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BOOK REVIEW

Mark Mayfield, ed. *The Mental Health Handbook for Ministry: A Practical Guide for Supporting the Church's Mental and Emotional Well-Being*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2025. Pbk. 336 pp. ISBN 9781540904782. $32.99.

The Mental Health Handbook for Ministry offers clinical and biblical guidance for ministries, clergy, and laypersons, who believe they are unequipped to deal with mental health crises. In a world where "approximately 25 to 40 percent of individuals wrestling with a mental health diagnosis will seek out counseling from their clergy first" (9), Mark Mayfield, the editor, and the contributors believe that a trusted resource that aligns with the Bible as the main source of guidance and truth is necessary. *The Mental Health Handbook for Ministry* reflects the collective scholarly work of twenty faculty members from Colorado Christian University School of Counseling.

The book recognizes the multitude of definitions, technical terms, and conflicting voices surrounding mental health, creating misunderstandings. However, Mayfield believes that essential information pertaining to mental health should be available and understood by all, making support possible from a biblical worldview (25). While not exhaustive, *The Mental Health Handbook for Ministry* is a strong scholarly reference guide providing brief analyses and interventions on mental health topics for the purpose of equipping Christians for compassionate care.

To accomplish his purpose, Mayfield organizes the book with each chapter dedicated to a mental health topic. These topics are prefaced by the interconnectedness of man, the importance of cultural consideration, and a brief examination of human sexuality. The larger portion of the book addresses common mental health topics such as depression, grief, anxiety, trauma, suicide,

self-injury, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, and addiction. Chapters provide definitions, symptoms, a brief analysis, and interventions which can be implemented by a layperson or pastor. At the end of each chapter are additional resources for further study. Supporting footnotes demonstrate the scholarly authorship and comprehensive research of each chapter. In addition to the topics on mental health, the volume addresses support for children and adolescents, foster and adoption families, marriage, and high-performing families. An appendix offers a condensed look at disordered eating, medication management, and neurodivergent individuals.

Mayfield presents man as made in the image of God. The mind, body, and spirit are interconnected and therefore should be treated holistically (17). Suffering in one part of man often affects another (18). In approaching treatment, Mayfield warns of relating all mental health struggles to a physical disorder or spiritual oppression. He calls for discernment when evaluating causes of the various mental health struggles, which he believes may be caused by a combination of sin, brokenness, and spiritual warfare (18–20).

This edited volume has an empathetic quality, reflecting Mayfield's experience in running a nonprofit counseling center (19). Mayfield, along with the book's extensive contributors, desires to be a trusted resource for those providing care. The book has strong academic support alongside the additional resources, providing a foundation for anyone seeking to be equipped for the care of mental health struggles.

While the book may be an excellent entry point for individuals who desire to be more equipped to provide care for those struggling with mental health, for others, the book may not go far enough. Ministries, clergy, and laypersons may find a greater understanding of the presented topics, yet at the same time desire more knowledge for complicated cases. While the volume presents general symptoms of each offered mental health topic, not every case may clearly fall into the categories. For example, in dealing with grief, the book acknowledges that the most common sources will be explored, and the book provides a starting point to understand the topic (84). In considering depression, the con-

tributing author states, "Having an in-depth discussion about all the different causes is beyond the scope of this chapter" (60). While the book provides a solid starting point to understand the most common mental health issues from a standardized perspective, in doing so, it falls short of meeting the needs for more complicated cases.

The Mental Health Handbook for Ministry provides short-term suggestions for compassionate care. These interventions are described as practical tools that can be implemented immediately and applied by a layperson. While this does not present a problem in and of itself, this may lead to some of the suggested interventions seeming oversimplistic. Deeper training and discussion may be overlooked to keep interventions practical for the layperson. Additionally, long-term plans for the implementation of compassionate care are not the focus. In many ways, the book's strength is also its weakness. The book fills an important need as a primer on understanding mental health and suggesting immediate ways most people can provide care. However, in doing so, more advanced interventions and long-term plans to support mental health are lacking.

In keeping with the intent of the book, several enhancements could be made. While mainstream and familiar topics are covered, other areas of mental health could be addressed. Addressing a greater number of mental health topics could expand the reference guide and still allow each topic to be concise. Since the purpose of the book is to be a quick reference guide, a second edition of the book may also be considered for the purpose of greater detail. This would allow the twenty faculty members from Colorado Christian University School of Counseling to collectively expand their work.

However, these critiques and suggestions do not change the overall achievement of the book toward its stated purpose. The book serves as a trustworthy guide by providing a concise yet scholarly resource on various mental health topics. The suggested interventions may be implemented immediately and carried out by a layperson. The knowledge and practical steps can help build a foundation to equip a local ministry and the clergy or laypersons who serve. As a quick desk reference guide, *The Mental*

Health Handbook for Ministry could be considered by many churches and ministries an essential resource in a personal or church library. Both pastors and laypersons will find the resource a foundational place to start and a reminder of the fundamental issues surrounding mental health. A scholarly approach, biblical integration, and practical interventions allow the book to be used in training church staff, teachers, and others serving in church ministry.

Many will find the resource helpful for family members of those struggling with mental health. In the hands of a pastoral counselor, the resource can be given out to the family providing support to a struggling family member. In cases where a family struggles to understand what another member may be experiencing, the resource provides a solid presentation of the definitions and surrounding symptoms of common mental health topics. This knowledge and understanding can produce empathy and compassion in family members for the caring process.

The Mental Health Handbook for Ministry fulfills its desire to be a trustworthy quick reference guide for mental health issues. The actions at the end of each topical chapter focus on practical and compassionate care to those struggling. These interventions focus on immediate actions for a layperson or pastoral counselor in the church. With so many competing voices and sources on mental health, Mayfield oversees a scholarly work of twenty faculty members bringing a biblical worldview to mental health.

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