

# HELPING COMPLEX INQUIRERS

As we minister to struggling and suffering saints in the context of our Community Freedom Ministries (CFM), we can encounter those that could be classified as “complex inquirers.” Notice I am avoiding the term “complex clients” (a term we have used in our ministry in the past), because we want to stay away from terminology that would make us appear to be professional counselors, which we are not.

Different people within our ministry might describe a “complex inquirer” differently, but for the sake of this paper, I would like to identify them as follows:

## COMPLEX INQUIRERS WILL OFTEN DISPLAY ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING TRAITS:

- Extreme difficulty in processing through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* and/or experience very little resolution of core issues even after going through *The Steps*
- History of going to many different counselors, treatment centers, ministry leaders, etc. for help with little or no apparent improvement
- Difficulty getting connected with or staying connected to a healthy, healing community of believers, sometimes due to an aversion to being under authority, but sometimes through no real fault of their own
- Tendency to gravitate toward an unhealthy, over-dependent relationship with one person that can become extremely draining and overwhelming to the caregiver (caregiver fatigue/burnout)
- Struggles with a wide array of needs—including financial, legal, medical, relational/social, marital, familial, “transportational” and vocational
- Catastrophic thinking, use of histrionics or caustic, guilt-inducing behavior in order to gain attention and control caregiver

Now that you have read through those bullet points, you may recall some people that you have ministered to in the past that match this profile as a “complex inquirer.” You may be working with someone right now that fits the bill. If so, you could be experiencing any one or more of the following: anger, sadness, frustration, defeat, guilt, fear, a sense of being pressured or trapped, weariness, helplessness or hopelessness (sometimes with short bursts of optimism mixed in). Or you may have a story to tell of God’s great victory through Christ on behalf of a “complex inquirer.” Maybe both.

*The purpose of this short paper is not to instruct or train you in how to work with “complex inquirers.” For that, I would point you to the immensely helpful *Discipleship Counseling* by Dr. Neil Anderson and *Encourager Training Manual* by Hal Parks, both available through our online bookstore at [www.freedominchrist.com](http://www.freedominchrist.com). The purpose of this paper is to, by God’s grace, provide some counsel as to how to respond to a “complex inquirer” should your CFM encounter someone who could be so categorized.*

**THE FIRST PRINCIPLE** I want to share is that all of us need to stay in the kingdom niche to which God has called us. And that especially pertains to the healthy operation of a Community Freedom Ministry.

Remember, a CFM is designed to provide a “freedom presence” in a local church (primarily) or within a Christian organization (at times). That freedom presence should include:

- **Teaching** the message of freedom as written in Dr. Neil Anderson’s books, *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker*.
- **Taking** people through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*.
- **Training** individuals in how to use *The Steps*.

The teaching element of a CFM must not be neglected. It is, in fact, the most important part of a CFM. We have a message that the entire body of Christ needs to hear. All Christians need to come to know and understand their *identity, position and authority* in Christ. Knowing those truths helps a believer in Jesus become a growing, fruitful disciple (follower) of Christ. Neil has been greatly gifted by God to present the biblical truths of our identity and freedom in Christ in a wonderful God-directed, liberating way. But this teaching did not originate with Neil; it is straight from the New testament. It is new covenant Christianity brought to us initially by the apostles Paul, Peter, and John and further developed by the early Church fathers.

If this teaching element is neglected, a CFM is going to simply become a ministry that takes people through *The Steps* which likely will marginalize it in the minds of church leaders and church members alike. You will become known as a counseling ministry that helps the really “bad off” people, as opposed to a discipleship ministry that provides crucial teaching for every saint. Believe me, this is a very real problem. We have battled being “pigeon-holed” as a spiritual warfare ministry from the get-go. We are actually a discipleship ministry that understands the reality and operation of the spiritual world, but we are not a spiritual warfare or deliverance ministry. Nor are we a counseling ministry. We are a discipleship ministry that helps God’s people resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts through a process of repentance toward God and faith in the truth, so they become growing, fruitful disciples.

I encourage you, as a CFMA, to make sure your CFM remains true to its calling. Stay focused on “The Three T’s” as mentioned above. Continue to provide a grace and truth teaching environment wherein God’s people can soak, steep, marinate and grow in these freedom truths. I have seen many, many chains fall off saints while simply sitting under this teaching faithfully week after week...even before going through *The Steps*.

Also provide an opportunity for people to periodically go through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* in a group setting and, as you develop trained encouragers, in individual freedom appointments as well. *The Steps* is not a cookie-cutter, “rote” process. It is a powerful tool in the hands of the Holy Spirit as He empowers a trained encourager who is compassionately and courageously led by that same Spirit. Aside from seeing someone radically saved out of darkness into salvation in Christ, there is no greater joy and privilege in ministry, I believe, than seeing a follower of Christ set free before your very eyes to walk in newness of life!

It is entirely possible that the Lord may want to develop a “specialization” as part of your CFM based on the particular strongholds and needs in your community. That specialization might be a recovery ministry, a youth-oriented ministry, an overcoming depression emphasis, a focus on marriages, a men’s ministry or something else. You may also find that “complex inquirers,” some of whom you are able to help by

guiding them through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*, seem to gravitate toward your CFM. There is nothing wrong with that at all. You want to be open and available to help everyone that the Lord sends your way. Having said that, however, make sure there is also always a primary teaching component to your CFM that any and every believer in the church would feel comfortable and welcomed.

Use of the new *Freedom in Christ Course* or *The Grace Course* or a study through *Victory Over the Darkness* or *The Bondage Breaker* are wonderful ways to keep the teaching component of your CFM in the forefront.

Again, these three things: **Teaching, Taking and Training** should form the bedrock foundation of your CFM. It is not a bad idea to periodically take inventory to see if in any way you have strayed from these priorities. If you need help in diagnosing where your CFM is or in getting back on track, I encourage you to contact your Regional or State Director. That is what they are there for and they are eager to help.

**THE SECOND PRINCIPLE** I want to share flows from the first. Remember that you are not called by God to work individually with everyone who asks for help.

This can be a tough one for many of our people because FICM tends to attract saints who have very tender, merciful and compassionate hearts. We want to see everybody discover their freedom so they can grow up spiritually and become growing, fruitful disciples. So does God, by the way!

The question is: How do I discern what our CFM's God-given role in this process is for each individual? In many cases it will be to take that person through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*. In other instances, that will not be our role. It is not always immediately clear where on this individual's journey to freedom in Christ our CFM is meant to intersect.

The obvious first place to go for the answer to this question (posed in the paragraph above) is God Himself. Don't assume that an opportunity constitutes a call. Don't make a knee jerk reaction to an inquiry. Sometimes our desire to help an inquirer springs more from our own neediness rather than from God's call and what is best for the inquirer. This can be quite subtle, so pray! James 1:3-5 says:

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."*

God gives wisdom when we ask for it sincerely and expectantly. But if we have already made up our minds before asking God or if we don't truly believe He will guide us, we might as well not bother asking. I believe, in cases where it is difficult to discern whether our CFM is called to minister to a particular individual or not, a plurality of people should be asked to pray, including the pastoral staff. There is safety and wisdom in the spiritual authority and chain-of-command that the leadership of the church in which the CFM operates provides. The concept of having "the mind of Christ" that we teach in FICM is not singular but plural. "For we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16 emphasis mine). There is safety in numbers.

What might be some of the reasons why it would not be the Lord's will for a CFM to take on personal "Steps" ministry with an individual at the time the individual expresses the desire to do so?

1. The person is not truly ready to go through *The Steps*. As I have taught elsewhere, there is a very valuable element to having an individual go through books like *Victory Over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker* or at least *Restored* so that God uses the truth to plow the soil of their hearts in preparation for the “digging up of weeds” and “planting of healthy crops” that takes place during a freedom appointment. I recommend that prior to going through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* that the individual not only do reading upfront, but also journal what God is teaching them. This slows the process down in a healthy way so that a person looking for a “quick fix” instead takes the time to connect with God and has the opportunity to get “weaned off” thinking all they need to do is go through *The Steps* and everything will be magically fixed.

If an individual is sincerely wanting help but needs time and assistance in the learning process due to a physical or mental impairment or even spiritual interference, it would be good to have a wise, godly individual (or team of individuals) in the church spend unhurried time with the person teaching them the freedom material basics (e.g. maybe going through *Restored* one chapter every week or two) prior to going through *The Steps*.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the possibility that someone may not be ready to go through *The Steps* because they are not yet truly a follower of Christ. I realize that many who are truly saved don't think they are because of the devil's accusations. But the other side of the coin can be true as well. Not everyone who thinks he or she is a Christian is truly born again. That is why there is a clear gospel presentation at the beginning of *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*, with an opportunity given for the inquirer to receive the Lord. In some cases, part of the reason for the “complexity” of an inquirer is because he or she is not yet born again. After the Lord saves them and the lights in their heart come on, *The Steps* will be far more effective. After all, they aren't *The Steps to Freedom in Adam*!

2. The person is seriously “at risk” (e.g. they are genuinely suicidal, consistently high on street drugs, etc.); are in a state of trauma or great grief (e.g. they were just the victim or a serious crime or experienced the sudden, tragic loss of a loved one); or there are so many imposing life-disturbing issues causing deep anxiety (financially, legally, medically, etc.) that require immediate attention that it is wiser to first find someone in the church that can track with the individual in an ongoing relationship of comfort and discipleship for a period of time. Second, make a referral back to the pastoral staff who can provide the necessary professional referrals to help the inquirer cope with issues that would otherwise be overwhelming for him/her.
3. The individual expresses or exhibits spiritual, behavioral or mental/emotional symptoms beyond the capacity of those in the CFM to take on. This could include cases of ritual abuse or Dissociative Identity Disorder (D.I.D.). This

could also include some serious mental health issues or severe personality disorders. Having the inquirer fill out the Confidential Personal Inventory (CPI) in advance is best practice in all cases, but it can be especially helpful in pre-diagnosis of an individual that might require help outside of the CFM. Make sure you pray for discernment as you read an inquirer's CPI. You can learn a lot from what they write.

In these cases, a high degree of CFM leader discernment is needed and bringing in other godly leaders of the church to pray and seek God may be required. There is no doubt that the Lord often calls us out of our comfort zone to take on inquirers with symptoms beyond our experience. He does that to grow us and when we "step out of the boat" and walk on the troubled waters the Lord calls us to, we watch Him "show up" in amazing ways and our faith in Him soars. That is an experience we don't want you to miss. But don't assume that taking on a challenging situation is always God's will. There is only one Savior and it's not us! We need to consult Him first.

It is important to realize that a CFM is not designed to be a counseling center. We are seeking to help saints who truly desire help and who can be helped through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*. Most sincere saints looking for help can indeed be helped at some level by going through *The Steps*, but that is not the complete answer for everybody. God has been pleased to use this tool in the context of freedom appointments, led by godly, caring, Christ-dependent people, to see thousands of captives set free... even those who exhibit symptoms of being "complex inquirers." But *The Steps* is not an automatic cure all for every inquirer. Though most earnest believers experience some benefit from going through *The Steps*, some of God's people have had a freedom appointment without seeing their core issues effectively resolved. That is just the way it is, and we shouldn't feel like our ministry is a failure because it has not been the primary means of healing for everybody. Christ alone is the Healer and only He holds the keys to freedom and healing for all people. Sometimes FICM is handed those keys; sometimes not.

The question to answer is: *What if going through The Steps to Freedom in Christ turns out not to be enough?* What if the inquirer needs ongoing counseling help in order to methodically work through deep-seated issues that could require months or even years to resolve? What is the role of the CFM in cases like that? These are important questions to face.

First, never feel guilty or be ashamed to admit that an inquirer needs help beyond what the CFM is able to provide. To graciously refer an inquirer to someone more skilled, experienced, educated and trained is not failure, it's wisdom. Second, if someone who works as a discipler within or alongside your CFM is a person qualified to be that helper to give long term help, that's great! God may want to use your CFM to bring hope and healing to complex inquirers in a special way. If so, He will raise up individuals within your CFM who are called and gifted to minister in that manner. **But the one called by God to be the CFM Coordinator should not be that person.** Let me repeat. The CFM Coordinator should not be that person. And working with complex inquirers should not become the primary ministry of the CFM. The operation of an entire CFM could get bogged down and even come to a grinding halt if the CFM Coordinator shifts his or her attention away from leading and growing the CFM to focus efforts on ministering to one or two individuals. That would not be God's will.



Someone trained and available to disciple such an individual or even an adjunct person at the church (e.g. a licensed professional counselor at the church who knows and is a supporter of the CFM) should be the person taking on that longer-term role.

I pray you hear my heart in this matter. We all want to see every sincere inquirer find hope and help through each CFM. Sometimes God calls the CFM itself to be the place where that freedom and healing happen. But not always. Sometimes God calls the CFM to be the place that directs that struggling inquirer to another place where their freedom and healing will be found.

It is not about us (FICM) or our CFM anyway. It's all about God's glory and the advancement of Christ's kingdom in and through the lives of His people. Ministering to the entire body of Christ is a monumental task, much bigger than any one ministry, including ours, can handle.

In summary, as a CFM:

- Pray for God's wisdom in any and every circumstance
- Stick like glue to the priorities of what a CFM is designed to be (see the Three T's)
- Operate under the authority of your church leadership
- Minister boldly in the calling God has given you
- Graciously "refer out" those beyond your calling, without hesitation, guilt or shame

**THE THIRD AND FINAL PRINCIPLE** flows from the second...and is specifically addressed to CFM Coordinators. Continually develop an up-to-date network of other caregivers and professionals that can become your CFM's own referral network.

If you feel like you are alone in trying to help hurting people in your church and community, you can easily feel responsible beyond what God has called you to do. You can do a lot to protect yourself and your CFM from taking on inquirers beyond your calling if you do a good job in forming a network of caregivers and people helpers. Here are some guidelines in this area.

**First**, develop a local network of people to whom you can refer complex inquirers that are in need of help beyond what your CFM is able to provide. Some suggestions would be the following:

- Your pastoral staff (they are often the best "first line" of finding others that can help you)
- Licensed professional counselors (especially those that are familiar with and supportive of FICM)
- Competent physicians and psychiatrists (medications can sometimes work wonders for hurting people); if you can find those that are followers of Christ, so much the better
- Marriage and family counselors
- Legal professionals and financial advisors (your pastoral staff can help with this)

Don't think you have to be an expert on everything. Our kingdom ministry niche is narrow but extremely important. When you find yourself facing something outside of what God has called and equipped you to do, that's when your referral network comes in very handy.

**Second**, stay connected to your FICM Regional or State Director, and participate in the monthly prayer call led by your Regional or State Prayer Coordinator. These folks will pray for you and support you and can also let you know of people in the region that can help with specific ministry situations you encounter.

If you don't know who your Regional Director is or how to get in touch with them, go to [www.ficm.org](http://www.ficm.org) and click on the "CFMA's" tab in the top right corner of the page. From there, you will see each of the 7 regions listed on the side (i.e. Northeast Region, Southwest Region, etc.). Once you click on a region, you will see the states that are included in that region. There you will find your Regional Directors listed. We currently have a Regional Director of Expansion, Care and Training, Prayer, and E3.

**Third**, know that FICM-USA nationally has connections with FICM-USA Field Staff, former FICM Staff, Board members, and other like-minded ministries that have wisdom and experience that can be of great assistance to you. In the latter case, go to the bottom of the [www.ficm.org](http://www.ficm.org) homepage and click on "Links to Related Ministries". You can also email our FICM-USA national office ([info@ficm.org](mailto:info@ficm.org)) and they will seek to assist you.

And, as mentioned previously, for more training in the "how to's" of actually ministering to complex inquirers, we encourage you to pick up the books *Discipleship Counseling* (Anderson) and *The Encourager Training Manual* (Parks). Both are available at the FICM online bookstore: [www.freedominchrist.com](http://www.freedominchrist.com).

In conclusion, we trust this paper has been helpful. We love you and so admire your heart to see God's people set free to become growing, fruitful disciples. Your reward in heaven is great. I hope you are able to serve with us for many years in joy and freedom, bearing much fruit that remains for Christ's kingdom. This paper was written, in part, so that you can avoid some of the enemy's pitfalls along the way, maximizing the impact of your CFM to the glory of God. May He bless you in all your good works.

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