

The Integration of Psychology and Theology in Addressing Depression and Anxiety: A Theological Reflection on the Book of Job

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ABSTRACT

Depression and anxiety are associated not only with psychological conditions but also with crises of meaning, spiritual struggles, and social relationships within experiences of suffering. Although the integration of psychology and religion has been widely studied, research specifically developing a psycho-theological model based on the narrative of the Book of Job remains limited. This study aims to analyze Job's experience of suffering through a dialogue between theology and psychology and to formulate an integrative model for Christian counseling. The study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review method. The Book of Job is analyzed through theological hermeneutics using narrative and thematic approaches and is subsequently placed in dialogue with psychological perspectives on depression, crises of meaning, spiritual struggle, existential anxiety, and social support. The findings indicate that Job's experience reflects dynamics that intersect with aspects of depression and anxiety, particularly hopelessness, loss of meaning, spiritual struggle, emotional expression, and relational distress, without equating these experiences with modern clinical diagnoses. This study formulates an integrative psycho-theological model comprising four stages: expression of suffering, reflective struggle, perspective transformation, and relational-holistic restoration. The novelty of this study lies in formulating this model from the narrative of the Book of Job as a contextual framework for developing Christian counseling that attends to emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual dimensions.

Keywords: *Depression, Anxiety, Book of Job, Psychology–Theology Integration, Christian Counseling.*



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Article History

Submitted:	Revised:	Published:
21 March 2026	7 August 2026	11 September 2026

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, mental health has emerged as an increasingly significant and pressing global issue. Amid the tide of modernization, technological advancements, and increasingly complex social dynamics, psychological stress has actually shown a significant increase, particularly in the form of depression and anxiety (Nochaiwong et al., 2021). These disorders not only affect individuals' emotional well-being but also have far-reaching impacts on social relationships, productivity, and overall quality of life including within religious communities, which have long been assumed to possess strong spiritual resilience. Global data indicate that more than 280 million people suffer from depression, while anxiety disorders rank among the mental health conditions with the highest prevalence (Organization, 2023). These findings underscore that mental health is a multidimensional issue that cannot be understood reductively through a purely psychological approach alone.

In the field of modern psychology, various approaches have been developed to effectively treat depression and anxiety. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), for example, has been shown to help individuals identify and restructure negative thought patterns that contribute to emotional disorders (Cuijpers et al., 2021). In addition, mindfulness-based approaches such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) have also demonstrated effectiveness in improving emotional regulation and preventing the recurrence of depression (Goldberg et al., 2022). Nevertheless, these approaches tend to focus on cognitive and symptomatic aspects, and thus do not fully address the existential and spiritual dimensions of the individual (Captari et al., 2020). This highlights the limitations of modern psychological approaches when addressing issues of the meaning of life, suffering, and the human relationship with the Divine.

In light of these limitations, a number of previous studies have emphasized the importance of integrating psychology and spirituality into the mental health recovery process (Captari et al., 2020). A meta-analysis has shown that integrating religion and spirituality into psychotherapy significantly contributes to the effectiveness of interventions, particularly for individuals with a religious background. These findings are reinforced by a meta-analysis showing that the integration of religion and spirituality in psychotherapy significantly contributes to the effectiveness of interventions, particularly among individuals with a religious background; a meta-analysis of various randomized controlled trials indicates that religion- and spirituality-based therapies are more effective than non-spiritual approaches, especially among

religious populations (Bouwhuis-Van Keulen et al., 2024). Furthermore, Oxhandler found that mental health clients generally view the integration of religion and spirituality as a helpful aspect of the recovery process, provided it is conducted sensitively and contextually (Oxhandler et al., 2024). Hodge et al. demonstrated that mental health clients view the integration of religion and spirituality as helpful when it is carried out sensitively, professionally, and in a manner consistent with the context of their beliefs (Hodge et al., 2020). Thus, those studies share a commonality with the present study in positioning the spiritual dimension as a crucial element in mental health recovery and rejecting a rigid separation between psychological and spiritual aspects.

However, these previous studies primarily focused on the effectiveness of integrating religion and spirituality into psychotherapy and on clients' experiences in mental health services, whereas this study focuses on the use of biblical narratives as the foundation for constructing a psycho-theological model. Specifically, previous studies have not developed an interpretation of the Book of Job as a theological source that is systematically engaged in dialogue with psychological perspectives to understand the dynamics of suffering, despair, a crisis of meaning, spiritual struggles, and social responses toward individuals experiencing suffering. Based on this gap, this study offers an innovative psycho-theological integrative model grounded in the narrative of the Book of Job, formulated through four stages: expression of suffering, reflective struggle, transformation of perspective, and relational-holistic restoration. Thus, the contribution of this study lies in the utilization of Old Testament narratives not merely as theological illustrations of suffering, but as the basis for constructing an integrative framework that can be developed within the context of Christian counseling.

In line with the need for a more contextual and text-based approach, the Book of Job serves as a relevant theological source for study from a mental health perspective, as it openly portrays experiences of suffering, loss, despair, the search for meaning, and the relationship between humans and God. Job 3, for example, depicts Job's intensely heartfelt lament as he curses the day of his birth and questions the meaning of his existence (Pargament, 2021). Hermeneutically, these expressions cannot be directly equated with modern clinical diagnoses such as major depression or hopelessness. However, from a dialogical perspective, these expressions of lament share common ground with psychological constructs regarding despair, loss of meaning, and emotional distress which in modern psychology are often associated with experiences of depression. Furthermore, the dynamic dialogue between Job and his friends

reflects the complexity of social responses to suffering, which in some cases actually exacerbate an individual's psychological condition, as emphasized in research on the importance of empathetic social support in the recovery process (Xiong et al., 2020). This means that the point of intersection between Job's lament and that psychological construct is not intended to pathologize Job's experience, but rather to demonstrate that the suffering in the Book of Job possesses emotional, existential, and relational dimensions that can be brought into critical dialogue with psychological perspectives.

The Book of Job offers a unique perspective on restoration through human encounter with God. Job's struggle with his friends reveals the limitations of retributive explanations that seek to link suffering directly to human moral failings. Job's suffering does not receive a simple causal explanation when God finally speaks to him from within the storm (Job 38:1). Instead, God's series of revelations in Job 38–41 directs Job toward the vastness of God's creative work and the limitations of human knowledge (Munthe & Gulo, 2025). This encounter does not provide an answer to the "why" of suffering, but it offers a new perspective that transforms Job's view of reality (Marbum, 2026). From a psychological perspective, this can be understood as a form of cognitive and existential transformation that goes beyond mere restructuring of thought, in line with the concepts of cognitive reframing and the search for meaning in existential psychology (Yalom, 2020). Thus, the Book of Job is not only theologically relevant but also has significant psychological implications for understanding the holistic process of human healing.

Based on this background, this study aims to conduct a theological analysis of the dynamics of suffering in the Book of Job that intersect with psychological constructs regarding depression and anxiety, particularly in terms of despair, loss of meaning, spiritual struggle, cognitive processes, and social support. The analysis is conducted through a dialogue between theological hermeneutics of the Book of Job's narrative and psychological perspectives limited to cognitive psychology, existential psychology, religious psychology, and the perspective of social support. This study is not intended to provide a clinical diagnosis of the figure of Job, but rather to understand his experience of suffering through an interdisciplinary dialogue that maintains the text's theological context.

Based on this synthesis, this study formulates a psycho-theological integrative model grounded in the Book of Job that explains the process of accompaniment through four stages: expression of suffering, reflective struggle, transformation of perspective, and relational-

holistic restoration. The novelty of this study lies in the construction of this model through a systematic dialogue between the narrative of the Book of Job and relevant psychological constructs, so that the Book of Job is not merely positioned as a theological reflection on suffering, but as a conceptual basis for the development of a Christian counseling framework that takes into account emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual dimensions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing a library research method to examine the integration of psychology and theology through the Book of Job, which serves as the primary source for theological analysis. Library research was selected because it enables the researcher to examine written sources systematically and critically in constructing the study's conceptual framework (Zaluchu, 2021a). Epistemologically, the research adopts a critical-dialogical integration paradigm, positioning biblical theology as the normative foundation for interpreting the Book of Job, while utilizing psychology as a dialogical perspective to understand the dimensions of human experience within the text. This integration does not aim to eclectically blend the two disciplines but rather to bring them into critical dialogue while maintaining their respective epistemological boundaries. The analysis involves narrative and thematic approaches to the Book of Job, subsequently engaging in dialogue with perspectives from cognitive psychology, existential psychology, the psychology of religion, and social support. The outcome of this dialogue forms the basis for formulating a psycho-theological integrative model grounded in the Book of Job. Research sources comprise the text of the Book of Job as the primary source, alongside relevant books and scholarly articles as secondary sources.

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-interpretive approach through thematic and narrative analysis, taking into account the Book of Job's genre as poetic wisdom literature; thus, the interpretation did not treat it as a historical account or a clinical text. The analysis aimed to identify the main themes of suffering, despair, loss of meaning, spiritual struggle, and social response in the narrative of the Book of Job, and then to engage them in dialogue with the psychological perspective limited to this study (Krippendorff, 2019). A theological-biblical analysis is used to understand these themes within the literary and theological context of the Book of Job (Zaluchu, 2021b). The validity of the argument is strengthened through source triangulation by comparing relevant theological and psychological (Creswell, 2018). With this approach, the study aims to produce an integrative synthesis as the basis for developing a psycho-theological counseling model grounded in the Book of Job.

The psycho-theological integrative model in this study is not intended as a clinical diagnostic model or a substitute for professional psychological intervention; rather, it serves as a conceptual framework for Christian counseling that brings together psychological understanding and theological reflection to support individuals experiencing suffering and a crisis of meaning. Accordingly, the terminology and conceptualization used in this study consistently characterize it as a psycho-theological integrative model based on the Book of Job, rather than as a psychological intervention model or a standalone holistic model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Dynamics of Depression and Anxiety from the Theological Perspective of the Book of Job

Analysis of the Book of Job reveals that Job's experience of suffering cannot be accurately understood merely as a clinical diagnosis of modern depression or anxiety; rather, it demonstrates human experiential dynamics that intersect with psychological constructs regarding despair, loss of meaning, emotional distress, spiritual struggle, and social relationships. The loss of family, wealth, health, and social standing constitutes a complex web of suffering, while Job's responses reveal emotional and existential processes that evolve throughout the narrative. From a psychological perspective, layered experiences of loss can heighten vulnerability to psychological distress. In this context, Job's experience also reflects a profound crisis of meaning, wherein suffering can no longer be integrated into a coherent framework of understanding life. Frankl asserts that suffering devoid of meaning leads the individual toward existential emptiness, which can ultimately devolve into profound despair (Frankl, 1985). Thus, the crisis Job undergoes demonstrates that suffering can be simultaneously a psychological and a theological issue, as the individual seeks to re-examine the meaning of life, the nature of suffering, and their relationship with God.

Job's emotional expressions in chapter 3 are key to understanding the nature of his depression. When Job curses the day of his birth, he is not merely expressing sadness but revealing a radical loss of meaning in life. In clinical psychology, this condition aligns with the concept of "hopelessness depression" a state in which an individual loses hope for the future and views life as no longer having value (Clark & Beck, 2011). This finding is consistent with modern psychological research indicating that the loss of life's meaning is one of the primary factors in the development of depression, particularly during existential crises (Pargament,

2021). However, the Book of Job expands this understanding by placing this experience in relation to God, so that suffering is understood not only psychologically but also theologically.

Within this framework, Job's struggle can also be understood as a form of "spiritual struggle." Pargament explains that inner conflict involving one's relationship with God such as feelings of abandonment, perceived injustice, or confusion regarding the divine purpose constitutes part of the psychological dynamics that frequently emerge during situations of extreme suffering (Pargament, 2021). This is evident in Job's questioning of God's justice and purpose in his life. Thus, the biblical text not only depicts suffering narratively but also implicitly embodies psychological dynamics that can be analyzed within a scholarly framework.

In addition to depression, anxiety in the Book of Job manifests as recurring existential questions. Job questions God's justice, the purpose of suffering, and the future of his life. This pattern suggests that the anxiety he experiences is not merely situational but touches on the existential dimension of human existence. Recent research in psychology shows that existential anxiety often arises when individuals face a loss of meaning and uncontrollable uncertainty (Goldberg et al., 2022). In this context, the role of the religious dimension becomes crucial, as McMinn has shown: spiritual beliefs and a relationship with God can serve as both a source of meaning and a coping mechanism in the face of life's pressures (McMinn, 2012). Thus, Job's experience demonstrates that depression and anxiety cannot be separated from an individual's sense of meaning and spiritual beliefs.

This perspective asserts that the suffering depicted in the Book of Job cannot be reduced to mere punishment; rather, it is part of the mysterious relationship between humanity and God a relationship that transcends rational understanding (Balentine, 2002). Consequently, Job's experience demonstrates that depression and anxiety are not phenomena detached from the life of faith; instead, they are integral to the human existential struggle before God. This perspective paves the way for a more holistic understanding, wherein psychological conditions are not divorced from the spiritual dimension but are, in fact, dynamically interconnected within the human life experience.

A Psychological Analysis of the Dynamics of Job's Suffering

From a psychological perspective, Job's experience reflects various aspects that intersect with theories of depression and anxiety. A prominent aspect is the emergence of

cognitive patterns and biases specifically, an individual's tendency to process and interpret information negatively when facing stressful experiences. In Beck's cognitive theory, depression is linked to the emergence of negative thought patterns, cognitive distortions, and information-processing biases that can influence how an individual perceives themselves, their environment, and their future (Beck et al., 2024). Meta-analytic research also indicates a relationship between certain forms of cognitive bias such as catastrophizing and interpretation bias and symptoms of depression (Nieto et al., 2020). In the narrative of Job, questions regarding God's justice, the meaning of suffering, and his future reveal an intense cognitive struggle as the reality he experiences clashes with his prior understanding. However, from a psychological perspective, these dynamics illustrate how profound suffering can shape the way a person interprets reality.

Upon closer analysis, Job's experience reveals a pattern consistent with modern psychological theory, particularly the cognitive approach. According to Aaron T. Beck, depression develops through a structured pattern of negative thinking, known as the cognitive triad that is, negative views of oneself, the world, and the future (Beck et al. 2024,) In his dialogues, Job demonstrates a tendency to question his self-worth, the fairness of the world, and the direction of his future. This pattern reinforces the negative emotional state he experiences, so that his suffering stems not only from external circumstances but also from internal processes within his mind.

However, a cognitive approach alone is not sufficient to explain the depth of Job's experience. That experience also points to a profound crisis of meaning in life (Rotua et al., 2025). From a logotherapy perspective, Frankl asserts that suffering without meaning can lead an individual into an existential vacuum, which ultimately triggers despair (Frankl, 1985). This is evident in Job's experience, as he not only suffered physically and socially but also lost the framework of meaning that had previously sustained his life. Beyond the cognitive and existential aspects, Job's experience also highlights the importance of the emotional dimension in the recovery process (Gulo & Angelina, 2026). Job did not suppress his emotions but expressed them openly through lamentations and complaints. In modern psychology, authentic emotional expression is viewed as a crucial part of the healing process because it allows individuals to process traumatic experiences in a healthier way. In this context, Job's experience can be understood as an early stage of the psychological recovery process through emotional processing.

Job's struggle also reflects what is termed "spiritual struggle" in the psychology of religion. Pargament explains that inner conflict involving one's relationship with God such as feelings of abandonment, confusion regarding divine purpose, or questions about God's justice constitutes part of the psychological dynamics that frequently arise during situations of extreme suffering (Pargament, 2021). This indicates that Job's suffering was not merely psychological but also spiritual, thereby necessitating an integrative approach. From the perspective of existential psychology developed by Irvin D. Yalom, anxiety arises when individuals confront fundamental life realities such as suffering, death, and uncertainty (Yalom, 2020). Job found himself in precisely this situation, experiencing not only suffering but also a loss of certainty and control over his life. This explains the intensity and prolonged nature of his emotional response, as well as why the anxiety he experienced was existential rather than merely situational. On the other hand, Job's interactions with his friends highlight the significant role of social support during a crisis. Instead of offering reinforcement, Job's friends tended to be judgmental and to oversimplify his suffering. This response exacerbated Job's psychological state by failing to provide the necessary space for empathy.

Research in psychology shows that non-empathetic social support can increase stress levels and exacerbate depression. Xiong emphasizes that the quality of social support has a significant impact on an individual's levels of depression and anxiety (Xiong et al., 2020). In this context, Ayub's experience demonstrates that non-empathetic social responses can worsen psychological conditions, thereby underscoring the importance of a holistic approach to mental health care. In this context, the responses of Ayub's friends not only failed to help but also deepened the emotional pain he was experiencing. This underscores that experiences of depression and anxiety are always multidimensional, involving the interplay of cognitive, existential, and social factors.

In this context, Koenig's findings also underscore the significant role that the quality of social and spiritual relationships plays in mental health, particularly during crises (Koenig et al., 2023). Empathetic, spiritually grounded support can serve as a protective factor, whereas judgmental responses tend to exacerbate an individual's psychological state. Furthermore, Job's experience demonstrates that suffering affects not only emotional well-being but also the dimension of self-identity. Lase and Parinussa emphasize that psychological crises are often linked to a distorted understanding of the self as *Imago Dei*; consequently, recovery cannot be separated from the reconstruction of identity within one's relationship with God (Lase &

Parinussa, 2025). This indicates that Job's recovery cannot be understood merely as a psychological process but must also be viewed as a theological one, involving the restoration of relationships and spiritual identity.

Integrating psychological and theological dimensions is crucial. Martha and Julio assert that counseling approaches combining faith and psychology facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the human being as a complex person (Dondokambey & Nendissa, 2026). Job's experience confirms that depression and anxiety are multidimensional phenomena involving the interplay of cognitive, emotional, existential, social, and spiritual factors, thereby necessitating (Taturu & Nendissa, 2026) a holistic approach to recovery.

A Critical Evaluation of Job's Friends' Pastoral Approach

Beyond depicting Job's internal experience, the narrative of the Book of Job also presents significant social responses through the presence of his friends. This aspect warrants examination because it demonstrates how approaches to suffering can influence an individual's psychological state. A key finding of this study is the critique of the approach adopted by Job's friends; they embraced a retributive theology mindset the belief that suffering is the direct consequence of personal sin. While this approach may appear logical within a certain framework, it becomes problematic when applied absolutely, without regard for the complexities of human experience.

From the perspective of modern psychology and counseling, this type of approach can be categorized as a form of emotional and spiritual invalidation. When a suffering individual is confronted with rigid moral judgments, they tend to experience heightened guilt and diminished self-esteem. Research by Captari et al. indicates that spiritual integration lacking sensitivity to an individual's psychological state can actually hinder the recovery process (Captari et al., 2020). The narrative of Job clearly illustrates the negative impact of such an approach; rather than finding solace, Job became increasingly isolated in his suffering. This demonstrates that, in counseling practice, theological approaches must be accompanied by psychological sensitivity. Without empathy and deep understanding, theological truths can transform into a burden that exacerbates an individual's condition. In the context of Christian counseling, the unempathetic approach demonstrated by Job's friends contradicts the fundamental principles of pastoral care, which emphasize presence, empathy, and compassionate accompaniment (Sasoeng & Nendissa, 2026). This aligns with findings in

counseling studies showing that approaches characterized by judgment or the oversimplification of suffering can impede recovery and increase an individual's psychological distress (Octavianus et al., 2025). Thus, the critique of Job's friends is not merely theological; it also carries practical implications for developing counseling approaches that are more humane and contextual. Consequently, an empathetic and contextual pastoral approach is crucial when supporting individuals experiencing depression and anxiety.

Formulation of an Integrative Psycho-Theological Model Based on the Book of Job

Based on a narrative and thematic analysis of the Book of Job and a dialogue with psychological perspectives, this study formulates a Psycho-Theological Integrative Model Based on the Book of Job as a conceptual framework for Christian counseling. This model is not intended as a clinical procedure to replace psychotherapy, but rather as a framework for pastoral care and support that integrates psychological and theological dimensions in understanding human suffering. The model's structure comprises four interconnected stages: the expression of suffering, reflective struggle, the transformation of perspective, and holistic-relational restoration. Thus, the emotional honesty found in Job's experience can be understood as the foundational starting point for the process of psychological restoration.

The narrative of the Book of Job demonstrates that suffering does not immediately lead to restoration; rather, it unfolds through a long and often bewildering process of struggle. First is the expression of suffering (Bram M et al., 2025). This stage begins with Job's lament particularly in Job 3 which reveals the courage to articulate his suffering, anger, confusion, and questions regarding the very meaning of existence. Second is the reflective struggle. The lengthy dialogue between Job and his friends illustrates a process of questioning the meaning of suffering, the justice of God, and the relationship between suffering and human life (Job 4–31). At this stage, the counselor walks alongside the counselee as they explore the thoughts, emotions, questions of faith, and crises of meaning that arise from suffering (Hopson & Rice, 2008). Third, a transformation of perspective. Job 38–42 reveals a shift in perspective that occurs through Job's encounter with God. This transformation does not imply that all of Job's questions receive rational explanations; rather, it involves a change in how he understands himself, his suffering, and God. Fourth, holistic-relational restoration. The concluding section of the Book of Job depicts a restoration that extends beyond individual circumstances to encompass social relationships and Job's life as a whole (Job 42:7–17). Consequently, Christian counseling aims to restore the counselee's relationships with God, self, family, community, and the social environment. Restoration is understood holistically, addressing

emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual dimensions. In psychology, such change can be understood as a form of "cognitive reframing" a process in which an individual experiences a shift in thinking that impacts their emotions and behavior. However, in the context of Job, this reframing transcends mere cognitive aspects, as it involves a profound spiritual dimension. Pargament notes that a shift toward a transcendent meaning of life has a significant impact on an individual's recovery from depression and anxiety (Pargament, 2021). Therefore, the encounter with God in the Book of Job can be understood as a form of existential transformation that lies at the heart of the restoration process.

The conclusion of Job's story demonstrates that the restoration he experienced was holistic, encompassing not only emotional aspects but also social and spiritual relationships. Job was not only restored externally but also underwent a transformation in the way he understood his life. This aligns with the holistic psychological approach, which emphasizes that mental health cannot be separated from the balance between psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions (Koenig, 2018). Thus, the restoration in the Book of Job cannot be reduced to merely the elimination of symptoms but is a comprehensive process of transformation involving the reconstruction of the meaning of life and one's relationship with God.

Thus, this model outlines a process of suffering, reflective struggle, transformation of perspective, and relational-holistic healing. These four stages indicate that accompanying someone through suffering is not sufficient through the provision of advice or theological explanations alone, but requires space for expressing suffering, a process of reflection, the formation of new perspectives, and relational healing. This model serves as a conceptual contribution from this research toward the development of Christian counseling grounded in the Book of Job, while still leaving room for the involvement of mental health professionals should the client's condition require clinical intervention.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Book of Job presents a complex portrayal of human suffering, encompassing emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and relational dimensions. While Job's experience cannot be equated with modern clinical diagnoses of depression or anxiety, certain expressions of his suffering resonate with psychological constructs regarding despair, loss of meaning, spiritual struggle, and relational distress. These findings affirm that suffering should not be understood merely as a psychological issue or a sign of weak faith; rather, it requires a

holistic understanding within the context of human experience and one's relationship with God. The study's primary contribution is the formulation of a Psycho-Theological Integrative Model based on the Book of Job, developed through a critical-dialogical integration paradigm. This model comprises four interconnected stages: the expression of suffering, reflective struggle, perspective transformation, and holistic-relational restoration. The model indicates that pastoral care for individuals experiencing suffering should begin by providing a safe space for emotional expression, followed by support in navigating struggles regarding meaning and spirituality, the formation of a more constructive perspective, and the restoration of relationships with God, the self, family, and community. Thus, the study's contribution lies not in clinical diagnosis or therapy, but in the construction of a conceptual framework that bridges the theological reflections of the Book of Job with relevant psychological perspectives.

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