

biblicalcounselor training

Original Manuscript Written and Compiled by Dr. Greg Burts, Founder/Director
Center for Biblical Counseling • www.centerforbiblicalcounseling.org

Rewritten and Formatted with Permission by Steve Aurell, Director
Biblical Counseling Ministry • Central Peninsula Church

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Course Syllabus	5
Schedule of Topics and Assignments.....	6
Introduction	7
Counseling Paradigm Overview	9
I. What Is Biblical Counseling?	11
II. What Is a Biblical Counselor?	15
III. What Is Man?	21
IV. Why Did God Create Man?	27
V. What Is Wrong with Man?	33
VI. What Is the New Man?.....	43
VII. Why Is It Such a Struggle?	53
VIII. Making Better Choices	63
IX. Feelings: What Good Are They?	73
X. Developing a Treatment Plan	83
XI. A Treatment Plan for Anger.....	95
XII. A Treatment Plan for Depression.....	99

BIBLICAL COUNSELOR TRAINING COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Description

The Biblical Counselor Training Course is a 10-week course providing a complete learning curriculum in Biblical Counseling, including the theological and doctrinal basis for Biblical Counseling, and the application of that theology/doctrine to specific counseling issues. It is designed for Christian workers who desire to be equipped in Biblical Counseling principles and skills.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, participants will be able to:

- 1) identify the principles of Biblical Counseling; and
- 2) develop a treatment plan and conduct a counseling session.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Date	Class Discussion	Assignment
Week 1 What Is Biblical Counseling? What Is a Biblical Counselor?	Review Questions Key Concepts Case Study Ministry	Read <i>What Is Biblical Counseling?</i> <i>What Is a Biblical Counselor?</i> Memorize Hebrews 4:12a
Week 2 What Is Man? Why Did God Create Man?	Review Questions Key Concepts	Read <i>What Is Man?</i> <i>Why Did God Create Man?</i> Memorize John 1:12
Week 3 What Is Wrong with Man?	Review Questions Key Concepts Case Study Defense Strategies	Read <i>What Is Wrong with Man?</i> Memorize Romans 12:2a
Week 4 What Is the New Man?	Review Questions Key Concepts Case Studies Identity	Read <i>What Is the New Man?</i> Memorize Romans 6:6
Week 5 Why Is It Such a Struggle?	Review Questions Key Concepts Case Study Problem Behavior Handout Establishing a Stronghold of Truth	Read <i>Why Is It Such a Struggle?</i> Memorize Galatians 2:20
Week 6 Making Better Choices	Review Questions Key Concepts Case Studies Problem Thinking Handout Put Off/Put On	Read <i>Making Better Choices</i> Memorize Ephesians 4:22–24
Week 7 Feelings: What Good Are They?	Review Questions Key Concepts Case Study Problem Feelings	Read <i>Feelings: What Good Are They?</i> Memorize Philippians 4:6–7
Week 8 Developing a Treatment Plan	Discussion Treatment Plan	Read <i>Developing a Treatment Plan</i> Memorize Ephesians 2:10
Week 9 A Treatment Plan for Anger	Case Studies Anger	Review <i>Developing a Treatment Plan</i> Memorize James 1:19–20
Week 10 A Treatment Plan for Depression	Case Studies Depression	Review <i>Developing a Treatment Plan</i> Memorize Hebrews 12:11

INTRODUCTION

The Need for Biblical Counselor Training

Across the desk from Pastor John sat Mary and Mark, a couple who had come in to see him because they were having marital problems. Mary had recently discovered Mark accessing pornography websites on his computer. She was devastated not only because it was so contrary to their values, but also because it had affected the trust level in their relationship. As Mary tearfully expressed her pain, and Mark painfully explained how he had come to this point of sexual addiction, Pastor John was silently praying, “Lord, help me because I don’t know where to begin.” He would have preferred to send Mary and Mark to a competent Christian therapist, but he knew Mary and Mark did not have the money to pay for therapy. Pastor John felt so inadequate and unequipped to help his parishioners, all he could say was, “Lord, help me!”

For many people, the local church is the first place they think of when they need to discuss their problems. In a stressed world where a growing number of people are seeking some kind of psychological and spiritual support, paying an exorbitant fee for counseling can be prohibitive. Most pastors, however, are feeling overwhelmed by the increasing numbers of their parishioners who are requesting help.

For pastors who desire to be more effective counselors there are few resources for training, and many obstacles. First, pastors feel overwhelmed with their already-too-full schedules. It is a time factor. Second, pastors feel they have been poorly trained. They are simply not equipped to handle the needs. Third, pastors struggle with the conflicting interests. The same people who present these very personal problems in the counseling arena are also sitting in church or social settings with them. But there is good news! The answer to the pastor’s dilemma can be found right within the resources of his own church: the solution is to establish “lay” counseling ministries. However, these lay counselors must be trained not to be “pseudo” therapists, but to be Biblical Counselors. Biblical Counseling is the application of biblical truth through a personal and relevant treatment plan that strengthens the counselee’s relationship with Jesus Christ, resulting in spiritual, social, and relational maturity.

Many pastors’ first response to a lay counseling ministry is that they don’t want to open themselves up to liability. Yes, it is true that if a church lay counseling ministry does not distinguish itself from secular therapy, the counselors — and therefore local churches — open themselves up to malpractice liability. But as long as the church carries out its charge to restore and repair the wounded and needy in its care, as an extension of its pastoral duties, there is no fear of malpractice. In other words, the answer to the need for pastoral counseling is lay Biblical Counseling.

There are three advantages to church lay Biblical Counseling ministries. First, lay Biblical Counselors can extend the effectiveness of the pastors’ shepherding responsibilities. Second, lay Biblical Counselors promote a spiritual perspective as they help counselees to apply the Word of God to issues. And third, Biblical Counselors have the advantage of working within the context of the church and can avail themselves of all the associative resources.

What is needed more than anything else in this time is a simple model of Biblical Counseling — one that will instruct and empower mature Christian leaders to counsel their weaker brothers and sisters in Christ. But this model cannot rely on psychological principles. For 2000 years, clergy have been the recognized persons the community has sought out for counsel and advice. Modern day psychotherapy is a replacement for what-used-to-be a pastoral function of caring for souls. It is time to return the ministry of pastoral care and counseling to the church.

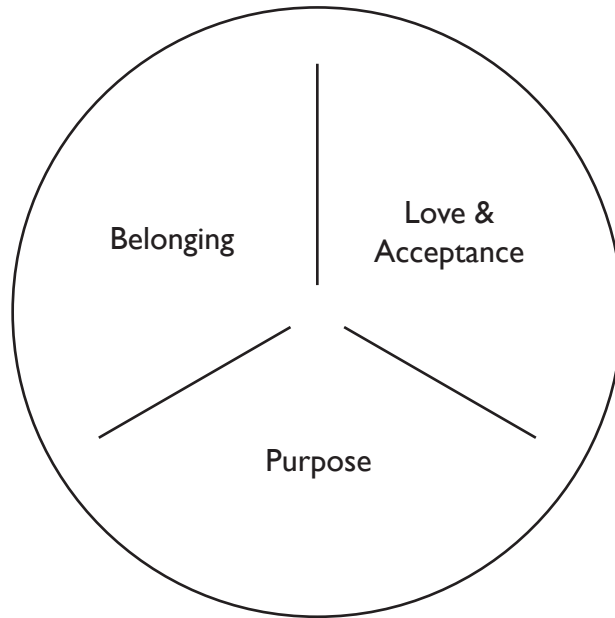
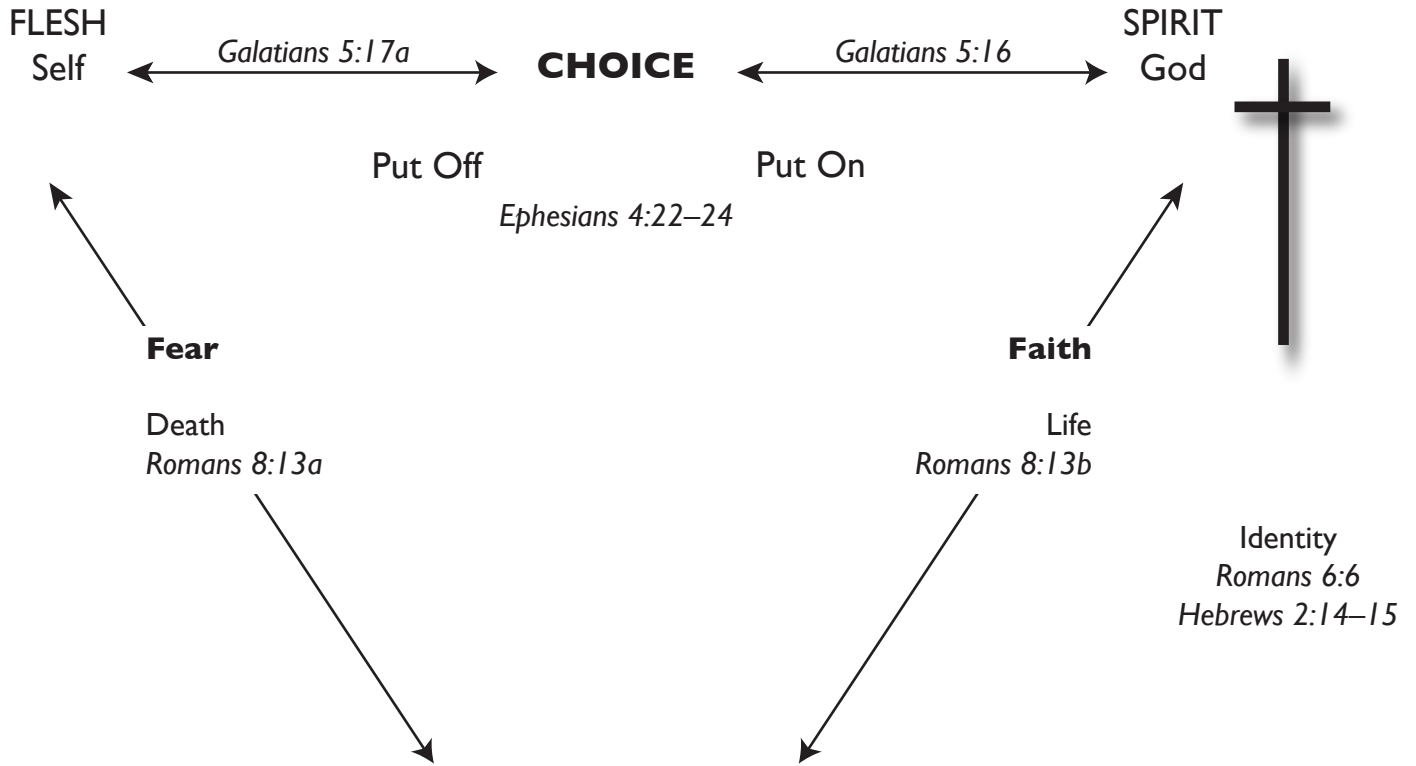
Don't forget the promise of sufficiency in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: [God is] able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us... (3:20).

Overview of the Training Manual

The purpose of this training manual is to provide: 1) a framework for Biblical Counseling, and 2) a strategy for applying that framework to individual needs. The first two chapters answer two basic questions: What is Biblical Counseling? and What is a Biblical Counselor? Chapters three through nine build the doctrinal framework for Biblical Counseling. They explore the doctrines of God, Christ, Holy Spirit, man, man's sin, the process of sanctification and Christian living. The purpose of presenting these "doctrinal" themes is to show the link between sound teaching and effective counsel. Sound doctrine must always be at the heart of Biblical Counseling. These doctrines provide answers to our counselee's questions: Why did God make me this way? Can I change? Why is it such a struggle to live out the Christian life? How can I change? Without a sound working knowledge of these doctrines, the Biblical Counselor won't be able to answer these questions with confidence, and thereby minister hope to his/her counselee.

The foundation for Biblical Counseling having been laid, chapter ten provides a strategic treatment plan to address the counselee's issues. This treatment plan instructs the counselor in how to conduct a session, assess the problem, set specific goals, monitor the progress and assign homework. And, the last two chapters illustrate how to set up and execute a counseling session for someone whose presenting problem is anger or depression. Included within each of these chapters is a case study that will challenge you to work through and integrate the treatment steps. Our hope is that by the time you are finished you will be, at least academically, prepared to offer biblical counsel to others.

COUNSELING PARADIGM OVERVIEW



Basic Needs as Created in the Image of God
Genesis 1 and 2

I

What Is Biblical Counseling?

Memory Verse

For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edge sword,
piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit... Hebrews 4:12a



The question of what is – and what is not – “Christian” in counseling has been the bane of the Western evangelical church in our time. The debate has resulted in many articles and books written by Christian psychologists and pastors attempting to reconcile or integrate models of psychology with Christian principles. And our purpose, here, is not to debate Biblical Counseling versus psychology, but to distinguish between the two. So the first thing we want to say is that:

BIBLICAL COUNSELING RELIES ON GOD’S WORD

The most powerful weapon given to the Church, and to the Biblical Counselor, is spiritual truth. And the only source for absolute truth is the Bible. It is the believer’s plumb line and compass. The Bible is also the basis for defining humanity and determining morality. In other words, it is the believer’s *framework*. Whatever theories social scientists may deduce from their observations, in the end it’s God’s view of man that ultimately matters. And this view of man is delineated in the Bible, a framework not only adequate to address man’s issues, but superior to any other. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” God’s Word is the “lamp unto our feet.” It imparts revelation we could never come to on our own. So when we ask the question “What is Biblical Counseling?” we see that it’s counseling that is biblically, and not psychologically, oriented.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING IS THE COMMUNICATION OF TRUTH BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Because Biblical Counseling relies on God’s Word as *the* foundation for all truth we are able to give people a real anchor in life. These truths, however, can only be facilitated through the work of the Holy Spirit. We can’t persuade anyone to accept the truth of the Scripture. All we can do is put it out there – to be accepted or rejected. How many of you have struggled with a truth in your life? I certainly have. You may even know it on an intellectual level and yet still find it difficult to apply. So what do we do? We pray, “Lord, make this truth real to me.” And it is the Holy Spirit’s job to illuminate the truth, integrate it into our hearts and empower us to act on it. Now, that should probably help us feel less anxious about counseling others. Fortunately, it’s not our job to make anyone believe the truth. It’s a work only the Spirit can do. So Biblical Counseling is dependent on the Spirit’s work in a person’s life. It’s not our job to “fix” anyone. Our role is to discern how the Holy Spirit is working in the counselee’s life. In other words, we are merely the facilitators of the Spirit’s work to affect change in the lives of others.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING IS CHRIST, AND NOT ISSUE, CENTERED

Secular psychology presents a man-centered approach to counseling. It focuses on issues. The first thing Adam and Eve became aware of after they sinned was their nakedness. Think about that on a psychological level. What does this mean? It means that they looked at “themselves,” and became aware of their issues. And man has been trying to solve their own issues ever since. But Biblical Counseling is Christ-centered. We try and get people to stop looking at their issues and start looking at Christ. We try and get them to stop looking at the presenting problem and start looking at the eternal solution. What the enemy wants more than anything is our attention. So we want to move people, over a period of time, to being less issue-centered and more Christ-centered. This is not to say that we are not concerned about people’s problems. We never want to minimize anyone’s experience. Nor do we want to cosign their denial. But a foundational tenet of Biblical Counseling is that once a person begins to see their identity in Christ their issues will shrink in proportion, *and* they will be better equipped to overcome them in the strength He provides.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING IS SPIRIT, RATHER THAN SOUL, CENTERED

The word *psychology* comes from the Greek word *psuche*, which is translated into our word for “soul” or “natural.” A natural person is therefore a psychological person. The apostle Paul defines all of humanity into two camps: the natural man and the spiritual. Significantly, the word for natural man is *psychikos*, while the word for the spiritual man is *pneumatikos*. Paul distinguishes between the human spirit and the soul as separate faculties. So we could say that psychology is concerned with helping someone soulically. In fact, a lot of Christian counselors will say, “I’m here to help people with their mental, emotional and relational issues. If they have spiritual problems, I send them to a pastor.” So you see, people do make this distinction, don’t they? I’m not sure I’m in agreement with that. I believe that, at its root, the majority of problems (with the exception of chemical imbalances) must first be dealt with spiritually. But most psychologists, especially secular ones, will only deal with therapeutic (or soulical) issues. So if people have a problem with God (which, from our viewpoint, ought to be the starting point for any counseling) they often are referred to a pastor instead. Do you see how people naturally make that distinction? While Biblical Counseling certainly brings healing to the soul of man, it does so through the human spirit by way of the Holy Spirit. And this is always facilitated through the Word of God. So Biblical Counseling is spirit, and not soul, centered.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING ACKNOWLEDGES MAN AS A SPIRITUAL PERSON

Now this may sound self-evident but it’s essential to our understanding of Biblical Counseling. Since our particular diagnostic manual – the Bible – is inspired, it can only be understood through the spirit of man. And so it is a spiritual and not a psychological process. Now this can be an encouragement because in order to be a Biblical Counselor we don’t need to be familiar with psychological language. I have found that oftentimes my own training in clinical categories often hinders the Spirit’s work of discerning a counselee’s problems. I can lose the forest for the trees. But there is a way to touch the heart and help facilitate change without getting caught up in labels. For example, we don’t primarily see people as “narcissistic” or as “adult children of an alcoholic” family system. And though everybody comes in with “issues”, we don’t primarily see them as “issue” oriented. We see them as spiritual beings longing to connect on a deeper level with the Father of all created beings. So another distinction of Biblical Counseling is that we are spiritual people.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING IS CROSS-CENTERED

The Cross stands as the turning point for all of humanity. In the Old Testament everything leads up to and foreshadows the Cross. And everything after the Cross is simply people learning how to appropriate its work to their lives. Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live; but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20a). So to help people, from a biblical perspective, we need to impart right-thinking about the Cross. Through the Cross, God made it possible for man to die to the stranglehold that death had over this world. And when Christ resurrected He brought new life to all who would receive Him. So the Cross becomes effective the day we accept Christ. At that point we become a new person. But the Cross not only has the power to save us but the power to change us as well. And this is good news to anyone who is feeling helpless and hopeless. Those who come to us for counseling are stuck for a reason. In some way, they have lost their ability to access through faith the power of the Cross. Instead of looking at the Creator they are looking at their circumstances, their own helplessness, particular struggle or deficiency. They are asking the question, “What can I do?” rather than “What can He do?” Biblical Counseling helps people refocus on the Cross as our source and power of change.

BIBLICAL COUNSELING IS BASED ON SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY

In 2 Corinthians 10:3 Paul writes, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh.” Paul is saying that we are all at war. And it is here that Biblical Counseling really distinguishes itself from psychology. We recognize that Christians everywhere are in the midst of a battle. This spiritual warfare affects all of us. It affects us in our fleshly struggles, in our interactions with the world around us, and with demonic forces that are constantly nipping at us like pit bulls. And though we are in a spiritual battlefield, it’s important to recognize that we have been authorized to fight in the strength that God provides. “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Corinthians 10:4). These weapons that Paul refers to are the Word of God and prayer. Biblical Counselors have an authority no psychologist has. We are taking up our weapons of warfare to free people from the snare of the trapper. We recognize that God has empowered us to facilitate growth and healing in others. And yet we also acknowledge that we certainly have limitations. So we avail ourselves unto the authority of God’s Word and the sufficiency of His Spirit to accomplish these purposes according to His perfect timing. This balanced view of our authority in Christ is disclosed to our counselees in our first session so that the scope of our ministry is put in its proper perspective.

Review Questions – Key Concepts

What is a psychological framework? What is a Biblical one?

Why is it so important to use the Word of God in counseling?

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Counseling?

Why is it important to emphasize the distinction between the soul and the human spirit?

What does Biblical Counseling focus on instead of issues? Why is this important?

What is the significance of knowing that we are involved in a spiritual battle?



What Is a Biblical Counselor?

Memory Verse

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ... For each one will bear his own load. Galatians 6:1–2, 5



God's ultimate purpose is to reconcile all men to Himself through the salvation Jesus offers at the Cross. This salvation, however, is followed by restoration – a ministry that all New Testament believers are called into. And no other passage in the Pauline epistles better defines this role, the process and goals of a Biblical Counselor, than does Galatians 6:1–2, 5:

“Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ... For each one will bear his own load.”

Galatians 6:1 characterizes this process of Biblical Counseling in a wonderful way. When counselors are aligned with the principles of this verse, they will be assured of bearing lasting fruit in a counselee's life. In Galatians 6:2 Paul goes on to define what a Biblical Counselor is – we are to bear one another's burdens. But then it appears that he contradicts himself in verse 5 by saying that each one should bear his own load. How do we reconcile this? Let's start back in verse 1 and work our way down to that point. First of all, it's important that we use these verses to understand what kind of attitude God wants us to have towards hurting people.

BIBLICAL COUNSELORS SEE OTHERS THROUGH GOD'S EYES

One of the “black eyes” that Biblical Counseling ministries have had is the reputation of beating folks over the head with Scripture. The perception is that pastors and counselors use the Bible to exhort others towards obedience while having little compassion for what that person may be going through. And that is simply not accurate. Biblical Counselors have a compassion that reflects the very heart of God to hurting people. So, in verse 1, we are told, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass.” I can't ever remember anyone coming to me for counseling who was deliberately sinning. People don't come in saying, “I'm drinking, partying, and having affairs and I like it like that!” If that lifestyle was still working, they certainly wouldn't be seeking counsel. Those who are looking for help say things like, “I'm struggling with drugs, pornography, bitterness or resentment and I can't get free.”

A woman came in to see me one day. She had been struggling with alcoholism for years and the only conclusion she could arrive at was, “I must not be a good Christian.” That could be the only reason, in her mind, as to why she was still doing something she really didn't want to do. She is an example of someone who is “caught” in a trespass. The word *caught* gives us some framework

as to how God wants us to see people who are struggling. It means “to be overtaken” or “taken by surprise,” usually in the passive voice. And the thought is of someone running from sin. But sin, being faster and more powerful, overtakes and captures them. So they are caught in something they have little or no control over. So our attitude, as counselors, needs to be that those who have been taken captive are responding from a point of pain. Now, I am not saying that we are to treat sin in a trivial way. But, first and foremost, we are to see our counselee’s through the lens of compassion and not judgment. We can disagree with the behaviors, but, above all, we are to accept and embrace the person.

The word “trespass” is also significant. It means to take a false step. There are different words for sin and this one has to do with stumbling. So when we are counseling with people who are struggling, we are dealing with those who can’t walk without a limp. Now, if I asked how many of you have stumbled in the last few days, I trust that, in all honesty, you would openly acknowledge that you have. And if you can’t admit that, then you probably shouldn’t be taking this course on Biblical Counseling because you won’t have any compassion for the rest of us. All of us stumble, we all walk with a limp and we all need compassion. That’s our charge – to have God’s heart for His people.

BIBLICAL COUNSELORS OPERATE AT A LEVEL OF SPIRITUAL MATURITY

The call of Galatians 6:1 is addressed to those “who are spiritual,” and to take a spiritual approach in helping those who are caught in a trespass. Anyone who has been born again is a spiritual person. And as that person matures in their faith the Holy Spirit will accentuate and give shape to certain giftings. And because Biblical Counseling is an extension of pastoral care, the ones most commonly demonstrated are the gifts of teaching, healing, faith, discernment and mercy. But regardless of the particular gifting, Biblical Counselors recognize, at some level, that the Spirit has anointed them for the purposes of counseling. This internal calling is usually confirmed by external sources – a pastor or elder, friend or associate – who recognizes that gift in us. And, more importantly, that we have reached a point of maturity in our own walk that God can use them for His purposes. So a Biblical Counselor is spiritually mature.

BIBLICAL COUNSELORS ARE MINISTERS OF RESTORATION

Galatians 6:1 says, “you who are spiritual, restore such a one.” The word “restore” has some rich imagery attached to it in the Greek. And there are three basic meanings given here. The first is defined for us in 1 Thessalonians 3:10. Paul is concerned about these believers. And so he tells them that he wants to complete what is lacking in their faith. They had some holes in their faith; things that Paul hadn’t been able to teach them before he had to leave. So he is writing back in order to accomplish that. Secondly, in Hebrews 13:21, the writer uses this word to mean that, as the great Shepherd, the Lord will “equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight.” In other words, He is providing the “tool bag” that enables us to do His will. God always gives us what we need in order to accomplish what He has called us to do. So it not only means to complete something but also to equip. Finally, this word is used in Matthew 4:21 which is simply a reference to the disciples sitting around mending their nets. The Greek word for “restore” can also be translated into our word for “mend.” Now, that’s a good picture! What happens when you throw a net out time and time again? It snags on the rocks and eventually becomes weathered and torn. Someone has to sit on the shore or the boat with needle and thread to sew up all the places the net has been torn. And that is what God is calling us to

do. When people come in for counseling they are feeling pretty beat up. Our calling is to sit with them for a period of time and help strengthen their faith, equip them to start using the tools that are at their disposal, and to mend their hurts in Christ. In the 6–8 weeks that we are engaged with them our job is to provide a basic foundation to help jumpstart the restoration process. So the word “restore” is a rich word and that is really the ministry we are called to do.

BIBLICAL COUNSELORS ARE GENTLE

Paul says, “restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.” Isaiah 42, as a prophetic word, says, “a bruised reed He will not break.” It goes without saying that Jesus is gentle. It may not seem that way at times, especially when we experience conviction of sin or the Lord’s discipline. But, in contrast, His ways are much gentler than the alternative. So you and I need to manifest this spirit of gentleness because people are generally afraid when they come in for counseling. There is an element of shame that is present in those who are seeking help. And, oftentimes, they expect us to treat them in the same way they are treating themselves – with judgment and rejection. For this reason, we need to be very gentle. In 2 Timothy 2:24–26 there is a great reference to this. Paul tells Timothy, “The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” Look at how practical these verses are. How easy it is to get into an argument with someone who has been caught in a trespass and their pride is justifying itself. But Paul is saying, “Don’t do that! Be kind, gently correcting those who are in opposition to the truth.” And then in verse 26, that, “they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil.” A lot of people who are caught in sinful ways are being held captive. And, our desire as counselors is to help them recover their senses. We accomplish this is by gently reminding them of who they are in Christ rather than what they have or have not done. And so our approach as Biblical Counselors is to see people as being caught in a trespass; that is, to have compassion for them. We are to operate as mature ministers of restoration. And we do all of this in a gentle manner.

BIBLICAL COUNSELORS MUST PRACTICE SELF-EXAMINATION

Biblical Counselors must be committed to our own spiritual progress and to live by the truths we teach. This calls for disciplined living – studying God’s Word, praying in the midst of our weakness and seeking the Lord’s correction. Paul tells Timothy to pay attention to his own teaching to assure salvation both for himself and for those who would hear (1 Timothy 4:16). So the Biblical Counselor is called to “look to himself.” In Galatians 6:1, the word Paul uses is *skopeo*, which we derive our word “telescope” from. A telescope is an instrument that helps us look upon something in detail. So what Paul is asking of us, as Biblical Counselors, is to examine ourselves attentively. We need to examine our motives and be aware of our own fleshly responses to other’s needs. As we commit ourselves to a daily regimen of reading Scripture, prayer and meditation, the Holy Spirit Himself will expose the things in our hearts that might prevent us from hearing the Lord, or pockets of pride that would keep God’s work from being accomplished. And because of the intense spiritual nature of pastoral ministry, we can’t have any longevity unless we diligently care for our own heart’s condition first. And while heart work may be hard work, we can be assured that it’s God’s work.

BIBLICAL COUNSELORS PRACTICE HUMILITY

Counseling with others demands that we get ourselves out of the way and be present for them in their pain and crisis. That demands humility or “self-forgetfulness.” Jesus’ last words to His disciples were, “Watch and pray lest you enter into temptation.” What temptations are we talking about? For one, the temptation to be prideful or self-righteous is always a temptation for counselors. The need to control the process or fix another’s problem can also be tempting. But, the one we are most concerned about is labeled as *transference* by most counseling professionals. Transference and counter transference consist of feelings that are projected onto others that arise from out of our own brokenness. As a pastor I have to be aware that some will expect me to be an authority on spiritual matters. Or they may see me as a father figure. These projections usually have little to do with me and more to do with that person’s unmet needs. Therefore, they are not realistic. The problem comes when we, as care-givers, are blind to the fact that our counselees are doing this. So *counter transference* happens when we – either consciously or unconsciously – begin to play out these roles in the counseling relationship, perhaps in order to feel more effective or esteemed. Again, these feelings also have more to do with our “stuff” than with any feature of the present relationship. And, though none of us can be completely free of counter transference, you can bet bottom dollar that when you have a strong reaction towards something a counselee says, the way they look or an attitude they carry, it probably has more to do with you than them. God uses others to mirror back our own need of healing. And when that happens the only thing we can do is take ownership for our response and humbly bring it to the Lord. If we refuse to and choose instead to project the unmet need back onto the counselee, we are then in danger of spiritually abusing that relationship. God did not intend for the leaders of His church to “feed off the sheep” but to shepherd them. This is why, in the internship process, we give out copies of a book co-authored by Leanne Payne called, “Sheep in Wolves’ Clothing.” This is a little manual that helps counselors be aware of ways they may be tempted to do this through transference and counter transference dynamics. So Biblical Counselors are called to practice humility within the counseling relationship and allow others needs to be more important than our own.

THE GOAL OF BIBLICAL COUNSELORS IS TO EQUIP THE COUNSELEE TO CARRY HIS OWN LOAD

Paul writes in Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.” But then, in verse 5 he says, “For each one will bear his own load.” Now, let’s talk about this. Paul uses two different words here. The word “burden” comes from the Greek *baros*. And it simply means “something too heavy for one person to bear alone.” Charlie Royce always helps me to set up this room for tonight. He knows that my back is not as strong as it used to be. So for me to throw these tables around is burdensome. It’s too much for me to bear alone. So he helps me. Now, it would be silly to expect him to also make the coffee or put the water bottles on the tables because this is clearly something I can do myself. These water bottles could be referred to as a “load,” from the Greek word *phortios*, meaning “something easily carried by one.” Do you see the difference? Biblical Counselors have this challenging task, when working with hurting people who are burdened, to not allow dependency to foster within the relationship. One way to gauge this is to ask ourselves – do I want their wholeness more than they do? If the answer to that question is, “Yes, I do!” then we are taking on more responsibility than we can possibly carry alone. And, most often, hurting people will allow us do to just that. Our job, and it’s often a tricky one, is to carry the burden only insofar as they can’t carry it themselves. We don’t want codependency to subtly creep into the counseling relationship. We want to be helpers; we want to be prayer part-

ners. We want to be available in times of crisis and need. But we must also ask ourselves – at what cost? Are we being a help or a hindrance? Are we fostering a healthy sense of interdependence or toxic dependency? So when someone is caught in a trespass and they come to us for help, the best thing we can do is to help them carry their own load. By themselves? Certainly not! Only through the strength Christ provides and the support of true community. We are to point them in that direction. In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus said, “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My *load* light.” You see, Jesus doesn’t give us a *baros*, does He? He gives us a *phortios*. Isn’t that great?! Jesus gives us something that is manageable. Why? Because He is the One we are yoked with. And that is what we want to do for others. Don’t let them get yoked to you. We want them to learn how to walk with Jesus. That’s what a Biblical Counselor is meant to do.

Review Questions – Key Concepts

What are the components of the “ministry of restoration” found in Galatians 6?

What is the difference between a burden and a load?

Why is self-evaluation important for the Biblical Counselor?

Case Study: Ministry

On our first night of Biblical Counselor Training we just knew we would be receiving full preparation for ministry. We felt called and eager to walk alongside and counsel those who had reached a level of despair in their lives. We expected to encounter anger, anxiety and loss in our counselees. But we never dreamed of all the tears we'd cry and weight we'd carry because of other people's sin. Often repeated sin. We remember the first time a teenager came in for counseling who had been sexually molested by one of her family members. Our hearts broke as the consequences for the entire family began to unravel. A few months later, we were shocked that a man we spent months counseling had an affair and destroyed his marriage. We remember the woman whose life was unraveling so fast that she threatened suicide. The weight of these problems was enormous. Years later, we're no longer surprised by the hidden burdens that often come uncovered in Christians' lives.

Biblical Counseling is focused on serving others, loving them, and teaching them God's Word. We encourage them to yield into God's will, even when we're heartbroken as they continue to make choices to not do so. Compassion comes easily at first. But, over time, our hearts tend to grow more callous as people continue to fall, despite our best efforts to point them to God's Word. We didn't realize we were signing up for this kind of disappointment when we entered ministry. We often get weary of giving biblical advice, seeing it ignored, and then shouldering the consequences we knew were coming. Isn't this asking too much?

Paul makes it clear that bearing burdens is a part of every Christian's calling: "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" (Gal. 6:1). When we "bear one another's burdens" we are fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). That's what Christ did for us. He carried our sins as His burden in order to bring us back into the fold. And through His example, He established a calling for every believer. Still, the pride easily arises in our hearts when those we counsel disappoint us. But, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal. 6:3). We have had to acknowledge that we are not so important that we can neglect the needs of some in order to focus on others who appear "more" teachable or acceptable in our sight. We have been called to be burden bearers – period. "Each one must examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another" (Gal. 6:4). The Lord has revealed, in His faithfulness, that how we respond to those who have fallen is a litmus test for our own character. And so we have learned that doing our work well is at least partly determined by how we are bearing the burdens for those whom God has called us to serve.

What are your expectations for ministry?

How can your expectations get in the way of being an effective Biblical Counselor?

Where do you find the capacity to be a "burden bearer?"

What personal supports need to be in place for you to do this well?



What Is Man?

Memory Verse

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name. John 1:12



Early in my counseling career, a 20-year-old college student named Gerald was referred to me. Gerald was struggling with depression and suicidal thoughts. As he entered my office, I was struck by his appearance. He was definitely bi-racial: African American and Caucasian. He had light brown skin with freckles and reddish hair. Growing up in Harlem, Gerald was taunted and teased for his physical differences. He felt rejected by the other boys. Growing up in a household of women, and having no father figure to model masculinity, he developed a gender confusion that is not unusual for someone with his background – he had sexualized his longing for a strong man in his life. Gerald’s anxiety and depression stemmed from his feelings of inadequacy as a man. In short, Gerald was conflicted about his identity.

From the very first appointment the counselor will begin to evaluate the counselee’s self-image and esteem. Arguably, the most important objective in Biblical counseling is to help the counselee make the connection between negative emotions and self-image. Every person’s self image is a reflection of his or her background. Most are conflicted, seeing themselves through their histories, subjectively identifying themselves as the sum total of their life experiences. They are in the midst of what we would call “an identity crisis.” A believer’s identity, however, is rightfully an expression of his being a child in God’s family. So a primary task of the Biblical counselor is to assist the counselee to make the transformation from this *old* way of seeing himself to a *new* way. In order to address the fundamental issue’s around identity, Biblical Counselors will need to know what the Bible says about it. When God created the world He created man to be the centerpiece. So to understand God’s design for humanity we must look to the creation narrative and learn what took place in the beginning. In these first chapters of the Bible, we gain insight into the operational relationships between God and man, and man and woman as originally intended. Accordingly, God’s first recorded words concerning man will be the foundation upon which we can build our theological framework.

WHAT IS OUR SELF-IMAGE?

“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” Genesis 1:26

What comes to mind when you think about “image”? We live in a culture that is extremely image conscious, don’t we? We’re concerned with how we look and whether or not people approve of us. Where do you think we get this image of self? Well, it’s likely a reflection of the world around us. Every culture has a different perspective about what an image should be. If you happen to be in Africa or the North Pole, the greater your body mass, the more beautiful you are. Where-

as in the United States, physical beauty is correlated with being thin. So our image is something we receive from outside of ourselves. It's how others perceive us. But God, who lives outside of us, says that He fashioned us in His image. What does that mean? Well, it means that we have His DNA. We were created to reflect His character.

So, let's have some fun with this! In order to understand God's image, let's look at ourselves and project that back onto God. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about someone's image – our bodies; how someone looks; their physical appearance. So, can we say that God has physical attributes? Well, not as we know it. God is Spirit. But there are references in the Scripture to His splendor being displayed in the heavenly "bodies." There are allusions to God sitting on a throne "like" a man; having eyes "like" fire. He is a God who "hears" our pleas for help. Jesus Himself took on the likeness of man during His earthly ministry. But would you agree that the "body" is probably not the most important aspect of being made in the image of God? What about the "soul"? The soul, as we will define it throughout this training, consists of the mind, emotions and will. Does God have a mind? Of course! Does God have emotions? Yes! We can see references to His righteous anger, His love and sorrow; even His jealousy throughout the Scripture. Does He have a will? Does He make decisions? Is He deliberate about the things He does? Of course! So all of these components – our intellect, our ability to feel emotion and make choices – must be part of what it means to be made in God's image. But would you say that's all it means to be created in the image of God? No! There is one other aspect – God is Spirit. And in order to be like Him we, too, must be spiritual beings. The spirit was created as the most important aspect of our identity. Through it we relate to God. And by it God meets our needs in a spirit to spirit dialogue with Him. So, for our purposes, we have three distinct parts: spirit, soul and body. We have to acknowledge here that there are some theological disagreements about this. Some maintain, as we have, that spirit and soul are different aspects of our nature, in the same way that body and spirit are different. This position is known as trichotomy, which affirms three parts – spirit, soul, and body. Others believe that spirit and soul are two ways of speaking of the one nonmaterial aspect of human nature. Let me just say that it's not heresy to believe either. It's interesting, however, that the Old Testament anthropology was really quite simple.

GOD'S ORDER: SPIRIT, SOUL, BODY

"The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Genesis 2:7

This verse in Genesis provides the best reference point for understanding the spirit, soul and body components. What this tells us is that God created the body of man out of the dust of the earth. He then breathed, through the nostrils, a living spirit. The words "breath" and "spirit" are the same, both in Hebrew and in Greek. So, as God breathed life into the body of man, he "became a living being." The Hebrew word for "living being" is *nephesh*, which is translated as *psuche* or "soul" in the Greek. So, according to this account, as man came into being, he came full-orbed, as a threefold being, existing in spirit, soul and body.

GOD DEFINES THE SOURCE OF LIFE

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld

His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.”
John 1:1–4, 14

The Gospel of John begins with these great words. In the original Greek, John calls Jesus the *logos*, which means, “word” – God’s expression of Himself. A word is a symbol – either written or spoken – that expresses thought. And thoughts can’t be communicated unless they are put into words. There are several passages in the Scripture that ask the question, “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” The answer is no one. No one knows what God thinks until He tells us in His Word. Jesus’ life is also an expression of God’s mind to us. Through it we can see and hear God’s love, God’s power, His compassion, justice and forgiveness. Jesus is the ultimate expression; the clearest Word God could ever speak to us. He came to unfold the mind of God in ways that can’t be mistaken. But then, John says that in Jesus “was life, and the life was the light of men.” What this is saying is that Jesus is the source of eternal life, a life that never ends. Throughout the Scripture, we are invited to pursue God’s truth and discover the life He has created. But if we stop at the level of human understanding, then life becomes too narrow and limiting. Furthermore, we will never understand the workings of God in the world. It’s only as we seek that deeper level of revelation found in God’s Word and proceeds from the lips of Jesus that we can begin putting the pieces together.

Hebrews 4:12 declares the power of God’s Word when it says, “For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The function of God’s word, as described in this verse, is to penetrate all disguises and lay bare the soul. Like a sword, it cuts into the innermost self and makes judgments about what’s there. Now this word “judge” doesn’t mean, “to condemn,” but rather “assess.” God’s word penetrates to the deepest crevices in our lives and reveals what’s there. But if we study this verse in relation to its larger context of Hebrews 3, it provides a great application to the Biblical counseling process. Hebrews 4:12 not only presents us with a dynamic look at the power of God’s word, it’s also a warning against unbelief – a warning the nation Israel didn’t heed when they stood at the borders of the Promised Land and found themselves outside of God’s rest. Hebrews 3:19 says, in reference to Israel, “They could not enter because of unbelief.” So what’s really at stake here? What’s at stake is entering God’s rest. And the way to enter that rest is through the principle of faith. So how does this apply to Biblical Counseling and identity issues? Well, let me ask you: Have you ever been lost in a desert of unbelief? Nothing seemed to work. You didn’t know which way to turn or whom to trust for your provision. Of course you have. And many of those who are coming in for counseling are in the same place. They know the Lord. They love Him. They want to be obedient. But for some reason they just can’t seem to act on God’s word. And this scripture is a warning about what happens when people draw back after gathering all the evidence needed upon which they can rest their faith.

Let’s be more specific. When Moses led the nation of Israel out of slavery they had enjoyed the protection, guidance and fatherly care of God. They had been chosen, delivered and set free to enter the land of promise. And yet, as they stood on the borders of the Promised Land and were given the word of the Lord, through Moses, to cross over and take the land for themselves, they held back. They drew back in unbelief because they were afraid of the giants that inhabited the cities of that land. When they were asked to face the giants and, by the principle of faith, overcome them, they refused to do so. They turned back and for forty years wandered aimlessly in the wilderness. So we are never really “stuck” are we? We are either going forward or backward. Many who come into counseling have stopped exercising their faith when it comes to the giants in their

lives – those *giants* of anxiety and fear, bitterness and hatred, jealousy and envy, impatient and intolerance. As a result, they are stuck in the wilderness and are in danger of losing the capacity to believe the very thing they were once so committed to. So the word of God provides a reference point to help jumpstart their faith. And as we begin to separate natural, unbelieving thoughts from those that emanate from the source of life, we can then encourage them to move forward.

GOD DEFINES WHOLENESS

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Thessalonians 5:23

As Biblical Counselors, we’re concerned with the spirit of man and how it interacts with the mind, emotions and will to bring the body under submission. Paul uses some words here that are key to understanding our identity. He begins by saying that we are sanctified by the God of peace. What does it mean to sanctify something? It means to set it apart for its intended purpose. So Paul is saying, in this prayer, that “you” – the believer – are set apart for God’s purposes. And then he says, “entirely.” This word means whole or complete and has to do with bringing, or integrating, all of our parts together into one whole. So Paul is saying that to be sanctified as a whole person requires the spirit, soul and body to be integrated in a way that God intended. This concept is explained in the next phrase, “and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete.” Now, Paul is saying spirit, soul and body here. But what is the natural man’s order when these three aspects of identity are put together? Body, soul and spirit! Natural man works from the outside in. Our emphasis is on the inside out. Do you see that? This really is the distinction of Biblical Counseling. We’re not counseling around the external circumstances or particular issues. We want to interact with the spirit of a person and find out what’s going on with their relationship with the Lord and what needs to happen for the soul to change. As God interacts with the human spirit, ideally, the soul then becomes influenced by its effects. We begin thinking God’s thoughts, sharing His feelings about things, and exercising our will to do what He desires. And so we have the body or flesh under the control of the spirit. Finally, Paul uses the word “preserved” to add another dimension to his explanation of man’s identity. In order to be preserved, or kept in a decay-less condition, the process has to come in the right order. Practically speaking, we are not ready to be complete until we are functioning as God intended – spirit, soul and body. This verse, then, defines wholeness as God intended. And, as we know, we will not fully experience complete wholeness until “the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

And here is another point of clarification that’s important for Biblical Counselors to make. Many who come into counseling have a distorted perception of what “wholeness” means. They may have grown up in legalistic churches or performance oriented family systems that expected an unrealistic adherence to the moral law. And, in their heart of hearts, they know they can never live up to such a lofty standard. So it’s important that we, as counselors, are able to communicate that the lack of wholeness they may be experiencing is not *necessarily* a sign that there is something wrong with the way they are living their lives. So before we judge ourselves or others too harshly – or not holy enough – let’s turn, for a moment, to Romans 8:16–23 for some perspective:

“The Holy Spirit and our spirit together bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children we are heirs as well: heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, sharing His sufferings so as to share His glory. What we experience in this life

can never be compared to the unrevealed splendor that is waiting for us. The whole creation, which was made unfulfilled by God, is waiting with anxious longing, hoping to be freed. From the beginning till now all creation has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; and we too, who possess the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait to be set free.”

This is a paraphrase, but one that accurately captures the spirit of this great passage. Notice that our primary identity is affirmed as “children of God” who will one day share in Christ’s glory. That’s an amazing concept! And yet this passage also describes our present experience as being marked with “anxious longing” as “we wait to be set free.” Gerald May uses the term “holy deprivation” to describe this apparent paradox. Think about that! How can one be whole and, yet, deprived at the same time? Well, spiritual wholeness is, by its very nature open-ended. It’s always in the process of becoming, always incomplete. Therefore, by design we ourselves are also incomplete. We are always reaching for a fullness of love and truth that is never quite within our grasp. So the course of our lives is precisely what Saint Augustine once said: our hearts will never rest, nor were they *meant* to rest, until they rest in God completely. In this light, our shortcomings and anxieties may be reflective of a blessed pain. There *is* an emptiness. But this needn’t be a sign of something wrong, but perhaps something more profoundly right than we could ever imagine. The deep sighs and groans of Romans 8 may just be God’s way of calling us back to Him time and time again. The problem most people have is with their choices. Many are tempted to fill the emptiness by attaching their unmet needs to the things of this world. These counterfeits may then become their objects of worship; and in a sense, come to rule their lives; providing a false covering over our true calling. And so, one of the challenges that faces any counselor is to help them to increase awareness and discern the difference between the legitimate sufferings all Christians bear from those that may be self-imposed. But regardless, as Christians we are never to identify ourselves by our attachments or our brokenness. Our identity is based in Christ, and our wholeness solely on what He has done and continues to do in us. Understanding this is the beginning of change. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation.” Because of the Cross, the old influences have passed away in one sense, and are passing away as we appropriate that finished work in our lives. As a result, we are no longer powerless to change from the inside out. The Holy Spirit empowers our will to align with God’s purposes. And at some point in time we will be living in the fullness that is Christ. That’s God’s promise to us all.

Back to Gerald

As Gerald began to see that his identity was not to be defined by his race, and that manhood was not defined by his culture, he relaxed into the truth, knowing who God made him to be. Though his feelings of rejection were slow in catching up to the truth, Gerald made progress in counseling once his identity was understood.

Review Questions – Key Concepts

What are God's first recorded words about man?

What does it mean to be “created in God's image?”

Why is this concept so critical to Biblical Counseling?

What does Genesis 2:7 tell us about how God designed man?

How does John's Gospel describe the source of life?

What does 1 Thessalonians 5:23 tell us about “wholeness?”

How can Hebrews 4:12 apply to a counselee that may be “stuck” in a wilderness of unbelief?

Why is Romans 8:16–23 a fitting caveat to those who may have a distorted picture of what is intended by the word “wholeness?”

IV

Why Did God Create Man?

Memory Verse

And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches
in glory in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19



Candy was 20-years-old, and caught up in a very bad family situation. Her mother had just left her father, who was angry, controlling and abusive, and moved the family to a small tract home. Candy was depressed with her life; everything had changed for the worse. In the midst of her depressed state, she was drawn into a relationship with a man 12 years her senior. Soon she began to spend most of her time with him. Being a Christian, this became a point of guilt. She justified it because they were soon to be married. But her boyfriend was reluctant because he was recovering from an injury and didn't want to set a date until he was able to support her. Meanwhile, he was living off his small disability payment in his parents' home. In the course of counseling, I discovered that her boyfriend was a controlling person: they often quarreled over the way he wanted things done. When Candy came home from work, she would cook the meals and take care of his needs. She gave him money. Candy had been drawn into a very unhealthy relationship but was unable to break free. The question she needed answered was "why."

In the previous chapter, we addressed the question, "What is man?" We are God's children; spiritual beings that express ourselves through soul and body. The next question – "Why did God create man?" – is also important in understanding our humanity. And the simple answer is that God created us to live in relationship with Him – to belong to Him; to be the object of His love and to partner with Him in overseeing His created order. God created us purposely. We are not the result of a cosmic accident.

DO I BELONG? AM I LOVED? DO I MATTER?

Basic Human Needs	Completely Fulfilled by God
<p>To Belong</p> <p>Genesis 1:26</p> <p>"Let Us make man in Our image..."</p>	<p>Commitment</p> <p>Hebrews 13:5</p> <p>"I will never leave you nor forsake you"</p>
<p>To Be Loved and Accepted</p> <p>Genesis 3:8a</p> <p>(fellowship with God in the "cool of the day")</p>	<p>Unconditional Love</p> <p>John 3:16; Romans 5:8</p> <p>"God so loved us... while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"</p>

<p>To Matter or Have Significance</p> <p>Genesis 2:15 “put him in the Garden to cultivate and keep” it”</p>	<p>Purpose for Our Lives</p> <p>Ephesians 2:10 “we are His workmanship... created for good works...”</p>
---	--

To understand a counselee’s self-image or esteem it’s important to consider these questions: *As they grew up, did they feel like they belonged? That they were loved? That they mattered? And what did they do to compensate for those deficits in their lives?* How people express themselves behaviorally usually corresponds with how they see or esteem themselves internally. Jean Vanier, who founded the LArche homes for the disabled, said that every person has three great “cries of the heart.” First, we cry out to be loved unconditionally by a father and mother who can hold us in our weakness. We begin life as helpless infants, and even as we move into adulthood we never outgrow the need for unconditional love and acceptance. Next, says Vanier, we cry out for a friend or a partner – someone we can belong to, relate with and trust without fear. God formed us for family; fashioned us for fellowship with one another. And, finally, we have a cry to participate in God’s creation by serving those weaker than ourselves. For many, parenthood satisfies this need. Others seek out service to the poor, the sick or disabled, in response to this cry. *Have I made a mark for the good?* This is the most significant question those nearing death are asking of themselves. For our purposes we will label these three distinct “cries of the heart” as – the need to belong, the need to be loved, and the need to matter. These three basic human needs, which can only be fulfilled in part by the world, find ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

THE NEED TO BELONG

“Let Us make man in Our image.” Genesis 1:26

What does this verse tell us about God? This statement tells us that God is a personal being; that He can be known. The word “Us” also tells us that God is a plurality. In other words, God has fellowship with Himself – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So the Creator is a God of relationship. And if we are created in God’s image then we are relational beings as well. So the first component of man’s identity formation is the need to belong. Adam enjoyed intimate, communion with God even before Eve came on the scene. Then God introduced him to another dimension of belonging. In Genesis 2:18, “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.’” God gave Eve to Adam – and Adam to Eve – to enrich this experience of belonging. So a true sense of belonging comes not only from knowing that we belong to God, but to each other as well. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.” When God created Eve He established human community. And ever since that time, it’s been man’s nature to be part of a family and community. We were not made for isolation. People can’t exist disconnected from one another. They tend to shrivel up and die when alone. We were created for community, fashioned for fellowship, and formed for family. So the first need that God wired inside of man is the need to belong as we see by the words, “Let Us make man in Our image.”

THE NEED TO BE LOVED

The word “Us” implies not only relationship, but also intimacy. How is this different from belonging? Well, isn’t it possible to belong to a family or community that shares no intimacy? Not so with God! God’s love can be thought of as His eternal sharing of Himself. In this way, love

has always been present among the members of the Trinity, even before there were any created beings. How great to experience intimacy in the place where we belong. In the Genesis account, Adam and Eve enjoyed this sense of intimacy as they walked with God “in the cool of the day.” This was not an unanticipated visit. It was part of God’s routine. He desired to talk with them, laugh with them and delight in them. They were the objects of His love and He was the object of their worship. Of course, we are not talking about a romantic or sentimental love here. The kind of divine love described in the Old Testament is tied to the word *hesed*, which means “covenant loyalty.” The quality of love that God expresses towards us is not based on looks, or hormones, or mutual compatibility, or even on what we can get out of it. Instead, God’s love for us is grounded in relationship. He is willing to suffer our anger and rejection, our sin and rebellion, and still accomplish His purposes because of His unfailing love. Throughout the scriptures – both old and new – God’s love is proclaimed. He is the great agape. His primary purpose for mankind is this compassionate and forgiving love that asserts itself despite our rejection of it. So God demonstrates a quality of love and acceptance that is unconditional. And nothing is more fundamental of humanity than the natural longing for love and to move closer to its source. As a father I am certainly conscious of this desire in my daughter, Jessica. And it’s my God-given responsibility to nurture and connect with her in a way that she can be confident in her father’s love. This is so important, because to the extent that she is able to receive my love she will be able to feel loved later on by others, and ultimately, by God. So we all have this insatiable need to be loved. That is the second component of man’s identity formation.

THE NEED TO MATTER

“God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Genesis 1:26–27

We can see in the created design that mankind matters to God. He has blessed us with significance and purpose. As God’s image bearer, man was to be the caretaker of God’s creation – not only to maintain it but to “subdue” the earth and replenish it. He gave man great authority. The word “make” here is significant. It reveals that God is dynamic, powerful and competent. God is Creator. He rejoices in His works because it’s an extension of His glory. And like God, we too have a need to express our worth by being effective. We don’t want to wait until we are on our death bed to wonder if we have impacted others for the Kingdom. Adam’s work was part of his personhood. Again, in Genesis 2:15, we read, “Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.” Do you think that God really needed Adam to do anything to take care of the earth? No! God wanted to relate to him in partnership; a partnership that expressed “belonging” and “intimacy.” What a great picture of God’s devotion and care. Every mother who enlists the help of her 4-year-old to set the table or clean the house understands that they can’t possibly perform the task as well as she can. But, it’s not primarily the help that Mother is seeking; it’s the relationship. In partnering with her child Mom knows that their identity is being formed. So the third component of our identity is the belief that we matter; that we are effective and competent – in a word “significant.” God created us to be people of purpose, as we express His image in all that we do. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

So what is the significance of this to Biblical Counseling? Well, very simply, when we allow God to meet these needs as He created in our original manuscript, then our self-concept is both integrated and secure. So that no matter what storms come our way, we can say, “I know who I belong to, by whom I am loved, and who purposed me for His design.” We are then relationally fulfilled in Him.

Maurice Wagner writes, “If we reached into our storehouse of assorted memories to recall various experiences in which we were aware of being an effective person, we eventually would discover three kinds of feelings that have peculiar significance. These three feelings integrate to form the essential elements of self-concept. They not only constitute the mental structure of self-concept, but also give it support and stability. The triad of feelings is belongingness, worthiness, and competence. These three feelings blend together in the formation of self-concept like three tones of a musical chord. At times each can be considered separately, but usually it is impossible to distinguish one from the other. As in a musical chord, the first note, or ROOT, is fundamental to the development of the other two elements. The three feelings also work together like legs of a tripod to support and stabilize self-concept. If any one of the three feelings is weak, the self-concept totters like a camera on a tripod when one leg is slipping. Each of these feelings is developed on a fundamental level in early childhood during the impressionable years. As one approaches adulthood and the state of responsible independence, he or she functions from this fundamental base of self-concept feelings.”

These feelings or “needs” are God-given. But there are influences that would move us away from their created design. Family and worldly influences tend to set patterns that the Lord wants to reshape. So this is really key to the Biblical Counseling paradigm. As we get into the case studies and begin to make assessments you will see how these three needs provide our starting point. Finding out in what areas people are deprived and how they have attempted to satisfy these needs through the flesh provides the direction for the rest of the counseling process. Our goal is to help people move out of deficit and into the fullness that Christ provides. Or at least get them on their way. If they feel as if they don’t matter or have no purpose in their lives, we want to help them understand that “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Ephesians 2:10). If they are feeling unlovable or unacceptable we want to help them integrate the truth of John 3:16 – that they are worth a Son to God. And, if they are feeling isolated, alone or without community we want to reflect God’s word in Hebrews 13:5, “I will never desert you, nor will I forsake you.” God doesn’t want His children to live in the wilderness, unable to enter His rest. On the contrary, He wants to provide rest for our souls. And so, our commitment as Biblical Counselors is to point them to where those needs can be met and thereby bring them back into alignment with His created order.

Back to Candy

Candy realized that her father who was emotionally abusive had never met her sense of “belonging”. He belittled her through criticism and neglect. Over time, Candy became aware that she was still operating out of these deficit needs in regards to her boyfriend, who was very much like her father. She wanted a man who would take responsibility for her and meet her emotional needs. Not long after, she broke up with her boyfriend and moved into an apartment with some Christian girlfriends who could help to fill the emotional gap in a healthier way.

Review Questions – Key Concepts

What do the words “Let Us” in Genesis 1:26 tell us about God’s nature and our need?

What does Genesis 2:15 tell us about God’s relationship with us and our need?

What does the phrase in Genesis 3:8: “The LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” imply about Adam and Eve’s relationship to God and our need?

What characteristics can you attribute to a healthy sense of belonging?

What characteristics can you attribute to a healthy sense of purpose?

What characteristic can you attribute to a healthy sense of worth?

How does knowing your identity as a spiritual person affect your relationship with others?

What would you tell someone who was deficit in all three basic needs?

V

What Is Wrong with Man?

Memory Verse

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the
renewing of your mind... Romans 12:2a



Joyce was referred for counseling due to depression and anxiety. She had been in a relationship with an unbeliever for nearly six years. Her boyfriend, Harry, had a history of drug abuse. He also had two children from a former relationship. While she knew she could never marry him, Joyce was unable to break off the relationship. In some way, Harry made her feel special: he bought her flowers and told her how much he needed her. He complemented her and told her how proud he was to be seen with her. Joyce could not see the connection between her depression and her inability to remove herself from the relationship. In short, Harry was meeting a need in her life that was not being met anywhere else.

When we ask the question – What is wrong with man? – we must first consider how man fell from grace. This takes us back to the garden; to Adam and Eve created in God’s image. As we saw last week, God had placed them in a perfect garden paradise with explicit instructions. Adam was created to steward God’s creation. Eve was created to be a helper in that awesome responsibility. Together, they enjoyed an intimate relationship with their Creator. He had created them for fellowship with Himself. He communicated with them, delighted in them and counseled them in the use of the work of His hands. Our purpose today is no different. God has given each of us something to do that is part of His divine command; to reflect His plan and purposes in all we do and say. He has called each of us to Himself that we might walk with Him intimately. And God has prepared others to walk alongside of us for fellowship and support. So if anyone ever asks you, “Why am I here? Why did God create me?” I hope you have an answer for that person. Every need that Adam and Eve had was met in the garden. At that point in history there were no deficits, no sense of separation. Even the word “Eden” suggests satisfaction. The garden was a place of delight. And in this environment man was relationally fulfilled. So the first thing we see is that God was the total inner provision for Adam and Eve. And secondly, He placed them in an environment that was compatible with those needs. And, as long as they functioned within those parameters, their needs were absolutely met. What a beautiful picture we get from this account.

But before we look at Genesis 3, we need to ask a simple but significant question. In Genesis 2:18, God makes an interesting statement. For the first time God says, “It is not good.” Up to this point His observation had been the opposite. In Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good.” So the question is, how does God decide what is good or not? What is His reference point? Himself! God is His own reference point. Some of you may have had mothers or fathers who said, “If I say it is good for you, it’s good for you.” What this is saying, in effect, is, “I am the reference point. I decide what’s good.” But the only one who can really get away with

that statement is God Himself. He is the ultimate reference point. He alone knows what is good and not good. Now, before the Fall, how did Adam and Eve decide what was good? They looked at God as the reference point. What about after the Fall? What was their reference point then? Themselves! So, right here, at this particular point in history, we have the birth of conflict. Before the Fall, they were naked and unashamed as they trusted God explicitly. There were no barriers between them; no protective insulations, no pretending, no concealment. But now, after the Fall, they became aware of all the differences that separated them.

MAN BECAME SELF-CENTERED

How did this radical reversal take place? Well, we see in Genesis 3 that the “serpent” came into the garden “more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.” The original Hebrew translates “serpent” as “the shining one.” So this creature was not merely subtle and practiced in the art of deception, but he also possessed great beauty and seductive power. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” The tone of this question is significant. Hebrew scholars say that it is one of shock and dismay. “You must be joking! Did God really say something like that? Wow!!” In effect he is saying to Eve, “You certainly misunderstood Him or He obviously is not the kind of God you thought He was.” And with this single question casts a small cloud of doubt over Eve’s heart: “Could God really have said a thing like that? If He loves without condition, why would He forbid anything?” Now, in asking the question in this way, the tempter focuses Eve’s attention on the limitations that God has placed before her. And if we could climb inside her thinking for one moment, we would probably hear, “Hmmm! Why is God so restrictive? Why is He so intent on keeping me from all that I would have?” And rather than hearing an attitude of gratitude for all that God had provided there is a subtle shift in perspective – a seed of doubt has now entered a once unblemished heart. There is now a sense of restlessness and discontent. Notice that the temptation comes at the point of limitation. God had told Adam and Eve that He must limit them for their own protection. “You may eat of any fruit, any tree, anywhere – but one.” And this is what God says to us as well! It’s in this sense that the tree of good and evil is still right in the midst of the garden of our lives. Whenever we are confronted with the fact that we are limited or powerless in some way we are put to a test, aren’t we? We have a choice to make – whether we’ll accept the limitations that God puts upon us or not. Are we willing to accept that there are some things that He restricts for our own protection? And does so because He loves us as His children? So the tempter, ever so skillfully, creates a sense of deficit in Adam and Eve – that somehow God is withholding a blessing and, therefore, cannot be trusted for their growth. And we can see by this that the real temptation in the garden was not the forbidden fruit, but to fill that sense of deficit through meeting their own needs. They wanted to become, in a sense, their own god. As a result their reference point shifted. Rather than being God-centered, man became self-centered. And we’ve been self-absorbed ever since. So, the first thing is that man became self-centered – his view of himself changed.

MAN’S IDENTITY BECAME ALTERED

The second thing that happened is that man’s identity became radically altered because of sin. He became dead to God and alive to sin. God told Adam “in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die.” Now, we are not talking about physical death here. We know they didn’t die on the day they sinned. But they died in that they separated from God. The relationship became severed as a result of their sin. There was now isolation rather than fellowship, guilt and shame rather than a

sense of worth. Man became self, rather than God, serving. As a consequence, man was taken out of the protection of Eden and placed into a hostile environment, where the sweat of his brow and the pain of labor would permeate his existence. Ray Stedman writes, “In Genesis 3 we have the answer to the eternal “why” question that arises from within our hearts during times of tragedy or sorrow. Here is the explanation for over a hundred centuries of human heartache, misery, torture, blood, sweat, and tears. Remove this chapter from the Bible and the rest of it is incomprehensible. Ignore the teaching of this chapter, and the story of humanity becomes impossible to understand or explain. We cannot read this story without feeling that we have lived it ourselves... because we have. The Temptation and the Fall are reproduced in our lives many times a day. We have all heard the voice of the tempter. We have all felt the drawing of sin. And we all know the pangs of guilt that follow.”

One would think that after thousands of years of Satan badgering us with the same lies, the same tactics, we would eventually catch on and see them for what they are. And yet we are still listening to that voice which says, “You desire a little more wisdom? I have just the thing for you. You feel the need for sex? I have just the partner. No harm done. No negative side effects. Need greater status? I have just the means.” His tactics are always the same. He attempts to cast doubt on the truth of God’s Word and the goodness of His character. He twists and warps it in the attempt to create a sense of deficit in our relationship with Him. He then holds out the promise of something that will make us more than what we presently are – more rich, more beautiful, more acceptable, more fulfilled, more valued, appreciated and loved – while subtly downplaying any consequences associated with sin. He tries to get us to believe that in some way we are above the law and, therefore, not prone to the consequences others will experience. These are the big lies in Satan’s arsenal. So what were the consequences for Adam and Eve, and subsequently all of humanity, after the Fall?

BIRTH OF SHAME

“Then the eyes of both of them was opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.” Genesis 3:7

The first consequence was that they covered themselves up in shame. Before the Fall man’s awareness was not turned inward but toward God, His creation and each other. In other words, they were selfless. But now their eyes were open; they became aware of their nakedness and the immediate effect brought them a sense of shame and embarrassment. And with the birth of self-consciousness they immediately covered themselves up. The entire human race has been covering itself up ever since; so fearful that our weaknesses will be found out and exposed. Even the clothes we wear – our outer skins – create the illusion that our weaknesses are covered. Think about this on a psychological level. We all project an image, a pseudo-self, if you will, through which we create impressions to others. This psychological cloaking distances us relationally and fuels our denial and defense strategies. Like Adam and Eve in the garden, we, too, cover ourselves, hide the deeper cries of the heart and our needs for a Savior. We, too, sew fig leaves, worry and fret over what we’ll wear, and how we’ll look because we have this innate sense that we’re naked, even though we are fully clothed.

BIRTH OF CONCEALMENT

“And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him “Where are you?” And he said “I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.” Genesis 3:8–10

The second consequence is evidenced in the instinct to hide. This is amazing! How can one hide from an all-present, all-seeing God? But, perhaps more intriguing is the question: Why would one want to hide? Before the Fall, Adam and Eve had walked in perfect fellowship with the God of Creation. There was security and confidence in that relationship. But sin had ruined it – now there was fear and mistrust, guilt and alienation. And their very first response was irrational – they hid from God among the trees and separated from Him. Simon Tugwell had this to say about how this instinct influences our lives today: “We either flee our own reality or manufacture a false self which is mostly admirable, mildly prepossessing, and superficially happy. We hide what we know or feel ourselves to be (which we assume to be unacceptable and unlovable) behind some kind of appearance which we hope will be more pleasing. We hide behind pretty faces which we put on for the benefit of our public. And in time we may even come to forget that we are hiding, and think that our assumed pretty face is what we really look like.” Hiding is an instinctive response to guilt and fear. Something happens – we give in to sexual temptation, misdirect our anger on some innocent party – and instinctively feel that we must bury our heads in the sand like an ostrich. Someone once said, “If the best of men had his innermost thoughts written across his forehead he’d never take his hat off.” Here also is the very first description of human conscience beginning to function – that deep sense of conviction each of us recognizes and yet can’t turn off no matter how desperately we try. It haunts us, follows us, makes us afraid. We feel unworthy, terrified – just as Adam and Eve were – afraid of God, fearful of His judgment and retribution. But then God does an interesting thing. He comes strolling back into the garden and asks, “Where are you?” Now, when God asks a question it’s not because He’s having a senior moment and doesn’t know the answer. By asking this question God is attempting to draw Adam and Eve out of hiding. He wanted them to get honest; to say in effect “I don’t know where I am. I’m lost, hidden and in desperate need of your fellowship O’God.”

BIRTH OF BLAME

“And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” And the man said, “The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” Genesis 3:11–13

Here we see the third consequence of sin – defensiveness and the instinct to blame had entered into their relationships. Whenever we place blame we are looking for a scapegoat in order to avoid the pain of self-examination. Blame is a way of averting consciousness of error. And what we see in these verses is the first human attempt to deflect the guilt they experienced because of their sin. And we’ve been doing the same thing ever since. We say, “But it’s not my fault, I’m a victim of circumstance” or “I would be fine if you would just change.” Whether consciously or not, we all tend to point an accusing finger, and assign blame for virtually every failure. Adam took it, you see, like a man; he blamed it on his wife. And she passed it along to the serpent: “The devil made

me do it!” But behind both excuses is the unspoken suggestion, that it’s really God’s fault – “the woman you gave me,” said Adam; “the serpent you allowed,” implied Eve. Both point their fingers ultimately towards the Creator. How difficult it is for us to admit, “I’ve sinned, O’LORD, have mercy on my soul.” How seldom our search for a culprit returns empty and we recognize the accusing finger pointing right back at us. Ever since the Fall, we have a blind spot when it comes to examining the heart and discerning right from wrong.

BIRTH OF RELATIONAL NEEDINESS AND SEPARATION

“To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you saying, ‘You shall not eat of it’; Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.” Genesis 3:16–18

Here we see the fourth consequence of sin – a sense of pain and separateness now defined their relationship. We can easily imagine how difficult it must have been for this couple to come to terms with the huge gap that now existed between them. As a consequence, God told the woman, “your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” These words mark the beginning of the battle of the sexes. She who was fashioned to be his helper now stands in opposition to him. The phrase “your desire” is interesting. It comes from the Hebrew word for “leg” and means “to run after.” This is not a reference to passion, but to the hunger for approval. Her identity from that day onward would be tied to her husband while, at the same time, rebelling against his rule. So the law of love founded in paradise would now be replaced with struggle, tyranny and domination. After God pronounced judgment on Eve he turned to the man and said, “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.” Adam’s work would now be accompanied by pain, futility and weariness so that he might well say as Job did later, “Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired slave?” And from that day onward man’s identity and sense of value would be tied to the futility of his labor. So we can see from this account what relational baggage now existed within their relationship. Where they had been “one” – united in spirit, soul and body – they were now two needy individuals with competing agendas. Their God-given desire to belong became an unmet need. And no family this side of Eden has been able to satisfy this need for belonging since that time. Their God-given desire for unconditional love and acceptance became an unmet need. With the withdrawal of God’s approval they were left with feelings of guilt and shame. Finally, their God-given need for purpose became an unmet need. All of mankind would now try to meet that need through self-effort.

And it’s right here that we come to a critical Biblical Counseling principle – *if our primary needs for belonging, personal worth and significance are not being satisfied in a healthy God-honoring way, they will seek to be satisfied in an unhealthy self-serving way.* Because God hot-wired these needs into our being from the beginning of time, one way or another they will be met. We will either honor God in response to our need or we will develop flesh strategies to meet those needs apart from Him. Take a look at the following diagram. Here we see the fundamental responses most people make when there is a deficit in any one of our basic needs:

Basic Needs	Flesh Strategies to Meet Needs
<p data-bbox="415 268 542 300">To Belong</p> <p data-bbox="396 394 561 426">Commitment</p> <p data-bbox="407 453 550 485">Connection</p>	<p data-bbox="678 268 1365 338">An exaggerated need to connect with one who will fulfill expectations for belonging and commitment.</p> <p data-bbox="678 380 1386 449">An exaggerated need to separate and isolate from others in order to avoid rejection.</p>
<p data-bbox="326 583 631 615">To Be Loved & Accepted</p> <p data-bbox="440 699 518 730">Worth</p> <p data-bbox="444 758 513 789">Value</p>	<p data-bbox="678 583 1398 653">An exaggerated need for personal affirmation so that others will prove one's worth.</p> <p data-bbox="678 695 1360 764">An exaggerated need to be right, easily engaged in power struggles.</p>
<p data-bbox="363 898 594 968">To Matter or Have Significance</p> <p data-bbox="428 1052 529 1083">Purpose</p> <p data-bbox="402 1110 555 1142">Competence</p> <p data-bbox="428 1169 529 1201">Effective</p>	<p data-bbox="678 898 1370 968">An exaggerated need for self-sufficiency; maintaining distance and separation to feel safe.</p> <p data-bbox="678 1003 1398 1073">An exaggerated need to maintain control over one's life and others.</p>

In each of these examples people are looking for external solutions to the internal problem of man's neediness. Yet in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus acknowledges this neediness by addressing the fact that God knows all that we have need of. He then promises that if we seek first the kingdom of God, in the spiritual realm, then all of our external needs will be provided for. So He invites us into a relationship with Him where these needs can be fulfilled. Many who come into counseling are attempting to work from the outside in rather than allowing God to meet them in their place of need. And unless we give them a clear biblical understanding of man's problem they will never come to appreciate the beauty of God's solution. They will continue to believe they are adequate to meet their needs apart from Him. Where do they get this notion? Well, as we've seen, it comes through the lies of the tempter. But it is also the creed of the world's system passed down from one generation to another, family to family, parent to child. When any part of the family system begins to operate outside of God's design, the entire organism becomes affected in the same way that an illness will cause the entire body to become sick and dysfunctional. These families may even look good on the outside while suffering tremendous internal conflict. Over time the entire system fractures, standing alone without conviction of truth or forgiveness. Somehow we must recover the truth! And this is what Biblical Counselors are called to do. This doesn't mean

that we are to offer solutions to every issue. What it does mean is that we are to communicate the design that God intended from the beginning – that in order to be rightly related to one another we must first be rightly related to God. The more people focus on their deficits the more power they give to the enemy of our soul. The thing that distinguishes Biblical Counseling is that our goal is to bring people into a closer more intimate relationship with God through Christ. It's pastoral rather than psychological in its orientation. This doesn't mean that we're not going to empathize with people's pain, listen to their stories or love them in the midst of it. But we are not going to pacify them. When we see them locked into self-centered behaviors, we are going to ask them to identify what's driving them. When we see them covered up in shame, hiding away an essential piece of their brokenness, we are going to encourage them to bring everything to the light; that nothing lies uncovered in God's sight. And, when we see them blaming the externals, we are going to challenge them to examine their own hearts and take responsibility for what the Lord reveals. More than anything, we want to help them shift their focus onto how God can empower them in the midst of their deficits and regardless of their circumstances. We want to help them gain new perspectives, to change what needs to change in their own hearts, and to live life more abundantly through God's resources rather than the insufficiency of their own.

BIRTH OF ALIENATION

“Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” – therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.”
Genesis 3:22–24

The last thing we see is that Adam and Eve exited Eden. God escorted them to the door and ushered them into the world. What a sad picture! God's response is often understood as punishment, and it certainly reads that way. But when we look at this passage with an appreciation of man's condition after the Fall, Genesis becomes the story of a loving Creator who knows that Adam and Eve will not be able to withstand the compulsion to eat from that second tree – the tree of eternal life. What if man, doomed now to self-centeredness, guilt and shame should reach forth his hand and eat of the tree of life, and live forever? It would mean that he would never physically die but would remain in his evil condition forever. God's banishment is, therefore, more of a protection than punishment. The cherubs and the flaming sword are there to protect humanities' freedom rather than defend God's authority. In a tender maternal moment before Adam and Eve depart, God makes clothing for them out of animal skins. This is a sign of God's redemptive activity. With the sacrifice of another life He covered and clothed their nakedness, as Jesus would later do on Calvary. So if we have read God's wrath into this passage then we have surely misread it. There can be no doubt that God is adamant about being God. And there are sure consequences when one denies it. But God's insistence is grounded in love rather than selfishness. We have had God's breath in us since the beginning. And God knows that the fulfillment we long for will come from nothing other than God's very self. Nothing else will satisfy the yearning that He has planted within us. And now, as they take their leave, Adam and Eve are more acutely aware of this than ever before.

So here we see the defense mechanisms that people employ in the face of their deficits. Here we see the prototypical model for all future dysfunction. There Adam is, head bowed, face covered in shame. There is Eve, head thrown back, crying out in anguish. But it is not just Adam and Eve. This is all who go their own way rather than honoring God in their actions. Jesus spoke of His purpose in coming into the world when He said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it in the full.” But if we refuse to walk in His ways, we won’t have life. Instead we will have death even in life. We will have deficits that cannot be filled in and of ourselves or through any external thing. This is the result when we are tempted to believe, like Adam and Eve, that God is holding out on us. But the truth is God never denies anything that is for our good. Anything that is for our eternal good, God makes available in His timing. James writes, “Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow” (1:16–17). What the Father gives is for our perfection. He doesn’t tease us with a blessing only to snatch it back at the last minute. It’s a lie of the tempter that He has a vast storehouse of internal and external blessings that is locked away, inaccessible to us. So don’t believe it!

Back to Joyce

When Joyce realized that she was expecting Harry to meet her need to belong and to matter, she began to see that she had a choice she wasn’t exercising. Unfortunately, Joyce’s father had ignored her as a little girl. And even though she had tried to obtain her father’s love and approval, he had not responded. In Harry, she told herself that she had finally met someone who would meet that need. In the same way that she never gave up on her belief that her father would love her unconditionally, neither was she willing to let go of Harry and allow God to meet her there.

Review Questions – Key Concepts

How does God decide what is “good” for mankind?

How does natural man decide what is “good?”

In what ways are the temptation and the Fall reproduced in our lives on a daily basis?

What results when we conclude that God can't be trusted for our growth?

What are the great lies of Satan's arsenal? How does he create a sense of deficit in our relationship with God? With one another?

After Adam and Eve sinned they developed defense strategies to avoid the pain of self-examination. In the following case study identify what defense strategies are being employed.

Case Study: Defense Strategies

Terry grew up in a broken home. His mother and father were divorced when he was three-years-old. He never knew that Dad was not returning until Mom announced one day that she was soon to remarry. It was at this point, he recalls, that he first began to shut down emotionally. Because he wanted Mom to be happy, Terry buried his feelings of betrayal and outwardly conformed to this new set of expectations. He stopped asking questions about Dad while inwardly vowing to never give his stepfather “a snowball’s chance in hell” of developing a close relationship with him. Well, the great day came and went. There was much celebration and everything looked good on the outside. But the subterranean cracks within the family system were becoming more pronounced at every turn. As Terry grew older, and Dad remained a distant memory, he grew less and less inclined to trust in the family for his growth. So he started going to the schoolyard and, eventually, the street corners to hang out with friends. He began to cut classes and steal from his stepfather. At first it was just a buck or two to buy a soda, a salami sandwich or go to a movie. Then he started sneaking vodka out of the liquor closet and prescription medications from the bathroom. No one seemed to notice and so this behavior quickly progressed. Terry would wait until his stepfather took a shower in the morning to pilfer tens, twenties and even fifty-dollar bills out of his wallet. He justified this behavior by thinking that someone needed to pay the cost for his Dad’s abandonment of him and his stepfather was the logical choice. Everything Terry stole he would then generously share with his friends, which gave him in turn what he so desperately needed – approval and acceptance. Then one day, when Terry was 14, he came home from school to find his parents and two narcotics agents waiting for him. His stepfather had found a few marijuana “joints” in Terry’s drawer. When asked whether or not the marijuana belonged to him, Terry denied it. In defiance he accused his stepfather of planting the narcotic so as to be rid of him. Terry told the agents that his stepfather never wanted him anyway and had threatened to send him away if he didn’t “shape up.” Mom, looking tattered and confused, just stood there and cried. “It’s all my fault. I should never have fought against joint custody. What am I to do? I can’t continue to live in all this family conflict.” Well, Mom chose as she had chosen in the past. Terry was handed over to the Juvenile Authorities. He was booked for possession of marijuana and later placed in a boy’s home for incorrigible youth. When Terry was released a year later no one was there to pick him up at the gate. He never called home again.

What counsel would you offer Terry if he came in to see you?

What is his deficit need(s)?

Someone who has never felt like they “belong” may have an exaggerated need for . . .

Someone who has never felt “worthy” may have an exaggerated need for . . .

What is Terry experiencing on an emotional level?

What behaviors have become problematic?

Can you identify any false beliefs that may have given shape to these attitudes and behaviors?

VI

What Is the New Man?

Memory Verse

Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin. Romans 6:6



When Arthur called to make a counseling appointment, he told me that he had just had a conflict with his wife. I could tell that he was embarrassed to talk about their conflict over the phone. When he came in for his first appointment, I learned that Arthur, a 26-year-old man, was struggling with pornography. When his wife discovered this “secret,” she exploded into a rage and then in tears. She felt betrayed and humiliated. But, most of all, she was angry about his deception. Arthur explained that he had been addicted to pornography since he was 12-years-old when one day he found his father’s Playboy magazines in a closet. He said that both his father and his older brother both used pornography regularly and that he grew up believing it was normal. Although he had been to church seminars and read books on the subject of sexual addiction, he had experienced little success in overcoming his. He looked at me and said, “I don’t think I can ever change. This is just who I am!”

In the last chapter we looked at man’s fall from grace and its effect on all future generations. Romans 5:12 tells us, “Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so death spread to all men.” What this is saying is that Adam acted as the representative for all mankind. When he sinned, the results (the self-centeredness, the predisposition towards isolation, blame and shame), affected all of us. Adam polluted the river of human life to such an extent that anyone who drank from it also became polluted with the same disease and with the same end – physical and spiritual death. *So when we talk about “change” in Biblical Counseling we must first consider this fact – all change is relative to the issue of sin and its power over all who are born from Adam’s seed.* And it’s here that Romans 5 brings us face to face with the solution. In verse 15 we see the great gospel declaration that although the sin of Adam spread death to the entire human race, the grace of God manifested through Christ’s sacrifice provided the way of salvation for all. Now, most Christians understand this truth on an intellectual level. But we, as counselors, want to rest in the confidence that our counselees understand its implications in regards to change. Verse 21 tells us that even as “sin reigned in death, grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” So the key to understanding our capacity to change has to do with this concept of “reigning.” Simply put, without Christ we have no ability or authority to overcome sin. On the contrary, we will remain powerless and stuck in our old ways of relating. But in Christ, through His reign within us, we have the power to break free from the slavery that’s been our curse since the days of Adam. The problem for counselors is that we see so many Christians who are not acting on this truth. Despite their faith in Jesus as Lord, despite having heard Scriptures to the contrary, they are continuing to manage their lives in their own strength

and embittered because the outcome is not satisfying their basic needs. And we want to be very careful not to assume that just because someone professes to be Christian that they actually have a clear doctrinal basis of what that means. As counselors we want to explore with them what it means to be a new creature in Christ. This is so important because *our ability to change external behaviors stems from knowing how Jesus has already changed us internally*. This is a foundational tenet of Biblical Counseling.

WE BECAME BORN-AGAIN

“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” John 3:5–6

Three things happened at the point of conversion. The first is that we became born-again. The Scripture distinguishes between two births. In the first birth we were born with physical life – that is, in our body. We were also born with a soul – that is, the capacity to think, feel and exercise our wills. And finally, we were born with a spirit – one, however, that has been disconnected from God as a result of the Fall. This is the natural person. But there is a second birth that Jesus refers – this is the spiritual birth. The spirit of man is filled with the Holy Spirit that imparts a life never known before. Something has radically changed. C.S. Lewis once said that when man fell a new kind of species that God never intended sinned its way into existence. That’s an amazing thought! But, now, you and I have been born into a new existence. So we’re not talking about just a little adjustment or “tune up.” It’s much deeper than that. We have become a whole new kind of person. And so we need to see this distinction. This is important, because when we begin to talk to people about their identities, we want to penetrate into the deeper realities of who they are in Christ. So the first thing is that we are born-again.

WE HAVE TAKEN ON A NEW IDENTITY

“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

Something has changed. The old self-centered principle has been exchanged for a God honoring one at a fundamental level. We have become part of a new creation – no longer the sons of Adam, we are now sons and daughters of God. The word “creature” comes from the root word meaning “the act of creating” or “that which has been created.” When Christ comes into a life by virtue of the new birth, He performs a creative act – a miracle of metamorphosis, an inside-out transformation. Just as a caterpillar’s entire body dissolves in the cocoon and is restructured into a butterfly, so our old value systems begin to dissolve and are restructured around Christ. In short, He rewires our desires.

WE HAVE EXCHANGED THE OLD IMAGE FOR A NEW IMAGE

“The first man Adam became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.” 1 Corinthians 15:45

Here we see the difference here between the old identity that was “soulish” in its orientation and the new identity that is spiritual. “However,” Paul continues to say, “the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from

heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:46–49). What this is saying is that you and I bear this heavenly image today. Granted, it may be a bit dusty and tarnished. And we are going to see in the next few teachings why that’s so. But we need to understand that deep inside of us, in spirit, we already have the image of God. The divine image has been implanted within us by way of the new birth.

In the counseling ministry we have handouts that help people reflect on these great truths. This is important because when people come in for counseling they are generally misinformed. They describe themselves by their old and false identity – as sons or daughters of their earthly fathers, by their roles in the world, by their presenting problem, or how they may be feeling about themselves. Or, they may acknowledge that they never ever really made a personal commitment to Christ but assumed that because they grew up in a Christian home or were sprinkled with water by a priest as a child that they were Christian. And so we have a real opportunity of leading some of these to Christ, and helping them to get grounded in the truth that says, “This is who you are.” We are children of God. We have been spiritually reborn. We have Christ’s very life. We are clothed in His righteousness. Heavenly citizens, with a new position and character. Totally acceptable in His sight. God’s workmanship destined to bear fruit and be effective. Every Christian needs to gnaw on these truths on a daily basis and savor them like vintage wine. It’s who we are – regardless of what our experience tells us.

IN CHRIST, SIN’S CONTROL OVER MAN IS BROKEN

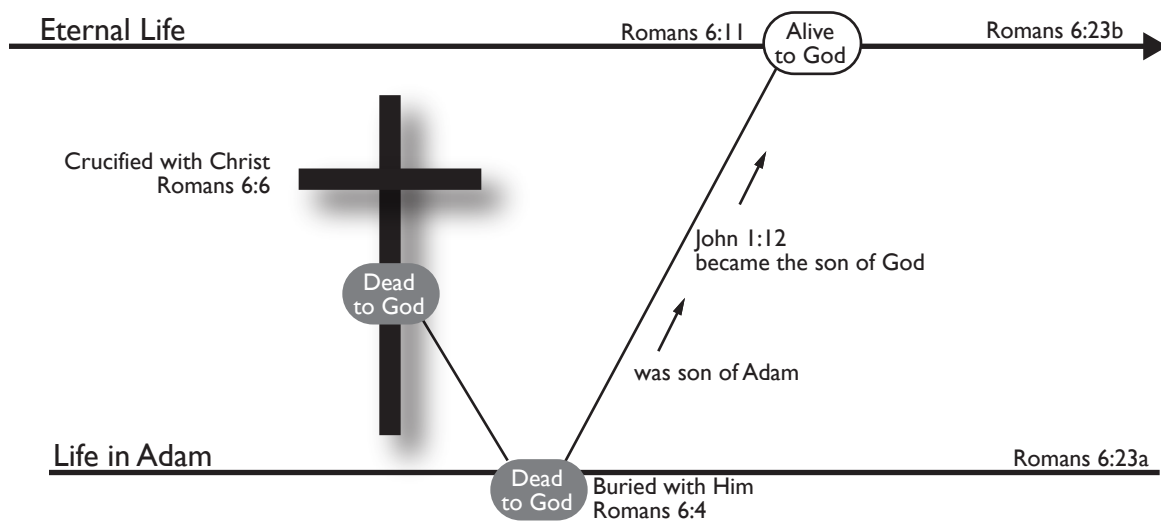
“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” Romans 6:1

Again, from a counselors perspective, the most pressing question you will be faced with is, “Can I change?” This is the cry of every heart that comes in for counseling. Can I stop looking at pornography? Can I stop depending on my husband for my value? Can I forgive my alcoholic father who was neglectful and abusive? This is what people want to know. Now that salvation from the *penalty* of sin has been received, how can salvation from the *power* of sin be secured? So in the first half of Romans 6, Paul begins to tell us. And the first step toward change involves knowing that we, as believers, are dead to sin. Paul introduces this thought, in verse 1, by answering the objection raised by an imaginary critic. In response to Paul’s assertion that salvation is a free gift of grace someone might say, “Since we are under grace why can’t we continue to sin?” “May it never be!” shouts Paul, “It can’t happen.” And then he gives the reason by saying, “How can we habitually yield to something that is no longer part of our nature?” In other words, how can we exist in two places at the same time?

The following analogy may help to illustrate this truth. Imagine a person, who is a citizen of a country under authoritarian rule, moving to the United States. He has changed his citizenship from that country to ours. Under a cruel dictatorship he had been subject to intimidation and tyranny. But upon leaving that country and living as a citizen of the United States he would no longer be subject to the laws of that country. He is free! But if he continued to live in fear of the dictator as though he were still a citizen of that country, afraid and intimidated by the police and authorities, afraid to leave his home or go out into the public, wouldn’t we consider that person to be, at the very least, confused? And the point is: through faith, we have passed from the old reign in Adam to a whole new authority in Christ. The sin nature that once ruled us no longer has the

power to keep making us obey its desires. Christ has saved us from sin's penalty *and* its power. So the question for our counselees is – where are they living? Are they living as though sin still has authority over their lives? Or are they living as someone who has been set free and under God's authority? So here is our first point of identification. Yes! We can change. Why? Because we have been radically changed through Christ who lives in us.

If you take a look at the following chart you will see that there are only two realities – life in Adam and life in Christ. The bottom line represents our life in Adam. As we were born in natural life we were dead to God. Now at a specific point in time, for all of us, Christ died – He was crucified – and we were crucified with Him. And not only crucified, but “we have been buried with Him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead we too might walk in the newness of life.



HOW DO WE EXPERIENCE CHANGE?

“Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him.” Romans 6:6

We need to know that our old self was crucified with Christ. “To know” is the operative phrase. Romans 6:6 tells us there are some truths that apply to all Christians. Paul writes, “Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him” What does he mean by the “old self”? The “old self” is man in his natural state – born of Adam, slaves to sin. That is the old self. So the person we used to be in Adam has died with Christ, Paul says, “in order that our body of sin might be done away with.” The body of sin is “the body as conditioned and controlled by sin.” What God created for good became perverted through sin. This fallen, self-centered nature had to be done away with before God could redeem His purposes for our lives. So Jesus, through the Cross, literally stripped sin of its power over humanity “so that we should no longer be slaves to sin.” What this image of crucifixion tells us is that, because of the Cross, sin no longer has any power over Christians. It has been made inoperative. It may still influence us, but the shackles of slavery have been broken. We don’t ever have to serve sin again. This doesn’t mean that we don’t ever choose to. And here is the rub. In our counseling process we emphasize “putting off” the old self and “putting on” Christ. Why would we need to put off something that has already died? Think about that. What are we encouraging them to put off – old ways of thinking, old feelings of guilt and shame, old attitudes and behaviors. In short, everything that has enslaved them *and* is still trying to gain a foothold in

the present. So we are talking about crucifixion as a proclamation and as a process. I died once to sin, but I die to self daily. Is that clear? This is so important because Christians come to us all the time doubting God's work in their lives because they still wrestle with the flesh. Let me ask you – Is there anybody here that doesn't? So it's a *proclamation* and a *process*. And we'll talk more about this next week when we look at the "struggle" and why it's so difficult for Christians to change.

But before we move on from here, let's look at Hebrews 2:14–15 for a moment. These verses are important because they help us to understand the impact the Cross has in our lives and in the lives of our counselees.

"Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

Psychologists say that "fear is at the root of all pathology." These verses in Hebrews give biblical support for this psychological construct. It's because of fear that people develop elaborate defense strategies in order to protect themselves. This is what Adam and Eve did after the Fall. So when you see them acting out in destructive ways keep this in mind. Underneath all the behavioral covering is a "scared child." And what are they afraid of? They are afraid of death. All of us are aware of it at some level. Why? Because we have been created for life: a life that only God can give. Fear rises to the surface when something threatens to separate us from the source of life. And death, in all its forms, is absence of life. Whether the natural man recognizes it or not, that's what produces a sense of disconnect and dis-ease. Because they are cut off from the source of life they are terrified of what's left. What's left is a black hole of deficit and death that, in all futility, the natural man attempts to fill with counterfeits. But we, who have been spiritually reborn, identify with Christ, who rendered "powerless him who had the power of death," so that, as Martin Lloyd Jones puts it, "We no longer take our orders from our body." So Romans 6:6 lays out the prescription for real change.

"Consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." Romans 6:11

Secondly, we must consider ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God. Now that we know this as true, Paul tells us to consider it on a daily basis. The word "consider," in one sense, means "to declare your thoughts or set your mind." But it's also an accounting term which means "to calculate, reckon, or count" something. Through the use of this word, Paul is telling us to continually take into account that sin is no longer our master, but that Christ is. We are to consider ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God as Adam was before the Fall. Sadly, this truth is far beyond the experience of most believers. Many Christians don't stand in the reality of their new birth. They tend to believe they can't change externally *until* something changes internally. And, in one sense, that's true. Every week we've been emphasizing that in order to change what we do we have to re-define who we are. Our behaviors change as a result of inward renewal. But, in another sense, God has *already* made us "new" in Christ. And, as we believe this, we invariably change. Ray Stedman sums this up by saying, "We think we have to change the way we act in order to be different and God says, 'No, I have made you different, and when you believe it, you will automatically change the way you act.'" So we are to recall, ponder and grasp this truth until it is so integral to our mindset that a return to the old lifestyle is unthinkable. Any new truth has to be exercised before it becomes second nature. We have to grow into it. I often ask people to "think about the day you

first learned to drive a stick shift. You were probably pretty self-conscious and clumsy in the beginning. But, after a while, you didn't even have to think about it. The shifting became automatic and effortless. So it is with spiritual change. The first volume of your life ended with the death of your former self. Volume 2 opened with your resurrection. Recall to mind these facts: "Volume 1 is a done deal. I am now living in volume 2. And it is inconceivable that I would ever go back to volume 1 as if my death and resurrection with Christ had never taken place." Our identification with Christ has severed us from the old life and committed us to the new. And through that life, we have the power to refuse the temptations of the flesh forever.

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." Romans 6:12–13

Finally, we must present ourselves to God. Up to this point, Paul has been dealing mainly with our self-concept; our identity. He has told us that we need to *think* of ourselves differently if we want to change. We must *know* the truth of who we are in Christ. We are to *consider* it on a daily basis. But how do we apply this knowledge, practically speaking? Well, there are two steps he asks us to take. The first, in verse 13, is a negative command, "Do not go on presenting the members of your body as instruments of unrighteousness." What is he referring to when he talks about the members of our body? Well, since the body seems to be the framework, its members are likely to be our limbs (our hands and feet) or our organs (our eyes and ears). But I think we can also stretch this to apply to our human faculties – our ability to think, feel and exercise choice. These too are our members. These are the capacities that God has given to us in order to live on earth but that can also be used as instruments of wickedness. The Greek word for "instrument", when linked with sin, can also refer to "weapons." So Paul is saying, "Don't use your faculties as weapons of mass destruction." What are some of the ways people might do this? By saying hurtful things to one another. Or by gossip. Through aggressive or controlling behaviors. By withholding forgiveness. Or acceptance. We can even use the eyes of our minds as weapons by logging on to porn sites or fantasizing about the opposite sex. In the counseling ministry we see people who have chosen, time and time again, to offer themselves as "instruments of unrighteousness." So don't be surprised! What do we tell them? I usually ask how that's working for them. Are they at peace in their lives? Are they resting in God's love with a clear conscience? Obviously, the answer is "No!" But, before we talk about behavioral changes, we always start by helping people understand their identity in Christ. We need to help them see who they are. It always starts there. Then we clarify our assumptions about change. Our *doing* always proceeds from our *being*. As Proverbs says, "As a man thinketh within himself so he is" (23:7). So in order to have new life and not just a change of destructive behaviors, we have to help our counselees examine what beliefs undergird their self-concept. Are they relying on God's word or the influences that have been passed down from Adam?

Furthermore, people don't live in a spiritual vacuum. We can't ask someone to turn away from a familiar but destructive pattern of behavior without turning towards a constructive counterpart. Paul understood this well. And so he says, "rather present yourselves to God." This is practical repentance at its best – a decisive turn towards the source of life. Whereas the command not to offer ourselves to sin is in the present tense, indicating we must not *continue* to do it, the exhortation to offer ourselves to God suggests a deliberate and decisive turning. Paul is looking beyond a general self-offering to presenting specific parts or members to God as "instruments (or

weapons) of righteousness.” For example, it is not enough for someone to say, “Lord, help me to stop sinning.” It is, however, to say “Lord, I choose not to live in anger for the hurtful words my wife spoke to me today. Help me look past the words spoken and forgive her the woundings those words caused me.” Do you see the difference? The first is all form and lifeless. It only goes through the motions. The second breathes life. It is a deliberate and decisive turning. And so, one of the most critical questions counselors can ask of themselves is – how can I best help this person make choices that serve life, rather than death? Notice that the ground of every command we have looked at tonight is that we have been brought from death to life. In the middle of verse 13 Paul says to “present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead.” The logic is clear. Since we have died to sin, it makes no sense to let sin reign in us or offer ourselves to it. Since we are alive to God, it conly stands to reason that we offer ourselves to Him. This theme of life and death, or rather death and life, runs throughout this entire passage. Christ died and rose. We have died and are risen with Him. We, therefore, regard ourselves as dead to sin and alive to God. And, as those who are alive from the dead, we offer ourselves to His service on a daily basis. So again the question – where do we choose to live? To whom do we choose to present our members? As counselors we want to encourage our counselees to choose, wisely.

Back to Arthur

Arthur never understood his identity as a “son of God.” Continuing to see himself as a son of “his father,” he continued to act out that wounded identity. We prayed, asking the Lord to open his eyes to this truth. As Arthur began to comprehend the truth that his “old self” was crucified with Christ, he gained more hope. I asked Arthur to meditate on Scriptures that contained this truth – that “Arthur,” son of his natural father, who was addicted to sexual sin was “dead” and that a “new” Arthur, son of God, was now alive. Slowly these truths re-framed Arthur’s view of himself. Though there was much work needed to apply these truths on a daily basis, Arthur had passed through the first obstacle to change. He was no longer in bondage to a wrong view of himself.

Review Questions – Key Concepts

What are some of the things we become at rebirth?

- John 1:12 _____
- 2 Corinthians 5:17 _____
- 1 Peter 1:4 _____

How do we answer the question “can I change?”

How does the believer break sin’s control over him/her?

Do you believe that a believer can lose their salvation? What doctrinal basis do you have for your position?

Case Studies: Identity

Adam is a single man in his thirties who suffers from a particular ruminating thought. He feels a lot of insecurity about life in general but is particularly confused spiritually. Although a believer, Adam has no devotional life. God feels distant. In spite of the fact that he attends church on Sundays, he otherwise is not involved in any accountability groups or ministries. Basically, he feels he is just going through the motions spiritually. His general health is good but he sometimes experiences sleeplessness and deep depression to the point of being unable to get out of bed. Sexually abused at the age of six by a half sister 11 years older than he, Adam has had little counseling regarding what happened. He has historically indulged in pornography, masturbation, and some self-flagellation. This culminated in the immediate crisis event of acting out sexually and railing at God's perceived inability and unwillingness to help him stop. It was at this time that he felt God "leave him" and has questioned his salvation ever since. Adam feels he has committed the "unpardonable sin." His most frequent emotion is a sense that he is eternally doomed. His goal for counseling is to restore his salvation.

Which of Adam's needs are not being met?

What is Adam's problem feeling?

What is his problem behavior/how is he trying to meet his need?

What does he seem to believe about his relationship with God?

What truth will you give him/which Scriptures will you apply to his problem thinking?

Eve lives according to her daily "planner." The first thing she does in the morning is to make a daily list of things she can accomplish if everything runs smoothly. She becomes angry if things don't go well or if someone takes too much of her time. She feels fulfilled if she uses her hours efficiently and effectively. Yet even when this happens she feels a pervasive sense of worthlessness. Her best is never quite "good enough," which tends to drive her to do more. Eve believes that accomplishing goals and making efficient use of her time represents what the Lord wants her to do. When she experiences stress, she occasionally thinks that something is not quite right, but her solution is to try harder, make better use of her time, and be even more regimented. Her goal for counseling is to set better limits for herself and experience the peace that other believers seem to have.

Which of Eve's needs are not being met?

What is Eve's problem feeling?

What is her problem behavior/how is she trying to meet her need?

What does she seem to believe about her relationship with God?

What truth will you give her/which Scriptures will you apply to her problem thinking?

VII

Why Is It Such a Struggle?

Memory Verse

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live,
but Christ lives in me. Galatians 2:20a



Marsha was an alcoholic. She grew up in a “good” family. Her father was the choir director in her church. Her father never drank in the home but it was his habit to stop at a neighborhood tavern every evening on the way home from work. He would sit quietly in his chair after dinner, hardly interacting with his wife or children. On the weekends he would visit the local tavern and return home to more isolation and distance from his family. Consequently, Marsha grew up a rebellious child, acting out the family dysfunction in her own life. But Marsha was not a “quiet drunk.” When she drank she became loud and offensive. By the time she came to see me, she was a divorced 30-year-old woman with a son in grade school. She was still struggling with her alcohol addiction, even after having been in recovery groups for several years. As she explained her struggle to me, she said, “I don’t know how I can be a Christian and still be drinking all the time.” When I questioned her further, she said she had asked Christ to come in to her heart several times, and in her view, to no avail! It was clear that Marsha did not understand her identity in Christ. Nor did she understand the “struggle” every believer experiences as they “crucify the flesh,” and strive to walk in the Spirit.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” Paul is answering critics who were concerned that salvation by faith alone weakens man’s sense of moral responsibility. In response, he lays out the same doctrine we learned in the last chapter. Those of us who are united in Christ through faith are never the same. We are changed. Not just in our standing before God; our entire character is radically and permanently altered. We have become a new creation and begun a new life. In one sense, we live this new life through faith in Christ. But, in another sense, it’s not we who live it at all, but Christ who lives it through us. And, living in us, He gives us new desires to please Him. This doesn’t mean we can’t sin again; we can and do. But, for the most part, we don’t want to. The whole tenor of our life *has* changed, in one sense, and is changing in another. So why does it seem like such a struggle? Well, because there are forces at work that would contend against our relationship with the Lord on a consistent basis. One of these is the deadly pantheon of spiritual hosts in the unseen places. Another is the influence of the world’s system. But the one we are going to look at in this lesson is called the “flesh.” Let’s look at Galatians 5 where Paul describes the operation of the flesh in a poignant way.

BIBLICAL COUNSELORS HELP OTHERS WALK IN A NEW WAY

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” Galatians 5:16

We all know what it means to walk. We’ve been doing that since we were about 18-months-old. The word that Paul uses is *parapateo* which means “to walk about,” and is the most commonly used word for Christian conduct. I can remember my daughter Jessica’s first attempts to walk. She was so determined, but her little legs were not yet strong enough to support her. So I would help her, encourage her to stand and support her until she was able to put one foot in front of the other. Most of the time she wobbled. Other times she fell. Then there were those truly blessed days when she didn’t stumble at all. In the same way, as God’s children, the Holy Spirit helps us to walk. As we rely on Him, He coaches us like a faithful father; encouraging us in our weakness, instructing us to follow Him. And just as I was so delighted in Jessica’s first, feeble, stumbling efforts, God the Father is well pleased by our attempts to walk with Him. Each time we fall He picks us back up again. And He knows perfectly well that our own efforts will never bring us anywhere near His perfection. So He calls us to rely on Him on a daily basis. In the same way, our counseling with others always begins with a commitment to walk by the Spirit according to the strength that Christ provides. We are involved in a spiritual process. But this is not to say that we have inordinate expectations that our counselees are going to get it down perfectly, that they won’t fall down and skin their knees before they develop the spiritual muscles required to walk in a new way. In fact, failure is always built into the long-term process of growth. It’s an inescapable bane of human life. Anyone who has ever tried to change an old habit for a new one knows that it’s a process of “baby steps.” So no matter how many times people stumble, we want to help them get back on their feet again. As one of my mentors once said, “The mark of a mature person is not that they don’t fail, but that they correct the course of their walk accordingly.”

WE NEED TO ALERT OUR COUNSELEES THAT THEIR PROGRESS WILL BE OPPOSED

“For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.” Galatians 5:17

Whenever our counselees make a decision to walk by the Spirit, whenever they say, “I’m ready to make a change,” do you know what’s going to happen? The flesh is going to arouse a desire to do the complete opposite. Here is the reason why people struggle so – the flesh doesn’t want to die. Every Christian has an antagonist within; one that is diabolically opposed to our spiritual walk. This is the flesh – that inherited selfishness that impels us to pursue our own interests at the expense of others. It’s a word that speaks of life apart from God. Furthermore, the flesh has great power. It is by no means eradicated because we may be Christian. If you don’t agree, then ask yourself where that last ugly or ungodly thought or desire came from. It didn’t come out of a vacuum, but from the old nature that is still resident within all of us. So we all know from experience that this is true. The Spirit-flesh conflict goes on throughout our lifetime. We never get so mature that we don’t experience it. And we never face a day where there aren’t choices that must be made in regards to it. So what do these choices look like? Well, they’re mutually exclusive! That which dominates depends on which one our counselees are *feeding*. If they are feeding themselves spiritually – through God’s word, their prayer life, and fellowship with one another – *and yielding control to the Holy Spirit*, then He will rule. But if they have become spiritually anorexic, with little or no disciplines in place, then the flesh will dominate. This is one of the reasons we always ask people what their spiritual disciplines look like. Without a daily regimen of prayer, scriptural reflection or relational supports they have little chance of succeeding.

WE NEED TO HELP THEM DISTINGUISH FLESH FROM SPIRIT

“Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” Galatians 5:19–21

These verses describe the outward behaviors Paul attributes to the flesh. This is helpful information. However, it’s not a pretty picture. Remember that Paul is addressing this to the brethren, “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident.” Paul tells us that these deeds, these outward acts or marks of the flesh, are plain to see. And so he divides them into four categories, beginning in the sexual area: “immorality,” from the Greek word *porneia*, from which our word pornography is derived, “impurity and sensuality.” These three words cover all sexual offenses. The second area is of religious nature: “idolatry and sorcery.” Idolatry is anything outside of God that takes or usurps the worship of our heart. Pleasure, power, property or prestige, even relationships to another person, can become idolatrous if exalted above God. And by sorcery Paul is referring to the rituals associated with these practices. The third category concerns interpersonal conflicts: “enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying.” We see a lot of these in the counseling ministry. And, the fourth category has to do with excessive drinking or alcoholism: “drunkenness and carousing.” Now it’s important for you to know that we won’t counsel anyone who is actively abusing drugs or alcohol. If you have ever tried talking sense to someone “loaded”, you can understand why. Instead, we refer them to a recovery-oriented fellowship that can support their sobriety. Only then will we offer Biblical Counseling. All the deeds in these categories are simple examples of how depraved Christians can be when the flesh rather than the Spirit is served. So don’t be surprised or shocked by what people bring to the counseling table. Oftentimes, it’s just a little sketch of life with God taken out of the middle.

So, in light of this, Paul holds up a solemn warning. He says, “I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” This verse doesn’t mean that we can lose our salvation. If our sin was too great for God’s grace, He never would have saved us in the first place. And because the tense of the word translated ‘practice’ is present, it indicates a compulsive unbridled tendency towards acting out of the flesh rather than an occasional relapse. So, Paul’s point is this: continual trafficking in sin shows a lack of spiritual life in the unsaved, whereas occasional relapses are a sign of the flesh rearing its ugly head in the saved. Regrettably, there are many Christians today who do these things in the name of freedom. What they fail to see is that these behaviors subject them to slavery. When our freedom in Christ becomes license to do what one pleases, not only is the great privilege of liberty abused, but those who abuse it are themselves shackled and imprisoned as a result of their own choices. Furthermore, when seeds are sown to the flesh, a rotten harvest can always be expected, one that separates them further and further from the very thing that can call them back to the truth. Can you relate? I hope so! A central part of the counseling process focuses on helping people identify these patterns in their lives. The first part of any solution is to always identify the problem clearly. And if we haven’t learned to identify our own tendencies to act out of the flesh, then we are of little good to those who are coming to us for help.

The sanctifying power of God lives within each believer, with the capacity to mold and perfect us into the people He wants us to be. But our counselees must *choose* to allow the Holy Spirit to work within them. As they do so, God will produce spiritual fruit that's like a ripe cluster of grapes. This fruit can't be produced through self-effort. Nor are they a reward for doing good deeds, like a merit badge or blue ribbon. Fruit is the result of a life of faith. The first three, "love, joy and peace" concern our relationship with God. He is our first love and first joy, and because of His grace we are at peace. The next triad, "patience, kindness, and goodness," describe our relationships with other people. We will seek their best and put up with their worst. And the final three qualities, "faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control," concern our self-ward relationship. For the most part we are able to master our passions and maintain a godly lifestyle. And then, Paul adds for the purpose of emphasis, "against such things there is no law" because these qualities of character, obviously, fulfill God's law.

OUR COUNSELEES MUST LEARN TO CRUCIFY THE FLESH

"Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" Galatians 5:24

So how can we help others to overcome this conflict within? What can we say that might give them the tools they need to control the lusts of the flesh and bear the fruit of the Spirit? Paul's brief answer is this: crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. Or, as Paul puts it in Romans 8:12–13, "So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." What Paul is saying is that we are indebted, not to the flesh but to the indwelling Spirit, to live out our God-given life and put to death everything that is incompatible with it. Notice that the crucifixion described here is not something that is done *to us* but *by us*. We are the ones called to take the action. It isn't a "dying" that we have experienced through union with Christ as in Romans 6:6, but such a decisive and radical rejection of evil that no imagery can do it justice except "putting to death". In fact, the verb he uses means to "hand someone over to be killed, especially of the death sentence and its execution". This is the way of the Cross. Jesus humbled Himself and became obedient unto death. And, for us as Christians there is no journey, no path set before us, aside from the one that He Himself walked. And, just as Jesus emptied Himself in obedience to the Father's will, we too are being asked to abandon ourselves in the same way. Outside of the cross there is no other place for our sin to go. You see, God, through His Spirit, wants to change us into the image of His Son. Therefore, He is devoted to healing everything that stands in the way of His perfect love. So He calls every Christian to take up his or her cross daily and walk to that place of crucifixion where every use of our body that is in service to the flesh is to be put to death.

HOW IS THIS DONE, PRACTICALLY SPEAKING?

Paul tells us that we can put to death the deeds of the body only "**by the Spirit**" – through His ministry and power. Only the Spirit of God can give us the desire and discipline to reject evil. Our part is to take the initiative to act. This beautiful painting by Briton Riviere illustrates this movement. It shows Daniel's posture in the lion's den. He is standing there with a single-minded devotion; his back against the problem and his face looking towards the heavens. I believe this is the posture that God calls us in regards to those things that have the capacity to devour our spiritual lives. It often seems that no amount of turning towards the problem does anything but

fuel its growth. The flesh exploits our weakness. The lions smell the fear. So God calls us through His Spirit to turn away and, like Daniel, trust in Him for our deliverance. This is not an unhealthy form of denial, but coming to acknowledge a greater reality. Through God's Spirit and His grace we can choose to neglect these diseased aspects of our character to death. This is how our true repentance is walked out in our daily lives.



This biblical teaching is so widely neglected that it needs to be further emphasized here. The first secret on how to live out the wholeness that God desires lies in the depth and decisiveness of our repentance. If patterns of sin are consistently plaguing those we are ministering to, it's either because they have never truly repented, or because, having repented, they haven't maintained it. It's almost as if, having nailed their sin to the Cross, they keep longing to return to the scene of its execution. They begin to fondle it, caress it, and may even try and take it down again. We need to encourage them to leave it there on the Cross. So when some jealous, proud, or impure thought invades their minds, they will be predisposed to kick it out at once. It's fatal to begin to examine it and consider whether or not they'll give in to its temptation. More than anything the enemy wants our attention. Instead, they need to remind themselves that they have declared war and refuse to negotiate further. And, since Jesus has settled the issue for good, they are not going to reopen it. The flesh has been crucified and they will never withdraw the nails.

Take a look at the chart at the end of this chapter. It will help you and your counselees become familiar with this process, practically speaking. On the right side of the page are the spiritual choices one can make. On the left side are the fleshly responses that always arise from the need to escape pain or deficit. Personally, I've learned to distinguish three emotional cues that help me identify the stirrings of the flesh. First, there is a restlessness within. Secondly, there is an irritability toward others. And, finally, a discontentedness in regards to my circumstances. These emotional triggers demand an immediate response or gratification. Oftentimes it's very subtle. And one of the things we want to do, and teach our counselees to do, is to objectify these emotional

responses. In other words, to identify what's causing these feelings to be aroused without reacting to them. One of the greatest services we can render our counselees is to help them differentiate fleshly feelings from the Spirit's true voice. So many people "believe it because they feel it," and this simply is not an accurate measure of truth. Let me just say that, as a Christian, if you ever feel condemned, it's not the voice of God. This is not to say there's not a healthy sense of guilt when we experience God's conviction. But God communicates that very clearly and distinctly – like synchromesh slipping into gear or a tuning fork being struck. Someone once said, "God never muddies the water. He makes it perfectly clear." So **separating out feelings from facts** is critical to the process of crucifying the flesh. Once the feelings are recognized as fleshly the question must be asked – **what false beliefs are fueling these responses?** Every disturbing situation is an opportunity to focus on a false belief that may be affecting or threatening our core identity. Over time and with the help of the Holy Spirit our counselees will need to train their minds to become conscious of them. This lifts the false beliefs from the unconscious into conscious awareness! It's only with the conscious mind that these false beliefs can be confronted and sought, in the name of Jesus, to be removed. To correct such false beliefs, they must then **turn from what is false and affirm what is true**. In other words, they must remind themselves of their true identity in Christ. And, finally, to **act on what is true**. Why is this important? So they "will live." In Romans 8:13, Paul tells us that, "If you are living according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." By "live" Paul is referring to the rich, abundant life reserved for God's children who are led by His Spirit. As those we are counseling become willing to "put to death the deeds of the body" God promises to display in their present experience the fruit of that intimacy. They will enjoy life and a sense of His peace. And even though their struggles with the flesh will continue they will know that He is a source of help in time of need. This is the beauty of life in the Spirit.

OUR COUNSELEES MUST PRACTICE WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

"But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit." Galatians 5:18, 25

There is a difference in being "led by" and "walking by the Spirit" that Paul intends for us to understand. Being "led by the Spirit" is in the passive tense. This means it's something that's being done to us. The verb is used of a farmer herding cattle, a shepherd leading sheep, or wind driving a ship. In other words, it's the Holy Spirit who takes the initiative to assert His desires against those of the flesh. This is why it is so critical to differentiate the two "voices." But it would be wrong to believe that all people need to do is passively surrender to the Spirit's control. On the contrary, they are to "walk" actively in the right way. It's the Spirit who does the leading, but they who are called to do the walking. Remember earlier we said that the verb "walk" in Galatians 5:16 is **parapateo**, which means "to walk around." In verse 25, where Paul says, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit," the word is **stoicheo** which means "to walk in line or conduct oneself rightly." And the idea seems to be that since we, as Christians, have divine life indwelling us, we are to conduct ourselves in line with that life. So as they "crucify the flesh," rejecting what they know to be wrong, so too they must "walk by the Spirit," by following what they know to be right. In other words, they reject one path to follow another. And because of His work within, they can begin walking in a way that is more reflective of His character. They will begin to experience life where there once was death, peace rather than war. They will be able to walk uprightly because He who is upright is walking alongside, empowering them to love as Jesus loved. By this the law is

fulfilled; not through any external means or regulations, but through Christ's Spirit who is helping our counselees to exercise their choices in a way that God intended.

Back to Marsha

Marsha began to distinguish between her feelings and her thoughts. She began to comprehend the truth that her flesh was not her identity. And, most importantly, she began to accept the fact that "new life" in Christ was both a "proclamation" and a "process." She had been wrongly influenced through her church culture that life in Christ was supposed to be easy and comfortable. Recognizing the realities of "spiritual warfare" at a deeper level allowed Marsha to abide in Christ in a way she had never known before. She picked up her armor and began a warfare lifestyle of crucifying her flesh.

Review Questions – Key Concepts

In Galatians 5:17, what are the two opponents?

How do you define "flesh?" What kinds of behaviors are associated with it?

What does Romans 8:12–13 tell us in regards to "crucifying the flesh?"

What does this process look like, practically speaking?

What is the difference in being "led by" and to "walk by the Spirit?"

What does Peter tell us will happen when we suffer in the flesh (1 Peter 4:1)?

Case Study: Problem Behavior

Rob is a middle-aged Christian man. On paper his life works – by the world’s standards he is a “success.” He was once a CEO of a successful Silicon Valley corporation. He owned a house in Atherton, had a beautiful wife and two young children. He never lacked material possessions. Even within the church community he was touted as a seasoned veteran of the spiritual life. He understood theology, led prayer groups and went on overseas mission trips. But there was something missing. Despite his obvious success and religious activities, Rob felt disconnected. He had few intimate friends and seemed to maintain relationships with a quiet but controlled reserve. As a result, he was a lonely man and terribly afraid. Then one day he was on the Internet and accidentally stumbled upon a porn site. At first, he was shocked and disgusted by the explicit images and quickly logged off the site. But something took hold of him and despite his resolve to resist this temptation found himself logging back on that same night. What began as a casual and innocent encounter became an obsession. And the more he connected to the pornographic images, the more desensitized he became to the call of Christ upon his soul. Eventually, this one night affair became an every day preoccupation, eroding his free will, devouring his dignity, and taking control of his life. It wasn’t long, thereafter, that he began seeing prostitutes – selling out physically to what he had already given his mind over to. As a consequence, he lost everything. His family was shattered. He lost his career, his home, his ministry. And now this shell of a man is wondering what has become of his life.

Which of Rob’s needs are not being met?

What is his problem behavior – how is he trying to meet his need?

What is Rob’s problem feeling?

What is his problem thinking?

What counsel would you give Rob to offer hope in regards to his particular flesh/spirit struggle?

CRUCIFYING THE FLESH

Flesh Reality – Death

↑
Because the fleshly strategy does not satisfy, negative feelings result and the cycle starts over

↑
Pain is temporarily relieved by one's flesh strategy

↑
Pain motivates a person to meet one's needs

↑
The consequence is pain:
I do not belong; I am not loved;
I do not matter

↑
The response is passive:
feelings take over

↑
There is an emotional stimulus that demands a response:
anger, anxiety, depression

Faith Reality – Life

↑
Expect to experience fruit and joy of the Spirit

↑
Take thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ

↑
Deny the fleshly emotion by not paying attention to it

↑
Make a commitment to godly choices

↑
Identify false beliefs and deal with appropriately

↑
Recognize feelings as fleshly

VIII

Making Better Choices

Memory Verse

In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Ephesians 4:22–24

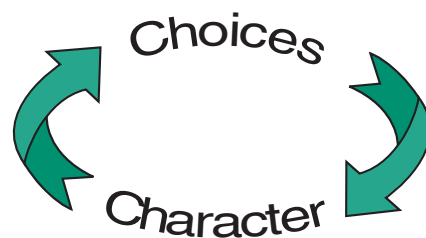


Bob, a man in his late 20's, married eight years, was referred to me for counseling. He and his wife were having tremendous conflicts in their marriage; she was considering divorce. As I talked with Bob I learned the following: his wife had just discovered that he had been having an "emotional" affair with a woman at work. Bob seemed totally unrepentant. He justified his actions by saying that his wife's constant complaining was such a source of anxiety and stress that he had sought emotional comfort outside of the marriage. I also learned that Bob averaged over fifty hours a week at work and had been attending college at night. This left little time for his wife, Nancy, and two small children. When I asked why he had chosen to spend so little time with them, he responded with surprise: "I didn't choose to be away from home so much. My job and my schooling required it of me." Bob could not at first see that doing these things was a choice. And by doing them, he was choosing not to spend time with his family. Bob knew how to be a student; he knew how to work hard. Bob, however, felt very inadequate for the role of husband and father. The way Bob viewed himself correlated to the choices he was making. As I got to know Bob better, I learned that his own mother was very controlling and critical. And so Bob had never learned to view Nancy apart from his mother. Hence, Nancy's attempts to get Bob's attention were interpreted as control and criticism. By his choice, Bob was distancing himself from his wife. And the choices he made confirmed Bob's belief that he would never be a good husband or father.

Throughout this training we have talked about the mind a lot and the importance of allowing God to renew our minds through His word. This is not to say that our emotions are not important. In the next chapter we'll talk about the role that feelings play in our capacity to understand ourselves and others. But in this lesson we are going to talk about the will and how our counselees can make better choices. This is what gets people in trouble. Oftentimes, they – like all of us – make terrible choices; those that compromise their integrity and hurt other people. So we want to help them get grounded in the doctrine of free will. The beauty is that God created us different from anything else. He shaped us in the image of Himself; as spiritual people with mind, emotions and will. The "will" here is key because He who hung the stars is a decisive God. He is deliberate. He makes choices. And every choice He makes is in line with His character. Now, if we are created in God's image then, optimally, every choice we make should be in line with our character as sons of God. That's what He intended from the beginning. The first man and woman were given the capacity to make moral choices. And were, therefore, given the greatest of dignities – that being,

human freedom. But God also placed a limit on this freedom: “From any tree you may freely eat,” he told Adam – “all this is yours. But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” The great theologian, Francis Schaeffer, writes, “God simply confronted man with a choice. He could just as well have said ‘Don’t cross this street’ or ‘Don’t climb this mountain.’ God is saying ‘Believe me and love me as a creature to its creator, and all will be well. For this is the place for which I have made you.’ It’s perfectly true that in making man as He did, God made the possibility of evil. But the mere possibility of evil is not the actualizing of it. And in making that possibility God validated choice and validated man as being significant in history. All love – man to woman or woman to man or friend to friend – is bound up with choice. Without choice the word love is meaningless. God has indeed made the possibility of man’s choosing, including the possibility of choosing wrongly. But God has not made evil. There is simply choice. When God finished creating there was nothing which was contrary to His character.” So God had told Adam and Eve that He must limit them for their own protection. “You may eat of any fruit, any tree, anywhere – but one.” And this is what God is saying to our counselees as well! It’s in this sense that the tree of good and evil is right in the midst of the garden of their lives. Whenever God draws a line in the sand, they have a choice to make; whether they will accept the limitation or not. Throughout history, man’s refusal to honor God’s boundaries has brought pain and sorrow to our experience time and time again. So choices are important to God. More than anything He wants to see our faith expressed through our choices. Why? Because every decision we make brings either life or death into our experience. As C.S. Lewis once wrote, “Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long, you are turning this central thing into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature.”

WHAT MAKES OUR CHOICES SIGNIFICANT?



First of all, **our choices are important because they reveal our character.** We can see the character of a person as a result of the choices they make. When someone decides to tell the truth rather than lie, we can say that they have an honest character or sense of integrity. If they show up for work consistently on time, we would characterize them as being responsible. That’s all pretty simple! Secondly, **our choices determine the kind of person we are becoming.** What this is saying is that the quality of a person’s character – who they are and are in process of becoming is a sum total of their choices. So choices determine character and our character will determine our choices. So which comes first, choices or character? It doesn’t really matter which comes first; they both reinforce one another. But the place to start in helping people change is not with choices but with character. We are starting with the spirit of man rather than the behavior. We want to help people understand their identity in Christ. And we believe, upon the authority of the Scripture, that this will result in helping them make more God-honoring decisions.

WHAT PRINCIPLES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN CHANGING CHOICES?

The counselee must consider the cost of change. As counselors, one of the first things we do is assess people's motivation. Why are they seeking help? Are they really committed to change? Or are they merely complying with some external source of pressure? Most have mixed feelings about this. Most want to experience the benefit, but avoid the cost. And so the question is – what are they willing to give up? Something is going to have to die if they are going to live out of the fullness that God intended. It may be a relationship to a person or object that has become idolatrous. It may be their romanticized images of a perfect partner. They may need to give up their anger to feel the sadness or find expression for pain in ways they've never learned. Certainly, their self-centeredness will need to die. And this will always mean that in some area of their lives they will have to give up control to Jesus. In Biblical Counseling, we want to help our counselees understand what this means. A couple of weeks ago we said that the most primary thing about change is the depth and decisiveness of a person's repentance and their ability to maintain it over the long haul. Most are pretty good out the gate. But the more distance they get from the painful event that motivated their desire for counseling in the first place, the more likely they are to go back to what's familiar. So when we're working with those who aren't really motivated, we need to help them understand that it's okay to be ambivalent about change as they begin this process of healing. But we don't want them to stay there. We all know how frustrating it can be to communicate God-honoring principles to someone who doesn't seem motivated to change. But I refuse to believe it's because they don't want to. It's either because they don't know how or they are too fearful of what God will ask them to let go of. So be sensitive to your counselee. The fact that they are coming to you for counseling must indicate that they are looking for help. And we need to treat this with respect and allow them to wrestle with their motivation. We want to come alongside and pray that God will motivate them to change.

The counselee must recognize that suffering is a normal part of change. God perceives the imperfections within us. But because of His great love for us, He is not content to leave us in our weakness. He is, therefore, devoted to healing everything that stands in the way of His perfect love. C.S. Lewis writes, "That is why Jesus warned people to 'count the cost' before entering into relationship with Him. 'Make no mistake,' He says, 'if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Whatever suffering it may cost you, whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased. This I can and will do. But I will do nothing less.' Yet – and, this is the other and equally important side of it – this Helper who will, in the long run, be satisfied with nothing less than absolute perfection, will also be delighted with the first, feeble, stumbling efforts you make... Every father is pleased at the baby's first attempt to walk." Any authentic struggle with the flesh will involve deprivation. As with any habit, the more people stop doing it, the more it will hurt. Withdrawal symptoms are very real and one way or another they will be experienced. But the more they suffer by not giving in to the flesh, the closer they will come to crucifying it altogether. In the words of the apostle Peter, "Therefore since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose; because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4:1). So suffering is an integral part of any change.

The counselee must change their thought patterns. There is an old expression that says, "sow a thought, reap an act; sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap character." In other words, what a person does originates from their thought life. People don't take a step in any direction

without it first being justified in their minds. So, in order to have a new life and not just a change of destructive behaviors, counselees must learn to identify their current belief systems and allow their minds to be renewed through the word of God. Here are some differences between true and false beliefs: True beliefs are based on the Word of God; false beliefs are based on fear or arise out of loss or pain. True beliefs support the value and growth of an individual; false beliefs demean and diminish the value and growth of an individual. True beliefs are proven true through life experiences that edify both self and others; false beliefs are proven false by destructive, defensive behaviors and painful relationships. True beliefs result in safe, healthy relationships; false beliefs result in separation from others. True beliefs create peace and confidence; false beliefs create anxiety and exhaustion. Our beliefs represent the filters through which situations are interpreted. Some of these interpretations are conscious reflections; most, however, are based on unconscious habits. These beliefs trigger thoughts, which in turn fuel the emotions that then drive the actions, in that order. The important thing to understand is that thought patterns can be changed.

HOW DO WE MAKE BETTER CHOICES?

“In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” Ephesians 4:22–24

Here we see the principle by which we are changed as people. Paul gives us three steps in this process of being changed. The first is **“laying aside the old self.”** The picture from the Greek is “to strip away filthy clothing.” This requires that our counselees, first, identify their flesh strategies (those goal-oriented behaviors designed to meet their needs apart from God) and, secondly, abstain from the destructive behavior. Paul is saying, “Have nothing to do with those old tattered rags, those attachments that lead to your destruction.” And then he says, “Rather than live the way you used to before you knew the Lord let your mind be changed in the place you make decisions. Think in a way that’s different, **have your mind renewed.**” And finally, Paul says to **“put on the new self.”** In other words, “Begin to live and act like a new creature in Christ. The old habits and attitudes are being restored to their true intent as the Spirit of God works in your life. Little by little God is replacing them with new patterns that honor Him rather than self.” This process of change takes place over the course of an entire lifetime. But on a daily basis every Christian is challenged to refuse to act out of the old desires and live their lives based upon God’s word and His values. This is the way that all the potential we have in Christ becomes a reality in our experience. This is the way we are changed – by practicing the process of growth laid out here.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO RENEW OUR MINDS?

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2

To renew the mind is to transform it, to alter its content, to renovate it, change its condition, its nature, its function, and its identity. This requires an act of creation far greater than anyone can do for themselves. But God, as Creator, wants to change more than just external behaviors. He wants to change the way one thinks. Simply changing behaviors is like trimming the weeds in a garden instead of removing them. Weeds always grow back unless pulled out by the roots.

2 Corinthians 10:3–4 tells us how this is done: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.” Paul is simply saying that because man is fraught with human limitation, we can’t afford to fight this battle by human means. We are in a spiritual battle that requires spiritual weapons. And though Paul doesn’t tell us in these verses, the overall revelation of Scripture is clear that there are at least three weapons of faith: the greatest being the Word of God. As our counselees immerse themselves in spiritual truth and apply it to their hearts, the enemy is recognized and defeated. Bank tellers learn to distinguish counterfeit money from real bills not by looking at what is false but by studying what is true. Another mighty weapon is prayer. We want to encourage our counselees to bombard heaven through their prayer life, believing that God can and will move in powerful ways to change them. And the third weapon is that of love. Remember that love is a verb – an action word. Our love for God is shown through our obedience; our love for others by putting their needs before our own. These are some of the weapons used to repent of false belief systems or strongholds. But it’s not enough just to recognize them. To truly repent is to experience a Godly sorrow in regards to how these lies have found expression in relation to God and others. It’s to acknowledge the false beliefs as being untrue, and to replace them with the truth of God’s word.

PUT OFF’S AND PUT ON’S

In Ephesians 4:25–5:4, the Apostle Paul takes this principle of repentance and gives six concrete examples of what it means to live it out, practically speaking. In verse 25, he writes, “Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.” Paul begins with the most universal temptation of the human experience: the temptation to misrepresent the truth. So he is saying, “Don’t tell lies but speak truth in love.” This is so important because any fellowship, be it husband to wife or friend to friend, is built on trust, and trust is built on being able to speak the truth. So being dishonest undermines fellowship, while truth strengthens it.

Then Paul says, in verses 26–27, “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.” This tells us that although our counselees may at times be legitimately angry they are not to sin. And the way to prevent such sin is to keep “short accounts,” rather than long “black lists,” and deal with anger before it turns to resentment or hostility. If the sun is allowed to go down on their anger, it may then begin to control them rather than the other way around. So Paul is saying, “don’t sin in your anger, but rather ensure that your anger is righteous.”

The next command comes in verse 28, “Let him who steals steal no longer; but rather let him labor, performing with his own hands what is good, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need.” Stealing can be defined as depriving anyone of anything – whether that be property or affections – without giving its value in return. It’s rooted in the self-centered desire to satisfy our own needs at the expense of others. So Paul is saying, “rather than take from another, give to those in need.” That’s what it means to put on the “new self.”

Then in verses 29–30, Paul says, “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you have been sealed

for the day of redemption” The idea here is for our counselees not to use their mouths for evil, for in some way it hurts the hearer and brings sorrow to the Spirit of God. Instead, they are to use their speech constructively, to build up rather than tear down. Then their words will impart grace to those who hear. Refusing to speak evil is putting off the old self, while using their speech to build up is putting on God’s character.

The next command starts in 4:31 and ends in 5:2, where Paul says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” Here is a whole series of six attitudes and actions that God calls those we are counseling to put away. This means to repent of them, change one’s mind about them, stop justifying and defending them as if they had a right to feel this way. Instead, they should welcome the kind of qualities that characterize the behavior of God. They are to be kind to one another, even the ungrateful and the selfish. They are to be tenderhearted and compassionate rather than hard and calloused. God calls every Christian to be forgiving, which literally translates “acting in grace,” as God in Christ has acted in grace towards us. It’s been my experience that, with few exceptions, people come into counseling harboring some form of bitterness or resentment that needs to be put off if they are to move forward in their relationship with God. In the Lord’s prayer, Jesus links our own needs for forgiveness with our willingness to forgive others. This doesn’t mean that God’s forgiveness is dependent on our having forgiven others first. But we should never expect to receive what we are unwilling to give. Therefore, leading others through the hard work of forgiveness is a critical tool for Biblical Counselors.

The last command is in verses 3–4 of Ephesians 5. To conclude, Paul hits on the issue of controlling sexual impulses by saying, “But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.” The Greek words that Paul uses covers every form of sexual sin. So all forms, he writes, must be put aside. “Instead,” Paul says, “let there be thanksgiving.” All of God’s gifts, including sex, are subjects for thanksgiving. Unfortunately, our present day culture ridicules the ideal of sexual purity as outdated. Many Christians also come into Biblical Counseling engaged in sexual activities outside the context of marriage. What they fail to realize is that within this act, they are giving pieces of their soul to another and receiving something of their partner’s soul into themselves. That’s a scary thought! Most have bought into the lie that acting out sexually is just innocent fun. But the truth is that it has disastrous consequences for their spiritual lives. Have you ever noticed that the things that ultimately hurt us most have a tendency to be habit-forming? People keep doing them because they provide a certain degree of pleasure. That’s why the consequences can be so easily denied. It’s a good trade-off. But as people keep giving themselves over to sexual habits that lie outside the parameters of God’s will, they also become increasingly broken. It’s like handing over little pieces of their souls until, in the end, the strength of their identities becomes utterly fragmented. When, and only when, they are willing to flee from fleshly behaviors *and* turn toward God in thanksgiving are they in a position to receive of His abundant blessings. Most habitual sin is difficult to change because people automatically respond without thinking. That’s why it’s important that we teach them what God has to say through His word about establishing new patterns.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy he writes, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (3:16). But it would be wrong to assume that's all our counselees are needing from us. Many who come into counseling are coming out of battered pasts, fractured family systems, legalistic churches that distort the image of the One true God. As a result they have had little reason to believe in anything outside of themselves. For many, even their relationship with the Lord is hanging by a thread or non-existent. If it were not so, why would they continue to rely on self-effort to fill those places only God was meant to occupy? What they are looking for, and lacking in, is a vision of what grace and forgiveness, mercy and truth really looks like. So part of our pastoral calling, as we have been talking about, is to redirect their thoughts from their rags to the Redeemer – that Christ is sufficient to meet their needs. But the other is to give them a glimpse, to help them see concrete examples of God's abundant grace through our relationship with them. It's one thing to tell people, on the authority of the Scripture, about God's grace; it's another to model it. They need to hear the voice of compassion, see the eyes of mercy and witness the transparency we are calling them to, in us. And this is where our accountability to the Lord gets tough. You see, we can't ask someone to "put off" a destructive behavior or mind-set that we ourselves are stuck in. God will nail us to the Cross. This is not to say that He expects perfection from us. But it would be a contradiction in terms to think that we can carry a message we're not living. So there is a price to pay in being a Biblical Counselor. And I would be negligent if I didn't tell you so. God uses the counseling ministry not only to restore the brokenness in others but also to mirror back our own need of healing. That's how faithful He is to align our works with His will. To Him be the glory and honor, forever.

Back to Bob

Ultimately, Bob took ownership for the choices he had set in place and the false assumptions he had integrated into his identity as father and husband. As he began to see the lies more clearly and became willing to measure them against the truth of God's Word, clarity began to sink in. Bob began "putting off" his neglect of his family as well as misplacing his own emotional needs. He then committed to making adjustment in his schedule that would create more family time. At my suggestion, he also started creating relational supports and accountability with seasoned Christian men who were willing to walk alongside of his process.

Review Questions – Key Concepts

What is the significance of the choices we make?

When helping a counselee consider change, what are the three things that must be considered?

How would you help them prepare for “counting the cost?”

What is the three-step process of change Paul describes in Ephesians 4:22–24?

Case Studies: Problem Thinking

Identify the problem thinking (false beliefs) that create the following behaviors. What needs to be “put off?” What needs to be “put on?” What verses support your counsel?

Jerry only has surface relationships. He never asks for help and is prone to isolation.

Cathy is an efficient administrator, but her personal relationships are a mess. She tends to get really upset when things don't go her way.

Carl's devotional life is dry. When he reads the Scriptures, he feels as though he is being condemned.

Robin feels as if God is distant. Although she has been a believer for 10 years, she tends to take matters into her own hands rather than trust in His provisions for her.

Vivian is frustrated because her husband is not very affectionate. She tells you that if only he would romance her more, she would feel more worthy.

IX

Feelings: What Good Are They?

Memory Verse

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6–7



Alice was referred to counseling by her pastor for problems with anger. She had been married for seven years, had two small children: one still in diapers, the other 5-years-old. She was increasingly acting out her anger with her children. She said that she had been yelling and saying things to her kids that were unhealthy for their self-esteem. Alice was also frustrated that she was unable to keep the house as nice as she used to. Between taking her little boy to soccer practices and caring for her toddler, she could find no time for herself. Alice felt like things were spinning out of control. In a recent event, her son spilled his milk one morning and she spanked him to the point that she felt very guilty. She confessed that she hated feeling inadequate; she especially didn't like feeling so angry all the time. Subsequently, Alice was quickly succumbing to feelings of depression.

Unwanted, undesirable feelings are the reason most people seek counseling. They are experiencing some form of anxiety, depression or anger. An effective Biblical Counselor knows how to use a counselee's "feelings" diagnostically, that is, to understand the problem. They must be able to answer the counselee's questions: "Why do I feel angry?" "Why am I anxious?" or "Why do I feel depressed?" The purpose of this chapter is to help the Biblical Counselor understand the significance of negative or "problem" feelings. Emotions are important. They are like smoke detectors – not the primary problem, but the warning signs that accompany it. God has given us feelings as outward indicators of what is happening internally – in our thought life, our expectations and, ultimately, our unmet needs. So how can we begin to make biblical sense of the role that emotions play in our counselee's lives? At the end of the lesson is a chart that will help us to understand emotional responses to unmet needs. Please refer to it as the progressive development of a person's beliefs, the corresponding behaviors and consequent emotional responses are explained.

IN THE BEGINNING

Every child is born with unmet needs. They are looking for answers to three fundamental questions – Do I belong? Am I loved? Do I have significance? These three needs form the basis of a child's self-concept and motivate their interactions with the world. So, as counselors, we want to bring people back to these three basic and simple needs. They provide the basis for our assessment. Since God created us in this way, doesn't it make sense that when we're born these needs are waiting to be met? So I want to make sure you all buy into this first assumption – that when a child comes into the world they are born with unmet needs. This should be pretty obvious.

DEVELOPING BELIEF STRUCTURES

Secondly, they begin developing belief structures. They start asking themselves, *how do I see myself? What do I think about myself?* For example, if children are raised in a neglectful family system, they will experience deficit and rejection in terms of their basic needs. As a result, they will most likely be incapable of forming healthy attachments to their caregivers. And, at a very early age, the child's self-concept is already being shaped into conformity to this environment. They will then begin developing belief structures that contain distorted ideas about their intrinsic worth and identity. Do you see that? It's virtually impossible to grow up in a fallen and imperfect world without integrating some wrong ideas about ourselves. So everyone, without exception, grows up with distorted ideas about themselves and the world in which we interact. Having been born with unmet needs, children begin to develop wrong ideas about themselves because these needs are not being completely met.

DEVELOPING GOAL-ORIENTED BEHAVIORS

Because we all have a need to belong, children will "do" certain things in order to "be a part of" a group or community. Because a child needs to be loved and accepted, they will make choices that satisfy this need. And because a child needs to know that they matter, they will do certain things in order to bring a sense of purpose into their lives. So, at a very early age, children begin to make choices, to develop strategies, to meet their needs apart from God. They don't know it. Their intellectual formation is not yet sophisticated enough to separate self-centered strategies from those that are God-honoring. But they are already creating goal-oriented behaviors to satisfy these needs. And within the first few years of life these self-gratifying patterns are already growing strong tentacles. Everything they do is geared towards meeting these basic needs. These behaviors start very early in life and can become patterns that last into adult life.

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO UNMET NEEDS

As counselors, the three emotions we look for are anger (or resentment), anxiety (or fear), and depression (or a sense of hopelessness). These feelings provide the basis for our assessment. Anger springs to the surface when our needs for belonging, worth, or purpose are interfered with or blocked. Anxiety arises when these needs are threatened or uncertain. And, depression often results when our needs appear unreachable.

Blocked goals result in anger. Anger is the tip of our emotional iceberg. It's what we can see. And as with all icebergs there is much hidden beneath the surface. Anger in itself is not sin or even an unhealthy emotion, but rather a "red flag" that tells us that something we need is being blocked or interfered with. It is the red light that goes off on the dashboard as we are driving down the street, indicating the need to pull over, stop the car, pop the hood and examine what's going on with the motor. That would be the healthiest thing to do. But many who come in to counseling don't understand what's really driving their anger. Most feel justified in it. They are angry because someone cut them off on the free-way. Or because their spouses aren't measuring up to their expectations. Or because the can opener they are looking for is not in the drawer it's supposed to be. And so they come into counseling blaming all the externals when the real root is not circumstantial but internal. So when our goals, ambitions or self-centered strategies for meeting our needs are blocked, anger is the typical response. So we need to help folks take responsibility for their anger and identify what's at its root. And the question we ask is: what do you need that is being blocked or interfered with? And, then, point them back to the deficit.

Uncertain or threatened goals results in anxiety. Our media reminds us of this on a daily basis. We hear of natural disasters, violent acts and terminal diseases that threaten the very fabric of our physical lives. And our instinctive response to external threat is fear. Other times our fears are less easily defined. They may be more spiritual or psychological in nature. We may fear God or the devil, failure or commitment, intimacy or rejection, love or punishment. We may fear heights or the dark, crowds or isolation, being swallowed up by overwhelming circumstances or being left totally alone. These fears, because they are usually more subtle in nature, are experienced through what we call anxiety or worry. One psychologist calls anxiety “the official emotion of our age.” It’s defined as “a small trickle of fear that meanders through the mind until it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.” And so we want to help our counselees understand that most fears and anxiety result from uncertain or threatened goals. So the questions we have to ask are: how does fear touch your life? What experiences, what beliefs, give them shape and power? In whatever way it does, God’s Word gives us real solutions to the problems associated with fear. Most often our fears result from an acute deficiency in our view of God. But when we see the greatness of His power, the breadth of His love, then that which we fear tends to shrink down in size. When we trust in Christ, in His reliability and goodness, then we will stop holding ourselves so rigidly, fearful that any moment the other shoe might drop. And we begin resting in the confidence that all things work together for the good. As a result, there is peace at the center of our lives, rather than anxiety and conflict. Panic and discouragement seem to fade away for we know, without a doubt, that God is an ever present help in time of need and in complete control of our circumstances.

Unreachable goals result in depression. Now, it’s important to say that not all depression is the result of an unreachable goal. Some depression is biological. It is caused by a deficiency in norepinephrine or serotonin levels in the brain. In these cases the treatment of choice is chemical. Antidepressant medications can eliminate or greatly reduce depressive symptoms. So we want to leave the clinical forms of depression to the clinicians. What we are concerned with in Biblical Counseling are the feelings of discouragement and hopelessness, guilt and shame, sadness or repressed anger that may result from an unreachable goal. We could even say that these are the emotions “behind” the depression. So it is extremely important that we are able to identify the extent of the counselee’s depression and its suspected causes. We can do great harm and risk being liable if we attempt to treat a biological deficit spiritually by calling it sin!

Somewhere, God has a plan for the clinically depressed person who comes to us for help. It may simply be that we are able to assess the symptoms and refer them to a medical professional for help. It may be that they are living without the hope of a Savior, which provides us with a great opportunity to pray that God would act in a powerful way. Or, it may be that they are looking for an unreachable goal to satisfy their basic needs. They are coming in saying, “I can’t live unless...” or “I have to have this or else...” It never ceases to amaze me to what extent people can become trapped by these lies as if their life blood depends on “this” thing or “that” relationship to make things okay. And when life doesn’t measure up to their expectations, they feel sad, discouraged, angry and depressed. What are we going to tell the person who comes in with this story? Well, that their life blood doesn’t depend on this or that, but on Jesus doing what only He can do. And that it’s in Him that true hope is found. Then we invite them into a process designed to refocus the mind on what is true and pray that God will reach into their depression.

THE STORY OF MARTHA ILLUSTRATES THE CORRELATION BETWEEN UNMET NEEDS AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

“Now as they were traveling along, Jesus entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word. But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.” Luke 10:38–40

Jesus blocks Martha’s goal-oriented behaviors. Martha was full of expectations about how things are supposed to be. She had learned and accepted the cultural expectations of what it meant to be a woman in that society. Conforming to these expectations was her way of meeting her needs to belong, to be loved and to matter. So we can see, from this story, that her self-concept was defined by how well she cared for the home, prepared the meals and entertained the guests. And as long as she performed well, she could *control* the way others responded to her. Therefore, we could say that she was *in control* of satisfying her own needs. We could also say that Martha’s conformity to these expectations was learned from outside of herself at an early age. But very quickly these expectations became internalized. And once internalized, certain fixed roles were quickly assumed. She probably didn’t even need to think about it – that’s just who she was *and* had always been. The story goes on to paint a portrait of Martha’s emotional responses. She is clearly upset at the unwillingness of Mary to conform to the status quo. Anyone who understands sibling rivalry can appreciate the tone of her challenge to Jesus, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work?” The way the question is asked shows that Martha anticipates a positive answer. She expects Jesus to come to her aid. The text tells us that, “Martha was distracted.” So we can probably see her in the kitchen “stewing” more than meat. She’s preparing a meal for Jesus and yet Mary is out in the living room “with all the men.” “How inappropriate!” she probably muttered. “Doesn’t Mary know a woman’s place is in the kitchen? Doesn’t Jesus care that she’s left me to do all the serving alone?” So already we see that Mary is blaming others because her needs are not being met.

“But the Lord answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things.” Luke 10:41

Martha’s behavior shows how she is trying to meet her needs. With great tenderness the Lord says to her, “Martha, Martha; I have something very important to tell you. So please listen.” He then defines Martha’s problem, one she may not have known she had. He tells her “you are worried and bothered about so many things.” The word that Jesus uses for “worry” is the same word Paul uses in Philippians 4:6 for “anxiety.” It’s the Greek word for “divided mind.” It wasn’t Martha’s heart of service that Jesus was challenging, but her preoccupation with it for her sense of identity. Her anxiety was causing her to be “drawn about in different directions.” And then Jesus uses the word “bothered” meaning that she was outwardly agitated and angry. Martha was not at peace with the Lord or her circumstances. And her anger confirms that she’s blaming Him. Jesus had blocked Martha’s rules by sanctioning Mary’s neglect of them. Martha sense of worth and purpose had, no doubt, been systematically crafted towards being in control. And now Jesus is blocking Martha’s strategies designed to make her feel as though she matters. Feeling un-affirmed for her choices she probably doesn’t feel as if she belongs – the men are involved in separate activities and Martha is not part of them. It’s also likely that she is now feeling a sense of unworthiness – in her mind her worth has been devalued. And she cannot possibly meet her need to matter by pre-

paring dishes for the feast. Consequently, if Martha can't adjust her goals to the Lord's values she will, most likely, become increasingly angry and depressed at some point. But Jesus doesn't leave her in that place:

“But only a few things are necessary, really only one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” Luke 10:42

Jesus redefines life's priorities by letting Martha know what is really important. Just one staple dish would have required little preparation and left her free for other things more important – the spiritual “one thing” that Mary had chosen as her “good part.” This is what Jesus prescribes for her anxiety and anger. It wasn't that Martha made a bad choice in wanting to serve the Lord an elaborate meal, but that Mary made the better one. Mary had taken her place of worship at the feet of Jesus, eager to hear every word of her Lord's teaching. Martha was so preoccupied with meeting her own needs that she missed the provision that was being offered. And if you remember, it was also Mary who later shouldered all the scorn and criticism when she broke the expensive box of perfume and anointed Jesus “against His burial.” The reason she was able to express such devotion in that hour was because she had chosen before “the good part” of sitting at the Lord's feet and not being distracted by all the cultural expectations.

There is one other story in the Scripture that has Martha and Mary at the center of the action. That story is of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead in John chapter 11. Lazarus was deathly sick. So in desperation, the sisters send for Jesus. Verse 5 tells us that “Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” In light of this, you would expect Jesus to drop everything and come running to his bedside. But curiously, Jesus delays for two days. Was He too busy attending to matters of greater importance? No! The purpose for the delay was twofold. The first reason is in verse 4. We are told “that the Son of God may be glorified by it.” And secondly, “so that you (speaking of His disciples) may believe.” By the time Jesus comes to Bethany, Lazarus has died and been in the tomb for four days. The news of His arrival sparks reactions – both similar and dissimilar – in Mary and Martha. When Martha hears that Jesus is coming she goes out to meet him. She had been in the house mourning her brother's death. But now she bounds out of the house, in her take charge style and says, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” So here again, we get a sense of her disappointment and anger. But when Mary comes to Jesus, “she saw Him, and fell at His feet, saying to Him, ‘Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.’” Both Mary and Martha's words are identical. But their internal attitudes are not. Martha runs to Him, erect; Mary falls at His feet, prostrate. Angry and confused, Martha engages Jesus in a theological debate. She says, “Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother shall rise again.” Martha said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” And with this great question Martha comes back to her senses and says, “Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.” You see, Martha needed to be shaken out of her box again. And the Lord does this by addressing her intellectual and spiritual confusion. Mary, on the other hand needs His emotional support. Verses 33–36 tell us that “when Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her, also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled, and said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord come and see.” And Jesus wept.” Martha needed to know that Jesus was in control. Mary needed to know that He cared. And without rebukes or reserva-

tions, He meets each sister at the place of their deepest need. So what was Martha's blocked goal? She wanted her brother to live. Her expectation was that Jesus would come and prevent Lazarus from dying. Underlying this, Martha must have been thinking, "Jesus, why in the world didn't You come? He was one of your best friends. Don't we matter to You?" Isn't that the cry of her heart? Isn't that a question we all ask from time to time? I'm sure that, at some point in our lives, all of us have asked God to intervene in a difficult situation. We wait for Him and, yet, the heavens are silent. And that hurts. Our tendency, at that point, is to interpret God's delays as denials. And that's not necessarily true. The delay that Jesus displays here is just like the ones we experience in our relationship with Him. Clearly, Jesus loved Mary. He loved Martha. And he loved Lazarus. But His delay is not a sign of indifference but rather a sign of His love. That delay, though painful, was intended to help them. Jesus deliberately delayed because He knew it would strengthen their faith as they saw God at work in a way they least expected. And so it is for us.

So this paradigm for Biblical Counseling works. Jesus is calling our counselees to let go of their privately ordered worlds and trust in Him. He wants His followers to exchange their control for His, to be God-centered and less self-centered. When our counselees arrive at the counselor's office, their spiritual eyes are generally out of focus. This is because they are primarily focused on their issues, their failures or failures of others. The most important thing we can do is help them refocus on what's really important – the one good thing that Mary had chosen as her good part.

Back to Alice

When Alice understood the relationship between her anger and her "goal" to perform well as a way of proving her worth, she was able to let go of that behavior. Alice was more comfortable meditating on God's unconditional love of her. She put off the "old way" of thinking about herself and enjoyed the "new self" as she had never understood it before. She began a new walk of freedom. This enabled her to have an imperfect house and children who made mistakes. As she grew in grace, she was able to extend grace to herself, and more importantly, to her children. The more she let of the "need" to be in control, the more Alice's anger diminished. The children's bad behavior was no longer a blocked goal because the goal had changed. Instead of expecting others, or her self to "perform," Alice's goal was to find her pleasure in God's unconditional love and acceptance of her. As long as she mattered to God, that was all that mattered to Alice.

Review Questions – Key Concepts

Why are feelings important in the counseling process?

How do feelings form the basis for the counselor's assessment?

When basic needs are not satisfied what emotional responses are we looking for?

- When goals are blocked then _____ is the typical response.
- When goals are threatened then _____ is the typical response.
- When goals are unreachable the _____ is the typical response.
- What can we learn from the Mary and Martha story in regards to identifying emotional responses with the belief systems that fuel them?

What does Martha want to happen in order to satisfy her basic needs?

How does Jesus minister to Martha and Mary in regards to their perspective needs?

Case Study: Problem Feelings

Taylor is a middle-aged Jewish woman who struggles with her Christian faith. In some ways she feels as though she has betrayed her culture even though her upbringing was far from orthodox. Her father is a wealthy real estate investor who is inclined towards an eclectic mix of eastern mysticism and western new age philosophies. Her mother is an extreme materialist. She collects rare artifacts — particularly Indian and African tribal masks — from all over the world. The only religious activities her mother ever knew were through her father, who would take her, on occasion, to the Masonic Temple. Mom is typically matriarchal, domineering and needs to be in control at all times, like her mother was. Subsequently, Taylor experienced much neglect and abuse at her hands. Her father stayed busy most of the time and was subject to passivity. He rarely intervened in his wife's tirades, which left their terrified daughter without protection and vulnerable. To compound matters the family moved frequently which made it difficult for Taylor to form any healthy attachments with kids her own age. So she started to drink alcohol and experimented sexually at an early age. By the age of 14, the destructive effects began taking its toll as Taylor started "cutting" on herself. Psychiatric wards and treatment centers followed, to no avail. Outside of her alcoholism, no one seemed to be able to put a finger on what triggered the suicide attempts or why she had slipped into a dark depression at such an early age. Her destructive patterns continued well into adult life — chronic relapses, failed relationships and deeper levels of despair. Even after coming into a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, Taylor has experienced little joy. She has a consistent devotional life, healthy relational supports, is involved in church service and yet still feels agitated and restless inside. For years she has cried out to God to make Himself known; to be her protector and shelter. But God has seemed distant and unapproachable. To think that He would withhold His grace often fills her with shame and rage. This culminated in the immediate crisis event where Taylor found herself beating her head against the bathroom wall screaming at God to stop the pain. Her deepest prayer is to experience the peace "that surpasses comprehension."

Which of Taylor's needs are not being met?

What is Taylor's problem feeling?

What is her problem behavior/how is she trying to meet her need?

What is her problem thinking?

What truth will you give her/which Scriptures will you apply to her problem thinking?

UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO UNMET NEEDS

As personality develops...

Questions needing to be answered...

At Birth:

A child's life begins with...

unmet needs.

Do I belong? Am I loved? Do I matter?

Mentally:

A child develops a belief structure that results in...

wrong ideas.

How do I view myself? What do I think about myself?

Volitionally:

In order to meet his needs, a child develops...

goal-oriented behaviors.

How do I meet my needs?

Emotionally:

As a result of unmet needs, the child / adult experiences...

painful emotions.

*When goals are **blocked**, **anger** is the response.*

*When goals are **uncertain**, **anxiety** is the response.*

*When goals are **unreachable**, **depression** is the response.*

X

Developing a Treatment Plan

Memory Verse

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:10



In this chapter, we will identify the five steps of the counseling process. As you read through them keep in mind that effective counseling is necessarily brief. In our ministry we recommend that counseling be limited to six to eight sessions. Of course, this is not a rigid “rule.” Some counsees will, of necessity, need more sessions to integrate the Biblical framework we are providing. But we must always be careful not to create dependency in the counseling relationship. We also believe that a person’s greatest growth will be realized within the context of a larger church community. As Paul prays in Ephesians 3:17–19, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

STEP ONE: ENGAGING

In the first appointment, the counselor’s objective is to:

- Build rapport
- Set boundaries/limits
- Identify reason for counseling
- Explore relevant history

Building rapport through the initial conversations with the counselee is necessary to establishing a caring and safe environment. As you prepare for this first meeting it would be helpful to think how you would feel if you were in this person’s shoes. A counselor cannot communicate an understanding of the counselee’s world without getting in contact with that world. Basic empathic listening, or *being with*, means to walk in the other person’s shoes without making judgments about it. As Romans 12:15 tells us, “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” Choose your words with care and wisdom. If your counselee has come to you for help, he or she is likely facing a crisis and is hoping that you will offer them a solution or relief. In this regard, be optimistic in letting them know that you are there to help facilitate change. Then model healthy dependence by praying that the Holy Spirit would indeed meet them at that place of need or conflict.

Setting boundaries or limits is essential. Your time is important. So let the counselee know your expectations concerning punctuality, the number and frequency of sessions and what they can expect in each counseling session. Clearly defining the process will provide much needed direction. It’s also important to let them know that you will be assigning homework, in the form

of reading and applying key concepts, and how critical their cooperation is. And finally, assure the counselee of confidentiality. In our counseling ministry we have our counselees sign a disclaimer that, except in cases of reported child abuse, elderly abuse or suicidal intent, the information shared within the counseling relationship is privileged. In the exceptions mentioned above we are ethically bound to intervene in an intentional and appropriate fashion.

Begin by asking your counselee why they are seeking help at this time. In most cases, the problem(s) for which they are coming to see you have been occurring for some time. So ask the question: “What has happened recently that triggered the need for help?” Perhaps they had a conflict with a spouse or friend. Perhaps they recently “hit bottom” and want to come to grips with a particular behavior or addiction that has mastered them. Or maybe they just recently lost a loved one and are in need of someone to walk them through the grieving process. Whatever “it” is, the counselor should be looking to identify the immediate catalyst for the counselee’s cry for help.

Probe carefully the counselee’s world to understand a problem’s root causes. These are likely to be woven into other aspects of his or her life. Ask God for wisdom as you ask these questions. James tells us, “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given him” (1:5). Remember: Job suffered greatly at the hand of his counselors. They assumed they knew Job’s problem without ever asking questions or gathering adequate information about it. Even when he tried to correct their misconceptions, they stubbornly stuck to their theories. They couldn’t interpret Job’s problems accurately because they never really sat and listened to his story. And because of that, their counsel to him only made his situation worse and added to his distress. We must be careful we don’t make the same mistake. James says, “Be quick to hear, slow to speak,” and nowhere is that command more important than in counseling.

STEP TWO: ASSESSMENT

The following paradigm makes assessing the problem relatively easy. Although it relies on a simple construct, resist the temptation to offer a “canned” diagnosis. Your role is to come alongside the process of restoration, but you may not have the final answer. Trust that the Lord is working in this person’s life. As Paul writes in Philippians 1:6, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” There are three elements in assessing the problem:

Identify Problem Feelings

The first and most obvious thing that happens as counseling begins (first session) is that the counselee will disclose how he or she is feeling. This is *almost always* the reason that the counselee is seeking help. I say almost always because there are some counselees, more often men, who may not know how they are feeling. For whatever reason, they seem to be unable to access their emotional lives. In such cases, the Biblical Counselor will need to help them identify specific feelings. This is critical because feelings lead the counselor to assess the self-destructive thought patterns, expectations, and ultimately the counselee’s unmet needs. This provides the basis for the treatment plan.

Identify Problem Behaviors

Another thing that will happen is the confession of sinful behaviors. Counselees may be embarrassed, however, and therefore somewhat cautious in revealing the depth of the problem

behavior. For example, a man struggling with anger may confess that he gets angry. But it may be several sessions before he also discloses his tendency to be violent. People usually minimize sexual misconduct, as well, because of shame. An effective counselor will ask questions to explore the scope of the problem. Other problem behaviors may be less evident. For example, a husband may have a habit of withdrawing from his wife and children when feeling overwhelmed by stress or fear. He may justify the behavior, not seeing it as wrong, nor seeing it as a flesh strategy to avoid feeling inadequate. In order to be successful, the counselor and counselee will need to be specific in addressing what needs to be *put off* so the counselee can *be renewed in his thinking*, and thus *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*. Destructive behaviors are learned over time. They are the choices/actions people learn in response to certain undesirable feelings. Behaviors are also goal oriented; that is, they are aimed at meeting a specific need. To assess these behaviors accurately, Biblical Counselors understand that these external actions are outward displays of what is going on in the heart of a person. Jesus said that it is not what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out of him. Therefore, by looking at a counselee's behaviors and choices, we can learn much about that person's self image and esteem.

Identify Problem Thinking

In the third part of the assessment process, the counselor begins to evaluate the counselee's belief systems – the faulty thought patterns and strongholds. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul says, "Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." Every thought and belief one holds must be examined in light of what God says is true. The Word of God is the counselor's reference point and plumb line. Identifying the counselee's false beliefs helps the counselor to hone in on what needs to be *put off* along with the destructive behaviors. As the counselor listens to the counselee and discerns the underlying beliefs, a strategy of what truths need to be taught is formed. Keep as your goal the restoration of the counselee's relationship with God, always checking out your own motives before pointing out any error.

HOW DOES THE COUNSELOR IDENTIFY UNMET NEEDS AND WRONG GOALS?

<p>Step One From the “Engaging Phase”, the counselor must answer the following questions: Is the counselee most deficient in belonging? Is the counselee most deficient in love? Is the counselee most deficient in purpose?</p>	<p>Problem feelings result in problem behaviors that reveal what the counselee believes he must do to meet his needs. This “feeling-behaving-believing” complex is what Paul calls the “mindset of the flesh.” The objective of this process is to begin to discern deficits.</p>	
<p>Step Two Identify Problem Feelings</p>	<p>Anger is a blocked goal: If counselee is angry, it is because he is blaming someone else for not meeting his need. Anxiety is an uncertain goal: If counselee is anxious, a need is being threatened. Depression is an unreachable goal: Counselee has given up hope of ever getting his needs met.</p>	
<p>Step Three Identify Problem Behaviors</p>	<p>How does counselee meet his needs?</p>	<p>Problem behaviors identify strategies the counselee has employed to meet his needs. Strategies are directly related to goals. Goals are what the counselee tells himself must happen in order for his needs to be met.</p>
<p>Step Four Identify Problem Thinking</p>	<p>How does counselee view himself?</p>	<p>Problem thinking reveals the “beliefs” that underlie the goals the counselee has unconsciously set in place in order to meet his need to belong, to be loved and to matter.</p>

<p>Example: SALLY, a 38 year old married woman How does the counselor identify Sally’s unmet needs and wrong goals?</p>	
<p>Step One Is the counselee most deficient in: belonging? love/acceptance? feeling effective?</p>	<p>Sally feels like she cannot keep up with the demands of her life. She has 2 children in grade school. Her husband returns from work too tired to talk with her. He doesn’t ask her about her day. He doesn’t affirm her for what she does to keep the house clean or take care of the children. In fact, he is critical. She doesn’t “feel” appreciated.</p>
<p>Step Two Identify Problem Feelings</p>	<p>Sometimes Sally feels angry and other times she is depressed. The reason she seeks counseling is that she is angry with her husband and has become increasingly impatient with the children. Her anger is spiraling out of control.</p>
<p>Step Three Identify Problem Behaviors</p>	<p>Sally fights and conflicts with her husband daily; he says she is nagging him. Sally yells at the children and calls them “stupid” and/or “idiots” if they make a mistake. Feeling guilty, she tries harder to keep the house clean and “be there” for the kids’ activities.</p>
<p>Step Four Identify Problem Thinking</p>	<p>Sally has been telling herself for years that the only way to be acceptable and feel appreciated is to perform well. She has always been able to excel in whatever she has done. Now she is thinking that perhaps she should never have married and had children.</p>
<p>Conclusion: Sally’s anger is a blocked goal. Her goal to be “effective,” even perfect, is blocked by a husband who doesn’t validate, but criticizes her and the children who don’t “do what they are supposed to” (this makes her look like a bad parent). She has never learned how to draw upon her relationship with Christ to “feel” effective. When she feels inadequate, God seems distant to her. Now the counselor is ready to set goals, facilitate right thinking, and help change behaviors.</p>	

STEP THREE: SETTING GOALS

After the problem has been identified, the counselor and counselee will determine what goals they can reasonably accomplish within a limited amount of sessions. There is a common saying, “those who fail to plan, plan to fail.” An effective counselor knows the importance of setting goals. Setting goals with a counselee at the onset of counseling does four things:

- **It prevents passivity.** The counselor is letting his counselee know that he expects him to

take responsibility for the treatment plan. He must “own” it.

- It establishes the **direction** of the counseling and keeps the treatment plan on track. It’s not unusual for counselees to have lives that are disorganized. So it is crucial to not allow the counselee’s lack of discipline or boundaries to determine the direction of the sessions.
- It strengthens **accountability**.
- It is a way to measure **progress**.

GOALS MUST BE REALISTIC, MEASURABLE AND FLEXIBLE

Realistic

Goals that are not realistic will result in discouragement. Let’s suppose that Eve is having problems dealing with her anger towards her husband and children. She tells you she wants to “get over” her anger “once and for all.” This is not realistic! Consequently, Eve will probably leave counseling believing she has either failed or that you failed in helping her with her anger. A realistic goal might be to understand why she gets angry, or to start dealing appropriately with her feelings, or practice self-control.

Measurable

If Eve is seeking counseling because she is angry, the goal of “learning to deal appropriately with her feelings” must be broken into measurable components. For example, she could begin to journal her emotional responses. She could begin to monitor her angry outbursts or sarcastic remarks. All of these actions are measurable. And she will most likely come into her appointments eager to talk about her little successes. It’s important that the counselor affirms the progress and keeps Eve focused on the process, not the final product.

Flexible

Goals need to be flexible so they can be altered if necessary. If Eve is having trouble in her marriage, her first goal might be to be less destructive with her anger. After a few sessions, however, the emphasis may shift from her anger at her husband to her dissatisfaction with God. Then the goal may be changed to, “How can I develop a more intimate relationship with the Lord?” Counselors change goals when the counselee has become aware of a deeper heart issue.

Counselees do not always find it easy to articulate their goals in counseling. But if they are not engaged in making these decisions, they will then be more inclined to sit back and let the counselor do all the work. Consider using one of these questions to help your counselee set goals:

- What do you like to see change as a result of counseling?
- When we have finished, what would make you say that this was worth your time?
- What would need to happen so that you no longer need counseling?

STEP FOUR: APPLY TRUTH TO WRONG THINKING

The fourth step in counseling is the most critical stage: the Biblical Counselor communicates truth to the counselee. Unfortunately, this is where many well-intentioned lay counselors fail. Rather

than discern what the counselee's faulty thinking is, and apply appropriate truth, they may commit one of two mistakes: 1) They give pat answers: *just trust God; have faith; God is in control; God still loves you; God works all things for the good, etc.*, or 2) They give advice – not biblical counsel – that emanates from their own experience: *when I was your age...; when I was experiencing what you are going through, I...*, etc. In both cases, counselors may not be listening to the Holy Spirit to discern real heart issues. In the first case, the counselor is using Scripture in a “mental” way. There is no power in this kind of counseling since the Holy Spirit can only communicate spiritual truth. The Spirit-led counselor takes the logos and waits for the Holy Spirit to communicate a specific word to the counselee. Secondly, in the advice-giving approach, the counselor's reference point is himself – not the Word of God. This is a common mistake made by many well-intentioned Christians. There is a place for advice, but it must be distinguished from Biblical Counseling.

Knowing what truth to apply to the false beliefs requires the counselor to pray and listen to the Spirit's voice. Paul prays in Philippians 1:9–10 that these believers will grow in discernment so that they will excel in making better decisions. Biblical Counselors must take a different path, a higher strategy. This can only happen as they operate in true spiritual discernment.

WHAT IS THE “TRUTH” THAT BIBLICAL COUNSELORS APPLY TO WRONG THINKING?

The Biblical Counselor should assure that counsees understand their identity in Christ. Most, if not all, counsees approach counseling focused on the old self, neglecting the truth that the “old self was crucified with Christ.”

Many counsees do not understand God's process of sanctification. They are usually unable to see how the trial they are going through is connected to God's bigger picture. Biblical Counselors provide new eyes for seeing circumstances. Even in secular therapy, this practice is commonly understood. A common construct of psychologists is to *re-frame* the counselee's issues. Who better to re-frame an issue than a counselor who can provide a biblical perspective?

The following is a summary of essential truths that the Biblical Counselor will communicate to every counselee:

- Truth about God's original design for mankind as found in Genesis chapter 1 and 2.
- Truth about the consequences of the Fall and birth of defense strategies found in Genesis 3.
- Truth about one's identity in Christ as referenced in Romans chapters 5 and 6: most counsees are defining themselves as “sons of Adam” rather than “sons of God.”
- Truth about one's sinful patterns of thinking and behavior as found in Galatians chapter 5 and Ephesians chapter 4: most counsees are not conscious of their self-defeating behaviors and beliefs.
- Truth about the power to change because of the counselee's union with Christ as referenced in Romans chapters 6 and 8.
- Truth about the process of change as seen in Galatians chapter 5 and Romans chapter 8: most counsees do not understand the process of crucifying the flesh or walking in the Spirit.

ASSIGNING HOMEWORK

One of the primary ways to help the counselee effect these changes in thinking is to provide homework assignments. This can be by way of recommended articles, application-oriented handouts, and of course, Scriptural passages for meditating and memorizing. Every Biblical Counselor should have materials and handouts that will be used for these purposes. Like a doctor prescribing medications, the Biblical Counselor prescribes spiritual food for the counselee to chew on and digest.

STEP FIVE: SECURE COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL BEHAVIOR

Every counselee will most likely have some behavior that is sabotaging his or her spiritual and emotional progress. Therefore, counselees must commit to making changes in these behaviors that are consistent with a new mindset. If they don't, their personal progress will be impeded and the counseling process extended. These changes can be summarized by two biblical principles:

First, **repentance** is essential to salvation, and is a foundational block of sanctification. The counselee must exercise true repentance in order to expect God's life-changing power. Repentance simply means to reverse the course of one's life. This reversal occurs, initially, in the mind, which recognizes the intolerable cost of sin. But where the reversal touches the mind but not the heart, sin's despair deepens. They must have a change of heart! This is reflected in a deep sorrow for sin coupled with the awareness that sin – whether personal or social – is, at heart, sin against God. Repentance is a deeply felt remorse and regret over wrongs done against others and ourselves, offending our integrity, our dignity and, finally, offending God. A repentant heart grieves over the wreckage. There is a healthy sense of guilt and conviction that tends to have a constructive effect by changing character and habits. And finally, repentance requires a decision of the will, to take responsibility for their wrong choices – both past and present – and seek a new life of forgiveness. Having recognized and grieved over his sin, David prayed, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit” (Psalm 51:12). True repentance is to be sorry enough to quit. It consists of a heart being broken for sin and from sin. Failure to lead the counselee into repentance will not only result in ineffective counseling, but will contribute to easy-believism and cheap grace. Secondly, **obedience** is the result of the life of true faith. Many believers do not recognize that their partial obedience is resulting in spiritual impotence. The most commonly used word for obedience in the New Testament is the Greek word *hupokuo*, which means “to pay attention to”. Therefore, obedience means to listen, hear and pay attention to God. But most counselee's are used to following their fleshly feelings. In essence, they have been paying attention to their sinful desires. Therefore, Biblical Counseling is fundamentally redirecting the counselee's attention away from the fleshly desires to godly desires. Obedience means paying attention to the Word of God and to the promptings of the Spirit and acting on them in faith.

THE DESIRED RESULT: FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

At some point, there is an expectation that a changed mind will result in new behaviors and changed feelings. Every mature believer knows that feelings do change. At first, the feelings will change in their intensity. Eventually, the feelings dissipate. Fleshly feelings of anger, jealousy or strife will be replaced with love, joy, peace and goodness. A clear conscience and confidence in God's grace becomes stronger and stronger. The writer of Hebrews captures it well when he says, “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but sorrowful. Yet to those who have trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (12:11). However, we must end with this cautionary statement about feelings. The goal of Biblical Counseling is not for the counselee

to feel better. Mature believers know that feelings are not to be our drivers. Neither are they to be discounted as irrelevant. Mature believers know that God's process of sanctification emerges through persevering in the midst of suffering. By God's grace, however, there is a joy and peace available that surpasses all negative feelings.

Review Questions – Key Concepts

Why is it important to develop rapport?

Why are boundaries so important to the counseling process?

What are the steps in assessing the problem?

Why do we set goals with the counselee?

What are some questions that may help the counselee determine their goals?

What are essential truths that the Biblical Counselor will communicate to every counselee?

In what ways is a commitment to biblical behavior manifested?

Why is homework important?

COUNSELING SESSION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Establishing the agenda. To be successful, each counseling session requires management and direction. The counselor should have a strategy that is born of prayer and reflection. Accordingly, the counselor should have an agenda for each session, while being willing drop it at any point where the Holy Spirit is leading otherwise. Each session begins with prayer that acknowledges the Holy Spirit's direction.

Be supportive. Let the counselee know that you care and want to understand his or her world. Giving encouragement comes from visual as well as oral feedback from the counselor. Verbal encouragement is achieved simply by making statements such as "I see"... "Is that so?"... "Yes, I understand, go on"... Brief, interjectory statements such as these tend to encourage the speaker to say more. They indicate that the counselor is attentive and is attaching proper importance to what the counselee is saying.

Do not be afraid of silence. Pauses need not be embarrassing or awkward but reflective. Silence often draws people out. Pauses are also valuable after a counselee has responded too briefly to a question. Such a pause is often sufficient to convey the impression that the answer needs to be amplified. If silence continues too long, simply rephrase the question.

Reflective listening. An essential feature of counseling is the art of listening. The counselor is connecting a counselee's response to what has already been disclosed. In so doing, the counselor is able to track the deeper themes of a counselee's life. "What are the core messages? What does the counselee want me to understand?" – these are questions an effective counselor will ask of themselves. It's also important to listen for sour notes. That is, listening for the things the counselee says – the gaps or distortions – that may need to be clarified or challenged when it is appropriate to do so. Reflective listening that is most effective is accomplished by restating the counselee's comments in a way that adds value and may even help clarify for the counselee what he or she is really feeling or believing.

Non-verbal communication. A counterpart of and supplement to verbal communication is non-verbal communication. This involves observations of such things as manner of dress, body language, eye movements, seating arrangements etc. Non-verbal communication will amplify, underscore, and at times, contradict what is conveyed on a verbal level. With this caution in mind, the counselor should be mindful of his/her own thoughts, feelings and body expressions lest the non-verbal cues inadvertently convey false impressions to the counselee.

Note-taking. The general rule for note taking is this: Do not become preoccupied to the degree that continuous writing becomes distracting. It shouldn't interfere in the counselor's ability to pay attention to what the counselee is saying.

Closing the session. It's helpful to leave the counselee with a sense of closure after each session. It's also important that there are no unresolved concerns about what was said before the counselee leaves. Therefore, the counselor should end the session with enough time to ask if there are any concerns, give homework, or discuss the agenda for the next session. If this is not done, counselees may speculate about where the process is going. Always close every session with prayer.

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS THE COUNSELOR MIGHT ASK DURING COUNSELING

The following are some questions that may be helpful as you seek to understand your counselee better:

- When did you first begin to experience this problem?
- What external pressures are you currently experiencing?
- If you could change your circumstances, what would that look like?
- How would you describe your health? Your sleep patterns?
- In what ways is the work you do purposeful?
- Tell me about your relationship with God?
- How would you describe your devotional life?
- How are you strengthening your relationship with the Lord?
- What kind of community supports do you currently have?
- What were your family dynamics like in childhood?
- How is your relationship with your spouse and children today?
- When you have had this problem in the past, what has helped you?
- How do you feel about what is happening in your life right now?
- If you were able to change anything about yourself, what would that look like?
- What do you see as your most pressing problem?
- Do you have any idea why it has become so severe?
- What do you think about the way you have been handling it?
- What does this tell you about yourself?
- What do you desire or hope for?
- What are your expectations and goals?
- When you are pressured or tense, where do you turn?
- Where do you find relief?
- Have you considered the personal cost required to make these changes?

HOW TO USE THE BIBLICAL COUNSELING TREATMENT PLAN

The goal of the Biblical Counselor is to help the counselee start a new walk and return him or her to “mainstream” care in the church. Biblical Counseling requires a plan. To be effective the treatment plan must be specific. It must address the counselee’s needs, set measurable goals and provide appropriate teaching. The process of developing a treatment plan involves a logical series of steps that build on each other, much like constructing a house. It is to be used in the following fashion:

1. Read and study the relevant Scriptures; choose one or two you will present to your counselee.
2. Review and select a single long-term goal with your counselee.
3. Review short-term goals and select the one(s) you and your counselee agree to be reasonable.
4. Choose relevant interventions/teachings to assist in changing behaviors and replacing wrong thinking with the truth from God’s word.
5. Assign homework that supports the process of renewing the mind.

XI

A Treatment Plan for Anger

Memory Verse

But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;
for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. James 1:19–20



PERTINENT SCRIPTURES

James 1:19–20

But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

James 4:1–2

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.

Ephesians 4:26–27, 31–32

Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity... Let all bitterness and wrath [wild rage] and anger and clamor [violent outbursts] and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

1 Peter 3:8–9

All of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for that very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

James 5:8–9

You too be patient; strengthen your hearts... do not complain against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged.

Philippians 2:3

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than yourselves.

SETTING LONG-TERM GOALS

- To recognize and appropriately express angry feelings without outburst or rage. Be able to practice self-control as a fruit of the Spirit.
- Learn to walk by the Spirit and experience the reality of crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires.

SETTING SHORT-TERM GOALS

- Increase awareness of destructive patterns of communication (slow down and listen).
- Increase awareness of negative impact of handling anger.
- Decrease number and duration of angry outbursts.
- Develop specific, spiritually acceptable ways of handling angry feelings.
- Identify “blocked goals” or “unmet expectations” at the root of anger.
- Verbalize feelings of anger in a controlled, assertive way.
- Understand the need for forgiveness and acceptance of others and self in order to reduce cause of anger.

REPLACING WRONG THINKING WITH BIBLICAL THINKING

- Teach your counselee what it means to be created in God’s image and to understand his or her nature as a spiritual person.
- Teach your counselee about God’s power to change through our death and resurrection with Christ.
- Confront counselee’s angry behaviors, encouraging self-control.
- Teach your counselee from James 1:19 to slow down and think about what’s going on at the moment – in the dynamic between them and the other person and in their own thoughts and feelings.
- Teach your counselee from James 1:20 to realize they will not achieve their objectives through anger. Lead him or her to repentance.
- Empathize and assist counselee to clarify feelings of hurt and anger by identifying past disappointments and self-defensive patterns.
- Look at Adam’s response to God and Eve as a defense mechanism, i.e., fear of loss of control, followed by anger and blame and distancing.
- Teach about blocked goals, citing Jesus’ words about Martha, using account of Mary and Martha.
- Use Understanding *Emotional Reactions to Unmet Needs* to teach anger as a “blocked goal.”
- Identify your counselee’s expectations and goals.
- Identify your counselee’s goal-oriented behaviors.
- Teach your counselee about flesh strategies.
- Clarify your counselee’s understanding about the struggle involved in making changes and what it means to *crucify the flesh*.
- Work with your counselee to understand process of forgiveness and acceptance.

HOMEWORK

- Assign your counselee to read: “What Is Man?” and “Why Did God Create Man?” to reflect on the truth of his or her identity as a spiritual person.
- Give your counselee a copy of *Emotional Responses to Unmet Needs* in order to identify blocked goals.
- Assign your counselee to read: “Feelings, What Good Are They?” to help identify the self-protective nature of anger and blame.
- Give your counselee a copy of *Flesh Strategies to Meet Unmet Needs* to help identify his or her own flesh strategies.
- Assign your counselee to reflect on forgiveness in order to begin working on letting go of unmet expectations and goal-oriented behaviors and move toward forgiveness.
- Assign your counselee to reflect, study and memorize pertinent Scriptures.
- Assign journaling to record emotional responses and write out prayers to God.
- Develop relational supports to help contain anger in a constructive way.

Case Study: Anger

Theresa is a middle-aged woman who has a lengthy history of drug abuse. At one time she had 20 years of consistent sobriety and worked in various treatment centers as a drug and alcohol counselor. She was regarded as one of the finest addiction counselors in the Bay Area. She has been a Christian for a long time but has never entered into a church community or been formally disciplined. Two years ago Theresa lost her daughter in a tragic auto accident. Her present experience, however, is just as fresh as if her child had passed away today – in fact, worse. From that day onward Theresa relapsed into old behavior and began to medicate her pain with alcohol and prescription drugs. As a consequence, her other daughter was taken from her by Child Protective Services. Theresa eventually ended up in a psychiatric unit; penniless, angry with God and suicidal. She is now free of drugs and alcohol but is having a difficult time reckoning with her emotions. At first all you can do is listen. It would be ludicrous to say, “I understand how you feel.” Nor can you salve her sorrow with any “canned” biblical solutions. She seems unwilling to look into the Scriptures or even pray. It soon becomes obvious that Theresa has allowed the loss of her daughter (who was a born-again Christian) to steal her peace and put a wedge between her relationship with the Lord. In her mind, God has crossed an irreconcilable line by taking from her the one thing she could not live without. As a result, her bitterness towards Him is extinguishing any flicker of hope. And as she sinks deeper into despair she forgets about tomorrow. When you ask if she ever looks forward to seeing her daughter in heaven, she replies, “I’m not sure I believe in that hocus-pocus any more. It all seems like some cruel, sick joke.”

What is Theresa’s problem emotion?

What is her problem behavior?

What is her problem thinking?

Which of Theresa’s needs is/are not being met?

How is she trying to meet that need?

What truth will you give her?

What goal(s) will you set?

What homework will you assign?

What will you do in the next appointment?

XII

A Treatment Plan for Depression

Memory Verse

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Hebrews 12:11



PERTINENT SCRIPTURES

Psalm 42:5–6a

Why are you downcast, O my soul?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God.
My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you.

Psalm 77:2–3, 10 [from “The Message” by Eugene Peterson]

I found myself in trouble and went looking for my Lord;
My life was an open wound that wouldn’t heal.
When friends said, “Everything will turn out all right,”
I didn’t believe a word they said.
I remember God – and shake my head.
I bow my head – then wring my hands.
I’m awake all night – not a wink of sleep.
I can’t even say what’s bothering me.
I go over the days one by one;
I ponder the years gone by.
I strum my lute all through the night, wondering how to get my life together.

Once again I’ll go over what God has done,
lay out on the table the ancient wonders;
I’ll ponder all the things You’ve accomplished,
and give a long, loving look at Your acts.

Romans 15:13

May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

SETTING LONG-TERM GOALS

- Walk by the Spirit, maintaining feelings of joy, peace, and contentment, and be thankful in all things.
- Regain a sense of purpose and find God’s fulfillment in doing the things He has planned.
- Grieve the “loss” (of something or someone) in order to reach a place of true acceptance.

SETTING SHORT-TERM GOALS

- Identify the source of depressed feelings: *Emotional Responses to Unmet Needs* diagram.
- Identify negative self-talk and the “lies” or “misbeliefs.”
- Identify “feelings of inadequacy” or “unreachable goals” at root of depression: *Emotional Responses to Unmet Needs* diagram.
- Identify what God wants to change in order to move beyond depression to spiritual and emotional healthiness.
- Engage in physical, recreational and social activities that reflect increased energy and interest.
- Understand the need for acceptance of others and self in the context of God’s sovereignty.

REPLACING WRONG THINKING WITH BIBLICAL THINKING

- Teach your counselee what it means to be created in God’s image and to understand his or her new nature as a spiritual person.
- Teach your counselee about God’s power to change through our death and resurrection with Christ.
- Use *Emotional Responses to Unmet Needs* to teach depression as an unreachable goal.
- Help your counselee to see their negative self-talk and commit to replacing it with right thinking.
- Teach your counselee about flesh strategies.
- Make sure your counselee understands the struggle involved in making changes and what it means to *crucify the flesh*.
- Work with your counselee to understand the process of forgiveness and acceptance.
- Reinforce positive, Scripture-based cognitive messages that enhance healing:
- Rest and stress relief can help alleviate the gloom. (1 Kings 19:5–8)
- Self-pity perpetuates the downward spiral. (1 Kings 19:1–10)
- Reassurance of God’s love is a critical counter to overwhelming circumstances. (2 Corinthians 4:8–11)

- The enemy of our souls can be the author of depression (1 Peter 5:8). Fight him no matter what the other causes may be.
- Assign participation in recreational activities (sunlight and exercise, being with people).
- Memorize appropriate Scriptures and assign daily meditations of selected Psalms. Encourage journaling.

HOMEWORK

- Give your counselee a copy of “What Is Man?” and “Why Did God Create Man?” to reflect on the truth of his or her identity as a spiritual person.
- Give your counselee a copy of *Emotional Responses to Unmet Needs* in order to identify unreachable goals.
- Give your counselee a copy of *Flesh Strategies to Meet Unmet Needs* and ask him or her to identify their own flesh strategies.
- Give your counselee articles on forgiveness.
- Assign your counselee to reflect on and study pertinent Scripture.

Case Study: Depression

John is an unmarried, self-employed carpenter. This is the latest of a number of attempts to find a career he enjoys. He admits that he may have self-defeating patterns of behavior. In the last five years he has had two jobs with great companies. But in each case he eventually became bored and quit. He is demanding of himself and finicky about his work, which often leads to frustration. Additionally, he is depressed. He has just broken up with his girlfriend. The pain of this separation is the cause for him seeking counseling. He's obsessed with her. They dated for three years and he admits taking her for granted by not providing her the kind of care and intimacy she deserved. It appears that they argued a lot about petty things. Now he's realizing what he's lost and wants to change. He has called her in the attempt to make amends, but she has asked him not to call anymore; that she needs a clean break. He believes if he waits long enough, she will change her mind.

John is born-again and grew up in a conservative church. He goes to a weekly men's Bible study but is not very close to anyone. He has never found a regular church to attend and has no accountability.

John has also become addicted to Internet porn. After buying a computer in order to keep his books and make correspondences, he logged onto a porn sight one day and has been unable to stop ever since. You ask about his family background and he tells you that his father died when he was only two. His mother remarried when he was five-years-old to an emotionally unavailable man who was angry and controlling. His stepfather had three children of his own who demanded the majority of his attention.

What is John's problem emotion?

What is his problem behavior?

What is his problem thinking?

Which of John's needs is/are not being met?

How is he trying to meet that need?

What truth will you give him?

What goal(s) will you set?

What homework will you assign?

What will you do in the next appointment(s)?