

## Is it a Spiritual or Mental Health Problem?

*Joshua Strickler, Pastoral Counselor & Psychology Resident*



Sometimes wisdom is facilitated by asking a different question. When listening, notice how the questions asked function for the person asking and seek to re-frame it in a more fruitful direction. As a Christian with training in biblical counseling and clinical psychology, I've been asked, "Is this problem a spiritual problem

or a mental health problem?" I've learned this question often voices deeper concerns: Will the counseling process excuse sin or diminish personal responsibility? The fear arises that "mental health" categories soothe a person's emotional needs without addressing spiritual causes. It is feared that people will not be called to change sinful motivations or behaviors. Use of "mental health" categories provokes apprehension that individuals will be encouraged to coddle painful experiences, complain about crippling effects, and be given permission to deny responsibility for personal choice.

Secular conceptions of man formulate human existence and behavior without foundational reference to a Creator God and without an understanding that as created, fallen, sinful beings our greatest good comes through humble submission to God's will and purpose. Instead of considering healing in light of a relationship with Jesus Christ, secular counseling considers whether a person is well adapted to current life circumstances. In other words, is the person doing as well as he is able given what he has been handed? This human-centered kind of thinking is typical in secular mental health treatment centers. When seeking mental health treatment, Christians are wise to consider the impact of this worldview. They are wise to pray for discern-

ment and right to seek wisdom in Christian community.

The concerns embodied in the question attempting to distinguish between spiritual and mental health problems are legitimate. However, they can become barriers to finding help, rather than functioning as an invitation to Holy Spirit-guided discernment. All problems are spiritual in nature because humans are created to live in relationship with God. Additionally, there are times a mental health evaluation offers explanation and help.

For example, most people have thoughts at times that result in anxiety. While many are able to let go of these thoughts with relative ease, a small percentage of the population struggles to dismiss distressing thoughts from their mind and begin to engage in compulsive coping mechanisms to lower the resulting anxiety. When this kind of pattern becomes problematic enough to cause interference across multiple areas of functioning (these domains may include social functioning, self-care, spiritual disciplines, and vocational functioning) a mental health evaluation may be advised. If the person has a mental health condition, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, knowing this can be helpful.

Understanding the way a person's mind works when struggling with obsessions and compulsions can inform approaches to dealing with this unique experience of suffering. However, understanding mental health categories doesn't answer questions about ultimate realities. Instead of asking, "Is this problem primarily a spiritual or mental problem?" it might be more helpful to ask, "How does clarifying the presence or absence of a mental disorder improve how we can help the person to live faithfully?" Instead of functioning as a barrier to growth, this question opens the door to a call to faith. Sometimes wisdom is facilitated by asking a different question.

# I Have Been Watching You

Naomi Zimmerman, Counselor



I was shopping in a mall with my husband. We had a stroller and a few toddlers. He decided to go into one store, and I decided to shop in another store very close by. As I finished and entered the mall area, I paused and looked for my husband.

A woman next to me said, "He is over there." I asked, "How do you know who I am looking for?" She

responded, "I have been watching you."

Several years later, we were checking into the Columbus airport, moving our family to Albania. As we were checking in our many pieces of luggage, I noticed an older couple next in line behind us. She had a pretty white lace collar around her neck. They stood there waiting patiently, watching as we did what was asked of us to complete the check-in process. We proceeded to the gate and in the details of travel, flight connections, and family needs, I forgot about this couple.

After we were in the air several hours, I got bored and chose to walk the aisles. While walking, I noticed the woman with the white lace collar and her husband. She stopped me and asked me questions about where we were going and

what we were doing as a family. Then she said, "I have been watching your family since we left Columbus."

God says the same thing: "I have been watching you. I have seen...

...your affliction and groans, and I have come to deliver you." (Psalm 32:7)

...your tears and groanings, and I have come to heal you." (Psalm 30:2)

...your adulteries and stiff neck, and I have come to restore you." (Psalm 23:3)

Job expresses it this way, "Will You never turn Your gaze away from me, nor leave me alone until I swallow my spite?" (Job 7:19 NASB)

God spoke these words to Jeremiah, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." (Jeremiah 31:3)

The words of the hymn writer keep running through my mind— "O love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in Thee." Can I be at rest when I know someone is continually watching me? How do I do life with the knowledge that there is something I cannot shake off, something I cannot get away from— namely, "a love that will not let me go"?

"I have been watching you (I am watching you) with a love that will not let you go!"

# Appreciation Banquet | 2022

Monday, March 28, 2022

Shady Maple Banquet Center

5:30pm Doors Open ♦ 6:00 Music ♦ 6:15 Dinner/Program

Children must  
be 12 years old  
to attend.



Music by Brian Fox and the Next Generation

**Lakewood Cabin Giveaway!**  
Two certificates of \$200 each  
for a cabin getaway

**Registration Required!**  
Please Register by  
Friday, March 18, 2022

**Grant Us Wisdom, Grant Us Courage**  
*Lest We Miss Thy Kingdom's Goal\**

**Speaker: Leon Zimmerman**

Leon is passionate about God's Word and truth, and has served many years as a pastor and teacher. He is currently mentoring and teaching church leaders internationally. His wife Naomi is a part-time counselor at Life Counseling Ministries. Together they have four adult children and one daughter-in-law.



\*From the hymn "God of Grace and God of Glory"



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*A free-will offering will be taken.*

To our dear, extended Life Counseling Ministries family,



Matthew & Ian

Our beloved son and brother, Matthew Gingerich, passed away peacefully Saturday, January 29, 2022. His health had quickly declined in the weeks prior, and the last MRI revealed the brain tumor was spreading rapidly. In spite of Matthew's deep disappointment, since he really wanted to live, his peace was visceral in the final weeks

and we could feel the presence of Jesus pouring out of him.

We cherish Matthew's words of authority spoken at Ian's funeral three years ago and imagine him saying them to us now: "I believe and proclaim that no weapon formed against my family will prosper. I choose to believe that God is good, just like He was last week and He will be next week."

We are grateful for the many stable scans and that Matthew was relatively seizure free after the second craniotomy and treatment two years ago. With gratitude and wit, he experienced a lot of life during those years, including returning to college courses. He completed requirements for a Psychology major from Millersville University only a few weeks before his passing. Matthew held onto hope in the midst of very difficult circumstances by living out his life verse: "I can endure all these things through the power of the one who gives me strength." (Phil. 4:13)

Although in his final days Matthew lost his ability to speak or communicate through writing, his eyes spoke volumes to the end. Matthew paraphrased a verse and song in one of his last texts, "One thing I have desired of the Lord is that I might remain faithful."

Matthew and Ian, ages six and five when we joined LCM in 1999, were always supportive of our calling to serve. Thank you for being a part of their lives. Though our sadness is overwhelming at times and always a reminder in our hearts of our loss, we feel cocooned—surrounded by your love and prayers.

- Sam, Cathie, and family

**Dads, here's a chance to invest in your son!**

## FATHER/SON RETREAT

July 21-23, 2022

held at Life Counseling Ministries  
250 Meadow Lane Conestoga, PA 17516

Cost: \$200 per family. Limited to 12 fathers with a maximum of two sons (ages 7-16) per dad.

Contact the office for an application.  
717.871.0540 | info@life-ministries.com

## Rocky Mountain Men's Retreat

August 6-10, 2022

The week includes:

- Horseback riding to base camp
  - Daily trail riding
- Discussions surrounding issues men face today
  - Personal solitude time
- Sharing how our stories are part of God's larger story

Cost: \$450 plus travel expense

Contact the office for more information.  
Phone: 717.871.0540 or Email: info@life-ministries.com

## PRAISE GOD FOR...

- A cohesive spirit among the staff team.
- His loving, gentle presence during times of grief.
- Our faithful prayer supporters who hold us up to the Father.
- Hope in the midst of sorrow.

## PRAY FOR...

- The Sam Gingerich family as they grieve the loss of son and brother Matthew.
- Wisdom and courage for the staff team as they walk with clients.
- Our clients struggling in difficult marriages.

## CLIENT TESTIMONIALS

*"My time here at LCM has been such a blessing. The atmosphere surrounding the grounds is incredibly peaceful and comforting. I felt like God was present and the Holy Spirit moved in my sessions with my counselor. It felt like my counselor understood where I was at in this stage of life and was more than willing to discuss things that were important and pressing. The challenges he presented were effective and it was what I need to hear and not what I wanted to hear. Overall, I highly recommend LCM." - Kentucky*

*"Thank you very much for your help and advice. It has been healing and refreshing to be here. May God bless your beautiful work!" - Brazil*

## Ten-Course Subjects Offered in 2022

- **Core 2, Lab 2\*** – Date to be determined
- **Core 1, Lab 1** - Nov 2022, Jan & Mar 2023  
Registration now open.

Contact the office if you wish to sign up for any of these courses.

\*Prerequisite course: Core 1, Lab 1

### EMAIL NEWSLETTER

Do you want to help reduce our costs? Those with email can receive the quarterly newsletter as a pdf. To make this change, email us at [bhershberger@life-ministries.com](mailto:bhershberger@life-ministries.com). Please include name and mailing address. To be removed from our mailing list, kindly contact us.



**Life Counseling**  
MINISTRIES

250 Meadow Lane  
Conestoga, PA 17516

Return Service Requested

## 2022 Upcoming Events

- **Appreciation Banquet** - March 28, 2022  
Registration required! See ad inside.
- **Father/Son Retreat** - July 21-23, 2022  
Registration now open.
- **Rocky Mt. Men's Retreat** - Aug. 6-10, 2022  
Registration now open.

Contact the office to register for any of these events.  
[info@life-ministries.com](mailto:info@life-ministries.com); 717-871-0540

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Spring Garden Office  
5207 Old Philadelphia Pike, Kinzers, PA 17535  
(GPS Only. Do not mail to this address.)

Life Counseling Ministries is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization established to provide counseling for individuals, marriages, families, and church leaders. LCM also offers training and teaching through workshops and seminars. This newsletter is published quarterly and is available to interested persons at no cost.

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