



CCEF NOW

Restoring Christ to Counseling & Counseling to the Church

2012

BULLYING

An Interview with Julie Lowe

HOW DOES JESUS "COUNSEL" UNBELIEVERS?

Alasdair Groves

MOVING TOWARD PEOPLE

Ed Welch

THE BODY OF CHRIST: CARING FOR FAMILIES AND DEVELOPMENTALLY DELAYED CHILDREN

Darby Strickland

MORE THAN COUNSELING

Tim Lane

Welcome

A recent tweet caught my attention. It read, “Why do some biblical preachers not value biblical counseling while biblical counselors value biblical preaching?” I found this question thought provoking and representative of a common theme in the circles I run in. I wonder if some Christians might not value biblical counseling simply because they misunderstand the word *counseling*. Therefore, this issue of CCEF NOW seeks to define and interpret counseling in ways that capture its full-orbed, biblical meaning. In addition, this issue will once again provide you with helpful insights that are applicable to all of life—from everyday struggles to the more acute life dominating sins and sufferings that are endemic to the human condition.



As we approach the end of the year, I would like to ask each of you to consider giving to CCEF. If you have been helped in any way by CCEF, know that your gift will go toward helping even more people like you. Our goal for this fiscal year is to raise \$850,000. I believe we can raise that money and here's one way we could do it: This magazine is sent to over 16,000 people. If only 2,000 of those recipients give \$50 a month, then we would raise \$1,250,000. That would exceed our goal by \$350,000!

As you can see from the bar graph to the right, we average between 600-800 donors a year. Regular monthly donors help sustain our work by leveling cash flow throughout the year. If you can't give \$50, start with \$10 or \$15 a month. Every gift counts. You can give with the envelope in this magazine or by going online to www.ccef.org/donate.

Thank you for partnering with CCEF! I hope you enjoy this issue.

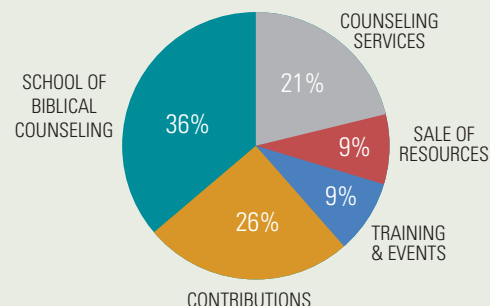
With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Lane".

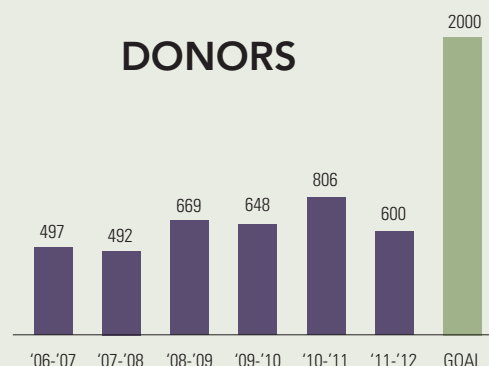
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CCEF NOW

Restoring Christ to Counseling & Counseling to the Church

TESTIMONY

Last year I served God's people in a second generation Korean-American congregation. We approached my internship unsure of the initial response to "counseling." But a wise man once compared the skillful art of biblical counseling to sharing a wise conversation. My brothers and sisters at that church graciously embraced the idea of wise communication, also known as discipleship. I was blessed by this church's commitment to growth in grace. The Lord taught me the power and beauty of relationship as it weaves its way across cultural boundaries. The Spirit's movement in this body was demonstrated as they humbly moved toward one another in love.

A new CCEF intern is counseling at the church this year. I am grateful for our ongoing connection with this church as we seek to fulfill the second half of our mission, "restoring counseling to the church."

Chase Maxey
CCEF Counselor

CONTENTS

- 2** More Than Counseling:
A Vision for the Entire Church
Tim Lane
- 4** An Unlikely Counselor
Rebecca Lipkowitz
- 6** Bullying
An Interview with Julie Lowe
- 8** How Does Jesus "Counsel" Unbelievers?
Alasdair Groves
- 12** Moving Toward People
Ed Welch
- 14** Meet the Counselor: Darby Strickland
- 15** The Body of Christ: Caring for Families
and Developmentally Delayed Children
Darby Strickland

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MORE THAN COUNSELING

A VISION FOR THE ENTIRE CHURCH

by Tim Lane

One strength and weakness of CCEF is our name! In fact, we have had many discussions over the years about whether to change our name. Those discussions always end where they began, and our name remains unchanged. Surprisingly, the strengths *and* weaknesses of our name are due to the word *counseling*. Our debate is always about how the “c-word” both communicates and miscommunicates the vision of our ministry.

First, there are strengths in coupling the words “Christian” and “Counseling.” Our name means that we are convinced that the good news of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, ascension, present intercession, and promised return (the gospel) directly addresses

the very problems that formal counseling and therapy address. At CCEF we are convinced that Christ brings hope to any and every conceivable personal and interpersonal problem. And even more, we believe that the redemptive actions and words of the Father, Son, and Spirit on our behalf always speak to both the seemingly mundane and the extremely complex problems that are a part of the fallen human condition.

Because of the power of the gospel, we aim to practice and teach *Christian counseling*. We want to do this well and avoid being simplistic when we help people with complex struggles. We want to wisely engage secular psychology and psychiatry with

wisdom formed by the Scriptures. We aim for a highly relational methodology that communicates the fathomless wisdom of the grace of Christ for sinners and sufferers alike. Though this is our goal, we do not claim to do this perfectly. We want to remain humble because we are in process ourselves. CCEF's counselors and teachers need the same good news that we offer to others.

Second, the narrow definition usually ascribed to the “c-word” is the weakness of our name. When you hear the word *counseling*, what comes to mind? Most people immediately think of a trained professional meeting privately with one person or a couple. In order to be useful, this trained specialist needs a psychology background *far more* than theological wisdom and genuine love. In addition, many people think of a counselor as someone who is well-versed

another. How can Josh and Sara change their bad marriage into a better one? How can Leslie deal with the grip that fear has on her life? Is there hope for people who struggle with addictions? Do the Scriptures offer any hope for people who struggle with depression, bi-polar disorder, or obsessive-compulsive disorder? Those situations may seem extreme, but the church can and must minister to these kinds of struggles. The church is *the place* to find help and hope for change. That is why CCEF is committed to helping local churches cultivate a culture of grace and growth—where people can find wise and compassionate help for a host of problems, both common and acute, both sins and sufferings.

In saying all of this, I don't want to imply that every person is completely competent to help anyone and everyone. There are

...because counseling is really about making wise application of the grace of God to people's lives, then it is clear that counseling is what we as the church are called to do for one another.

in technical language and theories, and provides unique insight into people and unique power to help people change. And where can you access this kind of help? Most people do not think of the church as the location for this specialized help. Others may even conclude that the church has no business counseling.

But this is not the only way CCEF understands and uses the word *counseling*. We use it much more broadly. When we say *counseling*, we do mean formal counseling, but we also find other words that capture it. Words that express the fuller meaning of counseling are discipleship, informal helping relationships, one anothering, growth in grace, conformity to the image of Christ, sanctification, change, growth in godliness, the fruit of the Spirit, faith and obedience, and increase in wisdom. Since this is what we also mean when we say *counseling*, then the church should absolutely be involved in counseling.

The Church's High Calling

Since churches should be involved in counseling, biblical equipping and training is needed. And that is exactly what we seek to do at CCEF as we restore Christ to counseling and counseling to the church. CCEF cares about the same problems that the church cares about. And because counseling is really about making wise application of the grace of God to people's lives, then it is clear that counseling is what *we as the church* are called to do for one

people with unique gifts for inter-personal ministry just as there are people with unique gifts for public preaching and teaching. All of us are in different stages of life with varying degrees of training, life experience and case wisdom. That means that there are some who will function well in a more formal capacity and will engage in formal counseling.

Likewise there are people within every local church with various gifts that God uses to walk compassionately with someone, to disciple someone facing the pressures of daily living, or to lead as an elder, deacon, small group leader, lay counselor, or mentor. When this kind of broad *counseling* is happening, you have a church living out the calling of Colossians 3:16.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.

As we grow in grace, the word of Christ dwells in us more richly. As a result, we are able to wisely teach and encourage others according to the gifts we have received. This, according to the apostle Paul, is the definition of a vibrant community. It is a Spirit-empowered community where everyone shares the privilege and the responsibility to minister to one another based upon personal gifts and calling. CCEF is honored to partner with churches that seek to live out this great and high calling.

Tim S. Lane (M.Div., D.Min.) is the President of CCEF and also serves as a Faculty member and counselor. Tim has been counseling for more than 25 years and has previous experience in both campus and pastoral ministry, including serving as a pastor for ten years. He co-authored the books *How People Change* and *Relationships—A Mess Worth Making*. He also authored several mini-books including *Forgiving Others*, *Sex Before Marriage*, and *Freedom from Guilt*.





We have had students
representing 42 countries.

THE SCHOOL

Because CCEF believes that counseling is a vision for the entire church, we've created an in-depth counseling educational program that provides equipping and training for everyone in all ministry contexts. Our School of Biblical Counseling online and onsite campuses make our courses accessible all over the world.

An **Unlikely** Counselor by Rebecca Lipkowitz

I have a confession to make: I am not a counselor. I remember my first day of class in Dynamics of Biblical Change. The auditorium was filled with people anxious to learn how to serve their brothers and sisters better. Not me. I knew I didn't want to be a counselor. People were messy. Their problems were messy. No thanks! I remember praying during that first class that I would never have to use what I was learning.

* * *

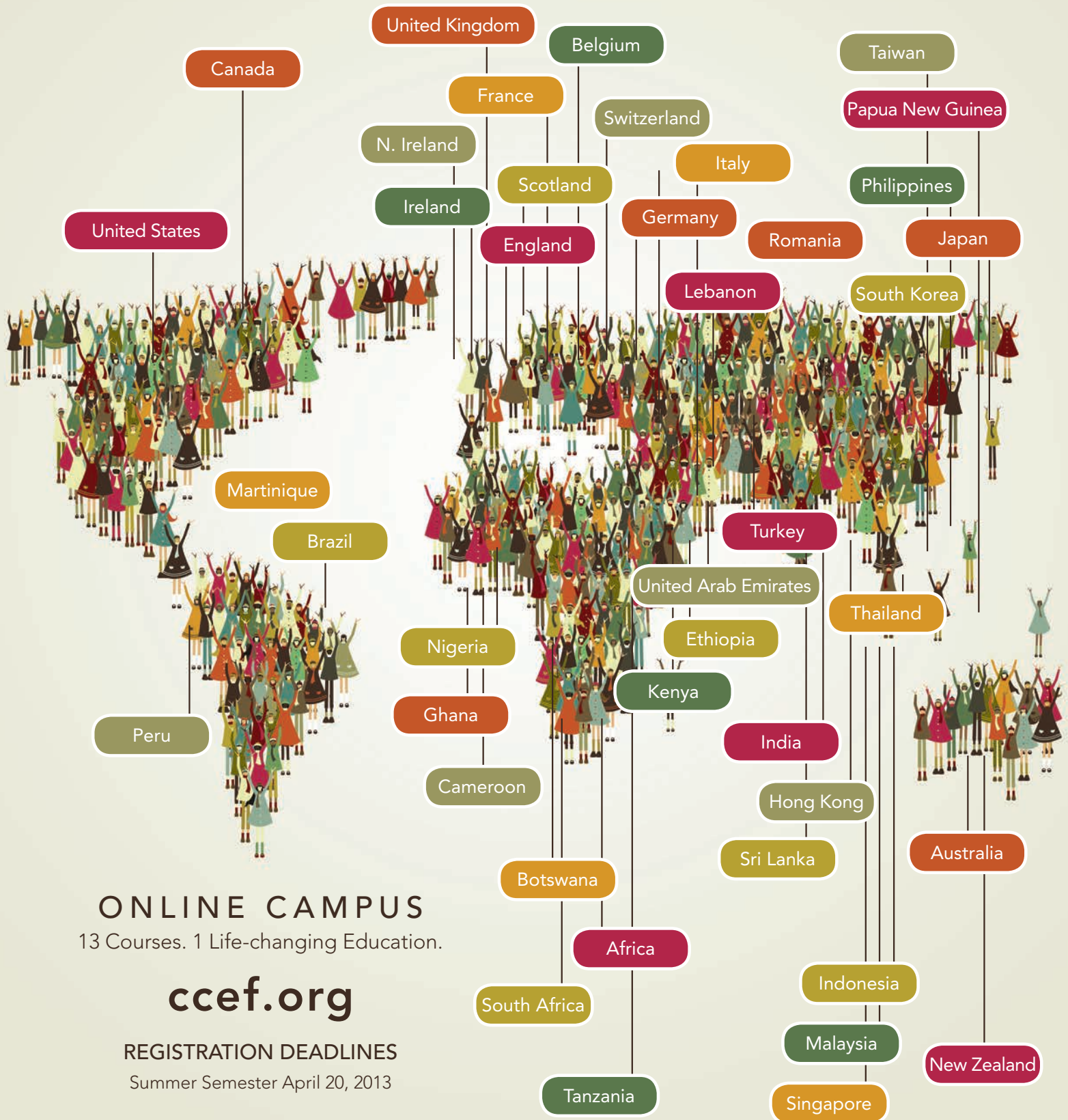
I took Dynamics of Biblical Change six years ago. Today I live in Santiago, Chile as a missionary tent-maker. I moved down here on a whim. I got invited to go with a friend. I accepted. She ended up not being able to go. I came anyway.

When I moved to Chile five years ago, I joined a church plant. The majority of people are new believers or seekers. I serve the church mostly by discipling women. As you can imagine I am so grateful that God didn't pay attention to my stubborn prayer five years ago. The truth is that CCEF has had a huge impact on my ministry. First, it helped me realize that my heart is just as prone to wander as anyone else's. That puts me on the same level as any person I talk to. Second, as I sit with these women and hear and see so much brokenness in their lives, it can sometimes be overwhelming. It can be hard to know where to start. But CCEF resources have taught me to always move people toward the gospel and to the God of the gospel.

I am glad to report that there is great interest in biblical counseling in Santiago right now. The women in my discipleship group have been extremely receptive to CCEF resources, and the people at the church are thirsty for more. The leaders at my church rely on CCEF resources as they seek to resolve conflict. I also know of a group who is currently going through *How People Change* in Spanish. And the local seminary in Santiago has a vision to train up pastors in biblical counseling so they can pastor their people well. These leaders understand that so much pastoral work is counseling. So whether it's preaching and teaching from the pulpit, or preaching and teaching individuals in discipleship and counseling contexts, the model and training that CCEF offers has been found to be extremely helpful.

As biblical counseling has spread, I have started to see the principles of gospel-centered change take root in Santiago. Chileans appreciate how biblical counseling honors the true depths of the gospel and Christ's impact in bringing about lasting change in people's lives. Would you please pray for the work in Chile and that people will continue to be open to Christ's work in their lives? My long-term hope is to start a ministry that helps pastors understand sexual brokenness and how to approach and minister to those who struggle. There is much to be done here, and I am so thankful for the tools that I have gained through CCEF's classes. Those classes have changed everything about how I do ministry. Everything.

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BULLYING

An Interview
with Julie Lowe

Bullying happens in every school across America. This means it is highly likely that your child or one of the kids in your church has experienced bullying. And since it has become an area of concern in schools and a focus in national media, techniques and advice now abound. CCEF wants to offer a perspective on bullying that goes beyond punishment or behavior modification and toward wise love for the bullied and the bully. We recently sat down with Julie Lowe to discuss this issue and practical helps for parents, youth leaders, and children's ministry workers.

What are some warning signs to watch out for if you are concerned your child is being bullied?

Many kids are subtle about being bullied. They may come home one day and say, "I was picked on today." But then for weeks you won't hear a thing until suddenly they tell you that they don't want to go to school anymore. Often there is "withdrawing" behavior, like stomach aches in the morning or comments about wanting to stay home. By the time warning signs become obvious, it is possible bullying has already been happening for a period of time. As a parent you hate it to get to that place, so you want to be proactive not reactive. You will see warning signs sooner if you

talk regularly with your kids about their interpersonal experience at school—what the other kids are like and who they fit in with.

Sometimes it is hard for kids to open up. From your experience as a counselor, what are some creative suggestions for how parents can engage in conversation with their kids?

One way I encourage parents to engage with their children is by role-playing. It is non-threatening and kids enjoy being creative. The goal is to foster open conversation. You can start by brainstorming different scenarios with your children on a variety of topics or difficulties.

Brainstorming about bullying is a great idea because you can ask many “What if?” questions: “What would you do if you saw your friend being bullied? How could you help? Where would you go for help?” Give them every scenario you can think of: “What do you do if you are being bullied? What do you do if your friend is bullying someone? What do you do if you got in trouble at school for intervening in a fight?” Each new question provides an opportunity to shape and teach your child and learn more about who your child is as a person.

Why do you think brainstorming is a helpful tool to teach and counsel children?

Kids think in black and white, and we want to help them think about the grey areas of life. Often those grey areas include things that kids have never thought about. As we teach different principles (e.g., loving your neighbor), we want kids to learn how those principles transfer into different situations. The more willing parents are to talk about the “What ifs?” the more their kids are willing to say, “I don’t know. What do I do in this situation?” This provides an open door for parents to enter in.

Let’s move from conversations at home to ministry in the context of a church. Where should ministry leaders start?

First, leaders need to ask themselves, “Am I observing and actively building the dynamics of the group? Do I know who the outsiders are? Am I building cohesion—a positive and supportive atmosphere?” Second, they need to realize who is coming to the group and what they struggle with. There could be kids who struggle with cutting, homosexuality, or promiscuity. Some of these kids may be outsiders. They may experience bullying, either in this group or at school. Unless there is a safe and supportive atmosphere, none of these struggles will surface. As a leader you want struggles to surface so you can minister the gospel. Ask yourself if this is a safe place for anyone to come, and not just safe for those who fit a certain mold.

What if a youth leader is working toward a safe and accepting environment, but still sees bullying dynamics?

Call it out right away. Pull the kids aside and let them know this group has zero tolerance for bullying. But don’t stop there. Engage the child in conversation and ask, “Why do you feel the need to do this? Has this person provoked you or done something to you?” That’s where you will get into the messiness of the situation, which is necessary.

You also need to say to the group, “No one is ever allowed to pick on someone or threaten others in this group. How else can we say the love of God is in us? You must commit to embracing each other and letting each other be different. We all struggle in different ways.” As a leader this is how you communicate boundaries to the kids in your group and provide a place that makes it safe for new people to come in.

If there is an ongoing issue, what fundamental goals should leaders have when they intervene?

Too often youth leaders deal with surface issues, but they are unsure of how to handle difficult issues. These types of situations are opportunities to go deeper and ask meaningful questions, to find out what is really going on in a child’s life. Your goal is resolution. Both godly love and wisdom have to be in place for real resolution. And that’s what we are hoping will happen in these situations. We are really talking about living in relationships—wise decision making, loving well, being honest, showing respect for one another, and learning how to put another person before yourself.

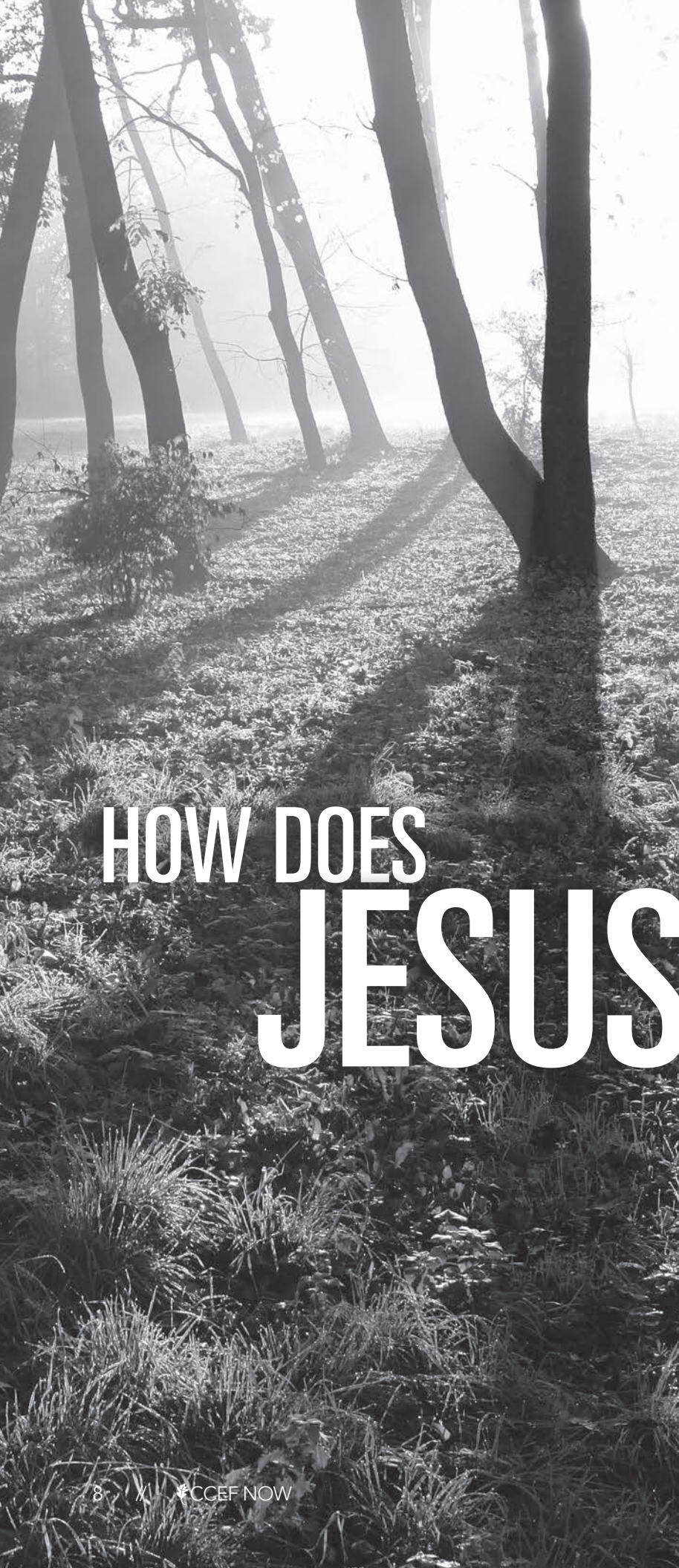
There is an immediate goal of stopping the bully and protecting the victim and a longer vision for teaching children how to live in relationships.

You want to help kids see what motivates them and what’s going to help them grow. “What’s going to turn this situation around?” For the bully the focus will be on showing respect, putting the other person first, and seeking forgiveness. For someone being bullied you want to teach the child to speak up and say “no” to someone, how to forgive, how to speak about this child to others, and how to guard against hate. You are putting this in the context of loving well—with an eye on Christ who loved us well and gives us the Spirit to love others well.

This brings a longer vision of ministry into the picture. There is an immediate goal of stopping the bully and protecting the victim and a longer vision for teaching children how to live in relationships. And the world won’t do that. The world will say, “End the relationship. Guard your boundaries.” Sometimes that may be necessary. But often we can equip people to love well and remain in relationships. These are our goals in gospel ministry.

Julie Smith Lowe (M.A., L.P.C.) is an Associate Faculty member and a counselor at CCEF. She has been trained as a Certified Christian Conciliator through Peacemakers Ministries. She has extensive experience with foster and adoptive families and speaks at events on topics surrounding women’s issues, children, and conflict resolution.





HOW DOES JESUS

by J. Alasdair Groves

When Jesus said “Go and make disciples,” he had a radical and incredibly comprehensive vision for human transformation in view. Disciple-making is *the calling* of the church and it includes everything we do in this world—from preaching sermons, visiting people in the hospital, to counseling conversations about significant personal struggles and hardships.

But personal interactions that focus on crises or difficult personal issues are some of the hardest areas in which to practice disciple-making, aren’t they? This is true when you are shepherding mature believers. It is all the more true when you disciple non-Christians. We intuitively know that moments of significant suffering, grief, hardship, and confusion in the lives of unbelievers ought to be prime occasions for the gospel to break through. In practice, however, we are often unsure where to start or how to speak to someone in the midst of their chaos when we *don’t* have a shared faith from which to speak.

You may ask, “How can I counsel a non-Christian who is coming to my church if the person doesn’t respect God’s Word (yet)?” “How can I help an anxious teen, a bitter wife, or an angry husband when my entire approach to hope and healing depends on Jesus’ power, love, and command?” “Should I even counsel an unbelieving couple before they get married?” “When someone does not submit to the Scriptures, has my most vital tool been taken away?”

“COUNSEL” UNBELIEVERS?

Thankfully, the Bible itself demonstrates how to engage non-Christians in counseling conversations by showing us how Jesus did it. Think about the ministry of Jesus. He is incredibly consistent. Jesus’ teaching always revolves around the same core issues: ungodly loyalties and the deep problem of sin, how to treat other people, the interpretation of suffering, a call to change, and the importance of finding hope that is true and reliable. These core issues are exactly the concerns of biblical ministry—and biblical counseling is simply biblical ministry that takes place in personal conversations around significant personal problems.

When we overhear Jesus in personal conversations with people who do not believe in him, we find that he is still talking about these same core issues of life in God's world. Although Jesus' core message does not change, we find his approach varies enormously depending on the individual and the situation.

Take the example of the woman at the well (John 4:4–26). Although Jesus is aware of the sinful lifestyle of this woman, he engages her without speaking immediately about the obvious sin in her life. Instead of seeking to establish his authority by naming her unrighteousness, he puts her in the position to help and question *him*. She is defensive, so Jesus lets her lead the conversation. He responds to the issues she raises, but always with concern for her. Jesus knows the real issues are personal issues of the heart—her ungodly loyalties and the need to find hope that is true and reliable. When he does address her lifestyle of sin, he does so by simply naming the facts, and she is ready to assent to the truth.

Remember the rich young ruler? He comes to question Jesus (Mark 10:17–27). In asking, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus senses self-justification more than genuine curiosity. Yet he still loves the young man. Convinced that the most important personal issue is not yet recognized, Jesus puts a spotlight on the real problem: he sends the man away with an assignment to sell all his wealth and give it to the poor. Jesus asks the young ruler to examine his ungodly loyalties and make a change in his life. Jesus counsels him to embrace selfless mercy over self-righteousness.

The Pharisees also come to Jesus with questions. But their questions are nothing more than traps. Jesus confronts them with incisive directness. He demands that they see the evil in the motives behind their seemingly righteous actions and innocent questions. What should we learn from this? When personal conversations become malicious or manipulative, we need to tell the truth boldly. People are blind to their own sin. Jesus responds by choosing the most vivid language he can find in an effort to shock the Pharisees out of their self-righteous stupor. Jesus cares enough about them to engage their most dire need, even as they try to destroy him.

Jesus bids for the ultimate allegiance of every one of these people. But he does not demand they accept the gospel *before* he engages them personally. Instead, he constantly establishes the relevance of the gospel for them. He does not hesitate to talk about their behavior or address their questions, anxieties, troubles, or purposes. He allows the contours of the world that each unbeliever lives in to shape the way in which the gospel will be heard for what it is—genuine good news.

While we cannot script personal interactions, I want to offer three orienting perspectives from Jesus' example that can frame your approach with unbelievers.

Don't forget the obvious: know and love the person. Counseling involves building a friendship. Ask questions. Express appreciation. Show tenderness and compassion. Share things about yourself. Spend time together. Listen attentively. Discern what is important. Notice strengths as well as failings. Ask how someone is really doing, and mean it.

Help the person look in the mirror. Help people see themselves accurately. No one does this instinctively. The questions, comments, and reflections you offer have a purpose. They guide non-Christians to articulate their world and simultaneously begin to reinterpret it. Here are four categories of questions you might ask: (1) Questions that bring out the good that is already present in someone's life, (2) Questions that help flesh out significant life situations, (3) Questions that pinpoint behaviors, (4) Questions that reveal allegiances. These four categories lend themselves to a biblical reinterpretation of life. If someone can accurately describe what his or her life is fundamentally about, then that person is already starting to track in God's world.

Find out what the person thinks about God. Every person who is not a Christian has a reason for not being a Christian. Some consciously reject God and the Bible. Others have never given it much thought. Still others believe they are Christians without any real understanding of the gospel of grace. Very often, someone is repulsed by a “God” who is in fact repulsive and has little to do with the true God.

Christian ministry *is* evangelism, and counseling is Christian ministry. The core message is consistent, but our approach is flexible—just like Jesus', in counseling this means we strive to build a relationship where the natural next step in that relationship is speaking about the good news of the Good Shepherd. We want people to see that the gospel directly engages the parts of their lives that matter most to *them*. What happens when someone learns to acknowledge shame, guilt, wounds, wickedness, weakness, or loneliness? That person becomes more open to hear about and more ready to embrace a Shepherd who laid down his life so his sheep could have glorious, forgiven, painless, shameless, eternal life with him as part of his family.

Alasdair Groves (M.Div.), is the director of Counseling at CCEF New England and is an Assistant Faculty member.



SHAME INTERRUPTED

with Ed Welch

A new, annotated audio experience with the author, Ed Welch

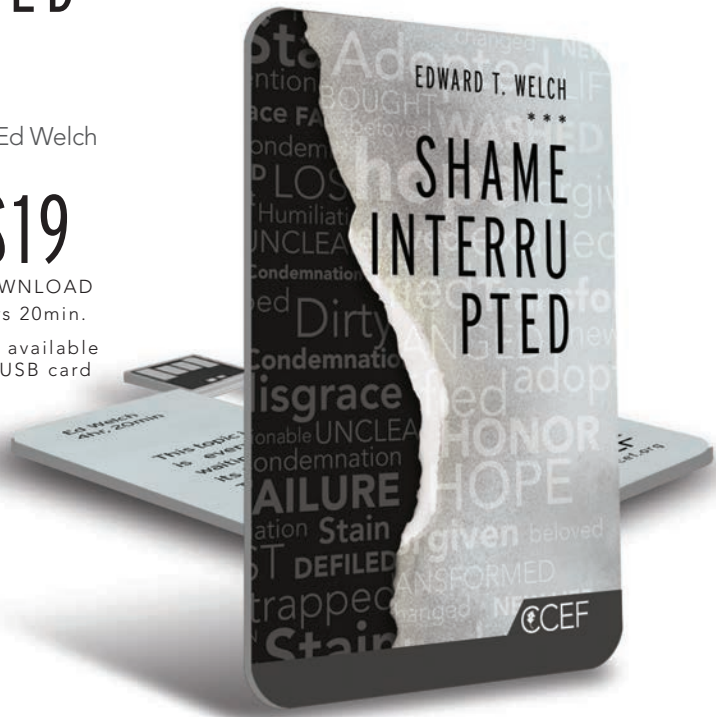
This topic is so important. Shame is everywhere, and it is just waiting for Scripture to unleash its beautiful and hopeful words. This material identifies some of those words. I was blessed to speak them. I hope you will be blessed to hear them.

Thanks,
Ed

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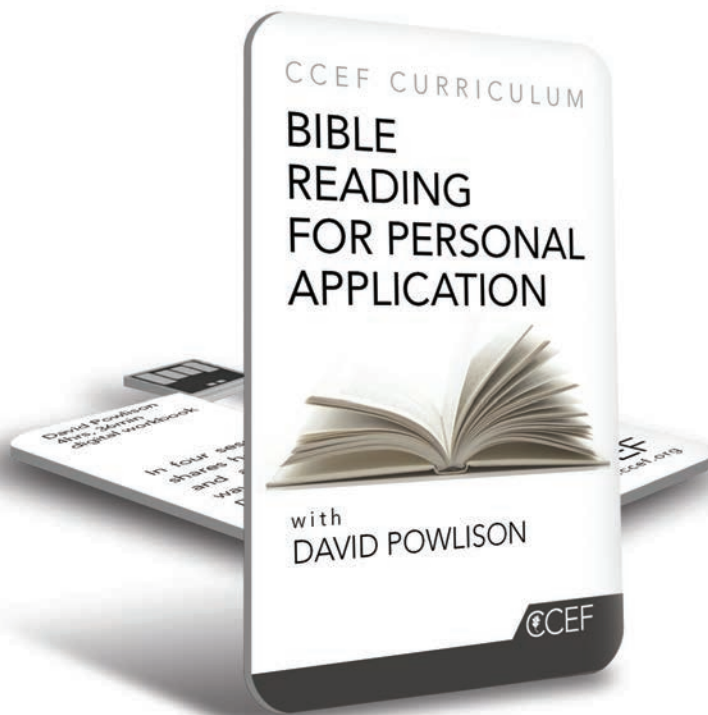
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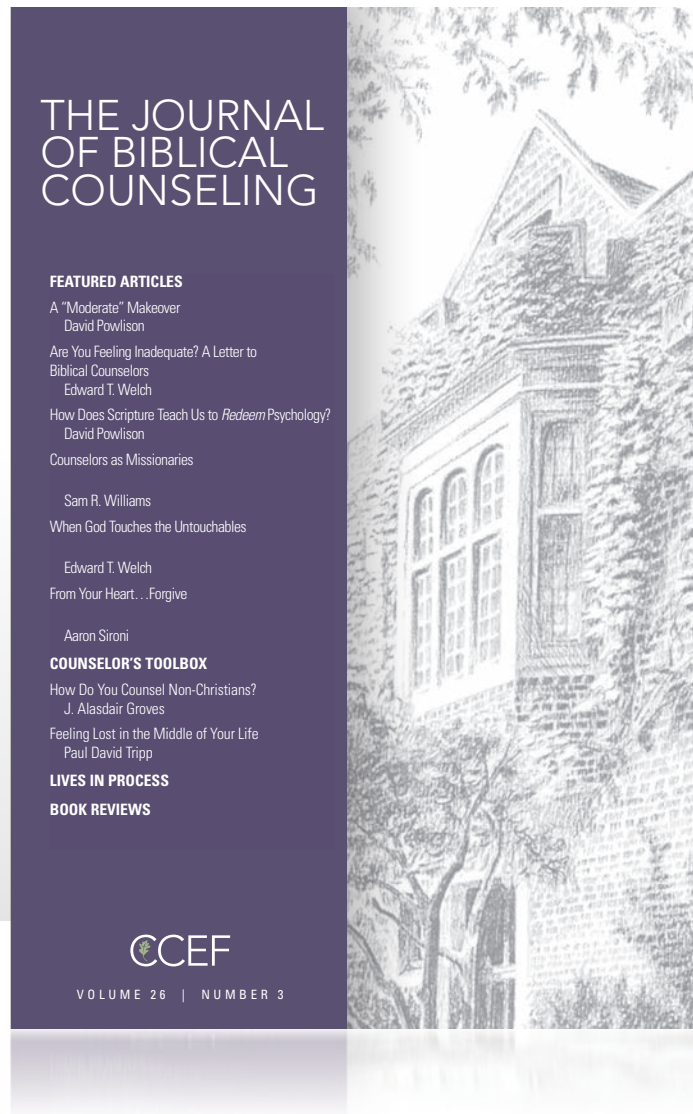
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moving TOWARD people

by Ed Welch

We turn toward others and move in their direction. That is how the kingdom of heaven works.
Sin scatters people; grace draws us toward each other.

A woman was sitting in the front row of church during her husband's memorial service. Many people knew her, though not well. She was a private person. Her body language communicated "leave me alone." A number of people were trying to give her space. Except the woman sitting behind her. This woman never stopped touching the grieving widow throughout the entire service. This second-row minister was going to break through the "leave me alone" barrier. She was on a mission.

At first I thought the touching was a bit impolite. Couldn't this woman see that the widow wanted to be left alone? But my next thought was, "I want to break through those barriers, too."

What she did reminded me of what I do every week. As I meet with people, there is a resounding theme to my interactions. Move toward...that's the drumbeat...move toward. There is nothing static about life in Christ, just lots of action. Let me explain.

God moves toward us. Consider Israel. The triune God pursued his people when they were suffering in bondage in Egypt. Once free, the people reject him and hold him in contempt. And yet he responds by moving toward them and guiding them through the wilderness. For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them (Ezekiel 34:11).

And as his servants, we are called to do the same. We move toward others in love. Because we are relentlessly pursued, especially when we not are worthy of such pursuit, we also become pursuers. We turn toward others and move in their direction. That is how the kingdom of heaven works. Sin scatters people; grace draws us toward each other.

For example, notice how it can change us when we gather together on Sunday mornings. Maybe you go to church because you are supposed to go, but you don't really engage with anyone while you're there. Maybe you go to church so you can worship, but you really view worship as a private matter. Imagine instead if you go because you want to hear the Word and respond in worship *with* your brothers and sisters. And imagine if, as soon as the service is over, you are ready and willing to move toward someone. The moving toward doesn't have to be complicated. "How are you [really] doing?" is enough.

Or consider someone who is going through suffering. Let's say the suffering is especially difficult—a chronic and dangerous disease in a child, rejection by a suitor, or a spouse's death. Here's the ironic thing. The more severe the suffering, the more we feel like we have no words to offer. And when we don't know what to say we don't say anything. After all, who wants to mutter something stupid at such a difficult time? But when we bring God's way of pursuing, God's way of moving toward into the picture, we will find ourselves right there, in front of the suffering person. "I just want you to know that you are on my heart. I'm very sorry."

There you go. If God gives you grace to move toward others he will also give you a few words that will be more precious to the grieving person than you think. Sometimes deciding to move toward others can present a spiritual battle, especially when the barriers involve conflict. What if you have a fractured relationship with someone? Maybe someone wronged you, maybe you wronged another person, or maybe it was a complicated misunderstanding that included hurt feelings all around. Whatever its origin—our response needs to be the same: move toward (e.g., Matthew 5:23-24).

But it's hard to do, isn't it? I know, because I struggle too. I hate to admit this, but when I have a conflict with someone outside my immediate family, my natural instincts are to let the tension blow over and let a little formality and coolness settle into the relationship. No moving toward there. Even with my wife, I prefer to let her take the initiative, confess her many egregious sins, and propose a long-term strategy for restitution, or something like that. My instincts, of course, are wretched. When in doubt, I need to move toward others and have confession of my sin lead the way. The process is hard. But God always shows up to help when our hearts line up with his.

So, I admire this woman who busted through the widow's veil of privacy and isolation. She probably discerned the message correctly—"leave me alone"—but the widow might as well have been saying, "Hrrnip blestobr coblouie" or some other indecipherable code. When in doubt, people of the kingdom move toward others.

Edward T. Welch (M.Div., Ph.D.) is a counselor and Faculty member at CCEF. Ed has written extensively on the topics of depression, fear, and addictions. His books include: *When People Are Big and God Is Small*; *Shame Interrupted*; *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*; *Blame It on the Brain*; *Depression—A Stubborn Darkness*; *Running Scared*; *Crossroads: A Step-by-Step Guide Away from Addiction*; and *When I Am Afraid: A Step-by-Step Guide Away from Fear and Anxiety*.



MEET

the

Counselor

Darby Strickland



In this edition of “Meet the Counselor” we introduce you to Darby Strickland who has both personal and professional experience in ministry to children with developmental delays and their families. As you read some of Darby’s story and the wisdom she has gained, our hope is that you would consider how you and your church body can come alongside families and express the love of Christ through words, deeds, and prayer. To that end and as a follow up to our interview, Darby has included a list of what practical love and ministry looks like to families of children with developmental delays.

It is believed that as many as 1 in 6 children will be developmentally delayed. What are developmental delays?

A developmental delay is when a child does not reach a developmental milestone at the expected time. A delay can occur in one or many areas, including: language/speech, movement/motor skills, emotional skills, social skills, thinking/cognitive skills. Initially, it’s difficult to project if the delay will be a permanent disability or a delay in normal development.

Why are you interested in helping children with developmental delays and their families?

Growing up I had a friend who had a blood vessel deformity in her brain. Her parents cared for her so well. Even as she declined physically there was something beautiful going on in that family spiritually. Her parents treasured her as a person. Witnessing that gave me sensitivity to the ministry needs of those who suffer physically.

Later, God blessed my husband and me with a son who has an undiagnosed neuro-muscular disease. My experience caring for our son has helped me become empathetic for other parents in similar situations and has grown my ability to identify with them in their suffering.

Based on your personal experience as a mother who has a developmentally delayed child, what do you want others to know about what the experience is like for parents?

Most people don’t understand what the experience is like and too often assumptions are made. That means that the experience is isolating. Parents are isolated because they can’t participate in life the way a normal parent can. For example, it is difficult for these parents to join play groups because their child’s behavior isn’t proper, or because the child has to be home with an occupational

therapist. Often times, the parents are the only ones who are equipped to care for the child, so it makes going out somewhere like a Bible study or prayer meeting nearly impossible.

The experience is also exhausting. It’s exhausting due to the amount of care needed. It’s overwhelming to coordinate so many doctor and therapy appointments. It’s emotionally exhausting because parents always wonder and doubt if they are doing the right thing for their child. Yet the beauty of having children with developmental delays is that they always put you at the end of yourself, because you have to be so focused on someone else.

As a counselor working with the parents of a child with developmental delays, what are your counseling goals?

Parents come in overwhelmed and exhausted. They need a place to be honest about how they’re really feeling. So I give them that space to be open and raw. Oftentimes, there is disunity in the marriage regarding parenting strategies, or which resources should be going toward the child, and so we process and address those issues.

Some parents come to counseling because they feel like their toolbox is empty—that they have tried everything they know how to do and it’s not working. Yet, in reality, they’re probably doing the best they can. My job is to encourage and remind them that the results of their efforts won’t necessarily be predictable. Their job is to love their child well. Instead of asking, “How did I fail?” the question I ponder with parents is “What can I do to love my child better?” And even in that question, I give permission for parents not to get it right.

Parenting children with developmental delays takes a willingness to be broken and a willingness to receive grace and mercy from God and others. So an additional goal I have in counseling is to help parents grapple with the fact that we all are perpetually broken. It’s

not until they connect with this reality that they will be able to enter into the brokenness that their child experiences.

One practical outcome of facing that truth is the willingness to be transparent with others in the body of Christ. If they want to pretend to be parents who have it all together and make it look like they have kids who have it all together, then they fail. But if they have a place at church to be honest about losing their temper with their child or about how afraid they really feel, then they gain freedom, nourishment, and prayer in their times of need.

With so much pulling for their time, what important ways can parents care well for their other children?

Parents must recognize that the sibling will have the longest relationship with the child and have the greatest social impact on the child. Therefore, it is imperative that parents nourish the sibling relationship.

Parents must also teach siblings how to talk about their developmentally delayed sibling with people outside the family. Within the family, siblings should be given permission to talk openly about their sibling with their parents. If something embarrassing happens in public, give the siblings permission to feel embarrassed and to say they feel that way.

Parents must foster this openness on a daily basis by asking their children questions: “How is this affecting you? Did anyone say anything to you? What are you worried about?” Don’t let children wonder about the results of a sibling’s appointment with a doctor. Spearhead those conversations.

As parents and children talk openly together, parents should also acknowledge that a lot of time and energy is focused on the child with a developmental delay. This is an opportunity to make it clear that they desire one-on-one time with each child. “Your brother takes up a lot of our time. But spending time with you is important. Let’s go out for ice cream every week on Wednesdays.”

Above all, parents should remember that they are a witness to the siblings. The degree that the parents embrace a series of challenges with grace, then the children will react in kind.

The Body of Christ: Caring for Families and Developmentally Delayed Children

To care well for a family who has a child with developmental delays, the multitude of the gifts and skills of the body of Christ are needed. Here are practical ways the local church can minister to children with developmental delays and their families, followed by ways that people with specific positions in the church can minister. No matter what size church you have, there are critical ways your body of believers can come alongside families with developmentally delayed children and love them well.

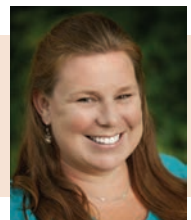
- Be on the lookout. Go out of your way to introduce yourself and sit with the family. This lets them know they are welcome. Don’t ask or expect a family with a developmentally delayed child to sit in the back row at church because they may have to get up during the service. Instead, tell them you understand it’s hard to come to church and you are so happy they came. Help the family feel that you see them as a part of the community and not as a burden or bother.
- Be intentional in pursuing relationships with the parents. Reach out and call them on the phone. Be willing to listen for an extended amount of time. Hold off on giving advice—they have therapists and countless professionals in their lives who help devise strategies for their child. Instead, ask how you can be an encouragement to them in what they are facing.
- When you offer to serve in a certain way, always ask if there is a different idea that might work better for the family. Be willing to help them in ways you might not have considered.
- Help to alleviate economic strain for the family.
- Offer to come and babysit.
- Offer to pray. Ask for a specific prayer list—for example, before an important doctor’s appointment that is coming. Follow up after the appointment, and ask for new specific requests based on the visit.
- Periodically offer to sit with the child during church, so the parents can have a more focused time of worship.
- Be aware of the family’s schedule. Initially when awaiting a diagnosis, there is a long wait period and the parents are coordinating many appointments. Ask how you can be helpful during this period.
- Offer to go to a doctor’s appointment. Wait outside with the child while the parent talks to the doctor. Offer to drive home as the parent may be too upset to drive after talking to the doctor.
- Offer to come over for an hour so parents can play and spend time with their other children.
- If a parent shares a concern with you, don’t dismiss it or imply it’s an overreaction. Encourage the parent to speak with a doctor. When developmental delays are caught early, treatment can be more effective.
- Send a note or anything that says you remember.
- Don’t make assumptions when you see an unusual scene. Remember it’s easy to assume and then render judgments based on your assumptions.

continued >

- Sunday school teachers:
 - Don't simply report disturbances to parents after being with their child. Instead, explain what happened and ask what might help in the future. This shows the parents you are in it for the long haul.
 - Ask if there is anything that can be helpful to create a better environment for the child—for example, dimming the lights.
 - As a church, commit to the child. It's usually not best to have a different teacher in Sunday school every week because the care needed is so specific. Is the church willing to have people work for two months at a time so there is consistency?
- Youth group leaders:
 - Find ways for developmentally delayed children to serve.
 - Realize that peer relationships may be hard. Connect an older, more mature teen with the child.
 - Teach other children how to respond and interact well with the child.
- Pastors and elders:
 - Visit the home and pray. This cannot be stressed enough. Include this family in a regular rotation.
 - Preach and teach the truth that we are all made in God's image. If the leadership treats the broken as valuable and created in God's image, then that will be contagious.
 - Create a culture within your church where the physically or mentally broken are incorporated into the life of the body, valued for their uniqueness, and able to offer their service in some way.
 - Coordinate long-term care and discipleship for this long-term struggle. Churches are really good at helping in a crisis, but these families can feel forgotten.
 - Realize that these families are often unreached by the church. Think of creative ways to invite them in, like making church facilities available for support groups or for sporting events.

No matter what size church you have, there are critical ways your body of believers can come alongside families with developmentally delayed children and love them well.

Darby Strickland (M.Div.) has worked at CCEF for 10 years as a counselor. Previously she worked with children with autism and as a crisis counselor.



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