

The Christian Therapist and the Kingdom

By James Porter Moreland

Announcer 1:

Good morning everybody. I don't think Dr. Porter's here today. So I'll just go ahead and get started with a word of prayer. Lord, we just thank You for this opportunity today just to come before You, Lord, to come into Your presence, to gather as a community; Lord, to hear the words that You have put in the heart of one of Your servants, God. And Father, we just pray that You would bless this time this morning, that we would-, our hearts would be open to receive what You have for us. Lord, umm- that You would just bless the chapel speaker, Dr. Moreland, this morning and just give him the words that You have laid on his heart. Lord, and give him- give him peace, Lord, as he comes with us this morning. And we pray all these things, Lord, in Your name.

I think that's going to take a second here. Do you guys know the song "Breathe"? Alright. It's the miniaturized version. Sam's the man. Alright. 1 2 3 4.

[Musical Interlude]

Lord, we just come before You this morning, God. Pray and praying, Lord, just to- in everything we do that You would be glorified, Father. Thank You for this morning. Lord, thank You for the words that we're about to hear and the servant after Your heart Lord who's bringing them this morning. God, we just lift this time and all that we have up to You, Lord, that You may be glorified. In Your name we pray, Amen.

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Announcer 2:

Good morning. It is a privilege for us this morning to have J. P. Moreland with us, sharing. Most of us don't need an introduction to J. P. Moreland but I will-, some of you may so I'll give you a brief introduction. J. P. has been at Biola since 1990. He is a distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Religion or something to that effect, I think. He came here in 1990 and started the Master's program in Philosophy, Religion and Ethics, and has built that up to be just an outstanding program in philosophy. I heard, recently, J. P.-. How many people have-, has your program put into secular Ph. D. programs? -Close to 90 graduates of their program have gone on to secular Ph. D. programs. They're just having a tremendous influence. If some of you saw, there's a recent- recent Christianity Today article about Anthony Flew, who recently changed his position on atheism. The article cites J. P. and talks about him in there. So he has a very wide influence. It's a privilege to have him here. But I think more importantly, J.P. has poured his heart out into the Biola community for the last 15 years. And so it's just a real privilege to have him here to share with us so.

J. P. Moreland:

Well, I'm really glad to be here for two reasons. Number one, I got stuck in traffic and I didn't think I was gonna make it. So it's good to be here. And secondly, I may be the most important PR person for Rosemead that exists. I uh-. Both of my daughters, I gave them a gift of 14 months of therapy, their senior year here at Biola, and let them each have a little over a year. And that was the best money I ever spent. I'm approaching my second year of therapy with a Rosemead grad and it has been a marvelous journey for me. And my wife is in therapy, finishing her first

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year, with a Rosemead grad. So we owe Rosemead a great deal. And all-, every member of my family has benefited from you. And I-, actually, I was talking to someone last night from the East Coast and we were both commenting on how we don't know of a school that does a better job of training therapists anywhere, including and I'm proud to say the secular community. I would rather have a therapist that came from this school than from UCLA, certainly UCLA. But-. Certainly UCLA (audience laughing). But umm- I guess that really isn't saying a whole heck of a lot heheheh. Well I uh- I basically-, I basically want to encourage you this morning and just build you up and give you a little bit of a vision, I think, for the impact you can have when you get out in the Christian community.

I want to begin by- by making a remark about the nature of the Gospel and how the understanding of the Gospel has changed since I became a Christian. I came to the Lord in 1970 and-, through campus crusade, and the basic understanding of the Gospel was the message of justification by faith. It was a Protestant Reformation concept that the Gospel is primarily an offer of reconciliation with God and forgiveness of sins. And I shared the four spiritual laws book with I can't tell you how many people. And that was the primary understanding of the Gospel. The difficulty for me and for many of us was to try to make a connection between that message and a life of sanctification. And what- what we all tended to do was to emphasize dedication because that was the only way that I could make a connection. Now that doesn't work because you can admonish people to be more and more dedicated and what they end up doing is feeling guiltier and guiltier. I think in the last, I don't know, ten years or more, I think, through the writings of George Ladd at Fuller Seminary and through Dallas Willard's writings and others, there has been a recapturing of the Gospel as a- as a message that goes beyond justification by

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faith. And so the understanding of justification by faith is now understood to be an entrance into a presentation of the availability of the Kingdom of God.

I've just finished reading a book by N.T. Wright, who's just a marvelous New Testament scholar, and it is a book that I really recommend to you some time. It's called *The Challenge of Jesus*. And what the book does is it strips away our modern western understanding of Jesus, and tries to locate Him in the midst of first century struggle and political and religious chaos. And I tell you, talk about a fresh perspective on the man. What what what is so wonderful about it is that Jesus comes through in this, if you understand the first century situation, as a radical brilliant orchestrator of a sub- subversive message that just undercut all the other currents. And the core of his message was the announcement of the present availability of the kingdom, which he likened unto a family; an invitation to enter a family, which was a very radical idea in those days, that was to be characterized by grace and and and forgiveness and mercy, in terms of the relationships.

And so what I'm seeing happen is that there is a recapturing of the concept of human flourishing as central to the Gospel, and that the Gospel announcement is not simply about justification but it's an invitation to robust human flourishing. And I think that that means that therapy is at the very core, in my view, of what the church's mission is all about. And I want to try to give you three facets of the Kingdom, as I understand it, that I- as I travel around the country; these are three areas that I think we are regaining ground in, in terms of the evangelical community in the country. And I want to comment on them in terms of how this can be an encouraging thing for you and what you do.

The first of the three is a recapturing of the life of the mind and the transformation by the renewing of the mind. You- you understand that Romans 12 tells us that we are to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. But many times we understand that as just gaining doctrinal truth and having correct thinking. And I don't-, that- that may be part of it but I think the renewing of the mind is what I've been experiencing for close to two years in therapy. And a classic example, Chris Lindemann is my therapist and I'll be processing something with him, and he will stop me and- and say "no- no. Why would you think that?" And he- he'll call me on ways that I process events and my feelings and my relational dynamics, and patterns of processing that are not conducive to my own health and to a robust form of the Kingdom among those I know. And what he does is he has e- because of his training, he has eyes to see things that I can't see about me. And- and- and he calls me on it.

And in addition to helping me process emotions, he is renewing my mind. And I find my-, one of the great-. People don't get, in the church, I think, the difference between therapy and counselling because I think therapy's a process-, it-, the process is as important as insights that you get. It's the process. And what I find myself doing during the week is talking to him in my mind. And I'm trying to say now "what would- what would Chris think about this." (heheh) And I am actually renewing my mind and forming new habits of attending to my life because of the therapeutic intervention of a Rose Mead grad. And I think that you have a powerful role to play in the renewing of the minds of Christian disciples in the churches. And it may very well be that you'll be teaching Sunday school and things of that sort, and God bless you if you do. But I'm talking about in your practice. I'm talking about the effort that you will put in to helping people that are

hurting think differently, and to develop healthier ways of processing their feelings and their ideas by way of the renewing of the mind.

And so I want to just encourage you, that you have- you have a stake in that passage. And it's a distinctive therapeutic stake. You have a way of helping people do that that pastoral training and other kinds of training in the body of Christ don't provide. And so I hope that as you go about your work, you will feel a deep sense of vocation to help people think differently and form new habits of processing, and you'll tie it to this whole concept of renewing of the mind. And I think this is a way that psychology influences theology and pastoral ministry, by bringing the skills and the categories of psychology to bear on the task of helping people renew their minds.

Now there's another direction in this, and I think that theology can help psychology with some categories and concepts that can be, then, used to develop strategies to bring these about. I'll give you a classic example. There's a book that I read just recently that it would-, now is on my top 10 list. This- this is a great book. It's called Total Forgiveness by R. T. Kendall. It is the richest study of the nature forgiveness that I've ever read. He- he goes into-, it is not a formulaic book. He goes into a very careful understanding of what forgiveness is not, and what it is, and how to go about learning to be the kind of a person who finds forgiveness to be easy. And it has already brought some great relief in my own life, in terms of laying- laying some burdens down that I've carried. And I would encourage you, as you help people renew the way they think, that you would constantly be consulting good theological sources, not- not the standard kind of pabulum we have out there but books that really give a rich treatment of categories that can become goals for you to develop psychological strategies to help realize.

For example, it would be a fun thing to know the six or seven characteristics of forgiveness.

They're-. One of them is that you lay down the need for the person that hurt you to be heard as to how they hurt you. You lay down the need to have to tell them and make sure they get it. Now that's- that- there are certain strategies, I'm sure, that your training would give to help accomplish that goal. So I see- I see this one area, as we recover the Gospel, as a broader invitation to a life of flourishing. One of the three components is the renewing of the mind, and I see this absolutely critical to what you do. And I see also that you can gain greatly from rich theological works to help establish some end points for you that your training will help you best with means to how to achieve those end points.

Now, in addition to the life of the mind, there is the second area that is spiritual formation. This- this renewed effort, I know John Cohen and- and his program is working on this, but I have in mind three things, and I have in mind, first of all, the- the reintroduction of the importance of spiritual disciplines and habit formation. I think that is a thing that's being recaptured and I think it's very healthy. I think the second thing is the reintroduction into the Evangelical Church of the spiritual director. And I think I- I pray that this will become more widely adopted by the evangelical church. I think if it is, it's going to become important for you to give input to your local church about the difference between a spiritual director and a therapist. And to-, if- if this- if this starts emerging and we have more and more people that are functioning as spiritual directors in churches, I think that your training would give you a real platform to help shape a church's understanding of the nature of the spiritual director and how it relates to therapeutic issues. And so, I think as- as we recapture in the church spiritual disciplines, and as we recapture

the role of the spiritual director, it seems to me that a very natural byproduct of that is going to be a renewed commitment to therapy as a part of the discipleship process.

And so, I think, in terms of spiritual disciplines, it will become increasingly important for your impact on the church; for you to be able to build bridges between the language of spiritual disciplines and the language of spiritual directors, on the one hand, and the language of therapy. I am hoping that the days are passing when there's bit-, where this at-, there is this attitude towards psychology. I- I feel the same thing toward philosophy; they actually think that philosophy is psychology misspelled. So I, first of all, have to correct that and then I have to tell them that don't pay attention to vain philosophy doesn't mean the whole stinking thing, you know, that there have been a few good philosophers in the history of the world. So I know what it's like to- to enter a church and to have people be suspicious of you because of your training.

I think the- the window of impact for the therapist is going to be spiritual disciplines and spiritual direction. And I can't over emphasize the importance of local churches using Christian therapists as resources. Now, recognize that in your practice, you may not want to build a practice around Christian clients or right-. I understand that. But I do want to challenge you with the idea that your training gives you a unique voice in this whole area of how the development of an inner self and the cultivation of a flourishing self is related to what the church should be about, and that's the production of human flourishing. And the window, I think, through which you can do that again is by- by trying to attach your language to the language of spiritual disciplines and spiritual direction. So that's a second aspect of this. First is the life of the mind, which I think you can clearly see, the therapist has a powerful role to play in the recapturing of a

renewed mind. This whole aspect of the cultivation of an- of a healthy inner life is becoming more central through the concepts of disciplines and spiritual direction, and therapy is a crucial part of that. And this gives you, I think, of a window into that cultivation of an inner life.

The third thing I'm seeing as I travel, and this is part of my own journey, is the recapturing of the power of the spirit through signs and wonders. I am not a charismatic in my orientation. I have no uh- no attitude about that whatsoever. I think charismatics or- have a wonderful approach to the Christian life. I just don't happen to- to be there yet but I haven't been a cessationist for- for 25 years, but it's been recently that I have begun attending a vineyard church, and have, for the first time in my life, begun to see general- genuine manifestations of the power of the Spirit that strike me as healthy and authentic and not weird- inappropriately weird. Sometimes, when God shows up on a person, things can get a little bit messy but that- that I judged to be sane and good and to have a texture of enrichment about it and not some sort of self-serving power moves or anything like that.

And I think- I think that the integration of psychology and Christianity needs to do more work on this whole issue of the power of the Spirit. And let me give you three areas of reflection on this. I think the first is a- is a renewed commitment to understanding demonization. The simple fact is that demonization is- is real and, there in, this whole area of the demonic is real. That is now, for me, more than a doctrine. It is beyond reasonable doubt. And a book that you may be familiar with, that I have found tremendously helpful, is Charles Kraft's book *Defeating Dark Angels*. What this- what this book does, that I think is the most helpful thing about the demonic, is- is to liken demons to rats that feed on garbage, and the whole point of the book is that if you

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addressed the demonic in a person, you will always be incomplete if you don't deal with the therapeutic needs that created the garbage that gave the demonic an entrance into the person's life to feed on.

And what Kraft does in this book is to build a very tight connection between therapy and exorcism and dealing with the demonic. And I- I believe it's a both hand. And I think he's provided a useful model, through this concept of the demonic as a rat, to show that the underlying issues when a person is demonized will- will be therapeutic issues. They'll be issues that need to be healed through the process of therapy. But what happens is that there is an agitation and then an exacerbation of these issues that go beyond just the psychological. And I think this is a rich up model for integrative reflection. And I'd like to recommend to you as you seek to bring the supernatural into your understanding of human dynamics, that you remember the demonic and that Kraft's book would be something that you'd consider.

I think, secondly, I don't know how else to put this but the power of the Spirit to heal miraculously. Umm Perhaps you're hearing, maybe you're not, but of the presence of emotional and physical healings that are happening all over the world, where there are-. I just watched some videos of entire cities that have been completely transformed in 18 months because of awakening that broke out. I'm thinking, for example, of Colombia and South America, where it was the leading drug capital of the world; in a period of 18 months, they had an awakening breakout in that place and it emptied the jails. And a whole bunch of relational healing took place. And umm-, my concern is that in the- in the healing movement that there is not an attempt to substitute healing for process. But I don't think it has to be an either or. I- I've seen cases, for

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example, where a person has had a word of knowledge given to them at a particular moment and there has been a very deep sense of release, and accompanied by great weeping and tenderness. And I think that those are pivotal moments in a person's life that are not to be substituted for a process but it's again a both end.

And so what I'm trying to say is that as you develop a Christian approach to your discipline in this third area, I would challenge you to try to think through the overtly supernatural dynamics of the unseen world. First in demonization and second through healing, miraculous instantaneous healing that can include healing of the emotion, as a part of the church's strategy. Now I'm not suggesting that you do that in your practice but I am suggesting that this is a tool that you ought to reflect on as you're trying to develop your own understanding of this.

There's one other aspect of the power the Spirit, and this is in first Corinthians chapter 12 verse 8 and first Thessalonians 5:19-22, where Paul is discussing the miraculous gifts of the Spirit. And he talks about words of knowledge, words of wisdom, and prophetic words. Now, I, myself, believe that these are supernatural revelations that God gives to people. They're not theology and doctrine but they are revelations that God gives to people about facts and a person's life and- that no one could know. I wish I had time this morning to tell you about some things that have happened in my own life in the last 24 months, where I've had- I've had some very specific prophetic words given to me and others in my presence that there's no way that they could be human because they were too detailed and too specific and no one knew about them. And when something like that happens, I will assure you that there is a sense of God's love and affection because you feel noticed by God.

Now, I know two Rosemead grads, that- that have their own practices now, that count on divine revelation in their therapeutic practice. I have-. There's- there's one Rosemead therapist, good friend of mine, where he-, when he- when he sits down with a client he prays quietly, doesn't let the client know this but he asks for the Holy Spirit to help his training to give insight and understanding and approach to the situation. So it's a both end, then I said "Does this ever happen?" and he says "I believe that the- that the Lord Jesus and His Spirit speak to me almost every day but certainly a handful of times each week." I said "what is it like. What does it feel like to you?" And he said, "Well, I'll be talking to a patient and I'll be of using my- my- my skills that I've acquired to just to focus and so on, and it will be like-, something like this happens, like a light comes on from out of nowhere, from a direction that I was not attending to, that that brings a new sense and approach to the person. And when that happens to me, I've come to recognize when it's the Spirit speaking and when it's my own training, and I- I will approach the person in light of that very gently but it gives me a cooperation with the Spirit of God."

And another Rosemead grad that I've talked to recently relies on words of knowledge and prophetic words as a part of the package of doing therapy. So here's- here's the bottom line on that, the Scriptures tell us to desire earnestly to prophesy; to seek it, to desire it. And I believe that the fundamental relationship that we have with God in our ministries is that of co-worker. We are co-laborers with Him. That, for me, means there ought to be a place where I count, where my ministry has my personality and my training and skills that make a difference. But there ought to be something that's inexplicable that you can't just explain as a result of my own talents and so on. And I think in therapy, I would urge you to seek the Lord on this, that He would give

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you the ability to discern words of knowledge and words of wisdom as you approach people in your practice.

So I want to say in closing here that I think that there has been a rediscovery of a richer gospel, which is an invitation to a life of human flourishing in a family and a community. And I think that this is extremely healthy. I think we're yet to see the implications of this shift in our culture. But I think it's good. If I'm right about that, then what you do is very central. It will become obviously central to the mission of the church. And I think there are three areas, I'm saying, that as you seek to integrate your training with your discipleship, where I think you have a window of making an impact on the church. And the first is the life of the mind, where you provide the renewing of the mind. I think the second area is this whole issue of the affective inner life and the healing of that. And I think a window for you would be through the spiritual discipline movement and the spiritual director movement that gives you an opportunity to locate yourself relative to those, already in existence, trends. And I think the third area is to-, it's to find ways to incorporate supernatural unseen reality into your practice through- through- through understanding more about demonization and how it relates to therapy; through understanding this whole issue of the role of signs and wonders, and prophetic words of knowledge that can be a part of your understanding of a client in this- and also this issue of miraculous inner healing.

I want to thank you for coming to Rosemead. I want to thank the faculty here for the training you give students, and every member of my family is in your debt. That's why I was doubly worried about not making it here 'cause I wanted to have some chance to pick- gi- give something back

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here a little bit. And I really speak blessing, I speak blessing to you on your work. Let's pray together.

Lord, I believe with all my heart that You have raised up this school to make a huge difference among your people. I thank You for each person here. And I pray that You would protect each student in their training and help each one of them to understand and to have a greater vision for what he or she can do to advance the Kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.