



PSYCHOLOGY FOR
Living

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Dealing Faithfully with Dementia



NCF Ministries Today

Tim and Cindy Hibma

This year Narramore Christian Foundation is celebrating its 60th Anniversary. From its earliest years, NCF has been a pioneer in the field of Christian psychological services. But when others take up ministry areas in which NCF has pioneered or served, NCF may “pass the torch” rather than duplicate services. Our mission

statement – “to meet the psychological needs of underserved populations” – continually guides us to assess current ministries and ascertain new opportunities where the Lord may lead NCF to serve the “underserved.”

NCF continues to use its resources to pioneer and support ministries that meet psychological needs and integrate scriptural truth with psychology. This year we celebrate our 40th year of hosting MK ReEntry Seminars for young adult children of missionaries returning to North America to attend college. NCF conducts annual Counseling and Member Care Seminars in Asia and Europe for training missionaries and those in Kingdom ministries; we sponsor a doctoral program in clinical Christian counseling in Manila, Philippines; we helped to found and continue to support counseling centers for cross-cultural workers in Thailand and Turkey, and we are now exploring the establishment of a center of care, possibly in Spain, for Latin American missionaries; we offer consultations with mission leaders; and we provide, when requested, referrals to Christian counselors and psychologists.

Although radio broadcasts ended when founder Dr. Clyde Narramore retired, NCF’s publishing ministries continue. Practical booklets that address a wide variety of human problems are available for download online at ncfliving.org or mailed, when requested. Monthly newsletters inform faithful donors of opportunities for giving and how their gifts are being used in its global ministries. The *Psychology for Living* magazine is published annually and features timely, in-depth articles on the integration of Christian faith and psychology, with past issues available at ncfliving.org.

“Every person is worth understanding’ is more than a slogan to adorn the Foundation’s stationary,” wrote Jeanette Lockerbie. “The heartbeat of the Narramore Christian Foundation will, of course, continue to be the specific calling for which God brought it into being: human problems...It is gratifying to be used of God to help people who have difficulties, but how much more worthwhile to reach thousands so that they never develop serious problems...The future of the Narramore Christian Foundation is as significant and exciting as its past...Its success is accounted for through the fact that *the hand of God is upon it*. He has caused it to grow because it honors Him, and *it is meeting a unique need around the world.*”¹

As we celebrate our 60th anniversary and look to the future, with Moses we pray:

*May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us—
yes, establish the work of our hands.*

Psalm 90:17 (New International Version)

1. Lockerbie, J. W. (1968). How it all began. In *Psychology for Living* series, Narramore Christian Foundation.

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Dealing Faithfully with Dementia: Scriptural Themes to Guide Us on the Journey

Suzanne McDonald

It is estimated that around 50 million people worldwide have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease, with approximately 5.5 million of them in the United States. Once we take into account spouses and other close family caregivers, we can at least double the number of people whose lives are profoundly affected by the disease. Alzheimer's is only one of several kinds of dementia, and the number of people with all kinds of dementias is likely to increase exponentially in coming decades. This is because of an approaching population bulge in many parts of the world in the years when dementias become more prevalent, that is, sixty-five and older.

Dementia tests the faith, hope, and love of all of us. The thought of having to deal with it bewilders and frightens many of us. Dementia challenges our usual ways of thinking about what it means to be human, how God relates to us, and how we relate to God. As dementia progresses, it also places huge demands on family caregivers and wider family structures.

One way to help us as we seek to walk well with those who have dementia is to remind ourselves of some key scriptural themes, including what it means to be in the image of God and the value of our physical selves for our identity before God and in relation to others. These themes are important, not just for how we *think* about dementia, but especially for how we *care for* people with dementia. From these themes we can reflect on good practices that honor the personhood and dignity of those with dementia. As we will see, we can become “guardians” of someone’s personhood on their behalf when they can no longer keep hold of their identity for themselves.

OUR LIVES ARE HIDDEN WITH CHRIST IN GOD

But before we explore such themes, let’s acknowledge that dementia puts a question mark beside some of our most usual and most beloved ways of expressing our faith. A significant part of the beauty and wonder of what it means to be a Christian

is that our faith is so deeply relational. The eternal Son comes to us in the person of Jesus. Throughout scripture God relates to his people in ways that are deeply personal, summoning his people to respond to him in kind. To be a Christian means the awesome reality that the Triune God is in intimate relationship with us, and we with God.

How can we speak of knowing God and loving Jesus when someone no longer recognizes their spouse of fifty years? If they once professed Jesus as Lord, it seems that they can’t do that anymore, or not in a way that we can recognize. And what does the good news of our identity in Christ mean when advanced dementia seems to have robbed someone of any sense of their own unique identity? Add to this, if we have had an overly cognitive

understanding of what it means to be in the image of God, does the apparent disintegration of someone’s mind and memory call into question whether or not they are in the image of God, and so whether they are truly human?

As we seek a scriptural framework for understanding what it means to be human, especially in the situation of dementia, here are some verses to keep in mind.

First, consider Colossians 3:3-4: “For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory” (English Standard Version). *Your life* – who you are, your true personhood and identity – *is hidden with Christ in God*. To know that Christ holds our identity for us is crucial, not only to our perspective on dementia, but also as we think of the many ways that our culture seeks to define our identities, be that in debates around gender and sexuality, perceptions of race, or other pressures. God’s concern in the face of the many ways that our society seeks to determine our identity

is that we know and value the identity he defines and keeps for us as his permanently adopted children.

Also consider 1 John 3:2: “Beloved, *we are God’s children now*; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (italics added). Especially in the situation of severe dementia, we must hold on to this assertion – those who have dementia continue to be God’s children *now*, even in dementia, even when what makes them who they are seems to have disappeared.

Both of these texts also remind us of something else that is very significant as we reflect on the situation of dementia: that while who we are now is extremely important, it is also penultimate. *All of us* are awaiting the fullness of who we will be.



Photo by Cindy Hibma

*Dementia challenges our usual ways
of thinking about what it means to be
human, how God relates to us, and how
we relate to God.*



Photo by iStock

God has put his people in Christ, thus his attachment to us is sufficient and permanent even though our subjective sense of attachment to God may vary.

So, while we lament the apparent disintegration of personhood in someone with severe dementia, we all need to ask a rather peculiar-seeming question: Do you really know who you are?

The Christian answer to that for all of us is, only partly. Obviously, it is a truism that some people are more self-aware than others, but that is not what is meant here. None of us knows who we truly are because that cannot be known yet. Only God knows who we truly are now, far better than we can ever know ourselves, let alone anyone else. What's more, we will not be who we fully and truly are until we are with God in glory. Only then will all that is incomplete and broken about us be made whole. We are indeed God's children now, even in dementia, and our lives are hidden with Christ in God. Our personhood is kept safe with him, to be fully and finally revealed when we see him face to face and know him as we are known.

GOD IS THE GUARANTOR OF OUR PERSONHOOD

This means many things as we think about someone with dementia. Above all, it means that we are not the guarantors of our own personhood. God alone is the guarantor of our personhood. If the time comes when I no longer know myself as "me" anymore, then this is wonderfully good news for me and for the people who love me. My perception of who I am can completely disintegrate, but it does not mean that who I truly am is lost. It is kept safe for me in Christ. We cannot ultimately lose our personhood, because it is not actually ours to lose.

But this also means – and this can be profoundly challenging for the rest of us – that the situation of someone with dementia is not so radically different from ours. It is simply the most extreme form of what is true for all of us. We do not fully know who we are, and in fact, we are not yet who we truly are. In our own walk of faith, we constantly forget our true identity as children of God. We do not always act in ways that are fitting for our personhood as brothers and sisters of Christ. We fail to recognize the Spirit of God when he calls us. Lacking trust, we live as if we have forgotten the history of God's prior goodness to us – his faithfulness in our lives and in our family's story, and in all that he has done for his whole family as we see this in the scriptures. One of the most unnerving things is not how different the person with dementia is from us. It is how many similarities there are between the person with dementia and us!

None of this is meant to take away the horror and pain of the situation of dementia, but it is to say that there are difficult truths for us all to face, and dementia confronts us with those in particular ways. Dementia also shows us very powerfully the sheer grace of the gospel.

The grace that is there for us when, day by day we forget God, and do not live fully into our identity as children of God, is there for the person with dementia too. While we forget God, God never, ever, ever will forget us, and he will come through on all his promises to us. This is because God's faithfulness is not grounded in or dependent upon us. Especially, it does not depend on what the person with dementia can no longer be and do. Just like his faithfulness to all of us, God's faithfulness to the person with dementia is grounded in his very self. This connects with attachment theory, and its significance in the field of psychology. God has put his people in Christ, thus his attachment to us is sufficient and permanent even though our subjective sense of attachment to God may vary.

Romans 8:31-39 is particularly powerful in this context. It reminds us that nothing in life or in death or in all of creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Dementia cannot do that, no matter how deeply it ravages someone's mental capacities. This is particularly important when a person with dementia no longer seems to know Christ, or, as can sometimes happen, when a person says terrible words, maybe even blasphemous words, as

What's more, we will not be who we fully and truly are until we are with God in glory. Only then will all that is incomplete and broken about us be made whole.

their dementia deepens. I have had people ask me in tears if their mother or father has lost their salvation because of the things that they have said in the depths of dementia. This is the disease. It is doing terrible damage to the brain and to the person. The consequences can be horrendous to see and to hear. But *nothing in life* (or in death) can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Christ will carry them through even this.

A little earlier in Romans 8:26-27 we also have a powerful reminder of how we can trust that the Holy Spirit continues to be at work in and for the person with dementia, and those who love and care for them. Paul presents the Holy Spirit as the one who intercedes in and for us when we cannot. The Spirit is interceding when all a caregiver can do is weep. The Spirit is praying in and with the person with dementia when all they can do is groan. The Triune God does not abandon someone with dementia; he is alongside those who love them. Our gracious God is faithful even when we cannot be.

WE CAN BECOME GUARDIANS OF SOMEONE'S PERSONHOOD

While God is the *guarantor* of our personhood, and it is in this that we rest our ultimate hope for people with dementia, we can be *guardians* of their personhood now, in the meanwhile. To get a sense of what this might mean, here is another question that might seem rather curious:

What makes you who you are? What makes you “you”?

When we hear that question, most of us jump immediately to “inward” things, such as our ancestry, personality traits, and personal preferences. But it shouldn't take long for us to realize that none of us would be who we are apart from the people who share our lives to varying degrees. Likewise, we soon realize that a significant part of what makes each of us unique is how we express that outwardly. Think of things like the clothes you like to wear, whether you have a beard or not, the way you do your fingernails, your hairstyle, your favorite watch that never leaves

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your wrist. We shouldn't trivialize these kinds of things about ourselves. We are whole people, body as well as soul, and our physical aspects are very important in the situation of dementia. These outward things become key expressions of someone's personhood and dignity as inner awareness of themselves begins to crumble away. The deeper the relationship we have with someone who has dementia, the more aware we will be of these various facets of what makes them who they are, and the better guardians of their personhood we will become as the disease progresses.

As Christians we can draw on deep roots for this understanding of our identity as relational. We also have a holistic awareness of a person that goes beyond simply equating personhood with mind. Scripture gives us a foundation to push back vigorously against any understanding of personhood that reduces someone to simply a thinking individual, and thus moves toward categorizing someone with dementia as a non-person.

First, we need to remind ourselves that God has made human beings for relationship. This, and not reason, for example, is at the heart of what it means to be in the image of God. Nowhere in scripture is the image of God identified with any single faculty or capacity that we possess. Genesis 1:26-28 makes it clear that what distinguishes human beings from all other creatures is that God sets us apart for a unique relationship with himself. It is especially important that God is the one who establishes this relationship. That is one of the reasons why the Bible indicates that the image of God persists in all human beings. We can distort the image of God in ourselves, we can reject our side of the relationship, but we cannot destroy the image of God because God, who has established a relationship with human beings, remains in relationship with us, even if we turn aside from him. This is true whether that turning aside is deliberate, or, as in the situation of severe dementia, someone may simply no longer be able to know about God's relationship with them or theirs with God. That the image of God is primarily about the relationship that God establishes with us,

which can never be lost, is profoundly good news for people with dementia and those who love and care for them. No matter how badly this disease ravages someone's mind, they remain someone with whom God is in relationship. They continue to have the human worth that goes with being made in the image of God.

Besides having this primary relationship with God, we are also created to be in loving relation with one another. We cannot be who we are apart from the network of relationships in which we are set. This means that if the time comes when I am not aware of being me anymore, those other people who know and care for me can be guardians of who I am on my behalf.

When we are walking with someone down the dementia road, we hold their identity for them when they cannot keep hold of it anymore. So, every time we retell that special story from their lives and ours, every time the photo album comes out and you go through it with them, every time you put on what you know is one of their favorite pieces of music, you are re-bestowing their personhood on them when they cannot keep it for themselves. Very often it is only in the moment, but for that ten minutes or less, by grace the person with dementia may reconnect with who they are through what you say and do.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PHYSICAL THINGS

There are all sorts of good things we can do in the early stages that will be beneficial for the person with dementia and will also help family and friends to be better guardians of their personhood as the disease progresses. Soon after a diagnosis is a great time for the person with dementia and their family to put together a scrapbook, including things like photos of places where they have lived, places they went to school, and favorite vacation spots, some church bulletins, something related to favorite hobbies, and so on. Include a list of favorite songs or kinds of music.

A memory box is another helpful idea. This is a shoebox containing about twelve small items that are deeply meaningful to the person. As a wonderful illustration of this, a gentleman with dementia would spend hours lovingly holding and stroking a pocket watch, smiling all the while. It was his favorite item to choose from his memory box. The watch had been his grandfather's, who had given it to his father, who in turn gave it to him when he turned twenty-one. No one knew how much of that history the gentleman could still recall, but his deep joy in that beloved object and his peace of heart while he held it were evident to everyone.

In the early stages of dementia, it is also good to help the person to rethink their devotional habits, to prepare for a time when written and spoken words will become difficult. Make a list of key Bible verses, hymns, and songs, and maybe also a compilation of favorite prayers, so that later, friends and family will have access to them when the person with dementia can no longer read for themselves. Also, think about getting something physical to be associated with prayer time. Our Roman Catholic friends may have rosary beads; a good suggestion for Protestants might be a prayer shawl or a hand cross. This new habit of feeling the shawl or holding the cross can become incredibly important later as a physical thing that is associated with prayer and the intimate presence of God, even if there are no more words.

As many of these ideas remind us, physical objects and our physical selves matter for our identity and wellbeing. This becomes all the more important in the later stages of dementia when memories fade away and words become few.

The importance of the physical should be obvious to us as Christians. We should have no hesitation in affirming that our full personhood is physical, not just spiritual or rational. Sadly though, some aspects of our culture and heritage can push us to-



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As many of these ideas remind us, physical objects and our physical selves matter for our identity and wellbeing. This becomes all the more important in the later stages of dementia when memories fade away and words become few.



Photo by iStock

wards denigrating the body and physical things to such an extent that we only see value in the mind and the spiritual. We need to be on our guard in case these tendencies become unscriptural. As Christians we must never let ourselves fall into any way of thinking that makes it seem like only our minds or our souls matter to God, and that he doesn't care so much about our bodies. Our bodies matter deeply to God. From the beginning God delighted in created physicality and called it good. Most obviously, in the incarnation the Son of God took on flesh for us, and his triumph over death is a *bodily* resurrection. Our bodies matter so much to God that he takes on a body and raises it to glory. That will be our future too.

This is extremely important when we think about the situation of someone with dementia, and when we try to honor and care for them as their minds disintegrate. For their sake and for those who love and care for them, we need to remember that the mind isn't all that makes someone who they are. It is obviously an enormous part, and we rightly lament the terrible losses caused by dementia. But physical things matter too, and our physical selves matter. When a friend of mine was struggling most with his wife's end-stage dementia, he spoke of how almost everything about her seemed to have gone, but it still gave him profound comfort just to look at her face. For all the inner change in his wife, "When I look at her face," he said, "I still see the same beautiful woman that I married."

Scripture confirms for us as Christians what the healthcare professionals insist upon in dementia care: that physical things are tremendously important to the personhood and dignity of someone with dementia. Part of walking faithfully with someone with dementia is to honor the physical side of who they are. The simplest of physical things show respect for someone's dignity and unique personhood, such as being able to wear their favorite clothes, or having their hair styled the way that they love. One of my favorite stories to show the importance of this is of an older gentleman who moved into a dementia care home. He was visibly distressed, as manifested in fretting with his hands. He was always plucking at his wrists. Staff at the care home assumed that this was simply one of the symptoms of his stage of dementia, when restless hand movements are common. But a friend of his, a guardian of his personhood, came to visit and knew what was wrong. Throughout his life, this gentleman had never thought he was properly dressed unless he had his cufflinks in! So the next visit, the friend brought a set and put them in. The gentleman smiled radiantly, patted his wrists, and visibly relaxed. His fretful hand gestures ceased and he was at peace. His friend told the care home staff, and from that day on, the cufflinks went in.

We also need to remember the importance of all the senses. Let's start with hearing. Many of us who have walked with people with dementia have experienced what the neurologists tell us about the extraordinary power of music. We have seen people

Your life – *who you are, your true personhood and identity* – is hidden with Christ in God... *God's concern in the face of the many ways that our society seeks to determine our identity is that we know and value the identity he defines and keeps for us as his permanently adopted children.*

who no longer know their spouse, but who can sing every word of every verse of a beloved hymn or song. We have seen people who seem to be completely unresponsive sit up and smile and even tap along when they hear a favorite piece of music. And then, touch. To be touched well is a beautiful gift. This is obviously something that needs great sensitivity and care, but a loving touch on a hand or an arm might be the only touch that someone receives all day that is not simply to do with toileting, bathing, dressing, or feeding. Sight is probably the most obvious for many of us. Looking at photos can prompt memories. Seeing a grandchild might not mean recognizing who she is, but it might transport grandma to the time when she was a young mom and prompt a flood of stories. Finally, don't forget the taste and smell of food! While taste perception does decline with dementia, still, as long as it is medically appropriate, the smell, taste, and texture of a favorite food can bring deep joy.

The more we know of the fullness of what makes someone who they are –very much including the physical aspects of their identity, not just their minds – the better guardians of their personhood we can be.

But as the disease progresses, what might have allowed someone to recover a sense of their identity, even if only for a brief time, no longer elicits a response. Even then – especially then – family and friends continue to be the guardians of their personhood for them. This may become an extremely demanding calling. It helps to keep us faithful in that calling if we realize that we have the great dignity and honor of holding something of the identity of the person with dementia on their behalf.

The response of the other person is never the only straw that we are clutching onto in order to preserve the fragments of their personhood. They are not the only keepers of their identity. We

play our part as guardians of their personhood by doing what we can to love the person with dementia and honor and preserve their identity and dignity, until God, who is the guarantor of their personhood, takes them to himself to be more fully who they truly are than we can know, until we see him too.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

De Haan, Robert. *Into the Shadows: A Journey of Faith and Love into Alzheimer's* (2003). Grand Haven, MI: Faith Walk Publishing. De Haan, who was a Christian psychologist, describes his experience of caring for his wife from the earliest stages of her Alzheimer's diagnosis through to her move into assisted living and skilled nursing care.

Mace, Nancy L. & Rabins, Peter V. (2017). *The 36-Hour Day: A Family Guide to Caring for People Who Have Alzheimer's Disease, Related Dementias, and Memory Loss*. 6th ed. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. This is regarded as the "go-to" book for caregiving advice.

Mast, Benjamin. *Second Forgetting: Remembering the Power of the Gospel During Alzheimer's Disease*. (2014). Grand Rapids: Zondervan. This author explores helpful and accessible ways to connect faith and scripture to the experience of people with dementia and those who care for them.

Swinton, John. *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God*. (2012). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. This very dense book reflects on changes in medical approaches to dementia and the field of dementia care and explores a number of theological themes in relation to people with dementia.

Two websites with a great deal of information and many resources:

<https://www.alzheimers.net>

<https://www.alz.org>



Suzanne McDonald is currently Professor of Systematic and Historical Theology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI. Before that she taught theology for seven years at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI, and is an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church. She has written books and articles on a range of theological topics and has been reflecting on the interface between theology, pastoral care, and dementia for many years. In addition to teaching seminary courses on "Ministry, Aging, and Dementia," she regularly gives presentations on "Dealing Faithfully with Dementia" to churches, clergy groups, and Christian care workers.

NCF CELEBRATES 40TH YEAR OF MK ReENTRY SEMINARS

Debbie Hewitt, Program Director



Why did NCF start MK ReEntry Seminars?

For several years, missionaries who attended Narramore Christian Foundation's Pastor and Missionary Seminars in the 1970s had been asking Dr. Clyde Narramore to develop a seminar for their teens coming back to the U.S. to start college. Indeed, as Clyde and Ruth ministered to missionaries in various countries of the world, they met outstanding MKs and saw their tremendous potential for leadership. So in 1978, Clyde and his colleague and friend, Lee Bendell, along with their wives, Ruth and Gloria, held the first program for children of missionaries at NCF's beautiful Rosemead campus just outside of Los Angeles. For forty years now, NCF has served hundreds of MKs and it would have been IMPOSSIBLE without the help of faithful donors!

What has remained the same?



So much! Valuable teaching sessions are still designed to help Christian young adults acculturate to the U.S. Topics include MK identity, coping with grief and trauma, and building friendships with Americans. We continue to offer a personality assessment to help with personal growth. We still hold small groups led by trained counselors and one-on-one appointments with counselors for MKs to talk about their biggest concerns. At the heart of

Lee and Clyde teaching MKs in 1990

each seminar is a strong Biblical perspective and interaction with volunteer staff who love the Lord.

We have a lot of fun! For nearly twenty years Clyde and Ruth hosted a large pool party and dinner at their home in Pasadena for the MKs and staff, an evening filled with fun and great conversation. In 1996, when the program was moved to Biola University's campus, Clyde's nephew, Bruce Narramore, and his wife Kathy began hosting the pool party at their home. These off-campus activities remain highlights as the MKs have so much fun together and build lasting friendships.



Playing volleyball at the pool party held at Clyde and Ruth's in 1980

What has changed?

Up until 1995, MKs went off to college with two new outfits they received at the seminar from generous donors. By 1996, we no longer offered this or held the accompanying fashion show.

A great addition came in 1994 when NCF entered into a partnership with Barnabas International. President Jim Lauer and his wife Ruth took over as directors of the program, working closely with Clyde. By 2000, Perry Bradford, the future president of Barnabas International, and Sandi, his wife, became program directors, working with Bruce. They added older college age MKs as staff through their ministry connections with Mu Kappa, a college campus group for MKs around the country. MK staff continue to play a vital role in NCF's program by serving as big brothers and sisters and mentors to the MKs who have just left everything



Clyde and Ruth leading a small group of MKs in 1980



Sandi and Perry Bradford interact with MKs in the early 2000s,

behind. In 2013, Perry and Sandi led their last MK ReEntry Seminar with NCF in order to invest more time with Barnabas, and Debbie Hewitt became the MK ReEntry Program Director. NCF is grateful for the nineteen-year partnership it enjoyed with Barnabas, and we continue to partner with a variety of ministries which

seek to provide resources and care for MKs.

Dr. Clyde wrote in 1999, “We feel that if (MKs) can become aware of their weaknesses as well as their strengths, and if they can resolve any problems, they will be much more likely to succeed in college, in marriage, in their vocation, and in serving the Lord for years to come. Consequently, when we are working with them in a seminar, we are thinking of how it will affect them when they are in their forties, fifties, and sixties.”

We celebrate God’s love and care for MKs through the faithful staff that have served in this ministry these past forty years. We celebrate the donors who have made it possible through their faithful prayers and financial support. As Paul reminds us, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Gal. 6:10, New International Version). We look forward to many more years of serving missionary families and their young adult children through our MK ministries.



Debbie Hewitt has directed the MK ReEntry Seminars for NCF since 2014. She studied English and Psychology at Biola University and received her MA in Education from Claremont Graduate University. She taught high

school English for 10 years with a two-year stint in Kenya at a missionary school. Debbie and her husband live in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with their two teens, and she teaches creativity classes at Cornerstone University. She has recently also assumed a part-time position as Leadership Development Coordinator for New City Kids, an urban ministry. She loves spending time with her family, traveling, exploring the outdoors, and spending quality time with people.



What MKs say:

I came through the program in 2015 and those 2 weeks have become a permanent milestone in my life...It has been a privilege to return as MK Staff and watch this ministry continue to change lives...We have watched God begin to redeem what has been broken and bring beauty from ashes. This is a multiplying ministry. It equips these MKs to go out healthier and impacts their family and friends and peers!
– MK from Senegal

This program is truly one of the best things that could happen to us, and thanks to NCF Supporters, the cost was greatly reduced so that it would be affordable.
– MK from France

I have felt refreshed, loved, and accepted these two weeks. I am forever thankful.
– MK from Nigeria

These two weeks have been a huge turning point in my journey as an MK. The moment this retreat started I could see how much love and commitment was going into it. Every single MK is thankful for this once in a lifetime setting and is very sad to leave. NCF has an amazing ministry!
– MK from Chile

I feel much more confident now in my transition to college life. At this seminar I discovered personality traits and feelings in myself I didn't know I had and things that had affected me, and I was able to deal with those feelings and burdens. I am so thankful I was able to attend. – MK from Papua New Guinea

I don't know what other MKs do without this seminar!
– MK from Indonesia

**Let mission families know!
MK ReEntry Seminar
July 14-26, 2019**

http://ncfliving.org/what_we_do/mk-reentry-seminar.html

Help for Your Missionary or Pastor

Jeanne L. Jensma

When people come into hard times, they often turn to their pastor for help. But when the pastor runs into difficulty, where does the pastor turn for help? Or, for that matter, or where do missionaries turn?

Life in ministry can be difficult. Yes, there are rewards — many rewards! — but there are also many challenges and even heartaches. Many people in ministry struggle with burnout. Some find themselves experiencing personal crisis, like the death of

Many Christian leaders become wounded in the front lines of spiritual battle, and they need time to rest and a place to be restored and refreshed.

a child. Some have marriages that are struggling or have issues with their children. Many are discouraged, some to the point of actual depression. Some wrestle with anxiety. Some face a lot of conflict in their ministry. There are major transitions to navigate. Many missionaries face a good deal of trauma. Loneliness is often problematic in ministry.

Life in ministry has become increasingly more challenging in this fast-paced, modern world in which we live. Many Christian leaders become wounded in the front lines of spiritual battle, and they need time to rest and a place to be restored and refreshed. ALONGSIDE, a counseling-centered retreat ministry near Kalamazoo, Michigan, offers specialized care specifically for missionaries and pastors and other Christian leaders, helping them find personal renewal and restoration of their joy in ministry.

ALONGSIDE offers one 3-week program every month. Each morning includes two interactive teaching sessions and a time of group counseling. The afternoon offers personal counseling sessions. In addition to providing this for the adults, ALONGSIDE also offers a parallel program for children and adolescents, teaching them the same things their parents are learning, but at various age-appropriate levels. The whole family can grow together, and the parents can concentrate on their own renewal, knowing that their children are being cared for very well.

For those in the church who are responsible for the care of pastors and/or missionaries, it would be a wonderful gift to send your pastor and family to ALONGSIDE during a difficult time in life or ministry. Another good time to send them would be at the start of a sabbatical. What a wise and wonderful gift that would be! And it would be so encouraging to many of your missionaries for your church to give them the gift of a 3-week program at ALONGSIDE when they run into difficult struggles or at the beginning of “home service,” or what we used to call “furlough,” when it has been a difficult term. Most missionaries and pastors would consider such a gift to be a tremendous blessing and would be greatly benefitted by it. Beyond that, the gift would pay dividends in the ripple effect it would have on various aspects of their ministry for years to come. Because they were ministered to well, they would then be able to minister better to others (II Cor. 1:3-4).

You might ask, “But how can we be sure that three weeks makes much of a difference? And if it does, does the difference last?” Those are great questions! Important questions. And there are some hope-filled answers.

At ALONGSIDE we began asking these questions a number of years ago. “How do we know that what we are doing really works? How do we know that the results last?” So we set up an outcome study, utilizing the 451 pastors and missionaries and other Christian leaders who came to ALONGSIDE from January, 2014, through December, 2016. Each person took a 45-item mental health questionnaire called the Outcome Questionnaire – 45 (hereafter referred to as OQ-45) a month before coming to ALONGSIDE,

Life in ministry can be difficult at times.

What a difference it can make to have trained and caring people to help you through.

took it again at the start of our 3-week program, took it again at the end of the program, then again three months after the program was over, and finally one year after the program had ended. The OQ-45 is an instrument commonly used in counseling centers to determine the level of distress that a person is experiencing.

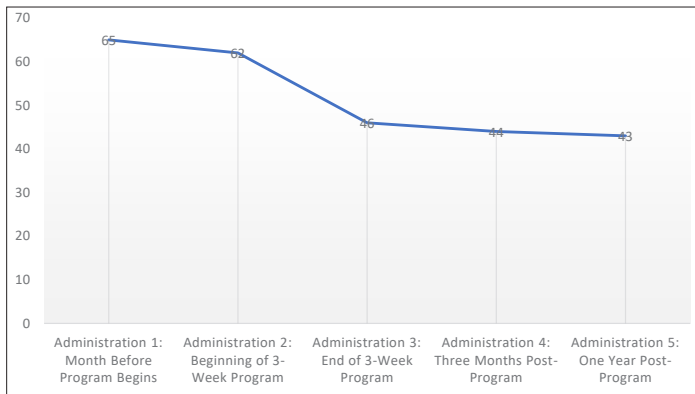


Figure 1: Average score at five points in time on OQ-45

When we looked at the difference in the scores between the first administration (a month before the program) and the second administration (at the beginning of the program), there was very little change, showing that time alone was not bringing about the healing and renewal that was needed. When we compared the scores from the administration at the beginning of the 3-week program and the administration at the end of the program, we saw that there was a significant drop in the average score — in light of 14 points or more signifying significant improvement on this instrument — indicating that substantial healing and renewal had taken place. When we administered the questionnaire again three months after the program had ended and also a year after the program ended, both times the scores were about the same as at the end of the program, showing that the healing and restoration was maintained for the first year.

Life in ministry can be difficult at times. What a difference it can make to have trained and caring people to help you through. The staff of ALONGSIDE care about Christian leaders and are equipped to help your pastor and your missionaries find healing and renewal when they stumble over some of life’s bumps in the road. Many missionaries and pastors have been able to sort through issues both great and small at ALONGSIDE and have found the healing and wholeness that God provides. And when they have been ministered to well, they can better minister to others!

This article presents a follow-up summary to results published at an earlier point in the study: Jensma, J. (2016). “Outcome Study Findings of an Intensive Outpatient Program for Missionaries and Clergy.” *Journal of Psychology & Theology*, 44(4), 281-289.



Jeanne L. Jensma, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist who founded the ministry of ALONGSIDE in 2000 and served as its clinical director until her recent retirement. Earlier in her career, Jeanne served as a missionary in Brazil for over a decade, after which she studied clinical psychology at Wheaton College Graduate School and Rosemead School of Psychology. She then combined her experience in missions and her studies in psychology to develop the ministry of ALONGSIDE, a counseling-focused retreat center for missionaries and pastors near Kalamazoo, Michigan.

ALONGSIDE, a counseling-focused retreat center for missionaries and pastors near Kalamazoo, Michigan.

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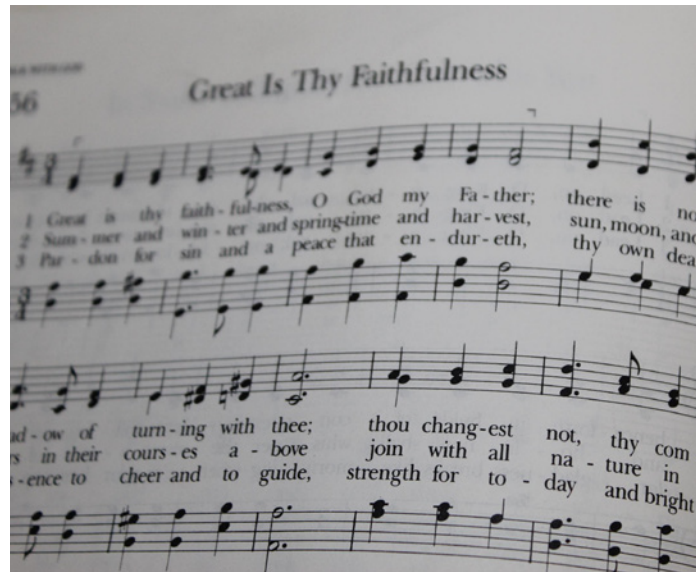


In Learning to Feel

Karen Liang

I still remember how naturally the tears streamed down my face. That night I had been asked to share my seven-page grief journal. I had never cried so hard, at least not in front of people. I was trembling: I had never shared my story in such a vulnerable way. Flashback to three summers ago at NCF's MK ReEntry Seminar at Biola University in Southern California where I heard about Grief for the first time. Little did I know that would be the start of my grieving and healing season. Little did I know God was mending the broken pieces back together. I recall sitting in a Biola classroom learning about trauma and hardships with Dr. Pam Davis, receiving counseling through my small group, and sharing my story with other MKs. These moments felt like heaven on earth. I was loved and understood in ways I had never been in the past.

Growing up in a Chinese culture and home, I was not used to being asked how I was or how I really felt. Emotions seem to be ignored and at the most, avoided. Feelings are often kept to ourselves. I think growing up I longed for someone to validate my emotions, but how could I if I never shared? From the MK seminar in 2014, I came to acknowledge the many losses of my past. At first, it felt like I was opening a can of worms. I was afraid to open up because I knew that if I did, I would explode. In anger, in frustration, in sadness, in tears. Yet God was patient with me. He knew I would need time to heal. In my junior year at Nyack College,



I took a class called Personal Spiritual Formation out of a desire to get answers from God. You guessed right. I didn't get a single answer. Rather, I received his very presence, comfort, and sustaining love. By the end of the class, I felt a peace take over me, and the Father's arms wrapped around me.

I could not stop crying the night I shared my story. All the losses and hurt I had bottled up inside came to the surface, twenty-one years later. I returned to the eight-year-old Karen who needed to be held and embraced. "God is patient to let things sink in," my mentor told me. She was

right. Back as a student in ReEntry, I wanted a quick fix to my problems and mixed emotions. In college, I wanted an immediate answer from God. But in my heart, I knew it was not about finding an answer. Deep down I was trying to avoid feeling. I preferred the "easy" way out instead of having to deal with my emotions, and the messiness that comes with it. But God is patient. He has given me the time and the space to grieve. He has graciously brought God-fearing men and women into my life to listen and speak life into my dry bones. My favorite all-time hymn is "Great is Thy Faithfulness." When I give way to despair, God places this hymn in my heart. It's as if he's saying: I am still here, I will never change, I am good, and I am faithful to keep my promises to you."

To witness his faithfulness, just this past summer at MK ReEntry, I had the opportunity to be on MK staff! With six other MK staffers who had participated in ReEntry in years past, we spent two weeks with forty MKs from around the world. Returning to ReEntry after graduating from college is an eye-opener. I realized I am not the same Karen I was four years ago when I walked in to the seminar, hesitant, anxious, and fearful. I was now the leader, helping younger MKs transition to college, and America. I saw lost and confused eighteen-year-old Karen in their eyes.

The two weeks of July flew by! On the second night, I shared my testimony with the girls during devotional time. It's funny how God works: I wanted to leave parts of my story out but God wanted me to be honest and vulnerable. I was surprised when some of the girls later came to me and spoke about deep wounds and fears they had never shared to anyone before.

*All the losses and hurt I had bottled up
inside came to the surface, twenty-one
years later.*



The heaviest, hardest day of the seminar is on trauma and hardship. Never did I think I would share my college grief journal with 40+ MKs and staff counselors. “Healing cannot come in hiding... Vulnerability is the key,” my college professor would often say. Ugh, there’s that word again...being vulnerable. So I shared my story, even reading parts of my grief journal out loud. I know God’s Spirit gave me the strength because unlike me on most days, I was not nervous or self-conscious over the opinion of others. At that moment, I desperately wanted the MKs to hear what I would have wanted to know: it’s okay to not be feeling anything right now and it’s also okay to be feeling every emotion. Vulnerability takes time. Grieving through losses takes time. Healing takes time. But it’s all going to be worth it.

*When we are given the space to grieve,
we not only acknowledge our losses,
but also in the process experience the
healing we desperately desire.*

As the MKs wrote down the traumas, losses, and hardships they faced, I was suddenly overcome with deep sorrow and heaviness of heart. An absolute silence permeated the room that morning. I did not have to go up and read each loss. All it took was a glance at the notes that filled the entire whiteboard. I could hear my heart beating as I choked back tears. Yet sometimes it is in that silence

that deep healing comes. When we are given the space to grieve, we not only acknowledge our losses, but also in the process experience the healing we desperately desire. And that’s exactly what MK ReEntry provided: a safe place to share and be honest about my feelings. During college, though I knew I still had a lot to process, I put my emotions to the side. But deep down, I longed for that “safe place” where I could be known. God is always faithful. When two of my good friends encouraged me to take the PSF college course, who would’ve thought that’s where God wanted to meet me? Like I mentioned earlier, he met me in my grief journal, in my vulnerability, in my anger and frustration, and in my pain. His patience was enough.

Sometimes having compassion and empathy feels more like a curse than a gift. I like to quickly fix problems. So when I hear someone’s pain, I feel deeply with them but I also want to do something about it. But recently, God has been showing me that it is enough for me to be present, to listen, and to try to understand. Because maybe what we’re looking for is not a quick fix or solution. Perhaps it is in our longing for that “safe place” where God our Father and Comforter meets us in our pain. “So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy” (John 16:22 NIV).



Karen Liang graduated from Nyack College in the fall of 2017 with a degree in Communications. She grew up in Panama City, Panama. She is passionate about camp and youth ministry, social justice, the outdoors, writing, and using her passport as often as she can. Karen currently lives in the Los Angeles area.

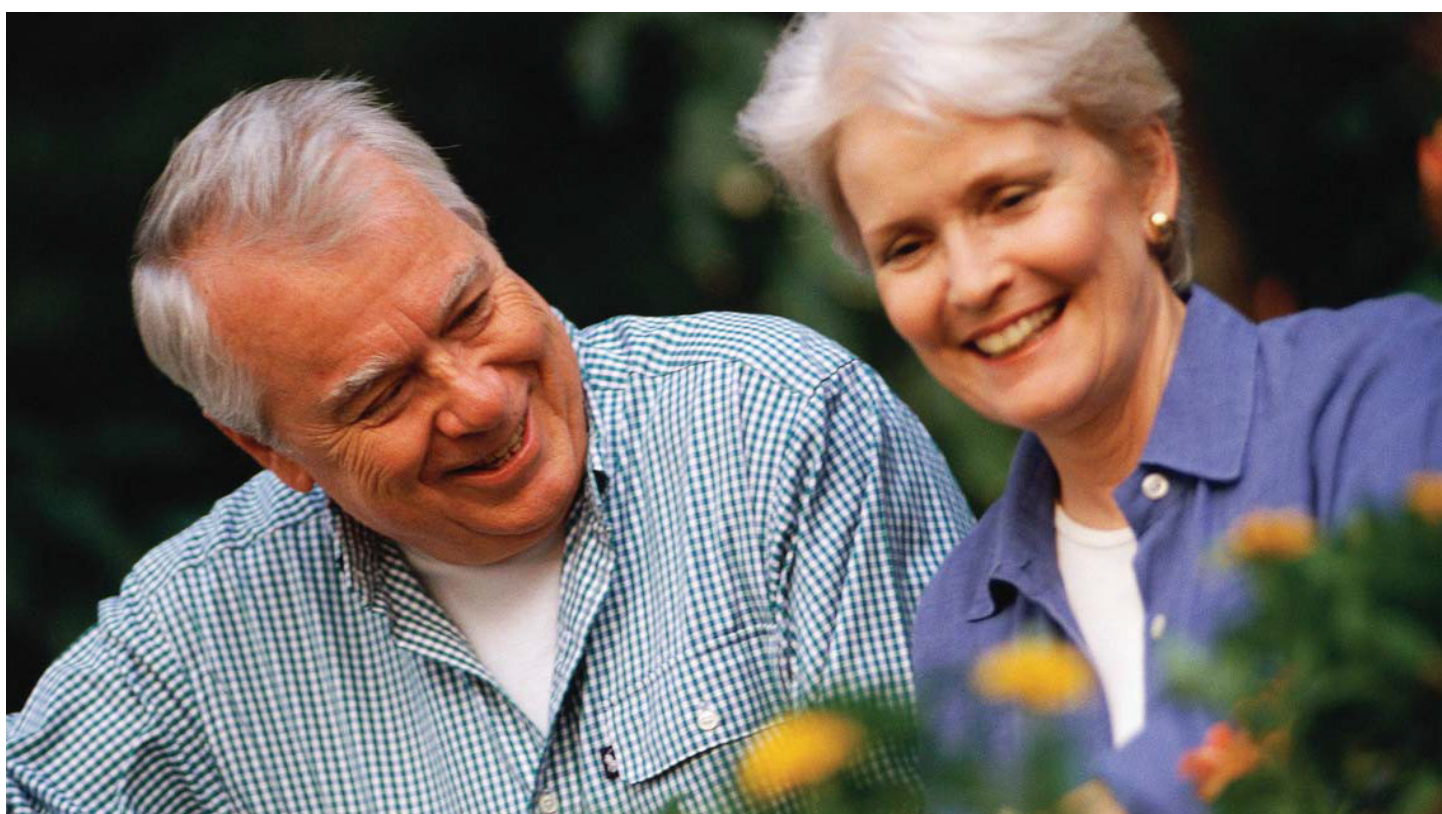


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