

# **DISCERNING MENTAL ILLNESS (PART 1)**

## Introduction

*Several reasons Christians ought to reject the current cultural understanding of mental illness:*

1. The term is a misnomer according to Scripture.
2. The term lacks any concrete definition.
3. It requires an evolutionary, materialistic anthropology.

## QUOTES

1. In 1955<sup>1</sup>, the disabled mentally ill were primarily cared for in state and county mental hospitals. Today, they typically receive either a monthly Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) payment, and many live in residential shelters or other subsidized living arrangements. Both statistics provide a rough count of the number of people under governmental care because they have been disabled by mental illness.

In 1955, there were 566,000 people in state and county mental hospitals. However, only 355,000 had a psychiatric diagnosis, as the rest suffered from alcoholism, syphilis-related dementia, Alzheimer's, and mental retardation, a population that would not show up in a count of the disabled mentally ill today. Thus, in 1955, 1 in every 468 Americans was hospitalized due to a mental illness. In 1987, there were 1.25 million people receiving an SSI or SSDI payment because they were disabled by mental illness, or 1 in every 184 Americans...

The Food and Drug Administration approved Prozac in 1987, and over the next two decades the number of disabled mentally ill on the SSI and SSDI rolls soared to 3.97 million. In 2007, the disability rate was 1 in every 76 Americans. That's more than double the rate in 1987, and six times the rate in 1955...

This plague of disabling mental illness has now spread to our children, too... In the short span of twenty years [1987-2007], the number of disabled mentally ill children rose *thirty-five fold*. Mental illness is now the leading cause of disability in children, with the mentally ill group comprising 50 percent of the total number of children on the SSI rolls in 2007.

The baffling nature of this childhood epidemic shows up with particular clarity in the SSI data from 1996 to 2007. Whereas the number of children disabled by mental illness more than doubled during this period, the number of children on the SSI rolls for all other reasons—cancers, retardation, etc.—*declined*, from 728,110 to 559,448. The nation's doctors were apparently making progress in treating all of those other conditions, but when it came to mental disorder, just the opposite was true. — Robert Whitaker<sup>2</sup>

2. "The distinction between bodily illness and mental illness rests on a misuse of the term *illness*. When we say that Smith has a mental illness, we misidentify his strategic behavior as a bodily disease (an objectively identifiable physical phenomenon with its origin not directly under human control). If we limit the use of the term *illness* or *disease* to observable biological— anatomical and physiological—phenomena, then, by definition, the term *mental illness* is a metaphor. Mind is not matter, hence mental illness is a figure of speech. The idea of two kinds of diseases, one bodily, the other mental, is an unintended product of the scientific revolution: the imitation of science, called 'scientism.' *Hysteria, schizophrenia, mental illness, and psychopathology* are scientific, not scientific, terms."<sup>3</sup> — Thomas Szasz

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<sup>1</sup> 1955 is an important year because Thorazine, the first antipsychotic drug, was introduced the year prior (1954).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Whitaker, *Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010), 6-9.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Szasz, *Psychiatry: The Science of Lies* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 25.

3. "A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities."<sup>4</sup> — Peter Gray
4. "Mental disorder has no really satisfying definition. It's a fuzzy concept. Everyone knows that, including the people who wrote the *DSM-IV*. Yet, for various practical reasons, they had to come up with a definition. For one thing, insurance companies demand that patients be diagnosed as having a mental disorder if there is going to be reimbursement for treatment, so some sort of definition had to be laid out, no matter how fuzzy the concept."<sup>5</sup> — Peter Gray
5. "Hobbes argues that spirit, or soul, is a meaningless concept and that nothing exists but matter and energy... In Hobbes's view, all human behavior, including the seemingly voluntary choices we make, can in theory be understood in terms of physical processes in the body, especially the brain. Conscious thought, he maintained, is purely a product of the brain's machinery and therefore subject to natural law. This philosophy places no theoretical limit on what psychologists might study scientifically."<sup>6</sup> — Paul Bloom
6. "You - your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will are, in fact, no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Luis Carols Alice might have phrased it, 'You're nothing but a pack of neurons.'<sup>7</sup> — Paul Bloom
7. "For the Christian counselor, the Word of God must be more than an interpretative grid for the acceptance or denial of psychological truth claims; it is the operative domain from which the counselor derives his/her functional and final authority, being accepted as the determinative authority in anthropology. Scripture serves as the only reliable resource for the Christian counselor's diagnostic terminology and remedy." - John Street<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Gray, *Psychology*, sixth edition (New York: Worth Publishers, 2011), .

<sup>5</sup> Gray, *Psychology*, 594.

<sup>6</sup> Gray, *Psychology*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in "02 - Foundations: This is Your Brain," Psychology - Audio (Open Yale Courses, October 12, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 31.