

Christians and Mental Health Training:

A reflection on the Good Samaritan

The phrase "Good Samaritan" is well established in our western culture. A charity supporting those in distress bears the name. A stranger who comes to our aid earns the moniker. As Christians training in the area of mental health, what can we learn from the Good Samaritan that goes beyond its current place in our language and culture?

The parable of the Good Samaritan is part of a conversation between Jesus and an expert in the law. They talk about eternal life and the essentials of Scripture but the expert of the Law is interested in specifics and asks, "If I'm expected to love God and love my neighbour then who is my neighbour?"

Rather than a list, set of criteria or additional rules, Jesus tells the story of a crime: a traveller is attacked, robbed and beaten to the point of near-death. Two people with religious standing notice the man and do nothing. One person who comes from the wrong side of the tracks sees him, takes pity on him, tends his wounds, takes him somewhere to recuperate and covers the costs of doing so.

You can read the account in the Bible [here](#).

Some points of reflection as we train in mental health as Christians:

This story is used to illustrate to an expert of the law what God desires and commands from us but there is no explicit mention of faith in the story. Responding to people in the way God would respond to them seems to be at the heart of this parable. *We help because people are in distress. It is advisable to offer what is called "religious solace" to those experiencing mental health difficulties only when it is asked for. This does not make our help any less a faithful act.*

There is no judgement expressed in the parable from the Samaritan. No sense of whether the beaten man was wise to travel at that time of day or whether he was being overly conspicuous with his valuables. His plight moved the Samaritan. *Non-judgemental listening is incredibly powerful. To listen to someone where they are at, rather than review their route into difficulty, is more impactful than we often credit.*

The Samaritan responds to both the immediate crisis and the longer term process of healing for the

man. He tends his wounds and gets him to a place of longer term recuperation. *The conversation you have will be part of a larger picture of support and help.*

The Samaritan pays the cost of time, convenience and money in order that the man be restored to health. *Supporting in this way costs - especially emotionally. Do not skimp on rest, relaxation, recuperation and reconnecting with God for yourself - even in the name of church busyness.*

The Samaritan sees it through but does not do it all. The donkey does the carrying and the innkeeper does the longer term caring. *We do not do more than we are trained to do. We do not attempt to replicate a professional service that already exists. This ensures that the person receives the right support at their point of need.*

The Samaritan is reliable but is not always present. He doesn't wait at the bedside until the man is fully better. *The person we have supported has the right to dignity and the right to move beyond the place of needing our support. We can be reliably available and dependable but this is different from behaving in a way that encourages someone to be dependent on us.*

There is no mention of reward or gratitude expressed from the man to the Samaritan. *Training in this fashion supports the range of ways in which we can effectively serve. It is neither a badge of honour nor a badge of status and to consider it so makes us less effective and more prone to counter-productive interactions.*

A prayer for ourselves as we train

*Dear Lord,
Thank You for making minds that can learn and create. Thank You for giving us signs for when our minds are in need of rest and recovery. May You grant us steadfast minds and perfect peace as we trust in You and learn together for Your service. Amen.*

The 3 hour Mental Health Awareness Course lets participants explore the foundational principles of Mental Health. If you wish to have more in-depth training (for example on how to be a Mental Health First Aid Trainer) do look into our two day training.

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