

# Pastoral Counseling

## Encounter, Sacrament, and Place

by Tom Camp

Jesus told us that the kingdom of God is nearer than we think; in fact, it is within each one of us. Another way to say this is that the Spirit of God is one with our spirit, that we are created in the image of God. When we encounter this Spirit, we are in the kingdom of God. These encounters or times of special awareness are sacramental.

Several times in counseling sessions I have experienced an individual having an encounter with the divine spirit in him or her. When this happens, one's face changes color and becomes soft, eyes brighten and widen, and the attitude in the room changes to a deep sense of authenticity and power. It is truly a sacred moment when God is fully present and known, even if not by name.

I feel privileged and humble to be in the presence of this encounter. It is a time of potential change for this person. A time when one's self-esteem is no longer an issue, when the power of God is behind one, when one is connected to all the love in the universe, love that is powerful enough to create and restore. Yet it is a small and often brief moment. Like Jesus with his disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration (or like Jack Kornfield's book title: *After the Ecstasy, The Laundry*), such encounters lead us not to Heaven or Eternal bliss but back into the world of events and relationships. We go back into the world, however, with a deepened awareness that we are, indeed, in the Image of God, that God's Spirit is with and in us.

Occasionally, a person will ask to visit the sanctuary of our host church after such an encounter. Sometimes she or he will simply state that being in a church building gives this experience more meaning or context. One client told me that after she left the session in which she had a sacramental experience, she stood for a while just looking at the steeple. Another said he sat under the tree by the Welcome Center and felt embraced.

These healing and sacramental encounters are not the result of counseling. They come as the work of the Spirit and part of a person's life-long process. The counseling is one part of that process, and the symbolism of the church building is another part. There are many other parts: the various life stories these persons bring in their selves. We do not direct the Spirit, but we do provide places and relationships in which the Spirit is more likely to be recognized and encountered.

That is the unique identity and counseling provided by Samaritan Counseling Center.



**SAMARITAN**  
COUNSELING CENTER  
*of Northeast Georgia*

This content may be reprinted with the following signature:

Tom Camp is a Pastoral Counselor and a Marriage and Family Therapist who also serves as Executive Director of the Samaritan Counseling Center. He can be reached at [www.samaritannega.org](http://www.samaritannega.org) or by calling 706.369.7911.