

A detailed embroidery of a plant with a large flower at the top, several leaves, and a cluster of buds at the bottom. The embroidery is in a golden-brown thread on a light-colored fabric.

MEANING IN



L I F E

ENHANCING THE JOY AND
FULFILLMENT IN YOUR LIFE

PAUL MEIER, M.D.
KEITH COBERN, PH.D.
NANCY BROWN

Meaning in Life

(Enhancing the Joy and Fulfillment in Your Life)

By Paul Meier, M.D., Keith Cobern, Ph.D. and Nancy Brown

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Life Scripts.....	3
Chapter Two: Family Functions and Dysfunctions	6
Chapter Three: Healthy Family Systems.....	9
Chapter Four: Dysfunctional Roles in Life	11
Chapter Five: Therapy at Meier Clinics.....	14
Chapter Six: Emotional Growth	20
Chapter Seven: A Personal Testimony.....	23
A Personal Testimony from Nancy Brown, President of Meier Clinics	27

Introduction

“Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards.”

Soren Kierkegaard

This book will help you look backwards and forwards: backwards to understand better what your true conscious and unconscious purposes in life have been (which very few people really understand) and forwards to determine what your purposes and meaning in life will be for the rest of your life. The authors of this book (a psychiatrist, a psychologist, and the President of Meier Clinics) want to ask you two questions that may seem simple at first, but are actually extremely complex:

1. What gives your life meaning?
2. What are your top five purposes in life?

We tend to go through life on “automatic pilot” without stopping to think these out and without planning our lives around them like we need to in order to have the most productive and joyful lives. In fact, for most of the seven billion people on planet earth today, these have never been willfully thought out and used to determine their futures.

For most people, these were determined by age six. Most people go through life in a meaningless rat race, feeling deep down inside like a nobody, and going through life trying to prove to those around them that they are not a nobody. People use sex, power, money, and other means to seek meaning and purpose in life, and end up with lives that often seem meaningless and without purpose.

We all also have unconscious purposes in life—purposes that we are totally blind to. If every secret thing you ever thought or did was put up on a large movie screen for everyone to see, what would you really be like? What is the “secret you” really like? The secret you probably has some purposes, conscious or unconscious, that may differ from the public you. The secret you is the real you, so the meaning that you get from that life and the purposes that drive that life are what this book is really concerned about. To really get meaning and experience true happiness in life, we all need one or more significant people who know the secret us and love us anyway.

Your childhood, especially your early childhood, can strongly influence who that secret you really is. Three things determine how we all turn out—our GENES, our ENVIRONMENT, and our CHOICES. Thank God for choices. No matter what genetic and environmental influences we may have, we can still choose to become, with God’s help, whoever we want to become. We can determine our own purposes in life and decide for ourselves what will truly bring meaning to our lives.

Your dominant parent may have been abusive and wanted you to fail so he would be able to beat you in his own personal competition in life. So you may consciously want to succeed in

spite of him while having an unconscious failure script to please him. You may achieve great successes in life only to eventually find yourself making some horrible mistakes that bring you to the brink of failure. In reality, failure is often good for us, because it serves as a wakeup call to bring our purposes and meaning to light so we can make new decisions based on new purposes and meaning. Abraham Lincoln went through severe depression once and bankruptcy twice before becoming the man most widely considered the best President of the United States.

Richard Nixon grew up the son of very strict Quakers. We suspect he had very high expectations placed on him. He learned a great work ethic and the value of making a contribution to society. But we suspect he also had standards of moral excellence that were impossible to achieve. He may have rebelled against these and found ways to be deceitful—to bend the rules to achieve his other goals. He became two people, the secret Richard Nixon and the public Richard Nixon. Both likely had lots of outstanding qualities.

He may have been so angry at this dilemma in his life that he determined to achieve the greatest possible success, and then to fail in order to get vengeance on his parents for expecting the impossible or on himself for being such a “failure” at achieving moral perfection. He graduated near the top of his law class at Duke University and rose politically to the most powerful position on earth, President of the United States. He accomplished some great things as President, like opening up relations with China. But, he was eventually impeached in great humiliation, losing his job as President over the Watergate scandal; spying on the Democrat Party’s secrets and lying to cover it up.

The purpose of writing this book is to help you discover and uncover your existing reason for meaning in life and your primary purposes in life, both secret and public; then to analyze them insightfully and revise them wisely. This book will change your life for the better by doing so. We pray for God’s insights, direction and wisdom in your life as you go through this process.

Paul Meier and Keith Cobern

Chapter One: Life Scripts

This book will clarify, enhance and expand your meaning in life. Have you ever specifically chosen and taken possession of your meaning in life—your main purpose for the life you are choosing to live? Whether you have consciously chosen one or not, there are one or more purposes that your automatic, unconscious brain and heart are operating on. We are often mistaken about what our true meaning and purposes in life really are. We are often "assigned" certain "life scripts" from our early childhood experiences.

Examples from the Authors

I (Paul Meier) grew up in a home with parents who loved me and my siblings, loved God, and loved each other. I was very fortunate in that regard. My mom was a homemaker and my dad was a carpenter. He was a very good carpenter and worked hard to do good work. My parents were also deeply committed to God, reading the Bible daily to us at the supper table, and serving God in various ways at our local church. My parents were German immigrants, and my father was very strict. If I got all A's and one B, he would ask me why I got the B. When I had my first book published and gave him the first copy as a present, he was happy for me, but immediately told me about an author he liked who had written 300 books. I felt like I could never be quite good enough. The "life script" I got from my father (who I am sure had mostly good intentions) was to become a workaholic without the expectation of ever achieving enough. The life script I have developed, however, is to have a reasonable schedule and to do the things I love to do, like helping people psychiatrically, writing, and hanging out with my wife and friends (many of whom I have worked with for decades). I determined to come up with my own purposes in life and not to live to achieve his purposes for me, as good as they may have been. I valued all the wonderful things he taught me, and treasured the love he had for me and the pride he had in me, regardless of my imperfections. I determined that I would not try to write 300 books to achieve the unachievable. But at age seventy, I have over ninety published books, selling over seven million copies in over 30 languages. I love to write. I love to help people through written guidance from the valuable lessons I have learned as a psychiatrist and as a human being who searches for truth. But I sometimes wonder how many of my achievements were to fulfill my father's purposes rather than my own.

I (Keith Cobern) grew up with an alcoholic father. The main things I learned from him were what not to do. By observing and experiencing his behavior through my growing up years, I made many choices to do the opposite. My mother, fortunately, was very loving and introduced me to Christianity when I was a young child. I remember how she regularly took me and my two brothers to church when we were children. My father never went with us. She had me involved in Sunday School and Vacation Bible School in the summers. I watched her be baptized and sing in the choir. Seeing and experiencing these things made an impression on me and helped me believe in God. I remember I started to pray and believe that God really heard me and loved me about this time in my life.

My father never sought to have a relationship with me, but I knew that my mother loved me. She encouraged me, she cared for me, and she was attuned to what I was going through. I believe that her loving and caring for me was the foundation for my developing a sense of self-worth. Later, when I became a Christian and started growing and learning about how God loved and valued me, that foundation grew even stronger and my sense of self-worth more secure. I attribute these things to my mother's love. Now, as a psychologist, I have a meaningful life because I love helping my clients find happiness and meaning in their lives. Even more importantly, I find meaning from loving and being loved by my wife, children and friends. Serving God is my primary purpose in life.

There are a large host of "life scripts" that we have seen in our clients down through the years. Some live their lives to persecute others, for a variety of reasons. Some live to be persecuted. Martyrs. Masochists. They seek meaning in life by being the victims of continued abuse in various ways. Some live to be rescuers. They get between the persecutors and the victims and try to mediate peaceful solutions.

Case Study: The Movie Star (Barbara)

Our natural tendency is to repeat our childhoods unless we make conscious choices to do otherwise. In several of my books, I (Paul Meier) shared the rather dramatic true case study of a client I treated many years ago. I will call her Barbara to protect her identity. Barbara was a successful, rich and famous movie star but she had no meaning in life that brought her any feeling of joy or fulfillment. She was in her thirties, was suicidally depressed, and going through her sixth divorce. She thought all six of her husbands were nice guys when she married them, but all of them turned out to be either drug addicts or alcoholics. They all ran around on her and were physically abusive if she griped about it. How in the world did an intelligent, beautiful and talented woman have such horrible bad luck? In reality, luck had nothing to do with it. When I first meet a new client, I always ask her about her childhood. But in Barbara's case, I asked her if I could guess what her childhood was like based on what she was going through; she agreed. I guessed correctly that her father was an alcoholic, repeatedly ran around on Barbara's mother, and was physically and verbally abusive. I even guessed correctly that he had sexually abused Barbara when she was growing up. Barbara was stunned. She thought she either had very bad luck or that all men must be alike, neither of which was true. Her conscious life script was to have a happy life in both her career as a movie star and in her personal life. But unconsciously, her life script was to reenact her childhood over and over again with men like her father so she could try to fix her father. She also had a natural craving for her father's love and positive attention, which she never got, so she was "codependent"—addicted to jerks like her dad to try to win the true love that none of them was able or willing to give. Her conscious mind picked out men who she thought were relatively nice, but her unconscious knew exactly how to pick out jerks who were hiding their jerkiness until marriage. At our Catalyst day program at Meier Clinics, clients come and spend six or seven hours a day, five days a week for several weeks to get intensive insight-oriented therapy. We dig out their root problems. We uncover their life scripts and their conscious

and unconscious purposes in life. By going through our Catalyst program, Barbara recovered and ended up living a very happy life. She never married another jerk.

As we look at Barbara's life, it is easy to see how desperately we can fool ourselves. We can see the extent to which our unconscious purposes can rule our conscious purposes and bring depression rather than happiness to our lives. But what is important to see right here and now is that, to some extent or another, this happens to every one of us.

We all have unconscious conflicts of which we are not yet aware. If we ever became aware of all of them and conquered all of them, we would be perfect. But Jesus was the only perfect human being because he is both God and man. Throughout our lives, it is wise to pray for and seek out more and more insights into our unconscious dynamics and purposes, so we can either endorse them or overrule them.

I (Paul Meier) define anxiety as "the fear of finding out the truth about our own unconscious thoughts, feelings and motives." Think about that for a moment. We are all, to some extent, fearful of seeing the truth about ourselves on a deep, inner level. If I do not see certain faults that I have, and then spend time with someone with similar faults, I will not like that other person very much. I may feel quite uncomfortable around him or her, because being around that person threatens to make me become aware of those things in myself that I would rather not see.

In most families, therefore, the father is toughest on the oldest son and the mother is toughest on the oldest daughter. They usually love their children, but are more critical of the one that reminds them the most of themselves. It is typically the oldest son who comes along and walks, talks, and acts like daddy, and the oldest daughter who copies her mother growing up. Teenagers are often unconsciously rejecting the parent who reminds them the most of the faults they do not see in themselves. This phenomenon is known in psychology as "projection," a self-deceiving defense mechanism.

We will discuss more of these things as this book progresses. At this point, we hope you understand that as mature and successful as you may already be, there are things this book will teach you about yourself that will make your life even more happy, purposeful, and filled with love and meaning.

Chapter Two: Family Functions and Dysfunctions

I (Keith Cobern) grew up in an alcoholic home in the 50s and 60s. My father was depressed and he used alcohol to treat his depression symptoms. When I was thirteen my parents divorced and my mother, two brothers and I moved in with my grandmother. That next summer I went to the local Baptist encampment in Cedar Hill, Texas, and there I became a Christian. After becoming a Christian and throughout my adolescence, there were two dominant thoughts in my mind—I was determined to find out how to live the Christian life and I was determined to find out what it took to make a family work.

I was very involved in church and learned about the Christian life, and, by age 16, I believed God had called me to the ministry. I also came to believe the way to make a marriage work was to remove the alcohol, since my family had divorced because of alcohol. I decided there would be no alcohol in my family after I married.

I married at age 22 and did a pretty incredible thing; I re-created the home I grew up in without alcohol. The alcohol was the most obvious destructive force to the home I grew up in, but the rules of the alcoholic home were not obvious. The rules of the alcoholic home are:

- Don't talk
- Don't feel
- Don't trust anyone
- Always make this family look good

Whenever something needed to be talked about or a problem solved, somehow nothing was said; it didn't get talked about. It was not okay to feel emotions; in fact, the unspoken message was to not feel. The indirect verbal message was something like, "If you are going to cry, then go to your room." or "Don't be angry at your sister." You were told to "be strong," and that showing emotions was a weakness. You were taught not to trust anyone outside the family. You also knew that you better not do anything that would make the family look bad.

These were the rules, spoken and unspoken, of the alcoholic home. From later studies on families, this became known as "dysfunctional families." A dysfunctional family would include the alcoholic or any other family where there was a mental illness-like depression. The depressed person or the alcoholic becomes the focus of the rest of the family so that the needs of the entire family go unmet and dysfunctional roles emerge. Getting needs met requires a healthy, functional family, starting with the parents.

The family serves a number of functions. Mainly these functions center around the needs of the family members. For example, there are basic maintenance functions where needs such as shelter, food, and clothing are provided. When the air conditioner goes out, someone repairs it. When clothes are outgrown, someone buys new ones. When we are hungry,

someone provides the food and someone cooks it. Each family provides for these needs in various ways. In some cases, one family member will work and provide all the money needed to buy these things. In other cases, all the members work in order to provide these basic maintenance needs.

My father grew up in the depression years of the 1930s. He used to say to me, "You've got food to eat, clothes to wear, and a roof over your head. What else do you need?" Those basics were a lot in the depression years, but we have found that humans need more than just the basics in order to live a healthy life.

We will repeat several times in this book that the ONLY way to have true meaning in your life, with meaningful and productive purposes guiding you, is to love and be loved by God, by yourself, and by others. The "Great Commandment" in the Bible is found in Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV):

³⁶ "'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?' ³⁷ Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

There are 365 commandments in the Bible, all given by God to help us succeed in life and have a good, kind, and fruitful life and to help us avoid sins—which are all ways of hurting someone. Jesus said in this Scripture that if we obey this one commandment—to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves—we will automatically obey all the other commandments.

The world teaches us the opposite—to compete with each other and beat each other in the competition called life. As we said earlier, the rat race of life is to go through life using things like sex, power, and money to compete with each other to try to feel significant. But none of these work.

Wise King Solomon tried all three before coming to his senses. He had a thousand wives and concubines and, he admits, did not withhold from himself any pleasure. But he eventually found it meaningless. He became the most powerful king on earth, but eventually found it to be meaningless, still leaving him with an empty feeling. He tried money and became the wealthiest man on earth, with silver nuggets even lying loosely in his courtyards. He eventually found that to be meaningless as well. When you get old and look back on your life, what do you want to see? Thinking about that will help you rethink your priorities and purposes in life and what will bring your life meaning.

King Solomon finally figured it out. The answer was not sex, power or money; the answer was to fear (meaning to respect, love, and honor) God and to follow his loving commandments. As Solomon said in the Book of Ecclesiastes:

⁶ "Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young—before the silver cord of life snaps and the gold bowl is broken; before the pitcher is broken at the fountain and the wheel is broken at the cistern; ⁷ then the dust returns to the

earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. ⁸ All is futile, says the Preacher; utterly futile. ⁹ But then, because the Preacher was wise, he went on teaching the people all he knew; and he collected proverbs and classified them. ¹⁰ For the Preacher was not only a wise man but a good teacher; he not only taught what he knew to the people, but taught them in an interesting manner. ¹¹ The wise man's words are like goads that spur to action. They nail down important truths. Students are wise who master what their teachers tell them. ¹² But, my son, be warned: there is no end of opinions ready to be expressed. Studying them can go on forever and become very exhausting! ¹³ Here is my final conclusion: fear God and obey his commandments, for this is the entire duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will judge us for everything we do, including every hidden thing, good or bad." (Ecclesiastes 12:6-14 TLB).

So once again, we can obey all the commandments of God automatically by obeying the Great Commandment, making the purpose of our lives to love God with all our hearts, and to love and be loved by significant others and by ourselves.

Chapter Three: Healthy Family Systems

My (Paul Meier) parents and grandparents were godly people who lived according to the Great Commandment, loving God, others and themselves (in a mature, not narcissistic, way). When my grandfather was ready to die, he led my mother and her sister by the hand into his bedroom, where he laid down on his bed. He looked up at the ceiling, raised his hand, and pointed as though he saw something. With a smile on his face, his hand dropped and he was gone to Heaven.

My sister and I were together with my dad in the intensive care unit, and all three of us knew he would be gone within another ten minutes or so. I asked my dad if he was ready to go to Heaven and he said he was. My sister and I told him we loved him and he said he loved us too. Then he suddenly looked up at the ceiling as though he saw something. He had a big smile on his face as his head dropped into my hands and he passed on to be with God.

When my mother died, her kidneys had failed her. She knew she only had a few days left to live and called all of her grandchildren to encourage them to live for God and to join her some day in Heaven. I visited my mom as much as possible those last three days. She had three wonderful dreams the three nights before she died. In the first dream, three nights before she died, my dad looked like he was about 33 years old and he came down from Heaven in his old aqua and blue 1957 Chevy (instead of a chariot!) to get my mom. She climbed in and they flew in it together back to Heaven. In the second dream, two nights before she died, my mom entered Heaven and her own mom and dad were waiting for her with big smiles on their faces. They were also young, as my mom was when she got there (even though on her deathbed she was nearly 97 but still mentally sharp). In her third dream, the night before she died, she got to Heaven and her friends were all there throwing a big welcome home party for her.

The night she died, I was sitting by her bedside in the hospice as her breaths became more and more shallow. She also told me that she was looking forward to dying so she could be with Jesus and all her friends who had gone on before her. But she said she wanted a new body and to live in a place where there was no more suffering or tears. With her very last breath, she looked me in the eye and whispered, "I love you Paul." Her head dropped into my hands, as had my father's years earlier. If I have the opportunity to die of old age, or to die while conscious like my parents and grandfather did, I hope to die in a similar manner. Their lives had meaning. Their purposes for living were good. Will yours be?

The healthy family should create an environment where each member is provided warmth, safety, and nurturance. In a healthy system, family members will care for each other. There will be appropriate touch, they will cry and laugh together, share each other's joy, and protect each other from harm. Similar to these needs, there is a need for love and a need to belong; to be a part of something bigger than oneself. We all have a need of communion,

belonging to a group, of being included and loved. In a healthy, functioning family, these needs will be provided.

Each individual has a need to develop separateness or autonomy. Depending on the age of the family member, a healthy family will allow its members to be somewhat self-determining. Children will be allowed to find out what they want to do for a living and what they like and don't like about the world. They will be encouraged to have a sense of uniqueness. They will be allowed to have privacy as well as belonging. Parents can change their minds about their careers and roles. They can be flexible as their needs change and their personalities develop over time. Both parents and children will learn to love each other in appropriate ways without becoming enmeshed and tangled up in unhealthy ways.

Another function of the healthy family is to promote a sense of worth or self-esteem in its members. Criticism does not accomplish this; demanding perfection and pushing relentlessly to perform does not accomplish this. Rather, praise and healthy skill building will accomplish this goal. It comes out of the belief that each person is truly valuable and worthwhile and has something of importance to offer to the family and to the world. In a healthy family, each person will be allowed to find and have a sense of dignity, worth, and value.

Families provide a place where its members get to learn from their mistakes, as well as have fun. None of us are perfect; in fact, we have come to believe that true perfectionism is a disease fueled by toxic shame. This is well documented in the research literature over the past 25 years. Families that expect perfection don't allow their members to learn from their mistakes. Learning from mistakes and having fun is part of being human. Families that allow members to make mistakes and grow from them and allow for fun are much more creative at problem solving and effectively dealing with stress.

Finally, there is a need for spirituality that is met by the family. Initially, we learn about God through our family. Secular psychology agrees that there is a need for spirituality, but it would be defined more like one's relationship with the universe or creation, the unexplainable around us, a higher power, or however one chooses to describe it. But as Christians, we know with absolute certainty that we have a relationship with Jesus Christ, the creator of the universe and of the unexplainable. He is The Higher Power; He has supremacy according to Paul in the Book of Colossians. Spirituality is such an important need, and the healthy family functions in such a way to meet that need.

Chapter Four: Dysfunctional Roles in Life

The needs and functions that I've just listed are the things that each family member should be getting mainly through the leadership of the parents. In a dysfunctional family, these functions are divided up separately or delegated to one specific family member, or sometimes they just fall to a family member by default. Notice how each dysfunctional role in some way meets one of the needs of the family, but in an unhealthy way. All these roles can be switched and family members can assume more than one role.

The Do-er. The Do-er does many things. Most of all, the Do-er provides the maintenance functions for the family. The Do-er makes sure the kids are fed and ready to go. The Do-er irons the shirts, pays the bills, and gets the kids to all their practices. The Do-er does a whole lot. But because this is a dysfunctional system, that's about all the Do-er has energy or time to do. So the Do-er feels lonely, tired, taken advantage of, empty, and neglected. The Do-er, however, gets a lot of satisfaction from being so good at this task. The Do-er is supported and encouraged directly or indirectly by the family. The Do-er keeps going through his or her own overdeveloped sense of responsibility and unhealthy guilt.

The Enabler. The Enabler takes care of all the belongingness and nurturance needs for the family. This person could also be the Do-er. In fact, the Enabler does many things for other family members that the other family members should be doing for themselves, which enables the other family members to become more selfish and dependent. The daughter of an alcoholic father will often grow up to be attracted to male alcoholics, then marry one, enabling her husband to stay an alcoholic by providing funds or other subtle helps. She may complain about him being an alcoholic, but in family therapy she learns the many ways she has been enabling him to stay an alcoholic. Without therapy or other help such as self-examination and study, she will continue in her unhealthy, enabling ways. The goal for the Enabler is keeping everyone together and preserving the peace. Fear that other members can't stand on their own and fear of abandonment is what motivates this role.

The Lost Child/Loner. The Lost Child uses escape to deal with the family's dysfunction. In an unhealthy manner, this person (child or parent) is taking care of the family's needs for autonomy and separateness. This is the child or adult who isolates a lot, but not in a healthy way. It is the deep sense of loneliness that pervades this role.

The Hero. The Hero meets the need of self-esteem for the entire family. This is the child who grows up, goes to law school, and becomes an internationally known attorney. They secretly feel horrible because they have a brother in a psychiatric hospital with a mental disorder and another brother who has died from a drug overdose. But because they are now an attorney, they make the family look good, and so carries the family banner for all the public to see. The family is proud of the Hero, but at a cost of their child's own well-being.

The Mascot. The Mascot is often one of the younger family members. The Mascot's role is to provide comic relief or humor for the family. The Mascot gives the family a sense of fun and playfulness, but it is distorted. The Mascot never gets to express his or her true feelings of pain and isolation. The Mascot becomes an emotional cripple.

The Scapegoat. The Scapegoat, also known as the "problem child" or the "black sheep of the family," is, in a way, often the healthiest one in the family. This is because the Scapegoat is most likely to seek treatment and help for his or her problems, instead of just pushing them aside in order to fulfill the assigned role. The Scapegoat gets to act out all of the family's pain. He or she takes the blame for the family for what is wrong. The Scapegoat steals, gets addicted, gets in lots of fights, acts out sexually, etc. The family then gets to say, "If you weren't such a problem, we'd have a great family." The cost to the Scapegoat is obvious. But Scapegoats who get good therapy often mature to become very good people with meaningful lives.

Dad's Little Princess/Mom's Little Man. This is the most destructive role of all. It is also referred to as "emotional incest." It happens when an adult is too unhealthy to get his or her needs met with another adult, usually a spouse. It feels good to the child/adolescent who gets to be a "little spouse" to one of the parents. But it violates the boundary between parent and child. The parent becomes a best friend, the child becomes a confidant, and the boundary is blurred. It sets the child up to become involved in physically and emotionally abusive relationships in adulthood.

The Minister. This is the child who expresses the family's spirituality and is expected to become a minister, priest or nun. It is also often expected that this role is not to be sexual. Often these expectations are never spoken, only implied and subtly reinforced and encouraged. This child comes to believe that he will only have worth if he acts out the family's spirituality. If he doesn't, he will have little value at all.

It is very likely that a depressed person would assume one of the dysfunctional roles in their own family. Having one of the dysfunctional roles may very well be all or part of the cause for the depression. An excellent family therapist or psychiatrist will have training in both Family Systems Theory and in understanding biochemical and genetic factors that contribute to depression, anxiety, and other disorders that may benefit from, or even require, medication as part of the treatment.

In Family Systems Theory, we were taught to define problems in a way which they can be solved. In Family Systems thinking, sometimes the depressed person would be the "symptom bearer" for the entire family. In some cases of depression, this individual needs to be depressed. The other family members want to appear healthier than they really are, so one member of the family becomes the identified patient and bearer of "mental illness" for all of them. That one family member with depression is doing something, not necessarily positive, for the family.

Consider the following analogy of a mobile in thinking about this. The person's struggle with depression is the thing bumping into the mobile. It threatens to disrupt the family

image, making the family look imperfect. It threatens to reveal areas of emotional problems in other members of the family. Even getting over the depression can be upsetting to the family structure because it makes the dysfunction of other family members stand out more.

"As you imagine a mobile suspended from the ceiling of your living room, notice how all the separate pieces of the mobile hang magically suspended in delicate harmony and balance with each other. Although each part of the mobile might be a separate, fragile piece of crystal or polished metal, the mobile as a whole seems to be at one with itself—one beautiful, whole work of art. If you bumped against one element of the mobile, it may move with a burst of energy and unpredictable motion, but it does not move by itself. Although it appears to be a separate, solitary piece of crystal or metal, it is connected nonetheless to the rest of the mobile by wire or string. Thus, whatever energy it picks up from you will be transmitted to the rest of the mobile, even though the effect may be subtle and nearly imperceptible.

"In other words, whatever happens to one part of the mobile affects the other parts of the mobile. If you stop bumping into the mobile, something else very predictable will happen, too. Each of the individual, autonomous pieces of that mobile will return to precisely the same spot it was before you bumped into it...So it returns to its original form, hanging silently where it began, a whole made up of individual parts, each in its own place, carrying out its function of giving us joy and a sense of beauty."

This is truly a brilliant metaphor given in *Adult Children: The Secrets of Dysfunctional Families*, Health Communications, Inc., by John and Linda Friel, p. 48, 1988.

From this analogy of the mobile, we can identify four characteristics of a system:

1. All systems have a definite structure.
2. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
3. A change in one part of the system affects all other parts of the system, but not necessarily in the same way.
4. All systems try to return to their original state (the principle of dynamic homeostasis).

If the family member struggling with depression is the "symptom bearer" for the family, then the fourth characteristic is in play and the family needs that person to stay sick (dynamic homeostasis). One reason for this might be that the focus is then on the depressed individual and the rest of the family doesn't have to look at their own issues. They can blame their problems on the depressed family member and say something like "If you weren't depressed, we would have a perfect family." If the depressed person gets better, then everyone else in the family will have to take responsibility for their own issues.

Chapter Five: Therapy at Meier Clinics

Meier Clinics has been in existence since 1976. I (Paul Meier) received my psychiatric training at Duke University where we had two professors per psychiatry resident. We learned Family Systems, Gestalt, Psychoanalysis, the “Medical Model” and a variety of other therapeutic approaches. We were taught not to use only one approach to make all the pegs fit into one hole. We learned to adapt each person’s therapy to his or her own unique needs.

Now Meier Clinics is a national chain of non-profit, Christian, counseling centers. We have psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists, and other trained staff all coming from a Christian perspective, since that is our particular mission.

We have some clients who have genetic problems, like ADHD, OCD, bipolar disorders, some types of depression, etc., who come primarily for medication to correct those biochemical imbalances. Some come for weekly outpatient therapy for months, possibly even years, to overcome past traumas or unhealthy family systems. Others choose our Catalyst day program where they receive six hours a day of therapy, five days a week, for several weeks. People who are so depressed or anxious that they are missing work or school, or are dealing with extreme feelings such as death wishes, will usually choose the Catalyst day program for more rapid recovery. Data shows that just a few weeks in Catalyst is equivalent to six month to a year of outpatient therapy.

Treating depression, anxiety, or other emotional problems from the “medical model” is great if done correctly, but can be a hindrance if done incorrectly. The majority of clients who come to Meier Clinics seeking help do not need medications. They need different modalities of insight-oriented therapy to discover the root problems causing their depression or anxiety. They need to understand what thoughts or behaviors are leading them down the wrong path to unhappiness and tension. They need to learn boundaries to protect themselves from unhealthy individuals in their lives.

If we treated every client with antidepressant and anti-anxiety medications, they would nearly all feel significantly better without any personal growth and resolution of conflicts. On the other hand, we don’t want anyone to suffer needlessly. If anyone is suffering enough to significantly interfere with their lifestyle, or have feelings of self-harm, then medication is helpful to get them well enough so they can benefit from effective therapy. Medication can be discontinued later when the root problems are resolved.

About 25% of the population inherit various forms of emotional problems, including mild to severe genetic depressions (often regardless of circumstances but sometimes triggered by stress), genetic anxiety, social phobia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), bipolar spectrum disorders, schizophrenia, and a host of other potential genetic tendencies that may even make them more susceptible to substance abuse or addiction such as pornography or gambling. This population can nearly

always be helped by finding the right medication (sometimes lifelong) to correct the chemical imbalance causing the problem. Many people have more than one of these genetic tendencies.

Modern medications are absolutely amazing. The psychiatrists at Meier Clinics can take a new client who has had panic attacks daily for years and end them in five to ten minutes by temporarily using an immediate action anti-anxiety medication (like a benzodiazepine). This is then replaced with a non-addicting medication that is safe to take lifelong, although it may take a week or longer to build up to where it eliminates the anxiety and panic attacks (like the GABA medications or the atypical antipsychotics, which are used for all types of emotional problems).

Take a simple problem like ADHD, from which about ten percent of children and adults suffer. They tend to be easily distracted, forgetful, put things off to do later, restless, bored and frustrated more easily, etc. They may not be performing very well at school or work, but ten minutes after they take an effective ADHD medication, they become immediately productive, more organized, more motivated, less forgetful, more focused and less restless. We have seen many clients change immediately from a C average in school or college to an A average overnight from that point on. We have clients who were about to lose their jobs who come back to see us for a medicine check three months later with a job promotion instead. And ADHD is just one example.

We can see clients with bipolar disorder, which is totally genetic and lifelong and can only be treated with medication, and they often becoming fully functioning within a few weeks on a GABA medication like Lamictal or an atypical antipsychotic like Seroquel, Abilify, or half a dozen other equally good medications. People with bipolar who are properly treated medically have been reported to have an average annual income greater than those without bipolar, because they tend to be people with better energy and more likelihood to take risks like starting their own businesses. Many also have ADHD that requires medical intervention.

People with lifelong OCD come to a Meier Clinics psychiatrist with a lifetime of being self-critical, possibly even frequent death wishes, songs that won't leave their heads, compulsions to count things, performing tasks repeatedly such as rechecking the doors, compulsive hand washing, and a host of other compulsions or obsessions (worrying about the same things for hours every day). People who develop OCD temporarily after a car accident or some other crisis can be cured with therapy alone, but people who inherit it and have these traits since birth or infancy can only be successfully treated with medications. Nearly any antidepressant that is an SSRI (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor), like Prozac, Zoloft, Lexapro, or SNRI's (Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitor) like Cymbalta or Prestiq, and a host of other medications, can get rid of OCD within five or six weeks using a double dose of whatever is normally used for depression.

For example, if 20 mg a day of Prozac resolves most depressions, then 40-60 mg a day of Prozac will "cure" most OCD's. If this isn't quite enough to get rid of the OCD, adding an atypical medication like Abilify to the antidepressant can often finish the job, bringing

about a cure for as long as the medical combination is taken together. Since genetic disorders are lifelong, the person may not have OCD for many years on the right medication, but then if he quits taking the medication, the OCD or other genetic disorder will return within weeks if not sooner.

If you have diabetes requiring insulin, then you will always require insulin and will die if you quit taking it. The same goes for chemical imbalances in the brain, which is just one more organ of the body. So don't overlook the medical model to enhance your quality of life if you have a genetic problem with one or more of your brain chemicals. And if you have a medical problem that causes depression or other emotional problems, like hypothyroidism-causing depression, be sure to get it treated or this book, with all its helpful advice, may still not bring joy and meaning to your life. If your thyroid is low, you will not only have more depression, regardless of circumstances, but you will also tend to have dry mouth, constipation, hair loss, weight gain, sluggishness, and feel cold most of the time even when your friends and loved ones are comfortable with the temperature.

Treating depression or other emotional problems at Meier Clinics from a therapy perspective involves four things:

- Uncover and acknowledge what happened
- Utilize resources—we know how this stuff works now
- Talk to others—being known
- Start making healthy choices

In group and individual therapy, we uncover and acknowledge what happened in the person's life. We have them talk about things that they have probably avoided ever talking about. We teach them about how their emotions work and how their emotions are connected to the things that happened to them that they are now talking about. Neuroscience studies show that when an individual processes and talks about what happened and expresses emotions connected to what happened, the brain becomes "integrated;" it literally re-wires itself. A brain that is well integrated decreases depression and anxiety.

We utilize resources by teaching clients about the causes of depression and how depression works. Some of the subjects include:

- Emotions
- Anger
- Shame
- Codependency
- Anxiety
- Boundaries
- Assertiveness
- Family Processes
- Grieving

Understanding how these are related to depression and anxiety helps the brain to be better integrated and, thus, helps decrease depression and anxiety.

Group therapy is one of the most effective forms of therapy. In our Meier Clinics Catalyst day program, we rely heavily, but not exclusively, on various types of group therapy. This is where we help people struggling with depression talk to others and are then known by others. People tell us that this is the most important part of the program for them; this is what helps them the most. Being in group therapy and letting others get to really know them is healing. The Bible tells us to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2) and Scripture is full of passages emphasizing the importance of fellowship with one another. The Apostle James taught us in James 5:16 (KJV), “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.”

Small group interaction done in a healthy manner is a powerful source of healing and personal growth, bringing about clearer purposes in life and bringing meaning to our lives. They were used throughout human history, recommended in the New Testament, and used today in Sunday School classes, growth groups, mini-churches, Celebrate Recovery Groups (which we strongly recommend), process groups at our clinics and other healthy clinics, AA, and a wide range of other formal or informal groups. One of my most recent books is Growing Stronger, (Paul Meier and Mary Beth Woll, 2015, Morgan James Publishers). It is a book designed to help women in crises of various kinds to recover from those crises, and also explains how to set up Growing Stronger Groups in churches. But healthy groups need some of the following healthy components, as outlined by Irvin Yalom many years ago.

Irvin Yalom has given us the 11 Curative Factors of Group Therapy:

Universality—demonstration that we are not alone in our misery or our problems. Isolation and feeling alone are fundamental to most emotional struggles. The group experience helps us see that we are not alone and that there are others who are experiencing the same things we are walking through.

Instillation of Hope—faith that the treatment mode can and will be effective. We all know the power of hope for a hurting person. Regardless of whether he struggles with addiction, depression, divorce, grief, or even the battle with a physical illness like cancer, research is clear that helping a person find hope is the first step on the road to healing. It is easier to have hope for your own journey if you can look into the eyes of another who shares the same path and see they are making their way out of the darkness. It also helps when that person looks at you and tells you that you can do it too.

Imparting of information—didactic instruction about mental health, mental illness, psychodynamics or whatever else might be the focal problem of the group. The group allows a forum for hearing what was helpful to others who share our experience and pain. We can gain insight and information from the stories of others in the group.

Altruism—opportunity to rise out of oneself and help somebody else; the feeling of usefulness. While the one-on-one helping relationship is generally about receiving help, the

group experience is about both receiving and giving. Group members are able to reach out to others who are hurting. Through the group, you are able to give back the benefits you yourself are gaining. Research is clear that giving to others is a powerful agent of change and healing.

Corrective recapitulation of primary family group—experiencing “feeling felt” in relationships growing out of primary family experiences, and providing the opportunity to relearn and clarify distortions. Yalom believed that the small group served as a microcosm of other social groups, including families, workplaces, even society itself. This allows us to better see how we interact with others, work out problems, have a safer and more positive experience in a group, and maximize opportunities for personal and relational growth.

Development of socializing techniques—social learning or development of interpersonal skills. The small group is an ideal environment to learn the necessary life skills of being and interacting with others in a healthy and productive way. Those who alienate others, without even knowing how they do so, find out in group therapy how they push others away, thus becoming more skilled at interacting in healthy ways with others in their culture, family, and society.

Imitative behavior—taking on the manner of group members who function more adequately. A group allows individuals to see the behavior of others very clearly. It allows them to see what works when interacting with others and what behaviors don’t work well. Then they can practice the behaviors that are effective and, hopefully, alter those that are not.

Catharsis—opportunity for expression of emotions. This is the classic example of “bearing one another’s burdens.” The group gives us a safe place to express and explore our entire range of emotions, especially the uncomfortable emotions that tend to be suppressed in other environments.

Existential factors—recognition of the basic features of existence through sharing with others (e.g., ultimate aloneness, ultimate death, ultimate responsibility for our own actions). Groups allow us to see and understand that others may have different views, perspectives, and values. We become more compassionate when we see into the lives and hearts of others who are different from us in culture, race, gender, age, socioeconomic status, etc.

Group Cohesiveness—a small group functioning effectively provides a sense of belonging and importance to others, thereby creating the right environment for change.

Interpersonal learning—receiving feedback from others and experimenting with new ways of relating. Often, we see the world from only one perspective—ours. The small group experience gives perspective and balance, allowing us to see the world, particularly ourselves, through the eyes of others.

(The above information is from *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 5th edition. By Irvin Yalom and Modyn Leszcz, Basic Books, 2005.)

This is all done in a Christian context, using what is called the Integration Model. This model looks at psychological concepts through a filter of Biblical truth and Christian beliefs. If there is a discrepancy between psychological truth and Biblical truth, then Biblical truth takes precedence.

Once the individual has uncovered and acknowledged what happened to them, learned about how all of it fits together, and shared their stories and emotions with others, they are now in a better place to be able to make healthier choices.

Chapter Six: Emotional Growth

Some Basic Questions To Ask Yourself (and Answer) to Promote Personal Emotional Growth:

To monitor your own life narrative, it may be helpful to write down your responses to some of these basic questions of adult reflection:

What was growing up like in your family? Who was in your home with you?

Think of seven words that reflect your earliest recollection of your childhood relationship with your mother. Then think of an example for each word that illustrates a memory or experience that supports the word.

Now do the same exercise for your father, and for anyone else who was an attachment figure for you in your life (a grandparent, nanny, neighbor, older sibling).

Who were you closest to and why?

What was it like the first time you were separated from your parents or other caregivers?

What was it like for you and for them during this separation? What would you do when you were upset?

If you were sick, injured, or emotionally distressed, what would happen?

Were you ever terrified of your caregivers?

How did your relationship with them change over the years?

Did anyone ever die in your childhood or more recently? Did anyone you were close to leave your life?

How were those losses for you, and how did they impact the family? Are you close with your caregivers now?

Why do you think they acted as they did?

How did all of the things we've been exploring in these questions influence your growth as an adult?

What are the main things you've learned from being parented by your parents?

If you have or anticipate ever having children, what would you want them to say that they learned from being parented by you?

What would you want for them in the future?

How do you feel all of these issues of your attachment history may impact your ability to be open, attune, and resonate with others—in your personal or your professional life?

(The Mindful Therapist, Daniel J. Siegel, W.W. Norton & Company, 2010)

Emotions (Energy in Motion)

Emotions are positive in nature, in that they are given by God to serve a purpose and give us energy to act on perceptions of our environment. Emotions can come from what we sense, what we think, or what we remember. Emotional maturity comes from the ability to differentiate between thoughts and emotions.

Like any energy, emotions, even positive ones, can be corrupted or made toxic. It is said that "Emotions buried alive never die." The first step of the path to health is to recognize the intended, healthy purposes of our emotions; the second is to express them in a way that allows them to dissipate or be released. For example, the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 4:26-27 that we should go ahead and be angry without sinning. Anger can sometimes be the result of sin, but it can also arise out of righteous indignation. But we are instructed to release that anger by bedtime. If we stuff the anger or otherwise hold on to it, perhaps in hopes of getting vengeance later, we give Satan a foothold in our lives. The anger that gets buried becomes toxic in our lives, leading to many sinful choices later.

Anger - Signals an injustice: threat to one's sense of value, or ability to communicate self. Can also be a secondary emotion.

- Natural response - Get others to respect us.
- Healing response - Respect/value self, communicate, seek justice, forgive.

Fear - Signals danger to basic needs; pain *may* occur.

- Natural response - Protect self: fight, flight, or freeze.
- Healing response - Courage: With fear present, do job anyway.

Sadness - Signals a loss has occurred.

- Natural response - Energy to stop.
- Healing response - Energy to grieve; establish new relationship with the loss.

Loneliness - Signals need for connection.

- Natural response - Redirect; express alternate emotion or boredom.
- Healing response - Energy to risk letting others get to know us.

Hurt - Signals violation of basic needs; pain *has* occurred.

- Natural response - Hurt the perpetrator.
- Healing response - Energy to heal.

Guilt - Signals violation of laws, rules, values or beliefs; punishment *may* occur.

- Natural response - Denial, defense, hide the offense, or shame.
- Healing response - Energy to take corrective action.

Shame - Signals human (power) limitations; abandonment, rejection, or ridicule *may/has* occurred.

- Natural response – Hide Super-human; hide weakness or perfectionism or Hide Sub-human; hide self as worthless/broken.
- Healing response – Energy to set boundaries; allow self to be human.

Happiness - Signals achievement of established goal or expectation.

- Natural response – Entitlement, license.
- Healing response – Energy to celebrate.

Steps to release emotional energy:

1. Recognize the emotion – Name it.
2. Identify the source of the emotion – Where is it coming from?
3. Identify the purpose/message of the emotion – What does it want me to address or to see? What does it want to say?
4. Process the emotion – Is the source present? Is the message accurate? Do I need to act on the situation, the thoughts or the emotion? What action is necessary? What are my options?
5. Express the emotion appropriately.

Chapter Seven: A Personal Testimony

In the first six chapters, we have shared with you a variety of ways of thinking and behaving that can bring about tremendous growth in your life. We want you to find real meaning in your life. We want you to take control of your purposes in life rather than to allow your unconscious purposes to ruin your life. In this short chapter and with permission from our client, we are sharing the very process that took place during a three-week period in the life of one of our Catalyst day program clients. We are quoting him below, word-for-word, because we can think of no better way to explain to you the process you need to go through than to see the process this man went through by applying the things we taught him, which are the same things we taught you in this book.

Actual Case Study as Written by Our Anonymous Client

“After a lifetime of misery. Years of literally working to come home and lay in bed. Depressed to no end. Four months after finally agreeing to psychiatric care. Two months after an ill-fated suicide attempt. An attempt I know was thwarted by God. Two days after sinking ever farther and finally hitting rock bottom, I ended up in the Meier Clinics for what was essentially a last effort. The two other hospitals I had visited before were definitely not for me. I even snuck a text to my wife to rescue me out of the admissions process to one. From the minute I walked in the Meier Clinics I knew this was where I belonged. This is where God was directing me to be.

Monday morning I walked in terrified to be there. So much so, that I had my wife drive me. She waited the whole day for me outside in that parking lot. Right away I met Dr. Meier and answered his questions the best I could. After his questions, he gave me the diagnoses of schizoaffective bipolar disorder and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). He told me the medicine I was taking was not the proper medication for my condition. This was definitely a relief because they were not helping at all. The new medication Dr. Meier prescribed started working almost immediately. I have not had a traumatic flashback since. My mood, all the highs and lows (mostly lows), has really stabilized.

I walked into my first group therapy session absolutely terrified. I was horrified. I stumbled through introducing myself and telling my reasons for being there. Sweat was pouring out every inch of my body. My body and voice trembled in fear. The verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse I experienced growing up had made me so afraid of people. I am uncomfortable sitting in a waiting room for a doctor’s appointment. I was so embarrassed of the things I had been through that I never wanted to tell a soul.

I sat and listened to people talk about the things they were dealing with and the traumas they had faced in their lives. The first connection I made in group was with a young woman hiding behind a rock. I identified with her because so many times I had ran and hid trying to escape. I had been in the same hard place.

My first task was to write a letter to the boyfriend of my mother, the source of my flashbacks and my most traumatizing abuser. I felt so worthless, like such a loser when I had to tell my counselor that I didn't write to him. I remember saying to her I do have a poem that I had written to/about him. I handed her my phone and let her read it. I saw her jaw drop like she had seen a ghost as she read. She handed my phone back and said, "Can you read that?" My response was, "Can I?" I questioned her because of the content and it being a Christian clinic. She said, "Read it."

I started off by saying to the group "I will warn you that if you will be offended, don't listen." Trembling in sheer fear of this man that I had not seen in 25 years, I stumbled through my feelings. I felt so angry and scared reading this poem, but it was a start. The beginning of me opening up and starting to let these things out. Things I tortured myself with for years. Things that have consumed my thoughts my whole life. Thoughts that had run my life straight into the ground.

As I started to learn in education class, it kind of brought me down. I realized I had been so shamed that I didn't know who I was or how to feel. It also made me realize the harm I was doing to my own family. That really hit me hard because I had tried so hard to protect them from the things I had seen and the things that happened to me. I stopped drinking and I stopped using drugs and tried to love them. I was hurting them just as much as I had been hurt, just in different ways.

I guess the expressive therapy class scared me the most. Yes, I was physically more afraid in group therapy, but I didn't really plan on participating. Expressive therapy did so much for me though. I exposed more of myself than I ever imagined I would. The first few projects I always sat back and ended up presenting last. The first two, content-wise, were pretty easy as I look back at them now. But by no means was I comfortable standing at the front of the classroom. The third project, "Humpty Dumpty," is where I really started to shock myself. I had a red cross made of bricks to represent the wall I had fallen off which was my falling away from God. My actual fall was depicted by a rope. This is when I opened up and told the story of my suicide attempt in my garage. The next project was "Shout out," and I angrily shouted out the name of my mother's boyfriend and exposed him as the pervert he was. The hardest project for me to present was "X-Ray." This was my revelation to the aborted Angels that I miss every single day. Wow! I let go of lots of secrets in expressive therapy. I had so many skeletons in my closet.

I had several small turning points or redirections. I'm not really sure how you would say this. Maybe steppingstones? Baby steps that were huge leaps for me? Once I read the poem and realized no one was going to hurt me even after that tirade, I poured myself into every letter I wrote and every project. I could feel myself starting to heal! I was starting to feel. Dr. Cobern is greatness in group therapy. No matter how hard I tried to hide, he always seemed to catch me feeling. Things he said gave me such hope. When he told me how bad my story was, it didn't bring me down because he followed it with "We're going to fix it." I believed every word he said. I asked him one day why I didn't believe my wife and kids when they said they love me. I asked him why faces were blurred out of my mind when

people talk to me. He said it was because of the shame and as we lessened my shame it would get better.

These things really had me going in the right direction. My individual counseling sessions with Miss Rachel...I can't do her justice. From my first homework assignment, she didn't make me feel, but she sure knows how to draw feelings out of me. I do not know where I would have been without her. I asked her one time how she ended up with me. Did she lose a bet or did she draw the short straw? I know God put us together and used her to bring me to Him. I felt every single time she did Christian Life she was preaching directly to me. All the counselors have helped me in one way or another. Even if they don't realize it.

After all the steppingstones or building blocks, personal turns, however, you want to say it, I did have one great day. This is the day that skyrocketed me to the heavens. The biggest breakthrough came on the morning of Friday, August 15. I believe this is the greatest day of my life. Miss Rachel came into Christian Life a little late. She didn't say anything or even smile, deliberately placing index cards with Bible verses on the coffee table. Then she pulled a wooden cross from out of the corner and laid it on the floor. It is so usual for her not to smile, I remember asking her if she was mad or if this was a production.

She told us what we were doing that day. She said we were going to give something to God that we didn't need to carry anymore. I instantly knew my card was going to be about my two Angel babies (aborted babies). I only looked at one of the verses she laid out. It was Colossians 2:14, "Having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us, He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross." I have not been a Bible studier or even reader for that matter. I was blown away when I found (I know in my heart I was directed) to Psalms 32:1-5:

"Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me, my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord' and you forgave the guilt of my sin."

Did you just hear me exhale?!? I had been so angry with God for what happened to me as a child. But also felt so ashamed and so guilty about those babies, I thought, "How can God love me?" It was such a good feeling. My shoulders literally felt lighter. I believe I physically stood taller. I didn't dream or couldn't imagine the day getting any better but [it]did! I was so excited about the feeling of absolute joy in my soul and was texting my wife all day that I had to tell her something as soon as I got home. She knew how excited I was but she didn't mention it at all. That hurt my feelings so I didn't mention it either. Finally, late that night, I said "Are you going to ask me about my day and what I did that made it so good?" Her response really shook me. She said "I already know." I was like what? How? In her guilt and shame, she feels like she nailed our baby to the cross and could see the baby's blood running down the cross.

She had for the first time told a friend this the night before. As she cried and we talked, we both realized I had no idea what she was talking about. For six years, I hated my wife because I thought she sneaked off and did this without me knowing – behind my back. It was a traumatic event that I have completely blocked out and have absolutely no memory of. And as she cried and continued to tell me the story of what really happened, I sat across the table and fell in love with her all over again. The feeling that day is beyond all comprehension. I was forgiven and fell in love with both God and my wife on the same day.

Then today, August 27, Miss Emily passed out verses for us to read. The verse I got was Colossians 2:13-14. I am amazed at the way God brings things around again and again. I do not believe in coincidences.

I was even more amazed when Miss Emily taught and explained the word Tetelestai this morning. Tetelestai – “IT IS FINISHED.” When I learned how this was written on cards when a debt was paid in full, I saw Jesus in my mind writing it across my card and forever taking that burden from me – “IT IS FINISHED.”

I have found two men that I am now able to tell my story to and that has also been a tremendous help in lessening my shame. They are good Christian men and have been a real blessing.

I have to say the deepest heartfelt “thank you” to the entire staff at the Meier Clinics. Dr. Meier, Dr. Cobern, Ms. Rachel, Ms. Emily, Ms. Tammy, and Ms. Tamara, God has used what you do to give meaning to life that I didn’t care about five short weeks ago. You all have blessed me with God’s knowledge and I know you will be a blessing for the work you’re doing.

A Personal Testimony from Nancy Brown, President of Meier Clinics

I was born in 1948 to a loving, Christian family in Michigan. Our parents were German immigrants, and my siblings and I were the first of our family to be born in America. We were born about three years apart and I was the youngest of four. I have wonderful memories of a godly father who liked to spend some of his time after dinner “walking” while carrying me around the house when I was about two or three. He also led our family in Bible reading and prayer every night—almost without exception my entire 18 years of living at home. He was also strict and had a strong work ethic. Often he would repeat a German phrase that meant “work makes life sweet.” I watched him as he worked hard as a home builder and carpenter, and remember him always being grateful for extra work hours on Saturday as that represented added income for his family. To me, his life and “walk” was completely consistent with his teachings to us and others.

My mother added “spice” and joy to our family. We always had birthday parties, and Christmas and Easter were wonderful holidays at our home. We frequently had dinner guests, and visiting ministers or missionaries connected to our church would often stay at our home. These guests made a very favorable impression on us as kids in the Meier family. In fact, one of the medical missionaries who stayed with us is the man who influenced my brother, Paul, to first consider becoming a Christian doctor. There was also an elderly woman in our church who felt led to especially pray for Paul and God’s work that perhaps Paul could do one day.

Our parents raised a minister with the spiritual gift of evangelism (Richard); a Christian psychiatrist who has authored or co-authored over 90 books, became the “Pioneer of the integration of Christian faith and mental health care,” and is the founder of Meier Clinics (Paul); a woman who loves and serves God and her family, has many of the hospitality gifts that my mother had, and also is a prayer warrior like my father (Bettye); and me (Nancy) who has my father’s work ethic and my mother’s and father’s love of children and family.

We were also a family that faced hard times, and whose faith was tested; yet it was during those dark valley times that I also felt God working in my life, redirecting and refining me, and sandpapering the rough edges down to make me more usable to Him. I believe this process will last as long as I live, as I will always want to keep growing and will always have more rough edges to be dealt with.

My mother almost died when she had me at the age of 40. She had trouble with hemorrhaging after my birth and told my father that, if she died, he should give me to my father’s sister who had never been able to have children. I also was born with a small birthmark on my lip, and my parents were concerned that this needed medical attention. After a woman in our church, who had the rare blood type that my mother needed, donated her blood, my mother recovered her strength and we were discharged from the hospital together.

The doctor my parents consulted with about the small birthmark on my lip suggested they use a technique of radiating the spot. Because of the way I cried and screamed during the first treatment, my mother decided not to have any of the follow-up treatments that were recommended. Around the age of 12, we noticed that the tiny part of my lip that had received radiation was not growing in the same manner as the rest of my lip. My parents told me that someday, when I finished growing more, we would take care of it.

I was a spunky girl who loved dolls, playing house, and roller skating, as well as bike riding. I loved my neighborhood of friends and friends from church with whom I grew up, and had a very happy childhood.

When I was 13 years old and active on the girls' softball team and volley ball team at school, I came down with strep throat. This was back in the day when doctors actually made house calls, which was a blessing as my mother did not drive a car. The doctor examining me thought I just had a virus, so he recommended I get rest and take aspirin for my fever; he then left, going on a two-week European vacation. During that time, my fever did not get better and my throat was very sore. I woke up one day having difficulty walking on one of my legs—as though I had arthritis. My mother decided to take me on a bus to see a different doctor, but by then it was too late. Rheumatic fever had settled into my body as a complication of the strep throat that should have been treated with Penicillin. The new doctor examined me and immediately put me in the hospital. I was there for three weeks, and for most of that time, I was confined to my hospital bed as they were so diligent in trying to protect me from heart damage caused by the rheumatic fever.

During my time in the hospital, my oldest brother, Richard, who was in the Air Force and preparing to go into church ministry as a pastor, wrote me a letter. He told me that this was a good time to think about spiritual things and make sure my personal faith in Christ as my Savior was based on my individual decision and not just because I had been born into a Christian home. I had accepted Christ at the age of six and was baptized, but I realized I had limited understanding of what it meant to really surrender my heart to the Lord and let Him direct my life and focus. Instead, I had gotten in with some friends at school who were fun and popular and who didn't have the same rules I had about dancing, movies and the like. When there was a party I was invited to, I would ask one of my girlfriends if she could invite me to spend the night at her house so my parents wouldn't know I had gone to the party. These were just fun parties of kids whose parents were home, and there was no concern about alcohol or drugs at parties. However, it was deceitful; my life was going in the wrong direction. I knew by the time Richard's letter came that I wanted to recommit my life—my future, my meaning in life—to serving God.

It is amazing how the greatest challenges of life can often be the best times of evaluation and turning points as well. There is no question but that my rheumatic fever at age 13 was a great time of recommitment and positive changes in my life.

People have all kinds of challenges that enter their lives, and all kinds of opportunities to pause and see where they are going, what their goals are, and what will be the legacy of their lives. However, for me, it was mostly health crises that created my turning points.

When I turned 16, I had a boyfriend who won my parents approval since he was a Christian. It was a fun time of activities in youth group, joining a choral group with Youth for Christ, singing at monthly YFC Meetings, and doing well in school. I had no symptoms whatsoever of having had rheumatic fever and there were no limitations on my activities. It was at this age that my parents and doctors decided I had matured and grown enough physically that I should have that small area of my lip examined by a plastic surgeon for repair. We lived in Saginaw, Michigan, which, although a large city, did not have teaching hospitals where best practices were abundant along with latest technologies. My plastic surgeon decided to take my case, surgically removed the small area on my lip, and performed plastic surgery to repair it and made a cut on my chin as part of his strategy. My lip ended up healing very well for the most part. However, my chin scar did not heal well and I had to have two more surgeries on my chin over a period of years. I remember crying when I faced these things at the height of my teenage years, especially in a family that did all things well, including looking good. God had allowed me to be placed in a situation where I had to choose to believe He was with me and would help me, or He had abandoned me. Somehow God gave me strength to push through that, though it was not easy. My friends were so supportive, including a boy I was dating. I don't think we can say enough for the support of others around us when "the secret us" is fully exposed and we need them to be God's arms, hugs, and affirmation in spite of it all.

I continued to be active in church and youth group and served on my public school's Student Council. I was able to make the National Honor Society, which greatly pleased my parents. I went on to college, finished a business program, and eventually ended up working at Wheaton College in their Student Personnel Department.

That is the period of time, during the Vietnam War, when a young man returned home to Wheaton on military leave and we were introduced. Dave and I were married within one year and were stationed first in Charleston, South Carolina, and then at Great Lakes Naval Base in Illinois. My young husband thought we should take up jogging together, so we did. However, I got completely winded while running. We thought I just needed to work out more and so I kept trying. However, soon fluid would back up into my lungs, making me feel like I was drowning. We went to the Great Lakes Naval Base Medical Center where a doctor asked if I had ever had rheumatic fever. I told him I had, but that I had escaped without complications. He said that was until now; over time, little by little, scar tissue had formed around my heart valves which was now making me symptomatic. After a series of tests and increasing symptoms, we opted for open heart surgery. This was in 1972 and I was just 23 years old. We went to Bethesda Naval Hospital to have a rather new technique of "cleaning" my mitral valve.

Once again, I was faced with a health crisis and had to decide if my faith in a loving God was able to stand the test and take me through to the other side. What was He teaching me and for what purpose? Was there something He was preparing me for later in life where I would need this "Marine-like" training to help me be strong? My husband, family and friends were all so supportive. Our church, where my husband and I were attending, surrounded us with love and prayers. One particular friend there took it upon herself to

write me every day while I was in the hospital, providing verses of promise and encouragement. Once again, I saw that God provides for us, making sure our faith crisis is not so great as to make it impossible for us to endure it. Although, there were times when I thought God had overestimated my strength and endurance. That's when I learned He give us His strength to carry us through our time of weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

My heart surgery was a huge success with immediate relief from all symptoms, including shortness of breath. The surgeon said I would probably need a repeat surgery at some point in the future as they had just "cleaned" my mitral valve; it would need to be replaced someday with a mechanical valve. He encouraged me to have babies soon if we wanted them, as I had a short window of time in which to have the strength to carry babies. We ended up having four babies within four years—all boys. The first baby weighed in at 10 lbs. 8-1/2 oz., the twins weighed 8-1/2 lbs. *each*, and our last baby weighed almost 10 lbs. When God decides to bless us, He can do it in amazing ways! (*"Is anything too hard for God?"* Jeremiah 32:27)

I ended up having 32 years of wonderful health with no restrictions on activities. My heart doctor, who is the President of the American Heart Association for the Midwest, has told me that I should be in the Guinness Book of World Records as he has never seen someone have so many years of health after a heart valve cleaning. We were able to raise our precious sons, see them all graduate from Wheaton College, and watch all of their football and soccer games throughout their school years. All four married Wheaton College women, and they have blessed us with 16 grandchildren who all live near us.

In 2004, 32 years after my first open heart surgery, I started to again have symptoms of breathlessness and a racing heart. It was time for my artificial heart valve. I can't begin to express the gratitude I had that God would allow me to have full health in raising our four active sons, loving on them and being at their many, many sports events over the years, while also serving as the Clinic Director of Meier Clinics (then called Minirth-Meier Clinics) in Dallas starting in 1976, then becoming President and Co-Founder of the Meier Clinics nationally in 2001. For all of the heartache, God had blessed us *"immeasurably more than we could ask or think"* (Ephesians 3:20) with our wonderful sons and the joy of my work at Meier Clinics. This was, for me, true and purposeful meaning in life.

I had my artificial mitral valve implanted in 2004 and thought I was done with health crises. However, this time my heart also had a complication of atrial fibrillation. From 2004 until 2015, I had 14 electric cardio versions to shock my heart back into normal rhythm and two heart ablations. Then in the spring of 2015, I learned my atrial valve was dangerously closing as a result of slow growing scar tissue from rheumatic heart disease. I needed another open heart surgery and an artificial atrial heart valve this time.

We were somewhat numb at first, but "God is God and I am not." Once again, I had a decision to make as to whether I would trust Him to be sufficient or worry as though I could change anything on my own. My previous two open heart surgeries ended up with a time-limited, full, and wonderful recovery of about three to four weeks, so this is what we anticipated again. However, we were wrong! This third open heart surgery ended up with

complications. One of my lungs had significant amounts of fluid around it, making it hard to talk or walk due to breathlessness. I ended up having surgery in which a catheter was placed in my lung area to help it drain. For most people who have this complication, this is all they need; the fluid drains and never returns. However, within two weeks of the surgery, I continued to have breathlessness and learned that the fluid around my lung had returned. The lung specialist again did surgery to drain my lung and was surprised at the amount of fluid she extracted. Within a week, the fluid had returned and another surgery was recommended. This time a catheter was implanted through my chest, and my husband had to learn how to drain it and measure the fluid that was removed. This was four months after my initial open heart surgery. After six weeks, the fluid being drained was miniscule and the catheter could finally be removed. My heart was also back in normal rhythm again. What a journey!

I am still too close to the recovery to have a full grasp of what I have learned and continue to learn through this all. But here are several key items I can share with you:

- 1) God never wastes our pain, but uses it to make us stronger and also to make us more compassionate people. If we never had pain, it would be easy to tell someone else in pain to snap out of it, or ask them what sin is in their lives that they deserve all of this pain—a pain we cannot relate to at all if life has been easy for us.
- 2) Gratitude for the raw honesty of God’s word that does not cover up the questions and contentions of godly men who experienced huge struggles and heartaches, like David (“a man after God’s own heart”), Job (“a righteous man”) and Joseph (the favored son whose brothers sold him into slavery and would later save their lives). It is awesome that our human contentions with God at times of hardship do not make Him turn His back on us. In fact, I wonder if our true feelings and struggles we share with Him are the reflection of our truest selves—our “secret us” that God already sees—which serves to enrich the depth of fellowship, authenticity, and love between us and our Heavenly Father.
- 3) While I was in the hospital recuperating from my last open heart surgery, my sons, their wives and all the grandchildren gave me pictures they had drawn, Bible verses, and hand-written notes of love. One of the nurses said we needed to post these all over my room. These were taped on the walls and I was soon surrounded by precious reminders from my family. One of the scriptures that was so meaningful to me was Joshua 1:9, *“Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”* I was reminded that God gives us strength and courage. He gives us faith and encouragement. We are unable to muster these in our own humanity; only God can do this through hearts that are open and minds that choose to believe despite the challenges.
- 4) As I look back on my life, I could not have gotten through the valleys and the challenges without God first putting me through “Marine Corp” training to learn perseverance, hope, and faith. It is wonderful to be able to help thousands upon

thousands of people with mental health struggles who are coming to Meier Clinics, giving them hope and perseverance in their journeys. It would have been humanly impossible to do this if life had been easy prior to my leadership role at the clinics. I would have undoubtedly given up.

- 5) Satan *hates* it when people find great meaning and positive purpose in living. He is *"like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour."* (1 Peter 5:8) I believe spiritual warfare is taking place all the time. This scripture helps me to choose to believe, choose to have hope, and choose to have victory over whatever hardship is placed in our path at Meier Clinics as well as in my own life. God is greater, and we are promised that if we *"resist the Devil, he will flee from us."* (James 4:7)

There is great meaning in a life of faith knowing God is with us and for us, and all will end up for our good though we may not see that on this earth. We can trust God to fulfill his promise that He rewards those who diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

My husband, children, and grandchildren are so very precious to me. I believe they are my gift from God to more than balance out the other struggles of my life. Through God's grace, I have found great meaning in life. My family, friends and my work and co-workers at Meier Clinics have been and continue to be a source of great joy and purpose.