

[NB: The first part of this liturgy is designed for three readers (with the congregation reading Psalm 23 itself). The second part is for a single reader/prayer.]

A Prayer for Mental Health:

From Psalm 23, Deuteronomy 31, and Joshua 1

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

Although sometimes we feel we lack everything. Sometimes we cannot see what you have given us through the lie of what has been taken away. Show us how to see your blessing. Show us how to see your provision when the world teaches us an economy of fear and scarcity.

The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.

Refresh us, LORD. Let the raging waters be quiet. Let dry pastures be watered. Let us lie down and rest without fear.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

We so often turn from your path—believing lies about ourselves, about others, about you; taking on burdens that are not ours to bear; struggling to entrust you with ourselves, our family, our friends, and our circumstances. Guide us along your path of trust and contentment.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

The valley of depression, the valley of medication, the valley of sorrow, the valley of pain and abandonment, the valley of past wrongs done to me, the valley of despair, the valley of derision, the valley of fear, the valley of waiting, the valley of misunderstanding.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of the valley in which you walk, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

Although we sometimes feel abandoned, you have not left us alone. You have not left us alone with our depression, with our sorrow, our pain, our illness, our despair, our fear, our waiting. You have not left us alone with the past wrongs that have been done to us, with the derision and misunderstanding of others. You have not left us alone. You are with us.

The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

With your rod, you protect us from ourselves. With your staff, you protect us from the harm of others. Your truth comforts us, as we find our identity wholly and firmly locked up in you.

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Although we are surrounded by people who do not understand the weight we bear, the struggles we face, we gather to eat at your table. Although we suffer ignorant comments, laughter, and sometimes shame—we are worthy to eat at your table. We can eat our fill—even feast—because you have not despised us. You have made us welcome.

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

You have made us worthy. You have made us chosen. You accept us with all our flaws, with all our illness and frailty, with all our failings. You have anointed us, *us*, to serve with you—our cup overflows with joy.

The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,

Surely goodness and love will follow us. Surely goodness and love will chase us down—despite ourselves, despite others, despite our circumstances—goodness and love, by the power and grace of your Spirit, have found us. And will never let us go.

The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Forever. In health, in strength, in love, in mercy. Forever. Amen.

The LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.

And as we rest in that assurance, we pray for those who live without it, and who live with the pain and stigma of mental illness. We ask that you would watch over those who live on the street, without the medication they so desperately need. We pray that you would hold accountable those systems that have let these precious children of yours down, that have left them destitute. We pray for those who are in positions of power—that they would faithfully and carefully consider the welfare of those who struggle with mental illness as they make policies and work to improve existing structures of care. We pray that you would prevent us from putting distance between ourselves and those struggling with mental illness. That you would grow in us the love we need to take action, and to make their struggle our own.

Comfort those who live with the darkness of depression. May we be a light in the darkness for them. Teach us to avoid false cheerfulness, and instead give us wisdom to know how to help our friends and family who struggle in this way to come up for air. To see, again, your goodness. Lord, watch over those who are, even now, contemplating suicide. Stop their hands. Send someone to intervene.

Guard our tongues from unthinking and unkind words that contribute to feelings of worthlessness. Empower us to use our words, instead, to speak for those who cannot. To proclaim your worth over those our culture denigrates. To defend the powerless, and stop others from contributing to the stigma that mental illness so often carries.

Bring the comfort only you can bring to those who have lost a loved one to mental illness. And use us to bring comfort. May we, your church, be a healing presence, a safe community, a strong advocate for people living with mental illness.

Thank you for the assurance that you do not let go. That you are always with us. May we in turn extend that hope to every person we encounter.

Amen.