melancholy	Upset Mad Defended Frustrated Agitated Disgusted	Apprehensive Frightened Threatened Insecure Uneasy Intimidated	Apologetic Unworthy Sneaky Guilty Embarrassed Secretive
LOW	Glad Contented Pleasant Tender Pleased Mellow	Unhappy Moody Blue Upset Disappointed Dissatisfied	Perturbed Annoyed Uptight Resistant Irritated Touchy	Cautious Nervous Worried Timid Unsure Anxious	Bashful Ridiculous Regretful Uncomfortable Pitied Silly

Dig Deeper

Psalm 143

Explore the text

This section is intended to be studied similarly to an inductive Bible study. Help the student unpack the Scripture by marking it up, asking questions, then applying it.

Read the context or summarize it for the student

Psalm 143 (NIV)

A psalm of David.

¹ Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief.

² Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.

³ The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in the darkness like those long dead.

⁴ So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed.

⁵ I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.

⁶ I spread out my hands to you; I thirst for you like a parched land.[a]

⁷ Answer me quickly, Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit.

⁸ Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.

⁹ Rescue me from my enemies, Lord, for I hide myself in you.

¹⁰ Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

¹¹ For your name's sake, Lord, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.

¹² In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.

Context for Psalm 143:

Psalms has been the songbook and prayer book for countless generations of Jews and Christians over the centuries. It contains the entire range of human emotions, from the highest points of joy and thanksgiving to the lowest points of depression and loss, and everything in between. The psalms are transparent, passionate, emotive, personal, and genuine, and they provide believers with language with which to express their own deepest emotions and passions.

Unpack

1. Who was David talking to?
2. How does David describe God?
3. Mark a cross over the words/phrases that are referring to God.
4. What is the tone of these 12 verses?
5. What is David asking for? What does he want?

Connect

6. What are the timeless truths about God and about people?
7. Circle all the emotion words in the passage
Name the emotions David is experiencing (refer to the Feelings Chart if needed)
8. What is the basis for what David asks from God?
9. How would you describe David's communication with God? Do you think it's still okay to talk with God like this now? Why or why not?
10. What characteristics of God do you see in this Psalm? How are these characteristics still true of who God is today? (Hebrews 13:8--Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever).

Apply

11. Have you ever felt any of the emotions David expresses in this psalm?
12. How does it help to know you are not alone in what you feel?
13. What difference might it make to connect what you learned about God in this psalm to your pain, hurt or suffering?
14. How does David model for us how to talk/pray to God?

Meditation

God cares about our hearts, our emotions and our minds. He cares about our pain and struggle, and He is present in it. Like David, we can dwell on God's presence and character as we share with him what we are thinking or feeling. The first step is to be honest with God and ourselves.

We are going to take 3 minutes of silence together to give room in our hearts and minds to hear from God. During this silence, check in with your current emotions and invite God into those feelings.

After this timed silence, allow space for your student to share how they are feeling.

“Great job tackling such a difficult conversation around mental health. I know it takes a lot of courage to be willing to talk about a lot of these things, and really delve into your thoughts, feelings and emotions.” Megan, mental health professional and former student-athlete.

Read the quote and let them know that, later in the day, you will send them a 1-minute video message (you can find it on YouTube, <https://youtu.be/Dz9-vHV-Kp8>) from a former AIA student-athlete who is now a professional counselor. This text will create another touchpoint between you and them on this topic. You don't want this study to be a one and done discussion. Use the video as a way to check in on how they are feeling and what they are thinking since the study. Check in often about their mental health as you meet together in the future. By talking about it regularly, you normalize the conversation when/if a crisis occurs.

This is another time to point out that you are not a mental health care professional, so there are limitations on the help you can offer. If they express interest in seeking professional counseling, make sure you offer them multiple counselors to choose from (offering multiple counselors is very important liability protection for you and the organization)

Next Steps

Come prepared to share local resources. Have the student fill in the blanks for campus and athletic department resources they can access. You will need to research this before your discipleship time or look them up together in the meeting.

Use the 'Dig Deeper' section as a way to encourage them to keep processing with God about their mental health journey. Encourage journaling through the Psalms of Lament as a great next step. They could bring some of their journal entries to your next discipleship meeting to continue the conversation.

Save a few minutes for prayer with your disciple at the end of the study. Pause to reflect on the weight of the topic and the current struggle of our society. Thank them for going to a deeper place and allowing you and Jesus into their mental health journeys. Spend time in prayer.

Reference the tipsheet for more mental health resources.

It is vital that you know there are mental health resources available to you. If you are struggling you are NOT alone! Having a community around you is the best approach to mental health journey. Let's identify some of your resources.

- **Nationally and locally:** National Suicide Prevention Lifeline//1-800-273-8255 or 988
- Crisis Text Line: 741741 Text "CONNECT"
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) offers free support groups www.NAMI.org
- **Campus Mental Health Resources:** _____
- **Athletic Department Resources:** _____
- Dig deeper into the Bible
 - In the Hebrew text, 73 Psalms have "Of David" in the title, and the New Testament adds two additional references to David as author: Ps 2 (Acts 4:25-26) and Ps 95 (Heb 4:7). The psalms consist (on the surface) of human words to and about God. But the psalmists were not writing simply for themselves as private individuals. In almost all cases, they wrote with a view to others preserving and singing their words. In other words, even though many psalms are intensely personal (e.g., Pss 17; 51), their authors wrote not only to express their own private sentiments but also for the benefit of others. **Considering reading one Psalm of David a day and journaling your thoughts and personal connections with the Psalm.**
 - The Psalms also point to Jesus' suffering: Matthew 27:34-35, 43,46. What were figurative expressions of David's suffering became literal sufferings of Jesus. David prefigured Jesus as the heir to the throne that God promised (2 Samuel 7:1-16); he suffered and went through hardships before becoming king, as did Jesus. Paul affirms that all who follow Christ will share in the sufferings of Christ if they are to share in his glory (Romans 8:17-18). **Consider looking up these passages and reflecting on the sufferings of Jesus.**
- Using Psalm 143 as a model of communication with God, write your own psalm to God
- Read the story of Elijah, and spend time in I Kings 19 meditating on how God cared for Elijah in the midst of physical and emotional exhaustion.