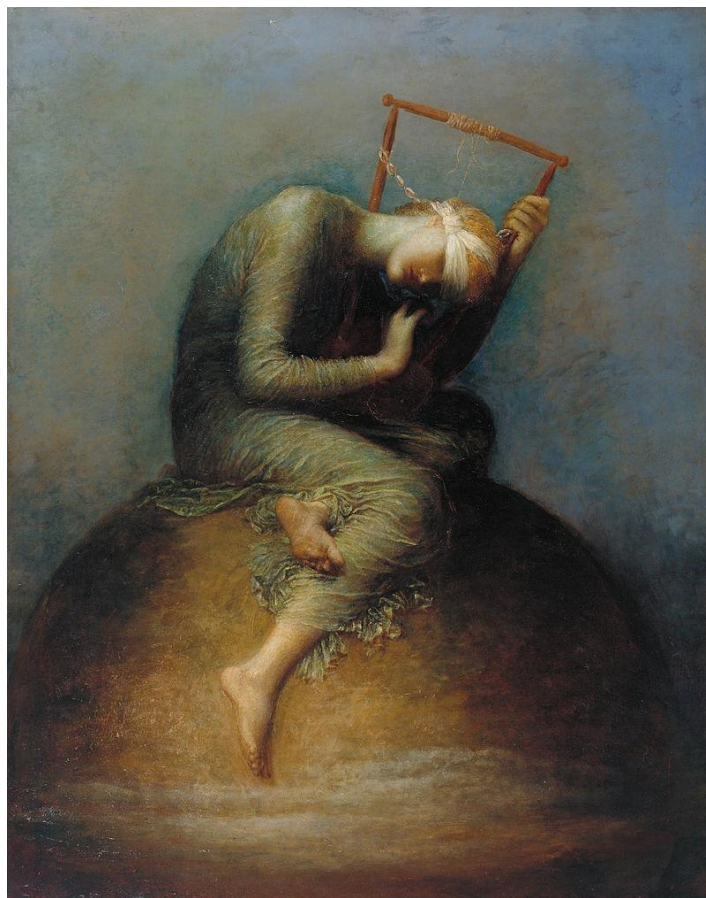


SOUL TO SOUL: SCRIPTURE AND WELLBEING

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*Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.
1 Peter 5:7*



Hope by George Frederic Watts, 1886.
Oil on canvas. Tate Britain.

George Frederic Watts and workshop, Public domain, Wikimedia Commons
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/watts-hope-n01640>

The symbol of hope is usually identified with an anchor, but the artist George Frederic Watts wanted to explore a new idea on this theme in his art. He painted hope as a blind young woman sitting on a globe playing a lyre with all its strings broken except one. Hope bends her whole body and head to listen to the faint music that only one string can make.

Welcome to *'Soul to Soul: Scripture and Wellbeing'*.

You may have come to this resource out of curiosity. You may be purposely looking on behalf of someone else. Or you may be going through a difficult time. Whatever has sparked your interest, this brief foray into Scripture and wellbeing is not a manual, or six-steps 'guide to happiness'; nor is it meant to replace pastoral care, counselling or psychotherapy (see footnote). What it offers is an opportunity to look at matters of the soul through a biblical lens. It will be a close look, and at times, it might be uncomfortable or even painful.

Mental and emotional wellbeing can be elusive. The mind is a fragile thing. Thoughts and emotions, faced or repressed, run deep. Events lasting seconds can haunt us for a lifetime. Genes and early childhood collude in determining the way we end up seeing the world and dealing with life. Even those of us fortunate enough to have grown up in a loving home can have all manner of fears and hang-ups; but what of people who were rejected, neglected or abused while still utterly dependent on individuals who were meant to care for them?

Meanwhile, we're taught to get on with it. The stiff upper lip is practised well beyond our shores. The supremacy of performance and success transcends national and cultural boundaries. Being the best you can be, and working hard for it, is intrinsically human. But there is a fine line between a healthy degree of self-improvement and damaging levels of perfectionism. In the West, the minimum entry requirement for joining the club of respectable members of the public is the ability to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Meritocracy, free market, pursuit of happiness – call it what you will – is all about 'stronger, faster, higher'. You've done well in your job; now see how you can improve. You're healthy, now see how you can shed a few pounds to conform to digitally enhanced beauty ideals. Your children are essentially happy; now see how you can beat yourself up about not being the perfect parent. Stronger, faster, higher: Olympian perfectionism forced onto average lives. Millions suffer from burnout and self-loathing, and we wonder why.

Add to that the well-established postmodern crisis of meaning, the inadequacy of earlier philosophical models, the inability of people to shift to more helpful patterns, and with many people struggling to find lasting fulfilment in temporary things. Then, of course, there's the pandemic. As if we didn't have enough to deal with already, before Covid added its daily dose of depressing headlines.

When it comes to today's multi-faceted onslaught on our mental health, how can a collection of texts, written thousands of years and half a world away, help? That's the question we'll be exploring over the next six sessions. As we walk through parts of the biblical story, alongside some of the biblical characters, we'll be looking at spiritual fundamentals like repressing truth about ourselves, the link between faith and meaning, suffering and the 'dark night of the soul', and what salvation might mean in the here and now.



Moonlight by Edvard Munch, 1895.

Oil on canvas.

National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design,
Oslo, Norway.

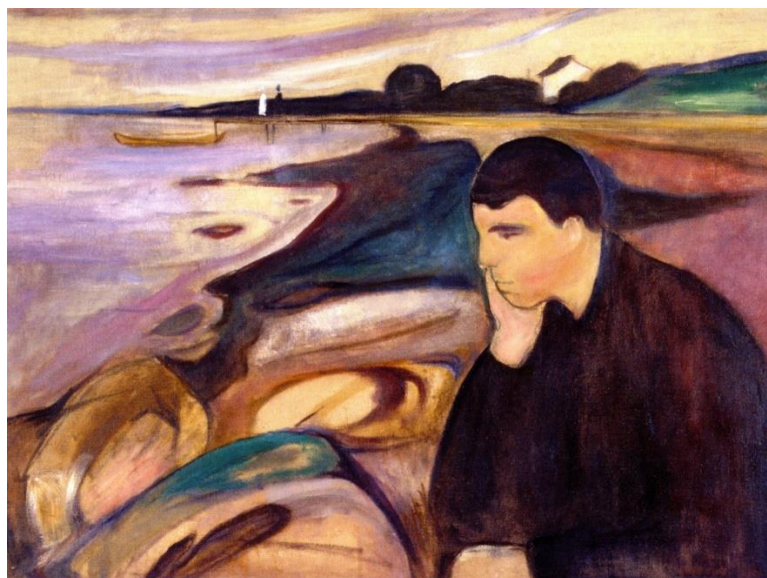
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Munch_Moonlight.jpg

How this resource works

- a) There are six sessions which contain the following:
 - A central theme with reflection on the theme.
 - A short prayer.
 - Questions for reflection and action.
 - A painting with a short reflection.
 - A Scripture text.
 - Additional Bible references for further reflection.
 - Suggestions for further reading.
- b) We suggest you download one session a week.
'Walk with' the session content, reflecting and trying any of the suggested activities over the course of the week.
Or focus on any of the texts or paintings that speak to you more directly.
Remember that whatever works for you is the start of taking steps to form habits which will help with your spiritual wellbeing.
- c) At the beginning of each session, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you on your journey this week.
- d) All Scripture passages are from the New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised Catholic Edition.
- e) Please note: Mental ill health covers a wide spectrum of symptoms, from occasional low moods or anxiety common to most people, to states of the mind that require psychological support or psychiatric intervention.

Contact your GP or a mental health professional if you are experiencing mental ill health and are in any doubt about its nature or severity, or your ability to handle it.

Or go online to the mental health charity MIND - <https://www.mind.org.uk/>



Melancholy by Edvard Munch, 1894.

Oil on canvas. Private Collection.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edvard_Munch_-_Melancholy_\(1894\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Edvard_Munch_-_Melancholy_(1894).jpg)