

A READING GUIDE

The Bible and Mental Health

Series

Ten sermons, July 5 to September 6, 2026

Preachers

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Recordings and summaries

beverlyheights.org, The Bible and Mental Health

The books behind a ten-sermon series preached at Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church, Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, in the summer of 2026.

How to use this guide

This summer we preached ten sermons on what the Bible says about the mind: anxiety, depression, identity, anger, craving, suffering, death, and the mind of Christ. The sermons leaned on a shelf of books, some of them quoted from the pulpit and some of them standing behind the argument. People asked for the list. This is it, with a line on each author and a note on where the sermon used him, so you can tell at a glance whether a book is a biblical counselor's prescription, a cultural diagnosis, a Puritan's medicine, or a story.

A word on register. Not every author on this list is a theologian, and not every theologian here agrees with us. We quote sociologists, a pope, a novelist, a retired justice we argued against, and a clinical psychologist. The notes say which is which. Read the Reformed and biblical counselors first; read the diagnosticians to understand the culture you are living in; read the older voices because they knew the soul before the therapeutic age renamed it.

The recordings and written summaries of all ten sermons are at beverlyheights.org under The Bible and Mental Health.

Start here: biblical counseling

Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel* (1970). Reformed pastor and theologian, founder of nouthetic (biblical) counseling. The rediscovery of this book was one of the reasons for the series. Adams argues that Scripture is sufficient for the problems the therapeutic culture has claimed for itself, and that the ordinary pastor, armed with the Word, is competent to counsel. Used in the first sermon for the definition of nouthetic counseling, and again in the sermon on anger, where his line on anger as a God-given force for moving a man to biblical action does most of the work.

Greg E. Gifford, *Lies My Therapist Told Me* (2025). Biblical counselor (PhD, The Master's University), pastor of counseling. His critique of secular therapy gave the first sermon its title and its framing: therapists may relieve symptoms, but they miss the underlying spiritual causes of much of what we now call mental illness. Read it as the modern companion to Adams.

The Westminster Larger Catechism. Our confessional standard, not a book you buy, but quoted in two sermons and worth your attention. The answer on the tenth commandment supplied the sermon on craving with its three-part anatomy of covetousness (discontentment, envy, inordinate affection),

and the answer on the second commandment, read in full in the sermon on anger, shows that idolatry reaches far beyond carved images.

The diagnosis: how we got a therapeutic culture

Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966). Sociologist and cultural critic, writing as a secular observer, not a Christian. Rieff saw before almost anyone that Western man had become “psychological man,” that the pastor had been displaced by the therapist, and that a culture organized around feeling well cannot bind anyone to anything. The first sermon uses him to explain how the church handed the cure of souls to someone else.

Carl R. Trueman, *The Desecration of Man: How the Rejection of God Degrades Our Humanity* (2026), and *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (2020). Reformed theologian and historian, Grove City College. Trueman takes Rieff’s diagnosis and carries it into the present from a confessional Reformed position. Quoted in the sermon on death to confirm that we live in a culture of death, and the best single guide to the ideas behind the identity crisis the series addresses.

Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). A papal encyclical, which is to say a Roman Catholic magisterial document; we are Presbyterians and quote it for its diagnosis, not its authority. The phrase “culture of death” is his, and the sermon on death quoted him at length on the eclipse of the sense of God and the structures of sin that follow.

Marilynne Robinson, *The Givenness of Things* (2015). Novelist and essayist, a Calvinist of an unusual kind. Quoted at the close of the sermon on death for the line that fear is not a Christian habit of mind.

Anthony Kennedy, the majority opinions in , *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). Not a book and not a recommendation. The sermon on identity quoted Justice Kennedy’s “heart of liberty” passage as the clearest recent statement of the view that each of us defines his own existence, and then argued against it from Philippians 2. Read the opinions if you want to see the doctrine of the age in its own words.

Seth Gruber, *The Last Stand: Christ or Chaos* (2026). Pro-life speaker and activist; polemical in register. Quoted in the sermon on death on the early church’s confrontation with the evil of its day.

Older voices: the soul before the therapeutic age

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559). The opening sentence of the Institutes, that there is no knowledge of self without knowledge of God, was the takeaway of the sermon on identity. The chapter on providence (1.17) stands behind the sermon on anxiety: to be human in a fallen world is to be exposed to care, and the doctrine of providence is the only ground on which a Christian can stop being anxious. Read Book 1, chapters 1 and 17.

Martin Luther. No single book; the sermon on depression told the story of Luther’s wife dressing in mourning to show him that he was living as though God had died. Spiritual depression is exactly that.

John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678). Puritan pastor and allegorist. The sermon on craving opened with Vanity Fair, where everything foolish is for sale and Faithful dies. We read it from

Dangerous Journey (Oliver Hunkin's illustrated retelling), which we recommend for children and grandchildren.

John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin* (1656). Puritan theologian. One line, quoted at the close of the sermon on craving, and the line the whole sermon exists to deliver: "Be killing sin or it will be killing you."

The Philokalia, edited by **G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware**. A collection of Greek patristic and ascetic texts, Eastern Orthodox in provenance. The sermon on craving drew from the fathers their anatomy of temptation: provocation, disturbance, communion, assent, prepossession, passion. What they called prepossession we call addiction. Read selectively; it is a large and uneven collection, and the sermon took one thread from it.

John Chrysostom, as quoted by Thomas Aquinas. The sermon on anger quoted the line that he who is not angry when he has cause to be, sins. It comes to us through Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 158, a. 8), who took it from a commentary long ascribed to Chrysostom and now known not to be his. The sentence is sound whoever wrote it.

Stories and poems

Hannah Hurnard, *Hinds' Feet on High Places* (1955). Devotional allegory by a missionary. Two passages on the furnace of Egypt carried the point of the sermon on suffering: suffering is common to all of God's people, and it grinds the grain into bread.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Who Am I?" in , *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Theologian and pastor, written in a Nazi prison months before his execution. Read in the sermon on identity as the model of honest self-assessment before God: whoever I am, thou knowest, O God, I am thine.

C. S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia*; **E. B. White**, *Charlotte's Web*; **J. R. R. Tolkien**, *The Lord of the Rings*. Named together in the sermon on depression as examples of what Sir Philip Sidney (*The Defence of Poesy*, 1595) called icastic story: fiction that tells the truth about real life. The point was that Elijah's story in 1 Kings 19 is icastic history, and that a man in a cave is not beyond God's reach.

Also cited

Gilbert Meilaender, *The Way That Leads There* (2006). Christian ethicist. The chapter on duty, read in our Wednesday book study, stood behind the sermon on confrontation and the duty to speak the truth.

Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (1972). Evangelical apologist. The five-fold separation of the Fall (from God, self, others, nature, and nature from itself) organized part of the sermon on death.

Henry Cloud, *Necessary Endings* (2010). Clinical psychologist and leadership author; a secular-register book by a Christian. Used in the sermon on death for the observation that some things must end and we are afraid of endings.

Wendell Berry, Joel Salatin, and Eugene Peterson. Mentioned together in the sermon on death for the picture of the church as a farm that grows things slowly; Peterson once said that Berry's farm reads as church.

Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve* (1999). Rabbi and family therapist, writing on leadership in anxious systems. Not read from the pulpit, but cited in the notes of the sermon on anxiety.

Byron Bitar, *A Christian Understanding of Ethics* (1995). Philosopher, Geneva College, and the preacher's mentor in the faith. The sermon on suffering closed on a sentence from page 167: forgiveness is only a means; the end is transformation. Long out of print, the book is being republished by Parrhesian Press.

A word to the searcher

These are sermons and the books behind them, not medical advice. The series insists on a distinction the culture has lost: the brain is part of the outer man and deserves proper medical care; the mind is part of the inner man and is renewed only by Christ through his Spirit. If you have reason to think something is wrong with your brain or your body, see a doctor, and let the church minister to your soul at the same time. If you are in danger of harming yourself, call or text 988 now.

Good mental health begins with possessing the mind of Christ. If you are in Pittsburgh's South Hills, come and worship with us. Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church, 1207 Washington Road, Mt. Lebanon. Sundays at 10:00 a.m., Sunday School at 9:00. beverlyheights.org/about-us/plan-your-visit