

10 Ways Christians Can Improve Their Mental Health

- **Ryan Duncan**
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When people think about mental health, they typically picture mood disorders like schizophrenia, OCD, or a bipolar episode. What many don't realize is that common symptoms like stress, anxiety, and depression are also tied to mental health. Among Christians, it's easy to dismiss these emotions as personal flaws in our moral character, but nothing could be further from the truth. It's been estimated that nearly 1 in 5 Americans experience some kind of mental health incident each year, and like any physical ailment, these shouldn't go left untreated.

For Christians, practicing emotional self-care can be extremely difficult. Things which benefit our mental health can often feel selfish or self-indulgent, so we avoid them out of guilt and misplaced shame. Yet our mental health affects how we think, feel and respond on a daily basis. It can even take a toll on our spiritual life if we're not careful. It's important to remember that God does not want his children to suffer unduly, and we cannot be faithful disciples if we're avoiding our own problems. So if you find yourself overburdened with anxiety or worry, here are 10 ways you can invest in your own mental well-being.



1. Pray

Slide 1 of 10

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. - [1 John 5:14](#)

[Prayer](#) should always be our first approach to any problem. Before we set out to face our inner demons, it helps to take a moment and return our hearts to God. Scripture tells us that the Lord hears our prayers and will walk with us through any trial ([Psalm 102:17](#)), so we shouldn't worry about standing alone. God *knows* our fears, he *knows* our suffering, and he loves us through it all. That knowledge alone can be very encouraging.

So take a moment and present your troubles to God. Tell him about your anger, your sadness, and your fear. Don't be ashamed, because he wants hear your worries. Who knows? By the end, you may discover your burden has grown a little lighter.



2. Journal

Slide 2 of 10

On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. - [Esther 6:1](#)

Putting pen to paper can often help liberate your inner feelings. Don't worry about grammar or neatness, simply sit down and write. Some Christians may find it cathartic to write about their [anxieties](#), while others gain encouragement by reliving old adventures. Either way, the act of journaling can serve to nourish and satisfy the mind. Studies have even found it's especially helpful for those suffering from stress-induced insomnia.

Oddly enough, even Biblical characters were fond of journaling. When King Xerxes couldn't sleep, he had a servant read to him from the recorded histories. David and Solomon were both experienced poets, and would frequently put their emotions into verse ([Psalm 13:2](#)). You don't have to create the next American classic, just take a moment and put your thoughts to paper.



3. Lean on Your Community

Slide 3 of 10

“Share each other’s burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ.” – [Galatians 6:2-12](#)

Never be embarrassed to share your struggles with other Christians. The Church was created so that fellow believers could nurture, protect, and inspire one another as they pursued Christ. In recent years though, too many congregations have become obsessed with outward appearances. They put on a showy display of being happy, wholesome individuals when inside they’re barely holding together. This type of thinking is neither healthy nor holy.

If you’re feeling overwhelmed, it’s ok to reach out to your community for help. Find someone within the congregation whom you trust and let them know what’s happening. No Christian was meant to go through life alone. So instead of toughing it out, lean on your fellow believers and remember we’re all strongest when we work together.



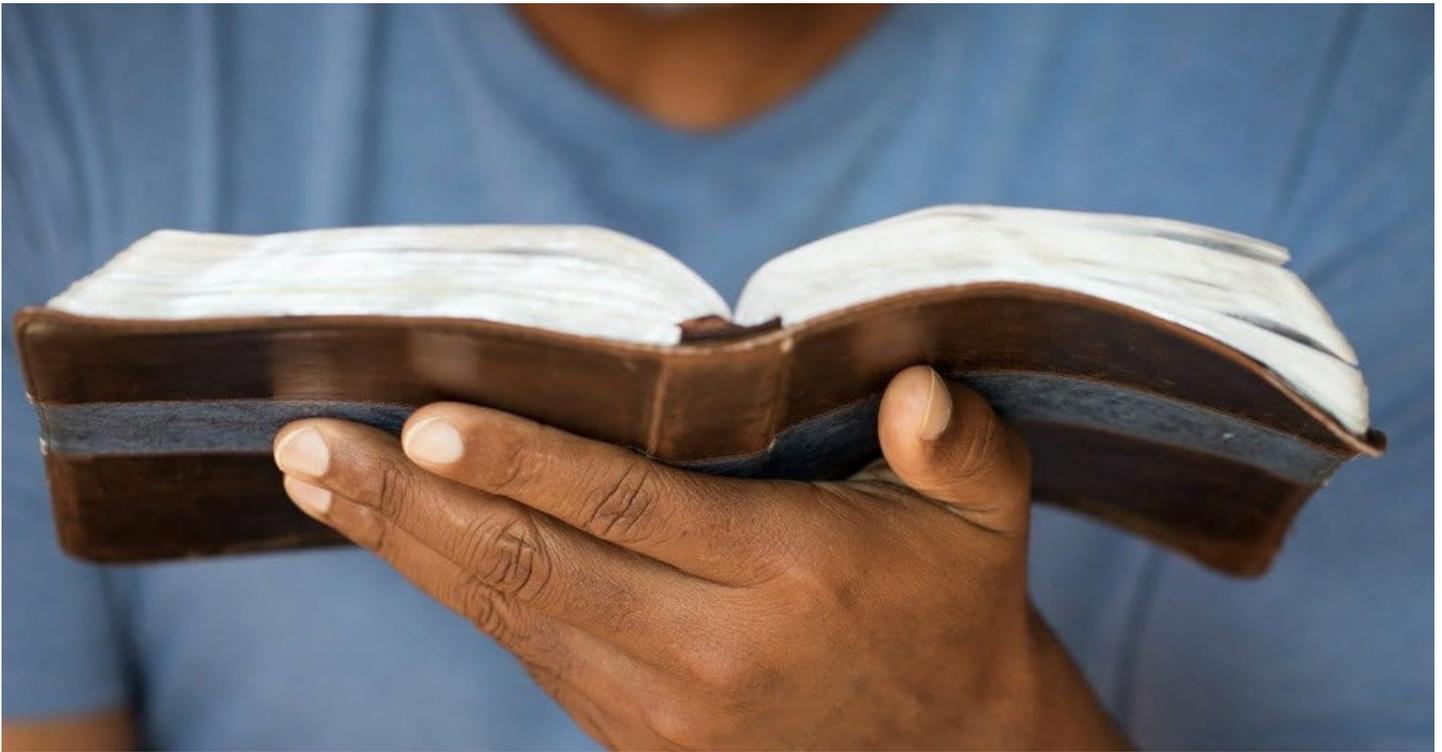
4. Eat Well

Slide 4 of 10

“Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat, for drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.” [Proverbs 23:20-21](#)

This may sound strange, but what you eat can have a profound effect on how you think! The [Bible](#) has plenty of warnings against gluttony, and its words are practical advice for anyone wrestling with their mental health. When we overindulge in sugary drinks or deep-fried foods, we're more likely to become overweight, incur physical problems like diabetes and heart disease, and see a drop in our overall self-esteem. Tempting as it may be to sooth our troubles with comfort food, Christians must learn to practice self-control.

Instead of snacking on candy, why not try a bowl of fresh fruit? Incorporate leafy-green vegetables into your diet, and cook up a nice piece of fish for dinner rather than a greasy burger. It may not seem as appetizing now, but you'll be amazed at how much better you feel in the long run.



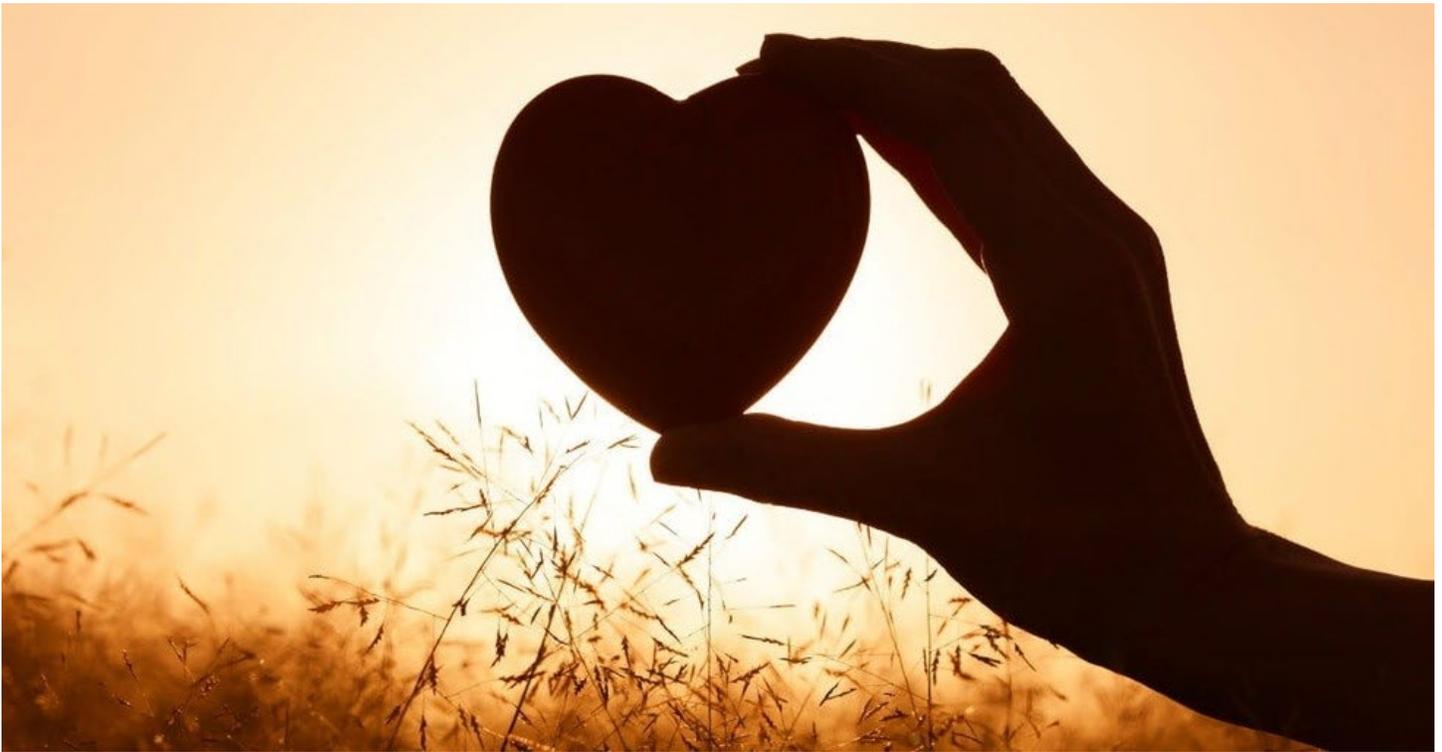
5. Read Your Bible

Slide 5 of 10

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." - [John 16:33](#)

This one should be a no-brainer. Scripture is filled with multiple, encouraging passages for anyone going through a rough period. For starters, it helps to know several Biblical figures also struggled with depression and anxiety. Job was so miserable he cursed the day of his birth ([Job 3:1](#)). A dejected [Elijah](#) actually went into the wilderness and begged God to kill him ([1 Kings 19:4](#)). Even Jesus knew how it felt to suffer mental anguish ([Luke 22:44](#)). If you're feeling depressed, just know you're in good company.

Thankfully, the message doesn't stop there. The [Bible](#) teaches us that God will give us strength ([Isaiah 40:31](#)), provide shelter ([Nahum 1:7](#)), and walk with us through these dark times ([Psalm 23:4](#)). His message is one of hope, grace, and ultimately, joy. Whatever this world may throw at you, remember that Christ will see you through.



6. Practice Gratitude

Slide 6 of 10

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” - [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#)

There’s an old song for children which goes, *“Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings, see what God has done.”* It’s a fairly useful piece of advice. When you’re angry or upset, it’s easy to forget all the good things which are happening in life. So it always helps to pause and count your blessings. Do you have a roof over your head? Clean drinking water? A family who loves you? That’s more than most have.

Counting your blessings may not mitigate your suffering, but it will remind you things aren’t as bad as they seem. Practicing gratitude is one of the most effective ways of staving off bitterness and depression. It might even be worthwhile to combine this step with #2, and create a journal of gratitude to revisit when you’re feeling low.



7. Exercise Regularly

Slide 7 of 10

“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst?” - [1 Corinthians 3:16](#)

Never underestimate the value of physical exercise. The endorphins from a good run can work wonders on your mental health, and the feeling of accomplishment after a solid workout is hard to duplicate. Just as a proper diet can change the way you think, staying active helps your body guard against [anxiety](#) and depression. This really shouldn’t come as a surprise either, since Christians know God designed our bodies to run, jump, swim, climb, and do any number of physical feats.

Eating right and exercising regularly are the building blocks of good, [bodily stewardship](#). When we neglect them, it only makes sense for our minds to suffer alongside our physiques. This doesn’t mean you immediately have to run a marathon or join a boot camp, but maybe consider taking a walk outside once in a while. A little outdoor activity could be a welcome change.



8. Practice Your Spiritual Gifts

Slide 8 of 10

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” – [1 Peter 4:10](#)

God created each person with unique and precious abilities. Do you like to sing? Can you memorize scripture better than anyone else you know? Maybe you enjoy volunteering in Sunday school or lending a hand in local events. Practicing your spiritual gifts doesn’t just glorify God, it can also help you when you’re suffering from depression.

These gifts remind us that we are [fearfully and wonderfully made \(Psalm 139:14\)](#). The God of the universe created us to be special, and desires us to build a better world than what we see now. It’s a daunting task, but also an exciting one. So whenever life feels stressful, spend time practicing your gifts and remember God made you for a purpose.



9. Rest

Slide 9 of 10

“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.” - [Genesis 2:2](#)

This may be the hardest entry for Christians to accept. Our modern society moves at a blinding speed, and we’re constantly told to work longer, achieve higher, and contribute more often. Even on the weekends, our schedules overflow with tasks like doing laundry, cleaning the house, fixing the car, or shuffling the kids off to sports practice. We have effectively forgotten how to rest.

True relaxation is necessary for a [healthy mind](#). If even God was willing to take a break, so should you! Spend some time reading a fun book, do a puzzle, take a nap, go see a movie, or grab a massage at your local outlet mall. Self-care isn’t necessarily selfish, it just ensures you’re not burning yourself out. So take the afternoon and treat yourself.



10. See a Doctor

Slide 10 of 10

For lack of guidance a nation falls, but victory is won through many advisers.

- [Proverbs 11:14](#)

For the most part, these entries have focused on battling the common, day-to-day struggles of mental health, but sometimes emotional problems can turn deadly. If you've reached the point where self-harm is being considered, it is **absolutely vital** you go see a doctor right away. Regular appointments with a psychologist or licensed therapist can help with these feelings, and there's no shame in speaking with a professional about them. To put this in perspective, a Christian speaker once compared therapy to getting routine car maintenance, *"There's nothing wrong with seeing a mechanic to make sure everything's alright, why do we think any differently about counseling?"*

God loves his children more than we could ever know ([John 3:16](#)), and he would never, ever want us to stay in a place where we would actively hurt ourselves. If you're in a dark place, please reach out and ask for help. God put you on this world for a reason, because it's a better place with you in it.

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