



# CCEF NOW

Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

2017

## HOW<sup>do</sup> we PRAY?

David Powlison

IDENTIFYING OPPRESSION  
IN MARRIAGES

Darby Strickland

WHEN A CHILD SAYS  
I DON'T KNOW

Julie Lowe

TREASURING OTHERS

Alasdair Groves

MEET THE COUNSELOR

Michael Gembola



# Welcome

## Need and Joy

Recently I've been reading Luke and watching how Jesus interacts. It strikes me that two questions are always in the air either explicitly or implicitly.

- *Do you get who I am?*
- *Are you listening to me?*

Jesus is calling us to radically rethink and redirect our lives. His call creates a reaction. In some people unbelief and hostility rise up. In other people faith awakens—they see who he is, they hear what he says.

Are you seeing and hearing? Your faith expresses an essential humility. It may be the humility of urgent personal need reaching out for help. It may be the humility of joyous gratitude for mercies shown. Whether you are struggling in darkness or beholding the light, faith awakens to Jesus.

Scripture connects to the struggles and troubles that press each of us to need God's mercies. Jesus is insightful. He is caring. He is helpful. And he intends that we become like him. As we make that connection—first for ourselves and then with others—counseling ministry finds its natural place as one of the core ministries of every church.

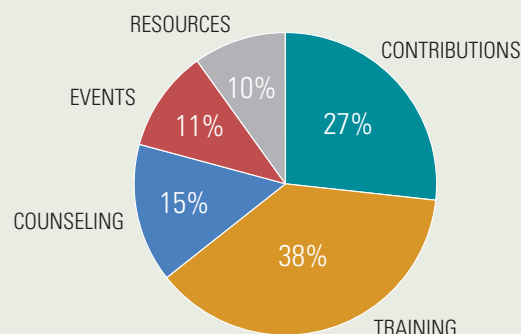
CCEF's mission is to nourish insightful faith, caring relationships, and helpful counseling. We accomplish our mission by equipping other people. God's Word to us is deep and wide. The riches are unfathomable, the applications innumerable—because what Christ says and does applies directly to every single human being. The articles in this issue of *CCEF Now* (and our magazine cover) seek to capture something of that depth and breadth—of faith expressed in both sorrow and joy.

God bless you,



Dr. David Powlison  
Executive Director

## HOW MINISTRY HAPPENS



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# CCEF NOW

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is the Executive Director at CCEF and has served at the ministry for 35 years. He is the senior editor of the Journal of Biblical Counseling and has written extensively on pastoral care and counseling. In his article, *Why Do We Pray?*, he writes, “How do you pray? You want to have a straightforward conversation, at the intersection of where you really are and who God really is. And when this conversation happens, redemption explodes onto the plane of our earthly existence.”



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is a counselor at CCEF where she also teaches the course, *Counseling Abusive Marriages*. She has a B.S. in Psychology from the University of Chicago and a Master of Divinity degree, Counseling Emphasis, from Westminster Theological Seminary. Darby has been counseling at CCEF for over 12 years. In her article *Identifying Oppression in Marriage* she defines oppression, identifies oppressive behavior, and recommends initial responses for those who help. “I define oppression in marriage as patterns of coercive, controlling and punishing behaviors whereby one spouse seeks to control and dominate the other.”



### Alasdair Groves, MDiv

is the Director of Counseling at CCEF New England and is a CCEF faculty member. He has a passion to foster genuine relationships in the local church, especially through counseling and counseling training. In his article, *Treasuring Others*, he writes, “There is enormous power in the realization that every person who becomes more like Christ, in even the slightest way because of you, will be part of your treasure in heaven.”



### Julie Lowe, MA, LPC, RPT

is a faculty member and counselor at CCEF who specializes in counseling children. In her article, *When a Child Says “I Don’t Know,”* she identifies conversation barriers and suggests how to overcome those barriers in order to build bridges with kids. “As adults, parents, teachers, leaders and counselors, we can become much more winsome and patient when asking kids questions, especially in response to ‘I don’t know.’ Do the hard work of drawing kids out. And when they open up, do the hard work of listening.”



### Michael Gembola, MAR, MAC

is a counselor and lecturer at CCEF. He serves as Director of Congregational Care and Discipleship at City Line Church and is under care of the Philadelphia Presbytery (PCA). When asked about how counseling influences his ministry at church he said, “I view my calling in the church as care-taking. So whether I am preaching, teaching, meeting with someone, setting up small groups, or planning an event, my desire is to care for people. I’m sure my counseling training influences every area of ministry.”



ccef.org 

A hand holding a smartphone displaying a compass app against a sunset background. The compass shows cardinal directions (N, S, E, W) and degrees. The background is a blurred sunset over water.

# why do we pray?

DAVID POWLISON

How should we pray? And what role does prayer have in counseling and pastoral care? Let me start with an important question.

## WHY DO YOU PRAY?

I suspect that you and I are probably alike. And that your answer is the same as mine. “I need to.” This question is like asking, why do you breathe? You could say, “I breathe because I’m supposed to. I breathe because it makes me feel better. I breathe because life goes poorly if I don’t. I breathe, but it’s just a habit that I happen to have.” But you realize that when it comes to breathing, the deepest and simplest answer is that we need to breathe. Why do we pray? When we are honest, we say the reason we pray is that we need to pray. It is the door of life. And if we don’t, we perish. If we don’t, we are insane.

Now back to our original question, how should we pray? In order to explore how prayer goes right, it helps to identify ways that prayer goes wrong. Here are a few ways prayer drifts.

- Prayers can be vague and confusing.
- Prayers can function as a wish list.
- Prayers can be superstitious, a way to ensure bad things don’t happen and good things do happen.
- Prayers can just be a religious or pious practice, a habit that separates the religious from the irreligious.
- Prayer can be a mantra that seeks to evoke good feelings, treating prayer as a psychological experience.
- Prayer can be a reflex—something we simply do before we “get down to business” or after something is completed.
- Prayer can be something we simply tack onto life.
- Prayer can be boiler plate—a simple repetition of stock religious phrases.

But prayer goes right when it is honest conversation with the Lord we need, trust, and love. Prayer is a spiritually needy person’s communication with the God who hears.

## WHAT DOES PRAYER COMMUNICATE?

What does prayer communicate about our beliefs? Let me answer that question

by beginning with an observation about our culture. Think about this fact: the vast majority of counselors do not pray. The designated counselors in our culture, as a matter of their deepest commitments, do not pray with and for the men, women and children that they seek to help. Those who do not pray believe that no outside help is needed *or* wanted *or* available.

A powerful faith commitment drives why a counselor would *not* pray. The faith commitment is, “I believe that my insight, my care and concern for a person, my action plan, my expertise, and my experience is enough. I believe that men and women and children do not need the forgiveness of sins. They do not need a hope for eternal life. I believe they do not need refuge in the midst of the many afflictions that beset every single person. They do not need a shepherd who will care for them, guide them, and lay down his life for them.”

When we do not need strength from outside ourselves to be given to us, we aren’t able to live life humbly. We can’t extend



mercy if we haven't received it. So there is no joy and no thankfulness, because if you don't ask for anything, you aren't thankful for anything.

Whether or not you pray reveals what you believe about everything that really matters. And as you enter into a world of pastoral care and counseling—a world where you seek to help others—you should never underestimate the difficulty and complexity of life.

Our culture promotes a failsafe way to help people with their problems. It is our culture's ideal that we can have a definitive understanding and explanation for every problem. And as Christians, it is often our heart's desire to also provide a comprehensive, definitive understanding of people and their problems. But our understanding is always limited. A human being is an infinitely intricate dance and interplay of factors beyond our imagination. We cannot fully understand a person.

Our ability and power to help is always limited, and prayer recognizes the reality of our limited ability to help, and lives within it. When you pray, you live with a fundamental humility before God and others. This humility fits reality—everyday needs can only be met by God himself.

## WHAT DO WE NEED THAT ONLY GOD CAN PROVIDE?

What do we need to pray for? In prayer we connect human need with the promises of God. This is why we pray. All true prayer comes forth when our need and God's promises meet. Here are some of our needs:

- We need everyday wisdom and understanding, and that's not just information.
- We need power to live within the sufferings and afflictions of human life.
- We need courage, humility, hope, faith and love.
- We need protection to find genuine refuge amid the hardships and heartaches and afflictions of life.
- We need forgiveness every single day.
- We need presence. We need the presence of God himself in our lives. We were made to know Him.

- We need provision, both tangible and spiritual provision.
- We need hope. We need to know that the King will come.
- We need indestructible friendship.

These needs correlate to the attributes of God—his character and his nature. Deuteronomy 31:8 says, "It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." Your need for courage, for God's presence, and for hope are answered by who God is, "I am with you."

## SO, THEN, HOW DO WE PRAY?

The answer to *how* we pray flows right out of *why* we pray. We pray because we need to. Here are three practical tips that will help guide your prayers.

Tip 1: Understand that faith has two moods. One side of faith is need. The other side of faith is gratitude. The Old Testament sacrificial system included sin offerings, guilt offerings, and burnt offerings because of need. And it included peace offerings and fellowship offerings because of gratitude. This is how life works. It is the core structure to human experience.

Let's refer to this core structure as *minor key* and *major key*. The minor key psalms in Scripture are filled with sorrow, need, heartache, guilt, and suffering. The major key psalms have joy and gratitude—we are strong, bold, confident, and radiant. In the book of Psalms, most of the first 90 psalms are *minor key*. In the last 60 psalms, we start to move toward predominantly *major key*. Life mirrors this pattern—we move through sorrow to joy. It is only at the end that all is made right. Likewise in the psalms, it's only in Psalm 150 that all is made well.

When a person's need meets God's promises, you get both kinds of psalms. Psalm 31 is a classic minor key psalm. Psalm 23 and Psalm 121 are classic major key psalms. Some of the most interesting psalms are both—e.g. Psalms 25 and 40. You have reason for both joy and heartache in life. So be honest about both in your prayers.

Tip 2: Be specific. The Bible's narrative stories come to life because of the details

that are present. The details make the stories rich and human—a perfect theater for the revelation of God in whose image we are made. By contrast, the Psalms take the opposite strategy. The Psalms, by and large, strip away the details. The Psalms can be used to reflect on who God is, but it is also helpful to turn a psalm into prayer.

For the most part, within the Psalms, you are given patterns of experience that you can fill with your specific details of life. The Psalms are general and open, so that your life experience can be placed in them. Your purpose is to populate the Psalms with your life experience. Over the centuries, our spiritual forebears have done this with the Psalms, and the Psalms are meant to be alive for us.

Tip 3: Talk straight to God. Sometimes this means you will need to wrestle with your interpretation of a passage until it makes sense in straight-talking English. As you wrestle the psalm down into straight talk between you and God, the psalm comes alive for you. This is the word of God, and yet you are wrestling it into a form that you are able to live in, so that it comes to life for you and speaks to your need. Your goal is to know what Scripture is actually saying in a way you can live it in your own life.

Here is an example. Psalm 28:1 says, "To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me, lest, if you be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit." Be not deaf to me is not straight-talking English. This verse rephrased into straight-talk says, "I am crying out to you, Lord. Don't turn a deaf ear to me. If you don't answer me, I will die."

## CONCLUSION

Why do you pray? You want the answer to the "why I pray" to be increasingly "I need to pray because I am living in reality." How do you pray? You want to have a straightforward conversation, at the intersection of where you really are and who God really is. And when this conversation happens, redemption explodes onto the plane of our earthly existence.



Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

# Any Given Day



Your gifts. Our people. God's work. \$2,400 a day. 365 days a year.

## HOW DOES IT WORK?



It is our responsibility and joy to share how God is working in and through CCEF. As a partner you help hold us accountable to our mission.



# How Can You Help?

## PRAYER

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

## GIFTS

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

- Cash gifts (check, EFT, credit card)
- Stock gifts
- Church support

## SERVICE

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

- Participate in our ministry
- Stay informed
- Introduce others to CCEF
- Give us feedback
- Volunteer at the national conference




## PLANNED GIVING

Advance CCEF's mission tomorrow by planning today.

- Did you know if you are 70 1/2 or older a gift to CCEF from your IRA satisfies your required minimum distribution?
- To learn more about planned giving (bequests, charitable trusts, and life insurance) contact us today at [support@ccef.org](mailto:support@ccef.org).





Back in 2010 a stack of unanswered letters from prisoners was sitting in the CCEF customer service office. The staff at the time knew we needed a caring volunteer to help us correspond with prisoners. Cory Lisk immediately came to mind. Six years later Cory continues this ministry with CCEF staff member, Sarah Gammage.

# PRISON OUTREACH

**Cory, when you received those first letters, what was your first impression?**

**Cory:** I was so moved by what I found in those first letters. I don't think I had read more than three letters before I was crying. They were from men who had earned advanced seminary degrees from behind bars, and they were reaching out to CCEF to ask for resources to serve their prison mates.

**You've been doing this for six years. How often do we get letters?**

**Cory:** It's well over a hundred since the time I started. That is about 25 letters every year. We have received letters from 80 different county jails, state correctional centers, and federal prisons in 34 states.

**How do prisoners find out about us?**

**Cory:** Usually through our written materials. They've read something by a CCEF author and reach out to see what other resources we have.

**What is the process when we receive a letter?**

**Sarah:** When we get a letter, I'll open it and read through it to see what the request is. I pray for the prisoner and consider if there are specific resources we can send. I will respond with a note of encouragement and those resources. Normally that means I send one of our books or mini-books. But if they are asking general questions or need encouragement, I will send the letter to Cory so she can respond with an article or two from the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (JBC).

**Cory:** The first thing I do when I get the letters is pray over them. I choose and print at least two JBC articles, or if I have a whole JBC I'll send that. Sometimes I send a book, and twice I have sent a Bible.

Sometimes I receive letters back after I've sent an article and the person tells me that he or she passed around the article to others. So although my correspondence might be with one prisoner, I know the resources we

send are being shared with multiple people. I know they are a huge encouragement to the inmates.

**Sarah:** One prisoner wrote to us and said that even as he opened his package, another inmate saw "Anger: Escaping the Maze" by David Powlison and asked for it. So without getting a chance to read it, he passed it along. There is a hunger for our resources.

**What are typical requests that people have?**

**Cory:** Requests for prayer, resources and mentors (for someone willing to mentor them while they're imprisoned).

**Sarah:** I also see letters from people who are looking for a better understanding of biblical counseling and what CCEF is all about. So I'll send them an informational packet. I've also sent *Journal of Biblical Counseling* articles such as *Cure of Souls* (and the *Modern Psychotherapies*) or articles on anger, suffering, and depression. It's really cool to see prisoners who are further-





ing their understanding and education with the goal of serving other prisoners.

**What do you think draws prisoners to CCEF's ministry?**

**Sarah:** CCEF is so realistic with the sufferings of life. There is no escapism mentality or self-help (e.g., do these 5 simple steps and your life will change). CCEF always goes back to the Word of God and applies the truth to suffering. That's water to a weary soul...to any of us, but especially behind bars, where they are in a humble place with ears to hear.

**Cory:** And the examination of the heart that helps people get a feel for what the Christian faith looks like when the rubber meets the road.

**What particular resources have prisoners mentioned that have been helpful to them?**

**Cory:** A lot of people first hear about us from Jay Adams's *Competent to Counsel*. One letter was from a woman who had read

Ed Welch's book, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*. She was so excited in her letter about how that book had met her. That was wonderful.

Another time I was in touch with a chaplain in Indiana. He said women in the female prisons used CCEF curriculum as part of the prison courses. They would order a set amount of materials, bind them and then reuse them for subsequent classes. They were finding ways that they can reuse the materials.

**Can you share a touching interaction that stood out to you?**

**Cory:** There was a letter from a man who is serving the rest of his life behind bars. He has an advanced theological degree and the prison has become his mission field. He was asking for additional resources and included a slip of paper that invited me to read his testimony online. As I read his testimony, I admit I was shocked. What he had done was heinous. And in the next moment the Lord impressed on my heart this message: *My love reaches that deep.*

I will never forget that day. I began to weep for this man and for the love of our Father in heaven.

**That is an incredible testimony of God's power to save and restore people. If you could have your way, how would you like to see this ministry develop?**

**Cory:** God is clearly at work in the prison system, so I see a lot of potential there. It would be wonderful to see what we can do to get more materials into the hands of inmates. I would love to see a library of CCEF books in every prison in America.

I have also discovered there are a lot of seminaries operating in the prisons, and so it would be neat to partner together so that the seminaries can use CCEF materials for their classes.

**What are some ways that people can support what we're doing right now?**

**Sarah:** People can pray for wisdom for Cory and me in what materials to send. We want

to send resources that are relevant to what we know about the person from the letter, and that are helpful and encouraging.

We can't send digital resources; they have to be in print. Right now we purchase our author's books and then send them to prisoners. So there is a real cost for this ministry that doesn't even include the hours I work. So people can also support us by donating. If you want to give, you can help build up our library of resources.

**How have you been impacted by serving in this ministry?**

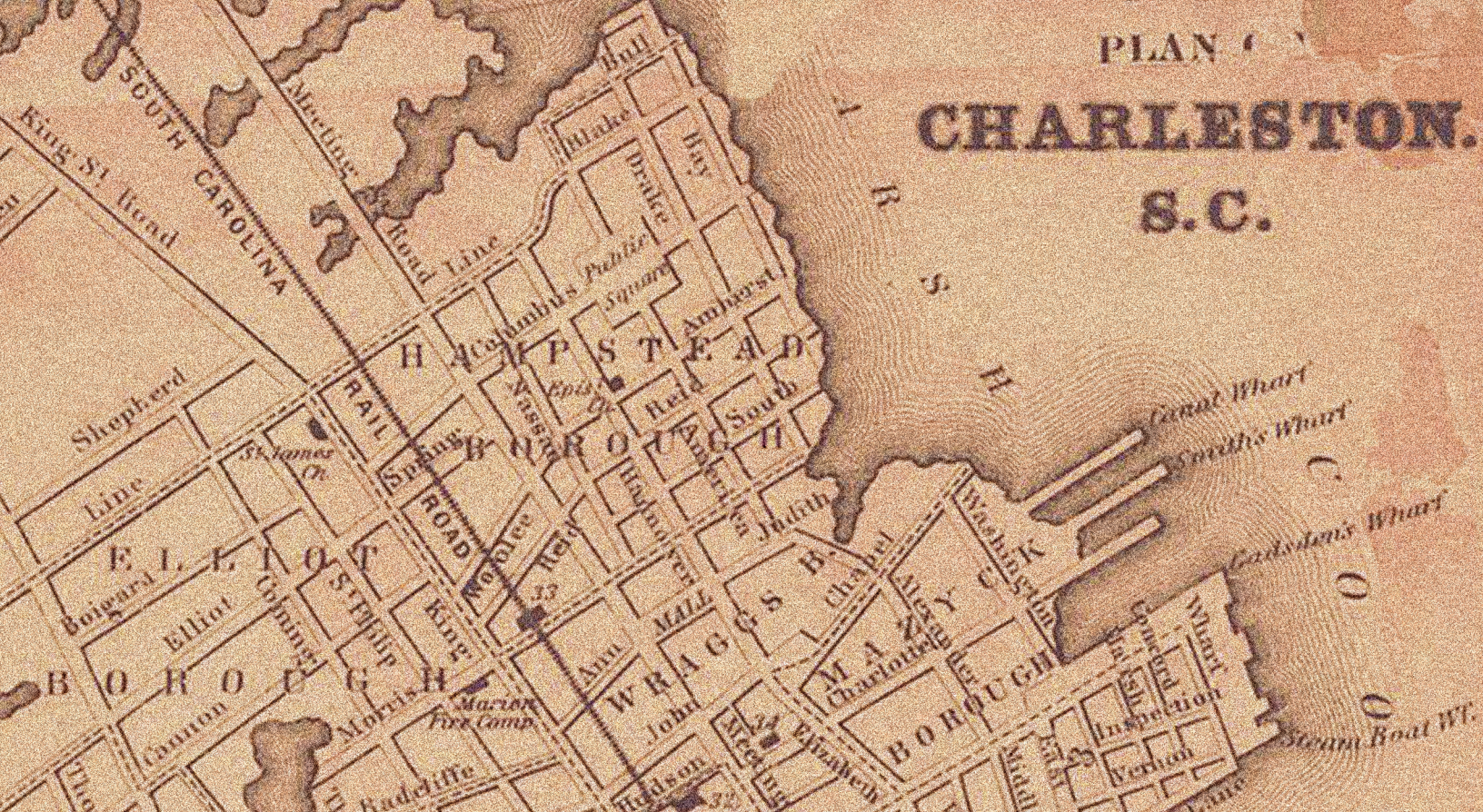
**Sarah:** It has really impacted me to see God at work in the prisons. His Spirit is not hindered by prison bars. He is alive! To see these inmates using this time wisely so they can live wisely going forward is remarkable. For many of them, God has gotten ahold of them in prison and given them eyes to see him. He's bringing life to places that had seemed dead. It's really beautiful. I think that's why it's a joy for me to serve in our prison outreach. I get to read these stories and be a part of a tiny piece of the kingdom in an unlikely place.

**Cory:** Yes, I get a front row seat! It's so humbling to be able to give something tangible to these prisoners. It's just a sweet ministry to be a part of. My faith has grown through reading and answering these letters. I'm more confident of the fact that God never stops pursuing us with his grace, even when we're in the deepest pit of our sins and shame.

On any given day, Sarah and Cory are serving prisoners with words of hope and resources for changing lives. Your gift to CCEF serves prisoners around the country. Please pray for Christ's light to shine brightly behind prison walls.

To financially support CCEF's prison outreach (including the purchase and distribution of resources) please give at [ccef.org/donate](http://ccef.org/donate).





# PENINSULA BIBLICAL COUNSELING CENTER

*In 2016 David Powlison traveled to Charleston, South Carolina to minister alongside the Rev. Dr. Dallas H. Wilson, Jr. and his wife Janie Wilson. The time they spent together deepened their friendship, which is built on a shared love for Jesus Christ and a desire to see counseling restored to its rightful place as one of the core ministries of the church. Editors Bruce and Rebecca Eaton recently interviewed Brother Dallas and Sister Janie to learn more about their heart for ministry and Peninsula Biblical Counseling Center.*

*PBCC describes counseling as discipleship—the personal ministry of the word through conversation. As they minister to those who are hurting, they are also equipping Christians in their local community to be wise helpers.*

## **Janie and Dallas Wilson**

Dallas and Janie Wilson have both been in ministry for over 30 years. Janie, a biblical counselor, and Brother Dallas, a pastor, were first connected to CCEF's ministry through the writings of David Powlison and Ed Welch. They describe the writing as having simplicity but also depth. They were interested in learning more about these men and CCEF, so in 2015 they attended our national conference in Virginia Beach. That is when we first met these two faithful believers.

Brother Dallas came to Charleston, SC in 1982 with a vision to establish a church and ministry. Dallas' dream was to replicate the church at Colossae, and to follow the Apostle Paul in being all things to all people that they might win some to Christ. Through that process Agape Ministries was founded. The ministry initially started as a Bible study that sent 75 people to minister in MacDougall Correctional Institution on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings.

The purpose and basis of Agape Ministries is to be an advocate for the cross, and to be an advocate for the whole message of what it means that Christ has been crucified. Agape was started to be a voice and a light in the 1.7 square-mile Eastside community of Charleston, SC, in what can be a very dark place to live. But it's also a worthwhile place, a place where the kingdom of God has been expanded, even though in earthly terms it would be an almost impossible task. Agape Ministries has grown to over eight entities that provide social, educational, legal, financial, and occupational services in the Eastside Community of Charleston. Brother Dallas currently serves as the vicar of St. John's Chapel in the same Eastside community of Charleston. He also continues as the President of Agape Ministries.

Janie Wilson earned a master's degree in biblical counseling with an emphasis on women's ministry in July, 2013. She is now finalizing her dissertation for a doctor-



ate through Trinity College of the Bible & Theological Seminary, Newburgh, IN. Her approach to women's ministry and counseling is continuing to develop through the establishment of PBCC in Charleston, SC, a ministry that began in early 2016. Her desire is to biblically educate and minister to women with the goal of older women discipling younger women (Titus 2).

### Why Biblical Counseling?

Dallas and Janie's main calling in life is to know Christ and to make him known. Brother Dallas said, "For me to know Christ and for me to make him known as the sole source of our eternal salvation, the sole source of our joy, the sole source of meeting needs. These are ministry goals that I believe biblical counseling will 'wreak havoc on' in a positive sense, because we are moving people toward the truths that will always stand."

The Wilsons believe biblical counseling isn't about one person telling another person something helpful. It's about the riches of God's Word connecting to every part of our life and the hardest parts of life. Janie described it best when she said, "I believe in biblical counseling because it believes in the inerrancy of God's Word, that God's power is well enough able to make all the changes in our hearts and our lives that pleases him. And he has come, through his Son, hallelujah. This makes all things well."

The Wilsons believe that the gospel is for the whole world, but at the same time, the gospel should be taken very personally. Janie said, "Scripture is not far off from a believer. It should be something that you live and breathe and have your being in every day. This reality has been a part of my own faith journey and it is bringing me forward in the idea that biblical counseling is truly the key to all ministry—within the church and outside the church. Because inside the church, as my experience has been, I've not always gotten the reality of the intimacy of God's Word for me."

Brother Dallas added, "In our ministry we believe, really and honestly, in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:46-49). We believe in interpersonal

evangelism, and we believe in those things that bring us, on an *individual level* close to people. The Bible speaks to us about making disciples. That is a relational work. In ministry, we spend a lot of time one-on-one with people, building servant leadership and character, and getting people to look beyond their abilities and look to the abilities of Christ."

### Focus on Women's Ministry

The purpose of the PBCC is to equip the women of Charleston, spouses of pastors, spouses of first responders, and women who are in leadership positions within their local church. Through counseling and training PBCC helps women to fulfill their scriptural mandate to teach, mentor and counsel other women and bring glory to God. The minis-

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SCRIPTURE IS NOT FAR OFF  
FROM A BELIEVER. IT SHOULD  
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IN YOUR BEING EVERYDAY.

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try focuses on Gospel-centered counseling where one Christian woman comes alongside another woman with words of truth from God's Word to encourage, admonish, comfort, and challenge her.

Janie believes that when women truly grasp a biblical understanding of their worth—seeing how wonderful God is, how he cares tenderly, and how through his Son he redeemed—it can change the whole course of a woman's life, and especially her household. As she dreamed about the impact that this ministry could have she said, "What if all the women, or most of the women in church, decided to use biblical counseling as a tool to begin to share the gospel with other women, to form relationships with other women, and to win other women to the idea of being discipled into the body of Christ? I think that would—that would show a great amount of glory to God."

Janie sees that women need to be strengthened within the church and outside the church in her community. She wants women to be won for the glory of God and won to the gospel through biblical counseling. There is a great need for counseling. Janie said, "The women in my community are so full of hurt. When you are born into very difficult patterns of living, then it's very hard to break them. But biblical counseling has an answer, it does. The answer is through real and tangible relationships, and it takes energy and it takes intention to say — 'You may not be my friend now, but I'm going to be your friend starting today. We are going to become very good friends. You know why? Because I believe I have an answer in God's Word for you that is going to set the captive free, so to speak, and that is going to help you understand your value and your worth as God sees you in Psalms 139. God formed you and knows you.'"

### Prayer Needs

Throughout the past year the Wilsons have found that biblical counseling is literally transforming women's hearts. Their hopes are resting in the only hope that is given to us in Christ Jesus. To God be the glory.

When asked how we can pray, Brother Dallas asked for prayer for his wife. "I really want prayers for my wife and her ministry to the women of this community. We live in a matriarchal community. If Janie's message could resonate in the hearts of the women of this community, those women could be the biblical women God has called them to be. And it would have a tremendous impact. We are at a wonderful place to see some of the hearts in this community changed. So, that's where my prayers would be today, that you would pray that the Lord would take the PBCC and make it an absolute weapon against sin in this community."

Join us in praying for the Wilsons—for their love for Jesus, their sacrificial dedication to serving his church, and for their newest ministry endeavor in the East Side Neighborhood of Charleston, SC. May Christ be glorified in and through them.



# IDENTIFYING OPPRESSION IN MARRIAGES

The prevalence of abuse<sup>1</sup> in Christian marriages is vastly underestimated. As a result, counselors, pastors and other helpers can at times fail to identify abusive behaviors in a marriage. One reason for this is that we do not ask questions about things we do not think are happening. But abuse is happening—and it's probably happening to someone you know.

Justin and Lindsey Holcomb highlight the pervasiveness of abuse with this illustration in their book, *Is It My Fault?*

In a church of 400 people (with 160 adult women and 20 teenage girls) 20 women would be currently experiencing physical abuse. And if you factor in emotional or verbal abuse, 80 women would be currently suffering. 60 men would have assaulted their partner at one time or another.<sup>2</sup>

These statistics should change our thinking about the prevalence of abuse in our communities, and they highlight that helpers need to be able to look beyond appearances and know how to identify abusive situations. *Abuse* can be a tricky and loaded word in our culture because it can describe so many different acts. The same is true for the term *domestic violence*. The justice system and mental health fields define these terms to include a spectrum of violating acts, including—but not limited to—physical violence.

In my counseling and teaching, I prefer to use the term *oppression* to identify these violating acts. This is a biblical category that describes the manipulative domination of one person by another. It captures the idea that someone is subject to another's harsh control. God first speaks about oppression when Pharaoh enslaves the Israelites (Exodus 3:9). Pharaoh is ruthless and cruel in domination, but God hears and sees when his people are wronged. Throughout the Bible, we repeatedly learn of God's great concern for those who are mistreated. He seeks deliverance for the oppressed. He is a stronghold for the powerless (Psalm 9:9).

Using a term that is found throughout Scripture helps us to be rooted in what God says about oppression and guides us into God's heart for the oppressed. It provides us with understanding, and with a goal for ministry. It captures the idea that someone is subject to another's harsh control; and it also captures the various meanings that can be applied to the terms *abuse* and *domestic violence*.

Specifically, I define oppression in marriage as patterns of coercive, controlling and punishing behaviors whereby one spouse seeks to control and dominate the other. The tactics used by the oppressive spouse can vary. They can be behaviors that prevent personal freedoms, induce fear, exploit, terrorize, humiliate, withhold resources, isolate, threaten, demand obedience or physically harm. Living in these circumstances harms the oppressed person's emotional, spiritual, physical, sexual, relational, or economic well-being.



DARBY  
STRICKLAND



## Evaluating and Identifying Oppression

Now that I have defined oppression, let's look at how we can identify oppressive behaviors in the lives of people we are helping. When abuse is not overt or self-identified by a spouse, it can be easy to miss. I will offer three evaluative tools to help you.

First, these questions are designed to look for *patterns* of punishment and *imbalances* of power in a marriage. They are questions you can ask when you are speaking with a spouse you suspect is being victimized.

- Do you have the freedom to give your input in decisions at home?
- What happens when you say “no” to your spouse’s requests?
- Do you ever feel fearful around your partner?
- Have you ever been threatened or physically hurt in this relationship?
- Have you ever participated in a sexual act against your will?
- Does your spouse blame you for things that go wrong? How?
- Does your spouse monitor your interactions with friends and family?
- Do you have a say in how your economic resources are used?

When you ask these questions, also ask for detailed examples. And try to have this conversation when the spouse in question is not present. It is not likely that a spouse can be honest about the situation if the abuser is present.

A second way to detect oppression is to gather precise information about how the couple argues. Oppressors do not engage in arguments to find unity and resolution. They view arguments as war. To assist in my detection of potential oppression, I have couples fill out an argument inventory in one of their early sessions. Using a checklist, spouses identify tactics that each spouse uses in an argument. The list is comprised of controlling behaviors—e.g., sarcasm, distorting what is said or done, sulking, refusing to respond or listen, towering over, physical intimidation, laughing, turning your complaint against you, acting like a victim, harsh criticism, name-calling, and blocking a doorway.<sup>3</sup>

Knowing how a couple discusses and resolves conflicts enables me to ask additional questions that help me get a sense of the atmosphere in the midst of their fights. We need to know what an argument *looks* and *sounds* like. For instance: “When he was yelling at you, where was he standing?” This gives a spouse the opportunity to report things like being cornered. Follow-up questions are critical—e.g., “When he withdraws, how long does it last?” “What names does she call you?”

A third way to evaluate if a spouse is being oppressed is through non-verbal cues that the couple exhibits when they meet with you. Oppressors tend to control conversations, interrupt others, and fail

to show empathy or connectedness to their spouse. In contrast, oppressed spouses often say very little and seem, in both posture and speech, to be deferring to their spouse. But this isn’t always true, so don’t let this one behavior cause you to rule out the possibility of oppression in a marriage. Watch for non-verbal cues that demonstrate discomfort and guardedness.

When the non-verbal cues in the room point to a disparity in relational power, I ask to meet with the oppressed spouse alone for the next session.

## Characteristics of Oppressors

In addition to these evaluative tools, it is also important to be familiar with what oppressors are typically like. Here are seven common characteristics of oppressors. The first four focus on how oppressors relate to others.

***Oppressive people feel entitled.*** Oppressors believe their spouses exist to keep them happy. They have an inflated sense of self and feel that they are owed preferential treatment. For example, a husband believed that it was his right to come home to a perfectly kept house. When the house’s appearance did not meet his standards, his wife paid a price.<sup>4</sup>

***Oppressive people dominate others.*** Through manipulation and unrelenting pressure, oppressive people demand their spouses meet their needs by requiring them to live by a set of specific rules. They seek to exercise control over their spouse’s choices (e.g., money, menu, cleaning, clothing, friendships).

***Oppressive people use threats.*** Oppressors maintain control by creating a climate of fear. They use threats to manipulate spouses by reminding them of the retribution they face if they fail to comply. Threats can be overt, like these:

“Do not interrupt me when I am watching a movie or I will make your life hell.”

“If you don’t have sex with me, I will tell the elders at church that you are not being a good Christian wife.”

Threats can also be covert. One husband did not like his wife to spend time with friends, so he would scrutinize the cleanliness of the house on the days she saw her friends. He would walk around the house shaking his head in disapproval. Without saying a word he communicated something very powerfully. Eventually, she stopped going out because she could not bear his attitude when she did.

***Oppressive people punish others to maintain control.*** These punishments are not always physical. Constant blaming, humiliating, ignoring, isolating, deceiving, and monitoring are just a few. Look for punishments across all relational dimensions—physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual.

To sum up, when relating to others, oppressors are entitled, dominating, threatening and punishing. To complete the picture of oppressors, I’ll now explain how they view themselves. They have little self-awareness and are profoundly self-deceived about their own behavior and intentions. This self-deception has three aspects.



# WE HAVE THE SCRIPTURES THAT SHOW US WHAT LOVE LOOKS LIKE IN THE FLESH—JESUS CHRIST

***Oppressors are blind to the destructive nature of their behavior.*** Due to their sense of entitlement, oppressors are unable to find anything wrong in their dominating and sinful behavior. They are unaware of their own contributions to a conflict or outcome.

***Oppressors feel justified in how they treat others.*** Since they are blind to the destructive nature of their behavior, they do not have sorrow for how they hurt their partners. They lack remorse and feel others deserve what they get.

***Oppressors view themselves as blameless.*** They place blame on anything or anyone other than themselves—usually on a spouse. Since they do not see their fault in the relationship, they feel justified in their behavior. They will therefore not take any responsibility for it, or the harm it causes.

It is not hard to see how damaging these seven traits would be in a marriage. One partner lives and works hard to meet the other's demands under the fear of punishment. Over time, fear of the oppressive spouse replaces fear of the Lord. Working hard to keep another person from being angry and punishing is a frightening and impossible way to live. Couples like these need help. Let's consider how to help after oppression has been identified.

## Initial Responses after Oppression is Identified

Here is an outline of first steps to take.

***Make safety the priority for the oppressed spouse.*** Evaluate the level of danger. There are several tools for this. I use the One Love App.

Keep in mind it is not always wise and safe to confront an abuser. Confrontations often lead to more volatile, if not dangerous, situations for the oppressed spouse. Sometimes the wisest course of action is for the victim to flee danger. Carefully plan for this by creating a safety plan.<sup>5</sup> Know that when women leave abusive spouses, it is the time when they are most in danger. Women are 70 times more likely to be killed in the two weeks after leaving than at any other time during the relationship.<sup>6</sup>

If you are out of your depth, make use of local community resources: police, domestic violence shelters, counselors who are experienced with abuse, or the National Hotline that can refer you to local resources—call 1-800-799-SAFE. Victims of domestic violence should not suffer further from our inexperience.

***Stop joint counseling sessions.*** Even when there is no physical danger, safety needs to be the priority. Anything that signals to the oppressor that this is a shared problem will likely fuel more abuse, so joint counseling must stop.

***Recommend individual counseling for the oppressor.*** Counseling for the oppressor should focus on the seven characteristics that fuel oppression. Know that oppressors are hard to influence and tend to flee counseling when counselors fail to agree with them. Plan for this by broadening the circle of who is involved in their care.<sup>7</sup>

***Provide ongoing support to the oppressed.*** Offer protection, support and insight that will help victims make sense of the dynamics within their marriage. Counseling should aim to help oppressed spouses increase their understanding of how much God values them and help them regain aspects of their lives that have been overshadowed by the oppressor.

Further, if there are children in the home, assess their safety and whether counseling services are needed for them as well.

These initial steps are only the beginning of what it will take to help a marriage heal from the damaging effects of oppression. On average, it takes an oppressor two years of weekly counseling to begin to see and own his or her sin. Since repairing the relationship cannot begin until all abuse has stopped, this is a lengthy process.

## Participating in God's Rescue

Oppressors are masters of deception. As God's people, we are called to expose their works of darkness and bring them into the light (Eph 5:11). As a pastor or counselor helping in an oppressive marriage, we can't fix everything. But we are called to develop our detection skills, and we can shed light on a situation.

To do this ministry, we have the Scriptures that show us what love looks like in the flesh—Jesus Christ. His love and his actions are the complete opposite of everything oppressors do, and his desire is to rescue the oppressed. His love compels us to participate in that rescue. And as we work prayerfully, carefully and diligently, we honor him, the oppressed, and the oppressor.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this topic read "Identifying Oppression in Marriages" published in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (30:2, 2016) and "Counseling in the Brambles: How to Help Oppressive Marriages" published in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (30:3, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Justin Holcomb and Lindsey Holcomb, *Is It My Fault?: Hope and Healing for Those Suffering Domestic Violence* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2014), 59-60. For another resource from the Holcombs, see "Does the Bible Say Women Should Suffer Abuse and Violence?" in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (28:2, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> For a complete list, see Lundy Bancroft's *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men* (New York, NY: Berkley Books, 2003), 142-145.

<sup>4</sup> Entitlement is the core attitude of oppressors. For a detailed discussion of entitlement, see my article "Entitlement: When Expectations Go Toxic" in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (29:1, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> For a safety planning worksheet see: *Domestic Violence Personalized Safety Plan*, National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence, accessed fall 2016, [http://mnadv.org/\\_mnadvWeb/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/DV\\_Safety\\_Plan.pdf](http://mnadv.org/_mnadvWeb/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/DV_Safety_Plan.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> *Myths and Facts about Domestic Violence*, Domestic Violence Intervention Program, accessed June 15, 2016, <http://www.dvpiowa.org/myths-facts-about-domestic-violence/>.

<sup>7</sup> Widening the circle of care is a time when the resources of the church can be beneficial. Sometimes church leadership can work toward keeping the oppressor in counseling.



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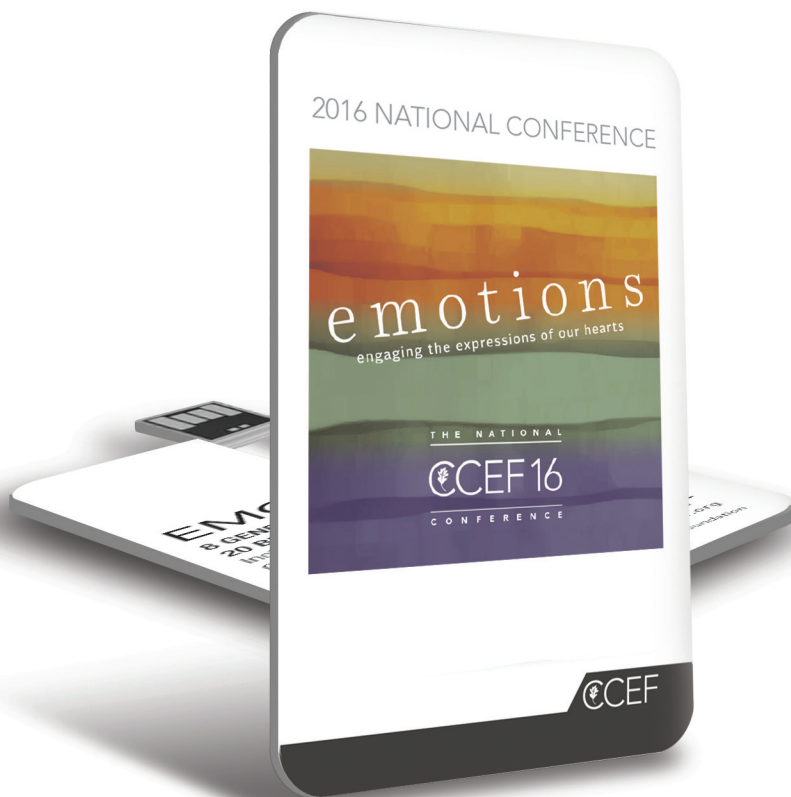
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# TREASURING OTHERS

ALASDAIR GROVES

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19–21

Why does Jesus tell us to seek treasure in heaven? Isn't it a bit selfish to do good if we're just doing it to build up capital in some eternal bank account? For years I felt uncomfortable with Jesus' command to seek rewards, crowns and treasure. I knew heavenly treasure had to be a good thing, but I tried to keep my focus on seeking the kingdom because it was the right thing to do. I remember when a friend said he didn't know what getting crowns in heaven meant, but we were just going to throw them at Jesus' feet anyway, so he wasn't going to worry about it. Relieved, I put the idea of heavenly treasure on the shelf, trusting God would work it all out in the long run.

Now, when you don't understand something in the Bible, trusting God to work it all out in the end is not a bad response! But I've come to realize that I was missing something

important—something Jesus emphasized for a reason. God's promise of heavenly treasure is not a concession for our selfishness. Instead, it is the key to connecting his command to love our neighbor with a growing hunger for heaven!

The connection is this: God himself will be our joy and delight in heaven, which means we will truly, and without the limitations of our sinfulness, treasure what God treasures there. And what does he treasure? We could give many answers—his glory might be the best summary answer—but Ephesians 1:18 offers something surprising: *we* are his treasure, *we* are his rich and glorious inheritance! Now, if we are made to treasure what God treasures—and what he treasures is his redeemed children—then there is one inescapable conclusion we must draw:

Your brothers and sisters in Christ are one of *your* heavenly treasures.

Because they are the riches of Christ's inheritance, your brothers and sisters in Christ are a glorious testimony to his saving grace, a stupefying jewel in his holy crown, set there by the unsearchable depths of his mercy.

## Why This Matters

Why does this matter? It matters because the call to seek heavenly treasure is connected to the call to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:12–13)

When we see our spiritual siblings as *our* treasure, we suddenly find enormous incentive to invest in their good. When friends in your small group, or a challenging spouse, or a co-worker are your treasure for all eternity, stepping into trials with them to support and encourage them in seeking Christ is an opportunity, not a chore. Loving your neighbor becomes a chance to develop, polish and invest in something that will still be a delight to you in ten thousand years! There is enormous power in the realization that every person who becomes more like Christ, in even the slightest way because of you, will be part of your treasure in heaven.





This reality has touched down in two areas for me recently. First, it's shaped how I think about parenting. I confess that far too often I lose sight of parenting as a gift and precious calling to raise my kids in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I get impatient, distracted, and I can treat my kids more like an inconvenience than a privilege, much less a treasure. But I'm slowly waking up to the staggering promise Jesus gives that every cup of cold water given in his name brings a reward that cannot be lost—and that little reward is sitting right in front of me (Matthew 10:42). This helps me be patient with my children's sin and sass, knowing both discipline and mercy are cultivating fruit that will be a blessing infinitely longer than the frustration of the moment. Anything that makes heavenly treasure out of helping a four-year-old clean her mom's stolen lip gloss off the wall is too important to miss.

Second, it's changing my small talk. I suspect I'm like most people who don't enjoy small talk. It often seems like people keep conversations going to avoid awkwardness while they search for the opportune moment to politely escape each other. This mentality is folly when I'm across from someone in whom I have a stake, in whose Christlikeness I have a vested interest! This doesn't mean every thirty-second interaction in the hall after church has to become a counseling session, or that I can't politely exit a conversation and move on. It does mean I'm learning to see even a thirty-second connection as a foretaste of heaven, where I get a sample of the feast God is preparing that will someday bring me to awestruck worship. It means the kindness, concern, love, prayer and compassion we give in thirty seconds will make a difference that endures for eternity.

When your brother and your sister are your treasure, no act of love is lost. Indeed, you will surely not lose your reward, for your reward is the very brother or sister you are serving.

### **Making it Personal**

Let me suggest three ways you might put this perspective to work in your own life. First, when you pray for someone to grow in Christ, you have the certain hope that every

time you ask for anything on behalf of another, God will either say "yes" or do something even better in response. What comfort that he answers our prayers in ways beyond what we even know to ask. Prayer, then, is a way to pour spiritual riches into another person's life, and those riches *in* that person *will be* your heavenly reward!

Second, you add to your heavenly treasure by encouraging others. Name the good things you see, the work of God's Spirit, and the gifts he has given. Encouragement helps someone gain clarity about how to pursue Christlikeness in his or her life and provides motivation to press deeper into the good work God is already doing.

My third application may surprise you—it's confession of sin. How does your confession build treasure in others? Confession augments the riches of God's inheritance in another person listening to you, because every time you confess your sin to brothers or sisters you give them a front row seat to the power of the gospel. Every time you name your failings of will and deed, you affirm the power of God to forgive and redeem. You demonstrate the trustworthiness of the gospel by leaning on it with all your weight, risking certain ruin if Jesus doesn't catch you. I have seen time and again in my life how the culture of openness about sin and struggle in the church I attended growing up taught me that sin was a terrible problem, but that it was no match for grace. When you take the gospel seriously enough to confess your sin before another Christian, you invite someone else to taste and see that the mercy of the Lord is good.

The point of recognizing our treasure in each other is not to pat ourselves on the back, or take the focus off of God's glory. Rather, I hope we will be energized to love Christ and his people more and more as we realize how generous he is to share the riches of *his inheritance in his saints* with us. How great is the love of the Father for us that he would choose to make us heirs of his eternal kingdom with Christ, and invite us to the banquet his Spirit is laying out. May Jesus' promise of reward make us hunger and thirst to see our brothers and sisters mature into full fruitfulness.



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# WHEN A CHILD SAYS “I DON’T KNOW”

JULIE LOWE

The book of Proverbs exhorts us to disciple our children (Proverbs 1:8). But to do that we need meaningful relationships that are honest and open. We need to know what is really going on in their lives so we can help encourage godly thinking and living. But kids don’t always cooperate. Sometimes they don’t want to talk with us and, at a surprisingly young age, children learn they can avoid engaging in thoughtful discussion by giving the notorious “I don’t know” response to our questions.

## **We see this at school.**

When a student is not paying attention, or doesn’t have an immediate answer and says “I don’t know,” the focus quickly moves to the next student and they’re off the hook. Kids learn very quickly that little attention or effort needs to be given in school if they can feign obliviousness.

## **We see this at home.**

“Why did you cheat on that test?” “Why didn’t you clean your room when I asked?” “Why did you lie about that?” Far too often, a simple “I don’t know” relieves them of any accountability to engage with their actions.

When given the “I don’t know” response, the parent often lapses into lecture mode—and many children choose to check out emotionally. When this happens, the child goes

unchallenged and does not have to call heart motivations to task.

## **We see this in counseling.**

Kids say “I don’t know” instinctively, almost without thought. It also comes with an expectation that I, as the counselor, will move on to another topic, or do as many other adults have done and answer the question myself. Possibly I will begin lecturing as well, which simply requires the child’s ability to endure my rant.

The problem with all these situations is that children learn that such a response keeps them from having to do the hard work of critical thinking or personal self-reflection. They don’t have to stop and put any deliberation into a subject. They may even be avoiding accountability or trying to prevent being vulnerable by admitting to particular thoughts, feelings or beliefs. But letting children get away with such shallow responses is not good discipleship.

We want children and teens to learn the value of godly, vulnerable conversations. We need to find ways to get past such responses of “I don’t know.” Our goal isn’t to simply get an answer to our question; it is for them to gain insight into their own hearts. Proverbs 20:5 says, “The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who

has insight draws them out.” The question is, how can we draw them out?

Years ago I attended a training session where I heard the results of some research done with youth on the “I don’t know” response. When asked the follow-up question, “Well, if you *did* know, what would your answer be?” kids will give a more responsive answer 50% of the time. Brilliant, isn’t it? It confirmed what I already suspected. By demonstrating genuine care, slowing the moment down, and giving kids an opportunity to really consider the question, they will often respond more thoughtfully.

Here are some practical ways I handle the “I don’t know” response in my parenting and counseling.

## **Brainstorm with the child**

Keep in mind that sometimes a child may not know how to answer your question. At these times, it is helpful to brainstorm with the child about what might be going on. By offering them possibilities, I’m encouraging thoughtful interaction. I’m also *not* letting the child off the hook. Loving well sometimes means coming alongside someone to aid in greater self-awareness. After hearing several options, a child will often say, “Yeah, I think that is it.” When this happens, it may be that I was able to put into words what they





were thinking or feeling but were unable to articulate. At other times, they won't initially voice what they think for fear of admitting what they know to be true or shameful. By offering a possibility and modeling it as an option that does not shock me, it frees them to acknowledge it openly.

### **Wait them out**

For those who are simply unwilling, defiant or lazy in their response, I have multiple goals. I want the youth to know that I care

too much to accept "I don't know." What a child thinks matters to me and I genuinely want to understand, so "I don't know" can't be accepted as a final answer. I respond with, "Take a minute and think about it. I am willing to wait." Then I wait silently. The pressure is on. They stare at me. I stare at them. I am open and encouraging but allow for the potential of uncomfortable silence. Silence can be a powerful motivator for those who are uncomfortable with it. I use it to my advantage—a type of positive pressure for kids to engage. More than that, I hope it truly demonstrates that they are worth waiting on. I will often encourage them by saying, "What you think and feel is important, and I care. I'm in no hurry."

By showing them that this conversation isn't going to end until they thoughtfully engage, I hope they see me as a person who genuinely cares and wants to know them more deeply. I don't need to move on to the next topic, nor will I be put off. It may be one of the few times someone in their world slows down enough to really wait and listen. It will not be lost on them.

### **Gently encourage self-awareness**

Insight comes from the Holy Spirit and honest self-reflection. In order to become more self-aware, children need to explore the underlying motivations that influence their

behavior. So I work to teach the skill of self-reflection. Once they start to talk, I urge them to consider their motives for what they said or did, and I gently challenge their responses to stimulate critical thinking and greater self-awareness. If we want to raise godly children, these skills are essential.

### **Be patient**

As adults, parents, teachers, leaders and counselors, we can become much more winsome and patient when asking kids questions, especially in response to "I don't know." Do the hard work of drawing kids out. And when they open up, do the hard work of listening. Be careful in how you respond—your response will impact whether or not they open up next time.

There may be times when you allow them to walk away from the conversation to consider things, but give a time frame to show the discussion is not over and make sure to follow up again in the near future. They may challenge you, reject you, or be angered by your attempts, but you will model care by your persistence. We do not always get the privilege of seeing the ways in which it speaks of our love for them, but Galatians 6:9 encourages us, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."



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# MEET THE COUNSELOR

## MICHAEL GEMBOLA

*We sat down with Michael Gembola, a counselor at CCEF and a local pastor, to discuss his counseling ministry.*

***Tell us about how you first became connected to CCEF and your journey into pastoral ministry and counseling.***

My undergraduate studies were in English and history, so I actually didn't have counseling in mind. I had plans to go to seminary, but after college I joined Americorps, which brought me to Philadelphia. Initially I thought I would be in the area for one year, so I decided to sit in on one of David Powlison's classes. I had heard the audio of his seminar at the Sex and the Supremacy of Christ Conference, "Making All Things New: Restoring Pure Joy to the Sexually Broken" and it had a big impact on me—I've revisited it as a resource several times since then, and passed it on to others.

In the end, my one-time class became much more than that. That class was Theology & Secular Psychology, and by the end of it I decided to give up a scholarship and change my seminary plans in order to study with CCEF, so I enrolled at Westminster Theological Seminary in 2008.

Something that also helped in this process was that I went home and got feedback from my church about the idea. I was surprised to hear all the people I asked affirm my sense

of calling into pastoral care and counseling. To a person, they said, "Yes, that sounds exactly like what I'd think you should be doing." So I joined the program, and graduated in 2012 with a dual degree, an MAR (Master of Arts in Religion, Biblical Studies) and MAC (Master of Arts in Counseling). I began the internship at CCEF that same year, and I have stayed on as a contract counselor ever since.

***What was it that drew you to David's teaching?***

Many things, but his recent series of articles, "How Does Sanctification Work?" in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* (see 27:1, 27:2, and 30:3, but especially the first in the series), provide a good illustration of what resonated with me. The vision I came to share was for an approach to the Christian life that was not reductive. My experience of some church environments had been that Christian growth was sometimes reduced either to experiences of surrender or to self-talk strategies. But to be nuanced, careful, and comprehensive in appreciating both surrender and thoughts, and then *also* relationship, worship, virtue formation, and much more—that is very difficult to do. So I appreciated the broader vision I saw in his approach.

I'll also add that David's manner and tone were temperamentally a good fit for me as a student. His example, and even just his

personality, helped me imagine that I could also help people within my own personality and temperament.

***What attracted you to CCEF's model of pastoral care?***

The Theology and Secular Psychology course first pulled me in that direction. I was intrigued by the idea that Christians could think carefully about problems that are seen as under the purview of psychology, and then re-think or even reformulate those psychological problems within a Christian framework. The course covers more than theory and frameworks though, and the historical element in particular piqued my curiosity. The development of psychology interested me in itself, but it was sobering and catalyzing to see the lack of continued development of pastoral care as a discipline in the 20th century church (at least in the evangelical church).

***Tell us about your work as Director of Congregational Care and Discipleship at City Line Church. How does counseling influence your preaching and teaching ministry?***

I view my calling in the church as caretaking. So whether I am preaching, teaching, meeting with someone, setting up small groups, or planning an event, my desire is to care for people. I'm sure my counseling training influences every area of ministry. Counseling changes my preaching, in that I



can imagine the first steps of application more quickly as I prepare for a sermon. In counseling you have to spend hours thinking about small steps, the next baby step of change for someone, and so it gives a vision for what growth could look like in our church. Counseling forces you not to live in abstractions, since you have to deal with real people's lives. And I hope that makes me less likely to preach vaguely, in generalities, or with too many stock phrases and dead metaphors.

Counseling training also changes my teaching at church and at seminary. In both contexts I feel a burden to teach both the content and process of care, so I'm faced with the challenge of modeling care for the people I teach. I do feel a sense of burden for future pastors in particular, because I want to cast a vision for pastoral care that extends beyond preaching. That is a project and mission that I find meaningful, because I would love to see churches where pastors and lay leaders are proactive and wise in their ministries of care, and who are in turn building churches that are active in burden bearing and love. I know I need help personally so that I am effective in pastoral care and in building wise structures of care, so I want to never stop learning and sharing with others what I learn.

**What does counseling at CCEF look like for you?**

The actual counseling hour varies quite a bit, since sometimes a person needs help in practical life skills, so we're working together to bring a sense of Christian wisdom to simple plans and changes. Other times there is the hard work of putting our minds together to

understand a complicated situation, and still other times I'm nudging a couple toward starting to relate together in a new way. I'm honored that people entrust serious, personal matters to me in this field of service, and in turn I appreciate being able to entrust these same things to God in prayer together, and to bring our need for wisdom to the One who gives it generously.

Although the people I see at CCEF are not walking into a church, they are typically seeking explicitly Christian help, so this makes it natural for the counseling to look a little different than it might in another context. They want help out of the resources of the Christian faith, or as the Apostle Paul says it, out of "the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33). It is a huge advantage to operate out of shared understandings of God as a very present help in times of trouble.

**You recently had an opportunity to teach other CCEF counselors. Tell us about that time.**

I did a talk on premature termination in counseling, and also what I called "discipleship drop-out." I covered some of the reasons why counseling ends too soon, and my goal was to help people to avoid that happening, both in their counseling at CCEF and in their lay or pastoral care at church.

**Do you have some practical tips or suggestions for avoiding dropout in counseling and discipleship relationships?**

**Recognize and affirm what God is already doing.** Ed Welch calls this "grace hunting." If I'm being sensitive to what God is doing, I won't be so bound to my sense of agenda, and

I will be much more encouraging.

**Address and deal with problems in the relationship.** It's hard to be helpful if there is something between you and the other person, and the person may never initiate that conversation. The Apostle Paul spends significant time in his writings working through problems in his relationship with churches, to clear the way for ministry.

**Talk about motivation.** It's easy to get ahead of people, to force an agenda, or overwhelm someone. But discussing their motivation and emotional state can help you work together on what practical steps would be best next. You want to make sure your efforts aren't leading to "overmuch sorrow" (2 Corinthians 2:7).

**How can people pray for you as you continue to think about your ministry as a counselor and pastor?**

Because I am working in different roles, it can be difficult simply to live in one role at a time. But I want to leverage the different callings—husband, father, director of congregational care, counselor, lecturer—in a way that serves people. I don't want my life and ministry to be so broken up into segments that they end up distracting me from my calling at the moment.

I would also welcome prayer as I look to complete the next stage of ordination, as well as the final stages of counseling licensure.

# 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)

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