

WHEN HUMAN HELP CROSSES
INTO GOD'S TERRITORY

THE TANGLED LINE

SACRED BOUNDARIES
IN COUNSELING AND MINISTRY
THE DANGER OF PLAYING GOD

SCOTT
MORMON



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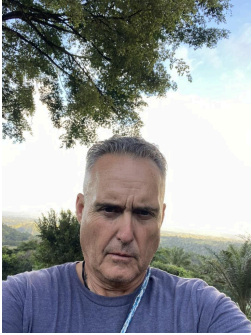
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Once trapped in addiction, prison, and deep hopelessness, everything changed when Scott encountered the living Jesus in 1988. That divine encounter didn't just save his life—it sparked a radical transformation and a lifelong mission to bring the hope of Christ to the most broken and overlooked.

Even before coming to Christ, Scott carried undeniable leadership gifts—gifts the enemy once used to influence others into darkness. But what was twisted for destruction has now been fully redeemed by God.

Today, those same gifts are used to equip servant-hearted leaders, rescue the lost, and build the Kingdom of God in some of the hardest places on earth.

Just two years after his conversion, Scott began mentoring others through the painful, beautiful journey of addiction recovery, spiritual growth, character formation, and Christ-centered leadership. Over the past 38 years, he has lived on mission—preaching the Gospel across prisons, streets, recovery centers, housing projects, and pulpits. His style of radical evangelism has remained constant: bold, Spirit-led, relational, and unbound by walls.

In 2006, Scott launched the Servant Leadership Training (SLT) School at the Georgia campus, deepening his call to develop leaders grounded not in title or ego—but in humility, sacrifice, and service. Through years of frontline ministry, he also earned a Doctorate, further sharpening his ability to teach, train, and multiply faithful workers for the harvest.

From his personal transformation, *Breaking Free Inc.* was born—a ministry that reaches the addicted, the incarcerated, the chronically homeless, and the spiritually forgotten. Through *Breaking Free*, Scott has led residential programs, planted churches, raised up missionaries, served in refugee camps and orphanages, and developed ministry leaders internationally.

Now, as he continues pouring into others, Scott is writing *Church Without Walls: 24-7 Radical Harvesting Manual*—a field-tested equipping tool drawn from nearly four decades of hands-on evangelism and discipleship. This manual is for those called to reach the streets, the margins, and the mission field just outside their front door. It's for harvesters—not spectators. Yet Scott will be the first to say: none of it is about him. The miracle is not the ministry. The miracle is Jesus.

A grateful father to four biological children, six adopted daughters, and one adopted son from Costa Rica—and now a proud grandfather of thirteen—Scott's deepest joy is watching God's faithfulness across generations. His passion remains the same: to love people back to life, lift high the name of Jesus, and keep showing up wherever hope is most needed.

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...” — Galatians 6:14

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...” — Matthew 28:19–20

Preface

Every generation of believers has faced the tension between human wisdom and divine authority. In counseling, ministry, and the helping professions, this tension becomes especially sharp. We long to help, heal, guide, and comfort—but in our eagerness, we sometimes cross unseen lines, stepping into places that belong only to God. This book was born out of watching those lines blur in real time. Whether in a counseling office, a recovery group, a pulpit, or a hospital room, I have seen men and women of faith unintentionally carry burdens that are not theirs to carry. I have seen the subtle drift from servant to savior, from guide to controller, from helper to healer. The motive is rarely malicious; most often, it springs from compassion, zeal, or even brokenness. But when humanness and deity get tangled together, the results can wound more deeply than they heal. This is not a book about abandoning counseling or ministry. It is not a rejection of training, experience, or wisdom. Rather, it is a call to humility. It is an invitation to discern the sacred boundary line between our role and God's role, and to honor that line with fear and trembling. If we are to serve others faithfully, we must learn to stay in our lane as ministers, counselors, and helpers—while pointing those we serve to the One who alone has the power to transform hearts and renew minds. May these pages stir in you both a deeper caution and a greater confidence. Caution, so that you do not take upon yourself what belongs only to God. Confidence, because when you stay within your God-given role, you can trust Him to do what only He can.

Introduction

There is a sacred mystery at the heart of helping others: God chooses to use broken, limited human beings to carry His truth and His comfort. We sit with the hurting. We listen to the wounded. We speak words of wisdom, pray prayers of faith, and walk alongside the lost. But in doing so, we enter dangerous territory. For the line between guiding and controlling, between encouraging and manipulating, between ministering and playing God, is perilously thin. Most of us don't even realize when we have crossed it. We speak with authority that was never given to us. We carry responsibility that was never ours to bear. We take God's place in the lives of those we are called to serve—not out of pride, necessarily, but often out of love, desperation, or ignorance. But Scripture is clear: “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:6–7) This truth reminds us that there are boundaries—sacred boundaries—between what we can do and what only God can do. We can plant. We can water. We can counsel, pray, encourage, and guide. But transformation? Healing of the mind? Forgiveness of sin? Restoration of a soul? Those belong solely to the Lord. This book is not meant to discourage you from helping. It is meant to equip you with discernment. To help you recognize the warning signs when you are crossing into God's territory. To give you language for the tension you feel when your humanness collides with the sacredness of God's work. And ultimately, to bring you back to a place of humility, dependence, and trust. If you are a counselor, pastor, mentor, sponsor, or servant-leader of any kind—this book is for you. If you have ever felt the pressure to fix what only God can heal—this book is for you. If you have ever wrestled with the line between wisdom and omniscience, guidance and lordship, compassion and control—this book is for you. Let us walk together into these tangled places, not with fear, but with reverence. And may we rediscover the beauty of staying in our rightful role, while trusting the God of all wisdom, all healing, and all power to do what only He can.

A Word of Caution

Before you move into these chapters, it is vital to pause and consider the heart behind this work. This is not a call to withdraw from ministry, counseling, mentorship, or any form of service. Nor is it a caution against pursuing wisdom, education, or practical experience—these are gifts from God, tools He has placed in our hands to serve His purposes. Every believer is called to love sacrificially, to encourage, to comfort, and to point others toward the hope, healing, and truth we have discovered in Christ. Service is sacred, and the impulse to help, heal, and guide is a reflection of God’s heart flowing through us.

Yet even with the purest motives, there is a profound danger: **giving out of our own strength, wisdom, or experience beyond the limits of our character in Christ.** When our outward ministry exceeds our inward maturity, we enter dangerous territory. Knowledge without depth of character can create the illusion of godliness, tempting us to speak with authority we do not truly possess, to offer solutions we cannot sustain, and to carry burdens that belong only to God.

Many faithful servants have unwittingly crossed this line. They do so not from malice, but from zeal, compassion, or even their own unhealed brokenness. They desire to help, to fix, or to bring relief—and in that desire, they assume responsibilities that God has reserved for Himself. This can manifest in subtle ways: giving advice too quickly, making decisions for others, offering “healing” from the pulpit or counseling chair, or carrying burdens that were never theirs to bear. Over time, this unintentional overreach can result in burnout, disillusionment, and even harm to those we are trying to serve.

The Scripture offers a clear reminder of the boundaries in ministry:

“I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” (1 Corinthians 3:6–7)

We can plant seeds of encouragement, water hearts with prayer, offer wisdom, guidance, and support—but transformation belongs to God alone. Forgiveness, healing of the soul, deliverance from bondage, restoration of relationships—these are divine works. They cannot be manufactured by human effort, no matter how skilled or sincere. When we forget this, we step into the dangerous illusion of saviorhood.

Practical realities we must recognize in ministry include:

1. **Boundaries protect both the servant and the served.** Overstepping can lead to dependency, resentment, or spiritual confusion. Healthy boundaries are not a

lack of love—they are an expression of it. They demonstrate that we are committed to following Christ's lead, not our own impulses.

2. **Character precedes competence.** Knowledge and skill are valuable, but without humility, self-awareness, and brokenness before God, they can mislead both the giver and the receiver. Spiritual maturity is the foundation that sustains ministry over time.
3. **Discernment is essential.** We must constantly evaluate our motives, our methods, and our emotional investments. Ask yourself: Am I serving from Christ's abundance or from my own need to feel needed? Am I guiding, or am I controlling? Am I pointing to God, or am I pointing to myself?
4. **Humility protects the sacred.** When we recognize that God alone is the healer, redeemer, and restorer, we approach ministry with reverence. We do not attempt to carry the weight of transformation ourselves; we walk alongside others, faithfully reflecting Christ's love.
5. **Sustainability requires dependence.** True ministry flows from intimacy with Christ, not from personal effort. The more we abide in Him, the more we can give without depletion. The less we rely on our own wisdom, the more He can work through us without distortion.

This caution is not a call to fear or paralysis—it is a call to wise vigilance. Boldness and courage are required in ministry, but they must be grounded in Christlike maturity. Give freely, teach boldly, pray earnestly, and counsel faithfully—but always within the depth of your character in Him. If you operate beyond this, you risk offering guidance that is incomplete, misleading, or harmful.

Reflection for the reader:

- Examine the places where your heart desires to fix, control, or overstep. Ask God to reveal hidden motives.
- Identify the areas where your character in Christ needs strengthening before you attempt to serve in those arenas.
- Commit to walking in humility, acknowledging that the outcomes of your efforts belong to God.

True ministry is not measured by how much we do, how many lives we touch, or the answers we can provide. It is measured by faithfulness: our willingness to abide in Christ, to reflect His love, to serve from our spiritual depth, and to point every soul we touch to the One who alone can transform and redeem.

As you move through the chapters of this book, receive them both as encouragement and caution. Let them guide you to love courageously, serve faithfully, and lead wisely—but always from the secure foundation of abiding in Christ. Let His life flow through you so that what is offered is not your own wisdom, but His life-giving truth, His sustaining grace, and His transformative power.

Chapter 1: The Mystery of Humanness and Deity

God made us in His image, yet we are finite.

Introduction: A Beautiful Tension

Every counselor, pastor, mentor, or helper stands in a mysterious tension: we are called to represent Christ to others, yet we are not Christ. We are made in God's image, but we are not God. This reality creates both beauty and danger. On one hand, it allows us to bring God's compassion and truth into people's brokenness. On the other, it tempts us to step into places that belong only to Him.

This tension is not new. From the beginning, humans have reached for knowledge that does not belong to us. The serpent's temptation to Eve—"You will be like God"—echoes in every attempt to "fix" someone out of our own strength. We are drawn to help, to heal, and to restore, and yet we face the challenge of doing so without overstepping.

The sacred line we must honor is simple in principle but challenging in practice: **we must work faithfully in our lane while never forgetting whose power truly transforms.** We are vessels, mirrors, and channels of God's grace—but the work of salvation, transformation, and healing belongs solely to Him.

The Limits of Human Knowledge

We often operate under the illusion that the more we study, train, and acquire knowledge, the more control we have over people's healing. We take comfort in degrees, certifications, seminars, and manuals. And while knowledge is a gift from God, it is not the source of transformation.

Deuteronomy 29:29 reminds us of this boundary: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever."

This verse draws a clear line. There are **things revealed**—truths, insights, and skills—entrusted to us to steward wisely. There are also **secret things**—the depths of the human soul, hidden pain, and the inner workings of God's Spirit—that belong solely to Him.

When we forget this, even unintentionally, we step into dangerous territory. We may begin to live as though we can uncover, control, or heal everything. Our words gain unearned authority. Our counsel becomes overbearing. And even our prayers can inadvertently take on the tone of instruction rather than intercession.

Example: A well-meaning mentor might advise someone to “forgive immediately” or “fix your marriage now,” not realizing that the heart and timing belong to God. The advice may be scripturally sound, but if delivered from overconfidence or impatience, it risks frustration, shame, or spiritual harm.

Made in His Image, Not His Equal

Being created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27) carries both dignity and responsibility. We reflect His character—love, reason, creativity, and compassion. We are designed to mirror His light and communicate His heart.

Yet reflection is not possession. A mirror can show the sun’s brilliance, but it cannot create sunlight. Similarly, we reflect Christ’s love but cannot generate His saving or healing power.

When a helper begins to believe their wisdom, experience, or strategies can save, they have crossed from reflection into imitation. This subtle shift is at the heart of idolatry: placing ourselves in the center of the story instead of pointing others to God.

Illustration: Consider a counselor who prides themselves on solving relational conflicts or “fixing” broken hearts. Their confidence grows, their voice becomes authoritative, and yet the transformation they hope for does not occur. They may inadvertently cultivate dependence, rather than point to Christ’s power to change hearts from the inside out.

The Danger of “We Don’t Know What We Don’t Know”

One of the most humbling truths in ministry is that our ignorance is far greater than our knowledge. We do not know what we do not know. Trauma, hidden sin, spiritual warfare, and God’s timing all contain mysteries that cannot be fully discerned by human insight.

Proverbs 3:5 warns: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

The moment we lean too heavily on our own understanding, we close ourselves to God's greater wisdom. Worse, we risk causing harm. Even well-meaning advice, if given without humility and discernment, can wound. Our human perspective is limited; our empathy is filtered through our own experiences. God alone can see, heal, and orchestrate transformation in the heart.

Practical Reality: Ministry is rarely a linear equation. A strategy that worked for one person may fail for another. Healing often unfolds slowly, mysteriously, and unpredictably. Accepting our limits allows us to participate faithfully without overstepping.

Practical Reflection

Consider these questions thoughtfully:

1. Where in your ministry or counseling do you feel tempted to “know more” than God has revealed?
2. Have you ever tried to fix someone out of your own strength, only to realize later you crossed into God's territory?
3. How would your ministry change if you continually reminded yourself: “I am a mirror, not the Divine light”?
4. Are there areas where pride, impatience, or anxiety are subtly driving your counsel or guidance?
5. How do you differentiate between offering guidance and attempting to control outcomes?

Journaling Prompts for Deep Reflection

- Describe a time when your desire to help exceeded your capacity. How did it affect the other person? Yourself?

- Write a list of your strengths and limitations in ministry. Pray over each one, asking God to guide how you use them.
- Reflect on moments when your advice or actions may have unintentionally assumed God's role. How could humility have changed the outcome?
- Create a short "ministry covenant": a statement committing to act as a mirror of Christ, not a substitute for Him.

Prayer for Humility and Dependence

Lord, keep me small before You. Protect me from believing that my wisdom, experience, or insight is enough to heal the brokenhearted. Remind me daily that You alone hold the secret things. Teach me to live in awe of Your mystery, to serve humbly, and to stay within the sacred boundary of my humanness. May I never confuse reflection with deity, but always point others back to the One who truly heals. Give me discernment to recognize overreach, courage to surrender outcomes to You, and patience to trust Your timing and power. Amen.

Application Exercise: Living in the Tension

1. Identify one area of your ministry where you feel the temptation to overreach.
2. Pray specifically for humility, discernment, and Christlike wisdom in that area this week.
3. Share your reflections with a trusted mentor or accountability partner.
4. Make a covenant with yourself to "mirror, not replace" Christ in that role.
5. Revisit this exercise monthly, measuring growth in humility and dependence on God.

Chapter 2: The Seduction of Knowledge

Knowledge can make us prideful (1 Cor. 8:1).

Introduction: The Subtle Drift

The pursuit of knowledge begins innocently. We study Scripture, theology, counseling methods, and human behavior to prepare ourselves for ministry, to serve faithfully, and to be responsible stewards of the calling God has placed upon our lives. Knowledge equips us to meet real needs, communicate truth, and guide people wisely.

Yet there is a subtle and dangerous drift that can take place: the more we know, the more we may begin to lean on that knowledge instead of leaning on God. Knowledge can become a false foundation. It can inflate the ego, subtly replacing dependence on the Spirit with confidence in human ability. Paul warns us directly: *“We know that ‘We all possess knowledge.’ But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.”* (1 Corinthians 8:1). Knowledge by itself inflates the ego; love humbles the heart.

At the same time, Scripture also affirms the pursuit of wisdom and understanding. Proverbs reminds us: *“The mind of the intelligent seeks knowledge”* (Proverbs 15:14). This is the paradox. Knowledge is not the enemy; in fact, it is a gift from God, a tool for growth, and a necessity for wise living. The danger lies in the invisible line we often cross—where the pursuit of knowledge ceases to serve humility and begins to serve pride. When knowledge is untethered from humility, brokenness, and Christlike dependence, it seduces us into believing we are more capable, more powerful, even more godlike than we really are.

This tension is one of the greatest challenges in ministry. We are called to seek knowledge diligently, yet we are warned never to let it become our trust. We are called to grow in wisdom, yet never to boast in it. We are called to study deeply, yet never to forget that it is love—and love alone—that builds up the Church. Knowledge may open doors, but only Christlike character can keep them open without collapsing under the weight of pride.

The Illusion of Control

There is a strong temptation to think: “If I just learn enough, if I just apply the right method, I can fix this person.” On the surface, this seems compassionate, but underneath it is pride—a subtle assumption that healing originates in the counselor rather than the Spirit of God.

This mindset reduces people to problems to be solved, wounds to be repaired, or behaviors to be corrected. Humanity becomes a project rather than a soul. When people sense they are being treated as projects, they often withdraw, resist, or become dependent on our expertise. True healing is hindered.

Illustration: Imagine a counselor who knows every technique for anxiety, depression, or relational conflict. They may speak with confidence, offering exercises, advice, and step-by-step solutions. Yet the deeper wounds—the shame, fear, grief, or brokenness of the heart—cannot be fully touched by technique alone. Only the Spirit of God can reach those depths.

Human Wisdom vs. God’s Wisdom

The Bible constantly contrasts human wisdom with divine wisdom: “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.” (1 Corinthians 3:19)

“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Human wisdom—our degrees, knowledge, strategies, and insight—cannot penetrate the deepest parts of the soul. At best, it can teach, counsel, and provide temporary relief. At worst, it can create pride, dependency, or a false sense of authority.

The seduction of knowledge lies in the illusion of control. It subtly shifts focus from the power of Christ to the brilliance of man. We may impress others, gain admiration, or feel competent—but true transformation requires surrender, reliance on God, and recognition of our limits.

The Danger of Identity in Knowledge

For many in ministry or counseling, identity becomes entwined with expertise. We begin to define ourselves by what we know: “I am the one with the answers,” “I am the trained expert,” “I am the seasoned counselor.”

This is spiritually dangerous because when our identity rests in knowledge:

- Humility is easily lost.
- Correction feels like an attack.
- Pride becomes the silent companion of every insight.

Proverbs 16:18 reminds us: “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.” When identity is wrapped in knowledge, even small failures or challenges can cause frustration, defensiveness, and spiritual imbalance.

Example: A ministry leader may feel threatened when a volunteer or colleague questions their approach. Rather than listening, they react defensively. The subtle shift from servant to ego-driven leader has occurred—not because of malice, but because knowledge became the foundation of identity.

Knowledge Without Love

Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians cut to the heart of ministry:

“Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”

Knowledge alone produces arrogance; knowledge infused with love produces life. The true test of knowledge is not what we know, but how we use it. Does it draw people closer to Christ? Does it build up or tear down? Does it empower and encourage, or does it impress, create dependency, and control?

We are called to wield knowledge like a servant’s towel: a tool to serve others, not a weapon to prove our competence. Knowledge without love risks creating a ministry of ego rather than a ministry of Christ.

Reflection: Ask yourself, “Do my words and advice draw others closer to Christ or closer to me?”

Practical Reflections

1. Have you ever caught yourself trying to “fix” someone with knowledge instead of pointing them to Jesus?
2. In what ways has your training or education strengthened your ministry? In what ways has it tempted you to rely on yourself instead of God?
3. Do you notice pride or defensiveness arising when your expertise is questioned?
4. How can you remind yourself daily that love—not knowledge—is the true measure of faithful ministry?

Journaling Prompts for Humility and Discernment

- Reflect on a moment when your knowledge made you feel more powerful than God. What were the consequences?
- List areas where pride or identity may have crept in through your expertise. Pray over each one.
- Write a short statement affirming that your knowledge is a tool, not a measure of worth.
- Describe a situation where love and humility transformed a counseling or ministry encounter more than knowledge alone.

Prayer for Wisdom and Love

Father, thank You for the gift of knowledge. Forgive me when I have leaned on my understanding instead of Yours. Protect me from the pride that knowledge can bring, and anchor me in love. Teach me to serve faithfully, relying on Your Spirit rather than my intellect. Remind me that only Your wisdom saves, only Your Spirit heals, and only Your truth sets people free. May I be a vessel of Christ’s love, not a display of my own competence. Keep me humble, teachable, and Christ-centered in all I do. Amen.

Application Exercise: Guarding Against the Seduction of Knowledge

1. Identify one area of your expertise where pride could subtly influence your ministry.
2. Pray daily for humility and dependence on God in that area.
3. Share a ministry challenge with a mentor or accountability partner to gain perspective.
4. Intentionally practice stepping back in situations where knowledge tempts you to control outcomes.
5. Reflect weekly on whether your words, actions, and advice draw people to Christ or to you.

Chapter 3: Sacred Territory – The Mind and Soul

“For the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought.” (1 Chronicles 28:9)

Introduction: Entering the Holy of Holies

When we minister to the mind and soul of another person, we are stepping onto sacred ground. This is not a surface-level encounter. We are not merely addressing behaviors, coping strategies, or habits; we are entering the very places where identity, pain, shame, and destiny dwell.

Scripture affirms the sacredness of the inner life: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.” (Psalm 139:23)

Notice the psalmist does not ask another human being to do this. Only God possesses the authority and capacity to fully know the depths of the human soul. As helpers, we are invited into these depths, but we are always limited by our humanity. The trust placed in us is profound, sacred, and not to be taken lightly.

When a person shares their fears, secrets, or inner thoughts, they are giving us a glimpse of the inner sanctuary of their life. This is a holy invitation. Every word, every gesture, every act of listening is combined with responsibility. And that responsibility is never ours to claim as power; it is a stewardship under God’s authority.

Why the Mind and Soul Are Sacred

The human mind is far more than neurons firing or memories stored. It is the arena where spiritual battles are fought:

“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.” (2 Corinthians 10:4)

It is the place where lies from the enemy are sown and where God’s truth must take root. Every thought, every belief, every self-image is a potential battlefield. The mind and soul are holy ground, not neutral territory.

When we enter someone's inner world through counseling, mentorship, or pastoral care, we are walking where God Himself is already at work. This is why the line between humanness and deity can easily blur. We are invited guests in a realm that belongs to God alone.

Example: Consider a teenager confiding about anxiety and shame over family struggles. We may feel compelled to offer solutions or insight—but God alone can remove the guilt, heal the shame, and restore identity. Our role is to listen, pray, and point them to Christ, not to “solve” the heart.

The Limits of Psychology and Psychiatry

Modern psychological and psychiatric disciplines provide valuable tools for understanding trauma, behavior, and mental health. They can illuminate patterns, identify disorders, and guide supportive interventions.

But even these tools have limits. Detached from God, they cannot reach the deepest levels of the soul:

- **Psychology** can name wounds but cannot fully heal them.
- **Psychiatry** can medicate pain but cannot restore identity.
- **Human wisdom** can counsel coping but cannot create new life.

Jeremiah warns us: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind.” (Jeremiah 17:9–10)

If we cannot fully understand our own hearts, how could we assume mastery over another's without God?

Only God Can Heal at the Deepest Level

When we forget the sacredness of the mind and soul, we fall into the temptation of playing God. We may attempt to diagnose, advise, and even manipulate outcomes—but deep transformation is the work of God alone.

Only God can:

- Remove guilt that paralyzes.
- Heal shame that distorts identity.
- Restore a sense of purpose and calling.
- Transform thoughts, renew the mind, and reorder desires.

Romans 12:2 reminds us: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Notice the transformation is passive on our part—it is God who renews. Helpers can encourage, pray, guide, and support, but we cannot recreate what only God can.

Reflection: True ministry involves partnering with God in His work, not substituting our understanding or effort for His.

The Temptation of Overstepping

When we sit across from someone in pain, temptation is constant. Out of compassion, we may try to carry what only God can bear. Out of confidence, we may offer solutions that presume full understanding. Out of pride, we may assume our knowledge and experience are sufficient.

This is sacred territory. Just as priests in the Old Testament approached the Holy of Holies with fear and trembling, so too must we enter another person’s mind and soul with:

- Humility
- Reverence
- Dependence on God
- Prayerful discernment

Illustration: A pastor may counsel a grieving widow. Though they may offer guidance, empathy, and Scripture, only God can knit her heart together, bring comfort that

surpasses understanding, and restore hope. Our role is to remain faithful in the small things—listening, praying, and pointing her to God.

Practical Reflections

1. Do I approach ministry to the mind and soul with reverence, as if stepping onto holy ground?
2. Where might I be tempted to overstep into God's work rather than remain a vessel of His grace?
3. How often do I rely on my understanding instead of praying for God's wisdom in sacred conversations?
4. In what ways can I cultivate a posture of awe before the human soul as God sees it?

Journaling Prompts for Sacred Ministry

- Reflect on a time when you assumed authority over another's thoughts or feelings. What was the outcome?
- Write about a moment when God used your humility to minister effectively. What lessons can you apply going forward?
- List ways you can remind yourself daily that you are a vessel, not the Owner of someone's heart.
- Consider your own mind and soul. In what areas do you need God's searchlight? How can your personal submission to God's authority improve your ministry?

Prayer for Reverence and Humility

Lord, remind me that every soul I encounter belongs to You. Forgive me for the times I have assumed authority that is Yours alone. Teach me to enter sacred conversations with humility, reverence, and dependence on Your Spirit. Help me to

point people to You—the true Healer—while I remain simply a vessel in Your hands. Keep me small so that You may be seen as great. Teach me to honor the mind and soul of every person I serve as holy ground. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Application Exercise: Walking in Sacred Awareness

1. Identify one ministry or counseling situation this week where you will consciously step onto sacred ground with reverence.
2. Begin the encounter with prayer, acknowledging your limitations and God’s authority.
3. Listen more than you speak. Resist the urge to fix, correct, or analyze beyond what God calls you to do.
4. After the encounter, journal about what God revealed through the experience and how you stayed in your God-given role.
5. Evaluate: Did your actions point the individual to Christ? Did you maintain humility and reverence?

Special Note: Dependency and the Mirror of Our Own Wholeness

In years of ministry, I have discovered a sobering truth: the degree to which we create dependency in those we serve often mirrors the level of dependency—or lack thereof—in our own relationship with God. When we fail to channel people back to Christ and instead try to become their answer, we subtly assume the role of a “little god” in their lives. This is not only unsafe for them but also reveals something about us. God came to restore three primary relationships—our relationship with Him, our relationship with others, and our relationship with ourselves. Whenever we overstep into control, fixing, or rescuing, it usually signals brokenness in one or more of these areas within us. We may even hide behind ministry, pouring into others as a way to elevate ourselves or avoid our own need for healing. At *Breaking Free Ministries*, we believe this truth is a diagnostic tool as much as it is a warning: how we minister to others reflects the current health of our own walk with God. May this awareness keep us humble, keep us dependent, and keep us pointing people back to the only true Savior

Chapter 4: The Wounded Helper

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Introduction: Ministry Through Broken Vessels

Every helper—whether counselor, pastor, sponsor, mentor, or friend—steps into ministry with a history. None of us begins with a blank slate. We bring our stories, our scars, our failures, our fears, and the lessons learned from our own struggles. Some of those wounds are healed, some are in process, and some remain tender.

This reality does not disqualify us from being used by God. In fact, it is precisely why He can use us. Paul reminds us:

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” (2 Corinthians 4:7)

We are cracked jars, fragile and imperfect. And yet God chooses to pour His treasure into us. He does not wait until we are flawless before entrusting us with His work. He ministers **through** our weakness, not in spite of it.

But this truth carries both beauty and danger. Our wounds can either become a place where God’s grace shines most brightly, or they can become the very cracks through which we attempt to play God—covering our pain, overstepping our role, and trying to heal others in order to prove our own worth.

Our Brokenness Shapes How We Minister

Most helpers underestimate how much their unhealed wounds shape the way they serve. Every story we carry influences how we listen, counsel, and respond.

- A counselor who grew up without affirmation may **overcompensate with excessive affirmation**, unable to speak hard truths.

- A pastor carrying unhealed shame may **avoid confronting sin**, for fear that exposing others will bring his own guilt into the light.
- A mentor who was abandoned may **cling too tightly** to those she helps, blurring boundaries because she cannot bear the thought of being left again.

Unhealed wounds do not vanish with time. They surface in the patterns of how we relate to others. Left unchecked, they distort ministry. Instead of pointing people to Christ, we may end up pointing them to ourselves—seeking validation, control, or even identity in their healing.

The Temptation to Overstep

Wounded helpers are especially vulnerable to overstepping. This does not usually come from arrogance but from insecurity, fear, or misplaced identity.

- **Covering insecurity:** When we feel inadequate, we mask it by speaking with authority or giving advice beyond our capacity.
- **Fixing to feel valuable:** If our worth is tied to results, we pressure others for quick outcomes so we can feel successful.
- **Rescuing to avoid our pain:** Sometimes we throw ourselves into saving others so we don't have to face our own wounds.

Each of these is dangerous because it shifts ministry away from Christ and toward ourselves. We risk becoming pseudo-saviors, unintentionally assuming God's role in someone's life.

Why God Works Through Weakness

Paul's testimony of the thorn in the flesh reminds us: "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" (2 Corinthians 12:9)

God did not remove Paul's weakness; He transformed it into a platform for grace. Likewise, God is not searching for flawless healers—He seeks surrendered ones.

Our weakness, when offered to Christ, becomes the doorway for His power. When we admit, “I don’t have the answers, but I can walk with you to the One who does,” we redirect the gaze of those we serve away from us and toward Him.

This posture requires humility. Pride hides wounds; humility exposes them to God’s healing light. Pride pretends we are whole; humility acknowledges we are in process. Pride leads people to depend on us; humility points them to depend on Christ.

Practical Safeguards for Wounded Helpers

To serve faithfully as wounded helpers, we must adopt intentional practices that keep us grounded in Christ and honest about our weakness:

1. Ongoing Self-Examination

- Ask yourself regularly: Am I ministering out of God’s strength or my own insecurity?
- Examine your motives: Am I helping to be seen as wise, or am I truly serving to glorify Christ?

2. Confession and Accountability

- Share your struggles with trusted mentors, peers, or spiritual directors.
- Remember: wounds hidden in secrecy grow in power; wounds brought into the light lose their grip.

3. Daily Surrender

- Begin each day by naming your weaknesses before God.
- Pray: “Lord, redeem my pain. Let my wounds be a channel for Your grace rather than a hindrance to Your work.”

4. Keep the Focus on Christ

- Remind yourself: I am not the healer—I am the signpost pointing to the Healer.

- Resist the temptation to measure ministry by outcomes. Faithfulness is measured by obedience, not results.

A Story of Contrast

Two counselors sit with the same client.

- The first counselor, insecure about his own worth, dominates the conversation. He provides constant answers, prescribes steps, and attempts to fix every problem. The client leaves impressed by the counselor's confidence—but increasingly dependent on him rather than on Christ.
- The second counselor, aware of her own brokenness, listens deeply. She resists the urge to control, prays silently for wisdom, and gently points the client to God's Word and Christ's sufficiency. The client leaves not impressed with the counselor but drawn closer to the Lord.

The difference is not education, skill, or intelligence. It is posture. One minister from brokenness denied; the other from brokenness surrendered.

Reflection Questions

1. In what ways might my unhealed wounds be influencing how I help others?
2. Do I feel the need to "rescue" people in order to feel valuable?
3. Am I willing to let my weakness be visible so Christ's power can shine through?
4. How do I respond when the ministry does not produce quick or visible results? Do I grow discouraged—or do I rest in God's sovereignty?

Journaling Prompts for the Wounded Helper

- Write about a time when your brokenness got in the way of ministry. What happened? What did you learn?

- Identify one personal wound that still feels tender. How might that wound shape the way you serve others if left unhealed?
- Reflect on Paul's words: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). What does this look like in your own life?
- Journal a prayer of surrender, inviting God to use your weakness as a channel for His grace.

Prayer of Surrender

Father, I confess that I am a wounded helper. I carry scars, fears, and inadequacies that I sometimes try to hide or cover with my own strength. But You see me as I am. Teach me to bring my weakness into the light of Your presence, that Your power may rest upon me. Guard me from rescuing others to avoid my own pain or from ministering out of insecurity. Let my life be a cracked jar of clay, where Your light shines through the broken places. May every soul I serve be drawn not to me, but to You—the true Healer, Redeemer, and Restorer. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Application Exercise: Practicing Ministry from Weakness

1. **This Week's Awareness:** Before each ministry encounter, pause to pray: "Lord, remind me I am a vessel, not the source. Let Your power flow through my weakness."
2. **Post-Ministry Reflection:** After the encounter, ask yourself: Did I point this person toward Christ—or toward myself?
3. **Naming Your Thorn:** Identify one personal weakness or wound you often try to hide. Share it with a trusted mentor or accountability partner this week.
4. **Reframing Weakness:** Write down how that very weakness might actually become a channel for God's strength in ministry.
5. **Gratitude in Weakness:** Each evening, thank God for at least one moment where your limits reminded you of your need for Him

Chapter 5: Playing God Without Knowing It

“Who has known the mind of the Lord, so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16)

Introduction: The Invisible Drift

Most helpers never intend to “play God.” Rarely does a pastor, counselor, mentor, or friend consciously decide to assume divine authority. Instead, it happens gradually, quietly, and almost imperceptibly. Over time, the weight of caring for others and the longing to see change can shift us into roles that belong only to God.

This drift often begins with noble motives. We want to help people grow. We long to see broken families restored, addictions broken, and lives transformed. We feel a deep responsibility toward those entrusted to us. But caring too much—without healthy boundaries and humility—combined with our own unhealed wounds, can cause us to carry burdens that were never ours to carry.

Slowly, without realizing it, we begin making decisions that are not ours to make. We take responsibility for outcomes we cannot control. We feel indispensable, as if the person’s success or failure rests entirely on our shoulders. In these moments, we may not openly declare ourselves God—but in practice, we begin to act as though we are.

This is not because we are evil. It is because we are human. Yet when helpers unconsciously slip into God’s role, they risk harming both themselves and those they serve. The invisible drift toward “playing God” robs us of joy, places crushing weight on our souls, and subtly misdirects people away from Christ.

Signs We May Be Stepping Into God’s Position

The line between healthy helping and unhealthy control is often thin. Recognizing the signs is the first step to returning to our rightful place. Here are indicators that we may be crossing into God’s territory:

- **Feeling indispensable** – Believing “They cannot make it without me.” This mindset binds people to us rather than to Christ.
- **Owning outcomes** – Carrying either guilt if someone stumbles or pride if they succeed, as if their transformation depends on us.
- **Controlling decisions** – Steering choices in relationships, finances, or spiritual steps instead of teaching people to discern God’s will.
- **Withholding truth** – Avoiding hard conversations or necessary confrontation because we fear losing their dependence on us.
- **Neglecting prayer** – Leaning on our wisdom, strategies, and words rather than seeking God’s guidance and power.

Each of these signals a dangerous shift—from being a vessel God uses to being perceived as the source of wisdom, healing, or direction.

Guiding vs. Controlling

The difference between guidance and control may appear subtle, but the outcomes are worlds apart.

- **Guidance** is walking beside someone, shining light on the path, asking reflective questions, and pointing them to Christ. It respects the person’s freedom and God’s sovereignty.
- **Control** assumes responsibility for someone’s growth, dictates decisions, and tries to orchestrate outcomes. It fosters dependence on us rather than dependence on the Lord.

Guidance produces freedom—helping others stand on their own faith. Control produces bondage—tying people’s spiritual survival to our presence. When people depend more on us than on Christ, we have unknowingly stepped into a role that belongs only to Him.

Examples of Ministry Overreach

These scenarios show how easily a helper can slip into God’s place:

- **The over-directive mentor** – Instead of equipping someone to hear God’s voice, they decide which job, school, or relationship is “God’s will” for the person.
- **The overprotective counselor** – Afraid of seeing their client struggle, they rush to solve every problem, not allowing space for growth, perseverance, and God’s refining work.
- **The insecure pastor** – Discourages members from seeking wisdom outside of his counsel, fearing loss of control, and inadvertently making himself the mediator instead of Christ.

On the surface, these actions may appear caring, but beneath them lies misplaced authority. They elevate the helper to a throne only God can sit on.

Why This Happens

It is important to understand the deeper heart motives that lead helpers into God’s territory.

- **Pride disguised as love** – We tell ourselves we are simply “caring deeply,” but beneath it, we crave importance and affirmation.
- **Fear of failure** – If someone does not change, we feel exposed as ineffective, so we push harder to ensure results.
- **Insecurity** – Our identity becomes tied to being needed, so we fear letting go.
- **Impatience** – God’s timeline feels painfully slow, so we try to speed up the process through our own intervention.

Each of these reveals a lack of trust—not in our intentions, but in the Spirit’s ability to work in His time and His way.

God’s Role vs. Our Role

One of the most freeing truths in ministry is this: **God never asked us to do His job.**

- **God's Role** – Convicting hearts, granting repentance, transforming lives, healing wounds, breaking chains, and bringing about lasting change.
- **Our Role** – Offering presence, encouragement, prayer, wise counsel, truth spoken in love, and Christlike example.

When we confuse these roles, two dangers emerge. First, the person we help may build their foundation on us instead of Christ. Second, we carry a weight we were never meant to bear, leading to exhaustion and burnout.

The Call Back to Dependence

The good news is that God has already made provision for our tendency to drift. He calls us not to perfection, but to humility and dependence. The cross reminds us daily that we are not saviors—only Christ is.

We do not have to carry outcomes. We do not have to manufacture transformation. We are not responsible for producing fruit—that is the work of the Spirit. Our calling is to faithfully plant seeds, water them with prayer, and trust God for the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6–7).

When we embrace our limits, we step into freedom. Ministry becomes lighter. We rediscover joy. And those we serve are drawn, not to our wisdom, but to Christ's sufficiency.

True ministry is not about fixing people but pointing people. Not about being the solution, but being a signpost. The more we decrease, the more Christ increases (John 3:30).

Reflection Questions

1. Do I sometimes feel like someone cannot succeed without me?
2. Do I carry pride when people change—or shame when they don't?
3. Am I controlling decisions instead of teaching people to seek God's wisdom?

4. Where have I neglected prayer, leaning on my own wisdom instead of God's?
5. How might releasing control bring freedom both to me and those I serve?

Prayer

Lord, forgive me for the times I step into Your role without realizing it. Forgive me for carrying burdens You never asked me to bear, and for trying to produce results that only Your Spirit can bring. I confess my pride, my fear, my insecurity, and my impatience.

Teach me again to trust Your timing and Your power. Keep me humble so that I guide without controlling, love without possessing, and point people to You instead of myself. Let my presence bring freedom, not dependence, and may my weakness continually testify to Your sufficiency.

I release every outcome, every burden, and every person into Your hands, knowing You alone are Savior, Healer, and Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Chapter 6: Sacred Boundaries in Ministry

“What belongs to God alone: forgiveness, transformation, deep healing. What belongs to us: compassion, presence, encouragement, pointing people to Christ.”

The Weight of Ministry Without Boundaries

When God calls us to walk with the broken, He entrusts us with a sacred task. There is great privilege in sitting with hurting people, praying with them, speaking God’s Word over them, and witnessing His Spirit bring hope where despair once reigned. But with this privilege comes a very real danger—the danger of **crossing sacred boundaries**.

One of the greatest temptations in counseling, discipleship, or pastoral care is to take on responsibilities that belong only to God. This happens subtly. At first, it looks like compassion: staying up late to carry someone’s burdens, rushing in to fix what is broken, giving advice with urgency because we long for their freedom. But somewhere along the way, our role shifts. We stop being a companion and begin acting like a savior.

Without realizing it, we may assume that we can change someone’s heart, lift their guilt, or heal their wounds. When this happens, we are not just overstepping—we are trespassing on holy ground. We are stepping into the sacred space reserved for God alone.

This is not simply unwise; it is spiritually dangerous. For the person we are helping, it can foster unhealthy dependence. For us, it can lead to exhaustion, pride, and ultimately burnout. Most importantly, it misrepresents the gospel. Instead of pointing people to Christ, we place ourselves at the center of the story.

The moment we attempt to do God’s work for Him, we fall into subtle idolatry. We may not say it aloud, but in practice we attempt to sit on His throne. And when we do, both we and those we serve will suffer the consequences.

What Belongs to God Alone

Scripture clearly marks out areas of life that belong exclusively to the Lord. These are sacred boundaries that must never be crossed.

- **Forgiveness**

Only God has the authority to forgive sins. As much as we may extend forgiveness personally or proclaim God's forgiveness to others, the actual cleansing of guilt belongs to Christ alone. The Pharisees rightly asked in Mark 2:7, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" The cross and resurrection sealed this truth: forgiveness flows only from the blood of Jesus (Ephesians 1:7).

- **Transformation**

No matter how persuasive we are, we cannot change the human heart. We can teach, exhort, encourage, and even challenge, but turning a heart of stone into a heart of flesh is the Spirit's work alone (Ezekiel 36:26). Paul makes this clear: "Neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:7).

- **Deep Healing**

We may comfort wounds, apply biblical wisdom, or walk with people through trauma, but ultimate healing belongs to Christ—the Great Physician. Isaiah 53:5 reminds us, "By His wounds we are healed." When we try to carry this role ourselves, we take on a weight that only the cross could bear.

When we respect these boundaries, we remain aligned with God's design. When we cross them, we risk harming those we serve and crushing ourselves beneath an unbearable burden.

What Belongs to Us

Though we are not the Savior, God has given us a profound calling. He does not ask us to do His work but to faithfully represent Him as vessels of His love and truth.

- **Compassion** – To weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice (Romans 12:15). Compassion means entering into someone's pain without needing to fix it immediately. It means carrying burdens with others (Galatians 6:2) while pointing them toward the ultimate Burden-Bearer (Matthew 11:28).
- **Presence** – Sometimes the holiest ministry we offer is simply being there. Like Job's friends—before they opened their mouths—we can sit in silence, hold

space, and embody the reality that God has not abandoned the broken. Presence says, “You are not alone.”

- **Encouragement** – When despair whispers lies, encouragement reminds people of truth. “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Encouragement is not false optimism—it is anchoring others in the promises of God when they cannot see them for themselves.
- **Pointing People to Christ** – At the core of all ministry is this: we are signposts, not saviors. Our greatest gift is not solutions but direction. We exist to point people toward the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).

When we faithfully walk in these callings, we release people from dependence on us and direct them toward Christ’s sufficiency.

Setting Boundaries With Humility

Healthy boundaries are not about protecting ourselves from inconvenience—they are about **honoring God’s rightful place**. Boundaries are a declaration of humility: “I am not the Messiah, and I refuse to pretend to be.”

This posture requires courage. It means being willing to say:

- “I don’t have all the answers.”
- “I cannot carry this weight for you.”
- “I can walk beside you, but the real work is between you and God.”

When we draw these lines with humility, people learn not to lean on us as their savior but to look to Christ as their Deliverer.

When Boundaries Are Crossed

History and experience both testify to the damage caused when boundaries blur in ministry:

- **Leaders burning out** because they tried to carry burdens beyond their capacity. Exhaustion, cynicism, and even moral failure often follow.
- **People growing dependent** on their counselor or pastor rather than learning to stand on Christ. This stunts spiritual maturity and creates an unhealthy attachment.
- **Helpers shifting from compassion to control**, dictating choices and rushing outcomes rather than trusting God's timing.

Jesus' words echo across these situations: "Apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Ministry without boundaries inevitably collapses under its own weight.

The Beauty of Staying in Our Lane

Sacred boundaries are not limitations—they are liberations. They free us from the crushing expectation of being a savior and allow us to fully embrace our role as servants.

When we stay in our lane:

- **People look to Christ, not us.** They leave conversations with a greater dependence on Him, not admiration for us.
- **We walk in peace, not pressure.** Ministry becomes sustainable and joyful because the results rest in God's hands.
- **The gospel shines brighter.** Our weakness highlights His power, our humility exalts His glory, and our boundaries magnify His sufficiency.

Boundaries are beautiful because they keep the cross at the center and prevent us from replacing Christ with ourselves.

Reflection Questions

1. Have I ever felt pressured to “fix” someone in my own strength? What was the outcome?
2. In what areas of my ministry or relationships do I need to release control back to God?
3. How might I practice compassion and presence without stepping into God’s role as healer or savior?
4. Do I believe that Christ’s Spirit is truly enough for the people I serve—or do I act as if I must be?

Prayer

Father, teach me the sacredness of boundaries. Forgive me for the times I have stepped into Your place, even when my intentions were good. Protect me from the pride that makes me feel indispensable and from the fear that drives me to carry what You alone can bear.

Help me walk in humility—carrying only what You have assigned to me and surrendering the rest into Your hands. May I be faithful in compassion, steadfast in presence, bold in encouragement, and consistent in pointing others to Christ.

Keep me free from burnout, from pride, and from the subtle temptation to play Savior. Let me find rest in knowing You alone are the Healer, Redeemer, and Lord. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Chapter 7: Walking in Dependence

“Daily surrender for the counselor/helper. Listening to the Spirit instead of leaning on self. The beauty of being God’s vessel, not His replacement.”

Dependence Is Not Weakness—It’s Strength

The world celebrates independence. From childhood we are trained to “stand on our own two feet,” to solve problems without help, to prove our worth by how little we need others. Self-sufficiency is praised as maturity; independence is viewed as strength.

But the kingdom of God flips this script. In God’s kingdom, true strength is found not in independence but in dependence—specifically, dependence on Christ. To the natural mind, dependence sounds like weakness. But in reality, it is the only posture strong enough to sustain us in life and ministry.

Jesus Himself modeled this perfectly. He said: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing” (John 5:19, NIV).

Think about that. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, the One through whom all creation was made, refused to walk independently. He humbled Himself to the point of saying He could do nothing apart from His Father.

If Jesus lived this way, how much more must we? If He—the perfect Son—depended daily on His Father, how can we dare to walk in self-reliance?

Dependence is not laziness. It is not passivity. It does not mean shrugging responsibility or sitting idly by. Dependence is active trust. It is the daily choice to surrender control, to seek God’s wisdom above our own, to wait on His timing instead of forcing our agenda. It is the humble confession: “Lord, I am not enough—but You are.”

The Daily Surrender of the Helper

For those who serve in ministry, counseling, or any kind of soul-care, dependence on God is not a luxury—it is survival. Each day we are entrusted with the sacred burden of stepping into broken stories, listening to deep wounds, and walking alongside complicated struggles. The temptation is to rely on our training, instincts, or even natural

charisma. And while those things may help for a moment, they cannot carry the weight of ministry for long.

When we drift into self-reliance, three dangers arise:

1. **Burnout** – Because we carry what only God was meant to carry.
2. **Pride** – Because we start believing our own wisdom or gifting is enough.
3. **Manipulation** – Because we try to engineer outcomes instead of trusting God to work in His timing.

The antidote to all three is daily surrender. Not once in a lifetime, not once in a season—but every single day.

Daily surrender looks like:

- **Starting with prayer** – “Lord, I don’t know what today will bring, but I know You do. Lead me.”
- **Admitting limitations** – “I don’t have all the answers, and I don’t need to. You are enough.”
- **Leaning on God’s Word** – Refusing to treat Scripture as a supplement or a backup plan, but as the living foundation of counsel and encouragement.
- **Returning to the cross** – Reminding ourselves that we are not saviors. There is only one Savior, and His name is Jesus.

Surrender is not a posture of weakness—it is the only way to serve in a strength that does not run dry.

Listening to the Spirit

One of the greatest treasures God has given His people is the indwelling Holy Spirit. He is not merely an idea or a distant power—He is the Counselor, the Guide, the Comforter, the very presence of God within us.

Jesus promised His disciples: “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26, NIV).

If this is true, then listening to the Spirit is not optional—it is essential.

But here is the tension: we often lean more heavily on methods, strategies, and systems than on the Spirit Himself. We prepare outlines, memorize techniques, and sharpen skills—and none of those are bad. In fact, they can be good gifts. But when they drown out the Spirit’s whisper, they become dangerous substitutes.

Listening to the Spirit may look like:

- Pausing in a conversation to pray silently, “Lord, give me wisdom right now.”
- Allowing silence in a counseling session instead of rushing to fill it with words.
- Redirecting a conversation when God nudges us, even if it disrupts our carefully planned approach.
- Asking questions led by the Spirit rather than offering quick answers from our own assumptions.

Paul reminded the Galatians: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25, NIV).

This image is powerful. To keep in step means the Spirit sets the pace and direction—we follow. He does not race ahead, nor does He lag behind. Our job is not to lead the Spirit but to follow Him with trust and attentiveness.

Vessel, Not Replacement

Perhaps the most freeing truth in all of ministry is this: **we are vessels, not replacements.**

Paul captured this with stunning clarity in 2 Corinthians 4:7: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

We are clay jars—ordinary, fragile, easily cracked. But within us is an extraordinary treasure: the presence of Christ. And it is precisely through our cracks, our weaknesses, and our limitations that His glory shines most clearly.

When we forget this truth, we start trying to be savior, healer, or redeemer. But God never asked us to be those things. He asked us to be vessels. He is the treasure. He is the power. We are the clay.

Dependence keeps us small, and in keeping us small, it makes space for Christ to be seen as great.

The Freedom of Dependence

Walking in dependence is not bondage—it is freedom.

- **Freedom from outcomes** – Dependence teaches us that results belong to God. Success is not measured in numbers, speed, or visible change, but in faithfulness. Our job is obedience; God's job is transformation.
- **Freedom from perfectionism** – We don't have to get everything right or say everything flawlessly. God is big enough to work through our stumbles.
- **Freedom from comparison** – Dependence protects us from measuring ourselves against others. When the power is God's, there's no need to compete.
- **Freedom to worship** – Dependence transforms ministry from performance into worship. Every act of service becomes an offering. Every conversation becomes holy ground.

Dependence takes the crushing weight off our shoulders and lays it on the One who has already carried the cross.

Reflection Questions

1. Do I tend to rely more on my own training, personality, or gifting than on the Spirit's leading?

2. How do I usually begin my day—rushed and self-focused, or quieted before the Lord in prayer?
3. What are the warning signs in my life that I am drifting into self-reliance?
4. Where is God asking me to pause, slow down, and listen more attentively to His voice?
5. In what ways has God shown me that my weakness is actually the place His strength shines brightest?

Journaling Prompts

- Write a prayer of surrender for your current season of ministry. Name specific areas where you struggle to let go of control.
- Reflect on a time when you leaned on your own wisdom instead of the Spirit. What was the outcome? What would dependence have looked like?
- Describe what it feels like to be a “jar of clay” carrying the treasure of Christ. Where do you see His light shining through your cracks?
- Write out a declaration of dependence: a statement you can return to when tempted toward self-reliance.

Prayer

Father, Teach me the beauty of dependence. Forgive me for the times I have leaned on my own strength, wisdom, or personality instead of on You. Remind me daily that I am a vessel, not a savior. Keep me small, Lord, that Christ may be seen as great.

Fill me afresh with Your Spirit. Tune my ears to hear His whispers, and give me courage to obey even when it disrupts my plans. Protect me from the pride of self-reliance and from the despair of burnout. May every word I speak and every act of service I offer point others to Jesus, the true Healer and Redeemer.

I surrender again today. My life, my ministry, my words, my actions—all are Yours. Use me as You will. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Chapter 8: Untangling the Line

“How to keep humanness and deity in right order. Practical safeguards for ministry and counseling. Closing encouragement: we don’t have to be God—we only point to Him.”

The Line Between Us and God

Every counselor, minister, or helper lives with a sacred tension: Where does our role end, and where does God’s begin? This is one of the deepest challenges in ministry because our compassion runs deep. We long to see healing in broken lives. We ache when people remain trapped in cycles of addiction, fear, sin, or despair. Out of love, we want to do more, say more, or even be more for them.

But here lies the danger: in our desire to help, we sometimes step across a line that was never ours to cross. We forget that there are things only God can do.

- He alone forgives sin (Mark 2:7).
- He alone transforms the heart (Ezekiel 36:26).
- He alone heals the deepest wounds of the soul (Psalm 147:3).

Our calling is not to replace Him but to point to Him. We are not the Redeemer, but witnesses of the Redeemer. We are not the Light, but lamps that carry the flame of His truth.

Untangling this line means asking: Am I walking in my God-given role as servant, or am I drifting into God’s territory as savior? This requires constant humility, prayer, and discernment—because even our best intentions can slide into spiritual overreach.

Signs the Line Is Getting Tangled

Recognizing when we are crossing the line is crucial. Here are some warning lights:

1. The need to control outcomes.

When someone does not change as quickly as we think they should, frustration boils up. We push harder, try new strategies, or bear the weight of responsibility for their choices. But transformation is not ours to produce. We are planters and waterers—God alone brings growth (1 Corinthians 3:6–7).

2. Believing our words alone can change someone.

Our words may carry truth, but only the Spirit can make that truth take root in a person's heart. Paul said, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (1 Corinthians 2:4). If we rely on eloquence rather than Spirit, we confuse our role with God's.

3. Tying our identity to results.

If ministry feels like success when numbers are up but failure when growth seems slow, we have tangled the line. Our worth is not tied to outcomes—it is rooted in Christ alone.

4. Creating dependence on ourselves.

This can happen subtly. A counselee may begin to rely on us for wisdom, comfort, or direction instead of Christ. If people walk away impressed by us rather than drawn to Him, we may have unintentionally made ourselves the center.

These signs do not mean we are failures—they mean we need recalibration. They are God's gentle warnings: Step back. Trust Me. Untangle the line.

Practical Safeguards for Ministry and Counseling

How do we remain in our rightful role while honoring God's? Here are spiritual safeguards that protect both us and those we serve:

1. Anchor in Scripture.

Our words may encourage, but only God's Word transforms. Scripture must always be the standard, not our opinions. When in doubt, return to the unshakable truth of the Bible.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

2. Stay rooted in prayer.

Prayer is our lifeline. It humbles us, keeps us dependent, and shifts the burden back to God where it belongs. Begin in prayer, continue in prayer, and end in prayer. Make prayer the rhythm of every ministry moment.

3. Cultivate humility.

Ministry without humility quickly drifts into pride. We must remember: we are also sinners saved by grace. We, too, are jars of clay. Humility reminds us that God is the healer, not us.

4. Invite accountability.

No one is beyond drift. We all need trusted voices—a mentor, pastor, or peer—who can gently but firmly remind us when we are taking on too much or stepping into roles that belong only to God.

5. Release outcomes to God.

Success in ministry is not measured by results but by obedience. Faithfulness is the measure. If we obsess over outcomes, we will inevitably cross the line into “playing God.” Our task is to sow faithfully; the harvest belongs to Him.

The Beauty of Staying in Our Lane

When we untangle the line and remain in our rightful role, ministry becomes lighter. The crushing weight to fix people, heal wounds, or save souls is lifted—because it was never ours to carry.

Instead of striving, we begin to rest. Instead of manipulating, we begin to trust. Instead of building dependence on ourselves, we point people to the One who never leaves them.

Paul paints this picture in 1 Corinthians 3:6–7: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

We plant. We water. But God gives the growth.

The beauty of staying in our lane is that ministry becomes worship instead of performance. Our role is no longer about proving ourselves or producing results—it is about faithfulness, obedience, and pointing to Christ.

Closing Encouragement: Pointing to Him

At the end of the day, untangling the line is about perspective. We are not healers, redeemers, or saviors. We are servants, witnesses, and signposts.

- We plant seeds of truth.
- We water with prayer and encouragement.
- But only God makes things grow.

And this is not a burden—it is freedom. It frees us from the crushing pressure to perform miracles. It frees us from pride when things go well and despair when they do not. It frees us to simply point to Jesus.

Our weakness becomes the very place His power shines brightest. Our dependence becomes the channel through which His Spirit flows. Our humility becomes the signpost that directs weary eyes away from us and toward Him.

The greatest gift we can give those we serve is not ourselves, but Christ in us. And the greatest freedom we can embrace in ministry is this: **we don't have to be God—we only have to point to Him.**

Reflection Questions

1. Where do I most often blur the line between my role and God's?
2. Do I measure ministry success by obedience and faithfulness—or by visible results and outcomes?
3. Am I pointing people consistently toward Christ, or am I unintentionally encouraging dependence on myself?

4. Who is helping keep me accountable in staying in my lane?
5. When was the last time I truly rested in the truth that God alone brings growth?

Journaling Prompts

- Write about a time when you tried to carry a burden that belonged to God. How did it affect you?
- Where in your current ministry do you feel the temptation to “fix” or “control” outcomes?
- Reflect on 1 Corinthians 3:6–7. What does it mean to you personally to be a planter or waterer rather than the grower?
- Write a declaration of release, entrusting specific outcomes or people back into God’s hands.

Prayer

Lord, Untangle the line in my heart. Forgive me for the times I have stepped into roles that belong only to You. Protect me from the subtle pride of believing I can save, heal, or transform. Teach me to plant faithfully, water diligently, and then release the growth into Your hands.

Keep me anchored in Your Word and rooted in prayer. Surround me with wise voices who can keep me accountable when I drift. Clothe me with humility so I may always point to Christ, not to myself.

Father, remind me daily that I am a servant, not a savior; a vessel, not the treasure; a witness, not the Judge. Let every act of ministry direct eyes away from me and toward Jesus, the true Healer and Redeemer. Keep me in my lane, Lord, and give me joy in knowing that You are God, and I am not. In Christ’s name, Amen.

Chapter \$\$\$ – When Money Shapes Ministry: The Subtle Corruption of Self-Preservation

The Hidden Influence of Wealth

In every culture, money carries influence. It creates opportunities, provides access, and secures stability. But money is not neutral—it carries spiritual weight. When tied to the work of helping others—whether through counseling, ministry, or any form of care—money begins to exert a hidden pressure. What began as a sincere desire to serve can quickly shift into a balancing act: How do I faithfully help this person and still protect my own livelihood?

This tension is magnified in regions marked by affluence and professional expertise. In such places, the “market” of care is thriving. Programs are polished, clinics are abundant, and services are costly. On the surface, this looks like blessing: resources are available, and skilled helpers are present. But beneath the surface, the invisible hand of money often guides the process more than the hand of God.

The subtle message becomes: healing happens at the pace we prescribe, for the cost we determine, through the methods we control. This shift is rarely intentional, but it is dangerous. It positions the helper as the center of change and ties the client’s progress to the financial structure surrounding the care.

Self-Preservation Masquerading as Care

When money undergirds ministry or counseling, self-preservation easily disguises itself as compassion. Consider these common scenarios:

- A counselor prolongs a process, not because the client truly needs it, but because ending it would mean the loss of income.
- A minister avoids difficult truth, fearing the family who donates heavily to the church might withdraw their support.

- A professional helper maintains dependency, subtly reinforcing that the client needs me, rather than pointing them toward God who alone can set them free.

Each of these examples reveals the same root issue: **care is being shaped by the preservation of the helper, not the freedom of the one being helped.**

Scripture warns against this corruption:

“Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.” (2 Corinthians 2:17)

Paul’s words remind us that sincerity and purity of motive must mark every act of service. To peddle truth for gain is to cheapen it, distort it, and ultimately rob it of its power.

The Deeper Problem: Brokenness or Self-Reliance

But the issue runs deeper than money. The way we handle financial influence in ministry or counseling flows directly from the state of our own hearts.

The level to which we know Christ, and the depth of brokenness we have walked through before Him, will determine how much this danger controls us.

- If we are unbroken, we will naturally lean on ourselves. Money will matter too much. We will use knowledge as control.
- If we are broken before God, we will lean on Him. Money will find its rightful place as a tool, not a master. Our knowledge will be surrendered to Christ, becoming wisdom in His hands rather than authority in ours.

This is why secular knowledge, though valuable, is so dangerous when divorced from God. Psychology, psychiatry, and human wisdom can explain patterns and describe symptoms, but they cannot heal the soul. When God is left out, the helper becomes the functional “savior.” And when that happens—whether fueled by ego, money, or both—the sacred line has been crossed.

Without realizing it, the counselor or minister begins to occupy the place of God in a person’s life. Healing, direction, and hope are tied to the helper’s expertise rather than the Spirit’s work. Even if the words are correct, the dependence is misplaced.

The Silent Idolatry of Professionalism

There is another subtle layer: professionalism itself. In affluent contexts, the pursuit of credentials, recognition, and financial security can shape the identity of the helper. Over time, the “professional self” becomes the standard by which success is measured.

- Am I seen as competent?
- Am I respected among peers?
- Am I financially secure in my role?

These questions, though natural, can eclipse the only question that matters: Am I faithful to Christ?

When professionalism replaces brokenness, ministry becomes performance. When money replaces dependence on God, care becomes control. When self-preservation replaces surrender, the helper is no longer pointing people to Christ—they are pointing people to themselves.

The Call Back to Brokenness

The answer is not to reject knowledge, professionalism, or financial provision. Scripture affirms the value of wisdom and the rightness of wages. The danger lies in forgetting the order: **we are not the Source.**

True ministry flows from a place of humility and brokenness before God. It acknowledges, “I do not have the power to heal. I am a vessel, not the source.” It is the posture of John the Baptist:

“He must increase, but I must decrease.” (John 3:30)

When we remain broken before God, money cannot corrupt us, professionalism cannot puff us up, and knowledge cannot blind us. Instead, all of these become tools surrendered to Christ—useful in His hands, but powerless on their own.

Reflection Questions for the Helper

1. When I make decisions in ministry or counseling, am I more concerned with God's truth or with protecting my income, reputation, or security?
2. Do I ever prolong care, soften truth, or create dependency out of fear of financial loss?
3. Am I cultivating brokenness before God daily, allowing Him to expose my motives and purify my heart?
4. Do I subtly position myself as the source of healing, or do I continually point others back to Christ as the only Healer?
5. How do I safeguard against the silent influence of money, recognition, and self-preservation in my ministry?

Closing Word

At the end of the day, the question is not Do I have knowledge? or Am I supported financially? The question is WHO do I depend on? If our dependence rests on ourselves, money and knowledge will always corrupt. But if our dependence rests on Christ, both money and knowledge can become powerful tools for His glory.

The line is razor-thin, but the difference is eternal. **Either we play God, or we point to Him.**

Conclusion: Returning All Back to God

Over more than thirty-eight years of walking alongside individuals facing extraordinary challenges—people caught in the grip of addiction, trauma, or cycles of brokenness—we have learned an unshakable truth: **our ultimate role is never to carry the weight of someone else's transformation.** That is God's work alone. The moment we attempt to hold that weight ourselves, to control outcomes, or to shape healing on our own, we step into a dangerous space where humanness and deity become dangerously entangled. This is not prideful confidence—it is subtle, often unnoticed, and yet profoundly consequential.

In ministry, counseling, or any helping role, it is tempting to believe that the depth of our knowledge, our training, or our experience equips us to orchestrate someone else's restoration. We see a need, a wound, or a broken pattern, and we want to “fix it.” But what we often fail to recognize is that **our maturity, character, and spiritual depth set the boundaries for how much we can safely give.** When our giving exceeds our capacity in Christ, we inadvertently step into God's territory—acting as though we can heal what only He can heal.

The antidote to this danger is a consistent, daily return to God. Healing, guidance, and transformation must flow from Him, through His Spirit, to the person seeking change. Our role is sacred but limited: **we point, we guide, we support—but we do not replace.** This is why practices like Scripture reading, reflective journaling, and intentional prayer are essential. These tools are not just exercises—they are conduits for God's voice, His truth, and His direction.

When a person sits with the Word of God and asks questions such as:

- “God, why are You showing me this?”
- “God, what do You want me to learn in this moment?”
- “Lord, how do You want to shape my heart, mind, and spirit?”

something profound happens. They learn to **hear God for themselves.** They discover that their transformation is not tethered to the wisdom of a human helper but rooted in the living, breathing work of the Holy Spirit. Healing becomes relational, spiritual, and deeply personal—no longer dependent on the personality, energy, or availability of the counselor.

This principle protects both the seeker and the helper. For the person receiving help, it cultivates **true dependency on God**, not on a flawed human being. For the counselor or minister, it fosters **healthy boundaries, humility, and freedom**, removing the crushing weight of trying to be God. It allows the helper to operate in **strengths of presence, encouragement, prayer, and guidance**, while leaving the work of salvation, renewal, and inner transformation where it belongs—with God.

It is in this sacred alignment that ministry becomes safe, sustainable, and deeply effective. We do not overstep. We do not manipulate or control. We do not create dependence on ourselves. Instead, we model **faithful humility, Christ-centered guidance, and a posture of constant reliance on God**. This requires vigilance, self-reflection, and honesty: acknowledging where our own wounds, pride, or insecurities might push us into roles that belong to God alone.

Our decades of experience reveal another layer: **the power of journaling and reflection**. When seekers write down their thoughts, questions, and insights alongside Scripture, they are actively learning to engage God in dialogue. They are training their hearts to recognize His voice, discern His guidance, and internalize His truth. This practice reinforces the boundary between what we can offer and what only God can do, creating a rhythm of reliance on Him rather than us.

This is why sacred boundaries matter so deeply. Forgiveness, deep transformation, and ultimate restoration are God's alone to give. Our compassion, encouragement, and counsel are the bridges, not the destination. When we remember this, we release **ourselves from the burden of trying to save**, and we release others into the hands of the One who always knows best.

Ultimately, the call for every helper, counselor, or minister is simple yet profound: **remain humble, stay dependent on God, and never overstep your place**. Allow God to lead every step, speak every word, and do the deep work in hearts and minds. The more we embrace this reality, the more our ministry becomes an instrument of His grace rather than our own ambition. The more we point others to Him, the more freedom, healing, and authenticity are produced—both in their lives and ours.

Let this manual serve as a reminder that ministry is not about our brilliance, training, or insight. It is about **faithfulness, presence, and pointing all glory to God**. Let it remind us that when humanness and deity remain properly ordered, lives are changed, hearts are healed, and the Spirit is glorified.

May every reader of this manual leave with a renewed commitment to:

- Anchor their lives and ministries in the Word of God.
- Guard sacred boundaries between what belongs to God and what belongs to us.
- Encourage seekers to hear God for themselves, to journal, to reflect, and to respond to His voice.
- Walk in humility, dependence, and the joy of seeing God work beyond what human hands could ever achieve.

We do not need to be God. We only need to be faithful. And in faithfulness, God's power is revealed, lives are restored, and His Kingdom expands in ways far beyond our comprehension.

Stand firm. Walk in humility. Point always to God. And rejoice in the freedom that comes when we let Him do what only He can do.

Pre-Ministry Self-Assessment and Reflection Guide

Before stepping into ministry, counseling, or any form of spiritual leadership, it is essential to measure your readiness—not in terms of knowledge, skill, or desire to help, but in terms of character, humility, and dependence on Christ. Use this guide prayerfully, with honesty and vulnerability before God.

Step 1: Examine Your Motives

Ask yourself: Why do I want to serve?

- Am I motivated primarily by love for God and others, or by a need for approval, recognition, or control?
- Am I seeking to fix others to feel competent, or to point them to Christ?
- Am I comfortable with outcomes belonging to God rather than to me?

Reflection prompt:

Write a paragraph honestly answering: “When I serve, what do I hope to accomplish? Who am I trying to please or validate?”

Step 2: Assess Your Spiritual Foundation

Ministry flows from intimacy with Christ, not personal effort. Evaluate:

- Do I spend consistent, intentional time in prayer and Scripture?
- Do I recognize my own limitations and weaknesses before God?
- Am I willing to allow God to shape my character before I attempt to shape others' lives?

Journaling prompt:

Describe areas where you feel strong in your walk with Christ and areas that need deeper surrender. Ask God to show you where He wants to grow your character.

Step 3: Measure Your Emotional Readiness

Helping others often involves walking with brokenness, pain, and conflict. Consider:

- Can I sit with someone's pain without trying to fix it immediately?
- Can I bear others' burdens without becoming emotionally drained or resentful?
- Do I have unresolved wounds that might interfere with my ministry?

Reflection prompt:

List emotional triggers that may surface in ministry situations. Pray for God's guidance and healing in each area.

Step 4: Evaluate Boundaries and Self-Awareness

Boundaries protect both you and those you serve. Reflect:

- Do I know where my role ends and God's role begins?
- Am I comfortable saying "no" when necessary to protect spiritual, emotional, or physical health?
- Am I aware of my strengths and limitations, and willing to operate within them?

Journaling prompt:

Write down your current boundaries in ministry. Where might you need to strengthen them? What warning signs indicate you might be overstepping God's role?

Step 5: Test for Humility and Brokenness

Humility and authentic brokenness are the soil from which fruitful ministry grows:

- Do I admit my own struggles, failures, and need for God?
- Can I receive correction or feedback without defensiveness?

- Do I rely on God's wisdom above my own in difficult situations?

Reflection prompt:

Describe a time when pride or self-reliance caused difficulty in your service or relationships. How might greater humility change your approach?

Step 6: Consider Dependence on God's Power

True ministry is powered by Christ, not human effort:

- Am I willing to surrender outcomes to God, trusting Him to produce growth?
- Do I consistently pray for guidance before taking action in ministry?
- Can I rest in the truth that God is the ultimate healer, redeemer, and sustainer?

Journaling prompt:

Write a prayer committing your ministry, your words, and your service to Christ, acknowledging that all transformation belongs to Him alone.

Step 7: Commit to Ongoing Discernment

Ministry requires constant evaluation and humility:

- Am I willing to step back, reevaluate, or adjust my methods when God directs?
- Can I seek counsel and accountability from mature believers?
- Am I alert to subtle shifts from serving to controlling or trying to carry burdens that belong to God?

Reflection prompt:

Create a short checklist for ongoing self-examination. Examples might include:

- Did I rely on God today?
- Did I overstep my role in someone's life?
- Did I maintain appropriate boundaries?
- Did I serve from abundance or from my own need?

Final Reflection Exercise

At the end of the self-assessment, write a personal declaration:

"I commit to serve from a place of humility, brokenness, and dependence on Christ. I will respect the sacred boundaries between my role and God's role. I will trust Him for transformation, healing, and growth, recognizing that it is His power, not my own, that sustains the lives I touch."

Keep this declaration as a reminder that **readiness for ministry is less about skill and more about Christlike character and reliance on God**. Return to it regularly as a guardrail against overreach, burnout, and pride.

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