



# Healing

Body,  
Soul  
& **Mind**

by Dr. Melody Palm



“Is this Dr. Palm?” asked the kind but troubled voice on the other end of the phone line. His name was Bob Hunter.\* He was a pastor in a nearby town. The chaplain at the local hospital had referred him and his wife, Shelly, to me for counseling. They had been married for 25 years and had three children.

Shelly had been hospitalized twice in the last six months, and the doctors could not find anything medically wrong with her. The neurologist recommended she see a psychologist. She was depressed and afraid to see one, especially one who might not value her spiritual convictions. The hospital chaplain assured Bob that I was a Christian psychologist and would be able to help them. Shelly agreed to meet with me the following day.

Bob greeted me with a firm handshake while Shelly paced behind him like a caged animal, her fear and anxiety almost palpable. Her eyes darted around the small office as if she were looking for an escape. Her breathing was short and labored. When she spoke, her voice was timid and her speech stilted. There was a childlike quality to Shelly that moved me.

I could not imagine how she managed to be a mother of active teenagers, a homemaker and the wife of a busy pastor. Dark circles were evident under Bob’s deep brown eyes. He cried frequently as he recalled their dark journey.

Six months before, Bob and Shelly’s world had begun to fall apart. Shelly began experiencing

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unusual physical pains in various parts of her body. Her blood pressure skyrocketed. She experienced dizziness and partial paralysis in her left arm. At times her speech was slurred and her gait became wobbly. She had frequent headaches and felt as if she was going to pass out. Unexplained pain seared through the bottom of her feet. She began forgetting basic things. She was almost certain

she remembered turning off the burners on the stove when she left the house that fateful day.

The fire marshall said the burner controls were found in the On position. Her family home had been reduced to a burned-out shell.

Over the past six months, Shelly had lost her home, her health, her job, the freedom to drive and the ability to trust her mind. The crippling anxiety and physical problems were stealing her life. As if that were not enough, doctors were telling her nothing was medically wrong: it was all in her head. Her father must have been right all along—she was crazy.

Shelly’s worst fears had come true. After a childhood full of extreme physical, sexual and emotional abuse, she had hoped she was not the one with problems but that it was her dysfunctional family instead. Sitting in the office of a “shrink” seemed to confirm that *she* was insane.

But in God’s sovereignty and provision, Shelly found herself in the office of a born-again, Spirit-filled mental health provider—an AGTS alumna, trained to lead wounded people to emotional, psychological and spiritual heal-

\*Names and places have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.



ing; a minister of the good news of Jesus Christ, trained to expose the lies of Satan, to impart truth and to instill hope and healing.



Ministry in today's professionalized culture may require paradigm shifts. These shifts include acknowledging that professional counseling is a healing ministry; seeing effective ministry as holistic and utilizing available resources within the community.

#### PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING IS HEALING MINISTRY

According to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, the verb *minister* is defined, "to give aid or service to the sick." In Matthew, chapter nine, the Pharisees wanted to know why Jesus was spending time with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus replied, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." Students in the professional counseling track at AGTS are not preparing for a position or title of minister but for the doing of ministry. These men and women are the balm of Gilead to the bruised and broken.

Shelly needed healing in her body, soul and mind. She knew Jesus as her personal savior and knew how to "do ministry." Bob, for his part, knew how to comfort the hurting in his church. However, neither of them knew what to do when unresolved psychological issues from Shelly's past flooded her present and threatened to destroy her life.

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#### EFFECTIVE MINISTRY IS HOLISTIC MINISTRY

God is a God of integrity. *Integrity* means "the quality or state of being complete or undivided." *Holistic* relates to complete systems rather than the treatment of or dissection into parts. God created us to be integrated. His desire for us as bearers of the good news of Jesus Christ is that we minister holis-

tically. Effectively ministering to people involves addressing spiritual, physical and psychological needs. These can't be separated from one another. Shelly's unresolved psychological issues were having a profound effect on her physically—impacting her relationship with God, her husband and children.

Shelly's struggles were not a result of sin in her life but rather the ramifications of being sinned against by other people. The cruelest abuse was that suffered at the hands of her parents—the people who were supposed to love and protect her. Thirty years later, the physical manifestations and anxiety brought on by the flood of painful memories were destroying her ability to be a wife, mother and minister. Shelly needed a professionally trained, spirit-filled Christian with a holistic approach to ministry who understood the interplay between body, soul and mind.

#### UTILIZING RESOURCES

People are fractured. Families and society are split. Abuse is rampant. Traumatized, disconnected people fill church pews and cry at altars. The need is great. How can it be met? Bob was a seminary-



educated pastor, preaching throughout the week and caring for those in his congregation. Yet, realizing his limitations, he sought help from someone God had prepared. Just as Shelly's medical doctors knew to refer her to a mental health provider, pastors, church workers, missionaries and parachurch workers need to know when to refer. They need to make themselves aware of the resources available in their local community.



As for the rest of the Shelly's story, God has been faithful. Shelly is learning how to control intrusive and painful memories. She has come to realize that she is not crazy and that her body had become the canvas on which her emotional and psychological pain was finding expression. Facing the congregation on Sunday no longer causes panic attacks. She is driving again and enjoying taking her kids to soccer games and band practice. She has had no more hospitalizations. Shelly and Bob are hopeful.

Shelly is gaining insight into how her body, soul and mind are

connected. One day, after several months of therapy, she said she was beginning to wonder if the unexplained searing pain she felt on the bottom of her feet was connected to her childhood. She recalled that as a child, her mother would beat her on the bottoms of her feet with a branch from the rose bush. Oddly, this took place only during the school year, whereas during the summer her mother beat her all over her body. I asked Shelly if she knew why. She told me, "Because school officials never checked the bottom of feet for abuse. They just checked my back, arms and stomach." My eyes welled with tears as I saw the pain in her face at the recollection of childhood abuse. Yet my heart was hopeful because I knew Shelly was on the way to recovery. She finally understood the intricate connection between body, soul and mind. She knew God was beginning to heal her.

At AGTS God is preparing men and women for the ministry of counseling in the professional setting—students who are willing to commit to the academic rigor required to minister in a world of increasing professionalism, legal requirements and state licensure.

These men and women know that people are fractured and society is broken, but they are answering the call to this new paradigm of ministry—a paradigm which both acknowledges professional requirements and believes in the power of the Holy Spirit to heal.

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