

Bible study: mental health

Topic: A Christian response to mental illness in Australia

Key verses: Psalm 34:18, Isaiah 53:3, 1 Kings 19:4, 1 Peter 5:6-7

[Note: Consider including a trigger warning for people who have experienced suicidal thoughts or are struggling with significant mental illness and give them the opportunity to leave, or give them the heads up the week before.]

Question 1

- **Warm up question:** Mental health issues come in many different forms. Which can you think of?

Clue: The most common mental disorder groups in Australia are anxiety disorders, affective disorders (including depression) and substance use disorders.¹

Introduction

- On average, nine Australians die from suicide each day.² In fact, suicide is now the leading cause of death for people aged 15-44.³
- 2 in 5 Australians (aged 16–85) experienced a mental health condition within the past year.⁴
- Men in particular are over-represented, accounting for three times more suicides than women in 2021. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide rates are double the rest of the population.⁵
- In Mission Australia's 2022 Youth Survey, mental health was identified as the third-highest issue of national concern among young people.⁶
- People with a history of homelessness (2 in 5 or 39%) experience mental health conditions at a rate almost double of that of the general population (21%).⁷

Question 2

- The latest research indicates that two in five Australians will suffer from some form of mental disorder this year, so why don't we talk about it much?⁸

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023). National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of Results, 2020-22.

² AIHW (2023), Suicide and Self-harm Monitoring Project. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/overview/summary>

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) *Deaths in Australia*, AIHW, Australian Government

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020-2021). National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022). Causes of Death, Australia, 2022.

⁶ Mission Australia Youth Survey 2022. <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/youthsurvey>

⁷ ABS (2021): Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2021

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020-21), National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing

Question 3

- **READ: Psalm 34:17-18** *The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.*
- Who do you think could be seen as 'broken-hearted' and 'crushed in spirit' in today's society? What do you notice about the nature of God in this verse?

Question 3

- **READ: Isaiah 53:3** - *He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

One of the unique and powerful elements of our faith is that we have a Saviour who is familiar with human suffering. How could this idea of a 'suffering saviour' help someone who has a mental illness?

Question 4

- **READ: 1 Kings 19:4** *I have had enough Lord, he said. Take my life; I am not better than my ancestors.*
- These words were spoken by Elijah not long after he'd won an incredible victory against the prophets of Baal. What sort of state of mind do you think that Elijah is in?
- If we read on, we see that God gently and caringly ministers to Elijah, gets him back on his feet and sends him on to the next part of his purpose.
- It is important to recognise that Elijah's mental condition did not destroy his purpose in life. Why is this important for Christians who suffer from mental illness to understand?

Question 5

- **READ: 1 Peter 5:6-7** *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*
- Which aspects of God's character in these verses could serve as an encouragement during times of distress?

Question 6

- Providing ongoing support for someone with mental illness can be emotionally draining, especially in situations of serious, prolonged illness. How can we best support those caring for others with mental health issues?

Discuss: three ways you can help those with mental illness

1. **PRAY:** Pray for those suffering from mental illness and for those working actively to help them. Pray for organisations such as Mission Australia which last year assisted 4,021 of people through 33 mental health services.

Sign up to receive Mission Australia's prayer diary at missionaustralia.com.au/prayer

2. **VOLUNTEER:** There are many ways to help, from simply offering a smile and warm conversation to giving of your time and talents to bless others. You could offer to read the Bible, pray, and encourage someone suffering from mental illness. Or your church could serve alongside a Christian service organisation like Mission Australia.

For ideas, go to missionaustralia.com.au/churches

3. **GIVE:** Give of your finances to support the work of God in this area. As Jesus said in **Matthew 25:35** *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*

You can donate to Mission Australia securely online at missionaustralia.com.au or by phoning 1800 88 88 68.

Know someone who needs help?

In an immediate crisis, call the relevant number below:

- If their life is in danger, they should call 000
- Lifeline (for 24 hr counselling call 13 11 14 or chat overnight at lifeline.org.au)
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people in crisis can call [13YARN](https://13yarn.org.au) on [13 92 76](https://139276.org.au). This service is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Suicide Call Back Service (for 24 hr phone and online counselling call 1300 659 467 or suicidecallbackservice.org.au).

Otherwise the best starting point is their GP, who can develop a Mental Health Treatment Plan and provide referrals to specialist support services.

General information and helpful links to other mental health support services are available at: healthdirect.gov.au/mental-health-where-to-get-help

Mission Australia's mental health services are available at missionaustralia.com.au/find-support.