



CCEF NOW

Restoring Christ to Counseling & Counseling to the Church

2014

**WHEN COUNSELORS MAKE
HOUSE CALLS**

Ed Welch

LOSS

Julie Lowe

**OFFERING HELP & HOPE
TO WOMEN IN NEED**

Ruby Bea Peters

MEET THE COUNSELOR

Cecelia Bernhardt

The Local Church Is
THE Place For
Biblical Counseling

David Powlison

Welcome

I've been thinking a lot about 1 John lately. John's letter is rather like a Bach fugue: a few powerful themes recur, each time with a slight but significant variation. In dozens of different ways, John shows how faith in Jesus Christ leads to loving others well. So how do we care well and wisely for each other?

Faithful words of counsel are one part of care. But should we even call this "counseling"? That word has many unhelpful connotations—but the reality of life-nourishing, personal conversations is intrinsic to loving others well.

This issue of CCEF Now aims to show how counseling ministries can take many different forms while embodying the same fundamental DNA of Scripture. This is because different churches, different individuals, and different ministries are called to love and address the needs of different populations. Elderly or young? Single or married? Homeless or wealthy? New believer or seasoned saint? Fearful or angry?

How can we better care for others? How can we counsel more wisely? CCEF works to serve that growing edge. We work to show how Christ and his Word address the core counseling problems. Each of us has personal and interpersonal struggles. Jesus knows those struggles, cares about strugglers, speaks relevantly, and enters in. Passion for Christ's relevance in counseling is our heritage and heartbeat. We work to establish counseling as one of the core ministries of the church. The words and actions of God's people are his primary instruments for helping other people to change. The good news of the gospel is meant to be preached, taught, and worshiped—and also meant to be counseled with relevance to individual people. Our goal is to equip Christians to live, love, and counsel well.

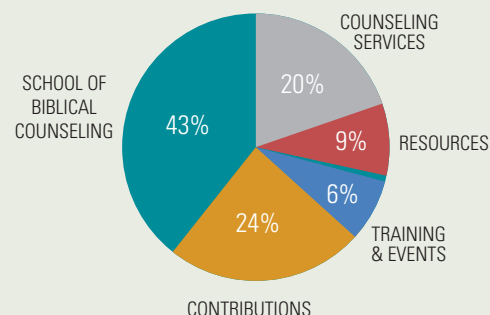
To fulfill this goal, we are dependent on God's people for about \$800,000 each year. The pie chart to the right shows how CCEF is funded as a ministry. Would you consider donating to our work? You may use the envelope enclosed in this magazine, or you may donate online at ccef.org/donate.

Warmly,



Dr. David Powlison
Executive Director
CCEF

CCEF Revenue Sources



\$800,000 needed in donations annually

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CONTENTS

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| 2 The Local Church Is THE Place For Biblical Counseling
David Powlison | 8 When Counselors Make House Calls
Edward T. Welch | 10 Offering Help & Hope to Women in Need
Ruby Bea Peters |
| 4 Ministry Connections
Stories from Three Pastors | 12 Loss
Julie Smith Lowe | 16 Meet the Counselor
Cecelia Bernhardt |

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David Powlison, M.Div., Ph.D.

is the Executive Director at CCEF. David has devoted his career to biblical counseling and exhorting God's people to take up their call to be instruments of grace and change in one another's lives. In his article *The Local Church Is THE Place For Biblical Counseling*, he explores how the church is uniquely equipped to be the context in which that happens. "In principle, the local church is the natural home for face-to-face ministry. Counseling can and should thrive in local churches."



Julie Smith Lowe, L.P.C., M.A.

is a faculty member and counselor at CCEF who specializes in counseling children. But in this issue of the magazine, Julie gets personal and invites us into her family's recent story of loss following a fire that destroyed their home earlier this year. "The trauma of the fire stripped away the sense of safety and stability I had. There was this blunt realization that the world is both a dangerous and precarious place. Any sense of security I held onto was a pretense. Life was turned upside down in so many countless ways that it became hard to quantify."



Ruby Bea Peters

is the Executive Director of Pregnancy Support Services (PSS) in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. PSS ministers help and hope to women who are faced with an unplanned pregnancy by offering practical helps and relational support. "We do believe that we can be a woman's first taste of grace when she comes through our doors."



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. In his article *When Counselors Make House Calls*, we see how Ed and an ornery man get to talking about the most important matters in life. "I held his hand and said, 'We are Christian men, my dear brother. We want our legacy to be love, not winning arguments.' He quickly responded, 'All my relationships are bad.' Now we were getting somewhere."



Cecelia Bernhardt, M.Div.

is a faculty member and the Director of Counseling at CCEF. We recently sat down with Cecelia to hear more about CCEF's counseling department and ways the department seeks to bless and help the larger body of Christ. "We are honored when God uses CCEF's experience to bless and help others who are working to bring about good redemptive results in the face of challenging situations."

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The Local Church Is **THE** Place For Biblical Counseling

by David Powlison

Can local churches become a natural home for counseling ministry? Often the limitations or failures of the church get cited first, making it seem that church is at best an adjunct to “the real work of counseling.” But, in principle, the local church is the natural home for face-to-face ministry. Counseling can and should thrive in local churches. Here are five of the numerous advantages to counseling being localized in the church.

First, a wise pastor (or friend, elder, small group leader, mentor, etc.) has many advantages over the secular paradigm of the office-bound counselor. In your own church you know people. You have seen them in action. Perhaps you know their parents and friends. You see how they treat their kids. You know how they handle themselves in a group. You have “back-story,” and aren’t limited to hearing only one side of the story. You know what kind of Christian nurture they are receiving week to week—and counseling can build on that. In addition to a wider knowledge base, you relate at multiple levels. You can invite people to your home, and invite yourself into their home. You can initiate the relationship, and express your concern. In contrast, office-bound counseling is structurally passive, only on the receiving end of inquiry or referral. There is an active, outreaching quality to counseling ministry when we conceptualize it in the church.

Here is a second advantage. It is a premise of biblical counseling that people are not just “problems.” They are not defined by a “diagnosis.” People come with gifts and callings—from God himself. They have a new identity—in Christ. All of us are given a role to play in the greater whole—regardless of physical or mental abilities, or education, or age, or any of the other human differences. Most people have helping gifts. The call to serve others brings dignity, purpose, belonging, identity, and participation. A woman coming out of drug addiction and poverty was moved to tears of gladness by the simple fact that she was personally invited to help another family in need. She contributed five meaningful dollars and a Saturday morning to helping them. Instead of being seen just as a “needy, troubled” person, she, too, could give, and it meant the world to her.

Here is a third advantage. Anyone can help anyone else. God delights in apparent role-reversals. Counseling in a church context is far richer than “designated expert” meets with “needy client.” I’ll never forget a story that my former pastor, Jack Miller, told about his sister-in-law. She was mentally disabled and lived with him and Rosemary, his wife. As a result, “Aunt Barbara” was a natural part of our church body. One day on the way to church, Jack had been grumbling about the rainy weather. Aunt Barbara, in her simple five-year-old way, said to him “But Jack, the sun is always shining. It’s just behind the clouds.” God used that like a lightning bolt. God is always shining, no matter what his providence displays on the surface. Out of the mouth of a woman with

a child’s mental life came words of faith that blessed the pastor of a church of 800 people. That’s the body of Christ!

Here is a fourth advantage. You have freedom to be completely open about the life-rearranging significance of God’s gift of himself, and you can participate together in his gifts of Scripture, worship, prayer, sacraments, and bearing one another’s burdens. The means of grace come naturally in a church context. It comes naturally to talk about knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent—which is the hope of life in a world of death. The counseling implications could not be deeper.

Here is a fifth advantage. It is natural to talk about the Big Questions, as well as the practicalities of problem solving or the process of coming to truer self-understanding. You can ask pointed existential questions. “What are you living for?” “Where are you placing the weight of your identity?” “How do you deal with your inner contradictions—the tension between the good and the bad in each of us?” You can help a person face mortality, and the reality that so many things let us down in the end. “Are you spending your life longing for things that will finally end up disappointing you, that will leave you with nothing but regrets and losses?” The church is uniquely equipped to ask, to talk about, and to offer real answers to the biggest questions.

Local churches flourish as they become places where counseling flourishes.

By the way, does this exclude counseling ministries that are outside of local churches? These wonderful advantages to local church counseling do not mean that “para-church” ministries are by definition unhelpful or wrong. God blesses the counseling that occurs through educational institutions, campus ministries, military chaplaincies, publishing houses, crisis pregnancy centers, mission agencies, and many other para-church Christian organizations. For example, CCEF is a multi-faceted para-church ministry—and I happily work here, as well as participating in my local church. But there are pitfalls that any para-church ministry must guard against. We must not generate an autonomous existence. We must genuinely serve the church. There are particular things that a counseling ministry like CCEF does—distance education, seminary teaching, counseling training, conferences, and publishing—that a local church would have a hard time replicating. But that said, our work serves a high view of the centrality of the local church. Local expressions of the body of Christ are God’s primary point of interest and activity.

For further reading, you might appreciate an article that appeared in the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*: “The Pastor as Counselor.”
ccef.org/jbc/pastor-counselor.

MINISTRY

connections

CONNECT <

We want to hear from you. If you have a story to share, email us at donate@ccef.org

We often hear from pastors and leaders who want to begin or expand counseling ministries within their churches. Pastors and leaders desire to think through how counseling will add another dimension of care to their shepherding, whether to the married couples in their congregations, or in their youth and young adult groups, or even in outreach ministries to hurting or underserved people in their communities.

In the following pages you will hear stories from three pastors. Each one has integrated elements of counseling care in their ministries. In the first story you will meet a church who has made biblical counseling part of their vision from the very beginning. The pastors seek to permeate each aspect of ministry with gospel wisdom, and then make application of that wisdom to issues of daily living. The second story comes from a pastor who was provided with a unique opportunity to serve individuals who are

currently homeless and living in the woods behind his church. This pastor is confronted with the intensity of need and the complexity of struggles facing the souls God has brought in his path. The third story is from a seasoned pastor who was tasked with starting a new counseling ministry within an established church. You will hear where he began and what God is doing through this effort.

As you read, perhaps you will catch a vision for how our resources might be helpful to you. That is certainly our hope. But more than that we want you to be encouraged by what some faithful servants are doing to build God's Kingdom. CCEF is humbled and joyful to have played a part in each of these stories. We are thankful to God for connecting us to these churches and many others around the world. It helps us see that, by God's grace, we are fulfilling our mission to restore counseling as a core ministry of the church.



JBC MUST READS

Over the decades, the *Journal of Biblical Counseling* has published more than one thousand articles. With so many articles to choose from, it is hard to know where to begin. We developed a "Must Reads" series to provide you with an entryway into those decades of content.

Our first series includes selected articles on 5 key issues: anger, parenting, relationships, suffering, and redeeming psychology.

ccef.org/resources

Biblical Counseling in the DNA of the Church

by Byron Peters

How does intentional biblical counseling become part of the DNA of a church? As you read about Christ Community Church's approach to biblical counseling from Pastor Byron Peters, you will see that it takes on many forms—from more formal one-on-one counseling relationships to a church class focused on listening more carefully to our neighbors' commonplace concerns. This church's holistic approach connects public and private ministry together to serve the goal of connecting Christ's riches to life's problems.

Biblical counseling is in the DNA of Christ Community Church in Chapel Hill, NC. Our mission statement is to glorify God by connecting the riches of Christ to the realities of life. We seek to fulfill our mission through our preaching, our small groups, and our individual conversations. We know that biblical counseling must be a part of the whole picture of how the gospel applies to life. To use my co-pastor's golf analogy, we need to be able to hit the ball down the fairway with the sermon, chip it near the hole with our small groups, and putt it into the hole when we are across the table having coffee with a hurting friend. We want to make connections between Christ and this person's reality, and the Bible makes those connections in all these ministry venues.

We envision God transforming us into the image of the risen Lord Jesus, so that we see as he sees and love as he loves. As pastors and elders we want to equip people in our congregation to actually participate in that Kingdom work, to get into the game, not just look on from the sidelines. We have taken ten groups of people through the *How People Change* curriculum. After going through this course, we have overseen the development of their skills in practical counseling ministry. We have focused on helping people take the theory they have learned and put it into practice through evaluated experiences of counseling ministry. The counseling team has trained a dozen people in biblical counseling ministry. Church-wide we want to help the congregation understand the language and ideas of biblical change, so that Scripture is viewed not merely as theoretically normative, but as practically useful to bring change in people's lives. We want to preach, teach, and counsel in ways that show the Bible is connected to life—the details of life—because Christ is our life.

We recently used an article by David Powlison, “Modern Therapies and the Church's Faith,” to teach a class about how to know and love our neighbor with the gospel. We used this article as an equipping tool and asked, “What can we learn about what a family member, friend, or co-worker sees and cares about in life? And what can we learn from Scripture about how to appreciate (and re-interpret) what this person sees and cares about?” In doing this, we oriented people to a model of change that they can apply in whatever spheres of influence God has called them to live and work in. Our goal in this is to help them know how to gently re-interpret a person's point of view with the intention of applying the gospel to that person's life and perspective. This approach requires intentional Christian education that is rooted in biblical Christianity and is relevant to our culture.

I am encouraged by this approach—to have biblical counseling be part of the DNA of our church—especially when I see people in our church who came from difficult backgrounds. Over a period of time their lives are transformed as they learn to process everything about themselves through the lens of Scripture. Some begin to feel emotions (joy, compassion) for the first time in years. Others emerge from their shell of fear. The church becomes their family—worship their anchor. And they in turn begin helping others marvel that Christ's riches made known in the gospel really do connect to all the realities of life.

Homelessness

by Jeremy J. Tuinstra

Ministry to homeless people can look as simple and beautiful as believers (and not-yet believers) gathering together to study God's Word and talk through issues of dignity and hope. As you read Pastor Jeremy Tuinstra's story, you will see how he is doing biblical counseling in his church. Please join us in prayer for this church—and for many other churches that seek to reach out to needy people. Pray the church will grow in skill and wisdom. Pray for fruitfulness, for lives changed by the gospel.

At Redemption Community Church (Burtonsville, MD) we have been blessed with a unique opportunity to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ among homeless people in our community. Discovering that relational poverty is at the core of homelessness, we want to follow hard after Jesus by offering ourselves and commending our Savior to our homeless friends in the context of redemptive relationships. Homeless people are unique in that their problems are obvious and intense because they have fallen through the cracks, both socially and economically. This is ministry that gets messy!

We live with a sense of urgency—sprinting alongside of the people we minister to in order to prevent them from losing their battle with hopelessness. But we also want to run the marathon with them—taking the time to get to know them in order to bring lasting hope in a relevant way. CCEF's materials are grounding us to walk alongside of people who are struggling with self-destructive and abusive habits, and helping us with long-term concerns, like restoring people's sense of dignity by pointing them to Christ and to the renewal of their identity as God's image-bearers.

CCEF materials have been crucial to my continuing education goals and ministry strategies for the past several years. I have read nearly every book written by CCEF authors, including the majority of the mini-books. I have facilitated Bible studies using *How People Change* and *Addictions: A Banquet In The Grave*. Long-time church members learn alongside people just coming to terms

with the message of hope in Jesus. Because of the gospel, normal sin struggles are radicalized and radical sin struggles are normalized. Gospel transformation is advancing!

I began pursuing further training for the congregation and for me through CCEF because of the number and complexity of life-impacting troubles our homeless friends face. What a world of bad and sad. The sins and sufferings include: addictions, sexual sin and abuse, codependency, anger, mental illness, family of origin struggles, incarceration, divorce, loneliness, stress, and more. Ignorance of the gospel and indifference to the implications of the gospel for meaningful life changes are the biggest challenges. But CCEF materials consistently demonstrate and inspire confidence in Jesus for honestly facing those challenges.

As our congregation started to engage this relationally intense ministry, it became clear to many of us that homeless people were not the only significantly broken people in the room. So, for example, while my wife and I were receiving training to strengthen ourselves for ministry “in the deep end of the pool” with our homeless friends, we were also receiving ministry for our own personal transformation and encouragement. We praise God for CCEF resources that help us address our own big-ugly-monster-of-a-sinful-heart with the hope of the gospel!

Establishing a Counseling Ministry

by Lou Gallo

How does an established church start a new biblical counseling ministry? How do pastors equip and mentor counselors within their church? As you read the following story, you will hear how Pastor Lou Gallo wrestled with and found answers to those very questions. As you read, we hope you will be encouraged by the practical wisdom he shares.

CCEF has been instrumental in the way we think about counseling at Sovereign Grace Church in Fairfax, Virginia. We became familiar with CCEF materials many years ago and have greatly benefitted from their wisdom, utilizing many resources in our small groups and in pastoral counseling. We attended many CCEF conferences and had faculty speak at our church. Though we are an established church, over time we recognized a void in the way we were handling the personal care of our members. We had a strong desire to engage our people in biblical counseling relationships, but our pastoral staff lacked the time to counsel all those seeking help. We also wanted to equip ourselves with additional training to grow in wisdom and expertise in order to counsel more effectively.

So the pastors asked me to establish a counseling ministry in our church. I knew we needed to implement in phases. With the help and assistance of two biblical counselors in our church, we proposed a 5-year plan to develop a biblical counseling ministry. We began at a grass-roots level. Our first goal was to work with people already in our church who possessed the talent and interest to counsel. Many of them had a strong sense of calling in this area. Our hope was that we could complete the training and present well-equipped counselors to our church within a few years. Our long-term goal was to also serve our local community.

The Lord was clearly working in our church. We had a number of church members begin pursuing classes and certificates through the CCEF School of Biblical Counseling (SBC) online program. We also began teaching *How People Change* and *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*. These classes provided our pastors with an opportunity to evaluate those interested in counseling. Some of the questions we asked included: "How well do they understand

the material?" and "Do they show an ability to approach others with tenderness and care?" We were able to pursue individuals we thought might minister well as counselors.

From there a core team was developed and included two church members who had nearly completed all the courses offered by SBC. We met to explore counseling topics and wrestle through the SBC materials and lectures. We desired to grow together in our counseling skills. One woman in particular also had a burden to see a biblical counseling ministry established in our church, and she is now our Counseling Ministry director. Gradually these and other developing counselors assumed responsibility for counseling situations that would have normally come to the pastors. This allowed for more struggling men and women in our church to receive counsel and encouragement.

Now that our counseling ministry has grown, we are making inroads into serving our broader community—bringing the light of the gospel to confused and hurting people. Recently we formed a GriefShare support group using GriefShare's materials. We opened our doors to anyone in the community struggling with the death of a loved one. The response has been wonderful; several men and women who do not know the Lord have joined the group. In addition, the two counselors and others we have been mentoring are now walking alongside group members, ministering to them with the love of Christ. We are very excited about how our biblical counseling ministry is growing, both within our church and in our local community. We look forward to what God will do through these efforts. We are deeply grateful to CCEF for helping in this vision, equipping us to wisely love and care for those struggling in our midst.

WHEN COUNSELORS MAKE

HOUSE CALLS



by Edward T. Welch

It wasn't exactly a house call. It was a nursing home call on an eighty-five year old who had talked to me about his depression a handful of times over the last few decades. He was there because the deacons of his church knew that he was not making it on his own and they, with great effort, had organized his minimal finances and found him a place that seemed to be better than what he could afford.

He is not an especially pleasant guy; he leans toward the ornery and critical. He complained about depression for much of his life, and he could do it as he pointed the accusing finger at other people. He had worn most every relationship down to the bone. He was relatively alone. Now add some intellectual decline to the picture. I was, however, very pleased the deacons let me know where he was, and I was looking forward to seeing him.

He was lying fully dressed in his bed—his roommate was out (he had some nasty name for the roommate)—and we greeted each other warmly. “I’d like your advice,” he quickly said.

Always ready to toss out some advice, I took off my shoes, propped my feet up on the side of his bed, and was ready to hunker down and hear the details.

He launched into a story I had already heard. He rehearsed some church debates he had in the 1950’s and made it clear that he was the last line of defense, necessary to save the church from heresy. Interspersed through his rant were specific criticisms about other people, especially one individual who had visited him in his old apartment and said he was “dirty.” I tried to turn the conversation to something more edifying, like anything loosely connected to Jesus, but that persuaded him that I too was one of the heretics. Within ten minutes I was being accused of being a Freudian, which I think was the worst thing he could imagine calling a biblical counselor, and I was asked to leave. I had said about twenty words.

I was tempted to leave. I had seen him in this state before and he could be a stubborn coot. Though I have always believed that “don’t cast your pearls before swine” is a passage to be used only once in a lifetime, and I had already used it, I considered using this proof-text again. But then spiritual clarity kicked in.

First, the Freudian accusation was wrong and I thought it was worth mentioning. “You are making that up—that is just stupid. Why would you ever say that to me?”

There are more delicate and godly ways of saying such things, but I knew him well enough, and he was being stupid. Surprisingly—stunningly—he backed off and said he had “overstated.” That, for him, was the pinnacle of contrition, and I accepted his apology.

Then I held his hand. “We are Christian men, my dear brother. We want our legacy to be love, not winning arguments on matters that few understand. It is no longer the time to fight theological wars. We can leave it to younger men. We want to love.”

He quickly responded, “All my relationships are bad.”

Now we were getting somewhere. The sparks of humility and insight were starting to fly. He continued, “I don’t even think I am a Christian.” He was looking through eyes overflowing with tears.

“I disagree, but why do you say that?” His string of broken relationships was probably enough to make him wonder if he was spiritually dead, but I wanted to hear more from him.

He leaned in my direction, lowered his voice, and began to talk of a lifetime of viewing pornography. In his eighty-five years, he had mentioned it once, two decades ago, to a friend who was no longer a friend. And now I was the honored friend, and he would not rid himself of me so easily.

That is why the “dirty” comment had been so piercing. He was ashamed of himself, and that is why he was so ornery. Indeed, he had sinned in so many relationships, but he was also trying to keep conversations from getting personal and wanted to keep people as far away as possible.

So we talked about Jesus—the one who loves the shamed, the outcast, and the needy—and he was certainly confessing his need. We prayed to both know Jesus’ love and talk about it to others. Almost before we finished praying he was overflowing with names and faces from the nursing home, and he was imagining ways to love them.

I can’t wait to visit again.

Ed Welch’s Course “Problems and Procedures”

Now available in video format through CCEF online courses

If you had the opportunity to be in this man’s life—if you could make “house calls”—how would you help him? What does wise and effective ministry look like with a person who struggled with lifelong addiction? As Christians we will encounter and be called to walk with people who struggle with problems like addiction. If you want to grow in helping people with complex struggles, then consider taking Ed Welch’s course Problems and Procedures. This course aims to go deep with the everyday and universal problems of life, such as guilt, shame, and suffering. And it also considers problems that are not found in a concordance, such as addictions and various psychiatric disorders. Through case studies, lectures, and outside readings, you’ll learn to move toward people in a way that is helpful and Christ-centered.

Visit ccef.org/courses for more information on how to register.



Offering Help & Hope to Women in Need

by Ruby Bea Peters

Pregnancy Support Services of Durham and Chapel Hill is a ministry that offers help and hope to women who are faced with difficult decisions as a result of unplanned pregnancies. Through this ministry we offer free pregnancy tests, education, adoption, parenting, free first trimester ultrasounds, and Bible studies. We have five full time staff, two part-time staff, and over forty volunteers. These volunteers are very important because they meet with the women seeking help. It is my responsibility to equip and guide our staff and volunteers, and I am thankful for the equipping ministry of CCEF.

For example, at a recent staff meeting I drew two circles on a board—a circle of responsibility and a circle of concern. Paul David Tripp in his book *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* introduces these circles as a way to understand the difference between the areas that God has entrusted you with responsibility versus the areas that you care and pray about, but are beyond your ability and calling to control. In our work with women facing difficult circumstances, we can be tempted to either shirk our responsibilities or take on more than God has called us to. We as a staff, and the volunteers we train, are regularly in a position to overstep our area of responsibility. We can easily take on the role of a parent for the women who come to us, but we must guard against that. This tool has helped our staff and volunteers ask, “Where does biblical wisdom draw the lines between responsibility and concern—as an organization, as a staff team, and as one-on-one client advocates?”

As I discussed the fact that our responsibility for our clients is necessarily smaller than our concern, I was encouraged by the response of our staff to this principle. We can't take God's place as we walk with women through an unplanned pregnancy. We have to remind ourselves that our role is not to “fix” the woman who has come to PSS, but to come alongside her and help her down the road toward Christ. And if someone already knows Christ, we want to walk beside her and put before her a plan of how to make healthy choices at this point in her life.

As we work with women, it's important to remember our mission because it will shape the way we serve. We focus on each woman as an individual person. We want to know her and hear her story and let her know that her name matters to us. We want to help her carefully weigh the options that face her. Our responsibility is to talk through each of those options and let her know about the services we provide. We are pro-life, so we do not refer for abortion. These are difficult and important conversations. As a result it is tempting to assume responsibility for areas more appropriately viewed as "concerns." If a woman agrees she is open to hearing about the gospel, it's our responsibility and joy to share that with her. If she wants to hear about parenting or adoption, it's our responsibility to share that with her. If she says "no" to any of our offers of service, then it becomes an area of concern and a reason to pray, but it's not our responsibility to control what services a woman chooses to pursue.

This concept not only shapes how we approach ministry, it also helps shape our services at a practical level. If a woman chooses to enroll in our parenting classes she will receive vouchers for a clothing closet which provides items for setting up her nursery. One very practical question that we ask ourselves is what size clothing do we offer to our clients? Should we offer past infant into toddler size clothing? I am working with our staff to think through how we understand our areas of responsibility and focus of our ministry at that very practical level. This is a great tool because it fits the practical of what we do in our ministry and it transfers to get to the heart issues of responsibility and concern.

And we are adding to our ministry services. Right now we are working on reaching out to women after they have had an abortion. There is often a significant grief process. It takes courage for a woman to come to our center and talk through her abortion experience. We are training volunteers in basic counseling skills. We want them to understand and know how to directly help a woman with issues such as guilt, fear, and confusions about personal identity and life-purpose. Post-abortion issues can be complex. We also help our volunteers know when the wiser choice is to refer a woman to other skilled helpers.

We do believe that we can be a woman's first taste of grace when they come through our doors. Our goal is to be attentive, prayerful, and loving. We do not judge. We want to listen well—her story matters because she matters. It is amazing to watch someone receive undistracted eye contact and to have her name remembered when she comes in, distraught, wondering what will happen if the pregnancy test she is having is positive. Those women are the women we are here to serve.

For two free resources by David Powlison on this important topic, go to
ccef.org/personal-liturgy-confession
ccef.org/video/process-healing-after-abortion

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LOSS

by Julie Smith Lowe



The Monday morning after Mother's Day life began as normal in the Lowe home. We were rushing around to move everyone out the door for school and work, taking care of our menagerie of pets, and making a list for the day's agenda. We live a full life with five children, two dogs, two cats, three birds, and two bunnies. I was on vacation and looking forward to rest from work and time to putz around my little haven, tackling things I never have time for.

My enjoyable day off did not turn out as expected. By noon, I was standing in front of our home in shock, watching seven fire companies make a frantic attempt to save our house. Unfortunately, it was not to happen. For five hours, we watched a fire that began in our kitchen ravage its way through our entire home. It was deemed a total loss. I helplessly watched our cherished pets die in front of us. Memories we had made over the last seven years flashed through my mind as everything burned away. I experienced an overwhelming sense of grief (and guilt) over not being present when the fire started in order to save our dogs—one of whom was blind and deaf. I was in a state of utter disbelief. I watched fire fighters risk their lives to save our home, while neighbors and bystanders took videos and pictures of our tragedy.

As you can imagine, my mind quickly rushed to my children. How do I tell five small children that all they had left behind that morning is now gone? How do I prepare them to face the fact that the toys they cherished were destroyed, the pets they adored were dead, and the place we gathered together as a family was gone? It is hard to paint a vivid enough picture of what that day was like,

let alone the ongoing experiences that have followed. That day I began to feel a range of emotions I was unprepared to deal with, and I often still feel the repercussions of our loss.

It was not entirely about the physical and material loss, though that was significant: the memories, the wedding albums, family photos, favorite Bibles, heirlooms, and childhood treasures. And simple things, like my favorite reading spot where the sunlight

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shines in, and the floors that creak when someone walks down the hall. Despite all that, the most significant loss was not our possessions. Years earlier I had survived an apartment fire, and I had learned to hold on lightly to what I owned.

So what was the most significant loss? It's the loss that comes from the trauma of watching all that I tangibly loved and cared for destroyed right in front of me. It's the memory of watching that fire go from bad to worse. It's the hours spent standing in front of a crisis, incapable of changing its outcome. It's living with the "if onlys" and the "what ifs." And it's replaying the day over and over again as though I could bring about an alternative ending.

No, what it really did was far greater than even that—the trauma of the fire stripped away the sense of safety and stability I had. There was this blunt realization that the world is both a dangerous and precarious place. Any sense of security I held onto was a pretense. Life was turned upside down in so many countless ways that it became hard to quantify, and difficult to capture for others to understand.

In a moment the world stopped. But it didn't really stop. Life kept going. And the challenges kept coming. Within weeks after the fire, one of our children was diagnosed with a progressive and degenerative eye condition, and no clarity about what the long-term effects would be. My son faced even more loss.

thing—perhaps without even knowing it—more than my Creator. I was reminded anew of my need to invest in my eternal home, where moth and rust, and fire and flood, do not destroy.

*My hope is built on nothing less, than Je-
sus blood and righteousness,*

*I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but
wholly lean on Jesus name.*

On Christ the solid rock I stand, All other ground is sinking sand,

All other ground is sinking sand.

(My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less)

As believers, as biblical counselors, we must be able and willing to walk alongside people in their suffering — to offer ourselves as another person processes and heals.

*I hear the Savior say,
“Thy strength indeed is small;
Child of weakness, watch and pray,
Find in Me thine all in all.”
(Jesus Paid It All)*

The fragility of life was in our face over and over again. We were left reeling. We did not doubt God or his goodness. We did not become angry at him. I'm not even sure I could bring myself to question him, though I did have many questions.

We were simply hurting. What did we need? What does processing loss look like? We needed to find the ability to grieve and find comfort in him. To shed tears and still trust. To be confused but know our hope was sure. To hold onto both sadness and belief. This, I believe, is the complexity of living with loss. Sorrow couched in hope. We needed people to understand, to help us think with clarity when we were incapable of doing so, and not to judge us unfaithful when we struggled—because struggle we did.

As I reflect on what I most lost that day, I am faced with how much I loved my home. It was my haven, the place I retreated to at the end of a long day. My refuge when life, relationships, or the daily grind felt burdensome. The sanctuary filled with those people and things I found solace in.

In one swoop it was all removed. The loss actually represented something far greater than what the fire destroyed: It represented all that I found comfort, pleasure, safety, and stability in. I was left exposed to this tenuous world. I was afraid. There is no doubt I had been lulled into a sense of stability as I enjoyed the created

I know there are those who have suffered loss far worse. My experience was hard, but I am also reminded that I have my children and spouse. Those gifts of life bring perspective and thanksgiving, but they don't alleviate the sorrow.

I am reminded that God calls each of us to empathize with those who are suffering—who have lost a child, a spouse, survived a tragic experience, lived through a war or genocide, or have suffered cruelty at the hands of others. As believers, as biblical counselors, we must be able and willing to walk alongside people in their suffering—to offer ourselves as another person processes and heals. It takes time to understand, to listen, and to help survivors find comfort and hope. Tragic losses aren't overcome in a few weeks, or even a few months. With each new life event or season, the loss is experienced at a new level. This has definitely been my experience.

May we find comfort not in our circumstances, but in the One who is in control, redeeming all that has been lost. No matter what loss you experience, may this truth be your comfort too.

LOSS

SPEAKERS

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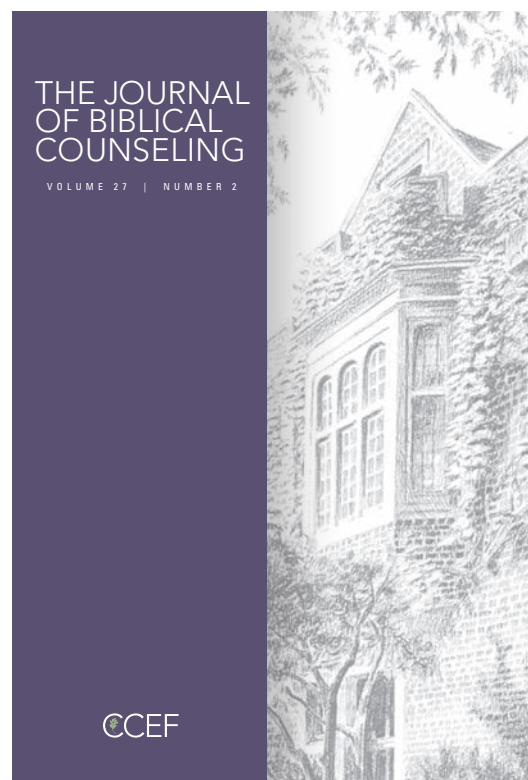
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MEET

the

Counselor

Cecelia Bernhardt



At our counseling center in Glenside we have the unique opportunity and calling to fulfill CCEF's overall mission through the ministry of biblical counseling. We have forty counselors who are privileged to counsel families, children, individuals, and couples throughout the week. Our continual aim is to make our practice of biblical counseling reflective of the counseling model that we teach in the classroom and write about in our publications. The Director of Counseling, Cecelia Bernhardt, oversees the daily operations involved in running the counseling center. In this edition of Meet the Counselor, we sit down with Cecelia to hear more about her experience as a counselor, a director, and a faculty member.

Cecelia, can you tell us more about what your role as the Director of Counseling entails?

In the big picture, I have the responsibility of ensuring that our counseling center fulfills CCEF's mission. I want to see our commitment to love and honor God and others front and center. In all that, I want to guard against any drifts in our practice of counseling that could take us away from these goals. On a daily basis I work closely with the counseling staff to improve the training, supervision, and support of our counselors and interns, as well as provide direct support for crisis case management.

How does your role as a faculty member overlap with your role as director of counseling?

My two roles complement one another. As a faculty member I work alongside the other faculty to build, develop, and refine the biblical counseling model. From there, I train our counselors to ensure the model is implemented in our actual counseling practice. And, of course, what we learn through counseling, and how we grow through acquiring case wisdom, also impacts the ways that we refine the model.

Is there a particular area of counseling that you have gained experience in and have a passion for?

Yes, I have experience in and a passion for counseling survivors of childhood sexual abuse. I've worked primarily with women, but also with some men. These individuals have suffered greatly. When I first began counseling I wondered if biblical counseling

could really help. Over time I found that as biblical counselors we actually have the most to offer because we can hold out the hope of the gospel, which is the only lasting hope that can bring healing in the face of such evil.

Can you offer an example of how the gospel speaks to a particular area survivors often struggle with?

As biblical counselors, we consider how the gospel redeems and renews our identity—and identity is often a point of confusion for a victim of childhood sexual abuse. Our identities are formed at an early age, and the trauma of abuse can leave a person with a distorted sense of self. Many victims blame themselves, as if something about who they are has caused them to be abused. Others think that now that they have been abused, it is the abuse that marks them and makes a claim on who they are and how they are to be perceived. In either case, the gospel speaks powerfully. Christ speaks powerfully. Christ tells us who we are. And when we are in him, our identity is found in him. His righteousness becomes ours. He removes our shame and loves us as his treasured children, no matter how dirty we feel or think we are. It will take time for survivors to grapple with these truths. Only the Holy Spirit can bring that lasting peace, and it will take time for survivors to walk through the healing process. And we are privileged to walk with the person in this process, to help her to live out of her new identity in Christ in her relationships, and to see her overall sense of reality brought into the story of redemption that Jesus brings.

What help can CCEF offer to pastors who are working with survivors of childhood sexual abuse in their church?

At CCEF we offer consultation services, and I have had the opportunity to work with many pastors and other helpers who are seeking guidance and direction in how they can help a victim who is in their church. This is a unique way that CCEF is positioned to help the local church, because we have gained much “case-experience” over the past four decades. Whereas a pastor may only encounter a congregant with a certain type of complex counseling issue once every two years or more, we may see dozens of people over that same period. So we can share what we’ve learned with a helper who doesn’t have the benefit of experience in working with that particular counseling issue.

Using the example of working with a victim of childhood sexual abuse, can you describe what that process of consultation might look like?

If a pastor or other helper would like guidance, he can call CCEF and be put in touch with our intake team, who will gather basic details of what kind of help he is seeking. Given the particular situation, the intake team would thoughtfully assign a counselor with experience in that area. So if a consultation case related to the issue of sexual abuse was assigned to me, I may be meeting with that pastor over the phone, over the internet, or in person depending on where he lives. When we connect, I have several goals in mind. First, I want to point the pastor to Jesus as he aims to faithfully minister the Word to this hurting person and embodies the love of Christ. I also want to support the pastor in prayer. Second, I outline an approach for helping this particular person. I help identify goals for their times together and help him to consider how to pace those counseling goals, depending on where the survivor is in the process of healing. I brainstorm questions he can ask to better understand the person’s story and experience. I share what I’ve learned that has been effective, and I suggest resources. And I advise him in how he can develop a team approach to helping this person that draws upon the myriad of resources that are available in the body of Christ.

Can you offer a few examples of what else pastors should consider?

If the person seeking help from the pastor is a woman, I help the pastor consider issues that can arise in a cross-gender counseling context. If the abuse is current or recent, I alert the pastor of the need to know the laws in his state about his role as a mandated reporter.

Given the severity of this issue, I know from experience that a season of counseling often lasts a long time, so I help pastors assess what their particular calling is in this person’s life and whether they have the time in their schedules to adequately help this person, or whether an alternate approach is needed. If it is determined that an alternate approach is needed, we can think creatively about what that approach might look like, and how the pastor can stay involved even if he is not the one providing the most frequent and direct care for the person. Finally, I help pastors and other leaders wrestle with feelings of inadequacy in their ability to help such a struggler. We often feel intimidated if we don’t have experience and wonder if we can really help. In those instances, I have the privilege to speak words of encouragement to leaders, knowing the vital role of shepherding they have in this person’s life.

What other types of consultation services does CCEF offer?

We have a local consultation group that biblical counselors can attend. This group is led by a faculty member, and counselors have the benefit of speaking about their counseling situations and receiving feedback and direction.

In addition to helping pastors and church leaders, we have done consultation appointments with other counselors when they get stuck with how to approach a particular person or counseling issue. And we’ve come alongside individuals, churches, and organizations that are dealing with instances of abuse or conflict situations and would like to be advised. As I said earlier, we at CCEF have been blessed with experience in all of these areas. We are honored when God uses our experience to bless and help others who are working to bring about good, redemptive results in the face of challenging situations.

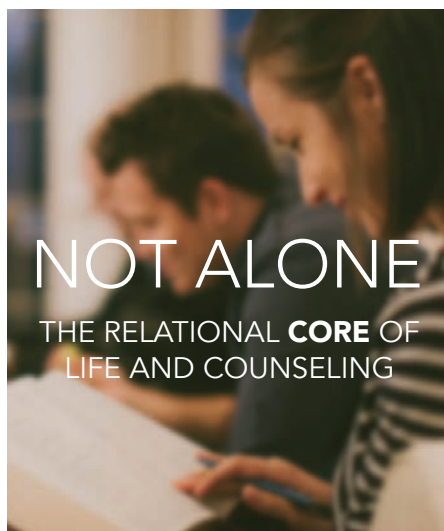


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