

# PRESSING ON...

"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Philippians 3:14



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## Redeeming the Pain

### | Where is God in suffering?

■ by Dr. Janet Irvine, Clinical Psychologist



Many years ago, when my kids were still toddlers, I fell into a deep, dark depression for many years. I was tired, negative, crabby. I could hardly sleep at night, and cried through the day when the kids weren't looking. I put them to bed and then sat on my couch, crying and crying, night after night.

With so little energy, I had to resign from everything I was doing at church. It was a time of dark desolation; so much so that my pastor even asked if I still cared about our church! I spent my days running after my two active boys, carrying on with exhausting activities and appreciating the care my friends provided for them. I decided however, that no matter what, I would still go to church.

But God, who was the most important person in my life, felt very far from me. I could not pray. Reading scripture made me cry even harder. Music was intolerable. Church was the worst place of all, and the words that had comforted and held me for so long were like dry dust. I cried and cried there, explaining my tears away to curious parishioners as "bad allergies." I felt forsaken and lost, and often had no idea what was going on inside to make me so sad.

I was encouraged to seek counseling, which I did for several years. It dredged up lots of

pain I didn't know I had. My therapist encouraged me to try medication. I was humiliated and embarrassed, but I did. The medication provided relief for some of the physical symptoms and the therapy helped me work through the emotional pain.

Like anyone experiencing pain, the questions welled up, over and over...why me? What have I done to deserve this? Where is God? Has He left me? Why were all the things that once brought comfort so full of pain?

One day, crying as usual in church, I sensed a prayer bubble up from deep within: "redeem the pain..." What did this mean? It was so clear and intense that I knew it was important. It threaded through my days and nights as the only prayer I could pray.

Slowly it dawned on me that God might use this darkness, somehow, to bring light somewhere else. It seemed like a rather far-fetched notion, but I began to believe that maybe something unknown but healing would happen.

Another day, as I knelt at the communion rail fighting back tears, I looked at the crucifix above me. Suddenly I realized "God does His best work with broken people!" At that moment, the pastor placed a piece of broken bread into my outstretched hand. Christ, broken on the cross; Christ in broken bread; Christ in broken me. Christ, who had been the Redeemer through the pain of the cross, was the ultimate example of redeeming the pain.

I realized, much much later, that God, indeed,

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took this desolation and helped me to know Jesus on a whole different level. He loved me even when I could scarcely move, when I contributed nothing to the church, except my outstretched hands to take communion. I came to really believe he loved me unconditionally simply for being me, and not for what I did. Redeeming the pain, bringing light from darkness.

As for doing His best work with broken people – well, I sure fit the broken part. And where the cracks and the breaks are still healing up, I hope He is leaking out of me with His love.

And redeeming the pain.



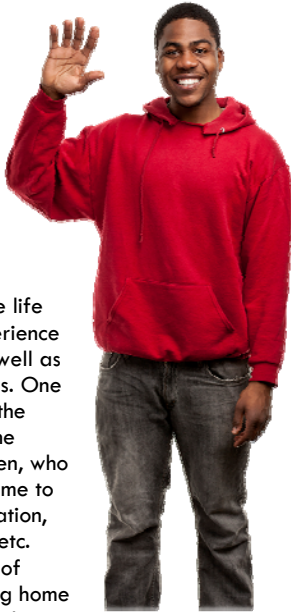
Janet Irvine enjoys working with children and families in our Orland Park location.

# Adjusting to an Empty Nest

■ by Brian Smith McCallum, MS, LPC

Families - - like individuals - - develop through the life span. Families experience growth and joy as well as crises and transitions. One major alteration in the family structure is the departure of children, who eventually leave home to pursue higher education, careers, marriage, etc. Though the process of young adults leaving home is natural and normal, parents can experience it in different ways. For some parents, this period is one of celebration of a job well done in addition to a time of freedom and reduced responsibility; yet, for others, this change brings a profound sense of loss.

A phenomenon known as the Empty Nest Syndrome grew in popularity in the 1970s; it referred to parents' experience of loss and sadness when their children came of age and left home. Since then the existence of Empty Nest Syndrome has been challenged and debated in both the popular press and clinical literature. Empty Nest Syndrome, to be sure, is not a diagnosable



condition, but some parents do indeed experience difficulty in the "empty nest" phase of the family life cycle. The range of feelings can include grief, anxiety, depression, regret, insecurity, emptiness, loneliness, even loss of purpose/meaning/identity, or an acute awareness of one's mortality and the aging process (especially if parents need to care for their own parents).

Mothers or fathers who stayed at home to raise children can experience the empty nest as disruptive to their roles and routines. Likewise, spouses in unsatisfactory marriages can struggle in this period. The "hiddenness" of the loss associated with the empty nest can compound the suffering, too; society often does not acknowledge the conflicting feelings that arise during this family stage. Furthermore, others may impose expectations that this juncture should be accompanied with a sense of joy, accomplishment, and relief.

Hope, however, is available during this rite of passage. To those experiencing difficulty, it's crucial to implement positive coping strategies. The following are some practical, behavioral strategies that can alleviate the potential void:

- Return to or join the workforce
- Volunteer

- Develop new hobbies
- Rekindle relationship with spouse
- Exercise
- Write in a journal (and keep a gratitude log)
- Talk to friends, church leaders, counselors about grief and loss
- Rejuvenate your spiritual life with an emphasis on spiritual formation

The maxim "once a parent, always a parent" holds true. Yet the relationship parents have with adult children changes from controlling and directing to advising and supporting. To this end, parents can remain in contact with adult children on a consistent basis - - whether in person or via digital technology (think mobile phones, email, text, Skype, Facebook, Twitter). Parents can also reflect on, and draw comfort from, what they have taught their children and the values that they've instilled in them. As Proverbs 22:6 advises, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it" (ESV). ■



Brian Smith McCallum is a Licensed Professional Counselor and enjoys working with clients in our Arlington Heights & Lombard, IL offices.

# The Power of Forgiveness

## Part II: How?

■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT



Those who understand the path of forgiveness have learned to appreciate the beauty and freedom inherent in letting go of their right to anger and negativity. They have also learned that there can be many barriers or stumbling blocks when trying to move in that direction. Understanding that forgiveness is important does

not mean that it is suddenly easy to do. Here are some ideas for when you find the journey more difficult than you expected:

### 1. Ask God for help.

Philippians 4:13 says "I can do all things through Him who gives me strength." In light of this, I will also be adding a scriptural reference at the end of each exercise for you to look up and meditate on for additional help.

### 2. Practice not focusing on what happened.

We tell our story over and over again - sometimes to other people and sometimes just in our mind. The incident can become bigger and more painful every time you dwell on it, so practice stopping the talk or thought, remind yourself you are choosing to forgive, and move on to something else. Philippians 4:8

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# Celebrating God's Faithfulness

■ by Melvin Jonkman, MDiv, Executive Director

**F**orty years ago this June, a group of churches started the Chicago Christian Counseling Center. The mission of this ministry was to provide pastoral care to the individuals, couples and families of the Christian Reformed and Reformed communities. The vision of those leaders was exceptional and the cooperation between the denominations exemplary.

Today, by the grace of God, the Chicago Christian Counseling Center continues to provide care for individuals, couples and families. However, the mission has changed from providing pastoral care to providing the best in professional Christian therapy to the Chicagoland area and to NW Indiana. Scroll through the list of those employed by the Center and you will discover a group of highly trained and licensed Christian men and women coming from a rich variety of churches. All of them are passionate about providing quality care to the people who come for help.

Over the past forty years we have also grown to provide our brand of Christian therapy to more and more people. From one center in the south suburbs, we have grown to 15 offices all over Chicagoland and NW Indiana. There are those who wonder why we need so many offices. Well it isn't about the offices; it's about our clients. Research has shown that those needing therapy will drive 30-40 minutes when they are in crisis; however, when they begin to feel a little better usually after 1 or 2 sessions, they will stop going because of the distance. This is not good for our clients because true healing and change doesn't really take place until after 7 or 8 sessions. For that reason we try to have offices that are convenient for our clients.

While change has been evident over the past 40 years, the most important aspects of the mission of the Center remain unchanged.

- **We continue to provide professional therapy from a Christian perspective.** The study of Psychology has given us great insight into the mind and human emotions. Our therapists have studied these truths and apply them in their work; however, we know that true healing cannot take place unless the truths of God's Word are also applied to the brokenness of the human condition. We, therefore, seek to integrate God's Word into our professional therapy.
- **We remain committed to training the next generation of Christian therapists.** We currently have 5 interns on staff. These dedicated graduate students are committed to the mission of the Center and they are providing a great service to our communities.
- **We are committed to helping people, regardless of their ability to pay.** In 2012 the Center gave 20% of our services to the disadvantaged of our communities. As our economy continues to struggle we believe that more people will look to us for help. We remain committed to providing those services.

As I look over the history of the Center, I am overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude for all of the support we have received over the years. Men and women, churches and business have given generously to help us provide professional Christian counseling to so many communities. For 40 years the Center has been a blessing because of the faithfulness of donors, therapists and staff. I pray that God will continue to allow us to serve and be a blessing for many more years to come. ■



Mel Jonkman, M.Div.  
Executive Director

## Want to be involved in "Changing a Piece of the World"?

- If you would like to talk about a CCCC counseling office in your church, contact me. Let's start a dialogue.
- Are you a former client and would like to share how Christian counseling made a difference? Let me know.
- Maybe you want to support us financially?  
Give online or send your tax deductible donation to  
Chicago Christian Counseling Center  
15127 S 73rd Avenue, Suite G, Orland Park, IL 60462

Please keep us in your prayers.

Contact Mel:  
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## Our Mission Statement

Promoting health and wholeness through professional counseling, consultation and education from a Christian perspective.

*Continued from page 2 "Forgiveness"*

**3. Try another perspective.**

\*Look for the positive.

What is the silver lining for your storm cloud? Sometimes it can take a LOT of looking, but it helps if you can find what good came out of the bad! Romans 8:28

\*Look at the life and reasons of the one who wronged you.

Our hearts can be softened when we understand that "hurting people hurt people." Try to see with the eyes of Christ. Luke 23:33-34; Luke 15:11-32

**4. Remember your own sins and the cost of God's forgiveness.**

When we acknowledge that we have sinned, hurt others, and been forgiven, appreciation for the cost of our forgiveness – the blood of Christ - overflows to those around us. Romans 2:1-3; Romans 5:6-10

**5. Pray for the person you are choosing to forgive.**

This isn't praying down the wrath of God! It's truly difficult to hold onto anger and pray for God to bless someone at the same time. James 3:9-10; Matthew 5:43-45

**6. Get help if you need it.**

Sometimes barriers are just too high or strong to surmount alone. If so, find a counselor who will challenge and help you to be your best – whoever God has called you to be. Proverbs 11:14

It might be the hardest thing you ever do, but it will be worth every ounce of effort!



*Debi Mitchell is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist. She enjoys working with children, adolescents, and adults in our Scherverville location.*

In our Mar/Apr 2013 *Pressing On* issue, Debi shared "**The Power of Forgiveness—Part I: Why?**"

## New staff...



**Ellamonique Baccus, MAAT, LCPC**  
**Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor**  
**Art Therapist**  
Office hours in Chicago (South Loop), IL location

Child, Adolescent & Adult  
Individual, Couple & Family Therapy  
MA in Art Therapy—School of the Art Institute of Chicago  
BFA in Painting—Bowling Green State University, OH