

# I Am More Than the Sum Total of My Problems

*An integration of psychology and theology for healing, hope, and identity*

**By Counsellor James Kofi Abbrey**

There are seasons in life when our problems seem to introduce us before we introduce ourselves. People may know us by what we are going through, what we have lost, what we failed at, what we are battling, or what we are trying to recover from. Sometimes, even we begin to define ourselves by our pain. We may say, I am depressed. I am anxious. I am rejected. I am wounded. I am a failure.

But the truth, both psychologically and theologically, is this: you are more than the sum total of your problems. Your problems may describe a chapter of your life, but they do not define the whole book. Your wounds may explain some of your reactions, but they do not erase your worth. Your struggles may affect your emotions, but they do not cancel your identity. Your pain may be real, but it is not the final word over your life.

## 1. Problems Are Experiences, Not Identity

Psychology teaches us that human beings are shaped by experiences, relationships, thoughts, emotions, memories, and environments. We are affected by trauma, disappointment, stress, family background, rejection, grief, and failure. These things can influence how we think, feel, behave, and relate to others.

However, psychology also reminds us that a person is not merely a diagnosis, a mistake, a symptom, or a painful history. A person may struggle with anxiety, but that person is not anxiety. A person may experience depression, but that person is not depression. A person may have made mistakes, but that person is not the mistake.

This distinction is very important for healing. When people begin to see themselves only through the lens of their problems, they lose hope. Healing begins when we separate the person from the problem. The problem is something you are facing. It is not the full definition of who you are.

## 2. Theology Declares That Our Identity Comes From God

The Christian faith gives us an even deeper foundation. Scripture teaches that our identity does not begin with our pain, our past, our weakness, or public opinion. Our identity begins with God.

Genesis 1:27 declares that God created humankind in His own image. Before life wounded you, before people labelled you, before society judged you, God had already placed value upon you. You carry the image of God. That image may be covered by pain, confused by trauma, or weakened by sin, but it is not destroyed.

Psalms 139:14 says, I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. This is not empty religious language. It is a declaration of identity. You are wonderfully made even when life is painfully complicated. You are God's workmanship even when you are under construction.

### **3. Pain Can Distort Identity**

One of the painful effects of repeated struggle is that it can distort how we see ourselves. A child who grows up being criticized may become an adult who feels inadequate. A person who has been betrayed may begin to believe that everyone is unsafe. A man or woman who has gone through repeated disappointment may conclude, Nothing good will happen to me.

In psychology, we often speak about core beliefs. These are deep inner conclusions people form about themselves, others, and life. Some negative core beliefs include: I am not good enough. I am unlovable. I am helpless. I will always be rejected. I cannot change.

But a belief can feel true and still not be true. Pain can speak loudly, but pain is not always a reliable prophet. Trauma can interpret life for us, but trauma does not always tell the truth. Fear can advise us, but fear often exaggerates danger.

Romans 12:2 calls us to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. The renewal of the mind is both spiritual and psychological. It involves allowing God's truth to confront distorted thinking. It also involves learning healthier ways to interpret our experiences.

### **4. God Does Not Reduce People to Their Problems**

One of the beautiful truths in Scripture is that God does not call people only by their condition. He sees beyond the visible struggle. When Gideon was hiding in fear, God called him a mighty warrior. Gideon saw weakness, but God saw potential. Gideon saw limitation, but God saw assignment.

When Peter denied Jesus, Jesus did not reduce him to his failure. After the resurrection, Jesus restored him and recommissioned him. Peter's failure was serious, but it was not final. When the prodigal son returned home broken and ashamed, the father did not call him by his wastefulness. He called for a robe, a ring, sandals, and celebration.

This is the heart of God. God corrects, heals, restores, and transforms. He does not throw people away because they have problems.

### **5. You Are a Whole Person, Not a Single Story**

A human being is not one event. You are not only what happened to you. You are not only what someone did to you. You are not only your worst decision. You are not only your family background. You are not only your current struggle. You are a whole person.

A holistic view of human life recognizes the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of a person. This is why healing must not focus only on the problem. It must also focus on the person's strengths, relationships, faith, values, meaning, skills, and God-given purpose.

Yes, you may have problems. But you also have resources. You have resilience. You have wisdom from past battles. You have lessons from pain. You have people who may support you. Above all, you have a God who does not abandon His children.

### **6. Your Problems May Be Part of Your Story, But They Are Not the Author**

There is a difference between being shaped by something and being controlled by it. Life's problems may shape our journey, but they must not be allowed to become the author of our identity. Hebrews 12:2 reminds us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

That means your pain is not the author. Your critics are not the author. Your past is not the author. Your diagnosis is not the author. Your failure is not the author. God remains the author and finisher.

This gives us courage. The story is still being written. A painful paragraph does not cancel a glorious conclusion. God can take what was meant to break you and use it to build wisdom, compassion, strength, and ministry.

## 7. Healing Begins When We Change the Question

Many people ask, What is wrong with me? Sometimes that question may help us identify wounds, patterns, or areas that need attention. But if that is the only question we ask, we may become trapped in self-condemnation.

A more healing question is: What happened to me, and how can I heal? What has God placed in me that is still alive? What strengths have helped me survive until now? What truth must replace the lies I have believed? What kind of person is God shaping me to become? What support do I need in this season?

In counselling, we do not only look at problems. We also look at possibilities. We explore coping skills, emotional regulation, healthy boundaries, forgiveness, meaning, responsibility, and hope. In theology, we also look at grace, redemption, repentance, restoration, calling, and divine purpose.

## 8. You Can Be Honest and Still Be Hopeful

Faith does not require denial. To be a believer does not mean pretending that everything is fine. The Psalms are full of honest prayers. David asked painful questions. Jeremiah wept. Elijah became exhausted. Job wrestled with suffering. Jesus Himself cried out in anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane.

So, you can be honest about your pain. You can say, This is hard. You can say, I need help. You can say, I am tired. You can say, I do not understand. Honesty is not unbelief. Honest lament can be part of deep faith.

Yet, as we are honest, we must also hold on to hope. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 says that we may be hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down, but we are not crushed, not in despair, not abandoned, and not destroyed. This is the testimony of resilient faith.

## 9. Responsibility Without Condemnation

To say I am more than my problems does not mean I deny responsibility. Some problems are caused by life circumstances. Some are caused by other people. Some are connected to our own choices, habits, or attitudes. Maturity requires honesty.

But responsibility is different from condemnation. Condemnation says, You are finished. Responsibility says, You can learn, repair, grow, and change. Godly conviction invites us to healing and repentance. Shame imprisons us in hiding. Romans 8:1 reminds us that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Healthy counselling helps people face truth without destroying dignity. Biblical faith helps people confess sin, receive mercy, make amends where possible, and walk in newness of life.

## 10. A Word of Encouragement

My dear reader, you are not the sum total of your problems. You are not the sum total of your fears, failures, disappointments, family history, symptoms, or painful memories. You are a person created in the image of God, capable of growth, worthy of care, and invited into healing.

You may need counselling. You may need prayer. You may need rest. You may need medical support. You may need to rebuild your boundaries. You may need to forgive, grieve, learn, unlearn, and start again. Needing help does not make you weak. It makes you human.

Let your life be interpreted by God's truth, not merely by your pain. Let your next chapter be shaped by wisdom, grace, courage, and healthy support. The problem is real, but it is not the whole story. Your struggle is present, but so is God. Your wound may be deep, but grace is deeper. Your story is not over.

## Conclusion

Life will present challenges that test our emotions, our faith, our confidence, and our sense of identity. There may be seasons when pain feels louder than purpose, when failure seems more visible than potential, and when problems appear bigger than hope. Yet, even in those moments, one truth remains unshaken: you are more than the sum total of your problems.

Your struggles are real, but they are not your identity. Your wounds may influence you, but they do not define your ultimate worth. God did not create you merely to survive pain; He created you with dignity, purpose, value, and the capacity for healing and transformation. The same God who sees your tears also sees your future. He sees beyond your present condition into the person you are becoming through grace, growth, resilience, and restoration.

Psychology reminds us that healing is possible, that minds can be renewed, emotions can recover, and lives can rebuild after brokenness. Theology reminds us that God's love, mercy, and redemptive power are greater than our failures, fears, and scars. Together, they encourage us not to deny our pain, but to face it with courage, wisdom, support, and hope.

So, do not surrender your identity to your struggles. Do not allow temporary pain to become a permanent label. Continue to seek help when needed, grow through your experiences, renew your mind with truth, and lean on the grace of God. Your story is still unfolding, and God is not finished with you yet.

You are not merely wounded. You are healing. You are not merely struggling. You are growing. You are not merely surviving. You are becoming. And by the grace of God, your problems will never have the final word over your life.

## About the Author

Counsellor James Kofi Abbrey is a licensed professional counsellor, ordained minister of the gospel, marriage and relationship coach, trainer, lecturer, and certified mental health advocate. He serves as Executive Director and Principal Counsellor of Holistic Counselling & Coaching Institute, where he integrates professional counselling practice, Christian theology, pastoral care, coaching, and holistic human development.

Through counselling, teaching, supervision, seminars, and church-based training, he is committed to helping individuals, couples, families, students, ministers, and communities experience healing, growth, purpose, and restored hope. His work reflects a strong belief that people are not defined by their pain, but can be renewed by truth, supported by wisdom, and strengthened by the grace of God.

For counselling, training, speaking engagements, or further enquiries, contact: 0244598994.

## Reflective Questions for Personal Growth

- What problem have I allowed to define me more than it should?
- What truth from Scripture must I hold on to in this season?
- What support, counselling, prayer, or practical step do I need now?
- What strengths has God already placed in me that I can build on?

## Selected Scriptures for Meditation

- Genesis 1:27
- Psalm 139:14
- Romans 12:2
- Romans 8:1
- Romans 8:28
- 2 Corinthians 4:8-9
- Hebrews 12:2



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