

My Mental Illness Primer by Ben Huot

My Mental Illness Primer

5th Generation Writings

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My Background

I have Schizophrenia and understand what it feels like and what it is to live like someone with the disease, but I do not have any academic training in psychology or experience treating the disease.

I am mentally ill. I have had Schizophrenia for over 25 years. What I write is based on my own personal experiences and those of others I know.

One thing I can say is that I have never gone off my medicine. Secondly, I was only committed once, when I was first diagnosed. Furthermore, that was voluntary and only for 11 days.

However, I am not trained in any kind of medicine or psychology and hold no degrees in any related areas.

I was first diagnosed by the admitting psychiatrist of my local behavioral health ward around the year 2000, but I likely had my first psychosis beginning in Army Basic Training in 1996. I now am and have been for over 20 years a disabled veteran with a service connected disability for Schizophrenia. I am very high functioning and I do not suffer from disorganized thought. But I do suffer from both paranoia and voices to the point that I cannot hold down a job.

Often I use the words mental illness and Schizophrenia interchangeably although I know there are other major mental illnesses and know other people with them. The reason for this is that Schizophrenia is hard to spell correctly and a lot of people who encounter this disease often likely have trouble spelling it as well. I do not know much about other mental illnesses as most my experience with mental illness is from my own diagnosis.

Daily Life

Symptoms

Daily life with Schizophrenia for me is to be constantly in fear of something. If not for my family and church, I would be very lonely as I have no car or regular job.

My church is great but other people know so little about mental illness especially Schizophrenia. There is really nowhere I can point to online or in a book to read that will not either be incomprehensible technically to non-medical readers, call for treatment not endorsed by mainstream medicine, or those who do not believe that Schizophrenia is really a disease at all.

One of the biggest ways that Schizophrenia affects me differently is that I do not suffer from the symptom psychiatrists call disorganized thought. Disorganized thought makes it almost impossible to write anything coherent. But in addition I can read to an extent and still have a sense of humor.

But the paranoia is strong in me and I hear audio hallucinations (voices) as well. So I always look to worst case scenarios when encountering problems. This does not mean that I am not right about my concerns and we have to consider now that most people are paranoid about something. The entire political system and media are based on generating fear.

Technology and Security

I have spent several decades reading about technology and designing my website. I see a digital dark age coming on us as we depend too much on computers and especially the Internet. The

big difference today compared to 5-10 years ago is that we have a proliferation of hacking tools from the US and Russia to organized crime and everyday people. The tools nations use to spy on or hack each other are now used for crimes of all kinds.

Most crime now has gone online now as it is cheaper, easier, and you are less likely to get caught. Almost no government, business, or non-profit of any size has any interest in guarding our information because they are making so much money off of it. Most people in technology so not have enough training to do their jobs correctly and few are aware of how vulnerable we are.

The direct result of US hacking the rest of the world now is that the same technology and skills are being used to make money off hospitals, schools, and local governments in inner city and rural districts who notoriously have poor security as they have low budgets for securing their technology.

Disaster Survival Basics

I also spend a lot of my time stockpiling things for the End of the World as We Know It. I started preparing for disasters in 2008 during the economic crisis. I first focused on gathering supplies that would last a long time and would work without any electricity. Later I started stockpiling books, craft supplies, and games to keep my busy when I cannot get my computer to work or I cannot leave the house due to paranoia of the day or an actual disaster.

Many people do not know this but the most important thing necessary to survive in a crisis is not supplies or even skills. The most important factor is what I learned in Boy Scouts as a positive mental attitude. Anything that helps you lower your stress is the most important supply to have.

People have been known to survive without any supplies or skills while others with supplies and skills don't do well. The most important thing you can learn is how not to panic. This usually means slowing down and allowing more time for everything than you think you need.

Another important way to prepare is to be aware of what is going on locally and in your neighborhood. In preparing do not buy anything that requires electricity or is not portable.

Survival Problem Solving

One of the first problems occurs when the electricity goes down completely for an extended period of time. This problem is that people still use the flush toilet instead of using a bucket with cat litter in it. Your family may keep from doing so possibly but your neighbors will not. Also there is not enough room on most properties to keep your outhouse far enough away to maintain sanitary conditions. This means you will be forced to relocate.

Very few people can survive in the wilderness via hunting or trapping even if there is a huge die off. Long term survival assuming most people do not die off will require farming. Almost everyone will need to be a farmer to produce enough food. Modern medicine will not exist but neither will most diseases we currently die of today. This is because we will not have access to enough animal products like meat and dairy to slowly kill ourselves.

The biggest security problem will likely be wild dogs and cougars at least in more rural areas. One of the best protection methods for this threat is pepper spray. When you gather supplies, take a little at a time and focus on books and skills, not food and perishables. Anytime you have to travel most your weight will be in water you need to carry. Also remember water bottles are only safe to drink for 6 months after purchase.

One of the biggest questions is do you want to do the things you need to survive?

No Politics

I do not recommend getting involved in politics. It sounds unAmerican to not focus on government change for problem solving, but we have little power to change things.

The reason why policies are so hard to change in any institution is because someone powerful wants things to be as they are now. They have no interest in changing for any reason. Most institutional problems tend to be spiritual in nature anyway and cannot be affected much by changing leadership. This is because the problem is often in the middle of the management chain.

One of the problems with politics is it is competitive. One person wins and the other loses. The winner wins at the expense of the loser. This is similar to how wars work and the general story of economics throughout history. This is why I am not a fan of any kind of competition.

There is a reason 1/2 of American do not vote. The American church is so focused on changing things about politics but this was not what Jesus did.

My Code of Conduct

Peace

I have never done anything violent and am against violence under any conditions. I believe we should forgive others and not respond to violence with violence for three reasons. This is what God has asked of us and modeled in the life of Christ, it helps stop a cycle of violence, and it is to our benefit, because we can let go of it and moved on easier (as the person we are angry at probably does not know or care about our anger). This is not easy but it results in less pain so it is worth at least trying for everyone.

I do not believe in calling others names or using any kind of curse word of any variant. This is why I do not use these on my website.

I try to write about myself and my own self improvement but I am guilty of sometimes engaging in politics. I do not mention names or even groups of people as much as possible. I advocate the ending of hostilities in all cases. I do not support any group or another but usually support the individual in cases of conflict with the group. This is why I am a fan of the US Bill of Rights, as I think it tries to put in legal form a kind of code of kindness.

Self Esteem

I believe that God wants us to have good self esteem as He calls us His friends and children. Instead of lowering our self worth, as is often assumed when humility is talked about, God wants us to see others as having equally raised worth, as we are all loved by Him and He wants to spend this life and all eternity with all of us. As a Christian, God's Holy Spirit actually lives within you.

You have to think if Christians really do believe in a real Heaven and Hell, of course they would want evangelize others, even if not directly called to in the Bible, because they would be mean people if they didn't want to share it with others. After all, many of us either were or would be much worse people without God. The Church is taking on the seemingly impossible job of making bad people good. This can only be done by God and His grace, but God chose the Church to represent Him on earth.

God really values people as He both created and suffered greatly for them.

Identity

I identify with the Church, the Bible, and with the Christian God. On the other hand, I do not believe many things people say that also call themselves Christians notably mostly in the realm of politics (especially in America).

I talk about God, America, and the world a lot on my website. I believe America and God have little in common. I also see myself more as a Christian or even an animal rights advocate than I do an American. I did serve in the military voluntarily and am permanently physical and mentally disabled because of it, so I do think this makes me a loyal American, too.

Change

I see great change happening in my life and in the world today and this entire century or two. The information revolution will transform the world into a place with greater differences than the agricultural revolution did. This will only stop once all social changes catch up to the current (at the time) level of technology.

The whole meaning of civilization is defined by the agricultural revolution, so whether we still have a civilization after or not depends upon your definition. Either way I think the idea of America will be like the idea of the Roman Empire was during the Dark Ages. Will the same people be in power? This outcome is likely, especially if it happens slowly and if it happens as it did after the fall of the Western Roman Empire or after the American Revolution.

But I also know I have no power over anyone else of any kind, nor do I want any. So I try to let people know of the dots I have connected in general enough to steer people away from things that might hurt them. I also try to be general enough not to anger powerful people.

Freedom

I believe that our biggest problems are within each one of us, but I also acknowledge that there are many large scale problems caused by the introduction of sin in the world. I believe all suffering comes from sin, but often good people get hurt and bad people go free. This phenomena is actually a proof against karma and for the truth of the Bible.

As far as what I want others to do is to think for themselves. I want my visitors and readers to know that they do not need to just believe something because someone told them. Making choices either because they think it will make someone else happy, they think everyone else thinks that way, or because they think it absolves them of responsibility is not a good enough reason. Always follow your conscience and I think you will suffer less.

My Faith

Why Christianity?

Faith is a difficult thing and I actually think Christianity is by far the easiest of the major world belief systems to practice. If God didn't make it so easy for me I know I wouldn't be able to do it. The idea of practicing Islam or Buddhism reminds me of being in the military. Some things are hard enough for typical people to do and for those with Schizophrenia they are exponentially harder.

Although people with Schizophrenia may tend to have more of an interest or even insight into aspects of religion, everything is harder to do with Schizophrenia that requires rational thought or discipline. Doing the same thing everyday is almost impossible for me. It is also much more difficult to meet with other people on a regular basis. It is even harder for me to be a help to others.

My Faith

To me, faith is about learning to please God. If you have a God you can respect and has enough integrity to make the universe work, how can you please Him? The question to me is not that there is evil in the world, but why is there good? Our world is hostile and it is dangerous and people often amplify these things.

Why does anyone care for someone else in a way that does not advantage them? In Christianity, we are saved first and then we help others out of gratitude and as a proof of our faith. We only do good to others because we have the Holy Spirit (God's Spirit) living within us. I cannot speak for others, but for me I would be a much worse person without Christ in my life.

Misunderstandings

It is ironic that many people still think Christians are good to go to Heaven. This is not Christianity. People drawn to Christianity tend to be broken morally. They are improved after salvation not before.

If we waited until we were good enough to please God, we would never become Christians. Christianity takes a lifetime to understand even a little. This long process is a part of getting ready for life in Heaven, but it does not get us entrance.

One of the turning points in many Christians walk with God is seeing things from His perspective. Today that might bring up issues of why is God male? But ultimately faith is belief without full understanding. This is one of the reasons why it is so surprising to have so many American Christians fight to be thought of as rational and not believe in other things they cannot fully explain.

My Recommendations

There are 2 things I can recommend without training for everyone with Schizophrenia. They should see a psychiatrist for diagnosis and always take their medicine as prescribed. Any reputable person with any training in mental illness will tell you the same. They also need to live a low stress life in order to not counter the effects of the medicine.

There are also many secondary treatments you can do and these vary widely in effectiveness by person. I have had immense help from my family (which is many times not possible for many people). I have also had immense help from my faith in Christ.

Counseling can be an effective treatment for everyone but especially the mentally ill in related problems. This is not a primary treatment because you generally cannot talk a person out of delusions when they come from having Schizophrenia. The brain says they are real, so they appear real for the one with that particular brain.

What you do to get free community services and support changes over time and by location. I have described some of this in some of my writings, in general terms. If you can get a good social worker or someone fulfilling the same role with up to date information on this, definitely follow their advice above mine.

Religion and Schizophrenia

Useful Help

As far as religion and Schizophrenia are concerned belief systems can offer help but can also cause problems. Religion especially within communities like churches can be very helpful. But religion can also exasperate obsessive compulsive disorders and delusions. As always try to do within reason and continue to take your medication.

God and medicine can work together. Faith in God does not need to contradict psychiatry and modern psychology anymore than it does eating healthy or following human laws. In fact, I believe that key ideas in modern psychology comes from the New Testament originally. Paul appears to me to be the first Existentialist.

Also, from my experience, you can still live a good life and have Schizophrenia. It will likely be far from a typical one though. Schizophrenia is, as I have experienced, a disability and not a special power or a gift of any kind. Certainly people can do great things with Schizophrenia but I do not believe the illness is the same thing as supernatural power, or gives any more insights than someone gets from being blind or in a wheel chair.

Connections

From what I have read, experienced, and seen in others Schizophrenia has no more connections to anything spiritual than any other emotional or physical disease or trauma. I see the cause of Schizophrenia as being biological tendency plus trauma. That being said having one disability does not keep you from having

another disability as well or entirely different problems. So for people who experience spiritual issues I see this as different than Schizophrenia.

There is no denying religion does have some connection to mental illness. As a Christian, I think the most important part of the brain for survival in our current kind of world culture (which is what is most affected by Schizophrenia) is in some ways an impediment to understanding God and spiritual things. So I think the major connection between religion and Schizophrenia is people with Schizophrenia have greater potential to understand some aspects of the spiritual world better than those who do not have Schizophrenia.

Meditation

There is a big trend today in mental health, especially in the Veterans Affairs, to treat mental illness with meditation. From my experience, I figured out how to meditate but it took too much energy to be helpful. I think simply taking deep breathes can be extremely useful though and are much simpler to do especially in crisis.

Meditation is a vast field and there are many different types of meditations from many different traditions for different things. I think the key to getting use out of this is to find someone that really understands this that you can trust (and who does not mix it with other traditions). Start out slow and small and gradually build up to a moderate level. I think it would be good to read about some of the theory behind this as well.

I would not recommend going beyond a moderate level until you are sure know what you are doing and are willing to accept that it may be difficult emotionally at times. Furthermore I don't know if it will help everyone. Buddhism was not initially developed to

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deal with mental illness but to work with people of typical mental conditions.

Inappropriate Examples

I have not found an effective sedative strong enough and appropriate for Schizophrenia in Traditional Chinese Medicine either. Maybe people at that time just weren't treated like we can today with modern medicine. One of the concerns with Christianity and mental illness involves Biblical prophecy.

In Christianity, we often have people predicting the end of the world. This happens despite it saying clearly by Jesus Christ Himself (in the end of the Gospel of Matthew) that even He does not know when He will return. When it happens, it will be fast and without warning, and it will be at a time of great peace. Christ also talks of people giving false testimony of His return. No one will be left wondering when Christ does return - it will be obvious to all. To prepare for it though, we are to do good works, not stockpile things.

Note that when I predict the End of the World as We Know It, this is not the actual apocalypse. We as Christians have to admit that losing electricity and modern plumbing or even modern medicine does not mean Christ has returned or is not blessing us. Most Christians throughout world history had none of this and likely were not any less happy. Think of the example of Job. Job had great wealth and God allowed him to lose it all to see if he only served God because he was wealthy.

The Human Brain

Much of our understanding of the brain is changing rapidly. Some people say we have learned more about the human brain in the last 5 years than the last 5,000 years. There is still much to learn.

I believe that understanding how to fix or prevent the illness of Schizophrenia is so difficult to understand that we will travel in time and space before we really understand how the human brain works in its entirety. I am not convinced society will last long enough for that to come true. I would hope to be proved wrong though.

I also worry about what evil could occur in a society with the technology and understanding to be able to accomplish this. Many of the things that are designed to help a small part of society can be detrimental to most of society. This is evident with computers which have immensely empowered or at least have the potential to empower many people with diverse disabilities.

But our over reliance on computers and or inability to defend our wealth that we store in this technology could make it easy to lose our entire technological and social base. If and when this happens modern medicine and psychology could disappear and this would be a grave loss for the weakest part of the population. Everything has a cost.