

Vessel of Hope

My professional counseling career started in 1983. I enrolled in a counselor training program to become a substance abuse counselor. I quickly rose to the top of my profession and had achieved all of my career goals within 7 years. I had started an inpatient adolescent substance abuse program. I was involved in the first adolescent outpatient substance abuse program which included a group home. I finished graduate school and became licensed as a professional counselor and built a successful private practice. Personally I struggled with being a workaholic and having self doubts. I did not feel complete as a person and I was definitely not satisfied with myself and all my accomplishments.

In 1980 I had been miraculously delivered from the deadly grasp of alcohol and drug addiction. Obviously that made a difference in my life. I believed in God but was not in relationship with Him. In 1998 I became a born again Christian. That was truly the beginning of a new journey. I had a renewed outlook on life. I was frustrated with my work because I didn't see lasting results. I had known for a long time that unless a person has an inner catharsis or a heart change, that whatever I did with them was only a temporary fix. I believed that if I could incorporate the Word of God into how I was helping others, there would be lasting change. I began to grow spiritually and in my relationship with Jesus. I wanted to integrate Biblical truths into my counseling profession. I started reading about "Christian" counseling and read different resources on the subject. You know, the "how to" kind of books. For several years, nothing seemed to change. I was still struggling with fear, self doubt. I was not at peace with myself. At times I was tormented by anxiety and periods of depressiveness. My studies of Christian counseling lead me to study the Bible and listen to teaching sermons from a variety of Biblical scholars.

Through this process, the Word of God transformed me. What I had been experiencing was a spiritual oppression or heaviness if you will. I figured out that I had been under attack by the enemy. I was ill equipped to do spiritual warfare. My study equipped me with Biblical truths and spiritual skills. I soon was delivered from the cloud of oppression and fear that at times consumed me. In retrospect, I had been in a Christian counselor training program. It was orchestrated by God to teach me what I needed to know to be an effective Christian counselor. I could not teach or give away that which I did not have or understand. God had His way with me. He gave me permission to do Christian counseling.

God had given me special gifts and talents that had enabled me to be a good counselor. I have always had the gift of mercy, understanding, and discernment. People find me easy to talk to and I usually have an unassuming demeanor when engaging others. That is why I was successful in the secular counseling world. I had now gone through a personal and professional growth process. I saw things happening in my practice that I had only dreamed of. I believe that all truths in life can be traced back to the Bible. I learned this from my pastor and other men at Laura Street Baptist Church who held me accountable. They were my spiritual mentors and support as God was changing me from the inside out. I joined the Joseph Company at Word of Life Church in St. Joseph Mo. It is fellowship focused on helping professional business men and women, and entrepreneurs of any discipline develop work place ministries. That means that their CEO is Jesus Christ. It means they follow Biblical principles in all of their affairs. I also joined a morning prayer call. These prayer warriors join in prayer and praise every morning at 6 AM

via conference call. There have been times when this call has reached from the East to the West coast. A Christian business man is not a business man who is a Christian or goes to church. A Christian business man builds his business on Christian principles of integrity, service to others, and leading by example. Just belonging to or even attending a church no more makes you a Christian than putting on a mechanic's uniform makes you a car mechanic.

I am continually learning the life lesson that you cannot help someone past the point of where you have gone in your own personal journey. I cannot take or help a person to an emotional level of healing that I have not experienced myself. This is the challenge for all of us. We do not remain static in our life's journey. Personal growth and healing lead us to more personal growth and healing. As professionals we need to challenge ourselves to continue to grow. That is no less than what we expect of the people we serve. As humans, we resist that process because it can be scary and uncertain.

I firmly believe that our faith is what will get us through any situation in life. The scriptures give us re-assurance of that. We are promised an abundant life. John 10:10 (New American Standard Bible) Jesus says: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly". I recall a spiritual experience that had a significant impact on me. It happened on a day while I was driving to an appointment. I was not having a particularly good day. I don't remember what I was stressed about. It was probably one of those days you experience when your life seems overwhelming. When there's an underlying current of fear and doubt. I was listening to praise music and doing what I could to try to get myself out of the funk I was in. During that drive, God planted in my heart the words "I will never leave or forsake you". There are no less than five references to that phrase according to my search of the New International Version Bible. This is my favorite: Joshua 1:5 (New International Version) "No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you."

I had instantaneous relief. I am able to draw on that experience because that particular word of God is planted in my heart and soul. I use this as a personal testimony of how the word of God can be powerful in our lives if we use it. That is what excites me. Helping others use the word of God along with practical life skills and counseling techniques. The word of God makes what we do and say healing, powerful, and everlasting. The scriptures tell us in Romans 10:17 (New American Standard Bible) that "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." It doesn't matter how we hear it. It can be heard in our spirit, like my experience. It can be heard by reading and studying the word of God. It can be heard through teaching sermons

Vessel of hope. What does that mean? I believe it means that we are to be a vessel through which others can receive healing and guidance. We have the challenge to love people where they are. My belief is that all truths must lead back to or come from the Bible. Jesus says it best in John 15:1-5 (New International Version) when he speaks about the vine and the branches: 1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you

bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

For me, this means that I must maintain my vertical relationship with God. I must be willing to be engaged in my own process. My own journey of healing and restoration. As I heal, I am able to bear more fruit because I can help others at a deeper level. If I remain static, I die spiritually. I lose my connection with God. I love Psalm 51:10- 13:(New International Version): "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you." It clearly tells us that as we are healed we will be sustained and we will become teachers. We will be part of the healing and restoration process of others.