

Mental Health Q&A; Panel

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Date: 28 September 2025

Preachers: Eva Chiu, Felistas Muodza

[0 : 00] Yeah, so thank you again. Yeah, thank you so much for joining us, both of you.! A full-time counsellor.

Do you want to just tell us a bit more about that, what that's like? Or, yeah, what does your week look like? Good evening, church. My name is Felicitas, like what Pastor William has already said. I'm a member at Papakura Baptist Church, and, yeah, I work as a counsellor for a not-for-profit-making organisation in Papatoe. So, what my day looks like.

That's difficult to describe. So, I work with people, you know, having issues with mental health, all sorts of mental health issues you can think of. So, I work with people aged from 15 upwards.

So, I work with adults, teenagers, and couples as well. Fantastic. Okay, yeah, so all ages, yeah, it sounds like. Yeah, okay. Maybe just a very brief question, like, you know, if, let's say you're in a food court, and it's got all the food of the world, okay, for listeners, what's your go-to, if you want, you know, what's your favourite food or something that you really enjoy?

[1 : 34] Did you say food or? Yeah, food, yeah. That's a good question. I love food, but I think I will go to my traditional food.

Home is always best. I love my traditional food, and we call it sadza. Sadza, oh, nice. And we'll eat that with vegetables, and any stew could be chicken or beef.

Okay, fantastic. I tried making sadza once, and, yeah, I feel like I should leave it to the experts. All right, Eva, how about you? If you were at a food court, what would you grab?

If you could pick anything. I would go around the whole food court, check the hygiene rating, and then check. I'll compare the hygiene rating, price, number of workers, the length of the lines, like the general cleanliness of the place, and then I'll decide.

Okay. I might go around another time just to double check. Yeah, fantastic. Yeah, I think that is a familiar experience, yeah. Let me ask you as well, Eva, since I'm talking with you.

[2 : 45] You're an officially trained basic mental health first aider. I didn't even know you could have first aid training in mental health, but, yeah, I mean, it sounds amazing. Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

I actually just did the course a few months ago. So, well, the good thing is it's still fresh on my mind. Basically, it is just like what it is.

It's first aid, but for mental health. So, New Zealand, I think, at the moment, is one of 29 countries that recognizes something called mental health first aid. And you can do a course for a few hundred dollars through St. John's, Red Cross, just like your physical first aid.

It doesn't involve CPR. You don't need to do it on the head or anything like that. It helps you recognize symptoms. Someone who needs mental health first aid and then point them to professional help.

Just like when you do physical first aid, you need to call an ambulance at the same time. So just because you become a first aid responder doesn't mean you can diagnose or treat people.

[3 : 59] It's just that you are there to help them get help. Okay, great. Phyllis, is that something you're familiar with as well? Mental health first aid or anything you want to add to that?

I would say maybe a trained counselor. Similar to what you said, we are trained to help people. I guess they will be referred to us once you realize they need help.

So, yeah, it's really important that people know how to, you know, recognize some of those symptoms and refer them to where they can get help. So it sounds very familiar, and that's what we do.

Great. Sometimes, like what Eva said, we cannot diagnose. Sometimes we have to refer to specialists so they can diagnose. Yeah, fantastic. I guess a few of us in the church, you know, a

church our size, some of us will be familiar with having received counseling, whether through school or through, you know, just being referred.

Some of us maybe have encouraged others to seek counseling. So you work in a counseling practice. It's just a not-for-profit. But you worked as a Christian.

[5 : 04] How does being a Christian inform your approach to counseling? Yeah. Does it make a difference? That's a good question. Yeah. I work as a Christian, but I work for a secular organization.

So the agents I work for is not a Christian organization. They are just a community agents. But we work with clients from, you know, different backgrounds, Christians, non-Christians.

But what I've realized, being a Christian actually helped me a lot in my career because what they say in counseling, the relationship is the most important thing because it determines the outcome.

So the way you embrace those clients as they come in will determine the outcome of therapy. So for me, I thank God that being a Christian, my values, they just embrace people, you know.

We are called to be compassionate, to be empathetic, to love people, to respect people. So I've realized that it helps me to build those relationships with clients from any background.

[6 : 09] And also knowing that as a Christian, I have to embrace everyone. It's God's creation. We are all created in God's image. So just not being judgmental and accepting them as they are has helped me a lot to create good relationships with my clients and also helped with the outcomes of their therapy.

So, yeah. That's great. Yeah, thank you for sharing that. And lovely to hear that, just a reminder that everyone that walks through your doors is made in God's image. They're not just clients.

They're people that, yeah, if we're Christians, we believe that everyone is someone worthy of respect and compassion. Yeah. So that's great. Really helpful to hear that. Okay.

There's a really interesting question here that's come up. What is the cause of mental health decline in general in the past few years? So changing gears a bit. So in your practice or just in your experience, are you seeing, you know, more awareness or more, you know, mental health issues?

And if so, why? Yeah. So maybe we can ask you first and then Eva, if you want to jump on. Right. Yeah. That's a great question. But what I would say is, maybe from my opinion, is maybe because we live in a fallen world, things change every day.

[7 : 28] Our environment change now and then. and we seem to be sinking deeper and deeper every day. And I think those changes are affecting our mental health as well.

Because with the people I work with, of course, working in South Auckland, most of the people I work with are from a very low socioeconomic status. So they struggle a lot.

But what I've realized is, I think most of the challenges are coming from the, maybe the environment they live in. Because people, yeah, I think we have just gone further and further from God.

And sometimes I wonder, you know, when the Bible says, you know, in the last days, there will be difficult times. I sometimes wonder about that, if maybe, you know, this decline in mental health is also maybe the signs of the last days.

I think that verse is in, is it in Timothy? I'll just check. I think there's a verse which does say that, and I'll share that with you. Yeah, sure. Yeah. Yeah.

[8 : 33] I hadn't thought about that. In these last days, there will be, you know, people will be godless. There will be times of war and famine. Yeah. I think it's 2 Timothy 3, verse 1. But know this, that in the last days, perilous times will come.

Sometimes when I see some of the, you know, issues that I deal with, I sit in front of people dealing with all sorts of issues, very difficult. People are struggling. I sometimes think along those lines to say maybe these are some of the difficult times of the last days.

And also sometimes the environment that we live in, I think there's a study which is being carried out about social media. And they say it may have an impact on anxiety because a lot of people are struggling with anxiety, especially the young people.

and they say social media may be also contributing to that, you know, heightened anxiety in our young people. So our environment is contributing as well.

And maybe sometimes some of the life challenges like maybe the diseases, a lot of diseases, you know, and people who are sick with chronic sicknesses sometimes, you know, they end up, you know, having some of these mental health issues.

[9 : 47] Okay. That's really helpful. Yeah. Anything you want to add to that, Eva? Do you see it the same way? We're in the last days and social media is a big thing now? Or, yeah, anything else you'd add?

I think that we can see just a general trend. Humanity is further and further away from God and his values, right? And there are always evil consequences to every act of sin.

Whether it is suffered by the person who committed it personally or someone else will have to suffer. So the Bible says very clearly the world is continuing to decay.

There will be deceit and mental health is just one of the areas that we see, right? Climate, environment, biologically, everything is related and it's just that recently there are more talks on mental health and then more people are willing to talk about it.

So we see a lot more of this attention but also because of just a general decline. Okay. Yeah. And obviously, we have such a limited view.

[10 : 58] We can't see all the reasons why someone is suffering but, yeah, it does seem to be more and, you know, more prevalent at least. There's a greater awareness. You know, the fact that we're having a whole month thinking about mental health is, you know, a sign of that but also, again, you know, it's challenging because at the root of it is still we are living in a sinful fallen world and really helpful.

Okay. Someone's asked and this, a few people have asked similar questions like this so I might group them together. So someone's asked, I worry about things that are out of my control. When is worrying just worrying and when does it become a mental health issue?

So I think behind the question is maybe someone that is worrying or has anxiety or something like that. When is it just I'm worried and then when does it become, oh, I need to see a specialist or someone about something that might be clinical or something?

Yeah. Any thoughts on that? Do you want to go first, Eva? So in, so when we talk about mental health it's not a black and white topic. It's not like you are either healthy or unhealthy.

So in mental health there's something called the mental health continuum. So the model that I found very helpful is that green, yellow, orange and red.

[12 : 11] So green is when people have normal moods, ups and downs, you're able to face challenges, you bounce back. Yellow is when you're reacting to things, especially changes.

Changes in your body like you're sick or changes to your life when you are, you know, when you move house or things like that.

So you react to stress. Perhaps you find that you find hard to sleep, you lost your appetite or you're overeating. That's when you're reacting but just like yellow in a traffic light is transitional.

You're either going back to green yourself or you're going down to orange. Orange is when the stress in your life are continuing or your response are continuing even longer than the stress.

So for example, instead of just losing your appetite for one or two meals, you find that you are constantly under-eating. You are not sleeping at all most nights.

[13 : 19] So that's when you are mentally injured. If you're not able to go from yellow back to green yourself, then it's highly unlikely you're able to go from orange to green yourself.

That's when you need external help. Maybe you need to talk to someone, maybe you need to, something needs to change in your life. Okay? And you need someone's help.

It may be medical help, it may be just talking to someone, a friend, it may be just a change in the environment. But if you stay in that position for long, there is a high chance that you will drop down to red.

That's when the same indicators, not eating, not sleeping, but they're affecting other parts of your life. And they are preventing some of the normal daily functions.

For example, severe lack of sleep leading to hallucinations. Or you're not able to work. Or you're under-eating so much that it affects other parts of your body.

[14 : 26] It affects your health directly. So red is when you have a clinical medical disorder. That's when you definitely need medical intervention.

So if you're just worrying about your exam, very nervous about your first date, that's perfectly normal. You don't need to see a counselor for that.

You don't need to talk to your pastor. Maybe if you want to, of course you can. But the thing is, that's a normal part of life. And the thing is, a lot of the times, especially nowadays, when people are more aware of mental health terms, sometimes we misuse these words.

Anxiety is just normal being nervous. But if you see this persisting for longer, then you know you need help. So that's a continuum picture that can help us know when we need help and also to know when someone else actually needs help.

Because sometimes you see someone say, oh, they have anxiety or they have this and that problem. But when you see the bigger picture, the rest of their lives, they're actually pretty fine. [15:43] Then you know you don't need to worry. So that's helpful. Just having a picture in mind of a continuum, a scale or sliding scale. Felistas?

I think Eva summed it up very well. So like what Eva said, anxiety, a little dose of anxiety, we all need it. It helps us to be safe sometimes.

Because if we are not anxious, sometimes we can just do things that are very dangerous because we don't have that bit of anxiety that can keep us safe. And we also worry about things like what Eva said.

How am I going to pay bills? Those are normal things. We think about things. maybe when Pastor William said, can you come and talk? I felt anxious.

How am I going to do that? Are there going to be a lot of people? You know, all those things. That's normal. And it sometimes helps us to prepare well. help. But when the symptoms are severe, like the word is uncontrollable and it's going on and on and it's impacting your day-to-day functioning, then you need help.

[16:50] Sometimes when you talk about anxiety, if the word is so severe that sometimes you can't even get out of the house, you can go to the mall because you feel so anxious, and sometimes maybe you can even get a panic attack, then that's the point when you need help.

That's not normal anxiety. So it's more about the frequency of the worry and the severity. Yeah, that's what I can say. Thank you.

And at church, obviously, we've thought a bit about anxiety this past month. That's almost, yeah, the Lord's timing, we thought about it at the start of the month, and Eva also shared her own personal testimony of anxiety as well and working through that.

So thank you for covering that so well. Yeah, let me ask a different question. someone's asked, what is helpful and unhelpful about using medication to treat mental health?

Should Christians use it? So none of us here are medical professionals, like doctors, but do you have any just vague or helpful or just from your experience, something to respond to, yeah, just the paradigm of, yeah, is mental health a medical thing?

[17:58] Is it more than that? how do we manage it? I think when we think about mental health, sometimes we kind of separate it from our physical health, and when we are sick physically, we go to our GP, they prescribe medication for us, and we are okay taking the medication, we don't question.

But I wonder why when it comes to mental health, we tend to question whether we should take medication or not. As we know, some of these mental health conditions, they can be treated by medication, by going to therapy.

So my understanding, working as a counsellor is, normally there are some symptoms that can be so severe and so debilitating that someone cannot cope.

That's when doctors will prescribe medication so they can be able to carry on with their day-to-day tasks, like going to work. Sometimes, maybe if someone is so depressed that they can't even get out of bed, they can't go to work, they can't maybe even look after themselves.

In a situation like that, the doctors may prescribe medication. So what I would encourage is if the symptoms are so severe and the doctors can give you medication, I would say take the medication because it will help you alleviate the symptoms.

[19:22] But at the same times, you realise that the medication does not treat the anxiety or the depression. You still need to go for counselling or go see someone who can work with you to dig deeper and address the underlying issues that are causing the anxiety or the depression.

So medication helps alleviate the symptoms and is helpful. Of course, there may be some downside of it, maybe side effects like any medication.

Some of the medication can trigger other issues or other health issues. So I think that's the downside of it. But personally, I would encourage people to take the medication if they can to alleviate those symptoms.

symptoms. Okay, that's helpful. Thank you. Eva? I think the question is whether Christians should, right? So I think the most basic answer, bottom line, is taking medication for your mental health is not a sin.

Okay, so don't feel guilty about it if you need to take medication. But at the same time, understand that medication is not the only solution. So sometimes it may take a combination of things to help change.

[20 : 43] For example, if someone is depressed and medication may be, like pharmaceutical treatment may be one option.

But talking to a counselor may be able to help you find that perhaps your underlying issue is not just brain chemistry.

It may be perhaps you grew up in an environment where you have never experienced unconditional love. Knowing the gospel definitely helps, but right now in day-to-day perhaps all you need is a dog, but you go to see the doctor, the doctor is not going to prescribe a dog, right?

So it also depends on who you talk to, right? So perhaps talking to a counselor, instead of just taking one possible solution as the only solution may be more helpful.

But definitely it is not a sin. So if you need medication, then yes, treat it as one of the possible help.

Okay, thank you so much.

[21 : 53] Okay, I'm going to switch gears. This is maybe a more sensitive question. how do I help someone in my life who is suicidal or experiences ideas of suicide?

So obviously just general thoughts of how we can help and knowing that for serious situations we do want to point people to professionals as well. But how do we help?

What are some ways to help? So one of the trainings in the mental health first aid course is about talking to someone that you suspect is having suicidal thoughts.

So it depends on your relationship with them. The course I did is with St. John's and if you know St. John's they're very good at coming up with acronyms. So the plan they have is called HIT, H-E-A-D. So first of all H stands for hazard. Hazard, so you make sure that that person is safe. You also need to identify whether you are in danger, whether you are one of the hazards because perhaps your relationship with them or maybe the location, are there hazards?

[23 : 03] Is it a safe place to talk and to engage with that person? Second letter, E is engage. So this is like a really condensed one minute answer.

Engage with empathy, no judging and understand that when people who are suicidal are then usually they don't want to die.

They want to be freed from pain. So if you're able to show them that there are other ways to be freed from pain other than just dying, that's your attitude in approaching them.

And then A is action. you need to ask them whether they actually are thinking of killing themselves. So there has been myths that if someone is suicidal and you mention suicide to them, that will trigger them.

That is actually not true. It is much better if you ask very clearly. Don't beat around the bush. Don't say, oh, are you thinking of doing something stupid? How do you define that?

[24 : 14] So just ask them plainly, are you planning to kill yourself? And if they say yes, then you ask them, do you have a plan? Like, what do you plan to do? And then see if they have the tool to do it.

That will help you determine how dangerous they are, whether they need immediate intervention. And then, depending on how dangerous the person is, you ask for help.

You call the mental health helpline, you call the police, et cetera. And after that, D is for debrief. So this is for that person, but also for yourself, just to check in with them if possible afterwards to see how they're doing.

But also debrief yourself, maybe check how did I do? Did I do anything? Could I have improved it? How did I handle this? Maybe talk to someone so that that burden is not just all on you.

So this is how I was trained to approach someone that I'm worried that may be suicidal. Thank you so much for condensing that for us.

[25 : 30] Felicitas, is there anything you would add to that? I think Eva summed it up very well. Maybe what I can only add is to say if someone tells you that they are thinking of committing suicide, never take it for granted or never ignore that.

I remember during my training when I was training to be a counselor, I was still an amateur and one of my colleagues was also a student. They called me and they were very far away, up north, and I was here in Auckland, and they told me they were going to kill themselves.

It was my first time and it was difficult because I didn't know what to do. At least you explain the process, but I didn't know about that. Thankfully, I just reached out to our training institute and they took over everything.

So normally when people say they are going to kill themselves or they are talking about suicide, we should never take it for granted. If we don't know what to do, we better call the police and they can be able to help.

They can even drive to the place and be able to help someone. Because there are so many things that can cause people to be suicidal.

[26 : 42] Even us as Christians, we know we are Christians, we sometimes don't even think that we can find ourselves in that place, in a dark place where we feel maybe we need to take our lives.

I think when we read in the Bible, we know people who struggled and they wished. if they were not born, we think of Job when he was struggling. He cursed the day he was born.

Why didn't I die in the womb? Because they were going through despair. Sometimes we can be in a space where things are very difficult and maybe we become hopeless. It's something that we cannot say maybe it may not happen in our communities Christians.

If someone says they are struggling, they feel like taking their own lives, it's very important that we seek help. If we don't know how to help them, even explain what we can do, but if we are not sure, calling the police is helpful.

Maybe if they are a church member, talking to the pastor is very helpful, they know how to help as well. So what I just want to emphasize is never take for granted someone who says they are thinking of killing themselves.

[27 : 53] Okay. Thank you. It is a heavy issue. Obviously some of us have first-hand experience, some of us don't know much about it, but I'm so grateful that we can lean on your experience and hear from that as well.

And thank you for reminding us that the Bible is full of people who have struggled through similar thoughts like that. Maybe we've run out of time, but maybe one last question, and just even as Christians as well.

What are some tips or ways for us practically as Christians to help people with mental health struggles? What are some practical things that as Christians we can be doing or thinking?

I think the most important thing we can do is to support them, be there for them. Because most people are struggling with mental health issues. For example, if they are depressed, they don't have motivation to do maybe things.

We can say to them, go for a walk, go and exercise, exercise, why don't you pray? We can tell them all those things, but when they are in that space, they are not able to do that themselves.

[29 : 02] So what we can do is to be there for them, do those things with them. Instead of saying, why don't you pray, pray with them, pray for them. Why don't you go for a walk?

Why don't you go and exercise? Take them for a walk. Just be there sometimes to listen to them, ask them how you can help, ask them what they are experiencing, and create an environment that can be helpful for them.

I think the most important thing we need is to be compassionate. That's what the Bible tells us, to be compassionate and to carry each other's burden. I think if you may have an experience of someone who is struggling with depression, those people really need a lot of help and they can't do much on their own.

So for you to be able to help them, you really have to be willing. to carry their burden and that's what the Bible encourages us. I think that's Galatians 6 verse 2 which says carry each other's burdens.

So as Christians, we really have to walk alongside those people. That's what they need because when they are going through difficult times, there are things they cannot do on their own. Thank you so much.

[30 : 14] That's so helpful. And you can see in today's passage, like grieving for example, if you have a friend who is grieving, let's say if I have a friend who just lost her child, I don't mean like the child ran off in the mall, lost to sickness, the child died, like Mary and Martha, they're grieving.

There is absolutely nothing you can do to make her feel better. Nothing you can say, nothing you can do can make her feel better in that moment. she needs to grieve.

But we feel inadequate. I want to make her feel better. Why? Because I'm not comfortable with her grief. Because I want her grief to be over.

I want her to get over with maybe in three months time if she's still crying. I've lost my compassion already. But God's mercy is new every morning.

So in that moment, she's grieving. she's mentally in a dark hole. Okay? If I just stand outside of the hole and point out, oh, so poor, oh, like I feel for you, that's, yeah, but you're not feeling, you're just pointing out the obvious.

[31 : 37] That doesn't actually quite help. Empathy is when you actually, you're willing to go down into the hole with her. Hold on to her tight with one hand and your other hand hold on to God extremely, like even tighter.

Think about the passage today. Why did Jesus need to weep? He doesn't. He knew that Lazarus was going to come back, right? He already said that he would come back and he knew that Lazarus was going to come back because Jesus was going to make it happen.

The only reason Jesus wept is to weep with Mary. He entered into that dark hole with her. He didn't need to.

He chose to. So when we intentionally join someone in their grief to feel their pain, I don't need to, but I chose to, that's sacrificial love.

that's gospel in action. That's what Jesus did on the cross. He didn't need to. He chose to come and suffered for us and with us.

[32 : 52] So what does it mean practically to hold your friend close with one hand and God closer with the other? In BSF training, we train the group leaders with this, I found it very helpful tool called the ABC Prayers for crisis.

So A is when you acknowledge that person's feeling. Even if that person is suffering because of something stupid that they've done, doesn't matter, don't judge, you acknowledge that they are in pain.

And in order to do this, you need to be with them in their feelings. You need to be willing to join her in that hole. It's cold, it's dark, it's hopeless.

So in a prayer, maybe you start saying, Father God, we learned this news today, we found this really hard to understand, we are scared, etc.

So you share in that feeling. B is you bring God into the picture. So notice how Jesus talked to Martha and said, I am the resurrection, I am the life.

[34 : 03] He brought what is true about God into the picture. God so maybe find an attribute of God or a promise of God that actually applies to us.

Don't drag God into this and make him do something that he never promised to do. Don't say, oh God, you need to heal this person or something like that. So a promise or an attribute that is true. And then C is to claim that promise. And I know there are people who take light of this word, claim whatever promise that you want. But this is why you need to know your Bible really well.

So claim the promise that Jesus actually has promised. For example, peace, even though we'll have trouble in this world, but Jesus has conquered the world so that we can have peace.

So, or attribute like God is sovereign. So we know that that is true. So we can claim that because God is sovereign, he is in control. This news may be a surprise to us, but it's not a surprise to him.

[35 : 10] So we ask for peace. We ask that we have strength to face another day, things like that. So this is a practical way to pray, but also help your friend to feel that she's not alone.

There's a reason why solitary confinement is a punishment for someone who is already in prison. Because being alone is awful. So if you can't help that person feel better, at least help her not feel worse.

When you go down to the hole with her, she knows that she's not alone. And you be that bridge, sacrificial bridge, to link God and put God into her mind in the picture.

so that it is a sad story, it is grieving, but God is in the picture because Jesus was there with Mary.

That's so good. All right, ABCs of crisis and praying to God. Why don't we do that? So before we do it, can we just thank our panelists and thank them so much for their wisdom? You can have a seat now.

[36 : 22] As you take a seat, let me pray for you and pray for us as well. Father, we thank you. We thank you that Galatians 6.1 is true, that we can bear each other's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ.

And we thank you for just the reminders through Philistas and Eva, just their experience to remind us to bring God into the picture as we come alongside people who suffer. So would you help us? There are so many more unanswered questions we have, but help us to lean in on your wisdom, to claim your promises of resurrection life and hope in Jesus as we help each other as a church through all the struggles of life, including in our mental health. And so we thank you, we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.