Healing Mental Health Through Faith, Peer Support & Holistic Wellness Transcript

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Opening on Mental Health Access

What do you think the biggest challenges are in the mental health world? I think the biggest challenge is that there are not enough people in the field.

Yeah. And I don't know, because you're in California? Iowa. Iowa? I'm sorry, you're in Iowa? Yeah. Okay. I'm in Missouri. I don't know if you have the same problems we do here.

It takes a long time to get in to see someone. Yeah, it does. Yeah, there are waiting lists. They're like therapists, then and then they're booked out.

Mm-hmm. Eight, nine months. Yeah. Yeah, so to me, the biggest crisis is that people who actually do want to get help are having trouble finding help. Welcome to Take Back My Brain with Lori Hammer, where real healing starts in the brain.

I'm Lori, a functional nutritionist and mom who's walked the path from anxiety and burnout to clarity and calm. Each week, we're going to dive into brain-based tools like amino acid therapy, gut health, fasting and faith to help you reclaim your energy, emotions and sense of self.

Hello everyone. Welcome back. I am excited to have you back again today. I have with me today, Carolyn Cooper. And the fun part is, is that you can jump on over to her podcast because I recorded a podcast with her too.

Podcast Introduction and Guest Background

So I want you all to go to mental health and faith. on your favorite podcast platform, it is episode 63, and that'll also be in the show notes for all of you, but Carolyn is a writer, a speaker, she has her podcast, she has YouTube, and she talks a lot in the field of mental health, faith, and recovery.

She is a certified peer specialist in the mental health world in Missouri, and she has been married to her husband, Harry, for 40 years. They have four grown children and five grandchildren.

And so she is one busy lady, but she did take time out today to share her specialty with us. So if you want to understand what it means to be a certified peer specialist and hear Carolyn's story, this is going to be amazing.

So Carolyn, welcome to the podcast. Thank you, Laurie. I'm very excited to be here today to tell a little bit about my story and to start off with talking about what it means to be a certified peer specialist or just a peer specialist.

Sometimes you might read. hear that role referred to as a peer support specialist. There's lots of different names for it. Different states use different names.

And in Missouri, I am considered a certified peer specialist, which means I have gone through extensive training. It's a 40 hour training, but then you also have to collect continuing education.

So it's not just the 40 hours and you're done. 40 hours ongoing training to serve in the mental health field as a peer. And what that means is I am someone who has lived experience.

In other words, I live with a mental illness. I had trauma in my background, I haven't diagnosed mental illness, and I have been trained to walk beside others who have mental health challenges.

And usually if you're working as a peer specialist in a behavioral health facility of some kind or in the mental health field, what you're doing is you're supporting others who are not as far along as you may be or may never be as far

along as you are and helping them learn how to live in the world.

And so that's what a peer specialist does. I worked at a behavioral health facility for a year. It was the employment services group, so I was helping people with mental illness of different degrees learn how to work a job, like at Walmart or in a kitchen.

I helped them. I coached them in different jobs. I took them shopping for clothes for interviews.

Carolyn's Trauma and Recovery Story

I helped them with resumes, all of that. from a perspective of a peer. And of course then they did have case management and mental health professionals who helped with the other aspect of their recovery and their care.

But I love being a peer specialist. Yeah. So tell us kind of back up just a little bit. Tell us how did you get to where you are today? Well, it started Let's see, 2002. So that was 23 years ago, I guess.

And it started with my own emotional and mental health breakdown. I had childhood trauma. I was sexually abused as a child. And from that experience. I really developed a lot of mental health challenges that were not recognized, not talked about, not diagnosed back in those days.

Back in the day, we didn't talk about things like that at all. I was very introverted, very insecure, really honed in on my academic and music talents.

That was kind of my focus. I isolated myself into those worlds. And then when I went to college, I decided I'd start fresh. I was putting all that behind me, starting all over.

And life was really good for a long time. I met my husband when we were still in college. It's 42 years now. Wow, 42 years. Congratulations. Thank you.

In fact, just a few days ago, we had the 45th anniversary of our first date. That's so fun. It was really good for a while. Then the undiagnosed depression and mood swings kind of caught up with me and the Trauma caught up with me in a big way.

I started exhibiting some Unhealthy coping skills is how I will say it unhealthy coping behaviors that were not good for me or my family We had four children by that time and in 2002 it was the year I turned 40 we'd been married about 20 years and I sunk into a deep depression.

I was staying home with the kids. I didn't work outside the home at that point. I had just quit a seasonal job to be home for the summer. But as the summer went on, I was increasingly depressed.

and discouraged and I felt lost. I felt very, very lost and very alone. I didn't know why I was having all these feelings and issues. And so for about a month and about July and August, those couple of months, really, I spent most of my time in my room in my bed and into early September.

And it was, you know, it was God that pulled me out. I know he doesn't always work this way. He works very uniquely with each individual in their situations.

For me, he pulled me out of my bed. I mean, it was a day, it just blended in like any other day. I can't tell you what day of the week it was. I can't tell you really anything.

Other than, I felt the spirit move me and I physically dropped out of my bed onto my knees and began to pray. That was the first time I had really seriously come before the Lord for a long time.

I would pray, but it wasn't me coming and saying, help. If it's more like, why isn't this happening? But now I was ready to say, How can I, how can I get out of this Lord?

He told me it was time to change. So from that point on, I did go into a psychiatric hospital for 10 days as an outpatient in the trauma unit. I spent several other years doing EMDR and other intensive therapy and EMDR is eye movements desensitization reprocessing.

I think I got that right. I think you did too. I have a couple episodes on my podcast about EMDR, so if anyone wants to check it out, scroll down, you'll find it.

Yes, find those episodes because EMDR is an amazing tool that's used by mental health therapists and such to help you process through trauma, which was why I went through that.

And by 2005, three years later, I was wrapping up my intensive therapy and I knew that I wanted to do something to give back. God had pulled me through.

He had totally I think in a way it was like I was saved for eternity when I was 10 years old. I received Christ into my life at about the age of 10, saved for eternity.

But I really look at that experience in 2002 as being saved to live in the world. being saved back to have a productive life pleasing to the Lord and just wanted to devote myself to helping others who also were feeling lost and alone and Struggling things like that.

So I saved healed and delivered right? So yeah, it's a healing and the delivery process Yes, definitely So in 2005, I wrote a book and this is the newest version of the book.

I don't know if you can see it. It's kind of blurry. Probably not. In this corner it says. In this corner. That'll be in the show notes. That'll be in the show notes since it's kind of blurry.

I wrote this book in 2005. I just republished it through Trilogy Christian Publishing.

Becoming a Peer Specialist

a couple of years ago. It's a workbook to help people work through trauma and mental illness. So that's the beginning of my ministry. Got it. Was that because from that point, I also started speaking.

I started getting more and more involved in getting the word out. I did more writing. And fast forward to 2016, I have this mental health ministry, my writing and my speaking.

And my sister who is a, she just got her doctor of social work degree. She's a mental health professional. She told me about the peer specialist program.

Okay. And so when I found out about it, I went through the training. I became a peer specialist. I absolutely love it. And even though I'm not working out in the mental health field, I use my training and my ongoing training to be equipped.

I think God uses that secular Oh, he does. Yeah, he absolutely does. So he uses the secular training I've received for me to be able to write and to speak and to be knowledgeable about mental health.

So that's how I got where I am today. That's amazing. So going on your own journey and now being a peer specialist, so you're working with people pretty deep in the mental health space every single day, right?

So like I'm working with people who are seeking an alternative to that mental health space. So they're seeking the nutritional, they're seeking the amino acids, but you're in a space where they're not, right?

So I would say it's, I would say it's kind of a combination, but I see what you're saying, but I totally agree that mental health is only one aspect of our lives.

I believe in the holistic approach, which I may be getting ready. That's what I'm leading up to, but to be in the world, to be in that world that's not holistic, how do you, cause I feel like as a Christian, I can't imagine not viewing the world holistically.

I know there's lots of Christians who do. They're stuck in the medical world and all those kinds of things, and I just don't understand that perspective.

So dealing with mental health from just a secular point of view as a Christian in that world, How do you, one, how do you navigate that? And what has the Lord shown you through all of that?

Hey friend, just a quick break to remind you if calming your brain is the missing piece in your practice or in your home, my MindThrive certification course teaches you exactly how to do that with targeted amino acid therapy.

So it's real science, real results, no band-aids. Enrollment is now open. Link is in the show notes. So back to the show. Oh, that's an excellent question.

I have learned how to give my testimony in the public places, you could say. I speak at, at least in the past, I think I might slow down this coming year, but I typically have been speaking at three mental health, secular mental health conferences every year for about five or six years now.

So I am out there in the secular world speaking. I am also a respect speaker in Missouri, which is an organization that trains people who have mental health issues, substance use disorders, or disabilities to learn.

And the respect speakers are primarily the mental health side, but anyone who has that kind of a story, they train them specifically for telling a chronological story of their life and events to help others understand what it's like to live with a mental illness.

Faith, Holistic Health, and Ministry

So I'm also a respect speaker, which is a secular program. So I am out there in the world, but God has shown me that it's okay for me to reference my faith.

If I do it the right way, I'm not witnessing, I'm not proselyzing, I'm not trying to tell somebody you have to believe the way I believe, but I'm sharing from my perspective that God is the one who navigated my recovery.

God is the one that's applied the strength I needed to overcome. And sometimes that's about as far as I can go with it, just those kinds of comments. But I don't hesitate.

I've also done presentations where I will refer to a scripture passage. Because that's very important to me. And if they're not a Christian, they can just ignore that slide.

They can just take it as just an inspirational thought. An inspirational quote if they want. That's totally fine. Yes, exactly. But I definitely do not…

I definitely do not hide the faith when I'm out in the secular world. That's part of my story and I can't change that. It is part of my story. Now, the other thing you ask is how I navigate that, you know, from more of a, what about the holistic approach?

As you were saying, what I've seen out in these conferences and such is very much like you said, the focus when I'm at a mental health conference is very much mental health.

But I have seen more and more workshops that include other areas of life and how that can improve. I was at a workshop just recently, I was at the American Association of Christian Counselors World Conference in Nashville a few weeks ago.

And one of the sessions had to do with your health, your sleep, your sleep habits. and your overall health in that way. So yeah, it's great. I have seen more workshops trying to bridge mental health into other areas of life, but not that much.

Yeah. Well, I just went to the Integrated Mental Health Conference, IMMH in San Diego, and it was so fun to go, like I went just to kind of I'm normally going to chiropractic conferences, nutrition conferences, and so I'm like, well, I'm in the mental health space, so I really need to go dive into this mental health world.

So it was my first real mental health conference that I've ever been to. And it was kind of fun because the mental health world is definitely waking up to this holistic approach.

And it was kind of fun to watch because they're talking about, you know, the ketogenic diet and, you know, going out in nature and grounding and all this kind of stuff.

Like I've been teaching this for, you know, decades. But it's finally, finally catching on. Which is really good because we can't compartmentalize this brain because everything head to toe affects how we think, feel and react to whatever's going on in our environment, whether it's trauma, whether it's or a different other kind of stress.

So I love the fact that you're out there sharing your faith in whatever capacity presents itself. And then I suppose that it's opened up lots of doors for you to just kind of dive deeper with people.

I will say yes. I am getting to know, I love the Missouri Mental Health Foundation. Nice. It's a nonprofit foundation. It's a secular organization, but they are the ones that sponsor the Respect Institute.

So I know the people there. They also organize a conference that I go to. So I'm getting to know people. that I am hoping eventually I will be able to encourage them to consider their faith if they don't have a faith.

So it is giving me opportunities. It's also giving me opportunities. I have met some amazing Christian men and women at these secular conferences. I'm not the only Christian out there.

Mental health doesn't discriminate. Definitely not. I have a lot of friends I have made over the years who I've been able to encourage and support, and they've been able to encourage and support me as well.

I was going to mention back on the holistic approach, I actually just did a workshop called the Women's Wellness. It was a women's wellness retreat. And I've developed a curriculum.

It's based on Mark 12. Forgive me if I'm wrong. It's the passage where Jesus is reminding them of the great commandments. the two big commandments, love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.

And are you looking that up for me? I'm looking it up, yeah. All right, thank you. I think it's Mark 12, 10 through 12, but I may be wrong. But anyway, I was really inspired by that passage.

I mean, we've heard it, if you're a Christian and you've been a Christian for a long time, you've heard that, love the Lord your God with your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Well, God really inspired me to think about that beautiful passage as a way that Jesus revealed and God has revealed how we are to love him. And that describes who we are.

We have a heart, that's our emotions. Heart, soul is our spirit. Mind is our mental health. Heart, soul, mind, strength is our body. our physical health, and loving others is our relational health.

So the wellness retreat that I did, the curriculum I'm developing, talks about our mental, physical, spiritual, emotional, and relational health. Because if God wants us to love Him with all of we are, shouldn't all of those parts be healthy?

They should be. So that we can love the best we can? Yes, I am in 100% agreement with you on that. And that's, we're always talking about the health, body, mind, and spirit.

Because if one of them is off, then the other two are off as well. Yeah, always. There's no exceptions, I don't think. Yeah. I agree. What do you think the biggest challenges are in the mental health world?

I think the biggest challenge is that there are not enough people in the field. Yeah. And I don't know, because you're in California? Iowa.

Challenges in Mental Health Care

Iowa? I'm sorry, you're in Iowa? Yeah. I'm in Missouri. I don't know if you have the same problems we do here, but it takes a long time to get in to see someone.

Yeah. There are waiting lists, therapists, and then they're booked out. Nine months. Yeah. Yeah. So to me, the biggest crisis is that people who actually do want to get help are having trouble finding help.

Now another part of that, like I said, is people that are actually looking have trouble. There are so many people who don't even look for help. If you look at some of the statistics, you know, NAMI, the National Alliance of Mental Illness and Mental Health America, SAMHSA, the Substance Use and Mental Illness Administration.

Okay, I said that wrong, but you'll put it in your show notes so they'll get that. SAMHSA, you know, those are the three organizations that I refer to a lot when I am checking statistics and facts and research and things like that.

And the research shows such a huge percentage of individuals who have mental illness or mental health challenges don't even try to get the help they need.

They just try to cope on their own. And I think that's part of the society we live in, isn't it, that right now people want to do it themselves. They want to try to get through it themselves.

And some things If you're listening and this is ringing a bell for you, it's so important to get the help. It is out there. Yeah. Well, I think, you know, we just went through the pandemic and, um, you know, we were told to isolate.

We were told to like deal with all these mental health issues during this whole time. You know, as you're isolated, of course you have anxiety and depression.

We were told, you know, so sorry. Um, you're going to have to, you know, suck it up. Buttercup basically is what it was. Yeah. So I think that's still carrying over and I see so many more mental health issues now.

Yes. Than we did before, unfortunately. And especially with children, it's interesting because I just, I just, uh, interviewed someone, um, on my podcast that we'll be airing in a few weeks and she, she is a therapist and she works exclusively with children three years old and up teenagers.

And she says that she has seen an increase of. the issues that even the middle school kids are having, the young kids are having. And I know we hear that, but just to have someone in the field tell me and share with me some of the challenges You know, we have to be aware.

We have to be aware. And that's really, that's what I try to do in my ministry, you know, through my website, my podcast and my writing and such. I really want people to be aware that we have this problem, but there are ways to overcome it.

And I believe first and foremost through the power of the Lord. Amen. But you know, We need to address it. We do. We definitely need to address it. And I appreciate you creating such an awareness, especially in that secular space.

I mean, we all have exposure to that, but some people just aren't bold enough to kind of live in that space. So I appreciate your boldness and your dedication to all of that.

Is there anything else you want to leave the audience with tonight? Well, I think what I would say is, first of all, I've already said it, if you are struggling, get the help you need.

But another thing, not just individual help, not just find a therapist. I have a mental health support group that I've been leading for about 20 years, almost since I wrote my book.

A couple of years after I wrote the book, I started a support group because I wanted a faith-based mental health support group and I couldn't find one at that time.

It's hard to find. It is. Well, now there are all kinds of resources. I have mine as a live support group. I do have it virtual now so that I do have some people that I know coming in from other places.

But if you look, if you search for mental health, Christian mental health, you're going to find a lot of great resources out there.

Support Systems and Finding Help

So find a group, a support group. You know, invite people to be in your network, your support network. Be intentional about knowing who can you call. And I love, I can't tell you when I first heard this, but I love the idea of having a 3 a.m.

friend. Have you ever heard that before? Have a 3am friend. Have somebody you could call anytime, night or day and they're going to answer the phone for you.

And they're going to be there and they're going to support you. So that's, I really want your listeners to know it's okay to get support for yourself.

It's okay to get people surrounding you to provide support. That's how we get through. That's how Jesus modeled things. He wasn't on his own doing this ministry, was he?

Anyway, that's what I like to leave your listeners with, just the importance of getting the help you need. Yeah. And it is so important. I really appreciate you being so vulnerable and sharing your story and how you're navigating this life.

So thank you so much, Carolyn. You're welcome. I really appreciate you being here. Where can they find you? Of course, that's all going to be in the show notes, but say it out loud.

Yes, I will. OK. I am on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. And my name is Carolyn S. Cooper. I always use my middle initial because people can find me easier if they use my full, that full name, Carolyn S.

Cooper. If you search for that on, on those places, my ministry name is mental health connect. Sometimes you can find me by searching Mental Health Connect, but probably one of the best ways to find me and find my social media is just to go to my website.

And my website is simply my name, carolynscooper.com. Now, my name is not spelled like Carolyn, Carolyn, it's spelled like Caroline. So just make sure when you go, you can see on the screen, C-A-R-O-L-I-N-E-S Cooper.

And you'll find my website and it has more information about the things that I do and things that I offer. I'm very excited about some new things that are going to be coming up.

I am going to be publishing a women's wellness retreat manual. So if other churches want to have that and put on that program, they can. I'm also making myself available as a speaker to come and lead.

a women's wellness workshop, and just some other things, focusing on my writing and just, again, helping encourage people. But thank you, Lori. Thank you.

Yeah. Thank you so much for being here. And all of you listening, make sure you like, subscribe, and share this, because I know you know somebody who needs to hear this message as well.

Where to Find Carolyn and Closing Remarks

And if you're a practitioner out there who wants to integrate more holistic things, whether it's my amino acid therapy or something that Carolyn has to offer today, all that information will be in the show notes.

Or if you're just a person going, I want to get certified in something and I want to help people, I have the Mind Thrive Academy that you are welcome to join and to be certified and then you can use amino acid therapy.

with all of your clients. And so make sure you check out the show notes for all of that. But I love each and every one of you. I thank you all for listening.

God bless you and I will see you in the next episode. Thanks for listening to Take Back My Brain. If today's episode helped you connect with hope or direction, I want you to follow the show, leave us a review and share it with someone who needs it.

And if you're ready to start your own healing journey, Explore our courses and our coaching programs at lorihammer.com backslash store. So until next time, remember you cannot medicate away a nutrient deficiency and healing your brain isn't just possible, it's powerful.