



# CCEF NOW

Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

2016

**COUNSELING / THEOLOGICAL**  
Ed Welch

**BECOME A WILDERNESS  
COMPANION**  
Winston Smith

**ENGAGING OUR EMOTIONS,  
ENGAGING WITH GOD**  
Alasdair Groves

**MEET THE COUNSELOR**  
Melissa Clemens

## God Is Changing Us—But How?

David Powlison

# Welcome

We rejoice to see biblical counseling taking root and growing throughout the world. The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) began teaching courses to seminary students and to local church pastors in 1968. But today we have grown beyond that. 90% of our students are now online learners. 25% of those students are international. We are teaching pastors, missionaries, counselors, and many lay people. In the past three years we have taught students from over 35 countries—Singapore, Austria, Australia, Brazil, Brunei, Chile, Finland, Jordan, South Africa, Slovakia, and the United Arab Emirates. Our online students are already active in counseling and discipleship ministries. I praise God who has made all this happen.

Serving this broad spectrum of students has opened a fresh angle on CCEF's mission. These students vividly illustrate that there are two kinds of love that are part of every Christian's calling. **We are all called to practical giving through mercy ministries that extend tangible help to people in need.** Everyone knows that. But our students embody something else that is rarely identified. **We are all called to wisdom-giving through constructive personal conversations.** Everyone needs relevant, encouraging, life-rearranging truth that connects the dots from Christ to our daily lives. In other words, good deeds and good words are both part of walking in the Lord.

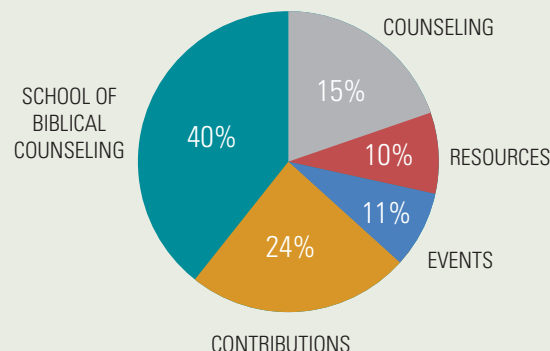
The articles in this issue of CCEF Now address both ministry of mercy and ministry of wisdom-giving. Our prayer is that you will be equipped and encouraged as you read. And if you are able, please give to support and strengthen our work of ministry.

God bless you,



Dr. David Powlison  
Executive Director

## CCEF Revenue Sources



We need \$850,000 in donations this year.  
Thank you for considering our need.

### PUBLISHER

Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

### EDITORIAL OFFICE

1803 East Willow Grove Avenue  
Glenside, PA 19038  
1-800-318-2186  
customerservice@ccef.org

### PERMISSIONS

CCEF encourages the use of the articles in this magazine for ministry purposes. *CCEF Now* grants permission for up to 100 copies of any article to be made provided the copies are made free of charge and distributed with the following statement: This article is published in *CCEF Now*, a publication of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation.

### EDITORIAL STAFF

Rebecca Eaton  
Bruce Eaton  
Lauren Whitman

### DESIGN

Tom Temple, Tandem Creative

[www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org)

# CCEF NOW

## CONTENTS

**2** God Is Changing Us—  
But How?  
David Powlison

**10** Counseling *Is* Theological  
Ed Welch

**14** Engaging Our Emotions,  
Engaging with God  
Alasdair Groves

**6** Ministry Connections  
Featuring two  
counseling centers

**12** Become a Wilderness  
Companion  
Winston Smith

**16** Meet the Counselor  
Melissa Clemens

## CONTRIBUTORS



### David Powlison, MDiv, PhD

is the Executive Director at CCEF and has served at the ministry for 35 years. He is the senior editor for the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* and has written extensively on pastoral care and counseling. In his article, *God Is Changing Us—But How?*, he writes, “*The ways that Jesus meets me are analogous to the ways he meets you. Analogous, but not identical. God seems to love variety. You and I do not reduce to a category.*”



### Ed Welch, MDiv, PhD

is a counselor and faculty member at CCEF. Ed has served at CCEF for over 30 years and has written numerous books and articles on depression, fear, and addictions. In his article, *Counseling Is Theological*, he writes, “*Biblical counselors are theologians. We look for patterns in Scripture, we notice patterns in people, and we bring those two together.*”



### Winston Smith, MDiv

is a faculty member and has served at CCEF for over 20 years. He specializes in marriage counseling and is the author of *Marriage Matters: Extraordinary Change through Ordinary Moments*. Last year he served as a chaplain for twelve weeks in a hospital. In his article, *Become a Wilderness Companion*, he compares life in the hospital to what Israel experienced in the desert. He then offers practical steps for ministry.



### Alasdair Groves, MDiv

is the director of Counseling at CCEF New England and is an Assistant Faculty member. He has a passion to foster genuine relationships in the local church, especially through counseling and counseling training. In his article, *Engaging Our Emotions, Engaging with God*, he writes, “*Our emotions invite us to see the world as God sees it—both broken and beautiful—rejoicing where he is redeeming it and yearning for the full redemption that is yet to come.*”



### Melissa Clemens, MABC

is a contract counselor serving teens and parents at our Glenside location. In addition, she is a staff counselor at The City School's high school campus. We recently sat down with her to speak about counseling teens, she said, “*Students are usually pleasantly surprised and refreshed to hear that their confusion is not a roadblock to their relationship with God, but actually an entry gate to know his love for them more deeply.*”

## FIND US ONLINE



ccef.org

# God is changing Us BUT HOW?



DAVID POWLISON

“Sanctification” is the five syllable word used to describe the process by which we are reborn and then grow in a new way of life as followers of Jesus. But *how* does your growth in grace actually work? And how does ministry encourage and support growth in someone else? We need to pay attention to how God changes people. One interesting characteristic is that all Christians already have some first-hand experience. Every Christian can say: “*This* was key in helping *me* when I struggled with *that* in *those* circumstances.” Those stories teach us a lot.

But first-hand experience also presents a danger. It is easy to turn your own experience into a general rule: “*This* must be the key for *everyone*.” Both Scripture and personal testimony teach us that there is no single formula for the kinds of problems that call for our sanctification. There is no single formula for the kinds of change

that sanctification produces in us. There is no single formula for the truths and other factors that produce change. There is variety in how God changes people. Here are two stories from my own walk with Jesus to illustrate the key things that helped me—with *my* particular struggles in *my* particular circumstances.

## Story 1. August 31, 1975

When I was 25 years old I came to Christian faith. My conversion was dramatic. In high school I had become preoccupied with existential questions: “What lasts? What is meaningful? Who am I?” Four lines of development gave force and shape to my search.

First, in my teens I became estranged from the nominal version of church-going in which I had been raised. I never heard that Jesus Christ was anything more than a moral example. Christianity, as I experienced it,

seemed like a polite veneer for people who didn’t want to face hard realities.

Second, during those same years I was immediately confronted with death and depravity: e.g., a target of bullying, the murder of a classmate, suicidal friends, exposure to pornography, people self-immolating on drugs. And then there were the normal disillusionments in the years during and after college. Neither academics, nor athletics, nor career could bear the weight of identity and meaning.

Third, I matriculated into Harvard as a math and science major, but soon migrated to psychology and social sciences, and then moved on to literature and the arts. Through reading Dostoevsky and T. S. Eliot, awareness slowly dawned that the Christian message spoke directly to the deepest matters of our humanity.

Fourth, a college friend, Bob Kramer, became a Christian when we were 20. He

thought about the same kinds of questions I thought about. For the next five years we discussed, disagreed, and debated whenever we got together. I was stubborn. I did not want someone to rescue me. I wanted to do life on my own terms. But God had other ideas about how to do my life.

*How did God work?* He was merciful. One evening Bob spoke with unexpected candor, “I respect you as much as anyone... but what you believe... and how you are living... you are destroying yourself.” I knew he was right. The Holy Spirit used his words as an armor-piercing shell. I came under comprehensive and specific conviction of my sinfulness, uncleanness, unbelief, unacceptability before Christ. When I responded (one minute later? ten minutes?), I asked, “How do I become a Christian?” Bob shared a promise from the God of hope:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezek 36:25–27)

Bob invited me to ask God for mercy. I beseeched Jesus for mercy. He was merciful.

*How on earth did I change?* I was changed because God intervened personally. I was changed because words of Scripture invited me into Christ. I was changed because a friend was faithful and honest. I was changed because of failure, guilt, suffering, and disillusionment. I changed because I turned from sin to Christ.

## Story 2. From 2000 to 2006

Fast forward 25 years. In my 50s, the front-and-center lesson significantly changed. These were the hardest years of my life. The recovery from open-heart surgery had agonizing moments. But the long-term

sequelae were worse than the short-term pain. For the next 5½ years I inhabited a body that was breaking down. I liken those years of exhaustion and cumulative losses to living through a slow-motion building collapse. Only family, a handful of friendships, and writing remained fruitful.

And God met me, and changed me for the good.

*How did God work?* First came the suffering itself. God works in and through suffering. My faith and love had to grow up—again, as I always have to grow up.

Second, a handful of wise, godly friends played a significant role. Some were going through analogous experiences. They understood. We were in it together. Other friends helped me to plan and to act within marked limitations. I needed both the tenderness and the realism.

Third, the wisdom of saints whose race finished long ago played a significant role in how public worship encouraged me. I love a well-crafted hymn that invites me to think as well as sing. But I never realized how many hymns (like the Psalms) inhabit suffering, until I myself was in a place of prolonged hurt and perplexity. For example, Katharina von Schlegel’s “Be Still, My Soul” is honest about her anguish and bafflement. And she gives voice to her reasons for hope amid grief. The Lord is on your side, even in this. He is your best, your heavenly friend, who will not bereave you. He soothes your dark emotions. He will restore love’s purest joys.

Fourth, God’s creation proved sustaining, refreshing, and sanctifying. In all seasons and weathers I went outside and walked. I noticed...the flight of a goldfinch, a field of blooming white dogwoods, a thunderstorm rising, maple leaves like fire in the fall. I was repeatedly drawn onto a bigger stage than my troubles.

Fifth, God met me with his words and his Spirit—through preaching, through the Lord’s Supper, through the informal counsel of friends, through my own reflecting on Scripture. I heard God’s voice of truth, and sought him, and found him. As familiar words engaged current experience, they

took on meanings and resonances I could not have imagined. Here are some of the passages that repeatedly met me.

- *Matthew 5:3–10* (the Beatitudes). The first four blessings bond to weakness as we depend on God: honest neediness, sorrow, submission, and longing. The second four blessings bond to strength as we move out into the world: active generosity, purity of purpose, constructive engagement, and courage. Jesus lived this unusual interplay of weakness and strength. This is what it looks like to be truly human.
- *Psalms 103*. This psalm befriended and renewed me. It drew forth my faith: to need, trust, and worship my Father. It enabled me to love others who share in the iniquity, frailty, and mortality of the human condition. “All the good things he does” (Ps 103:2) is a prequel to “every spiritual blessing” (Eph 1:3) that we find in living color, specified, and fulfilled in Christ.
- *2 Corinthians 1:4* and *Hebrews 5:2–3*. My first-hand experience does not terminate in me. It is transmuted so that I become able to deal gently and helpfully with others in their struggles. My particular troubles—mastered by the God of mercies and comfort—equip me “to comfort those who are in any affliction.” My sins and weaknesses—dealt with honestly before the Lord who gives mercy—equip me to minister well even to “the ignorant and wayward.”

The bookshelves in my home could not contain all the books that could be written about what Jesus did during those years.

*How did I change?* I was changed because God never let me go. I was changed because Scripture spoke many words of God’s mercy, protection, strength, and will. I was changed because many friends bore me up. I was changed because I had to walk through darkness, destruction, and the uncertainty of no explanations and no solutions. I changed because I repeatedly turned outward in faith and love, reversing my inward-turning tendency.

## Implications for Ministry

In my twenties I was primarily changed because failure, guilt, and disillusionment led me to turn from sin to Christ. Birth into a new life, freely-given forgiveness, and justification by faith were truths that caught fire. In my fifties I was primarily changed because darkness, loss, and suffering led me to turn in trust to my heavenly Father. God's presence and purposes in affliction—sustaining faith, making love wiser and more helpful—were the operative truths. Different struggles and circumstances of life brought different truths into the foreground.

How then can we think about sanctification in a way that generates ministry traction? Here is my core premise: *Ministry “unbalances” truth for the sake of relevance; theology “rebalances” truth for the sake of comprehensiveness.* Think about that for a moment with me.

*The task in any ministry moment is to choose, emphasize, and “unbalance” truth for the sake of relevant application to this particular person and situation.* You can't say everything all at once—and you shouldn't try. Say one relevant thing at a time. When Jesus talks with people he is astonishingly concrete, direct, and specific. By saying one thing, not everything, he is always challenging, always life-rearranging, always nourishing to those who are listening.

*The task of theological reflection is to abstract, generalize, and “rebalance” truth for the sake of comprehensiveness.* Balance—whether topical (systematic

theology) or narrational (biblical theology)—protects us from exaggerating, ignoring, or overgeneralizing. Part of why one truth cannot be the entire truth is because every Christian doctrine and every part of God's story also matters. In order to actually minister to people, you need wise selectivity while bearing in mind the fullest possible repertoire of options from which to choose. You do not build a house with only one tool in your toolbox, when God gives us a truck-load of tools. But you do use your tools one at a time, the right tool for the right job.

Here's the takeaway. I dare not extrapolate my exact experience of God's mercies to everyone else. One pattern of Christ's working (even a pattern common to many people) should not overshadow all the other patterns. A rightly “unbalanced” message is fresh, refreshing, joyous, full of song, life-transforming. But eventually, if it is oversold, it becomes a one-string harp, played by one finger, sounding one note. It drones. Scripture and the Holy Spirit play a 47-string concert harp, using all ten fingers, and sounding all the notes of human experience. Wise ministry, like growth in wisdom, means learning to play on all the strings, not harping on one note.

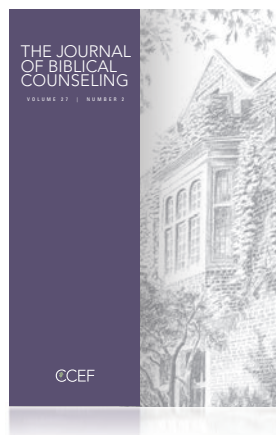
## Jesus teaches us to sound all the notes

The Gospels largely consist of scenes selected from Jesus' encounters and conversations with various followers, foes, inquirers, and undecideds. The variety of personal details is as significant as the common themes. Watch Jesus interact,

person by person, situation by situation. Notice how he notices things. Listen to the questions he asks and how he answers questioners. He rattles, invites, irritates, teaches, argues, clarifies, perplexes, saves, warns, encourages. Jesus reveals people for who they are. He precipitates decisive choices. In response to him, people change, either making a turn for the better or taking a turn for the worse.

The ways that Jesus meets me are analogous to the ways he meets you. Analogous, but not identical. God seems to love variety. You and I do not reduce to a category. Our Father is raising children, and every child I've ever known is unique. One privilege I have had is to read thousands of students' experiences of growth. And so I encourage you—pastor, friend, counselor, parent, small-group leader, missionary—to ask people in your church to share about times when God *really* met them, so much so that their lives were changed. By listening you will grow in wisdom because you learn more about God's ways from those stories. And by listening, you will be learning how to better sound the right note, for the right person, in the right moment.

You can read more about the subject of sanctification in two *Journal of Biblical Counseling* articles: “How Does Sanctification Work? (Part1)” by David Powlison (27:1) and “How Does Sanctification Work? (Part 2)” by David Powlison (27:2).



# The Journal of Biblical Counseling

## Timely and Timeless

Addresses today's counseling issues in ways that have lasting relevance.

## Biblical and Practical

Connects God's Word with life and ministry.

3 DIGITAL  
ISSUES

\$12 PER  
YEAR

3 PRINT  
ISSUES

\$27 PER  
YEAR

[ccef.org/jbc](http://ccef.org/jbc)

*When asked why they support CCEF...*

# What leaders are saying, What YOU are saying

## *What leaders are saying...*

“CCEF’s approach to the Christian life, to understanding the human heart, and to counseling introduced me to the power of repentance as the way to detonate the power of God’s grace in my life. Their writing and our personal conversations had a strong influence not only on how I pastored people, but how I preached when I moved to New York City to found Redeemer Church.”

**Tim Keller**, Founding Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan and Chairman of Redeemer City to City



## *What YOU are saying...*



“My husband and I are CCEF donors because we believe they have the most applicable, practical and biblical teaching that we have ever encountered. I have seen God use the ministry of CCEF to help people better know Christ and to bring Christ’s counsel to every situation of life.”

**Lucia Brown**, Biblical Counselor, Minnetonka, Minnesota

Read the rest of the stories at [ccef.org/connections](http://ccef.org/connections)

To learn how you can support CCEF, visit [ccef.org/support](http://ccef.org/support)

**Tell us a bit of your background and where you currently practice counseling.**

I was interested in psychology early on. And as college progressed my interest in the biological aspects that shape behavior grew, and I went on to medical school. It was during medical school that I realized I needed to rethink how I understood people and why they do what they do.

In addition to my work with PRN I have a private practice, I work at a Veteran's hospital, and at a local university's health center.

**How do you manage serving in different places?**

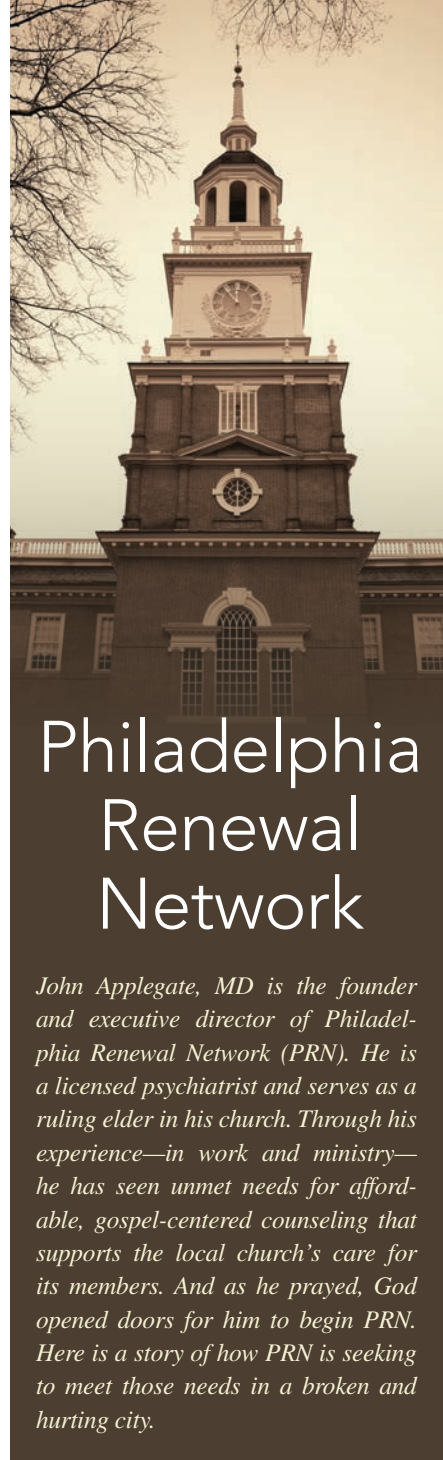
I find that having a well-defined job as a doctor in a hospital makes for a stable setting to build relationships over time. In private practice, I have more opportunities for conversation with people, to go deeper. I also spend time each week at the university. Each of these work settings is within a few blocks of where I live and where my church is, and I have a big heart for the community that we are living in.

I have also found that it's important not to peg one picture of what ministry can look like. I don't think it's necessarily a compromise to work in a secular setting, but you have to change your mindset of what your actual goals are in each setting. And it's important for me to have a venue where there are no restrictions on what ministry is and can be. For me, this variety has been helpful to my growth.

**How did you first become connected to CCEF?**

While I was in medical school I started going to a church in Philadelphia that introduced me to CCEF. A seminary student who was attending my church gave me a copy of Ed Welch's book—"Blame It on the Brain?"—and that was the first time I read someone who was really, honestly wrestling with the connection of Scripture to brain science. I have also spent time with Mike Emlet in recent years. He has been a mentor to me.

**How did your interest in biblical counseling begin, and your desire to see counseling take place in a church context?**



## Philadelphia Renewal Network

*John Applegate, MD is the founder and executive director of Philadelphia Renewal Network (PRN). He is a licensed psychiatrist and serves as a ruling elder in his church. Through his experience—in work and ministry—he has seen unmet needs for affordable, gospel-centered counseling that supports the local church's care for its members. And as he prayed, God opened doors for him to begin PRN. Here is a story of how PRN is seeking to meet those needs in a broken and hurting city.*

It was when I became an elder in my church that I gained a different perspective on what it meant for people in the church to seek help when they were struggling. And so I began to ask, "How can a struggling person see that their church is a place where care can happen?" There is a certain compartmentalization that takes place when someone has a struggle and they are referred out to a professional.

A message is sent, "The church can only walk 'so far' with you in your struggles,

but once that specialized area of need is addressed by someone else then we can help you again." Obviously, no one says this but functionally this is what happens. And it sends a message about how churches provide care to members. People learn that *there is something different about me and my issues that don't fit with regular church life.*

**Why do you think this compartmentalization happens in the church?**

There is the normal busyness of life that makes it hard for an outside counselor and pastor to stay connected, even if the intention is there. There is also a legal 'wall of separation' in regards to open communication that the Health Information Patient Privacy Act (HIPPA) laws create in counseling situations. We respect HIPPA laws, but they have also hindered shepherds in the church, keeping them from walking with people to the depths and degrees of the struggle that they have.

**So how do you think churches could make counseling more accessible in the context of the church to address this problem?**

Before founding PRN I started to think about how churches can be organized as their own third party payers. I saw this model in medical school; Christians get together and pool money for people who need health care. Mental health care is so much more amenable to this structure because there are fewer unpredictable costs.

I felt that if we could get a group of local churches to participate, we could create an available resource for people who can't afford it. I also thought about how to take some of the money that people pay for counseling and put it back into this church network to help with future costs.

And I also wanted to address the idea of accountability for the counseling and make it a part of the life of the church, helping shepherds and the church to *be* the church. This meant for our counselees that we placed a priority on membership in the local church, on being accountable to a shepherd in the local church, on equipping other helpers in the

church, and creating a financial structure that lowers obstacles to counseling.

**So how did PRN form? And how did you find like-minded counselors?**

PRN launched on September 1, 2013 after two years of prayer, assembling a team of counselors, and identifying the partnering churches. And of course we had to address the legal, administrative, and financial issues involved in starting a non-profit organization.

Initially, counselors were people I knew personally and had interacted with in the counseling field. Everyone had training from CCEF—either they had gone through the internship program or had earned a certificate of completion from the School of Biblical Counseling.

**What legal and liability issues did you consider as you began PRN?**

From the start I wanted to organize as a non-profit organization. I did this for public accountability and so that any surplus funds would go into a scholarship fund.

In terms of liability, a counseling center has many legal responsibilities that we don't have because we have no employees. Everyone counseling has a contract relationship with PRN. All our counselors have their own individual practice and dictate their own terms of service.

Because of our commitment to the local churches, we use a consent agreement that is HIPPA approved in order for a shepherd in the church to view confidential information.

**Your model is interesting. What does it look like for your counselors to interact with churches?**

Before counseling begins, the person seeking help understands and agrees to involve their shepherd throughout the counseling process. Each month we require our counselors to provide their counselee's shepherd in the church with feedback about how the person is growing in Christ through counseling.

The gospel is our shared foundation—for the shepherds and the counselors. It is important for our counselors to begin and continue in the gospel in their counseling, since they are an extension of the shepherding arm of

the local church. And likewise, there is a need for the churches involved with PRN to have a shared mindset. The shepherd needs to have a respect for the counseling relationship, and a level of maturity about how to handle the confidentiality of a counseling relationship.

**How does PRN facilitate a dialogue between a counselor and a shepherd in a church?**

AT PRN we have Care Coordinators that are assigned to one of our partnering churches. Whenever possible we try to assign a Care Coordinator that is already involved in that church—in some cases a member there. Care Coordinators are PRN counselors. Their main function is to proactively communicate with the church, and the counselor, about things that will help the person under their care who is seeking help. This provides a feedback loop that keeps the two distinctive areas of care connected in a meaningful way.

At the beginning of counseling we establish an initial care plan that identifies the issue the person has sought help for. We work to connect that struggle to areas of needed growth, and then develop a ministry plan. Accountability is maintained every month through a counselor's report that helps the shepherd be a part of a person's care—How many sessions were scheduled and how many were kept? Are there any areas of concern? In what ways is a person under care moving toward the goals of ministry? What are things to pray about for this person who is receiving care?

There is also an opportunity for the shepherd to provide a monthly report—Are there any areas of concern? Are there prayer needs for the person who is under care?

**Why do you emphasize the need for shepherd involvement in counseling?**

Psychiatry actually means 'soul care.' There is value in the specialized training and learning that is involved in modern psychiatry. But the way that it has developed and is currently perceived, especially in the U.S., has created a division between the church and the professional practitioner. The church is good for theology; but when it comes to disorders,

medical issues and even psychology, the church has no place to be involved in the care of an individual. That's the current message.

I disagree with this—and with parsing the person between his or her biology, psychology, and soul. There is so much interplay between biology and the spirit, and there is theoretical baggage with every psychological theory.

For the Freudian, what is important is how well a person understands their unconscious impulses, how they can become more aware of them, and then deal with them appropriately. For the cognitive behavioral therapist, what is important is how much people are paying attention to their negative thoughts. The solution is to modify their negative thinking to such a degree that it is having less and less impact on them. Whatever the psychology may be, what is most important is what their theory dictates.

But I believe that what is most important is what happened to Jesus and how someone can see him as relevant in this particular area of life. What's important to me is, "How does someone understand themselves in relationship to the gospel at any moment, in all the issues of their lives, with no exceptions?" PRN seeks to help pastors and the church feel less of the compartmentalization of modern approaches to care, and in the process find that the church is a good and wise place for people to find help with even the most challenging circumstances.





# LIFE COUNSELING CENTER

[lifecounselingcenter.org](http://lifecounselingcenter.org)

it was a safe place to need and ask for help. Referrals for counseling were increasingly taking up significant time for the pastors.

As a result, Chapelgate formalized its counseling ministry in 2007 as the Life Counseling Center. That meant building a counseling center by converting a large childcare room into 3 counseling offices. Counseling needs continued to increase and more counseling rooms were added in 2012. We were blessed and encouraged to see the clarity of their vision and purpose in helping people. The following is some of what we learned during our visit.

## Who They Serve

The Life Counseling Center currently has a group of 8 counselors. The Center now serves approximately 50 churches in the region. In fact, the majority of people who come for counseling are not Chapelgate church members. Some who come for counseling have no church background at all. This provides the opportunity for evangelistic ministry in a counseling setting, and an opportunity to connect un-churched people to a church.

This broadening of ministry has led Rich to be intentional and thoughtful about making connections to local churches. Life Counseling Center makes it clear on their intake form that they want their services to be part of a client's local church ministry experience. So how do they do that?

Life Counseling Center realizes that many churches do not have the necessary resources to handle all of the counseling needs (and counseling issues) that arise. So they want to be a resource to those churches, and they do this in a variety of ways. Some pastors have come from other churches to be a part of the counseling process, working with a counselor and their church member. Other pastors stay connected by staying in communication with the counselor on their church member's progress.

Rich has also made it a part of his pastoral ministry to visit the churches they partner with in biblical counseling. The Center currently provides over 200 hours of counseling per month, and it's important to him to remain as connected to other leaders and churches as possible.

As partnerships have developed, this has led to opportunities for Rich and Eliza to provide additional support and training to ministry leaders. Pastors and others in church ministry are invited to attend training workshops that address various counseling topics—marriage

R

ecently our director of development, Rebecca Eaton, and our director of events, Wayne Houk, traveled to Marriottsville, Maryland to visit with the counselors at Life Counseling Center. There we met with the director and assistant director of counseling, Rich Staroneck and Eliza Huie. We were able to tour their counseling office, have lunch with the counselors, and spend time learning how Chapelgate Presbyterian Church and Life Counseling Center are restoring Christ to counseling and counseling to the church.

## Life Counseling Center's Development

Life Counseling Center began and continues as a ministry of Chapelgate Presbyterian Church, which is located outside of Baltimore in Marriottsville, Maryland. The mission of Chapelgate Presbyterian Church is "to live out the Gospel in Word and Deed with the hope that God will bring Healing, Renewal and Peace to greater Baltimore and the Nations for His glory."

Chapelgate is a 1,500 member church that has historically emphasized caring for people. Life Counseling Center developed from the church's emphasis on mercy ministries that also had an outreach focus—addictions, divorce, and bereavement ministries. Many counseling needs surfaced in each of these ministries, and pastors began having intentional counseling conversations whenever they could. Counseling took place at various locations within the church for a long time, despite not formally having a "counseling ministry."

Learning to minister to people with many different life issues motivated Rich (along with 3 other church members) to take classes at CCEF beginning in 2000. At the time, CCEF didn't have an online learning program, so these faithful servants drove up to Glenside, PA every week, for months at a time, over several years.

Over time it became clear to Chapelgate that God was up to something good in the church. The needs were becoming greater because

and family, grief and loss, anxiety and depression, pornography, same sex attraction, and introductory courses on biblical counseling. In the summer of 2015 they led a workshop using Paul Tripp’s “Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands.” And in the fall of 2015 Eliza traveled to Japan, along with fellow counselor Tonya Cherry, to speak to church planters on the vital principles of mercy ministries and the value biblical counseling brings to the church.

And in 2016 Life Counseling Center will start a consultation group for pastors and ministry leaders, giving them an opportunity to discuss and process some of the counseling opportunities they have in their own ministry. This is a way to connect pastors with experienced counselors to talk about case studies and counseling ministry.

### Ministry Structure

Life Counseling Center has both state-licensed and non-licensed counselors. Every counselor works from a gospel-centered approach to counseling, seeking to connect the lives and troubles of the people they meet with to God’s work of heart and life transformation. Some areas of counseling (e.g., trauma, or abuse) benefit from having a counselor who is trained specifically to walk with a person in the midst of the pain of that experience.

Counselors meet together twice a month for supervision—this is an opportunity for the counseling staff to maintain continuity with one another as a ministry team. This is also a place to receive supervision and encouragement from one another, and to consider how counselors are relating to those they counsel, often gaining insight and direction both personally and interpersonally. This is an opportunity to ask questions like: “How am I doing in the room with this person? Am I loving this person well? Am I fully present? Am I approaching this person with a gospel mindset?”

### Partnership with CCEF

Churches that have had exposure to CCEF and CCEF resources have been eager to work with Life Counseling Center. And the number of churches that are familiar with CCEF has increased over the years; people who have taken a class or have been exposed to materials connect with its gospel-centered approach to counseling.

Life Counseling Center uses *Journal of Biblical Counseling* ar-

ticles, CCEF books and other resources in their ministry. They also regularly visit [ccef.org](http://ccef.org) to read blogs and locate new resources as part of their preparation for counseling.

Their counselors are required to take classes in CCEF’s School of Biblical Counseling, and to complete at least the first level of Certificate training. Rich and Eliza believe this foundation provides each counselor with the same biblical categories and counseling model to minister from. Counselors are also encouraged, when possible, to attend our National Conference each year.

Their approach to biblical counseling—like ours—is more than a system of change or a set of techniques. Biblical counseling doesn’t rest on a model or a formula for change, but on the presence and power of a living, active Redeemer. As counselors, their fundamental approach is caring for people where they are, being willing to take another person onto your heart. This approach reflects what the Apostle Paul says to the Philippians: “It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart.” (Phil. 1:7)

Over the years we have come to know and appreciate the counselors at Life Counseling Center. They support and encourage us in a variety of ways. It has been an honor to witness their growth as individuals and as a ministry. And we are excited about what God is doing in and through them. For more information about this ministry, visit [lifecounselingcenter.org](http://lifecounselingcenter.org).

Please pray for Rich, Eliza, and all the counselors. Pray they will serve and love out of the overflowing abundance of Christ’s work in their own lives. Pray for their new Roland Park satellite location recently opened in downtown Baltimore—pray for wisdom as they seek to help this hurting city in the aftermath of the riots in the summer of 2015.

*Rich Staroneck has been a pastor at Chapelgate Presbyterian Church for 15 years and a member for over 32 years. Rich first heard about CCEF in 1998 and began taking classes with us in 2000.*

*Eliza Huie is the assistant director of Life Counseling Center. Eliza has completed three levels of Certificate training with CCEF and is currently working on completing her Masters in Counseling in the Graduate School of Counseling at Biblical Seminary.*

## CCEF’s Supporting Church & Ministry Program

We have designed the Supporting Church & Ministry Program as a way to show our appreciation to partners. This program offers both training and counseling discounts to your organization.

[ccef.org/connections](http://ccef.org/connections)

	LEVEL 1 \$600-\$1,199/yr	LEVEL 2 \$1,200-\$2,399/yr	LEVEL 3 \$2,400/yr or more
COUNSELING	\$10 off counseling	\$10 off counseling	\$10 off counseling
School of Biblical Counseling		50% off one course	100% off one course
NATIONAL CONFERENCE	1 Free registration	2 Free registrations	3 Free registrations
The Journal of Biblical Counseling	Free digital subscription	Free digital & print subscription	Free digital & print subscription



# COUNSELING *is* THEOLOGICAL

ED WELCH

**Y**es, the title—*Counseling Is Theological*—is making you sleepy. But let me explain. Theology can, indeed, be boring. Some theological books read like an old encyclopedia article or an oversized dictionary. But theology done well is electric. It reveals to us the very mind of God and it compels us into action. There is nothing more exciting.

Theology looks for patterns in Scripture. What recurs? Are there particular themes? What seems especially important? It assumes that there is coherence and unity in Scripture because God inspired it all, and that coherence reflects the order of God's thoughts.

When you discover actual patterns, Scripture becomes less of a list of favorite, somewhat disconnected passages and more of a coherent story with the major themes always apparent. Think of some of the well-known musicals, such as *Lion King* or *Les Miserables*. There are certain recurring tunes throughout. Each time you notice the tune you feel like you are in familiar territory, but each time you hear the tune it accumulates more of the story. By the time you reach the finale, the familiar tune now evokes all the significant moments of the story, and you can't help but cry.

So when we find the patterns in Scripture,

we tune in. We keep track of the patterns as they accumulate more of the story. We savor them. As we savor them, we begin to live out of them. This is why counseling is theological: because we live out of our theology, and counseling focuses on life lived.

Here are a few examples of some themes in Scripture. They are ones that we can savor, ones that we can live out of. And some are so beautiful that they make us cry.

*God speaks and we respond.* When you read Paul's epistles you find a predictable structure: first he identifies what God has done in Christ and then invites us to respond to God's initiating work (e.g., Eph 2:13, 19; 4:1). It turns out that this structure is embedded in the Old Testament, even apparent in the Ten Commandments. They begin with what God has done. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Ex 20:2). Then those commandments teach us how to respond to his rescuing love.

John's first epistle captures the same pattern when he writes, "we love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God takes the initiative toward us and we respond. That is the way life works in the kingdom of heaven.

Indeed, God speaks and we respond. So what do we do with this bit of theology? Once we get started the applications never end.

God always moves toward us first. He al-

ways loves us more. Such love provokes us to thankfulness, joy and worship.

Legalism, in which the law of God becomes most important, feels religious—but it is wrong. Legalism suggests that we act and then God responds.

Disregarding God's law is also misguided. The law, understood rightly, is a delight. It is as if the Lord said, "I have taken the initiative of love toward you from the beginning of time. Now you are going to want to know how to love me in return. Here are ways you can do that."

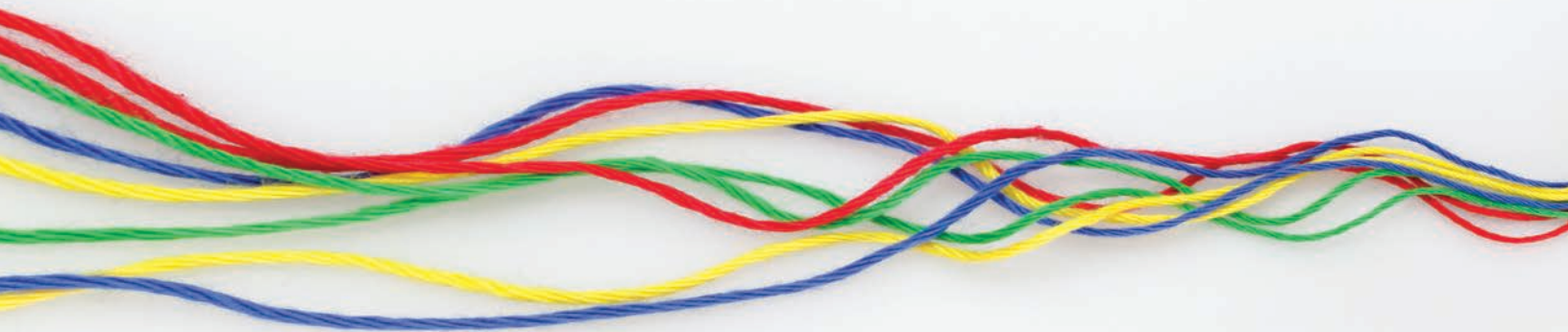
When we live in such an imbalanced relationship, where our God always loves first and most, we have a hard time being arrogant or judgmental. Humility becomes natural.

All eyes are on Jesus. He is God's Word in person. God has spoken to us in Christ. All transformation begins with knowing Jesus and what he has done. Then, amazed at his sacrifice, we respond.

Here is another pattern in Scripture.

*God is "a se."* This is a quieter, more esoteric piece of theology. When we talk about God's aseity, we mean that he is "of himself" or "from himself." He was not created, and he is not dependent on his creation. In other words, he does not need us in order to be complete and fully satisfied. His name, "I am who I am" (Ex 3:14) expresses his aseity.

Unlike all the other gods who were born,



derivative and interdependent, the true God is seated over all, and is complete in himself. We need him to live, move and breathe, but he does not need us. He is under no compulsion to create, love and adopt us; he loves us simply because he loves us. This again emphasizes the asymmetry in our relationship with the Lord. His love is freely given first, and is greater than our own.

What can we do with this?

God's love is not stingy. He doesn't dole it out to his favorites and restrain it with the rest of us. The picture he gives us is one of lavish, overflowing abundance. We, in turn, can repent of any thought that God's love is like man's love.

Since his love was freely given when we were still sinners and he redeemed us through the blood of Jesus, why would we think that our continued failings would make him love us less? We, again, can repent of our contaminated understanding of his love.

His love sets our sights higher. We want to love, not because of what we will get in return. We want to love because we have received the abundant love of God.

Now for a final theme that we can trace through Scripture.

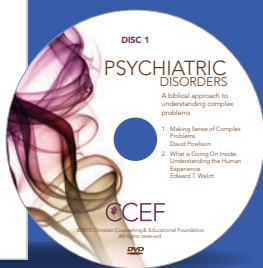
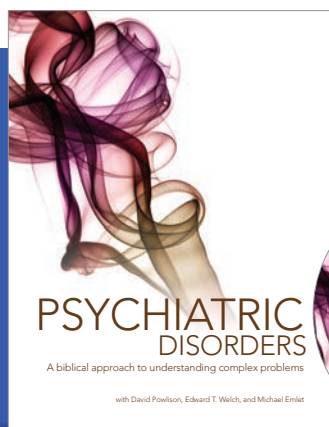
*We take what we know about God and we cry out.* I was reading Psalm 107 and noticed a phrase, but it didn't really stand out. "Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. . . Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love" (v. 6, 8). These same words appeared a few verses later. Now I was listening. A few verses later they came again and the pattern was clear. This was important in the story of God's people, it was important in the mind of God, and so it is important for me. By the time it was repeated a fourth time, I was already anticipating the refrain and was ready to add it to the details of my day. And I had tears over how God had so graciously revealed how we are to live.

I was doing rudimentary theology. I was on the lookout for things emphasized, echoing and familiar. When I found them I knew God better, and knew more about how to live as one of his people. Cry out, watch what he does or reflect on what he did, give thanks—that is the rhythm. And yet this

simple way to live before God is so much harder than it looks. Our natural tendency is to cry rather than cry out (Hos 7:14), and so God patiently reminds us that we are intended to speak from our hearts to him.

There are dozens of other themes in Scripture. We often know them as doctrines—the doctrine of God, of how we change, of the church, of the end times, of heaven, and so on. They emerge as we ask certain questions of Scripture—such as, *Who am I?* And they emerge when we look for patterns throughout Scripture. As Scripture unfolds, all those doctrines shape our understandings of life and how to help people through hardships.

Biblical counselors are theologians. We look for patterns in Scripture, we notice patterns in people, and we bring those two together. And there are even times when the emergence of a clear pattern in Scripture, spoken at the right time to another person, is enough to make us aware that we are standing on holy ground—a place where God spoke and someone responded.

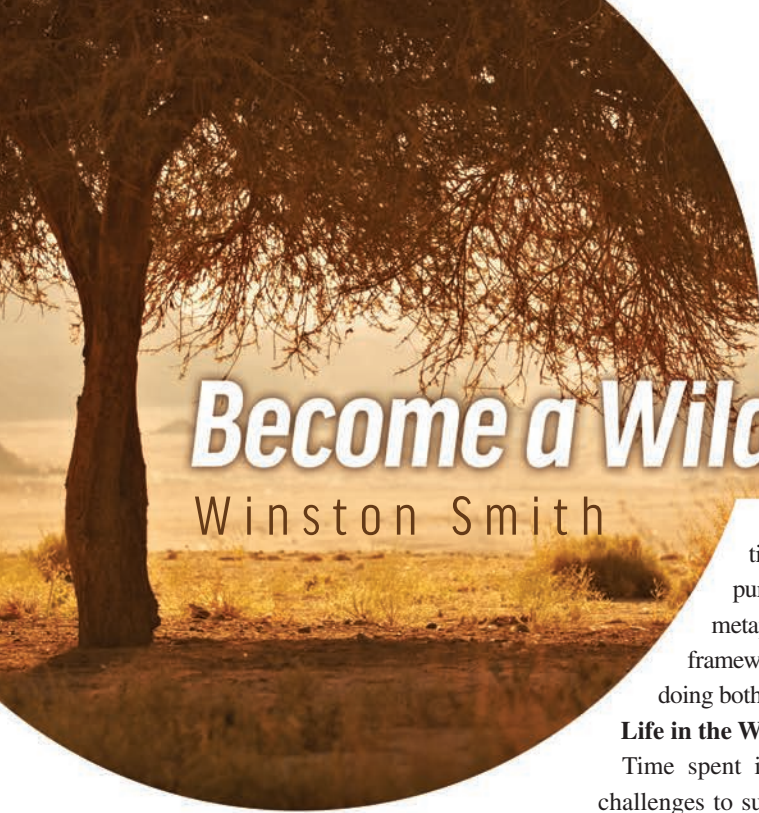


## NEW RESOURCE

Features teaching from David Powlison, Ed Welch and Mike Emlet

\$79	1 DVD set + 10 Workbooks
\$39	1 DVD set + 1 Workbook
\$4.40	1 Workbook

[ccef.org/resources](http://ccef.org/resources)



caregivers to help patients navigate both the emotional turmoil of the moment as well as the larger existen-

share their hearts using emotional language. Hospital visitors often do not realize how often patients ignore or suppress negative emotions. Patients may wear a stoic or even

# Become a Wilderness Companion

Winston Smith

Last summer I served as a chaplain at a local hospital in a Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) program. As a counselor-turned-chaplain, I faced a host of new challenges, navigating questions like these: How do you assess needs and set goals for brief, one-time conversations? How do you cultivate meaningful conversations that address the deepest heart issues with people who don't know you or even know that you are coming to see them? Here is some of what I observed and learned.

## The Hospital Experience

Understandably, hospital patients face a host of spiritual and emotional challenges. Patients and visitors alike are in alien and disorienting terrain. Anxiety abounds, ranging from the immediate concerns of how the kids will get home from school, to more serious questions—How long will I be here? How will this affect my marriage or job? Or even—Am I going to die?

Anxiety is often complicated by pain, isolation, loneliness, frustration, anger, loss and grief. And, of course, this often raises larger questions about the reasons for suffering, the nature of God's love, and what our lives are all about—How could God let this happen? Why is this happening to me?

Pastoral care in these situations requires

tial questions of meaning and purpose. Utilizing the biblical metaphor of wilderness, here is a framework that can aid caregivers in doing both.

## Life in the Wilderness

Time spent in alien terrain filled with challenges to survival, purpose, and meaning should remind us of Israel's journey through the wilderness. Just like the hospital patient, everyday life for Israel was dramatically interrupted by a seismic change and a journey into the unknown.

Of course, God orchestrated the exodus for Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Nonetheless, it was an ordeal that left many questioning God's identity as well as their own. It was a place where they were unable, through human effort, to preserve themselves.

This served the necessary purpose of coming to know who God was—and coming to know who they were. They needed to see themselves not as slaves, but as children who needed to rely on a loving father who gave them exactly what they needed.

Using the wilderness as a metaphor, let's explore specific ways of being a companion in a hospital setting.

## A Companion in the Wilderness

What follows are four ways to help. You may only get to use the ideas in point #1 during a visit, but in another situation you may be able to engage more deeply. Being a shepherd in the wilderness will take on many forms—you will respond in the moment to the needs at hand.

**1. Invite emotional sharing.** An important way to join patients and their loved ones in the wilderness is to invite them to

cheerful mask because they fear that expressing their emotions would only amplify them or burden loved ones.

Complicating matters further, they may believe that a lack of faith is at the heart of their distress. For example, "I'm upset because I'm too focused on myself instead of God." A sense of spiritual failure adds shame to their distress. However, keeping their distress to themselves isolates them and keeps them from receiving the care and support that they might receive if they shared their struggles.

A few simple questions were often enough to prompt distressed patients to share more deeply. For instance, after introductions I would sometimes say, "I know that being in the hospital can be very stressful. How are you doing emotionally?"

As patients begin to share, use their own words to highlight and affirm them. These are examples of how you might express your genuine understanding and care about what they share:

"I can understand why you're scared."

"I can really see how much you miss your children."

"You sound frustrated with the doctors."

Simple and brief responses are often enough to show that you are listening, understand, and are signaling for them to continue sharing. Your authentic interest and concern are the critical ingredients at this point.

If there simply isn't time to do any more than this sharing, or if the patient is in such a state that it doesn't seem wise to say anything more, then your visit may end here or perhaps with a prayer if he or she desires it. Many helpers find ending the conversation without having had a more explicitly

spiritual conversation difficult. However, we must remember that pressured, forced, or shallow applications of gospel truth can do more harm than good, actually robbing the suffering person of comfort rather than providing it.

The simple practice of listening to and being present with patients has great value. It is sometimes referred to in chaplaincy as “pastoral presence.” A caring person’s presence has its own worth even if patients aren’t receptive to more overt spiritual dialogue. You might not be able to speak about God, but your presence still represents him. Through you, he shows his concern with what is happening in their lives.

Inviting emotional sharing and simply being present are foundational ways to minister. But you will often have more time with people and can engage more deeply.

## **2. Listen for their theology of suffering.**

Understanding how people interpret suffering is another key way to offer help. Here are some statements you might hear from a patient or a family member.

*“I don’t understand.”*

*“I’m angry. I don’t deserve this.”*

*“I deserve this.”*

*“I’m afraid.”*

When you hear statements like these, don’t assume you know the person well enough to fully understand him or her. For example, a cardiac patient says, “I deserve a heart attack because I’ve been a terrible husband.” If you superficially respond—“I’m sure you haven’t been as bad as you think”—you are communicating that you aren’t willing to hear about the affair that he had ten years ago. Your comment suggests that you don’t really understand him—and he’s right.

Try to avoid speaking too quickly and offering unhelpful feedback.

*Validate the experience and invite the person to explore.* “It sounds like you’ve been thinking a lot about your marriage. Would you like to talk more about that?”

*Help the person make room for mystery.* In most cases, we don’t know why we are suffering unless our actions led directly to our illness or injury. Gently suggest that the

person let go of the need to know and avoid jumping to conclusions. “Could it be that there are reasons for this that you may not ever fully understand?”

*Offer grace.* If someone’s suffering is a natural consequence of their own behavior (e.g., a drug overdose), they usually don’t need help understanding *why* they are suffering, instead they need to be pointed to God’s grace. “God is merciful and forgiving. If you ask, he will forgive you and cleanse you of guilt. Would you like me to pray with you?”

The suffering that comes from being hospitalized *will* reveal people’s theology of suffering. Most will experience some fear, and wonder about where God is in the matter. Simple questions and reflections based on their concerns may help them to see God more clearly in this struggle. They need to know that God is for them, that he is a loving father in the wilderness, not a vindictive Pharaoh. For example, we might ask the cardiac patient to consider God’s work, “So you’re saying that there is more than one way that your heart needs to be healed? Maybe God is offering to heal both.”

Once a patient has been helped to voice the experience of suffering, you may then have an opportunity to help locate God’s help in the midst of the person’s need.

**3. Locate the manna.** If given the opportunity, help the people you are speaking to locate manna—evidences of God’s presence and care. Ask how God has already been speaking and supporting them. Identify ways they have been finding motivation and strength. Think, pray, and look for simple ways to direct them to God’s love and grace.

**4. Address relational dynamics.** Hospitalization often amplifies family dynamics. This can be an opportunity for caregivers to provide wisdom and support at key moments. Here are ways you can do that.

*Facilitate fruitful interactions.* Look for opportunities to help patients and family speak the truth in love with each other and medical staff. With medical staff this may mean timing your visit to coincide with morning rounds so you can help family to

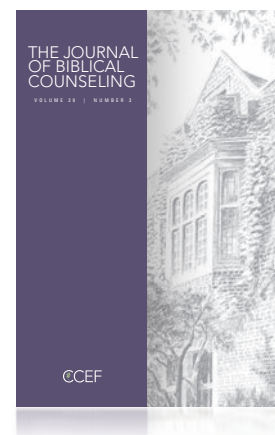
ask questions of doctors, express concerns, and help them to digest what they’re hearing. With family, it may mean encouraging them to be honest with each other about fears, resolve conflict, and alleviate guilt.

*Find out who has been left at home.* Patients worry about loved ones who are dealing with everyday life without them. Asking people about concerns they have for loved ones allows you to not only listen and care but also helps them identify resources. You may be able to help locate other family or friends that can step in and help while they are in the hospital. You may offer to contact their church or even a social worker at the hospital for help.

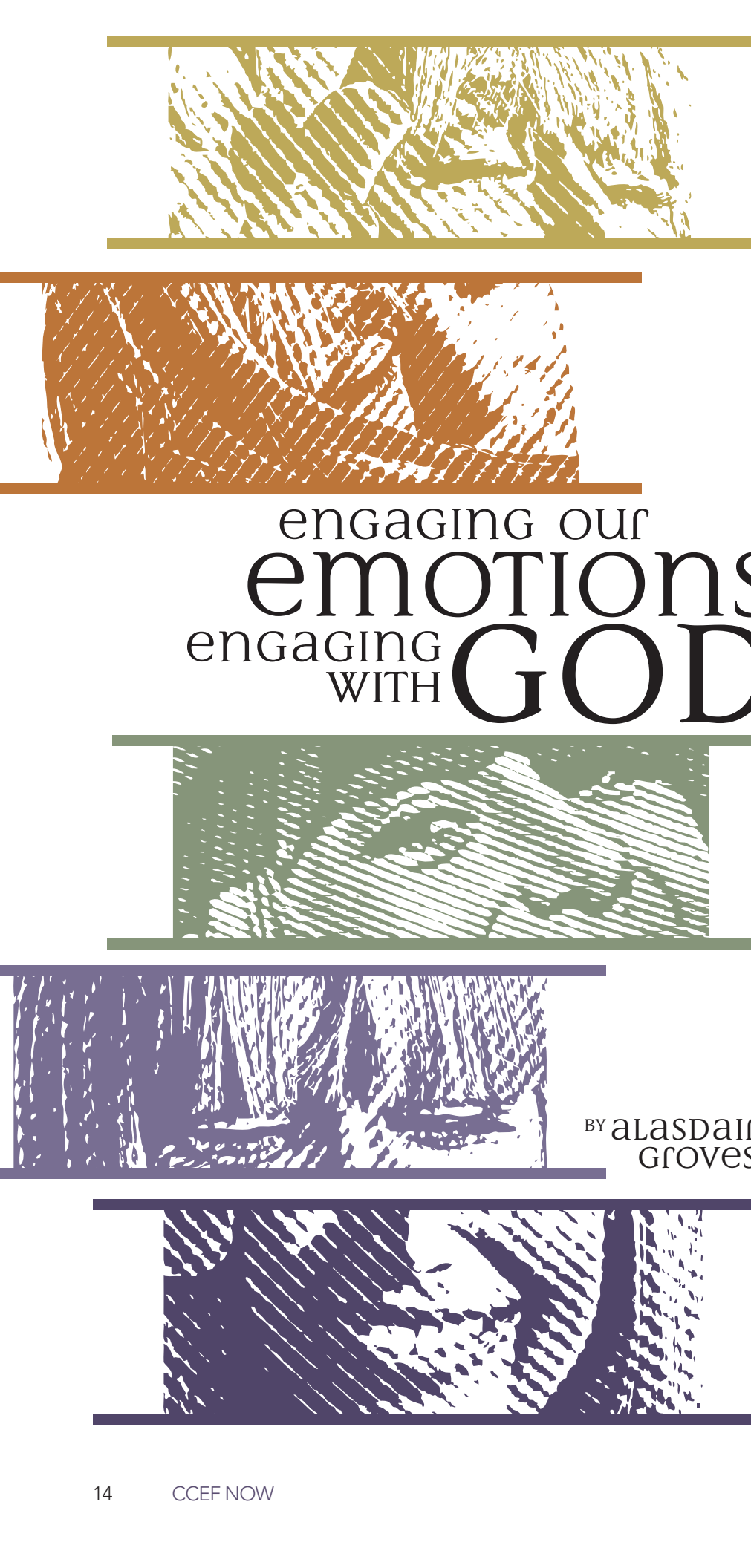
*Address loneliness.* Hospital rooms can be boring and lonely places. Is a patient hoping or expecting someone to come to visit who hasn’t? The person may be afraid to ask for a visit for fear of being a bother. As patients talk about who they wish to see, you can suggest that they contact them or offer to contact them yourself.

## **Offering Christ’s Presence**

There are many ways to be present and offer hope. Help patients to put their experience into words. Speak to their understanding of suffering. Point them to comfort and hope. Tend to their relationships. These four general themes are foundational. But above all, remember that your genuine interest and care proclaims the presence of Christ.



**Read the full-length  
article in JBC 29:3  
[ccef.org/jbc](http://ccef.org/jbc)**



# engaging our emotions engaging WITH GOD

BY **alasDAIR  
GROVES**

**E**motions are tricky. Everyone has them. Everyone struggles with them. Many struggle with how they *feel* more than anything else in their lives. Then there is the sea of other people's emotions in which all of us swim. I suspect most of us consider emotions to be more of a liability than an asset.

What does the Bible have to say about emotions? The Bible doesn't talk about emotions quite the way we do. We'd like Romans to lay out a theology of emotions, or Proverbs to include a section beginning "Here are six ways to manage your feelings, seven to feel as you should," but they're not there. However, Scripture frequently *does* exhort us to feel certain things and not to feel others. We are to consider our trials *joy* (James 1:2). We are to put off *rage* and *bitterness* (Eph 4:31). We are to have *compassion* for each other (1 Peter 3:8). We are to *love* God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength (Deut 6:5).

I've spent a great deal of time reflecting on God's call to us to have a whole array of emotional responses to his world, from awe-filled delight (e.g., Ps 8) to vehement hatred (e.g., Ps 139:21–23). How can we live up to this? Does God expect us to have perfect, instantaneous control over our emotions? No. God does not stand at a distance and command emotions we can never fully attain. Instead, he meets us with countless mercies, transforming our hearts and character, which always influences our emotions.

Throughout the Bible God continually encourages, comforts, convicts and reorients us. Instead of handing us a manual on emotional self-transformation, he patiently and tenderly invites us to simply come to him with all our feelings. This makes our emotions one of the premier opportunities to deepen our relationship with him!

## **Understand your emotions**

If you are surprised to hear that God actually wants you to draw near to him when you feel like you are an emotional mess, remember this: the Bible views emotions as fundamentally good. How do I know this? Because

we are image bearers of God and *he* has emotions. His joy, hate, wrath, compassion, jealousy and love are the model for ours.

We are more than computers cataloguing facts. He made us both to “taste and see that the Lord is good” and to “hate what is evil.” He commands us to “rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn” because he is a God who is moved by his children (eg., Hosea 11:8), a God who commands feasts and celebrations in Israel’s law (e.g., Lev 23), a God who weeps at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11).

God doesn’t call us to avoid or squash our emotions (as Christians often suppose). Neither does he call us to embrace them unconditionally (as our culture often urges). Rather, he calls us to engage them by bringing our emotions to him and to his people. I like the word *engage* because it doesn’t make a premature assumption about whether the emotion is right or wrong, or how it might need to change. Instead it highlights what the Bible highlights: our emotions (good and bad) are meant to reveal the countless ways we need God.

Our emotions invite us to see the world as God sees it—both broken and beautiful—rejoicing where he is redeeming it and

yearning for the full redemption that is yet to come. Only in the safety of his strength and patience can we face our visceral reactions, name them honestly, and talk about them with God and others.

### **Bring your emotions to God**

At this point, you might be wondering, “But what does it actually look like to bring our emotions to God?” Let me give you an example from a passage that has been especially powerful for me.

Look at Psalm 22:1. *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?* Here is a man in deep distress. He is in trouble and groaning. Worse, he is also alone and abandoned. Stop for a moment and consider the nature and intensity of the emotions he’d have to be experiencing to write something like that. Panicky fear. Deeply confusing disappointment. A shocking sense of betrayal. Tangible grief.

Now look at what this man does with these painful emotional experiences: he takes them *to* God. He is apparently free to engage God—with loud cries no less—even about being abandoned *by* God. He calls this God, from whom he feels so distant, “*My God*,” and speaks directly to him, not about him in

the abstract. “Why have *you* forsaken... Why are *you* so far?”

Of course we know from other passages that God will never leave or forsake his people—the psalmist’s feelings in this moment are not the whole story. The psalmist knows that too, because the psalm ends with an affirmation of God’s faithfulness. Yet this psalm and many like it come to us without a swarm of footnotes about how God hasn’t really abandoned us. And, importantly, this psalm doesn’t direct this person (or us) to ignore his feelings because they don’t reflect the truth about God. Instead, we are shown a path that forges endlessly toward God, even through the center of emotional storms.

### **God hears and cares**

Like the psalmist, you can come to God with a raw heart and lay your burdens before him (Matt 11:28–30). He will receive you in your pain and walk with you. When your emotions feel overwhelming, turn toward God and put those feelings into words. You *will* be heard by the God who hears. And when you don’t have words, read Psalm 22 and ask God for help. Know that when you do, you will find your father in heaven feels great joy for the opportunity to embrace a child he loves.

CCEF16

CHATTANOOGA, TN OCTOBER 14-16, 2016

# emotions

engaging the expressions of our hearts

with guest speaker  
**Joni Eareckson Tada**

Register online at [ccef.org/conference16](http://ccef.org/conference16)



# MEET THE COUNSELOR

Melissa  
Clemens

Biblical counseling is in more places than ever before. Schools are seeing the need for biblical counseling to have a voice and a place among children and teenagers. We sat down with Melissa Clemens, a counselor at CCEF and a school counselor, to discuss her ministry with teenagers.

**Tell us about your educational background and how you first encountered CCEF.**

I attended Presbyterian College, a liberal arts college in South Carolina. I was a psychology major with a counseling emphasis. During my senior year, I attended a weekend conference at a local church on marriage and relationships with Paul Tripp. He introduced me to CCEF, and it was such a wonderful introduction!

I discovered that biblical counseling is a convergence of all the things I am most passionate about—the gospel, counseling, and relationships! I picked up some CCEF books and booklets and realized: “This is life-giving truth! This is how I want to counsel!” I

was fairly certain that after college I wanted to get a masters in counseling, and I enrolled in Westminster Theological Seminary’s counseling program two years later.

In my final year of seminary, I did an internship with CCEF. Two years after that I began my work as a counselor at CCEF, and I have now been counseling for five years.

**Is there a certain counseling issue that you are especially practiced in?**

Much of my counseling has involved sitting with people who are grieving losses—loss of significant relationships, loss of hopes and dreams, loss of identity. This has been a common theme for many of the people I meet with. My approach has been to give space for the person to grieve this loss. I help them see that God gives us permission to feel angst and say to him, “How long? Will you forget me forever?” (Ps 13). I have found this to be a good starting place for broken-hearted individuals who feel stuck in their grief and disappointment.

**You also counsel in Philadelphia. Tell us about your work in the city.**

I am passionate about the city and biblical counseling, and I have been working to connect the two over the past few years. In addition to my counseling at CCEF, I counsel at The City School in West Philadelphia—a Christian academy.

There are around 100 students in the high school, and I see about ten per week. I primarily do one-on-one counseling with students. I try to meet with each student at least once in a school year, particularly with every senior and every freshman. With freshman, I like to introduce myself so they’ll know I’m here if they ever want to talk. It gives them a chance to see my office, which is a colorful space with beanbag chairs. With seniors, I focus on how their high school experience has been and discuss their questions, hopes, and fears about the future upon graduation.

Students are free to meet with me if they request to do so. Other times, a parent or teacher requests that the student come and

talk to me. Overall, I'm thankful that there is no stigma among students about going to talk to the counselor. Coming to see me is normal. The students even refer one another to come and meet with me!

At times I will mediate conflict between multiple students or meet with a group of students together. I have also led discussion groups related to counseling topics.

**Do you also counsel many teens at CCEF? In what ways is your work similar or different in these two different contexts?**

I do also see teens at CCEF. One thing that is similar in both places is a high level of parent involvement. This is a wonderful, unique characteristic of both places because many counselors don't interface with parents much at all. I try to involve parents whenever possible, at least by phone. And if schedules permit, I bring parents into sessions on occasion.

**How do you incorporate biblical counseling into the school context?**

It looks fairly similar to how we counsel at CCEF. Counseling sessions are usually during a class period, which is 45 minutes. I seek to meet the student where he or she is spiritually, taking time to get to know the student well. Most are excited to talk about their relationship with Jesus right away, even if this means that they are confused about where God is in the midst of their suffering. I use the Psalms regularly in all of my counseling. I find myself saying, "You sound a lot like King David there" in response to hearing students say that they feel forgotten by God. Students are usually pleasantly surprised and refreshed to hear that their confusion is not a roadblock to their relationship with God, but actually an entry gate to know his love for them more deeply.

**The City School is in an urban context and the majority of students are African-American. Have you encountered any counseling issues related to race, and how do you help in those instances?**

Sadly, our students do experience discrim-

ination based on race. I often hear students share stories about police or shopkeepers interacting with them out of fear or suspicion because they are black. When these situations occur, I provide space for the student to process how the experience felt. I validate feelings of anger. And I call racism out as the evil that it is. Sometimes students will try to minimize what happened to them, because it happens far too often. This is heartbreaking for me. So I try and help them see the wrong that was done to them, and the way that God sees it.

**What things about you personally help you connect with teens? What resources have you found helpful to make inroads into the lives of teens you see at CCEF and The City School?**

I enjoy many of the same things teens enjoy—art, music, and food to name a few! I am trying to incorporate these increasingly into my counseling. A counselee and I did an art project together last year. I put on some music in the background, and we each worked on our own painting. The music and repetitive motions of the painting created a peaceful, calm environment. This made it easier for her to talk about hard things, and it also introduced some new ways for her to express herself and communicate her experience of suffering.

I worked with another teen who was hesitant to talk and did not want to meet with a counselor... but he loved food! Once we started talking about all the food he loved and his adventures in cooking, we were then able to talk about important counseling issues.

If teens have written a rap or a poem, I will ask them to share it in a session, which is often a great entry gate into talking about other things that are going on in the teen's mind and heart. I also use an emotions chart that provides words to help teens grow in expressing themselves accurately.

**What drew you to invest in the city and an urban environment? What do you love**

**about Philadelphia?**

I love all the exciting opportunities that are in the city! People live here from all over the world. I love the rich diversity and being exposed to other cultures. It is truly a global experience living in Philadelphia.

This city has invested in me. I have learned so much from my students at The City School. God has become much bigger to me as I hear their stories and build relationships with them. God has done a great work in my own heart during my time in Philadelphia, and I can't help but want to be a good neighbor here and love people well.

I love that Philadelphia is a city of neighborhoods. It is a wonderful thing to put down roots in a neighborhood. I love walking around and bumping into friends and neighbors on my way to work, church, the corner store, the park, and library. Philadelphia is a walkable city, which creates so much more interaction and relational opportunity.

**What advice do you have for others interested in helping teens?**

First, I recommend you find ways to get involved in a local community organization, or in your church's youth group. It is easy for adults to forget what being a teenager is like. So find ways to make inroads and build relationships. Second, get equipped. CCEF has lots of free resources on its website for how to become a wise helper, whatever your context.

## School of Biblical Counseling

Learn how our school can help equip you for ministry.

[ccef.org/courses](http://ccef.org/courses)



1803 East Willow Grove Avenue  
Glenside, PA 19038  
[www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org)

NON PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE

**PAID**

PERMIT NO. 714  
GLENSIDE, PA



NOW AVAILABLE  
**2015 CONFERENCE AUDIO**

**\$89** MP3  
DOWNLOAD

**\$99** USB  
WAFER CARD

[ccef.org/resources/conference-audio](http://ccef.org/resources/conference-audio)