



# Conference Care Newsletter

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*“And went to him, and bound up his wounds . . . and took care of him” Luke 10:34*  
*“But that the members should have the same care one for another” 1 Corinthians 12:25*

## Editorial

### ***Empowerment***

At first glance, the term *empowerment* seems humanistic. In my mind, it wants to relate to individuals who radiate control. In this writing, we want to look at empowerment as a positive attribute that is bestowed by leadership on followers and by administration on employees.

Jesus told his followers, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” He was pointing them to what would happen to them in the future. The Holy Ghost was to be given to them. This is the ultimate empowerment available to mankind.

Empowerment is used in business and in human resources, especially in the workplace. It is an enabler conferred on employees by management. A synonym for empowerment is “to enable.”

Do parents have a responsibility to empower their children? Should pastors empower their congregations? Is control sometimes confused with empowerment?

Let’s approach parenting from the perspective of empowering children. Parents want their children to make decisions. The earlier in the growing-up phase this begins to happen, the better. A parent teaches a child to clean up after himself—toys, clothing, bed, dishes, etc. The parent wants toys to be cleaned up after use or at a given time. First, you teach by example, and then you help the child place the toy in the box. And soon the child understands what is expected of him. There are many small steps in this exercise. As the child catches on, he becomes empowered. This training process continues on through the dif-

ferent phases of growing up. After some time, you have a son or daughter who moves along through the day making simple decisions and doing small tasks and bigger ones without being prompted. A great foundation has been laid.

This child is prepared to face life and answer the call to be a follower of Christ. At convert meeting, the boy is asked if he understands the leading of the Holy Spirit. He hesitates but says he thinks so. He is asked to explain. “Well, something tells me that it would be good to help my brother with his homework.” He has not been taught that specifically. However, he has been taught to be helpful. As he becomes older, something will tell him he shouldn’t swear, even though he may have only been taught not to use bad words. At any rate, this person is empowered.

Contrariwise, the child who is not taught the first steps and the following steps, but has experienced his parents doing everything for him, has little impetus to make any moves and any decisions. This is not rocket science, so we digress from going over the story from the angle of what happens if the steps above are not taken.

The disciples were not taught how to be testimonies for Jesus. They were not “taught” how to preach, although they listened to Christ. But they learned many things as they moved along with their Master. He empowered them by example, and then He promised them they would be empowered with the Holy Ghost. This is security, and as followers of Christ, we have the same gift instilled in us. If parents do not empower their children, the spirit can override this, but not without struggle and hardship.

The above holds true for the workplace as well. We consider the care facility. It consists of different departments. We accept that administration is in charge. Each

department has a head. Not every facility operates the same way, but let's consider it from the angle of empowerment. Who has power? Of course, we'll say the DON or the administrator does. Interestingly enough, they are the ones who have offices to occupy. To stay in touch with what's happening in the facility, they will either have to be in touch regularly where the work is being performed or they will need to cultivate good communication with employees in each department—more than likely, both. In an article in a previous newsletter, we looked at parenting styles. We considered authoritarian or authoritative. An authoritative leader will surround herself with people who are gifted and who may have more knowledge than she has. An authoritarian leader will covet his position and worry if his workers know more than he does. He is afraid of losing his position. He will try hard to have the last word on every issue. The authoritative DON leans on her fellow employees for information and direction. She listens and gives everyone an opportunity for input and then helps the group make the correct decision. A DON says, "As administration, we scratch our heads and discuss and worry what to do about a certain situation on the floor. Then we get smart and ask the health care aides who face the issue daily. They come up with ideas that usually work." These workers are empowered. Their expertise is valued. They feel this. And in a moment of consternation when there is no time for discussion and enquiry, a move is made that comes into the mix from seemingly nowhere, and a task is completed. Where there is no empowerment, workers hesitate or become lethargic and, perhaps, careless.

It works the same in a marriage relationship. The husband who guards his position and head of the home and is determined to stay in control will actually slowly lose his position and his control. Instead, he needs to empower his partner. Trust her, and work things out together with her. And, above all, listen to her. In this way, he empowers her, and then when he's away on business, she has the confidence instilled in her that will see her through the days she is alone.

A husband was away. The family vehicle had some issues. The wife takes it to the garage. A decision needs to be made. The mechanic asks the woman what he should do? This is only correct. She really doesn't know and asks the mechanic what he thinks her husband would do. The mechanic knows, says so, and the problem is solved. The wife has been empowered. She is not afraid to trust both the mechanic to do the right thing and her husband that he will be satisfied. The overall outcome is not as important as the fact that progress was made because individuals were empowered.

In my youth, I wanted to do something questionable. Not dangerous or so foolish, but just something that was

not done so readily. I asked my father for permission. He said that it was up to me. So, I did it. Nothing so serious happened one way or another. Dad empowered me. He trusted me, and even though I kind of knew he didn't really approve, he let me decide. I never forgot. It made me feel like I was worth something, and I remember no judgment after. Had there been no groundwork laid and had he said go, I can imagine I would have gone and taken it as an open door to do it again. But something deeper spoke to me, and I caught something that may well have aided me later in life.

A father who guards his position of power will try to keep that position intact by leaning heavily on yes or no. And the teenager may never learn about empowerment. He will look for someone to tell him, and his sensitivity to the inner leading of the Spirit will not be there. He is not empowered.

A good team leader knows his coworkers. A leader does not learn this by sitting behind the desk. Opportunity is made to touch base with the team. Does he have break and lunch with anyone, or does he stick to a few of his peers? In a care facility, does he know the challenges laundry faces? Is he acquainted with the machines? Does the DON get involved in making beds and operating lifts? Does administration understand what the cleaning department faces? If the everyday tasks are considered too mundane for administration, empowerment will fall by the wayside, and employees will become lifeless. A nurse aide will know when her superior understands the everyday challenges she faces and has confidence in her. The desk and office are important but should not serve as an escape from reality.

Empowering employees and controlling them are entirely different issues. Tapping into the abilities of a team and empowering the team takes less effort and creates more blessings than trying to stay in control. Empowerment, instead of control, establishes healthy work environments, strong families, and healthy congregations.

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## ***A Cry of Disconnect***

Ben Friesen

Dear fathers, this is an open letter from my heart to yours. Being on the Resource Team, I have had the opportunity to hear hundreds of your voices over the last couple of years. The sound is like a weighted wind in the trees: a lonesome and, at times, angry cry that bends the branches and leaves a keening afternote of sadness. Out of this cry, I have isolated several commonalities. The most common,

and perhaps the most alarming, is this: the lack of connection between fathers and sons.

We all have a “father wound” that only God can fill. I am one with you. I have a precious son. I have a father who means the world to me. But I have experienced some of the same disconnections, as did my dad before me, and I’ve likely been the cause of the same in my son. Our earthly fathers will never be perfect and will never completely fill the need that can only be filled through soul-completion in the fatherhood of God.

The wounds we speak of here are more profound; the deep, jagged-edged wounds of verbal abuse, emotional neglect and abandonment, criticalness, and the lack of true connection. Interestingly enough, the majority of wounded men who contact us come from intact Christian homes with no obvious pathology. Most had no overt physical abuse but rather suffer from the lack of father-son connection at an emotional and physical level. Most wounds of this sort are generational and have been passed from father to son and so on. A heritage of disconnect.

The results of this disconnection are men who struggle with and suffer from same-sex attraction, a variety of addictions (pornography being the most common), and problems surrounding relationships (marriage being the most obvious). Anger, isolation, and depression all layer into this as secondary maladies. A young boy yearns for his father’s approval, appreciation, and affection. When these values are lacking or absent, a young man will seek them in unhealthy ways. A boy brought up in a church leader’s home runs some unique risks: a father very busy with a spiritual calling and combined with a keen sense of appearance and an exacting standard produces a young man who may become cynical and feel like he is required to maintain a façade.

Why are we surprised that so many men struggle with faith in God and struggle against authority? That so many men feel disconnected from a loving heavenly Father? A large part of the answer is that they see God through the lenses they were given as a child. If Dad was aloof and remote, the little boy’s developing brain was shaped to see and imagine an invisible God in exactly this way. If Dad was critical and hardline and portrayed the church and authority as rules to follow “or else,” why would we be surprised if his son imagines God the holy Father in the same way? Mothers can sometimes offset this picture, but this is rather rare and has its own set of pitfalls and negative emotional sequelae. If a boy can never live up to Dad’s expectations, he sees God as someone difficult to please, one for whom his best is not enough. If Dad did not show love, his son will have a difficult time imagining God as someone who loves him.

You may argue that the majority of men in our circles have a good connection with God and are good fathers. I

agree with this and rejoice for it. But as Christians, we are instructed to search out and save the 1 percent. The ninety-nine may be safe and secure, providing for their sons, connecting, and giving their developing brains a healthy perception of God. We wish to raise awareness of the 1 percent, as they and their wives and children deserve their voices to be heard, the voices of those crying in the wilderness, the wilderness of lonely isolation and disconnect. Furthermore, the fact that there may be more than 1 percent is substantiated by Scripture: We may have ten thousand instructors in Christ, but few fathers (1 Corinthians 4:15, paraphrased).

One reason fathers run the risk of becoming mere instructors and eschewing true, connected fatherhood is self-loathing. A father who has never accepted himself and has a negative self-perception can, subconsciously, see his son as an extension of himself. The unfortunate son then suffers the fallout of his father’s unfinished emotional business. This is reiterated by the addictions expert Dr. Gabor Maté: “Children swim in their parent’s unconscious like fish swim in the sea.” Thus, a negative, pathological cycle continues, passing on a further heritage of disconnect.

What does it take to raise emotionally healthy and secure men? Here are a few thoughts, taken not so much from personal experience as from observance and research.

A good dad is not perfect, but he is present. A good dad can and will make many mistakes. However, hurt does not come from the mistakes but from being unwilling to admit he is wrong. A successful and connected dad must have a well-oiled reverse. Turbulent father-son relationships are common, but according to research, if the positive to negative aspect is at least 5:1, relationship and connection is maintained.

It has been said that successful fathering comes down to one word. That word is *delight*. If a father delights in his son, that answers most questions. There is one example straight from Heaven on this score, as God speaks to his own begotten, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” A boy needs to hear from his father that he has what it takes, that he is enough. He needs to receive affirmation and be appreciated for who he is. He needs to hear the answer to his constant questions: Am I enough? Am I ok? A boy will do all kinds of things to hear his father say, “Good job, son!”

You, Father, are the most powerful person in the lives of your children, particularly your sons. Give them what they so badly need—physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally. A deliberate and intentional effort will ensure that a heritage of connection is passed on and will bless your life, the lives of your children and of your children’s children.

## ***Raising Hope Ranch***

Tim Penner

Early this summer, the Care Committee spent an evening and a day at Raising Hope Ranch. This was a first time for the whole committee to be there at the same time since the ranch came under the umbrella of the conference. Through recent years, representatives from the committee had been at the ranch periodically.

We spent time in session with the ranch's board personnel as well as a walk-through of the facilities. It was a blessing for me, and I know it was the same for the rest of the committee. Whether the people at Raising Hope felt so blessed, I am not sure. The committee came with a lot of questions. I hope they did not feel as if they were under a microscope. Many points covered helped clarify the questions we had. We trust we could answer some of theirs.

They were great hosts, and it was a pleasure getting to know them. The church is privileged to have a group like them in our circles paving the way to help young girls with their problems.

One point they made in answer to one of our questions, I remember well. We were interested in what they considered success. They indicated it was the ranch's endeavor to provide tools for young girls to better face life challenges after having experienced trauma in various forms that messed up their lives. They do not have a program that guarantees cures. Miracles would be welcome though.

It is the Care Committee's endeavor to work together with the existing board of directors at the Ranch. We want to support and learn. The Care Committee feels humbled to have the opportunity to work with these folks. We want to do what we can to be a liaison between them and you folks in the conference. Our prayer is that we could help make this service the church's service for the hurting girls in our circles.

Below is some information from Raising Hope's files. We present them as an introduction to what RH is trying to do for girls with heavy baggage in their lives.

### **Who We Are**

Raising Hope Ranch is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping young girls in difficult places. We feel that God has called and equipped his staff at Raising Hope Ranch to carry the good news of Christ's love into the hearts of struggling girls. We will provide a secure environment where the girls will be loved no matter what baggage they bring from their past.

### **History**

In 2015, two sisters from the Gentry Mennonite congregation, together with three couples serving as a board of directors, founded Raising Hope Ranch as a nonprofit

organization. Originally the goal was to do equine therapy with local learning-disabled children. In 2016, we were asked to take in the first long-term resident. Soon, a cry for help was heard from other heartbreaking situations among us. In answer to that cry, RHR has endeavored to offer a safe place for girls with emotional challenges to find hope, healing from past trauma, and the tools they need to go forward in life. We, also, work with parents facing difficulties relating to their children through parent seminars held throughout the year.

### **Philosophy**

Theme Verse: Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and future."

*Vision:* Raising Hope Ranch is committed to creating an environment where children and horses discover the freedom to love.

*Mission:* Raising Hope Ranch will offer hope by modeling Christ's love, touch lives by giving residents tools to make responsible life choices through daily mentoring and equine assisted learning, heal hearts by helping to resolve past emotional wounds and trauma through building a trust in God.

### **Core Values**

- **Deep Relationships:** Valuing meaningful relationships with God, each other, and our church community, tearing down the walls of self-protection and survival the girls have constructed in the past.
- **Humility/Reflective Decisions:** Realizing our humanity and depending on God's leadership in daily decisions.
- **Authenticity:** Consistent daily living staying true to the beliefs and values that represent our identity as a Christian nonprofit organization.
- **Teamwork/Unity:** Finding strength in unity, committed to common goals and open communication.
- **Stability:** Providing a constant environment allowing for progress in dealing with insecurities.
- **Faith Based:** We believe a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is essential to the Christian life.

### **Statement of Intent / Program Focus**

- We provide a healing environment for girls who have Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD), those with abuse and trauma history, and/or emotional difficulty.
- We serve girls from ages ten through seventeen.
- Our priority is to help girls from the conference of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.
- The types of services provided include therapeutic home environment, equine assisted learning, individualized counseling, and Christian-based education.

## Program

Raising Hope Ranch has a program that provides transactional relationships and experiential development. There are four main areas of programming that will give residents the opportunity to speak with a counselor every week to work through and develop the psychological and emotional aspects of healing and to learn to know and trust God in a personal way; participate in sessions of equine-assisted learning where trust is developed between horse and girl and provides ample opportunity for self-understanding; learn life skills of responsibility and dependability in doing household chores; and Christian-based education.

## Christian Mentoring

*Goal:* To model and provide guidance toward a supportive transactional environment with healthy responses to daily life.

*What it looks like:* Each resident who enters our program will be treated as an individual. She will have the opportunity to live in a small group setting with full-time houseparents and two young women who actively mentor them and create a loving atmosphere of incredible support for life change. This structured relational setting is a catalyst for learning and applying principles of forgiveness, care giving, and conflict resolution.

*Summary of Belief:* At Raising Hope Ranch, we believe in deep, heart transformation for every individual who enters our doors. Only God can do this, and it is in the context of a loving community of staff who model the transforming relationship with a loving God that residents are invited into that same transforming relationship. They will be mentored through actions and activities that model grace and are in line with the truth of God's Word. This is the heart of our ministry and permeates every activity and relationship.

Raising Hope Ranch  
Conference Care Committee

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## ***Importance of Relationship in Attention Deficit Disorder***

Patrick Hanes

ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder) is the official medical term for the condition, but the older term ADD is still commonly used. ADD was named more than a century ago and has until recently been viewed as a behavioral problem. Today, rather than a behavioral problem, it is more fully recognized as primarily an attention

deficit problem, as the name implies. It is a neurological problem affecting the brain's management system.

This explanation is interpreted by many as an attempt to excuse personal actions while blaming it on biology. There are those who have legitimate concerns that this disorder may be over diagnosed, and there are even some "experts" who try to deny its existence. We must acknowledge that we are responsible for our actions, and the attempt to understand the mechanisms at work in ADD will only help us to approach this problem in a way that can support the individual in fulfilling his potential.

Behavior is what has caused our frustration with the child, disruptive behavior that seems beyond the norm. But we are focusing on the symptoms rather than the cause if we become fixated on only changing the behavior of ADD children. What we are really striving for is that the child will develop the ability to self-regulate rather than simply comply. The threat of punishment or reward can be a pressure tactic no less than physical or verbal coercion. It is not so difficult to force compliance, but there will soon be another incident demanding attention. Employing only those methods that bring about change to the immediate behavior without being properly informed of the underlying problem will be an exhausting and never-ending pursuit with these children. Teachers, in particular, are placed on the front lines of this battle because of the nature of the difficulties displayed and the demands of the school setting. Paying attention to relationship can help bring a more positive result. The teacher who can reach out to the child in a nonthreatening way and maintain a relationship from day to day is often rewarded with less disruptive behavior.

If a child is having difficulty in school, he may have ADD, or he may have a learning disability or a mood disorder. An assessment by a pediatrician or a psychiatrist is necessary for an accurate diagnosis of ADD. This diagnosis will be based on symptoms and behaviors that negatively impact academic, social, or occupational functioning. These characteristics fall into several categories of inattentive and hyperactive/impulsive symptoms. As we look at these characteristics, we see that, at times, most of us struggle with each of these, but for people with ADD, it interferes with normal daily life. Here are some of the difficulties encountered:

1. Trouble getting organized (belongings, time), priorities.
2. Regulating sleep, alertness, hard to get up.
3. Can't sit still, poor attention skills, loquaciousness (nonstop talking).
4. Difficulty with deadlines, getting started on a task, distractibility, staying with a task.
5. Writing—many ideas but unable to organize thoughts and write them down.

6. Manage emotions and actions, slow down/speed up, small frustrations become large but may be quickly forgotten.

7. Compulsive/impulsive behavior, worry, not considering consequences.

8. Excellent long-term memory/poor short term memory, difficulty holding something in mind while doing something else, incapacity to consider the future.

The above characteristics do not harmonize well with school, and many difficulties surface in that setting. ADD has no relationship to level of intelligence or ability to learn, but a busy mind may wander here and there, becoming distracted at every opportunity. There can be the ability to learn, but no interest in the subjects being taught. Even though focusing is a common problem, there are often some things that can be done where there is no problem staying tuned in. These would be areas where there is an interest. This would make it appear as if there is a problem with willpower. Most people can focus on something when they are aware that it is important or there are consequences. They can and do force themselves to pay attention. With ADD, this is not something that is under voluntary control. It is not a problem of willpower but a problem with how the brain is wired.

The disorder seems to result from impaired neurotransmitter activity in the brain. This is why medication is sometimes used to stimulate production of certain chemicals in the brain to help with the problem. This approach is successful in a fairly high percentage of cases in controlling the hyperactivity and impulsive behavior that impairs the ability to focus. ADD may be recognized in infancy, but it may not be a particular problem until a person reaches mid-school years. That is when a wide variety of tasks are required, and there is little opportunity to escape or sidestep them. As years move on and we are in more of a position to focus on our interests and skills, and more able to avoid our weaknesses, many individuals become very successful in areas that they have an interest. However, most individuals with ADD will continue to have at least some symptoms as they get older.

It is said that ADD is a heritable genetic disorder. It is suggested that environment is very important. If children are raised in homes with an ADD parent, or in a home where there is emotional turmoil, there will be an impact on brain development. It might be stated that there is an inherited predisposition rather than a genetic predetermination. Our emotional state as parents will have a tremendous influence on how that tendency plays out. As parents who try to raise our children in secure homes, we do not need more guilt. Feelings of guilt are almost inevitable for parents of troubled children. There is little value in reviewing what I may have done wrong or where the fault lies. We need more understanding of how the parent-child

relationship can aid in the child's development. Eye contact, body language, emotional fatigue, and tone of voice speak louder than words. Even infants who are incapable of deciphering the meaning of words receive purely emotional messages.

Past events are stored in our memory, as are past emotions. Psychologists who study the subject speak of more than one type of memory process. One form of memory is named "explicit memory." This is recall of events, scenes, facts, ideas, and feelings. There is another form of memory called "implicit memory." Implicit memory is responsible for a great deal of human behavior. It is an accurate record of past experiences that influence us without our knowing that we remember something. This is maybe a little like the sermon you heard last Sunday but are not able to remember what the subject was. Do you not believe that it has had an effect on you? The words are gone but the essence of the thought remains and has seeped deep into your soul.

An overly busy lifestyle can be detrimental to our emotional state and to our relationship with our child. We often ask why we are seeing so much more of this type of problem today. We are living in a very stressful and busy society. We must be available to the child. It is possible to be physically present and emotionally absent. Strengthening the security of the relationship with the child will take time and devotion. Children must understand that the parents' acceptance is not dependent on their performance—it needs to be unconditional. Changes in the circuits of the brain are possible if the conditions necessary for that development are present. True motivation is not when I do what I do because someone wants me to, or because I "should" do it, or it is forbidden. I do it because I find satisfaction in it. That is part of the development that should come with growing up. Without the safety of a secure relationship with parents, that becomes a difficult place to get to. We cannot expect a child to grow out of ADD, but we can find those areas where there is an ability and interest that can be encouraged and built upon so that they find satisfaction and self-acceptance. Build upon that.

To attain a better understanding of ADD and to gain some hope and practical insight read *Scattered Minds* by Gabor Maté.

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## ***July Special Needs Meeting***

Tim Penner

It was a blessing to attend the special needs meeting in Detroit. Everyone felt welcome, and the hosts were gracious and helpful. This adds a wonderful dimension to a

meeting like this. We thank the congregation once more. May God bless you in your service.

The Care Committee and Resource Team met a day earlier for committee meetings. The time we spent together as a team was a time of sharing and planning. We felt renewed in our commitments to care for and assist the people who are asking for help. We dare not turn our backs on those who are hurting.

The general meeting started with a session by Eric Osborn. In the morning, he addressed parenting children from hard places. In the afternoon, he spoke about the effects of FASD (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder) and strategies for dealing with children who have the disorder. The committee has heard him before but again felt content that his address is timely. It was noteworthy that most of the attendees had not been at a meeting like this before.

Thursday evening was very inspirational. The message was on being broken. Jesus came to earth and was broken for us. We come into this world broken. As we grow up, we become aware of people, and we tend to classify them as abnormal or normal. Children will verbalize their observations. Adults know it's incorrect to do so, but they notice. Who is normal? How many defects qualify people as being abnormal? If a person wears glasses, is he abnormal? If he limps, is he abnormal? If he has an obvious birth mark, it would mark him for sure as abnormal. We could go on and on. Many people appear physically sound, but what is internal is often hidden.

We use the word *abnormal*, but let's change that to *broken*. In reality, we are all broken—all of us spiritually from when we were born, and many of us physically. As time goes on, we may become broken emotionally and mentally. Is this worse than physically? Although many people are seriously broken physically, the hurts of emotionally broken people are far greater usually.

In all conditions, we need our heavenly Father, and He is the one who is the healer. Let's never forget that. And everyone who does not avail himself of the Savior who was broken for our transgressions remains broken spiritually.

When we're seriously sick physically, we go to doctors. They prescribe drugs, therapy, rest, hospitalization, surgery etc. They start us on the journey of healing. This is a blessing, and who of us has not benefited from this?

When we are emotionally broken, we seek medical

help as well. We have the privilege of going to our brethren. Sometimes, it takes a combination of medications and therapy to get us on the road to healing. We value the counsel of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the story of the Good Samaritan, the traveler on the road to Jericho was beaten up and broken. The Levite and the priest walked by. Did they wrap their robes a bit tighter around themselves as they passed by? Did they think that he was almost dead anyway? Or did they think it was not their business? The Samaritan was despised by the Jewish crowd. Why did Jesus use a Samaritan as the good example?

Christ is like the Samaritan. He has compassion. He would have stopped. He would have bound up the broken man's wounds and taken him to an inn. Jesus asked the one who questioned him, "Who then was a neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" The man answered, "He that showed mercy." Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."

All of us are on the road from "Jerusalem to Jericho." All of us are broken, some of us in more ways than one. "Thank You, God, for the Samaritans who have the grace to stop and help the broken onto the path of healing."

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#### EDITOR'S NOTE

The article below, "Soundly Based Helps," was written with the intention of giving criteria by which to prove treatments for maladies. It has not necessarily been adopted as the bottom line for the Care Committee's efforts in finding safe places, but it includes points taken into consideration. We invite you as readers to read and think about these guidelines. Are they sound criteria? Do they make sense? In your mind, are any of the points out of place?

### ***Soundly Based Helps***

Patrick Hanes

If we find the need to seek help from the world and its methodologies, we will want to recommend those with a sound foundation. We would accept that simple folk medicine may be effective. It would not be our desire to condemn or support the use of any particular alternative medicine or those approaches that lack sound scientific backing. Alternative medicine consists of a wide range of practices, products, and therapies that claim to heal and may have no acceptance in the scientific profession. Traditional practices become alternative when used outside their original setting without scientific explanation or evidence. As we would examine various

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treatments, interventions, programs, therapists, retreats, and clinics, there would be several points to consider. After all the facts are gathered, we can make a wise decision concerning support. Not all points apply to all situations. It will take time, but it would be better to have a few good recommendations rather than many that are questionable.

Methods employed. Is the program evidence based and subject to peer review? Is it published in professional journals and recognized by organizations with oversight? Read criticism as well as supporting documentation. Are the methods used consistent with our faith?

Underlying philosophy. Is the basic theory recognized, or is it a fringe approach that hints at conspiracies by mainstream professionals? Is it the idea of a single individual and practiced by a small and devoted group of practitioners? Research a few of the principal proponents (their education, reputation, recognition). Many times, these new approaches are theorized by individuals with no training, no experience, and no recognition in their field of study. This should cause caution. Is the underlying philosophy humanistic, permissive, coercive, conspiracy based, or unchristian? Does it appear to function primarily as a money-making endeavor? Can the basic philosophy work within our faith? This may be the place to mention that there is a difference between confidentiality and secretiveness.

Religious affiliation. This may be either a positive or a negative aspect. A general Christian approach is appreciated until the point is reached where we discover that our basic beliefs differ with the advocates, and our goals differ. Are there subtle doctrinal teachings of a foreign nature that give us questions?

Trendy. Some approaches are outdated while some are timeless and still on course. Some are so new that they are unproven, and yet popular. Solid answers are not quickly and easily accomplished. It must be allowed that not all problems can be corrected. Sometimes, it must be recog-

nized that mitigation and acceptance are the reasonable course. There is a never-ending supply of new ideas that hold forth sometimes fantastical claims of effectiveness.

Credentials, licensing, certification. What are all those letters after their names? Find out! Flaunting credentials, particularly when they are suspect, does not inspire confidence. Who is the licensing agency? Is educational background and certification from a legitimate and distinguished source, such as a major university or medical school? There are many organizations that offer a certificate and a title with very little in qualifying preparation, sometimes only several days. Other individuals have spent decades of study and a life dedicated to their specialized field.

Testimonials and proving a record of success. How are we assessing track records? Many times, the first item to come forth in the process of evaluation is the testimonial. In reality, clinical trials and statistical studies are the basis for substantiating results. There is little reason for not working toward that goal or, at the least, being transparent with available statistics. Sloppy record keeping, no record keeping, fear of results, no measure of effectiveness or outcome could be the reason for leaning on testimonials. Testimonials stand out primarily as a marketing and sales tool. Track record is poorly assessed based on testimonials. Testimonials are used extensively to substantiate and validate programs with their roots in pseudoscience. There are normally negative reviews that are worthy of equal consideration. Are we measuring the level of enthusiasm or keeping a score?

All of this is not to say that testimonials hold no value. Many positive reviews equal a statistic that may give credibility, or a record of success. We all know that personal recommendations count in our decision making.

Let's look at the entire spectrum of criteria with a discernment that allows for sound choices. May we never neglect turning to the Lord and recognizing that only He has no limits in his ability to heal (Isaiah 31:1).