

*Book Reviews*

## Book Notes: Volume 4



by MICHAEL GEMBOLA

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The goal of this column is to highlight books relevant to the tasks of pastoral care and counseling by providing summaries, reviews, and some commentary. I hope to orient you to what is available by including new releases that are thought-provoking, helpful, or merit constructive, critical engagement. In a field flooded with books, I also hope to help you identify the right resource so you can decide what to purchase. I aim to be primarily informative and descriptive, though at times I will raise questions or counterarguments. I will engage more with some books than others, and I will often highlight one or two representative chapters rather than summarizing a whole book. A book's inclusion or exclusion is neither an endorsement nor a criticism. The six book reviews below are grouped into shorter and longer reviews. Within each category, the books are reviewed in alphabetical order by the author's last name.

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## SHORT REVIEWS

*Midnight Mercies: Walking with God through Depression in Motherhood*, by Christine Chappell (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023), 136 pages. Reviewed by Lauren Whitman<sup>1</sup>

The question of self-disclosure is one I wrestle with as a counselor and as an author. When should I share personally? How much should I share? How do I gauge the helpfulness of my personal disclosure? These are good questions to ponder because I know appropriate self-disclosure *can* be so beneficial to counselees and to readers. It can help people feel not alone. It can help people more clearly understand and find fitting words for their experience as they hear details of mine. It can help them become ready to make their own disclosure. Because I value self-disclosure, it was the first thing that stood out to me in Christine Chappell's book *Midnight Mercies*. I admired her so much for sharing her own story—a hard story—so that others could benefit. She gives us an example of self-disclosure done very well.

Chappell's book is for mothers who are suffering from depression, and Christine begins the book with an honest recounting of her hospitalization for mental health struggles. The book is not long, coming in around 100 pages, which seems to be a suitable length for a mom who is struggling. Christine provides a lot of helpful guidance, and she takes readers into the depth of Scripture with deftness, but none of it is overwhelming to take in. The book has eight chapters; the first seven focus on particularly hard emotional experiences mothers might be facing, such as sadness, anger, and loneliness. And the final chapter, titled "Hope," provides a landing place for readers that I'm glad Chappell didn't feel she had to rush to. Usually, we must wrestle long and hard through our experiences first, and hope is hard-won, so the sequencing resonated with me as true to life and how I think about sequencing in counseling. Each chapter ends with personal application questions, providing readers an opportunity to press in deeper to their own experiences and how they might get traction in the midst of struggle.

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1. Lauren Whitman (MA) serves on the faculty and counsels at CCEF. She is the developmental editor for the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*.

The *JBC* team has been hoping to publish on postpartum depression for years. Like Chappell, we always have moms on our hearts. And though we haven't accomplished that yet, I am very glad to have this opportunity to point readers to Chappell's resource. My hope and prayer is that more resources like it will continue to be developed.

***Facilitating Counseling Groups: A Leader's Guide for Group-Based Counseling Ministry***, by Brad Hambrick and John Chapman (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2023), 176 pages.

In this book, Hambrick and Chapman provide a short-term, church-based group counseling model that includes change-oriented and support-oriented groups. I believe this is a realistic model for churches both large and small. The groups are called *G4*, and the authors explain that the *G* in *G4* refers to the gospel in four categories of groups under the same ministry model: recovery, process, support, and therapeutic educational groups (p.14–15).

The foundational book in this series, *Mobilizing Church-Based Counseling*, presents the group model but does not explain it as thoroughly or give detailed guidelines for starting and running groups, which is what this book does. When I reviewed *Mobilizing*, I pointed out that the *G4* model includes some elements in other support group models but brings additions that increase effectiveness and protections for participants and leaders.<sup>2</sup> Some wise principles include building in collaboration with local counselors and building into each group meeting a few minutes to care for the leaders. The authors even coach pastors or lay leaders on how to consult with counselors about difficult matters that arise in the groups (p.158–61).

Chapter 17 makes a strong argument for an open-group model, while also affirming the benefits of closed groups. I've had doubts that open groups can be as effective for change-oriented group work, while also appreciating that it is the nature of the church to be an open group—anyone can come in. Even so, the church has open *and* closed components. For example, the preaching and singing is open for all

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2. Michael Gembola, "Book Notes: Volume 1," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 37:2 (2023): 83–85.

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