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THE WHOLE MAN

40 SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS
FROM BLACK MEN FOR THE
HEAD, HEART, HANDS, AND SOUL

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HEAD AND MIND

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to
set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

Romans 8:6 ESV

We often weave the threads of faith, family, work, and community into the tapestry of life. The journey of Christian men is guided by the principles of love, compassion, and faith in a higher power. But amid these virtuous pursuits, there is one aspect of life that has been neglected for too long and has a profound effect on our well-being: mental health.

So we begin our journey to wholeness here, with an in-depth exploration of the importance of mental health for Christian men, revealing the essential connection between faith and emotional well-being. In our modern world, where expectations, responsibilities, and pressures increase every day, the importance of promoting mental wellness cannot be overstated.

As Christian men, we often find ourselves caught up in the delicate balance of providing for our families, serving our communities, and maintaining our spiritual lives. It is a noble pursuit, but it can sometimes lead to neglect of spiritual and emotional needs. In a domino effect, this neglect weakens our ability to fulfill our responsibilities with love, peace of mind, and perseverance.

In the following articles, brothers delve into the complex relationship between faith and the mind. We explore how embracing our spirituality can be a powerful source of strength and comfort, while acknowledging that sometimes even the most faithful among us struggle with emotional challenges. We discuss the stigma surrounding mental health in Christian communities and the urgent need to break down these barriers so that men, without fear or shame, can seek help and support when they need it. We hear stories of Christian men who have weathered the storms of depression, anxiety, sorrow, and doubt and found hope and healing through their

faith. Their experiences are lights that guide us to a place of understanding, acceptance, and compassion. We also explore practical strategies to promote mental wellness within our Christian faith, including prayer, meditation, community support, and professional counseling. These tools allow us to develop resilience, self-awareness, and emotional well-being while staying true to our faith.

We are embarking on a transformative journey that challenges us to redefine our understanding of strength and faith. We understand that emphasizing mental health is not a sign of weakness but of our humanity. By accepting this truth and weaving conversations about mental health into the fabric of our faith, we prepare to live a fuller, more authentic Christian life of compassion, purpose, and grace. It is our hope that, together, we will reveal to Christians the profound meaning of spiritual health and illuminate the path to wholeness in harmony with the teachings of Christ and the profound gift of grace.





HEART AND EMOTIONS

*Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.*

Proverbs 4:23

We're often told the whats of Scripture but not necessarily the hows of Scripture.

- We're told to put on the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:11), but we're not always told or shown how.
- We're told to go make disciples (Matthew 28:16–20), but we're not equipped with scriptural tools on how to share our faith with others.
- We're told to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33), but not everyone knows how.
- We're told to cast our cares on God because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7), but when it comes to grief and anxiety, we're not necessarily told how to release our cares.

As people of faith, we must be equipped with the hows, especially when it comes to being vulnerable and embracing our heartfelt emotions. Brother, this is important because grief will hit us all and we will need more than Christian clichés to hold on to. Studies consistently tell us that, worldwide, one in five of us experienced a mental-health struggle in the past week. So, we must know how to take care of and steward our emotions and allow ourselves to be vulnerable with others.

“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13 CSB). Do you see the realness and hope in this verse? In comforting the Thessalonian believers that their brothers and sisters in Christ who had died would be raised again, Paul is essentially saying that while grief is real, when our

hearts are rooted in Christ, we can stand and withstand the challenges that come our way. So, as you read this part of the book, I want you to think about how you would rate the condition of your heart currently—not physically but emotionally. Categorize the type of grief you may be dealing with right now, and then rest in the reality that this situation doesn't have to define you because Christ is the source of your identity.

Types of Grief

- *Disenfranchised grief*—when others don't consider your loss worthy of grief or signal that your grief isn't valid, so your grieving can feel especially isolating
- *Traumatic grief*—processing loss and trauma at the same time
- *Absent grief*—when you don't show signs, but you know it's there
- *Ambiguous grief*—loss of a dream such as a marriage, or loss that makes you feel incomplete

Identifying where you are helps you to move toward a healthy and rested heart. I want you to apply the four steps below and reflect on and replay them throughout your seasons of life to stay grounded and centered on Christ.

Four Steps to Grow from Grief to Gratitude

1. *Replay His rescue.* Recall the ways God has brought you through difficult situations in the past.
2. *Verbalize victory.* Speak it! Encourage yourself through your words and thoughts.

3. *Respect His timing.* Recognize that God's timing is not like yours.
4. *Sow your sorrow.* Reflect on the circumstances and situations that grieve you.

I want you to know that your soul care is essential to your health and stability as a man. Reflect on and replay these four steps, and let each devotion minister to your heart.

Jerome Gay





HANDS AND WORK

Let your work be shown to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.
Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and establish the work of our hands upon us;
yes, establish the work of our hands!

Psalms 90:16–17 ESV

Moses had it all figured out. We read his credentials in Acts 7:22: “Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.” You know you’re a bad man when your skills are declared in the Bible! Raised as a prince in Egypt, he had studied under the nation’s best and graduated from “Pharaoh U.” Moses had a clear vision to help his people and a desire to lead them. But the problem arose when he tried to work it out his own way, and his passion turned to violence. In a moment, Moses caught a body and a case, experienced rejection from his people, and fled his hometown in disgrace. He became an anonymous man with an average life in the desert, shepherding someone else’s sheep.

We can all relate to Moses in some way or another. Maybe the big dreams you once had when someone asked you as a child, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” have turned into bitter disappointment. Maybe the degree you thought would set you up for success has let you down. Maybe you feel like you’re just shepherding someone else’s sheep, helping them grow while you labor in obscurity.

Or maybe you achieved success but feel burnt-out, like it’s all empty. That was Moses’s story until he became a whole man. It all changed for Moses when one day, while at work, he encountered God in a burning bush. Experiencing God changed everything for Moses. He no longer defined his worth or evaluated his success based on himself but on God’s revelation.

Moses would go on to meet with God for forty days on a mountaintop and eventually write, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). Moses discovered something all men need to discover in order to realize our true identity: *we must understand God’s purpose*

in work to understand our purpose in work. Psalm 90 is the one psalm attributed to Moses. In it he prays: “Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.” Men, we are often misled in our culture to define our identity based on our work. It is no wonder so many of us find anxiety, despair, and disappointment in our jobs, and work so hard that we end up finding ourselves unhealthy: unable to maintain healthy friendships and relationships, and even unhealthy in our bodies. Black men have the shortest life expectancies in the country. We are working ourselves to death. But there is a better way.

The devotions in this section help us get into the Word to reframe work from God’s perspective. And not just work. The other thing we learn from Moses in Genesis is what God did on the seventh day: He rested. Dig into these articles to get into the true meaning of work and rest, and to experience what *The Whole Man* team is praying for you: “Establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!”

Rasool Berry





SOUL AND SPIRIT

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

Psalm 42:1-2

The Psalms are some of the most popular passages in the Bible because they speak to our souls. But what is the soul? Throughout Scripture, the soul is the life force in us that is able to commune with God but is also in touch with our minds and bodies. In Psalm 42, we read of the yearnings of our souls: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.”

Have you ever thirsted for a deeper connection with God? The second verse reveals you’re in good company. “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” The psalmist goes on to reflect on how unjust oppression and physical violence threaten him and cause a struggle deep within his soul. It’s a struggle the Black community knows all too well, which is why *soul* is such a significant word to us.

“My tears have been my food day and night” (v. 3). Soul food originates from the story of the struggle to survive the transatlantic slave trade and being supplied meager food rations as enslaved people. But enslaved Africans transformed what was considered worthless and made it glorious. From the rice that Africans demonstrated the unique ingenuity to grow on American soil to the oxtails that were once deemed useless but now are regarded as a delicacy, soul food is a reflection of resilience in the struggle.

These things I remember
as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise
among the festive throng. (v. 4)

Soul music, with its dynamic blend of the lament of blues and the hope of gospel music, transformed music in America

and became the soundtrack to the struggle. Tracks like “Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)” by Marvin Gaye, “A Change Is Gonna Come” by Sam Cooke, and “Respect” by the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, all were expressions of what it looks like to “pour out my soul.” This tradition of honestly and passionately calling attention to the struggle is rooted deeply in the Christian tradition. Jesus himself sang soul music on the cross when he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46), quoting Psalm 22:1.

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. picked up on this theme when he wrote of his approach to responding to the violent resistance to the Civil Rights Movement: “We will meet your physical force with soul force.”

As you read this section on the soul, you will encounter reflections that acknowledge, “Brother, the struggle is real.” Take them in with an open heart that’s ready to resonate with the challenges of temptation, trauma, and doubt. Let these meditations guide you to see God’s beauty more clearly, embrace His power more boldly, and receive His peace more consistently in your life in order for you to be a whole man. The struggle is real, but so is the God who makes beauty for ashes and can revive your soul with hope.

Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God,
for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God. (Psalm 42:11)

Rasool Berry



Scan to watch a conversation with men about loving God with our head and mind.