

### **Called by Name**

By: Stephanie Loomis

Isaiah 43:1-2

*But now thus says the LORD,  
he who created you, O Jacob,  
he who formed you, O Israel:*

*“Fear not, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.*

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.*

May is Mental Health Awareness month in the United States. While the goal of the month is to educate about all mental illnesses, far and away the most common is anxiety/depression, followed by PTSD. If you deal with debilitating anxiety, know that you are not alone.

The Church over the centuries struggled with how to address mental illness. It has been called a spirit sickness, a lack of faith, demon possession, and even sin. Even with recent developments in psychiatry, medicine, and Christian counseling, the stigma of mental illness leads many sufferers to keep silent in fear. This way of thinking must change in the Church, beginning with each one of us. We can begin to understand our sisters who struggle with anxiety and depression by remembering a few important things.

1. We are each created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*). We live in a fallen world wherein individuals struggle with the effects of human (not individual) sin, including sickness, accidents, allergies, autoimmune diseases, chronic illness, death, and all forms of mental illness. No one is exempt from the effects of the Fall (Genesis 1-3).
2. Mental illness, including anxiety, does not mean "crazy." Mental illness is a real, biological disorder that affects a person's ability to function without distress. The stigma of anxiety disorders begins to dissolve when we default to grace among each other, using words that add dignity and worth to each person around us (Philippians 2:1-11).
3. We need to understand that worry is not the same as anxiety. When Jesus said, "Don't worry about your life," in Matthew 6, it is not a criticism of someone with crippling anxiety, nor did he imply that mental illness is something we can control by faith alone. Worry may have a rational root, is usually connected to something specific, and passes with time. Anxiety, on the other hand, often has physical symptoms, may be unpredictable, and affects daily functions. Anxiety affects sleep, relationships, concentration, and creates a sense of being without value or worth in the eyes of people or even of God. We can speak dignity to our sisters by not minimizing their lived experience and by loving them unconditionally (1 John 3: 18-24).



Commented [1]: image courtesy Joel Muniz via Unsplash

Those of us who live with mental illness, including anxiety, can remember a few things, too.

1. We are not alone. It's entirely likely that the sisters we know across the worship center also wear the mask of "everything's fine." If we can be bold enough to reach out, we will likely find a community where we can give and receive support, love, and acceptance (John 13:34-35).
2. It's not our fault. Everyone deals with some "thorn in the flesh," but it is because we live in this world, not because we are being judged, disciplined, or punished. Mental illness is not a moral failure nor a lack of faith (Romans 8:18-38; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10).
3. We are seen and loved by the One who created us and by the sisters around us (Genesis 16:13; Matthew 10: 26-31).

For all of us, we can rest in knowing that knows us intimately because He made us for relationships. We do not have to live in fear, no matter what kinds of burdens we live with. The Father has gifted us with each other to comfort, uphold, and support through every circumstance in this life. Let's strive to make our Fellowship community one where women feel safe, loved, and seen no matter what.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.*

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

## Resources

[A Look at The Three Most Common Mental Illnesses | Inspira Health](#)

[14 Scriptures For Mental Health | Mercy Multiplied](#)

[Weekly Devotional: Christians and Mental Health and Illness](#)

[What Does the Bible Say About Depression? | Lifeway](#)

[Simplify Life Atlanta Counseling](#)

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