

# Hope for the Wounded Soul

Claudia could not believe what she was seeing. Just moments before, her three children had been playing happily in the family room while she fixed lunch. Now her 2-year-old son, Isaac, was dangling eight inches off the ground, eyes glazed, face purple and swollen. He was hanging from the cord of the mini blinds.

"No, Jesus! No!" she screamed as she rushed forward, scooped his limp body into her arms and unwound the cord from his neck.

"Come on, Isaac, you have to breathe," she urged. He took several tiny gasps of air, followed by a deep gulp of air, and then both of them began to wail.

"After that I was a wreck!" Claudia recalls. "I thought I had lost him. I was tormented by the image of Isaac hanging by the cord. I could not get it out of my mind.

"I went online and read that it takes just four minutes for a child to die that way. We took down all the blinds, but every 60 seconds I was checking on my kids. My nights were filled with nightmares of not getting to him in time."

Just six days after the incident, Claudia attended a theophostic training seminar at which Ed Smith, founder of Theophostic Prayer Ministry (TPM), demonstrated the ministry using volunteers from the audience. Claudia was so distraught she asked several friends to pray that Smith would choose her. He selected her in the second round.

During the session Smith asked Claudia to embrace the fear that was tormenting her—that Isaac had already died by the time she found him. She realized she had believed the lie that by saving him, she had interrupted God’s plan to take Isaac home.

She heard the Holy Spirit speak to her mind: “I did not come to take him home that day.” Later in the session, she saw Jesus in the memory, kneeling in front of her little boy, one arm around his back, the other smoothing the hair on his forehead, and saying: “Isaac, you’re going to be all right. Your mommy’s coming for you.”

“It was so tender,” she says. “Jesus was not stressed; He was anticipating all the good that would come of this.” In that moment, a deep relief filled her. She was not alone in her parenting; Jesus was there.

“I went home and for the first time in six days, I slept like a baby,” she recalls. “I can’t imagine where I would be if I had not gone through TPM.”

Claudia’s ministry session was taped and has become part of the Ministry Demonstration Training DVDs available through New Creation Publishing, a subsidiary of Theophostic Prayer Ministry headquartered in Campbellsville, Kentucky.

### **What Is TPM?**

Smith describes theophostic ministry—a term derived from Greek words meaning “God” and “light”—as “mind renewal,” though others might describe it as Christian inner healing.

Thousands of people in more than 130 countries report finding relief through TPM from a wide range of emotional and psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, anger, phobias, panic attacks, dissociative identity disorder, sexual addictions and eating disorders, as well as pain from sexual abuse and physical abuse.

In one independent survey of 1,354 people who had ordered the basic seminar material, 70 percent to 85 percent rated TPM as more effective than any other method they had used, including counseling and other forms of inner healing.

TPM was born out of a time of deep discouragement in the life of its founder. A former Baptist pastor, Smith had earned his doctorate of ministry and served in local churches for 17 years before opening a pastoral counseling ministry, where he worked primarily with female survivors of sexual abuse.

It was slow going. Even after years of counseling, his clients were still reporting feelings of intense fear and shame that impacted their daily lives.

“Where is the healing I’ve read about in the Bible?” he complained to God one night while driving home from work. My telling them that it is not their fault is not working, he thought. Then he wondered, What if I ask God to speak to them?

After mulling this thought over for several weeks, he asked a client if she was willing to try something new. She was—even though Smith confessed he did not know if it would work.

He asked her to call to mind a particularly troubling memory. She shook and cried, but then, when Smith asked her to listen

and see what Jesus wanted her to know, she stopped crying, looked at Smith through her running mascara and said, "It's gone."

"What's gone?" he asked.

"The shame and yucky feelings."

Smith insisted that she recall the memory a second time. The emotional pain was completely gone.

The woman recalled another painful memory, and the same thing happened. She reported that God had said it was not her fault and that she no longer felt any shame from the memory. She was free.

Smith was so amazed he insisted that the woman come back for several additional sessions to see if she remained free from pain. She did.

Smith was as surprised as anyone. As a pastoral counselor, he was accustomed to having to work with women for many years before the pain became even tolerable, and yet this woman was completely free. She had no symptoms or residual effects from the abuse and still doesn't, a decade later.

One of the basic principles of TPM is that a person's current situation is not the cause of his ongoing emotional pain. The lies the person has believed during a previous, often traumatic, event are the source of the pain.

When those lies are triggered by current events, the lie-based pain rushes forward to join the present pain, leaving the person in such anguish that he cannot see his current situation clearly.

In Claudia's case, she assumed that her distress was entirely due to Isaac's near-hanging, but during the session Smith asked her to let herself feel the pain and try to remember when she had felt that same emotion before. She recalled a time when her 7-year-old sister was having an asthma attack.

"My parents had put us to bed and gone out, leaving me and my sister with my 11-year-old brother," she says. "I had no idea that anything I was feeling was tied to that memory. ... I remembered the panic, the sense of not knowing what to do.

"As Dr. Smith questioned me, I realized that I was believing that there must be something wrong with me because I did not know how to help my sister. Then Jesus showed me that I was just a child—just 9 years old—not expected to know what to do!

"[At the time of the incident] Jesus had whispered to me, 'Why don't you go get your neighbor?' That neighbor had saved my sister's life.

"I felt such relief in the session. I saw that Jesus had been with Isaac as well. He was the one who put the thought, Why don't you go check on your kids? into my mind while I was making lunch."

Today, more than a year later, Claudia says that the memory of Isaac hanging by the cord has become one of her most precious memories.

“When I start to worry about my kids, I go back to that memory and hear Jesus saying: ‘It’s OK. I’ve got them.’ It is such a source of comfort,” she says.

### How TPM Works

Typical TPM sessions begin by discussing the current situation, but the goal is not problem-solving as in traditional therapy, but rather helping the person connect with what he is feeling. After his current emotions are identified, the recipient is asked to let his mind connect with any memory that matches the present emotions.

Not all memories are traumatic. In fact, people often express surprise when they realize how much they have been negatively impacted by lies stemming from old, seemingly minor memories. The TPM facilitator is not to interpret the memory, express his opinion, diagnose the condition or make assumptions about what might have happened.

Instead, he encourages the person seeking healing to search his memories to determine his own beliefs. The facilitator asks questions such as, “What does that little girl believe is causing the pain?” “What do you believe will happen if you let yourself feel that?” to help the person identify what he believes in the memory.

After the core lie is identified, the facilitator asks the person if he is willing to hear what Jesus has to say. If he is, the facilitator will pray and ask Jesus to speak into the situation. Some people get mental pictures or words from God, while others just get a sense of what is true.

Those who desire healing sometimes balk at having to revisit painful memories, but Smith says: "People have to own what they believe. They have to connect with it. As long as they deny what they feel and believe, they won't get anywhere."

The session is over when the person feels peace and calm in that memory. "The true test is in the fruit. A genuine encounter with Jesus produces changed lives," Smith adds.

Many people have what Smith calls "guardian lies"—lies that keep them from being able to do TPM. Lies such as "This won't work for you," "If you let yourself feel that pain you will die" or "You can't hear from God" interfere with a person's ability to connect with their "stuff" and receive from God.

In the session, all guardian lies are referred to Jesus. The facilitator simply asks, "Would you like to hear what Jesus has to say about that?"

If the person is willing, the facilitator asks, for example, "God, is it true that Susan can't hear from You?" When the recipient hears from the Lord, the lie is dispelled and the person is able to move forward.

A research study conducted by professor Fernando Garzon of Liberty University evaluated the effect of TPM on clients suffering from anxiety, depression and adjustment problems. The clients were evaluated on the basis of psychological tests four times: before treatment, after 10 hours of TPM, at the conclusion of treatment and three months later.

Independent reviewers who met with the clients after their treatments were completed classified nine of the 13 as

recovered, two as improved, one as having experienced no change and one as having deteriorated.

All 13 clients said they had been helped by TPM. Twelve said that the ministry was more effective than what they had received before, and 11 said they had grown spiritually through theophostic ministry.

At a theophostic convention in Orlando, Florida in November 2006, Smith surveyed 151 pastors from a wide range of church affiliations, including Baptist, Assemblies of God, Episcopal, Lutheran, Nazarene, Pentecostal, Catholic, Vineyard, Christian Church, Evangelical Free Church, Presbyterian and Church of England, as well as pastors of nondenominational churches, regarding their experience using TPM.

Eighty-eight percent reported TPM to be more effective than any other approach they had used in helping people emotionally.

Ninety percent reported that they had witnessed what they believed was genuine life transformation in most of their ministry sessions.

Eighty-nine percent reported seeing genuine spiritual growth as an outcome of the ministry, and 98 percent stated that they had personally benefited from having received ministry themselves.

Although 13 percent said they had some theological issues with theophostic ministry, 100 percent said they have recommended TPM to others.

Elliot Miller, chief editor of Christian Research Institute



Journal (CRI) observed for three days Smith's ministry to people in Kentucky and concluded:

"After an exhaustive evaluation ... CRI finds nothing inconsistent with Scripture in TPM's core theory and practice. It certainly fits the biblical worldview to hold that believing lies oppresses or injures people and replacing those lies with truth frees or heals them.

"The theory that the emotional pain that haunts so many people's lives (including Christians) is rooted in false beliefs associated with past experiences rather than the experiences themselves seems elegant in its profound simplicity, and the proposal that Satan is often the source of those lies while Jesus supplies the truth that dispels them is again consistent with Scripture (e.g., John 8:44; 14:6; 18:37)."

Miller goes on to write that "CRI does have several peripheral concerns about TPM, but we have been favorably impressed by founder Ed Smith's openness to constructive criticism and change."

Smith says that he himself receives TPM from trusted friends and often does theophostic ministry on himself.

One benefit of the ministry he has received is that he lost 43 pounds and 6 inches from his waist without trying—and without being aware of the change. It wasn't until his wife, Sharon, asked him why his pants looked so funny that he became aware of his loss of weight.

Says Smith: "[I realized that] the anxiety that had been

driving my eating was gone. I had stopped standing in front of the refrigerator when I wasn't hungry."

His own experiences of healing through TPM, as well as the testimonies of thousands of others, have convinced Smith that this method brings lasting healing to those who have been wounded, regardless of the source of their injury.

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Elizabeth Moll Stalcup is the associate director of the Healing Center at Church of the Apostles in Fairfax, Virginia.

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### **Pitfalls of Prayer Ministry**

Though theophostic healing prayer has helped many people, critics say it can be misused.

When people write to Theophostic Prayer Ministry (TPM) founder Ed Smith complaining about something that happened during their session, Smith sends them a copy of the ministry guidelines and asks, "Is this what happened during your session?" He says that "in every case, people have not stuck to TPM."

According to the guidelines, the facilitator is not allowed to use guided imagery, instruct the person to look for Jesus, give him words of knowledge or do anything to move the session in a particular direction. During the entire session, the focus is on Jesus.

Though tens of thousands of people say they have been helped

by TPM in the decade since Smith started selling his training videos, a small but very vocal minority say they were wounded or even destroyed by the process. One of the main complaints comes from people who say that remembering suppressed abuse was devastating to their families. Some even accuse TPM of generating false memories of abuse.

Critic Jan Fletcher writes on her Web site, "I believe some women have been deceived through theophositic's mystical methods into thinking they were victims of child abuse ... when these events never actually occurred." Such deception should never occur in a TPM session because, according to the guidelines, facilitators are not allowed to suggest anything to the person receiving ministry.

Smith says the problem is not with the process but with the facilitator and admits that "a few facilitators have mishandled the process and are causing unnecessary discomfort to people they are seeking to help."

He adds: "There are many people out there who call themselves theophostic prayer ministers who are not doing theophostic. I always tell people, 'If you are adding something, don't call it theophostic.'"

He also warns that "there is a strong correlation between unsuccessful ministry and inadequate training. One of the most common mistakes people make is rushing forward before they have adequate training."

Smith admits that earlier versions of the video training in which he urged people to find a partner and practice on each other were overly optimistic. At his church, Riverside Church

in Fort Myers, Florida, he says: “No one is allowed to facilitate the ministry until they are adequately equipped. We take 16 weeks just going through the manual, and I recommend people practice under the supervision of people who know what should be happening for one year before they start seeing people.”

Smith recently upped the requirements for obtaining a certificate of completion for the basic seminar. Now facilitators must not only view the entire Basic Training Seminar DVDs and read the 343-page Basic Training Seminar Manual but also watch the seven Live Ministry Training Demonstration DVDs and pass an online test of the basic principles.

He urges practitioners to have qualified supervision and churches to use discernment in deciding who may practice this ministry. “Not everyone should be doing this ... only the mature and spiritually discerning.”

The temptation for a facilitator to incorporate other methods when a session gets “stuck” can be great. That’s why Smith cautions anyone seeking TPM to know what a session should involve.

“At a minimum read the guidelines [to] know what should be happening in the session, so you will know if your facilitator starts to stray from the guidelines. ... A good theophostic prayer minister will always be willing to stop at any point. I hear horror stories about people who call themselves theophostic prayer ministers saying, ‘Come into the bedroom.’ They are not doing theophostic.”