FOR SEVERAL YEARS, I worked for a psychiatrist who specialized in borderline personality disorder (BPD), and I counseled many with this disorder. Although I was a Christian, I did not understand how Christ could make a profound difference to BPD persons, even if they were Christians themselves. Why not? Because I believed the psychiatric literature, which taught me that they had to go through years of therapy before they could emotionally and cognitively grasp reality. I hoped those necessary years of therapy would bring them to the place where they could cognitively understand spiritual truths. For years I anxiously waited, prayed, and hoped they would come to believe, understand, and live by the ultimate reality of God's Word. But that hope never came true.

Although I learned about BPD in graduate school, it was very different to actually work with those who suffered from it. Their sense of despair was palpable as they desperately tried to connect with (actually consume) someone who would not abandon them. Even perceived abandonment sent them spiraling into suicidal depression or extreme rage. I very much wanted to help them out of their deep despair.

So I read all the research and tried every therapy the experts prescribed. I was available 24/7, and I prayed with all my heart for their healing while the psychiatrist prescribed cocktails of medication. But nothing we did could fill their agonizing emptiness. After several years, I reached the end of my rope, totally exhausted from working with those suffering with BPD. God brought me to the end of myself by graciously showing me how utterly incapable I was to do something that only he can do and how foolish I had been to depend on psychiatric theories to cure *his* children.

I began to trust God's wisdom to heal those with this diagnosis rather than to depend on psychological theories with portions of Scripture tacked on. Christians who struggled with BPD now learned that they were actually battling with the flesh and needed to learn to trust God and begin to walk in the Spirit. Easy? No. Magic? No. Change happened the same way it happens for all Christians—through spiritual battle: "the blood, sweat, and tears of dying to self and listening to God."[1] They "put off" their "issue-based identity" (BPD) and "put on" (Eph. 4:22–24) their "Christ-identity."[2] With that identity in place and supported by brothers and sisters in Christ, they began to grasp the truth of the gospel: they had died with Christ and were therefore "no longer . . . slaves of sin" (Rom. 6:6)—or of BPD!

## DEFINITIONS OF BPD

### *Psychological Definition*

*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, Edition IV* (*DSM-IV*) describes BPD as follows:

> a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects [emotions], and marked impulsivity beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following [nine symptoms: identity disturbance/unstable sense of self; chronic feelings of emptiness; fear of abandonment; emotional instability; unstable interpersonal relationships; intense rage; paranoia or dissociative symptoms; impulsivity/self-damaging behaviors; suicidal/self-mutilating behavior].[3]

1. David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 119.
2. Mike Wilkerson, *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 16.
3. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, Edition IV* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1994), 280.