



Sanctuary Course for Catholics

# Session 4: Stigma





## Psalm 42: 4

- These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I went with the throng, and led them in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival




# Session Overview

- In this session you will:
- 1. Examine the effects of stigma on those struggling with mental health problems
- 2. Define and identify the process that produces stigma
- 3. Discuss the message of the gospel in light of the realities of stigma.




# Psychological Persepctive

- Stigma: the experience of being perceived negatively by or set apart from others due to stereotyping.
- Take a moment and reflect: Have you ever reacted to someone on the basis of a negative stereotype, or been stereotyped yourself? As you reflect, notice the words you use to describe this experience—words like shame, hopelessness, distress, and anger. These are some of the most commonly reported emotional effects of stigma.

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- Stigma can also create barriers to recovery by making individuals reluctant to seek help for mental health problems, inhibiting community participation in the recovery journey, and limiting social and financial opportunities for those who are suffering.
  - People with mental illness are violent and dangerous
    - People with mental illness cannot work or “hold down” a job
    - People just use mental illness as an excuse for poor behavior
    - People with mental illness could “snap out of it” if they really tried •
  - People with mental illness are weak and cannot handle stress.



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- One of the most painful realities for individuals facing stigma is the low self-esteem that results from being negatively stereotyped. When society blames you for your problems, it is all too easy to begin blaming yourself as well. The shame and guilt can be very intense, and these emotions prevent many people from reaching out for the help they need. However, it is possible to break free of the effects of stigma and enter into recovery



# Video


- We meet Simone who lives with schizophrenia.
- Discussion Question: How does Simone describe her experience of stigma? Can you identify a point in her story where she advocates for herself?



# Social Perspective

- Where does stigma come from ? A process of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination.
- A stereotype is a belief that most members of a particular group share certain negative characteristics.
- The term prejudice relates to personal thoughts and emotions. People become prejudiced when they hold beliefs and feelings about a group that are neither fair nor based on reason.
- The final step of the process is discrimination. This is when people act unjustly on the basis of prejudice.



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- “Jane is schizophrenic.”
  - “Michael is crazy.”
  - “That person seemed mentally unstable.”
  - “My mom is depressed. She is so difficult right now.”
  - “Sorry, that’s just my OCD coming out!”
  - Can you come up with language that is more compassionate and that doesn’t contribute to the stigma surrounding mental health problems ?




# Theological Perspective

- He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3-5)
- Here is a reminder that our God knows what it is like to be judged and rejected by society, and that he voluntarily embraced this experience in order to make us whole.



# Discussion

- In what ways did Christ experience stigma during his years of ministry?
  - How do you think he would respond to individuals who are experiencing stigma today ?
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# Final Prayer

- Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen