



Ministering to Youth in the Tough Times

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Preface

Our youth are dealing with issues and experiences that are leaving them wounded and affected for life. The foundations for healthy relationships have been damaged and even destroyed by the sickness of our contemporary culture. It is time we face up to these facts and confront the realities of them! We must prepare ourselves to offer healing and restoration to those affected already and equip our youth and youth leaders to avoid and prevent further damage and destruction. This requires the involvement of those who are adequately and professionally equipped and trained to bring healing and restoration.

- Andrew Graham fully meets that criteria! He’s traveled extensively in our Youth Camps as a Participant, Team Captain and Counselor. He attended one of our Bible Colleges and sensing God’s leadership in his life has furthered his education completing all his graduate work and serving as a Therapist and Counselor as he studied. Andrew has all the qualifications plus the heart and experience to offer direction and instruction to those who confront the overwhelming realities of these issues.
- Rebecca Miller has also proven to be an invaluable asset and resource for so many who struggle to overcome these challenges. She has a tender mother's heart combined with a solid professionalism that is the product of her education and extensive training. She has helped many with their own personal issues and offered invaluable advice and encouragement to those who find themselves struggling to know how to help young people deal with their problems.
- Steve Oliver serves as a Youth Pastor and like many of you has a compassionate heart for Young People. He has grown up in the Conservative Holiness Movement and has felt and dealt with

most of the issues our youth deal with. Steve graduated from Bible College, and has continued his education, recently completing his PhD. His own experiences as well as those of the youth he has worked with have given him some deep insights into the issues of the day.

This Team will provide invaluable understanding of the contemporary issues confronting our youth as well as helpful and insightful instruction and advice on where to turn and what to do to meet these challenges. I highly recommend them to you!

- John D. Parker, Pastor
Village Park Bible Methodist Church

Introduction

I was seeking God's direction for my life when I was asked to travel for the summer with the Chapel Quartet from Hobe Sound Bible College. It was 1995 and I had just graduated from high school. I felt God's call upon my life but was unsure as to the specific direction He was leading me. I accepted the offer to travel and spent 10 weeks singing tenor across the holiness movement.

We spent each night in a new city; local churches, youth camps, camp meetings. It seemed that each day brought with it a new opportunity to sit down with another young person who wanted to chat. Many of those chats were about the deep issues of life that they were facing. I found myself praying that God would bring young people into my path and that He would guide me into giving them feedback that might help them on their Christian walk. It was during that summer that God revealed to me the focus of His plan for me: to counsel those who are hurting.

After completing my ministerial degree, I married my high school sweetheart. We moved to Kentucky where I completed a master's degree in professional counseling. I wanted to work in a conservative holiness ministry context but I knew that I needed further, hands-on clinical preparation. I assumed that I'd work in a secular setting for a year or two and then something else would open up. Instead, I found God had designs for me to remain as a counselor in community mental health for what would end up being eight years. By that time, we had moved from Kentucky to South Carolina and then on to Virginia where I would commence a doctoral degree in counseling.

As I moved into supervisory counseling positions, I found younger counselors who were not well-equipped to integrate their Christian faith into their counseling. This led me to look for the

opportunity to write and teach online courses for various universities – mostly Christian ones. Then I had lunch with a Christian educator who encouraged me to begin to find creative ways to make myself available to conservative holiness churches, pastors and families. So I created a website and let some friends in leadership know that I was providing counseling and consultation online.

Immediately I began to receive email and phone calls from around the conservative holiness movement. Pastors were looking for resources. Parents were looking for guidance. Teens were looking for a listening ear and some direction. They were looking for a “safe” place to get help.

Many of the issues that they were contacting me about were issues that I believe could first be addressed with parents, youth workers and pastors. The feedback that I was receiving was that those key adults in their lives felt inadequately equipped to handle behavioral, emotional, and relational concerns. It was then that I realized that God had spent fifteen years preparing me for just that purpose – to assist in equipping pastors, youth workers, and parents to provide empathic support and godly direction to those around them who are hurting.

It is my hope and prayer that the information and resources found in this resource guide will be helpful tools. It has been my pleasure to work on this project alongside a competent counselor in Rebecca Miller and a compassionate pastor and teacher, Dr. Steve Oliver.

- Andrew Graham, MA, PhD (abd)
Licensed Professional Counselor

Foreword

The worst advice I ever received came from a psychologist. I'd been struggling with periodic feelings of depression for about a year, and it had gotten bad enough that I went to my doctor about it. He ran some blood tests, prescribed some medication, and sent me to a mental health clinic. After sitting in a run-down waiting room for about 45 minutes, I met the psychologist. We talked for a while until I told her that I had been raised in a pastor's home. She promptly told me that my depression was repressed anger against all the rules I had been raised with. She said that I'd be fine as long as I learned to relax and not be so strict. I left with \$110 less in my pocket, some papers about how to be happier, and a knowledge that I had to look elsewhere for answers.

And I am not the only one. Many young people in the church are struggling with tough issues--issues that psychology addresses. They are looking for answers. I found that the church offered sympathy but little else. They were not equipped to handle the stuff I was dealing with and did not know where to send me.

But today, eighteen years later, I look back at that time as the beginning of my journey to health. I've found my answers, but it's been a long journey. I've struggled through depression, battled relentless thoughts of suicide, experienced uncontrollable anger, dealt with overwhelming shame, and faced emotional pain so intense it felt like a physical stabbing. I could never choose to go through what I did, but I would not trade it for anything. I have learned a lot about human nature and myself, but most about God. I've watched in wonder as He has taken the worst in my life and continues turning it into good.

But I wonder what would have happened if my first foray into the world of secular mental health had been different. What if the

surroundings had been clean and well-maintained? What if the psychologist had not had such an obvious agenda? What if the spiritual poison had been more palatable? My story might have a much darker ending.

Let me be clear: God is the Answer to any problem. But He usually works through human means, and in my case, one of those means was a licensed Christian counselor. I learned that, just like a hammer can be used to build a house or to commit murder, so psychology can be used to direct people toward God or away from Him. The church had better be prepared with answers that are sound both psychologically and spiritually, answers that engage biblical teaching as well as solid psychological research. Because if the best we have to offer are threadbare platitudes, secular psychologists are all too happy to step into the gap with answers that lead to spiritual death.

Today, the CHM is a different place than it was eighteen years ago. There are more people and resources available to help, many within the CHM. But far too many pastors, parents, and youth workers are still unaware of the resources that we have. That's where this booklet comes in. Here is a practical tool to help you understand and deal with some of the most pressing issues among young people in the CHM, as well as a list of further resources for these and other issues. My prayer is that the information and resources in this little booklet will equip you to be a channel of God's grace to the hurting youth in your life.

- Steve Oliver, PhD

Helping in the Tough Times

Creating a Safe Environment

It has been commonly understood throughout history that the church should be a place of safety. In Medieval times, the church was a place where fugitives could flee to escape their pursuers. In more modern times, as the surrounding culture has become less and less Christian, holding biblical values and lifestyles has created a conservative sub-culture, a culture which attempts to isolate itself from many of the problems in the world around. Those who struggle with tough issues are sometimes seen as a threat to this culture, and they are encouraged (whether directly or indirectly) to hide their struggles from the church. And thus the church, instead of being a place of acceptance and healing, is seen as a place where one must outwardly conform or face criticism and rejection. So how do we change this perception?

1. Face the fact that in many churches, this is a reality, not just a perception. You must prayerfully question whether you are part of the problem or part of the solution. Are you willing to truly be a safe person, and to make your church or youth group a safe place?
2. Address tough issues. In public. From the pulpit. Yes, it may be uncomfortable, and you may get some fallout. But if you wanted a safe, comfortable career, you should have gone into accounting. On the other hand, if you want to make a difference in young people's lives, then get ready to take some risks.
3. Be empathetic. Making a crack about gays might get a response, but it also tells that young man in your congregation who is struggling with same-sex attraction that you are not interested in helping him.

4. Keep confidences. Betraying a young person’s confidence demonstrates that you are an unfaithful minister and therefore not qualified to be a pastor (Prov. 11:31; 1 Cor. 4:2). On the other hand, there are times at which you must report: see the sidebar on mandatory reporting. In these cases, let the young person know what and to whom you must report.
5. Build relationships. Youth want transparency and authenticity: you’re not perfect, so stop pretending to be. Learn to LISTEN, not just plan what your next pastorly bit of wisdom will be. And pleasepleaseplease never let the words “Just give it to God” pass your lips. Or any other trite bit of spiritual-sounding nonsense that we throw around so we can feel wise and pastor-ly. An honest “I don’t know” is far better than a mass-produced piece of plastic wisdom.

The good news is that young people—and adults—want and respond to honesty and genuine caring. If you build an environment where it’s OK to struggle and to be imperfect, then you will be in a position where God can truly use you to change lives.

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Pastors as First Responders

As pastors or youth pastors, we are often one of the first that our people turn to in tough times. The fact is that, like it or not, we are often the first responders in tough times. And being a first responder is not an easy job. You have to be ready for anything, because, just like EMTs arriving at the scene of an accident, you never know what you’re going to encounter. Fortunately, there are some basic principles for pastoral first response.

1. ALWAYS keep the best interest of the young person as your primary goal. Your responsibility is to the one who has been harmed, not to protect the wrongdoer. Yes, you try to help the wrongdoer, but covering for him is not helping anyone. Let me make this perfectly clear: if you are knowingly leave a young person in a dangerous or harmful situation for the sake of your church's influence or to avoid conflict in the church or whatever other excuse you invent, then your church should vote you out, your denomination should cancel your minister's license, and you should get the news in your jail cell.
2. Dealing with tough issues is messy. When the polished Sunday-school veneer comes off and you see what's really underneath, refuse to be shocked. Expressing shock at what a young person did or feels communicates rejection and makes his struggle that much worse.
3. You are human. That means you have limitations, and acknowledging that is part of being a professional. Learn to recognize when a problem is beyond your knowledge or skill level, and be willing to refer to someone who has more experience or training. Prayerfully establish boundaries: perhaps "I'll see someone 4 times on the same issue, and if she is not making significant progress, I'll find someone who can help her more effectively" or "I'll refer issues dealing with sexual abuse to Dr. Q." That means, of course, that you need to know the people and resources available online and in your area.
4. Follow up. Notice if there are changes in the young person's attitude or demeanor. A quick "You doing better? Good" is not followup, it's a brush-off. Especially if it's delivered in an off-hand way in a public setting. But a quiet, genuine "I'm still praying for you. How are you doing?" is non-threatening and

lets the young person know that you care and are available for further counseling if necessary.

When someone first comes to you for help with a tough issue, the most important thing for you to do is to listen and let them know you care. Be appropriate, be genuine, be committed to their best interests, and be prepared for God to work through you. SO

The Lay Helper: *Fulfilling the responsibility to serve others.*

Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel!

He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.

2 Corinthians 1:3,4

(The Message)

The year was 55 A.D. and the writer was referring to the current upheaval, discord, pretenders, and challenges to personal integrity. Fast forward. The year is now 2012 A.D. The *hard times* are just as hard, if not harder, in our post-modern world. Stress and anxiety, depression, addictions, hopelessness. The need is great for someone to *be there for that person* who is going through hard times.

In the past, congregations looked to the pastor to single-handedly provide for the needs of the congregation. However, it impossible for one pastor to be all things to all people as demands exceed capacity. The Holy Spirit has given various spiritual gifts of ministry so that the needs can be met. Many lay persons are discovering their spiritual gifts and aptitudes, learning appropriate skills, and becoming involved in ministry, either

within the walls of the local church or in the community at large.

Areas of opportunity for lay ministry include:

Compassionate Ministries	New Member Development
Family Life Ministries	Prime Time Ministries
Ministering to Those at Risk	Single Adult Ministries
Marriage Enrichment Ministries	Stewardship
Men's/Women's ministries	Theological/Doctrinal Studies

Lay pastoral counseling is an area that many churches are pursuing in order to help address the needs of those who are hurting. It is crucial to obtain full support of the pastoral staff and church board when starting a lay counseling ministry. The following are helpful criteria for selecting potential lay counselors:

- spiritual maturity
- psychological/emotional stability
- love for and interest in people
- appropriate spiritual gifts
- adequate life experience
- availability/teachability
- ability to keep confidentiality (with exceptions to confidentiality usually including child abuse or elder abuse and danger to self or others).

Training and supervision are essential for building and maintaining an effective lay counseling ministry. The lay counselor must know his/her limitations and when to refer. It is important to note that in some states, licensing laws for professional counselors may not allow the use of the term “lay counselor” or “lay counseling” for such a ministry. In these situations, other terms such as “lay helping” or “shepherding” should be used. Legal advice should also be obtained to determine whether malpractice insurance is required for lay counselors. A

valuable resource with step-by-step practical strategies to protect a lay counseling ministry may be found at churchsafety.com.

The lay helper has an integral place in the community of care within the church. Richard Foster writes, “God joyfully employs an infinite variety of means to bring health and well-being to his people ... we are celebrating the growing army of women and men and children who are learning how to bring the healing power of Christ to others for the glory of God and the good of all concerned.” (*Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home*, 2003) RM



When You Need Professional Help:

Accessing the Services of a Christian Counselor

There comes a point at which even the most well-equipped pastor and the most well-intentioned parent need to seek the services of a professional counselor. Finding the right fit can make a big difference. Let’s look at a few important issues.

Why seek the services of a professional counselor?

“Counselor” is an oft-used title. A professional counselor is licensed in the state in which they are in practice. They have the education and clinical experience necessary to be officially recognized as professionally competent.

Since each state licenses counselors independently, there can be some variation in the terminology. The most common types include: Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC), Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) and Licensed Clinical Psychologist (LCP).

While not every licensed counselor accepts payment from third-party insurers, many do; those counselors who are not licensed are not able to accept insurance. While many work in private offices, licensed counselors can also be found in other settings such as government agencies, private treatment centers – and even some church counseling centers.

Why seek the services of a Christian counselor?

While it may be acceptable to contract a non-Christian plumber to work in your basement, counseling is so soul-focused that Christian churches and families should intentionally seek out professional counselors who identify themselves as Evangelical Christian and acknowledge openly that they integrate faith into the counseling process. Even community counseling centers often have someone on staff that is able and willing to counsel from this perspective.

What questions should I ask?

Here are eight good questions to ask before scheduling the initial assessment:

1. Do you believe that the Truths of Scripture can, and should, be integrated into counseling?
2. Are you actively attending a local church? Which one?
3. Do you have a Statement of Faith I can review?
4. How much do you charge for sessions? Do you take insurance?
5. What level of education do you have? Where did you complete your graduate studies?
6. What licensure or certifications do you have?
7. What are your areas of expertise?
8. Do you have much experience working with my specific issue?

In some specific situations, it may also be important to ask specific questions as to the counselor's perspective (eg. abortion, divorce, same-sex attraction).

Are there lists of Christian professional counselors available anywhere?

There are many professional counselors across North America who identify themselves as Christians and practice consistent with biblical principles. There are two reliable sources of information that help to locate them.

Christian Care Network:

<http://www.aacc.net/resources/find-a-counselor>

The American Association of Christian Counselors maintains a database of licensed professional counselors who identify themselves as Christians and pledge to practice from that orientation.

Focus on the Family - Counseling Department:

http://referrals-loc.custhelp.com/cgi-bin/referrals_loc.cfg/php/loc/enduser/loc.php

Focus on the Family also maintains a database of licensed professional counselors. To be listed, counselors complete a detailed questionnaire that is reviewed by Focus staff. Counselors must confirm that they counsel from a biblical perspective.

Depending on your area, there may be a number of providers within driving distance. If there aren't, there are a number of places where you can receive counseling online.

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Principles for the Tough Times

Looking to Scripture

The Bible has much to say to a young person struggling with tough issues. To the common question, “Why is this happening to me?” the Bible answers, “Because of sin.” Let’s be honest though: that answer in itself is not much help the midst of struggle. But Scripture, and especially Jesus’ example, provides more answers. Jesus came “to bind up the brokenhearted.” He healed the wounded, He responded to struggle with compassion, He became angry at arrogance and indifference (Mark 3:5). He taught about suffering both by word and by example. He cared, and He still does.

There is often a tendency to think that you must have done something to deserve to suffer. Jesus made it clear that suffering is NOT always a result of your personal sin (John 9:2-3). Jesus suffered unbelievable pain—both physically and emotionally—and He never sinned. The book of Job makes it clear that personal suffering is not directly linked to personal sin. What you suffer—even struggling with depression—says absolutely nothing about your level of spirituality. Ever heard of Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Jeremiah (Jer 20:14-19), or Job (Job 3:1-26)?

And yet we recognize that God is sovereign, and He could end suffering and struggle if He chose to do so. Why doesn’t He? That is a question that the Bible does not directly answer, except to affirm that God is all-powerful, all-wise, and loving, and therefore we can trust Him. God does allow sin and struggle and uses it to accomplish His own good ends. The most terrible event in history was Jesus being tortured to death, but God used the horror to bring salvation. Joseph’s brothers’ sin caused Joseph untold suffering, yet God used it to save their lives. One of my favorite verses appears in this context: “You meant it for evil, but God

meant it for good” (Gen 50:20). God does amazing things through the suffering and even the failures of His children.

Finally, even though we may not feel it, Christ never deserts us (Matt. 28:20). Scripture tells us that God’s strength “is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9): what you think of as weakness may actually be God developing strength in you. Faithfulness in struggle builds godly character (Jam 1:3). Experiencing pain leads to having empathy for others (2 Cor 1:4). Physical problems can be stepping stones to further ministry. In short, God uses tough times to accomplish great good both in your life and in the lives of others.

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What makes Counseling Christian?

Many of the founding fathers of psychology were hostile to Christianity; in fact, Freud argued that all religious ideas are rooted in wishes and illusions. Others believe that the Bible is the lone authority and to investigate professional counseling is to compromise biblical authority. A more balanced view is one that recognizes the independent validity of each source of knowledge and is able to integrate them in a responsible manner.

Integration

Christian counseling has been defined as the integration of theology and psychology into a workable counseling model. Many of the techniques developed by secular theorists and practitioners are the same techniques used by those practicing Christian counseling. For the Christian counselor, good theory is built upon good theology; it must be with extreme caution then that secular conclusions be accepted into Christian thinking.

The distinctions that separate Christian counselors from their secular counterparts include unique assumptions concerning the attributes of God, the nature of human beings, the authority of Scripture, the reality of sin, the forgiveness of God, and hope for the future. Christian counselors have unique goals related to spiritual growth. They have unique methods that are consistent with biblical teachings such as prayer, Scripture reading, confrontation with Christian truths, and encouraging church participation. Christian counselors demonstrate unique characteristics to include a deep commitment to Spirit-filled servanthood, a dedication of God-given abilities and a desire to help others in their move toward personal wholeness, interpersonal competence, mental stability, and spiritual maturity. Christianity provides a basic framework that reminds each person that they are precious to God and have innumerable value. In a Christian worldview, people have value; they have value as God's creation; value as being created in the image of God; and value because God sent His Son to die for the redemption of His people. It is the Christian assertion that humans are created in the image of God that serves as the basis for human dignity.

Sources of Truth

The Bible is the primary source for all meaning and purpose and that it is the guidebook given by God so that believers may live happy lives in communion with Him but it is not God's sole revelation.

It is not unfaithful to God's Word to expand knowledge and understanding. Christian counseling affirms the Bible as the sourcebook for revelation and relationship and, as an extension, as the guidebook for treatment. While not claiming to be a textbook on psychology, the Bible does address issues pertaining to loneliness, discouragement, relational conflict, grief, anger, fear and a variety of other issues often addressed in counseling.

The concept of integration appears most consistent with the theological methodology of John Wesley. Wesley's quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience lends to the idea that psychological data and theory, as a function of both reason and experience, should be integrated into the preeminent theological content, Scripture.

Counselors who are committed Christians are going to have fundamentally Christian views of persons, conceptualization about the cause of problems, goals for therapy and techniques to facilitate change. Christian counseling can only be practiced by counselors "who have a personal relationship with God" and "have received Jesus Christ into their lives and are now children of God."

The Call to Helping

Helping others is not an option according to Scripture. Rather, it is the responsibility of every believer. Christian counseling is built upon the guiding principle of helping people to "recognize, understand, and solve problems in accordance with the Word of God." The claims of the gospel are all-encompassing and should penetrate into every area of a Christian's life, vocation included. Psychology and theology have a common primary concern: human nature and functioning. For the Christian counselor, the question is not whether or not psychology can be related to Christian faith, but how. A value-free approach to psychotherapy is impossible; psychology and counseling take place, not in a vacuum, but in the context of the counselor's worldview – and the counselee's worldview.

The goal of counseling should be to help others to feel that they are worthwhile, both to themselves and to others. Faith in God is vital to successfully overcoming. Healing is found in connecting. Connecting is found in community.

Only Christ can set free. All Truth comes from God; the key to effective integration is to recognize the difference between facts and interpretation of facts in relation to God's Word, the Bible and God's Work, His created order. AG

Understanding Shame

In his classic book *Healing the Shame That Binds You*, John Bradshaw describes shame as “a healthy feeling that can become a sickness of the soul.” He goes on to say that just as there are two types of cholesterol, HDL (healthy) and LDL (toxic), there are two forms of shame, healthy shame and toxic shame. Pia Mellody, in *Facing Codependence*, describes shame as “a gift from God” or “the legacy of abuse.”

Healthy shame:

- Focuses on *what you have done*
- Is a reminder that you are human and fallible
- Motivates you to *change*

Ezra 9:6 describes healthy shame: “O my God, I am ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads.”

Toxic shame:

- Focuses on *who you are*
- Makes you think that you will never be good enough
- Motivates you to *hide*

2 Sam 13:20 describes a result of toxic shame: after she was raped, “Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house.”

How does an emotion that is a gift from God disarrange into a legacy of abuse? Perhaps a glimpse into a real-life experience will help us understand. One experience – two very different responses – two very, very different outcomes.

The scenario: A father discovers his teenage son viewing internet pornography.

Response 1:

“Son, I’d like to sit down and talk to you about what you are looking at.”

By using the term “son,” the father is affirming the family bond is intact. The father is non-judgmental in tone and manner.

“Wow. She (the porn star) looks beautiful, and I understand why she is appealing.”

The father is modeling authenticity as he affirms his son’s masculinity (as well as his own) which normalizes sexual desire as God’s design.

“But let me tell you why viewing something that is fantasy and outside the bounds of God’s intent for intimacy is harmful.”

The father is demonstrating care and concern for his son’s well being through his willingness to discuss the dangers of pornography.

And the son begins to understand the shame that he feeling is a gift wrapped in grace.

Response 2:

“Who in the world do you think you are looking at that garbage? Are you sick? Shame on you!”

The father is inducing shame upon his son by attacking the son’s sense of self rather than addressing the unhealthy behavior. This response may also have an unintended secondary consequence - the distorted message that sexual desire is inherently corrupt.

“What will people think? I will not have my son bring disgrace to my name.”

The father’s own carried shame (arising from his felt need to maintain a good and perfect image in the eyes of others) is blinding him to his son’s need for validation and understanding. The message given is that the father’s needs (maintaining his image/being in control) are more important than the son’s needs. The son experiences a deep feeling of being “less than” and becomes engulfed in toxic shame. And the legacy of abuse is perpetuated.

Which response reflects the heart of Abba Father? How might He respond to this son? According to His love letter to the world, there is reason to believe He would say,

“Son, I understand your temptations... I was tempted too.
And when you fall... I made provision for that too.
Listen to your conscience. It is a gift.
You can then learn who I am and what grace means.”

How important is it to “get it right”? Extremely important. For when shame moves from being a healthy emotion to a “sickness of the soul,” the pain becomes so great the individual begins to develop defenses – perfectionism, codependency, blame, contempt, narcissism - and may develop maladaptive coping mechanisms including addictions.

But when we get it right, healthy shame allows us to be human. Authentic. Vulnerable. Deeply loved by Jesus Christ. What a gift.

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“Maladaptive”

Glossary:

God gave us the ability to respond and adapt to changes in our circumstances, and this ability helps us survive and even thrive during tough times. Sometimes, though, the way we adapt can be destructive: shunning close relationships to avoid the pain of betrayal results in the pain of loneliness; alcohol or sexual addictions make a person feel better short-term but worse long-term. Sometimes the strategies we adopt to deal with problems can become more destructive than the original problem.

Issues in the Tough Times

Abuse

“I'm 17 years old. I was raised in a Christian home, but it didn't feel very Christian. My parents were always at each other – unless we were at church. My dad treated me bad from the time I was about 8 years old. It was like I was never good enough for him. He would hit me if I made a mistake or did something wrong. Once he told me God didn't love me when I forgot to take my Bible to church. I learned to go along with whatever he said, and to keep out of his way.

“The worst thing was that mum never told him off for the way he treated me. She would just yell ‘Don't make him mad.’ She never defended me from my dad, and she acted like I deserved everything I got. I started to believe that I would never be good enough for them. Or God.”

Getting Perspective

Abuse comes in many forms. It is more than bruises or broken bones. While physical abuse may leave obvious scars, other types of abuse including emotional, spiritual, and sexual abuse also leave deep, lasting scars that damage the sense of self.

Abuse	Description	Signs	Message
emotional	control another through fear/humiliation; withhold emotional support; isolating; verbal attacks may include belittling, rejecting, cruel teasing, constant criticism and insult	Excessively withdrawn; extremes in behavior; lack of attachment to primary caregiver; inappropriately adult or inappropriately infantile	I don't matter or deserve to have a voice; nobody cares; I am worthless; disregarded

Abuse	Description	Signs	Message
physical	beating, pinching, slapping, hair pulling, burns, scalds; lack of appropriate physical nurturing	unexplained injuries; always “on alert”; shies away from touch; wears inappropriate clothing (long-sleeved shirt on a hot day)	touch is unsafe; my body is not worth respect; am helpless to protect myself; I need to be aggressive to protect myself
sexual	any sexual act performed with a child by an adult or older child, with or without force or the threat of force; exposing minors to adult sexual materials or activity	unusual interest in / avoidance of all things of a sexual nature; sleep problems; seductiveness; social withdrawal; delinquency; self-destructive behavior; depression	I am only an object; I am trash this is the only way to get attention; I am responsible; the only way to be safe is to be invisible
spiritual	Spiritual abuse occurs when spiritual development is distorted by a spiritual leader or system that tries to control, manipulate, or dominate.	use of exclusive language; live in a culture of fear and shame; have a distorted view of respect; overly dependent upon spiritual leader	God will not love me unless I am perfect; no matter how hard I try, it will never be good enough.

Biblical Insights

- To the victim: “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” (Psalms 147:3).
- To the abuser: “The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates.” (Psalm 11:5)
“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Mat 18:6)

Immediate Response

Loving God,

Open my eyes ... to see the bruises left by a human hand.

Open my arms ... when a teen needs comfort after a friend’s betrayal.

Open my mind ... when I'd rather deny that violence in our families exists.

Open my mouth ... to scream, "STOP!" when stopping is needed.

Open my ears... to hear the stories of children tell about the monsters that visit at night.

Open my heart to care... to notice... to not forget.

Help me to be the eyes, arms, mind, mouth, ears, and heart of Jesus.

Grant me the courage to see, touch, think, say, hear, and care.¹

Action Steps

- Validate feelings.
- Offer support and unconditional love.
- Listen to the victim's story.
- Provide a safe place for women and children in crisis.
- Provide wise counsel to victims that will not put them in more danger.
- Assess level of safety. If the victim is in danger, take action to help him/her get to a safe place.
- Refer the victim to a professional Christian counselor who is experienced with abuse issues.
- Know and abide by state laws for mandatory reporting. RM

Anger

Christian author and popular speaker Shanna Shutte relates the following personal experience:

¹ Adapted from Harder (2010, April 8). Let the children come. Weekly prayers for peace. Mennonite Church USA, Peace and Justice Support Network.

“In my late teens I felt trapped between my childhood and ever-growing adult opportunities. Like a toddler, I explored many new things: opposite sex relationships, driving, and college and career choices. Even though I still needed my parents’ guidance, I sometimes found it unpleasant. During an isolated and rebellious encounter with my father, I screamed, “I hate you!” Because I was generally a compliant kid and it never happened again, Mom and Dad weren’t overly concerned; they just chalked it up as teenage frustration.”²

Getting Perspective

Teenagers face an avalanche of emotional issues during this period of development. Questions of identity, separation, relationships, and purpose. The relationship between teens and their parents is also changing as teens become more independent, and parents often have a difficult time dealing with this new independence. It is common for teens to react to this avalanche by expressing anger. Remembering that anger during this stage of development is usually a secondary emotion brought on by fear can help you help the teen navigate through this turbulent time.

Biblical Insights

Anger has been called the *misunderstood* emotion, and for some, anger has been the *forbidden* emotion. However, valid anger – anger that has been provoked by wrongdoing - is not evil nor is it Satan at work. The ability to experience anger is evidence we are created in the image of God.

In the New Testament, accounts are given of Jesus demonstrating anger (Mark 3:1-5; John 2:13-17) and we are commanded to be

2

angry, and yet do not sin (Ephesians 4:26). God is angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11). God's purpose for anger is to motivate to take constructive action as demonstrated by God Himself. (Jeremiah 3:12-14).

Immediate Response

Listen and focus on the teen's feelings. Try to understand the situation from his or her perspective. Blaming and accusing only builds up more walls and can end all communication. Stick to facts, and deal with the present moment. Show that you care and show your love. Remind the teen that anger is the feeling and behavior is the choice.

Action Steps

Help the teen develop greater self-awareness by having them ask themselves the following questions³:

- Where is this anger coming from?
- Are my expectations unreasonable?
- Am I reacting to hurt, loss, or fear?
- What unresolved conflict am I facing?
- Am I using my anger to isolate myself or as a way to intimidate others?
- Am I communicating effectively?
- Am I accountable for what I am feeling?
- How am I choosing to express my anger?
- Do my emotions control me, or do I control my emotions?

RM

³ Grohol, J.M. (2004) *Teenage Anger*. Retrieved from http://psychcentral.com/library/teen_anger.htm

Anxiety

“I always thought I was just a worrier. I’d worry about what I was going to wear. Does anybody likes me? Do I look OK? And on and on. I just couldn’t let something go. I started to miss school. I had trouble concentrating and sleeping. I was always imagining things were worse than they really were. My life was miserable.”

Getting Perspective

For teens (or anyone else) anxiety is a normal reaction to stress. Things like taking tests, meeting new people, speaking in public, going on a date, and competing in sports can cause apprehension. But some teens react much more strongly than others to stressful situations.

- anxiety during the teen years typically centers on changes in the body, social acceptance, and conflicts about independence.
- 1 in 4 teens suffer from mild to serious problems with anxiety.⁴
- Some of the typical signs of serious anxiety include:
 - disengaging from most activities
 - sleeping in more
 - changes in eating habits
 - significant change in behavior
 - breaking off relationships with friend or family
 - spending significant amount of time alone
- anxiety becomes a disorder when the symptoms interfere with daily life and ability to function.
- approximately 1 in 12 teens have an anxiety disorder; with very few receiving mental health care.⁵ The most common disorders are:

⁴Merikangas KR, He J, Burstein M, Swanson SA, Avenevoli S, Cui L, Benjet C, Georgiades K, Swendsen J. *Lifetime prevalence of mental disorders in U.S. Adolescents*. Under review.

- Generalized anxiety disorder - persistent, unrealistic worry about everyday things.
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder - persistent thoughts (obsessions) and rituals (compulsions) to control the anxiety the thoughts produce.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - severe anxiety triggered by a traumatic event.
- Panic Disorder: sudden attacks of terror; producing a fear of doom or losing control.
- Social Anxiety Disorder: overwhelmingly anxious in everyday social situations.
- Specific Phobias: an irrational fear of something that poses little or no danger.

Biblical Insights

- the reality of anxiety: *Search me, God ... know my anxious thoughts* (Psalm 139:23)
- the results of anxiety: *An anxious heart weighs a man down* (Proverbs 12:25)
- the relief from anxiety: *Be not therefore anxious ... Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need* (Matthew 6:31-33)

Immediate Response

Teens today are experiencing an overwhelming sense of unease, worry, and fear as they face the angst of modern culture. Add in the stress of keeping up with all the social pressures from friends and peers, and it can become too much to handle. *It is important to communicate to our teens that our God is bigger and stronger than anything this world can throw at us.*

⁵ <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/anxiety-disorders-in-children-and-adolescents/index.shtml>

Action Steps

- ask well-framed questions about their their fears and worries
- listen carefully and respectfully
- help him / her understand anxiety is normal
- if anxiety begin to take over and limit activities, seek professional help

RM

Attachment

“It's happening again –just like the other guys I’ve dated. Guess I asked one too many times if he still loves me. He said that if I don't believe by now that he loves me by now, I never will. He said he is getting tired of me ‘clinging’ to him – said he needs ‘space to breathe.’ I am terrified he’s going to break up with me...”

Getting Perspective

Attachment is all about forming relationships. The attachment bond is the deep and enduring connection formed between an infant and primary attachment figure, usually the mother, in the first several years of life. This bond shapes the infant’s brain, profoundly influencing emotional and psychological development. If the relationship between child / attachment figure is close and secure, the child learns to trust and love. If the relationship is emotionally distant and inconsistent, the child learns not to trust or care and believes that he is all alone in the world.

Attachment Style	Parental Style	Resulting Characteristics
Secure	in tune with the child’s emotions	able to create meaningful relationships; able to set appropriate boundaries
Avoidant	unavailable / rejecting	avoids emotional connection; distant, critical, intolerant; rigid
Ambivalent / Anxious	inconsistent / intrusive	anxious and insecure; controlling; blaming;

		unpredictable
Disorganized / Fearful	ignored needs / frightening	chaotic; insensitive; explosive; untrusting while craving security
Reactive	extremely unattached or malfunctioning	cannot establish positive relationships; often misdiagnosed

More and more children are failing to develop secure attachments to loving, protective caregivers. Research has shown that up to 80% of high risk families create severe attachment disorders in their children.⁶ These challenges can be quite difficult to sort out, and the child may acquire a 'bad kid' or 'anti-social' label during adolescence. Attachment disorder affects all aspect of a child's functioning, and will likely get worse if left untreated. Symptoms may include:

- **Behavior:** oppositional and defiant, impulsive, destructive, lie and steal, aggressive and abusive, hyperactive, self-destructive, cruel to animals, irresponsible, fire setting.
- **Emotions:** intense anger and temper, sad, depressed and hopeless, moody, fearful and anxious (although often hidden), irritable, inappropriate emotional reactions.
- **Thoughts:** negative beliefs about self, relationships, and life in general, lack of cause-and-effect thinking, attention and learning problems.
- **Relationships:** lacks trust, controlling, manipulative, does not give or receive genuine affection and love, indiscriminately affectionate with strangers, unstable peer relationships, blames others for own mistakes or problems, victimizes

⁶ Evergreen Psychotherapy Center Attachment Treatment & Training Institute. *Attachment Explained*. Retrieved 10/08/2012 from <http://www.attachmentexperts.com/whatisattachment.html>.

others/victimized.

- **Physical:** poor hygiene, tactilely defensive, enuresis and encopresis, accident prone, high pain tolerance, genetic predispositions (e.g., depression, hyperactivity).
- **Moral/Spiritual:** lack of faith, compassion, remorse, identification with evil and the dark side of life.

Biblical Insights

- God created us for relationship: “It is not good that man should be alone.” (Genesis 2:18)
- God as an attachment figure: “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)
- “God is our refuge and strength, and ever-present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)
- “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” (Psalm 34:18)

Immediate Response

We are wounded in relationships, and we are healed in relationships. Healing the wounds from attachment deficits begins with a safe, warm relationship in which emotional needs will be accepted and not criticized or judged.

Action Steps

According to clinical consultant Linda Zimmerman, children with attachment issues typically do not respond well to traditional forms of treatment or parenting methods, particularly those that aim to modify certain types of behavior.⁷ The problem arises because these methods are relationship based, and these children lack the capacity for genuine relationships. Zimmerman advises:

⁷ Linda Zimmerman, *Understanding and Treating Attachment Disorders*.

Retrieved 10/08/2012 from

<http://www.strugglingteens.com/archives/2000/6/oe03.html>.

- accurate diagnosis is crucial
- the stress the child creates within the home often requires out-of-home treatment
- it is helpful to view the problem behavior as the child's way of keeping others at a distance, and recognize that the true problem is fear of intimacy
- it is more effective to deflect attention away from specific negative behaviors
- common interventions such as "go to your room" are counterproductive because these children have a "reversal of learning" in which closeness is scary and distance is safe.
- older adolescents with attachment issues are benefited by experiential therapy, such as wilderness programs, which foster and depend upon the building of trust between peers.

RM

Damaging Coping Strategies

"I don't want to keep doing this. I know that it's bad for me. I feel guilty about it every time. I just don't know what else to do."

Getting Perspective

Teens are going through significant physical and emotional changes. Adding ever-increasing stressors to the mix and they are vulnerable to all kinds of struggles. In the absence of appropriate coping strategies, teens often begin to manifest damaging coping strategies.

Each of these activities is often attempts to find relief from emotional pain – particularly pain from relationship loss or rejection. Teens who have not learned to cope with negative emotions find that these strategies do provide relief – even if it's only temporary. The endorphins that are released by these

behaviors can be addictive. Because of the nature of the behaviors, teens often feel a deep sense of shame on top of the emotional pain that led to the behavior.

Cutting

Cutting is using a sharp object for the purpose of self-injury. Other forms of self-injury include biting, burning and beating the skin. These injuries are most often inflicted upon the wrists, arms, legs or stomach. Teens often try to hide the scars so that others won't notice.

Nearly half of all high school students report that they have engaged in some self-injurious behavior in the last year. These behaviors externalize emotional pain in a way that is also physically stimulating. Often what begins as surface markings turn into extreme injuries that could lead to blood loss or infection.

Eating Disorders

More than twenty-five percent of teen girls have symptoms of an eating disorder at some point between age twelve and age eighteen. These teens have an obsession with food and the behaviors related to eating. There are two primary types of eating disorders: those with *Anorexia* restrict the amount of food that they eat; those with *Bulimia* eat a lot of food at once and then force themselves to throw up (often referred to as binge-and-purge). Either of these two eating disorders can have significant health problems long-term.

Substance Abuse

Ninety percent of high school students have tried alcohol. More than thirty percent say that they use some sort of alcohol or drug each week. Teens from Christian homes are immune and are sometimes even more prone to use because they have had limited exposure to it.

Biblical Insights

“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.” (Romans 6:6, 11-13)

Immediate Response

Look for patterns of behavior that indicate that there is a problem dealing with stress. Often what starts with curiosity leads to experimentation which leads to abuse and addiction. Affirm them for seeking help and continue to maintain a close relationship. The bigger goal is not just the damaging coping skills but building a renewed sense of hope and purpose.

Action Steps

- Share strategies for stopping their current (maladaptive) coping in addition to learning how to effectively work through their negative emotions.
- Help to identify places and situations in which they are more likely to engage in these behaviors and “safety plan” for them to use other strategies instead.
- Encourage them to review relevant passages of Scripture and to begin to journal their thoughts and feelings.

Depending on the level of severity of the behavior, the teen who discloses their problem may need to be directed to professional help. In some cases, a physical exam may be needed as well. AG

Depression

“I just feel sad all the time now. I’ve gained weight. I have a hard time sleeping. I don’t even want to do things that I used to find enjoyable. I just don’t feel like myself anymore.”

Getting Perspective

Depression is feelings of dejection and hopelessness that lasts for two weeks or more. Teens with depression often experience changes in their eating and sleeping habits, agitation, irritability, and restlessness. They find little pleasure in activities they once enjoyed.

Teen depression often lasts about eight months. Of those teens that have depression, seventy percent of teens will have more than one episode before adulthood. Fifteen percent develop bipolar disorder.

Depression comes in a variety of contexts due to confounded factors:

- **Biological factors:** There is evidence that some people can inherit a predisposition to depression.
- **Experiential factors:** Life experiences do not cause depression, but they can increase the risk of depression.
- **Social factors:** Some teens present with symptoms of depression because they feel that they receive more special attention.
- **Learned helplessness:** A significant component of depression is a perceived lack of control. They feel that no matter how hard they try, nothing will change.

- Negative thinking: Faulty thinking, particularly related to expectations, can convince a teen that they are worthless.
- Spiritual factors: Some teens experience symptoms of depression due to unconfessed, hidden sin.

Less than thirty percent of teens with depression seek professional help. Untreated depression increases the risk of other problems:

- Substance abuse
- Relationship problems
- Trouble with school and work
- Risky sexual behaviors, sexually transmitted diseases
- Physical illnesses
- Suicide

Biblical Insights

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.” (Psalm 43:5)

“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

Immediate Response

All individuals experience low emotional times. Teen years are full of stage-specific changes and challenges. They have more hormones and fewer developed coping skills.

Action Steps

- Look for the signs. Get involved with your teens. Have regular dialogue to see how things are going. If you have concerns about depression, talk with trusted friends and supportive adults to confirm concerns.

- Shower your teen with affirmation and love. Pray for them. Lead family devotions that concentrate on God’s love, provision, and care.
 - If concerns persist, seek help from a professional counselor. Professional treatment for depression most often includes outpatient counseling and medication.
- AG

Loss through Divorce or Death

“It’s been six months since my dad died. I haven’t told my friends how I feel. I just smile and make everybody laugh so they don’t know how much it hurts. I don’t talk to my mom because I don’t want her to feel worse. Once I did, but she got all teary. I felt like crying too. No way am I going to cry.”

Getting Perspective

The teen years are an especially difficult time to deal with loss as young people are torn between independence and the need for support. Teens feel very conflicted and their feelings may be very intense at times which feels even more overwhelming.

It can be difficult to separate normal teen behavior from that of a grieving teen in trouble. Some of the indicators that let you know when a teen needs extra help are:

- academic failure
- isolation
- unspoken anger - can become depression.
- depression - sleeping difficulties, restlessness, low self-esteem
- death wish – if a teen starts talking about when, where and how or if there is a history of depression or suicidal behavior, get prompt professional help.
- risk-taking behaviors - drug and alcohol abuse, fighting, and acting out sexually

- denying pain while at the same time acting overly strong or mature.

Biblical Insights

- Seek God in times of grief: “The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.” (Psalm 9:9).
- Comfort: “And I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor 6:18).
- Grief is not willingly brought on by God: “For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone” (Lam 3:33).

Immediate Response

Teens experiencing loss will have good and bad days. Stability and a supporting relationship are the best ways to help an adolescent through the long and traumatic process of loss.

Action Steps

Divorce:

- Develop a caring and trusting relationship with the teen.
- Encourage the adolescent to talk, grieve and cope in his or her own way.
- Help a teen look to and rely on the heavenly Father.
- Try to develop a relationship with the divorcing parents - it's helpful to know the whole family, not just the teen.
- Encourage parents not to play games by using children to deliver messages or take sides.

Death:

- Let them talk. Don't try to make them “feel better.”
- Let them be silent. Sometimes they won't want to talk.
- Let them have their feelings. Their feelings may be many and mixed: confusion, sadness, anger, guilt, relief, numbness.
- Help Them Say Goodbye and Create Remembrances.

- Respect Their Process. Don't expect teens' grief to evolve according to a predetermined time-line.
- Be sensitive to possible triggers—things that will cause intense emotional responses.
- Cut them a break. Now is not the time worry about details.
- Don't offer false reassurance. "Everything will be okay" may seem like the right thing to say, but it trivializes the very real fears that the teen is dealing with.

RM

Same-Sex Attraction

"I know that I'm expected to start dating girls soon... but I'm just not attracted in girls in the way that other guys seem to be. Ever since I can remember, I've been attracted to other boys."

Getting Perspective

This is perhaps one of the most complex social issues of our generation. Even the most conservative estimates would indicate that somewhere between five and ten percent of the population has some level of sexual attraction to members of their same sex. There is no consensus as to the reasons that same-sex attractions develops. There do appear to be several contributing factors:

- Family background, especially relationships with parents, seems to shape emerging sexuality in adolescence.
- Social interactions in the formative years teach and reinforce sexual norms.
- Early sexual experiences, particularly abusive ones, shape self-concept and perceptions of sexual attraction.

One of the primary arguments for acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle is the claim that homosexuals "are born that way." The fact is that we simply don't know if there are biological or genetic factors that predispose a person to same-sex attraction.

It is important to realize that same sex attraction is not usually a choice, but engaging in homosexual fantasies or acts is a choice. The temptation is not sin, but acting on it is.

There are three tiers to consider.

- Same-sex attraction. Teens in this tier have attractions to the same sex. These are not sin, but temptations to sin.
- Homosexual orientation. In this tier, teens have experienced same-sex attraction to the degree, intensity and length of time that feel that they are oriented toward the same sex.
- Gay identity. In this third tier, teens describe themselves as “gay” or “homosexual” and embrace the label.

Biblical Insights

“If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination.” (Leviticus 20:13a)

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Immediate Response

As with most of the issues addressed here, compassion will be compromised if the reaction to disclosure is shock, judgment or disapproval. Empathy and understanding must be conveyed clearly.

Action Steps

Teens who disclose same-sex attraction must be provided a safe, calm, nonreactive environment in which to talk about their experiences and perspectives. Don’t judge. Avoid lecturing. Maintain your relationship with the teen and pray that God will use you as an instrument of His healing.

Distinguish between same-sex attraction and sexual sin. Jesus disclosed that even He was tempted; to be tempted to sin is not the same as sinning.

Remind them that there is no work of grace by which temptation is entirely removed. While change is possible for some, others learn to live a God-honoring life that eschews acting out on same-sex attractions.

AG

Sexual Thoughts and Behaviors

“I can’t stop it. I know that it’s wrong. I ask God to forgive me – but it seems that every day I get caught up again and find myself giving in to sexual temptations.”

Getting Perspective

With the onset of puberty, sexual desires, expectations and needs begin to take an increasing role in the life of an adolescent or teen. These desires are God-given and relate to the longing to be known and to be loved. These thoughts and feelings come during a time when many teens are already struggling with loneliness and a lack of connection with others. Combining those struggles with the sudden hormonal changes creates a potentially volatile scenario.

During puberty, self-exploration is normal. For both males and females, that can lead to self-stimulation. While those activities are not spiritually or psychologically damaging in themselves, self-stimulation in conjunction with illicit sexual fantasies is wrong – and can lead to chronic sexually acting-out behaviors.

Pornographic fiction and images degrade people. Viewing them as means of sexual gratification is a clear distortion of God’s plan for sexual intimacy.

Biblical Insights

“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Philippians 4:8)

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Immediate Response

Sex is about connection and intimacy. Sexual urges are God-given. Empathize with teens who disclose that they are struggling with sexual thoughts and behaviors. Affirm them for seeking help.

Share with teens a biblical view of sexual intimacy and the God-given boundaries in which sexual expression should occur. Let them know that with God’s help and the support and accountability of a godly community, they can take control over their thoughts and behaviors.

Action Steps

Individuals struggling with sexual thoughts and behaviors need to find a godly accountability partner (or partners) who are safe to support them in confession yet strong enough to hold them to their commitments. If the person has access to the internet, appropriate filters should be installed.

Help them to identify the triggers that often result in sexually acting-out. Acting-out sexually is often related to a lack of genuine intimacy. Help teens to build healthy relationships with godly peers and mentors.

Teach them skills that will help them in times of temptation. Memorizing Scripture should be an integral part of this process. Focus on verses that address God’s love and His desire for a relationship with His children as well as verses that address how sin impedes that relationship with God.

AG

Spiritual Insecurity

Kyle is trying to be a Christian, but he is struggling with forgiving an abusive father, and his feelings of anger and bitterness keep cropping up. When he feels this way, and especially when he gives vent to these feelings, Kyle is convinced that he has “backslidden”⁸ and is no longer saved. He sometimes thinks that it is useless for him to try to serve God and is tempted to give up entirely.

Getting Perspective

Struggling with tough issues is often compounded by spiritual insecurity, or doubt as to one’s spiritual condition. Teens are often faced with pressure to conform in order to “please God,” and are told that they are not saved if they do not conform. When a young person is going through a tough time, the additional pressure to “perform” spiritually can cause him or her to walk away from the church and even from God. Failure to perform up to expectations (their own or others’) adds to feelings of guilt or failure.

Biblical Insights

The Bible teaches that we are saved by faith, and that we remain saved by faith (Heb 10:38, Gal 2:20, Eph 3:17). Faith, not performance. We fall from grace when we rebel against God, not when we fail while honestly trying to do right. It is impossible to have saving faith while in rebellion against God (1 Sam 15:23, Heb 10:29), but it is entirely possible to have saving faith and also to make mistakes, to make poor choices, to struggle with depression, or to be overwhelmed by intense emotions. It is even possible to be

⁸ I use this term here as the common term in the CHM for falling from grace, but it is not the biblical term. In general, the Bible uses “backsliding” to refer to the process of pulling away from God (Jer 3:6-22, Hos 14:4), and words such as “fall” (Gal 5:4, Luke 8:13), “depart” (Heb 3:12), “draw back” (Heb 10:38-39), or “forsake” (Ezra 8:22) to refer to returning to an unsaved state.

saved and have feelings of anger directed at God.⁹ Faith is a choice to trust and obey God in spite of feelings.

Immediate Response

When working with a young person who is struggling with spiritual insecurity, emphasize that salvation is based on faith, not performance or emotions. Especially when struggling with an addiction or deeply-rooted emotions like anger or bitterness, the young person must realize that failure does not always equal falling from grace. If he does fail, he should immediately repent and continue following God. Emphasize that faith is a God-enabled choice, not a feeling. The only thing that can end one's salvation is the choice to rebel and thereby walk away from Christ.

Action Steps

- Continue to reinforce the fact that salvation is by faith, and therefore the believing young person is saved regardless of his feelings, temptations, or struggles.
- Teach how to recognize the difference between failure and rebellion:
 - Rebellion does not care what's right or wrong, ignores the conviction of the Holy Spirit, does not repent, and continues in sin.
 - Failure recognizes the wrong, responds to conviction, immediately repents, and continues struggling against sin.
- Do not allow "failure" to become an excuse for sin: refusing to resist sin is rebellion.

⁹ The Bible contains examples of godly people who expressed anger at God: Habakkuk (1:1-4), Job (19:6-13), David (Psalm 22:1-3). Each of these coupled their anger and frustration with expressions of trust in God, and remained attentive to God's voice. Jonah was also angry at God, but refused to allow God to deal with him about it (4:1-9).

- Give consistent encouragement: God cares about a young person's struggles, and through the struggle He will enable him to overcome his weakness and failure. SO

Suicide

"I'm a failure. I'm a failure at home. I'm a failure at school. Things would be easier on my family if I just wasn't around anymore."

Getting Perspective

Suicide is the third-leading cause of death among teens. It's important to note that, for adolescents and teens, suicide is rarely an impulsive act. Nearly 90 percent of teen suicides occur at home – and there are some key warning signs:

- A decline in performance
- A recent traumatic event
- Communication problems with family and/or friends
- Onset of quick-tempered outbursts
- Depression
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Drugs and alcohol
- Social withdrawal
- Lack of hope for the future

Nearly 80 percent of teens who complete suicide talked about it with others before making the attempt.

Suicide attempts are tangible cries for help. There are several factors that motivate young people to consider suicide:

- to avoid pain
- to seek punishment
- to hurt others
- to manipulate
- to gain notoriety

- to reunite with a loved one
- to demonstrate love
- to avoid burdening others

Biblical Insights

“For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”

Psalm 139:13-16

“I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”

(Psalm 40:1-3)

Immediate Response

If a teen is presenting with the above warning signs, pull them aside and spend some time with them. Ask them how things are going with them. If they talk about hopelessness, ask them directly if they are contemplating suicide.

If suicidal thoughts are acknowledged, don't respond with a judgmental spirit. Allow them to talk openly about their struggles and their “reasons for dying.” When they have fully given their rationale, note that they have “reasons for living” as well. Help them to explore all of the reasons that they should continue to press on.

Action Steps

Safety should be a first priority. Create a written safety plan that disables any suicide plan and reminds the teen of any helpful resources they can access. If there is an immediate threat, get professional help immediately. They may require hospitalization for their own safety.

Once they are more stable, investigate options for counseling to address the issues that brought on the thoughts of suicide and to help the teen to understand more appropriate coping strategies. Link them with support networks.

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Resources

General Resources for Pastors, Youth Workers, and Families

Book Overviews

Soulshift: The Measure of a Life Transformed

Steve DeNeff & David Drury

This 189-page book discusses seven identity shifts that God wants to use to transform His children from a religion that is performance-based to a relationship that is genuine. Each chapter includes an opportunity to reflect and write as well as questions to be asked of ourselves and to discuss with others.

The Quick-Reference Guide to Counseling Teenagers

Tim Clinton & Chap Clark

This 300-page reference-guide discusses 40 issues for which teens seek counseling. Each issue is covered in a comprehensive eight-part outline that includes: portraits (a scenario describing typical symptoms), definitions and key thoughts, an assessment interview, wise counsel, action steps, biblical insights, a prayer starter, and a list of recommended resources.

Helping the Struggling Adolescent: A Guide to Thirty-Six Common Problems for Counselors, Pastors and Youth Workers, Updated & Expanded

Les Parrott III

This 597-page book presents the basics of being an effective youth worker. It then provides guidance on 37 common problems. For each problem a wealth of information is provided related to: what the struggle looks like, why the struggle happens, how to help, and when to refer. The final section of the book includes helpful assessment tools that can assist in counseling teens.

Quick Scripture Reference for Counseling Youth

Patricia Miller & Keith Miller

This 245-page spiral-bound book includes topically-sorted Scripture verses for 134 issues that relate to counseling teens. While not a stand-alone counseling resource, this book does provide convenient access to passages that can be used when preparing to educate teens on challenging topics – or when having them memorize relevant verses as part of their counseling.

Solid Answers: America's foremost family counselor responds to tough questions facing today's families

James Dobson

Life on the Edge: A Young Adults Guide to a Meaningful Future

James Dobson

Connecting: A Radical New Vision

Larry Crabb

Integration of Psychology and Christianity

The Integration of Psychology and Theology: An Introduction

John Carter & Bruce Narramore

Psychology and Christianity: Four Views

Edited by Eric Johnson & Stanton Jones

Integrative Approaches to Psychology and Christianity: An Introduction to Worldview Issues, Philosophical Foundations, and Models of Integration

David Entwistle

Abuse

The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Dan Allender

Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse

Diane Langberg

Violated: Mercy for Sexual Abuse

Nancy Alcorn

Helping Victims of Sexual Abuse: A Sensitive Biblical Guide for Counselors, Victims, and Families

Lynn Heitritter & Jeanette Vought

Renew: Hope for Victims of Sexual Abuse

Robert McGee & Harry Schaumburg

What Do I Do When Teenagers are Victims of Abuse?

Steve Geralsi

The Emotionally Destructive Relationship: Seeing It, Stopping It, Surviving It

Leslie Vernick

Anger

Unlocking the Mystery of your Emotions

Archibald Hart

Making Anger Work for You

Gary Oliver

The Anger Workbook

Les Carter & Frank Minirth

Anxiety

Stressed or Depressed: A Practical and Inspirational Guide for Parents of Hurting Teens

Archibald Hart & Catherine Hart Weber

Overcoming Anxiety

Archibald Hart

Release from Fear and Anxiety

Cecil Osborn

Attachment

Attachments: Why You Love, Feel, and Act the Way You Do

Tim Clinton & Gary Sibcy

Why You Do the Things You Do: The Secret to Healthy Relationships

Tim Clinton & Gary Sibcy

Loving Your Child too Much: How to Keep a Close Relationship with Your Child without Overindulging, Overprotecting, or Overcontrolling

Tim Clinton & Gary Sibcy

Boundaries with Kids: When to Say Yes, When to Say No, to Help Your Children Gain Control of Their Lives

Henry Cloud & John Townsend

Boundaries with Teens: When to Say Yes, How to Say No

John Townsend

Damaging Coping Strategies

Healing for Damaged Emotions

David Seamands

The Search for Significance

Robert McGee

Beyond the Cut: Real Stories, Real Freedom

Nancy Alcorn

Starved: Mercy for Eating Disorders

Nancy Alcorn

Drug-Proof Your Kids

Stephen Arterburn & Jim Burns

Depression

Happiness is a Choice: The Symptoms, Causes, and Cures of Depression

Frank Minirth & Paul Meier

Blue Genes: Breaking Free from the Chemical Imbalances that Affect your Moods, your Mind, your Life, and your Loved Ones

Paul Meier, Todd Clements, Jean-Luc Bertrand & David Mandt, Sr.

Coping with Depression: The Common Cold of the Emotional Life

Siang-Yang Tan & John Ortberg

The Pastoral Care of Depression: A Guidebook

Binford Gilbert

Loss

Recovering from the Losses in Life

H. Norman Wright

Where is God When it Hurts?

Philip Yancey

Same-Sex Attraction

Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Parents, Pastors, and Friends

Mark Yarhouse

Leaving Homosexuality: A Practical Guide for Men and Women Looking for a Way Out

Alan Chambers

Sexual Thoughts and Behaviors

Every Young Man's Battle: Strategies for Victory in the Real World of Sexual Temptation

Stephen Arterburn, Fred Stoeker & Mike Yorkey

The Purity Principle: God's Safeguards for Life's Dangerous Trails

Randy Alcorn

Faithful and True: Sexual Integrity in a Fallen World

Mark Laaser

Out of the Shadows

Patrick Carnes

Taming Your Private Thoughts: You Can Stop Sin Where it Starts

Jay Dennis & Marilyn Jeffcoat

Preparing for Adolescence: Straight Talk to Teens and Parents

James Dobson

Raging Hormones: What to Do When You Suspect Your Teen May be Sexually Active

Jack Balswick & Judith Balswick

Spiritual Insecurity

Security: The True and the False

W. T. Purkiser

Life in the Son

Robert Shank

Kept by the Power of God

I. Howard Marshall

Suicide

A Parent's Guide to Helping Teenagers in Crisis

Rich Van Pelt & Jim Hancock

American Association of Suicidology

www.suicidology.org

Relationships

The Five Love Languages of Children

Gary Chapman & Ross Campbell

The Five Love Languages of Teenagers

Gary Chapman

Love's Unseen Enemy: How to Overcome Guilt to Build Healthy Relationships

Les Parrott III

Relationships: Making Bad Relationships Better and Good Relationships Great

Les Parrott III & Leslie Parrott

Family Shock: Keeping Families Strong in the Midst of Earthshaking Change

Gary Collins

About the Authors

Rebecca Miller

Rebecca Miller, MA, LPC-CR, is a fully trained and licensed counselor in the State of Ohio. She graduated from Cincinnati Christian University with a Master of Arts in Counseling. Rebecca has partnered with Tim Barber, LPC-S, CSAT in private practice in the Greater Cincinnati area. Their practice, Counseling Alliance PLLC, is a network of professionals committed to providing quality care to individuals, families, and churches to help build stronger communities of faith. Rebecca also works on the campus of God's Bible School & College as a counselor and adjunct professor in the counseling cognate.

Rebecca has a heart for working with individuals who have experienced abuse (sexual/physical/emotional/spiritual) and those who have been impacted by sexual betrayal. She is a Certified Sexual Addictions Therapist (candidate) trained by Dr. Patrick Carnes, a leading expert in the field of sexual addiction. Rebecca also has a special interest in how shame affects our view of self, others, and God... and she is passionate about grace.

Rebecca has been married to her best friend, Steve, for 34 years. They are the proud parents of two adult sons and delight in their two grandchildren who “make the stars twinkle brighter!” To relax, Rebecca enjoys spending time with her family, friends, baseball (go Reds!) and traveling.

Stephen Oliver

Steve Oliver, MA, PhD, attended Bible Missionary Institute in Rock Island, IL, then earned his MA in Bible and PhD in New Testament Interpretation from Bob Jones University in Greenville, SC. An

elder in the Alabama conference of the Bible Methodist Church, he currently serves as Minister of Family Life at Faith Community Chapel in Thomasville, NC, where he lives with his wife and three children. He also teaches for Carolina Christian Academy, Aldersgate Distance Education Program, and Carolina Graduate School of Divinity. Steve is a contributor to HolinessHeartbeat.com, runs ConservativeHoliness.org, and blogs at “Life in the Logos.”

Steve’s two passions are Scripture and young people. Having struggled with a number of tough issues during his teen and young adult years, Steve has an inside understanding of many of the issues that young people face and a genuine desire to help them thrive in and through their struggles. His belief in and reliance on the full authority of Scripture leads him to search for biblically sound answers to the problems faced by today’s youth.

