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Editor's Note

We know counseling ain't easy. Polls show that most pastors prefer the pulpit to the counselor's chair. Not only are the problems people bring intractably complex and heart-rending, they consume vast quantities of time.

Yet we hope this issue of the 9Marks eJournal will do two things for you, pastor: encourage you to look for ways to bring counseling into your local church, and introduce you to an incredible resource, the individuals and materials at the Christian Counseling & Education Foundation (CCEF). Both parts of CCEF's vision statement nail it on the head: "Restoring Christ to counseling and counseling to the church." Is your counseling Christ-centered or moralistic? And how are you cultivating a culture of counseling and discipleship in your church?

Browse the [CCEF website](#) to learn more about their materials and courses. But learn below about CCEF's counselors, and get their take on important topics in counseling today. We also asked Pastor Michael Lawrence why every pastoral intern he oversees reads one particular CCEF book.

Pastor Deepak Reju gets the ball rolling by considering the advantages of bringing counseling back into the local church and by situating counseling under the larger umbrella of discipleship.

— Jonathan Leeman

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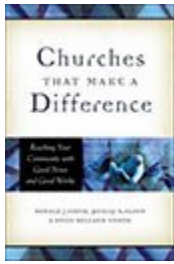


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Mark Dever asks church planter Mike McKinley about the travails of planting and why we should plant churches WITHOUT a vision statement.

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Five Advantages of Church-Based Counseling

By Deepak Reju

"God knows me well," a friend once said to me. "He knew that, apart from the accountability and love that comes from a Christian community, I would not survive in this world."



God never meant for Christians to live alone. Through the church on earth, therefore, he created a place where Christians could gather for corporate worship, accountability, fellowship, instruction, and godly exhortation. I would even dare say that the fullest expression of our faith cannot occur apart from loving communion with other believers in a local church.

Yet because Christians are often scared to reveal their problems to people they know, they commonly seek out counselors who work in private practices outside of their church. Now, many of these counselors are doing good work, and I do believe there is a role for private practice counseling. Yet, I want to argue that there are distinct advantages to doing specialized counseling in the context of one's local church, and I would even propose that it should be the norm.

Here are five thoughts on counseling in the context of the local church.

SUBMITTING TO THOSE WHO HAVE WATCH

First, church-based counseling means submitting to leaders who already have watch over your soul.

If you had a choice between seeing someone who knows nothing about you and has no obligation to you outside of counseling *or* seeing someone who will give an account to God for how well he has watched over your soul, who would you choose?

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. (Heb. 13:17)

Counselors counsel, pastors pastor. Counselors help you and send you on your way. But pastors are charged with helping you and staying committed to you for the long-haul. Counselors are typically open to you returning to their office if the problem resurfaces. But pastors are constantly in your life, so if the problem comes back they will already be walking alongside you. The counselor will help, care, and love. But the pastor will help, care, love, and will exercise authority over you through the ministry of the Word.

Both pastor and counselor do important work in the kingdom. But the nature of the pastoral relationship includes an ongoing commitment to the members of his local church. Thus, within a church context, the pastor's task is much greater than the counselor's.

If you are struggling with a problem, it would not be uncommon to want to see someone who is skilled at counseling. The market for Christian counselors has grown steadily over the last twenty years. And there

are many more competent, biblical counselors available today as compared to twenty years ago. But what if you could go to someone who was both a skilled counselor and also your pastor? What if you could combine both professions into one? Think about someone who was trained in counseling, who didn't charge a fee for counseling (and allowed you to avoid the hassles of insurance), who was committed to pastoring you and your family for twenty or thirty years, and was readily available to you in your own church. Would you at least give him a try?

BUILDING ONE ANOTHER UP IN THE FAITH

Second, church-based counseling reaffirms our commitment to build one another up in the faith.

One priority laid out in Scripture is the importance of Christians building one another up in the faith.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13)

God has given the church pastors and teachers, and part of the work of pastoring includes counseling as well as teaching the members of a church to counsel one another (see also 1 Thes. 5:14). A biblical counselor's work is one part of the overall project building the church toward maturity and attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

In counseling, there is always a temptation to problem-solve and "fix" people's lives. Yet the end goal of biblical counseling is spiritual growth. Pastoral counselors use their gifts to counsel because they want people to grow in greater maturity in Christ.

EXTENDING OUR COVENANT

Third, church-based counseling is a natural extension of our covenant to one another as members of the same church.

Covenants are important tools in the life of the church. They represent a commitment that members of the same church have to one another. When a church member meets a counselor in his church, he is meeting with someone who has *already* made a commitment to live with the member in a Christ-centered way. Biblical counseling should be a natural extension of the covenantal commitment we have made as members of the same church.

Not all churches have a formal covenant. But whether or not they do, all churches have a sense of how they are going to live together, which is what a covenant articulates. At my church, there are several lines in the church covenant that articulate what we want to accomplish in the counseling room and beyond:

"We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

"We will walk together in brotherly love, as becomes the members of a Christian church; we will exercise affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require."

"We will rejoice at each other's happiness, and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows."

"We will seek, by Divine aid, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life."

On the one hand, every member of our church commits to pursuing these promises toward every other member. On the other hand, our church has generously set aside one individual full time—me—to help it with the work of fulfilling these promises in areas of special need. Of course, I and the other elders need to work hard at reminding the congregation that all this remains their work too. As I've already mentioned, I as the pastor of counseling am also called to equip the congregation to do this work.

OTHER BENEFITS OF BELONGING TO THE SAME CHURCH

Fourth, there are other benefits for pastoral counselor and counselee to belong to the same church.

Many of the secular counseling paradigms advocate no contact with counseling clients outside of the counseling office. But being in the same church helps because

- it allows the counselor to live as a Christ-like example both inside and outside the counseling setting. The integrity of the counselor's words can be matched with the way he lives and participates in a church. It shows the counselee that the counselor doesn't just "talk the talk" but also "walks the walk."
- It provides the counselor with greater insight into the most important dimension of the counselee's life—their spiritual life.
- It allows the two to serve together in a variety of ministries.
- It allows them to serve each other and pray for each other.
- It allows them to grow together through the same corporate experiences. As they sing, worship, hear the Word preached, pray, study Scripture, carry burdens, care for the community, and exalt God together, they share in the experiences that builds them up together in their faith.

Recently, one of our pastors taught from the book of Philemon, and his thoughtful sermons prompted members to share with me their struggles with forgiveness. What an invaluable opportunity! Both the counselor and the counselee talked about the pastor's sermon and the ways God's Word had shaped us. And we got to do this because of our shared experience on Sunday mornings.

GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY AND NETWORKING CAREGIVING

Fifth, church based counseling provides the potential for greater accountability of shared problems, as well as the opportunity to know who else in the church can share the care-giving load.

A pastor has a unique opportunity to hear people share their struggles. Often no one else will hear and know the things that a pastor knows. How can a pastor of counseling then use this *privileged* knowledge well? When there is a church member who struggling with a problem, a pastor of counseling can serve the individual by connecting him or her with someone else who has already worked through the same problem. A private practice counselor outside the church has no other human resources to draw upon—no one else in the counselee's life who can assist. It all comes down to that counselor's wisdom.

But is there not wisdom in a multitude of counselors (Prov. 14:11; 24:6)? Why not charge the close friends of an individual to play a larger role in counseling and care-giving? Why not bring together those people who share the same problems to encourage one another through their struggles? Let the former alcoholic help the struggling alcoholic; or let the abuse survivor comfort the woman who was recently abused. Let them do this as Christians in a church. Let them do this as brothers and sisters who have a covenantal obligation to one another. Let them do this as those who received God's comfort, and now

desire to show that comfort to others. Let them do this as those who have grown and matured in Christ, and who now desire to help those who are struggling.

What a beautiful picture of the body of Christ—not just the strong helping the weak, but the weak helping one another.

IS CHURCH BASED COUNSELING FOR YOU?

America is full of choices. There are probably a variety of counselors available in your community. But, as I've suggested in this article, there are good reasons why you should consider counseling in your own church. God has made us to live and grow in the context of a church. It is good for us to receive strength and encouragement from that community. And it is wise for us to seek godly counsel from wise members of that community.

Deepak Reju is an associate pastor at the Capitol Hill Baptist Church with particular oversight over biblical counseling and family ministries.

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Counseling and Discipleship

By Deepak Reju

How are counseling and discipleship related? Let's think about this in terms of two pictures, a river and a battle scene.*

A RIVER

Our discipleship in Christ is like sitting in a boat on a river that flows toward him. Sometimes the river is winding and slow. Other times it's rocky and fast. But gratefully his Spirit is always drawing us toward him, increasing our love for him, his word, and his people. As we flow down the river toward him, different men and women help to disciple us along the way. And we are called to help disciple them.

Now, I am not a fisherman, but I have been told that along the river there are "eddies." These are small pools of water where the fishermen can pull off the river, reload their gear, get some rest, and even strategize before continuing along the river again.

Counseling is like an eddy. It's a particular form of discipleship, where Christians pull off the river for a period of time to focus on the "problems" that are hindering their movement. It's a time to stop and ask, "What slows us down from growing closer to our Savior?" The counselor sits in the eddy and waits for the fishermen to pull off and ask for help. The biblical counselor patiently helps them. They sort through the Scriptures together, pray, and work at removing the obstacles from the fishermen's paths. Then the counselor sends the fishermen back into the river that heads towards Christ.

Now, I believe this is a helpful illustration as far as it goes. But it's not the full picture. More explanation is needed. You might have heard someone say in the context of football, "The best offense is a good defense." In counseling, the reverse is true: "The best defense is a good offense." In this case, the "offense" is a healthy culture of discipleship. A church with a well-developed culture of discipleship is one of the best ways to aggressively head off life's struggles as they emerge. Discipling relationships in a church should work to counsel people all along the way, so that there is less need to pull into the eddies. Let's try another illustration.

A BATTLE

Think of discipleship in terms of a battle. The front line of the battle is not the counseling room, but the weekly gathering as well as the conversations that take place among members of the church every day in their homes, over lunch meetings, in Bible study, in conversations after church, over the phone, and even on emails! All of a church's life together involves counseling and each of these opportunities gives us a chance to counsel one another in the Word. If people have at least one or two people in their lives who are willing to share in the ugly details, to be open about their struggles, to hold one another accountable, to admonish and encourage one another, then God can use these experiences to shed light on the darkness and confusion.

One step back from the front line is not the counselor, but wise and godly older men and women in the faith who take time to pour themselves into the lives of younger Christians. These are the "captains" and "generals" of the faith, who by their wisdom and experience direct the soldiers in battle. A culture of

discipleship that encourages younger members of the faith to seek out the wise older ones honors Christ by making good use of the rich relational resources that God has built into his church.

To carry the battle analogy one last step, think of the counseling room as the M.A.S.H. unit that sits far behind the front line. It's only when people are beaten up, bleeding, or maimed so badly that they are no longer useful in the battle that they must be sent to get special medical help. Most people only retreat to the counseling room when their problems get too far out of hand, when they are at a complete loss for wisdom, or when they can no longer tolerate their own struggles. As counselors (or doctor of souls?) we do our best to consider what unseen infections might lie deeper than what can be seen on the surface, treat them accordingly, and then send them back into battle.

TWO IMPLICATIONS

1. Every Christian is called to a ministry of discipleship.

Every Christian should either be discipling someone else, be disciplined by someone else, or be doing both. Biblical counseling is just one form of Christian discipleship, and it's meant to be a *temporary* activity. The main work of discipling should be done by the members of the congregation. The counselor sends the fisherman back into the river of discipleship, the M.A.S.H. unit sends the soldier back to the front line, to be built up in his faith as he or she engages in one-on-one discipleship with other members.

2. It's important for pastors to equip their people to do the work of discipleship on the front-lines of the battle.

It's easy for pastors to become over-taxed and over-burdened and still just barely keep up with the congregation's demands. Pastor, have you ever thought strategically about how to equip your people to be better disciplers and counselors of the Word? By equipping your members, you enable them to do the work on the front lines, which in turn saves you time because many of the problems on the "front-lines" never get back to you. Think about preaching a series on discipleship, or running an annual Sunday school class on discipleship, or having your members read through some good books on discipleship. Make it an expectation that church members should be involved in each other's lives, teaching them to invite one another into their own lives for correction and rebuke. Have you modeled this kind of humility for the church? Pray that the Lord will help you build a healthy culture of discipleship in your church.

ONE LAST PRACTICAL SUGGESTION

One last practical suggestion: Last Spring our church began a lay counseling training class for the members of our church. The class is based on two curriculums—*How People Change* and *Helping Others Change*—developed by the Christian Counseling Education Foundation (CCEF). These user-friendly leader's guides and workbooks make it very easy for pastors, lay leaders, and members to teach one another how to counsel the Word and how to better care for one another. The format is useable in a Sunday school, small group, or one-on-one discipleship setting. To find out more or to order material for your church, check out CCEF's bookstore at www.ccef.org.

* This idea of discipleship as a river and counseling as an eddy comes from Steve Viar's "The Discipleship River," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20 (2002): 58-60.

Deepak Reju is an associate pastor at Capitol Hill Baptist Church with particular oversight over biblical counseling and family ministries.

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Why Every Pastor-in-Training Should Read Ed's Book

An interview with Michael Lawrence

[Ed Welch, When People Are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man. P&R, 1997, \\$14.99](#)

9Marks: *Is it true? Does Capitol Hill Baptist Church require every pastoral intern to write a paper on Ed Welch's book When People are Big and God is Small before they arrive for the internship? What's the assignment?*

Michael Lawrence: It's true. After we formally accept an intern into the program, we send him a variety of books that they must read before the program begins. One of those books is Ed Welch's. By the time the internship begins, they must write a five-page paper where they use the book to reflect on their own life: Where do they see "fear of man" in their life? How does it work itself out and what should they do to respond to it?

That's what the book is about: the "fear of man" versus the "fear of God. We think the fear of man has huge ramifications for the rest of their ministry. It's not the only issue that pastors face, but it's a huge one and will have an outsized impact on the faithfulness and the shape of their ministry.

9M: *Why do you have them read this book at the beginning of the internship and not the middle or the end?*

ML: We have them read this book at the beginning because we want them to realize right up front that the tendencies in modern evangelicalism that we're going to critique in the internship are not just issues that *other* people have. The same fears and issues reside in our own hearts. It's easy to critique pastors who are fixated on "numbers." But what's the root issue there, and where does it show up in my heart?

Also, over the course of the internship program we're going to repeatedly put them in situations that will provoke the fear of man in them, including occasions in which we offer critique. Yet we don't want to teach them how to please us, but to seek the Lord's pleasure, even as they learn to humbly receive critique from us.

9M: *Why is this book so important both for pastors and for those training for the pastorate?*

If I am living and working for other people's approval of me, I'm going to be sorely tempted to trim my sails, to adjust my message. For instance, I might refrain from rebuking a brother or sister in Christ when love calls me to do so because I'm afraid that they aren't going to think I'm a "great guy" any more.

If I want to be respected in my community, I will be driven to build and measure my ministry in terms that the community will respect and value. And that will lead me to subtly import some of the world's values and measurements into my ministry.

Another fear that Welch deals with is the "fear of exposure." This is the fear of being exposed as a fraud, or as someone who doesn't know what he's doing, and who shouldn't be where he is. That's going to lead a pastor to structure his ministry in ways that are defensive. It will cause him to play only to his

strengths—those areas where he feels confident that he won't be exposed. So he won't take risks; he won't be someone who's living by faith. He will live by his wit and by his skills.

The fear of exposure will cause a pastor to be the kind of leader who will be hesitant to encourage and raise up other leaders, especially those who look like they could challenge his position or credibility. As soon as somebody comes along who looks like he might be a better preacher, counselor, or whatever, that person becomes a threat to me. That person may expose me. So I'm not going to encourage them. I'm not going to build a team of elders or staff that pursues godly faithfulness and excellence, because it's all too threatening.

And this might lead the pastor to become quite authoritarian. It might lead a pastor to discourage others out of fear, rather than encourage and build up as he ought.

Welch's book is very biblical and practical in terms of how to respond to the fear of man. He calls us back again and again to the sufficiency of Christ, the gospel, and the glory of God as the only things big enough to dispel the fear of man. As we grow in an appropriate fear of God, that puts the opinions of people in a right perspective.

Welch takes something that exists in all of our lives and drags it out of the darkness and into the light. That's the thing about fear of man—it hides. It makes itself look respectable. Welch does a great job of pulling off its masks and helping us see it for what it really is.

9M: *What if I'm a pastor and I realize that I have structured my ministry to cater to my strengths? What are some practical things that you've seen that could help leaders?*

ML: I certainly would encourage pastors to read this book with their elders and staff. But then the pastor has to lead the way in acknowledging and bringing into the open the ways in which he struggles with fear of man. That's the way you are going to begin to put it to death.

One thing we do at Capitol Hill Baptist Church is to hold a regular weekly opportunity for giving feedback to everyone involved in public ministry: godly encouragement and godly criticism. On Sunday evenings after the public services, all the people who participated in the services walk through them together to offer one another feedback. It's not just Mark Dever with the senior staff, but everybody down to the newest intern participating. Mark leads the way by subjecting himself to this feedback. At that moment, Mark models the opposite of a defensive, cult of personality, untouchable approach to ministry.

Building that meeting into our weekly rhythm has been extremely helpful in corporately cultivating a culture of humility.

One of the other things that we do is to try to cultivate a culture in which it is normal to be involved in each others lives. We actively encourage the formation of real relationships of depth in which it's expected that you're going to be asked: "How are you really doing?" or "How are you struggling?" Pastoral interns, pastors, and every member of the congregation must learn to take a risk in relationships for the sake of growth in grace and godliness. That doesn't happen overnight. But it is a culture that can be encouraged, modeled, and cultivated.

It doesn't happen perfectly in our church, but it's the goal we've set for ourselves and it's bearing good fruit.

Michael Lawrence is an associate pastor at the Capitol Hill Baptist Church and oversees the pastoral intern program.

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Twenty Ways to Cultivate a Culture of Counseling

By Jonathan Leeman & Deepak Reju

By equipping your members to counsel one another, you enable them to do the front-line work of ministry. Here are twenty ways to cultivate a culture of counseling and discipleship in your church:

1. Preach the Bible to the church as a whole. In other words, biblical texts should be applied not just to individuals, but to the church as a whole. Help the congregation see what any given text means for their corporate life together, and look specifically for ways to encourage discipleship and mutual caretaking through your sermon applications.
2. Preach and apply the gospel. The gospel rightly and regularly preached should produce Christians that perceive their shared obligation to counsel and disciple one another based on their shared family identity in Christ. As often as possible, help the congregation to connect the dots between their profession of the gospel and their active love for one another.
3. Offer an occasional Sunday school class on discipleship and/or counseling. See www.capitolhillbaptist.org for sample curriculums (click on “We Equip” and then “Core Seminars”).
4. Offer Sunday School classes on more specific topics like “Fear of Man” or “Guidance.” Again, see www.capitolhillbaptist.org for sample curriculums.
5. In your membership classes, set the expectation of being involved in one another’s lives. Repeat this admonition regularly in sermons.
6. In the membership interview, ask the candidate if he or she wants to be involved in a one-on-one discipleship relationship.
7. Stock your book store and church library with good resources on discipleship.
8. Along the same lines, consider [a CCEF booklet display](#) in your church for featuring these very brief and digestible resources on a vast number of specific topics. If possible, offer these booklets for free.
9. Promote and hand out these same books and booklets from the pulpit.
10. Ask the church for a pastoral budget for book giveaways. Have a stack of books in your office ready for spontaneous give-aways.
11. Teach the congregation to invite correction and rebuke from one another.
12. As the pastor, model this type of humility and correction-inviting!
13. Consider providing church small groups with recommended resources according to small group type, e.g. good resources for young married couples groups, for singles groups, etc.
14. If resources permit, hire a full-time pastor who can devote himself to counseling.
15. If resources permit, hire a woman who can devote herself to counseling and discipling women in the congregation.

16. Encourage church members to attend Christian Counseling Education Foundation ([CCEF](#)) [conferences](#) and to make use of its online [training courses](#).
17. Offer a lay counseling training class for the members and/or small group leaders of your church. CCEF offers [two excellent curriculums](#)—*How People Change* and *Helping Others Change*. These user-friendly leader's guides and workbooks make it very easy for pastors, lay leaders, and members to teach one another how to counsel the Word and how to better care for one another. (www.ccef.org)
18. Read Paul David Tripp's *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*.
19. Encourage the individuals you are discipling for full-time pastoral ministry to read Ed Welch's *When People Are Big and God Is Small*.
20. Pray and ask God to raise up elders, godly women, and mature disciplers within your congregation to help care for the sheep.

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Looking at the Past and Present of Counseling

An Interview with David Powlison

LOOKING AT THE HISTORY OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

9Marks: *Are there significant points of commonality between biblical counseling in the past, such as the Puritan approach, and proper biblical counseling today?*

David Powlison: The church forgets things. The church rediscovers things. But when it rediscovers something, it's different because it's always in a different socio-cultural-historical moment, and different forces are at work.

Caring for the soul, which we try to do in biblical counseling, is not new. Two of the great pioneers in church history would be Augustine and Gregory the Great. Even secular people will credit Augustine's *Confessions* as pioneering the idea that there is an inner life. Augustine did an unsurpassed job of tearing apart the various ways in which people's desires become disordered.

Gregory wrote the earliest textbook on pastoral care. He pioneered diverse ways of dealing with a fearful person, a brash and impulsive person, an angry person, an overly passive person. He broke out these different struggles and sought to apply explicitly biblical, Christ-centered medicine—full of Christ, full of grace, full of gospel, and full of the hard call of God's Word to the challenges of life.

The Puritans represent a second era of great riches in the area of pastoral care, and the question is often asked about CCEF's relationship to the Puritans. People are more familiar with them because we still read them. You think about people like Richard Baxter, whose *Christian Directory* offers a treatise on everything from melancholy to domestic violence to addictions. Now, the Puritans use a different language set. There are certain ways that their studies are not as nuanced and sophisticated as ours, but there is a tremendous correlation of current wisdom for pastoral care in the cure of souls.

I would say that we have commonalities and discontinuities with the Puritans. In terms of commonalities, we share a way to understand people and their problems as well as a way to address their problems candidly and thoroughly in a God-centered manner. The living God sees our problem, weighs it, and has something to say about it. That commonality is what makes us Christians.

Discontinuities, I think, come in large part because of cultural context. What's interesting about the current rediscovery of biblical counseling is that it's the first time the church has had to grapple with doing counseling when there's a very powerful competitor in the wider culture. Historically, no one did counseling except the church. People were too busy making crops grow and making babies and making war. But the modern world does have time to do it.

The modern psychologies present a tremendously stimulating, informative, and threatening challenge. These psychologies are stimulating because they push us to ask questions that we may not have already considered. They're informational because they are very observant. They're threatening because they are a self-conscious alternative to the church and would love to take over the care of souls. They're willing to do our job for us, letting us be a religious club that does good works while they deal with the deep stuff and the long stuff.

That being said, the church is the place where we should think about what makes people tick and how the human heart can be renewed.

Maybe a brief way to illustrate it would be to point to Jonathan Edwards' *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*. It's a master work of empirical, thoughtful study on how people respond to God and how their emotions, affections, loves, and experiences can be distorted or greatly ordered. If you look at the courses CCEF has produced in the last couple of decades, you could say that we have been working in this direction. But we have to engage the problems in case studies in a much more fine-grained way. I think that is because of the provocative stimulus that living in a psychologized culture offers to us.

The psychologies are the great challenge to us. And the church can respond to these challenges either by syncretism—a kind of reverse conversion where we let the psychologies call the shots—or by doing something better than the culture. It's that "doing it better" that's actually our mission.

LOOKING AT COUNSELING IN CHURCHES TODAY

9M: *What most discourages you about the way churches are approaching the field of counseling and discipleship?*

DP: Counseling is about what? The cure of souls. How can we understand people and their life circumstances? We do so through the eyes of God as revealed in Scripture. We need to redefine the word "counseling" from the start, because when churches think about counseling these days, their first impulse is not the right impulse. They either mimic what the world does inside itself or they refer people out to the world.

The word "discipleship" is essentially a synonym for counseling. Maybe we could nuance it and say that counseling biblically is a more problem-centered form of discipleship. But that is just playing with words because discipleship means helping people change into the image of Jesus Christ. And that's what counseling is. That's what transformation is. That's what sanctification is.

In our evangelical culture, the word discipleship tends to mean some kind of structured program—learning how to have a quiet time, learning what your gifts are, learning certain facts about the church. All of those are great and certainly a part of discipleship. But the essence of discipleship is that the disciple is becoming like the master, and the master is someone who trusts God and loves people. If we are people who trust ourselves and use people, there is a gap. Discipleship is actually meant to bridge that gap so that people who trust themselves learn to trust God, and people who use other people learn to love other people.

This personal ministry—or inter-personal ministry—isn't just from the pulpit or even small group. It's climbing into one another's lives. Part of CCEF's mission is to convince local churches of these things and then to help churches take hold of a counseling and discipleship that is really worthy of the name.

LOOKING AT CCEF

9M: *Speaking of CCEF, what is CCEF trying to do that's unique?*

DP: For starters, we've got one of the world's best mission statements: *Restoring Christ to Counseling and Counseling to the Church*. Let's think about that first part—restoring Christ to counseling. Christ is not in most of the counseling that's in our world, because people do not understand the human dilemma. They don't understand what suffering really means. They don't understand the forces of enculturation. They don't understand the nature of sin or the nature of our desires. And they don't understand that Christ is the one who immediately, intrinsically, relevantly speaks to what people have been dealing with.

Every Bible-believing church on the planet would agree that we ought to *preach Christ*. But how many people have the idea that we need to *counsel Christ*? What does that mean? When you preach, you exposit the Scriptures and show how Christ applies. But when you counsel Christ, the process is typically going to be bottom up, not top down. You start by getting to know a person. You love the person. You get to know their world. They know you care. They have reasons to trust you. Once you've done this, you have a better idea of how to make the gospel of the one true living God immediately relevant to their lives.

The second part of our mission is restoring counseling to the church. The church ought to be a place where we "go deep" and "hang in long" in one another's lives. "Deep" and "long" don't tend to be qualities that are found in the church of Christ. Hence, people are willing to pay money to others who will never lead them to the Savior of the World. But that must change.

CCEF is also unique even within the wider biblical counseling movement in two more ways. One is what I call "R&D"—a research and development purpose. We don't believe that saying "biblical counseling" means that we have figured it all out. We are a work in progress. We have a core commitment to push, to develop, to build, to tackle a new problem.

Second is an evangelistic purpose. We try to think through how to reach those who disagree with us. How can we reach both the Christian community and a non-Christian community with the relevant counseling oriented message that is christocentric?

CCEF has five full-time faculty members who share a wonderful synergy, in part because you have people who all have a dual expertise—a primary commitment to Bible and theology, coupled with some other expertise. Our director, Dr. Tim Lane, was a pastor for years. He brings a sensitivity to how counseling ministry links to the other aspects of church life.

Dr. Mike Emlet is an M.D. who had a family practice for years. He's the scientist who brings an awareness of mind-body issues like psychiatric diagnosis and medications.

Dr. Ed Welch has a PhD in neuro-psychology and a burning interest in the nuances of actual counseling moments and how counseling actually happens.

Winston Smith stays very current with the psycho therapeutic world. He has given his life to issues of marriage and family and group dynamics.

My graduate work (besides Bible and theology) was in the history of psychiatry, history of science, and history of medicine.

I am only just speaking of the faculty and not speaking of various members of the much wider counseling staff who have various interests. It's a very rich environment with a common commitment to biblical counseling.

LOOKING AT POWLISON'S OWN WORK

9M: Can you give us a quick introduction to your two books *Speaking Truth in Love* and *Seeing with New Eyes*?

DP: The books I've written are labors of love. They are very personal.

You will notice that in the title of *Speaking Truth in Love* there is no "the" in the title. That's very intentional because biblical truth is not just the truth with a capital "t." The Bible also gives us what is true with a lower case "t"—truth about what is happening in our lives. The living God gives us truth that is once for all, unchangeable, incarnate, and



written, and that is always true and real and candid and direct. *Speaking Truth in Love* is both. In counseling it's both. If you're speaking to someone who is depressed, and you want to speak truth in love, you don't just proclaim the glories of God. You talk about the experience of depression. You talk about what he or she is going through. You talk about what may be motivational factors. You talk about the one who is the truth and the God who is true in his Word. So counseling is about bringing "big T Truth" and "little t truth" together into conversational, counseling ministry, implying a give and take. You want to deal with the life that's on the table.

So the book asks how such a counseling ministry or conversational ministry can proceed. The first half of the book is a series of case studies on counseling methodology. The second presents a series of case studies or perspectives on how the church can organize and think about a counseling ministry.

The burden of my other book, *Seeing with New Eyes*, is that God has a point of view on human life. I mean, it sounds like the most obvious thing in the world once you say that, but the counseling world has been almost blind to the fact that God *has* a point of view on counseling issues. It presents an endeavor that is obviously from outside the church. Even counseling inside, the church is often unhinged from God's point of view. But God has a point of view. He made the world. He judges it. He evaluates it. He redeems it. He invades it. He challenges it. He destroys it. He has a point of view on whatever happens in human life.



Not only that, God has revealed his point of view. He has told us how he sees things. On the one hand, the heart is deceitful and opaque. On the other hand, he has told us how to evaluate it. You can illustrate this point by considering the most profound psycho dynamic theories—the Freud's, the Young's, the Hadler's, and so forth. At some level, they are exactly right in their descriptions. They can observe the sorts of forces at play in the human heart—the "power drives" or "spirituality instincts" or "sexuality instincts" at play. At the same time, they don't know how to make sense of these forces. Their theories never get to the most profound depth of the human heart because they never see the religious dynamic taking place beneath all these forces and instincts.

Seeing With New Eyes is a book on how Scripture works. It's a book on how God sees. It's a book on how God teaches us to see. The second half of the book is a series of case studies on contemporary issues. What do we make of love languages? What about people who weren't loved by their father? What about the idea of unconditional love? What do we do with all the physiological/biological/psychiatry kinds of things? The book is an attempt to think biblically, with God's eyes, about contemporary issues.

David Powlison is a counselor and faculty member at the *Christian Counseling and Education Foundation*. He is the editor of the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*, an adjunct professor at the *Westminster Theological Seminary*, and the author of several books.

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Cultivating a Culture of Counseling and Discipleship

An interview with Tim Lane

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

9Marks: *Do you think a pastor can counsel from the pulpit?*

Tim Lane: Certainly. Preaching is a form of counseling because it's one part of ministry of the Word. Now, there needs to be consistent exegesis and good application. But if preaching is pointing people to Christ so that they're learning to worship him and the living God—Father, Son, and Spirit—then it's counseling.

9M: *I've heard you like the word "discipleship" more than the word "counseling" in the context of the local church. Is that right?*

TL: Let me nuance that slightly. The word "discipleship" communicates daily growth in grace as a result of the means of grace in the life of the church—fellowship, the Word, prayer, sacraments. The word "counseling" is understood oftentimes as a formal session with a degreed person trained to deal with complex issues. But the liability of the "counseling" word is that it tends to communicate that there's another solution or theory or message that changes the person. Christians understand, hopefully, that discipleship occurs through the gospel. But when you talk about counseling, people can think that the gospel isn't sufficient. And that's clearly wrong.

I'm comfortable using both terms, but would put both the discipling ministry of the church and the counseling ministry of the church (which will focus more on severe problems) under the ministry of the Word. Both discipleship and counseling depend on the same message of change (the gospel) and the same text (the Scriptures).

9M: *So describe the ideal church in regard to counseling and discipleship. What picture should we aim at?*

TL: I would paint a picture of a church that has as broad a definition as possible of what the ministry of the Word looks like. People who emphasize the ministry of the Word typically point to preaching. I want to say, "That's a very important aspect of ministry of the Word, but what about everything that follows?" The small group, the one-on-one formal meeting, or the conversation in the hallway where someone's asking for advice are all opportunities for the ministry of the Word.

Now, are the conversations in the hallway consistent with the pulpit ministry? Suppose the pastor preaches on anger from the Scriptures. Then the person who hears the sermon goes to a friend and says, "I'm struggling with anger." At that point, the friend will either support the ministry of the Word in the church or not.

The ideal church is where the pastors who do the more formal public ministry of the Word focus on Christ in their preaching. Then the ministry of the Word doesn't stop there; it continues throughout the church. The discipling ministry, the children's ministry, the youth ministry, the missions work, the worship ministry, the friendships and families—all of this operates on the same page by being Word oriented and Christ centered. Elders and deacons are taking the Word into their work. Parents are learning to bring the

gospel into how they train their kids. Husbands and wives are thinking about the centrality of the gospel as they relate to one another. And the list goes on and on.

In terms of counseling, I do believe in the importance of having better trained and more skilled pastoral counseling staff for intervening in serious crises, but they should not be doing all the counseling themselves. They should be training and equipping small group leaders, maybe for more skilled lay counselors. They should be creating a culture of discipleship and counseling in the life of the church.

In the ideal church, you're swimming in a sea of Word-saturated relationships. People are constantly asking, "How can we make this message—the redemptive work of Father, Son, and Spirit for us through what Jesus has done in His life, death, and resurrection—drive what we do?"

9M: *Where do you see this broader idea of the ministry of the Word pictured in Scripture?*

TL: There are many passages, but three stand out in my mind. The first is 1 Peter 5. The elders are to be shepherds, to feed, to care for, to exhort, to correct, to guide, and to nurture the sheep through the Word. The primary work of the elders is to ask the question, how can we best see our people be conformed to the image of Jesus?

The second is Ephesians 4, particularly where Paul calls the leadership to equip the saints. The leaders should think about how they can equip the entire body of Christ to be participants in one another's sanctification.

The third passage presents what 1 Peter 5 and Ephesians 4 look like when the leaders apply them. It's Colossians 3:12-17, where Paul exhorts the entire body of Christ—not just the teaching elders—to let the Word of Christ dwell in them richly, so that they may instruct and exhort one another with all wisdom.

Where there is a culture of gospel saturation in a church's relationships, there is this growing skill in teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom.

9M: *How would you envision a non-Christian responding upon entering this kind of church?*

TL: The life of the Word-centered church is an incredible apologetic to a watching world. Paul says in Ephesians 5 that we're to live as children of light and—he uses an interesting phrase—"expose the darkness." The word translated as "expose" doesn't so much get at the idea of finger pointing as it does the idea of *persuading by our counter example*. When we live as children of light, we live a persuasive lifestyle that gets the attention of the non-Christian. A rich counseling ministry in the life of the church has wonderful evangelistic implications as we live life in the culture and persuade others of the truth of the gospel.

GOSPEL-CENTERED COUNSELING

9M: *Moving into the topic of a counseling ministry itself, what's distinctive about CCEF's and your understanding of counseling? And what distinguishes your approach from modern secular psychology?*

TL: The major category that gets excised in secular psychology is the category of the transcendent—the reality of a living God before whom we're accountable, a living God who intervenes by his grace in the person and work of Jesus.

In our own work, and in what we try to teach through all our resources at CCEF, is a view of counseling that is utterly Christ-centered. The gospel forms the center of how we think about counseling, and so you will find on-going connections to what Jesus has done for us and the benefits and blessings that are ours if we are united to him.

Start with justification. That's a wonderful blessing that comes to us by virtue of our union with Jesus. We are forgiven and counted righteous. Jesus died in my place the death that I should have died because I was a sinner. And the life that I'm required to live—a perfect life—has been lived by Jesus for me.

Then think of the doctrine of regeneration which is connected to progressive sanctification. Sanctification starts at the moment you're regenerated because you are given the Spirit. I have a new nature. I am a new creation in Christ. I have a new heart. That doesn't mean I have a perfect heart. I have a new heart. A new heart is valuable, because it's sensitive in the way the old heart wasn't to the things of God, to the Scriptures, to the influence of Christian brothers and sisters.

Often we use the word "progressive" in front of the word sanctification because most of the time it's a very slow process that takes place over a long period of time. Sometimes a person might be delivered in a short period of time from a dominating enslavement to anger or sexual lust, and we're thankful for those. But by and large, growth requires a lot of effort that is, of course, given to you by the work of the Spirit. We are participants. It's a fight. J. C. Ryle said the two marks of the Christian is a *new peace* in a person's life because he is now free from guilt and condemnation, but also a *new fight* because of the Spirit's work to destroy remaining sin completely.

Another blessing that comes to me because of my union in Jesus is the fact that I am adopted. I am no longer living with God in a court room trying to woefully defend myself and saying "I'm not guilty," when in fact I am. Because of what Christ has done for me, God is now my Father, and I live with him in the context of a family, and that relationship is irrevocable.

Not only does the doctrine of adoption focus individually. It's also corporate. I am adopted into a family—brothers and sisters in Christ, and that's to be worked out in the context of commitment in the local church.

Another benefit of our union with Christ is the assurance of perseverance and glory. If I really belong to Jesus, he's not going to let go of me, even when I'm struggling at my lowest. Then there is the wonderful promise that one day this struggling sinner will be glorified. There is an end to the struggle, and there's hope.

9M: Does your book *How People Change* address these issues?

TL: Yes, the book *How People Change* seeks to put forth a very basic and fundamental understanding of who God is, who we are, what kind of world we live in, and how change happens through the redeeming work of Christ. It's trying to lay out the big picture and to put forth a very practical view of the Christian life. You might say it's trying to put forth a robust biblical and gospel-centered Christian psychology.



PROMOTING DISCIPLESHIP AND COUNSELING

9M: What are the most important things pastors or elders should think about as they seek to promote discipleship in their church?

TL: Oftentimes, in some evangelical and Reformed contexts, we're first and foremost concerned about protecting the purity of our doctrine. That's certainly important. But we also need to think about how we are going to help our people live the Christian life with the common problems that we all struggle with. If we don't move to the practice of our doctrine, then we're missing something fundamental. How do we diagnose people's struggles and problems biblically? How can elders and pastors apply the gospel with skill and relevance to people's lives, to marriages, to families? These questions need to be on the radar screen.

This is why I love the Book of Ephesians in this regard. Ephesians 1 through 3 is awesome stuff. Look at all the wonderful things God has done for you and his glory. Then in chapter 4 he takes this jumbo jet that was flying at 30,000 feet and lands. He says, "Here's how it plays out in your daily life." Chapters 4 to 6 are how to work together as a church, how to parent your kids, what marriage should look like, and how you should view your role in the world that God has placed you in.

9M: *How do you train lay people in lay counseling and discipleship?*

TL: If I were pastoring right now, I would be using CCEF's curriculum!

COUNSELING REFERRALS AND RECOVERY GROUPS

9M: *Many pastors prefer to refer their counseling to a professional counselor who does not attend their church. What do you think about counseling referrals, and how does this work in connection with the culture of discipleship?*

TL: I would say that there isn't room to be legalistic about this, and there probably are occasions where you may want to refer. But I would have two very important qualifications: First, I would want to know where the particular counselor is coming from and his or her understanding of how change happens. Is it consistent with what the church teaches? Second, I would want to know if the outside counselor is willing to work with the leadership of the church, because the ultimate responsibility for giving oversight in the counselee's life is with the leaders of the church, not the outside counselor.

9M: *One popular way to do discipleship and counseling in churches is to start therapy groups—addiction recovery, financial debt recovery, grieving, sexual purity, and so forth. What role should such groups play in a church setting?*

TL: I would say that there is certainly a place for these groups so that people can find specific help for specific sin struggles, and there can be great encouragement in those groups. The danger occurs when people remain in them indefinitely and start to define themselves based on a sense of unique struggle with that sin. So "I'm an addict" or "I'm a divorced person" or "I'm someone who struggles with pornography," rather than, "I am in Christ. My fundamental core identity is that I'm a Christian, a new creation in Christ, who struggles with this particular sin."

I would say there is a place for them, but it's important to mainstream the people in these groups back into the life of the church because, at the end of the day, every sin struggle has a similar dynamic. It's a worship disorder. Mainstream these people back into the life of the church so they can be useful to everyone.

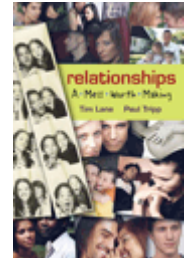
9M: *Tell us about the course that you teach for both pastors and lay people in your distance education program.*

TL: The name of the course is called "Counseling in the Local Church." In it, I'm trying to give pastors, lay leaders, and even average church members a picture of what it would look like if you took all the other courses of CCEF and actually worked them out into the life of the church. It explains what a culture of discipleship or counseling actually looks like and how you can promote it. It gets at the question of how to take advantage of the opportunities that God has given you so that you can be a part of the sanctification of another person.

(Note – CCEF offers this course, along with 8 others, through their distance education program. You can learn more about this program here:

http://ccef.org/distance_ed_faqs.asp)

Timothy S. Lane, M.Div., D.Min., is executive director of CCEF, a faculty member, and a counselor with almost twenty years of experience. He is the co-author of CCEF's Transformation Series curriculum, How People Change, and Relationships: A Mess Worth Making, in addition to numerous articles and booklets.



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Sorting Out the Spiritual and the Physical

An interview with Michael Emler

MEDICAL BACKGROUND AND TRAINING

9Marks: *You began your career as a medical doctor and switched to full time teaching and counseling? How does your medical background benefit your counseling work?*

Michael Emler: It has been a lengthy journey and certainly not anything that I anticipated. Because of my involvement in a local church and the interactions I had with patients, I began to think about pastoral ministry. The movement toward ministry seemed to be confirmed externally through church involvement and internally with a growing sense of calling. Over the course of a year or so, I began to wrestle with that calling and finally decided I would go to seminary. I did not think that I would necessarily be counseling as a vocation. I anticipated that I would be in pastoral ministry, and possibly part time in medicine. For example, I saw myself working as a bi-vocational pastor in an urban setting. I ended up attending Westminster Seminary because of CCEF [Christian Counseling and Education Foundation]. I knew that as a pastor, I would be doing a lot of counseling, so I wanted to be better trained.

9M: *Why did you want to go to CCEF?*

ME: My first exposure to biblical counseling was when I went into practice in South Carolina. There was a real burden to match biblical counselors with Christian family practices throughout the state. It was a terrific idea. In primary care, there are many people that come to their physician with psycho-social-spiritual issues. It is a great opportunity to be able to minister as a physician, but there is just not enough time to be doing that kind of counseling. As a practice, a number of us met with the organizer as well as some of the people that had been trained. It seemed like a great fit, but the person that was assigned to our practice was not actually *suited* for counseling. He was very abrupt, abrasive and not very personal. After a few months, I did not feel comfortable referring people to him. I had experiences where people were entrenched in certain sin patterns to the point that it created health problems. He gave a cut-and-dried, "Write this verse on a card, and when you're tempted, pull it out." There wasn't much about it that was gospel-centered. For a while, I said I would not go any place where biblical counseling was the norm!

We then had another counselor come along that had a great way with people and really bonded with them. I was encouraged, but after a while I began to be unsure that long-term change was happening. I knew that the overtly biblical approach didn't seem to connect with people. This new approach seemed to connect, but I wasn't convinced of its ability to deal with deeper issues. I began to hear more about CCEF around this time by talking with a student who had been taking classes and began to get a different sense of biblical counseling.

9M: *Are there any worldview assumptions in the medical field that the average Christian or pastor should be aware of as they visit the family doctor?*

ME: Generally, a non-Christian physician is going to have a worldview that sees people as simply physical beings. They will be more likely to have a physical or bio-medical explanation for the problems at hand, particularly if there are problems in terms of mood or intellect. This is particularly true when you get into the psychiatric realm. Obviously both Christian and non-Christian physicians will treat something like a broken ankle as a physical problem. But when you get into the issues of mood and intellect, that's

where you really see the worldview assumptions coming to bear. Interestingly, even as a Christian physician, all the bio-medical and the physical training I had received caused me to unwittingly and artificially separate the two spheres. In my mind, there was one place where the Scriptures were authoritative, and there was another place where bio-medical knowledge was authoritative. But in my counseling training, I began to see that the Scriptures provide this overarching view to any problem of life.

SORTING OUT THE SPIRITUAL AND THE PHYSICAL

9M: If you had someone arrive at CCEF's door for counseling, expressing some things that may be going on with them psychologically or physically, would you encourage them to also see a medical doctor in conjunction with their counseling?

ME: Yes, sometimes I do. There are some expressions of anxiety and depression that have physical causes. A low functioning thyroid might be associated with depression. An overactive thyroid might be associated with anxiety. Because of my medical background, I tend to approach people holistically. I tend to think—*what do I see that is weighted towards the spiritual, towards the heart? What might I be seeing that may have a physical correlation?* I try to keep both of these things in mind.

9M: Pastors will often find themselves talking with people who use terms like "major depression," "schizophrenia," or "post traumatic stress disorder." How should pastors think through those labels? Is there any value in them or do they mislead?

ME: I think they have value and can also be misleading. They can be helpful as long as we understand what the labels signify and we are aware of the benefits as well as the risks. In other words, we must be aware of the problems and pitfalls with the psychiatric diagnostic system. Interestingly, even within psychiatry there is disagreement about how we should classify disorders of mood and intellect. The diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders is on its fourth edition and they are planning the fifth. It has been delayed because the leaders within psychiatry are fundamentally not sure how we should best classify these problems.



One of the most important things regarding these diagnoses is to realize that they are helpful descriptions of disorders (thinking, behavior, mood), but they are not explanations. Ed Welch talks about this in [Blame It on the Brain](#) [P&R, 1998].

Someone comes in (just as they would in any medical situation), describes what they are feeling, what they are experiencing, what they are seeing. Then the physician pulls it all together as a diagnosis.

Similarly, psychiatric diagnoses are a list of symptoms. The difference is that there are no recommended objective tests—physical tests like brain scans or blood tests. There is an increasing interest in examining the brain pattern of someone who has OCD [obsessive-compulsive disorder], or someone who is severely depressed. But no one has determined that to diagnose depression, you need to do a particular blood test; to diagnose OCD you need to do a particular brain scan. We need to recognize that these are good descriptions, but they do not tell you *why* a person may be depressed—only that they meet the criteria. It gives a helpful outline of what this experience is like, but it doesn't tell you why.

For example, you see me and my face is red and I am stomping around, yelling and my brow is furrowed. You might say, "Oh, you're angry." Then you might ask, "Why are you angry?" What if I replied, "It's because my brow is furrowed, my face is red, and I'm stomping around!" That wouldn't be a very satisfactory answer. I am just using one word, anger, to describe many things—furrowed brow, red face, and stomping.

In a similar way, psychiatric diagnoses use one word (e.g. major depression, OCD, post traumatic stress disorder) to characterize a list of symptoms. It still does not tell you why a person might be struggling in a certain way. I think the diagnoses can come across as more authoritative than they really are. On the other hand, I think those descriptions can be really helpful.

I remember a prime example of this in my own practice. I had someone come in with the diagnosis of asperger syndrome. I never heard of asperger syndrome. It's a relatively recent diagnosis. Was it helpful to me to pull out my DSM and read about it? Yes! It helped me craft questions and better understand the person's experience.



9M: Can you give pastors any wisdom on how to distinguish between medical and non-medical problems? How can they help the people that are coming in the doors of their local church?

ME: I think the first thing is to have your radar up for the possibility that there could be something physical going on. I urge anyone in ministry to avoid the extremes. Do not put all your eggs into *the spiritual basket* or all your eggs into *the physical basket*. Always ask the question, "What do I see here that is either in line or is not in line with the gospel?" If something is not in line with the gospel, ask, "What might be going on at the level of the heart? What might be motivating this person?"

Secondly, a pastor should consider what the potential physical aspects of this struggle are? I want to know if I'm dealing with someone who is angry or depressed. What is going on at the home front? If they are being persecuted at work or if they are in a very contentious family situation, these contextual factors matter in terms of the way I approach them. In the same way, I want to be aware of the physical context. These two aspects of our personhood—physical and spiritual—are absolutely intertwined. We need a healthy awareness that both are at work.

Again, if you're dealing with a broken ankle, you're going to be focused on the physical. If you're dealing with someone who is gossiping or complaining, you're going to be focused more on the spiritual side of things. But I don't want to create an artificial distinction. I can't gossip without neurons firing in my brain, so I'm absolutely intertwined.

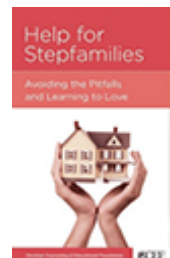
If someone is on a lot of medications, there is an increased likelihood of disturbances in thinking or mood. The medications may have side effects. The more medications a person is on, (not just psycho-active meds, anti-depressants, etc., but even simple blood pressure medications) there is potential interaction. There may also be sleep issues involved, or symptoms that occur later in life with an abrupt change—that is indication of something going on physically.

Obviously the gospel transforms us, but if I've been an introvert all of my life and, at age 45, I start being extremely extroverted; or I've been extremely thrifty and I suddenly begin spending thousands on a credit card, a pastor should start to wonder if something might be going on physically.

TRAINING COUNSELORS AND PASTORS

9M: You are involved with the counseling internship at CCEF. What does CCEF train interns to do?

ME: The internship falls right in line with CCEF's vision to "Restore Christ to Counseling and Counseling to the Church." We want to equip men and women to use counseling-related gifts to help the church both locally and globally. The internship provides a practical component. It is hands-on training to help people grow in their counseling skills for their



field of ministry, whether it's pastor, director of women's ministry, counselor on staff, or the youth director.

9M: How do you integrate this into local churches? What roles do they play?

ME: Most if not all the interns are in their final year of an MA or the M.Div. in counseling and are involved in their local church. Some are serving in the church and participating in the internship simultaneously. Most of them are involved in leadership. Many are leading Bible studies, perhaps teaching in some capacity. During the application process, we inquire about their level of involvement with their local church and require a letter of reference from the pastor. We need a sense from the pastor that this person is trusted, respected, and actively involved.

PROMOTING CHANGE

9M: What are the most important things pastors and elders should think about as they seek to promote discipleship in their church?

ME: I think the first (and maybe the most important) thing is whether the pastor/elder is exhibiting a lifestyle of being transformed by the grace of Christ. One of my former pastors used to say, "For the church to change, I must change." I think that's right on the money. Whether it is in the context of public ministry, informal conversations, or session meetings, if the pastoral staff is exhibiting that kind of lifestyle (gospel-centered, heart-directed change), then they are essentially mentoring the congregation to do the same.

And this may show up in a man's preaching. I am reminded of a conversation with my former pastor, Joe Novenson, where we discussed whether preaching more grace-saturated messages would decrease or increase your counseling load? We decided that it would increase them, and that has certainly been my experience. As the pastor self-discloses in an appropriate way and makes the Scriptures applicable to daily living, it emboldens people to come forward and say, "I don't have to have my act together. I can be honest about my struggles and failures. I can find help here."

Michael R. Emler, M.Div., M.D., practiced as a family physician for twelve years before becoming a counselor and faculty member at CCEF. He is the author of many counseling articles, two booklets, *Asperger Syndrome and OCD: Freedom for the Obsessive Compulsive*, and a book entitled, *CrossTalk: Where Life and Scripture Meet* to be released by New Growth Press in the fall of 2009.

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Premarital Counseling, Pornography, and Marriage

An Interview with Winston Smith

HOW'S THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM?

9Marks: *What is the conventional wisdom for having a healthy, happy marriage among evangelical Christians? Would you differ from the conventional wisdom? How?*

Winston Smith: I think that the buzz word for the day—not just for Christians but marriages in general—seems to be *compatibility*. The idea is to locate your "soul mate" or the person who is most compatible with you.

There is something tricky about the idea of compatibility. There is an elementary wisdom that you actually see in the Proverbs concerning compatibility. Marriage is so much harder when you marry somebody you don't like. "Like a constant dripping is a quarrelsome spouse." You shouldn't marry somebody that you don't like or don't get along with. That might sound like a no-brainer, but people do it. That's where the Scriptures say, "Yes, compatibility means something."

The slippery slope comes in when we go no further than a superficial understanding of compatibility—finding somebody that makes my life easy or makes me feel good. We lapse into this "relationship consumerism" where we go out in the world and look for a potential partner like we're at a grocery store. We don't look at others as someone that we are called to love. We tend to develop tunnel vision—looking for what is sugary and sweet. We actually make worse decisions rather than better decisions. We must be really careful about how we talk about compatibility. It's okay to talk about it and acknowledge it as a factor, but when it stands alone, it just plays to the selfishness and sinfulness of the human heart.

BIBLICAL PRIORITIES AND PRE-MARITAL COUNSELING

9M: *If the key to a healthy marriage is not just compatibility, what is it? Or let me place this in a real world setting and ask the question like this: What's the most important thing to tell an engaged couple in premarital counseling? What's the most important thing they need to get?*

WS: Any time I meet with a couple who are planning to get married, one of the things I always have to keep in mind is that I'm looking at people who are bullet proof. That's the way I think of it. In other words, by the time a couple gets to me for premarital counseling, they are often already engaged. Someone spent a few thousand dollars on an engagement ring. Sometimes the wedding invitations have already gone out, and they're not really there to hear about their problems. They have come in to get a rubber stamp—that stamp of approval so they can go forward with confidence. My job is to help them understand that there are important reasons for them to be open to seeing their problems.

I think for the most part, young people get married because their dating experience has taught them that they are really good at having fun with each other. They have enjoyed wining and dining each other. And they want to cement that fun with marriage. It is really nice being married to somebody that you enjoy and have fun with, but ultimately marriage isn't about fun. Fun can be one of the great byproducts of marriage,

but ultimately a marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship to his bride, the church, and his love for her. It is our opportunity and our obligation in marriage to image that—to be a walking, talking portrait of that kind of love.

And you know what? That kind of love doesn't just show up in the good and happy times. That kind of love is sometimes most visible when things go wrong. We know Christ's love because he came to us in our messiness, our ugliness, our brokenness and our rebellion. This kind of marriage requires a couple to meet each other in those messy, scary places. In marriage counseling, I want to prepare people for this most critical part of imaging Christ. I need them to be willing to look at the messiness before they get married so they'll know if they are making a wise decision.

9M: *Is there anything else that is crucial for premarital counseling?*

WS: I think the key word for premarital counseling is wisdom. The decision to marry somebody isn't about maintaining an emotional high. It's about making a wise decision. The wisdom of that decision is based on choosing someone to marry that you will love not only in their strengths, but you'll be prepared to love and minister to in their weaknesses. Then, conversely, a wise decision is choosing somebody who will love *you* not just in the fun moments and in your strengths, but will minister to you and love you in *your* weakness. That's a wisdom decision.

What I want to do in premarital counseling is not tell them whether they should or shouldn't marry this person. They are free to marry anybody they want to marry who is a Christian. But I want to ask,

"What would a wise decision look like for you?"

"Here's what I'm learning about you and your temptations and manner of life. Here's what I'm learning about the other person, their manner of life, their temptations, their sins. What would it look like if you tried to minister to each other in that?"

"Here's where your strengths would lie, and here's where your weaknesses would lie. Here's the way it would probably flesh out in marriage. Now you decide. Is that a ministry you're willing to commit to for the rest of your life? That's really your decision, not mine."

On rare occasions, I've felt compelled to say, "This will be a disaster if you marry each other." More often than not, I'll say, "This is my realistic opinion of what it will look like and it's up to you to decide if that's okay with you or not."

CULTURAL CHANGE AND PORNOGRAPHY

9M: *How do you think the culture has changed over the last fifteen or twenty years? What do you think marriages are facing now that they may not have faced twenty years ago?*

WS: There are probably many cultural pressures that make marriage different than it was even 15 or 20 years ago. I will just point out one because it's one of the most insidious. I've seen time and time again just how powerful and destructive pornography is in marriages. Of course, pornography is more than 20 years old, but what has changed in the last 20 years is technology. In the past there was this shame barrier that you had to be willing to cross. To really throw yourself into pornography, you had to go to a different part of town. You had to get out of your car and walk into a store and be willing to be seen. Your name and your face would be associated with the material that you were handling. Now anonymity seems almost guaranteed. It's not just *available* to you, it's *invading* your life. It's promoting itself. It will pop up in your e-mails. It will show up on the movie menu in the hotel room. Probably the classier the hotel, the easier it is to view pornography and the more shamelessly it's displayed.

Pornography is on the offensive against you. It's coming after you. So you have to have real reasons to say no to it, not just because you are going to get caught. That's not a good enough reason because you'll have opportunities to secretly indulge in it. The mode of pornography has changed, and the message has become amplified. Without being graphic, anybody who's seen pornography will probably know what I'm talking about. Pornography is ultimately about anonymous, meaningless relationships where the center of focus is personal gratification.

Sex is wonderful, but sex is intended by God to communicate meaning and purpose. It is intended to communicate God's commitment, covenantal and sacrificial love, tenderness and care. It is not intended to communicate a freedom to do what you can get away with, focus on yourself, and engage in anonymous, meaningless relationships. You take those anti-relationship messages of pornography and pair them with a physiological high and you've got something really nasty on your hands. It doesn't just enslave a person's time and thought life. It begins to invade the rest of their relationships. Those same messages of convenience, pleasure, and self-focus leak all over your life—they don't just stay on your computer .

9M: Do you have any wisdom for pastors and churches for taking the offensive—ways they can be proactive in the battle against pornography?

WS: I think one of the ways churches should work against this threat, very simply, is to start talking about it. And don't just talk about it as something that's out there in the culture, but talk about it as something that's coming after us as individuals and families in the church. Create forums/arenas where people who are battling with it can talk about it without being shamed or treated like second class citizens. Create an open conversation where this problem is treated with the same care, concern, and tenderness as any other sins and struggle.

This is a very simple but bold step. You need to say, "We're going to talk about it like it's a problem in our church, because *it is*." It is a given. Of course, this conversation should occur as part of the larger culture of discipling and accountability that pastors should be cultivating in their churches.

Then be really practical in giving people tools to do something about it.

- If you have an Internet connection in your home, think of it as a portal to a XXX book store. You have a doorway in your house that leads to an adult book store if you have an internet connection, a cable TV, or satellite connection. So treat it like it's a door that needs to be guarded and locked. It's ok to be entertained with your computer, but you need to know what you're doing and why you're doing it. You're not just grazing on your computer.
- Limit private access to the computer. If you have a desktop computer, put it in a family area with the screen facing the middle of the room.
- There are all kinds of software available that are effective, but no software is foolproof. There are software options that are effective at erecting a barrier (stringing up some razor wire). If you break through, it's because you wanted to break through - not because you were entrapped.

There are all kinds of basic things that we can do to protect ourselves, but we seem to walk around in churches with naïveté. People are assuming, "No one is talking about it so it must not be a problem." I have seen countless examples of pastors and church administrators who've been ensnared by it. I have counseled people who work as cleaning staff who will log onto computers at night and look at pornography in the buildings they are cleaning. Hopefully, some of these suggestions will be helpful in battling this prevalent issue.

BUILDING HEALTHY MARRIAGES

9M: How do you build a culture of healthy marriages in the church? What are practical steps that pastors can pursue to build healthy marriages?

WS: I think any time you consider how to do something in the church, you should start off with *how do I lead by example?* Don't jump to a program. Don't jump to structure. Consider the following:

- How do I live in my marriage before my people?
- How does this show up in the pulpit?
- Do I talk about marriages as ministry from the pulpit?
- Do I talk about relationships as having a purpose from the pulpit?
- Do I help people understand from the pulpit what grace and love look like in the day-to-day details of life?



We all love preaching that has funny stories or even jokes. What we really need are applications that are earthy and applicable—down to the level of how you speak to each other. How do you fight with each other? How do you forgive? How do you deal with the day-to-day stuff where you live?

Winston T. Smith, M.Div., is the director of counseling at CCEF and has extensive experience as a marriage and family counselor. He is the author of many counseling articles, the booklet, *Rest*, and is currently writing a book on marriage.

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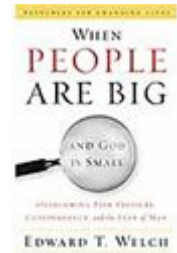
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What Should Pastors Do with Fear, Medication & Addiction

An interview with Ed Welch

9Marks: *You have written two books on the theme of fear, **When People are Big and God is Small** and **Running Scared**. Why is fear a theme you have focused on so much?*



Ed Welch: As you look into the Bible on the subject of fear, the discussions are rich. There are dozens and dozens of books someone could write because it's such beautiful material to access. That is ultimately, I think, the thing that gripped me with the material. One passage led to another to another to another, and I began to realize that God perseveres in speaking beautifully to people who struggle with fear. He speaks often to them.

9M: *Should pastors give more thought to the topic of fear?*

EW: I think that pastors should give attention to the Word and to the people in their congregation. As they study people in their congregation, they are going to find that people are filled with fear about what other people will think of them, about financial loss, and about multiple other things. Now, there are many places in Scripture that speak to these issues. And I hope that pastors will speak to people in their congregations who wrestle with fear.

9M: *How do men and women experience fear differently?*

EW: There does seem to be a gender difference in the way people think about fear. Most women can immediately connect it to their own lives, their children, fears of aloneness, and so on. Women just seem to have that immediate response to it. It makes sense. It captures them.

On the other hand, it takes more work for men to reckon with the issue of fear. There are a number of different reasons for that. One is, "Fear is for wimps" or "It's a womanly kind of thing." Let me speak personally. I want my wife to think I'm a strong man who has everything under control. When there's a crisis I want to look really strong; like someone she can rely on. To talk about fear goes against the grain of most male thoughts. But fear is a universal phenomenon. We know from reading the first couple pages of Scripture that women don't have the corner of the market on fear.

Where is it with men? It's everywhere. Fear plays a role in the main male problems. For instance, anger is a common problem among men. What is anger? It's the possibility that you could lose something. Something precious to you is in jeopardy, and there's an aggressive response rather than fear response. But it's the same thing: "Something that I love is in danger. What am I going to do about that?"



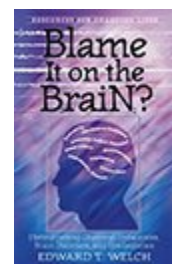
Look at men's favorite compulsive and sinful behaviors. You have drugs and sex. Now, talk to most men and you'll find people who are afraid they're going to be found out. They are afraid they're going to be left alone. They're afraid they're not going to be loved. I would suggest you can find fears wrapped around the majority of male sins. We can find fears and anxieties everywhere, but they do seem to have a particular gender expression.

9M: You've also written a book called *Blame It on the Brain*, distinguishing chemical imbalances, brain disorders, and disobedience. Is there such a thing as chemical imbalances and brain disorders that require medical treatment, or are you opposed to medication for depression?

EW: One of the enjoyable issues for us to consider biblically in this generation is the whole area of modern psychiatry and medications. There's the delightful opportunity to see how the Scriptures speak to all the issues of life, even issues that weren't anticipated by the biblical writers.

How do we bring the Scripture to bear? Let's take the issue of medications. Are psychiatric medications sinful? Are they wise? Are they wrong? How should we view such things, especially when the Scripture doesn't seem to speak about psychiatric medications in any particular chapter and verse? I think it's an exegetical stretch to say that Scripture speaks against modern medication and that we cannot use it—period. Modern medication is trying to assuage some forms of suffering, and we certainly don't oppose assuaging suffering. Rather, the Scriptures leave us in the category of wisdom—rooted in the fear of the Lord. Sometimes we might choose one thing, and sometimes we might choose another.

How do we make those kinds of decisions? You may say that there are two poles of thinking here. One pole says that medication is essential and that every pastor should be aware of psychiatric medications. The other is that medications are wrong and that they contaminate sanctification in the Christian church.



Both poles exist because they have important points to make. The important point on the no-medication side is that, when people take medication, they usually imbibe the worldview of modern psychiatry along with it. They begin to think in two tracks—a psychiatric track and a spiritual track. The spiritual track is the “stuff they get on Sunday.” The psychiatric track is “that's where the action is because the psychiatric track owns our emotions.” People live their lives asking, “How do I feel today?” If they feel wretched and medication is able to help, then that's where they will put their trust. The challenge for people taking medication is to think biblically and to not put their hope in medication. In that sense, the no-medication perspective is saying something very important. It is saying that we shouldn't put our hope in psychiatric medication, but in Christ.

On the other hand, pastors really must *know* about psychiatric medications. We should listen to the problems that psychiatric medications are trying to address. When we do, we inevitably find a hybrid of spiritual and physical struggles.

We know that people taking psychiatric medications are suffering. If they are suffering, we must move towards them because Scripture says it's imperative for us to encourage one another daily. There is no question about these things.

It is a complicated phenomenon, but I at least want to establish that both poles inevitably have a point. Those who speak for psychiatric medication have seen it alleviate (or at least lower the pitch) of certain kinds of sufferings in a person's life. In that sense, we are very much for it.

9M: Are you opposed to medication for depression?

EW: I'll answer in three parts. First, we need to consider the relationship between mind and body. You hear all kinds of discussions about chemical imbalances. The reality is that no diagnosis in modern psychiatry has a known physiological cause behind it. Psychiatry wants its diagnoses to be treated as traditional medical diseases, but at this point there is no known gene or chemical imbalance. That's just the way it is.

But that doesn't answer all our questions about medications, as if to say we shouldn't use them. I suspect that in another 100 years psychiatry will find that there are chemical differences between schizophrenics and non-schizophrenics. They will find brain differences, and they will probably find genetic differences.

Now, they will not find that that something like schizophrenia is purely a genetic or a physiological phenomenon. It's a combination of things. But certainly there will be a more sophisticated understanding of the incredibly complex organ of the brain, and they will be able to distinguish between a schizophrenic and a non-schizophrenic brain. I'm anticipating that that's the way psychiatric research will go.

I anticipate these developments from a biblical perspective because we understand from the Bible that people are embodied souls. Both soul and body have a particular contribution. The body brings particular strengths and weaknesses, while the soul brings particular allegiances—spiritual allegiances. Soul and body work together to create a whole person, but they can be distinguished. Biblically, therefore, we can anticipate that there is some sort of biochemical substrate behind an individuals' particular strength or weakness.

Now this raises the question, how do we respond to all this in a godly way?

Second, we need to consider the question of what medications can do and cannot do. Medication has a certain limited field of work. It can never change our spiritual allegiances. It can't make us love the Lord more. It can't make us sin less. At best, it can alleviate some physical weaknesses that are especially bothersome. The spiritual allegiances of the human heart continue to be the most important issue in all of life, and it so happens that this is what pastors focus on. Now, pastors want to bring sensitivity to the strengths and weaknesses we all experience and to show compassion to psychiatric weaknesses in particular. But these weaknesses cannot make us sin, which is one of the really fine features of the way God has composed us.

What do we know about depression? Depression is at least a form of suffering, and medication in some people seems to alleviate the suffering. When it does, that's a good thing. But we also know that there's something deeper that all of us need to learn, which is learning to turn to Christ quickly in the midst of suffering.

There lies one of the dangers of medication, and the danger doesn't arise out of psychiatry but out of the nature of the human heart. People latch onto different things to trust in. So the question is, how can we more quickly encourage one another to call out to the Lord for mercy and grace in the midst of trouble. That is what's most important when we think about depression from a pastoral perspective.

Third, we need to consider the relationship between medication and sin. Here's an illustration from a popular book on the medication Prozac. A man went to a physician for mild depression and also mentioned that he was involved in pornography. Neither the person nor the physician considered pornography to be a problem, but they both noted it. Since the man was depressed, the physician gave him Prozac. The guy came back in a month and, among other things, reported that was he wasn't interested in pornography anymore. Well, that's great, we say. Why battle pornography? We can just take a little Prozac.

Well, in that case, the Prozac was just another way of feeding this guy's idol. The idol was, "I don't want to feel lifeless. I want to feel a certain way, and I'm going to do everything I can to deal with that." Finally, he found that Prozac could make him feel that way, so pornography no longer occupied the same central place. But we also know that Prozac will eventually follow the path of pornography, where he'll try it, it won't work, and he will move on to something else. So here's a place where it looks like medication is helping someone to not sin. But I think there are other ways to interpret what has happened biblically.

9M: *In seminary pastoral care classes, aspiring pastors are sometimes taught to distinguish between spiritual matters with which they are competent to deal and medical issues which they should refer to professionals. Is this good advice?*

EW: Some seminaries communicate to the students, "Here are the things that are yours, and here are the things you have to refer to other people." The things that belong to other people include all things medical

and all things psychiatric. And the psychiatric includes the angst of life, the challenges of life, the troubles of life, and the relational difficulties of life. What's left for pastors? Guilt, adultery, and murder are what's left.

Perhaps a better way to consider all this would be to say, as you move pastorally towards people, know that you will find struggles; and struggles will be about sin and about suffering—a combination of the two.

When people are out in the wilderness, they wonder where God is. If there's anything we know from people out in the wilderness, it is that they need the encouragement of God's people. They need to be able to fix their eyes on Christ who is with them in the midst of their suffering. You move toward everybody—absolutely everyone—because sin and suffering encompass all of this.

What about medical problems? You move towards someone who has cancer. It's a form of suffering, and we all know that we want to speak words of encouragement and point them to Christ in the midst of their suffering.

Psychiatric problems are the murky middle. Whether they are physiological or spiritual does not matter. It will involve both sin and suffering. We move toward them and we do the same thing we do with everybody else in our congregation by helping them to turn to Christ in a true and meaningful way. I think the Scripture has a simpler answer for seminary students and pastors. Someone is hurting over there. Somebody's stuck in sin. We are called to move toward them.

9M: Can you talk about the materials that you have just written to facilitate a small of group around the problem of addictions?

EW: I've written a curriculum for people struggling with an addiction that is entitled *Cross Roads*. There is a picture in Proverbs where wisdom goes into the urine-drenched alleys. It goes out into the bad places and the hard places. My desire was to write a curriculum that made Scripture quickly accessible, inviting, and persuasive for people who struggle with addiction, live in the trenches, and might not even be Christians. The nice thing about addiction in our culture is that, for better or for worse, people talk about addictions as a spiritual problem. The word spiritual can be defined by people in very different ways, but at least it means that they expect you to talk about God.

I foresee the curriculum as being able to speak to people who have a profession of faith and people who don't have a profession of faith. They just have to be willing to hear; that's all. There is also a guide for the people who *walk along* with that person.

The goal is that it would be clear, accessible, persuasive, beautiful, hopeful, and that the gospel would be vibrant in the middle of it all.

Edward T. Welch, M.Div., Ph.D., is a licensed psychologist and faculty member at CCEF. He has counseled for over twenty-six years and has written many articles, booklets, and books including *When People Are Big and God Is Small*; *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*; *Blame It on the Brain?*; *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness*; and *Running Scared: Fear, Worry, and the God of Rest*. Dr. Welch's newest release is a curriculum entitled *Crossroads: A Step-by-Step Guide Away from Addictions*.

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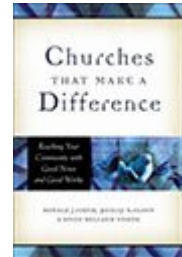
Book Review: Churches that Make a Difference

By Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland

Reviewed by Flynn Cratty

Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching your Community with Good News and Good Works.

[Baker, 2007. 334 pages.](#)



Recent years have witnessed a renewed evangelical interest in the social aspect of the church's mission. Various evangelical leaders are seeking to broaden the evangelical policy agenda to include global warming, poverty, and a variety of other concerns.

At the same time, some observers voice concerns that this expanded agenda will distract evangelicals from their traditional concern for abortion, marriage, and religious freedom.

Locally, increasing numbers of evangelical pastors are leading their churches to embrace social activism as a key to Christian discipleship. Other pastors worry that zeal to provide affordable housing and job training will replace the desire to see sinners repent of their sins and trust in Christ.

WHOLE GOSPEL, WHOLE PERSON, WHOLE CHURCH

In *Churches That Make a Difference*, Ron Sider, Philip Olson, and Heidi Unruh attempt to walk a middle road that avoids both the social gospel of Protestant liberalism and the compassionless spirituality of some conservatives. The core of *Churches That Make a Difference* is an exhortation for churches to practice holistic ministry, ministry focused on "Reaching your community with the whole gospel for the whole person through whole churches" (59).

The "whole gospel" means something more than forgiveness of sins. It includes "inner conversion of individuals, physical well-being, the transformation of social and economic relationships, the renewal of communities, and the ultimate triumph of Christ over the forces of evil on a cosmic scale" (59-60).

The phrase "the whole person" is meant to remind us that human beings are simultaneously physical and spiritual beings; ministries that neglect physical needs are by definition incomplete.

"Whole churches" are congregations of unified believers who share a common vision for outreach. The first part of *Churches That Make a Difference* explains how evangelism and social ministry join in holistic ministry. The second part lists and describes those elements essential to a holistic ministry. The third and final part provides practical advice for how to build a holistic ministry.

STRENGTHS

While there are many things to appreciate about *Churches That Make A Difference*, I will mention just three. First, the authors insist that evangelism must be central to the outreach of any church. Moreover, they define evangelism as an activity which requires a verbal presentation of the gospel. Good works are not a sufficient witness to the unbelieving world. They write, "Loving acts need the complement of the verbal presentation of Christ's life, death, and resurrection (64-5).

Second, the authors of *Churches That Make a Difference* strike a blow against the passive and consumerist mentality that many Christians bring to their churches. The authors encourage pastors to mobilize the entirety of their membership for service and evangelism. Several of the churches profiled in the book have large majorities of their members actively engaged in evangelism and service.

Third, Sider, Olson, and Unruh remind their readers of the need to reach urban centers with the gospel. The churches profiled in *Churches That Make a Difference* are largely churches ministering in challenging environs in and near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Their examples serve as a reminder that middle-class Christians must be occasionally willing to leave the comfort of the suburbs to take the gospel to the lost. Soccer moms and farmers need to hear the gospel just as much as those in city centers; but undoing generations of neglect of urban centers should be a priority for evangelicals.

These positive characteristics make *Churches That Make a Difference* useful at least as a catalyst for further reflection.

SHORTCOMINGS

However, the book has a number of serious shortcomings. First, the authors display an overly broad understanding of the gospel. They write, "Divine forgiveness ... was not all there was to Jesus' gospel. Jesus also taught and demonstrated that his dawning kingdom was beginning to transform horizontal socioeconomic relationships wherever people accepted him" (48). To be sure, the Good News is not exhausted by the concept of forgiveness of sins. However, forgiveness of sins is the very center of the gospel.

Sider, Olson, and Unruh regularly describe human need and sin as "brokenness." By this, they seem to mean that unbelievers in our fallen world live lives which lack the fullness which God intended for his humanity. Unbelievers need to be restored to the wholeness—physical, spiritual, relational, economic, and political—which was present at Creation.

Again, this is true, but they present man's physical and economic needs as if they are as pressing as his spiritual needs. Yet the unbeliever's primary predicament is not that he is addicted to drugs or victimized by an unjust political system. Rather, the unbeliever's chief problem is that he is a sinner who stands condemned before a holy God. The Good News is good precisely because it brings forgiveness of sins and everlasting life. While the horizontal transformation that comes as sinners believe the gospel is of incalculable value, it should be overshadowed in our thinking by the reconciliation to God which we have obtained through the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The primary mission of the church must be to reconcile sinners to God and build them up in the faith. Anything else it does is subsidiary to this great aim. After all, "what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?" (Mk. 8:36).

Churches That Make A Difference further confuses the gospel through its choice of the churches it upholds as models of holistic ministry. Conservative churches like Philadelphia's Tenth Presbyterian appear alongside the world's first Episcopal church to ordain women and a Baptist church with a website that links to a variety of homosexual activist groups. These churches may be feeding the hungry and comforting the suffering, but they don't seem to be teaching the same doctrine.

Second, *Churches That Make a Difference* articulates a polity which is program-driven and pragmatic. It asks, "Is the system [of governance] designed to protect the church from the world or to equip the church to go out into the world?" (207). A better question to ask would be "Is your system of governance biblical?" Little thought is given to the possibility that the New Testament might have something to say about church polity.

Third, the authors frequently blur the distinction between the church and the world. Sider, Olson, and Unruh frequently reference Israel under the Mosaic Covenant as a model for holistic ministry. However,

the analogy between Israel and the church is of limited utility. Israel was simultaneously a cultural group, a political state, and God's covenant people. By contrast, the church stands distinct from the culture and the state. Christians can look forward to a time when the economy, law, and worship are unified under Christ, but we cannot expect it until the New Creation.

I believe that Sider, Olson, and Unruh should be warier of ministry opportunities—including receiving government funding and partnerships with secular social services agencies—that harm the church's distinctive nature.

Fourth, the authors betray a lack of discernment about the place of political advocacy in the life of the church. In recent years, many evangelicals have expressed a desire to talk about more than abortion and marriage. The authors of *Churches That Make a Difference* take this several steps further, highlighting churches that advocate for improved public transportation, more favorable zoning laws, and a larger Earned Income Tax Credit. These policy proposals may all have merit, but there is no biblical position on the Earned Income Tax Credit. Churches should speak publicly on political issues only when they can speak with the authority of the Scriptures, because that's the only authority Christ has given the church.

WHAT'S THE CHURCH'S MISSION?

What then is the mission of the church? This is the question at the root of current evangelical debates about social engagement. Is the mission of the church to address all of the needs of all people, or is it more limited in scope? Sider, Olson, and Unruh seem to think that the mission of the church is to do all it can to evangelize, meet people's needs, and transform society. There is more biblical support for some of these activities than others. The Bible is clear that churches should take the gospel to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:18-20) and care for the needy in her midst (1 Tim. 5:16; Gal. 2:10). Broader social action is not expressly prohibited, but it should not be equated with these two essential obligations.

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Book Review: The Multiplying Church

By Bob Roberts Jr.

Reviewed by Lance Quinn

The Multiplying Church: The New Math for Starting New Churches
[Zondervan, 2008, 192 pages, \\$19.99](#)



In a series of three books published by Zondervan Publishers,* Bob Roberts, Jr., founding Pastor of NorthWood Church in Fort Worth, Texas, casts a new vision for how society can be transformed by Jesus Christ.

In the third work of his, *The Multiplying Church*, Roberts seeks to show how local churches must see their primary vision as multiplying churches. Churches should not merely strive to plant another local church here or there; they should actually multiply them through the proven methods of Roberts and others for church planting. This will make it possible to proliferate hundreds if not thousands of others churches all over the globe.

A REVOLUTION IN CHURCH PLANTING

Roberts believes that imbedded within the very nucleus of every local church must be a clear desire and a strategic plan for aggressively reproducing themselves into countless other local churches, whether it be in their metropolitan backyard or other parts of the world (targeting specific countries, like his church has done with Vietnam).

Roberts calls for a virtual revolution in current thinking regarding church planting. He says that his and several others' views of successful church multiplication "is almost if not out of control" with exciting multiplication (p. 45). When the exuberance for planting church after church after church is realized, "churches wind up starting others that start others" (p. 45). The growth will be cataclysmic and exponential. But not only that, "A global church planting movement will be necessary for the bride of Christ to be prepared for the coming of Christ" (p. 47). Notice that his movement is "necessary." A grandiose claim indeed!

Roberts believes that a monumental movement of church multiplication could revolutionize the entire landscape of Christianity's impact upon our world because these churches will be led by non-clergy, especially by those whose vocations are better suited for establishing viable churches. He writes, "Our current focus on the use of 'professional pastors' almost ensures that we will not get to church planting movements. This is what the house church movement has to teach the broader church community in the United States. Some of the best church planters have been businessmen, lawyers, and those from a thousand other vocations" (p. 46).

In addition to those who will venture out as official church planters, every individual church member should see themselves—wherever they are spiritually and whatever they're doing vocationally—as nothing less than *new missionaries* who are a vital part of transforming society via the use of their particularly unique skills and ministries. What greater impact could a church have on the community around it than for its members to recognize and use their lives for the gospel? The goal of the book is very exciting and impressive!

AND THE APPROACH?

But in order to accomplish this goal, Roberts appeals to sociological and business principles of success, which he gets from non-biblical, secular sources rather than any apparent exegesis of the biblical texts. He seems to have been more impacted by books like Jim Collins' *Good to Great* than by any substantive theological analysis of the New Testament.

This is not to say that Roberts' book is devoid of references to Scripture or any theological framework. A few passages from the book of Acts, for instance, are listed, including an attempt to see the church at Antioch as his exemplar for the NT multiplying church (pp. 125-129). Also, Roberts attempts to define what the church *is* and *is not* (pp. 40-43). And he has the theological conviction that it is the local church that should drive the multiplication of other local churches (pp. 53-54).

What he doesn't do, however, is consider the Bible's framework for understanding the purposes of the church and mandate for spreading the gospel.

As such, he doesn't offer any marks of what a healthy church plant looks like. Will just any plant do? Without a theological framework, it's hard to measure what exactly distinguishes healthy churches from unhealthy churches, or churches from any other organization that you might plant and grow. It's also not clear how planted churches of different theologies and philosophies of ministry work together, or what theological training a church planter needs before launching.

Consider as well what the lack of a biblical framework means for his understanding of church leaders. Roberts is to be commended for encouraging deliberate mentoring and close accountability toward "church starters" (pp. 90-94, 141-142), but he also challenges planters to be *entrepreneurs, mystics, and daredevils* (pp. 96-115). Never mind the idea of looking for individuals who are "sober-minded," "respectable," and "gentle" (1 Tim. 3:2-3) and all those other qualities Paul talked about. It raises the question of whether Roberts views what a "pastor" is in the same way that God does.

Or if Roberts understands "growth" in the same way God does. One of the principles he espouses is this: "To start a church that starts with the society, the church planter must think and act like a community developer, not just a preacher" (p. 119). But doesn't God mean to grow his church through his Word, because growth isn't just about numbers but holiness and love, too? Isn't that what Paul tells Timothy to do (2 Tim. 4:1ff)? I can't help but think Roberts is unwittingly downplaying the role of preaching in his model. It seems his orientation pulls him in the direction of more "exciting" secular labels and ideals rather than toward a more biblical apparatus and construct.

Likewise, Roberts writes much about the "Kingdom of God" and our need to minister in light of it (pp. 73-81), but spends too few words defining with precision what that phrase actually means. It is too important not to define. Roberts' view of the kingdom is at best amorphous.

This lack of interaction with the biblical material hurts the book's ability to live up to its ambitions.

HELPFUL FOR FAMILIES

It is possible that the most significant contribution Roberts makes in his book is the last chapter, "Living as a Missional Family." He provides very helpful advice not only for church planters, but for all pastors, pastor's wives, and their children (pp. 159-171). He encourages anyone in ministry to be open to criticism, to correct character flaws, to deal with past hurts (but be very careful here!), and to grow into the next dimension of your leadership. Frankly, I would have been helped if Roberts had written this good material in an expanded form and left off significant sections of the previous chapters. Of course, this would have substantially changed the nature of the book's purpose and theme, and I suspect Roberts himself wouldn't agree.

All in all, Bob Roberts certainly cannot be faulted for his obvious and infectious desire to see the gospel of Jesus pervade and transform a godless society. Church starters will however, need to adhere to a more

closely aligned New Testament paradigm for the planting of local churches than Roberts' model has provided.

*The first two books are *Transformation: How Glocal Churches Transform Lives and the World* (2006) and *Glocalization: How Followers of Jesus Engage a Flat World* (2007).

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Book Review: Who Can Save the Incredible Shrinking Church?

By Frank Page

Reviewed by Owen Strachan

Who Can Save the Incredible Shrinking Church?

[Nashville: B&H, 2008. 145pp. \\$14.99.](#)

Frank Page wants to do nothing less than save struggling, shrinking churches everywhere.

The former president of the Southern Baptist Convention and pastor of Taylors First Baptist Church in Taylors, South Carolina declares this intention at the outset of his book *Who Can Save the Incredible Shrinking Church?*



My prayer is that this book will give practical, actionable advice to pastors of all kinds of Bible-believing congregations to enable them to grow into the great kingdom churches God wants them to be. (p. 5)

The following twelve chapters, an expanded version of a PowerPoint talk Page has delivered to numerous SBC churches, present Page's vision for accomplishing this aim.

WHY THIS BOOK IS ENCOURAGING

Page exudes love for God and his church throughout the text, revealing a heart to help the struggling pastor and the disheartened church. His tone is confident and pastoral, and his writing suggests a personality of infectious faith and trust in God. In short, he sounds like a strong shepherd and a fruitful Christian, the kind of believer who cannot help but ignite good works in the lives of those he encounters. His text has this effect as Page works through chapters on "Paul's Perspective" of ministry; "Shrink-Proof Leadership" that seeks a bold pastoral corps; "Heading Toward Evangelism," which seeks to empower all church members for evangelistic work; and "The Whole Armor of God," an exhortation to pastors to adopt and embody a biblical approach to ministry.

The following are some of the insights I took from these and other chapters:

- "Pastors have to be willing to stay put and see beyond the horizon of trouble." (58)
- "Pastors have to be good at conflict management. I don't like conflict, but I've learned *never* to run from it." (59)
- "Visionary church leaders have to attack musical and worship snobbery and let people know that God can be worshipped in a variety of ways and settings." (71)
- "Your task is to do all you know how to do, then wait on the Lord to work out the details and His timing and tell you what to do next." (140)

Certainly, it is necessary these days to say that pastors should "stay put" through times of "trouble." All too often, pastors today mistake a troublesome spot of ministry for a call to change location. Perhaps many of our "shrinking" churches find themselves shrinking because they have not experienced the loving

care of a shepherd who seeks to emulate the covenant faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead they have only experienced the fickle, self-serving ways of certain business leaders.

A second point worthy of consideration is Page's firm belief in a balanced music ministry that attempts to embrace various musical forms. Page's words encourage us to esteem musicians of the past, but also to embrace the riches of modern hymnists like the Gettys, Sovereign Grace, Indelible Grace, Red Mountain Church, Sojourn Community Church, and many others whose compositions will richly bless us. We all need to steer clear of ennobling our own musical preferences and pursue congregational deference and unity instead.

A repeated refrain throughout the book involves the need to work hard according to biblical mandates and to trust God to work as he sees fit. This is excellent—and simple—advice. In the end, it is the chief contribution of the book. *Who Can Save the Incredible Shrinking Church?* offers most fundamentally an encouraging word from a godly pastor to other pastors to stay the course. The book is not particularly imaginative, but it provides hope through accounts of what the Lord has done in the struggling churches Page has pastored.

SEVERAL PROBLEMS

The book suffers from a few weaknesses. Chief among these is the matter at its heart: growth. Though Page promises the reader definitive counsel for growth, he ultimately delivers no real secret, but instead says simply, "Be faithful." This is excellent counsel taken straight from the Bible (Mt. 13:31), and I wish more writers were emphasizing faithfulness like Page does. But there is no guaranteed promise that any and every church will grow when their pastors are faithful. I have personally encountered biblically faithful churches that, despite years of scriptural fidelity, shrank instead of growing. In God's mysterious providence, he does not grant revitalization to some churches. This is a hard reality, but it is a reality nonetheless.

Also, Page is not always consistent in promising a solution. For example, he notes in a folksy way that,

It would be nice to have a checklist titled 'The Absolutely Foolproof Antidote for Your Incredible Shrinking Church' that you could run down, marking off the steps like a science experiment, and get a guaranteed result at the end. There are too many variables for this approach to work.

But the "antidote" has already been promised by this point (see above), leaving the reader to wonder which counsel he ought to trust. Furthermore, spiritual and numerical growth are sometimes confusingly conflated (see, for example, 49-50).

The book would also have been strengthened by the use of a biblical-theological hermeneutic that reads scriptural texts in the flow of redemptive history. Page interprets figures like Samson and David as if their primary significance is their leadership ability. There is little sense of the gospel of Christ being the center out of which all Scripture proceeds and ministry flows.

With these weaknesses noted, however, I was thankful for Page's exhortation to pastors to be like Paul and others who "used their God-given talents and worked extremely hard, doing all they could to reach their goals, then had faith that God would do what they could not" (140). This is surely the note that Scripture strikes on the matter of pastoral ministry. As Paul said to Timothy, "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (1 Tim. 1:13-14). Page's seasoned counsel may well encourage pastors currently carrying out the work of church revitalization.

REFLECTING ON GROWTH

The subject of the "incredible shrinking church" requires, in conclusion, a bit of contextual reflection. Though we are trained in America to think that large size in any field, religious or otherwise, signals success, Scripture reveals that God's mind is not like ours. The metric by which God measures his people is not numerical size, but faithfulness (1 Sam. 12:24, Psa. 31:23, Prov. 28:20, Ezek. 18:8-9, etc.). After all, he is the One who called Israel to be a peculiar people (Deut. 14:12). Tiny Israel, puny David, Gideon's 300, the faithful remnant, the mustard seed, the narrow way, the scattered disciples, the overmatched apostles, the slain martyrs—this is just a tiny sample of how God chooses and delights in what is small.

And this is the confidence of the pastor of the small church. As he leads his church and it worships together, evangelizes the lost, cares for its needy, celebrates the ordinances, and images the glory of God in a fallen world, God is not dishonored. He is glorified. He is not ashamed with the smallness of the congregation, shrinking though it may be. If it is faithful, he is delighted.

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