

Psychology and Mental Health in the Bible

Much information about psychology is contained in the Bible. This collection of books, some written as far back as 1450 B.C., contains data that has been overlooked for centuries, yet is prevalent in today's society for good health. As we have seen in this series, Science has at times been at odds and disagreed strongly with information contained in the Bible, but often Science discovers its errors and finds itself agreeing with these God inspired writings. We must remember, the original authors of the books contained in our Bible were not manufactured by men, but were inspired by a holy, perfect God who created the cosmos and allows people to know Him through these writings.

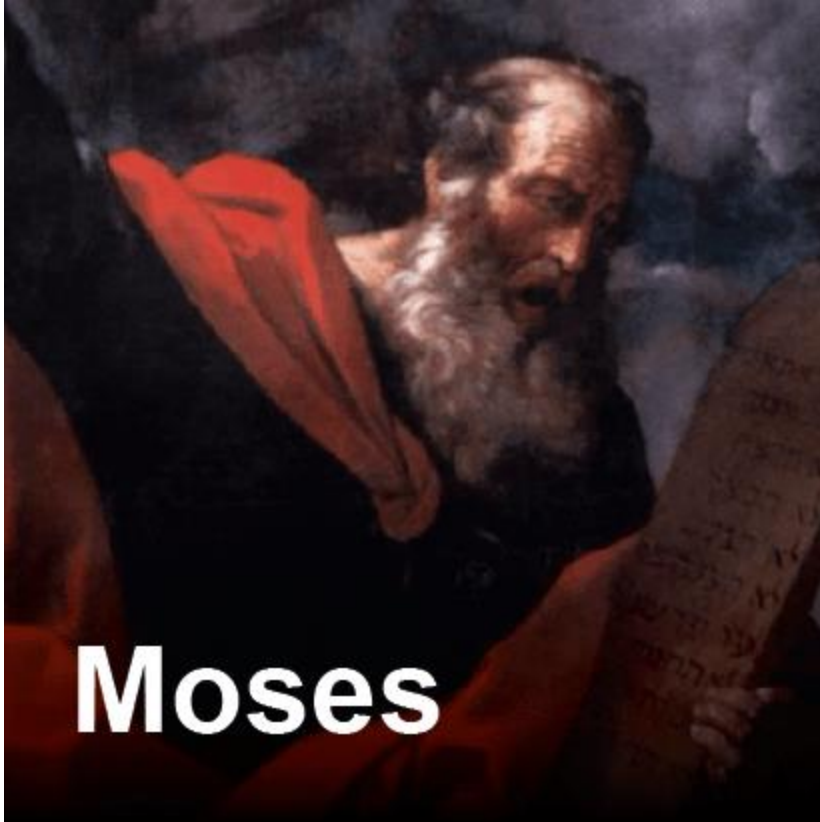
For the subject of psychology, emotional and mental health there are too numerous passages to cite in this one session. One could study this information in a college semester and still be strained to complete the entire contents contained in it. Thus, we will examine some major areas, dividing this mostly into two subtopics: what the Torah has to offer and then the Book of Proverbs.

The Torah was written by Moses around 1450-1400 B.C. He was 120 years old when he died. After growing up and living in the palace of Pharaoh for 40 years, followed by living in the wilderness for the next 40 years, he finally returned to Egypt and led his people out to the Promise Land for another 40 years. His death is recorded near the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, and we are given a clue about his health then.

Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated.

Deuteronomy 34:7 (ESV)

Often when a geriatric man dies who is around 100 years of age, his physical and mental attributes are not that well pronounced and are deficient. Some people lose much of their mental health decades before they reach 100 if they even come close to living that long. Apparently, Moses was not like this. He was healthy mentally and even physically up to his death. He continued to lead the nation of Israel for 40 years right up to his death, in some of the worse conditions imaginable. For instance, during those last forty years, he put down rebellions of the people and his family. He fought wars. He stood up to many of his own people plotting his death and murder. He faced extreme situations like thirst, hunger, and constant complaining. He died with the greatest respect of his people. How did this man do it? How was he so successful under all these threats and problems? How did he handle his emotions, and what drove this man?



Moses By Guido Reni – Web

Gallery of Art: Image Info about artwork, Public

Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15885392>

We can get a clue to his mental health by what he wrote. God Himself, who spoke to Moses face to face, told him what to write down for the people.

Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.

Exodus 33:11 (ESV)

What Moses learned from God and recorded in the Torah are some basic facts that science now agrees is healthy for people. Let's explore these one at a time and examine what Scripture contains.

Maintain a Good Character

Much of Moses' success may be traced to his character that was developed over the years. Some came from the formal training he received in court, but much of it was also learned after he turned 40. Some examples of these character traits are:



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Prayer

Moses prayed (Exodus 33:13). Prayer has been studied by many major universities and medical research facilities and has been found to be very beneficial to one's health. A 2009 study by Koenig and colleagues found that six weekly in-person Christian prayer sessions with patients at a primary care office lowered their depression and anxiety symptoms and increased their optimism.

READ THE STUDY: *Int J Psychiatry Med* 2009;39(4):377-92. doi: 10.2190/PM.39.4.c.; "A randomized trial of the effect of prayer on depression and anxiety" <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2190/PM.39.4.c> | <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20391859/>

Prayer is also found in Scripture in nearly every book of the Bible. Jesus Himself instructed and taught His disciples to pray. To list the verses stating this would take too much time.

Trust in the Lord

Moses trusted God (Exodus 15:2). Throughout the Exodus from Egypt, Moses kept putting his trust in God.

Mayo Clinic doctors published a paper indicating many health benefits that come from trusting God

READ THE STUDY: *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2001;76:1225-1235, “Religious Involvement, Spirituality, and Medicine: Implications for Clinical Practice.” Mueller, Plevak, Rummans. [https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196\(11\)62799-7/pdf](https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196(11)62799-7/pdf) | <https://mayoclinic.pure.elsevier.com/en/publications/religious-involvement-spirituality-and-medicine-implications-for->



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Courage and Support of Others

Moses was a true leader. He was also the protector of people who were being threatened (Exodus 2:17).

Recent medical studies have shown that helping others in distress aids in our own mental health.

READ THE STUDY: 7 Benefits of Helping Others www.mentalfloss.com/article/71964/7-scientific-benefits-helping-others.

Compassion & Meekness

Moses was compassionate and understanding of others. He supported and defended people who just did not understand (Number 12:3).

Numerous medical papers have shown evidence that expressing empathy leads to mental health benefits.

READ THE STUDY: *Should We Train Doctors for Empathy?* Jill Suttie, Psy.D. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/should_we_train_doctors_for_empathy

Love the Lord

According to old school psychology, Christian faith is of no benefit to people. Yet a study in 2011 by Alex Bunn and David Randall was published in Christian Medical Fellowship and stated, *“In contrast to the popular myth that Christian faith is bad for health, on balance, and despite its limitations, the published research suggests that faith is associated with longer life and a wide range of health benefits. In particular, faith is associated with improved mental health.”*

READ THE STUDY: Christian Medical Fellowship. “Health Benefits of Christian Faith” by Alex Bunn and David Randall [CMF File # 44, 2011. https://www.cmf.org.uk/resources/publications/content/?context=article&id=25627](https://www.cmf.org.uk/resources/publications/content/?context=article&id=25627)

One of the main points of the Christian faith is to love God. Moses talked with God face to face. He was devoted to God with all his heart. Under God’s direction, Moses wrote the *Shema* which means to *hear and obey*. It is most likely the most often quoted and read verse in the Tanakh, as well as being a command from God.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”

Deuteronomy 6:4 (ESV)

Jesus also called this the greatest commandment:

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

Mark 12:28-30 (ESV)



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Love Your Neighbor

Moses received God's Commandments himself on Mt. Sinai and some of those commands are not to steal or lie. But in the Book of Leviticus, God goes further about treating your neighbors.

You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord. "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

Leviticus 19:13-18 (ESV)

To love our fellow man as we love ourselves is quite a command and it leads to good mental and physical health. Being kind to others produces oxytocin, a hormone that is

called the “love hormone” for it lowers blood pressure and helps in social bonds. Being kind has also been linked to higher levels of dopamine, which is called the “feel-good” chemical that gives us a healthy euphoric feeling. Still other studies show that being kind to others increases serotonin levels, which is a neurotransmitter that helps regulate our moods

READ THE STUDY: [Cedars-Sinai Blog](https://www.cedars-sinai.org/blog/science-of-kindness.html), “The Science of Kindness.” Feb 13, 2019 *Cedars-Sinai Staff* <https://www.cedars-sinai.org/blog/science-of-kindness.html>

Love Yourself

There is an old saying that “health truly begins in the mind.” How many people have come to an unfortunate early end simply because they did not love themselves? I think of famous people like recording artist Karen Carpenter, who died of anorexia because she could not love herself. Scores of other celebrities have had serious problems with stress, drug addictions, aggression and more due to having a low self-esteem and not begin able to love themselves. In the Journal of Social Issues, Jennifer Crocker notes that many health and social problems are detrimental to a healthy body and mind.

READ THE STUDY: *JIS*, “The Costs of Seeking Self-Esteem,” Vol. 58, Issue 3, 2002. <https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/wiley/the-costs-of-seeking-self-esteem-8qTTqc0Jls>

In Leviticus, God had Moses write down a command for people to love themselves.

Love your neighbor as yourself.

Leviticus 19:18 (ESV)

God is very concerned about our mental and physical health. Jesus even quotes this passage in telling us how to live.



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Benefits of Meditation

Meditation is complicated. There are forms of it in eastern religions, but this is not the same as the biblical meaning of meditation. To explain the difference between the two, Dr. Bill Bright and Dr. Ron Jensen discuss this in their book *Kingdoms at War*. “Eastern meditation encourages people to focus on nothing, or within themselves, or on a universal power or force, or on some seemingly meaningless word. The Biblical concept of meditation is the idea of ‘chewing’ as a sheep chews its cud. As we meditate on Scripture, we allow God’s thoughts to so permeate our lives that they actually become our thoughts, resulting in new behavior patterns and changed lives.” They go on to outline several steps from the Hebrew tradition of meditation:

1. Select a time to concentrate.
2. Select a verse or passage.
3. Study it.
4. Memorize it.
5. Visualize it in your mind.
6. Personalize it in a prayer to God.

7. Listen to what God says to you.
8. Apply it to your life.

There are too many verses commanding us to pray often and to meditate on Scripture for us to cover in this study. One verse that covers this well is written by Joshua, Moses' replacement.

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Joshua 1:8 (ESV)

The National Institutes of Health has an excellent article describing the health benefits of meditation.

READ THE STUDY: NIH Benefit of Meditation, <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/meditation-in-depth>

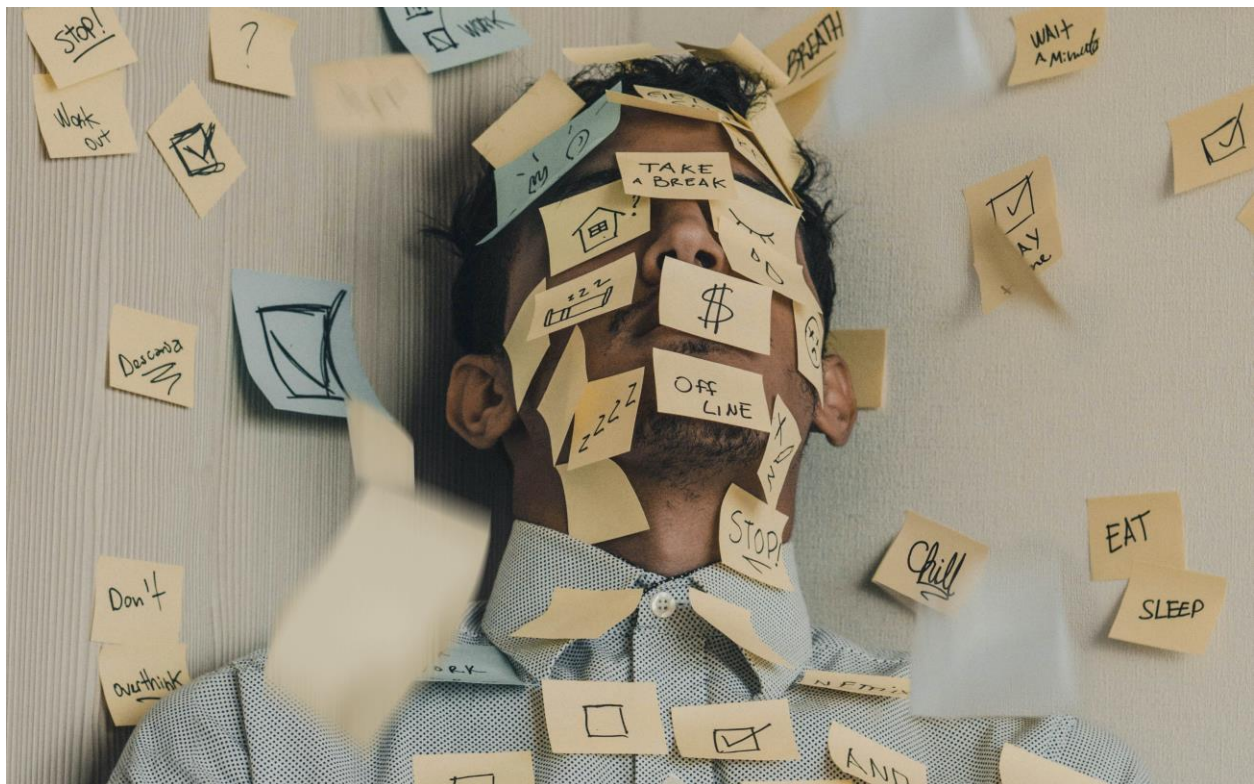


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Handling Stress

When a person is under stress or worried, he or she is trying to assume responsibility for the situation. This is something God does not condone. We are to rely upon Him. Yet, stress can indeed take a terrible toll on not only our mental health, but our physical bodies as well. There is much scientific documentation on this. One excellent paper was published in *EXCLI Journal Experimental and Clinical Sciences* 2017; 16: 1057–1072. In this article the authors describe many abnormalities associated with stress, including how stress impairs brain function, memory, and learning. Many of these same conclusions are covered in the book *None of These Diseases* by McMillen and Stern.

READ THE STUDY: *EXCLI Journal Experimental and Clinical Sciences* 2017; 16: 1057–1072
“The Impact of Stress on Body Function: A Review” https://www.excli.de/vol16/Sahebkar_Panahi_21072017_proof.pdf

None of These Diseases by McMillen and Stern, <https://www.amazon.com/None-These-Diseases-S-McMillen/dp/0800752333>

The Bible has much written to us about not letting stress or worry dwell in our minds. God knew it was very unhealthy for us, so He frequently stated verses and even passages declaring for us not to let stress and worry command us. Some examples are:

Casting all your care on him; for he cares for you.

I Peter 5:7 (ESV)

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: not as the world gives, give I to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

John 14:27 (ESV)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)

Even when Jesus visited Mary and Martha, Martha was all stressed out about fixing dinner, and Jesus corrected her. (Luke 10:41).



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Laughter

Laughter brings joy. That is in the Bible (Psalm 126:2).

I recall a time when I was ill and went to the hospital for help. I was in a great deal of pain and my blood pressure was highly elevated. Instead of giving morphine or some other drug, the doctor had me lay down in a small room with a TV. He dimmed the lights and asked me what I thought was funny? I begged his pardon and he asked what on TV makes me laugh? I told him Mr. Bean, Laurel and Hardy, Road Runner and Tom and Jerry cartoons. He opened a drawer and pulled out a DVD. He placed in a machine and told me to relax and watch this. He informed me that he would be back in a while to check on me. I laid there laughing at cartoons and shows for about an hour. He suddenly entered and quickly took my blood pressure, which had dropped dramatically. He asked me how my pain was, and I replied that it was not gone, but it had dropped to a level I could handle. I was amazed! After this episode, I returned home and downloaded medical papers on how laughter helps medically and physiologically. There have been many papers published on how laughter makes one joyful and helps our mental status.

READ THE STUDY: *Todays OR Nurse*. "Seriously, Laughing Matters." Nov-Dec 1993;15(6):19-24. *Not available online.*

READ THE STUDY: *Holistic Nursing Practice*. “Humor: and Antidote for Stress.” 1996 Jan;10(2):49-56. https://journals.lww.com/hnpjjournal/Abstract/1996/01000/Humor_An_antidote_for_stress.7.aspx

Dancing, which can be related to laughter, does the same thing.

READ THE STUDY: Harvard Medical Magazine, Winter 2015, Dancing and the Brain. <https://hms.harvard.edu/news-events/publications-archive/brain/dancing-brain>

Singing also helps our mental health. According to the *British Medical Journal*, “Psychosocial singing interventions for the mental health and well-being of family carers of patients with cancer: results from a longitudinal controlled study,” August 10, 2019, singing is a promising multimodal psychosocial intervention that has been used to support mental health and well-being in diverse populations, including among patients with cancer.

READ THE STUDY: *British Medical Journal*, “Psychosocial singing interventions for the mental health and well-being of family carers of patients with cancer: results from a longitudinal controlled study,” August 10, 2019. <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/9/8/e026995>

The Bible often has people dancing and singing after stressful events (Red Sea crossing, Exodus 15; Judges 5).

Conclusion

In the 1953 publication “*Personality Manifestations in Psychomotor Illness*” doctors determined that the brain is the seat of emotions and that those emotions can raise havoc with our physical health. Today we know that many illnesses are enhanced and sometimes caused by emotional health. Emotional stress can cause disease. Psychosomatic illness can interfere with blood flow in the body and cause illness, cause increased muscle tension, and cause certain glands to over or under secrete.

As we have seen, many books of the Bible contain verses that support mental health. The Book of Proverbs is filled with many verses that support what is known today in Psychology as dealing with mental health. Though at one time, psychology disagreed adamantly with the Bible, this science has come a long way and now often agrees with what is contained in it. Time and space do not permit all of these verses and passages from Proverbs and Psalms to be covered, but here are a few that have been proven true.

*An excellent wife is the crown of her husband,
but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.*

Proverbs 12:4 (ESV)

God tells us here that a man that finds a good wife will be healthier, which is what modern science is trying to tell us (*American Journal of Men's Health*, Sept. 2018).

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

Proverbs 14:30 (ESV)

Here God tells us to live at peace with everyone. Not doing so causes much emotional stress and thus harms us and makes us sick.

The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones.

Proverbs 15:30 (ESV)

God tells us here that if we are happy emotionally, we are healthier. Science is now saying the same thing.

*Gracious words are like a honeycomb,
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.*

Proverbs 16:24 (ESV)

God tells us here that we should speak kindly to people. This adds to their emotional health and physical health.

A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

Proverbs 17:22 (ESV)

This statement from God is exactly what studies suggest; that making a person happy or getting them to laugh improves poor health.