

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
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Fearless – Ep 94 – Elephant in the Room-Counseling
Final Transcript

Cissie Graham Lynch:

00:00:00 Is therapy taking the place of godly counsel inside of our churches?

MUSIC STARTS

Cissie:

00:00:05 Hi, I'm Cissie Graham Lynch. Welcome to *Fearless*, helping you have a fearless faith in a compromising culture.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Cissie:

00:00:26 Welcome to another episode of *Fearless*. Today's episode is gonna be the last one of the "Elephant in the Room" series. And if you've missed some of those series where we've talked about alcohol inside the church, cohabitation, or any of those other episodes, you can check them out on my website, CissieGrahamLynch.com. But in today's episode, we are going to address a trend that I've been seeing inside the church, that I think has some dangerous consequences, and that is seeking therapy versus godly counsel. I've been very open about my story. I shared on my podcast on episode towards the end of last year about my struggles with anxiety and depression in my pregnancies, and how that really just crippled me of who I was—I struggled with that in all three of my pregnancies.

But it was during that time where it was just like extreme darkness in my life for about nine months that I shared my story with a few people in my, kind of, inner circle. And I was sharing it one day with somebody kind of in tears and crying, and they looked at me and just said, "Cissie, you need a therapist." And it kind of took me back a little bit. I wasn't expecting that when all I really needed was somebody to kind of hug me, to love on me, and to pray for me. And that's when I realized I kind of saw this trend happening over the last 10 years, but especially now where we're seeking, kind of, therapy and therapists in the place of maybe the Holy Spirit, in the place of godly counsel, in the place of just a faith community around us.

And I wanna be, you know, just very upfront that this is not a podcast against therapists. I'm not against therapists. I think there are godly therapists, godly counselors out there who help us navigate through traumas and challenges in life that we face or that have been a part of our past. But I want to make sure and encourage you on this episode that we're seeking *godly* counsel. I read in the Barna study that 42% of Americans have been in therapy at some point in their lives, which means that therapy is becoming the cultural norm. But only 3% of those who have gone to therapy have found their therapists through the church. And I've seen some just kind of dangerous trends—and a few of 'em that we're gonna talk about today as it's become kind of become a weekly routine. Like, you're gonna go get your coffee today, we're gonna see our therapist today, and it's become like the first solution that we're seeking. People are not seeking

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godly counsel. I've seen one bad therapist ruin somebody's life, and we need to be very careful of the counsel that we are seeking and making sure that we're seeking godly counsel.

I think we've removed the job of the Holy Spirit in some seasons of our life. When God needs us in those difficult times to let the Holy Spirit work through, we quickly remove the job of the Holy Spirit. And we're always seeking there's an a reason why for our actions, and we're gonna get to some of that, you know, we explain our past, and excuse the present. But to be honest, I had this kind of on my docket last year—last fall— to discuss, and I've kind of written up this script of what I wanted to talk about therapy inside the church and some of the dangers I saw in it, and when I came to record it, I just didn't think it was the right time.

I didn't want this to be an episode that I did by myself, because like I said, I don't want people to think I'm against therapists or godly counsel. There are definitely times in our life and different circumstances and people's, kind of, history in their lives that they need that and they need somebody to come alongside of them and help them and guide them. So, I wanted to bring somebody along. So I've asked some sweet friends, Drs. Paul and Virginia Friesen. I first met the Friesens when Corey was playing in the NFL at an NFL marriage conference. They are chaplains, kind of, not a part of the organization, but they became, kind of, the chaplains and did a Bible study for the women and for the couples of the New England Patriots.

They've been in ministry for 40 years, helping marriages, helping families, counseling over the last 40 years, and have their own ministry called Home Improvement Ministries, and there was a time in my life and in Corey's life where they really came along early in our marriage to help us. And so I've asked them to come and join me. Help me navigate this conversation of how do we seek godly counsel and kind of some of these dangerous trends of therapy that we're seeing. So Paul and Virginia, thank you for joining me on today's episode of *Fearless*.

Paul Friesen:

00:05:00 Thanks so much Cissie. So good to be with you.

Cissie:

00:05:02 Virginia, there's a neat little story of your dad speaking at a Billy Graham Crusade. Tell us a little bit about that.

Virginia Friesen:

00:05:10 Yes, I was fortunately raised in a home that loved the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association [BGEA]. From the time I was little, I could see my parents writing their tithe checks every single month at the dining room table, and the BGEA was always one of them. When my father was a commander in the Navy—just on the way to—actually, he was a captain on the way to becoming an admiral, Billy Graham's

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Crusade came to San Diego in 1976, and they invited my father to be the military voice of testimony. It actually brings tears to my eyes just to think about that moment of him sharing the platform with one of the really, really, wonderful, great giants of the faith. And he gave his testimony there in San Diego, and it's one of the treasured recordings we actually have because the BGEA was kind enough to send us a copy of that soon after my father's death.

Cissie:

00:06:03 Well, it's really sweet because years after that, Corey and I were at an NFL marriage conference, and I signed up to take one of your classes, and didn't know any of that history. I didn't even get a chance to meet you and Paul at that marriage conference. And it was months after that when my dad was speaking out in California, y'all had walked into the room and I just lit up and I finally got to introduce myself to the two of you, and, over the years, I've gotten to know you and I follow your ministry. But tell us a little bit about the two of you, your background in your ministry.

Paul:

00:06:36 Well, thank you, Cissie. We met in San Diego in 1973, '74 [laugh]. I got married in '76. Been in family ministry, camping ministry our whole life, and in 2004 started Home Improvement Ministries and have been speaking and traveling, trying to help couples and families grow in God's design for a godly marriage and family.

Cissie:

00:07:04 You two really have impacted many marriages and families and we're so grateful, so thank you for joining me on today's topic of this new cultural norm of therapy. And to start off, you know, I think even in my introduction, I've probably have used the word therapy and counseling and kind of going back and forth, which I think happens naturally in conversation, but in Scripture we read many verses with the word "counsel." In Isaiah, Jesus Christ is called the Wonderful Counselor. But what's the difference—is we're seeking—what's the difference between therapy and counsel?

Paul:

00:07:38 Hmm. I think you're right; they are used interchangeably. If you did make distinctions, think therapy often is considered a little more advanced or people with a little more of a professional degree.—Mm-hmm. [Virginia: affirmative]—Sometimes people who deal with just weekly meetings where a counselor may be shorter term. Maybe somebody, a therapist, may be focused more on just long-term healing.

Virginia:

00:08:08 Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yeah. I think one of the biggest distinctions probably is education. I think that typically therapists have higher degrees in the area of psychology or counseling. Counselors often can be laypeople or just somebody who, especially if you're considering Biblical counseling, somebody who really regards the Word of God as our ultimate authority and the Holy Spirit as our ultimate Counselor.

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Cissie:

00:08:36 I think when everybody's got a different background—Mm-hmm. [Virginia: affirmative]—and that some of us have traumas that we have yet to overcome, or maybe we're currently in it, you know, somebody's life can turn upside down in an instant. But also I kind of see this trend of people just seeking, going to a therapist, kind of more like a rent-a-friend with maybe no end goal. But when in our lives—let's start there—when in our lives would you suggest is a good time where we do look for outside sources for counseling?

Paul:

00:09:09 Well, I think, as you've already alluded to, sometimes we just need somebody to share with, somebody who's been through the experience, somebody who can give us some hope. But I think if we're dealing with something that just continues to nag us, we don't seem to get on top of it, or the people that we're talking to say, "This is really above my pay grade. I'm just not equipped to help." It may be issues of abuse in the past or some significant trauma, and I think at that time it may be helpful to say, Well, let's look at somebody who has a little more specific training in this area.

Cissie:

00:09:41 Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You had shared a story with me, Paul, about where there was a church that started small groups and what they saw. Share that story.

Paul:

00:09:51 And when I was in college, our church started what they called home fellowships, which were gatherings. It was like small groups. And, Pastor John Tobe, who is our mentor to this day, had shared with me that his counseling load dropped by 75% when these groups were fully engaged. And I called him just last week to make sure I was correct, and he said, "No, it's more like 80%." He said having people just have somebody to talk to them, give them hope, saying I've been there, God's gonna help you through this was what they really needed. And then there were some of the more critical issues that he dealt with or a trained counselor dealt with.

Cissie:

00:10:33 Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, I think that's so important, especially after we're coming after 2020 and the pandemic where people were technology driven, but were set ourselves in isolation, and, you know, people—it's kind of like me where I just shared: I really just needed somebody to love on me in a difficult time, and as God created the church that we are to be in fellowship with one another and be part of the body of Christ—and that we've become so isolated. We're not a part of churches anymore, we're not a part of small groups. Life has become very transitional for many people moving from city to city, and we've taken that fellowship out with one another. And I think even with friends, a lot of our friends, we won't have those like deep conversations and to really walk through kind of the muck with some friends. And so I think that's a very interesting story that I've never forgotten that you've shared is that

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once we became in fellowship of the way Christ intended it to be, the need for certain counseling dropped tremendously.

Virginia:

00:11:38 Mm-hmm [affirmative].

Paul:

00:11:39 You know, it's interesting, Cissie, that when Scripture was written, I don't think they had licensed therapists at that time or counselors, and yet as we were preparing for this, I was looking through Scripture and it's interesting, Proverbs 11:14 says, "*Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.*" And I just think that's a great verse or another: Proverbs 15:22, "*Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.*" I just think we need other people to feed into our life.

Virginia:

00:12:14 Yeah. I think it's such a huge affirmation of God's design, that we are image-bearers of Him. We were designed for relationship. We were never designed to go at it alone. And I think it's fascinating that in 2023, most Americans identify as the biggest troubling issue in their life is loneliness. And I think that that's just fascinating since it's juxtaposed to a world that's more connected technologically than we've ever been. So with just a movement of your thumb, you can quote, unquote *connect* with somebody. But I think it's just such an affirmation that we are truly image-bearers—Mm-hmm. [Paul: affirmative]—made for face-to-face relationship, that screens really don't satisfy our souls—Mm-hmm. [Paul: affirmative]—but an interaction actually does. And I think that's where a lot of this—we've lost the role we have in one another's lives by not living in community, by not having fellowship, by living in so much isolation—Mm-hmm. [Paul: affirmative].

Cissie:

00:13:15 I think of that even just in our personal lives inside of our families, whether you go to a restaurant and you see kids on their like iPhones and even headphones on where they can't talk to their families. And even for spouses, many times you go to bed, one's on their phone, the other's on their phone, and we go to bed not even talking, even Corey and I are working through that. But, I wanna talk about, as I shared with you, I have seen one bad therapist ruin somebody's life. And, you know, for example, a friend of mine, years and years ago, was going to a state university. That's where she was seeking her counsel, through a state university. That's probably a big, big red flag right there [laugh].

We're not seeking godly wisdom and godly counsel, and it really kind of messed up with her life. It was with eating disorders and with some family situations. And she was listening to this ungodly counsel of this person at a university. And I just saw these like long-term effects on her life. So if we're somebody that has sought counsel, gone into

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therapy, what would be some red flags? Like for somebody that's sitting there and saying, "Uh-oh, this is a person that I don't need to go any farther with. I need to kind of cut all ties."

Paul:

00:14:34 Well, I think when you use the phrase "seeking godly counsel," a godly counselor is going to lead you to godly lifestyle and godly choices. And so one of the red flags is if the counselor is advising something that's against God's Word, saying, Well, just pursue your self-awareness, your self-happiness, and if you can't find that with the person you're married to, you deserve to be happy, find somebody else. I think even as you're trying to figure out who to go to, you might say, Tell us your position on marriage and divorce, or tell us your position on gender issues, or just get a feel, are they somebody who's really centered in Scripture?

Virginia:

00:15:18 I think you definitely have to vet anybody that you're seeking with counsel, especially under a professional banner. Interview them just like you would—I think most of us interview a doctor before we're gonna sign on for them as our primary care physician. We're gonna vet information on an educational system, especially if we're sending our kids to a Christian school. We wanna know what do they actually believe. And I think it's especially important when we're seeking counsel that we make sure every therapist and every counselor should have a printed statement of their beliefs, and so it would be really appropriate to ask to see that prior to signing on with somebody.

Cissie:

00:15:58 Hmm. That's good. I know some friends that they've been in it, maybe they're kind of feeling like they're just treading water in their therapy sessions, but they don't know if it's a good time to walk away. When would be a good time to kind of step away from a therapy session or to kind of say, OK, God, I've gotten what I've needed. What's a good time? I know people are struggling with that.

Paul:

00:16:21 Well, I think you use the term "treading water" when you don't feel you're making progress—Mm-hmm. [Virginia: affirmative]—that you're not moving towards the goal, that's probably a good time to step away or look for somebody else that's going to help that. We will have that with a couple: If they're not doing the work, they just don't seem to wanna do that, or if they're not finding us helpful, we'll say, You maybe need to find somebody else, at that time.

Cissie:

00:16:45 You're talking about end goals and that's one of the things I feel like some people don't have an end goal when it comes to these therapy sessions. What should be the end goal when you're seeking counsel in therapy?

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Paul:

00:16:57 I think the end goal is growing in Christ-likeness, and sounds like a Sunday school answer, but if our counselor or therapist is not helping us become who God wants us to be, that's not a good fit. I think a lot of therapists tend to want us to feel OK about our sin rather than grow in righteousness. It's, Well, look backwards, evaluate what's happened to you. Give an excuse for why you're doing what you're doing instead of empathizing with your past, but really moving you towards the future. I think Christ was the best counselor ever. And I think of the woman caught in adultery. He says, "*Neither do I condemn you.*" He was empathizing with her. He was expressing empathy, but then He says, "*Go and sin no more.*" He was being prophetic. He was saying, "So I understand this is your background, but don't live in that anymore. You don't have to." And I think we have to give people hope that God has something way better than muddling around in our past.

Cissie:

00:17:58 Well, when you say that, I think actually you said, "They wanna explain their past and excuse their present." And so many times I've kind of noticed this trend—this would be like another dangerous trend—that they're always wanting to find an excuse for what's happening in their life now. And a lot of those excuses will end up being their dad. Now I want people to hear me if they're listening: I know some people have some—have had some horrible dads out there, some terrible fathers who have hurt them, maybe who have abused them—but I'm talking about overall people that probably had good fathers. Now, no father's perfect. I had a father that was gone *most* of my childhood, taking the Gospel around the world, and like most teenagers, I resented my dad.

My dad wasn't there at many of my volleyball games. He wasn't the one teaching me how to ride a bike and to play basketball. Those were some other fathers that kind of stepped in, and so as a teenager, I *really*, I resented him—started resenting the ministry of Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. But I remember when I was 18, I went on this around-the-world trip with my dad and—to see different projects of Samaritan's Purse—and I can remember exactly where I was in Africa, and I looked at my dad across the way of this tribe that was in between us and I thought, "My dad was being obedient on God's calling on his life." And yep, there were sacrifices and our family looked quite different, but I'm thankful that I had a father that was obedient.

And God had to work in my life, and that was the place where the Holy Spirit really had to come and work, and my relationship with my dad and I really changed. That doesn't mean my dad's perfect to this day. He'll do things I disagree with and he might do things that hurt me, but I don't hold this like bitterness in my heart. I have a wonderful father. So I don't want people to listen thinking, there's all these like, deep secrets. But that's the point is no father's perfect. I often say, "Well, at least our father wasn't Abraham that was taking us to the stake and gonna sacrifice us." [laughter]

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But I've seen that over and over that people wanna find some excuse. And Paul, I'm so thankful that you said that we have to have a hope. I feel that God is gonna use our future, that we are new creation in Christ. We can recognize things from our past, but to move forward from that, and that's something dangerous I've seen. Virginia, do you have anything to add to that?

Virginia:

00:20:32 I just wanna affirm what you've said. None of us come from perfect situations. We don't have perfect moms or dads. We aren't perfect parents or grandparents or perfect spouses, but we do have a perfect Father who keeps calling us to His heart. And I think that that's when you're talking about, "What is the end goal?" I think you really do have to have a clear picture of what you want therapy or counseling to accomplish. We had a couple that came to us and they announced when they sat down in our office— Paul and I do couple-to-couple counseling; we find that's just most effective in marriage counseling—and they started by saying, "You're the fourth counselor we have come to." Well, I will just tell you from a counseling standpoint that's an immediate red flag. You think, OK, wait, the problem can't be with all of the counselors, the problem must be with you. But we didn't say that. We just said, "Well, tell us about your previous experience."

And they said, "Well, each one of the three previous counselors we've gone to as a young married couple"—they were about eight years into their marriage, they were having financial problems. They were facing infertility. She had found out that he was unfaithful to her. But, the overarching umbrella in their life was that they were actually Christ followers and they wanted to somehow follow Christ—and they said, "Every one of our previous three counselors has said, 'Cut your losses. I mean, seriously, you have so much to overcome, you'd probably be better just to start over again with somebody other than each other.'" And we said, "So why did you come to us?" And they said, "Well, a friend of ours told us about you, and they said that you fight relentlessly for marriage."—Mm-hmm. **[Paul: affirmative]**—"So we've come to you because we have hope that maybe you can help guide us to a better place in our marriage, a reconciled place so that we can have a Christ-honoring marriage."

And as soon as they said that, we said, "Well, by God's grace, you've come to the right place because we just believe in the power of prayer. We believe in the power of God's Word. We believe in repentance and transformation." And we walked with them for the next two years and they did reconcile their marriage, went on to become marriage kind of point people in the church that they eventually landed in where they were helping to organize marriage events, to strengthen marriages. And we say that not at all to our credit, but completely and honestly, all praise is His. Ultimately, Paul and I don't have any power to change a person's heart, but a marriage that is reconciled of a life that's put back together is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of Jesus in somebody's life.—Mm-hmm. **[Paul: affirmative]**.—And He certainly uses people to help other people get there, but it's really ultimately His work.

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Cissie:

00:23:21 I love that story that they were wanting to focus on the future. And, I always remember kind of the analogy like in our car, there's a reason we have a very small rearview mirror, but a really big windshield in the front to see the future and to see what's ahead of us. We're not to dwell on the past. We can move forward, let God use it in our lives to make us stronger, to make us like your friends, to help others in the future of their marriages. But that couple, they wanted to see the future that they knew God could heal their marriage.

And, I think too often we dwell of what's behind us and we hold on to that, and people are always looking for excuse. All of a sudden, they have a family issue or a daddy issue, and that's why who they are, and they gotta set up these boundaries with one another. And that's another thing. It's like help me figure out, are these—everybody's gotta set boundaries, is that Biblical? Maybe I'm wrong.

Paul:

00:24:20 Well, I think it goes to your word about we all want to have excuses for how we are, and I think especially we're seeing it more and more that people are looking backwards and they can blame their father or their mother or something, and so it excuses their present behavior. And, my whole life, I've struggled with my weight. I have half of an eating disorder: I binge, but I don't purge.

Cissie:

00:24:45 Oh. [laughter]

Paul:

00:24:48 Yeah. And when Virginia talks to me about that, I'll say, but you know, the home I grew up in, we ate when we celebrated, we ate when we were sorry. We were told to eat as much as you could at the smorgasboard to get your money's worth. I said, "It's my parents' fault." And she'll look at me kindly and say, "You're 72, I think you could start taking responsibility for your own actions." And I think that's one of the things that we're prone to do, to—we just want somebody to give us an excuse and that doesn't help us move forward.

Virginia:

00:25:23 So to pick up on your analogy, it's exactly the metaphor we've used for years that the role of a rearview mirror is to give you context for what's behind you, but if you stare at the rearview mirror, you will surely crash because you won't be able to see what's out ahead of you. It was born in the garden, right? Blaming. It's the woman you gave me, it's her fault. No, it's that snake, it's his fault. It's somebody else's fault. So it's really part of human nature, part of our broken human nature, that we're gonna look for somebody to place the blame on. And you know, we're with you on this, Cissie, I realize that there are, as I understand boundaries, there's a place for putting a boundary. Say that somebody is genuinely abusive and you will not let your children be with an abusive

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grandparent or a grandparent that's steeped in a lifetime of sin and is gonna show them pornographic movies and drink and smoke and do all sorts of evil things in front of 'em.

I think there's an appropriate place to put boundaries there. But we see a lot of more abusive boundaries where it's just sealing off the border, it's cutting people off without really trying to work through whatever the issues are. Because relational harmony, being reconciled with one another is just a really high value of Jesus. That's what He's come to do, is ultimately to reconcile us with the Father. And I think just as we watch Him, you read through the gospels, you realize that reconciliation is a huge theme. And when we are, I think, encouraged so often in therapy, "Oh, you have to put up that boundary and not let them into your life at all," I think that's going down a wrong path.

Cissie:

00:27:10 Mm-hmm. That's a beautiful thing to remember, that God gave us a relationship of reconciliation and not to cut ourselves off and all in the sake of ourselves and protecting ourselves and these boundaries—and yes, I wanna keep reiterating there are times and places for those unhealthy relationships.

Of course, we are in a time where mental health is on the forefront, which is a good thing. I'm glad people are talking about mental health. I have talked about my struggles when I thought I needed to keep 'em secret. But when we look at how therapy kind of entered pop culture—I guess maybe in the sixties, seventies—but have we, as a generation after generation, becoming less resilient when we face life?

Virginia:

00:28:01 Well, that's definitely what the studies are showing us, that Gen Z, which are those born between 1990 and 2010, have been sort of dubbed the least resilient generation. And when you go back to the greatest generation ever that sort of peaked during World War II and you realize that there are some not very flattering adjectives attached to Gen Z. But what has been proven is that they don't know how to navigate the challenges of life. Interestingly, they're the first generation that has been completely computerized. Secondly, up to 50% of Gen Zers admit that they are online 10 or more hours a day. And as the studies are coming out showing the effects of online behavior, which has caused depression, suicide, a withdrawal from the ability to actually communicate face-to-face with people, you just realize that those are huge pieces of why Gen Zers seem to be kind of incapable of managing life.

When we teach on parenting, we will often say that one of the parents' biggest challenges is preparing their children for the road, not the road for their children. And I think if you go back in history, there was a greater grasp of that as parents realizing we need to teach our children how to navigate the ruts and the boulders of life because life isn't easy. There are all sorts of things that are gonna come in their path that will trip 'em up if they don't know how to navigate it. I think that today's generation is being raised with parents who are trying to prepare the road for their children. So they're clearing the

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obstacles, they're not equipping them with how to manage the challenges of life, and as a result, they're really not very resilient.

Cissie:

00:30:07 Well, and I look at kind of my grandfather's generation and probably generations before that, there was no—you didn't share feelings, right? And now fast forward all these years later, it's all about feelings. How do you feel? How does that make you feel? How does this person make you feel? So there was this just kind of this stigma in the past, now we've kind of overcome that. What is the balance we should be seeking, if that's a fair question? And maybe there's not a right answer for that one, but you kind of had one generation that was so far this way and now Gen Z that's so far that Gen Zers are growing up being told they need a weekly therapy session. That's a dangerous place to be. So where do we meet these generations in the middle?

Paul:

00:31:00 Well, I think there is a middle, Cissie, but I think this generation wants to feel good about everything. They're very sensitive about everything. Instead of focusing on, Am I just being the right person? Am I doing the right thing? So it's interesting when the Apostle Paul gives directives to husbands and wives, he doesn't say, husbands love your wife as Christ loved the church, unless you feel hurt by her and she's been mean to you today. My call is to act in a Christ-like way of Virginia, no matter how she is responding that day. And her challenge is to act correctly towards me, not to take the cues from me and give an excuse. So I am called to be sensitive. I'm called to listen more. I think as a man I need to do that, but I don't take my cues from her.

Virginia:

00:31:52 And I think the whole issue of feelings, obviously we are feeling people, right? So I think that where the older generation probably missed it was in closeting all of their feelings; they projected a problem-free life in one sense, like, "I don't really struggle with anything. We just kind of do it." The "can-do," we get it done. But I think the pendulum has swung so far to the other side, the feelings direct everything. And as we all know, they're unreliable. We can go to bed one night thinking that the world is gonna end tomorrow, that there's no hope for our marriage, for our kids, or anything else. And after a good night's sleep, we wake up, and we realize, "Oh, it's a new day. There is a sense of hope that's in me." If I make my decisions based when I'm at the bottom of the roller coaster of my feelings, I'm gonna make the wrong decision.

So I think where it comes in terms of interaction is I think that there is a need for us to be honest—but the honesty, it needs to be carefully shared. I think that there are people that you share pretty much everything with who are in your close, close circle. I don't think the majority of people need to know everything that's going on inside of you—although social media has certainly made that possible, right? But the goal in sharing that is not to invite everybody into the mud pool so that we can just all slosh around together and say, "Yeah, right, well everybody does it, everybody looks at pornography,

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everybody drinks too much, everybody does this. So we're all OK with that." I think the goal is in saying, "Listen, I'm struggling with this and I don't want this to mark my life. So I would like for you guys to come alongside me and help move me forward in this area."

Paul:

00:33:37 We were counseling a couple recently, and the man said, "Well, yes, I'll do these things for you as long as I feel like doing it." [chuckles] And, it's sort of that his feelings were guiding his actions rather than his actions guiding his feelings. What's that statement: "It's easier to do one thing than the other"?

Virginia:

00:33:57 Yeah. It's better to act your way into a new way of feeling than to feel your way into a new way of acting. Because if you wait for the feelings, there's just a whole lot of things we're never gonna do that God is calling us to do. Take forgiveness for one. If I have to wait until I *feel* like forgiving somebody, or I feel like they've paid enough back to me that they've earned my forgiveness, it's never gonna happen, 'cause the enemy has us exactly where he wants us, which is stuck in our own hurt.—Mm-hmm. [Cisse: affirmative]—That isn't where God wants us to live.

Cissie:

00:34:28 Virginia, you've shared with me like the beautiful story of your mom and just kind of how her past, but she really had to make a decision to kind of change her way. Can you share that story?

Virginia:

00:34:42 Yes. I was very fortunate to be raised in a very godly home, but it wasn't actually always that way. When my parents married at age 20 and 18, my father, who was the son of a pastor, wasn't faithfully following Christ at that point. My mother had been raised in a home with three brothers and a mother who passed away when she was only 12. She was the only girl. Her father didn't really like kids, so he sent her off to a boarding school. When she met my dad at 17, she recognized that he had something in him that she really needed. They fell in love, got married literally at 20 and 18.

My father was in the Navy and by the time my mom was 26, they had five children. And my father was working extremely hard in his military career, and my mom, who remember, lost her mom when she was 12, and actually had a housekeeper. Her parents were a little bit more affluent. So she really learned nothing from her mom about how to maintain a house, how to cook meals, or how to do anything with kids. So she obviously had a crash course in all of this, but she actually wasn't studying very well. And my father was doing everything, literally working all day long and then coming home and then he'd fix dinner and he'd make sure the laundry got done and he would assign chores to all of us. And when she was 26, my dad sat her down and he said, "Esther, you know I love you to the ends of the earth, but I can't keep doing this."

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He said, “I cannot maintain a full-time career in the military and run our whole household. I need you to step up.” And my mom looked at him with really wide eyes and she said, “Well, what do you mean?” And he said, “I need you to learn how to cook. I need you to learn how to do the laundry. I need you to learn how to clean the house—these things—I really need you to share this load.” And my mother didn’t tell me that story until years and years later. And I said, “What happened?” And she said, “I just looked at your father and knew he was the best thing that ever happened to me.” And she said, “It wasn’t long before that that we had been in Panama and it was there that we both committed ourselves to following Jesus. For me, it was the first time commitment. For your dad, it was a recommitment. So in the context of your dad telling me this, I realized that I just had to believe that God could help me to become who I needed to be in our home.” And she said, “I did.”

And I tell that story with such wonder to think that she even went on to learn how to sew and she never liked sewing, but they had no money, and they had seven children, six girls and one boy. So she made matching dresses for us for Easter and for Christmas every year for years after that. The things my mom learned to do because she was faced with a challenge, that’s actually what helped her choose her life verse, which is Philippians 4:13, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*”

Cissie:

00:37:41 Well I just think it’s a beautiful story that our past won’t define what God has for our future. And, but it’s also a choice, like we have to choose that. And your mom had to make that decision that day when her husband, when your father, came to her and she could have been offended. She could have been hurt by what he said, but she didn’t. She allowed God to kind of change her heart. And I think it’s a beautiful story cuz I see a lot of times we’re living in this world and I think when we are seeking counseling in therapy, we become very self-centered. It’s about me, me, me. I struggled with an addiction for years in an eating disorder, and it was all about me, any kind of addiction I’ve had becomes about myself.

So then when you go to therapy, whether it’s about relationships and boundaries, all of a sudden you become the center—and that’s not Scriptural. We’re to die to ourselves. We are to serve Christ. And that relationship with Christ, it’s hard. Our earthly relationships, they’re difficult. There are times that we are gonna be lonely. And I think we have to recognize that seasons are OK, and I’m no counselor, so step in if I say something wrong, but my mom taught me that there are seasons of loneliness. And so see, that’s OK—now I don’t mean extended long, but my mom taught me that there were seasons when they would move to a new city or that she was raising us kids and my dad would be gone, that there were lonely times. But those seasons of loneliness God used, where God could fill that void, no man could fill that void. My dad couldn’t fill that void. And I think in today’s time, no therapists and counselors, they can help guide us, but if you don’t have a godly one, they’re not gonna help reach to where God wants us to be in our lives.

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Virginia:

00:39:30 You know, that's such an important point you make, Cissie, that we really need to embrace that there are parts of us that no human can satisfy—and that is God's design, because if all of our needs could be satisfied on earth, we would have no need for God. And so I think that's really important for us to remember. It's actually in our lonely times, it's in our difficult times that most of us will say that's where most of our growth actually has happened. And just going back to my mom for a moment, I thought if she lived today, I think rather than take my father's challenge, lean into Jesus, and just continue to really press into becoming Christ-like, I think she would've recited all of the reasons she didn't have to do any of that. I mean, after all, she had a dad that was not involved and actually was outspoken about the fact that he didn't really enjoy children.

We never met him as grandchildren. We never met my maternal grandfather. He passed when I was only 11, but he just didn't wanna have anything to do with kids. She lost her mom when she was 12, and in that year, because her father didn't wanna take care of her, he sent her to live with his identical twin brother and his wife, who told my mother every day for that year she lived with them: "I really am sorry that I have to take care of you." She could have said, "... and I had an uncle that sexually molested me and I was sent off to boarding school." There were so many excuses my mother could have had for never living the productive, amazing life she lived until she was 90. And she was considered by so, so many people, just this amazing woman of God.—Mm-hmm.[Cisse: affirmative]—And I just thought her story could have been so different if she had just taken a different path.

Cissie:

00:41:15 Or if she lived in a different time telling her something different. As we're getting ready to close, actually I wanna back up a little bit. Virginia was talking about her mom learned to sew. Well Virginia got those sewing skills from her, and I didn't mention in the beginning that Virginia and Paul do Bible study for the New England Patriots, with the wives and couples. Is that correct? Because that's how they got involved with this NFL marriage conference. I know a few couples that were in their Bible study who love 'em, but Ms. Virginia would have—I won't mention *some* names, but, let's just say if you knew some of these famous football players and their girlfriends or their wives were at Ms. Virginia's house sewing pajamas together, that's the spirit that Paul and Virginia had, their home was welcomed.

And I think that's another thing we need to remember is we're in fellowship with one another to walk through life. Our homes have to be open to our community around us. And that's been a challenge for Corey and I to open up our home, to be in fellowship, to serve, show hospitality, so that we can walk with our friends and stuff through difficult times in life. But as we're getting ready to close—that was just a little side note about your sewing skills—is there anything, as we're talking about some of the dangers we're seeing and to be aware of some of these trends that are dangerous, but there are also good godly counselors out there that you should seek, is there anything that we've

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missed today that you think is so important? Cause this is a sensitive subject for many people.

Virginia:

00:42:46 Well, I would like for just to focus just for a minute on seeking pastoral counseling. When is it appropriate to go to the church? Some churches have lay counselors on their, as part of their program, but most actually don't. And so the question of when do you go to seek counsel from a pastor, and we're gonna back that up first and just say, choose your pastor carefully. I think it was conventional wisdom that pastors believed in the authority of God's Word and the relevance of it to today, but that's really no longer true, to be honest, even in the majority of our churches. I think it was Barna who recently released a study that a shockingly low percentage of pastors believe in the ultimate authority of God's Word and the inerrancy of it.

Cissie:

00:43:36 And reading God's Word on a weekly basis.

Virginia:

00:43:38 Yes, exactly. And so before you seek pastoral counseling, make sure that you've chosen to sit under a faithful, godly, Biblically driven pastor. Because if you don't, you are gonna get all kinds of cultural wisdom that will probably lead you astray.

Paul:

00:43:57 Yeah. I think one of the questions, how do you know if your pastor is a good candidate to be a counselor? Is he doing a good job? If you go to a mechanic, you expect that your car will run better when you finish, and same thing if you're with a pastor and it's not helping, he probably doesn't have a gift of counseling. And I actually admire pastors who know that and just say, "I'm really not the person." We have one pastor that we visit their church every so often and he'll just tell a person, "I'm not the counselor; wait until Paul and Virginia get here." And I appreciate him being realistic about his gifts.

Cissie:

00:44:38 Well, and at seminary, what courses—not all pastors take a course on counseling, right?

Paul:

00:44:45 Yeah, for most seminaries there's only one course on pastoral counseling and it's really not adequate. I think people have gifts in counseling. Some don't. And again, it's realizing whether you do or don't, whether your pastor does or does not.

Cissie:

00:45:01 Well, with all of that said, I want this podcast to be an encouragement to people. I don't want people to think I hate therapists, I hate counselors. I just saw some

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dangerous trends happening. I want people to be aware. I want them to have a hope of a future that Christ has for them and kind of an end goal, and not to be in a therapy session every day for the next 20 years. And that's why of course I wanted to invite you and y'all have just a *ton* of resources. I actually have some back here if people are watching on YouTube. Some of your books that you've written, your latest, I think this is your latest one—cause I have not read this one: *Loving Your Wife Like Christ When You Ain't No Jesus*. Hope for Ordinary Men. I love that one. And that one is actually, forwarded by Matt Hasselbeck and, of course, NFL quarterback and ESPN analysis, which, like I said, you two have made a huge impact in the NFL because your other book was forwarded by Elisabeth Hasselbeck. The marriage app, and I will put a link to my show notes to where people can find your books, your resources, but, share with us your website.

Paul:

00:46:12 Himweb.org/. Himweb.org/.

Cissie:

00:46:18 Well, Mr. Paul and Ms. Virginia, I just wanna say thank you. You two have been a gift. There are marriages all around the country in this world that you, that God has used the two of you to help save. And like I said earlier, you two played an important role in Corey and I's marriage in those early years when we were trying to figure it all out and we thought it was all about our feelings all the time. [laugh] You helped set us straight and we're so grateful for that, and the ministry that God has given you in the NFL and couples, but also just in our churches, how grateful I am for you. So for those who are listening, I encourage you check out their ministry on their website. I will put that link in my show notes and to check out their resources. I have used many of these resources. Another one was called *Restoring the Fallen: A Team Approach to Caring, Confronting & Reconciling*. I've used that to help walk some friends through difficult times. So thank you.

Virginia:

00:47:14 Thank you. What privilege to be with you, we love what you're doing.

Paul:

00:47:18 We appreciate your commitment to God's Word, your faithfulness, your willingness to be fearless in presenting that Word. And, I was just thinking as we are finishing here, maybe it's appropriate to look at the Apostle Paul, what he says in Philippians 3:13–14, "*Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*" And I think that's it: that we see what's behind, but we forget what's behind because there's a hope of what's in the future, and the real hope is to be those people who press on to the upward call of Christ Jesus.

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Cissie:

00:48:04 Absolutely. Thank you for ending that. May we just keep our eyes focused on Him and on the cross and not let our past define us, but that God would use it for His glory.

MUSIC STARTS

Virginia:

00:48:14 Amen.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Cissie:

00:48:20 Thank you for joining me on another episode of *Fearless*. If you would like to check out those resources from the Friesens, you can go to their website, which is Himweb.org/. That's Himweb.org/. I will also put a link in my show notes, but thank you for joining me on today's episode of *Fearless*. As always, I encourage you to check me out on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

CLOSING MUSIC

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