



## SESSION 8 TRANSCRIPT

- Alastair Sterne: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.”
- Alastair Sterne: Church planting made me realize something was not right with my mind. I was doing everything I’d prayed for and been trained for and hoped for and in the back of my head I kept saying, “If six months from now I still feel this way, I’ll go to a doctor.” And six months would go by and I would think, “Okay, another six months, if I’m still feeling this way, I’ll go to a doctor.” And there’s always this lingering sense that I should feel fulfilled. I should feel like I am living a life of purpose. I should feel happy. Yet most of the time I felt nothing.
- Alastair Sterne: And it was in 2015 I had my first anxiety attack. I went to the doctor and she administered a standard depression test and I scored one point away from severe depression. She’s a family friend and she looked me in the eyes and she said, “I don’t know how you get through the day. To put it into perspective, you scored a seventeen, I scored a two. So you need to start medicine tomorrow.”
- Alastair Sterne: For someone who’s just starting to discover that they may have a mental health struggle or a challenge or an illness—you actually have to discover language to explain your experience. I didn’t know how to explain my experience. I didn’t know what words actually resonated with this deep-set purposelessness that I carried with me all the time. And so as I looked closer at the writings of people who were depressed, as I journeyed through the psalms, I started to discover, “Wow. These metaphors actually explain my experience.”
- Alastair Sterne: My story has bled into the church I lead. I wasn’t sure how I could go through this privately. So that first started with us just saying, “Hey, twice a year, we’ll do a mental health Sunday.” Sometimes those services are different, we will do an art service or read poetry by members in our community who have mental health challenges. People just need permission. And the thing that gives permission is people saying, “This is my story.”
- Hillary McBride: I think about my experiences of recovering from an eating disorder, and [being] in and out of treatment programs, and how often the thing that was the focus was symptoms or weight. Looking back on my story, I knew that recovery was beginning when I had a therapist who actually didn’t even talk about eating disorder stuff with me. She talked about me, and it felt like I was seen for the first time. And the way that I describe that often is [it’s as] if there was this little flicker, like a candle that’s in a breeze, almost about to blow out, and she put her hands around it and allowed that flame to grow until I was able to put my hands around it myself.
- Hillary McBride: And in doing that, [I] was able to hold space for my own story and then move into relationship to hold space for other people and their stories.



## SESSION 8 TRANSCRIPT

- Ross Hastings: Nice. One of the challenges, of course, for the whole psychotherapeutic field—and in an ongoing way, psychology and theology—[is that] we’re dealing with two great mysteries: the mystery of who God is, and the mystery of who humans are. And we may have our lovely little theological definitions of the *imago Dei* and so on, but at the end of the day, we’re talking about [how] every person is a mystery. And so there is a mysterious dynamic to this field of integration.
- Alastair Sterne: For me, I realized that addressing mental health, it’s not an optional add-on to ministry in the North American context. The church that commissioned us to church plant is a megachurch in the States, and I was good friends with them. They helped train me and raise me up and send me to start a church in Vancouver, British Columbia.
- Alastair Sterne: A year into the church-planting experience, the senior pastor of that church resigned for a moral failure. And then a year after that, he committed suicide. How could this happen? How could someone of faith, a pastor, fail in such a way and then be so overwhelmed that the only option was to take his life? What I discovered was that the church, in that moment, lacked the vocabulary to understand that things like this will happen.
- Alastair Sterne: There is that tension, in the Church. We want to, maybe not always intentionally, create a veneer that there is something bigger than the mundane happening here—and there is. But unless we can allow that spirit and power of reality to meet us in the mundane (where we’re sick, or we’re not completely with it, or we’re slightly disheveled, whatever it might be)... but that’s where God meets us.
- Alastair Sterne: And so mental health is just one of those ways of acknowledging the reality. It doesn’t matter whether you acknowledge mental health or not, on one level; it’s still there. So you’re either going to name reality or you’re not. You’re either going to live in the truth or you’re going to live in self-deception.
- Ross Hastings: What does the concept of the image of God mean? Theologians have been debating this for centuries and it’s quite complex. But I think one of the agreements is around the issue that relationality is crucial for that.
- Hillary McBride: Sure, yeah.
- Lee Kosa: Picking up on what you’re saying about the relational aspect, [the] social aspect of being human... At our church we’ve come to use the biblical concept of *shalom*, of righteousness, of being in right relationship. And we put it this way at Cedar Park: we seek peace in all our relations with God, with ourselves, with others, and with creation.
- Hillary McBride: Actually, the self is this relational experience, both inside [oursevels] and with other people around us and [our] community. And no person’s identity develops in isolation. It develops relationally. And often a sense of identity about, “I’m a



## SESSION 8 TRANSCRIPT

broken person,” or “I’m a bad person,” is something they’ve learned relationally. And consequently, the experience of having a transformative or corrective relational experience can be so significant for healing. To be with people who say, “As you are, I see you and love you.”

John Swinton: In the book of Judges, the writer of Judges says very clearly, “Yahweh is *shalom*.” And Paul in Ephesians [6:44] talks about the idea that Jesus is our peace. Jesus is our *shalom*. So if we are the body of Christ, in a literal sense—it’s not a metaphor, we are the body of Christ—then we are a place that is bound together by health.

John Swinton: The reason the Church exists is because Jesus is who Jesus is. One of the founding internal dynamics of the body of Christ is to be in relationship with Jesus. And so in that sense, the body of Christ is called to be a healthy community. And within that, the interesting thing is that it’s not the fact that we’re all the same that makes us the body of Christ; it’s the fact that we’re all different that makes us the body of Christ.

John Swinton: When Paul talks about the body of Christ, it’s all about diversity. It’s all about difference. And so the difference that people with mental health challenges bring to the body of Christ is important. Because there are things that [they] need to be helped with, but there are also gifts that people bring. Gifts that people bring in terms of seeing the world differently, understanding a different way of thinking about happiness and joy, and a slightly different way of thinking about what is real and what is not real and how we discern that. What does it really mean if someone living with delusions has their most intense spiritual time in a situation where the mental health service will say it’s pathology? Does that mean it’s simply pathology?

John Swinton: And that raises a really interesting challenge for the Church to begin to think about what voice can speak into that situation. So I think it’s the diversity and the openness and the sense of belonging to the body of Christ that enables people with their mental health challenges to be part of that [body], in principle.

Alastair Sterne: Before I became a pastor, my first real ministry experience was helping begin a recovery ministry. Whether you’re dealing with depression, anger problems, drug addiction, going through divorce, whatever, you’re welcome. So we didn’t break people into small groups based on their challenge. Someone who is struggling with Oxycontin had to listen to someone going through divorce, had to listen to someone with anger problems, had to listen to someone who is depressed.

Alastair Sterne: What they began to see was the shared struggle. And in there, the Church is disposed actually very well to walk with people. Because discipleship is a journey. A journey in which we say, “We all are carrying different weights, different struggles, different baggage; and sometimes we can put [it] down and sometimes



## SESSION 8 TRANSCRIPT

it doesn't let us put it down." We get to walk toward Jesus together, and meet in a gracious space where people say, "I hear you and I'm willing to walk with you." And we believe as we walk toward Jesus together, he will meet us in this stuff. We can't tell you what that will look like, but boy are we happy to journey with you.

Alastair Sterne:

"Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my help and my God."