

LOOK WHAT'S INSIDE:

BURIED EMOTIONAL TREASURE

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

NCF IN ACTION

MENTAL HEALTH NEWS

## Running on Empty

by Clifford E. Denay, Jr.

After months of training, my nurse practitioner wife Jane was ready for the ultimate runner's test: The Boston Marathon. Twenty-six miles, three hundred eighty-five yards of grueling, downhill, quad-busting striding. Simply finishing is a victory for most runners. But Jane had trained hard through the grueling winter months of northern Michigan. Snow, ice, sleet, and bitter cold were her constant companions. Now, she was ready.

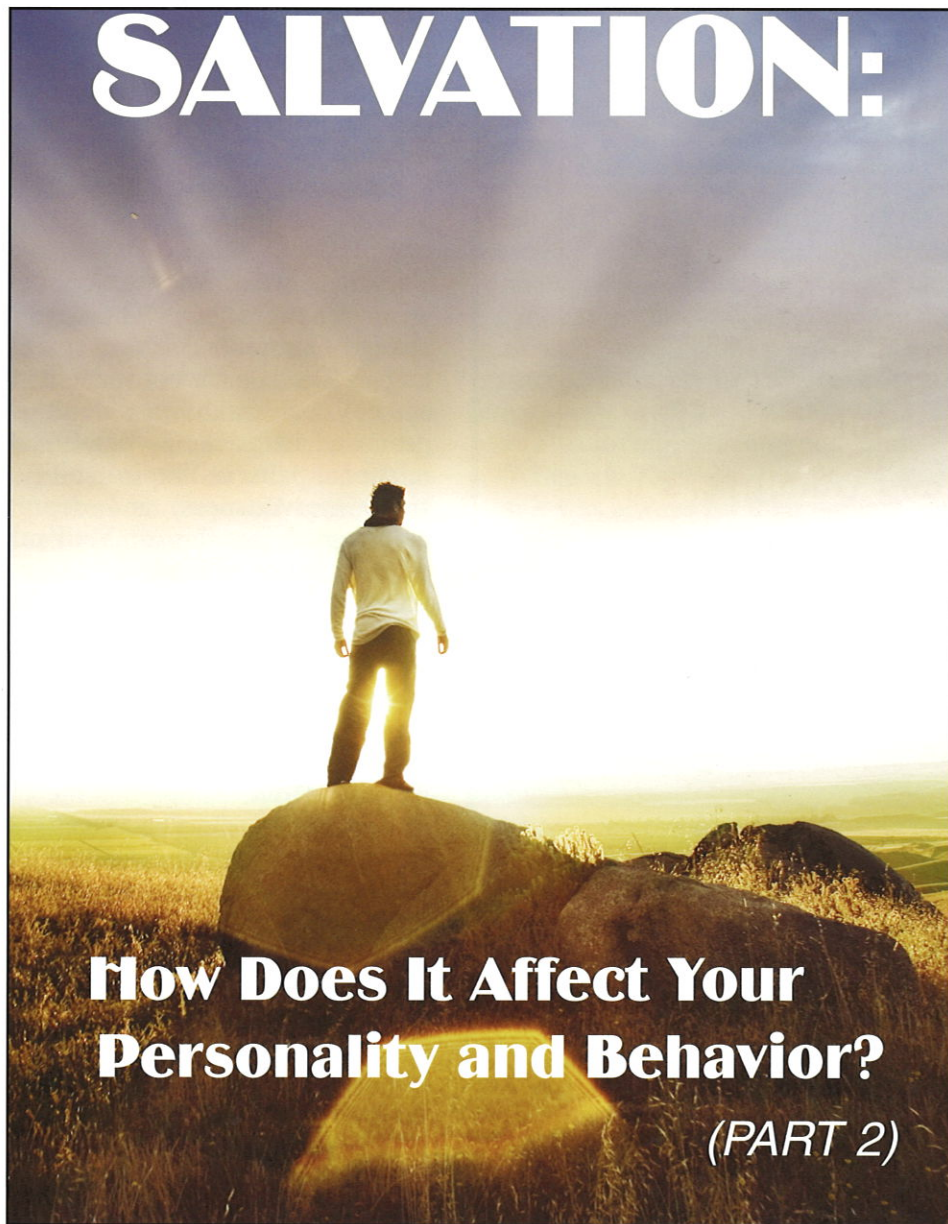
"Let's go to Boston!" she said, simultaneously clapping her hands and practicing a victory dance. "I'm ready!"

Andy Sneddon, our local Petoskey News-Review sports editor, interviewed Jane and her two running buddies, Ruth Skop and Tracy Brines, just days before the race. Ruth and Tracy were also Boston bound. But Jane said two things to Sneddon during that interview that have stayed with me.

"Life is a marathon, not a sprint," she told Andy.

Then Sneddon, referring to Jane's first marathon two years earlier, wrote, "Jane Denay saw a sign two miles into that '04 Twin-Cities Marathon that read, 'Pace it, don't race it.'" "So much

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## How Does It Affect Your Personality and Behavior?

(PART 2)

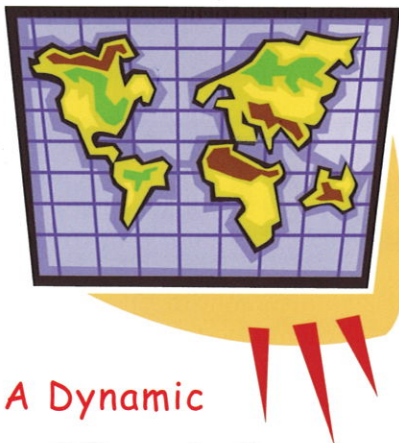
by Dr. Bruce Narramore

"I'm a complete failure as a Christian," Cheryl told me through her tears. "I have prayed and confessed my sins over and over but I still don't feel forgiven. I'm so depressed that I am useless to my husband and our children. If we are 'known by our fruit'

(*Matthew 7:16*) I must not even be a Christian. I would be better off dead." Then she quoted another Bible verse as evidence that she must not be a true Christian. "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (*II Corinthians 5:17, KJV*). "I'm

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PSYCHOLOGY  
FOR LIVING

Winter/Spring 2009 Vol. 51 No. 1

Published three times a year by the Narramore Christian Foundation, 250 W. Colorado Blvd., Suite 200, Arcadia, California 91007.

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## COVER STORY CONTINUED

SALVATION, continued from cover

certainly not new," she said.

Occasionally biblical passages like these seem confusing, unrealistic, or even untrue in light of our life experience. But on a closer look they turn out to mean something different than we first assumed. *Matthew 7:16*, for example, is talking about how to recognize false prophets. It has nothing to do with a struggling Christian who is deeply and painfully aware of her sins and failures.

And while *II Corinthians 5:17* seems to say everything about us changes completely when we become Christians, we all know that not everything changes. Our bodies don't change. Our noses don't get smaller (or larger). Our IQs are not suddenly higher. Physical disabilities don't disappear, and longstanding emotional and relational patterns like irritability, passivity, nervousness, and depression don't vanish into thin air. Yet Paul tells us, "all things become new." So how do we resolve this apparent conflict?

In Part I of this article (Fall 2008), we relied on two principles of biblical interpretation to clarify this apparent conflict. By "interpreting scripture by scripture" and "interpreting scripture in its context" we learned that the apostle Paul did not mean that literally every physical, spiritual, and emotional thing about us becomes completely different at the moment of salvation. In fact, in other places Paul says he himself wasn't made perfect instantaneously (*Philippians 3:12*) and that he kept struggling in order to not commit the very sins he didn't want to do (*Romans 7:19*).

The changes we experience at salvation are so dramatic that Paul describes us as new creatures because we have been spiritually reborn and have a completely new relationship with God. But that new person still has a lot of the old, even though it is oriented in a radically new direction.

In the Christian life certain things change at the moment of salvation. Other things change as we grow and mature over the course of our lifetime. Still others will only change completely with the return of Christ and the

beginning of our life in eternity with God.

### What Has Already Become New?

Here are several things that change at the moment we trust Christ as our Savior:

- ♦ We experience a spiritual rebirth known as regeneration or being born again.

- ♦ God forgives all of our sins because Christ took the penalty for us.

- ♦ We become God's adopted children.

- ♦ Christ's love starts compelling us to no longer live selfishly, but to serve Him.

- ♦ We experience an internal shift that acknowledges our sinfulness and our need of God and His work in our lives.

- ♦ We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Godhead.

- ♦ We become members of God's family, composed of all Christians everywhere.

These changes provide the foundation for the additional growth we need to experience over our lifetime.

### What Is Becoming New?

Every newborn child comes into this sinful world with a propensity for self-centeredness and sin. We also live in physical bodies that are imperfect and we suffer a variety of physical illnesses and difficulties. These three influences—our personal sins, living in a world where others (including parents and loved ones) sin against us, and suffering various physical problems and limitations—come together to create all sorts of spiritual, physical and psychological problems. They even shape the way we experience our relationship with God.

By the time we become Christians we have all developed our habitual ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. Many of these reactions are so deep that they are automatically triggered by our brains in certain situations. Adults who have been physically, emotionally or sexually abused as children may automatically recoil when they become close to someone who reminds them of their abuser. A child who could never please his par-

ents may become an adult who is never satisfied with his performance. A child who lived with anxious or irritable parents is likely to be anxious or irritable as an adult. Because they are so deeply ingrained, these reactions are extremely resistant to change. Overcoming these difficulties is part of the process of growing as Christians that takes time. As Paul also wrote, "We are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory" (*II Corinthians 3:18*).

This growth is known as "sanctification." It builds on the foundation of our new relationship with God through Christ, but it brings different changes than being spiritually born again. *The changes that occur at salvation are primarily changes in our relationship with God. The changes that come later are primarily transformations in our personalities and in our ability to experience the fruit of our relationship with God.* It is the difference between a baby being born (or in this case, "born again") and a child maturing after birth. Birth is only the beginning. As the apostle Peter put it, "Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (*I Peter 2:2*).

Perhaps the best summary of the changes that can come as we grow as Christians is also penned by Paul. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (*Galatians 5:22*). Think of the difference it can make in our lives if we develop these wonderful Christ-like attributes! It is revolutionary. But since we are not supernaturally "zapped" with these changes at the moment of salvation, they have to be learned and developed over time.

Much like earthly children need certain nurturing, training, knowledge and life experience to grow up physically and emotionally, God's children need certain things to mature. Most of our growth comes through our deeper understanding and experience with God our Heavenly Father, Christ our Savior, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and other members of the body of Christ including our families and others closest to us. The Bible teaches us an

incredible amount about ourselves and each of these relationships. It also shows us how God has worked through the ages and how we are to live our lives. As we study the scriptures we receive information, inspiration, instruction and insight. But it is primarily through our relationships that we internalize these truths so that they can change our lives.

The rest of this article describes just a few ways that our relationship with God and others and our increasing knowledge of the Bible can work to change the way we feel, act and relate to others.

### A New Father

All human relationships are to some degree conditional. If we misbehave we are punished or shamed and end up feeling badly about ourselves. To protect ourselves, we try harder, cover up our failures, or put on a false front to satisfy others so they will approve of us. But living our lives to earn love, and avoid anxiety, guilt, or shame keeps us under constant pressure. When we fail, as we inevitably do, we either blame others or feel even worse about ourselves. Blaming creates distance in our relationships with others and self-blame intensifies discouragement and depression. All of this is set in motion by our earliest relationships with our parents and others close to us.

At the moment of salvation we enter a completely new relationship with God. He becomes our Heavenly Father and we His adopted children. Suddenly we have a totally loving, patient, understanding Heavenly Father who never threatens us with guilt or fear. He accepts us unconditionally because Jesus has paid for all of our sins and failures. As we come to know Him better and let these truths soak in we become less fearful, less guilty, more confident and more fully alive. This can bring radical changes. But like an adopted child has to get acquainted with his new parents, it takes time for us to get to know our Heavenly Father. That's why we need to study the Bible, pray, and fellowship with other Christians. These "disciplines" help us experience God more deeply and accurately. As we do, we are increasingly

able to enjoy the wonders of our relationship with Him. That, in turn, begins to change our personalities. It enables us to feel more secure, forgiven and free. This, in turn, helps us connect more healthily with others.

### A New Friend and Model

As wonderful as our relationship with our Heavenly Father is, it is only one source of our growth. At the moment we become Christians we also gain a new friend and model. Jesus Christ is not only our Savior and the second member of the Trinity. He is the most emotionally, spiritually and relationally mature and healthy person who ever walked this earth! Jesus was confident yet humble, assertive yet not pushy. He was flexible, yet not disorganized. Like all of us, He grieved, cried, grew tired, and felt angry. Yet He was also loving, peaceful and kind.

When He reproved people for their sin, it was always for their welfare and the benefit of others. Although He was angry, He never became bitter. Think of the way He modeled forgiveness. When the religious leaders were about to have a woman caught committing adultery stoned, Jesus told them, "Let he that is without sin cast the first stone." And after they all turned and walked away, Jesus asked the woman, "Where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?" "No one," she replied. Jesus told her, "Neither do I. Go and leave your life of sin" (*John 8:3-11*). What an example to which we can aspire. Jesus didn't ignore her sin or say, "That's fine. Other people do the same thing." He called it sin, did not condemn her, and then told her to radically change her lifestyle.

Knowing God has forgiven us can motivate us to become more forgiving. Whenever we feel like evening the score with someone, we can call to mind a biblical passage like, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay," says the Lord" (*Romans 12:19*). Realizing that it is God's prerogative to handle issues of justice and forgiveness, and seeing Christ's example, encourage us to let go of our desires for revenge on those who have offended us.

Or consider Jesus' emotional life.

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Unlike some of us, Jesus didn't stifle His emotions or say they were unimportant. He experienced some fifteen or twenty different emotions. He had a rich emotional life and wants us to have the same. As we see His example, we gain increased freedom to allow ourselves to be the emotional/relational beings God created us to be. These are just a few of the ways our relationship with Jesus and our knowledge of how He lived His life can motivate us and help us grow more like Him.

### A New Spirit

At the moment we trust Christ as our savior, we also enter into a relationship with the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity. In fact, it is the Holy Spirit who calls us to Christ and regenerates us (*John 3:5-8* and *Titus 3:5*). It is the Holy Spirit who guides, comforts, teaches, and leads us into the truth (*John 16:13-14*). And it is the Holy Spirit who guarantees our salvation. We are "sealed by the Spirit" at the moment of our salvation (*Ephesians 1:13* and *4:30*). He prays and intercedes for us (*Romans 8:25-27*). He will ultimately raise us from the dead as He raised Jesus (*II Corinthians 4:14*). But the Holy Spirit does much more. His primary ministries are to make us aware of areas where we need to grow (*John 16:8-11*), and testify or teach us more about Christ (*John 14:26*). It is His indwelling presence that enables us to know our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus better and better.

### A New Family

As wonderful as our relationship with God is, we weren't created to relate only to Him. In fact, when God saw Adam alone, He said, "It is not good for man to be alone" (*Genesis 2:18*). So He created Eve. Then He brought Cain and Abel into the family so they would have parents to nurture and provide for them and guide them through their childhood years. God made us all so that we grow best in relationships with others. Friends, family members and other Christians can all be God's vehicles in our lives and we in theirs. Consider just a few of many biblical verses on how we are to help each other grow and change.

"Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (*Galatians 6:2*).



"May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other, just as ours does for you" (*I Thessalonians 3:12*).

"Warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone" (*I Thessalonians 5:14*).

Just like our relationship with God the Father and God the Son, the Holy Spirit uses our relationships with other Christians to help us grow and become more like Christ. Few things help us become more forgiving than having a husband, wife or very close friend forgive us. Few things help us overcome our anger like being close to someone kind and loving. Few things help us become less anxious than living with calm, relaxed and happy people. These relationships don't suddenly make our problems go away, but they can provide the safety and acceptance we need to explore the sources of our anxiety and pain so that we can start growing beyond them.

### Growing Through Hardship

Have you ever looked back on a difficult time in your life and thought, "I would never want to go through that again, but I am a better person now because of it"? Many of us have, because experience, even painful experience, is very often the best teacher. When we suffer a tragic loss of a loved one or of our job, or a major illness or other awful situation, it leaves us powerless. But in our helplessness we can start developing patience, humility, trust and increased sensitivity to others. We can gain a different perspective on life.

We can grow into a deeper relationship with God. Our powerlessness leaves us no other good option!

The author of Hebrews reminds us of this fact when he tells us to "endure hardship as discipline ..." for later "it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace" (*Hebrews 12:7-11*). Think of it. Hardship can make us more righteous and more peaceful! Even when we suffer incredible losses and go through tragic circumstances, God is working in those situations to help us grow and become more Christ-like in our character. As Paul puts it, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (*Romans. 8:28*).

### Only a Beginning

We have only scratched the surface of the potential impact of our relationship with God and His people in our lives and character. The Bible is filled with counsel for improving relationships, alleviating anxiety, and overcoming shame and guilt. But hopefully this introduction will answer the question where we began. How can we understand Paul's apparently inaccurate claim that "all things become new"? The answer? We entered into a completely new relationship with God at the moment of our salvation. Throughout the rest of our lives on earth we can grow into a deeper and richer experience of the benefits of being His children. Then in eternity we will be completely changed because we will see Him face to face as He truly is (*I Corinthians 5:51-52*). ☩

# Motherhood: The Guilt and the Glory

by Cathryn Flowers Ritchie

*My child, rocking you gently,  
humming your dreams to you.*

*You stir, awakening from  
soft stillness.*

*You gaze into my face,  
reflecting my love.*

*You look at me with trusting eyes.  
I turn from that look.*

*Such trust is too much to carry.*

*Have you forgotten so quickly  
the words I lashed upon you?*

*My temper that tumbled out?  
My tiredness that blamed you?*

*My child, I do love you; but oh,  
how I fail you. Forgive me.  
Rest with me in the  
arms that hold us both.*

I wrote this prayer after I'd lost my temper with my three year old. I felt so guilty. I resonated with Paul when he wrote, "I do what I don't want to do and I don't do what I want to do" (Romans 7:18-19).

Another afternoon I stormed out of the kitchen, yelling as I went, "Go to your rooms, do your homework, clean your rooms and don't bother me!" One day my son got so frustrated with me that he yelled, "Go to Heaven!" And one evening I flipped immediately from yelling at my daughter to remembering that I needed to cut her bangs. I grabbed her while pulling a pair of scissors out of the kitchen drawer. In confusion, she cried, "Don't cut my ear off!" By the end of the day I was full of guilt and feeling like someone else should take over my mothering. I was a total failure. I felt so defeated with my inconsistencies. That is the guilt of mothering.

Other days I am able to gently wipe noses, be patient and gentle, stay at home with a sick child and happily do the little tasks that God has called me to do. Those days I am rewarded by the wonder of nursing a newborn, awakening love within a child, teaching how to find joy in little things and the sense of accomplishment when my child can finally tie his own shoelaces.

I remember a day when I was able to gently hold my son who was full of anger over a fight with his sibling. And I remember the day I woke my four young children with a smile and a warm breakfast. On days like that I felt I was being the mother God called me to be. That is the glory of mothering.

Why is it that we become so angry at the ones we love the most? Why is it that this task we've longed for is the task that threatens to break us? And how can such little children drive us into anger and despair? I think there are several reasons we have those kinds of days and understanding them can help us smooth the way.

## Our Parents Weren't Perfect Either

We parents are only human, and sinners at that! Some of us were raised by parents who were spiritually and emotionally healthy while others were not. We may have been reared by anxious, controlling or abusive parents and none of us had perfect models. So even if we vow, "I'll never treat my children like my parents



treated me," soon after we start parenting it's natural that we slip into our parents' old ways.

## Our Hormones Make Us Do It!

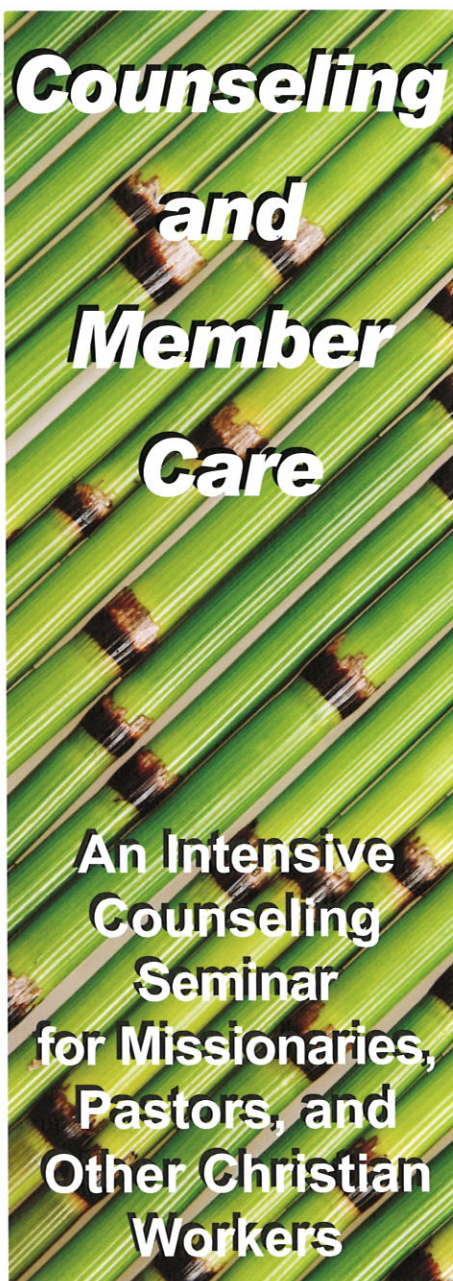
Some women have hormonal or genetic disorders that make them more emotional. These physical factors and pure physical fatigue make it easier for children to drive us to the brink. Some days we pay a price because we haven't taken care of ourselves. Perhaps we stayed up way too late reading a great mystery or talking on the phone with a friend. It felt good at the time but we are too tired to parent at our best.

## Some Days Are Difficult

Some days our children are especially difficult to manage. It may be their

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## Continuing Education In



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sinful nature running wild or they may be fatigued, bored or simply irritable. Rainy days and days when we are so busy we don't have much time to spend with our children make matters worse. Sometimes it seems like they must have stayed up all night just plotting things that would upset us!

### It's Often About Control

We also become upset because we feel absolutely helpless to control even the smallest child! Feeling helpless makes us feel like giving up or punishing our children in anger. Learning to discipline, set boundaries and train our children can avoid or minimize many of these hassles. Learning to control our anger is another key on these upsetting days. The more we understand and face whatever it is that triggers our anger, the more we can grow in patience, wisdom and consistency.

### Don't Go It Alone

Talking with insightful friends or our husbands can help us "get a grip." Many mothers find support in a Mothers of Pre-Schoolers (MOPS) group or in their church's small group Bible studies or prayer groups. Small groups can provide the safety to share our real struggles and receive prayer, encouragement and support. A pastor or professional counselor can also be a great source of insight and help if we have ongoing problems losing our temper with our children.

Much anger is not wrong in and of itself. It is what we do with it that makes the difference. But anger lashed out against a child is wrong. It instills fear, guilt and shame in our children and guilt in us. I suffered with guilt for years over my loss of temper with my children. The more I kept it to myself, the more I turned my anger towards myself. That became a recipe for depression. Sharing my anger helped relieve that burden as I found I wasn't so crazy. Others struggled with similar frustrations.

### Depression Gets in the Way

Depression can undercut any parent's ability to mother with kindness. All absorbing depression makes it difficult to be patient, to get into our children's shoes, and to play with

them and enjoy them. I struggled with loneliness and depression for a number of years until I sought professional counseling. In that process I was able to grieve over the years when my sadness of heart bled over onto my children. I sought their forgiveness for my behavior. Don't let depression rob you of some of the most wonderful years of life. If you need medication to cope with depression, get it. If you need professional counseling, seek it out.

We all need someone who listens with compassion, helps where needed and supports and comforts us in difficult times.

### A Divine Perspective

Taking time each day to be alone with the Lord can go a long way in helping us center ourselves and keep things in perspective. You may not be able to have a consistent time each day to pray and study God's Word, but you must grab time with Him whenever you can. Take time to take your children to God in prayer. Pray for patience and the courage to correct them firmly but in love. Make mothering your children an incredibly high priority, as God would have you.

In conclusion, there are no perfect parents. We all fail our children in some ways. But we can grow and do much better. Getting our frustrations under control and developing our ability to kindly yet firmly train up our children can make an incredible difference. Be honest with God when mothering is overwhelming. Be honest with yourself. Be honest with a wise friend. And if you need it, be honest with a wise counselor. He or she can help you lay your burdens at God's feet and remember to be thankful for the good days and good moments. Then you can give God the glory, as you've given Him your guilt.

We will all fall short, but as we grow spiritually and emotionally we will have less to feel guilty about and experience more to glory in. And we can look forward to the day God takes us in His arms and says, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." ✝

An empty nest mother, Ms. Ritchie's training at Covenant College and L'Abri helped her be a better mother. Now she has loads more time to spend with her husband, Steve. She eagerly awaits visits from their children and enjoys her time pursuing free lance writing.

of our life, if you try to race it, you won't be able to hang in there for the finish," Jane said.

As it turned out, Jane nearly finished the Boston race before it even started.

You see, what we assumed were nervous stomach jitters before leaving Michigan turned into severe gastrointestinal flu by the time we arrived in Boston. For three days, Jane ate and drank sparingly. And we always scouted the location of the nearest bathroom on our few forays into the city. There wouldn't be much sightseeing for these two Boston newcomers.

Still, her flu raged on.

There also wouldn't be any "carbo-loading" for Jane, the pasta feast that most runners consume the night before a long race to store up needed extra energy. Instead, she sipped chicken broth and nibbled on rice, testing to see if either would stay with her. Most of it didn't.

Jane had run up Boston's infamous "Heartbreak Hill" before taking her first stride.

Nevertheless, on Monday morning, April 17, 2006, she woke up and said, "I'm running!" Breakfast was simple: sips of Gatorade, a few teaspoons of apple sauce, a plain bagel, optimism, and prayer. Regardless of where we are or what we're doing, prayer has been an important part of each morning for us for several years now.

"Cliff, even if I'm sick - no, in spite of being sick - I've got to run this race today. Think about all the people back home who are praying for me this morning, right now." I thought about our families, friends, co-workers, church members, and even Jane's patients who had given her a fond farewell, blessings for success, and consistently voiced their validation and confidence: "You've done the preparation, Jane. You can do it." I accepted her decision, but voiced my concern.

"But, Janie, how? You've hardly eaten a thing for three days. How, honey? How?"

"I don't know, but I'm going to

race," she replied. "I'll give it the best I can. That's all I can do." It was settled.

For the first seventeen miles or so Jane ran "on reserve," on what her body had stored up in spite of being so sick. Then, the worst of her flu symptoms returned and plagued her for the rest of the race. The porta-potties spaced out along the route became harbors of refuge, safe havens for necessary stops. Several times she had to wait in line for her turn.

Still, she persisted.

About a mile from the finish line, in



a river of runners so thick she was hard to spot, Jane came into view. She looked weary, exhausted, but just as determined. She tried waving with her right arm, responding to my screams of encouragement. Her arm raised just enough for me to know she had heard my voice. At that moment, I knew she would finish the most difficult race of her life.

When I finally found Jane among the thousands of family members and space-blanket-wrapped-runners, she was shivering. Her eyes were filled with tears. As I wrapped my arms around her, she said, "I've never done anything so hard in my entire life."

"I'm so proud of you Janie, so proud..." I said, over and over and over again.

"Thank you!" she said, "I finished, didn't I?"

"Yes, you finished the race, honey.

Great job! You finished the race."

"That's what I came to do and now I've done it," she said, "Now I can go home and wear my 2006 Boston Marathon jacket."

And, she did.

In Paul's letter to Timothy he wrote, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (II Timothy 4:7-8). After starting his

career as a persecutor of Christians, Paul overcame incredible odds to become a follower of Christ, a winner of souls.

So can I.

What are the odds of someone sick with gastrointestinal flu and literally "running on empty," finishing the Boston Marathon? Very small. Yet, Jane did just that very thing. She deserves the "crown" she wears with humility and grace, her Boston Marathon jacket. Like Paul's "crown of righteousness," Jane's jacket identifies her as a "winner" because she finished the race set before her.

I also want to fight the good fight, to finish my "race," to keep my faith, to wear my own crown of righteousness when my life is over. And I don't have to "run on empty" to achieve these things. I can invite Jesus to run at my side, to come into my life, to "train me" and carry me through the hard times on the long road ahead. When I make this choice, my soul will be full, overflowing with His love for me.

I'll never have to run on empty again.

Ever. †

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# Finding Buried Emotional Treasure...

by Betty Hanks

**“D**on’t let your father see you crying,” my mother warned. He thinks, “women just use tears to manipulate men into getting what they want.” And although I saw my mother cry when I was a young child, it was only in her room when she thought she was alone. So I was taught by words and example that no matter how bad I was feeling, I shouldn’t let anybody know. Dad would erupt in anger and mother would blame me for upsetting him.

Even when I saw people crying when my grandfather died I knew my father would mock or punish me if he saw me cry. So by the time I became a Christian I had learned well how to stifle and repress my emotions.

In my early years as a Christian, I heard similar messages. Several well-intentioned believers told me negative emotions are sinful or showed a lack of faith. Since I was depressed much of the time some people even hinted that I might not be a true believer. Once more I was told to push away any strong emotions, especially “negative” ones like anger. Feelings were a nuisance to be avoided. Yet my upsetting emotions would not go away. I managed to repress some of my feelings but others kept popping up and depression became my constant companion.

I was confused about what I should feel and how to handle the feelings I was experiencing. My struggle to make sense of my sadness and what I had been taught about emotions eventually set me on a journey that changed my understanding of emotions forever.

As I started searching Scripture I discovered people who cried out to God out of anger, sorrow and pain. David cried to God in fear while being pursued by his enemies. Jeremiah lamented the condition of Israel out of extreme sorrow. And Christ Himself wept at the death of Lazarus and was

deeply grieved and despairing in the Garden of Gethsemane. I also noticed that after directly expressing their strong emotions to God, these men of Scripture went on to do precisely what God was asking them to do! Strong negative or painful emotions apparently didn’t prevent them from doing God’s will. In fact they may have even helped!

About this time, I sought out a Christian counselor who helped me realize that while my negative emotions needed to be changed they were actually indicators of internal problems. My anger, for example, was my way of hiding deep hurts received when I was abused as a child. It was easier to feel angry, even at myself, than it was to feel that awful pain. I realized that I needed to eventually face that pain and I gradually learned to do that. Several steps helped me work through and give these emotions to God so that I could be freed from the imprisoning hold they had over me.

## Building a Support System

My first step was to let a few people get close to me: my husband, my closest friend, and a helpful Christian counselor. My husband and I dated through my high school years, so he knew my family. He was the first man in my life to treat me with dignity and respect, showing me what it really means to be loved. When my struggles were particularly difficult, he reminded me of the joy I have in being with my children, or happy experiences through the years of our marriage. Facing my painful emotions wasn’t easy, yet his support and reminders of good things in my life helped bring stability. While I had not disclosed the abuse that was occurring during my childhood, he saw things that made him suspicious. And later as I began to deal with the reality of my past, he was able to reassure me of his belief in me and his love for me. His encouragement and support helped



me take step after step in the healing process.

At one point my closest friend confronted me about my struggle and her suspicions about some of my behavior. While her actions caused me immediate pain, I was able to voice that pain to her. We cried together, and she shared with me how difficult her decision had been. She was willing to risk losing me as a friend so I could get the help I needed. Our friendship grew into one of trust and support.

My therapist walked with me through the darkest crevices of my mind. He created a safe place for me to draw out every wound, and he supported me as I confronted each pain that was anchored in my soul. He helped me uncover the reality of who God had created me to be in Christ and provided support as I explored the life I was discovering.

## Allowing Emotion

During the healing process I learned to allow myself to be aware of my emotions, both loving, caring ones, and painful, scary ones. Repressing and evading emotions had been my method of self-preservation, a problem common to survivors of abuse. But I learned that while that helped me survive as a child, it ended up creating other difficulties, including my depression.

Repressing negative emotions had the side effect of repressing many of my positive feelings. I had trouble being joyful, relaxed and spontaneous. Repressing my anger also created self-



doubt and depression. I became my own critical, condemning parent.

As I increasingly allowed myself to feel, I had to learn the difference between my various emotions. In my mind, anger, sadness, and fear all felt the same: bad. Once I became more sensitive to my emotions I could acknowledge them as valid. There were reasons I felt that way.

I wasn't crazy or bad for feeling them. Once I realized that I had legitimate reasons to feel the way I did, I stopped being so afraid of my emotions. That gave me freedom to sit with them, see where they came from, and discover why I was so terrified by them as a child.

### Finding an Acceptable Outlet

The next step was finding a healthy, non-destructive way of expressing my emotions.

Initially my only means was anger. But that was not an acceptable solution. I had to learn to talk about my vulnerable and painful feelings instead of just blowing my stack. That required vulnerability because I was afraid if I did talk, I would melt into tears and never regain my composure.

As I risked sharing my pain with others, crying with a purpose became instrumental in my healing. Behind closed doors with the people I trusted most, I felt safe enough to cry and express my hurt and anger. Every time I emerged from the fog of experiencing strong upsetting emotions, I felt a new level of freedom from all that had been burdening me. It was a little like gingerly touching a hot potato and tossing it into the air until it cools enough that you can manage it. And once those feelings were "cooled off" and out in the open I realized they weren't so horrible after all. I also learned to express them in non-attacking ways. I learned to say, "I feel sad or angry," rather than, "You make me so angry." It was a slow, painful process, but learning to express my deepest emotions brought powerful healing and the ability to release my emotions to God.

### Praying

Before I worked through the pain of my past, prayer was a rote activity. It

was a duty I had to fulfill. I did a lot of talking, but I wasn't really honest with God. Prayer left me feeling empty and fake. I wondered why He never seemed to answer.

Gradually I learned that prayer was not a task to complete, but a path to knowing God.

To know him intimately I had to be honest in every area, including my terribly upsetting emotions. One Psalm especially impacted my life. "O Lord, You have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue, You know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; too lofty for me to attain" (*Psalm 139:1-6*).

God knew all about my pain long before I could admit it; he loved and understood me just the same.

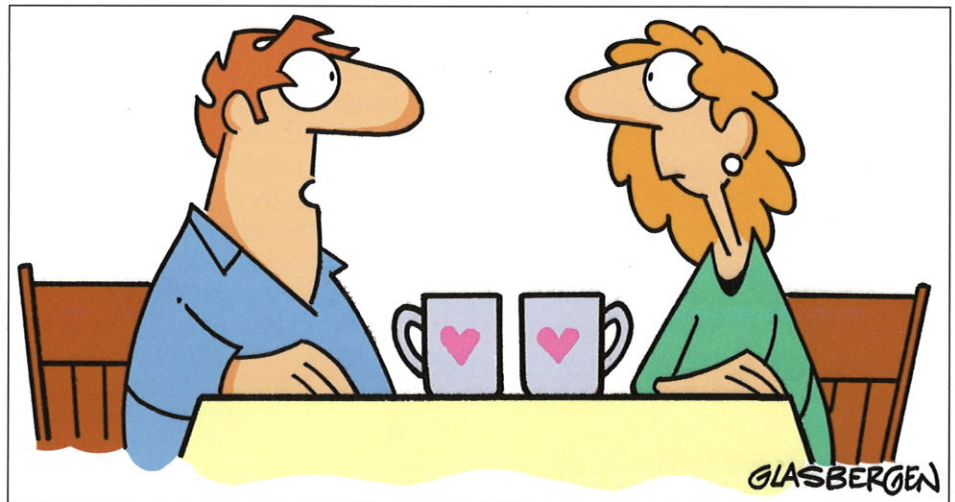
I had worked so long and so hard to keep people out that I had unknowingly been keeping God at a distance too. Once I realized he could handle my emotions and that He craved a relationship with me just as I was, I start-

ed moving closer and closer to him. Then I started feeling more loving, kind and caring. My positive emotions were growing stronger too.

Dealing with negative emotions is a part of our human experience. They are a signal that something is wrong and as we acknowledge them, God can use others to teach us to trust Him as He walks with us through the pain of negative emotions, and the discovery of new and richer emotions. As we learn to let God handle times when we want to take revenge on others or obsess about our futures, He honors our release of those emotions and replaces their burden with increasing freedom, spontaneity and joy in life. Underneath my painful emotions, I discovered wonderful buried treasures that deepened my relationship with God and others. †

Ms. Hanks holds a BA in political science from Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, TX. She has been a teacher, church administrator, and director of children's ministries. Current interests include freelance writing and ministering to women who have survived childhood abuse. Ms. Hanks lives near Houston, Texas with her husband and two teenage children.

## LAST LAUGH



"I got in touch with my feelings once. They told me to leave them alone and mind my own business."

# Training Provides Help for Troubled Marriages

Doctoral students in the Christian counseling program the Narramore Christian Foundation helps sponsor in the Philippines had an intensive month of study in January. Dr. Keith Edwards, Professor of Psychology at Biola University and a NCF staff associate, first taught a ten day course in Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy.

The course was built around the understanding that all human connections and relationships involve our emotions and that most problems in mar-



Doctoral counseling students in Manila.



Drs. Bill Kirwan (left), Hannah Haskell (center) and Bruce Narramore comprise the leadership team for the doctoral program in counseling.



Dr. Bill Kirwan dialogues with student during class break.

riage grow out of the partners' inability to be aware of what they and their mates are feeling and to communicate their emotional needs and feelings in clear, sensitive and non-demanding ways. When they don't, one partner typically ends up withdrawing or attacking in hurt or anger. That sets a destructive cycle in motion that is difficult to break.

Using lectures, discussions and an in-class role play, Dr. Edwards helped students see how they can come alongside couples in conflict and enable them to "de-escalate" this deeply entrenched cycle. Since the class ended, Dr. Edwards has begun supervising the students from his home in California over "Skype," a computer program that enables audio communication between people at computer terminals anywhere

in the world! Four students at a time gather together in Manila and take turns presenting a couple they are counseling so that Dr. Edwards can help them further develop their marital counseling skills. Any potentially identifying details of each couple are altered so that their confidentiality is maintained. The long distance supervision enables the doctoral students to put into practice the things they have learned in the classroom setting. They are finding the supervision in marriage counseling to be an extremely helpful part of their doctoral training.

**Course Helps Students Grow Personally and Professionally**  
Immediately following their course in Emotionally Focused Couples

Therapy, students in the doctoral program in Christian counseling in Manila took an intensive two-week course team taught by Dr. Bill Kirwan and Dr. Bruce Narramore. Their course focused on doing individual psychotherapy with adults. Students attended four hours of class lectures and discussions on how to help clients grow spiritually and emotionally each morning. Then they spent afternoons and evenings completing reading assignments covering similar material. They also presented cases for supervision and discussion during the class. Dr. Narramore reports that he often "saw lights coming on" as students grasped a new understanding of the dynamics of change and how effective counseling can work.

## Missionary Counseling Center Serves 900 Individuals in 2008!

When the staff of the Cornerstone Counseling Center in Chiang Mai Thailand compared notes recently they found they had served more than 900 individuals during 2008. More than half of those were missionaries from throughout Asia who sought out individual or family counseling at the Cornerstone headquarters in Thailand. The rest were missionaries who met with different Cornerstone counselors in small groups where they were ministering in various countries in that region of the world. The missionaries are serving with at least 78 different missionary organizations in 27 countries! In addition to seeing clients in their office in Chiang Mai, each Cornerstone counselor takes at least two, and often several, week long trips every year into nearby countries to consult and counsel missionaries who are unable to travel to Thailand.

The struggles that bring these missionaries for counseling are much like those we face in America. But they

are compounded by the pressures of cross cultural living, physical dangers, forced relocations, terrorist activities, the need for secrecy in "closed countries", and separations from family and loved ones "back home." They come to Cornerstone seeking spiritual and emotional help with depression, stress and burnout, marriage conflicts, children's educational and psychological problems, moral failures, and relational problems with nationals or other missionary team members.

Although Cornerstone staff counselors have not kept records, a significant number of these missionaries would have had to leave their mission field if they had not received help with their personal and relational struggles from Cornerstone staff counselors. In a few short years Cornerstone has become a vital and trusted resource for missionaries throughout that region of the world. Now Cornerstone is adding its first national Thai counselor to serve Thai Christians from the Chiang Mai region. †

Thank you for *Psychology for Living*. I had severe emotional problems (well hidden) and pursued help through you because I had 3 kids, no money and no psychologist! God used every single issue of your magazine to gradually heal me over the years. I never went to a psychologist, but God taught me through *Psychology for Living* and your booklets. I can't say enough about how God has used you to make me whole. I pray for you and I love the new work in Thailand.

— JP, North Carolina

Your website has been a great help to me. The articles are insightful and the site is very easy to navigate it. I value it a lot!

— MS, Ohio

Your website article on co-dependency is the most in-depth I have found. As a co-dependent married to a co-dependent spouse, I found this a helpful and honest introduction to the issue and appreciated the suggestions for working through co-dependency. Thank you.

— TL, Illinois

Sometimes students came to important realizations about their own personality styles and adjustment. After an especially intense course session, one student shared that he had been cut off from his emotions since he went through some very traumatic experiences as a child and that it had seriously impacted his marriage. "Today was the first time in my life that I have allowed myself to face those emotions." The next day he shared that he and his wife had stayed up late into the night discussing their relationship and that they were already experiencing very significant changes. These kinds of personal changes, of course, will enable the students to offer similar help to the people they are called to counsel. †

### TRIBUTE GIFTS

#### Gifts In The Memory Of:

Janet Louis Smith  
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Melodie Narramore Yocum  
Mary Lou Sparks  
Melodie Narramore Yocum

#### Presented by:

Mr. & Mrs. Alvin Remling  
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