



Life Counseling
MINISTRIES

*I have come that
they may have **Life**
and have it more abundantly.*

John 10:10

Volume 37 No. 1

Newsletter

March 2023

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Scrupulosity

A pastor once said, "Half of my congregation needs to be convinced that Jesus' blood can save, and the other half needs to be convicted that they need His blood!" This article is for the half of you who feel you are not okay and need to be convinced that Jesus is sufficient; in particular, those of you who struggle with religious scrupulosity. If you long to experience Jesus' love expressed by the prick of the Holy Spirit in your conscience, this article may disappoint. I invite you to read as a means of understanding those who have different needs.

"John, it is time to stop checking your work. If I had a dollar for each time you reviewed those drawings we could take off for the rest of the month!" his supervisor good-naturedly jokes. *But, what if I missed something?* John thinks. *A Christian engineer is dependable and thorough. I need to be sure I didn't mis-engineer those specs.* John begins the lengthy ritual of checking again.

The tension in Teresa's chest builds as she anticipates the altar call. She wants to do what's right; she has re-committed her heart to the Lord many times, but she just can't find peace. She anticipates with dread the shift in the minister's tone that will signify his call to commitment and repentance. This tonal shift will trigger a question about whether she is actually a believer. It has happened at every revival service that she can remember. *How can I know I am actually saved? What if I am wrong about the sincerity of my belief? Even the devils believe. How can I know for sure I'm not living in unbelief?*

"I'm sorry Jesus," Caleb whispers under his breath, hoping his friends won't notice. "I didn't mean to think that word." *Damn, Damn!* The thoughts intrude. *Damn, Damn, Damn, Damn!* Caleb yearns, *If only I could stop the*

torment. "I'm sorry Jesus. Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry!" There! I said it six times. Or did I only say it five times? Maybe I better say it again just to be sure I repented enough. "Come on, Caleb," his friends call. "What are you waiting for? We want to get started with our game! Are you alright?"

I've already talked with the pastor's wife about what I said and did back then, Miriam thinks. But what if my heart wasn't right when I spoke with her? What if I didn't really want to repent?

These vignettes explore religious scrupulosity, a kind of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). While many think of OCD as a disorder in which people develop an obsession with contacting germs and spend much time avoiding possible contamination, OCD sometimes takes the form of an insatiable demand for certainty in a person's spiritual life.

Religious scruples or obsessions may be characterized as unwanted thoughts or feelings that call into question the sincerity of faith. *Do you know for sure you fully repented? Are you sure you didn't think a lustful thought? How do you know you didn't make a mistake in your work? Better check again.*

The result of an obsession is increased anxiety. Consider a conscience or fire alarm that warns in a way that cannot be stopped. The irritation drives one to compulsion – *recheck the work, pray a prayer to Jesus to cover the possibility of sin.* Doing the compulsion results in feeling less anxiety. However, compulsions never really solve the problem because soon a new obsession results in the need to lower anxiety again through some form of repentance. The cycle continues. While the author of 2 Cor. 7:10

is not focused on religious scruples, this passage invites differentiation between a kind of repentance that leads to death and a kind of repentance that leads to life.

Sometimes people dread reading Scripture because doing so triggers thoughts of condemnation. Even passages that speak of the mercy and love of the Lord become reminders of personal insufficiency, sentinels of inescapable condemnation. This kind of repentance leads to death. The issue is not that the individual is unrepentant. Typically, these church members are the most conscientious people in the community. Instead, the issue is that the brokenness resulting from Adam's fall hijacks our conscience causing an insatiable sensitivity to the presence and possibility of sin. In this place, a demand for certainty becomes disguised as faith. *I will not be okay unless I can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I'm doing everything in my power to make sure I've done enough.* But somehow, trying harder or trying again never satisfies.

In contrast to this repentance that leads to death, faith looks like learning to recognize when a thought is being triggered by scrupulosity (OCD) and learning to live faithfully even though feelings question otherwise. Faith is learning to live as if Jesus' blood is strong enough to save even if I am missing some sin or mistake that could be confessed. Faith is trusting that the Holy Spirit is capable of calling me to repentance in a way that leads to hope and does not result in the hopeless condemnation of OCD.

Learning the difference between the kind of repentance that leads to death and the kind of repentance that leads to life is central to overcoming the struggle with scrupulosity. Here are several contrasting differences

(intended for the person who struggles with OCD) that may be helpful to distinguish between the repentance that leads to life and the repentance that leads to death:

- Faith is not the absence of all uncertainty; it is learning to walk faithfully in the midst of uncertainty.
- The OCD/scrupulosity voice plays its trickery by asking, "What if this isn't the voice of OCD but is really something to be seriously considered?" Instead, godly repentance brings freedom to ignore this voice and walk out a kind of obedient faith that ends in hope.
- Scrupulosity wants me to believe that spiritual safety is found in answering every question with certainty. Rather, spiritual safety is found in walking with Jesus in the midst of uncertainty.
- Intrusive obsessive thoughts say nothing about my true character. I can be at peace with God even when my feelings are saying I'm not okay.

While many overcome religious scrupulosity by learning new skills to manage their intrusive obsessions and by focusing on healthy physical habits, others may find they need the help of medication. Some people are biologically predisposed to an increased struggle with OCD, and there may be wisdom in considering medical management of symptoms. In either case, it is important to learn how to differentiate between change that leads to life and change that leads to death.

-Joshua Strickler, *PsyD, Counselor*



Rocky Mountain Men's Retreat

August 5-9, 2023

The week includes:

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

Contact the office for more information

Phone: 717.871.0540 or email office@life-ministries.com

Dads, here's an opportunity to invest in your sons!

Father/Son Retreat

July 20-22, 2023

250 Meadow Lane, Conestoga, PA 17516

Held at Life Counseling Ministries

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 | office@life-ministries.com

LETTING GO:

A Portrait of a Woman at Rest

This course offers married women practical Biblical tips for life and marriage on how to be happy, respectful, empowered women. This six-week online intensive course involves daily interactive emails, one group Zoom call per week, and journaling homework.

Coaches: Cathie Gingerich and Sharon Kuepfer

NEXT COURSE DATES:

MAY 22 - JULY 3, 2023

JULY 31 - SEP 11, 2023

OCT 9 - NOV 20, 2023

For more information, contact the Lorinda at
lorindan@life-ministries.com ♦ Phone: 717.871.0540

From the Director of Development:

I want to give a big "Thank You" to each one who contributed financially last year. Costs for last year went a bit over budget but, thanks to your generosity, there were more than enough donations to cover the extra expenses. Our budget for 2023 is the biggest ever, totaling about \$1.1 million for LCM operations, not counting the Leola Thrift Shoppe which we own and operate. The graph shows expenses and income for 2019-2021; Thrift Shoppe income and expenses are included. Totals for 2022 will be available after auditing is complete.

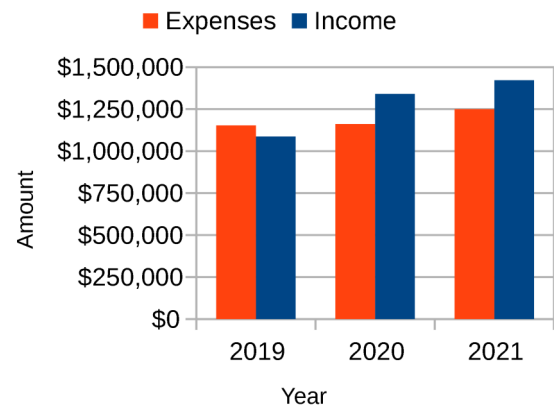
I also want to extend heartfelt thanks to those who have contributed time and materials to LCM and the Thrift Shoppe and to those who have invested through prayer. Our ministry would be useless apart from the work of God. May He "guide our feet into the way of peace." – Adam Lehigh



PRAYERS/PRAISES

- ◇ Pray for God's continued comfort and healing for the Gingerich family.
- ◇ Praise God for a caring board who guides the ministry well.
- ◇ Praise God for a group of Core 1/Lab 1 trainees who are willing to be stretched, and pray they will be better equipped to love God and people well.
- ◇ Pray for physical, spiritual, and emotional health for our staff.

Annual Income & Expenses



Annual Banquet | 2023

Monday, March 27, 2023

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



Music by the Beachy family

Lakewood Cabin Giveaway!

Two certificates of \$200 each for a cabin getaway

**Registration
Required!**

A free-will offering will be taken.

Please Register by Friday, March 17, 2023

Online: www.life-ministries.com | Email: info@life-ministries.com | Phone: 717-871-0540

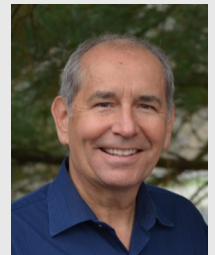
Afflictions Eclipsed By Glory

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

"For this light momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison..."

Speaker: Sam Gingerich

LCM Administrator



Ten-Course Subjects Offered

- **Core 2, Lab 2***
April 10-21, 2023
**Prerequisite Course- Core 1, Lab 1.*
- **Core 1, Lab 1**
Nov. 2023, Jan. & Mar. 2024
(Exact dates still to be determined.)
Registration opens April 1.

2023 Upcoming Events

- **Annual Banquet** — March 27, 2023
Registration open
- **Father/Son Retreat** — July 20-22, 2023
Registration opens March 1.
- **Rocky Mt. Men's Retreat** — August 5-9, 2023
Registration opens March 1.



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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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