



b. What can we learn from 1 John 4:18 that might help in our efforts to reduce stigma?

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.”

Genesis 3 records the Fall of Man. In this story, Eve is deceived by a serpent and eats the forbidden fruit. She then takes the fruit to her husband Adam and convinces him to eat it as well. The next scene finds the pair **hiding** from God. When God asks them where they are, Adam responds, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.” (Genesis 3:10)

6. What lessons can we learn when we relate this story to how those who struggle with mental illness **perceive** themselves and their illness, and how they **react** to stigma? What can be done to help them come out of hiding?

2 Kings 2:23-24 records a story of the prophet Elisha. On his way to Bethel, a group of young men began to mock him because he was bald. Elisha turned, looked at them, and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then “two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths.” (verse 24) Now, the reason for this seemingly overly harsh punishment would require a longer study than we have time for today. But pertaining to mental illness and stigma, it does raise a question:

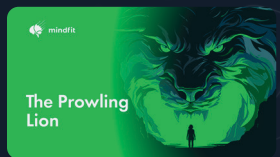
[Continues on the back](#)

7. The young men chose to deride and make fun of the prophet, resulting in a severe punishment. In the same vein, many have mistreated the mentally ill by demonizing, mocking, ostracizing, neglecting, and otherwise abusing them. What moral responsibility do we have toward the mentally ill, and will we one day **be held responsible** for how we treat those with mental struggles?

8. Stigma is a learned process . . . but anything that is learned can be **unlearned**. What steps need to take place for this process of unlearning and retraining to happen? What are some ways that society can begin to de-stigmatize mental illness?



Join us for the next session



voice of prophecy

mindfit

Copyright © 2024 by the Voice of Prophecy, vop.com

MFIT2024_001



Beyond the Asylum

Guide 01



Study Guide 1

Beyond the Asylum

Stigma is a result of **fear**. This fear stems from learned prejudices and biases fueled by misinformation or a lack of information. Over the years, the mentally ill have suffered under intense stigma, resulting in such issues as social isolation, harassment, abuse, workplace pressures, and hesitation to seek appropriate care, to name a few. According to *JAMA Network Open*, a peer-reviewed general medical journal, “Stigma has been implicated in worsening outcomes for people with serious mental illness, with nearly 40% of this population reporting unmet treatment needs despite available effective treatments.”

1. There are over 8 billion people in the world today. By our best estimate, at least 1 in 8 (in the U.S., 1 in 5) suffers from a mental illness. These numbers suggest that as a society, we contend with mental illness day in and day out. With that much exposure, why do you think **stigma is still a major concern** to practitioners and those who experience illness? Why is stigma alive and well today?

We find an intriguing statement in the Bible’s story of Creation. Genesis 1:26 tells us, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness . . .’” What this means, among other things, is that all humans were made **equal**—we are all the same. And you can see this in action with young children: they seem to be immune to the prejudices and biases of adults. They will play and laugh with any other child who’s willing, irrespective of race, socioeconomic class, illness, etc. They’ll simply see the other as a playmate, no more, no less.

2. If the Bible is true and we are all born on the same level, with the same feelings toward each other, how do you suppose we develop **prejudices and biases**?

Not too long ago, people didn’t have the internet, computers, or cell phones. To talk to someone, you had to see them in person, call them on a tethered line, or write them a letter. There was a delay in communication, and even when it did occur, it was a hassle to quickly distribute a thought far and wide without the use of television. But with today’s technology, anyone can disseminate information at mind-blowing speeds.

3. In what ways has the rapid growth and development of **technology and media** contributed to the problem of stigma in our society?

In the 1860s, the Georgia Lunatic Asylum in Milledgeville was the largest in the world, housing nearly 12,000 patients. There’s a curious story told about General William Tecumseh Sherman and the time he stationed 30,000 federal troops in town. The Civil War made supplies scarce, but Sherman spared the asylum, even *giving* them food provisions rather than taking any. Did the famously harsh general do this out of the kindness of his heart? Probably not. More than likely, it’s said, the lead physician, Dr. Thomas A. Green, told Sherman that he had 12,000 insane people that he was going to have to release unless he could get them food. That certainly would’ve prompted Sherman to share supplies—in order to **keep the “lunatics” locked up**.

4. Much has been said about the people and activities inside mental asylums. How has the history of asylums contributed to the stigma of mental illness?

A movie came out some years ago about a young man who was attempting to help a mentally ill individual. One night, the mentally ill man called, needing assistance. The young man wasn’t there, but his girlfriend was: having previously met the troubled man and wanting to help, she went over to his home. Soon her boyfriend returned—and realized she had gone to the man’s home *alone*. **Afraid for her safety**, he immediately rushed after her. When he arrived . . . it was too late. The movie did not say what happened, but it gave the impression that something tragic had occurred to her at the hands of the mentally ill man.

5. Fear has been a major contributor toward mental health stigma. Even our modern technologies and theories fall short of truly understanding the human mind—its diseases, much more so. Unable to understand thoughts and predict future actions, **we fear what the severely mentally ill could unwittingly do**. Even our criminal court system acknowledges that an individual could commit heinous acts but not be culpable by reason of insanity.

- a. What can we do to manage the fear of mental illness?



Continues on the back ▶